

Disclosure of teenage pregnancy in middle-class families: tensions and dilemmas

Elaine Reis Brandão

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Sexuality, culture and politics A South American reader

Although mature and vibrant, Latin American scholarship on sexuality still remains largely invisible to a global readership. In this collection of articles translated from Portuguese and Spanish, South American scholars explore the values, practices, knowledge, moralities and politics of sexuality in a variety of local contexts. While conventionally read as an intellectual legacy of Modernity, Latin American social thinking and research has in fact brought singular forms of engagement with, and new ways of looking at, political processes. Contributors to this reader have produced fresh and situated understandings of the relations between gender, sexuality, culture and society across the region. Topics in this volume include sexual politics and rights, sexual identities and communities, eroticism, pornography and sexual consumerism, sexual health and well-being, intersectional approaches to sexual cultures and behavior, sexual knowledge, and sexuality research methodologies in Latin America.



Disclosure of teenage pregnancy in middle-class families: tensions and dilemmas*

Elaine Reis Brandão **

Teenage pregnancy is a fruitful theme for the analysis of contemporary youth among the Brazilian middle classes. This is due, on the one hand, to these youths' material and social dependency upon their family of origin and, on the other, to the partial autonomy that Brazilian youth has begun to enjoy (De Singly, 2000; Chaland, 2001). There is a strong interpretive tendency which associates teenage pregnancy with traditional patterns of insertion into adult life. In contrast to this tendency, I analyze the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy in light of the process of individualization that have intensified in Brazil over the past few decades, causing significant repercussions in the family sphere, especially with regards to the transformation of intergenerational relations. The relationship between parents and young adult or youth is dominated by a tension between autonomy (youth self-determination) and heteronomy (affirmation of parental values) in the face of the challenge of producing an "individualized person". In order to understand pregnancy as one of the possible devices in youths' biographical trajectories, we must first situate it among the tensions present during this phase of life: that is, in the context of the problematic relationship between autonomy and heteronomy.

An empirical socio-anthropological study of fourteen middle-class families living in Rio de Janeiro, whose children remain single and live with their parents, allowed an understanding teenage pregnancy as a contingent event in the process of these youths' autonomization.¹ It integrates the current dynamics of social construction of young people without being seen as an exceptional event. It can be an unexpected (but always possible) manifestation of the gradual process of construction of youth autonomy which occurs due to the redefinition of gender and intergenerational relations.

This investigation (Brandão, 2003; 2004 e 2005) was part of a broader research project: "Teenage Pregnancy: A Multicentric Study of Young People, Sexuality and Reproduction in Brazil" (GRAVAD study). This article specifically discusses disclosure

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** PhD. Professor at the Institute of Public Health Studies, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

¹ Between 2000 and 2001, I interviewed members of both generations: 13 youths (6 men and 7 women) between the ages of 18 and 24 who had experiences of maternity or paternity before the age of 20 and may thus be understood as having undergone youth pregnancy, according to the World Health Organization's standards. I also interviewed 11 mothers and 1 father, for a total of 25 interviews.

of pregnancy to the family and the reactions this triggers, contemplating deliberations regarding the desirability of the pregnancy, as well as the subsequent management of its repercussions.

Disclosure of pregnancy

The disclosure of pregnancy is a critical moment for parents and youths. How can this issue be faced without abruptly disrupting the balance that governs youths' socialization? The diverse solutions discovered show distinct emphases in favor of the preservation of either the youth's autonomy or of their heteronomy. This disclosure has two dimensions. First of all, pregnancy makes public the youth's sexual activity. Depending on the parents' position regarding this, the revelation may be problematic. Some parents are not surprised by their children's sexual activity, but rather by its "precocity". They assumed that it would take place some years later. Secondly, pregnancy makes evident the exercise of youths' autonomy in the sphere of sexuality, regardless of parental acknowledgement or of whether or not the youth fully discloses their activities to family and peers.

The ways in which youths face the first suspicions of pregnancy, how they manage these and take applicable measures (by themselves or with their family's participation) and the disclosure of the news to parents are important aspects of this process. These aspects are inscribed in two registries: in the type of previously existing relationship between youths and their parents (intergenerational), in which youths' and parents' views on sexuality (and gender) are central; and in the type of relationship between the partners involved in the pregnancy, in which gender constraints are relevant.

The moments of disclosure

The disclosure of pregnancy has a certain temporality. It is related to two distinct moments. In the first, the female perceives the first signs of a possible pregnancy. In the second, the pregnancy (or suspicion of pregnancy) is communicated by the young couple to their families. Some young women only notice that they are pregnant after the first trimester. Lack of regular sexual relations, periodic adherence to weight-loss diets leading to weight fluctuations (very frequent among adolescents), bleeding confused with menstrual cycles (which may be irregular at this phase of life—14 or 15 years), all make it difficult to perceive body changes, directly contributing to a late discovery of pregnancy.

Even when they suspect a pregnancy, adolescents may take months to communicate this suspicion. This delay may make impossible the option for an abortion, something which may be desired by the youths and/or their parents. At times, pregnancies were

only discovered when they were well along into their second trimester. Abortion, in these cases, would require a micro-caesarean section, with significantly increased risks to the pregnant woman.

As is the case with the relationship between sexual activity and contraceptive use by youths, their perception and confrontation of pregnancy are also situations which are inscribed in growing and learning about responsibility and autonomy. These youths are in the process of self construction, learning about relationships with parents, peers and sexual-affective partners and, through these, learning how to become adults. This trajectory may involve advances and setbacks in terms of youths' taking responsibility for their own actions.

An example drawn from the study reveals interesting aspects of the relationship of youths with their parents. One young man was 15 years old when he started to have sex with his 13-year-old girlfriend, in his home and without his parents' permission. After receiving warnings from his mother, he was confronted by his father, who threatened to tell the young woman's father about what had happened. The young couple discussed the situation and concluded: "Ah, we have our own lives, why would we want to listen? We do what we want. We own our own bodies, you understand? I ignored what my father said to me."

Some time later, when talking about the pregnancy, this boy's mother reprimanded him for not taking the necessary care and wearing a condom. At that moment, the youth took a different stance from that which he had expressed before, exempting himself from responsibility for the pregnancy, since it was unplanned:

She [mother] spoke to me when she took me to school: "A child costs a lot of money. Do you think it's that easy?" I said: "Well mom, I really didn't plan anything. Do you think I planned this child? I just didn't use protection. I had the knowledge and didn't prevent the pregnancy because I really don't like wearing condoms". That's why I sometimes didn't wear one.

During the first moment of tension, when he was reprimanded by his father, the young man contested his father's authority and hierarchical position, ignoring his warning. During the second, reprimanded by his mother, he submits to her authority and hierarchical position, taking a subordinate place in the family relationship. This dislocation between firmer positions indicative of the autonomy of their own person and more subordinate positions revealing heteronomy, is not rare in adolescents' and youths' socialization. They are part of the inherent dynamism of family discussions and negotiations.

For their part, parents also do not know how to approach their children regarding delicate themes such as pregnancy, or sex. Although suspicious, they may not confront their children directly regarding the subject. This also contributes to delays in recognizing the pregnancy.

Parents' reactions

It is interesting to note how the contexts of family socialization and the affective relationships between the members of the young couple engender specific modes of disclosure and reception of the news of pregnancy. Although pregnancy is not something that is alien to either the youths' or their parents' symbolic universe, the process of revelation follows diverse paths according to the type of relationship established between the two generations.

Some young women share their suspicions of a possible pregnancy with their partners straight away, sharing their distress and discussing the decisions to be made. Young men may not immediately pay attention to the fact, in the hopes that expectations might be reversed. One young woman stated that she had been experiencing bleeding and indisposition, but when she talked to her partner about the possibility of pregnancy, this hypothesis was always relativized by him. When young women feel at ease talking to their parents, these suspicions are shared with the mothers, who then take part in the process. In the case of one young woman, her mother found out about the pregnancy before the boyfriend because she was the one who picked up the exam's result and communicated it to her daughter.

Regardless of what their stance is on the issue of abortion, all youths relate having passed through difficult situations, either alone or with their partner or family, upon receiving the news of the pregnancy. As soon as they found out, some young women became determined to have the child regardless of the partner's opinion and before telling their parents. These women state, however, that knowing that their partners and family members would support them in that decision was an important impetus in carrying the pregnancy to terms. Some young men favored abortion, but respected their partner's decision, standing by their girlfriends. Only one of the young women, who became pregnant by a friend with whom she occasionally "hooked up", did not get his support or his acknowledgement of paternity. She received support from her family in her decision to have the baby, but states that her friend did not receive the same support from his family. As to the young men, although they were all shocked by the news, they tended to decide upon how to deal with the pregnancy together with their partners. They also, in general, respected the partners' decisions in those cases where there was disagreement.

Youths emphasize the importance of parental support, which affords them security and assistance and is decisive to the acknowledgement of the pregnancy and its repercussions. The family's first manifestations when faced with the pregnancy are equally delicate. The way some parents react to the news reveals the dilemma they undergo regarding recognizing autonomy and affirming heteronomy in their children's upbringing. The following statement given by the mother of a young man (18 years old) whose girlfriend became pregnant is illustrative:

I think of these things [the possibility of abortion]... I remember I thought about it very clearly when they told me. I was still... I still thought to myself: "Anything I say now has to be really thought through because I'll have the rest of my life to regret what I said". No one forgets what is said, especially in a serious moment [like this]. So I didn't reprimand. I even congratulated them. What's the use? It's already inside: the cake has been baked [laughing]. So now it's time to celebrate, right?

In general, parents' first reaction, like their children's, was "surprise", "astonishment", "despair", "fright" and "shock". Another mother says she was not resigned to the news: "Everything came crashing down upon me." She had difficulties accepting the pregnancy, was "ashamed" of it and hid the fact from friends and neighbors during her daughter-in-law's first months of gestation. She even distanced herself from her daughter-in-law. That conduct was unusual, however, among the families that were interviewed. Although reporting that the news of pregnancy had an initial impact, some parents were quickly able to repress their apprehension with regards to their children. Despite claiming to be "upset", "worried" and "anguished", they still supported their children without censoring or reprimanding them to any great degree. Several youths claimed to have been surprised by their parents' understanding and/or supportive reaction, when they had expected a more explosive response to the news. Parental "upbraiding", "scolding" or "accusations" did not occur systematically and, when they did take place, tended to fade over time.

Generally speaking, there are four types of initial parental reactions to children's pregnancies. This classification should be understood as an exercise which privileges certain elements without, however, reifying them.

A small group of parents showed themselves to be more "incisive" in their *a priori* support of abortion as a solution, not being resigned to the perspective of an early pregnancy and its consequences for their children's future. Of these, some were already unhappy with their children's affective relationships, disapproving of their chosen partners. A second group showed to be resigned to the pregnancy, although they had considerable difficulties in accepting it or reprimanded their children for their behavior. In these latter cases, two elements, associated with censure contextualize this "conformist" stance: religious affiliation and disapproval of the daughter's boyfriend as a drug user. A third group of parents (of young women, exclusively) had an "optimistic" reaction to the news of pregnancy, privileging the event's positive side instead of its negative connotations and their concerns for their daughters' futures. In these families, unlike the others, the news did not surprise the parents because they were aware of their daughters' suspicions, except in one case in which they were certain the daughter was using contraceptives, ruling out the possibility of pregnancy. The fourth group includes most families in a "moderate" position. Despite their judgments regarding the pregnancy, they acknowledged that their children already have a separate identity that should be respected, even though they felt that the children were still in the process of

being socialized. They thus admitted that their children were beginning to have a life of their own and that the pregnancy was part of the individualization process then under way. Regardless of the type of evaluation of their children's behavior and relationships, or of their concerns for the future, these parents adopted an understanding stance. They believed that, in spite of their youth and dependency, their children already had certain autonomy. They incorporated the pregnancy into their views as an undesirable risk, which was nevertheless an inherent part of the youths' sexual activity. Although not all parents in this group explicitly admitted to being in favor of adolescent and youth sexual activity, none expressed open opposition to it. Some mentioned that it would be hypocritical to not accept their children's sexuality, due to the attitudes they themselves defended in their youth. Astonished that contraceptive and condom use are not an unconditional rule for the current generation, these parents are aware that today's youths are nevertheless at risk of pregnancy. These parents seek to promote the conditions for their children to take the necessary decisions regarding sexuality, together with their partners. They seek, thus, to respect their children's capacity to make decisions.

The designation of this parental stance as “moderate” should absolutely not be seen as something that mitigates the tension permeating their relationship with their children with regards to the decisions that must be made due to the pregnancy. It means that the parents make an effort not to decide *for* their children, in their children's place. They must, at times, wait longer than they believe necessary for their children to make decisions about whether or not to have the baby, whether or not they will remain in their homes, whether they will continue in their relationship (in the case of those relationships that were going through crises), whether they will join their partners and live elsewhere, whether they wish to work or prefer to continue with their studies, etc. This delicate process is shot through with apprehension regarding their children's futures, though these parents acknowledged the pregnancy as a necessary step in their children's individualization. The parents' availability to support their children depends on the families' conditions, varying according to the home's physical space and parent's financial and occupational conditions. Obviously, the youths' decision process is not exempt from family influences. The youths claim to know their parents' views and expectations and they weigh these against those of their partners. They also make an effort to construct their own decisions, however, aware that these are determined by their dependency on their parents. Some outcomes indicate that certain youths express a “realistic” attitude in their decisions, taking into account their family's conditions for support and constraint. In others, changes in youths' plans—particularly with regards to movements between the two available parental residences—constitute a process of experimentation in the sense of ascertaining where they feel to be in the best conditions to raise their children and lead their own lives.

The disclosure of pregnancy to the family triggers several conflicts. Mothers are almost always informed before fathers. At their children's request, they inform their (ex-)

spouses about the pregnancy. Few youths were close to their fathers at this moment. Upon hearing the news, one father phoned his son during a vacation trip. Another accompanied the mother when she gave the news about the pregnancy to her daughter. Two youths (one young man and one young woman) stated that their fathers stopped talking to them for months after they found out about the pregnancy. One of them even hid his daughter's pregnancy from his colleagues at his workplace, only making it public when his boss told him—euphorically—that his own daughter was pregnant. Some separated mothers stated their ex-husbands chastised them for not imposing limits upon their children. There is also the case of one father who felt “guilty” about being separated and distant from his daughters. Upon receiving the news, he became worried about his mother's reaction, believing that she would certainly reprimand him and affirm that there was a direct link between the granddaughter's pregnancy and the parents' separation. As the news of the pregnancy of an adolescent child spreads through a family, this may trigger a review of the family's own trajectory, along with increased scrutiny of the child's partner's family environment.

Kinship networks: challenged upbringing?

Besides managing the fact of the pregnancy within the family, with regards to siblings and fathers, the youths' mothers must also announce it to their parents. The grandparents are not always understanding of their adolescent or young grandchildren's generation. Many mothers mentioned criticisms made by the older generation with regards to the supposedly excessive freedom granted by the parents to their children. Many mothers were also reprimanded for the way they raised or are raising their children. Since intergenerational changes have become very striking over the last decades, the parents' generation occupies a delicate position, intermediating transformations that have occurred in their children's generations with the more conservative views typical of their parents' generation.

In short, none of the informants from either generation believes that the pregnancies occurred at an appropriate moment. To the contrary: all informants claimed that parenthood was occurring at an inconvenient juncture in the youths' and families' lives. However, the news of pregnancy and its reception should also be analyzed from the viewpoint of its impact on family events. Although it generally is initially seen as a negative impact, the birth of a child may be reassessed in relation to other events such as the death of older relatives (or the possibility of these deaths), serious illnesses, or a mother's previous abortions, among other events.

The decision to carry the pregnancy to term

Once the pregnancy has passed the possibility of abortion, youths' and parents' positions condense dilemmas and decisions that will reverberate in the family's future. Each, in their own way, expresses the difficulty of their particular position, as either an adolescent child or as the father or mother of a youth who has become pregnant / got another youth pregnant.

Family deliberations

In many cases, reflection upon whether or not to carry the pregnancy to term did not take place in any significant way. This was for different reasons. Upon finding out about the pregnancy, some young women never considered abortion, being determined to have the child. Among the young men, some mentioned the option of abortion, but claimed that it was not debated by the couple because the young women were against it and the young men respected their position. Other young men were, like their partners, against abortion. The young women's parents shared this opinion. At the extreme opposite pole of the spectrum, there were youths who were in favor of abortion from the start and the possibility of this alternative was shared with their parents. Later, this alternative was ruled out due to the advanced stage of the pregnancy.

When the children's first manifestations about the pregnancy coincide with their parents' stance, there was not much to discuss. The debate moved on to other decisions, related to the youth and the future grandchild. In this sense, there was an agreement between the generations about a central decision which mitigated conflicts. Some mothers claimed to have felt relieved when they found out that their children had decided to keep the pregnancy because they had decided to support them in all circumstances but, inwardly, did not wish to face an abortion. They acknowledged the complexity of the decision that their children (still understood as very young) would have to make, stating they did not wish to be in their children's position.

When the youths did not have a previous position regarding abortion, the decision was almost always made along with the families. The discussions between the young couple and between them and their parents mediated it. In some contexts, there was a dialogue between the families, especially the mothers, which preceded any decisions regarding the course of the pregnancy. In other cases, that dialogue followed the definition of the choice by the young woman's family and concerned arrangements regarding the grandchild's birth.

Abortion was suggested by the parents' generation as a solution, without being imposed on youths or their partners. Some parents, although opposed to the option of carrying the pregnancy to term, respected the youths' decision. Youths stated they felt safer going through with the pregnancy when they had their parents' support.

In some families, abortion was evaluated at length by parents and discussed with youths and experts, especially in the risks of carrying it out during the second trimester of pregnancy. In another, abortion was weighed against the fact that the woman was very young (14 years old) and wished to have the child, despite her age. Her choice was respected by the adults.

The pregnant youth's or couple's decision-making process undertaken with their families' support—whatever the final choice—tends to give structure to the youths and provides a reference in this troubled moment. Facing the process of decision-making is part of the youths' individualization and gradual acquisition of responsibility and autonomy, although the young couple is generally still not fully aware of all the subsequent repercussions their decision will have.

When there are disagreements between youths' desires and those of their parents, the conflicts tend to be aggravated. This is because whatever the youths' choice may be—carrying the pregnancy to term or having an abortion—they know they will not be able to carry it out without their families' help. In some families, the young woman's desire to have the child, shared by her partner, was not enough for this decision to prevail. As some youths became indecisive and fearful, they also became more vulnerable to the opinions of family members and doctors called upon to give an opinion.² Adopting the solution they considered best for their children, some parents manage to convince youths to have an abortion and, at times, they were able to impose that alternative. Two young couples claimed to have been relieved by the fact that abortion was impossible, given the pregnancy's advanced stage. In one case, pressure came from the young man's mother; in the other, from the young woman's. The young woman who had an abortion against her partner's wishes due her parents pressure then became pregnant three months later. She was aware that, in this case, abortion was not an option due to medical restrictions on a second abortion within a certain time period.

This extreme situation illustrates the tension that permeates the process of youths' socialization in the face of pregnancy. The youths may decide by themselves or with their partners, but they will have difficulties putting those decisions into practice without their parents' consent. The parents, in turn, may consider one option to be preferable to the other, but it becomes increasingly difficult to impose their views on their children. Many injunctions are present in current intergenerational relations and respect for children's privacy and autonomy tends to be a prevailing norm in middle class social segments. If there is a disagreement between the generations regarding the resolution of a pregnancy, parental strategies for convincing their children must become increasingly subtle.

² Parents may resort to medical experts in order to help convince their children, both to keep the pregnancy and to have an abortion. Aside from the case depicted above in which the abortion solution prevailed, another interview from the GRAVAD study reported a young woman who stated that her mother, a nursing technician, was against abortion. She took the young woman to have an ultrasound as a part of a strategy to convince her against termination. After the exam, the young woman, moved by the fetus's heartbeats, chose to carry the pregnancy to term.

As difficult as an adolescent pregnancy can be, both decisions—abortion or reproduction—may be incorporated into the process of constructing youths' identity, when these are lived as alternatives chosen and taken on by them and not imposed by others.

Family management of the consequences of pregnancy

After the decision to carry a pregnancy to term is made, youths evaluate whether they will make changes in their lives in terms of school, work, bonds with their partner, or residence. These considerations take on a distinct tone according to gender. From the earliest stages (concerning the decision whether or not to carry a pregnancy to term), gender differences were present in these dynamics without, however, becoming a significant obstacle. In most cases, young women were the protagonists of their decisions. In some cases, their decision coincided with their partners' expectations and in others there were disagreements. The young men accepted the young women's choices, however. When the young women didn't take the lead in the decision-making process, the protagonists became the parental generation, especially the mothers, reaffirming the appropriate gender of the leading actor in this process.

Gender differences between the young couple became more striking starting with the choice to carry the pregnancy to term. One concrete issue contributed to aggravate conflicts between the young couple: pregnancy aggravates the condition of dependency (material, financial, affective) upon parents. The relative autonomy attained by youths up to that point becomes vulnerable when faced with the constraints imposed by a child's upbringing and care, negotiations between partners and the conditions for support established by parents.

Some of the repercussions of a pregnancy may be contemplated within a generational perspective, especially when it comes to the types of support offered to children and to the gender perspectives that preside over the (dis)agreements between the members of the young couples.

Types of parental support

Two types of family support to youths were identified: one found in most cases and one discovered in only a single case. The fact that this last type of support is not representative does not render reflections about it unnecessary. On the contrary: it serves as a parameter for internal comparisons of the group under study, suggesting different emphases.

Preservation of youths' autonomy

The first position seeks to enhance the construction of youths' autonomy, even if at the expense of prolonging their dependency upon the family. Prioritizing youths' personal development implies maintaining the youths' projects that had been formulated prior to the pregnancy. The challenge here is in incorporating the birth of a child (and grandchild) into the socialization and individualization process already under way. This option favors youths' self-realization, insofar as they will have the freedom to decide and evaluate how to reorganize their lives around the baby, although the burden of actually raising the child may in fact fall upon others. In many cases, the youths continue in school and there are no great changes in their plans besides a more intense mobilization of their entire family group around the needs of the new infant. Some changes in youths' school trajectories due to pregnancy occur, however. These are: switching to night school; moving study to the so-called *supletivos*, which shorten the time in school required for a diploma³; delaying university entrance from the first to the second term; redefining the institution in which youths intend to pursue their higher education, due to restrictions on entry of youths with children (in military schools, for instance, such as the Military Institute of Engineering). For those youths already in university, changes may involve: reduction of the number of subjects per term; temporary interruption of paid intern work; delay of internships or foreign exchange programs, etc.

Emphasis on youths' submission

The parental position that contrasts with the previous one, found in only one family, is not predominant but is certainly revealing of the complexity of managing the process of children's socialization in middle-class families faced with early pregnancy. The type of support for the children in a teenage pregnancy is always related to the strategies adopted by parents in raising their children. The previous perspective—designated “contractualist” by Kellerhals et al. (1992)—favors intergenerational negotiation even in the adverse context of a pregnancy. The other perspective emphasizes the daughter's subordinate and dependent position, highlighting her heteronomy. This might be labeled the “statutory” perspective. Since the parents were already unhappy with their daughter's attitude, the pregnancy made it even harder for them to acknowledge and promote her autonomy. Heteronomy was affirmed under the argument that the daughter's was “irresponsible”, with serious consequences for the family. The family group currently provides support for the young woman to raise her child, but under the condition of her subordination to the family's rules.

In the family view that promotes youths' autonomy, the youth's status as father or mother is not reified as the main marker of their social identity. The birth of a child does not, in fact, alter their social status. They still occupy the same position in their family of

³ The U.S. American equivalent would be studying for a GED. (Translator's note).

origin. A third family nucleus resulting from the pregnancy is not constituted. Unlike the case in poorer segments of Brazilian society, the child is not a decisive marker that alters the social identity of the young parents, changing them into “providers”, “family men”, “housewives”, “family mothers” and redefining their social position in the space in which they live (Borges, 1999; Cabral, 2002; Costa, 2002; Desser, 1993; Duarte, 1986; Heilborn et al., 2002; Le Van, 1998; Vilar e Gaspar, 1999). Among the middle classes, the birth of a child is subordinated to the process of the youths’ individualization. All other markers of their identity—playful, student, youth, dating and engaging in affective and sexual experimentation—are promoted along with the recent parenthood. Certainly, the fact that the youth is a parent aggravates demands and conflicts within the intergenerational relationship, making it more complex. New negotiations must be carried out between youths and their parents so that they can make caring for the newborn a viable project. Several conflicts occur in the family, centering around the young women not doing their chores, for example; or around the fact that the new child (the grandchild) is raised with the other children in the household (the youth’s parents’ other children). The youth’s partner may also end up living closer to the family, leading to misunderstandings, discussions, jealousy, annoyances and diverse fights. However, in spite of these disagreements, the parental decision that the birth of a child should not impede the plans for the youths’ trajectories prevails.

In the parental stance that advocates youths’ heteronomy, pregnancy opens a parenthesis in the process of individualization. The imperative becomes the young woman’s “obligation” to raise her child. In this case, socialization is understood as having presented previous problems due to the young woman’s “irresponsibility” regarding the construction of future perspectives for her emancipation. Additionally, the family in question struggled to provide their daughter with the necessary financial and physical support necessary for her to resume her trajectory of individualization (attaining autonomy and independence) through returning to school. Although the young woman displayed an interest in reformulating her plans, her parents continued to have difficulty in trusting her with autonomy. To the contrary: they repeatedly affirmed the heteronomic dimension in the young woman’s socialization. Negotiations became even more difficult because the youth and the parent’s were in disagreement.

Worsening of conflicts between members of the young “couples”

Since pregnancy occurs unpredictably and without planning, youths only gradually assimilate this fact. However, this relatively difficult acceptance of pregnancy or parenthood, shared by both sexes at first, becomes very distinctly distributed in later months. As the pregnancy progresses, youths’ discourses on maternity or paternity and their relationship tend to differentiate according to gender.

The female perspective

Women generally refer to the mismatch between female and male perceptions of pregnancy and its consequences for everyday life. They complain that their boyfriends learn more slowly about the changes that a pregnancy introduces in the parents' lives. They feel alone regarding decisions about and caring for the child, a gap that is counterbalanced, in many cases, by their mothers' support. An 18-year-old woman referred to her conflicts with her boyfriend (20 years old) during pregnancy and after birth as being in part due to the difficulties of his acknowledging of paternity. She used the expressions "to press", "to put pressure on", "a little push", as necessary incentives for receiving greater support from her partner:

At first he said, "Let's live together". That kind of euphoria. But later, things happened and he got sort of dizzy with everything. That was very difficult for me. The hardest part was my relationship with him. More than with the baby.

Another exemplary situation of the impact pregnancy can have on gender tensions relates to continuing the relationship. The effect of the child's presence among young couples may be illustrated by one young woman's account. She received a bouquet of red roses from her boyfriend on a Friday night when he had not gone to sleep with her and their child, as he generally did. She said that the flowers were proof that he must have a "guilty conscience", since the couple had recently fought over the fact that the child curtailed their individual freedoms. According to the young woman, the cause of the fight was that the young man wanted to go out to meet friends at a pizzeria close to his university. Changes in peer sociability, which maternity makes more significant for women than for men, are an intense point of debate between the members of the young couple. Unfortunately, this point cannot be fully discussed in the present article.

Another theme of the disagreements that arise between the young members of a couple (or between them and their families) has to do with how to share the expenses of pregnancy, birth and a child's education. One young woman related that she had significant disagreements with her boyfriend regarding her hospital expenses. Although her father could financially support her, she demanded that her boyfriend contribute a certain amount of money as an expression of his commitment to her and the baby.

Difficulties between partners can also refer to the couple's sex life. One young woman stated that her boyfriend became distant after the pregnancy, both sexually and affectively, leading to their break up approximately one year after the child's birth. She found it difficult to face her boyfriend's lack of sexual interest. He was still very "frightened", and demonstrated difficulties in perceiving her as a "woman" and not just as his child's "mother". The "love" between the couple became "fraternal". Currently, she states that both her and her partner have overcome their past conflicts ("gotten over sexual commitment"), becoming close friends.

In short, there is a divergence in the way the partners' processes of socialization and individualization are redefined with the child's birth. Young women believe that, in practical terms, they tend to face up to parenthood more than young men. While highlighting their family's support, without which they could not take on their new responsibilities, these suggest that female acknowledgement of maternity is more expressive than that shown by their boyfriends. According to this young female discourse, male engagement in affective support for partners, paternity and the division of care for the child leaves much to be desired. The division of expenses between youths and/or their families is also a matter of disagreement and negotiation. The male partner's management and organization of everyday life does not systematically include the child as a priority, as this 19-year-old young woman complains:

The responsibility frightens him. He's very afraid of growing up, because it leads to a bunch of new things. You have to give some things up. You gain a lot, but you also have to give up many things. To him, it's still hard to give up messing around, having fun, inconsequential behavior, like: "Oh! I'll do whatever I want, when I want!". Not having a commitment to anything. You know. That is actually difficult for him. Having to worry about something. I have to study because I have to graduate in order to work, to give my child a good life. I won't always be dependent on my parents. I have to organize my calendar, my schedule, because I have to go take care of my child, you understand? He still can't. To him it's very difficult to take on the responsibility of growing up.

Although female complaints may not always be explicit, some difficulties may be deduced from how they manage everyday life. Some young women chose to stay at their parents' home during the week, spending the weekend at their boyfriends' house. In managing everyday life, then, the moments these young women choose to fully share with their boyfriends are those involving leisure or vacation activities. One young woman who moved to her boyfriend's house due to lack of space at her home complains she was very much alone. Later, she returned to her family. This arrangement highlights a form of organization of gender relations between the youths: domestic care is anchored in the female residence and distributed among the woman's family while leisure activities are carried out together with boyfriends.

When the young woman's family does not approve of the relationship, it suffers pressures and restrictions, possibly leading to temporary separations, and the interdiction of the son-in-law's presence in the home. This situation leaves young women in a very delicate position. On the one hand, they must rely on their families, because that is where they receive the most support and spend most of their time. On the other, they must also spend time with their boyfriends, who are unwanted by their parents.

Most young women show that they are aware of the gender differences in their relationships with their partners, bringing up several situations in the relationship in

which they defended their own interests.⁴ Certainly, the birth of a child intensifies the negotiations between the members of a couple. If women have the support of their family, they do not become totally subordinate to their male partners. Family members—and especially the young women's mothers—usually believe that their daughters should not submit themselves to their partners' will because of the child. Regardless of whether or not family members approve of young women's relationships, they expect them to build their own lives and work towards this end. Families which openly oppose a young woman's boyfriend do not approve of a vulnerable or submissive female role in sexual-affective relationships.

Those young mothers who most criticized their boyfriends' difficulties in exercising paternity and "learning" to care for their children are precisely those young women who do not occupy a subordinate gender position in their relationship. They claim control over the situation. The incentives given by families to female emancipation are important in terms of the role the young woman adopts with regards to her relationship. By contrast, some of the young women who do not study or work end up residing with their partners' families, occupying a more vulnerable position and having their movements and options restricted to the domestic space and childcare activities.

The male perspective

Two types of male roles regarding the relationship with their partners and paternity come to the fore in the interviews. In one situation (which is the minority) the young man and his family take in the girlfriend (whom the young man designates as his "wife") during pregnancy or after birth. Although the young man is totally dependent upon the couple's families and aware of this fact, he presents himself as morally responsible for his girlfriend and offspring. In two cases, the girlfriends had interrupted their education because of the pregnancy (one was finishing middle school and the other high school) and were involved in no other activities aside from caring for their children. One finds a strong gender demarcation in these couples, with the young men demonstrating dedication to and effort in continuing their school career (and being encouraged in this endeavor by their families); in contrast with their girlfriends' subordinate position. In lower middle class families and those family contexts in which parents did not push their daughters to attain a position of autonomy and personal independence, statements by the young men and their mothers do not show a significant reformulation with respect to female trajectories. They mention the possibility of the female partners' return to school or work at some point in the future (by taking a professional training course or a *supletivo*). There are no visible elements which might denote changes leading towards these outcomes, however.

⁴ An example of this is one young woman's joining the environmental group Greenpeace in a trip along the Brazilian coast in spite of her boyfriend's protests.

In these cases, the conflicts that arise between young men and their partners are generally motivated by family problems such as dissatisfaction regarding the financial control exercised by the young man's parents or the young women's families' refusal to participate in their baby's upbringing. This information was not presented to interviewers by the young men, but by their mothers. In the interviews, the young men minimize the conflicts arising from cohabitation.

The second male role (taken by the majority of the informants) acknowledges paternity and the continuation of the relationship, without making any drastic changes. The young men continue to live with their families and sleep with their girlfriends, sometimes at their home, sometimes at their girlfriends' house. Decisions made during pregnancy, with the agreement of both sets of parents, may include maintaining each of the youths at their respective homes, allowing them frequent encounters during the week and weekend, or might even include the temporary dislocation of the young woman and child to the young man's home. Some young men's families took in the girlfriends, without making this situation permanent. One young man stated that during the four years he maintained a relationship with the mother of his daughter, the couple always slept with the child, either at the girlfriend's home or at his. Another young man who had until recently lived in the same building as his girlfriend moved to another building on the same street and continued to share daily life with her. Both members of the couple studied in the same class, went to and from school together, spent the week together and traveled together on weekends to the young man's family's vacation home outside the city of Rio de Janeiro.

The young men generally claim that they know about the "responsibility" that raising a child entails. They are aware that the child depends upon them and they claim to understand that they must reorganize their lives in order to support their children. However, up to the present moment in our research, paternity has produced no expressive alterations in these young men's life projects. Since their children are not present in their homes most of the time, the exercise of paternity does not constitute a pressing demand that invades their everyday lives, as it does in the case of their female partners. The young men thus possess greater freedom in comparison with the young women. With the exception of one informant (whose relationship lasted until his daughter was 4 years old), all young men continued dating their children's mothers, moving between their homes and those of their partners. Some young men spoke of wanting to live with their girlfriends and children in their own space at some point in the future.

This group of young men also minimizes existing conflicts with their girlfriends. With the exception of two young men, there are no descriptions of affective or family conflicts. By and large, these men consider their current lives after the pregnancy and their children's births to be a linear evolution of their "normal" course, with no jolts or significant interruptions. Compared with the young women's accounts, the men's accounts reveal a greater distance from the problems of having and raising a child. The

accounts by the young men's mothers, however, are rich in details regarding conflicts within the family and within their sons' affective relationships. At times, the same facts were described by the son and the mother in distinct ways. Without the counterpoint of young women's and parents' discourses, the reality outlined solely by young male narratives regarding pregnancy, birth and parenthood would certainly be more succinct and also less problematic. By cross-referencing data originating from different gender and generational perspectives, we can thus enrich the comprehension of the realities of the families involved in these processes.

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