

The discourse on sexuality: a comparison of two sex orientation books for adolescents

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Abstract

Sex education is undoubtedly one of the most important items to cover in our country today. Although there seems to be general consensus on the matter, the truth is that the ways of approaching and teaching the contents of that education are as diverse as the groups that make up Mexico's social fabric. This article analyzes the underlying discourse in two books, whose objective is to guide adolescents in the exercise of their sexuality. One of them was published by Mexico City's local government, and the other by the Catholic Organization Red Familia ("Family Network"). This exercise is not intended to make any value judgments regarding such books, but only to point out their similarities and differences in the use of language, the construction of their arguments, and their ways of understanding sexuality.

Key words: sex education – sexuality – discourse analysis – Red Familia – Federal District Government.

Introduction

Sex education has been the subject of intense debate in Mexico at least since the 1970s, when the government of President Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976) launched a family planning campaign that challenged some of the principles of Catholic morality.¹ Now, more than four decades later, the contents and the way in which sexuality is addressed in the basic level textbooks are still the object of discussion. The discrepancies between the groups that defend a secular educational model and those that propose following religious values are visible in their discourses, in which clear positions not just about sexuality but also about a way to conceive personal and social wellbeing can be observed.

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¹ This issue turned out to be problematic because the most traditional currents of Catholicism maintain that the sexual act has a predominantly reproductive function. Thus their rejection of the use of birth control pills, central for family planning.

The aim of this article is to compare the construction of discourse in two sex education textbooks through the analytic contributions of authors such as Benveniste (1977), Austin (1982), Peirce (1987), and Irvine & Gal (1995) among others, through three dimensions: a) the conditions under which the texts were produced, b) their ideological affiliation, and c) the intention of forming specific moral positions in their addressees. It is important to underscore here that we do not intend to evaluate the pertinence, validity or supremacy of any of these discourses, but to apprehend their similarities and distinctiveness. Thus, this article is structured in three parts. The first one briefly describes the spatial-temporal context in which the books analyzed were published and who wrote them. Then we seek to uncover the underlying values in both texts, as well as the manifestation of these values through a) their contents and the way these are covered, b) the multiple voices included, and c) the link built through language with the books' addressees. Finally, we offer some observations resulting from our analysis.

Conditions of production of two books on sex education

In 2008 the books *Sexualidad y salud humana* ("Sexuality and Human Health") and *Tu futuro en libertad* ("Your Future in Freedom"), whose express purpose was to complement the contents of Biology textbooks and orient youths to reflect on the exercise of their own sexuality, were published. In broad terms, it may be argued that both books arose from the same concern. However, the discourses that structure their contents are profoundly different.

Peirce (1987) and Levinson (1983) argued that the analysis of any discourse must necessarily be conducted based on the context in which it is produced. Following that logic, in this section we show the conditions in which these books were published. We also present the authors and their moral positions, since these materials were addressed to secondary and high school students.

In his *Collected Papers* (translated to Spanish as *Obra lógico-semiótica* in 1987), Peirce established that the assignment of meaning is not a single event but an infinite process of interpretation.² This argument is valuable for the present analysis because it makes two things clear: first, that the interpretation of a discourse is not rigid; that is, that the analysis of words and their definitions is not enough to understand a text because the text is not a self-contained product. In other words, the meanings of a discourse always depend on the context in which it is produced and distributed. Secondly, that in a particular context those words may be construed as *indices*³ or signals of a social or ideological position, or of the type of relationship that exists between the participants of a communicative act (Irvine & Gal, 1995).

² This argument contradicts the assumption of Saussurian structuralism that the relationship between signifier and signified remains stable.

³ Peirce defines as indices those signs that indicate or maintain a relationship with the object to which they refer. In this sense, words may be considered indices of a social, political or ideological position of the person who uses them.

The creators of the discourse and the interest in sex education

As Foucault (1977) pointed out, sexuality in Western culture was under the regulation of Christianity and the consequent censorship, at least until the seventeenth century. The idea that this issue must remain concealed vanished to give way to the circulation of discourses in which sexuality plays a central role. However, this does not mean that it is exempt from controls and norms. Even today it is a crucial issue for the Catholic Church, because a reproductive function is fulfilled through it. Consequently, practices not linked to reproduction are often regarded as immoral, forbidden, or at least deviant. To this we must add the regulation of sexuality by the State apparatus, which problematizes it as a public health issue through secular institutions such as science and jurisprudence, among others.

In Mexico, the interest in sexuality and its regulation may be understood if we take into account some figures from recent decades: the marriage rate went down from 74% to 50% between 1990 and 2010, the percentage of people infected with HIV is 0.3%, and in Mexico City 54% of the mothers became pregnant for the first time before the age of 19 (INEGI, 2013).

These data show the need to offer timely sex education, whose natural space seems to be the school. But the agreement about the pertinence of introducing the subject into the curricula breaks down when faced with the opposition of groups with different notions of the way in which sexuality should be understood, taught about, and regulated. For the publishers of the educational materials analyzed in this article, the contents of the textbooks distributed by the federal government are insufficient.

On one side is the government of Mexico City, then known as Mexico's Federal District Government (GDF), whose officials follow the premise that sex education is a means to prevent public problems in the areas of health and of the coexistence of citizens with different identities, preferences and practices. On the other side is Red Familia ("Family Network"), a Catholic civil society organization not ascribed to the Catholic Church structure whose members regard sex education as a means to promote institutions such as life, human rights, marriage, and the family.

From this description it may be observed that both actors are deeply interested in the educational space as a means of regulation of sexuality. However, their discourse is different due to the ideological position they maintain.

The principle of laicism⁴ postulates respecting freedom of conscience, the autonomy of the political from the religious, and the equality of individuals and their associations before the law (Blancarte, 2008). The publishers of the GDF book seem to understand wellbeing as the situation in which every person is in conditions to develop fully in the framework of citizenship and equal rights guaranteed by the State.

⁴ That is, the autonomy of the State from dogmatic norms, institutions and authorities.

On the other hand, Catholic integrism⁵ maintains that religious morality should pervade both the private and the public space. With an ideology⁶ anchored in tradition, Red Familia maintains that personal and social well-being are based on the dignity of the human person. To preserve it, the State must ensure the protection of the family, understood as the union of a man and a woman in a marriage open to life (Red Familia, 2012).

These positions constitute the foundation of the discourses of both *Tu futuro en libertad* and *Sexualidad y salud humana*, two educational books that, as we will see in the following section, were published in a particularly tense context.

The Federal District Government and the threat to traditional order

During the administrations of Alejandro Encinas and Marcelo Ebrard as Heads of Government, there was intense debate about two modifications to legislation. The Law of Coexistence Partnerships (Ley de Sociedades de Convivencia) was passed in 2006, establishing regulations for the rights and obligations of members of homes without conjugal or kinship links, some of whose beneficiaries were same-sex couples. The following year, the Federal District became the first entity in the federation to legalize abortion in Mexico. The reactions to these legal regulations were polarized: what for some reflected progress in social policy, for others represented an attack on the stability anchored in traditional values.⁷

The climate of tension generated by the approval of these laws was the background for the drafting, editing and publication of the books analyzed in this article. We suggest that both can be seen as a response to the public debate of the time, and that in their discourse we can identify both their positions and some references to their opponents.

For example, in *Tu futuro en libertad* it is claimed that some religious organizations control their faithful's sexuality, but are not allowed to do it in legal terms because the State is secular. This fragment may be understood as an answer to statements from conservative groups about the laws mentioned above, described as reprehensible actions because they broke away from the values that – from that perspective – maintain social cohesion and stability. For its part, and as a vindication of the positions upheld by Red Familia and other associated organizations,⁸ in *Sexualidad y salud humana* it is said that “sex education corresponds first to the family, and must agree with its principles, customs and values” (Fernández, 2008: 27).

5 By 'integrism' we mean the model that places religion as the axis of social organization, and therefore as the rector of individual and social practices.

6 In this article we refer to ideology as the set of values, ideas, objectives and moral notions that give meaning to the way in which individuals see themselves and understand their social environment.

7 Multiple discourses were circulated at that time. Some examples are the re-emergence of the defense of sexual diversity, the organizations in favor of human rights, the anti-abortion pronouncements of associations such as ProVida or Red Familia, and multiple demands of quality education from groups like Red por la Educación or Confederación Nacional de Escuelas Particulares.

8 Some examples are Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia (UNPF) and Asociación de Laicos para la Madurez Afectiva y Sexual (ALMAS).

As we will discuss below, the ideological burden of the texts may be traced through the use of words that purportedly describe an objective reality but have a heavy normative component. Thus, the books analyzed here have a double purpose: they offer information on some issues and seek to create moral positions on them.

The underlying discourse and ideology in sex education books

This section aims to explore the discourse contained in the books mentioned through a comparative exercise around three dimensions: their contents and the way in which these are addressed, the multiplicity of voices that coexist in each book's discourse, and the use of language in their link to their addressees.

Ways to think about sexuality

A first strategy to approach the texts studied here is to review their tables of contents. Although the subjects addressed in the books are insufficient to make an analysis of their discourse, the way they are organized can show the structure upon which this discourse is constructed. At this point we must remember that both books have an educational intent, that they are addressed to adolescents, and that they are conceived as complementary to the free textbooks distributed by the federal government. In this respect, they have in principle an informative function, and as such they approach a definition of sexuality, its practices, its risks, and how to prevent them. At first, these shared features might lead us to hypothesize that the structure of both discourses is similar. However, it becomes clear that there are profound differences between them. As we will argue below, such differences may be viewed through their ideological positions, which are not limited to the description of facts or events but acquire a normative character.

The text of *Sexualidad y salud humana* begins by addressing the potentialities of the sexual act through reproduction and links of affection. Then it proceeds to the subjects of responsibility, health, and methods of prevention, with a final section on family planning. Thus, its discourse emphasizes the functions of sexuality as part of the life of the human species rather than individual life, while linking human rights to the dignity of the person and not to the exercise of citizenship. The final section is also symptomatic of the ideology that underlies the text, since it gives a predominant place to the family as a social unit.

On the other hand, *Tu futuro en Libertad* begins its approach from the individuals, their personal relationships, and diversity. In the second section it offers a definition of the concept of sexuality, and in the third it features information about sexual practices, their risks (infections, diseases, and unwanted pregnancies) and how to prevent them. Finally, the book includes a section on human rights, sexual rights, and the State's laicism. The order in which the discourse is constructed already provides some clues about the text's ideological affiliation: the individual

occupies a central place in this book, in which diversity and sexual experimentation are seen as part of the rights that the State must guarantee.

The contents of the books analyzed here are long, and we must admit that this brief exercise does not exhaust all the breadth of their discourse. Taking this limitation into account, we suggest systematizing the analysis through three questions: what is sexuality? How is it exercised? Who is legitimized as authorities to provide orientation about it?

In order to show the similarities and differences between both books, we will make textual quotations. Some words have been underlined by the author of this article since they are identified as indices (or indicative) of the ideology of the discourse analyzed.

a) What is sexuality? The primary aim of the books analyzed in this article is to provide sex education. For this reason, the concept of sexuality is crucial for both books. As noted previously, the way they construct what sexuality means is essentially different in each one of them.

The book published by Red Familia reads that sexuality is “[...] the integration of several potentialities of human beings: the capacity to love and relate with the others, of giving and receiving pleasure, the possibility of deciding and developing socially and professionally and of reproducing” (Fernández, 2008: 10). Immediately after this definition there are two sub-sections in which sexuality is explained as the power of reproduction and a place of physical and affective communication.

It is noteworthy that the capacity to love appears as the first of the potentialities in this fragment, and that the concept is built around “the others”. More than an exercise of individuality, the book presents sexuality as a relationship, a linkage with others through love, pleasure, development or reproduction. Likewise, the clarifications that follow the concept underscore the reproductive dimension over all the others.

As Irvine and Gal (1995) suggest, words are an index insofar as they refer to an ideology, a political commitment, a social positioning or a scheme of thought about the way the world functions. In the paragraph quoted we may identify some words whose use can be linked to Catholic doctrine: the text does not refer to individuals or citizens, but to *human beings* capable of *loving*, who maintain a linkage with the others and have the possibility of *reproducing*. We must remember that one of the basic principles of Catholic social doctrine is love, which generates social cohesion vis-à-vis the individualization that originated in the modern era. Catholicism takes a position against this trend, and does not refer to subjects as individuals but as people or human beings. These elements do not appear in *Tu futuro en libertad*, where the definition we are discussing is constructed in an entirely different manner:

Sexuality is related to attraction, pleasure, and sexual preference, as well as to affective and erotic linkage, love and reproduction. It is important to mention that sexuality is experienced or expressed as thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, values, as well as attitudes and practices in human relationships.

Sexuality is the result of the interaction of biological, psychological, socio-economic, cultural, ethical and religious factors between people (GDF, 2008: 9).

Noticeably, referents such as *human beings* are not used in this fragment, nor are the social functions fulfilled by sexuality privileged. Attraction, pleasure and preference go before affective and erotic linkages, and in the discourse they go before love and reproduction. Unlike the Red Familia book, in this one sexuality is related to experimenting at several levels. Also, in the GDF book sexuality is conceived through the interaction of a number of factors, rather than a potentiality that is intrinsically or naturally a property of people.

b) How is sexuality exercised? In the books analyzed in this article, the concept of sexuality pervades the notions about its exercise and its implications. Consequently, the differences between both books are visible in all the issues addressed in them. It has already been pointed out that in the discourse of the GDF sexuality is understood based on the individual, that it implies experimentation, and that it is not only expressed through practices but also through thoughts, desires and fantasies. This position is maintained in this fragment on sexual relationships:

Sexual pleasure is a substantial dimension of identity that strengthens self-confidence and self-esteem; it is a positive aspiration that enriches human life. Pleasure can be emotionally very intense and produce feelings of happiness, especially when it is experienced exercising human rights, when there is equality and horizontality in decisions, when it is the product of a self-determined and shared, timely and informed decision of mutual agreement and not of imposition or a relationship of subordination or asymmetrical, when it is free of any discrimination and violence and of unwanted consequences (GDF, 2008: 60).

In this fragment we can see that the individual is the starting point to understand sexuality. Once again, the emphasis is on its effects on the person and not on the affective linkage established with the sexual partner. In fact, this linkage is not presented in terms of affectivity but of rights and citizenship. This is interesting because it implies a specific notion about society in which equality is an ideal both in the public and the private spheres. In this discourse sexuality is conceived as an exercise of experimentation between equal people in search of their identity, not as an act that necessarily fulfills a function.

Sexual pleasure is understood in a very different way in *Sexualidad y salud humana*, where it is claimed that “[...] love plays a very important role, because it gives full meaning to the erotic pleasure provided by the sexual act” (Fernández, 2008: 19). Although the reproductive function of sexuality is considered central in the discourse of Red Familia, in the book analyzed here it is acknowledged that it is not exclusive. From that perspective, sexual plenitude results from an affective linkage constructed by love, one of the central values of Catholicism.

The association between sexual act, love and family continues throughout the text, and its implicit relationship with the reproductive function entails a traditional idea about the exercise of sexuality: "You may start to feel attraction towards people of the other sex: the features of a face, the movements of a body, the smile or the charm of a male or female friend will suddenly attract your attention" (Fernández, 2008: 12). Two things are worth noticing in this fragment: that the possibilities of attraction seem to be reduced to heterosexual partners, and that it is written in the second person to appeal directly to the reader, an aspect we will analyze below.

The heteronormative view of the sexual act in the discourse of Red Familia may be inferred from visible elements, such as the argument that the two sexes are complementary. But we must also pay attention to the invisible ones: what is not mentioned, and what its absence means. Unlike in *Tu futuro en libertad*, in *Sexualidad y salud humana* there is no reference to sexual diversity. Same-sex couples are not labeled as anomalous: they simply do not appear. That intends to naturalize the notion that sexual couples are always formed by a man and a woman.

The idea of the complementarity between the masculine and the feminine is derived from the concept of sexuality itself, which in the discourse of Red Familia fulfills the function of preserving the species through the foundation of a family. The latter is conceived as the unit that naturally constitutes society, whose cohesion depends on love. Thus, in *Sexualidad y salud humana* manifestations and practices not associated with this rationale are regarded as deviant behaviors. Masturbation and pornography, for instance, appear as signs of anxiety, anguish or loneliness. In the case of pornography, it is described as a crime in which the objectification of human beings may lead to perversion and violence.

In the discourse of the GDF, to the contrary, sexuality does not have a social but an individual function. Furthermore, individuals are conceived as free citizens, responsible and equal before the law. It is also assumed that they have enough information, so their sexual initiation does not represent a problem as long as it is a consensual decision. Implicit in that premise is the idea of responsibility: the assumed knowledge of the consequences that the sexual act may bring entails an assessment of the risks it involves and the alternatives to prevent them.

The notion of risk is an important part of the discourse in both texts analyzed, in which there are warnings about the possibility of being abused, catching infections or sexually transmitted diseases, or causing an unwanted pregnancy. In both books, these situations are construed as dangers whose prevention depends precisely on having access to pertinent education on the subject.

In this respect, in order to prevent sexual abuse, human rights are explained through juridical referents. Both books recommend denouncing any violation of rights to the state authorities. However, *Sexualidad y salud humana* introduces the family as a mediator between adolescents and juridical institutions. About the other risks, both texts provide information on natural and artificial birth control methods, how they work, their advantages and limitations. However,

the book published by Red Familia claims that natural methods are better, and emphasizes abstinence as the only completely reliable one: “Young people do not often regret having delayed the beginning of their sexual relationships, but they do regret having had them early and in an irresponsible manner” (Fernández, 2008: 21).

Discrepancies about the way to prevent and solve the risks of an active sexual life are much clearer in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. *Tu futuro en libertad* refers to the interruption of pregnancy as a legitimate and legal response for young women who do not want to become mothers, introducing juridical, psychological, and even economic arguments: “Bringing a son or a daughter into the world involves a significant economic burden, which may become a mechanism of reproduction of poverty when one lacks the economic resources to face it” (GDF, 2008: 97). This assertion reflects the interest of the authorities of the Federal District in sex education, a right that becomes a public affair because its consequences involve the State’s institutions.

Sexualidad y salud humana, on the other hand, maintains a position that adheres strictly to the value of life that originates in the Catholic doctrine. As in the case of sexual diversity, the interruption of pregnancy does not appear as an alternative because it is not mentioned in the book. Instead, the solution offered to pregnant adolescents is “[...] the possibility of giving him/her in adoption, through one of the institutions properly authorized to do it. After birth, she will decide freely whether she keeps him/her or if she entrusts him/her to a family that ensures him/her a better future and guarantees his/her education [...]” (Fernández, 2008: 41).

c) *Who has the authority to orientate adolescents about sexuality?* The exercise of sexuality in adolescence is problematized because it is assumed that the transit from childhood to adulthood is especially complicated. The physical and psychological transformations experienced in that stage have repercussions in the development of personality. Besides the emotional instability caused by those changes, adolescents have little experience and require adequate orientation for their development. This argument, present in both books, justifies the need of a sex education in which the youths have the guidance of qualified people. But who are these people?

In *Sexualidad y salud humana* it can be read that “sex education corresponds first to the family, and must agree with its principles, customs and values” (Fernández, 2008: 27). This assertion is also extended to health and hygiene. For instance, in a section where the menstrual cycle is explained, the possibility of experiencing anomalies is mentioned, in which case the girl “[...] must consult her mother, and if necessary, a physician” (Fernández, 2008). Thus, the importance of the family is emphasized through continuous reference to it as a mediator between adolescents and other social actors.

This intermediary role does not appear in *Tu futuro en libertad*. In this book the family is understood as an institution in which individuals develop, but they are considered independent in other spaces: "The main sources of sex education are: the family, the school, health and social development institutions, and the media. Churches also regulate the sexual life of their faithful, but they cannot do this legally in governmental instances, because we live in a secular state" (GDF, 2008: 125). From this perspective, sex education is the responsibility of a broader range of institutions, inscribed in the framework of a plural and liberal State. The last sentence in the fragment may be seen also as a response to the debates over the approval of the laws on coexistence partnerships and the legalization of abortion. Thus, its purpose is to underscore the State's laicism to legitimize its authority over religious institutions.

The multiplicity of voices as a pedagogical resource

In his studies on poetry and the novel, Bajtin (1989) pointed out that the latter is a particularly rich genre because it includes multiple voices that account for the linguistic, cultural and social diversity of the context in which it is produced. The analysis we are conducting here cannot be seen as a comparison between literary styles because both are educational texts. However, it is also possible to appreciate in them a multiplicity of voices that contribute to the construction of the discourse. It must be noted that the use of several voices does not necessarily reflect a plurality, because in these cases it responds exclusively to the objective of supporting the argument developed by the authors in the texts. Hence, the identities of those who give their opinions (for instance, in *Tu futuro en libertad*) or their professional analyses (scientists, lawyers and physicians, in both books) are only relevant insofar as they function as a pedagogical resource to "confirm" the veracity of the discourse produced by those who write the textbooks.

The use of those voices is very similar in both texts. Both use the scientific, juridical, human rights and gender equality discourses. The only difference in *Tu futuro en libertad* is that it also includes a discourse on sexual diversity, as well as quotes taken from interviews with adolescents. For its part, *Sexualidad y salud humana* has the distinctive feature of including a moral discourse.

What is important at this juncture is to highlight that even though both texts use almost the same discursive resources to legitimize completely different positions on sexuality. In *Sexualidad y salud humana*, for example, there is continuous reference to science to assert that there is research that demonstrates that the masculine and the feminine sexes are complementary by nature. *Tu futuro en libertad* uses exactly the same strategy to argue that the origins of sexual diversity have not been detected and that therefore it cannot be considered against nature. The issue is later linked to homophobia and discrimination, which in the book are regarded as undesirable practices in a democratic society governed by a secular State.

Another example of the use of scientific discourse to justify ideological positions in both texts is masturbation and autoeroticism. In the Catholic doctrine sexuality is seen as a natural activity that fulfills a reproductive function, or in any case a communicative one to guarantee family union. Practices that do not follow these directives are therefore reprehensible. Thus, in *Sexualidad y salud humana* it is claimed that “there is no medical evidence of the physical damage caused by this practice. However, when it becomes recurrent it may denote anxiety, stress, excessive visual stimuli, anguish or feelings of loneliness, situations that deserve to be taken care of and solved in their origin. If you have any doubt, talk it over with your parents or someone you trust” (Fernández, 2008: 19). Two things can be extracted from this fragment. First, the reference to medicine is used to legitimize a discourse based on the belief that masturbation denotes psychological problems, despite acknowledging that there is no scientific evidence to support that argument. Furthermore, by using the second person singular, there is an appeal to the reader. The aim of this resource is to formulate a performative utterance⁹ in which the reader is invited to approach people with more experience. As in other cases, here the members of the family are identified as guides. Besides, it is suggested that the relatives help solve problems that the youths cannot deal with by themselves.

The contrast with the GDF book is evident. In this book, sexual practices have to do exclusively with the individual and the exploration of his/her identity:

Research reports that masturbation does not cause physical or mental harm; to the contrary, it helps you learn about your body and rehearse your future sex life [...] Due to prejudice against sexuality, a number of false beliefs about masturbation have arisen [...] Pay no attention to these false beliefs that have no scientific foundations and only seek to inhibit healthy and responsible expressions of sexuality (GDF, 2008: 60-61).

It is noteworthy that in this fragment exactly the same resources as in the previous one are used, but this time to defend the opposite position. On the one hand, scientific discourse seeks to give credibility to the assertion that autoeroticism is not a deviant behavior, nor does it cause any harm. On the other hand, a link is established with the reader through a performative utterance that encourages experimentation. Furthermore, the emphasis is on the individual and not on people with more experience. The utterance invites the reader to reject positions contrary to the discourse of *Tu futuro en libertad*, and refers once again to science to disqualify them.

The use of juridical discourse has very similar effects. It is used in both texts to refer to the rights of citizens, as well as to the responsibilities of the State to guarantee them and maintain

9 J. L. Austin (1977) classifies utterances as constative and performative. The former are those that aim to constata a fact and may therefore be evaluated by a criterion of truth; the latter involve actions, and their evaluation depends on the conditions in which they are presented and whether or not they are “felicitous”.

social order. However, the ideal of order laid out in each book is also different. *Sexualidad y salud humana* constructs its discourse through an ideology stemming from Catholicism in which the traditional family is placed at the center of social organization. For this reason, the book emphasizes the reproductive and affective functions of sexuality:

In the sixth year of primary school you studied that when a man and a woman love each other they decide to share their life and form a family. In our country the laws give formality to this union through the civil marriage contract. Mexican legislation establishes the rights and obligations of the couple to each other and to their children. Thus, marriage is recognized as the first of the social realities of the human being upon which the family is founded (Fernández, 2008: 30).

Through the assertion that the importance of marriage is recognized in Mexican legislation, the juridical discourse is used in this fragment to legitimize the idea of the family as the basic unit from which the social tissue is derived. But it is worth wondering and reflecting about the words used to make that assertion. Supposedly, marriage is a social reality of the *human being*, and it is the result of the *love* between *a man and a woman* who decide not only to share their life, but also to *form a family*.

The juridical discourse used to refer to the responsibilities of the State is also recurrent in *Tu futuro en libertad*, which nonetheless does not speak of *human beings* but of *citizens* with rights. Marriage is understood then as an act upon which not *a family* but *a home* is founded, that enjoys legal recognition regardless of the sexual identity of its members: "This kind of laws is considered a first step towards the full recognition of the equality of rights that same-sex couples must have." (GDF, 2008: 53). The text then addresses the moral validity of sexual diversity, and then describes homophobia and discrimination as social problems.

From the above it can be inferred that the discourse of the GDF is based on liberal principles that foster equality before the law, as well as a secular and inclusive State in which gender equality is not a function of biological sex but of identity. The effort to show the policy of inclusion also becomes visible through the introduction of fragments of interviews with adolescents in Mexico City in which they express their opinions on their condition of youths and on sexuality.

In general, it may be argued that both books construct their discourse including multiple voices whose function is to legitimize them. From the analysis above we conclude that the scientific, juridical, human rights and gender equality discourses are used in the same way in both texts: they are included to legitimize the position upheld in them, without any analysis or discussion to justify it or acknowledge the validity of other positions.

However, we may identify two substantial differences in the introduction of multiple discourses. The ideas based on the laicism of the State are only present in the book published by the GDF, where they are used to defend the authority of the State over other social institutions,

among which are religious organizations. Moreover, the voices of individuals in the same age group as the addressees of the text are used to give a feeling of inclusion and equality before the law that coincides with the GDF's liberal discourse.

The use of language and the linkage with the addressee

As mentioned above, this paper follows Peirce's proposal (1987) about the dynamism in the process of signification and the need to place oneself in the context of the communicative act to understand it. In this respect, pronouns are an especially complex problem for analysis because their meaning changes depending on the situation in which they appear. This difficulty was pointed out by Benveniste (1971), who argued that pronouns do not have a fixed referent but that it is constructed during the communicative act. For instance, in the sex education books analyzed here, the addressers of the message are construed as a *we* speaking to a *you*, not a specific person but anyone who becomes the message's addressee by reading it.

We believe that in the books analyzed here the use of pronouns like *we* and *you* is a resource to maintain the link with the addressee. However, their use changes depending on what is said and on the intention of generating a position in the reader of the text. Three ways of constructing utterances can be observed in both books:

i) The information that appears as neutral is not usually accompanied by any pronoun, and is sometimes presented with reflexive verbs without any link to addressers and addressees. Sentences like "sexuality is..." or "being a man or being a woman is linked to ..." may be classified as *constatives* in J. Austin's (1982) terms, since they purport to refer to an objective reality and may be evaluated through a criterion of truth.

The structure of an utterance in which no personal pronouns are used invests it with a purported neutrality that reasserts the supposed truth of the discourse (Foucault, 1977). In other words, the absence of pronouns reinforces the idea that what is said is true and legitimate, especially if a discursive authority is mentioned. Saying that "significant data discovered by psychology is that the masculine and the feminine mode of being are complementary not just between the sexes, but also within each sex" (Fernández, 2008: 33) seems more legitimate than asserting that "we find thus a diversity of enactments of being a woman, being a man, of a love relationship, of being homosexual, of being lesbian, of being heterosexual, of being bisexual, of being transsexual [...]" (GDF, 2008: 51), where the use of the pronoun *we* generates the impression that the utterance is more of an opinion than a fact. Utterances without explicit and implicit pronouns can be found in both texts and must be analyzed carefully, because their purported objectivity

is often loaded with ideological positions. As mentioned above, such positions can be identified through words that function as indices.

- ii) Explicit or not, the pronoun *we* usually appears in utterances that, besides information, present a normative component. The use of this pronoun is linked to the construction of the addresser as a collective in which the possibility of including the reader remains open. For example, in the book published by the GDF it can be read that “[...] by living sexuality in an open, informed and responsible way we relate better affectively and [we] live more freely and happily and [we] can contribute our best to improve our city” (GDF, 2008: 18). It is not clear if the pronoun *we* refers to the group of people who are the addressers of the discourse or if it also includes the reader. In any case, the use of the pronoun *we* modifies the link with the reader. It is more direct than in the case described in the paragraph above and personalizes the discourse. The possibility of including the reader in the pronoun *we* also entails the idea that the reader also shares the ideological positions expressed in the discourse.
- iii) The pronoun *you* is used explicitly in both books to form a direct link with the addressee. Unlike the two cases above, the use of *you* is never associated to the construction of constative utterances but of performative ones. In the text of the books no assertions can be made about the reader (*you*), but questions and appeals to reflection or action can be formulated. In this way, *you* appeals directly to the reader and has seeks to generate a reaction in him or her through questions, advice or guidance for everyday life. Thus, in *Sexualidad y salud humana* it is said: “[You] have the right to say NO to early sexual activity. If [you] decide not to have sex until [you] are committed to a stable union such as marriage is, [you] must wait for the adequate moment to find the person with whom to sharer your life” (Fernández, 2008: 21). Although this kind of utterances are not orders, it is true that the way in which they are made appeals directly to the reader and makes him or her at least reflect on the pertinence of acting or not according to the position expressed in the discourse.

Once again, it is noteworthy that both texts have very similar ways of constructing their discourse and creating links with the addressee to influence his or her positions on this aspect of sexuality. However, here we may observe an important distinction not only in the underlying ideology, but even in the frequency with which the pronouns mentioned above are used.

Explicit or not, *we* y *you* are much more recurrent in *Tu futuro en libertad* than in *Sexualidad y salud humana*. This difference can be seen in the very title of the books, and becomes deeper as the discourse progresses. Two effects derive from this:

- The book published by the GDF maintains a less formal tone that the one published by Red Familia, generating a much closer link with its readers. We must not overlook the fact that the key addressees of these texts are adolescents, and thus informality may help attract their attention.
- Additionally, *Tu futuro en libertad* makes more frequent use of the pronouns *we* and *you*, with the effect of encouraging a certain kind of attitudes among its addressees. In this sense it may be argued that the book assumes the reader to be a much more active and reflexive individual than the book published by Red Familia does. In the latter the pronoun *you* is used especially for exercises and questions that the addressee must solve by himself, but in which he or she is encouraged to consult relatives under the premise that they have more experience.

Conclusions

The aim of this article is to compare the construction of the discourses in two books on sex education for adolescents, one of them published by the Federal District (Mexico City) Government and the other by Red Familia. Based on the dimensions proposed as axes for comparison, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- 1) The discourses were produced under similar conditions, since the books were published in 2008 after the debate brought about by the approval of the law of coexistence partnerships and the legalization of abortion. This implies that both discourses emerged as responses to the same concern, although the proposal to deal with it is radically different. This difference may be explained by the fact that they are founded on distinct schemes of values.
- 2) The books share most of the topics that are considered an essential part of sex education for adolescents, but the discourse around them is articulated differently due to their underlying ideological positions: the GDF defends an idea of social order based on liberalism, with a secular State capable of guaranteeing the rights of citizens and their equality before the law. In that ideal the individual is conceived as free, autonomous, and rational. For its part, Red Familia fosters a social order in which the family plays a fundamental role in the development of people, and not of individuals, whose rights must be guaranteed by the State. These positions, which at first glance may seem abstract, are observable through the identification of some words that function as indices of a particular ideological load, as well as the utterances constructed about them. Thus, in *Tu futuro en libertad* there is a recurrent use of terms such as *individual*, *freedom*, *rights*, *responsibilities*, *laicism*, *diversity*, *respect*, and *tolerance*, whereas in *Sexualidad y salud hu-*

mana we identify concepts like *human being, family, marriage, values, freedom, rights, responsibilities* and *love*. The discourse on sexuality may be compared through three thematic areas:

- a) The definition of the concept, which in the text of *Red Familia* is linked to love, communication, reproduction and mutual pleasure, whereas in the GDF book has an individual character,
 - b) The exercise of sexuality, understood in *Sexualidad y salud humana* based on heteronormative criteria that assume a traditional family and where experimenting is believed to denote psychological disorders, unlike in *Tu futuro en Libertad*, where it is defined as part of a natural process, and
 - c) The institutions considered legitimate to orientate youths on sexuality, which in *Sexualidad y salud humana* are restricted to the family and the school, while in *Tu futuro en libertad* the State, health and social development institutions and the media are also considered.
- 3) Both books incorporate multiple voices that contribute to legitimize their discourse. Both texts refer to science, Mexican legislation, human rights and gender equality to justify their own ideological position. What is noteworthy here is that these references are used in exactly the same way in both texts and respond to the same need. However, they are used to justify essentially distinct positions that are based on opposing principles. It is also worth remembering that *Tu futuro en libertad* also incorporates the discourse of laicism and the voices of a group of adolescents, in an attempt to show its congruence with inclusion and diversity, which are featured throughout its discourse.
- 4) In general it can be observed that both books are written a) in a neutral manner (that is, without personal pronouns) when what is said is purported to be objective and without any other purpose than informing, b) with the pronoun *we*, when what is sought is less formal writing that aims to create a more trustful link with the reader, and when the addresser is constructed as a collective in which the possibility of including the addressee remains open, and c) with the pronoun *you*, where the appeal to the reader is fundamental because he or she is invited to identify with a given situation, to reflect or to act upon it. The first kind of writing is widely used in both books. The second appears in both but is more recurrent in *Tu futuro en libertad*, and the third is used in the *Red Familia* book especially to point out the need to reflect and to ask relatives for orientation, while in the GDF book it promotes experimentation and individual action:

The following pages speak of freedom and equality between women and men, of tolerance, respect for our feelings and desires towards those who are different or do not think like you. Of what [you] feel and want, of what sometimes burns within your soul. With this text, the Government of our city wants

to show you a different educational proposal, a proposal that includes an invitation to participate in the construction of a city with gender equality. [...] (GDF, 2008: 2).

In both books we can identify both constative and performative utterances. The former are used to provide supposedly objective information that may be contrasted through a truth criterion. The latter correspond to parts of the discourse where the addressee is questioned or invited to reflect, experiment, or act, and they are more used in *Tu futuro en libertad*.

The discourses in the books analyzed here correspond to educational texts, and as such they are presented as purely informative and therefore neutral. However, after analyzing them it may be argued that both *Sexualidad y salud humana* and *Tu futuro en libertad* are constructed based on specific principles and clear notions about social order. The former book is based on traditional values and the family as a basic social unit, and the latter on liberal values centered on the individual. In this sense, both have a normative character that becomes evident especially in performative utterances in which the pronoun *you* is used with the aim of generating an ideological position in the addressees.

It is important to underscore that sex education is transcendent for both of the groups that publish the books analyzed here, because notions more or less compatible with the ideal of a society put forth by each group are manifested in the exercise of sexuality. In this respect, we argue that, regardless of whether their discourses are anchored on liberal or traditional values, both books seek to exert some control over the addressees by offering parameters of what is acceptable and what is not, and what must be reflected upon, discussed, or even uttered.

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