Published in final edited form as:

Cult Health Sex. 2015 ; 17(Suppl 1): S20–S33. doi:10.1080/13691058.2014.963681.

Desire Across Borders: markets, migration, and marital HIV risk in rural Mexico

Jennifer S. Hirsch

Department of Sociomedical Sciences, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

Abstract

This paper presents five concepts that articulate specific processes through which political and economic factors shape sexuality, drawing on ethnographic research on changing notions of marriage, love, and sexuality conducted in migrant-exporting rural Mexico and with Mexican migrants in Atlanta and New York. The first section describes how changing beliefs about love, marriage, sexual intimacy and fidelity constitute a cultural terrain which facilitates ‘vaginal marital bare backing’ in rural Mexico. The paper details sexual opportunity structures; sexual geographies; the multi-sectoral production of risk (including the ways in which housing, transportation, and other policy sectors together create the ‘recreation-deserts’ in which many migrants live); sexual projects, and externalities as conceptual tools that articulate how political and economic factors from the meso- to the macro-level shape sexuality.

Keywords

migrants; Mexico; heterosexuality; HIV/AIDS; masculinity

Introduction

In rural Mexico, as elsewhere, love and sex are big business. The ever-expanding wedding industrial complex provides work for transgendered strippers at bachelor parties who provide one final (or not so final) walk on the wild side; party-favour stores, hairdressers, caterers and *mariachis* render weddings suitably opulent, and photographers and videographers capture the moment. Markets brim with the porn and lingerie that are ever more commonly used to keep marital sex, at least ideally, on the spicy side. Much of this frenzy of consumption depends on the young men who risk their lives crossing the increasingly militarized US border in order to spend months enduring back-breaking labour so that they can get married like royalty back home. Consumption has become the language of love. Valentine’s Day is an opportunity to sell not just roses but also washing machines and other home appliances, underlining the intertwining of emotional connectedness, sexual satisfaction, and the patterns of consumption that characterise marital ideals in the region.

The idea that sexuality had a political economy emerged in the mid-1990s in response to concern about ‘the ways in which sexual cultures are integrated within and cross-cut by complex systems of power and domination’ Parker 2009, 259). Authors have examined how economic policies, social movements, national political struggles, class- and race-specific patterns of production and consumption, and economic inequalities at the national level shape sexuality (Lancaster 1992; Farmer 2001; Fields 2007; Padilla 2007). However, the specific social processes and pathways through which macro-level inequalities shape and constrain the ways bodies come into contact is not always precisely delineated. Addressing that gap, this paper uses five concepts (sexual opportunity structures, sexual geographies, the multi-sectoral production of risk, sexual projects, and externalities) as lenses through which to theorise one particular set of health-relevant sexual practices: namely, condomless, intimacy-seeking, marital sex and the attendant vulnerability to HIV infection. A social scientific turn to political economy, however, must include attention to culture, and so the first part of this article explores how emerging ideologies of marriage, which promote ‘vaginal marital barebacking’, are a critical element of women’s vulnerability to HIV within marriage.

The ethnographic data on which this paper draws were collected as part of two projects, with a total of 24 months of fieldwork carried out between 1995 and 2007. The first consisted of 15 months of participant observation in Degollado, Jalisco and in a small agricultural community outside of Degollado, El Fuerte, Michoacan, as well as in Atlanta, Georgia, with people from Degollado and El Fuerte. The primary method of data collection was life history interviews with 13 pairs of women (sisters or sisters-in-law), with one woman of each pair living in the Atlanta area and other one in the Mexican field sites. I also interviewed eight of the life-history informants’ mothers and eight of their husbands (Hirsch 2003, 28–56). The second study, part of a larger multi-site project exploring married women’s risk of HIV infection,¹ involved six months of fieldwork in Degollado, during which time Sergio Meneses and I conducted participant observation and collected data using a variety of other methods (Hirsch et al. 2010; Hirsch et al. 2007). Measured either ethnographically (by adolescent girls’ cropped tops and public drinking (Hirsch 2013) or demographically (by the vast transformations in patterns of initiation of first sex, nuptiality, or migration (Woo 2001; Campero Cuenca et al. 2013), life has changed enormously since fieldwork began.

Starting with culture: Intimacy, pleasure, and the work of sex in companionate marriage

Over the past generation, as is the case in many other parts of the world (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Padilla et al. 2007) intimacy and pleasure have become critical building blocks of Mexican kinship, and the marriages young couples seek to build differ in important ways from those of their parents’. Couples who married in the 1950s and 1960s talked about marriage as a bond of obligation, held together by an ideal of respect and the mutual fulfilment of gendered responsibilities. The man’s job was to *arrimar* (to bring

¹Supported by NIH Grant R01HD041724

money into the house), and the woman's was to produce meals, wash and iron the clothes, raise well-mannered children, and keep a clean house. If love grew it was the result of living well together, but women married knowing that if their husband turned out to be a drunk or violent or a womaniser or—worst of all, *desobligado* (not taking care of his family)—it would be up to them to *aguantar* (to put up with it). Marriage was a system for organising social reproduction, not a project for personal satisfaction.

For men and women who married after about the mid 1980s, however, the narrative is different. These younger couples articulate ideals for the gendered organisation of family life that map strikingly well onto Connell's classic characterisation of gender regimes as comprised of intertwining domains of labour, power and cathexis (Connell 1987). First, younger men and women frequently emphasised to me that they made decisions together, sharing *el mando de la casa* (control of household decision-making). Second, the younger men and women talked about the softening of a strictly gendered division of labour: men do not wash clothes or change diapers, but they might at least get up to get themselves a glass of water during a meal, and women are increasingly economically active outside the home. Third, perhaps the most prominent generational difference in marital ideals is the importance younger couples give to *confianza* (intimacy) in relations between parents and children as well as between husband and wife. A good father is now not just a man who provides for his wife and children but also one who enjoys spending time with them. Between husband and wife, intimacy is demonstrated and enhanced by mutually pleasurable sex. At least discursively (though not always actually), pleasure is the key force holding marriages together, and sexual relations between spouses have come to be regarded as producing feelings, rather than just children and pleasure.

Men and women perceive these companionate marriages as modern and egalitarian, but (as I discuss elsewhere (Hirsch 2007; Hirsch 2003, 12–17)) intimacy is not the same as equality. When I got to know Veronica and Gustavo, for example, they had been married for just over two years. He was a brick-maker and she cared for their two-year-old daughter. She told me, laughing, that she and Gustavo first kissed after only two weeks of dating. Early in their marriage, she told me, they kept things spicy with the lingerie he bought her and the occasional porn video. Gustavo spoke about their intimacy in interviews, emphasising their communication and emotional connection as well as its physical aspects. In some ways, though, Veronica's early married life differed little from her mother's. She did not leave their two-room shack without Gustavo's permission and had no access to the money he earned. She was scorned by her sisters-in-law, who exerted a great deal of power over her, because before marrying she was a cashier in a store frequented by men; to her sisters-in-law, this automatically made her a *puta* (whore).

These changes have occurred among the town's elite as well as among the working class. Catalina and Roberto both became *novios* (boyfriend and girlfriend), when she was 12 and he was 16, but they did not marry until nearly a decade later when Roberto had finished his studies. Exhausted by the care of her two immaculately dressed and groomed children, Catalin are counted to me that she frequently feigned sleep when he gets in bed at night, but she also told me that for their marriage to last, they must keep their sex life interesting. To that end, they occasionally splurge on a room with a Jacuzzi in the luxurious sex motel just

outside of town. Roberto had downloaded the Kama Sutra onto his palmpilot—they call it the palma sutra—to help them be, as she calls it with a laugh, ‘creative’. There were clearly limits, though, to this creativity; she said that they had never actually fought over anything related to sex but that she refuses his requests for oral sex—I was surprised by her use of the graphic phrase *chupar su pene* (to suck his penis)—because it disgusts her. She asked me if I thought she should see a psychologist to work through this disgust. The specific objects that were the focus of Catalina and Roberto’s sexuality-related consumption reflected their wealth, but the underlying notion that sex is a kind of marital glue was much the same as that expressed by Veronica and Gustavo.

Scholars elaborating a political economy of sexuality have called into question the notion that ‘sex worker’ is meaningful as a social identity (Wardlow 2006; de Zalduondo and Bernard 1995) and looked at the broader political economic context in which sex is traded for cash (Padilla 2007; Kelly 2008; Phinney 2008). Veronica’s anxiety about the revulsion she feels at the thought of giving her husband a blow job, however, frames marital sex as a kind of work, a feminised domain of labour in which one must strive to develop partner-specific skills. Certainly, a successful modern man should satisfy his wife—but a wife *must* satisfy her husband. Good marital sex, like a mortgage payment, is part of a long-term plan for keeping a roof over one’s head – as well, of course, as a means of expressing love and sharing pleasure.

Beyond thinking about marital sex in relation to labour and inequality, turning the optic of political economy to marital sex also means exploring how the very texture and experience of love and sex have become inextricably intertwined with the commodities through which they are constituted. In the mid-1990s, Chinese-produced thong underwear appeared in the Sunday morning market, spurring discussion among the married women I knew about whether the feeling of the *hilito* between one’s cheeks was erotic or dirty – or both; we were witnessing the commodity-driven eroticisation of a corporeal zone. (For a compelling historical parallel, see Fields’ discussion (2007) of the development of mass-produced undergarments in the early 20th century USA). Consumption eroticises and enables specific forms of sexual practice, but equally, sexual practice becomes a field for the performance of being a modern consumer.

A third element of this political economy of marital sexuality includes considering men’s and women’s insertion into gendered labour markets that provides the cash they take shopping. The NAFTA-driven weakening of Mexican agriculture, the increasing integration of men and women into migrant labour circuits, and the Mexican wealth generated by North American demand for flexible and cheap working bodies have enabled couples to participate in this quest for companionship and consumption. At the same time, to avoid slipping entirely into a materialist analysis, it is vital to note that, as I discuss elsewhere (Hirsch 2003, 81–111) the roots of this love story lie just as much in state policies that have contributed to rising rates of education and falling fertility rates; in the way the Catholic Church has adopted a discourse emphasising marital intimacy, and even in the brutal scum of Mexican partisan politics, in which the contested 1988 Presidential elections led, in a circuitous fashion, to the widespread rural electrification that has enabled so many couples to sit comfortably watching porn in the privacy of their own homes.

The fiction of fidelity and vaginal marital barebacking

For many women in rural Mexico – as around the world – marital sex presents their single greatest risk for HIV infection (UNAIDS 2012a; Torres 2010). The fact that some women in rural Mexico are being infected by the very people with whom they are supposed to be having sex – indeed, according to social convention, the *only* people with whom they are *ever* supposed to have sex – presents a challenge for existing approaches to HIV prevention: abstinence is unlikely, unilateral monogamy is ineffective, and marital condom use is rendered unappealing by a deep culturally-supported commitment to the fiction of fidelity. Love is only part of the story, and there are certainly gender inequalities within the marital relationship that may further dissuade women from proposing the use of condoms; nonetheless, attending to ideologies of love helps us make sense of the agential dimension of what we might think of as vaginal marital barebacking.

Mexico's HIV epidemic is concentrated, with a 0.3% HIV prevalence in the general population and up to 15% HIV prevalence in epidemiologically-defined sub-populations. Sex ratios of people with AIDS fell from an initial 10.8 men for every woman in 1985 to a low of 3.5 for new cases in 2008, with the sex ratio for HIV infections 3 to 1 (Magis-Rodriguez et al. 2008; Torres 2010). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was feared that labour migration would drive an exploding rural epidemic in Mexico. Migration remains a concern (Sanchez et al. 2012; Magis-Rodriguez et al. 2009), but the epidemic has remained concentrated among men who have sex with men, injection drug users, and other vulnerable populations (Magis-Rodriguez et al. 2009). In absolute terms, the 38,000 Mexican women ages 15 and over living with HIV in Mexico in 2011, out of a total of 170,000 people, barely register in comparison to the 13.6 million women in Sub-Saharan Africa, out of total of 23.5 million, living with HIV (UNAIDS 2012a; UNAIDS 2012b). It is a different scale of number, with a much smaller proportion borne by women, yet still useful as a case through which to explore intersections between love, sexuality, and the political economy of the body.

Perhaps married women should use condoms to protect themselves during marital sex, but they rarely do: data from 2006 show just over 6% of women in union using condoms (Haddock et al. 2008, 54–56). This should hardly be surprising. Sex, even routine or unsatisfying sex, is not like flossing your teeth: it is a social behaviour, not a health behaviour. Condomless sex is an intentional performance of commitment and proof of a successful companionate marriage, not just a wilful disregard of health risk. When a man returns home after long months in the cold north, having potentially risked his life to get there and then scraped and saved to send money home to his family, he and his wife are said to be *de luna de miel* (on honeymoon) again.

This condomless sex would not even be a blip on our public health radar screens if those marriages were mutually monogamous – but they rarely are. Tensions almost inevitably arise between the centrality of myths about monogamous companionate marriage in Mexican life and men's participation in extramarital sex. To minimise these tensions, and in deference to discourses of monogamy, younger men work much harder than their fathers did to be discreet, and women collude in the construction and preservation of the deafening silences around extramarital sex².

Articulating how shared meaning shapes sexual practices is one of the signal contributions of social science of sexuality (see, e.g., Weeks 1989; Parker 1991; Vance 1991). Because public health and social policy continue to be bedevilled by the unexamined assumption that people are health-maximising rational actors, this point about culture continues to be a critical starting point in thinking about sex. It is not good enough, however, as an ending; the remainder of this paper presents five concepts that help us see the social processes through which broad political and economic influences shape how bodies come together.

Mapping the political economy of sexuality: Sexual Opportunity Structures

Extramarital opportunity structures, which draws on the sociological notion of opportunity structures (Blau 1994), directs us to consider elements of social organisation that differentially allocate opportunities for extramarital relations (Hirsch et al. 2010, 199–205). The notion of sexual opportunity structures points to how any sort of social institution, from compulsory education to nursing homes to prisons, creates opportunities for sexual partnering. Gendered patterns of labour-related mobility are one example of an extramarital opportunity structure: in the rural Mexican context, men's work-related physical mobility – manifest locally through labour migration and their disproportionate access to horses, bicycles, cars and other means of transport and internationally through their participation in labour migration – both justifies their journeys out of town and ensures that they will have money for sex while they are away. This mobility is sometimes local, as with *el cachimbero* (the truck-stop guy), who drove a delivery truck for his family's business and knew every brothel along the way. Equally, this mobility may take men across the northern border.

Homosociality is a second Mexican extramarital opportunity structure. One very prominent form of masculine recreation involve cantinas, bars, and table dance joints, creating gender-specific opportunities for the pursuit of pleasure and the production of intimacy. Markets lurk just below the conceptual surface in both examples: in the former, it is the labour market; in the latter, it is what Padilla (2007) calls 'the pleasure industry', in which there are substantial opportunities for profit to be made through spaces that offer opportunities for pleasure and produce health risks. It is hardly a novel observation that labour migration and alcohol consumption are linked to HIV risk; my point here is that extramarital opportunity structures operationalise how economic and social factors intertwine producing contexts of risk.

Heteronormativity is a third example, particularly relevant in the Mexican context, of an organized and enduring element of social life that facilitates men's engagement in extramarital sex. During fieldwork, although the topography of same-sex desire was changing rapidly, men still needed to marry in order to be considered an independent adult. Heterosexual marriage was the only respectable path to permanently departing from one's parent's home to set up an independent household – and a wife, even for a man who prefers to have sex with men, performs many useful social functions. Engaging in same-sex sexual

²There is no question, of course, that women also engage in extramarital relations: one need only note the number of healthy babies who strikingly resemble full-term newborns and who are nonetheless referred to, with a wink and a nod, as *sietemesinos* (that is, babies born at seven months, since it was seven months since their mother's husband was last in town). Women's extramarital relations, however, must be understood within a somewhat different conceptual topography, and so rather than explore them superficially, I leave them entirely for another day.

relations outside of marriage was, for a whole generation of men, the only option open to them. A middle-aged man I interviewed in 2005 laughed bitterly when I asked him if he'd ever fallen in love. Love, he replied, was a luxury out of reach for men like him – the best he could hope for was to pay someone to fuck him. Sex between men seemed relatively common and not necessarily stigmatising (Hirsch, Wardlow, and Phinney 2012). As documented in other rural areas of Mexico (Nuñez Noriega 2014) men could form enduring partnerships, but in Degollado these were not afforded the public prestige of marriage. These three extramarital opportunity structures (gendered labour mobility, homosociality, heteronormativity) are part of the broader context that facilitates men's participation in sexual relations outside of marriage.

Sexual Geographies

The notion of sexual geographies frames spaces as productive of sexuality. Spaces have culturally-variable sexual meanings; sex in an airplane bathroom has a distinct erotic charge from that which might take place in the marital bed (Hirsch 2003, 301–302). Men and women in rural Mexico perceive the USA as a land of sexual opportunity, exemplifying the moral quality people attribute to different spaces, the sexual geoscapes of the transnational community. Whether measured in metres or kilometres, distance from the main square of their home town in Mexico is linked both in practice and in the social imaginary with sexual transgression and moral disarray. In Degollado, sex with a local girl (or boy) incurs a complex set of expectations and obligations. 'Loose American girls' are (relatively) more independent as sexual agents, and migration presents opportunities to express same-sex desire, whether through hidden relations or by seeking out gay communities and spaces. The easy availability of commercial sex combined with the desperate loneliness many migrants feel as they navigate life far from home, results in widespread belief that the USA is a country in which anything goes. As the older generation says, nodding their heads disparagingly, '*no es libertad, es libertinaje*' (it's not freedom, it's licentiousness). Men's delight in recounting the sexual exploits of their sojourns in the USA sounds both carnal and political, as they regale friends with tales of screwing the citizens of a country that has screwed them – and their forebears – in so many ways. Racialised notions of beauty are layered in the erotics of migration; the prestige of the foreign, the northern, and the blonde makes young men that much more eager to have sex with a fair-skinned beauty.

Multi-sectoral policies as influences on sexuality

The political economy of sexuality encompasses policies infrequently considered in relation to sex. I'll never forget the words of one migrant Mexican in Atlanta: 'You get used to the idea that you are alone here. You have to understand that, that it is you against the world: to face whatever comes, whether it is good or bad.' The isolation and anxiety that characterise the migrant sojourn, which are associated with seeking multiple sex partners (who could of course either be men or women), sex with sex workers, using illicit drugs and alcohol abuse, are not inevitable. Rather, they are produced at the intersection of housing, transportation, urban development, occupational safety, health insurance, and immigration policy, all of which shape the vulnerability of Mexican migrants to HIV. While not HIV policies or even health policies, they influence the conditions in which migrants live, and the circumstances

under which their sexual practices take shape, in ways that have clear implications for the transmission of HIV.

There were substantial numbers of unattached men (which includes both single men and men who migrate without their wives) among the 11.7 million Mexican born individuals in the USA in 2011. Although women constitute 46 percent of Mexican immigrants in the USA, the large absolute size of the Mexican population means that the 54 percent who are men translates into nearly a million more Mexican-born men than women in the USA in 2010 (Grieco et al. 2012). The risk of HIV infection ranks relatively low in the day-to-day concerns of many of these men; a significant proportion of them live in poverty and more than half of Mexican immigrants lack health insurance (Gonzalez-Barrera and Lopez 2013). Journeying to the USA, they risked dying in transit from dehydration, snakes in the desert, and the rapaciousness of their fellow humans (Rose 2012; Santos and Zemansky 2013). Once there, they must get to work in towns and cities with limited public transportation, places where they are unable to secure a driver's licence or car insurance and a journey on foot means crossing highways and weaving their way along the shoulders of roads without sidewalks. At work, they face discrimination, exposure to toxic levels of pesticides, fatal construction accidents, and being robbed of their cash wages on their way home. During moments of rest at the end of 6-day weeks, they worry about the physical and economic well-being of loved ones back home.

Given the limited recreational options and unbalanced sex ratios in the communities in which they frequently reside, they may drown these worries in alcohol or seek solace with a sex worker, which may constitute, as one young man in Atlanta said, 'the only time I feel like *un serhumano*, a human being'. People talk about 'food deserts' as a neighbourhood-level factor in obesity; I am making a parallel argument about 'recreation-deserts' as an influence on sexual risk practices. Substantial evidence suggests widespread sexual risk practices among these men (Parrado, Flippen, and McQuiston 2004; C Magis-Rodriguez et al. 2009; Parrado and Flippen 2010b; Winett et al. 2011). This does not mean that they are more sexually active than other groups, only that migrant men do, not surprisingly, have sex while they are in the USA, and that, like most other people, they do not always use condoms.

Migrant agricultural labourers, most of whom are of Mexican origin, live in dismal conditions in the US (Early et al. 2006; Vallejos, Quandt, and Arcury 2009). Overcrowded and poor-quality housing, existing at the nexus of low-wages, housing law, and banking practices, characterise rural as well as urban contexts (Pader 1994; Krivo 1995; Schill, Friedman, and Rosenbaum 1998; Rosenbaum and Schill 1999). Low-quality or unstable housing increases HIV risk and leads to poorer clinical outcomes for individuals living with AIDS (Aidala and Sumartojo 2007; Wolitski, Kidder, and Fenton 2007; Royal et al. 2009). Transportation infrastructure and policies also contribute to vulnerability to HIV by making the immediate neighbourhood context even more important. Many migrant-receiving destinations lack adequate public transportation infrastructure, and some states have legislation that makes it hard for undocumented immigrants to acquire a driver's licence (Frosch 2012; Lacey 2011).

For immigrants who engage in sex work, HIV is an occupational health and safety issue (Galvan et al. 2008), but Mexicans are among those most likely to face other deadly risks at work (Loh and Richardson 2004; Cierpich et al.). Working as a roofer without a harness, using a nailgun to hang sheetrock without eye or ear protection, or seeing one's co-worker impaled on a piece of steel at a construction site, also shape how men think about the comparatively remote risk of HIV infection. Migration policies also create vulnerability, restricting the ability of migrants to visit their families and severely limiting the circumstances under which their families can join them in the USA. Unsurprisingly, people who are far away from their spouses for extended periods of time are more likely to have non-marital partners (Parrado and Flippen 2010a). In the past, many migrant men returned home annually for an extended conjugal visit. The recent militarisation of vast stretches of the US's southern border, which greatly increased the danger and expense of crossing that border, is one of a number of factors that have disrupted that longstanding pattern. These policies not only restrict movement across the border – they also create a context of fear and alienation, inhibiting more pro-social forms of community engagement.

Remembering Agency while Attending to Structure: The gendered sexual projects of return migrants

Although men's access to extramarital partners is structurally over-determined, a discussion of sexual practice is intrinsically incomplete without some consideration of agency. The notion of sexual projects provides a tool for thinking about the various ends that men seek to accomplish via their sexual practices. Public health programme developers and policy makers expend a great deal of effort trying to change people's sexual behaviour, and when culture is considered it is frequently configured as a barrier to health-optimal practices. We cannot understand why people do not do what we want them to however, without first exploring what they are actually trying to do: in this respect, the notion of 'sexual projects' combines understanding of culturally-specific meanings, socially-variable goals, and attention to agency and strategy. Sexual projects brings embodiment back into the theorisation of sexuality – it is important, as Parker cautions us, not to get so caught up in the words and ideas we spin around sexuality as to forget that it involves a 'complex choreography of bodies, caresses, and sensations' (Richard Parker 2009, 261). More generally it focuses attention on how people use sexual performance and practice strategically to acquire desired ends, whether embodied, social, or material. The discussion above about the conditions migrant Mexican men face in the USA presents sex as a salve for loneliness, but the sexual projects of those men as well as others who have remained in or returned to Mexico sex are multi-layered.

Some men use sex as a form of conspicuous consumption: the \$2,000 pesos that our friend Octavio boasted of having paid at his favourite place in Guadalajara, where men choose from an assortment of gorgeous, slender Eastern European women who provide an invigorating massage and a blow job in tastefully appointed settings. Yet his tales also sounded like acts of resistance against his wife's bossiness, performances of the undomestication – or the undomesticability – of his sexuality. Both migrant and non-migrant men demonstrate their masculine independence in these men-only spaces (Hirsch 2009, 79–

80). Options are available at every price point; at the other end of the spectrum, down a sad alley in the red light district, one can buy access to a number of grimy bars, a policeman standing guard. The price of a quickie, no condom required, ranges from \$100 to \$200 pesos.

Parking lots in the strip clubs on the outskirts of neighbouring La Piedad are full to overflowing during the winter months. Men demonstrate their success by spending hundreds of pesos to invite friends to bottle service and perhaps a ‘sexy-privado’, a private ten minutes behind a short curtain with a dancer. These outings show power as well as pleasure – for return migrants, the power of being away from the *migra* (Customs and Border Protection), away from their gringo bosses and from their *jefas* (the female term for boss is used with affection to denote wives and mothers), of being away from seatbelts and drunk driving laws and the tiny crowded apartments. These scenes are repeated throughout the year but with a particular intensity during the winter months, when dollars from the north come to buy sex in the south, when the marriages arranged during the previous year’s courtship season are celebrated by one last night with a stripper and the guys. Through consuming sex, men express gendered power and national identity; return migrants are not just celebrating being home, they are celebrating returning home as Mexican men. Indeed, men’s sartorial displays in the streets of Degollado (cowboy hats, boots, large belt buckles) seems a pouring forth of all that which they hid behind workboots and baseball caps during the long months in the North, hoping not to call attention to themselves. After months as submissive workers in the North, men return home as conquering heroes, free at last from the ruthless rules of a foreign land, from the constant fear of deportation and a relentless economic rationality.

Another key project during these evenings is the construction and enjoyment of social and emotional bonds between men. These evenings promise the pleasure of affect, of *cariño* (caregiving), of the touch of a true friend and the ear of someone who cares deeply – that is, the men with whom they spend the evening. Organising these outings in spaces that promote the casual consumption of heterosexual sex keeps them safe from the women whose beds and tables they share during their daily lives. The fact that only women provide lap dances, however, does not mean that these evenings entirely suppress same-sex practice: we heard of many who stopped on the way home at an all-night grocery store where male sex workers congregated.

Finally, when the money is gone and, for those who migrate, it is time to go back north, men will sometimes say, with pride, – *me lo chingue*—‘I fucked it all away’ using the word chingar to signal the transformation of hard earned money into quickly consumed pleasure. To an observer, the expenditure looks irrational, even cruel, because that same money could buy a tank of fuel to cook with for a month, or shoes for their children, or a hearty meal of meat. Those who spend it, however, may be asserting that they are worth more than the \$10/hr they are paid in Atlanta to work as undocumented construction workers or the \$5/hour they earn bent over picking berries in the Salinas Valley sun. As the money runs through their hands like water, men are buying back their dignity, asserting that they are not just *mano de obra* (hired hands) but rather socially-rooted human beings whose lives cannot be made sense of solely within the cold logic of the marketplace. Men’s practices may help them resist class-based inequalities, but they may also reproduce gendered privilege; sexual

projects captures what people intend to do through sexual practice, and those intentions can be simultaneously liberatory and oppressive.

Consumption and the political economy of sexuality

Finally, patterns of consumption much broader than Gustavo's 'palma-sutra' and the thongs in the Degollado marketplace are critical elements of the political-economic context of sexuality. Food studies has clearly articulated the connections between consumption practices in rich countries and daily life in poor ones (Fischer and Benson 2006; Romero and Shahriari 2011). Because the prevalence of HIV is higher in the USA than in Mexico, men are rendered more vulnerable to HIV by the mere fact of being there, and they are there as workers—mowing lawns, butchering hogs, hanging sheetrock, or delivering Chinese food—at least in part because of the demand for inexpensive food and housing produced with low-waged immigrant labour. The three boxes of out of season strawberries that sell for 5\$ in Manhattan are only available at that price because they are picked by labourers who work for extremely low wages without any benefits.

The economic notion of externalities renders this visible (Hirsch 2014). The classic example of an externality is the pollution generated in the production of some item, the cost of which is borne by the surrounding community (either in terms of remediation or in terms of adverse health impacts) (Roberts, Mensah, and Weinstein 2010). The notion of externalities has been widely applied in other areas of public health, and the articulation of negative externalities, either just conceptually or through measuring the actual monetary costs of a product's negative impacts, draws attention to the firms that benefit from having these costs absorbed by society (Barling 2007; Biglan 2011; Epstein et al. 2011). Talking about externalities, however, says nothing about the consumer side, about demand for particular kinds of products or price elasticities. Indeed, in most work on externalities, the consuming public is configured as the object of externalities, rather than the agent of them (Hirsch 2014). A comprehensive political economic analysis should include consideration of how consumption practices shape sexuality and vulnerability to HIV. In this case, the fragile edifice of US hyper-consumption patterns is sustained by a reliance on underpaid immigrant labour. There is a connection here to the global problematic of labour migration and HIV vulnerability. The typical gold and diamond engagement ring sold in any urban metropolis, for example, is made of products mined in circumstances that produce vulnerability to HIV for miners and their sexual partners, yet that risk is not widely understood to be an externality of the production regime, nor does the average ring-purchaser or recipient – even those who might be socially-conscious enough to seek out conflict-free diamonds – pause to consider that it is not possible to buy an HIV-free diamond. The substantial literature that looks at how poverty or affluence produce vulnerability explores how an individual's position in a market economy creates risk. The point here, in contrast, is that capitalism itself creates vulnerability.

Conclusion: moving beyond working one penis at a time

Theory provides the lenses that focus our gaze on particular elements of social reality, helping us hold at bay the inextricably intertwined nature of social reality long enough to identify and analyse the drivers of social change and inequality. In approaching sexuality,

‘political-economic’ might be thought of more as a stance than as a particular theory; as this paper suggests, there are many possible ways to operationalise the ways that power and the organisation of production work together to shape sexuality. This paper maps out concepts that enable us to produce a culturally-inflected political-economy of sexuality. While not exhaustive, they encompass levels of analysis ranging from the intrapersonal to the international, and concepts from anthropology, sociology, geography, policy analysis, and economics – an approach to interdisciplinarity which has been described as ‘theoretical neopragmatism’ (Fraser 1995, 166).

It should be obvious now that the markets to this paper’s title refers are not just labour markets but also supermarkets, and the desire is not just men’s desire for sex or solace but northern consumers’ desire for the good life on the cheap. The emphasis on theory is a practical one, driven by the urgent need to elaborate more effective policy-level solutions to reduce vulnerability to sexually-transmitted HIV. Approaches to HIV prevention that work one penis at a time have patently failed to shift the course of the epidemic, and so articulating a political economy of sexuality is a critical step towards thinking about what population-level solutions might look like, about what kind of policies could reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with sexual practice in the way that systems of water and sanitation can make eating and drinking so much less deadly.

References

- Aidala, Angela A.; Sumartojo, Esther. Why Housing? AIDS & Behavior. 2007; 11(2):1–6.10.1007/s10461-007-9302-z [PubMed: 17710525]
- Barling, David. Food Supply Chain Governance And Public Health Externalities: Upstream Policy Interventions And The UK State. Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics. 2007; 20(3): 285–300.10.1007/s10806-007-9034-0
- Biglan, Anthony. Corporate Externalities: A Challenge to the Further Success of. Prevention Science. 2011; 12(1):1–11.10.1007/s11121-010-0190-5 [PubMed: 21225461]
- Blau, PM. Structural Contexts of Opportunities. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1994.
- Campero Cuenca, Lourdes; Atienzo, Erika E.; Lopez, Leticia Suarez; Prado, Bernardo Hernandez; Hernandez, Aremis Villalobos. Sexual and Reproductive Health among Adolescents in Mexico: Evidence and Proposals. Gaceta Médica de México. 2013; 149(3):299–307. [PubMed: 23807332]
- Cierpich H, Styles L, Harrison R, Davis L, Chester LD, Lefkowitz D, Valiente D, Richardson S, Castillo D, Baron S. Work-Related Injury Deaths Among Hispanics --- United States, 1992--2006. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). 57(22):597–600.
- Connell, Raewyn. Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; 1987.
- De Zalduondo, Barbara; Bernard, Jean Maxius. Meanings and Consequences of Sexual-Economic Exchange: Gender, Poverty, and Sexual Risk Behavior in Urban Haiti. In: Parker, Richard G.; Gagnon, John H., editors. Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Post-Modern World. New York and London: Routledge; 1995. p. 157-180.
- Early, Julie; Davis, Stephen W.; Quandt, Sara A.; Rao, Pamela; Snively, Beverly M.; Arcury, Thomas A. Housing Characteristics of Farmworker Families in North Carolina. Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health/Center for Minority Public Health. 2006; 8(2):173–84.10.1007/s10903-006-8525-1 [PubMed: 16649132]
- Eppstein, Paul R.; Buonocore, Jonathan J.; Eckerle, Kevin; Hendryx, Michael; Stout, Benjamin M., III; Heinberg, Richard; Clapp, Richard W., et al. Full Cost Accounting for the Life Cycle of Coal. Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences. 2011; 1219(1):73–98.10.1111/j.1749-6632.2010.05890.x [PubMed: 21332493]

- Farmer, Paul. *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press; 2001. Updated
- Fields, Jill. *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie, and Sexuality*. University of California Press; 2007. <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520252615>
- Fischer, Edward F.; Benson, Peter. *Broccoli and Desire: Global Connections and Maya Struggles in Postwar Guatemala*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; 2006.
- Fraser, Nancy. *Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Linguistic Turn*. 1995. <http://philpapers.org/rec/FRAPFA>
- Frosch, Dan. In New Mexico, a Fight Anew Over Driver's Licenses for Illegal Immigrants. *The New York Times*. 2012 Jan 18. sec. U.S. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/19/us/in-new-mexico-a-fight-anew-over-drivers-licenses-for-illegal-immigrants.html>
- Galvan, Frank H.; Ortiz, Daniel J.; Martínez, Victor; Bing, Eric G. Sexual Solicitation of Latino Male Day Laborers by Other Men. *Salud Pública de México*. 2008; 50(6):439–66.10.1590/S0036-36342008000600004 [PubMed: 19039432]
- Gonzalez-Barrera, Ana; Lopez, Mark Hugo. *A Demographic Portrait of Mexican-Origin Hispanics in the United States*. Statistical Profile. Washington: Pew Hispanic Center; 2013.
- Grieco, Elizabeth M.; Acosta, Yesinia D.; de la Cruz, Patricia G.; Gambino, Christine; Gryn, Thomas; Trevelyan, Edward N.; Walters, Nathan P. *American Community Survey Reports ACS-19. American Community Survey Reports*. United States Census Bureau; 2012. *The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2010*. <http://www.census.gov/population/foreign/>
- Haddock, Sarah; Hardee, Karen; Gay, Jill; Pawlak, Piotr Maciej; Stellini, Christina. *Comprehensive HIV Prevention: Condoms and Contraceptives Count*. Washington, D.C: Population Action International; 2008.
- Hirsch, Jennifer S. *A Courtship after Marriage Sexuality and Love in Mexican Transnational Families*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 2003.
- Hirsch, Jennifer S. *The Secret Love, Marriage, and HIV*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press; 2009.
- Hirsch, Jennifer S. 'Love Makes a Family': Globalization, Companionate Marriage, and the Modernization of Gender Inequality. In: Padilla, Mark; Hirsch, Jennifer S.; Sember, Robert; Munoz-Laboy, Miguel; Parker, Richard, editors. *Love and Globalization: Transformations of Intimacy in the Contemporary World*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press; 2007. p. 93-106.
- Hirsch, Jennifer S. *Gender in Cross Cultural Perspective*. 6. Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson; 2013. *Marriage, Modernity and Migration: Changing Dynamics of Intimacy in a Mexican Transnational Community*.
- Hirsch, Jennifer S. Labor Migration, Externalities and Ethics: Theorizing the Meso-Level Determinants of HIV Vulnerability. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2014; 100(January):38–45.10.1016/j.socscimed.2013.10.021 [PubMed: 24444837]
- Hirsch, Jennifer S.; Meneses, S.; Thompson, B.; Negroni, M.; Pelcastre, B.; del Rio, C. The Inevitability of Infidelity: Sexual Reputation, Social Geographies, and Marital HIV Risk in Rural Mexico. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2007; 97(6):986–96. [PubMed: 17463368]
- Hirsch, Jennifer S.; Wardlow, Holly. *Modern Loves: The Anthropology of Romantic Love and Companionate Marriage*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; 2006.
- Hirsch, Jennifer S.; Wardlow, Holly; Phinney, Harriet. 'No One Saw Us': Reputation as an Axis of Sexual Identity. In: Aggleton, Peter; Boyce, Paul; Moore, Henrietta L.; Parker, Richard G., editors. *Understanding Global Sexualities: New Frontiers*. London: Routledge; 2012. p. 91-107.
- Hirsch, Jennifer S.; Wardlow, Holly; Smith, Daniel Jordan; Phinney, Harriet; Parikh, Shanti; Nathanson, Constance A. *The Secret: Love, Marriage, and HIV*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press; 2010.
- Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). *Mexico HIV and AIDS Estimates (2012)*. 2012a. <http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/mexico>
- Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. *UNAIDS Global Fact Sheet - World AIDS Day 2012*. 2012. http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/epidemiology/2012/gr2012/20121120_factsheet_global_en.pdf
- Kelly, Patty. *Lydia's Open Door inside Mexico's Most Modern Brothel*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 2008.

- Krivo, Lauren J. Immigrant Characteristics and Hispanic-Anglo Housing Inequality. *Demography*. 1995; 32(4):599–615.10.2307/2061677 [PubMed: 8925949]
- Lacey, Marc. License Access in New Mexico Is Heated Issue. *The New York Times*. 2011 Aug 23. sec. U.S. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/24/us/24licenses.html>
- Lancaster, Roger N. *Life Is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1992.
- Loh, Katherine; Richardson, Scott. Foreign-Born Workers: Trends in Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1996–2001. *Monthly Labor Review*. 2004 Jun.:42–53.
- Magis-Rodriguez C, Lemp G, Hernandez M, Sanchez M, Estrada F, Bravo-Garcia E. Going North: Mexican Migrants and Their Vulnerability to HIV. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (JAIDS)*. 2009; 1(51 Suppl 1):S21–5.
- Magis-Rodriguez, Carlos; Bravo-Garcia, E.; Gayet-Serrano, C.; Rivera-Reyes, P.; De Luca, M. El VIH Y El SIDA in Mexico Al 2008: Hallazgos, Tendencias Y Reflexiones. Del SIDA, Angulos, editor. Mexico, DF., Mexico: Centro Nacional para la Prevencion y Control del SIDA (CENSIDA);
- Núñez, Noriega Guillermo. *Just Between Us: An Ethnography of Male Identity and Intimacy in Rural Communities of Northern Mexico*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press; 2014.
- Pader, Ellen-J. Spatial Relations and Housing Policy: Regulations That Discriminate Against Mexican-Origin Households. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. 1994; 13(2):119–35.10.1177/0739456X9401300204
- Padilla, Mark. *Caribbean Pleasure Industry: Tourism, Sexuality, and AIDS in the Dominican Republic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 2007.
- Padilla, Mark; Hirsch, Jennifer S.; Sember, Robert; Munoz-Labory, Miguel; Parker, Richard. *Love and Globalization: Transformations of Intimacy in the Contemporary World*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press; 2007.
- Parker, Richard. *Bodies, Pleasures and Passions*. Boston: Beacon; 1991.
- Parker, Richard. Sexuality, Culture and Society: Shifting Paradigms in Sexuality Research. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2009; 11(3):251–66.10.1080/13691050701606941
- Parrado, Emilio A.; Flippen, Chenoa. Community Attachment, Neighborhood Context, and Sex Worker Use among Hispanic Migrants in Durham, North Carolina, USA. *Social Science & Medicine* (1982). 2010a; 70(7):1059–69.10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.12.017 [PubMed: 20122769]
- Parrado, Emilio A.; Flippen, Chenoa A.; McQuiston, Chris. Use of Commercial Sex Workers among Hispanic Migrants in North Carolina: Implications for the Spread of HIV. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. 2004; 36(4):150–56.10.1363/psrh.36.150.04 [PubMed: 15321781]
- Parrado, Emilio A.; Flippen, Chenoa A. Migration and Sexuality: A Comparison of Mexicans in Sending and Receiving Communities. *The Journal of Social Issues*. 2010b; 66(1):175–95.10.1111/j.1540-4560.2009.01639.x [PubMed: 20454599]
- Phinney, Harriet M. ‘Rice Is Essential but Tiresome; You Should Get Some Noodles’: Doi Moi and the Political Economy of Men’s Extramarital Sexual Relations and Marital HIV Risk in Hanoi, Vietnam. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2008; 98(4):650–60.10.2105/AJPH.2007.111534 [PubMed: 18309136]
- Roberts RR, Mensah EK, Weinstein RA. A Guide to Interpreting Economic Studies in Infectious Diseases. *Clinical Microbiology and Infection*. 2010; 16(12):1713–20.10.1111/j.1469-0691.2010.03366.x [PubMed: 20825433]
- Romero, Simon; Shahriari, Sara. Quinoa’s Global Success Creates Quandary in Bolivia. *The New York Times*. 2011 Mar 19. sec. World/Americas. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/world/americas/20bolivia.html>
- Rose, Ananda. Migrants Dying on the U.S.-Mexico Border. *The New York Times*. 2012 Jun 21. sec. Opinion. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/22/opinion/migrants-dying-on-the-us-mexico-border.html>
- Rosenbaum, Emily; Schill, Michael. Housing and Neighborhood Turnover among Immigrant and Native-Born Households in New York City, 1991 to 1996. *Journal of Housing Research*. 1999; 10(2):209–33.
- Royal, Scott W.; Kidder, Daniel P.; Patrabansh, Satyendra; Wolitski, Richard J.; Holtgrave, David R.; Aidala, Angela; Pals, Sherri; Stall, Ron. Factors Associated with Adherence to Highly Active

- Antiretroviral Therapy in Homeless or Unstably Housed Adults Living with HIV. *AIDS Care*. 2009; 21(4):448–55.10.1080/09540120802270250 [PubMed: 19401865]
- Sanchez, Melissa A.; Hernandez, Maria T.; Hanson, Joel E.; Vera, Alicia; Magis-Rodriguez, Carlos; Ruiz, Juan D.; Garza, Alvaro H.; Castaneda, Xochitl; Aoki, Bart K.; Lemp, George F. The Effect of Migration on HIV High-Risk Behaviors Among Mexican Migrants. *J AIDS-Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes*. 2012; 61(5):610–17.10.1097/QAI.0b013e318273b651
- Santos, Fernanda; Zemansky, Rebekah. Immigrant Death Rate Rises on Illegal Crossings. *The New York Times*. 2013 May 20. sec. U.S. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/21/us/immigrant-death-rate-rises-on-illegal-crossings.html>
- Schill, Michael; Friedman, Samantha; Rosenbaum, Emily. The Housing Conditions of Immigrants in New York City. *Journal of Housing Research*. 1998; 9(2):201–35.
- Pilar, Torres, editor. *Mujeres, Adolescentes Y Niñas Mexicanas: Una Mirada Comprensiva En Torno Al VIH Y El SIDA*. Epidemiología, Prevención, Atención Y Mejores Prácticas En México. México, D.F: Centro Nacional para la Prevención y el Control del VIH/SIDA (CENSIDA); 2010. Ángulos Del SIDA
- Vallejos, Quirina M.; Quandt, Sara A.; Arcury, Thomas A. The Condition of Farmworker Housing in the Eastern United States. In: Quandt, Sara A.; Arcury, Thomas A., editors. *Latino Farmworkers in the Eastern United States*. New York: Springer; 2009. p. 37-67.http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-0-387-88347-2_3
- Vance C. Anthropology Rediscovered Sexuality: A Theoretical Comment. *Social Science & Medicine*. 1991; 33(8):875–84. [PubMed: 1745914]
- Wardlow, Holly. *Wayward Women: Sexuality and Agency in a New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 2006.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. *Themes in British Social History*. 2. London and New York: Longman; 1989. Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800.
- Winett, Liana; Harvey, S Marie; Branch, Meredith; Torres, Antonio; Hudson, Deanne. Immigrant Latino Men in Rural Communities in the Northwest: Social Environment and HIV/STI Risk. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2011; 13(6):643–56.10.1080/13691058.2011.565369
- Wolitski, Richard J.; Kidder, Daniel P.; Fenton, Kevin A. HIV, Homelessness, and Public Health: Critical Issues and a Call for Increased Action. *AIDS and Behavior*. 2007; 11(2):167–71.10.1007/s10461-007-9277-9 [PubMed: 17676279]
- Woo, Ofelia. *Las Mujeres También Nos Vamos Al Norte*. 1. Guadalajara, Jalisco: Universidad de Guadalajara; 2001.