

**CULTURE, GENDER AND MALE SEXUAL INITIATION IN MEXICO**

**Olga Rojas**

*El Colegio de México*  
[olrojas@colmex.mx](mailto:olrojas@colmex.mx)

**José Luis Castrejón**

*Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia*  
[jlcastrejon@colmex.mx](mailto:jlcastrejon@colmex.mx)

Prepared for delivery at the 2007 Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Montréal, Canada. September 5-8, 2007.

## ABSTRACT

Having in mind anthropological findings about sexual initiation as a ritual among Mexican men, who have to prove their masculinity in order to become adults, we explore the data coming from the National Survey on Reproductive Health among male population of 2003. We consider gender and social inequalities as well as the significant cultural and social changes due to processes of secularization, modernization and globalization. The objective of this article is to compare male experiences among several generations and social groups trying to find changes in time, as well as differences, similarities and nuances in the way the first sexual intercourse is experienced by Mexican men.

## Introduction

The features of men's sexual activity are a topic of notable interest in Mexico mainly from anthropology and sociology, and it frequently involves qualitative studies. There are relatively few surveys conducted among Mexican men on their sexual experiences, and they have generally been linked to concerns about respective health risks, such as the transmission of infections such as HIV/AIDS, the use of contraceptives, teenage pregnancies, as well as women's sexual and reproductive health. In this paper, we intend to use this type of quantitative sources to explore a fundamental transition in men's lives, which denotes their departure from adolescence and their entry into adult life: the first heterosexual intercourse<sup>1</sup>.

This crucial event marks the moment when a young man has reached a state where he is able to reproduce himself. The ways in which men experience this transition are shaped by particular cultural contexts. Therefore, it is important to point out that Mexican society currently is undergoing profound transformations, which involve the meanings of sexuality among the younger population. These transformations result from processes of secularisation and modernisation<sup>2</sup> and the implication of Mexican society in processes of globalisation. However, it is also important to highlight that alongside these important processes religious discourses continue to be influential. Individuals' experiences of virginity and sexual initiation are shaped by a diversity of discourses, which serve as cultural frames of references in the constitution of their meaning (Amuchastegui, 2001).

This is the social and cultural context in which we have undertaken our exploratory study about this male life transition, using data from a nation-wide survey. We recognise some limitations of this kind of data source because of the difficulties that often arise in the context of the elaboration of survey questions, the process of data collection, and, above all, in their interpretation. It also should be taken into account that individuals often exaggerate in their accounts of socially accepted practices and are less likely to admit to forms of conduct that are socially less approved. For these reasons, we interpret data from sample surveys on matters of sexuality more as indicators suggestive of possible forms of sexual conduct rather than as fully accurate accounts of sexual experiences (Ericksen and Steffen, 1999; Szasz and Rojas, 2005).

We also would like to highlight that we do not wish in anyway to establish normative patterns on individual modes of sexual conduct regarding male sexual initiation. Rather, we wish to explore the diversity of relevant experiences among different groups of men, taking into account differences in terms of generations, socio-economic strata, and contexts of socialisation and residence.

### 1. Male sexualities

While we recognise that sexualities are a special arena that articulates biological and cultural factors, we would like to begin our argument by conceptualising them as social constructs, which change along individuals' life course and across generations. Various studies on matters of male sexualities highlight that demonstrations of sexual performances come to be of key importance in the assertion of masculine identities among different groups of Mexican men. Masculinities have to be constantly reasserted and demonstrated because men are recipients of two cultural messages. On the one

---

<sup>1</sup> It has to be pointed out that, while we recognise that men's sexual initiation may involve diverse sexual practices, we will always refer throughout this article to men's first heterosexual coital intercourse.

<sup>2</sup> Such processes are encouraging the self autonomy and individual election in a field historically ruled by the Catholic Church values (Amuchastegui, 2001).

hand, they learn that being a man is of great advantage, in so far as it is associated with certain characteristics that are highly valued in society, such as strength, protection, courage and power. On the other hand, they also receive the message that one is no man as long as one does not prove it. Culture provides certain means to prove one's masculinity, and sexual prowess is a notable means in this context. Men receive the cultural prescription to have sex and to do so with diverse partners, in so far as they may come to doubt their masculinity if they do not prove it through relevant experiences (Szasz, 1998a).

In the case of societies such as the Mexican, a traditional double moral standard plays a significant part in the constitution of gender differences: Men may and are supposed to be sexually active; this is an internalised exigency in the construction of their own masculinity. In contrast, women have to be somewhat sexually active with their boyfriends, but without neglecting their role as 'serious women'; they can not have diverse sexual experiences. When studying gender relations, it is important to take into account this double standard, displayed through internalised norms and peer pressure.

With regard to male sexual initiation, some socio-demographic surveys in Mexico report that men in different age groups and socio-economic strata declared to have had their first coital sexual encounter on average when they were between 15 and 17 years old, i.e. much earlier than women. The majority of these men claimed to have had various sexual encounters before their marriage. The first coital sexual experience and marriage are events that generally occur at different moments in the lives of Mexican men; on average there is a difference of seven years (Szasz, 1998b).

However, it is also necessary to point out that in Mexico two important processes are currently taking place in young people's lives: a gradual postponement of marriage and a decrease in the age of sexual initiation. In the 1970s, Mexican women got married around the age of 21, while men did so around 24 years of age. By the 1990s women's average age at first union had reached 22 years, while for men it lay around 24.5 years (CONAPO, 2002).

Certain surveys indicate that the age of sexual initiation is gradually decreasing among both men and women in younger generations. In 2000, according to the National Health Survey (Encuesta Nacional de Salud; ENSA-2000), sexually active adolescents had initiated their sex lives on average at the age of 16 (CONAPO, 2004).

It has to be taken into account two phenomena that probably are converging to explain this earlier sexual initiation. On the one hand, early unions are very common among indigenous couples as well as rural population and population of very low socio-economic strata in marginalised urban areas<sup>3</sup> (Garcia and Rojas, 2004; Rojas, 2005). On the other hand, sexual initiation at a younger age among urban men and women could be related to a greater sexual freedom (Menkes and Suarez, 2003) and to lesser ties to a conjugal union, which normally occur a little later (Garcia and Rojas, 2004).

Furthermore, qualitative studies on the meanings of sexuality among Mexican youth indicate that sexual initiation for men acquires a ritual character<sup>4</sup>. It is socially organised by more experienced men, who provide the opportunity and the conditions for male youth to experience their sexual initiation in a brothel and become accepted as men. Social control in matters of sexuality is clearly different for men and women. Whereas the need to conserve their virginity until marriage is asserted for women, virginity among men after a certain age causes suspicions, in so far as it constitutes a

---

<sup>3</sup> In Latin America and in particular in Mexico, two marriage patterns have been identified. First, there is a pattern of early marriage, which is very common among poor and marginalised sectors of society with low educational levels in rural and urban contexts. The second pattern involves marriage at a somewhat later age that occurs among urban groups with mid-level or elevated incomes and high levels of education (Garcia and Rojas, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Apparently, the dangers exorcised by this ritual are not only homosexual desires and practices, but also effeminate characteristics that might develop due to a lack of heterosexual activity. This ritual of verification of masculine identity clearly contains sexist and homophobic elements (Amuchastegui, 2001).

sign of doubtful masculinity. For this reason, peer group pressure seems to play a major part in male sexual initiation, in so far as it seeks the confirmation of masculine identity of the boy and the social regulation of adolescents' sexual practices regardless of couple relationships in which they might be (Amuchastegui, 2001).

It is, however, important to note that these rituals of male sexual initiation are mainly typical of rural settings and used to be more common among men of older generations. This is due to the fact that in urban contexts and among the younger population male sexual initiation is less tied to these rituals and is more associated with personal decisions of young men who decide to initiate their sex lives with their girlfriends. These differences might be indicative of a transformative process towards a lower level of social exigencies regarding men's sexual performance and a greater importance for men of establishing emotional ties in their sexual encounters. This change might entail a deferment of sexual initiation and conjugal life, and it might even lead to a more careful election of the partner with whom men wish to begin their sex lives (Amuchastegui, 2001).

## 2. Characteristics of the study, the data, and the male population

In this study, we focus on analysing the circumstances of Mexican men's first sexual encounter and associated socio-demographic factors. In this regard, we distinguish between different subgroups within our population. Also, we consider to what extent a relationship exists between men's sexual initiation and their age at first marriage.

Therefore, some of the questions we wish to address are:

- Are there variations in men's sexual initiation according to generational groups, socio-economic strata, their place of residence, and the context in which they were socialised<sup>5</sup>?
- Based on the respective variations, is it possible to distinguish different patterns of sexual initiation among Mexican men?

The data on which our analysis is based come from the National Survey on Reproductive Health (Encuesta Nacional de Salud Reproductiva; ENSAR) among the masculine population. This survey was conducted in 2003. Its sample, spread out at the national level, contained 994 Mexican men between 20 and 59 years of age<sup>6</sup>. The socio-demographic variables we consider in this study are: the birth cohort (generation), the place of residence, the context of socialisation, and the socio-economic stratum. A list of these variables and its categories, as well as of their frequency distributions in absolute values and percentages can be found in table 1.

The three *birth cohorts* (generations) we examined were constituted with a gap of 15 years between each cohort and the next in order to avoid adjacent generations: a) 1945-1949; b) 1960-1964 and c) 1975-1979. The variable *place of residence* was constructed considering as members of the urban population those individuals living in localities of 2500 inhabitants or more and as members of the rural population those who lived in localities with less than 2500 inhabitants. Among the rural population, we chose to differentiate between *mestizo* and indigenous groups, in so far as both groups are culturally quite distinct. In this context, we used a variable which identifies the speakers of indigenous languages. Our resulting residential variable therefore contains

---

<sup>5</sup> The place in which men were born and spent the first twelve years of their lives.

<sup>6</sup> While the survey used probability sampling, it is important to point out that our population of interest was based on an exclusive selection of men who were in a marital relationship (cohabitation or marriage) at the time of the interview or had been in one at some point of their lives. Therefore, the male sample contains a notable problem of selectivity with regard to this variable.

three categories: a) the urban population; b) the rural *mestizo* population and c) the rural population speaking indigenous languages. In the following, we will refer to these three groups simply as urban, rural, and indigenous. The variable *context of socialisation* refers to the place in which individuals spent the first phase of their lives, i.e. the time from their birth until the age of 12, and in which they acquire culturally specific patterns of conduct that manifest themselves for the rest of their lives. In this case, the variable only contains two categories: a) village (*rancho*) or town (*pueblo*); and b) city. Furthermore, in order to further develop our analysis, we decided to group our participants into two *socio-economic strata*<sup>7</sup>: a) very low/low and b) middle/upper.

**Table 1. Socio-demographic variables**

Variable	Category	%	n
Birth cohort	1945-1949	21.4	92
	1960-1964	39.2	170
	1975-1979	39.4	171
Place of residence	Urban	75.5	856
	Rural <sup>a</sup>	18.6	212
	Indigenous <sup>b</sup>	5.9	67
Context of socialisation	Village or town	57.5	651
	City	42.5	480
Socio-economic stratum	Very low / low	72.0	812
	Middle / upper	28.0	316

<sup>a</sup> Non-speakers of indigenous languages in rural zones.

<sup>b</sup> Speakers of indigenous languages in rural zones.

Source: Own elaboration based on data from ENSAR-2003.

Regarding the first sexual experience, the variables we analysed are: the *age of occurrence* (before 16 years old or at 16 years and after); the *person who took the initiative*; the *place of occurrence*; the *presence of social pressure* felt by the participant to have his first sexual encounter; the *pressure the participant exerted* on his sexual partner; the perception of *having felt pleasure* by the participant and by his partner. We also take into account tow other variables regarding the participants' first union: the *type of this union* (cohabitation; civil marriage; religious marriage or both) and the *distance in years between the first sexual encounter and the first union*. Table 2 presents the distributions in absolute values and percentages of the variables describing the circumstances of the first sexual encounter and first union.

<sup>7</sup> In order to define these strata, we used the model of socio-economic stratification of Echarri (forthcoming). He originally defined four socio-economic strata: 1) very low, 2) low, 3) middle and 4) high. His classification is based on an index of social inequality using three basic characteristics of households: a) the quality of housing; b) the relative mean level of education of all members of the household and c) the best-paid occupation among the members of the household. We decided to assemble the men from very low and low strata in one single stratum labelled: very low/low. Equally, we grouped the men from the middle and upper strata into one single stratum labelled: middle/upper.

**Table 2. Variables related to the first sexual encounter and the first union**

<i>Variable type</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	
Concerning the first sexual encounter	Age at first sexual encounter	Less than years old	30.5	335	
		16 or more years old	69.5	762	
	Who took the initiative	Participant	24.8	280	
		Partner	14.2	160	
		Both	61.0	689	
	Place of encounter		In his home	27.7	307
			In his partner's home	21.3	236
			In a hotel	19.0	211
			In a car	2.5	28
			Countryside	9.8	109
			On the street	2.6	29
			At work	1.4	15
			Other	10.7	119
			At school	1.6	17
			In a relative's home	2.8	31
	In a bar	0.6	6		
	Relationship with sexual partner		Girlfriend / fiancée	33.4	500
			Wife / partner	27.9	417
			Friend / acquaintance	29.9	447
			Prostitute	5.7	85
No relationship			3.2	47	
Feeling of pressure		Yes	5.4	61	
		No	94.6	1074	
Participant exerted pressure on partner		Yes	2.8	32	
		No	97.2	1101	
Pleasure felt by participant		Yes	93.8	1064	
		No	6.2	71	
Pleasure felt by his partner		Yes	93.9	1066	
		No	6.1	69	
Concerning the first conjugal union	Marital status in first union	Cohabitation	18.6	282	
		Civil marriage	23.6	356	
		Religious marriage	5.8	88	
		Civil and religious marriage	52.0	787	
	Years between first sexual encounter and first conjugal union		<0	6.5	91
			0	13.5	188
			1-3	29.0	403
			4-6	19.2	267
			7-10	17.1	238
			11+	14.6	203

Source: Own elaboration based on data from ENSAR-2003.

### **3. Methods of statistical analysis**

For this study, we relied on a statistical analysis in two parts. In the first part we explored the bivariate statistical relationships between the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewed male population and the circumstances of the first sexual encounter and the first union. In this regard, apart from analysing percentages we applied the statistical test  $\chi^2$  in order to examine the significance level of the observed differences.

In the second part of our study, we simultaneously explore all relevant variables with the aim of detecting – according to the findings of previous qualitative research in Mexico – the existence of certain patterns of sexual initiation among Mexican men. For this part of our analysis, we relied on multiple correspondence analysis, which consists of an exploratory multivariate factorial technique for the dimensional reduction of categorical data. The results of this method allow the visualisation of the relationships between the categories of different variables in a graph with two or three dimensions<sup>8</sup>.

### **4. Some characteristics of men's first sexual encounter**

In this section we study some features of men's sexual initiation based on a bivariate statistical analysis and according to some socio-demographic characteristics of men: birth cohort (generation), type of place of residence, context of socialisation until the age of 12 and socio-economic stratum. In this analysis we discovered a strong association between the place of residence and the context of socialisation with some of the variables or characteristics of the first sexual encounter and especially with the characteristics of the first union. This is shown in table 3.

This table points to a smaller association of the birth cohort and the socio-economic stratum with several characteristics of these two transitions, i. e. men's first sexual intercourse and first union. This indicates that in Mexico the socio-cultural context, in terms of the places where people lived their childhood and where they live at the time of the survey, seems to define their ways of experiencing their sexual initiation more strongly than their socio-economic position or the generation to which they belong. The results in percentages of this bivariate analysis can be found in table 4, and we analyze them in the following.



---

<sup>8</sup> Multiple correspondence analysis is an exploratory method that seeks to establish the degree of association between the categories of multiple non-metric, i.e. categorical, variables. It presents this degree of association in the form of graphs (Perez, 2004).



**Table 3. Association between socio-demographic variables and characteristics of first sexual encounter and first union**

	Cohort	Place of residence	Context of socialisation	Socio-economic stratum
Age at first sexual encounter				
Person who took the initiative				
Place of first sexual encounter				
Relationship with sexual partner				
Feeling of pressure				
Pressure exercised by man on his partner				
Feeling of pleasure by the man				
Feeling of pleasure by his partner				
Type of first conjugal union				
Time between first sexual encounter and first conjugal union				

Significance levels:  p<0.05  p<0.01 Test  $\chi^2$

Source: Own elaboration based on data from ENSAR-2003.

#### 4.1 Analysis by birth cohorts (generations)

In this section we look at the possible existence of generational changes in men's age at their sexual initiation. In this regard, our findings indicate a slight decrease in men's age. The proportion of younger men (36.5%) born between 1975 and 1979 who experienced their sexual initiation before the age of 16 increased in comparison with the older men in the birth cohorts from 1945 to 1949 (32.1%) and men in the middle birth cohorts from 1960 to 1964 (35.2%). Regarding the place of men's sexual initiation, our data do not suggest any generational differences, because among the men in all three birth cohorts, it seems to have been common to experience their sexual initiation in their own homes or in the home of their partner. It is interesting to notice that the option of resorting to a hotel room seems to have lost importance over time.

Younger generations of men often had their first sexual encounter with their girlfriends or fiancées (52.3%), while, conversely, men's sexual initiation with their wives or long-term partners has become less frequent, declining from 36.9 per cent among the oldest birth cohort to 29.7 per cent in the intermediate birth cohort and only 23.4 per cent among the younger men. These findings support the results of anthropological research with regard to younger Mexican men's preference of experiencing their sexual initiation with someone with whom they have established a love relationship (Amuchastegui, 2001).

A similar transformation can be observed with regard to men's perception of social pressure to have their first sexual encounter. Our data show that a lesser number of men in the intermediate birth cohort (8.5%) and men in the youngest birth cohort (2.8%) felt this kind of pressure in comparison with men in the oldest cohort

(11.2%). The same pattern applies to men's perception of the degree of pressure they exercised upon their partners to have their sexual initiation.

Another notable change concerns a significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) grow over time in the proportion of men who stated that their first sexual encounter was pleasurable, from 87.8 per cent in the older birth cohort to 89.1 per cent in the intermediate and 93.6 per cent in the youngest cohort.

A further modification is the decline of the importance of civil or religious marriage as men's first union. While 69.9 per cent of men in the older cohort and 64.9 per cent of men in the intermediate cohort chose marriage, only 30.6 per cent among the men in the younger cohort did so. Conversely, our findings suggest that men in this younger cohort prefer cohabitation more frequently (32.4%) as their first conjugal union than men in the preceding cohorts (11%).

#### 4.2 Analysis by place of residence

In this section we argue that it is very likely that the social and cultural conditions and norms for sexual initiation vary according to individuals' residence in urban or rural areas. Furthermore, there may be important differences among the rural population between *mestizo* and indigenous subgroups.

In terms of the place of residence, our data point to an earlier sexual initiation among men in urban spaces in comparison with those from rural or indigenous backgrounds. While among the former 36.6 per cent initiated their sex lives before the age of sixteen, this was the case for only 27.7 and 29.1 per cent respectively among the latter two groups. We also found that it is very common (71.6%) among indigenous population that both partners jointly take the initiative in this experience. This is very likely due to the fact that men's sexual initiation among this group takes place in the context of marriage. Among the rural non-indigenous population and the urban population, the respective proportions are notably smaller, with 57.8 per cent among the former and 54.1 per cent among the latter group. In contrast, a substantial number of urban men (18.4%) stated that their partners took the initiative in their sexual initiation, while this pattern was much less common among the rural (7.5%) and indigenous (5.2%) populations.

We also discovered significant differences ( $p < 0.01$ ) in terms of the place of men's sexual initiation according to their place of residence. Our data show that 39 per cent of indigenous men experienced their sexual initiation in their own homes, which again is very likely due to the fact that these men's sexual initiation took place in the context of marriage. In contrast, 35 per cent of the rural non-indigenous male population and 20 per cent of urban men experienced their sexual initiation in their homes. In this context, it is worthwhile to point out that a notable proportion of these urban men (23.3%) had their first sexual experience in a hotel, while among the indigenous population the respective proportion fell to only 3.3 per cent.

Another significant difference ( $p < 0.01$ ) in terms of men's place of residence concerned the type of relationship between them and their first sexual partner. A significant proportion of urban men (36.7%) experienced their sexual initiation with their girlfriends or fiancées, while this was the case among only 27.5 per cent of rural non-indigenous men and 16.9 per cent of indigenous men. More than half of indigenous men (54.2 per cent) stated that their first sexual partner was their wife, in contrast only 39.8 per cent of rural non-indigenous men and 22.2 per cent of urban men had this experience with their wives.

The degree of felt social pressure towards sexual initiation was highest among indigenous men (12.7%) in comparison with their rural non-indigenous (5.9%) and urban (5.3%) counterparts. The same pattern can be found with smaller proportions regarding the pressure men had exercised on their partners for their sexual initiation. Both variables show a significant association ( $p < 0.05$ ) with men's place of residence.

The type of men's first conjugal union also varies significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ) according to their place of residence. Civil and religious marriage is predominant among urban (55.4%) and rural non-indigenous (48.3%) men, while cohabitation was most common among the indigenous participants (46.7%).

Regarding the length of time between men's sexual initiation and their first conjugal union, we found that 20.8 per cent of indigenous men had experienced both events almost simultaneously, a pattern which applied to only 16.2 per cent of rural non-indigenous men and 12.1 per cent of urban men. This indicates that a close relationship between marriage and sexual initiation is somewhat more common among the indigenous and rural populations, while among urban men there seems to be a clear separation between both events. Furthermore, increases in the temporal distance between sexual initiation and the first conjugal relationship were associated with growing proportions of urban men and decreasing percentages of rural and indigenous men.

#### *4.3 Analysis by context of socialisation*

In so far as men's place of socialisation points to the socio-cultural context in which they spent the first twelve years of their lives – a city, a village or a town-, it seems interesting to note that there are significant differences ( $p < 0.01$ ) between these contexts in terms of men's age at their sexual initiation because 38.4 per cent of men who spent their childhood in a city experienced their sexual initiation before the age of 16, while the respective proportion is notably lower (31.3%) among those participants who were born and grew up in a village or a town. These data may suggest a decrease in the age of urban men's sexual initiation in comparison with those who experienced their socialisation in a rural setting. This would confirm the results of earlier qualitative studies.

We also found a significant association ( $p < 0.01$ ) between men's place of socialisation and the initiative patterns in their sexual initiation. Participants who were born in an urban context stated that they had taken the initiative in their 'first time' in a greater proportion (33.3%) than those who had grown up in a village or a town (24.2%). Furthermore, 63 per cent among the latter group declared that both they and their partners had taken the initiative. This is maybe due to the fact that these men's first sexual intercourse was experienced at the beginning of their marriage.

Regarding the place of men's sexual initiation, our findings indicate that the majority of those who had grown up in a city experienced this event in a hotel (25.6%), in their partner's home (21.9%), or in their own home (20.3%). Among those who had spent their childhood in a village or a town, we found a different pattern, with 26.5 per cent experiencing their 'first time' in their own homes, 24 per cent in their partner's home, 16.1 per cent in a hotel, and 14.2 per cent in the countryside. Also, concerning men's relationship with their first sexual partner, we found that 44.2 per cent of those who had been socialised in an urban environment had their sexual initiation with their girlfriends or fiancées, while this applied to only 25.4 per cent of those who had grown up in a village or a town. It is more common (34.6%) among this group of men to have their 'first time' with their wives, whereas this was the case only for the 18.8 per cent of the urban group.

We discovered significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) between men's context of socialisation in terms of the degree of pressure they had experienced or exercised on their partner with regard to their sexual initiation. Our findings show that those men who had grown up in a village or a town experienced a greater degree of social pressure to have their sexual initiation (7.1%) than those in the urban group (4.4%). This pattern applies also –but in smaller proportions- to the degree of pressure they had exercised on their partners.

Finally, with regard to men's first conjugal relationship, there are also significant differences ( $p < 0.01$ ) in terms of their place of socialisation. Among those who had grown up in a village or a town, consensual unions were more common (21.3%) than among the urban group (4.7%). In contrast, 58.9 per cent among the urban group preferred a civil and religious marriage, while this was the case among only 47.1 per cent of those who had grown up in a village or a town. Furthermore, an important proportion among the latter group (16.6%) initiated their first conjugal union in the year of their sexual initiation, while this applied to only 9.4 per cent among the urban group.

#### *4.4 Analysis by socio-economic stratum*

Regarding men's age at their sexual initiation, we did not discover significant differences by socio-economic stratum, in so far as the proportions of men from both groups we considered (very low/low and middle/upper) who had experienced their sexual initiation before the age of 16 are very similar. However, men among the middle/upper stratum declared more frequently (33.7%) that they took the initiative during their first sexual intercourse than men among the very low/low stratum (26.0%). Men among the latter group also stated more frequently (58.3% vs. 49.5%) that both they and their partners had taken the initiative than men among the former group, most likely because the 'first time' among very low/low stratum men takes place more frequently in the context of marriage.

The participants' homes (24.4%) and those of their partners (23.0%) seem to be the most common places in which men from the very low/low stratum experienced their first time, while among the middle/upper stratum a hotel (27.6%) was a frequent choice, possibly due to the greater financial resources on which the members of the latter group can count. However, among the middle/upper stratum, the homes of participants' partners (23.0%) and their own homes (22.7%) continued to be important.

These proportions are certainly related to the type of the relationship between the participants and their first sexual partner. Among the very low/low stratum, a larger proportion of men (29.8%) experienced their 'first time' with their wives than among the middle/upper stratum (22.1%). In contrast, a larger proportion among the latter group (38.7%) than among the former group (31.7%) had their sexual initiation with their girlfriends or fiancées. With regard to the extent to which the participants experienced pleasure during their sexual initiation, we also discovered significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ). The proportion of men who asserted that their 'first time' had been a pleasurable experience was notably higher among the very low/low stratum (92.8%) than among the middle/upper stratum (89.5%).

With regard to the participants' first conjugal relationship, consensual unions were more frequent among the very low/low stratum (20.0%) than among the middle/upper stratum (14.8%). The latter choose a formal way of first union, civil or religious marriage, more frequently (67%), and their first sexual intercourse seems to be clearly separate from their first conjugal union, in so far as only 5.9 per cent experienced both events in the same year. In contrast, 16.3% of men among the very low/low stratum experienced both transitions within one year.

**Table 4. Association between socio-demographic variables and characteristics of men's sexual initiation and first conjugal union; percentages by socio-demographic variables (continues...)**

		<i>Birth cohort</i>			<i>Place of residence</i>			<i>Context of socialisation</i>		<i>Socio-economic stratum</i>	
		1945-1949	1960-1964	1975-1979	Urban	Rural	Indigenous	City	Village or town	Middle/upper	Very low/low
Age at sexual initiation in years	Before 16	32.1	35.2	36.5	36.6**	27.7	29.1	38.4**	31.3	33.6	34.5
Who took the initiative	Participant	33.9	29.7	24.8	27.2**	33.6	22.4	33.3**	24.2	33.7**	26.0
	Partner	12.9	14.2	17.0	18.4	7.5	5.2	17.1	14.1	16.6	15.1
	Both	53.2	56.2	58.3	54.1	57.8	71.6	49.4	61.0	49.5	58.3
Place of sexual initiation	His home	17.9	28.2	21.1	19.7**	35.4	38.9	20.3**	26.5	22.7**	24.4
	Partner's home	30.9	15.0	25.8	24.5	16.9	23.0	21.9	24.0	23.0	23.0
	Hotel	21.1	18.6	18.2	23.3	13.1	4.4	25.6	16.1	27.6	17.6
	Car	2.4	3.2	4.8	2.9	1.9	0.0	3.1	2.1	3.0	2.4
	Countryside	10.6	9.5	6.2	7.5	16.2	28.3	5.5	14.2	4.4	12.4
	On the street	0.0	3.2	1.9	3.3	2.3	0.0	4.2	1.9	2.2	3.1
	At work	0.8	1.4	2.9	1.7	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.5	0.5	1.6
	Other	10.6	14.1	11.0	11.3	8.8	1.8	12.2	8.7	7.4	11.1
	At school	2.4	2.7	4.3	2.5	0.0	2.7	2.9	1.5	2.7	1.9
In a relative's home	3.3	3.6	2.9	2.7	3.8	0.9	2.9	2.5	6.0	1.7	
Relationship with sexual partner	Girlfriend/fiancée	11.5**	28.4	52.3	36.7**	27.5	16.9	44.2**	25.4	38.7*	31.7
	Wife/companion	36.9	29.7	23.4	22.2	39.8	54.2	18.8	34.6	22.1	29.8
	Friend/acquaintance	36.1	30.6	21.6	31.8	22.7	28.0	26.9	32.0	30.4	29.6
	Prostitute	9.8	6.8	1.4	5.8	7.8	0.0	5.9	5.5	5.9	5.6
	No relationship	5.7	4.5	1.4	3.6	2.2	0.8	4.3	2.4	2.9	3.3

Significance levels: \* p<0.05 \*\* p<0.01, test  $\chi^2$ .

Source: Own elaboration based on data from ENSAR-2003.

**Table 4. Association between socio-demographic variables and characteristics of men's sexual initiation and first conjugal union; percentages by socio-demographic variables (*conclusion*)**

	<i>Birth cohort</i>			<i>Place of residence</i>			<i>Context of socialisation</i>		<i>Socio-economic stratum</i>		
	1945-1949	1960-1964	1975-1979	Urban	Rural	Indigenous	City	Village or town	Middle/upper	Very low/low	
Pressure felt by participant	11.2**	8.5	2.8	5.3*	5.9	12.7	4.4*	7.1	6.3	5.9	
Participant exerted pressure on partner	4.0	2.7	1.4	2.0*	3.0	5.1	1.4*	3.0	1.8	2.5	
Pleasure felt by participant	87.8*	89.1	93.6	90.8	95.9	94.7	89.7**	93.6	89.5*	92.8	
Pleasure felt by his partner	93.5	90.7	96.5	92.9	95.8	98.5	90.7**	96.2	92.5	94.2	
Marital status of first conjugal union	Cohabitation	11.4**	10.7	32.4	16.5**	15.1	46.7	14.7**	21.3	14.8**	20.0
	Civil marriage	16.3	20.9	27.9	24.6	26.6	6.7	24.2	23.2	13.7	26.9
	Religious marriage	2.4	3.6	9.1	3.5	10.0	19.2	2.2	8.5	4.5	6.0
	Civil and religious marriage	69.9	64.9	30.6	55.4	48.3	27.5	58.9	47.1	67.0	47.1
Years between first sexual intercourse and first conjugal union	<0	1.9**	9.6	1.4	5.1**	10.7	10.4	5.3**	7.5	4.8**	7.2
	0	14.6	12.0	13.6	12.1	16.2	20.8	9.4	16.6	5.9	16.3
	1-3	31.1	26.8	42.3	28.1	30.8	33.3	30.2	28.3	29.7	28.8
	4-6	7.8	18.7	23.5	19.6	19.4	15.6	22.1	17.2	16.5	19.9
	7-10	15.5	13.4	16.9	18.5	13.8	11.5	17.3	16.5	24.4	14.6
	11+	29.1	19.6	2.3	16.6	9.1	8.3	15.6	14.0	18.8	13.2

Significance levels: \* p<0.05 \*\* p<0.01, test  $\chi^2$ .

Source: Own elaboration based on data from ENSAR-2003.

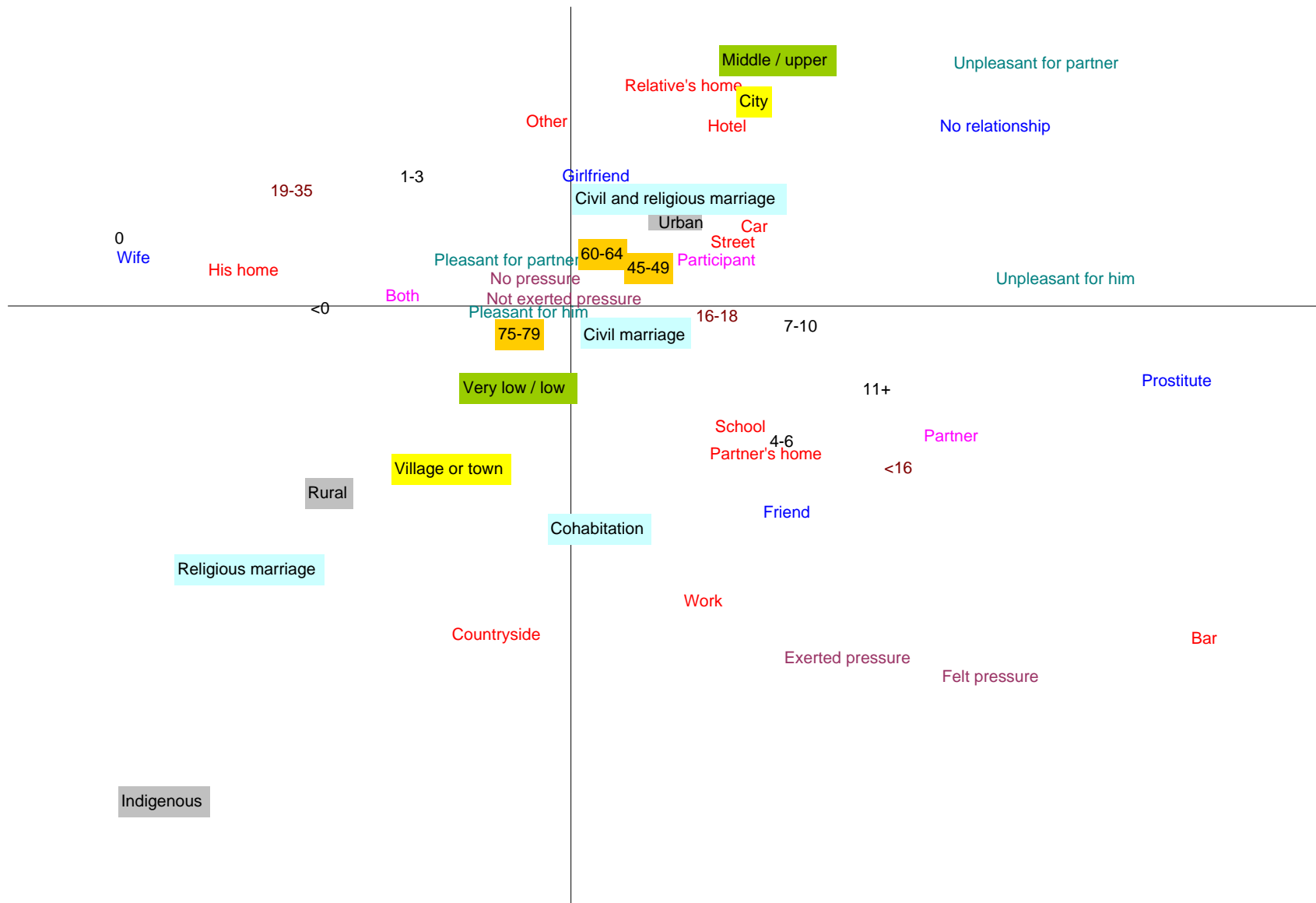
## 5. Some patterns of men's sexual initiation

In the second part of our analysis, we use the multiple correspondence analysis in order to explore possible relationships between the categories of the four socio-demographic variables, the eight variables concerning sexual initiation, and the two variables regarding the first conjugal relationship. Figure 1 contains a *map* that displays the associations we discovered, which suggest two patterns in men's sexual initiation, which are displayed on either side of the vertical axis.

The first pattern, shown on the right side is characteristic of urban contexts, of middle and upper socio-economic strata and of the oldest generations of men. It is likely shaped by processes of secularisation, modernisation, and cultural globalisation. This pattern would be characterised by a very early sexual initiation (before 16 years of age or a short time thereafter) that was unpleasant and took place under strong social pressure. There seems to be a strong sexual dissociation (of four or more years) between this sexual initiation and the first conjugal relationship. The latter is commonly formally sanctioned through either civil and religious or just civil marriage. These men's sexual initiation is frequently experienced with a girlfriend, a friend, a prostitute, or a stranger, and results from the initiative of the men or their partner. It frequently takes place at home of a relative, a hotel, on the street, in a car, at work, at school, at the partner's home, or even in a bar.

The second pattern, shown on the left, is characteristic of rural or indigenous settings, of very low and low socio-economic strata and of younger generations of men. Sexual initiation here takes place somewhat later (at the age of 19 or later), and it is closely linked to these men's first conjugal relationship (either in the form of a consensual union or religious marriage). Therefore, it nearly always takes place with these men's wives, in their own homes and without the feeling of social pressure. It results from the initiative of both partners, and therefore it is also experienced as pleasurable by both.

**Figure 1. Patterns of men's sexual initiation**





## Bibliography

- Amuchastegui, Ana (2001) *Virginidad e iniciación sexual en México. Experiencias y significados*, México, The Population Council / EDAMEX.
- Echarri, Carlos, “Desigualdad socioeconómica y salud reproductiva. Una propuesta de estratificación social aplicable a las encuestas” in Susana Lerner and Ivonne Szasz (eds.) *Salud reproductiva y condiciones de vida en México*, México, El Colegio de México (forthcoming).
- Ericksen, Julia and Sally Steffen (1999) “¿Qué podemos aprender de las encuestas sobre conducta sexual?” in Sondra Zeidenstein and Kirsten Moore (eds.) *Aprendiendo sobre sexualidad. Una manera práctica de comenzar*, Nueva York, The Population Council, International Women’s Health Coalition, pp. 81-96.
- Garcia, Brigida and Olga Rojas (2004) “Las uniones conyugales en América Latina: transformaciones en un marco de desigualdad social y de género”, *Notas de Población*, no. 78, pp. 65-96.
- Menkes, Catherine and Leticia Suarez (2003) “Sexualidad y embarazo adolescente en México”, *Papeles de Población*, no. 35, pp. 233-262.
- Perez, Cesar (2004) *Técnicas estadísticas con SPSS*, Madrid, Prentice Hall.
- Rojas, Olga “Reproducción masculina y desigualdad social en México” in Susana Lerner and Ivonne Szasz (eds.) *Salud reproductiva y condiciones de vida en México*, México, El Colegio de México (forthcoming).
- Szasz, Ivonne (1998a) “Los hombres y la sexualidad: aportes de la perspectiva feminista y primeros acercamientos a su estudio en México” in Susana Lerner (ed.) *Varones, sexualidad y reproducción*, México, El Colegio de México, pp. 137-162.
- Szasz, Ivonne (1998b) “Sexualidad y género: algunas experiencias de investigación en México”, *Debate feminista*, year 9, vol. 18, pp. 77-104.
- Szasz, Ivonne; Olga Rojas and José Luis Castrejón “Desigualdad de género en las relaciones conyugales y prácticas sexuales de los hombres mexicanos. El caso de la población masculina derechohabiente del Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS)”, *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos*, El Colegio de México (forthcoming).
- Walti, Carlos (2005) “Inicio de la vida sexual y reproductiva en México”, *Papeles de Población*, no. 45, pp. 143-176.