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Sexuality in Chile

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Sexuality in Chile
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CIR/SIT CHILE
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Abstract

This paper explores contemporary sexuality in Chile, through an analysis of the institutionalized rules and regulations, comprised of the many laws and regulations determined by Chile's governing bodies and embodied by the words and actions of State Officials, and the police force: *los Carabineros*; to the societal norms and collective values, which include the position of the Catholic Church, the media, and the sociological investigations which analyze Chile's collective understandings and dominant discourses, determining what is acceptable within the realm of sex and sexuality, and what is not. Additionally, this paper seeks to understand the efforts of the many organizations and individuals whose personal realities and collective actions aim to change the standards, so they more comprehensively reflect the diversity of sexualities and experiences of all Chileans. Using the ethnographic tools of first-hand observation and formal and informal interviews, it appears that the women's movement and gay movement are both working on changing sexual politics, behaviors and options within Chile, yet it appears that within these two groups, the voices of Chile's lesbians and bisexual woman are not being heard. This paper examines how this has occurred and why, and concludes with some possible ideas for the future inclusion of this invisible and silenced Chilean minority.

Introduction

The ground-breaking work of Michel Foucault revolutionized the study of sex, sexuality and gender in the modern occidental world. He deconstructs the traditional religious and medical discourses, concluding that their doctrines helped to create the current gender and sexuality binary. Foucault and others understand the binary to be the polarization of the two distinct sexes (man and woman) as they embody the two distinct gender-roles (masculine and feminine). Normative sexual activity between is between a man and a woman, within the institution of marriage, and for the purpose of procreation. These teachings have created a dichotomy between normative, acceptable sex and sexuality, and that which is deviant, or other.

R.W. Connell's work expands on these ideas, by providing the historical context through which one can further understand the dominant conception of sex and sexuality. In order to define that which is normal, one must define that which is abnormal, and through the lens of history, we can see the influences which made this distinction clearly defined in the western world. Connell writes, "Latin American machismo was a product of the interplay of cultures under colonialism. The conquistadors provided both provocation and model. Spanish Catholicism provided the ideology of female abnegation, and economic oppression blocked other sources of authority for men. As Walter Williams has shown, Spanish colonialism also involved a violent and sustained assault on the customary homosexuality of native cultures".¹ In Chile, the sexual norms brought by the Spanish, hundreds of years ago, are now fully-ingrained in the institutions of an

¹ R.W. Connell. *Masculinities*. (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1995), 198.

independent Chile, and are reinforced legislatively by various laws and representatives of the State. They are strengthened through the media, system of education, and religious institutions, especially the Catholic Church. Chile's normative definition of sexuality maintains traditional gender roles, whereby men maintain public, and often private, dominance over women, and sexual minorities are considered "other" and systematically discriminated against.

Although many of the same rigid moral and social definitions of normative sexuality still maintain a powerful stronghold in Chile, things are rapidly changing. A walk down any public street will reveal young couples passionately kissing, and teenage mothers without wedding bands. A closer look inside certain bars, clubs, and universities, will reveal a significant gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender population. And a visit to the offices of MEMCh (*Movimiento por emancipación de las mujeres chilenas*) will demonstrate a feminist organization running classes and working with other groups, empowering women and addressing issues of sexual rights and other problems facing Chilean women today.

The two realities in Chile expose the disparity between the institutionalized norms of sex and sexuality, and the large population whose lives and/or life-work sharply contrast the hegemonic model. Yet even within this growing group of people who are helping to change Chile's sexual landscape and expanding the definition of that which is normal and widely-accepted, the voice of lesbians and bisexual women in Chile is still not being heard. The feminist agenda has yet to include those women whose sexual orientation diverges from the heteronormative model, and the gay movement continues to use its male privileged position in society, to fight for acceptance, yet without the

inclusion of lesbians and bisexual women. This position of dual-repression—being female, and being a sexual minority—has left the already small lesbian movement dispersed and unsuccessful in overcoming the invisibility that plagues their lives in Chile. While feminists and gay men have succeeded in moving towards a public existence, the lesbians continue to remain private and isolated.

Only in the past couple of years has the lesbian and bisexual community of Chile started to make significant progress, mainly through the formation of internet websites, which, in a limited sense—has allowed the lesbians of Chile to “meet” each other, form a version of community, and given a forum where news of the larger gay/lesbian/bisexual movement—national and international—is readily available. Additionally, Chile’s lesbians and bisexual woman are now able to share experiences of homophobia (external and internal) in a comfortable environment, and slowly form a collective identity. These small, but significant advances have enabled this minority to experience increased exposure, in the media and even on the streets, where visibility is slowly beginning to reach the public and further complicate and expand the conception of sex and sexuality in Chile.

Methodology

I began my ISP period with the idea of studying sex and sexuality in Chile, and with the plan on focusing on the gay and lesbian movement. I decided to stay in Santiago, where the vast majority of organizations in the gay, lesbian and feminist movement are located. After a meeting with Carlos Sanchez, where we discussed my ideas and he provided me with the numbers for Tatiana Rojas, the secretary of the Luis Gauthier National Syndicate for Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals, and Gabriel Guajardo a

researcher in the field of gay and lesbian studies at the FLACSO: the national center for the liberal arts in Chile. I then proceeded to do a great deal of research online and using a variety of texts, where I was able to contact and arrange interviews with a variety of people working in different aspects the aforementioned movements. I went to an alternative club in Santiago called Blondie, and a lesbian club, Máscara, where I met two different people who I conducted informal interviews with. Since I was not yet sure of my thesis or central focus, I also talked with people, such as Eliana Dentone, the president of the National Syndicate for Sexual Workers, although I did not end up using our interview in my final paper.

The lack of contact with Carlos Sanchez ended up not being as detrimental as it could have been, since I was able to find my own contacts. Additionally, some of my most valuable sources came from random conversations, for example with Francisca, who is the Chilean host-mother of my friend who is with a different exchange program in Santiago; or with Daniel a boy I met at a party whose comments helped fill in many gaps in my understanding of what it means to be a Chilean boy and teenager today.

After the three weeks I spent in Santiago, I came to Valparaíso to organize my information and clarify my ideas in preparation for writing the paper. I was able to continue contact with certain people over e-mail which helped me once I decided I wanted to focus on the lesbian movement, in the larger contexts of the gay and feminist movements.

Institutionalized Norms

The Government and the Law

The 2002 National Study of Sexual Behavior, reached the conclusion that, “the political and social history of the country is characterized by a military and catholic style, therefore generating a moralistic culture, extremely conservative en sexual material...At the same time, without a doubt, coexists with this official discourse, a series of practices that depart from the norm, constituting therefore the question of a double-discourse en a true national topic”.² In order to understand this double-discourse, one must begin with the dominant discourse, characterized primarily by the laws and rules legislated by Chile’s various governmental bodies, interpreted by the courts, and enforced by the police. The Matrimonial Law, Article 102 of the Penal Code, defines the institution of marriage as a, “solemn contract between a man and a woman that unites them actually and indissolubly, for all of their lives, with the end of living together, procreating, and assisting each other mutually”.³ Adultery is a crime for both husbands and wives, yet, pressing charges against one’s spouse for this crime, can only be initiated by the husband. Sexual crimes in Chile consist of abortion, rape, violation, sexual activity with a minor, and adultery for being against the public order of the family and against the public morality, not as crimes against the victims themselves.⁴ Yet of the many laws that serve to define and regulate sex and sexual expression, Article 373 of the Penal Code—which penalizes “that which offends modesty, moral lease, o good customs of grave scandal or

² Estudio Nacional de Comportamiento Sexual, Chile: 2002. 30.

³ Ibid. 20.

⁴ Ibid. 22.

transcendental”⁵ has historically been the most discriminatory and difficult for those whose sexuality diverges from the norms. While the fight of gay organizations, such as the Movement for Integration and Liberation of Homosexuals (MOVILH) succeeded in eliminating Article 365—which criminalizes sodomy—in 1998, the fight against Article 373 has not yet been won, and has therefore yielded a public outcry by gay-rights activists, who have denounced the prejudicial law as randomly applied in order to discriminate against homosexuals.⁶

The random application of Article 373 is used by Chile’s police force, who Rolando Jimenez, president of MOVILH, explained, frequently harass, arrest, and even abuse gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people, simply for being non-straight, and because of Article 373, the police remain in full accordance with the law. These laws are clearly legislatively sanctioned tools used to officially define and regulate normative sexuality in Chile; by specifically criminalizing that which is against the “morality” of the State, dominant sexual norms have become institutionalized beyond the extent of mere social values, and make the fight to change them all the more difficult.

The gay movement’s public challenge to these restrictive laws has yielded minimal official governmental response. The Parliament admitted it has never officially discussed the issue. The Director of Communications for the governmental program of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination stated, “It puts but in an extremely difficult position as a organism of the State to discuss this extremely complicated issue. The only person authorized to discuss this is the director of the Division of Social Organizations. I would

⁵ Juan Pablo Sutherland. *Sexos y derechos: las nuevas batallas por la igualdad*. (LOM ediciones: Santiago). 33.

⁶ Rolando Jiménez, telephone interview, May 6, 2004.

have to transfer the anxiety [of dealing with this topic] and see if anyone could tell. But as I said, it is complicated for us, because we cannot speak against the laws”.⁷

The Media and Sex Education

The double-discourse previously mentioned could not be more obvious than in the popular forms of Chilean media and the debates over sex education in Chile. The imported images of scantily-clad women and teen-movies showing blatant sexual expression and often times, the act of sex itself, is impossible to avoid on television and in the movies. The programming of MTV, for example, takes for granted, an audience comfortable and accustomed to open and frank discussions of sex and sexuality, and minimally takes into account the social and cultural differences between the United States and Latin America, or even the differences among the many Latin American countries themselves. And while popular Chilean programming, too, is saturated with blatant sex and sexuality, these “for entertainment only” media examples are rarely accompanied with any public discussions of the issues; they are merely images that appear, removed from the specific context of the institutionalized norms of sex and sexuality in Chile. The National Study of Sexual Behaviors writes, “Economic globalization has imported and exposed difficult images launched in traditional Chilean society...On the other hand, one should note the growing homogenization in the means of communication, and in their editorial lines, that makes it extremely difficult to openly debate and expression the diversity”.⁸

⁷ **SITE THIS!!! (FROM OPUSGAY...I think)!!!!**

⁸ Estudio Nacional de Comportamiento Sexual. (Chile, 2002). 31.

Addressing the disparity between public images of sexuality and the lack of any public forum for education and/or discussion, reporter, Pía Rajevic laments that, “the lack of resources, the missing support from the State and the intrusion of powers that be, have not permitted the leap towards living informed, responsible and plentiful sexual lives...Furthermore, there continues to exist in this country, an enormous distance between that which happens to the people, that which the people want or need, and that which happens from those with power...There is not a plural and independent press in Chile that guarantees that journalists can complete the functions elemental and essential in a democratic society”.⁹

The complexities of the media, compounded with the complexities of sex education in schools, have created a profound confusion over sexuality. Alfredo Rojas notes the tensions in formulating a sex-education curriculum given the polar opinions of feminist and sexual-rights activists versus the Catholic Church and other conservative forces in Chile. He writes that, “Given the influence that [conservative groups] have in the national life, it’s important to recognize that the political opposition, summarized in the cultural opposition has an influence and power, especially if they appear magnified by our modes of communication”.¹⁰ He continues to explain that the never-ending debates, without a general curriculum lead to a disparity between what Chile’s students learn about sex and sexuality.

Daniel told me his private, catholic high school had one class period devoted to sexuality, where Biblical quotes were read and interpreted by a Priest, with the

⁹ Pia Rajevic. “Goces Privados, Públicos Castigos” (Santiago: FLACSO, 2002). 45-53.

¹⁰ Alfredo Rojas. “La educación sexual en Chile: tensiones y dilemas de una agenda”. (Santiago: FLASO-Chile, 2002). 192.

conclusion that sex is for procreation, between a man and a woman, and only during marriage.¹¹ On the other hand, Tatiana Rojas—bisexual mother of two teenage sons—was invited by her children’s more liberal school to discuss issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual rights. She concluded her description of the class by saying, “Having this type of class in high school is rare, very rare. To discuss sexuality in any school is complicated, because it’s a theme that people are not accustomed to talk about; it’s a theme that the people don’t want to have a position”.¹² While there are a plethora of positions on all sides, the single most powerful opposition to public discussions of sexuality and progressive sex-education, has been, and continues to be, the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church’s powerful influence in Chile goes back to the arrival of the Spanish Colonizers, who imposed the Catholic morality over sex and sexuality, making it the dominant, institutionalized position. The Church has strictly maintained its doctrine over God-ordained, and therefore acceptable, sexual expression. Marriage is considered a holy sacrament which intensifies one’s personal relationship with God and symbolizes the union of Jesus Christ with the Catholic Church. Sex can only be within the union of marriage and solely for the purpose of procreation. “Without a doubt, in one’s natural state, debilitated by the Original Sin, one can be corrupted. For that reason, the life of human sexuality requires chastity...Not as a restrictive norm, but as a true liberation from the slavery of the body’s instincts, in order to find the luminous path of God’s love for

¹¹ Daniel, interview, Santiago, May 19, 2004.

¹²Tatiana Rojas, interview, Santiago, May 11, 2004.

man”.¹³ In addition to chastity, all women must maintain their virginity until marriage, as one of the sacraments preventing idolatry of the flesh. “The dignity of marriage does not shine in all parts when put with the darkness of polygamy, the call of free love, divorce, abortion, and many other deformations. Moreover, congenial love continues to be frequently desecrated by egotism, hedonism, and illicit uses against the generation for other disturbing sources”.¹⁴

In describing the role of women, Mauricio Alegre says they represent, to an extent, the morality of society; and explains that the strength of the woman is not in that which is exterior, but lies in her discretion of that which is intimate and personal. The woman is closer to nature and at her core, mysterious, reserved and pure, radiating peace and serenity.¹⁵

One of the Church’s most powerful crusades has been against homosexuality, saying it is against the will of God and essentially calling homosexual sex a one-way ticket to hell. Rolando Jimenez of MOVILH said that en Chile, the separation of Church and state has not begin, since they still maintain enormous power in the opinions and politics of Chileans. He was speaking not just about opinions of homosexuality, but over the criminalization of all forms of abortion and the Day-After Pill, and the strong resistance to public education about AIDS prevention and an open discussion over issues of sexuality.¹⁶ The Chilean Catholic Church’s top leader, Cardinal Jorge Medina, has fought vociferously against homosexuality as one of the most important factors in the

¹³ Mauricio Alegre. *Amor y Noviazgo* (Madrid: Colección Folletos mc, 1998). 11-12.

¹⁴ Ibid. 22.

¹⁵ Mauricio Alegre. *Amor y Noviazgo*. (Madrid: Colección Folletos mc, 1998). 15 y 41.

¹⁶ Rolando Jimenez, May 6, 2004. Telephone interview.

decline of a moral, Christian, society.¹⁷ Homosexual relations directly counter the hegemonic union of a man and a woman, in holy matrimony, and in the eyes of the Church, disrupts the equilibrium achieved in the unification of the distinct genders, in their defined gender roles.

Traditional Gender Roles in Chile

The gender binary, as understood by Foucault, is a reciprocal dialectic, where the definition of one gender is understood by its absence of the qualities which characterize the other gender; therefore, traditional masculinity defines itself by the absence of femininity and visa-versa. In Latin America, and particularly in Chile, the rigidity of the definition of gender has remained dominant, in large part because of prominence of the Catholic Church, but also, by the social order which, without an open public dialogue, perpetuates itself through the socialization of children by their parents/guardians, and the effects of the many other social institutions which help define and maintain the status quo.

Victoria Hurtado writes that the traditional definition of femininity, “the woman is subtle, she is eternal; not lustful or vulgar... Chaney has introduced the notion of the Latin American “supermother”, which she explains is nothing more than the extension of altruistic, traditional femininity in the public sphere... The social imagination has not varied much... women are still located in that which is private, intimate and familial.”¹⁸ It is not surprising that the traditional gender role of a female is practically a reiteration of the Catholic Church’s teachings on the roles and values essential to women, considering the prominence of the Church in the history of the Western world, and particularly that of

¹⁷ Pamela Jiles. *Sexo y Derechos*. (Santiago, LOM Ediciones). 57.

¹⁸ Victoria Hurtado. “Identidad femenina, liderazgo y conflicto”. 140-2.

the Colonized world. Ana remembers that, “when my mother wasn’t telling me how to act like a ‘lady’ she was teaching me by example. I never saw my brothers help my mother, but I was cooking lunch by the time I was 8”.¹⁹

On the other hand, the hegemonic gender role for men, defined by its absence of femininity, inhabits the public sphere where decisions are made and power is negotiated. Masculinity is defined by strength and rigor; and sexually, men are the metaphorical hunters and gathers, initiating sex and dominating the woman in and out of the bedroom. Cristian recounted the many times his father told him to stop acting like a “fag” and start acting like a “man”, usually this had to do with his dislike for soccer during his childhood.²⁰ Interestingly, Daniel told me when he scored the winning goal for his soccer team, his father told him he’d never been so proud to call him his son.²¹ In Chile and Latin America generally, *machismo* could be considered the polar opposite of the “supermother”: the dominant definition of a man is excessive traditional masculinity. Considering the rigidity of gender roles here in Chile, those whose behaviors and identities transcend these boundaries are considered abnormal within dominant societal structures; it is Chile’s sexual minorities who are viewed as “gender outlaws” and are therefore subjected a society characterized by homophobia.

Homofobia

Chile’s National Study of Sexual Behavior concluded that, “If one compares Chile to other countries in respect to its opinions about homosexuality, it demonstrates

¹⁹ Ana, interview, Santiago, May 20, 2004.

²⁰ Cristian, interview, Santiago, May 19, 2004.

²¹ Daniel, interview, Santiago, May 6, 2004.

that in our country, judgment is more restrictive than in other parts”.²² The hegemonic model of sexuality, requires a married man and woman to engage in sexual activity for the purpose of procreation, yet same-sex couples, unable to procreate, engage in sex purely for pleasure, and that transgression has led the Church to denounce their sexual activity, in addition to their gender transgressions, where the binary of feminine and masculine becomes blurred and complicated within the homosexual relationship.²³

In addition to transgressions of social norms, the association of HIV/AIDS with homosexuals has compounded the problem where the departure from dominant morality and conceptions of sexuality, a physical component has developed. “AIDS has provided for contemporary societies with a pretext for reinserting homosexuality in a symbolic drama between the contamination and the purity, where the association between AIDS and homosexuality is permanent”.²⁴

Daniel told me although he has certain problems with the Catholic Church, they are right about “maricones” (fags), yet making a clear distinction between lesbian sex with is “hot” and gay sex with is “dirty and against God”.²⁵ Cristian, on the other hand, said was beaten during high school, when word of his homosexuality spread.²⁶

For Chile’s gays and lesbians, the experience of external homofobia does not appear to be nearly as debilitating as internal homofobia. In Chile, “a culture which stigmatizes the orientations not heterosexual, the exclusion turns into auto-exclusion for some. Those who possess homosexual orientations have internalized the evaluation that

²² Estudio Nacional de Comportamiento Sexual, Santiago, 83.

²³ Roberto Rosenzvaig. “Algunas características psicológico-sociales de la cultura chilena que explican sus rasgos homofóbicos”. (Santiago, 2001). 86-7

²⁴ Estudio Nacional de Comportamiento Sexual. 124.

²⁵ Daniel, interview, Santiago, May 19, 2004.

²⁶ Cristian, interview, Santiago, May 6, 2004.

says they are intolerable... This has had consequences on the formation of an integrated personality and on the construction of satisfactory relationships”.²⁷ Cristian told me “I spent years hating myself for being gay... I guess I still do in some ways”²⁸. Erika, the founder and director of the successful website “breaking the silence” (*www.rompiendoelsilencio.cl*), has become one of the leaders of Chile’s lesbian movement, yet at thirty-two years old, and with a serious partner, she has yet to tell her parents she is a lesbian.²⁹

While hegemonic sexuality remains institutionalized through various laws, uncompromisingly supported by the Catholic Church, and debate and open discussion is minimal within schools and in the media, leading to the maintenance of the gender binary and heteronormative sexuality, the work of the gay movement and the feminist movement have already successfully made significant progress in shifting the rigid definition of what is normal in Chile by fighting to emerge from their ‘private’ world and publicly fight for increased tolerance and equal opportunities. While it is difficult to try and gauge the shifts in hegemonic social definitions of sex and sexuality, the numbers speak for themselves. The sexual lives of many Chileans have long deviated from that singular acceptable model. The “reality” of sex and sexuality in Chile is a very different story from the established norms— which have traditionally been understood in a historical context, and forged by those with dominance and power. When one looks at the statistical realities of the population and studies the groups working to change the dominant discourse, the disparity between the two becomes clear.

²⁷ Estudio Nacional de Comportamiento Sexual, 83.

²⁸ Cristian, interview, Santiago, May 6, 2004.

²⁹ Erika, interview, Santiago, May 24, 2004.

Sex and Sexuality in Chile: Shifting Realities and Movements for Change

Chilean Sex

Sexual realities in Chile continue to be formed and understood through double-discourse of that which is dominant and its effects on the sexual behaviors and attitudes of the population, and the statistics and multiple sexualities and sexual expressions articulated by various Chilean movements and represented by growing acceptance among Chile's youth of more complex and diverse definitions of sex and sexuality. Although radical changes have and continue to take place, on the one hand, hegemonic sexuality continues to remain the norm. Pamela Jiles writes that, "Despite the described advances, an important percentage of the population continues to associate sex with masculine power and consider that there are "women to have relationships with and others for the bed", continuing feelings of being prisoners of taboos, fears and prejudices which make a healthy sexual life, difficult. Among the young exists the valuation of female virginity desirable in a serious companion, and a double standard in appreciating the fidelity of the partner. Many Chileans continue to have a vision of sexuality centered on women's ability to reproduce, and therefore accept a more permissive conduct by men".³⁰ Ana talked about her adolescent confusion, when her two closest friends became pregnant during high school, saying, "I really believed you had to wait for marriage before you had sex. I was wrong",³¹ And despite the dominance of hegemonic sex, Ana was correct: the statistics have revealed dramatic shifts in the sexual behavior of Chileans. For example,

³⁰ Pamela Jiles. *Sexo y derechos*. 59.

³¹ Ana, interview, Santiago, May 20, 2004.

in 1991, 42% of youths declared they were sexually active; in 1996 the number rose to 55%.³² Additionally, percentages of those using contraceptives (forbidden by the Catholic Church), and illegally having abortions (160,000 every year)³³, has also risen. Possibly more significantly is the rise in open discussion of sex and sexuality among the youth. Daniel said, “talking about sex is normal with my friends”³⁴. Marisol told me, “when I got pregnant and thought about having an abortion, I talked to my friends about it. One girl was really upset that I was thinking about killing my baby, and in the end I didn’t do it, but my friends all listened and helped me”.³⁵

The double-discourse—or lack of public discourse—around sex and sexuality, has left Chileans confused to the extent of becoming detrimental to their sex-lives. In 1997, 75% of women in between the ages of 25 and 55 reported they, “had an unsatisfactory and dysfunctional sex-life...The studies indicate that women are suffer frigidity, inability to have orgasms, a sexual apatite and other dysfunctions, with unusually high frequency”.³⁶ Francisca, who’s 20 year marriage produced three children, and who now currently has a serious boyfriend, revealed she’s never enjoyed sex with a man, and finds their abilities lacking, to say the least. Ana loves having sex, although she’s had many experiences where her partners only focus on having an orgasm, with minimal concern for their partner’s pleasure.

Chilean men also have high rates of sexual dysfunctions, including impotency, premature ejaculation, and difficulties in maintaining satisfactory sexual relations. The

³² Estudio Nacional de Comportamiento Sexual, 25.

³³ Pamela Jules. *Sexo y derechos*. 48.

³⁴ Daniel, interview, May 19, 2004.

³⁵ Marisol, interview, May 26, 2004.

³⁶ Pamela Jiles. *Sexo y derechos*. 51.

studies have shown that men view the bedroom as a battleground: “we demand of ourselves to polar opposites: a gladiator, yet tender; hot and sexy, but super faithful; strong yet soft; rapid but long-lasting; modern yet conservative; violent but careful; macho but with a developed femininity”.³⁷

Considering the difficulties of enjoying a healthy sexuality within the dominant model of heterosexuality, one must consider the added anxiety of homosexual sex. Tatiana Rojas discussed the theme of same-sex relations, by explaining, “Lesbians also talk about fidelity, getting married...there’s a fear of having sex without love, when it comes to your partner...there’s a need to maintain gender roles in sex and relationships, women appear to be constantly looking for a man, in a woman”. The feminist movement and the gay movement in Chile have been two of the most significant forces addressing and challenging the societal norms and the censorship of an open discourse around the theme of sex and sexuality.

The Feminist Movement

The feminist movement in Chile began to mobilize during the dictatorship of Pinochet, in a campaign to return to democracy and seek answers and demand justice around issues of human rights. With the return to democracy in 1990, the movement lost momentum and became dispersed. Yet a great deal of accomplishments have been achieved, including increased representation in education, the workforce and the government, a law prohibiting interfamilial violence, and the removal of a law distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate children, for example.

³⁷ Ibid. 54-5

Today, the women's movement has taken on the issue of sexual and reproductive rights, fighting to decriminalize abortion, develop and promote issues of health, and education. MEMCh: The Movement for Emancipation of Chilean Women, has been a vital force in the movement, and Paulina Weber explained the main priorities; their many classes educate women on leadership, health, sexual and reproductive rights, technology and personal development. Furthermore, MEMCh focuses on working-class and poor women, many of whom are single mothers trying to raise their children while financially providing for them. A student at MEMCh, Ana, takes free classes on computation and self-esteem during her two days off from her job as a housekeeper, while her mother takes care of her three children. She told me the difficulties of getting herself to MEMCh's offices and classrooms are well worth it, as the organization has not only given her the technical tools she needs to find a better job, but empowered her to believe she can do more than be a full-time mother and housekeeper.

While the many successes of the woman's movement in Chile have allowed women to enjoy a more public existence by publicly exposing and forcing a dialogue around the main issues of organizations such as MEMCh. This visibility has helped to lesson the rigidity of gender roles and definitions, yet the feminist/women's organizations still maintains a heteronormative agenda. Paulina told me MEMCh works with an AIDS organization in the gay community, Via Positive, yet she can not think of any groups of—or even individual—lesbians involved in any of their projects. She told me that the lesbian movement has always supported the feminist movement in Chile, yet remains apart.³⁸ Tatiana Rojas explained the connection between the gay/lesbian/bisexual syndicate and the feminist movement when she said “For us, the alliance with the

³⁸ Paulina Weber, interview, Santiago, May 20, 2004.

women's movement has been super important. The strength of the women's movement has fought the largest battles for sexual rights here in Chile. They deal with the themes of maternity, abortion, and divorce, which are apparently women's issues. But the movement has yet to deal with the theme of the woman worker, *las campesinas* and the seeds, nor have they directly addressed the rights of sexual minorities”.

The Gay Movement

The National Study of Sexual Behaviors attributes the great increase in public visibility of homosexuals to three factors: “the presence of an important and growing number of national studies on the theme, the advent of an organized movement of homosexual and bisexual people; and systematized work by the health system on the topic.”³⁹ In the late eighties and early nineties, MOVILH emerged as the first organization publicly and politically fighting for gay rights in Chile. The AIDS crisis forced the subject of homosexuality and health to be addressed publicly, and the presence of MOVILH and other newly formed groups such as MUMS: Unified Movement of Sexual Minorities, helped counter the negative images coming from the Church and health officials, in addition to the discrimination against homosexuals which was already a part Chile's social consciousness.

In addition, gay meeting places such as bars, clubs, coffee shops and saunas began opening and encouraging participation, but as Sutherland notes, “these spaces...reveal the tension between the public and the private” and furthermore, help formulate the emerging gay identity as one which costs money, and therefore remains available to a limited few. Tatiana explained, “Here in Chile, with money, you are going to be more accepted on the

³⁹ Estudio Nacional de Comportamiento Sexual, 2002. 123.

one hand, but even with money, never on all sides, but they do have more possibilities. But the majority of us are poor and don't have access to the clinic, to the gay bar, etc.”

The external influences which have helped shift the definitions of possible sexualities and improve the condition for homosexuals are television and movies. The international success of popular television programs from the United States, such as *Will and Grace* and reality based shows such as *The Real World* on MTV, which feature gays and lesbians, have forced Chile's traditional society to view relatively-positive images of gays and begin to rethink the hegemonic model of sexuality, as has already begun to happen with gender roles.

Unfortunately, national surveys reveal that in Chile, 0.3% of men and 0.1% of women identify as homosexual; 0.1% of men and 0.1% of women identify as bisexual. These dismal numbers compare with international estimates that 10% of the population is homosexual/lesbian. Unless Chile truly has a strikingly low homosexual population, it appears that many still do not feel comfortable revealing their sexual orientation. Cristian, who is 20, has not yet come out to his college friends or family. He feels ashamed, and he is still hoping to find a girl he considers to be sexually attractive one day. Gabriel Guajardo explained to be that the gay movement has gained significant visibility but has not reached an institutionalized level of acceptance, for example, in reserving an academic space of dialogue and education through a queer studies program at one of Chile's many universities. Lesbian activist Erika explained that for all the successes of the many gay organizations and even OpusGay, the online gay Chilean magazine, “our gay *compañeros* say ‘homosexual’ supposedly referring to all sexual minorities, but they aren't speaking about us lesbians, they are speaking for us...Because there are many

super *machista* gay men, and for them, lesbians are a sexual minority, but we are silenced because we are women”. The many lesbians I spoke with, clearly felt that the consciously or not, the gay movement in Chile has used the patriarchal structure of society, to advance their cause, many times leaving their lesbian sisters relegated to the private sphere traditionally occupied by women.

Chile’s Lesbians and Bisexual Women

As was the case with the gay and feminist movements, the lesbian movement first appeared in 1984, with the formation of *Ayuquelén* which means “to feel good” in Mapadungun: the language of the Mapuche. *Ayuquelén* was a feminist and lesbian social-justice collective, born in the context of the dictatorship, and was specifically political in this context. The group was formed after the death of a lesbian, Monica Briones, whose life remains a mystery as many of public records on her birth, life and death and can no longer be found. The group organized with the mission to never let this happen to another one of their comrades. Yet after the return to democracy, the majority of the social justice organizations formed during the eighties slowly began to dissolve, including *Ayuquelén*, which, while it didn’t officially end until 1997, essentially stopped organizing and became a low-key group of 2 or 3 lesbians. Since MOVILH has no lesbian leaders, and MUMS has 2-3 women who work under in sub-group, the lesbian movement has yet to find a central, active organization working within Chile. The the only lesbian organization is called Lesbian Work and Studies (*Trabajos y Estudios Lésbicas: TEL*) who have a house called The Precious Salon (*El Salon de la Preciosa*) where there are classes, a library, work on national campaigns, and a radio program named “Neither Marias nor Magdalenas” (*Ni Marias Ni Magdalenas*). There are four

leaders in the group and in between 20 and 25 participants. Additionally, there is the University Coordinator for Sexual Diversity, Karen Castillo, who runs a gay/lesbian/bisexual university organization with both men and woman. Erika finds their work particularly important as they bring a more liberal and a more fluid sexual perspective, as being members of the next generation.

Yet the most important “organization” which is finally beginning to bring together Chile’s lesbians and bisexual women, is the internet. Erika, as a founder of “Breaking the Silence”, an online lesbian magazine and meeting site specific to Chile, explained to me that, “while my critics have said that these web pages provide a false comfort since it is a virtual world and maybe not the ‘real world’, I think that might be the first step. The magazine helps inform and educate women and girls who might feel alone, and the poetry section gives a forum for expressing the complicated feelings of one’s identity. The chat rooms bring the community together in a way that can help someone who feels terrible, and most importantly, we use the page to try and take the over 300 listed-members to the streets, to erase our number one problem: invisibility”.

Yet Erika revealed to me that even within the small community of lesbians and bisexual women, there are many disagreements over what kind of agenda to publicize. Some people want everything to be public, with the goal of exposing those who are discriminated in a heteronormative system, and then again discriminated in a patriarchal, gendered society. Others want a more private support-group organization, where women who are struggling with their own internal homophobia can learn to feel comfortable with their identities and receive advice on how to come out to family and friends, and similar type dilemmas. “Breaking the Silence” debated whether or not to

publicly expose two cases of discrimination against lesbians which they knew of: Karen Castillo and her partner got kicked out of a restaurant for holding hands; and the case of the lesbian judge whose ex-husband is suing for full-custody because she lives with partner, and their two children. Despite the reservations of many members of the website's committee, these two cases have brought unprecedented attention to the theme of lesbians and bisexuals in Chile. It appears that what goes on in the virtual world of the internet can also have powerful affects in the real world. Furthermore, the website, with various other groups in the gay, lesbian and feminist movements, worked together to present a three-day gay/lesbian art exposition held on Alameda, the main street in Santiago. In between 3-4,000 people attended, due to the publicity and ground-breaking nature of the event.

Conclusion

In order to understand the current reality of Chile's lesbian population, one must first analyze the hegemonic structures which define, and therefore limit, conceptions of sex and sexuality. Chile's history as a country colonized by the Spanish century's ago, accounts for the dominance of a heteronormative, patriarchal system which uses the gender binary to create a strict distinction between the definitions and acceptable behaviors of men and women. This history also helps to explain the impact of the Catholic Church (who's influence in Spain led to the normalization and dominance of the above social categories). The Catholic Church long ago defined the institution of marriage as a holy sacrament, strengthening the relationship between God and his people, and the representing the relationship between God and the Catholic Church. Since a

patriarchal heteronormative system because institutionalized as the standard, that which is other, became abnormal and against God. This dichotomy between can be seen in the current laws, which define marriage nearly exactly the same way the Church doctrines do; and prohibits alternative sexualities and sexual expressions.

The norms relating to sex and sexuality uphold the singular definition of that which is socially (and morally) acceptable, yet in the hundreds of years between the conquering of Chile by the Spanish and today, the realities of people have changed and diversified dramatically. The statistics and nation-wide analyses reveal the facts which are obvious to any Chilean citizen: there are significant populations of people have sex before marriage, children outside of marriage, individuals not getting married, couples getting separated or divorced, and there are gays, lesbians and bisexual people living open and proud lives. The changes in the social landscape demonstrate the success of those working to dismantle the dominant model and include variations and diverse definitions which incorporate the realities of all Chileans.

Among the groups working to redefine and expand definitions and rights relating to sex and sexuality, are the feminist organizations and the gay and lesbian organizations. By using ethnographic research methods to observe and hear the first-hand accounts of those members of these movements, one will note that even among those working at the grassroots level to try and effect change in the dominant power structures of Chilean society, there are varying levels of power and influence within the movements. While the feminist movement tries to dismantle patriarchal gender-roles, their agenda remains safely heteronormative. And while the gay movement transcends the structure of

heteronormativity, they use their male privilege in a *machista* society to insert their agenda.

*“Lesbianism continues to be the territory most unknown and problematic for cultural command of the system of sex and gender. There is not a doubt that lesbianism renounces the true heterosexual regimen and exposes its own vulnerability before the hegemonic cultural order. This includes something as violent as penalizing sodomy only for men, because it was unimaginable that two women would renounce the imperative sexual order, a coherent issue with the social and cultural invisibility that Chile’s lesbians live with...That is to say, before being lesbians, they are women, and before being gay, gay men are men who enjoy in part the privileges of the social order”.*⁴⁰

Yet as today’s social realities around sex and sexuality have forced hegemonic structures to begin to shift and expand their definitions, the lesbian movement is starting to come together, in a public forum and find alternative ways of advance its cause. The two years since “Breaking the Silence” became an online-Chilean, lesbian magazine and website, have witnessed groundbreaking moments in lesbian movement, and if their constant search for alternative methods of organizing and publicizing their cause continues, the evolving societal definitions of sex and sexuality might find Chile’s lesbian population represented in a more diverse, representative social model.

⁴⁰ Juan Pablo Sutherland, *Sexo y derechos*. 36.

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Entrevistas

(persona, fecha, tiempo, posición, lugar)

- Ana, 20 de mayo 2004, 12:00 p.m., housekeeper and participante/estudiante de MEMCh, oficina de MEMCh: centro de computadores.
- Carlos Sanchez, 4 de mayo 2004, 9:00 a.m., Presidente del Sindicato Nacional Trabajador, Luis Guatire: Lesbianas Gays Bisexuales. Centro de los Sindicatos.
- Cristian (20), 6 de mayo 2004, 11:00 p.m., estudiante, Blondie discoteca.

Daniel (24), 19 de mayo 2004, 9:00 p.m., entrenador gimnasio, su casa.

Eliana Dentone, 20 de mayo 2004, 3:00 p.m., Presidenta Nacional Sindicato Independiente Trabajadores Sexuales Angela Lina, su oficina.

Erika Monteclees (32), 24 de mayo 2004, 5:30 p.m., Directora/Fundadora: www.rompiendoelsilencio.cl, café.

Francisca, 16 de mayo 2004, 2:00 p.m., socióloga/profesora/madre, un restaurante.

Gabriel Guajardo. 20 de mayo 2004; 9:30 a.m., Investigador de FLACSO, oficina en FLACSO .

Marisol (23), 26 de mayo 2004, 10:00 p.m., Enfermera/madre, casa residencial.

Paulina Weber, 20 de mayo 2004, 11:00 a.m., Coordinadora de MEMCh, oficina de MEMCh

Rolando Jiménez, 6 de mayo 2004, 6:30 p.m., entrevista por teléfono.

Tatiana Rojas (38), 11 de mayo 2004, 7:00 p.m., Secretaria del Sindicato Luis Gauthier: Lesbianas Gays Bisexuales, centro de los sindicatos.