Bliss and Blum (2007) Dangerous Driving in Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America Since Independence

Bliss, K. E., and A. S. Blum


Chapter 7 Bliss and Blum 2007 Dangerous Driving Mexico City.pdf

The main purpose this article is to analyze the emergence of youth culture during the revolutionary period of Mexico as well as to better understand how Mexican gender identities are tied to power relations.

This article focuses mainly upon the gendered experiences of Mexican urban youths during the 1910-1930’s. The article begins with the lyrics of a popular Mexican ballad of the era, which depicts the typical street cultural of adolescents during this period. It focuses particularly on the concept of the automobile as a vehicle of male sexuality and masculinity. The authors go on to note that automobiles created gendered effects. They imbued males with a ladies-man persona. They also helped to increase the reputations and possibilities of sexual encounter for males. The automobile like-wise caused many adolescent women to become labeled as promiscuous after engaging in sexual relations. This song also comments upon the recent emergence of urban social life and it’s focus upon public venues.

Although El Chauffer may glamorizes this new aspect of urban adolescent life, many persons and organizations showed concerns over these new patterns. The dramatic increase in the numbers of urban youths and their pursuits of freedom, entertainment, and sexual encounters drew attention from parents, social activists, social workers, and law enforcement alike. These new life style choices also led to variety of problems including personal dilemmas, family conflicts, drug and alcohol use, prostitution, and unwanted pregnancies. The article suggests that both young men and women sought out occupations as a method of gaining personal and financial freedom, which enabled them to attend public venues and engage with members of the opposite sex. Despite the similarities in both men’s and women’s reasons for adopting these new patterns of behavior their experiences differed due to gendered nature of Mexican society.

For many men this was an opportunity to establish independence and masculine identity. Working enables many young boys to develop these masculine roles with their peers. Many of these young boys sought out informal sexual encounters. Theft and other risky behaviors also characterized male behaviors. The additional monies generated by stealing were used for entertainment such as movies, drinking, drugs, and sex with prostitutes, all of which served to increase ones masculinity (perhaps “reinforce some young men's sense of masculinity”?)

Young women also sought independence and opportunities for socializing but their experiences are in stark contrasts to the experiences of young men. Women were faced with limited and constraining employment opportunities. Domestic work proved to a middle ground between personal and financial freedom and parental supervision. Domestic work, market jobs, and factory work gave girls access to more unsupervised leisure. Low wages also limited women's access to makeup, fashion, and certain forms of entertainment. Some women turned to prostitution in order to generate income or deal with parental abandonment. Prostitutes and those women who engaged in sexual relations for enjoyment were often labeled as promiscuous. Women faced unfair criticism due to the prevalent double standard in regards to sexual activity. As a result of sexual involvement women often had children young and married young. The existence of a double standard creates greater risks for women than men during adolescence.