

INTERPRETING AUTONOMY: WORK, SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT  
IN THE NORTHERN MEXICAN BORDER

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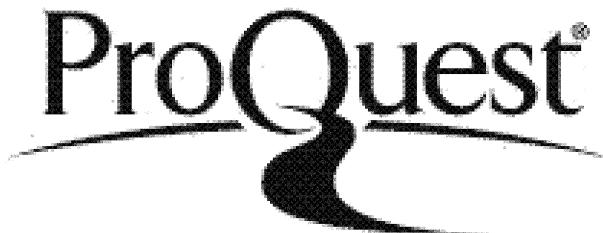
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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the extent to which women's employment status promotes autonomy among low-income women in the northern Mexican border. Autonomy is assumed as inherent in women's freedom from sexual violence in and out of the household, and therefore an underlying question to the above would be as follows: Which aspects of women's employment status offer valuable options to resist and overcome violence?

As a framework for discussion, I use the theoretical context of the New International Division of Labor (NIDL) and gender debate. In exploring the question above, I focus on the symbolic meanings women attribute to their experience as female workers, in connection to traditional gender notions. Such focus allows for a perspective on women's autonomy beyond the material aspects of work and into the symbolic realm of their experience. The analysis explores the impact of age, marital status, education, migrant origin, spirituality and structural change.

The argument has three main levels: First, the need to address the symbolic dimension of women's autonomy and dependence and its relevance to the impact of work on their daily life. I focus my analysis of this dimension on women's assimilation of Catholic gender notions in the Mexican context. Second, I consider women as active agents in that they are capable of transforming such notions and promote autonomy in their lives. Third, I explore the key factors in women's shift from a passive assimilation of Catholic gender notions to their challenge and positive use towards women's autonomy.

The final conclusions provide support for both the integration and exploitation perspective, showing that maquiladora employment can offer both the means for further dependence and increased autonomy. The outcome is relative to women's access to media communication and emerging gender roles, access to information and education resources, the availability of support networks and a positive assimilation of Catholic gender notions. These factors converge in two key elements that I consider particularly significant in women's paths toward autonomy, namely women's positive notion of self and gender solidarity. Consequently, work is most efficient in leading to autonomy when women assimilate their role as workers within a framework of elements that promote empowerment in their lives. This process is illustrated through a case study that explores the role of community support networks in women's experience of work and autonomy.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to provide answers to the question: To what extent does employment promote autonomy among a community of low-income women in the northern Mexican border? In posing this question, a main assumption lies in equating autonomy with freedom from sexual violence and therefore a second, underlying question would be: Which aspects of women's employment status facilitate freedom from violence? I use the context of the New International Division of Labor (NIDL) debate as a theoretical framework for my research, focusing on the question exploring the impact of maquiladora employment on women's autonomy. My objective in posing the question above lies in providing a deeper understanding of the processes leading women towards autonomy and the role of work within these dynamics.

Arriving to a research question for this project proved both the reflection of an intellectual creative process and a more personal search for answers. My main source of inspiration was the work of Prof. Susan Tiano (1995) and the gender class taught by Dr. Sylvia Walby at LSE during 1993. Both sources proved equally enriching and illuminating to my question, although my final argument offered a very different approach to some of the perspectives on this issue. And here is where my personal experience played a major part.

Latin America had fascinated me since my three-months stay in Brazil doing bibliographic research on the street children, an experience that eventually turned into a unit essay during the third year of my degree. Brazil opened my eyes to the reality of Third World countries and the humanity of its people. But mostly Brazilians provided a reflection of myself as a minority and migrant woman in a First World European city. Studying the street children only provided a wider lens to this reflection, as a testimony of extreme vulnerability and deprivation. Through the

limited insight a three-months bibliographic research can give, I managed to glimpse the extent to which violence was a constant theme in their lives. Thanks to the numerous people who offered help during this period, I also learned that despite the dramatic consequences of street violence, children found it more bearable than the violence they were escaping from at home.

Fitting my concerns into the theoretical context presented here proved a challenging task, since most past accounts on the NIDL from a gender perspective had focused on dynamics other than sexuality and violence. Besides, the methodological difficulties involved in researching violence rose all kinds of questions as to the feasibility of my research project. This was indeed a concern as soon as I arrived to Ciudad Juárez on April 13<sup>th</sup> 1994. Crossing the international bridge for the first time brought exciting memories of my trip to Brazil, evoking the same feeling of chaotic dynamism that had stayed in my memory and yearnings. This feeling only grew stronger as months went by, along with the paradoxes and struggles while trying to fit into the dynamics of a different culture and way of life. In finding an appropriate sample, I came to realize that in assuming sexual violence as inherent in most women's lives, getting ordinary women who were not labeled as 'victims' to talk about their lives would bring me the stories. Unfortunately, I was right.

Such realization set my fieldwork into motion and allowed me to finish my interviews in a relatively short period of time. Simultaneously, sharing my own experiences with them opened up new dimensions of communication that highly enriched the content of the interviews as well as the development of personal relationships. Furthermore, exposing myself on an emotional level allowed the interviews to become both the means for receiving honest information and a powerful vehicle for change for both myself and the respondents. This process took the research to a higher level of awareness that increased my understanding of the subject and its relevance to women's lives as well as my own.

On a different level, the main objectives of the study fluctuate from theoretical concerns to addressing what I consider urgent needs in the border. Regarding the former, this study seeks to enlarge the issues and variables included so far in the analysis of women's factory work in the Third World and their capacity for autonomous action. A major contribution of this work is derived from a focus on the significance of sexual violence within the NIDL debate, while assuming freedom from sexual violence as key in the process of achieving autonomy.

Furthermore, assuming that work does not in itself necessarily translate into freedom from violence, I explore what other factors promote women's liberation in this area and how do they interrelate with their work experience. Providing an inside look at these elements and their relationship to autonomy constitutes a major objective of this study. Simultaneously, work is treated as encompassing a wide variety of options, including maquiladora employment, domestic and service work, voluntary work and informal work. This conceptualization responds to the growing relationship of industrial work in the women-in-development literature to the informal sector and the household, showing the need for an empirical and theoretical definition of work that captures its daily reality. As stated by Ward (1995), work often takes place in the three spheres of the formal, informal sectors and the household. On a different direction and a more practical level, using sexual violence as a parameter for the relationship between work and autonomy opens up avenues for political action and the addressing of needs that may have not been sufficiently acknowledged in its due relevance to community development.

Since this project seeks to identify women's paths towards autonomy, I portray them as active agents in the dynamics taking place in this context. However, acknowledging that low-income women find themselves to some extent powerless in the face of the structural socioeconomic dynamics of the border, I focus the interpretation of their actions and strategies within the symbolic domain. On this issue, cultural values play a crucial

role in identifying the meaning of women's choices and actions.

In the context of this investigation, I define culture as a model of meanings concretized as historically transmitted symbols, a system of inherited concepts that find symbolic expression and through which men and women communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge and attitudes towards life (Geertz, 1973). A plausible way in which women's perceptions and actions can be thereby examined is found through exploring their subjective interpretation of daily life within gender power relations. In approaching women's subjectivity and its relevance to the construction of specific identities, I reflect on the argument of Alcoff (1989) and de Laurentis (1984), who offer a conceptualization of human subjectivity that escapes essentialism and allocates the subject within a context of practices and discourses.

As an example of the above, during the research process I found women's interiorization of the Catholic discourse as key in their self-perception, practices and potential towards autonomy. However, their interpretation needed to be connected to the process of colonialism in Mexican history, in order to provide a better understanding of women's specific meanings and practices. In this process I should make clear the difference between Catholicism as a specific set of discourses in a historical and socio-economic framework and women's spirituality or spiritual values. The latter is hereby defined as women's subjective interpretation of such discourse, which finds symbolic expression in their attitudes and way of life and differ according to specific factors such as age, migrant status, education level, etc.

Following this same line, gender becomes an interpretation of history within a specific discourse, where subjects turn into active agents in the construction of their identity without losing their interdependence with social structures (Alcoff, 1989). Consequently, adds Alcoff, women's specific position can be actively used as a locus for the construction of meaning, rather than it being simply 'discovered'. Finally, and borrowing

the concept from de Laurentis (1) the author refers to identity as a political point of departure, a motivation towards action and a vehicle of personal politics. Consequently, 'being a woman' implies adopting a position within a historical context and being able to choose what to do with this position, while transforming such context (Alcoff, 1989).

Incorporating the above into my own line of analysis, I conceptualize autonomy as an individual process translated into women's capability to take control over their lives reinforcing positive notions of self. The ability to make decisions and exercise choices that increase their well-being in all areas would be one manifestation of autonomy. However, in the context of this investigation I focus on women's ability to transform their status within abusive relationships, turning from victims into autonomous women (with or without a partner). Consequently, victimization is defined hereby as the opposite concept from autonomy, i.e. women's inability to overcome abuse in their lives. At the same time, I see autonomy and empowerment as going hand-in-hand, the latter constituting women's ability to use their personal autonomy in a wider social context that involves community networks and institutions. Similarly, both concepts are assumed as interdependent as well as connected to wider social structures. For that reason, I avoid essentialist notions of 'female independence' that might differ from the experience of autonomy as it is lived by the women in the sample. On the contrary, I take a step back and let women choose the specific paths that lead to freedom from violence and express the specific meanings attached to that process. A more thorough discussion on the use and definition of autonomy and empowerment is discussed in chapter two.

Inherent in the process by which women achieve autonomy lies a wider definition of social change, i.e. the reestructuration of Third World societies by colonialist and capitalist penetration and its impact on gender relations, the nature of the sexual division of labor and the kind of social and political options open to men and women. Following the work

of development researchers on this issue (Long, 1977, 1989; Moore, 1988), I pay attention to the variety of individual and group responses to similar processes of change, rather than interpreting paths of social change in terms of the intervention of private or public institutions or powerful foreigners. Such variety is attributed to socio-cultural factors that are historically and culturally specific, a view which leads to the notion of women as active agents of their lives, regardless of whether they succeed or not in exploiting and/or resisting new opportunities. (Stolen, 1991)

Bringing the above to a more concrete ground, I specifically explore women's responses to structural change in the Northern Mexican border, defining structural change as the concrete consequences of strategies followed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in order to deal with the debt crisis suffered by many Third World countries and promote their incorporation into the international division of labor. In the Northern Mexican region, such strategies translate into massive investment in export-processing industrialization.

Continuing with conceptualization issues, I define sexual violence as a 'continuum' that manifests at the physical, psychological, social and institutional levels (Kelly, 1988; Stanko, 1985). In the use of this concept, I refer to three fundamental areas: 1. Most women have experienced sexual violence in their lives, 2. Women perceive certain type of men's behavior as abusive, 3. Sexual violence manifests in a context of men's power and women's resistance (Kelly, 1988). However, I acknowledge that women's perceptions and definitions of violence are relative to age, marital status, education level, spiritual identity and migrant origin, thereby the need to emphasize the meanings given by women to their experience in this area. For the most part, women respondents refer to instances of sexual violence that relate to their experience during a specific life cycle.

On the whole, I treat the concept with caution regarding its potential interpretation as a dichotomy where all men are considered

aggressors and all women victims. Considering the definition above, and in assuming the dangers inherent in such a dichotomy, I assume the importance of acknowledging the role of masculinity as embedded in the dynamics of sexual violence. For that reason, this point would constitute one of the weaknesses of the present work, since I offer a partial view of the subject from the standpoint of women's perceptions. The feminist use of the 'continuum of violence' is further discussed in chapter two.

The Northern Mexican border, and more specifically the municipality of Ciudad Juárez, constitutes the socioeconomic context of the investigation. Considering that Ciudad Juárez is one of the two leading border cities in terms of maquiladora employment demand in Mexico, its socioeconomic dynamics reflect the paradox of contrasting modernization and traditional gender ideologies. The often conflicting combination of these two factors determine the direction followed by gender ideologies in the northern Mexican border, parallel to the process of global capitalist expansion. It is in this process where I allocate the issue of structural change as undergoing a rapid and on-going development at the global level that manifests in specific ways at the local level. A more detailed examination of the implications of structural change in the Northern Mexican border is provided in chapter three of this work.

Regarding the incidence of violence in the border, evidence is provided in the second chapter on the widespread nature of this problem and its consequences in the local context of Ciudad Juárez. The fact that sexual violence is a common occurrence, added to the lack of appropriate state action in this area resembles the evidence derived from research in First World countries. Examining the issue in the border and specifically Ciudad Juárez, might clarify the differential variables of women's subordination experience as well as their specific strategies against violence. Furthermore, promoting investigations that examine new variables on a common theme addresses the need to redefine social structures in the development context. In sum, the main objectives of the

study can be conceptualized as follows: 1. To examine the meanings women attribute to work and their effect on autonomy within unequal gender relations, 2. To bring the subject of violence among low-income groups in the border into the open, in order to identify specific survival and prevention measures.

This study can be divided into two main parts. Part one relates to the conceptual, methodological and theoretical issues of the investigation and includes the introduction, the first and the second chapters. In the introduction I describe the personal and academic reasons that led me choose this specific subject and establish a conceptual framework for the investigation. In the first chapter I describe the methodology followed in the present study in pursuing the main objectives, while paying attention to definition and operationalisation issues.

The second chapter discusses the relevance of violence within the NIDL debate, where I revise the main contributions within the northern Mexican border. I thereby arrive at my argument and its link to previous contributions to the subject. A second section constitutes a parallel argument to the main theoretical context of the study, focusing on the issue of sexual violence in its links with power within class, ethnic and gender relations. My objective at this stage is to establish the relevance of violence in measuring women's autonomy within the household, as well as influencing the power aspects of their participation in the working force.

The first section of the third chapter provides the basis to understand the here and now of the women under study. In doing so, I refer to the socioeconomic context of the study and focus on women's role within these dynamics. A second section explores the way in which cultural values and beliefs influence this process. In doing so, I provide a revision of some of the main investigations into the institutional discourse on sexuality and violence since the colony and

the differing ways in which it has influenced women's identities in these areas, as well as what we know of its influence today. Finally, I bring these issues to the concrete context of Ciudad Juárez, focusing on the specific situation of women in the face of sexual violence and the role of the state in this process.

The second part involves the interpretation of the data collected during the fieldwork carried out between June and August of 1994. It includes chapters four, five and six and provides an analysis of women's interiorization of and resistance to traditional gender notions, as well as the effect of this process on their autonomy. Therefore, autonomy becomes the focus of this last part, exploring its limits, the factors promoting it and a concrete means to achieve it through various community and individual strategies.

More concretely, the fourth chapter tackles women's assimilation of traditional gender notions and its impact on their role as workers, describing how this process prevent women from finding freedom from violence and therefore autonomy. The fifth chapter offers a more positive outlook in exploring the factors that inform women's resistance strategies against violence while redefining their identity in various areas, including work. In doing so, I focus on the ways in which they resist traditional gender ideologies in concrete ways that bring positive change into their lives.

In the sixth chapter I use the conclusions derived from the previous two chapters within a particular case study. My aim is to evaluate the way in which the factors that lead to autonomy can be used practically within community support groups, in order to prevent victimization and increase women's chances to resist and overcome violence in their lives. Finally, the conclusion relates my findings to the theoretical framework referred to in chapter two and suggests

concrete actions to prevent violence and increment women's autonomy and empowerment in this particular context.

### In Search of Answers: the Methodology

This chapter offers a description of the methodology used in the present study in searching for a plausible answer to the research question. From a broader perspective, the methods applied attempt to contrast concrete issues of survival and well-being among low-income women in the border with prevailing theoretical discussions. Simultaneously, I tackle some of the ways in which practice shapes theory, since the development of the fieldwork led to the final theoretical argument of the study. Such approach proved enriching to the point of discovering new and unexpected insights into the problem.

The methodology used is guided by qualitative research techniques, where I give emphasis to description and discovery to generate categories and interpret the meanings women give to their experiences. The use of this method responds to the objective of the study, which is exploratory of the variables affecting women's freedom from violence that generate autonomy in their lives. Consequently, it offers an in-depth examination of women's subjective interpretation of sexual violence in their daily life. Simultaneously, it explores the specific options they seek to achieve autonomy, of which work may be one. However, a further study with a larger sample, one that allows for a broader comparative approach regarding the variables affecting autonomy, would be useful to complement the exploratory information derived from the present work.

Among the main traditions within qualitative research methods, phenomenology is most adequate for the purpose of this study. The Husserl (1970) tradition has an epistemological character, emphasizing the return to reflective intuition to describe and clarify the experience as it is lived and constructed on a conscious level. Simultaneously, the hermeneutics tradition is ontological, a way to exist in the socio-historical world where the fundamental dimension of human conscience is historical and socio-cultural and expressed through language (Gadamer,

1975; Heidegger, 1962; Ricoeur, 1981). Both traditions fuse in the present work. The criteria that guarantees the reliability of the results are based on credibility, applicability, consistence and confirmation, rather than internal or external validity (Ruiz & Ispizua, 1989).

The main characteristics of the study as a qualitative exercise can be outlined as follows: it was developed in its natural setting, where I established direct contact with the subjects and situations under investigation. Simultaneously, the design was constantly open to new focuses, constructions and interpretations for as long as the research continued. At the same time, I conceived the technical part as an accommodative element within the multiple and often conflictive realities that I sought to explain. Furthermore, it was meant to be sensitive to the interaction between me as the researcher and the subjects of the study.

Although the study departs from specific conceptualizations and theoretical frameworks, I take these as references instead of conditioning aspects of the research. Rather, I aim to construct a theory that specifically emerges from the results of the study and within their context. Similarly, rather than intending to create a representative sample, I hope to provide an in-depth understanding of the relatively few testimonies in my sample. Their interpretation remains conditioned by and solely refers to the concrete context where the information is gathered, therefore not meant to be directed from the particular to the universal. Finally, the validity of the results derives from the interaction and interdependence between the researcher and the subjects under investigation, leading to a shared perception and mutual legitimization.

The main methods of data collection are as follows: first, I carried out 55 in-depth interviews among low-income women, mostly in the peripheral colony known as 'Granjas' between June and September 1994. The second method provided access to the community and involved the role of participant observer in the dynamics of a community women's group known as

'Grupo de Mujeres de Esperanza y Fe', ['Faith and hope' women's group] between June 1994 and April 1997.

Both methods constitute an alternative to most methodological approaches in the study of sexual violence, carried out in non-representative samples such as refuges, hospitals and penitentiaries. However, despite some differences in approach, the limited resources of the research prevented the gathering of a representative sample that allowed for the testing of a greater variety of issues within the question posed hereby. Among these, I could not adequately test women's differential working status and their effect on autonomy. Furthermore, the specific socio-economic reality that most low-income women face in the border derives in the fact that most of them have multiple and often simultaneous working trajectories. This created a basic difficulty in trying to measure the differential effect of work status on autonomy within a specific age group.

In view of the lack of appropriate comparative standards between women in differing working spheres, my approach took a different direction. I structured the interviews as a series of life histories where women expanded on the range of working experiences throughout their lives. Simultaneously, women referred to a broader spectrum of issues related to gender relations. These included family and sexual relationships, opportunities for education and self-fulfillment and sexual violence both in the private and public spheres. The groups are very heterogeneous regarding women's working trajectories and family structure. However, most of the interviewed women had at some stage in their working lives been employed in a maquiladora factory. This provided a framework that allowed to contrast the results with those derived from the NIDL debate in this context, as well as maquiladora employment with other employment options.

Through such an approach, I considered sexual violence a continuum and assessed the influence of differing work experiences affecting women's ability to withstand sexual violence. Simultaneously, through comparing the

differing responses expressed by women in specific life cycles, I evaluated the generation differences on identity construction, accommodation and resistance in the area of sexual violence. Similarly, I could appreciate the effect of factors such as structural change, migrant origin, education and spirituality on the autonomy of women in differing life cycles.

One of the implications of the above is that work status loses its central place in the discussion of autonomy, allowing for alternative variables to emerge and explain women's resistance strategies in this context. For that reason, the research is operationalised around autonomy as the main factor under scrutiny. The factors outlined above are therefore open to definition regarding their effect on autonomy and their relation to unforeseen elements in the dynamics of violence and resistance. The sexual violence suffered by women in the public sphere is relevant, since it is implied in the definition of violence as a continuum. Simultaneously, it affects women's perception of themselves in the private sphere, interfering with their process of autonomy.

In paying attention to the factors influencing autonomy, and as I already mentioned in the introduction, the limited size of the sample created difficulties in measuring adequately issues such as migrant origin and education. Furthermore, the lack of literature on the subject prevented the possibility of contrasting my insights with past research on the subject. The limitations met in this area led me to seek complementary means of evaluating the factors leading toward autonomy, i.e. my role as a participant-observer in a Catholic women's support group. This approach allowed me to further explore factors such as the effect of spirituality in women's self-perception and the exercise of specific choices towards autonomy.

Regarding women's role as migrants and its effect on their identity and specific survival strategies I found specific differences that need to be acknowledged. While some women characterized as 'of migrant origin' come from the state of Chihuahua, of which Ciudad Juárez is a border town, many

arrive from Central and Southern Mexico. There is a lack of literature on the differences between migrant groups in terms of the way in which their specific cultural heritage and other relevant factors interact with the dynamics of the Northern border. This limitation, added to the limited sample size and the exploratory nature of the research, prevent me from tackling this question in the analysis.

On the issue of women's life cycle I refer to specific stages in their life and the experiences related to them rather than to their concrete age. For instance, the younger generation of women as categorized hereby share the experience of being single and childless. The second generation have had the experience of having a partner or being married and have children, either at the time of the interview or sometime in the past. The third and last generation of women also have had a partner or been married, often more than once, and have grown children while some of them are widowed or separated. Each of these categories share specific experiences related to their life cycle and I duly consider these patterns in the final analysis.

It should be noted that I use the term 'partnered' for women who live with a partner, whether they are married or not, since I found no relevant analytical differences between these two categories. Similarly, since all partnered women have children, I consider these two factors simultaneously in examining its relevance and only refer to the fact that they are partnered. Finally, I refer to women over thirty five as 'older' women in the data analysis, since women's testimonies are relatively homogeneous in this age group when compared to women below this age.

Another aspect that deserves attention is the role of education in women's potential for autonomy. While I pay attention to this issue, the women in the sample who had higher education levels were also the youngest. To some extent, this factor constituted a limitation in trying to compare their own strategies against violence with those of older women, since they did not have parallel life experiences nor the same resources to

create lasting change. For this reason, the education element remains open to further interpretation in the construction of a larger and more representative sample where a more efficient comparison criteria can be established within the same age groups. During the analysis, I use the term 'higher education' to refer to education levels beyond primary school, including secondary school, technical school and university.

Regarding the structure and content of the final sample it includes three differentiated groups of women according to their life cycle. The first group includes fourteen single women with no children between the ages of thirteen and twenty eight, the second group amounts to eighteen women with children between twenty and thirty eight years of age who were either married, separated or widowed. The third and final group includes nineteen women between the ages of thirty three and seventy four and where either married, separated or widowed and had children. In narrowing down the sample to the cases that included testimonies of sexual violence, I reduced the sample from the initial number of fifty five to fifty one women, divided in relatively equal groups according to life cycle.

When for analytical reasons I required a specific category of women, they were sought for outside the community, although this constituted the exception rather than the norm. When outlining women's testimonies in chapters four, five and six, I classify them with a series of codes that refer to their specific age group, marital status, place of origin, number of children and education. The specific meanings of each code are outlined in the appendix.

Regarding issues of accessibility, I was perceived by the respondents as someone who could offer counseling and assistance. This was indeed a factor in attracting informants who had specific problems they wanted to talk about, although these were not expected to be necessarily related to sexual violence in their lives. However, rather than constituting an obstacle, this proved helpful for developing rapport and gathering an appropriate sample for the study.

Choosing the method of in-depth interviewing proved adequate for the purposes of this study, since it assumes and defends the capability of individual initiative. Consequently, I did not expect respondents to merely react to or repeat social constructions, but to construct meanings within the social reality in which they exist through a complex framework of beliefs and values. This premise fitted into my reflection of the term 'autonomy' and the role of women's interpretations within it. Although I depart from a specific definition of the term, the basic purpose of the interviews was to be open to the world of meanings women attributed to their experiences in resisting and overcoming violence in their lives.

The fact that I approached women who were not institutionally labeled as 'abused' allows for a greater variability within the sample. At the same time, it provides a range of experiences beyond physical or extreme sexual violence that may lead women to seek institutional treatment. Following on the issue of accessibility, women's perception of myself as a white and European professional woman led to the construction of a specific image that allowed for the development of trust. Since women associated professionalism with confidentiality, they jumped at the opportunity to express their experiences to someone they trusted. At the same time, they believed I would leave early enough not to develop significant relationships and spread their stories to other members of the community. This factor increased women's disposition to communicate and made the interviews more fluid.

At the same time, I cannot ignore the 'other side of the coin' and pay attention to the potential negative impact of the same image. I was an active member of the community for long enough to perceive sporadic elements of distrust, often related to my status as a foreign researcher. The community had already had the experience of being chosen as a research 'case study' and were not very impressed with the lack of immediate benefits derived from this experience. Considering that the 'here and now' are the most relevant elements of their daily life, research that sought

implications on a larger scale or intended to have potential long-terms effects was often not appreciated.

To counteract this effect and gain access to the stories, I chose to be plainly honest about my intentions and opened myself on an emotional level to the respondents. The initial contact took place when I was introduced to the members of the community women's group 'Mujeres de Esperanza y Fé' and expressed my interest in hearing about their lives. Immediately after, I shared my experience of sexual violence with the members and invited women to do the same thing with the other members of the group. Although I was aware of the risks involved in proceeding with such openness, the high level of identification derived from this experience delivered excellent results in achieving greater access to the members of the community.

In aiming for an appropriate level of depth in the interaction, I started the interviews by specifying the personal and professional objectives of the research. Furthermore, I stressed the issue of confidentiality and the potential benefits of the results for the population under study. Other strategies consisted in avoiding emotionally charged vocabulary such as 'violence' and 'battered women'. This helped prevent defensive reactions and allowed communication and emotional rapport to flow. At the same time, I did not make violence explicit in the subject of my research. Rather, I was interested in the general development of their lives, within which I assumed the existence of violence on different degrees. This assumption was in most cases confirmed while carrying out the interviews.

Similarly, to allow for the development of rapport and to increase women's chance to thoroughly express themselves on all kinds of issues the questionnaire mainly includes open questions. These are grounded in concrete experiences throughout their life, mainly those referring to gender relations within and outside the household and their impact on women's sense of self. In order to fill in the required information, I

introduced concrete questions when I felt the respondent had finished her testimony. Simultaneously, I avoided critical or intrusive comments that could obstruct communication and prevent the development of trust. A sample of the questionnaire is included in the Appendix II.

To maintain control and guarantee fluidity, I exercised specific strategies such as the use of silence, echoing, summarizing, deepening into a specific subject, repeating relevant questions, selective citation, distraction, stimulation and postponing of the interview to a later time or date. Finally, and prior to my arrival, I attended a set of eight sessions with a counselor. My objective was to penetrate in subconscious material that may interfere with the interviewing process, such as personal expectations and preconceptions. The strategies above directed the interview from the broader, superficial and impersonal details of the information to its deeper, interpretative and personalized aspects.

On the issue of control and validity, I invariably offered a reflection of the respondents testimony through summarizing and clarifying specific areas of the discourse, hoping to achieve a better perception of its subjective meaning. This measure prevented the appearance of confusing clues or false scenarios. Another strategy involved the recording of the interviews, which prevented excessive subjectivity in the interpretation. I also considered the 'social desirability impact', i.e. giving a specific answer that places the subject under a socially desirable category, since seeking approval was a widespread issue among women in the sample.

To counteract this tendency, I maintained contact with a broad number of people in the community and established relationships that opened the sphere of perception. I thereby had access to information from alternative sources that enriched the data analysis and interpretation. In interpreting women's discourse, I explored the meanings involved in factors beyond their actual words, considering their emotional reactions, body language and tone of voice during the interview. Finally, I carried out the interviews at women's homes or specific places that preserved intimacy.

The data analysis involved the identification of patterns about the impact of work experience and related variables on becoming autonomous. In a first revision of the material I identified central concepts and events. A second revision aimed to systematically identify the categories used by the respondent, in order to codify the conversation. Such initial codification established relationships between the different categories and pinpointed the most sensitive concepts. At this stage, it was possible to elaborate an approximate design of the respondent's construct. From this point onward, I was able to immerse myself into the data and arrange the pieces of the final message. I distributed the emerging patterns and common themes derived from the analysis into groups and subgroups that determined the structure of chapters four, five and six.

The second main method used involved participant observation in a women's group at the same community where interviews took place. Such experience proved valuable in gaining trust among community members and contributed to the precipitation of a 'snowball sample' for the interviews, as well as significantly complementing the information derived from them. A flexible approach to the situation under study determined the sample chosen in this particular method, namely the group sessions regularly taking place.

The selection criteria involved a series of strategies according to the specific stage of the fieldwork. In the first stage, I contacted people and institutions that worked directly with the community under study. A second strategy involved the increasing approximation to specific focus of interest, generating access to broader circles and a more intense contact with respondents. Finally, through a process of trial and error, I could come across processes of interrelation between relevant issues. In sum, the sample in this particular method had a multiple character, while the observation involved a cyclical rather than a lineal process.

Although I initially participated as a member of the planning team between June 1994 and January 1995, I carried out fieldwork as a

participating observant of the group between August 1995 and February 1996 and then again between February and April 1997. Two nuns from El Paso who followed the premises of the feminist liberation theology led the group. Their ideology seeks to reconstruct the mainstream Catholic interpretation of the Biblical texts in order to provide a liberation message to women. The group is open to Catholic women of all ages and aims to support their needs and potential towards increasing personal power and gender solidarity.

The analysis of the data derived from this experience confirmed the impact of specific issues on women's paths towards autonomy. For instance, it showed the significance of spirituality in women's lives and its impact on gender relations. Simultaneously, I could confirm the positive impact of the group on their notion of self, offering the means for potential autonomy in all areas. In this sense, the group's focus on reinterpreting the Biblical texts to increase gender equality and solidarity provided a valuable setting from which to gather added support of the factors leading to autonomy.

In sum, through examining the impact of the group ideology, practices and methodology on women's sense of self throughout time, I arrived to conclusions that complement the data derived from the interviews and provide added support to my argument. More concretely, I arrived at a clearer understanding of women's paths towards autonomy while reshaping their spiritual values, a recurrent theme in their resistance strategies against violence. Finally, this method allowed for the emergence of complementing factors such as the emergence of gender solidarity within a feminist support group. This proved to increase women's potential for autonomy and could be positively applied to their roles in other areas, including work.

The challenges I had to face in the use of this methodology were varied and equally illuminating of the research process as a whole. During the stage as a new comer into the community, I was introduced to the

planning team and members of the group through a woman widely known in the community. She was respected for her commitment to social work in general and her status as volunteer and promoter of community health for the Federación Mexicana of Private Health Associations and Community Development (FEMAP). This contact proved valuable in achieving legitimacy and acceptance at an uncertain stage of the fieldwork. Simultaneously, my established role as a sociologist and my honest approach and sharing of experiences, allowed for greater trust and contributed to the establishment of bonds with specific community sectors and its members.

Through my role as participant observer in the group dynamics from within the planning team, I had the opportunity to work from the standpoint of women's values according to their daily experiences. For that purpose, I learnt the need to transcend expectations and power barriers, while establishing a work itinerary in the group that would facilitate women's autonomy and respond to their specific needs. For this purpose, we organized the group's dynamics so that all decisions regarding its content were democratic, while we encouraged the participation of all women in this process. This strategy intended to contribute to a definition of autonomy emerging from within their reality.

At the same time, assuming an equal role while establishing personal relationships with informants and key community members involved the risk of becoming 'native'. Although identification at the gender level was key in generating trust and establishing a common ground, I was aware of the risks involved in going overboard and neglect the analytical aspects of the investigation. To avoid this potential pitfall, the meetings amounted to four per month, while the academic working environment was located outside the community. I also maintained contact with academics and other professionals involved in women's issues outside the group who offered alternative perspectives and comments, contributing to the analytical process of the research. Finally, I used a journal as the main method of

data collection, which allowed for a recurrent conscientization of the different levels of analysis.

The choice of a journal was also meant to be non invasive of the social actors and social processes involved in the research. At the same time, it captured a maximum of information and the context in which they interacted. To maximize its feasibility, I titled and ordered each session by date and regarding a specific context. I also added comments and notes when significant in the process of analysis, although at this stage the character of the notes remained descriptive of the specific situation and context. Finally, I enriched the description with as many details as possible, aiming to register that which was not understood and eventually came as a surprise. Initial descriptive notes increasingly became key descriptions of people or institutions, analytical notes, reports of scenarios and theoretical links.

The above prevented the risk of an erroneous sample while identifying any variations in the themes, social actors and interpretations. At the same time, I could gather and highlight the most recurrent patterns and be able to catch specific moments that enriched the interpretation. Similarly, I could avoid the risk of falling into typifications and premature interpretations while testing the existence of exceptions and contradictions that could lead to a new focus. Finally and foremost, I was able to collect and preserve all the information without having to rely on memory or notes that become meaningless as time goes by.

However, and as part of this process, I became increasingly aware of myself as a dynamic element in a field not devoid of conflict. Consequently, I developed strategies to remain neutral within these dynamics and avoid being absorbed by specific members or positions within the group. A major setback in this context referred to the clash between my own religious identity and those of the group as whole. Although raised as a catholic, my faith in institutional religion had experienced a drastic change at an earlier stage in my life. Consequently, and since my input was

key in the planning of the group sessions, the exercise of this method proved a constant challenge. The main issue lied in trying to remain neutral and avoid affecting the dynamics of the group. This situation faced a crisis towards January 1995. At that time, I decided to resign from my post as a member of the planning group and became a mere participant observer of its dynamics.

However, aware that my sole presence even as a participant observer would invariably affect the dynamics of the group, I developed a systematic approach during the stage when my presence turned more distant. I systematically examined the impact of class and ethnica differences between me, the members of the planning team and the women members. More specifically, I measured the impact of such variables in the consciousness rising impact of the group. Through this approach, I could test the relevance of common gender experiences beyond class, race and ideology (particularly religious ideology) differences through the group's dynamics, evolution and organization.

At the same time, such approach prevented the onset of excessive subjectivity that could lead towards avoiding challenging or unpleasant subjects or a lack of critical analysis. In doing so, I could differentiate between instances of objective truth and subjective honesty, establishing mechanisms to explain the difference and the motives of the informants in establishing such differences. A common motive found throughout the process of the research would be to gain acceptance by the leading members of the group or gain 'points' in competition with other women members.

Throughout the three-year period of participant observation, I used the support of people that would play my role as participant observer and deliver the information. These were adequately trained and informed about the research process as a whole and the significance of their role as informants and participant observers. A major advantage of this strategy referred to the fact that they were native Mexicans and could therefore penetrate more deeply into the internal dynamics of the women members. At

the same time, their shared cultural codes and perceptions enabled a richer array of communication clues that could have escaped my perception as an outsider.

As far as other secondary methods, I used bibliographic materials to construct a theoretical background for the study. Within this and in specific sections, I illustrate information through data derived from various statistical sources and official census. Simultaneously, I allocate bibliographic materials through the available academic texts, newspapers, official and unofficial documents, legislative texts, development plans and other local and external sources. Occasional interviews to social workers, lawyers, members of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and other professionals in related areas aim to fill the possible information gaps that might exist.

In this chapter I have provided an account of the processes that led me choose specific methods in order to explore and elaborate answers to the problem under investigation. The two main research methods of the study complement each other and the results derived from them often provided unexpected and illuminating insights into the problem under investigation. My aim in the next chapters is to articulate these insights, in order to present an argument loyal to low-income women's experience of subordination and resistance in the Northern Mexican border.

## 2. WOMEN'S FACTORY WORK, VIOLENCE AND SURVIVAL IN THE DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT: A PROCESS OF REDEFINITION

This chapter discusses the relevance of sexual violence within gender relations as applicable within the NIDL debate, the latter constituting the main theoretical context of the present study. Considering that the gender question on women's position in this context seeks to address the consequences of women's factory employment in their daily life, the issue of sexual violence, and how it affects women's autonomy through work participation, can be conceptualized within this debate.

The above is outlined in this chapter as follows: In the first section I discuss the NIDL debate, concentrating in the effects of factory work on women's potential for autonomy and the significance of violence within this debate. The second section aims to provide a rationale for using sexual violence as a parameter of gender power relations in the question posed hereby. I therefore discuss the reasons behind male violence against women and examine its consequences for low-income women in the Third World, showing that it constitutes a major obstacle for women who experience victimization. Finally, I explore women's resistance strategies in this context and their relevance for achieving autonomy and empowerment.

Since the main focus of inquiry is placed on women's autonomy, the last section explores how autonomy and empowerment have been conceptualized and applied within the gender and development literature. Finally, my own conceptualization of autonomy is incorporated into the main theoretical framework of the study and used to propose an alternative focus on the issue.

## TNC Expansion and the NIDL Debate: the Tensions between Exploitation and Integration

The spread of transnational practices (TNPs) in the global system is inevitable, and more so in the developing and more vulnerable nations of the world. Nowadays, thousands of people are part of an integrated world economy. The interdependent labor processes feeding this new order have been steadily growing since the last century, becoming a present overwhelming reality. This reality affects the international division of labor, as well as the daily lives of thousands of workers and their families.

The current process of corporate expansion on a global level reflects the evolution of the world capitalist system, as well as the ongoing relationships between the advanced and so-called Third World nations. This expanding process runs parallel to an export-led type of industrialization in the Third World originated in the 19th century colonial era. Colonialism reproduced a prior global division of labor in which the European countries provided manufactured goods while Third World countries distributed raw materials. (Mitter, 1986)

However, as the relations of exchange were not balanced, the advanced nations appropriated a larger share of the profits. With the arrival of independence since 1947, many newly independent countries resorted to a policy known as Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI), based on the production of goods formerly imported. ISI policies were not successful for different reasons, either due to the technological gap between the advanced and Third World nations or to difficulties linked to foreign exchange. From the late 1960s onwards, a new export-led industrialization model emerged, whereby investments by

TNCs aimed to provide both foreign exchange and technical expertise. (Mitter, 1986)

The proliferation of TNCs in the Third World reflects the following production patterns: research carried out in the home country, production assembling in the Third World and distribution in the global market. Two main factors shape the new international division of labor (NIDL) emerging from this pattern: Third world nations offer the incentive of cheap labor availability while the more advanced countries provide the capital. Furthermore, technological changes lead to an increased managerial control, reflected in the shifting of assembly operations.

(Mitter, 1986)

On a macro-level, the major features of the NIDL are the centralization of market forces and technology coupled with the decentralization of production. From a narrower perspective, it results in job relocation from the high-wage Western countries to the low-wage newly industrialized countries (NICs) of Asia and Latin America. These countries are: Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore in Asia and Mexico and Brazil in Latin America. A combination of interests between TNCs and the ruling elite in the Third World, culminated in the establishment of free trade zones (FTZs). FTZs are areas designated within a country where certain types of goods can be imported, processed and reexported without duty payments. These areas have become the focus of the export-led industrialization policy in peripheral nations. (Mitter, 1986)

Aside from the existing dynamics between TNCs' demand for cheap labor and the collaboration of the state to provide it, there are further implications for the labor structure in developing countries directly derived from TNCs investment in FTZs. The integration of developing societies into the world capitalist system has transformed their internal

stratification structure and turned it highly differentiated (Bossen, 1984). The previously existing differences have been enhanced or manipulated so that new stratification criteria arise to accommodate capitalist needs (Mies, 1988).

One significant criterion for differentiating labor pools within the NIDL is gender. Women constitute a significant proportion of the employees of Third World export-processing industries in FTZs: of the four million jobs in TNCs in the Third World, between one fourth and one third are held by women, mainly concentrated in NICs and key manufacturing export industries (Lim, 1985). Despite the latest data on gender stratification within the maquiladora industry showing a growing percentage of working men (Cooper, 1995; INEGI 1982-89), women still constitute a significant number.

The other sectors women are employed in are small-scale manufacturing of a variety of consumer goods, agriculture, tourism and the sex industry (Mies, 1989). In this context, women have become more migratory than in the past (Arizpe, 1984; Ruiz & Ortiz, 1995). Therefore, to explore the significance of export-led industrialization and the new capitalist order, we must consider the gender-based divisions at the national and international levels as well as the issues of production and reproduction from which they derive (Tiano, 1995). Feminist perspectives on gender and development explore these questions, constituting the theoretical context of the present study.

The feminist focus on the question above aims to explain the structural and cultural dynamics affecting the export-manufacturing work force, as well as its consequences for women and the structure of their households (Frobel, Heinrichs & Kreye, 1980; Elson & Pearson, 1981; Safa, 1981; Nash & Fernández-Kelly, 1983; Tiano, 1995; Peña, 1997). Despite

women in world market factories being a small proportion of all Third World women, their case is important as the provision of jobs for women was by various agencies, governments and organizations a way of integrating them into the development process. Furthermore, the clearest expression of changes in the world economy observed in the mid 1970s, remains the relocation of production (Frobel et al., 1980).

The liberal perspective on gender and development considers women's subordination within capitalism an exception from the prevailing rule of equality and justice (2). Therefore, it implies that women factory workers will find their way out of subordination through their work experience, affecting all areas of their lives (Boserup, 1970; Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Moore, 1965; Rosen, 1982).

This perspective has been criticized for the material interests and ideological boundaries reflected in its argument. Despite the fact that liberal feminists carry the slogan of 'integration', it is argued that women have been integrated in development since it began, only they have remained marginal (Bandarage, 1984). Therefore, the promotion for basic need strategies proposed by this perspective has been considered a substitute for the structural changes required. For instance, the 'Women in Development' (WID) school's (3) promotion of income generation projects, such as home production of commodities for export, has been criticized for being solely concerned with integrating women into cash economy. Such strategies ignore exploitative cash and sexual relations which intensify women's exploitation (Scott, 1984).

The opposite side of the debate can be conceptualized through the marginalization and exploitation thesis. The former emerged as a feminist critique to modernization theory (Jaquette, 1982) and runs parallel to the 'feminization of poverty approach' (4). It assumes the development of

capitalism to be the cause of women's marginalization from economic life, translating into a more deeply seated patriarchal discrimination within the household (5). Consequently, maquiladora workers find their range of choices limited, maintaining their marginalized status (Tiano, 1995; Rubbo & Taussig, 1978; Huston, 1979; Truelove, 1990; Kahne, 1992).

The above has been criticized for defining marginalization as exclusion, assuming that productive employment is key to financial independence and social well being. However, marginalization also occurs within employment, as patriarchal and capitalist forces combine to limit women's responsibility and autonomy in the workplace (6) (Faulkner and Lawson, 1991; Blau & Ferber, 1992; Acevedo, 1995).

Finally, the exploitation perspective agrees on the underdevelopmental effects of Western capitalist development on women's lives. However, it directs its analysis towards the differential effects of capitalism on men and women (7), arguing that while forms of sexual hierarchy change over the course of capitalist expansion, the subordination of women remains a systematic feature of capitalism in Third World countries (8). Therefore, women working in global factories cannot expect their liberation (Kucera, 1995; Rohrlich & Leavitt, 1975; Enloe, 1983; Mies, 1989; Cravey, 1998).

The exploitation thesis has been criticized for the gap between theory and practice inherent in its argument. It is implied that, theoretically, the abstract forms of capitalism lead to women's oppression. However, this premise neglects the oppression suffered by women in pre-capitalist and socialist societies. Furthermore, it ignores the changing nature of the relations between men and women under capitalism, as well as the cultural and psychological dimensions of sexual stratification (Bandarage, 1984). On the other hand, its major

strength lies in that it understands sexual oppression historically, as it interacts with class oppression and imperialism.

Regarding TNC employment, the interplay of factors influencing women's incorporation into factory work remains an issue in the feminist discussion on gender and the NIDL. Some authors agree on its positive influence on women's lives (Lim 1988, 1990) while others state that women are worse off with factory employment (Robinson 1986; Mather 1982; Chapkis & Enlow 1983; Denman, 1994). A complementary view refers to the contradictory effects of women's factory employment (Ong, 1987; Safa, 1990; Wolf, 1992; Tiano, 1995). This interpretation points at female factory employment as leading to greater participation in family decisions, as well as to opportunities to escape parental control. Although these do not change women's exploitation in the work sphere, the effects of women's employment in FTZs seem to have an ambivalent character in certain cultures.

The literature on gender and the NIDL has contributed to the understanding of global capitalist processes in their interconnection to patriarchal structures. However, its concentration on the macro level has lead to a number of criticisms. For instance, Wolf (1992) argues that in many of these studies the women themselves are missing, attributing more importance to capital than to the women it exploits. One of the implications is that women lose all their potential as agents capable of reacting, struggling or manipulating the circumstances for their own benefit. Furthermore, she argues, exploitation is considered in relation to a non-capitalist or pre-capitalist past or present when the women were free from exploitation (Robinson, 1988). With a few exceptions (Kung, 1983: Ong 1987; Salaff, 1981), there is a shortage of empirical studies

directed to women in the NIDL within the context of their families, households or communities.

The above opens up new avenues in the investigation of the NIDL and its effects on Third World women's daily lives. In this respect, Bandarage (1984) argues for the reformulation of old categories within Marxist feminism that pertain to the realities of early industrial capitalism, in order to draw new ones that contemplate structural change. Such premise has become inherent in more recent accounts of women's factory work and its effect on gender inequality. For instance, Lane (1998) criticizes the notion of workers as acting primarily as gendered or capitalist subjects and not as both, making it impossible to theorize the wide range of subjectivities that operate in the shopfloor of maquiladora factories.

Such recent accounts provide the grounds for a broadening of the range of patriarchal structures that operate against fixed limits in shaping gendered meanings (Lane, 1998). One of the implications of such an approach involves the incorporation of issues mainly tackled by radical feminists, i.e. sexuality and violence. Walby (1991) refers to this issue when evaluating the problematic aspects of dual-systems theory. The author considers that a broader number of structures should be analyzed within patriarchy, adding that an adequate synthesis between the radical and socialist feminist theories must include aspects of domestic work, paid employment, sexuality, violence and the state. This facilitates the interconnection between gender, cultural and historical variation through a theory which encapsulates various causal relations (Walby, 1991).

Sexuality and violence have been broadly ignored within the NIDL debate with a few exceptions. Nathan (1996) argues that the dynamics of

maquiladora employment establish a link between intensive work, pleasure engagement and vulnerability to violence. Such relationship involves the development of 'modern' cultural notions on women's sexuality, such as the value of physical beauty and so-called sexual liberation. Similarly, Lane (1998) incorporates the dynamics of flirtation and sexual politics within the factory to explain how gendered selves are constituted within the context of global capitalism, itself shaped by the gendering of those who populate its universe. Other accounts contribute to this focus (9).

The issues above are relevant concerning the effects of factory employment on women's lives. Particularly, the symbolic aspects surrounding sexuality and violence have a direct impact on gender relations, both within the public and private spheres. Under this premise, the interconnections between the factory and the household acquire a broader analytical significance, since the latter constitutes the locus where bargaining takes place in women's exercise of their choices (Tiano, 1995). Furthermore, the process of socialization of values and ideology takes place in the context of the household maintenance (Selby et al, 1990). Finally, incorporating the household into the analysis allows to examine the ideological and material components of gender relations and uncover asymmetries of rewards and disunity of interests (Acevedo, 1995).

Even though the household has received some attention within the NIDL debate, its most 'obscure' elements, i.e. sexuality and violence, have remained silenced and disconnected from the web of power relations in the dynamics of production and reproduction. On the other hand, such issues have been examined from a socio-demographic perspective that focuses on women's decision bargaining within the household,

conceptualized as 'survival strategies' (Tilly, 1978; Schmink, 1984; González de la Rocha, 1994))(10).

Contrary to the argument of authors such as Selby et al (11), which cancels the possibility of real strategies within urban Mexico, I depart in my analysis from the feminist literature discussion on the subject (García & de Oliveira, 1994; Benería y Roldán, 1987; González de la Rocha, 1989, 94). Feminist approaches to the household criticize the use of the term 'strategies' within a unifying notion of the household (Roldán, 1984; Moore, 1988; Guyer, 1988)(12).

The above is key in understanding power gender relations, since the roles that define women as wives and mothers tend to prevail despite their significant contribution to the household maintenance (Beechey, 1978). Simultaneously, the gender-based division of labor at the household level is reproduced within the capitalist mode, as capitalism uses patriarchal ideologies to create these divisions within the labor force (Beechey, 1978). The NIDL is replicating throughout the world these same gender-based divisions within and between the domestic and capitalist modes (Tiano, 1995).

From this perspective, a key issue relevant here is pointed out by Wolf (1992), who states that the generalized definition of the term 'strategies' conceals the set of conflicts and power relations inherent in the household dynamics (13). Consequently, she adds, the feminist approach on the NIDL could gain through the incorporation of a bargaining approach to the study of household relations, since women's roles in bargaining incorporates a recognition of agency and resistance by subordinate members.

Considering this issue is key in understanding the processes within development that lead women to empowerment. For instance, Kabeer (1994)

argues that the contractual nature of the household relations structures the ability of its members to cooperate, acquiesce or dissent in household decision-making processes. Consequently, the nature of interdependence in the production process and the differing labor relationships vis-à-vis male partners affect the level of autonomy achieved through work. Furthermore and as argued by the author, income *per se* is less important to women's bargaining power than access to new social networks which certain forms of income-earning provide. Therefore, women's capacity to define themselves as workers and organize collectively has implications for their bargaining power in relation to other household members.

Similar claims have been made while considering the patterns of power and authority in measuring the effect of income-producing work on gender-based relationships. For instance, García & de Oliveira (1995) see women's perceptions of their lives and the cultural meanings assigned to their reality as relevant in the analysis. Their findings agree with the impact of income control on women's empowerment through work (Blumberg, 1991), adding that women's commitment to work constitutes a further accountable factor in such dynamics.

Wolf's critique and similar arguments on the issue offer a valuable angle to women's survival within the NIDL debate. However, they do not cover the whole range of issues affecting the dynamics of women's autonomy through work participation. If we want to capture the complete picture of power dynamics within the domestic setting and their effect on women's autonomy in all areas, in 'opening the doors of the household', (Wolf, 1992, p.22) we must cover all aspects of intrahousehold dynamics. These include the 'dark' side of power relations where new dimensions of subordination, concientization and change can emerge. Sexual violence is

one of those 'private' issues that, although included in some analysis of daily reproduction (González de la Rocha, 1994; García & de Oliveira, 1994), it is not sufficiently explored within feminist accounts on the NIDL while being neglected as a substantive analytical tool in empirical investigation.

In the next section I expand on this issue and support two main leads of my argument: First, that androcentric bias is most visible and systematic in the area of male violence against women (Edwards, 1991), as well as the clearest, most straightforward expression of male and female power (Kaufman, 1997). This serves to justify the use of sexual violence as a parameter of gender power relations as it intersects with class and ethnicity in the question posed hereby. With this purpose in mind, I discuss the reasons for violence against women and explore the nature of power relations in these dynamics.

The second lead in my argument shows the impossibility to achieve autonomy while suffering victimization, therefore supporting the focus on freedom from violence as a manifestation of autonomy. For this purpose, I explore the consequences of sexual violence for low-income women in the Third World and the various resistance strategies exercised in this context.

#### Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Violence and their Applicability within the NIDL Debate

Liberalism sees male violence as the acts of a few psychologically damaged men (West, Roy and Nichols, 1978; Pizzey, 1974). The focus within this perspective is placed on psychological processes rather than social structures. West, Roy and Nichols provide evidence gathered through

interviews with twelve rapists, already confined in a psychiatric unit. Regarding the issue of domestic violence, Pizzey argues that men beat their wives as a result of witnessing their fathers react violently against their mothers. Her evidence comes from women's testimonies in the Chiswick refuge in which she participated. Although the liberal approach does not place much emphasis on the state in explaining violence, it suggests state action is inefficient due to the technical problems it faces. (Walby, 1990)

The main problems in the perspective above refer to the dubious quality of the empirical evidence. With regards to West et al's study, other more rigorous evidence shows that the majority of convicted rapists are not considered to be in need of psychiatric assistance by the courts. In 1978 only 3.5% of rapists were sentenced by the British courts to a hospital order under the Mental Health Act of 1959. The same applies to the evidence provided in relation to domestic violence. Pizzey's study was replicated by Gayford (1975), showing that only 9 of the 100 women interviewed had abusive fathers. These results were later supported by more methodologically rigorous studies (Gelles, 1972). (Walby, 1990)

Furthermore, both rape and domestic violence are far more common than suggested: in a sample of 930 women in USA, 44% had been victims of rape at least once in their lives (Russell, 1982). Regarding domestic violence, between one quarter and one third of married women suffer serious violence at least once in their conjugal life (McKinnon, 1987; Strauss, 1991b; Carillo, 1992). Finally, the little attention paid to the state by this theory is problematic, as most rapists are not prosecuted, therefore revealing its structural bias. (Walby, 1990)

Although violence was hardly included in class analysis during the 1980s, this issue has increasingly become the focus of attention during

the 1990s. Initially, the main argument pointed at the unequal nature of class relations as responsible for men's violence to women. According to this, men who are disadvantaged in the class structure will abuse their power in the domestic setting (14). Other authors provide a sub-cultural version to the above, stating that violent men develop a particular set of values that depart from the main culture, due to the alienation they experience. It is within this sub-culture where violence is generated (Amir, 1971; Hotaling & Strauss, 1980). (Walby, 1990)

Research from developing countries supports the argument above, pointing at the economic dependence of violent families (15), the economic crisis (16) and the existing gap between the privileged and the less privileged (Wamalwa, 1985) as some of the reasons behind violence. The research carried out in Bangladesh goes a step further in arguing that societal tensions inherent in a system of political and economic deprivation account for the high levels of marital violence (Zaalouk, 1987; Shamim, 1987). (Connor, 1989)

Class analysis is important in showing why some men might be more violent than others, while it refers to social structures rather than psychological processes in explaining men's violence (Walby, 1990). However, once again the empirical evidence is not solid. Amir's sample is only representative of the rapists that a racist police force would consider suspicious, as the subjects were drawn from those already filled for prosecution (Walby, 1990). Similarly, the results from research in developing countries derive from hospital surveys and social work case studies rather than representative samples. More reliable findings from a representative survey in the US showed that rapists are evenly distributed among social classes and races (Russell, 1982).

Simultaneously, the argument does not consider the gendered nature

of the violence, i.e. why men attack women instead of other men (Walby, 1990), while some unprivileged men do not use violence against women. Similarly, it does not provide an answer to why women, who often come from lower class ranks than men, do not attack men (Connor, 1989). Regarding an account of a class oppressive state, this has not been developed in connection to violence.

The issue of gender in explaining sexual violence was initially tackled by radical feminists. Both violence and sexuality within this theory are seen as socially shaped (Brownmiller, 1976; Enlow, 1983; Weems, 1995). This body of thought draws on political theory which defines politics in terms of power relations, considering force the coercive use of power by the dominant group as a resource of last resort (Millet, 1977). Therefore, this perspective sees violence as a form of social control by men over women that is expressed through acts such as rape (Brownmiller, 1976; Roberts, 1989; Griffin, 1971; Sheffield, 1997). In sum, radical feminism views partner violence as reflective of a larger patriarchal structure that functions to subordinate women. In this context, female sexuality is assumed as a particular threat to male power that should be under men's control (Marin & Russo, 1999). Other accounts within this theory focus on wife beating (Hanmer, 1978; Hanmer & Saunders, 1984), pornography (Dworkin, 1981), incest (Nelson, 1987; Russell, 1984) and sexual harassment (Russell, 1984; Stanko, 1988), adding to the argument an analysis of the state as perpetrator of violence.

The research carried out in the development context confirms the above argument, since gender inequality is shown to be the context where violence is condoned. Studies from India suggest that domestic violence might be a consequence of a societal structure where men exercise

authority over women (Singh, 1987). Research from China also finds the root of such behavior in the male-centered ideology, where a husband will abuse his wife when something is not done to his satisfaction (17). The above is further confirmed by studies that show that violence often takes place when the man wishes to take another wife, where he suspects his wife is unfaithful or where he sees her as 'rebellious' or 'nagging' (Zaalouk, 1987; Mukasa-Kikonyogo, 1987; Plata, 1987; Wamalwa, 1985).

In terms of the state options available to women in the Third World, Connor's conclusions confirm the argument followed by radical feminists in the First World. The author refers to the lack of coherence between the technical aspect of the law and its actual enforcement, which is fettered by the patriarchal attitudes of the judiciary (18). More recently, Connor (1994) points at two main issues regarding legal responses to violence worldwide: 1. In most countries it receives no special treatment by the law, and 2. There is a lack of a synthetic approach and a failure to link the manifestations of violence against women to gender subordination and the cultural make-up of the community concerned.

Radical feminism has offered a socio-structural perspective of violence as a gender phenomenon, integrating men's violence, women's response and an analysis of the state. Furthermore, the feminist perspective on this issue has been a major influence in understanding, predicting and preventing sexual violence, leading to the construction of approaches to intervene at individual, interpersonal and structural levels (O'Neil & Harway, 1997).

However, the main critique points at its biological essentialism (Edwards, 1987; Donat & D'Emilio, 1997) as well as its insensitivity to racial and class issues (Davies, 1981; Segal, 1990). Furthermore, its

focus on victimization leaves little room for understanding women's sources of power (Donat & D'Emilio, 1997). Similarly, feminist analysis, while stating that 'all men are potential rapists', one of the slogans of many feminists in the late 1970s and 1980s, have been unwilling to explore why some men become rapists or batterers and some men do not (Segal, 1990).

According to the above, combining class and radical feminist analysis provides a suitable synthesis to elaborate an explanation of sexual violence from a socio-structural perspective. Even though the evidence derived from class analysis remains inconclusive, class is relevant in a historical analysis of the relationship between power relations and violence against women. In sum, the factors that combine to cause violence against women in the family intersect with inequalities of class, ethnicity, race and age (Segal, 1990). This perspective is reflected in the work of Leghorn & Parker (1981) who integrate a discussion of the role of force in women's oppression within a framework of 'sexual economics', control over fertility, the division of labor, access to resources, networks between women and political power. The authors attempt to integrate a range of feminist concerns into a theoretical system which is not deterministic, reductionist, historically bounded or ethnographic.

Such a wider perspective on the issue is also proposed by Marin & Russo (1999), arguing that it is important to recognize culture as a factor in explaining the dynamics of sexual violence. Simultaneously, in considering macro-level factors with regards to sexual violence, we need an economic analysis of who benefits from violence and the tactics used to achieve specific interests. Finally, the role of traditional patriarchal values and how it is reflected in organizational and

institutional structures is key to understanding this issue. (Marin & Russo, 1999)

This focus has been expanded throughout the 1990s, offering an integration of the elements above in exploring what causes male violence against women. One example lies in the attempt to revisit the major critiques to Amir's subcultural theory of rape. O'Toole (1997) argues that a major problem lies in its inadequate testing and conceptualization, since a predominantly gender-neutral frame of reference has been applied unaltered to a gendered phenomenon. Therefore, the author's proposition is directed towards using the vehicle of gender analysis to explore subcultures in relation to rape incidence, arguing that masculinist subcultures such as fraternities and sport clubs share specific in-group identification and ritual behaviors that fit the sociological definition of subculture.

Exploring the construction of masculinity has also added to the debate on whether men are violent as a consequence of their power over women or to gain power over them. Recent accounts focusing on the role of masculinity in perpetuating violence against women tend to confirm the latter, showing that men are more likely to use violence if they are not economically superior to their wives (Messerschmidt, 1997; Sánchez-Huelles & Dutton, 1999) or their masculinity is threatened in some other way (Messerschmidt, 1997). For instance, Messerschmidt sees the workplace as a site of gendered control and authority, where power relations are maintained and reproduced through the creation of male and female jobs. Simultaneously, normative heterosexuality conditions work practices and is perpetuated through sexual harassment and the construction of specific types of masculinity and femininity. According to the author, in these dynamics the shop floor is an ideal place for differentiating between

genders, since the exercise of manual labor shows the 'manhood' of male workers and therefore the presence of women constitutes a threat to their masculinity. (Messerschmidt, 1997)

Simultaneously, unemployment has negative consequences for gender power relations within the household, since it undermines the patriarchal breadwinner/good male provider. Since unemployed and underemployed men lack the traditional resources for constructing their masculinity, they are more likely to forge one that centers on control of the domestic setting through violence (Messerschmidt, 1997; Alder, 1997). In these studies, it is acknowledged that while most lower-working class husbands do not abuse their wives, the specific social conditions that prevail in these families increase the chances of abuse.

The above is confirmed by research in Mexico, showing that the types of work available to women in the development process do not offer the means to overcome victimization (González de la Rocha, 1994). Rather, they pose a sufficient threat to male partners to generate domestic violence in order to ensure their dominant position. Simultaneously, the author refers to religious institutions as supporters of the hegemonic order that promote the use of violence as a form of control. Also in Mexico, García y de Oliveira (1994) examine the role of violence in female-headed households, showing that women's role in supporting the household maintenance increases the chances of being victimized by their partners, due to the threat it implies to their dominant role.

Reeves (1997) adds information to this issue while incorporating the issue of culture in explaining sexual violence, offering a wider cross-cultural lens to the issue. The author examines the cultural, economic and gender dimensions of sexual violence from a sociological perspective, elaborating two profiles of rape-free and rape-prone

societies based on examining sexual assault in 156 tribal societies. Reeves argues that depletion of food resources, migration and other factors contributing to a dependence on male destructive capacities motivates a rape-prone cultural configuration. In this type of context, the male role has greater status and force men to prove their manhood, therefore showing that men can also be violent as a consequence of their power rather than to gain power.

Results from surveys and hospital case studies in developing countries complement the above and make reference to culture in explaining sexual violence. However, they rise a relevant question on the issue, i.e. whether cultural values serve to contribute or prevent sexual violence. For instance, it has been argued that traditional values that may have served to control violence are disappearing, since migration and overpopulation in the cities have worsened individual life conditions, making violence a way of life (Wamalwa, 1985). Such violence is directed against the powerless, among which women and children constitute a majority (Zaalouk, 1987).

However, the work of Sánchez-Hucles & Dutton (1999) shows that cultural factors can have both positive and negative consequences for victims of domestic violence. The authors address the way in which societal, cultural and individual factors are linked to domestic violence. They depart from the notion that unemployment, poverty and immigration make ethnic minorities be at a higher risk for family violence than other groups in society. Although their research is based on the experience of ethnic minorities in the US (including Latin minorities), the results can be compared to the experience of these same groups in other contexts, since violence constitutes a reflection of power relations at various levels.

The cultural factors affecting violence are as follows: First, family violence is in part a result of the belief that what happens in the household is private and the domain of males ('Report of the Task Force, 1996). This notion is supported by cultural beliefs among families of color that consider appearance and status with respect to the outside world as important. Second, this in turn is reflected in the suspicion that many minority families feel with respect to official institutions (Asbury, 1993). Finally, ethnic minority women often feel it their duty to endure violence rather than lose male support. This notion is reinforced by religions that send clear messages that the welfare of the family is more important than the individual's well-being (Torres, 1991). (Sánchez-Huckles & Dutton, 1999)

Furthermore, although women who work are seemingly more involved in decision making (Vásquez, 1994), there is a strong cultural pull to accord their mates deference and let men be in charge. Simultaneously, cultural stereotypes that depict minority women as dependent and submissive might lead women to internalize these beliefs and blame themselves for the abuse suffered. Finally, cultural traditions among women of color portray women as morally superior and capable of accepting long suffering without complaint (Falicov, 1982). (Sánchez-Huckles & Dutton, 1999)

The above shows some of the negative consequences of culture on the issue of domestic violence. However, as discussed in a later section, cultural values and practices can prove valuable resiliency factors in preventing violence (Sánchez-Huckles & Dutton, 1999). On the whole, although the studies carried out on the impact of class and ethnic relations on sexual violence reflect contradictory patterns, they offer a deeper examination of the issues explaining violence. At the same time, a

general lack of comparability across studies in definitions and methodologies prevents the drawing of final conclusions.

In examining the reasons for violence against women we have explored some of the aspects that promote and prevent autonomy as freedom from violence and the impact of women's role as workers in these dynamics. Several themes emerge from the discussion above: 1. Sexual violence derives from unequal gender relations that intersect with class and ethnic relations, 2. Men's violence against women is both a consequence of their power and the means to acquire power. In the second instance, women's role as workers can promote the use of violence rather than lead to autonomy, 3. Cultural values are key in the dynamics of sexual violence, often counteracting the positive consequences of women's role as workers for achieving autonomy. These themes are key in supporting the use of sexual violence as a parameter of gender power relations. They also offer valuable information on the impact of women's role as workers in their potential towards autonomy.

These takes as to explore the above in a closer context, i.e. the impact of sexual violence within development and the relevance of women's incorporation into the working force in these dynamics. Official institutions around the world have established the significance of sexual violence in assessing women's participation in the development process. This issue has been referred to as a major obstacle to the achievement of peace, equality and development (UN Report, 1985; Issues Quarterly, 1996). The above has prompted an international dialogue on the issue, leading to intergovernmental measures by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1993). Similarly, the resolutions arrived to during the 1995 Global Conference on Women in Beijing have began to force governments to acknowledge and reform

policies and practices that have supported gender violence (O'Toole & Schiffman, 1997).

In the development context, violence has often been associated with health issues, due to the higher health risks and vulnerability low-income women face (Heise, 1993, 1997). According to the 1993 World Bank annual report on world development, rape and domestic violence are significant causes for incapacitation and death among women in their reproductive cycle (Heise, 1997). On a global scale, the health implications of violence among women in reproductive age are comparable to other risk factors which are already a high priority in the world agenda, i.e. HIV, tuberculosis, cancer and cardiovascular disease (World Bank, 1993).

With regards to the effect of violence on development, it manifests in areas such as women's work and their participation in development projects. In this context, Hyman (1993) showed that a woman who had suffered incest earned between 3% and 22% less than one who had not, due to its impact on educational success, physical and mental health. In general terms, the physical and psychological effects of violence on women and children are similar to those in the First World (Wamalwa, 1985).

However, the results' similarities escape a very real implication for women in Third World countries. The available options of low-income women are limited in terms of their lack of access to economic resources and welfare services, a situation often worsened by other social and cultural elements such as traditional religious beliefs and marginalization (19). Such limitations increase women's vulnerability to sexual violence and reduces their opportunities for change and survival.

This differential factor has a profound impact on the development of Third World nations and women's capacity for autonomy within them.

As to the relevance of violence on women's participation in development projects, a study carried out by UNIFEM/Mexico on the reasons why women stopped participating in such projects revealed men's threats as the main cause (Stephen, 1997). Similarly, case studies in Peru and Mexico show that men often beat up their wives to make use of their salaries (Vázquez & Tamayo, 1989). Other studies and events show similar patterns (Carillo, 1992; Rao Gupta, 1993; Bradley, 1990; Gibson, 1990).

The consequences of sexual violence in women's lives severely limit their potential for autonomy, therefore supporting the present focus on freedom from violence as a major manifestation of autonomy and empowerment. Simultaneously, by paying attention to women's strategies against violence in the development context, new avenues towards autonomy and empowerment can be identified. The specific processes of structural change emerging in developing countries in the last decades have generated a variety of support networks. Within this framework, some scholars refer to sexual violence as a significant variable in examining women's survival strategies (Ramírez, 1993; Kabeer, 1994; González de la Rocha, 1994; García & de Oliveira, 1994; Stephen, 1997; Sen, 1998).

Ramírez (1993) argues that collective survival actions and associative work offer valuable survival strategies towards breaking isolation, solidarity and reorganizing the domestic division of labor. Similar results derive from the work of Sen (1998) in Calcuta, who found that informal networks proved a more significant variable in leaving a violent relationship than formal employment. In the Mexican context, LeVine (1997), in examining the impact of urbanization and social change on women in Mexico city, refers to women's community networks such as

church groups as major resistance strategies against abuse among older women. In some of these groups, the influence of feminist theology is setting a precedence to question traditional assumptions that perpetuate violence (Elizondo, 1994).

Similarly, popular education based on the work of women educators, organizers and grassroots leaders has been groundbreaking and a challenge to more traditional pedagogy in the fight against sexual violence (Popular Education Research Group - PERG). Examples drawn from this perspective focus, among other themes, on building women's self esteem and the search for culturally appropriate community-based solutions to the problem of violence. According to Sánchez-Huelles & Dutton (1999) the interaction of individual differences based on belief, faith, cultural values and practices are valuable resources that protect ethnic minorities from violence in the US. Furthermore, they point at these issues as factors that sometimes counteract the effect of patriarchal notions. For instance, women of color have referred to their spiritual beliefs as resources to endure difficulties that empowered them to find freedom from violence (Sánchez-Huelles & Dutton, 1999).

Similarly, research that concentrates on the symbolic sphere, normativity and its practical aspects (Castaneda, 1993; Barrios & Pons, 1995), rather than on demographic factors, reproduction and health (Alatorre et al., 1994), illuminates the diversity of resources in women's fight for survival (Córdoba, 1997). For instance, Córdoba (1997) points at the exercise of a varied and broad sexuality among rural groups as a significant survival strategy. This is derived from the decisive role of women in the reproduction of the domestic unit, allowing to consider their sexuality as an area of power.

Considering the increasing violence derived from men's contradictory position between their traditional unfulfilled role and their generalized image as rebels, women's sexual conduct evaluates men's capabilities to satisfy their gender role as erotic and economic provider (Córdoba, 1997). Such perspective runs parallel to arguments that point at women's control of their bodies as a significant condition for liberation (Ward, 1997).

This issue illustrates the meaning of autonomy as 'power from within' in opposition to 'power over'. According to Kabeer (1994), empowerment strategies must be built on this type of power in order to improve women's decision-making as well as their ability to control resources and determine agendas. To support her argument, the author examines grassroots efforts to empower poor women in South Asia, focusing, among others, on a case study about a battered women center - Shanti Dairiam - that attempts to build their sense of control over their own lives (power from within) in order to restore women's self-esteem and autonomy.

As shown by the above, opportunities for change often arise through conflict and power bargaining on all levels. On this basis, I argue that the tensions arising from sexual violence prove a valuable analytical tool in measuring women's potential for autonomy. From this perspective, violence and its outcome becomes significant in achieving equal relations, or in the worst case, utter subordination. Whatever the case, using sexual violence as a parameter of gender power relations within the NIDL debate may alter the often taken-for-granted straightforward relationship between work, economic 'independence' and women's personal autonomy.

Simultaneously, this issue could bring a more balanced account of the interrelation of production and reproduction within the NIDL, while questioning the view of women workers as victims of patriarchy and capitalism. In viewing this process within a framework that embodies collective and individual interests, power relations and conflict, the issues relevant to women's autonomy expand beyond the material aspects of their lives and offer a wider perspective on subordination and resistance.

Such a perspective offers the possibility to explore the ways in which cultural ideas about gender do not necessarily reflect the social and economic positions of men and women (Moore, 1988). As stated by Stolen (1991, pp. 7), 'processes of change often contain elements of both a striving for continuity (...) as well as striving to achieve 'new' values'. Consequently, behavioral changes may take place without being supported by new directions in terms of ideology. In this process, religions are powerful sources of gender doctrines, becoming resistant to change that challenges the dominant gender ideology. For instance, the construction of sexuality within these doctrines is key in shaping gender identity in situations of socio-economic change. (Stolen, 1991)

This work takes the elements above to construct an argument on the need to expand the range of variables that lead to autonomy among low-income women workers in the Northern Mexican border. By including the symbolic dimension in women's process of resistance, I aim to offer a wider vision of autonomy and social change. Such view complements recent work that qualifies the assumption that increasing control over independent resources of income would necessarily lead to greater gender equality. Considering that the assessment of women's autonomy constitutes the main objective of this work, in the next section I will explore the

way in which the concepts of autonomy and empowerment have been conceptualized and arrive to my own definition. Simultaneously, I examine their cross-cultural validity and application within development policy and the gender and development literature. Finally, I allocate these terms in the context of the NIDL debate as applied in the Northern Mexican border.

#### Defining Autonomy and Empowerment in the Context of this Investigation

The definitions used to refer to autonomy and empowerment have often overlapped in the gender and development literature. Consequently, I take a first step towards differentiating the two terms and allocating their meanings within the question posed hereby. Both the definitions of autonomy and empowerment has been reclaimed by feminists in search of alternative definitions of power. This process has developed within a general lack of consensus on the meaning of either term (Rowlands, 1998; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). Rowlands (1998) refers to this problem as applied to empowerment, reviewing the different perspectives on power within the social sciences in order to clarify this issue.

The concept of power in the latter context has often been referred to as 'power over' (Dahl, 1961; Polsby, 1963; Wolfinger, 1971; Bachrach and Baratz, 1970), where one person or grouping of people controls the actions or options of another. This is particularly the case within the WID perspective. The problem with this definition is that it does not involve a structural change in gender relations and therefore power can be equally bestowed and withdrawn. (Rowlands, 1998)

Other ways of conceptualizing power are more focused on process than on a result and can take as many forms as 'power to', 'power with'

and 'power from within'. For instance, Hartsock (1985) refers to the 'energy' definition of power in that it is generative in nature rather than based on obedience. Another version of power is found in Foucault, who refers to power as relational while existing only in its exercise. Consequently, power exists within a series of relationships among subjects who have a relative freedom to act (Gordon, 1980; Foucault, 1982). Simultaneously, Foucault includes a notion of resistance in his model that is exercised within a system of micro-politics. (Rowlands, 1998)

The feminist model of power derives from the Foucault version, although it incorporates a gender analysis of power relations that examines women's internal barriers to the exercise of power. Most significantly to the question posed hereby, it also draws on how the gendered male violence against women conditions their experience (Faith, 1994). Other useful definition within the feminist thinking refers to power as 'power with', which points at a sense of the whole being greater than the parts and applies in terms of group solidarity and the ability to tackle problems together (Williams et al., 1995). Finally, there is also the view of power as 'the power from within' that refers more closely to the spiritual strength within us which basis are self-acceptance and self-respect. This type of power can only be self-generated and entails the experimental recognition and analysis of the structural mechanisms by which women's subordination is maintained (Kabeer, 1994). (Rowlands, 1998)

The definition of autonomy proposed by Valks (1992) fits into the feminist vision of power described above, referring to the right to control your own life and body in the physical, economic, sociocultural and political spheres. Inherent in this definition is the search for an

alternative concept of power to that of domination over others, i.e. power as ability (physical, mental or moral) to act, to do or exercise, equivalent of strength and energy to achieve, satisfy needs and reach common goals. (Zapata & Mercado, 1995)

Similar perspectives have used autonomy to conceptualize women's position cross-culturally (Blumberg, 1984; Chafetz, 1980; Mason, 1984; Schlegel, 1977; Safilios-Rothschild, 1982; Yuen & Lim, 1992). A structural bias in the definition of autonomy has been criticized for being excessively scripted while containing preconceived notions of individual and family behavior (Wolf, 1992). Alternatively, the term 'female agency' has been proposed to avoid the extreme images of women as autonomous individuals or as symbiotic with their families, while offering a broader continuum providing a subject-focused orientation based on practice instead of attributes. The benefits of the 'agency' concept lie in that it counters problematic stereotypes of Third World women. Simultaneously, it counters a tendency within the NIDL to privilege capital, offering a wider view of the contradictory forces that can operate simultaneously in different life arenas. Furthermore, it recognizes multiple and fluid sources of identity and interests since action is seen as conditioned by outside forces and structured within the context of collectivities. (Wolf, 1992)

Parallel to Wolf's argument lies the feminist critique to the masculinist conceptualization of autonomy, bound up with assumptions about selfhood and agency and with political traditions that have a problematic history for women's interests (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). However, as stated by the authors, the notion of autonomy is vital in terms of feminists attempts to explore oppression, subordination and agency. Feminist attempts to refigure the concept have led to what has

been referred as 'relational autonomy', linked to a range of perspectives that share the convictions that: 1. Persons are socially embedded, and 2. Identities are created within the context of social relationships, shaped by interrelated social determinants. Within this perspective, the focus is placed on analyzing the social dimensions of selfhood and identity in exploring individual autonomy and moral and political agency. (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000)

My own definition builds on this same model, focusing on the meaning of power as 'power from within', considered a major source of strength and ability to act. Empowerment, on the other hand, is considered as a consequence of autonomy and more directly linked to the effectiveness of the individual in its interaction with others, social structures and institutions (power with). The role of autonomy in achieving empowerment derives from the fact that the latter implies gaining dignity and therefore requires an individual process (Duarte & González, 1997). As stated by Duarte & González, this is true because empowerment emerges as a consequence of developing the ability for decision-making and improve individual autonomy, in itself inseparable from the autonomy of the group or structure to which the individual belongs. As defined by Batliwala (1993), empowerment would therefore be related to the power exercised in social relations, i.e. the control of physical, human, intellectual, financial and personal resources. Simultaneously, it would involve more work at the community level than at the individual level (Duarte & González, 1997).

In order to contextualize my own definition of the terms, I will now examine how autonomy and empowerment have been applied and conceptualized by development agencies and institutions, as well as within the gender and development literature. Since 1990, the United

Nations Development Program (UNDP) has published an annual Human Development Report (HDR) to chart the progress of well-being around the world. Income, life expectancy and education levels are the focus of economic progress.

However, in 1995 the Gender-related Development Index (GID) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) were also included as needed indicators of well-being and overall progress. The former refers to gender inequality in its overall assessment of aggregate well-being in a country and the latter charts the progress toward gender equity in agency in economic and public life. Similarly, at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, world leaders adopted a Platform for Action aimed at achieving empowerment for women. Although neither attempt is exempt from criticism (Williams, 1998; Bardhan & Klasen, 1999), they reflect the ongoing shift in the terms in which empowerment, agency and autonomy are conceptualized and applied to policy-making. With regards to the gender and development literature, this shift reflects in differing interpretations to the impact of women's employment in their well-being.

A key analytical aspect of the early literature refers to income control as a major means of acquiring power within the domestic setting, portraying a masculinist vision of autonomy and empowerment. Even though researchers admit the existence of other dependent variables in measuring power (Blumberg, 1991), the relative male/female control of income and other resources was, in practice, the single most studied variable of all. In fact, various perspectives in the development context show that women's control over family resources do indeed increase their self-esteem, participation in decision making and ability to make reproductive choices (Blumberg, 1991; Roldán, 1982; Kusterer et al, 1981; Safa, 1991). These findings are almost homogeneous despite some variations (20).

Ultimately, most earlier studies on the subject find a positive correlation between level of income, responsibility for decision-making and authority. One assumption underneath this premise is that family members active as wage earners tend to exercise greater authority than non-wage earners. A second related assumption is that the individual who earns the higher amount of money will have greater say and responsibility for decisions. (Hertz, 1992)

However, the research remains inconclusive and began to be questioned in the late 70s and 80s, emerging a new analysis that tackled the dynamics and structures of gender relations rather than simply the nature of women's roles. For instance, the traditional wives' role may be so powerful as to withstand a direct assault on the premise that wives do not contribute materially to the support of the family. Consequently, women's earnings could be written off as supplementary (Hertz, 1992), which enables men to remain cushioned and privileged in relation to women (Segal, 1990). Similarly, being paid does not necessarily entail retaining control of the income (Elson, 1999). Furthermore, imprecise measures of authority are being used, i.e. when employing survey items which refer to 'control over spending' there might be missing subtle but real shifts in authority (Hertz, 1992).

Most importantly in terms of assessing women's autonomy, a focus that restricts autonomy and empowerment to the material aspects of women's lives obscures alternative avenues of power. This conceptual shift acknowledges the complexity inherent in the terms 'femininity' and 'masculinity', since differing categories emerge within nations, classes and ethnias (21). The attempt to apply an hegemonic and masculinist concept of autonomy to the experience of Third World women creates an ideological barrier that prevents women's expression of their own reality

(León, 1993). This is where a conceptual shift is called upon, arising from women's capability to determine their options and exercise their choices.

This new focus accounts for variety, moving from simple dichotomies and women's economic or project participation towards including all aspects of women's lives as relevant, i.e. physical situation, intra-household relations, health, sexuality, education, violence, widowhood and abandonment. Finally, it makes visible the power relations between men and women and enables a critical view of supposedly neutral institutions (Kabeer, 1994), as well as male bias in the development process (Elson, 1995). (Rowlands, 1998)

Examples of literature that offers alternative views on women's options toward autonomy proliferate. Acosta-Belén & Bose (1995) offer a useful review on the experience of Third World women in this area, concluding that they most often survive through collectivizing their problems, rather than privatizing them (Blumberg, 1995; Aptheker, 1989; Ward, 1995; Ramirez, 1993; Safa, 1995). Women in this context often engage in organizing collective meals, child-care cooperatives and women's clubs, turning daily survival into a potential means toward autonomy. Sometimes such activities are partially or totally financed by development agencies or local NGOs (Mizan, 1992).

These perspectives illuminate the significance of traditional cultural values as part of the process that leads women to participate in collective action (Acosta-Belén & Bose, 1995). For instance, Safa (1995) found that the role of the church was key in acquiring support for social justice, since women organized in ecclesiastic base communities in an attempt to reinforce grassroots support. Although these groups were based on traditional women's roles, they offered a base from which to challenge

the existing order. These findings confirm my own argument as it rejects the view of traditional values as necessarily restrictive to women's autonomy. The above underpins the research on women's strategies against violence in the development context, showing that women often find freedom from violence through symbolic processes, rather than those based on financial gain.

The above takes us to question the ways in which this notion of autonomy can be applied within the NIDL debate in the Northern Mexican border. In reviewing the literature on the subject, most recent research shows the prevalence of mixed, flexible and experience-based attitudes towards work (22). Simultaneously, the image of women as agents of their life trajectories is closely linked to the subject of consciousness and autonomy as a result of maquiladora work.

On this issue, the exploitation thesis portrays women workers as passive victims of capitalism and patriarchy, while claiming that they could only gain autonomy through reversing their domestic status and gaining independence from fathers or male partners. On the other side of the debate, the integration perspective sees education and income as the main prerequisites for gaining autonomy, simultaneously reducing work criticism among workers and expanding their employment opportunities while minimizing the primacy of women's domestic role.

A few scholars in the northern Mexican border have tackled this issue, and their conclusions for the most takes elements from both the exploitation and the integration perspectives. Research from the late 80s concludes that workers showed resistance (Peña, 1987), although it depended on exposure to political organizations (Staudt, 1987; Young, 1987). Peña's latest study in Ciudad Juárez reexamines maquiladora employment within the context of informal work organizations, focusing on

the workers' perspectives rather than those of the management (Peña, 1997). The author identifies multiple forms of struggle and resistance through collective action and links it to workers' association with grassroots organizations. An interesting turn in her analysis relates to the issue of spirituality and how it can provide a tool for political organization.

The above transcends the theoretical limits imposed by the exploitation versus integration perspective. For instance, it redefines the concept of formal education as portrayed by the integration perspective, showing that informal education in the context of political organizations and community networks can lead to conscientization. With regards to the exploitation perspective, it shows that access to such networks can neutralize the negative effects of patriarchal gender relations. Therefore, it rejects the notion that autonomy can only result from a reversal of women's domestic status. These findings fit more accurately into the reality of low-income border women and open up new options for autonomy.

Tiano's investigation in Mexicali in the mid 90s builds on the above, measuring the influence of further variables in consciousness-raising, i.e. gender inequality, the primacy of domestic obligations, solidarity bonds and autonomy vis-à-vis male figures. Her conclusions portray an image of women as autonomous, aware of gender inequality, supportive of feminism and solidarious. However, women remained ambivalent about the primacy of their domestic roles, an ambivalence internal in nature, although exposed to external constraints.

Her analysis aims to assess why and how women depart from an emphasis on domestic primacy, identifying domestic role, education, income and number of children as the variables that affect their values.

A second question addresses how these values affect acquiescence, accommodation, alienation, resistance and women's experiences leading to autonomy. Tiano's conclusion points at the existence of contrasting patterns of consciousness arising from women's self-selection and employers' selective processes. For instance, assemblers were more likely to express accommodative and alienated attitudes, while some of them expressed resistance. Women working at electronics factories tend to be more critical of the work place, showing gender solidarity across class lines.

Tiano's account constitutes a valuable contribution to the NIDL debate, providing a wider lens through which autonomy can be interpreted. Her analysis covers issues such as the relevance of cultural values on the impact of work in women's lives and the significance of the symbolic arena in measuring job satisfaction. Her work further moves beyond the integration versus exploitation debate, confirming both arguments at different stages of the analysis. For instance, it confirms the exploitation perspective as well as some prior arguments on the lack of options available for maquiladora workers (Fernández-Kelly, 1983). However, she also shows that this situation can be reversed when considering factors such as educational level, age and work experience, therefore confirming the integration perspective.

On the whole, the research on factory work and autonomy in the Northern Mexican border illuminates some key elements about the impact of factory work on gender power relations. Among them, the role of informal networks, education, political awareness and the symbolic aspects of work prove relevant in the impact of work on autonomy. However, in examining these variables, it fails to address the relevance of the symbolic aspect of sexuality and the use of violence against women in their

impact of women's identity as workers. Including these issues in the analysis opens up a broad range of variables that may offer new meaning to women's process towards autonomy and empowerment through work.

My argument takes these issues as a departure point in the present analysis, stressing their relevance on women's self identities and choices towards autonomy. In exploring these questions I depart from the same assumption as Tiano, i.e. I acknowledge work as one of the variables that may contribute to women's autonomy, but interpret its meaning from a broader perspective that considers the social construction of sexuality and the use of violence against women as key in the construction of women's identity as workers and the impact of work on autonomy. Such a perspective builds on and further explores Tiano's focus on conflict when considering the links between women's domestic status and employment, showing that cultural norms dictating women's traditional role constitute a major influence on women's employment choices, self-identities and career trajectories (23).

However, in following this line of analysis I question Tiano's assumption on the disempowering effects of women's domestic roles and argue that women's traditional values on domestic primacy do not always lead to victimization, but can also be significant in achieving autonomy as freedom from violence. Consequently, in exploring the relevant factors in women's changing values and self-conception as workers, I include spirituality as well as other elements previously tackled, i.e. age, migration status, employment and education level.

In sum, I aim to enlarge the spectrum of variables and possible interpretations to the issue of women's autonomy, as well as generate propositions to enhance the positive aspects of women's lives and those of their family. Such focus provides the grounds to illuminate factors

beyond the exploitation-integration dichotomy and complement the recent research on the impact of work on women's autonomy. For instance, employment may acquire a specific meaning that differs from previous conceptualizations of the issue if considered from the standpoint of women facing sexual violence. Simultaneously, issues of sexuality and violence possibly permeate the contradictions between women's conceptions of themselves as workers and ideal notions on gender roles. The most recent research on the links between domestic status and employment in this context show some of the leads that shape women's experience in this area (24).

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that in order to solve the impasse derived from applying outdated analytical categories to the study of gender and development, the range of patriarchal structures under study should be enlarged so that issues such as sexuality and violence are incorporated into the debate. This could facilitate the interconnection between gender, cultural and historical variation. Simultaneously, it promotes a focus on women as agents in the dynamics of their daily lives, where sexual violence is seen as a manifestation of gender power relations and also as an opportunity of creative change through women's resistance.

As discussed above, studies within the NIDL debate have hardly considered this issue when measuring the relationship between women's factory work and autonomy. Even when the term 'survival strategies' has been criticized for its limited scope, issues of sexuality and violence have remained neglected in such critique as well as from the range of existing conflicts within household gender relations.

In a second section, my objective has been to provide a rationale for the use of violence as a parameter of gender power relations and its relevance in assessing victimization and autonomy. For this purpose, I discussed the reasons for violence against women, arriving at specific themes that refer to the range of power relations explaining men's violence against women. The above led to examine the implications of violence for low-income women, showing that marginalization, economic deprivation and inadequate state provision intensifies the consequences of violence for this population sector, often deriving into extreme poverty and serious health conditions. Simultaneously, colonization and religious influences support traditional gender notions that perpetuate sexual violence. Considering the above, freedom from violence

Since autonomy is the key issue under analysis, the way in which power has been conceptualized to fit women's daily experiences is critically analyzed, leading to a definition of autonomy and empowerment and their application in the development context. Such definition is linked to the symbolic dimension of power, beyond the material aspects of survival and decision-making. I argue that this perspective offers a more expanded view of women's role as workers in their process of survival and its impact on their ability to overcome violence. Simultaneously, it challenges the view of women workers in this context as victims of structural dynamics.

In connection to the above, I refer to the empirical literature on the NIDL in the Northern Mexican border in order to assess the conclusions derived from it, as well as propose new research avenues that complement and enrich the body of knowledge on the issue under investigation. In so doing, I conclude that women's interpretation of their various roles and their impact on autonomy should include issues of

sexuality and violence, since these are key in understanding their experience of subordination and resistance while generating alternative avenues for change. Through such focus, areas previously assumed as disempowering to women may turn into valuable means towards autonomy as freedom from violence.

In sum, the discussion leading this chapter presents an argument on the need to incorporate gender inequality and conflict, i.e. domestic violence, as a conceptual element in the study of women's factory work and autonomy within low-income groups in the border. A second proposition points at the need to derive attention from the economic elements involved in the relationship between work and women's well being. Regarding this issue, the incorporation of a symbolic dimension within class analysis, as expressed in the cultural representations of women's daily life acquires particular significance.

Including violence in the academic study of development provides not only the opportunity to enrich the range of conceptual issues under analysis, but it also constitutes a major priority in terms of people's survival and personal development. It is at this particular point where theory and practice establish a bridge, which should benefit not only the body of academic knowledge, but also the women in their fight for survival.

In the next chapter, I describe the concrete socio-economic and historical framework of the subjects under investigation. This will clarify the specific circumstances faced by border women in their daily fight for survival as influenced by economic, social and cultural forces. It will also help to understand the role of sociohistorical processes in today's paradoxes, particularly with regards to women's identity as workers and their internal barriers for achieving autonomy through work.

I argue that these are key in determining women's experience of subordination and resistance within unequal gender relations in the context of this work, providing a basic framework for further analysis.

### 3. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC REALITY OF BORDER WOMEN: THE ROLE OF THE PAST IN TODAY'S PARADOXES

In this chapter I tackle the various aspects surrounding the reality of border women in the context of this investigation. More concretely, I examine specific elements such as the socio-economic context of the Northern Mexican border and Ciudad Juárez in particular, as well as the more symbolic dimensions of their daily life, such as cultural values and beliefs. This combination of factors allow for an understanding of their experiences of subordination and resistance, while providing a conceptual framework from which to explore the main focus of this work.

With this objective in mind, I first provide a brief revision of the available data on the socio-economic aspects of the Northern Mexican border and Ciudad Juárez, referring to women's position within this context and focusing on their role in the global economy as it manifests at the local level. In a second section, I argue for the need to examine the role of specific discourses on women's identity since the colony, in order to understand the impact of these notions on women's experiences today and the paradoxes surrounding their potential for autonomy within unequal gender relations. Finally, I focus on sexual violence within the concrete context of Ciudad Juárez, exploring the state position and limitations on this issue as well as low-income women's increased vulnerability within these dynamics.

The geographic location of the Northern Mexican Border makes it an attractive development area. Its constant flux of influences, material interests and identities between the highly differentiated countries of USA and Mexico, has added dynamism to the region and a certain feeling of 'emergency' which generates both fascination and uneasiness. Ultimately, the border offers many benefits, mainly due to its strategic position and the fact that in this export era, it has mostly been turned into an FTZ. Since the last decade, the promotion of the maquiladora

type of investment has been considered central in government policy, accentuated by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the US, Canada and Mexico.

Maquiladora investment relies on labor exploitation, state value, rent transfers and location advantages. Some local sectors such as subcontracting, property and commercial companies have benefited from this kind of investment (Salas, 1988; Pradilla & Castro, 1994; Contreras, 1987). However, various elements constitute a threat to its expansion, i.e. international competition, the payment of minimum salaries, the state's incapability to improve urban infrastructure while promoting the maquiladora type of expansion and the lack of integration between foreign investment and local industries (Pradilla & Castro, 1994; Expansión 1989, pg. 24,51 & ss.; El Financiero, 2, 4 & 9/10/89).

The above shows the potential impact of these dynamics on the quality of life endured by low-income groups on the border. In this context, issues involving geological and industrial environmental problems, along with the increasing rates of population growth and inadequate housing in the border become paramount. Such conditions partly derive from economic and political interests that prioritize maquiladora expansion at the expense of worsening life conditions for its workers (Encinas & Anaya, 1994; Pradilla & Castro, 1994). Among these, housing inadequacies are partially a result of selective investment towards the provision of land, services and infrastructure for industrial parks (25). Furthermore, persistent low wages and investment in higher employment ranks and corporate unions further worsen the quality of life of the maquiladora labor force (Pradilla & Castro, 1994).

The border town of Ciudad Juárez can nowadays be considered a product of foreign investment, highly influenced by the socioeconomic dynamics described above. However, the development of Ciudad Juárez underpins the establishment of the Rio Grande as international frontier

and the implementation of the 'Programa de Industrialización Fronteriza' [Border Industrialization Program]. These two events played a major part in the increasing rates of population growth experienced at the time. With the signature of the Guadalupe Hidalgo documents in 1848, the state of Chihuahua lost the towns of Socorro, Isleta, San Elisario and the territory north the rivers Bravo and Pecos, marking the beginning of a vertical relationship with the US. Ciudad Juárez is located north of the Chihuahua state, bordering on the states of Texas and New Mexico. It constitutes the most important city in Chihuahua in terms of economic activity and population density. (Encinas & Anaya, 1994)

Particularly relevant to this process of expansion are the latest economic activities taking place in the Northern border, namely the foreign investment brought along with the export maquiladora industry. Following the termination of the 'Programa de Braceros' [Braceros program] in 1965, it justified the establishment of the 'Programa Nacional Fronterizo' [Border National Program], providing employment to citizens no longer protected. The program was initially established in 1966 in the towns of Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juárez and Matamoros, at a time when the first maquiladora plants established in the area, attracting thousands of migrants.

On the whole, however, Ciudad Juárez has in the last decade turned into a 'maquiladora town', concentrating more than 1,000,000 inhabitants. It also gathers 38% of the Economically Active Population (EAP), reaching a total of 940,000 workers, of which more than 120,000 are concentrated in the maquiladora industry. This proportion corresponds to around 80% and 30% of the state and nation's EAP correspondingly. Furthermore, Ciudad Juárez provided in 1987 more than a third of the state's net income while receiving more than half of its resources. The maquiladora industrialization process in Ciudad Juárez accelerates the town's capital recomposition and increments the development rates in the commercial and service areas required by the

industry. On the opposite side, agriculture has experienced a drop in production, as shown by the EAP fall, from 60% in 1960 to 3% in 1980. Capital investment has instead been oriented towards actions such as the development of industrial sites. (Encinas & Anaya, 1994)

Employment within this area grew increasingly, reaching 124,386 in 1989 and 155,421 in 1995 (INEGI, 1996). This tendency also applies to the commercial and service sectors, showing a labor growth of 110,000 workers between 1969 and 1986 (Encinas & Anaya, 1994). Despite the fact that in 1986 Ciudad Juárez provided 35% of the total aggregated value for the nation, namely 269,520 million New Pesos, which increased to 7,949,246 by 1995 (INEGI, 1996), the magnitude of the investment has not improved the infrastructure of the urban center nor the life quality of 'Juarenses' (26). Consequently, the already difficult conditions provided by maquiladora employment are worsened by the lack of efficient transport, recreation and adequate housing in the city. Simultaneously, popular sectors are further affected by cyclical crisis periods due to the accelerated inflation rates, since wages and inflation rates are increasingly disproportional.

However, according to Fuentes (1994), border towns were the only cities in the country to 'benefit' from the 80s economic crisis, since the unemployment rates prevailing in the country attracted potential workers to border areas, where employment was guaranteed. Fuentes further expands on the migrants' origins, showing that 27% of the maquiladora workers in 1983 arrived from the state of Chihuahua, compared to 25% from all over the country. In 1985, this proportion increased to 29% and 31% correspondingly. The annual rates of population growth experienced during the 70s remained steady towards the 80s, experiencing a slight decrease during the 90s, i.e. from 2.4 to 2.1 in 1995 (INEGI, 1996).

According to Fuentes, the increasing population growth experienced by Ciudad Juárez in the last decades precipitated a parallel urban

development. However, statistics on the rates of urban growth (27) do not reflect the urban area covered by new settlements (Fuentes, 1990), since from 1965 shanty towns are uncontrollably expanding along the city's outskirts. A wide range of infrastructure bottlenecks have resulted in serious backlogs not only in public housing but also in transportation, sewage, potable water, electricity, paved roads, health services, garbage removal and child-care facilities (PROFMEX, 1994).

The least serviced areas in Ciudad Juárez are located in the city's Northeast, where only 40% to 60% of the households have access to full coverage. The percentages in this area are as follows: 53% of the households have drinkable water, 82% have electricity and only 15% have installed sewage systems (Fuentes, 1994). However, actual rates on all categories are considerably lower (Granados & Cavazos, 1994). Paradoxically, the areas most poorly serviced are those where households are most crowded. For instance, in the colony known as 'El Granjero', an average of 4.68 people live in a household with only two rooms, including the kitchen and lounge (Fuentes, 1994).

Even in those households where water is available, its quality has increasingly lowered, since three decades of overuse of the Hueco Bolson aquifer, which lies under the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso metropolitan area, has left three major environmental legacies: the depletion of the aquifer, the deterioration of water quality and a migration of polluted water toward drinking water supplies (Díaz, 1994; Cervantes & Mercado, 1994; Granados & Cavazos, 1994).

The rapid growth experienced by Ciudad Juárez in the last three decades will force changes in the way policy makers address the use and conservation of both the land and surface water (PROFMEX, 1994). A lack of concern for this issue may affect other areas related to the country's development. According to Fuentes (1994), the worsening life conditions endured by the maquiladora working force may, in the long run, jeopardize the basic productive forces necessary in the

industrialization process. After all, a city is not just public services, streets and buildings (Ribera, 1987). Therefore, the author adds, the lack of public services needs to be considered from a social and economic perspective, particularly at a time when NAFTA is taking a concrete form.

Government efforts to provide key urban services have only been partially successful in responding to the rapid maquiladora expansion. In Ciudad Juárez, maquiladora industries generate mere token income taxes from operations in Mexico. Furthermore, because state and municipal authorities have no independent tax levying authority to fund public services, infrastructure is largely dependent on the federal government funds. Few mechanisms presently exist for the resolution of the urban services and environmental crisis in the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso area. Problems of border infrastructure are not routinely addressed by officials from border metropolitan areas and policy makers are only slowly recognizing the costs of not attending to infrastructure issues. (PROFMEX, 1994)

The above shows that the effects of the maquiladora expansion in Ciudad Juárez replicates the same conditions found on the border as a whole, albeit shaped by a specific historical and socioeconomic context. The conclusions reached on this issue constitute a gloomy picture for low-income groups in the area. Since women constitute a significant proportion of the population of migrants arriving to the town in search of employment, the social consequences of maquiladora expansion significantly affect the quality of their life. Furthermore, the long employment hours in the industry increase the pressure for women to juggle productive and reproductive activities, having to simultaneously engage in alternative jobs due to the low salaries on offer.

Women's participation in the working force is not a recent phenomenon, since it has experienced an steady increase since 1950. In 1980, the rate of women's employment participation incremented by 30%,

whereby one of three women over fifteen was prepared to work. Simultaneously, men's employment relatively decreased from 3.1 in 1989 to 2.8 in 1995, compared to women's employment rates (5.3 and 4.8 correspondingly). Although the numbers above reflect a decreased percentage of women at work, these data refers to relative global terms, according to the 1980 adjustment, as women's EAP was initially overestimated (Mexico Social 1988-89).

Young and Vera (1994) provide some data on the geographical origins of maquiladora women workers in Ciudad Juárez. Their study draws on a probability sample of 572 women workers in 22 plants and makes comparisons between them and another group of 674 working women employed in other settings. According to the authors, 73% of the maquiladora interviewed workers were migrants, of which 80% arrived from out-of-state after the 1982 economic crisis (76%). The state of Durango emerged as the main geographical source (38%), accounting for more than one third of migrants in the maquiladora industries of Ciudad Juárez, followed by Coahuila, Guanajuato and Chihuahua. In contrast, less than half of the women working in other sectors were migrants (45%), fairly distributed in terms of place and time of origin.

On labor composition of maquiladora industries along the border, hiring practices tend to prioritize younger and single women with fewer children. According to Young & Vera, the average age of maquiladora women and those in other working sectors differed by just about six months over twenty five. However, the former were more likely to be in their teens, while the other workers were mostly in their 20s. Finally, fewer than one fourth of the women in either group were thirty or older. The above shows that younger women are still overrepresented in maquiladora industries when compared to other working sectors.

In terms of fertility levels, the authors found sizable differences in the proportions of wives and mothers in the two groups. More maquiladora workers were family heads (41% compared to 31%) and did

not have daughters or sons at home (25% and 24% compared to 34% and 36% correspondingly). However, single and childless women are still more common in maquiladora industries. In general terms, data from the late 80s and early 90s show that fertility was not a factor regarding women's employment opportunities (García & de Oliveira, 1990). In contrast to data from the early 80s, women's retirement from work was already a late occurrence in their life cycle, showing that women gradually stopped working between the ages of twenty and twenty four (Cooper, 1995).

On this subject, it is still not clear whether women work because they have few children or have less children because they need to work (González, 1992), since the nature of the surveys prevents a final conclusion on this issue. From a sociodemographic perspective, and according to the 1987 'Encuesta Socioeconómica Anual de la Frontera' (ESAF-87) [Border socioeconomic annual survey], Ciudad Juárez shows the highest percentage of working women in the sample (40.50% compared to 35.32% in Tijuana). The above confirms the results of the 1982 'Encuesta Nacional de Demografía' (END-82) [National demographic survey], where 30% of women declared having worked the week prior to being interviewed. ESAF-87 also shows the origins of women who gave birth in each city five years before the interview took place. Despite the fact that both Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez attract a substantial amount of potential maquiladora workers, a greater percentage of non-native workers arrive to Tijuana, allegedly due to the greater appeal offered by California to international migrants (González, 1992).

Regarding the sex composition of maquiladora workers, although the proportion of female workers in Mexican export-led industries is significant, the 'masculinization' process in recent years contradicts some of the predictions on this issue. The percentage of women working in maquiladora industries at the national level, decreased between 1982 and 1989 from 77.2% to 61.4% correspondingly. In the Northern border,

this decrease is slightly higher, falling from 76.4% to 58.1% during the same period (INEGI, 1982-89).

However, more recent data from January 1990 and January 1991, report an increase in the percentage of women working at export processing industries. The latest report in 1997 states that 42.3% of men work in maquiladora industries along the border compared to 57.7% of women (Quintero, 1999). Simultaneously, half of the women population is employed in maquiladora industries (Bayón & Rojas, 1999). Cooper explains the initial decrease in terms of men's unemployment rates, leading them to accept 'women's jobs' regardless of the low salaries and inadequate conditions. Such trend could also be a consequence of more women joining the informal and/or service sector of the economy, although in these sectors salaries are still low for a high number of workers (Cooper, 1995).

Within the industry as a whole women constitute a majority among the working force in the following areas: clothing manufacturing, electrical equipment, textile manufacturing, office equipment and pharmacy industry (Cooper, 1995). As part of the above, it has been argued that export processing does not alleviate unemployment, for its work force is predominantly female and unemployment in the Third World is essentially a male problem (Woog, 1980; Fernández, 1977). Other authors have extended the issue to both men and women, stating that unemployment for both sexes persist despite considerable investment in export-processing industrialization (Tiano, 1987). Furthermore, the above assumes that women typically do not work outside their homes because they are supported by their partners or are able to secure employment to support themselves (Tiano, 1987).

Tiano (1987) tests these assumptions using data from Northern Mexico, showing that the highest women's unemployment rates for 1979 corresponded to the twelve-nineteen and twenty-twenty four year-old categories, which encompassed the age range most heavily represented in

the maquiladora work force (Encuesta Continua sobre Ocupación, 1980) [Ongoing Occupation Survey]. Furthermore, she found no evidence that the maquiladora program had led to disproportionate high levels of female employment participation in Northern Mexico. Rather, she showed that women's average rates of economic activity were slightly lower in the Northern region than in the rest of the country.

It might be argued that Northern Mexican women are less likely to enter the labor force because they are more apt to have husbands to support them. Yet Tiano showed that in all but one of the border states, the percentage of married women in the EAP was lower than the national average (IX Censo de Población) [IX Population Census]. Furthermore, female employment at the time contained a larger proportion of unmarried women than the Mexican average. The above suggests that Northern Mexican women may be more likely than women in other states to work out of financial necessity (Tiano, 1987).

Regarding the paradox arising from young women's unemployment despite the maquiladora expansion, Tiano points at migration as key in understanding these dynamics. Considering the high rates of population growth recently taking place in Northern Mexico, added to the inability of the border economy to provide enough jobs, a large surplus labor pool of men and women has been generated (Fernández, 1977; Bustamante, 1983). Furthermore, women are twice as likely to be unemployed than men. Simultaneously, twenty four year old women or younger are the most likely population within the surplus labor reserve, also the age group most disproportionately represented in the migration stream (IX Censo de Población) [IX Population Census].

Although the above provides a clearer picture of women's employment patterns, such account remains incomplete without examining how these variables operate within the household arena, the sphere where women's new roles as providers and reproductive agents interrelate. One of the social consequences of development in the Third World is found in

the way in which household structure has outlived its traditional form. This shift is linked to an ongoing change in gender roles, in terms of attributed responsibilities to household members both in the productive and reproductive spheres. Previously assumed relationships, such as that between wage earning and authority are questioned and often reversed as part of the household survival dynamics taking place within low-income groups. Consequently, the issue of female-headed families acquires increasing significance when exploring the conditions shaping women's daily life.

According to Acosta (1994), surveys carried out in Latin America and the Caribbean point at two concluding aspects on the proportion and distribution of female-headed households: 1. The proportion of households headed by women has increased since the 80s decade, and 2. Their prevalence is stronger in urban areas, specifically among low-income groups. A most frequent as well as problematic characteristic of female-headed households lies in their relationship to poverty, since this type of household shows the highest levels of material deprivation. The three main variables affecting this relationship as identified by Buvinic (1990) are: 1. The household structure itself, 2. The gender of the household head and 3. The specific gender condition of female heads.

Regarding female headship in Ciudad Juárez, Howard (1994) summarizes some of her findings on the impact of changing household structure. According to the author, women heads are more likely to live in poverty, compared to male-headed households or dual income families. Furthermore, a high percentage of women heads are also migrants, poor and poorly educated and need child care services for their children while they are at work. Finally, a large percentage of women in her study reported health problems and lack of medical services. (PROFMEX, 1994)

According to the above, female headship is a determinant of the poverty levels endured by women and their families in urban households. Female heads often find themselves in extremely harsh conditions, due to their devalued position in the employment market and limited support networks. Furthermore, despite the fact that female heads often assume the supporting role of the family, they tend to attribute such role to their unemployed male partners (García & de Oliveira, 1993b). However, within the Northern border female heads seem to enjoy less restrictive conditions than their counterparts in the interior, showing higher education levels and salaries (28). Although it has been argued that the maquiladora industry expansion in this area may have created these differences, we need further research into the subject in order to arrive at a final conclusion.

A superficial reading of some of the information above could lead to conclude that border women have, to some extent, outlived traditional stereotypes and roles. The fact that their participation in the work force has dramatically increased, becoming social agents within the migration and labor process, as well as often the only household providers, could be interpreted as a step in that direction. However, I argue that these factors are not sufficient to evaluate women's autonomy within the productive and reproductive spheres, since it is not clear the extent to which issues such as sexual violence are a factor in women's allegedly 'autonomous' role.

For instance, the role of violence in women's decision to migrate alone in connection to their incorporation into the working force and the nature of their condition as female heads has not been sufficiently explored. Assuming the role of violence as determinant of women's autonomy within these dynamics offers an alternative view of the factors defining women's autonomy and dependence in the production and reproduction spheres. Similarly, and relating the above to the symbolic domain, the fact that many women who provide for their families remain

reluctant to consider themselves as household heads and attribute such condition to their unemployed male partners clearly confirms my argument.

To further expand on the impact of gender stereotypes on women's sense of self in their various roles, in the next section I provide a historical account of the social discourse on sexuality and the use of violence as a mechanism of social control. Simultaneously, I consider to women's assimilation and resistance to these influences, aiming to show the relevance of the symbolic domain in their experience of autonomy and dependence throughout history and its relevance to the context of this investigation.

#### The Remnants of the Past: Sexuality, Violence and Resistance in Historical Perspective

As argued before, cultural values embodied in the social construction of gender relations play a significant role in women's experience of subordination and resistance. Consequently, it seems appropriate to examine the construction of these values in a specific historical context while paying attention to class and ethnic relations. Considering the lack of literature on the development of gender notions in specific regions and since the women in this investigation originate from a wide range of contexts, I portray a generalized view of values, discourses and practices.

It is not the purpose of this section to evaluate the research carried out on the issues above. My aim here is to use the available data as a standpoint from which to understand the ways in which low-income women in the border interpret their experiences of subordination and resistance. In doing so, my hypothesis is that many of the cultural values shared by these women highly resemble those emerging from the sociohistorical processes taking place since the colony. At the same

time, examining traditional gender notions related to violence provides the means to understand women's victimization. Simultaneously, it offers an appropriate framework for the development of specific measures to prevent it.

Along Mexican history, specific figures have come to symbolize the contradictory ideals of femininity. After the Spanish conquest, the figure of Mallinalitzin or Marina Malintze has been referred to as the living symbol of 'mestizaje' (29) (Tuñón, 1987). Coming from an accommodated family, in the border between the Maya and Mexica territories, a group of traders bought her from her mother. Due to her natural talent for languages, Marina acted as translator for Hernán Cortés and the Moctezuma ambassadors, aside from being one of Cortés' favorite concubines. According to Octavio Paz (1980), Marina was institutionalized as the symbol of mestizaje, and her image explains the conflict inherent in the Mexican national identity.

The complexity of the symbol portrayed by Marina allows for a variety of interpretations. Tuñón further refers to her as symbolizing 'the gender-sex dominant culture rose through denigration, maintaining the mestizaje symbol alive in its hierarchical meaning' (Tuñón, 1987, pg. 41). Furthermore, adds the author, the Malinche case is significant, since it reflects a specific social hierarchy: women's subordination to a superior through conquest and sex (Tuñón, 1987). Following the same line of interpretation, Octavio Paz refers to Marina as representing women's sexually exploited condition, amounting to a pile of flesh and bones that passively accepts violence (Paz, 1980). According to the author, the nature of this passivity in the face of aggression led her to lose her identity, turning into the 'chingada' (30), also constituting women's condition.

Yet another feminine symbol expressed the meanings of 'mestizaje': the Guadalupe virgin. A combination of the Virgin Mary and the Tonantzin or fertility goddess, she made her first appearance in 1531 on

the Tepeyac mountain before an indigenous shepherd known as Juan Diego. Her skin is dark, portraying a sense of solidarity and protection towards the marginalized and needy. Initially a religious symbol, the Guadalupe virgin turned during the independence wars into a nationalist and political figure, promoted by Hidalgo in 1810 as an image of freedom and courage. Guadalupe therefore represents the opposite but complementary image of Marina, namely treachery and prostitution versus religious purity and loyalty. This duality resembles the Mexican contradictory images of women and their sexuality, creating a pattern that seems to transcend economic and cultural systems. (Tuñón, 1987)

However, the ideal of purity and loyalty remained the most socially accepted role for women in most circles, instigated by the Church and adjoining institutions. The transition between indigenous power and the arrival of the Spanish was relatively easy, since both centered women's role in marriage and reproduction and promoted submission and virginity. Such common ideals became the means for adapting without much difficulty to the Christian conceptions of gender (Tuñón, 1987).

In this respect, the New Testament established itself as a major means of cultural colonization, expanding a patriarchal construction of sexuality and reproduction. The same argument is presented by Castillo (1994), showing that patriarchal attitudes and control over women condition religious beliefs in Latin cultures, while this experience is shared by women of differing religions around the world. In Mexico, the reproductive role of women in the process of cultural colonization was crucial, since they were expected to propagate their faith into future generations. The Crown acknowledged this fact and since 1528 established a series of schools for indigenous young women (de Herrera, 1982).

The first of these schools or 'retreats' was founded under the name 'El Colegio de la Caridad' [The School of Charity] in Mexico city during the first half of the 16th century. Although educating the

Indians was a priority, the increasing 'illegitimate' mestizo population led to the foundation of a school for mestizo women. By 1552, admission norms were gradually changed, reflecting the state's increasing concern with blood 'purity'.

From an initial emphasis on moral education for young Indian women, it directed its efforts towards protecting poor but 'pure' Spanish women from the dangers inherent in their gender and economic vulnerability. The destiny of these women was limited to marriage or cloister with chastity votes. Once marriage was approved and honor became a warranty, the newly married woman was escorted to her home (Aizpuru, 1987). The above is an example of some of the issues determining evangelization among the population of New Spain. Examining the Catholic discourse on sexuality and marriage will provide a clearer idea of its relevance to women's experience of subordination and violence.

The fundamental Catholic principles on sexuality and marriage are allocated by Ortega (1980) in three periods: the beginning of the Christian philosophy in the 1st century, the development of the St. Thomas theology in the 13th century and the pronouncement of the Council of Trent during the 16th century. The origins of Christian philosophy led to the Catholic discourse which, embodied in the New Testament, was taken by the Church as a reference model (31). The theology of St. Thomas represents the systematization of Catholic thought, influencing later religious currents in the New World, while the Council of Trent constituted a landmark in the Catholic Church's trajectory. It also led to the formation of the contrarreforma movement, highly influencing Spanish culture. Ortega analyzes the Catholic discourse on sexuality and marriage through a combination of Biblical discourses. According to the author, the Old Testament was already obsolete when the New Testament was written, and it is therefore discarded in his analysis.

Ortega carries out a quantitative analysis on the New Testament's proportion dedicated to each particular subject. The results show that 0.56% of the text refers to the regularization of marriage, 2.2% to the rules governing the family and 3.39% to sexual attitudes and behavior. According to this, the New Testament only dedicates 6.15% of the total contents to matters related to family and sexual relations. However, within this proportion a rejection to certain sexual behavior proved a priority. In general terms, St. Paul's discourse is significant in that he only represents one fourth of the New Testament but is author of 32.% of the discourse on family and sexual relations.

Ortega divides the discourse on marriage into three fundamental areas: 1. The constitution and duration of marriage; 2. The recommendation of marriage; 3. Marriage and family relationships. Regarding the former, separation between the spouses is severely condemned in the New Testament (Mt. 5, 31-32). However, divorce is not totally denied, as shown by the reference to fornication as the only justifiable reason for ecclesiastical divorce (Mt. 5, 31-32; 19, 3-9). It must be noted that divorce is conceptualized in the New Testament with words such as 'separation' or 'dismissal'. In this context, it particularly refers to an act of dismissal exercised by a husband against his wife and never the opposite. (Ortega, 1980)

Ortega directs his analysis towards the recommendation of marriage, an area where St. Paul advises men and women, particularly young widowers (1 Tim, 5,14), to marry, in order to avoid fornication (1 Cor., 7,2). He also shows women the way to salvation through motherhood (1,Tim.,2,15), while marriage confers a man the category of honorary community member (Mt. 19, 3-9). Finally, St. Paul has been interpreted as suggesting that parents should not intervene in a man's decision to marry, while women do not enjoy the same privilege (1 Cor. 7, 36-38).

The discourse of the New Testament recommends sexuality to be exercised exclusively among married partners. Ortega classifies the area

of sexuality and marriage into three subgroups: 1. The constitution of the family; 2. Norms on family relationships, and 3. The breaking of family ties 'to follow Jesus Christ'. Regarding the constitution of the family, the nuclear family is shown as the most appropriate arrangement. Although this is not clearly stated by the Bible, texts that refer to the issue prove more coherent under this assumption. This is supported by the fact that Jesus' family was integrated by a father, a mother and their child (Mt. 2, 13-14) (Ortega, 1980). Therefore, alternative family structures are implicitly condemned as 'unnatural'. On family norms, the need for women to obey their husband is justified by the husband's status as the wife's head, since women were allegedly created for men and not the opposite (Ef. 5, 22-23). Finally, on the breaking of family ties, the only justification to leave the family refers to following God's call (Mt. 10, 37). Consequently, a woman who became a nun acquired a higher status than that of a wife or mother.

Finally, the norms inherent in the Catholic discourse on sexual behavior are outlined by Ortega as follows: 1. General norms on sexual behavior, 2. Sexual norms between spouses, 3. Recommendation of sexual abstinence, 4. Rejection of specific sexual behavior and 5. Repression of sexual desire. The first point is expressed by St. Paul when referring to the body as an offering to God, never to be used for sensual purposes or fornication (1 Cor., 6-13). Yet another reference to the subject mentions the ideal quality of sexual relations within marriage, stating that men should possess their wives in sanctity and honor, meaning without passion or sensuality (1 Tes. 4, 3-8). Regarding the Catholic norms on marital sexual relations, St. Paul refers to men and women's equal right to consent to marital relationships. This constitutes an exception to the rule of male domination in this area. (Ortega, 1980)

Regarding the recommendation of the sexual act, celibacy in marriage is suggested although never imposed, referring to this practice

as leading to greater freedom to engage in God's matters (1 Cor. 7, 32-34). Other references highlight the importance of abstinence or virginity, such as the case of the Virgin Mary (Mt. 1, 18-25) or Paul's celibacy (1 Cor. 7, 7). From a religious point of view, sexual abstinence was related to eternal life, following God beyond all human commitments (Mt. 22, 24-30).

On the rejection of certain sexual behavior, the New Testament condemns adultery, since it attempts against others' rights (Rom. 13, 8-20). It also condemns prostitution, since Jesus was the head of the Church that gathered all Christians and it was inappropriate for a Christian to become one with a prostitute (1 Cor. 6, 15-20). Other condemned sexual behavior included homosexuality, incest and nudity. (Ortega, 1980)

In his initial analysis, Ortega concludes that Christianity established a social order inspired in religious mysticism as supported by the nuclear family. Therefore, the son's obedience to his father until the time of marriage as well as fraternity among brothers and sisters is heavily portrayed, in support of family relations. The rupture of this equilibrium is only justified if following God's call, which constitutes a Christian's ultimate objective. Regarding the relevance of sexuality within these dynamics, Ortega argues that the New Testament regulates this area to strengthen the nuclear family. (Ortega, 1980)

Ortega's work does not refer to the implications of the Biblical discourse on sexuality and marriage for gender inequality. However, his account reflects some of the ways in which the nuclear family has been idealized and promoted through colonial evangelisation. Furthermore, it extends towards the examination of differing discourses as applied to men and women and their influence on ascribed roles within family and marital relationships.

The major implications of the above for gender power relations are as follows: First, although marriage is recommended to both sexes, women seem to carry the heaviest burden regarding the maintenance of the family's honor and stability. This is shown by the emphasis given to women's virginity, faithfulness and obedience, as well as the exaltation of motherhood. The above is in turn reinforced by men's alleged right to dismiss a woman if she fails to fulfill her 'obligations', which deprives women of their intrinsic value, who have to depend on a husband to be socially legitimated. Reinforcing the above, men's role within marriage as head of the family automatically confers him authority as well as full citizen rights. This is considered a natural right for men, after living their paternal home to engage in marriage. The above played a significant role in the shaping of household power relations, establishing dynamics of dependence and victimization that still prevail.

The 18th century introduced a cultural change that would influence the general attitudes on family and sexual relations to the present date. Until the beginning of the century, the conviction that the individual's will played a prominent part in marriage decisions prevailed (Seed, 1991). In this new period, while parents increasingly protested against their children's inconvenient marriages, they began to use the Church's normative system to argue that their objections should be officially considered an obstacle to marriage. This issue initiated the evolution of a normative patriarchal system that took place in the so-called 'transition period' and increasingly transferred power on marriage decisions to the state. (Seed, 1991)

However, the institutional control of women's sexuality as implied in the traditional notions of will, honor, and virtue remained. The increasing exercise of patriarchal power as well as women's subordination is reflected in the use of violence as a means of control over women. Lavrin (1989) documents this issue and its role in shaping

women's sexuality during the 18th century. According to the author, domestic violence was legitimized if exercised to force women into débito payment, showing the abuse of power facilitated by certain religious notions. The sadistic behavior of some husbands towards their wives was at times exercised in public, implying that the implementation of 'discipline' in this context was socially accepted. (Lavrín, 1989)

The above is further reflected in the 18th century discourse on rape within ecclesiastical law. This issue has been documented as one of the most serious moral challenges (Lavrín, 1989), although the punishment applied did not correspond to its alleged serious nature. Rape was considered an out-of-marriage transgression and was usually punished through public shunning and temporal imprisonment, after which the man was sent back to his wife (Lavrín, 1989). However, in cases where he committed incest on his wife's niece or daughter, his repentance and penitence of the culprits was considered sufficient punishment. After this had taken place, he was sent back to his family (GSU, AHAOM, 1798 in Lavrin, 1989).

The fact that most rape victims were Indian or lower-class suggests that sexual violence operated beyond gender subordination. Lower-class Indian and mestizo women were less protected regarding family ties than their upper-class counterparts, constituting a major factor for their vulnerability towards attack. Rape became a public issue through the investigation of the reported crimes. The law treatment of rape during the 18th century does not derive significantly from current practices: a midwife engaged in the victim's examination and questioning, aiming to achieve a clear sense of the physical damage and force involved, after which a verdict could be issued. When the use of force was recognized, women could expect a financial recompense. An important difference in the treatment of this issue in the 18th century stems from its religious connotations. For instance, men who raped were

both criminals and sinners and charged for inflicting violence on a virgin with seduction. (Castaneda, 1984; Giraud, 1986)

Parallel to the strengthening of patriarchal authority within the family and the arrival of capitalist values, the subject of gender difference was introduced in European intellectual circles. In Spain, Benito Feijoo proposed a method of sexual morality in his work 'A Defense or Vindication of Women' rejecting the notion of female inferiority. However, he still maintained men's 'natural' capacity in the social sphere, whereas women were seen as in need of better education. Single and abandoned women were therefore educated in convents in how to perform their future role as wives and mothers. By the end of the century, Feijoo's ideas remained untouched, maintaining women's inferiority in the public sphere while exalting their motherly nature in the household. From then on each of these spheres remained separate and clearly distinguishable. (Tuñón, 1987)

In Europe, the 17th century was crucial in narrowing the definition of morality in the area of sexual relations. This was partly motivated by the Council of Trent conclusion in 1563 of its twenty-year period to reform the Roman Catholic Church. From then on, theologians enforced catechisms and confessionals to educate their followers in the colonies, which in many cases led to ambivalent notions and behavior.

Lavrin examines the effect of Counter-Reformation rules in the Viceroyalty of New Spain considering two main issues: the norms on sexuality as part of moral theology and people's actual behavior (32). Lavrin (1989) states that the array of races and classes that carried out sexual offenses represents the essence of the mestizaje process, being significant that a good number of them during the 17th and 18th centuries also involved whites.

On the subject of sexual relations within marriage, and about twenty years after the Council of Trent, the Pope enlarged the meaning of the sexual act by stating that it had to be open to and capable of

procreation, 'capable' meaning the requirement of men's fertility (Lavrín, 1989). Therefore, women's sexuality was not acknowledged in the performance of the sexual act. Following these precepts, the confessional of Fr. Clemente Ledesma considered five potential objectives in marriage: 1. The propagation of the species, 2. Satisfying the fulfillment of the débito (through the granting of sexual favors), 3. Respecting the sacraments' indissolubility, 4. Preserving the body's health, 5. Preventing concupiscence and 6. Deriving pleasure from the sexual act. (Ledesma, Confesionario, pp. 336). In this context, the limits between pleasure and procreation generated a dilemma. On the one hand, both spouses were obliged to perform sexual relations, implying the sinful aspect of denying sexual satisfaction to the other. However, married couples were expected to avoid disordered relations viewed as leading to lustful behavior (Oviedo, 'Destierro de Ignorancias', p. 49).

Although widely extended, the scope of religious ambivalence partly derived from structural factors relative to social change. For instance, although in central colonial Mexico the transgressions of honor, virtue and will experienced a generalized increase during the 18th century, this same process proved slower in far reaching regions of New Spain, where earlier notions on marriage and sexuality were more severely enforced and preserved (33). Similarly, the religious discourse developed parallel to new state structures arising since the Mexican revolution.

The arrival of independence into Mexico incorporated the intellectual vision of a modern state nation, meaning by 'modern' a homogenized society according to the European cultural standards. Supposedly, this process would erase all segregation, reaching the highs of prosperous modernization. A shade of unity developed during the Porfiriato years, because of the construction of railways linking far-reaching regions and rebellious Indian communities. Meanwhile, Mexico city became the country's modernization model. Simultaneously, a large

sector of the population remained on the margins of this process, wandering what the meaning of 'state' really was. However, Mexico's economical development during this period took place at the expense of the underdevelopment of this sector, while paradoxically placing the essence of independence in the figure of mestizo populations and Indians. (Franco, 1994)

Given the lack of a plausible capitalist ethic, women's allocation into the household sphere represented a requisite for family unity and the preservation of the bourgeois nuclear family. This process involved the development of an educational campaign with the participation of the intellectual circle. Praising themselves as 'the teachers of the nation', they claimed their responsibility for the liberation of the masses of mestizo populations, women and Indians towards cultural homogeneity. New gender codes developed in adapting to the new state notion, involving the social construction of the household as a niche of stability and decency. (Franco, 1994)

The development of educational methods in women's retreats during this period illuminates the ways in which new gender discourses incorporated into the process of state formation. The most influencing of such schools in 19th century Mexico was the 'Vizcainas', a significant institution due to the following factors: 1. Its size and grandiose architectonic style, 2. Its survival after the dissolution of previous retreats, and 3. Its pioneering role in detaching from the church administration. In this framework, the school's officials fought fiercely towards the implementation of liberalism. (Aizpuru, 1987)

The 'Vizcainas' introduced into the new education system activities that could be useful in the employment market, such as reading, writing and manual work. Since the new national identity incorporated capitalist values, educating women in this area would only benefit society. The foundation, however, retained many of the politics

that had characterized previous administrations, such as race and class discrimination in their admission procedures. (Aizpuru, 1987).

However, despite the introduction of capitalist ideologies that claimed women's equality and freedom beyond the private sphere, old Christian values regarding sexuality and marriage were reinforced to support the process of state building. This contradiction between political and religious ideals derived in renewed paradoxes. For instance, traditional femininities on body image clashed with 'modern' femininities that enhanced external appearance in women's new public positions. This subject concerned the administrators of women's schools and was soon incorporated into the normative system. However, the paradox raised when widespread attitudes turned the subject of body image into a necessary tool in finding a future spouse (Quevedo, 1876), therefore obscuring its liberating meaning.

The prevailing ideal of women's submission continued to promote their potential victimization, spreading beyond race, class and territory. This reflects in the kind of advice given in retreats to women victims of domestic violence: 'I suppose there is not a husband so effeminate and useless that lets his wife dominate him. Divine and human laws give husbands all the authority (...). It is true that it is the husband's role to correct and repress the bad through moderate punishment (...) as women know their dependence and their lack of authority' (Martínez de la Parra, 1948, p. 315-316). As for those who engaged in sexual relations but did not create a family, they were allegedly condemned to misery and death. Considering the number of people living in 'shameful' unions in 1900 Mexico, most women lacked legal protection in violence cases (34).

The revision above establishes a conceptual base from which to link past and present discourses on the issues of sexuality and violence. Although most of the available discourses on the subject are to some extent limited to the upper-classes, they provide a conceptual

framework that facilitates the interpretation of alternative ideologies. Considering the above, the institutional control of women's sexuality constitutes a common theme. Patriarchal precepts on this issue have dominated major institutions and enforced their notions on family relations. In this process, racist ideologies have directed these notions predominantly towards white and middle or upper-class women, resulting in more relaxed attitudes and practices among the lower-classes. However, the strength of the discourse still prevails beyond class and ethnic differences, since the lower classes assimilate the notion of inferiority and incorporate dominant discourses into their lives.

Religion has been portrayed as 'the' institution responsible for the spreading of patriarchal ideologies regarding women's sexuality. However, I consider that the state's discourse overtook this role since the 18th century, portraying the double standard of women's economic emancipation and repressed sexuality. This combination proves problematic for the misuse of power within unequal gender relations, leading many women to extreme subordination within and outside the home. Perhaps the paradox inherent in the state discourse proves even more problematic than the straightforward religious notions on these issues. After all, women's imposed role as housewife and provider has proved an extremely high price to pay for their 'liberation'.

So far I have concentrated in the elements that have determined women's subordination in the area of gender relations. However, an unanswered question relates to the sphere of resistance to violence, offering an plausible view of women's definition and exercise of their autonomy throughout time. It is in this area where the testimonies of lower-class women become more frequent, providing a comparative picture of their experiences as active agents within unequal gender relations.

Within 16th century Mexico the dominant religious discourse portrayed women as vulnerable and therefore in need of protection from a

man. Although in most cases such attitudes proved limiting for their mobility and independence in all spheres, occasionally they presented women with alternative options in dealing with domestic violence. Consequently, women sometimes made use of the very institutional means that condemned them into subordination, to take advantage of the available options.

Such is the case of upper-class single mothers and independent women who made use of property law. They often pretended to be widowers to administer their patrimony and avoid dependence from their husbands (Tuñón, 1987). Becoming a widow constituted one of the very few legitimized means to acquire independence over material decisions, potentially ascribing exceptional autonomy to women in colonial Mexico.

Beyond the material means of independence, the relative protection offered by retreats constituted yet another option to women who wanted protection (Tuñón, 1987). Although in most cases this alternative was directed towards women with no marital ties, occasionally it served to provide protection to women escaping from violent husbands or lovers. Once in a retreat, some women chose to become nuns, since the lives of secular and novice women in the convents were very similar (Muriel, 1974). Furthermore, the figure of the nun carried an aura of respectfulness, since the value of spiritual life was instilled from the early years (Tuñón, 1987). Consequently, nuns enjoyed a highly secure position in colonial society, both in the economic and ideological spheres.

In the 17th century women's status remained stable and most of them accepted their subordination within the home. Historical records confirm this fact, since women suffered threats and beatings with straps, sticks, stones, knives and fire arms (Lavrin, 1989), while only a small proportion chose to abandon their husbands. Within the lower classes, an unusual picture arises in a few cases until the 18th century, where husbands opened divorce files against their wives

(Atondo, 1992). The value of these testimonies lies in their unconventional nature, illuminating the dynamics of non-traditional relationships and the way in which women exercised their autonomy within them.

Most of the women involved in these cases were Spanish or considered as such and did not enjoy a comfortable life, since their husbands were either unemployed or earning very low wages (35). Their husbands' most common complaint lied in their wives' sexual misconduct, reflecting the institutional discourse on women's sexuality. Another major accusation was directed to their wives' lack of commitment to household duties. For instance, Don Mariano Bueno alleged that his wife 'did not even cook the most essential food (...), as for dinner, she gave me beans from the same pot for several days' (36).

The kind of conflicts described above often led to violent episodes. For instance, in the case of the soldier Domingo Lara during a conflict with his wife, who grabbed a sword and broke her wife's head, María Josefa Larrañaga, when he assumed having seen her coming from meeting her lover (37). As for married women who practiced prostitution, records show that they did anything but remain passive in situations of domestic violence. The most extreme case is featured by Josefa Ordoñez, who threatened to stab her husband if he did not do as she wished (38). Despite these obviously dangerous situations, ecclesiastical law was extremely reticent to grant divorces and in many cases petitions were simply ignored.

Further up the social strata and according to historical records, women from the upper classes tended to hide their marital conflicts. They often only regained their autonomy in the event of widowhood, following the trend in the past century. According to Lavrin (1978), upper and middle-class women in 17th century Mexico were not required to return to their parents' home after their husbands' death. They were also responsible for the administration of their dowry and arras, as

well as half of their late husband's state or that accumulated jointly throughout marriage. Considering women could count on their husband's confidence and had no pending debts and legal suits, these privileges gave them increased power. In such cases, they administered their patrimony as well as their children's inheritance (Bornassie, 1967).

However, the combination of urban life and modern influences in central Mexico led some middle and upper-class Mexican women to refuse their husband's 'right' to reprimand them. A symbol of the times was the figure of Maria Ignacia Rodriguez y Osorio Barba, known as 'la güera Rodriguez'[the blond Rodriguez]. She was an ingenious, intelligent and beautiful woman known for her numerous sexual affairs (Tuñón, 1987). Her first husband the marquis of Villamil, accused her of adultery before the divorce tribunal, while she accused him for his numerous violent attacks (Arrom, 1976).

As for mestizo and Indian lower-class women, their marginalized status could both make them vulnerable to violent attack and lead them to significant power. In fact, marginal women in colonial Mexico who were known for their magic powers were perceived by men and their community as extremely powerful. The work of Behar (1989) documents the existence of a network of women in 18th century central Mexico who exchanged magical recipes and advice in cases of marital conflict and violence. Consequently, women's experiences of subordination, autonomy and survival united them on the basis of their gender and beyond class and ethnic divisions.

The case of Manuela Bocanegra exemplifies the above. In 1733 Fray Diego Núñez, prior of the Our Lady of the Assumption monastery in Amecameca, accused Manuela de Bocanegra to the Inquisition for his bewitchment (39). Fray Diego stated that the reason for the woman's revenge derived from having been caught in the sexual act with a young painter who lived next to her in the monastery. Fray Diego reacted violently and severely scolded them both, provoking in the slave the

desire for revenge. Allegedly, since he only received food and drink from her hands, she was in control of his domestic life and could easily introduce into his body the tools of her lover's craft.

According to Behar, Bocanegra's powers resided as much in her position as in her condition as slave and mulatto woman. Therefore, adds the author, she provides an example of the 'power of the powerless' by challenging the social order of domination and submission. Behar's account proves valuable in further illuminating the resistance strategies exercised by marginal women in colonial society. Furthermore, it opens up the sphere of resistance beyond material considerations and proves that alternative and equally successful forms of resistance belong to the symbolic domain.

Most accounts on violence during the 19th century refer to the ways in which women often exercised extreme forms of resistance. For instance, a number of women who did not have access to divorce increasingly resorted to murder during this time (40). However, the differing activities higher-class and lower-class women engaged in while in prison clearly established their division (41). On the other hand, they shared their lack of remorse for their crime, which shows the extreme violence they were subject to. The independence war in 1810 also provoked many unhappy marriages to dissolve, often offering women the opportunity to break free from violence. Women of all classes and races united in the name of independence and freedom and abandoned their husbands and other authoritarian figures, often with no other choice but to fill the local prisons (Atondo, 1992).

The extent of women's resistance and creative change throughout this time provides a refreshing view on the issue, showing how women's resistance manifests and potentially leads to autonomy. It is in this area where the often silenced testimonies on lower-class women become more apparent. They illuminate the ways in which women's autonomy often relates to the sphere of meanings rather than practical, legal or

economic means. Considering the above, I argue that the world of meanings in achieving freedom from violence continue to be relevant today, and therefore should be applied to the notion of autonomy in the lives of low-income border women.

In exploring the issues above, I have referred to some of the elements that help understand the effect of the past in today's experience of subordination and resistance among border women. However, such an account remains incomplete without examining the factors conforming these same discourses as they manifest today, thereby continuing to link past and present discourses on sexuality and the use of violence against women. Such focus provides the means to understand the often subtle and even unconscious effects of past discourses and practices in the ambivalent visions that characterize modern gender notions.

Feminist research on the institutional discourse on gender in 20th century Mexico has paid particular attention to cultural representations of women's identity. For instance, Job (1988) examines women's sexuality in Mexican narrative during the 70s, concentrating in the production of a small circle of middle and upper-class women writers. Job's critique focuses on the absence of sexuality references within Mexican feminine writing. The author thereby points at the sexual repression inherent in their discourse, referring to the work 'La Seducción de Ausencia' (42), where happiness translates as false prudeness and resignation. Job derives this frustration from the silence surrounding aspects of women's sexuality such as pregnancy, childbirth and women's sexual organs.

Violence against women only appears in texts on the marginal sectors such as the tales of C. Pacheco (1984), where the author describes the dark side of family relationships. This could be misleading, since it might be interpreted as implying that violence is a lower-class issue (Job, 1988). A few authors escape this critique (43).

Amuchástegui (1995), provides an alternative vision that encompasses social class, focusing on the diversity of cultural notions surrounding sexuality. The author uses a sample from a Zapoteca community of Oaxaca, a semi-rural town in the state of Guanajuato and a low-income community in Mexico city. These broadly represent semi-rural, Indian and urban poor communities in Mexico as well as the broader proportion of low-income groups in the country. Her investigation shows that differences between rural and urban areas are not as significant as assumed, therefore diminishing the relevance of race and class divisions on this issue. The main question focuses on the way in which men and women conceptualize their first sexual encounter.

Her main conclusions point at a homogenized catholic morality permeating the sexuality discourse throughout the three chosen samples. Considering how global cultures have influenced modernization processes in the latest decades, the results of this study show the extent to which modernizing influences coexist with old discourses and attitudes. Within these, notions on sexuality applied differently to each gender, that is, while women's virginity carried a strong symbolic value, men's generated suspiciousness, particularly at a mature age. The above suggests that previous contradictions on the religious discourse versus people's behavior may have turned into those concerning rational and subjective images in modern sexuality discourses.

Hita (1994) provides further information on the sexual discourse of low-income groups in Mexico city. The author focuses on the cultural representations of catholic women between the ages of sixteen and seventeen, and concentrates in the issues of power relations, the exercise of women's sexuality and motherhood. In so doing, Hita establishes a comparative framework between secular and novice women students in a religious school. Her results also show contradictory patterns, where catholic representations are common among both groups of

students while paradoxes abounded within the secular group, defending both pre-marital relationships and the preservation of virginity.

The two studies above are relevant to the way in which new and old discourses interconnect, generating the syncretism of sexual attitudes and practices prevailing in contemporary Mexico. As shown by the results of Hita's study, new ideas on power and sexuality within gender relations are slowly emerging and permeating the most traditional spheres of social life. However, this process is not exempt from conflict both at the psychological and physical levels. Transition patterns in the construction of gender identities, in many cases involve the enduring of restructuring and conflict, resulting in heavy losses.

González & Liquori (1990) provide an example of the above by exploring the interconnection of emerging risk groups, and the cultural notions surrounding bisexual practices among construction workers in Mexico city. To identify the sexual culture shaping the daily lives of construction workers, the authors interviewed selected workers and carried out participant observation of the social relations taking place in the building site. The total sample gathered twenty two men of various ages and differing backgrounds and specialization levels.

The authors show that bisexual practices were implicit in the workers' boasting of their sexual experiences. These included sexual encounters with transsexuals, adolescents, priests and what they refer as 'sissies'. However, those who admitted engaging in such practices made clear that being penetrated was not 'in their code' (44). In this fashion, conversations took a life of their own, ending with toasts to 'never stop fucking without a condom' (González & Liquori, 1990, pp. 48). Considering the widespread use of unsafe homosexual practices as part of the masculinity model of low-income groups, we may infer that high-risk populations today include low-income housewives (45).

Further investigation into the sexual and gender codes within low-income groups, takes us to examine the prevailing gender notions within

the youth culture known as 'cholos' (Valenzuela, 1988). Originally from the US among Chicano and Mexican communities of Los Angeles, they contributed to the border urban landscape since the mid 70s. Dress code widely characterizes 'cholos', as well as their alleged engagement in drug consumption and violent activities. Women who become members of these 'gangs' do it mainly through contacts established during their school years and working experience. In the Northern border, 'cholas' often work in maquiladora industries where they establish their first social contacts.

Despite 'cholas'' unconventional image, they exhibit many of the stereotyped qualities applied to women, providing a further example of conflicting gender patterns. For instance, their organization strategies are more flexible than those of their male counterparts, often joining groups of 'cholas' from different communities rather than their own. This choice does not seem to present a threat to their identity within the community to which they are loyal. Other 'feminine' traits relate to more traditional spheres, namely, assuming greater responsibility for household chores than men, greater restrictions in heterosexual relationships and traditional expectations of marriage and family relationships. (Valenzuela, 1988)

However, Valenzuela argues that despite women's subordinate position, 'cholas' do challenge prevailing patriarchal values, since their role within the 'barrio' and among other male members is closer to partnership than subordination. Such premise is derived from their engagement in all the group activities such as smoking, drinking and even fighting. According to the author, since the meaning of 'cholismo' lies in the individual's decision to defend his/her ground, 'cholas' implicitly question ascribed gender roles (Valenzuela, 1988).

Studies on the sexuality discourse during the 20th century reflect a syncretism of influences. Simultaneously, it portrays differences between rational, ideological discourses and actual practice. Job's

critique of the discourse portrayed by middle and upper class writers suggests that sexuality remains a highly hidden subject in these sectors, resulting in women's limited capacity for autonomy and gender solidarity. On the opposite side of the social scale, other authors point at the coexistence of various discourses in a society influenced by urban trends and modernizing influences. Consequently, although traditional discourses and practices still remain, new spaces in this area suggest the potentiality for new avenues of autonomy and self-expression.

An example of persistent traditional ideologies is found in the state's treatment of sexual violence in the Mexican context. Despite the opening of new avenues for women's self-expression and increased autonomy, patriarchal discourses continue to permeate institutions and practices that increase women's vulnerability and victimization in this area. Consequently, this issue reflects a dimension of the impact of traditional notions in women's life today and allows for a deeper understanding of the factors limiting women's autonomy in the context of this work.

#### Sexual Violence in the Mexican context: Legal Framework, Extent and Manifestations

The widest poll on the generalized views about the degree of violence in the Mexican family, its consequences and the most vulnerable population was conducted by COVAC (Mexican Collective to Fight Violence against Women) in 1996. The poll covered 3,600 Mexican households and a total of nine states and in areas with local service programs, publicity, prevention and education about the issue. The results revealed that violence in the urban sector is serious, widespread and frequent. The above was the view of seven out of ten respondents, more than a third of whom said that violence had been a problem in their own family in the last six months. Among them, 74%

referred to female victims, 52% wives, 30% daughters, 26% males between the ages of five and twenty four, and 18% other female relatives. Aggressors were most commonly male family members, primarily fathers. (Duarte & González, 1997)

The poll further showed the generalized consensus on the negative consequences of family violence, while most acknowledged the lack of appropriate action in the hands of the state. In only 20% of the cases where abuse had taken place was a complaint filed, due to fear of provoking more violence or sending the aggressor to jail. In those cases where a complaint was filed, 35% were dismissed. Simultaneously, respondents reported a generalized lack of information as to the available agencies where these types of crime can be reported. (Duarte & González, 1996)

Action on the part of the state regarding family violence and rape has been slow and dependent on wider political processes during the 1980s and 1990s. The first institutional debate on the issue of rape took place in Mexico parallel to the construction of the new post-election legislative system, including the discussion in a conference on sexual crime during 1989. Simultaneously, a new initiative on the part of the Executive power promoted a legislation reform on the issue, reinforcing the prior emphasis on increasing penalty charges as well as definition issues. However, it was agreed that crimes that did not involve sexual intercourse would receive a lighter sentence. The initiative above turned into actual law by February 1989, a month after the conference on sexual crime was scheduled. It was at that time when the need to integrate sexual violence into the legislative system finally reached a consensus. (Duarte & González, 1994)

The above precipitated the foundation of several specialized agencies in the area of sexual crime, starting with the 'Agencia Especializada en Delitos Sexuales' (AEDS) [Specialized Agency on Sexual Crime] in Mexico city. The most visible consequence of the development of support groups and agencies was the increase in reported crimes,

rising from an average of 2 to 3.5 daily reports. The state's attempt to incorporate their effort into the arena of NGOs established a link between such groups and official institutions that benefited all. The results derived in the proliferation of specialized agencies throughout the country.

However, law amendment remained an urgent need, reaching a crisis point when nineteen women reported having been raped by police officials. This event led to a massive expression of concern over the subject of impunity and rape, leading to the foundation of the 'Grupo Plural Pro-Victimas AC' [Pro-victims Plural Group AC], engaging in the elaboration of reform initiatives in the area of sexual crime. (Duarte & González, 1994)

The reform proposal presented by the Grupo Plural Pro-Victimas stressed the victim's needs and could be summarized in the following points: 1. The substitution of the term 'sexual crime' by 'crime against freedom and psycho-sexual development', and 2. The removal of some rather archaic terms regarding sexual abuse (46), 3. The introduction of sexual harassment into the legislation, finally made official in 1991. This experience is referred to by the authors as pioneer in the history of Mexican legislation, since it proved women's power to influence institutional structures in their fight for gender equality. (Duarte & González, 1994)

Duarte & González further elaborate a report on the development of the debate on sexual violence and the law since the last reform in 1991. Most of the above law reforms focused on the various issues surrounding rape. However, as pointed out by the authors, the problem was far from resolved, particularly regarding the problematic attitudes prevailing among professionals dealing with rape victims. At the time this report was written, only four states in Mexico had enforced specific laws on protection to victims, while merely 0.4% of sentenced defendants were compelled to pay compensation for the inflicted harm.

To corroborate the above, González (1993) examines the official criteria in the treatment of violence, testing the extent to which it prioritizes women's safety. The author elaborates a survey addressed at official agents of forty eight governmental institutions, of which three specialized in sexual crimes. At the outcome of the examination, 71.42% of the respondents were men while 28.57% were women, showing the uneven gender distribution among specialized agents. Regarding the official procedure in the rape cases, in January 22nd 1991 an article on the procedure to test the validity of the victims' declaration, as well as other relevant elements of the attack, became finally official. Prior to this, a medical examination was the only means by which rape could be 'proved'. Unfortunately, this practice remains widespread due to the social nature of the crime and the alleged invalidation of the victims' 'subjective' opinion. Furthermore, according to the authors the number of specialized agencies remains insufficient in dealing with the totality of rape victims.

In the area of domestic violence, for a long period of time government policy did not pay much attention to the issue, showing the extent to which it is widely acknowledged as a 'private' area. Consequently, most official accounts reflected the view that it occurs in the hands of psychologically deranged men. This notion left battered women with no choice but to resort to alternative laws in defense of their personal security. In the past decade, various feminist groups acted as mediators between the state and the wider population, founding NGOs that tackled some of the issues ignored by the law.

Official and civil complaints around the nation finally led in 1996 to the creation of the first federal law on domestic violence. The 'Ley de Asistencia y Prevención de la Violencia Doméstica' [Law for the assistance and prevention of domestic violence] was approved by the Assembly of Representatives in Mexico Federal District, becoming active during August of that same year. The law aims to offer basic elements in

the coordination and execution of various branches of public administration for assisting and preventing domestic violence, including all forms of violence within the family. Domestic violence is defined as 'the recurrent, intentional and cyclical act of power directed to dominate, submit, control or exercise physical, verbal, psychoemotional or sexual violence to any member of the family in and out of the household' and 'will be exempt from stereotypical patterns of behavior or social and cultural practices based on inferiority or subordination notions' (Diario Oficial de la Federación, 1996).

However, the law has not been exempt from criticism, particularly regarding specific concepts in its definition, i.e. the terms 'recurrent' and 'cyclical' have been considered ambiguous and problematic, since an isolated act or the first instance of violence would not be considered an act of violence by the law (Torres, 1997). Furthermore, conciliation procedures remain a basic element in the process, involving serious risks that could undermine the effectiveness of the law. For instance, if conciliation is not exempt of prejudice the procedure can generate further dependence and abuse. On the other hand, it can only be applicable if approved by both parties, eventually leaving the victim with no other choice but to resort to another law such as the law on injuries. (Torres, 1997)

Overall, Torres points at some of the limitations of the new law, particularly the fact that it is only applicable in the boundaries of its legislative function, since administrative law cannot cover the complexity of the issue with a restrictive regulation. Recommended responses include the design of prevention policies, the assignation of public administration officials and health institutions officials, involvement between NGOs and state institutions, the establishment of prevention measures and protection orders for victims as well as effective sanctions, assisting and therapy programs and the financing of research programs. (Torres, 1997)

Regarding sexual harassment in the work place, it has officially turned into a crime in four more states after its first pronouncement in 1991. However, the law reform focuses merely on prevention, since no jail punishment has been prescribed. It is therefore not surprising to find that only twenty five reports were gathered in 1992, of which none reached the courts. According to the authors, among the required state actions on this issue, prevention should be included. (Duarte & González, 1994)

Regarding sexual violence as a whole, Duarte & González (1997) confirm the criticisms above, stating that a much more extensive transformation is needed to change the conditions of structural vulnerability among women and children. A major problem involves the lack of integration of the feminist discourse within government agencies and consequently official training is primarily directed towards the technical aspects of a rigid judicial system. This situation leads to the persistence of traditional gender notions that blame the victim and an individualistic view of the problem. The end result is that the way treatment is conceptualized and enforced reinforces women's dependence on a third party, i.e. the state and prevents women's autonomy and transformation. (Duarte & González, 1997)

The above shows the main developments in terms of official recognition and law amendment in the area of sexual violence. However, the various limitations of the present institutional approach to sexual violence and domestic violence in particular, show the extent to which traditional gender notions continue to negatively affect law amendment and practical action. On the other hand, the role of the feminist movement in the changes achieved deserves recognition, showing some of the ways in which women's incorporation into the public sphere can generate specific conditions towards gender equality.

Considering the specific characteristics and extent of sexual violence in Ciudad Juárez, the lack of academic research on the subject

leads to the examination of a variety of data collected through official and unofficial sources. Most of the data was collected during 1994, the year when the field work of the study was conducted. Despite its limitations in terms of the lack of control on the methodology used in collecting statistical material, it provides some clues as to the local manifestations of sexual violence. As part of this data, I include a series of interviews with professionals in related fields, providing differing angles to the same subject. The lack of academic research on the issue in Ciudad Juárez clashes with the extensive work carried out by NGOs on a day-to-day basis. As in the rest of Mexico, these organizations confront the challenges derived from the lack of institutional action, funds and the growing magnitude of the problem.

The following data from the Departamento de Investigaciones Previas [Department of Preliminary Investigations] in Ciudad Juárez provide some numbers on official reports of sexual attack and domestic violence. Between July and December 1994 the institution received 1300 violence reports, of which only 75 made it to the courts. Further data from the same source shows the proportion of injury cases directed towards the mediation process, where 28% involved women that had been injured by their husbands, 17% related to men threatening their wives and 6% were categorized as presumably psychological abuse. Simultaneously, the proportion of demands for injuries and threats during the same period were of 32.39% and 16.90% correspondingly. The similarity of the above proportions leads to infer that the majority of reports for injury and threats against women are directed into the 'mediation procedure' above.

The officers appointed as mediators play a selective role, aiming to prevent women from reporting the crime and reflecting the widespread assumption that domestic violence is a private issue. According to an anonymous social worker in the Department of Previous Investigations, such measure was implemented in response to the number of retractions

after a report had been made, obstructing the officers' job in 'serious crimes'. The question remains whether these types of measures reinforce denial patterns or offer valuable support.

In the area of rape and murder, further data published in 'Diario de Juárez' (May 9th 1996) outlines the number and characteristics of murders against women taking place between 1993 and 1996. Within that period, 69 women had been brutally murdered, sexually abused and mutilated. By April 1998 the numbers reached 118. The main targets of the crimes are lower-class migrant women between the ages of eleven and thirty six.

Although rape was confirmed in a small number of cases, in many of the instances the bodies were found too late to find any evidence of sexual abuse, while a majority of the crimes remain unsolved. The identity of the victims was revealed in 72% of the cases, leading to the assumption that many of the victims may be recent migrants (Méndez et al., 1999). The extent to which most cases remain unsolved shows the lack of institutional resources and/or motivation to deal with these crimes. This lack of action on the part of official institutions confirms the prevailing attitudes on women's responsibility for their abuse, specifically blaming the alleged 'immoral' behavior of maquiladora and sex workers for their dramatic fate. This is further confirmed by the type of preventive measures proposed by the local government, pointing at the need to avoid wearing 'provocative' dressing (Méndez et al., 1999; COVAC, 1996). Finally, the fact that most of the victims were identified as maquiladora workers contradicts that state discourse on the victim's responsibility for their crimes (Méndez et al., 1999)

A closer look into the state's treatment of sexual violence in Ciudad Juárez provides further insights into the ways in which traditional gender stereotypes permeate institutions and the official handling of violence. The generalized official resistance to positive

change in this area is reflected in the event taking place in January 5th 1993, when Griselda Rodriguez and other women blocked further demolition of the old Juárez customs house. The group, which hoped to convert it into a shelter for battered women, discovered that official workers had started demolishing the building during the Christmas holiday.

According to the local paper El Paso Times Borderland, the Mexican government, which abandoned the building when the new Zaragoza bridge was built, ordered its demolition because 'it wanted the area cleared'. Before the demolition was stopped the walls had been cracked, windows smashed and heating and air conditioning units removed. Since the building was left unusable, members of the group said they would petition the government for another building. Jose Luis García Chávez, a representative of the state office of communication and transportation had no comment on the women's claim. Since this event took place no other reports have been made on the subject.

With regards to the governmental and non-governmental institutions dealing with sexual violence, Ciudad Juárez counts with several groups engaged in dealing with women victims. The only official institution in existence known as Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF) [Family integral development] primarily addresses the welfare of children, which may involve domestic violence and/or incest. Its approach is largely psychological and facilitates counseling services to low-income groups. All of the above play a valuable role in providing the means for abused women to change their situation and increase their self-worth and personal autonomy.

However, many basic needs are still unfulfilled, particularly with regards to legal and financial support and the provision of refuges. In order to trace the reasons behind these vacuums, I interviewed some key professionals in the field. Marta Pérez Miramontes was at the time a lawyer specialized in sexual crime within the Department of Previous

Investigations. Her work was allocated within the public administration area and involved all issues related to family and sexual crimes, including rape (57), sexual harassment, bigamy and adultery.

According to this source, the lack of reports on marital rape leads to the conclusion that, in spite of its constitutional definition as sexual crime, it clashes with the widespread view of married women as property. The same applies to sexual harassment, since the number of reports remain extremely low since the last law reform establishing its criminal nature. Regarding the law penalty for rape, it runs between two and five years in jail, depending on the gravity of the charges. A major breakthrough took place since the 1994 reform, which denied parole to rape perpetrators. Such modification ended the prior measure which relied on the 'arithmetic media' to determine the possibility of parole.

The case of domestic violence is more problematic. As stated above, this particular manifestation of sexual violence remains absent from the law, leaving women no choice but to use related laws to report their case, i.e. the law on injuries. However, such 'alternative' laws have serious limitations, since in order to provide a valid case the injuries must take more than fifteen days to heal. The inadequate legal treatment of the problem leaves battered women with no choice but to listen to the social workers' personal advice about an allegedly personal issue.

On the issue of budget cuts, the social worker's testimony describes how despite the department's aim to provide information among vulnerable groups, this has been negatively affected by material limitations. Similar factors affect the amount of time in attending each case, limiting the quality of the victim's treatment. Similarly, the information gathered by the officers in the department is described as insufficient, since it focuses on the quantitative rather than the qualitative aspects of the case. Despite their intention to develop quality reports for further analysis, their lack of access to technical

equipment make their aims impossible to attain. According to the officer, access to computer units was applied for but denied.

A third interview with Javier Alonso Martinez, at the time lawyer at the Procuraduría de la Defensa del Menor [State Institution for the Defense of Minors] within the institution Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF) [Family Integral Development], confirmed the information above regarding the increasing institutional limitations in the treatment of violence, as well as other issues surrounding family conflict. However, and according to his testimony, women minors seem to have received wider law coverage than older women, since they have access to a relatively successful preventive system in incest cases.

The main achievements in this area are the existence of a refuge for abused girls and other children in similar circumstances, the priority given to their testimony and the quality of the procedure followed for their defense. It is in this area where the quality of victim's attention has developed most successfully. The treatment also allows for a space dedicated to prevention and family counseling on children's socialization with apparent results. However, the budget cuts which took place shortly before my interview with Martinez forced the institution to limit the amount of personnel and resources to prevention and reintegration measures.

Occasionally, the institution receives reports on domestic violence, in which case, and depending on the gravity of the situation, they are transferred to the psychology department where free counseling is available for all members of the family. However, when the case requires urgent action due to the gravity of the inflicted injuries or other factors, a judicial report is initiated and transferred to the Department of Previous Investigations.

Martinez's testimony provided further information on the legal treatment of demands for injuries. On this issue, a woman suffering abuse on the part of her husband has the legal right to demand legal

protection for her and her children. For this purpose, the figure 'depósito legal' [Legal Deposit] was created, involving the women and children's deposit in a specific address in order to protect them from further abuse. The obvious limitations of this measure lie in women's unsolved vulnerability to attack, since nothing stops men from violating the law before women have the chance to call for help. Furthermore, the relative legal protection available is only temporary, lasting a total of fifteen days, during which time the woman must start divorce proceedings.

Once a woman begins legal action, the case is taken into court in order to assess the validity of each partners' evidence in their defense. The final verdict includes decisions over family maintenance and child support. After divorce is initiated, the case is taken into court in order to assess the validity of each partner's defense evidence. The final verdict includes decisions such as the custody and maintenance of the children. Regarding the later, Martínez expressed his discontent, stating that men often do not comply with this requirement. Although cultural notions do play a part in this situation, economic considerations must also be taken into account, since law enforcement instructing direct payment from the husband's pay check is often prevented by men's job temporality and informal employment. Finally, Martínez further stressed the relevance of cultural values in the issue of domestic violence, echoing Miramontes' statement on women's reluctance to report the crime.

Yet another interview carried out to Norma Chávez, at the time in charge of the social work department complements the information above. This department basically provides abused women with assisting measures made of concrete actions which could help them solve their situation, i.e. medical treatment, plane tickets, funeral expenses, food allowances, etc. Chávez stresses the area of domestic violence, pointing at the problematic aspects of women's reluctance to accept their abuse.

On that basis, the institution chooses to deal with the issue indirectly, addressing the consequences of the problem rather than its causes. According to the respondent, the number of visits from women household heads looking for support are so frequent that the problem has become uncontrollable.

Chávez's testimony is critical of the institution's auxiliary approach, although the Juárez administration has tried to move towards a successful preventive treatment. However, the individual remains the main target since the widespread problem of low self-esteem among low-income groups in the border is considered a psychological rather than a sociological issue. Although this approach can provide the means for positive change, its impact is limited, since it ignores the significance of social structures in the formation of personal attitudes. A more integrated approach requires institutional action involving the law and political action at the community level.

Specific problems that prevent communication between the state institutions and NGOs dealing with sexual violence become apparent through the data below. A yearly annual meeting on sexual crime was at the time organized in Ciudad Juárez by the local NGO Centro de Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer. In the 1994 meeting, 95% of the attendants were men from the various institutional departments dealing with the issue. While two thirds of the speakers were specialized lawyers, one third pertained to the local NGO Centro de Orientación de la Mujer Obrera [Center for the Orientation of Women Factory Workers]. The main conclusions derived from the meeting can be summarized as follows: First, the socioeconomic problems affecting the border increases the likelihood of this type of crime, therefore requiring a closer examination and implementation of institutional law amendments. Second, education and information campaigns should be implemented to prevent the negative consequences of 'machismo'.

Despite the honorable conclusions above, actions speak louder. Most significantly, the only reference to domestic violence and sexual harassment came from the local women's group, stressing the gravity of the situation and the lack of institutional support. Their proposal in this area addressed the issues of accessibility, the cases' pursuit, privacy, punishment, the need for safer transport systems, and support to NGOs.

The response was, however, unsatisfactory, questioning the validity of women's claims on the basis of lacking statistical support. Apparently, the fact that the group attended an average of fifteen reports per day was not considered satisfactory evidence of its widespread nature. The above reflects the main difficulties which prevent a positive and rapid development of this issue, i.e. the prevailing traditional attitudes and lack of credibility attributed to 'women's issues' deriving in a reluctance on the part of official institutions to cooperate with NGOs.

The testimony offered by an anonymous source at the Department of Previous Investigations reflects the role played by local politics in addressing or resisting national legal trends and amendments to the law. Prior to the arrival of the right-wing party known as Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) [Party of National Action], a department of sexual crimes had been established following the national trend at the time. However, the administration change in the state of Chihuahua since 1992 significantly affected the reporting and attention procedures in the area of sexual crime.

A major change involved the removal of psychological support for women under stress and the department of social work in charge of reported cases. Most significantly, the department's objectives were dramatically altered from focusing on the victim to the treatment of whole families. Furthermore, the original initiative incorporated female personnel only and was allocated into a separate building in order to

provide privacy. Their location and relative autonomy allowed for innovative approaches such as interviewing the abusers, in order to assess their psychological profile.

However, with the arrival of the new administration, such practices were eliminated on the grounds that 'they had become too independent and needed to be controlled'. Consequently, female personnel was replaced by male staff, a measure later reversed in view of its impracticality. The only male staff that then remained was allocated in the medical section, a fact in itself problematic. Since the time this interview took place a specialized agency for sexual crimes was created, in response to the pressure exercise by local NGOs on the issue of sexual violence and the existence of specialized agencies throughout the country.

The above shows the problematic aspects of prevalent patriarchal attitudes, inadequate institutional response and low-income women's vulnerability to violence and its consequences. Regarding the extent of violence, the number of crimes recorded at the Department of Preliminary investigations and the fact that most sexual violence crimes remain unreported shows that the extent of sexual violence in Ciudad Juárez is likely to be considerable.

The inadequate institutional treatment of violence in Ciudad Juárez is evidenced by the state's response to the initiative of NGOs to build a shelter, denounce the murders of women taking place since 1993 and call attention to issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment in official local forums. The above confirms data provided through other sources on the prevailing patriarchal attitudes among state officials, leading to inadequate planning and allocation of resources while preventing vulnerable groups from having access to information on rights and specific options. Simultaneously, such attitudes translate in limited approaches to the issue, providing auxiliary rather than preventive measures that could effectively modify

the nature of the problem. However, the prevalence of traditional gender attitudes extends far beyond official institutions and permeates most sectors of society, partially the reason for women's reluctance to report the crime and men's abusive behavior towards women.

The concrete manifestations of low-income women's vulnerability to violence was examined through the testimonies provided by professionals in official and unofficial institutions, who expressed that a great majority of reported cases come from this population sector. However, this sector is also the most likely to resort to official welfare institutions, and therefore we cannot arrive to any conclusions on the prevalence of sexual violence among the lower-classes in comparison to other sectors of society. The lack of effective state resources against domestic violence added to the material deprivation they suffer makes these women more vulnerable to further attack, particularly considering the dubious nature of measures such as temporary 'legal deposit' and the law on injuries. Such inconsistencies should be addressed through a greater involvement between official, unofficial institutions and political networks engaged in sexual violence.

The above turns violence within the NIDL debate into an adequate measure of power relations in the household, showing the dynamics of sexual violence within and outside the household combine to generate specific power dynamics that negatively affect women's daily life. The data above also justifies the definition of autonomy as freedom from violence, since women can hardly become autonomous and productive individuals when facing the reality of sexual violence in their lives.

However, this issue goes beyond analytical considerations in showing how violence seriously undermines women's dignity, human rights and well being, all crucial factors for their successful participation in the developing process. Therefore, considering these two factors becomes paramount in an analysis of gender within the development

process that seeks the transformation of inadequate conditions and the achievement of a better quality of life for men and women.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined a range of elements that influence women's experiences of subordination and resistance within the Northern Mexican border. Regarding the socio-economic aspects of women's reality, specific features of the Northern border generate social consequences that affect negatively the quality of life of low-income groups and women among them. The heaviest weight carried by women in these dynamics derives from their dual role as mothers and workers. This burden results from material deprivation and traditional gender stereotypes that increase their dependence on men and vulnerability to abuse.

The fact that women's participation in the working force has dramatically increased, becoming social agents within the migration and labor process as well as often the only household providers, might lead to the conclusion that traditional gender stereotypes have for the most part been eradicated. However, I argue that in order to arrive to a conclusion we need to examine elements beyond the material aspect of women's lives. For instance, it is not clear the extent to which issues such as sexual violence are an influencing factor that reverses women's alleged autonomous role as workers and providers.

To support my argument, I examined in a second section the impact of cultural values and beliefs on women's lives today. Through a historic account of the institutional discourse on sexuality and the use of violence against women, I showed the evolution of persistent ideologies that underrate women's potential for autonomy and resistance to violence. Such account provides a framework from which to understand the implicit ambivalence of women's notions of self as they manifest today within the dynamics of ongoing structural change. However, the historic review of

women's resistance strategies since colonial times counteracts the above, showing women's capacity for autonomy as well as the relevance of the symbolic domain in exercising their choices.

The final section of the chapter refers to the specific institutional constraints faced by low-income border women today in the area of sexual violence. Departing from the argument that sexual violence is a daily occurrence in these women's lives, this picture helps to understand the relevance of state ideologies in women's victimization, limiting their potential for autonomy. Added to the material and social limitations referred above, the state treatment of violence further limits women's capacity to develop to their full potential and truly participate in the ongoing development process. In the next chapters my aim is to articulate the specific limitations met by the women in this study as well as their chosen paths towards greater autonomy.

#### 4. THE LIMITS OF AUTONOMY: THE IMPACT OF THE CATHOLIC GENDER DISCOURSE ON WOMEN'S VICTIMIZATION

In this chapter I focus on the way in which women's self conception limit their autonomy and increase their potential for victimization. I doing so, I show that traditional ideologies on women's roles and sexual violence as a continuum reinforce each other and perpetuate unequal gender relations. Although the main question in this work focuses on women's role as workers and its impact on autonomy, I consider it as immersed into the wider spectrum of roles that socially define women. Therefore, I aim to show the way in which the Catholic discourse portrays women's sexuality in various areas and how it permeates their potential as workers in the public sphere.

Consequently, women's testimonies on this issues cover material on today's manifestations of the religious discourse since colonial times regarding gender roles, as well as its connection to sexual violence in their daily life. As shown in the previous chapter, the religious discourse in Mexico traditionally portrayed women as 'naturally' sinful and therefore in need of protection from a man. This ideology, although intertwined with parallel institutional discourses, manifests nowadays within modernizing influences, generating conflict and ambivalence in women's role as workers. Attention will be paid to factors such as age and generation, structural change, spirituality, migrant origin and education.

In support of the argument that considers women as potential agents for social change, it should be noted that their testimonies go far beyond a passive assimilation of repressing values and notions, but picture a much richer and subversive discourse than might be assumed. The richness of their testimonies shows the various degrees in which women experience pain and rejection against socially imposed roles and victimization. Furthermore, the mixed nature of the sample allows for

the identification of patterns that show the flowing nature of their discourse during the past three female generations on the border, showing that social influences are subject to development, potentially modifying and improving women's gender relations.

The first section of this chapter deals with women's perceptions on the extent and characteristics and consequences of sexual violence in their community. A second section looks at women's interpretation of the dynamics involved in their experience of sexual violence, to understand its links with women's sense of self. In this section, I illustrate women's assimilation of the Catholic discourse on their alleged sinful nature and need of protection from a man, reflecting the character of their spiritual identity. I thereby show the various ways in which these notions articulate within their daily experiences, affecting their potential for autonomy. A third and final section examines how traditional gender notions on women's sexuality influence their self-perception as workers, leading towards victimization patterns within unequal gender relations.

#### Conceptualizing Violence: Women's Perceptions on its Extent and Characteristics

In this section I explore women's perceptions of the extent, characteristics and consequences of sexual violence within the community under study. Violence is a part of women's daily life from an early age, often in the hands of their father and other male members of the family: .

B34,Torr,prim,5ch: "...That time he arrived drunk from work, I was there with the baby and he said: 'Now tell me, who where you crying for?, so I just said: (ironically) 'Imagine, who?', and he said: 'Don't play the fool, don't you have someone?' and I said: 'Leave me alone, I'm not a pig like you... then the baby was lying in bed and I said: 'Don't you seat there with the baby because you're going to hurt her, drunk as you are and she's very small' and he grabbed the blanket and the baby and threw them to the floor, I swear to God who is watching me..."

Since men and women witness and often suffer abusive behavior in their homes since early in their childhood, it is assumed that they reproduce abusive patterns in their social contacts. This has the effect of potentially affecting the quality of future relationships, both within and outside the household. This is more often the case among young single women with higher education, showing that access to information and resources through education opportunities may increase women's awareness on this issue. Such perceptions, although to some extent accurate, rest significance to the social aspects of sexual violence while reinforcing its psychological component:

A22, tec, J: "...I've seen various cases at school where a boy said: 'No, no, no, I'm going to kiss her and if she doesn't want to I'll slap her so that she lets me'... I mean, already since they are children or I don't know... they see it so much at home that they say: 'Well, if my father does it, why not me'..."

The view of sexual violence as a private issue reflects the Catholic discourse on women's sexuality, whereby women's protection is left in the hands of their marital partner and therefore does not require external action. This is problematic in that women do not expect nor accept sexual violence to be a daily occurrence in their lives, particularly since society traditionally assigns male family members the role of bread-winner and protector.

Therefore, when reality strikes, women find it difficult to assimilate it in its full meaning, experiencing conflictive feelings with potentially disempowering effects. Older partnered women with low education and of migrant origin are more likely to think of violence as a private issue and assume it should not be exposed or discussed outside the household. In doing so, they contribute to further limit their options for reaching out and having access to outside support:

E58,Chih,prim,1ch: "...One day he tied my hands with the antenna's cord and he was choking me and I grabbed an ax and hit his bottom so that he would let me go, otherwise he would have killed me, then my neighbor next door came to intervene and I told him: 'Please, when you see us like this... don't intervene, thank you, but don't, please, I don't like it, when there's an argument like his I don't like to intervene or other people to do it'..."

Regarding the issue of rape and similar violent attacks, most women, regardless of generation, marital status, migrant origin or education level have been subject to this type of violence at least once throughout their lives. Often the perpetrators are family members or other known individuals. However, despite the status of the attacker, women always express extreme disgust at this kind of aggression:

D26,Zac,prim,2ch: "...Sex was hell... he was a beast, I never wanted to... with all the beatings, I was so unhappy I didn't feel any love, I didn't even want to hug him... 'Hug me!', he said prostitutes were better than me and used to grab my pubic hair and my nipples: 'I told you this and the other'..."

A17,prim,J: "...Two of my friends at school had this experience, they beat up and abused one of them, they left her there all beaten up, she didn't tell the police because they threatened her and if she said something, well, they were going to harm her parents and she was scared..."

A15,tec,J: "... I remember that I was about seven or six and we were staying with my grandma, and I had an uncle who was shot, rest in peace... and he sexually abused me but I've always tried to pretend that nothing has happened because I haven't told anyone, nor my mother, nobody and I loved my uncle a lot... he was the idol among all the children... and one day he abused me in the bathroom and I never told anybody... then I grew up and stopped being afraid but... it's not the same because my uncle died and who is going to believe me?..."

However, there are some factors that account for different perceptions on sexual violence. As suggested above, young single women with higher education levels are more likely to acknowledge violence as a common, although not for that reason less problematic, occurrence in their lives. As shown down bellow, older partnered women with low education and of migrant origin do seem to be more likely to have

experienced extreme violence in their lives. However, their isolation from information, resources and their limited support networks as a consequence of their migrant status has prevented them from realizing that other women share the same problem:

D26,CdMad,tec,1ch: '...I feel that *domestic violence* is quite common... (painfully)... I think in the majority of marriages once or twice the husband hits the wife... I feel there are many people with that problem...'

E53,Dur,prim,8ch: "...My life was very bitter, very treacherous... when we were together in the women's meeting I thought: 'My God, we've all been through the same thing'... when he was drunk he got the knife, sometimes he threatened me..."

A15,tec,J: '... People are very treacherous here, how can I say?... a lot of violence, a lot of chaos... and there's hardly any support... there're lots of people who stay with their trauma and stay with their trauma, there's no one to help them get out of it... here in Mexico they all think they're very 'machotes' (46) and that they have the right to beat up and kill and they take that right, but they're crazy... there's a lot of 'machismo' in here...'

Since sexual violence is a part of women's daily life, young women's vulnerability to sexual attack constitutes a factor that negatively conditions their routine in all spheres. This includes a simple journey to school, work and going out with friends. Once again, young single women with higher education levels are more aware of its problematic aspects and the limitations it imposes on their mobility:

A24,univ,J: '...To tell you the truth I feel affected by the lack of safety in this city... I leave school late and when nobody can come to pick me up I feel afraid at night on the streets, because of that, because of the lack of security...'

Women born in Juárez, regardless of age, marital status or education level refer to the way in which violence conditions the material aspect of their daily life. Violence in the home often generates financial neglect and instability in the lives of women, leading to situations of extreme poverty and the lack of means for a

stable education. Their testimonies show how the potential benefits of structural change in a border town like Ciudad Juárez, i.e. women's participation in the work sphere, can be severely undermined by sexual violence:

D32,prim,J,3ch: '...Once he sent me to a shop to get something to eat, he sold a cigarette so that we could eat... we had nothing to eat... the child's milk... at night I gave him only water and sugar, and then the sugar finished and it was just water... the child didn't want anymore because he was a baby and he just had water, water, water... then I had nothing to give him... I had to leave my job because I was 'doing things' (meaning her husband assumed she was unfaithful)... then we only had what he earned 'doing things' (meaning selling drugs) but everything he had he used, so all the money was for him!...'

A15,tec,J: '...If my father stopped drinking and didn't fight with my mother I would have better support with my studies, I would enjoy school much more, sometimes I'm at school and think that I'm going to get home... that's why I say that if he stopped drinking I would have more support to move forward and achieve my objective of becoming a nurse...'

Partnered women with low education levels and of migrant origin seem to have suffered the most dramatic experiences of sexual violence, often referring to events that threatened their lives and those of their family. Their extreme victimization generated consequences that influenced the course of their life:

D21,Torr,prim,2ch: '...Do you know what he did once? Once he shouted at the men walking by that I was on sale, and he ordered me to wash myself... men thought he was angry at me or crazy, but once one of them said: 'When I come back', 'But hurry!' he said, because I need money, I was so upset I thought I would have a heart attack, so I said: 'You're selling me?' and he said: 'I haven't sold you yet because I haven't found a client'... so carry that within me and I just want to scream to get it out...'

D43,IgAll,prim,5ch: '...They fought a lot, my mother and father... yes, until he took his life, he shot himself... yes, the thing is he beat my mother up a lot, once he hit her and she was breast feeding the babies and they fell down on the horses' legs, he didn't step on them because of God greatness but there they fell, then my mother got mad and reported it to the police, and as my father also had a strong character, then... they got a citation and both of them went and came together from the police station, he was telling my mother he wouldn't be taken alive and God knows what else... so he came and later he shot himself...'

D34,Zac,prim,5ch: '...My mother was single and we had a good life, but since she died everything changed... I was then twelve... she was

killed by a man who lived with her for a while... he used to go home with her sometimes, because he had his wife... he treated her well but I think he got jealous and that's why he killed her...'

Consequently, these women, and particularly those with lower education levels who lack access to information and resources, stay in abusive relationships or avoid taking any action for fear of their life or that of their families. This is reinforced by the lack of appropriate support in the hands of the state as well as women's generalized distrust towards official institutions. This combination generates further helplessness and dependence among women victims:

D32,J,prim,3ch: '...I was afraid but I didn't say anything, I was afraid even when I was asleep... I was afraid he would do something to my brothers because he doesn't care about anything, he always carried knives or whatever with him.. I used to go with my mum because I got fed up but he went and threatened me and I went back... so I stopped thinking about me but began to fear about my family... he hit me very badly, he hit my stomach, he choked me, he burnt my arms with cigarettes...'

Regarding the impact of violence, women's testimonies show that extensive abuse leads to severe health problems and psychological dysfunction. The effects of sexual violence on women's health are a reality among women of all ages, marital status, education levels and migrant origins, showing that all women are vulnerable to sexual violence and its consequences at some stage of their lives:

D49,Zac,noed,1ch: '...During a time I was taking precautions not to have children because after Alex was born I got pregnant very easily, but when I was one or two months pregnant he came home drunk and beat me up, killing the babies... she was the first one and after her I had six abortions...'

B25,J,prim,2ch: '...My father beat my mother up a lot... once they separated and my father came for my mother and we stayed with him... and after a month he wanted to kill us and he said he was going to throw a bomb and had a big knife, telling my mother he was going to kill her... as far as I remember my mother started to have problems with one of my brothers, the oldest, because since he was nine he started inhaling glue... sometimes I found her crying... then we found out my father had raped my sister... and from then on I started to notice she was more affected, I think things started to pile up, seeing

my brothers' failure and then my sister and mine... a little after that my mother started to be even more affected because they told us she didn't do her work properly and I looked at her and it seemed she wasn't there... soon after that they fired her and she started to feel bad and stayed in bed, she didn't recognize herself, her mind was blank, she was like a baby...'.

A15,tec,J: '...Even though he's older, my father goes on drinking and arrives home and wants to hit us... and we stop him... even though he's old now he still insult us and uses very offensive words... for that reason I have white stains on my eyes and my skin gets all itchy because of my nerves...the life I've had has damaged my nerves...'.

Other consequences of violence include its impact on women's sense of self in various areas, a rarely mentioned issue that plays a major role in their well-being. For instance, young women's experience of sexual attack interfere on the development of a healthy and attitude about relationships, affecting the course of their emotional development. This is more often the case among women with lower education levels, who lack the resources and access to information that allows them to consider treatment:

A17,prim,J: '...After that car went after me and like... when I've seen boys abusing girls, when they sleep with them and leave them there and all that... it gets to me and I feel something bad is going to happen and I get scared...'.

D34,Chih,prim,4ch: '...Lately I told my mother that my father used to touch me, my stepfather... and he didn't do anything else, didn't do anything else but I was very... I don't know why you feel guilty about that, I don't know why, I mean lately, lately... and my mother told me: 'Why don't you like your father? because my father is blind... but not even that makes me feel sorry for him, I mean, I feel nothing... I feel nothing, nothing... but I try to forget it because I get bitter, I get bitter, it makes me think a lot, I mean, that's ugly, the ugly things that happen, but I try to block it out, that's why I don't like to have sex, I mean... what's sex? it's disgusting, that's what I think...'.

The above reflects women's perceptions on the extent and characteristics of sexual violence, showing some of its major consequences in women's lives and those of their families. I have shown that violence is a common event, permeating childhood experiences, married life, work and social life while conditioning women's mobility, self-expression and sense of self. Consequently, it constitutes an

effective control mechanism that often manages to keep women in a subordinate position both inside and outside the home, limiting their capacity for autonomy and growth. Violence can also generate more visibly dramatic consequences, including death, illness and extreme poverty. The lack of appropriate state options for women increase their vulnerability to further abuse.

The main factors identified as relevant in women's differing perceptions and experiences revolve around age, marital status, education and migrant origin. Most women seem to have experienced sexual violence as a common occurrence in their lives since early childhood. However, single childless young women with higher education levels are more aware of the subtle aspects of violence, while acknowledging its widespread nature. They are also conscious of its effect on their mobility and the constraints it creates in their daily life. Their increased awareness may derive from the access to information and resources provided by education opportunities. Simultaneously, they are immersed in specific dynamics of structural change that affect the social life of young women within a border maquiladora town, resulting in an increasing access to alternative support networks. Finally, their reduced reproductive responsibilities facilitate a detached view on gender issues and the setting of objectives in alternative areas of their lives.

On the other hand, older partnered women with lower education levels and of migrant origin tend to acknowledge the abuse only when it involves extreme physical violence and often consider it a private issue. Furthermore, they are more likely to have suffered extreme violence, to the point where their lives have been threatened. Their increased reproductive responsibilities involve a limited contact with the outside world, while their reduced resources, information and support systems in connection to education level and migrant origin reinforce their vulnerability to abuse. However, in all cases women's

conceptualization of violence shows their frustration and lack of understanding of the dynamics that generate extreme suffering in many spheres of their lives.

The above justifies the definition of autonomy as freedom from violence, showing the extent to which sexual violence constitutes a significant obstacle in women's potential to achieve control over their lives and the ability to grow as individuals. It also reflects some of the factors that influence women's potential vulnerability to abuse, i.e. the lack of access to information, resources and support networks. In the next section I aim to provide a deeper examination of the causes and implications of sexual violence in women's lives. I therefore concentrate on their interiorization of traditional gender notions and its effect on women's victimization.

#### Interpreting Victimization: Women's Discourse on Sexuality, Relationships and Self

Behind the institutional religious discourse on sexuality and related issues lies the notion that women are sinful and helpless by nature and therefore in need of protection from a man. The differing manifestations of the religious discourse in women's lives vary, as well as the ways in which such discourse is assimilated and interiorized as part of their spiritual identity. However, a major aspect of women's alleged helplessness within the Catholic discourse on gender refers to the area of women's sexuality, assumed to need restrictions as a consequence of women's 'natural' sinfulness and lack of emotional control.

Such basic assumption, from which I argue many other notions on women's helplessness derive, still permeates all kinds of relationships between men and women in the context of this investigation. Translated into women's daily lives, the way in which they assimilate the social

construction of their 'appropriate' sexual conduct can be identified within their experiences of sexual violence. Furthermore, I argue that Catholic gender notions on women's sexuality and related issues reinforce the use of violence as a control mechanism over women, highly limiting their autonomy and personal development.

One of the consequences of such discourse is that victims of rape are generally seen as responsible for their victimization. This attitude is often interiorized and projected on to others to the detriment of their self-esteem and potential for autonomy. On this issue, young single women with higher education seem to be more aware of women's right to be themselves without having to suffer from guilt, although their testimonies remain ambivalent:

E58,Chih,prim,1ch: After having suffered attempted rape by her husband's cousin, Blanca declared: "...'Then, when my husband came, I told him: 'I don't want David to take me anywhere anymore (because I didn't know El Paso) this, this and this happened to me'...., to which her husband replied: 'That's because you let him'..."

A24,univ,J: '...I think some women provoke the harassment they suffer, they dress very sexy, flirt with men and everything but other times they don't, right? and even if they did it, I don't think they should be bothered just for the way they are, unless they want to accept that, those propositions... right?... well, it's for the woman to decide, but I don't know, I think it's very ugly...'

As a further example of women's interiorization of negative self notions and its effect on their victimization, a woman may feel pressured to marry her rapist. Women of all ages with low or no education and of migrant origin refer in their testimonies to instances where they felt trapped into having sex with their attacker. Often they chose to marry him as a result. In such cases, it is likely that the stigma caused from losing their virginity felt more threatening than their ultimate safety and well-being:

D49,Zac,noed,1ch: "...We never dated, he met me and talked to me but I didn't pay any attention to him... so one day, it was August... he got into my room and I didn't realize he was there... and when I was going

towards the door he shut the door and when I saw him I got very scared, he said: 'Relax' and I told him: 'What are you doing in here? You and I have nothing, so you'd better leave' and he said: 'No, I'm not going to leave' and I'm not going to leave and he never left... and since then I'm with him... I felt... *I really was very afraid of men but he didn't want to go*, so he didn't go... I'd never had a boyfriend and didn't even know how men are supposed to talk to women, because it never... they talked to me, but I never answered and that night we had sexual relations, so *there was nothing else I could do...*"

D21, Torr, 2ch: '...He took me to his home with lies, pure lies because he didn't call me so that I would leave with him... when he took me with him he said: 'Let's go to my place to have some water' and I said: 'No, I don't want to go, it's 10 p.m., already, I cannot stay out because my poor mum is ill and she will get worried' and he said: 'No, let's go, I will walk you home', so I thought it was OK and when we were at the door he offered me some water and I said: 'No, I just want to go home', he said: 'Come in', and when I came into the alley he pushed me in and I told him: 'Why don't you let me out?' and he said: 'No, you're going to be my wife', but I said: 'How? I don't want to marry you, I don't know what that's like, I don't know anything, how are you going to do this?', so he locked the door, I thought it was a joke, so I laughed and when I tried to open the door he got angry and said: 'No, you're not going anywhere, *you must understand you're going to be my wife*'..."

For the most part, women's perception on their sexuality reflects wider social constructions, since they often respond by repressing their sexual needs or showing ambivalence towards them. Regarding this issue, factors related to education level and migrant origin play a part in women's responses.

The next testimonies explore this issue and its effect on women's victimization. For instance, partnered women of migrant origin and low education consider that they are not expected to know much about sexual techniques and feel inadequate when questioned about the source of their knowledge. Women feel confused between their need to improve sexual relations with their husbands and the critical response they receive:

D26, CdMad, prim, 1ch: "...Sometimes I want to tell him something about sex, about what I learnt... because I might not have known everything there's to know... and he criticizes me: 'And where did you learn that?' and: 'Who are you getting together with?' and that makes me feel bad... I say: 'No, I'm just making a comment, you learn something everyday'..."

Some partnered women, again of migrant origin and with lower education internalize their sexual role within marriage as a duty towards their husband, following his requests to comply with their ascribed roles. However, although they may accept this situation, these women often feel highly conflicted by their assumed helplessness:

D26,CdMad,prim,1ch: '*...I don't like being with him, I don't say no, but I don't feel anything... I feel it's the wife's obligation to do it... I've been like that for a long time, almost since my child was born...*'

E53,Dur,prim,8ch: '*...Sometimes when they are drunk they want to do even what they cannot do with oneself, and they do it, because one is a woman and cannot defend oneself and has to do what they want and sometimes when he was drunk it was very ugly, very bad...*'

Consequently, marital rape is reinforced by the institutional discourse on women's sexual 'duties' within marriage, leading to unsatisfactory and often degrading sexual relationships. Although some women reject their husband's approaches, they often feel guilty about their behavior and eventually justify the abuse received:

B24,Dur,prim,3ch: '*...When he was drunk and when I didn't want to 'be' with him he hit me... maybe because I... I was wrong in that I didn't want to 'be' with him, as he gave me support and helped me move forward but I didn't feel anything, it didn't come from my heart... I know I had a duty towards him, but I didn't feel like it... I think maybe he fooled around doing God knows what, he came satisfied but he had to always have 'something' with me... but I rejected him...*'

E53,Dur,prim,8ch: '*...Sometimes when they are drunk they want to do even what they cannot do with oneself, and they do it, because one is a woman and cannot defend oneself and has to do what they want and sometimes when he was drunk it was very ugly, very bad...*'

We find another example of how the view of women as in need of protection affects their daily life in the discourse of women who consider marriage a priority in their life. In this case, marital status, number of children, education and migrant origin are not

significant factors in the analysis. The only exception is the generation factor, since such notions show shifting signs among younger women. However, ultimately ambivalence permeates most women's discourse on this issue.

Often women who decide to start a relationship express a sense of urgency to achieve what will supposedly give them a purpose in life. I interpret women's interiorization of their gender role within relationships as partly derived from the Christian notion concerning the indissolubility of marriage. As a result, and whether unions are or not official, the maintenance of the relationship and the family structure becomes a priority. Such notions continue to be reinforced by parallel discourses through the media, portraying marriage as women's prevailing role. Therefore, they often choose to withstand different degrees of abuse to themselves and their children in order to preserve a marriage.

An example of this type of denial refers to incest cases, where mothers sometimes excuse their husband's violent behavior through implicitly consenting to the sexual abuse suffered by their daughters. As a result victims feel betrayed, who often keep their anger and disappointment to themselves for fear of being blamed or discredited for their victimization:

B28,Guana,prim,2ch: '... My mother knew about it, but she never said anything to him or did anything to defend me... she knew about it... I don't feel any remorse towards her because she is dead now, but she didn't defend me in any way (crying) ...'

However, women's denial of sexual violence within their family or relationships extends to other areas, with negative consequences for the victims' sense of self. This is most clearly reflected in the testimonies of older partnered women with lower education levels. Extreme control often constitutes a pattern in the lives of these

women, enduring physical and psychological abuse. Women's inability to acknowledge the gravity of the situation relates to their interiorization of the institutional discourse on women's alleged helplessness and sinful nature:

D32, J, prim, 3ch: '...I didn't go to see my mum, or if I did it had to be at ten at night when nobody was around, because according to him I was going to meet men... I couldn't dress normally, I had to wear baggy clothes, I had to look ugly because he hit me very badly... on the street I could only look in one direction because if I looked to one side or the other he thought I was looking at somebody... I didn't go to the toilet if he didn't take me because if I did I was going to see my sister in law's husband (meaning he assumed that)... once, as I was going in he was leaving, so I was with him (meaning he assumed that)... I lasted all day without going to the toilet, and then he took me but if I went on my own, I knew what awaited me...'

D51, Lagos, prim, 5ch: '...As one is so ignorant, one is very ignorant because I never talked to anybody, I was always alone because he didn't like me being on the street, I was alone in the house and he wasn't there either because he went and got drunk and when he arrived he was already drunk and I couldn't talk to him...'

The patriarchal notion of marriage as a property contract constitutes yet another factor contributing to the use of domestic violence as a control mechanism over women. Consequently, partnered women of all ages, education levels and migrant origins suffer victimization under the assumption that they 'belong' to their husband, who can do as he pleases with 'his' wife. Such notions extend to situations where the couple is not married, since the man has invested time or resources in a particular woman and therefore feels has acquired certain rights over her. This shows that marital status constitutes a risk factor for all women, despite the existence of factors that can contribute to prevent it or eventually lead toward autonomy:

D26, Zac, prim, 2ch: "...Sometimes he even hit me in the middle of the street... once he run after me naked because I left with my child and somebody told him: 'What are you doing?', he said: 'I'm going to kill her because she's my wife'..."

E46,J,tec,3ch: '...We knew each other for four months before getting married, he first treated me as a queen but he changed after getting married, he was jealous, I think that's why he hit me, before we got married he wasn't jealous, everything changed very rapidly, after about three months...'

Furthermore, and as shown above, situations that place women in particularly vulnerable positions increase their chances of being victimized. Partnered and widowed women with lower education levels and of migrant origin often express suffering from violence when they found themselves in vulnerable positions. This in turn reduced their chances of finding the strength to break free from the abuse:

B24,Dur,prim,3ch: '...He hit me a lot... then I lived far away from my family, but they didn't imagine he hit me because I was locked up all the time... so I didn't go out at all... my bosses made me understand that I hadn't looked for it, that it had to happen, as a man always does what he wants with a woman, you know? and more so when she's alone...'

D34,Zac,prim,5ch: "... The whole pregnancy, as soon as he realized I was pregnant, he shouted at me and when I asked him where was he going, he answered: 'What do you care, all you want to know is where I go, women are made to stay at home, not to ask men for explanations'... it was a very sad life for me when I was pregnant, he even hit me, something he had never done, and he insulted me and called me names..."

E74,Jim,noed,nochild: '...God knows I go through hard times, I don't ask anybody for anything, I'd rather put up with hunger... how many times have I gone to bed without having dinner, lunch, breakfast, how many times I just have coffee all day ... he came and took everything that belonged to his father and continued to bother me and kept his father's money, I don't know how much, but no, not even a cent, he didn't even give me to buy an egg, on the contrary, he comes and asks for money - lend me 100 Pesos, lend me 30, lend me 200 - I don't have any... where from? and he gets pissed, he curses and I cry because I say, he takes advantage of the fact that I'm alone, just like you see me, all the time alone me and my dog...'

Regarding the assimilation of traditional gender roles among younger women, and regardless of marital status, education level or migrant origin, they define a 'good marriage' as one where each partner fulfills traditional gender roles. On this issue, it should be noted that this sector of the population conceptualizes free unions as

marriage and therefore the same rule applies when referring to any kind of unions:

A24,univ,J: '...Since my mother started to be more at home I began to notice her attitude towards my father... sometimes she was happy, sometimes she was indifferent... she always treated him well, as her husband, I imagine... as our father, she treated him well, *she was never nasty to him, she never stopped feeding him, ironing or washing his clothes... the functions of a wife... right?...*'

B24,Dur,prim,3ch: '...My brothers have more to be grateful for than us... they had a future and got married, and I am happy for them... as men they should support the family more than us as women...'

A17,prim,J: '... What I say is that women should marry for the man to support her, no... women are there to clean their house, clean their husband, no, cook his food, wash his clothes, well... that's what I think...'

Therefore, it is not surprising that young women often refer to their mother's inability to appropriately fulfill their role as caretakers and hold them responsible for the abuse they suffer. In so doing, women continue to avoid confrontation by choosing to deny that the person most likely to protect them and care for them is in fact an abuser. Similarly, by internalizing the Catholic discourse on their appropriate role, they excuse violent behavior against them or other women:

D26,Zac,prim,2ch: '...I didn't feel pity for my father, I loved him, I wanted to understand it was the alcohol that made him like that... I was very patient and always wanted to help him... but no, I saw it was my mum's fault because she was the head of the house and couldn't straighten up my father! and if she didn't do it, what was I going to do?! That's why I felt resentful towards her more than him...'

A14,prim,Torr: '...Sometimes my parents got on well and sometimes they fought, there was a woman between them and that's why they fought... for a while my father hated us... the other woman bewitched him and she used a powder so that he wouldn't love us...'

A19,tec,Dur: "...I had friends in the maquila(47) who told me that their husband had beat them up, but also because it was their fault, they said: 'You know, yesterday I saw my boyfriend' but she was married, 'and my husband found out and beat me up and we're even going to split up', and other times they do beat them up for no reason..."

In fact, most testimonies refer to domestic violence as a natural consequence of women's 'bad behavior' as housewives. Regarding this issue, women's incorporation into the work force, their control of the money within the family and the threat it implies to traditional gender roles are assimilated with guilt and ambivalence and often precipitates men's violence. Men resort to this strategy as a way to forcefully modify unwanted behavior from women:

D54,Guana,noed,7ch: '*...He started to beat me up since I've made something better of myself, thanks to the money, the loan, right?... because we knew how to build up a business, because of something I did, maybe I was wrong or I was right... I asked for money in his name and they lend it to me, so I got two loans at the same time but I worked all the money... that's when I started to make something of it...*'

Moving toward the reasons mentioned by partnered women for not leaving abusive marriages, the ability of male partners to financially support the family stands paramount. This is more often the case among women with low education levels and of migrant origin. Such reasoning continues to show the strength of the Catholic discourse on women's alleged helplessness. Therefore, the fulfillment of women's expectations on being supported by their male partners is strong enough to justify the abusive treatment they may receive:

E58,Chih,prim,1ch: '*...He arrived drunk at 2 a.m., with no money, he arrived, threw himself on the bed, left the car somewhere and later he thought it had been stolen... when he wasn't drunk he was a very nice person, he is a real man, very responsible with me and my daughter, he brought us food from El Paso, clothes, he was always aware of what we needed...*'

B24,Dur,prim,3ch: '*...I got together with a man who I'm grateful to because he supported me for some time, me and one of my children... he gave him a name... but it didn't work because he was older and very jealous... so he hit me a lot... then I lived far away from my family (I have other family) but they didn't imagine he hit me because I was locked up all the time...*'

As part of the same issue, the social status derived from the institutional discourse on appropriate roles as wives and mothers

prevents women from leaving abusive relationships. Therefore, by assuming their ascribed role they often feel protected from criticism and further financial hardship. As a consequence, partnered women with lower education levels and of migrant origin tend to attribute great significance to the preservation of the family unit and their status within it. This is often the case at the expense of women's safety, often feeling conflicted about their options and choices:

D49, Zac,noed,1ch: '...Maybe this is really the cross that I have to carry, because my older daughter is already grown up, but my son... *I don't want him to throw to my face one day that I left his dad...* 'One day I had my father and you left him'... and that's what I don't want, after all I've already suffered a lot and maybe now that I'm old he'll realize or believe how I'm suffering, so that he'll say: 'My mom didn't leave because of me'... that's why...'

B24,Dur,prim,3ch: '...I had thought about leaving because he was abusive and I never betrayed him as he thought I did... but I sometimes forgot about it because of the child... *I thought I wouldn't make it without his support*, everything seemed very difficult...' .

Often family members reinforce these notions and contribute to women's decision to stay in a violent relationship. This is also more common among women with lower education levels and of migrant origin. On the basis of traditional stereotypes associated to women's alleged role within the family, family members often reinforce victimization patterns and limit women's access to support networks, therefore contributing to their inability to leave:

D26,Zac,prim,2ch: "...Then came my nightmare, which is the reason why I live here, that hell is not over with, my mum looked after the child, I worked and everyday he left his job and with no shame he came every night and woke me and asked me to come out and threatened me if I made a noise... my brothers were little and I was afraid... yes, in front of my mum he hit me and in front of my brothers, *but they never intervened*, never... they weren't even good as brothers, they just said: 'Leave her' and my dad: 'I don't know anything', he was always drunk, he didn't see anything..."

E53,Dur,prim,8ch: "...I was always waiting for him and couldn't tell him anything because sometimes I used to get nervous and he used to 'calm me down' and responded violently... and he carried on like that, that was my life... once I went home with my parents and my father in

law used to tell his son that he didn't want any other woman but me for his son, because he knew me and I was a very good person and *who else would put up with what he did*, and he came and took me back and there I went back! back to the same life..."

As part of women's traditional roles in marriage, most women highly value motherhood. However, older partnered and widowed women with low education and of migrant origin seem to give more emphasis to this area of their lives. This can be interpreted as derived from the Catholic notion of nurturing as 'the' path towards salvation for women. Consequently, these women view infertility as a serious handicap in marriage, interiorizing feelings of guilt and inadequacy when faced with this problem in their lives. The above may lead to abusive situations, where women are invariably blamed if the couple is unable to have children:

E58,Chih,prim,1ch: "...At the beginning he was a good husband, but then he wanted family, but the problem wasn't mine, as the Bible says: 'Not because one has contact with a man a baby is born, but because it's God's will', so I told him that... he took me with doctors and the doctor told him that he was sterile, and from then on he got drunk a lot, I couldn't have anything in this humble house, he grabbed the curtains, my clothes, threw them out and burnt them.. he was constantly suspicious... he shouted at me and my daughter (from a previous marriage): 'You lesbians, you don't even know how to give birth to a child!'..."

B34,Torr,prim,5ch: '...One of my sisters is sick, she operated her tubes to stop having children and she got mentally ill... *they say it was because of that*, I don't know what it might be, she had problems since she operated herself, and *thank God her husband hasn't abandoned her*, who knows why that came over her, because she was very well...'

A significant issue in women's experience of motherhood relates to the way in which they place what they believe is their children's good as a priority, both with positive and negative consequences for themselves. Sometimes women place excessive power in the hands of their children, letting them influence major decisions in their life that could perpetuate abuse. This situation is more common among low-educated women of migrant origin:

A15,tec,J: '...Well, my father is an alcoholic and my mother is a saint and she puts up with him because of us... I have memories since I was a child... I have more bad memories than good ones... that he arrived very drunk to insult us, to insult my older brother... we were little back then, but he insulted us and beat up my mum... he sent her to hospital with her face like a monster, covered in blood... and he arrived and beat us like that... like a drunk... he lost control and beat up everybody... and it went on until we were older...'

D20,Zac,prim,2ch: "...When I went back home after having left him I told him I did it for the children, I said: 'I don't love you and I'll never love you, I'll never forget what you did to me', so yes, I do it for them, because I can get over it, I'll soon have my life back but they... it would be awful, first one father and then another and another..."

B25,J,prim,2ch: '...She loved my brothers very much despite the fact she suffered a lot with them (they were both drug addicts), she got used to the way they live and she wants to keep looking after them... sometimes my younger brother got sick and couldn't move and she made signs for me to lift him up... and she was worried about them, I went to bed and put her to bed and told her: 'Don't worry, they'll arrive soon', no, she looked and looked through the window to see if they arrived but they didn't, sometimes they didn't arrive and she woke me up, then I told her: 'Maybe they stayed with one of their friends, go to bed now', but she didn't, she didn't sleep until they arrived...'

Following on the subject of motherhood, the discourse of low-educated younger women show that ideals and practices on motherhood and contraception are often contradictory, as proved by the ambivalent discourses expressed on these subjects. Similarly, the availability of information on Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and AIDS does not necessarily result in the practice of safe sex, showing the strong influence of prevailing traditional gender notions. This ambivalence becomes a serious health hazard that can turn even deadly, considering women's increased vulnerability to STDs and their consequences:

A18,prim,J: "...I've only had sex twice and we didn't use anything, but not often, just twice, but we didn't use anything, we didn't use a condom nor am I taking the pill and all that... no, if I was pregnant it would be too late (laughing), we also talked about that and as I say to him: 'You have to take precautions not to make me pregnant' and he says: 'Yes, right?' he says: 'Yes, I'm taking them'... and then I tell him: 'Because I don't want to get pregnant'... and yes, I've never taken precautions..."

Other aspect of women's assimilation of traditional gender discourses on motherhood include their identification with the prevalent role of women as care taker and responsible for the family well-being from an early age. Low-educated younger women of migrant origin often face the responsibility of parenting their own parents as a consequence of the material deprivation resulting from violence in their family.

This kind of situation permeates the various stages of their life experience, bringing resentment towards their parents as well as feelings of inadequacy. Consequently, it has the potential effect of significantly lowering women's self-esteem in later life, leading them to ignore their needs and turn into potential victims of abuse:

D26, Zac, prim, 2ch: '...The relationship with my parents was very difficult... to start with my father was not my father and although I loved him very much, as I grew older he started to be more irresponsible, he stopped working and just drank... so since I was about eleven I knew what working was about and I bought what I thought was more necessary because if I gave my mum some money I don't know what she would do with it, she was and still is too innocent... so, little by little I began to leave my studies and I realized that I had to help my mum because my brothers were very little and my mum didn't even know how to go downtown! So all doors closed on us...'

D37, J, prim, 3ch: '...I remember that when I started to realize what was going on at home I said: 'He'll never beat up my mum again' and I got in the middle, and the funniest thing is that my father always did what I said, I remember I was about eight or nine and he stopped beating her up because I didn't let him... we paid for everything that happened to my mother... as I was the oldest I couldn't go anywhere, I had many responsibilities, which were hers, but she always passed them on to me... I had to start working at eleven to maintain my brothers... maybe that's why I'm the way I am, sometimes I ask too much of myself and I want my children to be that way...'

The above explores the relationship between traditional gender stereotypes and sexual violence against women. The following conclusions summarize my argument on the use of violence as a means of ideological control and subordination over women: first, many of the victimization patterns experienced by women arise from the interiorization of the Catholic discourse on their alleged

helplessness. This leads them to feelings of dependence, guilt and repression within relationships. Among the most significant traditional notions assimilated by women are their alleged 'natural' sinful nature, marriage as a property contract, men's 'right' to 'debito payment' and motherhood as the road to salvation. The dependence thereby generated and the fact that women tend to suppress the conflictive feelings arising from unmet expectations, leads to negative consequences for women's self-esteem and increases their victimization.

Second, women's inflicted guilt in abusive relationships is often related to the conflict derived from emerging roles within wider processes of structural change, which could potentially empower them but do not fit into the Catholic discourse on women's gender roles. These include women's incorporation into the working force as well as their participation into the public, political and community spheres.

Finally, women's decision to stay in abusive relationships derives from their clinging to the traditional ideals of marriage and the social status derived from it. This outcome legitimizes abusive behavior and seriously limits women's potential for personal growth and autonomy. To better understand this process it must be noted that while these stereotypes often reinforce abusive patterns, they also provide women with the social legitimization they feel they need. Education, age, marital status and migrant origin are the major factors that determine women's differential responses on this issues. Education is relevant regarding young single women's perceptions on violence, since those with the highest education levels tend to acknowledge its widespread nature and their lack of responsibility for violent attack. Simultaneously, they are less prone to passively assimilate the Catholic discourse on women's gender roles regarding issues of reproduction and more aware of their options in this area. However, migrant origin seems to outweigh the results above, since younger women in this category, regardless of education level or marital status,

often blame women for the victimization suffered, referring to their lack of commitment toward women's traditional gender role within the family.

In the final analysis marital status, migrant origin and education play a significant part in women's victimization among all ages, since partnered and separated or widowed women in these categories suffer the most dramatic consequences of violence and express the most traditional attitudes on gender issues. Similarly, they are more likely to feel guilt as part of their traditional gender role within relationships, often with dramatic consequences that increase their victimization.

In examining the factors above, I point at some key elements in women's assimilation of Catholic gender notions and its effect on sexual violence: first, the social construction of women as housewives, added to their status as migrants, generates their isolation, increasing their vulnerability to abuse. Furthermore, the lack of education opportunities severely limit women's access to information and resources. Both factors reinforce women's passive assimilation of Catholic gender notions and a spiritual identity that reinforces dependence rather than individual action. These combination of factors have a weakening effect on women's sense of self increasing the victimization of women in those categories.

In the next section I further consider the relevance of structural change regarding women's assimilation of Catholic gender notions and its effect on victimization. In doing so, I draw upon these notions to explore their impact on women's self-conception as workers and their vulnerability to abuse. Such focus illuminates the dynamics involved in women's potential ability to negotiate their role in and out of the household, often affecting the extent and consequences of conflict, violence and resistance. In examining these issues I focus on the symbolic and the material aspects of women's experience as workers.

Clashing Realities: The Impact of Traditional Gender Notions on Women's Identity as Workers and Victimization

Regarding women's options and choices in the areas of education and work, the former is often sacrificed for reasons other than material need. The testimonies of younger women of low education levels and regardless of migrant origin show that often the motive lies in the traditional view of women's role as housewives and mothers rather than workers. Such conception makes parents, and particularly fathers, reluctant to support women's education on the basis that they will not make use of it, since their 'natural' role is that of wives and mothers. Younger women respond to such restrictions with frustration and resentment, but for the most part feel powerless to exercise their choices:

A17,prim,J: '...When I wanted to study, that I saw my friends going to secondary school my father told me that why did I want to go to secondary school since it was going to be pointless, and I wanted to study and my father didn't let me, he told me I didn't need it... because I saw my friends going to secondary school and they told me what it was like, what things were like, Spanish and all that and I was anxious to know about all of that, and my father told me: 'No, what for?' that I didn't need it... and my father makes the decisions, because if my mother says something - imagine - my father jumps at her...'

D26,Zac,prim,2ch: '...I worked to finish primary school because my father didn't want me to finish school and then I looked for courses which were cheaper, did a typing course, but it had to be in the evening because during the day I had to study and my father used to say: *What are you doing? What for?... if you are going to get married...* so he bothered me a lot... so little by little I began to leave my studies... I wanted to be an accountant but apart from the fact that *my dad didn't give me an opportunity or encourage me or let me think*, I had to wake up at five to go to work, at four go to school and get back home to the same hell, no, no, I run out of steam...'

However, later in life this issue extends to women with higher education levels. All women, regardless of age, marital status, education level or migrant origin often experience difficulties at interiorizing and/or exercising their identity as workers without

conflict and ambivalence. This can be explain in terms of the impact of Catholic gender notions in women's sense of self and the ambivalence it creates in women's options and the exercise of their choices.

One manifestation of this impact reflects in the area of gender power relations, which interfere in women's ability to exercise their choices in various ways. Despite their frustration, women's feelings of guilt and ambivalence often prevent them from reacting to their manipulation and/or imposition to stop them from working. This is particularly the case when they consider their partner is fulfilling his role as provider. This situation extends to any activities outside the home, such as participation in community support groups, etc.:

D22,Carr,nochild,univ: '...I want children but I'd like to have a career, you understand? look, children are very nice, right? you get married and it's obvious you want children, right? yes, yes, I want children but I would've liked him to let me study, right?... and then have a child or two if it's possible... but the truth is a different matter, I know I'm going to stay here with him... and the truth is that, that I'll be here struggling with him and if he wants me to have a child I may do...'

A17,prim,J: '...He says that when he and I get together he won't allow me to work, that although he might have a hard time, because he's never worked, he'll support me whatever it takes, but he won't accept that I work... *I think he's right but sometimes I ask him to let me work for a while to help him out*, and as soon as we have enough then I'd leave and he could go on working...'

D24,Dur,prim,2ch: '... No, they think I want to work because I want to be free, all the time they've said that, the other day they were here and you see how people gossip, they see you alone and they start: 'I think so and so is doing this', that's how the lies started, that I was leaving the children with somebody to go dancing... please - yes, I will leave them but to go to work, not dancing - people are very conflictive, instead of helping me they do more harm, they see you suffer and they just do more harm so that you fall even more...'

However, women sometimes are forced to provide for their families as a result of their partner's unemployment or reluctance to work, resulting in situations of extreme vulnerability and victimization. This is more often the case among partnered women with lower education and of migrant origin. Although these women feel proud at their independence, they also feel deep resentment towards their partners,

who are perceived as the 'legitimate' family providers. Furthermore, their role as workers often involves the abuse of their labor, lacking control over the decisions regarding their choice of work and the distribution of their salary.

In cases where women comply with the abuse and carry on supporting the family, their alleged role as obedient wives carries more weight than the frustration derived from men's unfulfilled obligations and further abuse. However, younger women born in Juárez and with higher education levels seem to be learning from the experience of their mothers and are less likely to follow their path:

D26, Zac, prim, 2ch: '...I didn't stop working, I left work only when I was pregnant for a short time... he let me go to work, yes, but he wanted to take my money and then I didn't understand... then little by little, as I didn't know what he was like, I realized he was a drug addict... I started to discover what I didn't want to see...'

D53, Dur, prim, 9ch: '...I felt sad that my mum was always sewing... I tell my daughter that since I was little, when I woke up in the morning my mum was already behind the sawing machine, sewing and more sewing... and when I went to bed my mum was still behind the sewing machine... for me that was very... I don't know... when I was little I didn't pay much attention to it, right?, but when I grew up I understood that mum was the one working to support us... my father didn't like to work much and he lasted periods of time when he didn't work or didn't find work or I don't know and he stayed at home... what I realized is that I didn't have the material to go to school, that my mum sometimes struggled to give us food...'

A15, tec, J: '...My brother worked and supported us while my father went out drinking, and when apparently he wanted to control himself he supported us for about two months and spent the whole time ordering about, shouting at us... I mean, horrible... me and my mom went and cleaned houses and we arrived really tired... he had his music really loud, he switched the TV on and wanted to have it wherever he wanted, I asked him to let me do something, but no, he put me to clean the patio or sweep the floor, even though I left at 7:00 a.m. and didn't come back until 7:30 at night... that was my mother's mistake, that she worked, she supported us and my father drank...'

Since many women have experienced having to support their families without a partner or his cooperation there is a generalized perception, regardless of age, marital status, education level or migrant origin, that women's work increases their burden and negatively

affects their image and social value. Allegedly, this derives from the fact that the traditional roles that gave meaning to marriage often cannot be exercised, due to issues of structural change such as the need of their salary in contributing to the household maintenance. Similarly, this development shows the concrete effects of the traditionally portrayed symbolic duality of women as either household saints or street prostitutes:

A22,tec,J: "...Women have not become more valuable because they work, it's just the opposite, I mean, women have not become more valuable as women, not even for helping their partner financially... sometimes that's the case, about 10% of all men value their partner, but the rest know that women are independent now, that they can work... I mean, they think: 'I can leave you anytime'... that's why men don't value women at all because they say: 'They can defend themselves, they can go on by themselves, even they say so'..."

D34,Zac,prim,5ch: "...The fact that women have started to work hasn't helped them to gain respect within the home... because maquiladora workers have a very bad press, but really only those who want to do something go and do it... they are worse than those working in bars, although not all of them are like that... on the other hand, there are people who leave their husbands now because they can earn their living and you can see it... they say: 'He did it to me and I'm going to do it to him'... women react straight away now..."

In the above section I have shown some of the dynamics involved in women's role as workers in connection to gender power relations. Although their testimonies refer to specific instances of conflict with household members, the ambivalence permeating their experience as workers extends toward gender power relations in all spheres.

Women's testimonies in this area are relative to their life cycle, marital status, education level and migrant origin. Most women face the resistance of male family members to their incorporation into the working force, reflecting the Catholic gender notion on women's appropriate role. This generates conflict and ambivalence in their working roles and negatively affects women's sense of self, since their contribution to the household maintenance is an actual need that clashes with wider gender discourses.

However, the generalized resistance to women's ability to exercise their working role takes a surprising turn that makes it most problematic. In some cases, mostly among older partnered women with low education levels and of migrant origin, they endure a total lack of material support on the part of their partners and turn victims of controlling behavior regarding decisions about their work and income distribution. Furthermore, and as discussed in chapter three, the women who fall into this role find it hard to accept that they are the actual family providers and give more prominence to their role as obedient wives.

In such cases, women's ability to work and support their families turns into a vehicle for further abuse and victimization, reflecting the conflicting dynamics inherent in the process of structural change and its impact on gender power relations. Women's victimization in this context is a consequence of an increasing workload as both housewives and low-skilled workers, their limited support networks as migrants, their lack of outside information and resources through education opportunities and their negative assimilation of the Catholic gender discourse on the role of women as obedient wives rather than autonomous workers.

Consequently most women, and particularly younger women who have witnessed the personal cost of their mother's labor, conceptualize work as constraining and leading to women's increased subordination both in and out of the household. However, younger women with higher education levels and born in Juárez are more likely to reject following their mother's footsteps and aim for a more integrated role as women workers in their future life.

The above shows that the factors referred to in the previous sections as relevant to women's victimization, i.e. limited support networks and access to outside information and resources, continue to be relevant in the area of women's experience as workers. It was

confirmed that the consequences of structural change in women's lives, i.e. the latest economic crisis and women's incorporation into the working force, are for the most part assimilated negatively by women who lack the resources to confront and transform traditional gender notions for their benefit. This is particularly the case when referring to those derived from their negative interiorization of Catholic beliefs. However, even women who have the resources to confront such notions are often disempowered by the ambivalence experienced through their dual role as workers and housewives.

In the next section I continue to explore this issue through focusing on the aspects of maquiladora employment that underpin the Catholic discourse on women's sexuality. I thereby show the implications of women's self-perception as workers in this employment sector in its relevance to sexual violence within the factory and women's potential for autonomy.

The type of social interaction taking place among workers of both sexes inside maquiladora industries is widely perceived as immoral. Furthermore, it is often seen as leading to women's introduction to and sometimes involvement in 'inappropriate' sexual practices and behavior. Consequently, partnered women with lower education levels and of migrant origin mostly deny their involvement in the factory's social dynamics. However, younger partnered women within this category often accept it while showing guilt and confusion about its implications. Younger single women with higher education levels are more aware of women's victimization as part of these dynamics.

The perceptions above reflect the prevailing discourse on sexuality and women's appropriate roles. They imply that working women in a setting where they interact with men on a daily basis and do not dedicate themselves entirely to their families, are perceived as 'immoral'. Therefore, the institutional discourse on women's sexuality acquires more significance than the patterns of structural change

pushing women into the working force, generating ambivalence, guilt and confusion about women's working roles:

D40,Dur,prim,4ch: '...I liked working in a maquiladora... yes, I got tired but as I said I've never been one of those... well, women... well, when I worked in a maquiladora I already had my children and I've never been one of those who like to have fun or something, I've always gone from home to work and back home...'

D20,Zac,prim,2ch: '...He doesn't let me work now... he says we'll wait until we die of hunger, because I have no need to work, but I tell him it's to pass the time and get out of house, no, he doesn't let me, the things is he's lately been very jealous, I don't know what he imagines, as there are so many men... because he says that the maquila is an ugly place full of sluts and bastards, and I think there's a bit of everything in a maquila, that's why he doesn't want me to work in a maquila...'

A22,tec,J: '...Maquiladora factories have a lot of demand but people don't know that when they enter a factory... they enter because it's a job, to earn some extra money for their family and don't realize that there they humiliate both men and women too much... yes, because there inside the factory is where you really see how people are, how are today's guys... that really men are denigrating women too much... in a factory a woman is 100% denigrated... then you sleep with a guy, maybe it was your first time, but you become his trophy and soon after he resigns and she never hears from him again... and then another one who does the same thing... it's like massive prostitution in there...'

The generalized perception on the sexual dynamics taking place within maquiladora factories has influenced the nature of courtship rules among young men and women. They have generated distrust towards men, who are mostly perceived as interested in brief encounters without further commitment. As part of these new rules, physical attractiveness and 'liberal' behaviors have become an asset when seeking men's attraction.

Some women agree to these rules for different reasons, ranging from peer pressure to inexperience and acceptance needs, since they view social contacts as the means to escape from personal problems and find emotional support. However, and regardless of education level or marital status, their involvement often generates guilt feelings and confusion about their sexual roles and gender identity. Some less experienced women of migrant origin avoid interaction altogether and

seek the company of older women away from the peer pressure of younger workers:

D26,Zac,prim,2ch: '...My life changed quite a lot when I worked in a maquiladora, because I had a friend with whom I could talk, although I found out she was going through the same thing... not exactly the same thing, but she calmed me down and made me feel better... she used to say: 'Look at the guys!'... 'Which guys?'... 'Come on, put some make-up on', this, that and the other... so, I started to get closer to them, to put some make-up on and then *everything got more exciting...* (laughing)'

A18,prim,J: "...The truth is *my life changed a lot when I started to work*, because at the beginning I gave all the money to my mum and then I started to spend it on going out dancing... I bought clothes with my money, everything I needed I bought, but before I used to give it to her, to her, I mean, one week out of two I gave it to her... and apart from the maquilas, you meet many 'cholos' friends and start hanging out with them and then: 'Let's go dancing' and so on... sometimes you don't want to tell your friends because they say: 'Don't tell me they hit you! (ironically)... 'No, who hits me?'... 'Your mum and your husband'...and then we start to joke and they say: 'I think they don't let you go out'... 'No, yes they do'..."

A15,tec,J: '...I got desperate to arrive to a maquila and risk being sexually abused or something, I was scared, but... yes, but also I have to work, fear is not going to pay my bills...'

A19,tec,Dur: "...The younger people at work get you into trouble when you start talking, in the maquiladoras anything you say they go:... 'So you say this and that, that one said this about you'... that's how they start...that's way I prefer to be with older women..."

A particularly relevant element of sexual politics within the factory refers to the sexual harassment women endure on a daily basis. Sexual politics with employers in the factory is an issue that most women acknowledge and tackle with tact. Although some blame other women for this kind of sexual contact, seen as an easy way to get a promotion, most acknowledge the abuse involved and feel disgusted and hopeless. The above constitutes the norm, regardless of age, marital status, education level or migrant origin, showing that the dynamics involved in structural change in terms of women's material need to work knows no boundaries:

D35,Zac,prim,5ch: '...Yes, the young and pretty girls are the ones who get the better positions... yes, that's true, I'd never worked in the

afternoon shift and now that I am, I see lots of things, it's not the same as in the morning shift... *that's really an abuse from the boss, because they ask them for 'that' (meaning sex) in exchange of getting a better job when it should be a consequence of your hard work...* there are some pretty old men going out with young women there, only fifteen and sixteen year old women... the factories are full of young girls and they shouldn't take advantage of that..."

A15,tec,J: "...There was a rape here in the Phillips 3, or a rape in a bathroom... her supervisor... really ugly, poor girl... it's common that they want like... there're lots of girls that get taken home by their supervisors, first they start like friends and then they want to humiliate you saying things like 'Don't tell me you can compare your wages with mine, I'll pay you', they say... I've had friends who had that experience... 'I'll pay you for having sex with me', but no... you just start running, what else can you do? It's horrible..."

Women's sexual abuse transcends the inappropriate behavior of male co-workers and employers and it is often involved in the job application procedure. As part of the process of applying for a job in the factory, women have sometimes been forced to undergo a gynecological examination to find out the fertility status of the potential worker (48). Those who were found to be pregnant during such procedure had not chance to be hired. Furthermore, women who find employment must undergo regular check-ups to ensure they do not become pregnant. As part of the problems arising from such inappropriate selection methods, women feel uncomfortable at what they consider an abusive and demeaning procedure:

A17,prim,J: '...When I first entered a maquiladora I started crying because the doctor told me off... she examined me... she had to examine us... and I got nervous and she told me off...'

The lack of appropriate transportation is another area that results in women's potential risk of sexual attack. Regarding this issue, female maquiladora workers are concerned about their safety during their journey to work and back. According to their testimonies, danger of sexual attack is unavoidable, since company buses nor local

buses go through all the neighborhoods, having to walk home in the early morning hours (49):

D40,Dur,prim,4ch: "...I had friends there but they told me: 'Let's go dancing, let's go to this and that...', but no, I was afraid to walk around at night, I said: 'No, no, no... I won't go back home alone in the early morning, no way' and no, never... I go back home early, but walking around alone at night... even with friends, but when the time comes to go back home alone I get scared..."

The above provides a general outlook on the way in which the Catholic discourse on women's sexuality affects the working dynamics among maquiladora female operators, facing sexual violence and victimization as part of their daily working shift. Traditional assumptions attached to women's sexuality reflect both in the factory production process and in the social relations established within the job. Therefore, social relations at the work place have more complex implications than it is often assumed. Although in some cases they promote the development of solidarity bonds, in others they perpetuate the unequal gender relations that generate abuse.

The final outcome depends partly on the women's age, marital status, education level and migrant origin. Women of migrant origin with no prior experience of factory employment and with low education levels feel more conflict about the prevailing sexual politics in maquiladora industries. Consequently, they tend to avoid interaction and often form groups for mutual protection. This confirms the results derived from the previous sections, showing that the lack of information, resources and support experienced by low-educated women of migrant origin makes the dynamics of work more problematic and difficult to assimilate. Furthermore, the alleged immoral character of maquiladora employment increments women's ambivalence toward their working role, particularly among older partnered women.

However, marital status is not that relevant among younger women born in Juárez and with previous experience in the job, who are less likely to be shocked by the social dynamics of maquiladora employment. On the contrary, they often provide an escape from their personal problems and the means for acceptance within the group. However, and as shown above, they ultimately lead to confusion in terms of their identity and self-worth and all women finally acknowledge the victimization to which they are subject. Education did not seem to be a factor in these women's responses. Although women with access to information and further resources are more aware of gender inequality as part of their working role, their material reality as derived from factors of structural change in the border highly limits their options and increases their vulnerability to abuse.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have covered two main areas: 1. Women's perceptions on the extent, characteristics and consequences of sexual violence, 2. The way in which the Catholic discourse on women's sexuality and related issues affect their role as workers and potential victimization in and out of the household.

In the first section I concluded on the relevance of age, marital status, education and migrant origin regarding women's perception on the extent, characteristics and consequences of sexual violence. The access to information, resources and solidarity links derived from education opportunities among young single women offered them the chance to question traditional gender notions. Consequently, women who enjoyed these conditions were more conscious of the subtle elements of violence, as well as its widespread nature, decreasing their chances of being victimized. However, the fact that women in that category were for the most part young and single implies the need for subsequent

research to test the validity of these assumptions in their future relationships.

Similarly, women who did not enjoy such privileges (mostly older women with marital experience, low education levels and of migrant origin) were more likely to interiorize the Catholic discourse on women's sexuality and therefore were less aware of the subtle aspects of violence and its widespread nature. The results above show that the construction of support systems through education opportunities and contact with the outside world increases women's potential for autonomy. They also justify the attributed meaning of autonomy as freedom from violence, showing the extent to which it represents a vital element for autonomous action and well-being in women's lives.

The second section echoed the results above, pointing at the role of Catholic gender notions in women's interiorization of their alleged helplessness, leading to patterns of guilt and victimization. Simultaneously, the dynamics of structural change and women's incorporation into the working force within them clashed with traditional gender notions and perpetuated these negative patterns. Once again older partnered women with low education levels and of migrant origin were most affected by the Catholic notions on women's dependence and more easily subject to victimization. However, although younger single women with higher education levels were less subject to vulnerability in this area, those of migrant origin among them showed ambivalence in their responses and continued to cling to the traditional ideal of marriage and patterns of guilt on women's alleged role within the family.

In a third section, I further explored women's assimilation of Catholic gender notions in the face of their emerging role as workers and its impact on their victimization. Despite women's need to contribute to the maintenance of their families, they face resistance from male family members in the exercise of their working role, often

leading to patterns of guilt and vulnerability to sexual violence. This is more often the case among low-educated partnered women of migrant origin, due to their increasing work load, their lack of support systems, access to information and resources and their assimilation of traditional gender notions. However, even women with access to external resources often find themselves powerless to confront the social pressures on their appropriate role and become victimized. Therefore, external resources seem less significant than the assimilation of traditional gender notions.

In the minds of these women, the resistance from male family members and the conflicts arising from it further confirms their widely assumed 'natural' inability to support themselves or their families, negatively affecting their sense of self and increasing their vulnerability to abuse. In the face of the above, even younger generations, who generally enjoy better career prospects and are less constrained by traditional gender notions, express negative perceptions on the impact of work in women's self-value.

As part of the subject on women's assimilation of their working roles within wider gender discourses, the social relations established through maquiladora employment also present some problematic issues. The sexual and courtship dynamics within the factory often reproduce the Catholic discourse on women's sexuality, masked by supposedly 'liberal' practices (50). Furthermore, the bad press given to maquiladora female workers further reflects the power of such discourses and their implications for women's victimization in their working role. Therefore, the contradiction between women's need to provide for their families and the social construction of their gender role generates an ambivalence that highly decreases women's potential for autonomy.

This issue is key to understanding women's assimilation of newly emerging cultural influences through maquiladora employment and the

impact on their potential for autonomy. To what extent the dynamics involved in this type of employment provide a valuable strategy for women facing sexual violence will be tested in the next chapter. However, the issues discussed above have a negative effect for all women, and particularly for those who are partnered, with low education levels and of migrant origin. Although younger women find it easier to blend into the factory social dynamics, they eventually resent the victimization to which they are subject and feel powerless in the face of wider structural economic dynamics.

In arriving at the conclusions above, I have pointed at some of the factors that impact women's victimization, i.e. the lack of support systems, the negative assimilation of Catholic gender notions and the access to outside resources and information. I argue that a change in such conditions can provide the necessary awareness to transform women's assimilation of their role as workers, leading to a more integrated notion of themselves and a greater potential for autonomy. In the next chapter I aim to explore these issues in more depth, focusing on women's resistance to traditional gender notions and the factors that promote this shift. Simultaneously, I explore the elements that lead women to confront sexual violence and how their role as workers fits into this process.

## 5. INTERPRETING AUTONOMY THROUGH WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF SUBORDINATION AND RESISTANCE

In this chapter I continue to tackle the main focus of this study and examine the elements that promote autonomy. In doing so, I explore the relevant factors in women's departure from and transformation of Catholic gender notions, as well as their impact on women's role as workers and freedom from violence. In the first section I explore the ways in which women articulate their departure from traditional gender roles in and out of the household. Simultaneously, I focus on the elements involved in this shift and how they relate to age, marital status, education, migrant origin, spirituality and structural change.

Underlying the analysis is the argument that women's resistance in this area extends toward their emerging role as workers within a context of structural change, positively affecting their identity in this area and its role in achieving autonomy. In a second section, I test the argument above through exploring the factors that are relevant in women's resistance to sexual violence. Thereby, I position work within the symbolic elements of women's resistance and examine its impact on women's autonomy.

### Challenging Notions: Women's Departure from Traditional Gender Ideologies and its Potential Impact on Autonomy

In this section I focus on women's resistance from Catholic gender notions in various areas of their experience and examine the factors that influence their choices. In doing so, I show that their assimilation of religious precepts often manifests in positive forms that affect the effectiveness as workers and potentially promote autonomy in their lives.

Gender traditional notions interrelate with parallel social discourses on social class and ethnic divisions. In the case of lower-class women in the context of this investigation, these divisions

negatively affect women's already lowered status with a negative impact on their sense of self. The women in the sample are not an exception, aware of the societal stigma attributed to their class and ethnic condition. Although this characteristic is common among the three generations of women in this investigation, regardless of age, migrant origin or education level, older partnered women with low education and of migrant origin are more likely to interiorize notions of inferiority as a result. Their discourse reflects having grown up with the idea that poor and dark people are naturally 'bad', affecting negatively their effectiveness and promoting victimization.

Added to their limited access to information, resources and support networks such women endure, the negative impact of these perceptions acquire greater significance. However, women's testimonies show that often they do not assimilate such notions in a passive way and often choose to question them, modifying their sense of self and others. Considering their lack of resources through education, alternative influences and support systems, a positive spiritual identity and women's extensive life experience may be relevant factors in transforming social constraints into growth experiences. Therefore, they learn to differentiate between social meanings and those they attribute to their experiences. As for young single women born in Juárez and with higher education, their increased access to outside information, resources and alternative influences may constitute added factors in their positive attitude on this issue:

D53,Dur,prim,9ch: '...My family think that poor people will always do badly... they say that those who are better off or have a better education will do better and sometimes it's not true... it's not true... I used to think that way too, that education makes people better and it's not true... in my family they create differences because of the skin color, yes... some of the family members are very white and some are very dark and I'm one of the darkest... so they said that I didn't look like anybody in the family... my sisters are pretty and I was the ugly duck... but I'll be honest, I was the ugly duck but I never felt really that ugly, I mean, I've always felt strong about the fact that I am who I am, ugly or pretty or whatever, I'm who I am... just natural...'

A14,sec,J: '...I don't feel bad because my boyfriend's family are upper class... one day I spoke with his mum and she told me I should have a lot of money and shouldn't live where I live, that she could take me anywhere I wanted, move away from here... and I didn't like it, I told her: 'No señora, excuse me... I like you but I can't leave my home and be away from my parents because I think money changes people... I tell them that having money is nothing, you get it one day and the next day it's gone, I say that *it's not about money but about your feelings, the way you are...*'

In order to test the above, I now focus on women's spiritual identity and its potential impact on women's self-conception. More concretely, I concentrate on the ways in which women challenge wider notions on gender, class and ethnias through transforming the Catholic traditional discourse for their personal benefit. Younger single women with higher education levels and born in Juárez often show an individualized religious identity beyond the institutionalized vision of God portrayed by official religions. Once again this shift may derive from their increased access to information and resources through education and their increased contact with alternative influences.

On this issue, I argue that such enlarged vision provides them with a potential means for autonomy and effective decision making in their lives. Although this affirmation is not exclusionary, women who develop such individualized spiritual identity seem to have a stronger potential to exercise gender equality. They are less proactive to reproduce submissive and dependent relationships than women who view God and the Church as authoritarian figures. However, such argument will be tested throughout this chapter before arriving to a final conclusion on the issue:

A14,sec,J: "...Just my mum and my aunt go to Church, we hardly ever go, my father doesn't like to go either... I go, well, I go when I feel like it, I mean, I am Catholic but I don't like to go to Church. Sometimes I think I have faith, sometimes not, because they say: 'If I have faith in God my life will change', so I say: 'As long as I have faith and believe in myself I will be fine, I'll have faith in God'... other times they tell me: 'You don't go to Church because you don't have faith' and I reply: 'I have faith in God and in myself, I believe it in my heart of God, but don't ask me to go to Church, I go to sleep in Church! (says repeatedly), that's why I don't like to go to Church..."

Similarly, older partnered and widowed women with low education and of migrant origin often derive positive results from their religious identity. For instance, they may believe that God enhances their healing powers to be applied in specific areas of their lives and those of others. Furthermore, they refer to spiritual forces as responsible for their material success and ability to succeed. As it will be tested in the following section, this potential may be particularly positive for women in situations of domestic violence, since their belief in God's power in this area can generate the strength to make positive use of material resources in achieving autonomy:

E58,Chih,prim,1ch: "...A woman completely naked used to walk up and down the road and I said: 'Manuel, look! Poor woman, with all her parts beaten'...so I went and got some curtains and said: 'In the name of Jesus, I'm going to cover you, darling'... my boyfriend said, don't be silly, why don't you take her to an asylum', 'No', I said, 'I want to have her with me, I know my father God will give her sanity, I know he will hear what I say because I know I talk with God', and he said: 'Oh my darling, you and your God!', 'So what' I said, so I started: 'In the name of God give me your name, what's your name?' and I cured her just with the Bible and prayers..."

D54,Guana,noed,7ch: "...There's something about me, I don't know how to read or write but there's something about me which is that when I have a problem I talk to my Father (referring to God) and it gets somehow sorted out, it really does... I've talked to different people and they've said that what saves me is my faith... 'You have a lot of faith, but a lot of faith'... because now that we were worried about the Dollars... 'Who is going to lend me money if I have nothing?', then I got some information and that's how we started, and suddenly I got the loan here in Juárez... all my life I've suffered a lot anyway, but I'm very grateful to God because he's given me everything I've asked for..."

Similarly, these women often use religion beliefs as a coping strategy, in order to make sense of their class and gender status and the social marginality attached to it. This constitutes a valid option for women who are deprived of the material conditions to better their lives, showing the relevance of the symbolic dimension in shaping women's sense of self and potential autonomy:

E58,Chih,prim,1ch: Maria was having a conversation with her partner's ex-wife, a higher-class woman who came to visit her to get information about their relationship: "... Look at this woman, she's very intelligent and very articulate', I said to her: 'Excuse me, I don't have any education lady, I'm saying what God is dictating to me, I'm replying as he's talking to me', I said: 'You're a teacher and the wife of this rich man'... and she said to me: 'Did you know I have a very, very good position?', and I said: 'How do you measure your highness, in education, in money, in possessions, in what?... me too, my father worked in government, he had education, but he never humiliated anybody, and he used to carry his 45 gun, but he never humiliated anybody, you're the one who is humiliating me... maybe with all your education and your highness we're the same before God, God forbid..."

Finally, women's religious identity within this age group is often chosen as the means for 'belonging' to a community or family heritage. The fact that women with little resources justify their choice of religion in this way reflects their need for support networks. Furthermore, the significance given to this factor is a potential asset for women facing victimization, since seeking outside support is more likely when such values are already ingrained and culturally validated:

E53,Dur,prim,8ch: '...Yes, my parents were catholic and until now I have followed the catholic religion... a lot of sects have tried to convince me to change my religion but I haven't changed and I will not change, because that's the only heritage I have left from my parents...'

The above shows that a positive interiorization of Catholic beliefs proves to be a potentially valuable strategy in the face of women's marginalized gender, ethnic and class status. Women's testimonies on this issue show that their spiritual identity may provide the means for a strengthened sense of self and a greater potential for autonomy. This is the case both among older partnered women with low education and of migrant origin and young single women with higher education and born in Juárez, although the latter are on the whole more likely to assume a more individualized and empowering spirituality than their predecessors. In the next section I continue to explore women's departure from traditional gender notions, paying attention to the specific factors

responsible for this shift. In doing so, I concentrate on issues of sexuality, marriage and motherhood.

Most women in the sample view sexual relations as an expression of love and security, often needing to feel trust in a relationship to be able to engage in sex. Therefore, often the conflict brought by unmet needs in their relationships carries more weight than their alleged marital 'duty' and requests for sex from their partners result in rejection and disgust on the part of women. In such cases, women often do not subscribe to prevailing traditional gender roles in the exercise of their sexuality, particularly if their sense dignity is at stake.

This is more common among partnered women of migrant origin and with low education levels, which points at factors beyond the existence of support networks and access to information and resources in influencing their attitude. Considering the conclusions derived from the previous section, women's positive assimilation of religious beliefs that condemn their partner's lack of responsibility within the family could play a part in this process. Consequently, women's sexual conduct is shown to be far more complex than often assumed, proving an area of women's experience that can reflect and contribute to women's potential autonomy. At the same time, their conduct may derive in acquiescence rather than resistance and simply reflect a temporary strategy that does not result in lasting change.

The above shows a conflict between the social discourse on women's obligation towards their husband and their feelings of rejection and disappointment when their partners do not fulfill their ascribed supporting role. This conflict often lead women to exercise relative autonomy in the expression of their sexuality, choosing to reject their social role and follow their will on when and how to engage in sexual relations with their partners:

B34,Torr,prim,5ch: '...Yes, it's true, men don't care if there are problems, they just want to be there...but it's not the right time, yes,

yes, but you know something happens to me, I get very angry when they insist... *I don't know why that happens to me, because he was a good guy, he drank but never hit me*, but after a few days I felt as if I hated him, I don't know what happened to me... as if I wasn't comfortable, I got very angry, I couldn't have him close to me, still today I see him from a distance and I get angry, I'd like to destroy him even when I don't see him..."

D51, Lagos, prim, 5ch: "...I've never have been able to have sex properly with him because I get very upset, because when we get into bed I'm still upset, I'm very angry at him, if for instance we're getting on and he says something to me that I don't like, then I don't like it, it's because of all the problems we've had and many more that I've forgotten... I resent him a lot... he's still struggling because he likes a lot to have sex with me and sometimes I forget about everything but then he says something which reminds me and I don't want it anymore, I don't want to... and he gets angry because I don't want to..."

On a different direction, younger women of all marital status, migrant origin and education levels are more comfortable with the expression of their sexuality through dress style than older generations. On this issue, they show awareness of the differences between sexual codes in traditional communities and those in the city, rejecting the former. This factor constitutes a consequence of globalization and access to media information on 'modern' femininities and emerging gender roles, as well as their daily contact with US influences. However, it is not clear whether such changes may be viewed as liberating, since they could derive from women's need to attract a potential boyfriend, rather than to the free expression of their individuality and personal taste:

D20, Zac, prim, 2ch: "...It's very different here from where I lived, they're very liberal in here, very... yes, you notice the difference, if I wore a short skirt or dress over there people criticized me, saying that I was this or that or that I came from who knows where, there people are more naive, more stupid, children come 'designed' like that..."

A24, univ, J: "...Some people look very good in fashionable clothes... I think it's not so much the way you dress, because somebody can wear a really short skirt but because of something she has it doesn't look that bad, I mean, because she has class to wear those clothes, it doesn't look cheap even if she is lower class... but there are others that wear something or maybe the make-up, something that makes them look bad... but about today's fashion... if you look good in it you should use it, right?..."

On the issue of marriage, young single women of various education levels and migrant origins also show differing attitudes from older generations. They often plan to get or find a stable partner at an older age and value the possibility to acquire life experience in many spheres and to follow up education and/or a career. In these cases, their lack of emotional ties couples with an increasing access to images and information on emerging gender roles may play a part in their attitudes.

The above constitute relevant factors in women's ability to develop a stronger sense of self and support networks, while decreasing their vulnerability to sexual violence. However, the fact that they sometimes give in to the social pressures placed upon them in this sphere shows that their attitudes are still permeated by ambivalence. For instance, women may seek a temporary marriage as the only way to leave their parental home without guilt:

A17,prim,Chih: '...I wouldn't like to get married until I'm ready, sure of myself, until I have something in my life...'

A23,tec,J: '...My plan is to get married and then divorced... yes, you know why?, you're going to think I'm crazy, but I don't have enough freedom at home, even less when I get married, because I'm going to be a housewife and will try to take care of my husband but I'm one of those people who gets bored and gets bored, I don't want to dedicate all my life to a husband, for me marrying will be a way out from home, I'm going to get somewhere else but I'm sure it's going to be the same thing, because your husband's problems will be yours... then leave him, divorce him and look for the freedom I didn't have at home...'

A15,tec,J: '...I'd first like to find a good job, now I'm just fifteen and it's never crossed my mind to get married, right?... first I want to convince myself that I can get out of the hole by myself... accommodate myself... and then once I have my house and a good job I'll look for a relationship... with time, because I'm fifteen... I don't want to marry now and get all bitter... I have some friends who have gotten married, one of them while in primary school, and then three of my friends got pregnant in secondary school, girls, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen year old girls... and they get all bitter...'

Confirming the argument above, women in this category seem to be more aware than older generations of the relevance of gender equality for their well-being. Consequently, they often expect their future partners

to be respectful of their individuality. However, their testimonies continue to show a certain degree of ambivalence in this sphere, as reflected in the contradictory nature of their responses:

A17,prim,Chih: '*...I'd say he'd make the decisions in marriage, right? Well, regarding the children's education I'd say the two of us and the problems that we may have... talk about them, right? I think it's the two of us...*'

A23,tec,J: '*...Well, men hit women if they can't defend themselves but some women are really stupid, I don't let anybody hit me... well, I do, but if they hit me once I hit them twice, so women here are really stupid because they let them, and you know what? I'd like women to defend their rights, because we women need that, men and women are equal, there's something that distinguishes us very well but that doesn't mean we're not valuable, we're not equal... men without women do nothing and women without men do nothing, so women must defend their rights...*'

A22,sec,J: '*...I saw that my mum never contradicted my dad, she was a very weak person, she never said anything and didn't know how to read or write and then you start to set your objectives and you tell yourself: 'I don't want to be like my mum, I want to be something better' and you get stronger as you grow up and you start to defend yourself and develop'...*'

However, on the whole the discourse of younger single women show some improvement in this area, giving priority to their development and personal search before becoming involved in a relationship, therefore reducing their chances of victimization. Their attitudes show that new generations are developing a more individualistic perspective regarding marriage and relationships with potential for greater autonomy and self-esteem.

Within this group, young single women with higher education levels and born in Juárez seek to combine their reproductive and career roles in marriage. Therefore, the increasing access to information and resources brought about through education may be a factor in increasing women's self reliance in this area, being less dependent on unconditional support from a partner and ready to develop their individuality within marriage:

A24,univ,J: '*...For my future I see myself relaxed, as a woman... as a wife, because I'd like to have a good relationship with my husband, to have communication, understanding, cooperation, as a mother to try and give the best quality time to my children, but I also want to fulfill my*

*professional role, I wouldn't like to stop working, I don't want to, because I imagine it's hard to go back... I think that if you get out of the house and see the actual world around you, each moment, you know what's going on and have a wider vision so that you know what to protect your children from it in the future... and how will you understand life if you're not a part of it?...'*

Regarding the issue of motherhood, education level, marital status and migrant origin within similar age groups also seems to be a factor in women's decision to give birth. Young single women with higher education levels and born in Juárez recognize the importance of information on contraceptive methods in improving their decision-making ability. As a result, they expect to have fewer children than older generations and have greater power to exercise their choices, constituting a relevant factor in decreasing women's vulnerability to abuse. Furthermore, they are critical of family planning politics and methods that, according to them, take women's destiny into their hands:

A15,tec,J: '*...I'd like to have two children, not more... why should I want more if I won't be able to support them?... with two is already difficult but three, four, five... God! you have to plan... those who want to take the advice do and those who don't want to don't... I pay attention because you also have to think about it... the information is everywhere... a lot of young people today are very irresponsible, that's why there's so much AIDS and other diseases... there are a lot of people who take care of themselves but a majority don't...'*

A15,tec,J: '*...I think they are crazy in those clinics, how are they going to operate your tubes and leave you like that for ever?... how am I going to go there and find that they want to operate me?... how do they know if I still want to have a child? The woman is the one who should make the decision... they won't make it for her...'*

On the whole, the testimonies above show some of the ways in which women are departing from traditional gender notions and stereotypes and its potential impact on autonomy. In the case of older partnered women of migrant origin and with low education levels, their actions and attitudes regarding the exercise of their sexuality show a relative resistance to traditional gender notions that could eventually lead to greater autonomy. This may derive from a positive assimilation of spiritual beliefs that condemn their partner's lack of responsibility and support

toward the family. However, it may simply reflect an acquiescent strategy that does not lead to a lasting transformation toward gender equality and freedom from violence.

In the case of younger women, their testimonies reflect an increased access to media communication and US influences than older generations, expressing a more relaxed attitude on the expression of their sexuality through dress code. At the same time, whether this is a reflection of a strengthened sense of self remains unanswered. More definite conclusions can be derived from the testimonies of younger single women, who seems to put more emphasis on their education and future career than on an early marriage, while being more aware of the significance of gender equality within relationships. However, their attitudes remain ambivalent in these areas, showing that the transformations brought about through their increased access to communication, emerging gender roles and lack of marital ties is in conflict with their ingrained cultural values.

Finally, those with higher education levels and born in Juárez within this category show the highest awareness on their socially ascribed roles. They are less likely to assimilate negatively class discrimination and religion, more ready to assume their dual role as workers and mothers/wives and aware of their reproductive options. The above shows that the increased access to information and resources brought about through education may be relevant in women's increasing ability to develop a strong sense of self and greater potential for autonomy.

Following my own argument, the elements generating a change in attitude toward gender roles among young single women make them potentially less vulnerable to victimization in the area of sexual violence. However, and as shown in the last chapter, changing gender notions are still permeated by ambivalence and further research in this area would be needed to confirm whether this is actually the case.

In the next section I explore women's departure from Catholic gender notions and regarding their role as workers within the process of structural change and globalization. Simultaneously, I focus on its potential effect on autonomy as freedom from violence and aim to bring some light to the dynamics involved in women's potential ability to negotiate their role. In exploring this issue, I once again concentrate on both the symbolic and the material aspects of women's experience as workers. Finally, I once again pay particular attention to the factors that determine the shift from a passive assimilation of traditional gender notions to women's acquiescence and resistance.

#### Welcoming Change: Assimilating Work as a Potential Means toward Autonomy

For most women in the sample, regardless of age, marital status, education level and migrant origin, work revolves around issues of basic needs. Since these areas constitute a priority for them, work is regarded as a valuable and needed option, often requiring the sacrificing of other options such as education. Consequently, women usually start working from a very early age, conscious of the need for their labor to cooperate in the maintenance of the family.

This factor may prove valuable in situations where they face vulnerability to sexual violence in certain areas, such as domestic abuse and sexual harassment in the work place. Their extensive work experience from an early age promotes their ability to confront the financial responsibilities involved in supporting themselves and their family. Consequently their specific material circumstances and the value attributed to the family well-being may contribute to the development of valuable qualities such as great determination, self-reliance and a potential ability to successfully confront victimization. Consequently, this constitutes an example about the significance of women's values and beliefs in turning work into a potential means towards autonomy:

E32, Mich, sec, 4ch: '...I noticed my mum never managed to buy all the medicines my sister needed and sometimes she couldn't even go to work because she had to look after her... then I started to work when I was ten, although she never forced me... I had a pair of shoes full of holes and I needed new shoes for school, but my mum said almost crying that she didn't have enough money, so... an opportunity came up to go to work... that time I needed the shoes she even started to do the washing for other people, poor mum, at night she couldn't even sleep, she was so tired! and I was very happy with my new shoes, that's all I had...'

D51, Lagos, prim, 5ch: '...I started to work, I think I was about nine or ten when I started to work, because I saw I could earn money, you see? then I preferred to work than to go to school because at school they always ask you for money for the sweeper, this and that and my father didn't have any money, so when I started to work then I ate well, I went and helped some people I knew, so that I could eat with them...'

The above has significant implications for young single women who choose to take up higher education. This is more often the case among young single women born in Juárez, showing that their increased access to media communication and US influences may expand their options in the area of education and work. However, they invariably face the challenge of having to combine work with education, since their contribution to the maintenance of their families constitutes a priority. Consequently, they often put a lot of value on work as the means to achieve education and better opportunities for themselves and their family. Both work and education become a major objective in their lives and they are willing to sacrifice many areas of their lives to invest time and resources toward reaching a goal. The values ingrained in their determination have a positive effect on their sense of self and may decrease their chances of being victimized:

A24, univ, J: '...I have to work, right? to be able to pay for my studies, to support myself in general, in everything... and my family's support in terms of my studies is just moral support, the truth is that I try not to bother them with financial responsibilities... I distribute my money according to my needs at the time, I always give a part of my salary to my mum... not as much as I would like to, right? but part of my salary is for my mum... my objective now is to finish my degree, finish my degree... I'm not saying I'll finish it with honors, right?... as long as I finish it that'll be the greatest honor I could get...'

Another manifestation of women's courage and ability to cope with material deprivation is found in the experience of partnered women with low or no education and of migrant origin. When faced with the need to work, they are often glad to take the opportunity to exercise their creative resources. Their experience proves that factors beyond education and access to support networks play a part in women's ability to assimilate work for their own benefit. The value attributed to the family and the Catholic notion of women's moral responsibility within it may prove a factor in these dynamics. Thereby they find the means to effectively confront the challenges derived from their devalued status in the job market and the victimization to which they are subject. Their ability to generate creative strategies often has a valuable impact in their sense of self and a potentially positive effect on their ability to confront victimization in their lives:

D40, Dur, prim, 4ch: '*...Sometimes we do 'tandas' among the neighbors, for instance I ask you if you want to come in with twenty Pesos, fifty Pesos or whatever, then I gather ten or more people and get the money... one week I take it and another week someone else does and so on... until it's all distributed... sometimes we do that, so when it's my turn I buy my children what's needed...*'

D54, Guana, noed, 7ch: "...We started from the bottom, and as I'd always worked since I was a child I looked for the way to do things, doing people's washing, helping them to wash and do the housework because I said: 'Well, what am I doing here?' and always the need to find a way, but that's for sure, in an honest way... because I tell my daughters: 'Work won't eat you up, before that, you'll eat up work' because you do what you have to do and then have some rest... so that's how we started, and my mum said: 'Look, I'll give you a hen', she gave me a small chicken and she had ten small chickens, I took care of them and every eight days I went to see my parents and took them a basket of eggs and sold them... with that I bought a bag of sweets or whatever they sold in the rancho and that's how I started to make some cents..."

D54, Guana, noed, 7ch: "...Who knows, sometimes I think I don't know how I manage a business if I don't know how to read or write... I do everything, all the accounts with my mind and those who don't agree I give them a pen and paper and tell them: 'You do it yourself to see if it's right', and that's how I do it..."

However, the value attached to the family well-being is not the only relevant factor in women's positive assimilation of work. Work often

provides women with the means to exercise their independence, as proved by the satisfaction women derive from earning their own salary. In such cases women's objectives are placed beyond the well-being of family members, but seek to fulfill a personal need to develop their own identity. Women's testimonies show that this process may be ingrained in wider structural changes that have brought them the opportunity to exercise alternative roles, changing their view of the world and their gender identity.

This is the case among partnered women of migrant origin and with various education levels, showing that migration may in some cases provide access to resources and the assimilation of alternative gender roles that may have been unthinkable in their place of origin. Confirming the above, they often welcome the independence derived from having a job even if their labor is not needed to complete their partner's share in the household maintenance:

E53,Dur,prim,8ch: '...I think it's a good thing that women work, at least they aren't suffering what we suffered then... now they earn, they solve their own problems and carry on like that... I never even thought about that...'

E32,Mich,sec,4ch: '...When I started working I stopped studying... since then I made my own decisions, I bought everything I wanted...'

D54,Guana,noed,7ch: "...In Mexico city we worked in a different way, because you were not expecting your husband to give you money, there I didn't depend on his support but I had my own money, so when I got some savings together I said: 'Maybe I won't go to work anymore', and then I told him: 'You know? I want you to make me a little table like this' and he said: 'What do you want it for?... 'Well, you know there's a church over there and a lot of people come to mass, so I'm going to sell sweets and oranges and other things, let's see what I can sell' and then he laughed: 'You're beginning to like money' and I said: 'Yes, because with money you can do lots of things'..."

Women's positive attitude on the possibility of earning their own salary is also reflected in the way they conceptualize their transition from rural to urban areas. Older migrant women with low education express the appropriation of new working roles and identities during the migration process with a sense of pride and achievement:

D54, Guana, noed, 7ch: "...Mexico city is very nice... I took from my village two sons and, bad luck, I got straight away pregnant with another... but thanks to my godparents... they advised me, my godmother took off those long dresses I wore and started to dress me with trousers and tied shirts, they cut my hair, well... they changed me and then they showed me where I could ask for work, then they looked for a room where just me and my husband would live... so I started to like that life, a very different life... and that's how I created my home, I said: 'It's mine and I do what I want because I can be the boss here, only *both of us will be the bosses*, which is my husband and I', right?... so we started to change our mentality... there were lots of buildings and I stared at the sky thinking: 'Where am I? God bless you', I said... how money changes people..."

The above shows that the process of structural change taking place in Mexico in the last decades has provided women with the opportunity to exercise alternative roles from those in the past. This has given them the chance to change their view of the world and themselves within it, with the potential of bringing a stronger awareness of their capabilities and strengthening their sense of self. Simultaneously, their role as workers can affect positively gender power relations, providing important elements to prevent victimization.

So far, it has been shown that some of the elements influencing women's positive assimilation of their working role include women's extensive experience as workers, the value attributed to the well-being of the family, the Catholic notion of women as morally responsible for their family and the access to resources and alternative views on gender roles through migration. While all women attribute value to work as an essential means to fulfill urgent reproductive needs, this tendency has specific implications for younger single women with higher education and born in Juárez. They sacrifice a great deal in seeking access to better job opportunities and the possibility of improving their life quality and that of their family.

On the other hand, partnered women with low education levels and of migrant origin are also glad to exercise their creativity through work and appropriate their new working roles with pride and a sense of

accomplishment. However, the factors involved relate to the sphere of family values, the Catholic notion on women as responsible for the well-being of the family and their access to resources and alternative views on gender roles through migration. This last factor was also determinant among partnered women of migrant origin who welcomed the personal independence derived from earning their own salary. Consequently, migration proves to have contradictory effects in terms of women's vulnerability to violence, generating isolation from family members and close friends while offering alternative means of support.

Some of the factors above, namely women's value of the family well-being and their assumed responsibility within it, are attached to traditional gender notions while immersed in exploitative economic relations, which may lead to the conclusion that they prevent women from achieving gender equality. However, I argue that when supported by alternative factors that provide the specific resources discussed above, they can be turned into avenues towards autonomy.

I now move towards assessing the elements involved in specific types of work and their potential effect on women's autonomy. Domestic work sometimes offers women with low education levels and of migrant origin the opportunity to earn a good salary and assume responsibilities beyond their expected duties. This is often the option most commonly taken by newly-arrived women, since their low education level and lack of support networks highly reduce their options. However, this type of employment can provide them the opportunity to engage in creative tasks, increasing women's self-esteem as a result of their independence and ability to exercise their decision-making:

D53,Dur,prim,9ch: '...They paid me by the month... at that time it was a lot of money... I worked a lot and they paid me very well... but there I did everything, all the housework... I mean, I remember how that house was like my house, I'll tell you why... the lady didn't care much about the house or her daughters and I was the one who organized that and I felt... I knew that it wasn't mine, right? but because I organized it I did it with love, I mean, I administered the house and decorated it as I

liked, I changed the curtains, moved the furniture... I mean, as if it was mine..."

When faced with the option of working as domestics in Juárez or El Paso, these women often choose the latter. As the main reasons for such choice, they refer to the higher salaries on offer, the good treatment received and the availability of technological devices that facilitate the job:

A17,prim,Chih: "...Me and my sister worked in a house doing the cleaning and the lady was very, very, very clean, she always liked to have a tidy house, we got in at eight and left at five... the lady treated us very well, she began to trust me... she left to work and we arrived without having had breakfast, we arrived and opened the fridge and my sister liked eating a lot and ate two plates... when the lady arrived she opened the fridge and the bags were full of air and with little food and I thought: 'My God, what is this?', she told us that if we were hungry we could get food from the fridge..."

D51,Lagos,prim,5ch: '...You earn more in El Paso, and they treat you well, I was in a house for about two years, since I was fourteen until I turned sixteen or seventeen... I preferred working in El Paso, there they have all types of machines, dryers, washing machines and their houses are neater, it's easier to clean them...'

Since women enjoy more benefits from their work as domestics on the US side, they soon learn the strategies needed to survive as an illegal worker. However, they are not always successful in keeping their jobs and often face unpleasant situations that prevent them from trying to cross again:

D40,Dur,prim,4ch: '...I worked in El Paso, I was a 'wetback'... a 'wetback'... but once I got caught and got scared...'

A17,prim,Chih: "...Once the lady told me... well, I didn't understand her very well because they don't know how to speak Spanish, they speak 'mocho' (meaning Mexican-American Spanish), then she said to me: 'What's your name?', I said: 'Flor'... 'What are you of her?'... 'I'm her younger sister'... 'Do you live here?'... 'Yes, I live here'... 'Where you were born here?'... 'Yes'... I mean, because my sister had told me that if anybody asked me just to say 'yes' to everything..."

Regarding other benefits derived from women's work experience, service jobs provide most women origin with the opportunity to establish social relations that increase their sense of worth and their ability to develop valuable support systems:

A28, sec,Dur: '...When I went to work in El Paso it was great... it didn't last long... When I left my job in the maquila I lasted one year unemployed and when I started working there I started as a cleaner... there were twenty four single rooms and I had to clean twelve... I finished so quickly I had to pass the time talking! While cleaning the rooms I spent the time talking to the old people and they started to be fond of me... they said I was very different from the others who were very rude... it was completely different from a maquila, they left me in charge of everything but I had a room, a TV, a phone, all the services, and all I did was to be around and make sure nobody got hurt but I could sleep sometimes which is not the same as not sleeping at all...'

Within the service industry, prostitution often provides women with better material conditions than other types of jobs. For this reason and despite the bad press given to jobs in the sex industry, it can be perceived as a valuable experience by women who at some point in their lives face victimization and have to assume total responsibility for the maintenance of their family:

E46,J,tec,3ch: "...When I got pregnant with the girl I told the guy, so he said: 'So you're already pregnant? Well, go and find some work in Juárez', when the girl was born we started to have some problems, when she was thirteen days old I started to work behind a bar, then things started to get better, you see a lot of things behind a bar... my life changed completely, I felt more liberal, more of a woman, everything... I valued myself more and felt capable to confront life and whatever came along... I met many women in the same situation or almost the same but I gave them advice and told them that not because we were in a place like that we had to go around drunk or drugged or spending money in bad things, many of them did, they became drug addicts or gave their money to men, but I didn't, I made use of the opportunity..."

Older partnered women and those separated or widowed often prefer to administer their own businesses in the informal market, despite the lack of protection associated with informal work and the increasing responsibilities derived from it. The main reasons for their preference derive from the better earnings it provides as well as the opportunity to

develop creative skills, leadership potential, social contacts and the possibility to combine work with domestic responsibilities:

D54,Guana,noed,7ch: '*... How important is to be smart and wanting to move forward, right?... my son was then very little and I used a robe, so I got him into the robe and did a knot so that he wouldn't fall and went to the market, bought some chewing gum, lolly pops and everything I could, and also apples and oranges, and got my little selling post, ... so, I began to like the money and I wasn't going to wash, or iron or do the housework anymore...*'

D57,Dur,prim,5ch: '*...I get most satisfaction from buying and selling my own merchandise, mainly because it's mine and I only work when I want, and I get enough money to support myself... it's good to be your own boss, and all the benefits are just for me... I prefer it that way because I have no one pressuring me... I also meet a lot of people, of course... we are not protected by the government but we organized a community bank among ourselves.. I sell clothes because I like them and I have faith in them, if you don't sell this week you will next, you have to have faith...*'

D34,J,sec,3ch: '*Although working for yourself is better than working in a maquiladora, experience has taught me that with the food I made I lost money, because people don't pay their debts, If I go to a maquila I depend on an employer and I spend nine to ten hours outside my home, but I know that I have a certain amount of money coming home every week. When selling food you have to know how to sell, whom to lend and whom not to so that you know the money you will earn every week... but I prefer to sell food because I am more at home with my children'...*'

Regarding maquiladora employment, younger women perceive it as the most accessible job available. Since this employment sector provides an easy option for women, they are more likely to respond to its demand at their arrival or when all other options have failed. Similarly, maquiladora employment also constitutes a common temporary strategy that allows women to be eligible for social security for them and their families, pay their debts and gather the necessary resources to achieve future better conditions:

D20,Zac,prim,2ch: '*...It never occurred to me that working as a domestic would be better paid than working in a maquiladora, but as I didn't know Juárez, I went to the first maquila I found, I didn't have enough money to look for another job...*'

A18,prim,J: '*...I liked working in a maquila because I passed the time, I mean, I don't like it a lot, but I like it when I'm here in Juárez... without doing anything... weeks, working for some weeks... just for when*

my mum has to pay her debts, so difficult to pay, right?... for some weeks, about two months and as soon as I stop paying I get out...'

A23,tec,J: '...I'd say that maquilas have their good side, because you see, there are a lot of very poor people that have no other choice but to work there and a lot of people work there not because of the salary but for the social security for their family... so if something happens to you on the street and you don't have social security you die, you know?, so if you work in a maquila at least you know that you'll have somebody to bury you and to pay for it, that's what I say, anyway... that way I know I won't give my parents a headache...'

However, some women report other reasons for staying in a maquiladora, perceiving it as a productive and positive experience. According to the testimonies of younger women of migrant origin, maquiladora employment offers them the option to establish valuable social contacts, where they find the sense of support and solidarity missing in other personal circles or at their place of origin. Consequently, it can provide the opportunity to enlarge women's support networks and prevent victimization. This point offers complementary data on the subject from that analyzed in the previous chapter, showing that although on the whole maquiladora employment seems to increase women's vulnerability to sexual violence, it can also provide women with the opportunity to use the experience for their own benefit:

D26,CdMad,tec,1ch: '...Maybe what I liked about maquiladoras was that I treated lots of people, that somebody listened to me, when I think about it I have or had quite a lot of older women friends, I think I was looking for a mother's love, which is what was missing in my life... I didn't like being with people of my age... if I had a problem I always went with them for advice, thank God I have always been very lucky in that... maybe that's what attracted me the most to maquiladora employment, maybe because I needed it...'

A17,prim,Chih: '...I've made friends throughout the plant, I know most people there... if I were to choose between working as domestic and working in a maquiladora I would choose working in a maquiladora even though I get paid less... because of the atmosphere and everything, because I feel very comfortable there, I know lots of people and if I need some help, I get it...'

The above explores the specific factors in various employment branches that may promote autonomy in women's lives. For the most part, I argue that the jobs that provide women the opportunity to develop their

creativity, independence of action, leadership potential and support networks are more likely to be relevant in women's path towards autonomy. This conclusion complements and confirms the argument followed so far, since all of the elements above are key in women's strengthened sense of self and gender solidarity. From such basis, any of the employment options examined above offer women at least one of these factors, while women's choices largely depends on their life cycle, marital status, education level, migrant origin and previous work experience.

On the whole, younger women with little work experience find maquiladora employment an easy option that provides for their temporary needs in terms of social security benefits, their contribution to the family maintenance and a step to move forward. Service work would be a second option for these category of women, offering them the option to enlarge their social circle and support networks. Those of migrant origin among them seem to develop valuable support networks that decrease their vulnerability as new comers. Younger women with low education levels and of migrant origin are also found in the domestic employment sector, where they take advantage of higher salaries, the opportunity to develop their creativity and their contact with new influences and cultures.

Older partnered women with low education levels and of migrant origin also take advantage of such opportunities through domestic work, although in their case the higher salaries and relatively relaxed pace are the most common reasons for their choice. Finally, older partnered, separated and widowed women often choose informal work as their best option, offering a combination of elements that greatly increase women's chances for creative change in their lives. These include higher earnings, the opportunity to exercise their creativity and administrative skills, the access to support networks, greater mobility and the opportunity to successfully combine career and domestic responsibilities. So far in this chapter I have shown some of the ways in which women challenge traditional ideologies and generate conditions in their lives

that may turn into elements for change and autonomy. In the next section I test the tentative conclusions derived so far from my analysis on the potential factors in promoting autonomy. I thereby focus on the specific paths taken by women in becoming free from violence and therefore autonomous and the factors influencing their decision. In so doing, I divide women's choices into two main categories: 1. Acquiescence: short-term strategies that could lead women to greater autonomy at a later stage or simply limit their path towards lasting transformation, and 2. Resistance: strategies that provide the means for women to achieve creative and lasting change in their lives.

#### Avoiding the Bully: Acquiescent Strategies against Violence

Despite the fact that, according to the argument so far, young single women with higher education levels and born in Juárez may have greater potential for autonomy than women in other categories, the picture acquires a different tone when focusing on women's strategies against sexual violence. The testimonies bellow show that this category of women show signs of helplessness more frequently than their older counterparts, often taking measures that denote acquiescence rather than resistance. This outcome is related to factors beyond the benefits of education level, marital status and migrant origin, mostly referring to their relatively scarce options for employment and economic dependence on their families.

When these women face violence in the household either directly or indirectly as witnesses, they often choose the quickest way out. For instance, they constantly look for ways to get away from their home and tend to spend as much time as possible at work or school, often planning to leave the household as soon as the opportunity arises:

A23,tec,J: '...I could put up with living with my family here, because I suffered a lot alone, abused, they hit me... however, I always liked school, it's something really nice that I keep inside, right? because I

don't know but the school... I always liked to carry money in my bag, I sold matches on the street although my mum didn't know, I went to school and when I came out I went to sell matches... when I went back to my aunt's house the atmosphere was very tough, very difficult to live with...'.

Strategies derived from the urge to get away can lead to potentially dangerous situations that further limit women's capacity for autonomy. This is more frequently the case among young single women with low education levels, which shows that their limited access to information and resources added to factors of structural change increase their potential for victimization. For instance, teenagers may escape from violence in the home through seeking support networks in potentially damaging circles, such as street gangs. Once they become a member and are identified as such often engage in a self-destructing life style that offers them short-term emotional support and the sense of identity they yearn for. An alternative outcome derives from engaging in other kinds of aggressive behavior and giving up on support networks that might have provided future positive change:

D26, Zac, prim, 2ch: "...When I started to feel all the problems I joined a reflection group in the Church and never left my mum... later violence was stronger than me and I thought: 'I'd better turn a man than a woman!'..."

A18, prim, J: "...When I got home my father arrived drunk... my mother fighting with my father, my mother shouting at him... I mean, it's not that I didn't like going to church but you feel bad seeing them fight... I wanted to fight against temptations, very hard tests, and you become weak and with that weakness you fall... and I left my life to fate, so I stopped going to church without knowing, without anything stopping me... I started to get together with the 'cholos' when I was fourteen... cholos are... how can I tell you?... sheer laziness... you just want to be hanging around at night... you go up and then down and then they start fighting... to tell you the truth it's very ugly, because it doesn't do you any good to be in a gang, especially when there are drugs... you hold on to it, hold on to it... and you just go on... really, there are no friends..."

Similarly, in order to escape violence at home, partnered women of migrant origin and with low education levels refer to situations in their youth where they engaged in desperate attempts to find alternative means

of emotional support. Through such attempts women often exposed their vulnerability in situations where they ultimately risked further victimization. For instance, women's desperation to get away often led them to become prematurely involved in relationships that turned abusive and brought them back to the patterns they intended to avoid:

D26,Zac,prim,2ch: "...I said: 'I hope someone loves me sometime, I want him to love me a lot, I will love him a lot' and then I was afraid, but what was I going to do? I said I was leaving with him and so I did... I got pregnant straight away and after four or five months I was beaten on my stomach, he almost dragged me, he was very violent, he didn't even let me look through the window..."

D47,Dur,prim,7ch: "...I liked very much that boyfriend, I liked him very much and yes, I loved him, but I made the mistake of going with him (meaning having sex) and he didn't respond, right? I got pregnant right away and left home and it was worse for me because my father hit me... yes, my older brother used to hit me and that's why I wanted to run away and I learnt too late that wasn't the solution..."

Regarding acquiescent strategies to cope with violence within a relationship or marriage, women often take actions such as secretly using preconception methods. This strategy is used to avoid the possibility of increasing their economic dependence on their partners as well as their victimization. This is more often the case among older partnered women of migrant origin, showing that women with limited support networks may have to resort to indirect individual strategies that temporarily protect them from some of the consequences of violence:

E32,Mich,sec,4ch: "...I took precautions because I had been here for one or two months when he hit me the first time... so I lasted more than a year taking precautions..."

D33,Chih,prim,6ch: "...Since I gave birth I asked the doctors to operate me but - 'What about your husband?' - 'No', I told them, 'Whether he wants it or not I have to have an operation because I'm the one struggling with them, I'm the one with the burden, I told them... look, since he was born he's been sick but I haven't let him die, I do whatever it takes, he was in the hospital, they gave me the prescriptions and I begged to buy the medicines, he just went there during visit hours - 'How's the boy?' - but nothing else, he never brought anything, a juice for myself or anything, nothing..."

Women with low education levels within this category often choose a more direct short-term strategy and choose to strike back against the

aggressor, responding with the same violence they are subject to. Their lack of outside information and resources may be a factor in their choice to react to the abuse rather than seek an alternative solution. This option provides them with temporary physical relief while temporarily diminishing their sense of vulnerability and helplessness:

E58,Chih,prim,1ch: '...One day he tied my hands with the antenna's cord and he was choking me, and I grabbed an ax and hit his bottom so that he would let me go otherwise he would have killed me...'

E58,Chih,prim,1ch: "...He took me somewhere that wasn't the colony where I was going to pick up my daughter, then he jumped at me as if wanting to hug me and then I slapped and scratched him, and he said: 'No, little savage, now I have to be with you by force'" and I said: 'You're mistaken', at the time I always carried a little gun, a 22 and grabbed his bag and the insurance, so I told him: 'Well, now you take me or I leave the van... I leave it to you and he said: 'Bloody hell, I didn't expect this!', I said: 'Now, listen to me, do you want me to shoot the van or shoot you?, so I got off and shot the van and he said: 'Well, it made a hole', so I said: 'And if you don't take me where you said you were going to take me I'll make you a hole too'..."

D20,Zac,prim,2ch: '...He likes to hit, he wants to be the boss, the king of the house, thank God he doesn't hit me as he did his mum, he says he hit his mum really badly, and he's very jealous, he hit me for anything, he was very... anything we fought about there we were and now I've changed the strategy, before I used to cover myself and cry every time he hit me, but not now, no... now I defend myself as I can, that's what I needed, to react, not let him abuse me, until I put a stop to it... so he calmed down now...'

Less obvious short-term resistance strategies are connected to women's religious convictions. As shown in previous chapters, mostly older partnered women with low education levels and of migrant origin share a notion of God as a protector that will ultimately help them whatever the circumstances. Unfortunately, the nature of their beliefs often reflects a sense of helplessness in many areas of their lives since they turn to spiritual deities to 'solve' their problems. Unfortunately, the resulting dependency in their spiritual identity often leads them to deny responsibility for the abuse suffered, leading to further victimization and increased suffering:

D26,Zac,prim,2ch: "...I told my mum: 'Leave him, leave him, we can work!', because he called her names and was rude to her... when my mum

wanted to defend my brother, he used to tell her that she might even have sex with him and so on and that made my mum angry but that was all... 'Don't pay attention, only God, only God knows'... but God was up there and our life was here! Yes, there was a lot of violence, it was all very sad..."

D49, Zac,noed,1ch: '...Being religious has helped me because when they give me advice... because the nuns and priests have told me what happens to me is because of the cross I have to carry, because as we married in the church, they tell me it's like carrying a cross and if I leave my cross is going to be heavier and if he leaves thank God for that... yes, they say my cross is as heavy as my life, so I'd better put up with it...'

Such attitudes are often reinforced by some of the religious community networks available to women, which despite providing temporary relief from abusive relationships, perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes within marriage as well as abusive patterns:

D51, Lagos,prim,5ch: "...I used to go to the charismatic Church where they gave us talks, they talked really nice things there... they read the Bible during mass and they repeated it a lot, the same people came out as if it was the cinema (meaning they did drama), father Thomas repeated everything about the mass a lot, then we went to work and they said all that again and talked really nice things... when I arrived there I was very angry and when I came back I was OK, thinking about forgiving and all that, and that's what has been helping me... they told us for instance not to expect much from our husbands because the husband is like a child and that's how we must treat him, that we were like a chair, for them to rest on, and that when they arrived drunk we shouldn't shout at them but pray in the name of God for the devil to go away..."

Other indirect way of coping with the abuse among women in this category involves their emotional withdrawal from the relationship. once again their lack of access to information, resources and support networks lead them towards individual actions that avoids the pain derived from direct confrontation. Although this strategy does not convey long-term benefits to women or their families, it constitutes a temporary way of dealing with the hurt:

D34, Chih,noed,4ch: '...I haven't completely given myself to him, always: 'I'm leaving'...'Go, then'...'You don't love me'...'No, I don't and that's the way I am, if you want to leave, leave... but I want money'... but there's nothing inside, there're no feelings... shortly after we married

he went out drinking, he's always drank... and I waited for him, I tried to get closer to him, right? and I waited for him... and he arrived at two or three in the morning and it hurt... I wondered where he was, but he always said: 'Don't worry, I only go out to drink' and I totally believed him... but one day he arrived with hickeys on his neck and it hurt a lot, that hurt because that's betrayal.. and from then on I'm a completely different woman...'

However, when women choose to follow this strategy for long periods of time one of the consequences can be increasing health problems that can lead to serious and even fatal conditions. Although such dramatic consequences can lead to change on the part of the abuser, it is often too late for women to reverse the implications of years of abuse:

A14,sec,J: '...My father drank a lot, my mother suffered from her heart, I mean *she was always ill, then my father arrived drank and beat her up, he beat us up...* I think he's changed a little since my mother had the last heart attack and gave birth to my little sister, I think he learnt from the experience and has changed, he drinks a little but I think my father has changed, he's changed a lot...'

Among the available short-term state options available to women suffering abuse, they often choose to resort to the police forces, despite finding this service highly unreliable. This is the case among all women, which confirms that sexual violence is a common occurrence in all women's lives. Although in some cases taking this option provides temporary relief and can constitute a turning point for some women, in the long run it fails to address their long-term safety:

D49,Zac,noed,1ch: "...Once he beat me up a lot and I was all covered in blood like Jesus Christ and I went to the police who told me: 'No señora, go home' then I run into another police car and they saw me and stopped saying: 'What happened?' then I told them: 'My husband beat me up and I told them over there and they said I should go back home to get beaten up even more and that they only came when it was a matter of life and death', so they put me into the car and when we got there he was inside with the tequila bottles and the police said: 'Who's is this house?' and I said: 'Mine'... 'And who's is the plot?'... 'Mine' and they told him: 'The house is hers, get out', that's all they told him, they didn't take him away or anything..."

D26,Zac,prim,2ch: '...My neighbor suffers a lot of violence and we have a radio to call the police but they come when the storm is over, when one is even making up! What for?... sometimes they don't even come! Where is

the help? They should come before they kill you, not after, we don't need them then... that's why women need support.'

B34,Torr,prim,5ch: "... the baby was lying in bed... he grabbed the blanket and the baby and threw them to the floor, I swear to God who is watching me...he wanted to beat me but I slapped him and threw him on the floor and then I told a child who was there: 'Go and tell Toño, the policeman' so he did and then a policeman came and took him up and carried him.. the baby was there lying and I said to the police: 'Don't touch it, leave it there so that the police come and take note of everything'.. the next morning I went and told him: 'You know, the same way you hurt my baby, I'm going to hurt you, you're finished with me and right now I'm going to sign a paper so that you don't bother me anymore'..."

The above refers to some of the strategies women choose in order to cope with sexual violence in their lives. However, all of them prove to be either temporary or damaging to women's sense of self and are therefore categorized as 'acquiescence' rather than 'resistance'. Considering the testimonies above, it may be concluded that all of women's choices in this category prevent women's personal growth and potential for autonomy in the long run, often leading to stagnation with negative consequences for women and their families or to similar situations of victimization under different circumstances.

Regarding generational differences, although younger single women with higher education levels express more liberated attitudes on gender issues and on the whole have increased access to outside resources and information, their reaction to abuse is characterized by helplessness and the choice of inadequate options. This is due to factors beyond their control and related to structural change, such as the relative lack of adequate employment options and financial dependence on their families.

Among the options chosen by this category of women the most common are planning to leave the household, starting work prematurely, spending most of the time outside the household and exposing themselves to further abuse and self-destruction through connection with gangs or other inadequate relationships. Education is relevant to the extent that women with lower education levels are more likely to seek to escape through

destructive activities or relationships, while those of migrant origin within this category have an even greater potential for victimization. Young single women with higher education levels more often choose to spend time at school or in community and social activities rather than in gangs or other abusive relationships.

In terms of older partnered women, those who make use of coping and short-term strategies to avoid abuse also seek indirect or inefficient actions that provide temporary relief but do not lead to autonomy in the long run. Many women in this category are of migrant origin and have limited support networks, which may account for the indirect nature of their choices. Among them, those with lower education levels report resorting to actions that do not provide permanent relief nor involve outside support, such as striking back, leaving their destiny in the hands of God and emotional withdrawal. Finally, the generalized levels of vulnerability to sexual violence are reflected in the fact that most women at some point in time resort to the police forces, yet another short-term strategy that doesn't provide long-term protection.

The above identifies some of the variables that prevent women from achieving autonomy, pointing at issues of structural change such as scarce employment and education options and economic dependence. Other factors already mentioned include the lack of support networks, women's isolation from outside resources and information and a negative assimilation of Catholic gender notions. All of the above contribute to women's diminishing notion of self and lack of gender solidarity, showing that these two factors are key in women's ability to transform their lives towards autonomy. In the next and final section I offer my final conclusion on the issue through examining women's resistance strategies towards lasting change and autonomy. Simultaneously, I examine the role of work in these dynamics and its link with other elements facilitating this process.

### The Meanings of Autonomy: Women's Paths towards Creative Change and Freedom from Violence

I have shown in previous sections of this chapter the various ways in which women rebel against constraints regarding their socially ascribed role, thereby increasing their options for autonomy. In this section, I test the validity of the conclusions regarding the factors influencing this shift that lead to women's resistance. In doing so, I examine the relevant elements in women's decision to achieve freedom from violence and the different paths they choose in that direction. It should be noted that such process does not necessarily involve leaving a violent relationship, but whatever choices that lead women to become autonomous and transform their lives for the better.

When women decide to leave a violent relationship, their decision is often determined by situations of extreme violence, where their own life or the safety of their children is seriously at risk. This pattern is most common among partnered women with low education levels, showing that the lack of access to outside information and resources through formal education affects all generations and makes them less able to confront sexual violence until it escalates. On the other hand, women's motivation to leave reflects that the traditional value attached to the well-being of the family and motherhood can be a significant factor in women's paths towards autonomy:

D32,J,prim,3ch: "...We had nothing to eat... the child's milk... at night I gave him only water and sugar, and then the sugar finished and it was just water, the child didn't want anymore because he was a baby and he just had water, water, water... then I had nothing to give him... he didn't let me work because I was 'doing things' (meaning being unfaithful), we only had what he earned doing 'things' (meaning selling drugs), but everything he had he used, so all the money was for him! so when he sent me to the shop I went round to see my mum but was afraid he would be there waiting for me and then I went to see a woman and asked her to call my mum, I was crying, and then I told my mum I could not stand it anymore... yes, mum, *this is for good, I'm not going back...*"

B24,Dur,prim,3ch: "...What gave me the strength not to go back was that he was going to treat my child badly... that's when I started to feel something for my other child.. I thought, I have two children and he doesn't love the other one as he is not his child... I had to move

*forward for them and for myself because one day he might come back home more drunk than usual and hit me to death... and that was enough, I decided I wanted to carry on with my life... my children made me make a decision, despite not having the support of my family or suffering from hunger, I had to give them a future...*

However, women within this category also leave for reasons related to their own well-being, showing that factors beyond those related to traditional views on the family and motherhood play a part in this process. Women's testimonies show that the availability of support networks is a relevant factor in women's ability to make a final decision to change their life. This is also the case among women of migrant origin who migrated with their family and continue to count on their support:

E53,Dur,prim,8ch: "...That day in the morning I gave him lunch and after I went to talk with a friend and he started shouting: 'What are you doing!' and he threw me a knife and got stuck in the door, so I run to tell my parents-in-law and then they went and told him off... so, after I gave him lunch I decided to leave even though I didn't know where and then I run into one of my brothers and he asked me where was I going to and I said I didn't know, so he took me home..."

E32,Mich,sec,4ch: "...He hit me very hard and didn't calm down, he said: 'Go, go, if you want to go!' and if I moved he said: 'I'll kill you before you go!' he repeated so many times: 'Go, go! in the end I couldn't move... then I thought: 'Now I really have to go', because my sister had problems with her husband as well, she had told me about two months before that she didn't want to leave alone because she needed somebody to look after her children while she worked... then I went to look for her and she was very angry for all the bruises I had, but she didn't want to leave him anymore...a friend of mine bought our things so that we could get the money for the ticket... so we went to Sonora..."

One of the positive consequences of taking a definite step towards freedom from violence and against social constraints is that these women often find new joy in life and relationships, opening the doors to new opportunity and rebirth. In such cases women's decision to leave involves a complete change in their expectations and attitudes towards relationships, bringing new strength and determination to follow their objectives:

D57,Torr,prim,5ch: "...After I separated from my husband my life changed, yes, it changed a lot because I remarried a very good man, even my

children, well, my children love him very much, you know?... it was very nice, very nice, because I never had anything to complain about, you see, a second marriage is very nice... he shared with my children, he dealt with them, the youngest...'

D20,Zac,prim,2ch: '...Once I even dreamt about him, that I was with him, and I woke up screaming that I couldn't be with him again and when I saw that I wasn't with him I felt so good that... I mean, a great relief, I felt very relaxed, I really enjoyed myself and that's when doors opened again because what I needed was to leave him...'

In identifying the factors that led these women to seek freedom from violence beyond the benefits of education and the availability of support systems, I found that women's spirituality also played a part in this process. Many interpret freedom from violence and the positive changes derived from it as a consequence of their spiritual faith. However, and in contrast to women who chose acquiescent strategies, those who channel such beliefs into lasting change often express a religious identity that departs from paternalistic and dependent attitudes. In such cases, women express their experience of renewed power as derived from God and refer to the way in which divine forces operate through them rather than beyond them.

Although such perceptions are more common among younger than older women, those among the latter who have managed to change their lives truly believe that God has played a major part in achieving the strength in transforming their lives. This is the case among older partnered women regardless of education level or migrant origin, showing that the relevance of spirituality in women's autonomy transcends the availability of outside resources, information and support. However, I would argue that its influence is most effective when combined with the factors above:

E36,Ver,sec,5ch: '... when I've had problems I didn't need to go to Church, but I went home, I prayed and lit up a candle, because one believes that which has been taught, that it's not necessary to go to Church when you have a problem, although you don't have so many saints at home as in the Church, but I have some images and a little Christ, when I have a big problem I go there and get on my knees and pray and lit up a candle, sometimes like when I had big problems like what happened with my

first husband I prayed to God with all my faith, I felt better when I prayed... I feel as if I was telling somebody that is listening, even though he doesn't talk or say anything, but I think he's listening, yes!...'

D37,J,prim,5ch: "...When he arrived she'd already had her operation, that's when I made my decision, I told him: 'That's enough, we're going to separate, but I don't want you to come here anymore, I want to do as I want with my life and my children', when I prayed to God I asked him to give me strength not to give my children any more problems, fighting and moving from one place to another, so I said: 'I have no need for this, no more...'

D37,J,prim,5ch: '...I think it was the experience of my daughter getting sick that made me react, I said: 'If I'm alone anyway, what do I want a man for?', so it was hard not to be able to receive communion and all that, I said: 'No, better alone, after all he doesn't help me or support me'... I saw in God's word that we should respect each other, love God and trust each other, everything that I didn't have in my home, and I started to realize, if I don't have that, what am I going to give me children?...'

Another strategy women use to connect with their inner being and gain strength is that of solitude. Among the older partnered women in the sample with low education and of migrant origin who stayed at home, some used their time in solitude to reflect upon life and find the clarity to promote change and a better future for themselves. The fact that these women were able to reach out and reflect upon their needs and objectives shows once again the relevance of factors beyond access to outside resources, information and support networks. Women's testimonies reflect that connecting with oneself through solitude or spirituality are important means towards a strengthened sense of self and women's potential for autonomy:

D34,Chih,noed,4ch: '...I like solitude a lot, maybe even too much... when I'm alone, I think about a lot of things, I find myself... I start cleaning, I smoke a cigarette, think, sometimes I drink a beer... and I don't know, I find myself in solitude, I like solitude a lot... I think about my problem, right? that there's no solution, there's no solution because I don't want a solution, there's one, right? I don't want to find out, but there's one, the solution would be a complete change, I'm not talking about what I should do but what I have to do, I'm very conscious of that... if I do this I ruin a part of my life and if I do something else I ruin the other part, but I'd be happier and that's always best...'

It should be noted that women's transformation towards autonomy and a better life does not necessarily involve leaving an abusive relationship. In fact, women's testimonies show that their motivation to change their life can eventually lead to a positive change in the dynamics of their relationships toward gender equality, affecting positively the well-being of the whole family. Some of the women in the sample referred to instances in which formally abusive men changed their behavior both within a single relationship or with subsequent partners. Such cases show the extent to which women have the power to set limits to the abuse they receive, thereby creating the conditions for their partners to potentially change themselves along with them:

D22,Carr,nochild,univ: '...Yes, there were problems at home, my father didn't let my mother go out, but now she has changed quite a bit, she wasn't one of those people who answered back but did was she was told and not anymore, as if she has liberated, as if *she's liberated from him and now she says she doesn't fear him anymore*, and when she says she wants to go out she does and locks the front door and goes out with her friends and so on... and sometimes she doesn't cook for him and before... ah! she never went out or didn't have food ready... and you know he's one of those men who want you to be just there for him... and he has began to respond a little more... now that I went there I realized that when my father arrived for dinner my fifteen year-old sister was sitting there and my father told her: 'Ay! cook me some dinner!'... 'No, cook it yourself if you want, there's some, get some yourself if you want'... so I think that he's changed, he's changed and yes, my mother says he changed quite a lot, *he's not the man we knew...*'

D37,J,prim,5ch: '...I think he saw I had made my decision to leave and started to change, I think it was the experience of my daughter getting sick that made me react, I said: 'If I'm alone anyway, what do I want a man for?...'

As pointed above, another major element influencing women's autonomy refers to the relevance of emotional support networks within their families. This is the case among women of all ages, regardless of marital status, education level or migrant origin, showing that emotional support can be available through various options that encompass the experience of all kinds of women.

Women's testimonies about the impact of family support networks on autonomy shows that a sense of solidarity derived from this source proves

paramount in women's ability to change their lives. Consequently, when they find this kind of emotional support and are joined in their efforts to resist violence, their capacity for autonomous action significantly increases:

D38,J,prim,5ch: "...I fell asleep on a chair and all of a sudden I opened my eyes and saw him sneaking into my daughter's bedroom, and I followed him... and he leaned towards her and whispered in her ear, but my daughter was totally covered with her blankets... he asked her to go with him to the rancho... but my daughter didn't want to tell me because she thought I'd get mad... so I hit him so hard that he stumbled but I didn't even hurt my hand, and I don't even know how I dragged him outside, I told him: 'I don't want dogs here - I told him - I'd rather be alone', so he left, he took all his things with him... so I told my daughter: 'I'm here to support you my child'... 'we'll be alone from now on but we'll manage just OK'..."

B24,Dur,prim,3ch: "...That was the last time he hit me and that's when I decided to leave him, after my father supported me... I realized I had no need to put up with his beatings for no reason... my father said: 'You did him a favor instead of the opposite, as you were young and had a future and you took him into your life'... he said: 'You can work and your mum will look after your other kid, that's the way it should be, and you will move forward whatever it takes!'..."

A15,tec,J: '...When my father hit me and left me all bruised, I run and went to my cousin's house, because when that happened the only one who was there to help me out was my cousin's wife... she cured me because I... she put salt on my mouth because it was swollen... he cured several bruises I had on my back...'

Furthermore, the strength of women's solidarity in resisting violence often leads to the establishment of specific support networks within families that challenge traditional family hierarchies. In such cases, women's links extend beyond the nearest family ties towards political female relatives, reflecting the intensity of women's identification within exploitative gender relations. In so doing, women often join from different sides against male abusers within the same family:

B34,Torr,prim,5ch: '...My older brother doesn't like me, he got very angry once because I defended my sister in law when he broke her bones, he beat her and I defended her, I even reported it to the police...'

D32,J,prim,3ch: '...His sisters and his mother were very good to me, even until now, they defended me a lot because it was awful... sometimes my

mother in law gave us food, but sometimes she got angry at him because he was so rude, and then she gave food just to me...'.

Finally, women often receive support from friends, neighbors and authority figures such as school teachers, nuns and priests in their community, showing the extent to which women's day-to-day experience of abuse and their solidarity within it contradicts the myth of violence as a private issue:

B25,J,prim,3ch: '...The teacher always tried to give me advice, 'Look', she said, 'Isabel', because she loved me very much, she told me: 'You have to be a good girl, don't get into a gang, she knew some of the problems I had at home because she asked me, and as she saw I was tense or thoughtful, she asked me what was wrong and I told her...'

D54,Guana,noed,7ch: '...The neighbors used to call the police when my father beat up my mum, because we didn't dare doing it... when they put him away he got very sad and he called the president from where he was locked up to ask for permission to see his little children because he missed them... but it wasn't that, just that he couldn't be without drinking, so instead of going home as he said, he went straight to the bar...'

E46,J,tec,3ch: "...During my first marriage I had a woman friend who said to me: 'Don't put up with him, my child, go', I had some dresses that my mother gave me when I got married and I never wore, they were silk dresses, very beautiful, to go dancing and I gave them to her for her daughter, so that she would give me a train ticket to come over here, then he went to Puebla and I came over to Juárez, he wanted to put me in jail but no, I said: 'I won't go back' and I never did..."

The above shows some of the processes involved in women's resistance strategies towards autonomy. Most testimonies in this area refer to incidents of domestic violence among older partnered women, proving that this particular manifestation of sexual violence highly affects their lives. Simultaneously, their extended life experience provides them with personal resources that guide them in their search for a better life. Education constitutes a factor in women's choices, since older partnered women with low education levels are more likely to leave as a last resort and when violence has become extreme. This may derive from their reduced access to information, outside resources and support

networks, affecting their inability to find a way out until there is no other choice.

Women's testimonies also illustrate some of the elements that inform women's decision to change their lives, showing that traditional values widely assumed as leading towards victimization can be turned into effective means for autonomy. This was common among older partnered women of all education levels and migrant origins, proving the existence of relevant factors beyond access to information, outside resources and support networks in women's process towards autonomy.

Such factors often pertain to the sphere of values and beliefs in women's process toward autonomy. Among these, the testimonies of older partnered women with low education show the extent to which their courageous choices are often motivated by the Catholic notion of women as morally responsible for the family well-being and the significance of motherhood in their lives. Another way in which women's assimilation of Catholic gender notions can derive into positive action toward autonomy refers to women's spiritual identity, particularly when assimilated as a vehicle for inner strength rather than dependence. This was common among older partnered women, regardless of education level or migrant origin. Finally, those in this category with low education levels and of migrant origin who stayed at home referred to solitude as a vehicle to connect with themselves and find the inner strength to change their lives.

Finally, women in all categories often made use of alternative options such as the existence of support networks through family, friends and other community members. Solidarity bonds emerged beyond class, ethnic and gender divisions, reflecting the increasing social awareness developing within the wider process of structural change taking place in the Northern Mexican border. On the whole, it can be concluded that the combination of all factors above prove most powerful in women's ability to find autonomy in their lives.

Considering the above, women's choices in dealing with violence show their power to transform traditional gender notions and use them for their own benefit. They also reflect the degree of their courage in challenging the notions that socially shape their identities and reinforce victimization patterns. However, the meanings women attribute to their experience of liberation in this context cannot be considered outside the concrete framework of structural economic change and the options it provides. Such options mostly derive from economic and political networks that provide the concrete elements to bring about positive change and autonomy. It is this relationship between values and effective action that is relevant to the main question of this investigation, which explores the role of work in bringing freedom from violence into women's lives. In doing so, I will refer in the next section to women's conceptualization of work as a vehicle for autonomy and its link to the elements identified above as relevant to this process.

#### Unifying Forces: Assuming Work as a Vehicle towards Autonomy

Considering the limited options available for women through state resources, they often resort to alternative means that potentially provide long-term safety and autonomy in the face of violence. For the most part, the women who exercise resistance strategies against sexual violence welcome the possibility of engaging in productive activities outside the home, often contributing to the process of regaining a stronger sense of self and achieve autonomy both at the material and symbolic level. When partnered women with low education levels and of migrant origin make a final decision to leave an abusive relationship, migration is often their only option in looking for a fresh new start and a way to earn a living for themselves. In such instances, women's choice

to change their life, sometimes at the cost of losing the custody of their children, entails a great deal of courage and determination:

B34,Torr,prim,5ch: '...Then I got together with a guy from Rinconada whom I left because I couldn't stand the life he gave me, he always treated me really bad, so I decided to gather some money and go to Torreón where I lived for four years... he took away my children, saying they were his, he took them away... he always treated me very badly and was very jealous so I said well, God help you... and then from Torreón I went to Lazareno... I've always been wondering around by myself...'

Women with the resources to exercise resistance are more able to take advantage of the positive aspects of work in finding autonomy. Therefore and as stated above, the relevance of work in women's autonomy cannot be considered outside the framework of symbolic meanings that women attribute to their experiences. Simultaneously and as discussed in a previous section, the jobs that provide women with the elements that further increase their potential for autonomy are the most effective in supporting women in this process. For instance, the possibility of developing support networks through women's work experience stands as a significant factor in achieving autonomy. This factor was mostly referred to by women of migrant origin, showing one of the specific needs faced by women in this category when confronting victimization:

D34,prim,Zac,5ch: '...I got support from my work mates, I found relief with the ones I trusted most... when they noticed I was sad they encouraged me to talk, so I did... I felt better once I started working again, I was always thinking too much at home and at work time goes quickly and also I could talk to my friends...'

A28,sec,Dur: "...I was fifteen and my family found it very hard to believe that I was going to work, I started to work in a house, I remember my boss said: 'Do you know how to cook?', I was so desperate to leave home that I said: 'I don't know how to cook but I'll make you the sandwiches!' (laughs)... I tried very hard and got used to the family, I lasted there nine years... they used to say: 'You're like our oldest daughter'..."

E36,sec,Ver,5ch: '...He said he was going to change and I don't know what else and I went back to him, but he stayed the same... then as I had my children I started to work, to look for something for my children to eat, so I went with my comadre who sells clothes and told her I was going to help her and after that I decided to separate from him because one day he took the money I had made, he took it and spent it, so I went and told his father and mother and they said: 'It's your problem', 'OK', I said, 'since it's my problem I'm going to solve it'... since I realized I

*didn't need him anymore and he continued drinking I thought we'd better separate, if I can work to give my children what they need it's best to be alone...*

Similarly, often women's ability to earn their own salary strengthens their sense of independence and ability to make their own decisions, particularly among those who have the adequate resources discussed above as leading towards autonomy. This in turn has a positive effect on women's sense of self and enlarges their material options while facilitating mobility and the development of support systems. However, for women who lack the initial resources to take a step forward toward autonomy, their ability to earn a salary can produce the opposite result, contributing to victimization patterns or acquiescence rather than resistance. This was clearly reflected in the previous chapter through the testimonies of female heads and younger maquiladora workers.

However, the independence some younger women derive from earning their own salary cannot be underestimated in its potential impact towards autonomy. Mostly younger women with higher education referred to this issue, showing that this category of women have an increasing access to information and resources that make their role as workers more effective in facing victimization:

D26,CdMad,tec,1ch: '*...Working gave me stability... maybe because I got used to having my own money... even if it was little it was comforting to know I earned it... knowing that you can work and earning your own money gives you strength to make decisions in marriage, even if you earn little, you're earning your own money and in case you separate you have where to grab from for the children and other needs... when you don't work they feel more secure about the wife... they feel the wife won't be able to cope because she doesn't have a job, and there's more shouting and everything because she's not going to leave, as she has nowhere to get the money from and with all the children she can't go... it's different when you're earning your own money and you say: 'I've put up with it up to here' and go and that's it...*'

E53,Dur,prim,8ch: '*...I think it's a good thing that women work, at least they aren't suffering what we suffered then... now they earn, they solve their own problems and carry on like that... I never even thought about that...*'

On a different direction and as stated in the previous section, women often conceptualize the work opportunities they encounter as derived from their spiritual beliefs in God as a protector. Following the same argument, the women in the sample who used these beliefs as a vehicle for personal power used the arising job opportunities for their benefit, successfully overcoming victimization and sexual violence in their lives. This is more often the case among older partnered women with low education levels and of migrant origin, showing that a positively channeled spiritual identity becomes a particularly valuable resource for women who lack alternative support systems and resources:

D53,Dur,prim,9ch: '*...When I received the loan from FEMAP I was going through a difficult time with my husband... but God helps me a lot (repeatedly)... I couldn't believe they were giving me a loan with no interest, those young kids in FEMAP helped me a lot and I ended up being the treasurer of the first community bank... they cheered me up a great deal and during that time I felt free... after sometime I gathered a little fortune... about \$7,000 in five years, I now work about eight hours per day and earn between \$200 and \$300 per week...*'

In view of the above, once women decide to break away from the dependence dynamics of an abusive relationship, they often give a new meaning to the experience of work. This issue was most often referred to by women with low education levels and of migrant origin, reflecting the empowering potential of work for women who lack alternative means towards outside information and support. In taking advantage of this option, these women make effective use of their resources and open up to new perceptions of themselves while legitimizing their identity as workers. On the whole, their testimonies confirm the argument on women's view of work from a perspective that transcends the issue of economic survival and provides a valuable resource for the well-being of their children and the family as a whole:

D57,Dur,prim,5ch: '*...I've always worked, but when I was still with my husband I felt very pressured to work and after I left him and found this other man, I started to enjoy things more and I got used to the idea that I was working without the pressure, I was working for myself, the day I wanted to work, fine... and the day I didn't want to, I didn't... I've*

always liked to work and not ask anything from my children, always, always... for me independence is very important... I've always wanted to live better, if I have something, I want something better if I can, that's why I like to buy and sell clothes, I had the ambition to live better, although sometimes you can't, right?, sometimes you say, I have this, but I have to do this and that to have more, so you move forward more and more..."

B24, Dur, prim, 3ch: "...My children made me make the decision to leave my husband... after that I started working in a house, until I was bored and decided to work in a man's job... they started to hire women in the 'crianza de pollos' (chicken's breeding), they decided to give women an opportunity... women need the opportunity as well, they say women can do a man's job as well as a man, and that's the way it was... I was the best in my job, I needed the job very badly and wanted the managers to support me in everything I needed... I worked loading vans, did the washing, the ironing, the cooking, everything! (says with pride) and they liked my work a lot... they didn't pay me a lot but I struggled to earn a little extra because I did extra hours..."

The above shows that the combination of employment and the factors so far referred to as promoting women's autonomy fulfill significant economic and emotional needs that contribute positively to women's changing sense of self. Employment opportunities have expanded further during the last decades in the Northern Mexican border as a consequence of broader structural change. The results above show that if channeled positively towards the effective development of women's sense of self and the development of gender solidarity it can contribute to the broadening of opportunities towards a better quality of life for them and their family.

These factors are often combined most effectively in alternative forms of employment such as informal work and jobs offered through community support groups. Often supported by international funding institutions, these groups provide valuable options that enable women to transcend victimization, offering information and support on reproduction issues, AIDS prevention and economic projects. These options are taken by women in all categories, proving a valuable opportunity in general and more specifically for those who lack alternative resources through education and family support networks. The support received often furthers the options available for women leaving abusive partners,

allowing for the development of a sense of solidarity and helping them recover from the lack of self-steem and patterns of dependence:

E46,tec,3ch,J: '... 'Femap' and 'Compañeros' are the two groups that give talks on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), 'Femap' has been with us for about five years, my job as a prostitute hasn't changed that much since they arrived but *it's a good thing they're there...* we give talks about STDs, we hand out condoms and help people morally, financially, it provides help but *it's people's choice whether they want to take advantage of it...* *it also gives a sense of solidarity between us and the courage to face problems...* you learn more things, before we were closed in a circle and now you see more things...'

D22,Carr,univ,nochild: '...Yes, there were problems at home, my father didn't let my mother go out, but now she has changed quite a bit, she wasn't one of those people who answered back but did what she was told and not anymore, as if she has liberated, as if *she's liberated from him and now she says she doesn't fear him anymore... and she hangs out with one of those groups from PRI and God knows what...*'

A15,tec,J: '... My father arrived drunk and started to insult us, even though we were young then... he insulted as and hit my mum and he went on until we were older... then *I started to work with Franky when I was twelve and my mum worked in the child-care community center and the doctor gave me a grant to start secondary school...* we were volunteers but they gave food to my mum, and the doctor paid for my studies so I was more than happy because who else was going to pay for my studies as things are right now?... I met many friends who came with Franky from the other side to help in the community... *and they make you feel acknowledged and valued, it's as if you get some support...*'

Among such networks, feminist religious groups under the liberation theology take a different stand from the norm, questioning the traditional interpretation of the Biblical texts. A well known women's group in the community focuses on the reinterpretation of the Bible from women's standpoint, providing the means for solidarity links that often promote autonomy. The women benefiting from these experience are mostly older partnered women with low education and of migrant origin, providing them with an alternative support network that promotes conscientization from within their particular system of values and beliefs:

D51,Lagos,prim,5ch: '...*Going to that group has helped me, I feel relaxed there, yes, it has helped me... you see other people there and socialize with other women, I wouldn't have gone to school if they hadn't invited me... I like the subjects they give you and I like it, I like it a lot but sometimes you can't... I think more women should come to this group...*'

D26,Zac,prim,2ch: '...In some places they defend women a lot, *I envy those places...* you need protection as a woman, because women are weaker and cannot defend themselves so easily... I now cannot get pregnant and I think it is because of the beatings and I feel a lot of courage... I feel very comfortable because you can talk about your things and it's people you trust... sometimes I feel depressed and I go to the meetings and feel much better, *if I didn't have that group I'd probably feel trapped*, because I can't tell my mum, she's a good person, but I'd hurt her...'

Among the options offered by these groups is the opportunity for women to become community leaders, offering the means for them to acknowledge their leadership potential, spread their career options and find a purpose in life beyond dependence and abuse. This option was more often taken by women of migrant origin, which may be a reflection of their need to develop specific support systems within their community:

D53,Dur,prim,9ch: '... I started to trust him but he began to arrive late... someone told me he took a bus in a different neighborhood and he didn't deny it... I finally discovered it was true, he was seeing her again and my children already knew about it... *sometime after that I became a health promoter with FEMAP...* I always cooperated in social work...*(with passion)...*'

The above testimonies provide valuable information for the prevention of violence within low-income communities in the border. Women's experiences in this area reflect the specific spheres that need to be reinforced at the community level in order to strengthen their options for survival, autonomy and change. Simultaneously, this can facilitate women's incorporation into the development process and the effective use of their role as workers.

In this section I have shown that work, as a concrete manifestation of structural change, can be a valuable means towards autonomy. The types of work that provide the necessary elements for women to strengthen their sense of self and gender solidarity can in themselves constitute a vehicle for change. This is mostly achieved through conditions that allow for economic independence, the development of solidarity links, women's access to information and political support groups and the means for

women to exercise their creativity, leadership potential and initiative. While all types of employment offer at least one of the elements above, women benefit the most from the types of work that integrate several of such elements, namely informal work, voluntary work and work channeled by political support groups.

However, the experience of work is most effective among women who already have a strengthened sense of self through various resources. These include access to media communication and emerging gender roles, outside information through education resources, the availability of support networks, and a positive assimilation of Catholic gender notions. Women of migrant origin greatly benefit from the development of support systems through work experience, due to their relative vulnerability in terms of solidarity links. This is an even more valuable option for partnered women with low education levels, for whom migration often constitutes their only option in search of a better life and new opportunities. In a different direction, the discourse of older partnered women with lower education and of migrant origin reflects the significance of their faith and traditional family notions in achieving autonomy through work. Finally, mostly younger women refer to the independence derived from earning a salary and its impact on autonomy, showing the effect of their increased access to media information and newly emerging gender roles. However, education level plays a role in whether women make use of such independence to achieve autonomy or choose acquiescence as a strategy.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that women in all categories eventually find the courage to confront the social constraints that limit their capacity for autonomy. Their determination and strength often determine the course

of their lives and enable them to transform unequal gender relations for their benefit.

In the first section of this chapter I showed that a positive spiritual identity promotes women's constructive assimilation of their marginalized class, gender and ethnic status. This in turn enhances their potential for autonomy, regardless of age, marital status, education level and migrant origin. However, when examining women's resistance to Catholic gender notions on sexuality and related issues, the testimonies of older partnered women with low education and of migrant origin showed a picture of ambivalence in terms of the rejection of their sexual marital role, possibly leading to acquiescence rather than resistance.

On the other hand, younger women expressed a more relaxed attitude toward the expression of their sexuality through their dress code. However, the implications for gender equality and women's autonomy remain questionable. Those who were single within this category also remained ambivalent but expressed a greater openness toward alternative gender roles beyond marriage as well as the positive significance of gender equality in their lives. Among them, those with higher education levels and born in Juárez showed the greatest awareness on these issues, being less likely to negatively assimilate class discrimination and religion, more ready to assume their dual role as workers and wives/mothers and more aware of their reproductive options.

In the following section I expanded this issue toward examining women's challenging notions on their incorporation to the working force, within the wider process of structural change in the border. For all women, their extensive experience as workers from an early age positively affects their self-reliance and assimilation of their working role. Among them, partnered women with low education levels and of migrant origin referred to factors related to the value attributed to the well-being of the family, the Catholic notion of women as morally responsible for their family and the increased access to resources and

alternative gender roles through migration as playing a part in this process. This last factor was also determinant in the experience of older partnered women of migrant origin, regardless of education level.

The conclusions from the first two sections of this chapter can be summarized as follows: 1. Women's awareness of gender equality and ability to challenge Catholic gender notions increases with resources through access to media communication and emerging gender roles, reduced material limitations and reproductive responsibilities, access to information and education resources and availability of support networks, 2. Women's positive assimilation of their working roles derives from factors such as women's self-reliance regarding their role as family supporters, the positive assimilation of Catholic gender notions and the increased access to alternative resources and gender roles. Both the conclusions above derive into a converging point that refers to the promotion of women's strengthened sense of self and gender solidarity as key in women's potential for autonomy in these areas.

In the final section I tested the relevance of the factors above through examining women's differing strategies in finding autonomy as freedom from violence. It was shown that despite the fact that younger single women with higher education levels have on the whole more resources than women in other categories, these were not sufficient as effective resistance strategies. Economic factors such as the lack of adequate employment options and material dependence on their families significantly limited their actions in this area. However, low education and migrant origin proved relevant in the analysis, since women in these categories were more likely to engage in destructive behavior and victimization as a result of their choices. Older partnered women also made use of acquiescent strategies while those of migrant origin among them chose indirect and individual strategies which prevented lasting change. Those with lower education levels within the latest category sometimes used more direct although equally damaging strategies in the

long run. Finally, women in all categories have at some point resorted to the police forces, showing that women's vulnerability to the most dramatic consequences of violence is widespread.

Regarding the processes involved in women's resistance strategies towards autonomy, most testimonies referred to domestic violence among older partnered women, suggesting that their extended life experience provides them with personal resources that guide them in their search for a better life. Those with lower education levels were more likely to withstand abuse until it involved extreme danger.

On the whole, older partnered women mostly chose strategies that derived from their spiritual identity, rather than to factors such as access to outside information, resources and support. Among them, older partnered women with low education often referred to the assimilation of Catholic notions on women as morally responsible for the family well-being and the significance of motherhood in this process. This issue extends to the role of solitude as a vehicle to connect with oneself, common among older partnered women with low education levels and of migrant origin. Finally, women in all categories resorted to support networks through family, friends and other community members.

The results from the two sections above points at the main issues relevant in women's paths towards autonomy, namely: the availability of adequate employment and education options, economic independence, access to support networks, outside resources and information, women's positive assimilation of Catholic gender notions and the ability to dedicate time and space to themselves. As concluded above, the existence of all such factors contribute to women's strengthened notion of self and gender solidarity.

In the final section of this chapter I linked the symbolic aspects of women's resistance to the economic structure embedded in women's experiences, focusing on the role of work in women's resistance strategies. It was shown that the kind of jobs that offer women the

elements to strengthen their sense of self and gender solidarity can in themselves constitute a vehicle for change. This is mostly achieved through the conditions referred above as well as those that allow women to exercise their creativity, leadership potential and initiative. The jobs that integrated more of these elements were found in the categories of informal work, voluntary work and work channeled by political support groups. However, work was most powerful as a vehicle for change among those women who already had began to make use of such resources toward increasing their self-steem and solidarity networks.

The availability of support systems through work was most valuable for women of migrant origin, and particularly so for partnered women with low education levels. Simultaneously, those among them who were older expressed their belief that work was a consequence of their spiritual faith, giving them the strength to use it productively in their lives. The issue of independence through work raised mainly among younger women, although those with higher education levels were more likely to use their independence as a vehicle towards autonomy.

The above shows that the key issue on whether work promotes autonomy points at women's interiorization of their role as workers at specific stages of their life and the role of the elements above in such process. For instance, in the fourth chapter I concluded that older partnered women on the whole lack some relevant resources in facing victimization, i.e. access to information, education resources and support networks. However, I have shown that eventually the positive nature of their spiritual beliefs and family values make them exercise extremely courageous choices with little or no external support, managing to interiorize their role as workers as an effective means towards autonomy.

Similarly, while young single women with higher education levels and born in Juárez showed stronger awareness of gender inequality and its impact on their life, they exercised less effective strategies against

sexual violence. Their economic dependence on their family and limited employment opportunities, added to their short life experience and the ambivalence of their developing gender identity rested effectiveness to the resources they had and prevented them from taking full advantage of their experience as workers.

This ambivalent picture shows that women's choices are flexible and fluid in nature, while closely related to the specific stage of their personal development in its interaction with social and economic forces. In sum, the key issue in the effectiveness of women's choices toward autonomy are encompassed in two major areas: the strengthening of women's sense of self and gender solidarity. Consequently, whether work promotes autonomy in women's lives depends on: 1. The extent to which women appropriate their role as workers towards a strengthened sense of self and gender solidarity and 2. Whether that particular employment option provides women with elements that strengthen these areas in women's lives. These findings have theoretical implications that will be fully discussed in the final conclusion.

According to the above, this chapter shows an optimistic picture, establishing autonomy as a real possibility in women's lives and exploring the different paths that lead towards it. Women's testimonies have shown that breaking the patterns of abuse proves to be one of the bravest and most difficult decisions in their lives, having to confront long-standing sociocultural constraints, resistance and painful choices. Considering the fact that this decision is often made by women who lack fundamental resources and options, it confirms the view of women as agents of their own lives, capable of positively transforming themselves and promoting lasting and creative change in their lives.

In the next and last chapter I present a case study to illustrate a specific community strategy and its effect on women's sense of self and gender solidarity. More concretely, through my experience as participant-observer of a community support group in the context of this

investigation, I analyze its dynamics and specific impact on women's potential for autonomy through work experience. Simultaneously, the results point at an alternative preventive action in the area of sexual violence that could improve the lives of women, men and their future families among low-income groups in the Northern Mexican border.

## 6. PROMOTING AUTONOMY: COMMUNITY STRATEGIES TOWARDS WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER SOLIDARITY - A CASE STUDY

In this chapter, my aim is to evaluate the relevance of community strategies in women's paths towards autonomy. For this purpose, I examine the experience of a feminist support group in the community under study and its impact on women's sense of self and gender solidarity. Since these two factors have been identified as key in women's process of autonomy, I consider this an adequate focus in measuring the impact of the group on women's potential autonomy.

Similarly, considering the relevance of spirituality as a constant theme in women's interpretation of their daily experiences, I have chosen a specific feminist group under the feminist liberation theology. Liberation theology seeks to reconceptualize exploitative discourses on femininity within the Bible and thereby improve gender awareness, women's sense of self and solidarity. Since women's interiorization of the Catholic discourse on gender has proved relevant in their potential for autonomy, their experience within a group that seeks to transform Biblical discourses towards gender equality is particularly significant for the purpose of this work.

In the first section of this chapter I outline some of the main issues describing feminist liberation theology. A second section includes the main conclusions derived from my participant observation of the group's dynamics. This is divided in three specific periods since the group's foundation in June 1994. A third and final question examines the impact of the group on one of its participants, focusing on its impact on autonomy as freedom from violence and the interiorization of her working role within these dynamics.

### Redefining "Woman": Feminist Liberation Theology versus the Traditional Theological Discourse

Támez (1989), in 'Through her eyes: women's theology from Latin America', refers to the story of the birth of Ce Acatl Topiltzin (51) to illustrate some of the main precepts governing feminist liberation theology in Latin America. According to her account and the legends on the beginnings of the Toltec culture, Mixcóatl was a powerful warrior among the Toltecs who gathered among his conquests the towns of Morelos, Toluca and Teotlalpan. The legend refers to Chimalman, a beautiful non-Toltec woman, who appeared before Mixcóatl during his conquest of Morelos. Chimalman stood naked before Mixcóatl after having dropped her bow and arrows, provoking such confusion that led Mixcóatl to fire his arrows at her. However, he failed in his attempt and while Mixcóatl prepared for further attack, she hid in the cave of a cliff.

Some time later, Mixcóatl went to look for her without success, for which reason he began to mistreat the women that surrounded him in Cuernavaca. However, they did not stand his abuse and went to look for her in order to put a stop to it. When Chimalman heard about the mistreatment suffered by her sisters, she looked for Mixcóatl and once again dropped her bow and arrows while standing naked before him. When Mixcóatl realized that his arrows would be of no use, he decided to surrender and become one with her. Their union led to the conception of Quetzalcóatl, the founder of the Toltec culture. (Támez. 1989)

The above is presented by Támez as the extended metaphor from a theological perspective by Latin American women, providing a framework that reflects their experiences in this area. Reflection on Latin American liberation theology constitutes a recent phenomenon, the first meeting taking place in Buenos Aires in October 1985. In this meeting, representatives of various Latin American feminist theologians discussed issues such as sexual violence, work discrimination and the generalized

negative attitudes towards women encountered in many areas, including theology. These issues do not only inform women's discrimination today, but still reflect Mixcóatl's encounter with Chimalman's nakedness. Following this analogy, women's participation in this meeting denounced what they felt as attacks from Mixcóatl, considering that poor women are doubly affected by his arrows. (Támez, 1989)

Similarly, when considering Mixcóatl's domination of his own land and people, Támez points at the influence exercised by traditional theological discourse in many areas of women's lives. According to Támez, theological discourse has imposed a dichotomous perspective of life which separates the abstract from daily events, thereby disempowering women. Liberation theology, on the other hand, does not separate the experience of God from daily oppression, including the relationships between men and women. Therefore, since liberation theology situates itself in a particular place and time and includes traditionally marginalized subjects in the theological tasks, i.e. women, indigenous peoples and blacks, it opens new and liberating interpretations of theological discourse. In this context, women are called to reclaim their likeness of God and discredit those interpretations that reflect their alleged inferiority. (Támez, 1989)

Regarding the above, Bidegain (1989) focuses on the notion of sexuality as expanded by the church, in order to present a historical view on the role of women in Latin America. Parallel to the argument followed in chapter three of this work, Bidegain denounces the exploitative discourse on women's sexuality portrayed by the church, affecting women's lives through the perpetuation of males' supremacy. In doing so, she concludes that the marginalization of women from public life has been carried out through their portrayal as minors and therefore in need of protection, and through the notion that women's only available vocations are those of virgin and mother.

The above has resulted in what she refers to as the 'male-supremacist exploitation' of devotion to the virgin Mary, who represents the synthesis of both aspects. Bidegain's proposal of a human and Christian concept of sexuality which liberates women includes the recognition of religious experience as neither feminine, masculine or asexual, but as human experience. Her proposal includes the redefinition of concepts which recapture the liberating strength of Jesus and Mary, both figures utilized in the past to justify patriarchy and women's marginalization. In doing so, Mary is portrayed by the author as free and responsible rather than passive and powerless in her decision to become Jesus' mother.

Women's identity was also a central theme at the Buenos Aires meeting, considered in relation to women's spiritual experience in their daily lives. Regarding this issue, Támez points at the invisibility of Chimalman before she stood naked before Mixcóatl, since only after she withstood his arrows was she given a name and her qualities were acknowledged. The unusual way in which Chimalman confronted Mixcóatl and overcame his attack, that is, by exposing her nakedness and inviting him to do the same and dare to know himself and become one with her, speaks of alternative means for creative power. For the popular women and the base communities of Latin America, nakedness represents a rebelliousness against the restrictions imposed by society, the church and theology. From these actions, liberation theology set about to reinterpret theological discourse from women's daily experiences of liberation, discrimination and God. (Támez, 1989)

Regarding women's search for their identity in this area, del Prado (1989) refers to poor women's suffering as deriving from their marginalized status in Latin America, which lead them to confront a series of 'deaths' in their life. These are often brought about by poverty, sickness, repression, tradition and their deepest femininity. However, their experience of deprivation often leads them to serve the

community, affecting positively their self-steem. Furthermore, communion with others' suffering helps women transcend their own pain, leading to joy and hope. The second characteristic proposed by the author finds its ally in the solidarity women share in their service to others, forging the courage and strength to keep going. This notion of strength derives from that intrinsic to manliness and reinforces women's own identity. However, this is not an easy task since in order to achieve strength women must overcome many fears which feed their marginalized condition. Finally, the value of community is stressed in order for women to become stronger.

The third and last characteristic described by del Prado is that of prayer as a catalyst of power for women. Therefore, prayer is a vehicle of thankfulness for all granted and of belief in the liberating powers received through God. Furthermore, the author stresses the need for women to be thankful in their prayers for their condition as women, as opposed to previous discourses of prayer which diminish the feminine condition.

In sum, Támez gathers the characteristics that define the objectives of feminist liberation theology as follows: 1. Unifying while bringing together different human dimensions, 2. Communitarian and relational, 3. Contextual and concrete, 4. Militant, 5. Marked by a sense of humor, 6. Filled with spirituality, 7. Free, 8. Oriented towards refashioning women's history.

The above constitute some of the main issues that construct the feminist liberation theology and inform the experience of the case study presented here. However, it should be acknowledged that although most of its principles guide the work of many base communities in Latin America, these are themselves subject to alternative influences which affect the way in which this philosophy is transmitted and the dynamics taking place in the process. The above was taken into account during the participant information undertaken as part of this study.

**'Mujeres de Esperanza y Fe': Working towards Personal Transformation and Community Development**

The support group in question was named by its members as 'Mujeres de Esperanza y Fe' (Women of faith and hope). The group has since its foundation been coordinated by a US nun and team member in charge of the planning process and the organization of team meetings, as well as the women's meetings. She also engages in leadership training and the communication of other special projects, serving both as theological educator and consultant. The treasurer of the group is also a US nun and team member who monitors the budget, keeps the accounts, responds to donors and participates in the planning process, the team meetings and the women's meetings. She also coordinates children's activities and refreshments.

The objectives of the group are centered in empowering the women members to overcome class, race and gender exploitation, listening to the needs of approximately twenty women who choose to be part of this project. Therefore, the group seeks to empower its members by addressing their voiced, personal, economic, health, education, faith and family needs. To accomplish this goal, a steering committee, a cooperative economic project, a women's prayer group and a series of popular educational lectures were begun in the summer of 1994. Furthermore, in order to develop leadership at the base community level, the group aims to create a consistent presence in the community through local support. The members of the group choose to be a part of it, name their group, participate in the weekly meeting and build a faith community. They are involved in the decision-making process which sets the agenda and schedules the programming. (Kustusch, 1995)

On a broader level, the project is based on a series of assumptions considered as foundational for systemic change: 1. The local is global. The project is a community-based effort which focuses on the particular

conditions of a colonia or community in one of the poorest border cities in North America. 2. Finding one's voice is primary in the development of systemic change. The project is directed toward empowering women to find their voice as the first step toward self-determination. 3. Systemic change cannot happen without leadership at the local level and therefore the project is directed toward leadership training. 4. The economically poor must determine the type of change they want, since this constitutes an empowerment project. The Adrian Dominican Vision Statement on the Economically Poor calls us to 'walk in solidarity' on 'a mutually salvific journey'. This project holds that the path to systemic change for persons who are destitute comes from them, from their cultural perspective, from their lived reality, from their shared wisdom as the poor of God. (Kustusch, 1995)

Having clarified the structure, strategies and objectives of the group, in the next section I will present the main conclusions derived from the analysis of the planning strategies, actions and themes tackled at the group meetings. The analysis is divided between three main periods, namely: July 1994-March 1995, November 1995-February 1996 and February-April 1997. The notes taken during each particular period are gathered in the Appendix II. In each period I consider the issues of women's empowerment and gender solidarity within a framework of power relations based on class and ethnic divisions. I view this factor as relevant both to the investigation process and the construction of knowledge and its effect is reflected in the dynamics of the group.

During the session taking place in September 23rd 1994, it was made clear in the planning meeting that achieving a sense of community and the development of an empowering relationship with God (and thereby a positive change in self-perception) constituted major objectives of the group. Since, according to the results derived from this study, these also constitute the main elements determining women's potential for autonomy, the group's dynamics offer an ideal ground to examine how these

factors are incorporated into the group's dynamics and the response received.

Regarding the specific issues leading to women's empowerment and solidarity it was agreed in the planning session that empowerment derived from women's acceptance of their reality at the emotional and intellectual levels, where prayer and meditation played a significant role in the process of consciousness raising. Simultaneously, it was considered that emphasis on creating community within the group, through the identification of common objectives and the development of joint projects, was crucial for achieving solidarity.

During the analytical process attention was given to the factors above, as well as to the impact of the differential aspects of class and race divisions among the group's members, since it is assumed that real solidarity and empowerment should entail overcoming such divisions for a common goal. On the basis of the above categorizations, I analyze women's responses to the exercises leading the sessions. In measuring their potential for empowerment through participation in the group, I encapsulate women's responses as significant to either personal empowerment or solidarity, using both the categorization above and any other relevant issues arising through their responses.

More specifically, I situate empowerment within those responses more strongly related to the development of women's sense of self. Among these, I include women's attitudes towards learning and other issues that can potentially enlarge their sense of self. For instance, I focus on the analysis and confrontation of women's reality and the use of mediation and prayer techniques that promote autonomy rather than dependence. On the other hand, I measure women's solidarity through reference to issues that potentially enhance women's sense of community and facilitate communication within the group, i.e. prayer, the sharing of experiences and other joint efforts. According to the above, it is assumed that

women's responses in these areas reflect the level of solidarity and empowerment experienced.

In the following section I offer a synthesis of the results derived from the data analysis. I will first evaluate both the positive and negative factors regarding the impact of class and ethnic divisions among the group members and their relevance for women's empowerment. The same method will be applied to the subsequent sections regarding women's autonomy through spirituality and the impact of the group on gender solidarity and empowerment.

#### The Relevance of Class and Ethnic Divisions in the Group's Dynamics

The positive factors derived from the analysis on the impact of class and ethnic relations on the group refer to women's positive perception of its dynamics, referred to as open, accessible and an adequate means for improving themselves. Simultaneously, the planning team responded effectively to women's requests, incorporating them into the group's dynamics. Simultaneously, they were ready to acknowledge and confront issues of power relations that could affect the success of the group. Some of the exercises included in the sessions were useful in conveying unity and counteracting power struggles. Particularly, non-verbal dynamics such as prayer and meditation, were women can relate on a more subjective level, facilitated this process. Simultaneously, the choice of prayers by the planning team was particularly powerful for encouraging empowerment through the use of subliminal means.

During the first evaluation meeting the women members mentioned the existence of a language barrier between them and the organizers, referred to as creating controversy on the group's power dynamics. Similarly, women expressed their wish to participate more actively in the group and include their opinions during the planning sessions. Although the planning meeting responded promptly to some of the women's requests, more

problematic issues such as those pointed above required more effort and planning. For instance, the way in which leadership was incorporated into the group brought up unexpected power struggles between the members, turning into an issue that needed intervention.

In general terms, the group dynamics during the first period offered the possibility to make conscious the need to work at various levels in order to improve the chances for success. At this stage, my interpretation points at the existence of valuable conditions which could reinforce communication and mutual empathy, since women members perceived the group as a valuable means for personal growth and shared some common goals with the organizers. Simultaneously, the organizers were open to women's suggestions and requests and took the necessary time and effort to address them within their possibilities. I consider the issue of leadership, the language barrier and the need to include women into the planning sessions as some of the key issues that needed to be addressed.

In the second period, women became more visible in the organization and dynamics of the group, supported by the organizers through various strategies, i.e. promoting active participation and discussion among women. Other positive development referred to the increasing independence of the group members, who were able to carry on with the meetings regardless of the organizers' presence. Furthermore, women became active in the decision-making process of group projects, reversing the initial power dynamics. The organizers gladly accepted these changes and were more sensitive to women's needs, as shown by their participation in promoting the piñata project. Leadership was increased to four women members and the organizers actively sought to make women's values the basis of the group's dynamics, promoting equality within the group.

On the other hand, experience during this period showed some of areas which needed further adjustments. For instance, women's response to the piñata project showed a specific set of values and way of life which was not anticipated by the organizers. On a different direction, women's

increased leadership could derive into somehow problematic dynamics within the group, were women leaders are perceived as carrying more status or authority. Finally, certain actions such as the distribution of aid among the community could potentially generate dependence among women members, reinforcing passive attitudes and helplessness. All of the above generated the need to explore in greater depth the implications of specific actions within the group.

In general terms, during this period there was a visible improvement in the way in which women related to each other and promoted actions for increased empowerment and participation. The areas that required further effort referred to issues of clashing values, the way in which leadership was incorporated into the group's dynamics and the implications of certain actions for women's dependence.

In the third period, both the organizers and group members seemed to have acquired greater consciousness of dependence patterns and class/ethnic barriers, as well as the ways to overcome them, leading to an increased ability to relate. Simultaneously, the organizers showed their effort to bring awareness about social injustice and the need for liberation. However, clashing values and perceptions still permeate the interaction dynamics between organizers and women members, as shown by the organizers' romantic vision of the community, clashing with women's perceptions. This could generate confusion and evasion patterns among women members. Simultaneously, although class barriers have, for the most part, been confronted and assumed, ethnic divisions remain painfully present. Finally, women's responses are still inconsistent in many areas, possibly influenced by their need for approval on the part of the organizers.

On the whole, the dynamics between organizers and group members throughout time reached very high levels of awareness and maturity. In order for this process to continue, both the organizers and women members need to be aware of the issues arising and ready to confront and work

through them. Among these, the organizers need to make a conscious effort to understand the way in which women view their world, while both groups need to acknowledge more fully race and ethnic divisions. Finally, women members need to keep working at improving their self-esteem so that their need for approval diminishes and allows for greater self-expression. Working on those fronts would improve immensely the relationships among group members and their capability to achieve mutual goals.

#### Spirituality, Empowerment and Self

During the first period and after reviewing the results of the first evaluation meeting, women expressed very positive views on their limited experience as group members. These reflected their developing sense of self while feeling more relaxed, as well as acknowledging their limitations and potentials. Similarly, women showed an intellectual appreciation of the social forces affecting their lives, as shown by their ability to separate the institution of the Church from God and their own personal faith. Consequently, they acquired the necessary tools to understand the processes affecting their lives. Finally, during this period women expressed an increasing ability to share painful issues. All of the above reflect women's potential for personal autonomy and increased self-esteem through sharing their faith and participating in the group.

The most problematic aspect I found in this first period refers to women's inability to integrate their intellectual views into their actual lives, since they showed a strong resistance to acknowledge inequality as part of their experience. I interpret this process as derived from the role of traditional gender values in structuring their lives, resulting in women's reluctance to confront both these values and their consequences.

However, on the whole women showed a great potential to develop self-esteem and greater freedom in their lives. Their openness and faith regarding the group's potential in this direction is reflected in women's increasing ability to analyze their reality. Simultaneously, they acknowledge their limitations and potential and are capable of sharing their painful feelings in a safe environment. However, specific actions should be implemented for women to bridge the gap between mental and emotional processes, in order to successfully integrate them into their life for increased well-being and autonomy. Whether direct or indirect measures are applied, they should confront women's traditional gender roles and offer alternative ones for improving their lives.

During the second period, women showed greater confidence in expressing themselves and question traditional views on religion and God. Simultaneously, during the second evaluation meeting, the group leaders expressed a development in their perception of the structures affecting gender inequality. Similarly, they referred to powerful elements of womanhood, opening up new avenues of self-perception, while expressing their contentment for the way in which gender relations had been changed in the latest years. Similarly, and confirming some of the conclusions arrived to in previous chapters, a qualitative difference raised between older and younger women's perceptions. The latter expressed the existence of specific priorities that confronted traditional gender stereotypes. Simultaneously, each group related to the figure of God in a different way, i.e. older women showed greater dependence in their relationship with God and divine figures, while younger women established a more individualistic perspective on this issue.

A major weakness of the group's dynamics lies in the reinforcement of women's identification with the orthodox views on masculinity and femininity that characterize divine images. Since these are the product of patriarchal interpretations of the Biblical texts, they reinforce gender inequality and patterns of victimization and abuse. Similarly,

women related positive words such as 'wisdom' to traditional gender roles, thereby justifying their condition and avoiding the painful aspects of their lives. Similarly, 'love' was perceived as unconditional to the point of loosing themselves, avoiding responsibility for their actions. At the same time, women are too ready to accept that gender inequality is a thing of the past, avoiding once again the painful issues which remain part of their lives.

In general terms, the issue of empowerment, spirituality and self seems by far the more complex and difficult to approach. Perhaps this aspect of women's autonomy is the most crucial, since it creates the basis for women's efficient action in relationships and achieving solidarity and empowerment. While women are beginning to open up to previously unknown aspects of their life and reality, they remain resistant to take a decisive step in confronting old patterns and generating creative change. On this issue, the organizers carry the responsibility to generate strategies to confront women and slowly break the barriers that prevent them from developing to their potential. The main difference between the first and second periods lies in the increasing number of instances where women express their subscription to traditional gender stereotypes and the limitations they create in their lives. This is valuable in that it provides the material for evaluation and the generation of strategies for change.

In the third period, the differential patterns between older and younger women regarding their religious identity became more clear, repeating themselves after several exercises. A major development refers to the use of indirect strategies of confronting women's traditional values, such as prayer and alternative interpretations of the Biblical texts. Such interpretations are also beginning to appear among women members (particularly younger ones), opening up new avenues of self-perception. Simultaneously, women's greater ease with expressing themselves is reflected in their more spontaneous performances during the

drama exercises. Finally, women's positive development of self is reflected in their capacity for defending their own space and goals regardless of outside intervention.

However, some issues still limit women's potential for autonomy in this area. For instance, when the subject of aggression was tackled, domestic violence was not mentioned either by the organizers of the group members, reinforcing the privacy attached to it. During the exercises, it became increasingly clear that women identify with traditional gender stereotypes that reinforce dependence and guilt. These views are related to Biblical situations such as Jesus' crucifixion, which women relate to sacrifice towards redemption and reinforce helplessness and inequality in their lives.

In general terms, it is unquestionable that there are overtime developments in women's sense of self, autonomy and potential for empowerment. This could be derived from the use of indirect techniques such as specific prayers, consistently pursuing common goals such as the building of the women's center and the development of projects in response to their needs. However, women still strongly identify with images and figures that reinforce the same roles that prevent them from achieving autonomy in their lives. Higher levels of confrontation may be necessary in order to transform women's attitudes and roles while promoting greater autonomy.

#### Towards Empowerment and Gender Solidarity

During the first period, women showed considerable enthusiasm about the group, placing emphasis on issues such as joint action for a common goal and the community's well-being. Simultaneously, women's identification with each other in terms of their life experience and common goals contributed towards the development of emotional openness and the sharing of feelings in an atmosphere of trust. The above contributed to a sense

of belonging within the group and increased the possibilities for gender solidarity. A major means of identification referred to women's Catholic faith, thereby the group's positive influence for the development of solidarity on that basis. Furthermore, exploring social issues and their impact on women's lives opened up new avenues of identification and the setting of common goals that further contributed to their sense of solidarity.

In the second period the same patterns remained and were further reinforced by the development of closer emotional ties among women, who often expressed their love and concern for one another. Simultaneously, women became increasingly aware of the significance of sharing a space of mutual support. Both these factors reinforced the patterns started during the first period, contributing to the successful development of solidarity within the group. Their increasing personal involvement also provided women with the opportunity to identify specific areas that affected the workings of the group, such as respect, developing awareness of 'the other' and personal responsibility. Furthermore, the exercise on gender issues showed the extent to which women identify in this area, which suggests the appropriateness of exploring these issues in greater depth in order to increase women's solidarity.

In the third and last period, a further step in establishing the group's identity and women's unity within it lied in the inclusion of praying rituals to mark the beginning and end of the sessions. The relevance of women's common faith as a means for mutual identification cannot be overrated and finally gives meaning and a sense of purpose to the group. Therefore, such rituals provided women with a greater sense of belonging and the strength to overcome limitations. Furthermore, women's enthusiasm in the construction of the new building reflected an increasing sense of belonging and mutual identification, as well as their view of the building as a symbol of consolidation and hope. In women's responses about the perception of their reality it was made clear that

the group is perceived as an alternative space for support, since other spaces are perceived as being closed to them. A significant development also referred to women's overcoming of the limitations encountered when tackling the development of common projects.

The above provides an example of community action towards women's empowerment and gender solidarity. The conclusions above provide a broad view of some of the main factors involved in consciousness raising through community political action in the context under investigation. It also refers to the major limitations in achieving this objective, showing that community support groups undergo a complex but energizing process of development and growth. In the final analysis I would conclude that the formation and development of such groups is key in women's ability to develop the conditions for autonomy in their lives, positively affecting gender power relations and promoting the well-being of their families and the community as a whole. Despite the obstacles encountered in the way, they open up a space for women to confront their marginalized status in various areas and exercise specific actions to overcome it, proving an effective strategy towards creative change. This conclusion will be illustrated through the testimony of a group member for whom the experience of participation in the group proved a turning point in her search towards autonomy and well-being.

### Conclusion

Considering the implications of the conclusions above, the overall picture points at the positive impact of women's participation of community support groups in order to increase their potential for autonomy. More specifically, the ideology of liberation theology proves particularly positive in this process, since women's testimonies in the last two chapters reflect the impact of Catholic gender notions in their daily lives. Furthermore, this type of strategy explores structural

issues such as gender inequality in seeking to transform women's lives, rather than limiting their scope to the nature of women's roles. Finally, the symbolic sphere constitutes a basic element of the group's dynamics, proving a powerful vehicle of transformation towards a strengthened sense of self and gender solidarity. The above provides an example of the kind of support networks and outside resources described in previous chapters as supporting women's positive assimilation of their working role as a vehicle towards autonomy.

On the whole, the greatest strength of this strategy lies in the use of rituals and the sharing of faith in ways that empower women to the point of counteracting some of its weaknesses, i.e. the difficulties in integrating the group's discourse with daily reality in the area of gender power relations. This issue and some of the other weaknesses described above can be prevented with the following strategies: 1. Training of community activists, psychologists and other professionals in the analysis of gender power relations, 2. Funding and cooperation between NGOs and government agencies, 3. Political campaigns that spread the impact of gender inequality in women's lives and the positive impact of support groups, 4. Surveys that assess women's specific needs and their cultural, economic and social conditions.

## Conclusion

The results derived from the present study, although exploratory, offer a wider vision of the processes involved in the impact of work on low-income women's autonomy in the Northern Mexican border. As other studies in the last decade, it transcends prior dichotomies within the NIDL debate, showing that women's autonomy is a fluid and often contradictory process relevant to women's life trajectories, their needs and limitations at specific stages of their lives (Tiano, 1995). Furthermore, the findings above lead to specific patterns that are relevant to and complement the debate on the impact of work on women's autonomy.

With regards to the exploitation perspective, several issues confirm its argument on the negative impact of women's domestic roles on their autonomy. For instance, it was shown that Catholic gender notions are negatively interiorized by women of all ages, clashing with their identity as workers and potentially leading to victimization. Simultaneously, the resistance of males to women's working role further perpetuates the possibility of abuse and victimization. Finally, the sexual dynamics in maquiladora employment reproduce patriarchal gender notions on women's sexuality, masked by supposedly 'liberal practices'. Added to the general 'bad press' of this type of job, it generates a clash between women's economic needs and the negative stereotypes associated with this type of employment. This leads to a negative assimilation of their role as workers and prevents the achievement of autonomy. The results above also confirm Tiano's conclusion on the impact of cultural factors in women's identities and the disempowering effects of women's attachment to their domestic role vis-à-vis male figures (Tiano, 1995).

However, the testimonies on women's strategies against violence for the most part contradicted a major premise of the exploitation perspective, namely the view of women workers as passive victims of

capitalism and patriarchy. Women's testimonies in this area showed the level of courage in their choices, often confronting opposition on many fronts while lacking the adequate outside resources. Although resistance has many shades and forms, one of the most powerful weapons in achieving autonomy related to elements that generated 'power from within', namely a kind of spiritual identity that questioned or transformed traditional notions on womanhood and counteracted outside constraints such as low education, migrant origin and domestic status.

Therefore, paying attention to the symbolic sphere in the processes that led women to freedom from violence illuminated areas of power that had remained absent from previous studies in this particular context. For instance, Tiano identified domestic role, education, income and number of children as the main variables influencing women's changing values towards autonomy. However, the present approach made clear that a key issue in assessing women's paths towards autonomy refers, not so much to the impact of traditional gender notions on women's lives or other external factors such as the above, but to the way these are interiorized and used in their daily lives.

Consequently, the way in which women interiorize their role as workers and whether this process leads to autonomy turns key in the question under investigation. In the final analysis, women's autonomy through work derived from their ability to assimilate their role as workers positively into their daily lives. The elements influencing this shift included those that promoted 'power from within' such as specific spiritual notions on gender identity that interacted with several external conditions, namely: economic independence, adequate employment options that provide the opportunity for creativity, leadership potential and initiative, support networks, education and access to information.

Some of the elements above confirm the integration perspective, such as the positive impact of education and employment options on women's autonomy. However, I found that these proved irrelevant to

freedom from violence when traditional gender notions are not questioned, challenged and transformed. Therefore, although external factors are significant for women facing victimization in their lives, I found that factors related to women's inner self proved more powerful in its ability to transform notions for their own benefit.

For instance, although older, low-educated women of migrant origin were more vulnerable to the dynamics of abuse than young single women with higher education, they were also the ones who were able to use their spiritual faith and identity to transform traditional gender notions for their own benefit. In this process, the lack of external resources did not constitute an obstacle for women's positive interiorization of their role as workers and the achievement of autonomy as freedom from violence. Similarly, I interpret the positive results of women's participation in the group 'Mujeres de Esperanza y Fé' from its focus on their spiritual identity as a vehicle for changing traditional gender notions. Its focus on specific techniques that paid attention to the symbolic as well as the practical aspects of women's lives while aiming to enhance women's sense of self and gender solidarity proved quite powerful and effective.

When relating the above to the impact of factory work on women's autonomy, it leads to the conclusion that maquiladora employment can provide some of the external elements above mentioned. For instance, maquiladora work was mainly valued for the social contacts it provided. Other factors that shaped satisfaction referred to the stability it offered to women new to the employment market and had few or no other options. Both the above elements can be considered valuable in women's decision to change their lives in specific situations of abuse and therefore confirm the integration perspective on the impact of maquiladora employment in women's consciousness and empowerment.

However, I further argue that the establishment of links with political community networks that promote women's self-esteem and gender solidarity is key to be able to take advantage of these elements and

achieve autonomy. In linking the findings above with past research on the issue of women's factory employment, consciousness and autonomy, they confirm the data derived from Staudt (1987) and Peña (1987, 1997) on the relevance of exposure to political organizations for women's increased awareness through employment participation.

Therefore, while the integration perspective refers to education and income as the main elements of maquiladora employment leading to autonomy, I focus on the symbolic aspects derived from women's experience on the job. In so doing, I specifically refer to the development of a sense of solidarity through emotional support networks with co-workers and employers. Similarly, the ongoing availability of maquiladora employment relative to other working options increments women's self-assurance when facing particularly vulnerable situations, potentially increasing their chances for future autonomy.

In sum, the elements that lead to autonomy outlined above underpin two major factors that I consider most significant in this area: the ability to use the specific conditions in their lives towards enlarging their sense of self and their solidarity with others. These two processes are also key in the present conceptualization of autonomy and empowerment, the former involving an individual process (self), while the latter uses autonomy as a vehicle for effectiveness in relation to others (empowerment). Simultaneously, both processes prove to complement and enrich each other in women's search for liberation and fulfillment in their lives.

The complexity inherent in this relationship and the processes involved reflects the notion that finding the 'right' path towards autonomy is a fluid, flexible and often contradictory process, transcending fixed rules and dichotomies. Consequently, although some of the findings in this work can be compared and related to the integration and exploitation perspectives, the final conclusion transcends the limitations imposed by them. Therefore, women's paths towards autonomy

prove to be a more complex, challenging and rewarding journey than it is often assumed.

In terms of the recommendations derived from the conclusion of this investigation, I refer to two specific areas: 1. The prevention of sexual violence among the population under study, and 2. The proposal of concrete measures within maquiladora employment policy to increase the chances of autonomy through work participation. Regarding the first area, the conclusions above point at the need for official institutions to pay closer attention to the gendered aspects of violence. More concretely, I refer to the implementation of preventive education programs within the school curricula at all levels that address the issue of violence from a gender perspective. Simultaneously, public policies should implement such programs within criminal institutions, hospitals, welfare institutions, maquiladora industries and other areas of social life where violence against women is relevant.

Similarly, higher education institutions should include the study of gender as part of the curricula of specific degree programs such as psychology, sociology, law, social work and medicine. I believe that including gender in the training of professionals in these areas would provide some of the necessary elements for adequate policy measures against violence. With regards to unofficial institutions, I recommend active collaboration between official and unofficial sectors to provide the necessary options for women suffering violence. At the same time, state policies should consider the promotion of community women's groups that address women's needs at the local level and increase their options for empowerment and gender solidarity. Another important area of support to community women's groups involves the promotion of funding for academic research in the area of gender to be applied within the concrete sphere of non-governmental organizations.

In terms of the second area addressed above, I focus on the need for maquiladora industries to consider the relevance of the gendered

aspect of violence in the lives of their workers and the production process as a whole. While changes in the negative image of maquiladora workers can be promoted through adequate programs within education institutions, such images are further reinforced within the factory. Issues of sexual exploitation and the existence of patterns that increase women's vulnerability to violence and abuse, such as sexual harassment and the promotion of beauty contests as part of the factory dynamics, also play a part in the bad press of maquiladora industries and their female workers. Simultaneously, they diminish women's effectiveness as workers, the social value of their participation in the production process and increase their vulnerability to sexual violence within and outside the factory, dramatically affecting the quality of their lives and that of their families.

Regarding the recommendations outlined hereby in order to prevent the consequences of inadequate maquiladora policies in this area, I point at the need to implement adequate policies regarding sexual harassment in the work place. Such measures should address the enforcement of policy within the factory that aim to protect women from this crime and the consequences derived from it. Simultaneously, and according to the results derived from this study, I consider that maquiladora industries should redefine the issue of leisure within the factory, promoting activities that reinforce women's self-esteem and gender solidarity.

Considering this issue, I view maquiladora industries as potentially effective means of strengthening women's solidarity and empowerment within the factory. Since most women workers refer to the social aspect of the job as one of the most satisfying, maquiladora industries could use this factor to promote the development of programs that can benefit its image and that of its workers. Among these I recommend the following: 1. The implementation of cultural activities that address issues relevant to the lives of the workers, 2. The provision of specific options within the factory for women in need of

counseling or support, 3. The organization of social activities that promote gender equality and constructive action in this area and 4. The development of links between maquiladora industries and community groups that address prevention and effective action in the gendered areas of work participation, household relations and the use of leisure.

The above addresses issues that facilitates the transformation of cultural values regarding gender roles and stereotypes. It also promotes measures that reaffirm women's identity within their own cultural and social context, reinforcing those elements that offer alternatives for growth and empowerment. Consequently, another contribution of this work is found in its reference to the symbolic aspects of women's subordination and vulnerability to violence within and outside the household, as well as the way in which cultural beliefs can be used as effective means for resistance and empowerment in this area. In doing so, I have shown how women's conceptualization of their role as workers can be transformed to derive into women's greater participation in the developing process of their countries and an altogether better quality of life for them, their families and future generations of workers.

## NOTES

1. Suggested by Teresa de Laurentis in an informal talk at Pembroke Center 1984-85. A discussion and application of this concept is found in Elly Bulikn, Minnie Bruce Pratt & Barbara Smith 'Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism', Brooklyn, N.Y.: Long Haul Press, 1984.
2. The liberal feminist perspective on gender and development views women's subordination in capitalist societies as a deviation from the general norms of equality and justice. Emphasis is given to legal measures such as the vote, equal rights amendments and attitudinal strategies. At the ideological level, it shares many assumptions with modernization theory and the human capital school of neoclassical economics (Tiano, 1984) and underdevelopment is seen as caused by traditional values and social structures. On the opposite side, progress derives from the diffusion of Western values, capital and technology, necessary to spread the benefits of modernization to women (Lewis, 1969; Bhatt, 1976).
3. A combination of the liberal feminist approach and the modernization theory of development.
4. A growing proportion of families below the official poverty line are headed by women alone due to economic hardship caused by recession and cuts in public spending. The proposed treatment refers to public assistance and the provision of training that will enable women without skills to become better providers.
5. Marginalization theorists argue that women in precapitalistic societies were integral to subsistence production, a role eroded by industrial capitalism (Tinker, 1976). Their prior status afforded them some personal autonomy and influence at the decision-making level within their communities. With the arrival of private property, women lost their access to the land (Newman, 1981). Colonial administrators viewed women in terms of their reproductive roles and access to cash cropping and wage jobs were often available only to men (Blumberg, 1981). A new system expanded whereby women were relegated to the domestic and subsistence modes. In the urban sector, women's lack of education limited their access to formal posts, while discriminatory practices reserved the best jobs for men (Papanek, 1976).
6. Faulkner and Lawson (1991) examine the changing nature of work in Latin America and women's incorporation into paid employment. Their approach combines labor market segmentation theory with a feminist approach, providing an empirical analysis of women's and men's relative occupation position across economic sectors and through time in Ecuador. Their findings address the differentiation in women's and men's occupations in terms of control over economic resources and control over the labor process, which worsens over time. Patriarchy is therefore seen to extend over state institutions, influencing recruitment patterns.
7. Seccombe, 1974; Barrett, 1980; Delphy, 1984; Firestone, 1974; Acosta-Belén & Bose, 1995.
8. According to this view, women's oppression is tied to the monogamous nuclear family, the creation of a class-based, capitalist society (Etienne & Leacock, 1980). This family structure perpetuates capitalism and patriarchy through its gender division of labor, while it assures a labor force for the capitalist mode, making women dependent and providers of 'free labor' (Rohrlich-Leavitt, 1975). Consequently, when women enter the working force, they are subordinated to the dual systems of capitalism and patriarchy.
9. In this context, Lugo examines the cultural implications of the term 'barra' within the maquiladora slang, initially a metonymic transformation of the metaphor 'huevón', since both terms mean 'lazy' (Turner, 1987). Mexican males to talk about machismo or express

aggressiveness and/or courage regarding other males also use 'Huevón'. Machismo in this context constitutes a culture complex, i.e. if a woman were imposing herself on her husband, he would be referred by his friends as not having 'huevos' (testicles) to talk back to her. Lugo's analysis is revealing to the extent that it explores the ways in which the 'macho' ideal of competitiveness and aggression is recreated through the use of language inside the factory.

10. Garcia & de Oliveira (1994) describe some key elements in the 'survival strategy' definition: some authors refer it to the most impoverished sectors of society, using 'reproduction strategies' when referring to other social sectors (Margulis, 1989). Others consider it applicable to short-term strategies and unexpected events in daily life (González de la Rocha, 1986). The economic participation of the household members is a key issue in the use of the term, although various authors include other aspects, i.e. households that are not self-sufficient channel part of the domestic consumption for self-use, domestic work and the extra-domestic exchange nets (García, Muñoz & Oliveira, 1982; González de la Rocha, 1986). Some authors introduce conflict and violence as part of the 'strategy' concept and often concentrate on women's role in daily reproduction (González de la Rocha, 1986).

11. Selby et al. (1990) argue that if 'survival' is an analytic term, implying that people are able to participate fully in the cultural life of their community, this is what people are unable to do in urban Mexico: '...as the point of our book ... is to show that people are not surviving, are unable to make decisions, and are even more incapable of exercising sufficient control over their lives to formulate strategies, it at least behoves us to be careful in the use of these terms' (Selby et al., 1990, p.70).

12. In Third World countries the number of families where women constitute the main income providers has increased. This partly derives from a weakening of traditional relations, which regulated income transfers from men to women and children, parallel to the process of economic development in certain areas (Folbre, 1988). The economic crisis and the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) imposed by international finance institutions have reinforced this pattern, affecting negatively the employment opportunities available to men, and reinforcing women's increasing responsibilities (Selby et al., 1990).

13. This assumption closely resembles the New Household Economics, where the household decision maker acts in the best interest of the family members (Hart, 1978). Another problem pointed out by Wolf lies in the assumption that the individual decision maker is a male, which the face of the latest structural changes in peripheral societies turns contradictory (Folbre, 1988; Elson, 1991).

14. Farringdon, 1980, 1991; Wilson, 1983b; Gelles, 1972; Strauss, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Eisenhower, 1969; Wamalwa, 1985; Zaalouk, 1987; Shamim, 1987.

15. ISIS International, case study from Chile, Hospital survey.

16. Akande, J.O., Case study in Nigeria, Nigeria Social Service.

17. Han, W., case study from China, Shanghai, Criminology and Crime Investigation Department, East China Institute of Law and Politics.

18. Prosecutors tend to act as mediators in trying to make a woman drop her complaint or divert her case to a civil court. Mediation can have both negative and positive consequences. On its negative side, the assailant is not punished while the victim is required to modify her behavior, while remaining vulnerable to further attack. However, it can provide an adequate answer in certain societies where it is a part of the cultural structure, which provides the basis for showing the man that his violence is unacceptable (Wu Han, case study from China; Long, 1986). (UN Report, 1989)

19. The historical roots of race and gender inequality inherent in the

colonization process of many developing countries continues to generate victimization patterns that increasingly marginalize low-income and indigenous women.

20. Salaff (1981) found that industrialization may broaden women's boundaries for negotiation within a kinship system where they already have a position and certain rights. In a highly patriarchal kinship system, however, industrial employment and wage earning does not seem to chip away at the family power structure or let women in (Salaff, 1981).

21. In opposition to the often rational and individualistic conception of autonomy in the West, we find instances of allegedly 'subjective' and 'irrational' behavior from women in the Third World exercising resistance through oracles and magic (Behar, 1991).

22. Research on job satisfaction reflect the integration and exploitation perspectives, showing inconsistencies and differing theoretical approaches and methodologies (Tiano, 1995). It is argued that the reason for women to stay at their jobs is to provide for their families, and not for the satisfaction it might give them (Fernández-Kelly, 1983b; Grossman, 1979; Elson and Pearson, 1981; Ong, 1983; Fuentes and Ehrenreich, 1983; Ward, 1988). On the opposite direction, Stoddard (1987) and Seligson and Williams (1981), showed that employees felt respected and were satisfied. In Ciudad Juárez, Young (1987) showed the prevalence of both positive and negative attitudes towards factory work, where most employees responded positively on the treatment received and the salary level. However, there was ambivalence regarding management-worker relations. A subgroup of 134 women who had been exposed to consciousness-raising activities was highly critical of their jobs. On labor turnover and job satisfaction most recent research confirms the integration perspective. However, it also shows that satisfaction was mostly related to the non-economic aspects of the job, i.e. involvement, self-confidence, ability to relate and independence (Tiano, 1995).

23. Tiano (1995) showed that women's career trajectories resulted from their reproductive status, internalized cultural norms and employment choices, rather than merely financial reasons. Furthermore, when measuring the relationship between employment temporality, commitment and domestic status, Tiano (1995) found that cultural influences shaped women's life experiences, which played a part in women's opinions of financial need. This contradicts past assumptions on homogenous attitudes towards work while the interconnections between cultural influences and women's life experiences, i.e. identity as workers and housewives, generated ambivalence and conflict regarding women's sense of self (Tiano, 1995).

24. They point at women's vulnerability in terms of lack of support from their partners (Tiano, 1995). The relevance of the symbolic domain in women's day-to-day experiences is further evidenced through Tiano's conclusion on job satisfaction, pointing at the significance of the non-economic advantages of work.

25. Rivera, 1983; Aramburo, 1984; Hiernaux, 1986; Camberos & Barojas, 1989; Guillén, 1990, Sánchez, 1990.

26. Ciudad Juárez inhabitants.

27. In 1960 the total urban area covered 2,230 hectares, turning into 4,588 hectares 10 years later. In the 80s decade, the urban area grew from 8,290 to 9,005 hectares. Regarding land distribution, in 1970 88% of the land covered residential areas, 5% covered industrial zones and 8% was directed for commercial use. In 1990, the distribution of the urban area did not show any significant changes with the exception of the area destined for commercial activities, which decreased by half (Negrete, 1990). Simultaneously, agricultural areas lost approximately 1,385 hectares since 1960.

28. When female heads were asked whether they engaged in remunerated activities, the percentage of affirmative responses was higher in Tijuana

than in the rest of the country, corresponding to 75% compared to 60% in Mexico. Salaries were also higher in Tijuana, where only 7.6% of female heads received a minimum wage. In Mexico, on the other hand, 63.8% of women providers received such low wages. Various authors agree on the specific characteristics of the labor market in Tijuana as accounting for this difference (Bowning & Centeno, 1993; Garcia & Oliveira, 1993c).

29. The mixing of races as a consequence of colonization in Mexico.

30. 'La chingada' is literally translated as 'the fucked one' and constitutes one of the most versatile words in Mexico, although when used as an adjective for women (particularly one's mother), it has a highly discriminating tone.

31. The New Testament gathers a collection of 27 documents called 'books', written in the second half of the 1st century and directed towards Christian communities in the Mediterranean.

32. In most confessionals, sinful sexual behavior was reviewed through the study of the sixth commandment, holding the key to the discourse on sexuality since the 17th century. Fr. Gabino Carta S.J. provides an explanation of lust in 17th century confessionals as follows: lust could manifest in seven forms: simple fornication, adultery, incest, rape, abduction, sins against nature and sacrilege. Fornication referred to two unrelated single persons engaging in the sexual act without being married. Adultery took place when at least one the persons involved in an unsanctioned relationship was married while incest referred to a situation where a couple were related to each other in the first or second degree. Rape was the forcing of sex on a female and abduction her forced seizure. Sins against nature could be committed by masturbation, homosexuality and engaging in sex with an animal.

33. Supporting this point, Gutiérrez (1991) argues that in colonial New Mexico an exaggerated moral code for personal behavior based on honor developed as a consequence of lacking social and legal institutions in charge of the social order. Added to the exploitative class and race relations prevailing in this area, it led to the maintenance of order through the establishment of social codes on personal and family honor. Consequently, values attached to honor-status and honor-virtue seem to have developed simultaneously during the 18th century in colonial New Mexico.

34. This issue reappears in a study that explores the impact and characteristics of violence against women in rural Tenango during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (González, 1987). González examines a number of reported incidents leading to the conclusion that mostly higher-class women carried out indictments for domestic violence, confronting the contradictions of the legal system on this issue: i.e., the law punished crimes against property more severely than those against integrity, while unconsummated rape received the same penalty as stealing a corn worth 1 Peso. Rape required proof for the enforcement of punishment and therefore most accusations did not reach the legal system. Regarding domestic violence, it required the law on inflicted injuries to present a demand, since no specific law on domestic violence existed.

35. AGN, 1785, 1795 in Atondo, 1992.

36. AGN, 1785 in Atondo, 1992.

37. AGN, 1795 in Atondo, 1992.

38. AGIS (Audencia de México) [Mexican audience], 1766 in Atondo, 1992.

39. AGN, INQ 765, exp. 15 in Behar, 1989.

40. Calderón de la Barca visited women's prisons, where he made reference to the diversity of social classes among the recluses who were incarcerated mostly due to having murdered their husbands. At the time Mexico ex-governor's wife was paying a sentence for murdering him.

41. Rich women took lessons in reading and Christian doctrine, while poor women engaged in food preparation and other activities ascribed to their condition - Calderón de la Barca.

42. *Maria Luisa Mendoza, De Ausencia*. Mexico, Joaquín Mortiz, 1974.

43. *Mendoza* (1974) makes incest explicit through father-daughter, brother-sister, cousins and mother-son relationships. Vicens (1982) also approaches the issue when Luis Alfonso makes love to her mother's lover. Furthermore, there is a glimpse of fundamental change in the work of Neymet, Petterson, and Mansour, although their protagonists still show a marked degree of anguish (Job, 1988).

44. A common cultural belief among Mexican men of certain sectors, where the person playing the active role in a homosexual relationship maintains his masculine identity.

45. The above is further confirmed by statistical data, showing that lower-class populations have increased their risk to contract AIDS in the latest years (Boletín Mensual de SIDA/ETS, 1994).

46. Feminine chastity and honesty as well as the perpetrator's chance of forgiveness if he agreed to marry the victim.

46. Term referring to men who ascribe to the traditional notion of masculinity in the Mexican context.

47. Jargon for 'maquiladora'.

48. This procedure has been almost eradicated since 1997, as a result of intensive campaigning on the part of local feminist groups.

49. This has been extensively documented as a major precipitating factor in the killings mentioned in chapter 3 through various TV documentaries and similar reports.

50. Both maquiladora employment and sex work share widespread assumptions on the alleged 'nature' of the women occupying these jobs. Furthermore, maquiladora and sex work are widely perceived as going hand-in-hand, due to the limited salary offered by the former and moral moral considerations regarding women's appropriate roles.

51. The priest of the Toltec, god of life later known by the name of Quetzalcóatl, the god he later served.

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## APPENDIX I

### Interview guide

## 1. Introduction

Personal and professional motives for research and implications. Stress confidentiality.

## 2. Background data

Age  
Marital status  
Number and age of children  
Work status  
Education level  
Origins

### 3. Family history

Relationship with parents - progress overtime  
Perceptions on parents' relationship - progress overtime  
Family hierarchies

#### 4. Sexual relationships

Partners and patterns overtime  
Length of relationships and reasons for separation  
Perceptions on quality and satisfaction  
If unmarried, attitudes towards marriage, hopes and plans

## 5. Education

Level of encouragement from parents  
Special interests (fulfilled?)  
Limitations (sources)  
Choices  
Religion

## 6. Employment

Reasons for starting employment and age  
Nature of employment record  
Patterns of employment record - length of time in each job  
Satisfaction levels - financial/personal  
Stability levels  
Stress levels  
Perception on employers' attitudes  
Unions and/or informal workers's networks  
Perceptions on women and work

## 7. Latest relationships

#### Perceptions on nature of the relationship/marriage:

- Emotional factors: security level  
trust level

communication level  
relationship with children  
violence  
sexuality - contraception

- Economic factors:  
housework share  
children's share  
financial contribution to household  
personal access to resources  
participation in decision making

## 8. Support networks

- Official:  
police forces  
state provision  
violence reports - if not why?  
trust level - attitudes on police response  
information level on law and/or state  
provision and access  
attitudes on government provision

- Unofficial:  
availability/access to women's NGOs  
experience with women's NGOs  
information on services and access  
neighborhood networks and experience  
family networks and experience  
trust level - attitudes on feminism

### Interview codes

Women's testimonies are preceded by specific codes that relate to their marital status, age, place of origin and number of children. An example would be: 1. D34\*, 2. Cd.Mad., 3. 4ch.

Below are the specific meanings of each of these codes:

#### 1. Marital status:

A: single and childless, living with her family  
B: single mother living alone  
C: single mother living with her family  
D: married/partnered with children and living with partner  
E: Widowed/divorced with children

\* The number following the letters above refers to the women's age: i.e.,  
A15 = single, childless, 15 year old living with her family.

#### 2. Place of origin:

Dur: Durango  
Mich: Michoacán  
Chih: Chihuahua  
J: Juárez  
Lagos: Lagos de Morelia  
Zac: Zacatecas  
Torr: Torreón  
Cd.Mad.: Ciudad Madero  
Guan: Guanajuato

#### 3. The 3rd and final code (Number-ch) refers to the number of children.

## APENDIX II

### Notes on chronological review of planning strategies, actions and themes (first period).

#### Evaluation and planning, sept. 23rd. 1994

The initial evaluation and meeting took place soon after its foundation in July 1994, aiming to assess the progress of the group and the extent to which it responded to the needs of women in the community. The steering committee gathered in a previous meeting in order to establish the main goals of the session on September 23rd 1994, which were summarized as follows:

1. The most important elements of the group's mission were outlined as follows: to share problems and experiences, to find mutual support, to accept and confront conflicts in a positive light, to create a community inside the group, to identify common objectives and develop projects, to analyze our reality, to learn from one another, to spend time together, to get to know the people around us, to learn to listen, to learn to relax and meditate, to participate in the group.
2. A second step centered in developing a consciousness of our reality as women, through letting go of fear and opening up our minds.
3. Following from the above, the group sought to identify paths of liberation.
4. The elements above were set to enable physical and spiritual growth and the ability to extend ourselves to others. Physical growth would entail a betterment in the social and physical conditions of the community, while spiritual growth would bring self-esteem, power and spiritual strength.

The session on September 23rd was significant for assessing the development and potential success of the group's objectives, since women members would have, for the first time after three months, the opportunity to express in a formal session their opinion on the group's organization and dynamics. Its goal centered in the evaluation of the group's development in order to respond more appropriately to women's needs.

#### Questions asked:

1. Women's impression of the group
2. Positive things of the group
3. What can be improved
4. What women have learnt
5. What women expect
6. Themes women are interested in and would like to know more about

#### Women's responses:

1. Women felt more relaxed and didn't feel as affected by their problems, expressing their interest and hope, i.e. in improving their self-esteem and the well-being of women in the community. Women saw the group as the locus where they could identify with each other and felt eager to learn many things. Women perceived other members of the group as open and willing to express their feelings and discuss their problems, acknowledging their need for a sense of community. There was a generalized interest in the themes tackled during the sessions and they

welcomed the opportunity to leave their homes for a while, feeling they could forget about their problems and relax while the meetings took place. They also found that the group provided women with the necessary elements to improve themselves and reach their goals. The way questions were articulated were perceived by women as open and accessible, facilitating their participation in the group. They also felt praying was important. Finally, mutual respect and participation were qualities perceived among the members and participants in the group.

2. Women chose the following elements of the group's dynamics as particularly positive: Prayer, relaxing techniques and meditation, the possibility to integrate their mind, heart and body with their spirit, the accessibility for women to learn in a group setting, women's joint participation, the qualitative nature of the subjects chosen for women's development and women's solidarity.

3. Women's perceptions on what can be improved: Women saw the need to continue the group work with everyone's participation in order to reach a common goal, i.e. particular projects which will respond to their needs. Another proposition involved the elaboration of an work agenda for the group. Women felt the need on their part to move beyond their fear to express themselves as well as their perceived differences in order to feel equal. Women expressed concern about unequal participation in the group, feeling that specific women participated more often than others. They were also frustrated by the short period of time given on each session and found difficulty in communicating with some of the members, since some women did not speak Spanish.

4. Women claimed to have learnt about sharing experiences with other people, about trusting each other, tolerance in reaching a common goal, about their own bodies and how to relax and how women share common values throughout the world. They expressed having learnt about loving truth and a sense of community among women, felt freer both in their lives and their spirit and that they needed to love and accept themselves and their bodies in order to accept others. They also learnt about the extent of their insecurities and limitations when trying to participate in the group. In this process, they learnt about mutual support and sharing each other's stories, as well as about the strength and perseverance shown by women. Finally, they acquired a clearer picture of their daily reality.

5. Women's expectations were placed on learning through the Bible in order to put it into practice in their daily life. They also expected to transmit their knowledge and cooperate with other women in this process, learning to help one another. They expected to grow in number and to have access to more subjects and themes. Another expectation was related to their wish to share more time with other families. Generally speaking, they expected to learn more, to increase their participation among women in the group, to feel more united, to be more constant in attending the group and to learn from one another. They expected to one day be able to plan themselves the objectives and development of the group.

6. The subjects proposed by women as future themes were as follows:

Personal problems, relationship with children and learning how to treat them, communication and personal relationships, how faith helps us with the everyday problems, about guilt and how to liberate from it, self-love and self-esteem, responsibility for ourselves, the family, hygiene in women, cancer prevention, hypertension, diabetes, nutrition, education on drugs and drug-addiction, AIDS, planting, learning how to read, how to handle an angry husband and how to have control over one's self.

## **October 1994**

In early October 1994 an agenda was constructed in order to specify the themes and activities scheduled for the following 6 months. The agenda read as follows:

7 October: meeting on personal problems  
21 October: meeting on personal responsibility  
28 October: talk on the meaning of being a 'woman' in the community  
4 November: meeting on faith and life  
18 November: identifying who are the women in the community (meeting)  
2 December: talk on communication  
9 December: meeting on guilt and strategies to cope with it  
16 December: Christmas gathering  
January: learning to make handcrafts  
            meeting on personal liberation  
            talk on women's health  
            talk on anger

Aside from the agenda shown above, planning meetings were scheduled once a month.

## **2 December 1994**

In the communication talk, participation was very active and enthusiastic on the part of women, particularly from those who have belonged to the group for a while. Their sense of belonging derives into self-assurance when communicating with the group. Ramona, an unusually quiet member, seemed much more eloquent and generally happy, although the feeling is generalized. During an exercise where women were encouraged to talk to each other and share their feelings, women expressed their feelings in a relaxed manner and seemed happy and peaceful after talking to each other.

At a later stage during the meeting, the women were asked to perform a series of plays meant to reflect their daily experiences. At this moment, women's tension was felt in the type of questions directed at the leaders concerning their performance. After a short time, however, their performance became more fluid. It was noted that women's performance were not reflective of their reality and when the roles they were asked to play involved the confrontation of deeply ingrained values regarding gender roles within the family, women showed resistance through their silence and said they couldn't think of any situations of unfairness within the family dynamics.

Young women seemed more willing to discuss these issues, i.e. Rosa broke the silence and mentioned the different treatment received by men and women within the family. She initially mentioned the fact that she does what she wants in her home but has seen unfair treatment in other families. However, she soon retracted from this statement and admitted not having enough freedom. She also referred to sexual attitudes, stating that nowadays we live in different times and women can have sex before marriage, adding that she had seen submission in her home and didn't want the same treatment for herself.

On the meaning of Christmas, women related this festivity to the family and saw it as an opportunity to be together with relatives. María pointed out that Christmas was a sad festivity for her, because her family was not united. However, this Christmas her brother would be with her and she shared her feelings of sadness and joy with the group, which supported her. She finally thanked the group for being there. Isabel pointed out

that this Christmas were particularly special to her, since she felt closer to the church than in other years, when Christmas had a more material meaning. To her, Christmas means sharing.

### 13 January 1995

Theme of the session: the widow of Sarepta - without name or bread.

Questions:

1. Who are the characters in the story?
2. What do they do?
3. What value do they each have?
4. In what sense are they valuable to God? Why does he choose them?
5. Between us, in our community, are there people with those values?

Answers:

1. Elias, Yave and the widow
2. Yave - spirit  
Elias - messenger  
Widow - faith
3. Values:  
Yave - inspiration  
Elias - teaching  
Widow - faith/protection
4. Love

- While giving the answers, two participants in the group began to criticize the authorities of the church. Rosa pointed out that everyone is disposable. Sonia stated that Sor Amanda is a victim of the church as an institution.

5. According to the women, the presence of God remains important in the community, although it is not felt within it. Women see themselves as messengers. Regarding faith, there was a positive response in terms of the influence of the group on women's faith, but they mentioned the problems derived from lack of information and the intromission of other sects. Women saw domestic work as an obstacle in the exercise of their faith, since they had to prepare children's food and they didn't collaborate or help to clear the dishes. They also attributed people's lack of solidarity to the influence of sects, added to problems such as poverty, lack of services and priests. Women appreciated the labor of people like Frankie, who has spread good values in the community. Women identified with the figure of the widow in the passage of the Bible, since she was devalued, repressed and suffered discrimination.

- When women were asked to thank God for one of their good qualities, most women thanked him for being women or mothers, but didn't refer to a particular quality. Others forgot or ignored the purpose of the exercise and prayed or made a wish to God regarding a family member or friend.

### 20 January 1995

Analysis of women's cotidianity

Interview to Dr. Sanjuana

...This morning I want to tell you about a true story which happened in Ciudad Juárez, it happened to a woman, my sister... she was an accountant, she worked as an accountant in a maquiladora... she had worked for this company for approximately 18 months and was 27 and

single, she had finished her degree and was working as accountant supervisor... she was in charge of the payrolls... but all of a sudden the plant's authorities decided that she had to travel, that she had to make some trips to other town where the company had another maquiladora... it takes about an hour or an hour and a half to get there and the road is very dangerous... my sister was sent in the company of a security guard but with no protection equipment such as a radio, a gun, a telephone... nothing... they had to make that trip to pay approximately 6,000 Pesos to the workers in the other maquiladora... they left approximately at 9 a.m. from Ciudad Juárez and never reached their destination... between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. the families and the police were notified of their disappearance... finally a field worker found the car completely burnt to the point that it could not be recognized and the corpse of my sister and the man who was with her... four years have gone by and the Mexican police have not clarified anything, there are no suspects or detentions and when the maquiladora had to respond to the victims' families they responded they would pay for the funeral expenses and advised them to apply for social security benefits for the loss of these two workers... which left the family of the victims with a pension of approximately 800 Pesos per month... when trying to establish the maquila's responsibility for the attack they responded that they had no responsibility over it, since these two people were adults... in order to silence the allegations, the maquiladora made an offer referred to as 'humanitarian negotiation' independent from the law, offering 3,000 Dollars to each member of the most direct families... my parents didn't accept it, but the widow of the other victim did... we considered that the money managed by these companies and the work programs are designed and conceived in US and therefore this case could be handled under US law... fortunately about 10 months ago the US court accepted the application of the US law in this case, which is still in process... we don't want the death of my sister to be ignored, we want to bring this out into the open, we want the laws to be changed, to make arrangements so that the workers are not exposed to this type of risks...

After listening to the recording of the interview, women were encouraged to comment on any of the aspects surrounding the described event, leading to the characterization of three dividing categorisations gathering related issues to beliefs, power and money as follows:

Beliefs	Power	Money
Consumerism	negligence	theft
disrespect for the worker	submission	lack of infrastruct.
submission to the boss	corruption	dependence
gender inequality	image	economic
respect to the worker	blackmail	protection
braveness	humiliation	law corrupt.
lack of education	inequality	survival
fatalism		submission

#### Observations during women's participation:

All answers came from the group of women, although most answers came from the women who most often participate. There was a subtle tension between Rosa and Isabel that both wanted to give the same answer (both leaders). A man joined the group for the first time. He remained silent but listened carefully. His wife didn't speak, but she doesn't normally do. One of the oldest members made a point as to how 'the rich' (referring to the maquiladoras) use their power to 'keep the poor in their place' using

humiliating strategies (referring to the money offered to the Mendoza family in exchange for their silence). She added that this happens regularly in all spheres of life (as she had experienced it). The meeting ended on a positive note, when all members agreed that concientization, solidarity and courage were important elements in the fight against the problems discussed.

### 3 February 1995

Theme: guilt

The women's comments showed how difficult it was for them to stop feeling guilty and responsible for the happiness of their children. They showed difficulty in accepting that they feel guilty when told off for doing something out of love.

### Agenda January-March 1995

20 January	meeting on the analysis of our reality
27 January	talk on women's health
3 February	meeting on how to handle guilt
10 February	meeting on handcrafts
24 February	talk on alcoholism
10 March	meeting on how to be happy and have friends
17 March	talk on options against abuse
24 March	meeting on how to handle anger

During the meetings we practised a meditation technique which involved the repetition of phrases such as:

'God has made me an intelligent woman, valuable and strong'  
'I deserve God's love and that of others and others love me'  
'God gives me the power to change my life for the better'

Other prayers included the women's 'Padre Nuestro' (our father) which read as follows:

'Our father on earth as well as in heaven, all the women in the community want to sanctify you, make a reality of your reign of justice, equality and peace, give us the bread of hope, of organization, of joy and liberation, forgive all our silences and cowardness in vindicating our rights as women, forgive our society for oppressing women, for abusing them, marginalizing them, for not recognizing their value, don't let us fall into the temptation of oppressive power, don't let us remain isolated from society, because we are conscious that only united and with your strength, God, will achieve a new society' Amen.

Other common prayers in the group read as follows:

'I am a woman looking for equality, I will not accept abuse or nastiness, I am a woman and have dignity, and soon justice will become a reality, that's why I'm here today, looking inside myself for the faith I have in you, with this faith we will be able to walk, while fighting for justice freedom will come, all women who want to share lift their arms and shout 'yes!', we are life, strength, women, in searching for justice we begin to grow'

'I lived like a snail, locked up inside myself, without developing, but I have realized that I have wisdom, virtues, qualities that are sometimes hidden, but I know they have to come to light, to vindicate the place I deserve in society'

## 2nd period: Report of activities during November & December 1995

New activities in the period:

Temporary conclusion of the 'piñatas' project. This group was formed to enable women to improve their economies by making piñatas twice a week during two months and then selling them in El Paso. This objective was accomplished: all the piñatas were easily sold and the money was gathered amounting to an earning of over 30 Dollars per person. However, the group did not seem to work always well: the original participants did not turn up, or they went less and less frequently, since they did not see immediate advantages. If the activity is to be continued, a stronger commitment on the part of the participants would be required.

### Planning meeting 15th December 1995

4 Community leaders chosen for their leadership quality took part in the planning meeting.

#### 1. Personal symbols:

Each participant was asked to make a drawing of an object, animal or colour that represented her. Then the drawings were put together and the group had to guess who had done each one of them (quite incredibly, it was always guessed correctly). These symbols reflected women's individual values.

Rosa: a tree (the roots, life, stability)

Marta: a flower (innocent, simple, life, happy)

Teresa: a house with the family (home, maternity, family, love)

Chelo: a heart (love, family)

Margarita: a teddy bear (warmth, cosy, love, soft)

These are the symbols each one of us found relevant. They also represented the facts or values that move us to act. The participants were asked to share these values: the main value shared by all of us was that of the family (love to the family, the mother and children); other important ones were: to be helpful to the persons around us, friendship; my community (whether it is the neighborhood, the congregation or the group we belong to), work as a means for personal development, youth; equality and justice and finally, women's struggle (to believe in ourselves and develop as human beings).

Reasons behind this exercise: 'The project is the set of values that move people to act. It is the engine that moves us'. If there is no project, there is no movement, there is no reason to act. And if our values are not clear and specific to ourselves, any external influence can change our orientation. This is why it is so important to make these values (priorities) very explicit. This not only applies to each one of us as individuals, but also to the society (or culture) and to any group. We try to analyze what are the values that lead us as the Grupo de Mujeres de Esperanza y Fe.

#### 2. Definition of our values as a group

Brainstorming to define what are the values that move the group: what is moving the engine. If we can explicitly define these values, then we are in a better position to evaluate the activities carried out in the past and plan new ones. Are these activities leading us to that set of values?

- Values: a large number of values were expressed. Intentionally, they were mostly defined by the women members. Afterwards, we all ordered them in order of importance and regrouped them in clusters.

The main ones were:

1. Respect for the other members of the group.
2. Self-respect, self-sufficiency and personal development.
3. Tranquillity (a safe point where we can relax and not worry).
4. Learn new things that can be useful to face women's reality.
5. Faith and hope in the community.
6. Know ourselves and each other to face reality and improve our community life.
7. Recover our voice to be able to defend ourselves

The main objective is therefore to improve the way we face reality in order to change and improve it, both from the individual and collective perspectives.

Other values that were expressed and are important to the group are:

- Create 'community' in the area and share common problems.
- Support each other
- Generate confidence among the women
- Improve our quality of life
- Know how to listen to others
- Hospitality: create an open group

It was agreed that these values will be shared on a second phase with the rest of the group.

3. Evaluation of the activities carried out until now:

3.1 Activities carried out in approximately 1 years and 9 months:

Meetings:

Meditation and relaxation  
Systems  
Dynamics  
Sociodramas  
Praying circle  
Biblical themes (1 per month)

Subjects tackled:

Jesus and women, the meaning of Jesus for us, the washing of the feet, God as a woman, the Kingdom of God, the miracles, All-Saints day, names of God, the four faces of Jesus, self-esteem, life and values.

Talks on: family, communication, domestic violence, cancer, drug addiction, alcoholism, natural birth, the figure of Mary.

Celebrations: Xmas, a day out on the countryside.

Others: 'Piñatas', video, planning sessions.

3.2 Evaluation of these activities. Meeting among the organizers.

How these activities lead us to our values. For instance, the chats helped us learn more, meditation encouraged tranquility, piñatas helped

to improve the economy, dynamics and sociodramas helped recover our voice as well as express and define our values. From this evalution, we need to decide:

- What we would like to see continued: all activities should continue. Doubts about the 'economic projects' such as the piñatas. They probably should continue (considering the good results) but with more commitment from the participants and a person to motivate and lead the group.

- What we need to change or improve: improve the communication within the group (lack of sincerity to avoid problems, people were afraid to express their opinions). Improve the place where we meet. Improve attendance with an accent on regularity. The question of whether it is necessary to create a community committee was asked, referring to a group of people who communicate what's going on, visit those who are ill or in trouble, and even distribute food/clothes/aid coming from US. Conflict in the distribution of the aid coming from the US. On the one hand, it creates dependence, it breaks equality between us and the rest of the women, it creates complaints, jealousy, misunderstandings... on the other hand, there is a need for these items and it would be a shame to reject them... conclusion: women themselves will have to decide what they want to do, while we should stay at an arm's length from the distribution so as not to interfere and create problems.

- Which new activities we want to start.

#### **Analysis of group activities and participation: 25 August 1995-2 February 1996**

The Bible exercise involved reading a passage of the Bible chosen on the basis of the subject tackled on a given date. After the reading, women were asked to comment on how the passage related to their daily life as women. Therefore, the Biblical message served as mediator for women to express the meanings given to their day-to-day experiences.

#### **Theme - 25 August 1995**

**The love of Jesus and how it is represented through women's experiences as mother, wife, daughter, partner, friend, etc.**

**Women's response:** The love of God was felt among women as that coming from a father, while the Virgin Mary was felt as that of a mother, which itself resembled the love a mother feels for her children. As an example, one of the participants referred to another woman who took care of her grandchildren when her daughter died, giving them love and attention as if they were hers.

**Comments on the group's dynamics:** The reading was carried out by two of the women members, who were asked to do so by one of the organizers. In the Bible exercise, women were initially gathered in couples in order to faciliate communication. Of the 13 women comprising the group, 3 showed signs of embarrasment or difficulty to express themselves. The rest of the group showed strong will and enthusiasm in communicating. Most women showed affection towards the organizers and the other members of the group.

#### **10 Sept. 1995**

**Further reflexion on the theme: 'The love of God through us, the love we give others, the importance of loving one another and those around us'**

Women reflected on last session's theme through silent meditation and singing.

**Aim of the meeting:** women's evaluation of the group

**Women's response:** A woman commented that it would probably be a good idea to keep inviting more women in the community, since the group provides moral support and the opportunity to meet other women. Three more women had the same opinion in the sense that the group was positive as a way to meet other people, mostly because they got the opportunity to talk about their problems, receiving support from others. Another woman found positive the fact that she could learn to become less inhibited, saying: 'Here I can let go something I have inside and can't tell anybody, but here I feel safe and besides, I can get advice' and thanked the organizers for their wisdom in treating people. The rest of the women did not make any further comments apart from saying they like coming to the group.

**8 Sept. 1995**

In this meeting the organizers were absent and the meeting was led by one of the community leaders and member of the group. She pointed at the need to carry on with the meetings regardless of whether the organizers were able to assist, since activities could still be carried out. 8 women assisted.

**Exercise:** Rosa, the leader, organized an activity whereby women got together in pairs and told one another personal issues and things they liked. The second stage of the exercise involved one of the couples coming into the center of the room to tell everyone about what the other person said and viceversa.

**Comments on the group's dynamics:**

Women showed enthusiasm while doing the exercise and seemed to be more comfortable around the local leader than the organizers, perhaps because there was no language barrier and they knew the leader as part of the community and could therefore identify with her.

**22 Sept. 1995**

Once again the organizers couldn't assist to the meeting and it was led by Rosa, community leader. 15 women assisted.

**Theme:** The meeting centered around the discussion of new activities which can be both therapeutic and valuable economic resources. The first proposal involved the making of handcrafts in order to sell them in El Paso.

**Women's response:**

7 women in the group proposed different ideas on the same theme and others supported Rosa's proposal. The 7 women were more inclined to support the making of hair clips, home decorations, piñatas, hand-knitted clothes, etc. Women finally concluded that the best option was to make piñatas, since they can all contribute to gather the needed materials in order to make them. Besides, they all agreed that piñatas were easy and quick to make. Rosa proposed to sell them to small businesses or in the local market, adding she would herself invite people experienced in making piñatas so that they can get orientation from them.

29 Sept. 1995

**Theme:** following the discussion on the piñata project with organizers.

**Women's involvement:** organizers were informed by the community leader of the women's proposal regarding the piñatas project, explaining the process and the methods agreed to gather the needed materials. The organizers agreed on the project's feasibility and offered their support in selling the piñatas in El Paso, asking whether this was OK with the women or had any other ideas regarding their sale. Women agreed that selling them in El Paso would be the best option. The Implications of the economic project involved the need to organize one more meeting per week destined to elaborate the piñatas.

**Women's response:**

Some women stated not being able to attend the meeting twice per week, because of their domestic duties. On the whole, women expressed enthusiasm at the project, mainly because it would provide the means for distraction and learning.

13 October 1995

**Theme:** 'Christ is wisdom', 'We, Christians, are wisdom'. In what ways does Christ's wisdom reflect in ourselves?

**Women's responses:** A woman mentioned that the love we feel for one another can be part of the wisdom coming from Christ, because nobody teaches us to love, it is something we already have... 'Nobody teaches her sons and daughters to love their mother or the mother to love their children, it is a natural kind of love'. Another woman mentioned that wisdom also manifests in the messages of the Bible, because its advice always talks about goodness, about the right path to follow... 'Christ doesn't intend us to do bad things, on the contrary, he tries to open in order to prevent us from them'. Someone else commented that when she did something wrong to somebody else, it always brought something bad, which made her think about what she did. On the whole, the main idea that came up is that the wisdom of Christ is represented in people's goodness and love.

**Comments on the group's dynamics**

11 people turned up. Most women didn't comment on the text, but seemed to agree with what was said by the way in which they nodded their heads and the attention they paid during the discussion.

27 October 1995

**Theme:** 'The love and protection of Jesus towards the marginalized, the poor and those lead astray'

**Women's response:** One of the women expressed that as the love of Jesus is special towards his underprivileged sons, that's the way a mother acts towards her problematic son, and not precisely because she loves him more, but because he needs more attention, more dedication than the others. Then she remembered the passage of the Bible referring to the prodigal son who was always wandering, and how when he returns the father celebrates it, not because he loved him more, but because he thought him lost and celebrates his return to him. She added that only if

underprivileged children were given adequate attention they would improve more easily. Another woman pointed out that when parents support their sick children and take care of them with love and understanding, they may get better sooner or at least their illness would not bring so much pain. Another of the participants expressed that she had an alcoholic nephew and they lost him because of the drink. Now she feels bad because maybe if they would have paid more attention to him and support him with the family's cooperation, he would not have died. The reason for their lack of support was that he generated so many problems that sometimes he was thrown out of the house, having to sleep on the the streets, where he finally died.

**Comments on the group's dynamics:** Women read the passage of the Bible. Initially, small groups were organized in order to gather their comments to be exposed at a later stage to the rest of the group. One of the organizers commented that we all receive that special love from Jesus because he gives us many opportunities and does not forget those who have problems. However, she added, the reading was meant to make us remember we must show consideration towards our brothers and sisters in need. Towards the end, women played a game in order to relax and do some physical exercise before the usual prayer.

19 January 1996

**Theme:** women got together in groups to talk about anything that is important for them, regardless of whether it is sad or joyful.

**Women's response:**

One of them commented that her major concern is that she has a son who is a drug addict and gives her many problems, both inside and outside the home. He gets involved in street fights, he steals, beats up the neighbors for no reason and he fights with his family and threatens them to leave him alone. Another one talked about her daughter who is about to give birth, she is a minor and alone, her boyfriend abandoned her when he found out she was pregnant. The family has many young kids and has very little economic resources and have no medical state support. Another woman participated saying that she is very happy that her husband is doing well at work because they have been able to sort out some problems, since the whole family (the parents and four children) lived together in a room and recently they have been able to start building another room. Other women mentioned that two or three families in the community had been badly affected by the strong winds, destroying their carton homes, as in the case of Graciela, who was left with no ceiling in her home. Another woman did not only suffer material loss, but she was injured in a leg while trying to put out a fire in another house.

**Comments on the dynamics:** 13 women assisted. This time women got first in little groups and later expressed their concerns towards the group one by one. Most of the women mentioned their problems rather than something they were grateful for. When all of them had participated, one of the organizers intervened saying: 'We all have to be aware of the problems affecting this community', particularly when they affect a member of the group.

**Actions taken:** The organizers decided that everybody should contribute with something to help the affected families. For this purpose, they proposed gathering some more people to join the group and offer their help in a neighbor colony where there had been a fire, leaving about 30 families without a home. Simultaneously, they agreed to go to the local Churches and ask the priests to collect clothes, food, stuff for the

home, blankets, etc. A small commission was formed to visit the Churches and other places that could bring some help.

**2 February 1996**

**Theme: What do I like more about being a woman?**

**Women's response:** A woman responded that she was grateful that God had given her the best privilege, referring to her capacity to give birth. Another woman added that women also have the chance to educate their children and guide them, which brings a lot of joy and satisfaction. Yet another woman expressed: 'Women are those who guide children towards the path of God, the spiritual path, since men are generally busy working and do not have much time for children... they sometimes don't even know how they're doing in school'. Another woman adds: 'Generally when a couple separates children stay with their mother who has to deal with everything by herself... although some women forget their obligation with their children and a mother cannot do that'.

**Second theme:** one of the organizers referred to the old testament in the sense that women at that time lived under a patriarchal system and had no rights. She added they lived under men's oppression and couldn't decide about whom to marry, couldn't intervene in the children's education and had no saying within the Church. Everything was done by men and therefore men's privileges were to make those decisions. **Question: What are the differences and similarities between those times and our present reality?**

**Women's response:** 'Nowadays women decide whom to marry'... 'Couples decide the number of children they want to have'... 'Women do not only intervene in their children's education but they are often the only ones in charge of it'... 'Nowadays women work, study, take care of the home, the children and their education, they do everything at once'... 'There's machismo among most men, they want to be the boss and don't want anything to be imposed on them, but in the end it's always the women who handle the problems'.

**Comments on the group's dynamics:** On the whole, women perceive themselves as more privileged than in the past, as having more opportunities and freedom. When one of the organizers asked whether they thought men and women should be equal, all the women responded affirmatively. Women showed particular interest in this subject and looked more excited, paying more attention than usual. Also the organizers showed greater satisfaction with the results of this meeting and there looked more motivated.

**Third period:**

**7 February 1997**

**Theme: reflexion about women's experiences. Questions:**

1. When have you experienced sadness?
2. Why are there these types of experiences in the world?
3. Is God among us?
4. What do you learn about God and life through these experiences?

**Women's response:**

1. When a loved one is absent, either through death or departure. A woman said that the saddest experience of her life was when her husband

abandoned her with her just-born daughter. She added that it took her two years to get over it, for which she had to come all the way to Juárez and start all over again, where she had the opportunity to meet people, which helped her. Other women talked about the sadness of death and illness in our loved ones. In the younger group they also mentioned these situations as their major cause for pain, although they didn't mention the husband. The older group mentioned being truly sad by the absence of the organizers, although they added that it served to test their ability to carry on without them, because they followed God and not Donna and Leonora.

2. Women agreed that feeling sadness was God's will because it gives us the opportunity to grow. One of the women said that through sadness she had gotten closer to God and another said that sadness had taught her to pray for her loved ones. The younger women said that God sends this experiences as a test to see if we are ready and to test our faith in him. The older women agreed that although loss produces sadness, it is God's will and he always gives consolation.

3. Women agreed that God is always with them and although sometimes it doesn't look that way because at times they get angry at him, he always sends resignation and faith.

4. Women agreed that these type of experience have given them more faith in God since they've found peace in times of sadness. One of the women said that when her first husband left her she found consolation in the Bible. The others said they had learnt to pray in order to give them strength in anything they do and in helping other people who are sick. The younger women learnt to trust God more since he's always present. The older women learnt to see death as something beautiful which shouldn't cause sadness, since he died for us.

The second stage of the meeting involved the interpretation of specific passages of the Bible. The passages talked about the power of prayer, the need to treat workers fairly, and the need to preach without expecting material gains. There was a big difference between the way in which the older and younger groups interpreted the passage. The former were very quiet and didn't speak while performing, while the latter wouldn't stop laughing while rehearsing and when they finally performed they included jokes which made the rest of the women laugh. In the remaining group, a younger women asked one of the missionaries in the play: 'What's wrong with you? Do you spend your whole time visiting people? Don't you work?', to which they answered that they did worked as housewives and didn't waste their time, because God would reward them.

The meeting was ended with a prayer, sealed through the peace symbol, i.e. a kiss and a hug between the participants.

#### **Comments on the group's dynamics:**

The group's dynamics in 1997 show greater sophistication and women seem more articulate and communicative in their responses. It is also obvious that women have gained greater autonomy and can carry out a successful meeting without the organizers, since they behaved in their usual manner. At the same time, their relationship with the organizers have strengthened, shown by the way in which they miss them. The introduction of the 'symbol of peace' to seal the meetings also reflects deeper and more affectionate relationships amongs the members. Women expressed their joy at being together since the meeting started, greeting each other with hugs and kisses and exchanging the latest news. They initiated the meeting very joyfully and with great participation, jokingly saying:

'Today we don't have biscuits and coffee because we are not from El Paso'. They showed a positive attitude and didn't worry about the time, continuing to talk even after the meeting was finished. The meetings are enriched through the joint participation of older and younger women, learning from each other. For instance, when the older women spoke about death and what it had taught them, the younger women listened very carefully and there was a long and respectful silence.

**14 February 1997**

**Theme: reflexion about lent time**

**Questions: What does the Wednesday of ashes mean?  
Why do we take ashes?**

**Women's responses**

1. We must remember that we are dust and will turn into dust and therefore must be in peace with ourselves and others. A younger woman referred to lent time as the beginning of a change which would enable us to start anew.

2. We take ashes in order to repent of our sins and to remind us of our own mortality, so that open ourselves to rebirth as better people, helping others and being in peace with God.

**Second theme:** one of the organizers distributed a leaflet stating the main reasons why people gather to take the ashes, namely: to get protection from violence and injustice and from all kinds of humiliating situations which take place in Mexico. The leaflet showed a picture of rich people celebrating lent time with a big dinner, which is questioned in the exercise. One of the leaders then read the following passage of the Bible:

'This is the fast I want  
to break the chains of injustice  
to set sail the yoke  
to liberate the repressed'

'You'll share your bread with the hungry  
those with no home will find one  
you'll clothe the naked  
and won't turn your back on your brother'

**Questions: Do we live this kind of aggression?  
Is this kind of aggression and injustice in our families?  
Why?**

**Women's responses:** That kind of aggression is very common in our lives, since we cannot leave our homes when it's dark. We are often aggressive against our women neighbors, sometimes we don't even say hello. We all have felt aggression in our lives, for instance my son was robbed and now we can't send him to the shop because we're afraid something will happen to him. The organizer added that aggression was a consequence of the economic crisis, since people are unemployed and have nothing to eat.

**Theme: reflexion on fasting**

**Questions: What does fasting mean in our lives?  
Do you think fasting means simply to stop eating? Why?**

**Women's responses:**

1. To fast is also to visit a sick person, to be nice to our neighbors and children. Regarding the colony, it means to stop doing bad things and to change, to be near God.

2. To fast is to confess and be at peace with God. To fast is to leave all those things that harm us and others in order to reconcile with God.

**Theme:** This was followed by a reading on fasting, explaining its meaning beyond physical fasting:

'Let's turn our contempt into ashes, to stop our isolation from others... Let's turn our selfishness into ashes, as when we look only for our own good without caring about others...

Let's turn into ashes our distrust of union and solidary action with our brothers and sisters...

Let's turn into ashes our passivity in the face of injustice and deceit'

'Fasting represents the means for change'

The organizer commented that fasting meant knowing the neighbor: 'This community lives with a lot of love, they know and help their neighbors, they live for the gospel'. She added that for the organizers it was an honor to walk with them, doing projects, praying and working together. One of the leaders added that it is important to help the neighbors regardless of what people think.

The above was followed by a distribution of cards where women were supposed to write an objective for themselves.

**Women's responses:**

To be good to the children.

To be a good neighbor, a good mother, a good friend.

To be more patient with the husband and children.

To love the family more and be nicer to others.

To pray more to God for the family and the women's group.

To follow the path and be more loving to my mother and my family.

Asking God to give me more patience towards my husband and accept illness.

To be a good mother, deal with the children and be more patient.

To be more patient and not get angry when people shout at you.

To be a good neighbor to Mexico.

To keep participating in the group.

To look after the children, keep participating in the group and go to mass.

To be a better mother and a better friend in the women's group.

**Comments on the dynamics of the group:**

The atmosphere in this meeting was warm and people were kind to one another, showing their feelings towards each other through their smiles and positive attitude. The group was larger than usual and two women who had not participated before had no difficulty in integrating with the group. Older women showed some uncertainty about the meaning of the celebration. The meeting was more festive this time, for which women did not concentrate as much in the dynamics, although they still participated in them. Women left the meeting together and walked towards their home.

21 February 1997

**Theme:** women's building is about to be finished.

**Questions:** 1. What dreams do you have about the center? 2. What can you do for the center?

**Women's responses:**

1. To help, to offer some distraction to young women so that they entertain themselves and avoid drugs, to have many activities for the women and a space for silence and prayer. Another woman said she was desperate to see the building finished so that other women could attend the meetings. She added she would like some evangelization courses for youngsters and adults, saying that the building will help the whole community to grow in faith.

2. The center could help us pray and read the Bible and it could also help women in general make their life easier. She added she could help with the cleaning. Another woman said the center will help women to continue in the group. Another group also offered help with the cleaning, although they needed some notice so that they could organize themselves at home. A woman says that even though she might be ill she will help in anything she could. A further group wanted to see lots of colours, flowers and lots of people, learn things that will help them, pray and gain more strength in their community. Their dream is for it to be finished and to gather in there, adding that they would help in everything needed for the center to improve and grow. A final group wanted the center to improve both materially and in terms of community growth, and thought it was important to take care of the maintenance of the center and prevent gangs from breaking in.

At the end of the excersice, women gathered in a circle outside the center and each of them compromised for its development as follows:

- To keep attending the meetings
- To be patient with illness and persistent in helping others
- To do the cleaning and attend everything that is needed
- To plant a tree and take care of it
- To pray for the building's security
- To help create a nice garden

**Themes:** Genesis 22: 1-2, 10-13, 15-18

Romanos 8: 3-16

Marcos 9: 1-9

**Questions:** 1. Are we willing to do with our children what Abraham and Isaac did?

2. How does Jesus manifest in our lives?

3. Has Jesus been our friend on the earth or will he be our friend in the future on heaven?

4. Personally or socially? How does God help us?

**Women's responses:**

1. A young woman with a baby said she wouldn't sacrifice her child to death, she said if God asked her to do it she wouldn not be sure it was God who said it, because she can't hear him, whereas Abraham clearly heard him. An older woman said she'd never sacrifice one of her children

because it'd be too painful since they are her blood. Another group said they'd be partially willing to sacrifice their children because they have faith, but had their doubts about whether God would ask them such thing. The last group said that when a son dies we give it to God but we wouldn't kill him because we are not Abraham.

2.. God manifests through love, hope and faith, through friendship with the other women. The second group said God manifests through life itself, through everything he does for us to move forward with hope. A third and final group said God manifests through the 'eucaristía' in mass and through everything that constitutes our life at home.

3. God has been our friend here on earth because he's always with us in good and bad times. The second group stated they can always count on God to enlarge their faith. The last group said God is our friend here on earth and also on heaven and that here we have to feed his friendship with good deeds so that it will be strengthened in heaven.

4. God is our friend both personally and socially because he loves us all the same and loves the women's group, the community and everybody else. The second group said God loves us personally and socially because we have a group where we gather to talk about him and share good and bad times. The final group said that through prayer we get stronger to solve our problems and if we're united we have more strength to get over all that's bad.

After the exercise, women performed a sociodrama and seemed to really enjoyed themselves. Even though it was 6:00 pm and Donna asked whether to go on or leave it for next session, women insisted on continuing.

#### **Comments on the session:**

The community leader was not present in this session because a child in the community died and she went to comfort his family. The session was interrupted by one of the members, who had to leave because one of her sons was throwing her clothes on the street. Donna went with her. Meanwhile, the members generated a dynamic related to this incident and explained that Carmen has three children and two of them are crazy. The older one is a drug addict and although he's married he still gives her many problems because he gives drugs to the other two and they loose control. When women talked about this they looked very worried and felt bad for Carmen, thanking God for not having such problems. They also said that the children's father is also a drug addict but he hasn't been with her for a long time. They are very poor and live off what people and community leaders give them. When Carmen came back she looked very sad and had been crying and Donna didn't make any comments but asked the women to continue with what they were doing. At the end of the meeting all women prayed and surrounded Carmen placing a hand over her head to gain strength in her problem.

Each session women are more enthusiastic, possibly because the building is almost finished. They feel they are making themselves visible in their community since soon they'll have an exclusive space where they can carry out their activities. They are very excited because it shows their progress and although they're afraid of gangs they hope that when they find out it's a women's center, they'll respect it. Women's ability to share their problems help them cope with them as in the case of Carmen. However, women feel powerless to help her aside from praying and asking God to put up with difficulties. Carmen seemed to find peace only in the women's group, since after what happened she came back to the group and received the prayers in silence to finally say: thank you. Perla offered

to teach them how to read, to which they responded enthusiastically and started asking lots of questions. Women asked for help because they want their lives to change. After the session women walked together towards their home looking very satisfied and smiling.

**22 February 1997**

**Themes: Christian Women gathering in Chihuahua**

More than 200 women assisted a Christian Women's Conference in Chihuahua. The organizers took some of the members and one of them commented on how surprised she was to see Tarahumara women at the conference, adding how they had learnt to defend from their husbands and carry out their decisions. Before this changes, only their sons were taken to school and they decided their daughters should be educated as well. They have also organized in cooperatives and own a truck as school transport for the children. Tarahumara women also have learnt to use computers and looked very 'clean' and tidy. The members which had been to the conference also commented on Anahuac women and how they gathered their salaries to buy a 'molino' and sell their seeds, as well as owning a funeral service available to low-income groups. They also do handcrafts to help them maintain the funeral service. Donna commented on the solidarity expressed by women in the conference, since they talked about their shared experiences such as maquiladora work, women's community and the church. She concluded pointing out that they all have the same mission of progress in improving their lives and women sang the song 'I am a woman' as follows:

'I am a woman in search for equality  
I won't accept abuse of malice  
I am a woman and have dignity  
and soon justice will be reality

That's why I came all the way  
searching within me for the faith in you  
with this faith we'll be able to walk  
fighting for justice, freedom will come

Any woman who wants to share  
will lift her arms and say: yes!  
We are life, strength, women  
marching for justice we begin to grow'

Finally, she said that women from all over the country are fighting regardless of social class. After this, the women commented on the pain suffered by María and then they went all together to the church to pray in silence for 15 minutes. Donna advised women to think of all the pain María went through and to give her our pain in order to gain strength, joy and hope to change the cause of pain for joy.

**Theme: On the way towards the cross, Jesus finds her mother, the virgin.**

**Questions: What was María's attitude when she found Jesus was condemned to death? What does Jesus say with his eyes?**

**Women's comments:**

A group of women said that crucifixion exists today, because we are daily crucified although not necessarily on a cross... with low salaries, with violence on the streets such as the case of the disappearing women all over Juárez, and compared the pain suffered by María when she saw Jesus

was going to die with these situations. However, they added they trusted God and believed in resurrection which gives them hope within their pain. They also talked about the impotence they feel in some situations, as that felt by María when she couldn't save Jesus from dying. They talked about their children, i.e. one of them knows her children take drugs but cannot convince them to stop and feels she cannot do anything.

At the end of the session the organizer distributed a prayer which women repeated:

'Women's blessings'

'May those who fight for equality be happy because they generate a new way of life,  
may those who rescue freedom be happy because they conquer justice in their lives,  
may those who discover in their political work a renewing dimension of love be happy,  
may those who turn themselves into gospel be happy because they make Jesus believable within ourselves,  
may strong, generating women who in joint and solidary effort with men make a testimony of equality within difference, be blessed,  
may caring women, daring, who proclaim and build a more human world, be blessed,  
may sensitive women, efficient, who with their effort and work carry out the transformations we dream about, be blessed,  
may those who express their sensibility recovering the feminine face of God be joyful,  
may those who with their persistent struggle manifest our Father's misericordia be joyful,  
may those who with their resistance and perseverance glorify God transforming society be blessed,  
may those who by being loyal to their spirit recover the live from the church of the poor for our times be blessed,  
be joyful when with praying and contemplating pace you know how to discover the history of revelation and interpret it for us,  
be joyful when anticipating an utopic liberation you cultivate, harvest and distribute the bread of fraternity and solidarity,  
be joyful when, because of your charisma as mothers and fathers you become responsible for your life with fighting spirit'

7 March 1977

**Theme:** This session was dedicated to women's analysis of their problems in the family and the community in order to prepare for a coming gathering in Chihuahua. The organizer distributed a sheet of paper with the themes to be tackled during the gathering, so that women could express their opinions and participate in the gathering.

**1. About reality. Questions: What do we think about what we are living nowadays? How do we see ourselves?**

**Women's responses:** How do you see yourself?

- 1 - Like a flower, because I feel happy and fresh.
- 2 - Like a tree with flowers and rocks, flowers because they are the fruit and are meant to nurture and rocks because they mean strength, because I had to put up with a lot as a woman in order to survive.
- 3 - A garden of flowers, because I like to be accompanied by other flowers, even though they may be different, such as the women's group.
- 4 - Like a plant pot, with flowers, because flowers are very nice but at

the same time plant pots are always left in a corner and I've always felt very humiliated.

5 - Like the rain which falls everywhere and gets everyone wet and refreshed.

6 - Like a post, because I've suffered a lot, I've been through very difficult stuff but I'm still here, nothing has brought me down, even though life has treated me badly, I'm strong.

7 - Like a giving hand, open to help everyone and be caring. (one of the organizers)

8 - A heart, because it represents humanitarian love, in order to give love and respect to everyone around us.

9 - Like a book which once was closed and now it's open in order to share its life and knowledge and also receive.

10 - Like a big tree sustained with rocks. The same way autumn goes through the life of a tree, which is when I'm feeling sad, spring comes and bears its fruit. It's also free under the stars which are like hope and sadness is like the clouds which pass but don't stay. And then comes the rain which is strength and food to move forward, it's a firm tree, wise, which never dies, because the fruit has its seed which can grow again and therefore calm the hunger.

11 - Like a flower, which although it's a bit damaged because of so many problems, she carries on happy in the world.

12 - Like a river which before was almost dry but since I've come to this group has a lot of water which runs with strength.

13 - Like a plant which grows little by little and soon will bear its fruit.

**Questions: how do you see your reality in the family?  
how do you see your social reality?**

**For this exercise, women gathered in pairs and then they talked to the group**

**Women's responses:**

Donna talked to Carmen and said how sad she was with the situation that Carmen lives with her children. 'Carmen doesn't talk, she's very quiet because she's gone through a lot of sexual violence, beatings, all her life she's suffered a lot, she's very hurt', said Donna.

- We live a very sad reality because there are problems inside the family, the sisters-in-law don't love each other, besides the neighbors don't support each other, for instance the problems we have with the lots..., those who don't have that problem don't support others and that makes us feel marginalized and alone.

- Our reality in the family is sometimes sad and sometimes happy, particularly because we're together, but we have problems and the social reality is very sad because everything is very expensive, we cannot cope with the crisis.

- We feel alone without support but have found in this group a way to help and know people, because family doesn't help.

- I'm very sad because my daughter left home a month ago and haven't heard from her. The worst thing is that she left very angry with her dad. She's also worried because they don't have enough money and it's getting worse.

**Theme: the world that we want**

**Women's responses:** they draw pictures in order to show their social reality and the world that they want.

Their social reality:

- A tank without water
- A carton house
- A colony without flowers or trees
- A devalued Peso
- An ugly, twisted, colourless world
- A sad woman with a broken heart
- Dead flowers

The world we want:

- A tank with water
- A nice house made of brick
- A community with flowers and trees
- A stable currency
- A round world with lots of colours
- A smiling woman with a message of joy in her mind
- Very nice flowers

At the end of this exercise, the women who were going to the gathering in Chihuahua prayed for their minds to open in order to learn and understand better God's word.

**Comments on the dynamics:**

Women complained of poverty, saying that they didn't have enough money and that they were exposed to violence every day, both on the street and in their families. One of the women said that the solution was in staying together, not just them but with the family and society as a whole, since union creates love and respect. They also talked about the hope they all have, for instance in seeing the building finished in order to keep on growing in numbers. They said they have hope in having their community problems sorted, particularly regarding the legalization of their plots. This meeting was characterized by women's reflexion on themselves and the similarity of their experiences within the family and in the community. They considered very necessary to share their worries with other women. The meeting finished with the peace symbol as usual and then they carried on towards their homes, talking in groups.

4 april 1997

**Theme:** Hechos 4,32-35 - The passage talks about the first steps taken by the church apostols in the years after Jesus' resurrection, focusing on a group of people gathered to talk about Jesus and to share all their belongings. The book of Juan 5,1-6 talks about a group of Christians who weren't in Jerusalem and the faith in God, stressing that if there's faith and love in God and others, people will conquer the world. The gospel of Juan was the first one to confirm the existence of Jesus in God through eternity. Today's reading talks about the way in which Jesus appeared before the apostols the day after he died. Thomas was then not present and when the others told him about it, he didn't believe them.

**Questions:** 1. What are the obstacles to faith today? (personally, in the community and among the women in the group)

2. Who are the Thomas of today?

3. Is it impossible to live without faith in God, people and things?

4. How does fear and lack of faith control you and prevent you from

seeing Jesus today? (personally, in the community and among women in the group)

5. What is the most important doubt or question you have about our faith?

**Women's responses:**

**General:** The readings invite us to be like the apostols. It is very important to value the work carried out by priests, people should trust them because of everything they do (referring to the reading).

**In groups:** We always believe in God, we know that even though things are not going well, he's with us, but many times we get angry such as when our husband doesn't stop drinking and also when we see children dying violently and young women being raped and murdered. A second group said that many people stop believing in God when someone close to them dies, adding that another obstacle to faith was that they stop assisting to the women's sessions. Group 3, where most older women were, said that they believed completely in God both personally, in the community and the women's group.

2. We've all been Thomas at least once in our lives, although some people are like Thomas too often. Sometimes we doubt about the existence of God because the situation is very difficult or when someone we love dies. Group 2 said there are lots of Thomases because they don't believe in people, since although they do believe in God, people are very treacherous. Group 3 stated they believe in God but there are things in which they shouldn't believe, such as television.

3. It is impossible to live without faith and because of that faith we're gathered here, in order to be together and do something positive with our lives. Group 2 said that it's impossible to live without faith in God, even though they have no faith in most people. Group 3 said that it's impossible to live without faith because faith gives them the strength to keep on fighting.

4. When people die or suffer a painful illness and also when people of other religions tell people things about faith and the virgin Mary. Group 2 referred to when the economic situation doesn't get better even though people try. Group 3 stated that lots of people don't have faith and for that reason they live without goals, they loose their hope in reaching happiness.

5. Why did God allow Herodes to order the killing of children when Jesus was born? Group 2 referred to the 'hermanos' sect, since they preach preach about things which differ from their beliefs. Group 3 also referred to the 'hermanos' sect, stating that people don't understand what they talk about and that's why they get confussed.

After this dynamic took place, women left the building holding hands and with closed eyes. Although women were not supposed to know where they were being led by Donna, most imagined they were going to the new building. It was a very nice experience since we were all laughing and asking questions and felt very close to one another. It was noticeable they care for one another, since they took care of the few women who did the exercise properly, i.e. who didn't open their eyes. When we arrived we formed a circle, we sang and prayed. Women kept dreaming about how they were going to decorate the place and the flowers they were going to bring. The session ended with reading 'bienaventuranzas de la mujer' and the symbol of peace as usual.

**Comments on the dynamics:**

Women have been working in making paper flowers. They are going to sell them by the 10th of May (mother's day). They seem very enthusiastic about this project and meet every Wednesday to work on it. When they arrive to the meeting they see their flowers and express with pride about how beautiful they are, constantly talking with each other about the flowers. They show them off, showing their pride at having advanced a great deal, hoping to do some more. The money to initiate this project was supplied by the organizer. Today one of the women brought some jars made by a member of their family, proposing they are filled with flowers and sold. The economic project seems to keep women enthusiastic, which increases their solidarity in order to continue with this and future projects. Women enjoy feeling close and find any excuse to hug each other or shake hands. When they were all walking towards the new building they all held each other and smiled, showing innocence in their faces. It was obvious they found it funny to behave that way, as anticipating a surprise just for them.

**11 April 1997**

The meeting started by meditating about the time when Maria Magdalena opened Jesus' grave and realized he had resurrected. The leader asked women to concentrate and close their eyes, inviting women to meditate and let themselves go in order to feel Jesus' presence. Women kept their eyes closed and there was a very relaxed atmosphere.

**Theme: about the new building**

**Questions:**

1. When we talked about building a center, did we think it would be true?
2. What should we do to make it alive?
3. Who should have most responsibility to take care of the center?
4. What problems could we have?
5. How should we organize for the party?
6. Rules in the bathroom and kitchen

**Women's responses:**

1. They all said they knew the building would be a reality and now that's finished they want to work on it and take care of it as if it was their home.
2. To hang pictures and put curtains, to bring the image of the Virgin, a Christ and many other things.
3. We do. Also the people outside, but mostly us and if others see we take good care of it, others will do the same.
4. People might try to burgle the building and we should think of a way to keep an eye on it, maybe paying someone to do it. It would also be good to paint the image of the Virgin outside the building, so that gangs respect it and don't paint on the walls.
5. There was no consensus.
6. Children should be always accompanied by an adult when going to the bathroom.

After this dynamic, each woman one by one lit up a candle and kept very quiet, until Donna took the water and said we were the light. The water we used meant hope. Then she threw water at us and continued with the prayer. As usual women prayed for their children, their grandchildren, their brothers and sisters. One of the women prayed for the health of her husband, referring to him as 'my partner'.

**Comments on the dynamics:**

Last Tuesday someone entered the building trying to steal and destroyed the flowers women had made, taking the builders' tools. Women were sad but also full of strength and anger and made a point of having enough time to sort it out and make some more flowers. Women planned to inaugurate the building soon with the local priest who will formally bless the place. Women looked happy but didn't want to share their building with anyone else, since they had been asked to do so. They said that even if the priest asked them, they'd say no because it was a space just for women and it would be like a second home. Obviously women want to feel independent and don't want the church to interfere in their work, not even the priest. They therefore were a bit angry about the priest's proposal to use the building for other means and they seemed willing to defend their dream. When talking about furniture they were so enthusiastic that they all talked at once and were worried about the money, even though Donna told them that was sorted out. However, they always worry about money. Women in the group know how to express their feelings and are very spontaneous and honest, are very enthusiastic about doing things and nothing gets in the way of their enthusiasm. They truly have faith and hope in that their life will change at the rythm they choose.