Sexual Education Among Indigenous Ngöbe Costa Ricans: A Tale of Two Schools

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ABSTRACT

This research is an ethnographic study of school-based sexual education programs in two rural schools of Costa Rica. The two schools are 5 miles apart; one is inside a Ngöbe indigenous territory and the other is outside. Through participant observation, interviews, surveys, and free-listing exercises I was able to identify broken messages and miscommunication in the implementation of the programs. How the program was initially conceived, what teachers implement, and what students understand as the ‘take-home’ message, are three different things. Additionally, I propose that sex and sexuality has multiple ties with all other aspects of life, such as economic power, language, gender dynamics, and religion – which cannot be taught through standardized methods. The role of science teachers as program implementers must be reevaluated, and the program needs to adjust certain discourses and allow for flexibility in order to obtain the intended results, as conceived by the Ministry of Education.

INDEX WORDS: Sex, Sexuality, Gender, Culture, Education, Indigenous, Ngöbe, Costa Rica
SEXUAL EDUCATION AMONG INDIGENOUS NGÔBE COSTA RICANS:
A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS

by

GABRIELA ALVARADO

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SEXUAL EDUCATION AMONG INDIGENOUS NGÖBE COSTA RICANS:

A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS

by

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Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
December 2017
DEDICATION

Para mi Mita: my rock, my strength, and my best friend.

“All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel mother” – Abraham Lincoln
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been possible due to the support of many people who have guided me along the way. First of all, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Steven Black: working with you for the past two years has been a wonderful learning experience, and I am extremely grateful for your patience, direction, and counsel. I remember that the first proposal I submitted for thesis research was comprised of interviews and focus groups. Dr. Black urged me to step out of my comfort zone and conduct an ethnography instead, driving me to challenge myself in new ways and produce a document that up until now felt like a faraway dream.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Jennifer Patico and Dr. Cassandra White, my two other committee members. I want to thank Dr. Patico for her constant support, assistance, and flexibility as Graduate Director; without which I would not have been able to pursue this degree. I am extremely grateful to Dr. White, who recommended I read my first ethnography, Virtually Virgins, when I was finishing my public health thesis. It is because of this book that I decided I wanted to be an anthropologist.

I am forever indebted to all those who assisted in my fieldwork in one way or another: my friend and colleague “Dr. Díaz” who urged me to conduct my research in Coto Brus, Dr. Pablo who opened his home to me during my four months of research, the principals, science teachers, and guidance counselors at the schools, and all the young students who participated in my research. Finally, thank you to Carmen and Delia and their families, who invited me into their homes and were happy to be my cultural guides as I conducted my ethnography.
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1 INTRODUCTION

In 2012, the Ministry of Education in Costa Rica completed and approved a standardized sexual education program, which was implemented for the first time across the country in February 2013 (Sancho 2013). The program was designed for students in the public school system from 7th to 9th grade, and consists of modules integrated into the ‘Basic Science’ curriculum (Ministerio de Educacion Publica 2012). The existence of a standardized sexual education curriculum can be either beneficial or detrimental depending on the point of view. A standardized curriculum guarantees that all students will be familiar with certain key issues related to sexual health. However, the standardization of the curriculum by definition promotes a vision and philosophy that might not resonate in all sectors of the country. The program was developed by a group of academics and leaders in government institutions who did not take into consideration the diversity of Costa Rica, and to this moment there have been no studies evaluating the appropriateness of the sexual education program.

The sexual education program has been extremely controversial from day one. Costa Rica is a predominantly Catholic country, where the Catholic religion is written into the constitution, and 76% of the population identifies as a practicing Catholic (Villegas 2014). Catholic institutions were immediately opposed to the sexual education program and urged parents to file appeals against the program. Within days of the program announcement, over 6000 parents had filed complaints to the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, or Sala IV (Cerdas 2015; The Tico Times 2012). Despite overwhelming pushback and campaign slogans such as “I educate my child myself”, the program continued and will be entering its 6th year in 2018. Earlier in 2017, the
Ministry of Education announced they are planning on expanding the program to 10th grade as well, and again, the heated debate was reignited (Chinchilla 2017).

Unfortunately, as is the case in most countries, public policies and programs tend to be poorly evaluated, or not at all evaluated. The Ministry of Education has relied on general statistics at the country level to justify expansion of the program, yet internal evaluation and a close look at implementation has been completely overlooked. Should it not be a priority to fully understand the existing program before expanding? It is extremely important to carefully assess the less concrete features of the program, such as gender, power, pleasure, diversity, and other topics that are not associated with the traditional risk approach that dominates sexual education programs worldwide.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research project is to understand how students in a rural area of Costa Rica, including an indigenous community, understand sex and sexuality, following the implementation of the standardized school-based sexual education program in the public-school system. Special attention will be given to the discourse and language used in official school documents, by teachers, and what students identify as the ‘take home message’. The specific objectives are the following:

1) To collect and analyze the official documents and curriculum of the standardized sexual education program developed by the Ministry of Education in Costa Rica.
2) To observe the delivery of the sexual education curriculum in two schools of the Brunca region where indigenous students are enrolled.
3) To gather information on gender roles, perception of sexuality, and interpretation of reproductive health and rights within the indigenous community of the Brunca region.

4) Assess the current situation in the Brunca region and make recommendations for the sexual education program in Costa Rica.

I will draw from varied anthropological theories to analyze my findings, including praxis theory, queer theory, and models of biocommunicability and biomedicalization. Through critical pedagogy theory approaches I will then develop bottom-up recommendations and suggestions for the sexual education program in Costa Rica.

1.2 Why Sex Ed in Costa Rica?

Costa Rica is a noteworthy country from a public policy perspective: beginning in the 1940s, universal health was established and the army was abolished (Vargas Gonzalez 2006). These forward-thinking policies have generated great progress for the country, yet other policies hold the country back. The Costa Rican Constitution establishes the Roman Catholic religion as the official religion of the country, which has created numerous barriers on the human rights front, such as the prohibition of abortion, in vitro fertilization, same sex marriage, and a firm stance regarding abstinence-only sexual education programs (Villegas 2014). It seems that in terms of progressive policy-making in the country, it is often one step forward, but two steps back. This is the case of the standardized sexual education program developed in 2012, a huge step forward, but several steps backwards due to interference from religious groups, and poor implementation evaluation.
As a Costa Rican physician working in diverse areas of the country, I have noticed how important context and culture are in health. When I worked in central hospitals in San Jose I often encountered adolescent girls who were pregnant, and I remember the judgmental looks and victim blaming on behalf of most health workers and hospital staff. Later on, working in a rural area of the country, I often came across pregnant teens, and I found that the ‘spiel’ I used in San Jose was completely ineffective. For many girls in rural areas, finishing high school, going to college, and having a career were not priorities, so I started tweaking my discourse to try and match concerns that would ring closer to home with girls in the community I was serving.

Situations like adolescent pregnancy were one of the drivers that made me pursue a career in Public Health, as the health of populations can be more broadly impacted by policies than the one-on-one care I was delivering as a doctor.

My first research project in public health was on cervical cancer screening. I had read in a Costa Rican newspaper that the national health service was going to begin a trial to study the cost-effectiveness and accuracy of liquid-based cytology instead of the traditional Papanicolau (Pap smear). The newspaper article discussed that cervical cancer was a preventable condition, yet it was the third leading cause of death in Costa Rican women. The article also mentioned very briefly that there were regions of the country where screening rates were below 30% of target populations. These were the same regions with the highest incidences of cervical cancer. To address this, public health authorities were going to invest money to use newer technologies. However, no one had questioned why women did not want to get screened in the first place. High-technology tests might diagnose more accurately, but if women fail to come in to the office to get screened, public health wise, there is not much of an impact. For this reason, I decided to
conduct a KAP study (knowledge, attitudes, practices) regarding cervical cancer screening among women and health providers.

The results from the KAP study yielded unexpected issues, such as poor knowledge from the health providers and communication issues within the health system. The study identified simple changes that could be carried out at the primary level, which would encourage women to get screened. These were uncomplicated adjustments, such as allowing women the flexibility to choose if they wanted a male or female doctor, setting up a curtain for privacy to undress, and taking the time to explain what a Pap smear was, instead of assuming they already know or just giving them a pamphlet. This emphasizes how crucial human perspectives are for the development of comprehensive, feasible, and well targeted public health policies. Health and culture are two indivisible elements of the human condition, and as such, anthropology is the perfect complement to public health. Anthropology is the study of humans, and as such, it can analyze specific groups of people to understand local context, and provide tools for the development of feasible, sustainable, and culturally appropriate public health interventions.

Since 2012, Costa Rican newspapers have detailed the large controversy that the new sexual education program has sparked. Ongoing debates between Catholic and Christian groups and the Ministry of Education motivated me to look into the current situation and programs more closely and in a critical manner. To gain a better understanding of the situation I was able to interview the former Minister of Education, who was responsible for the design and implementation of the standardized sexual education program. In this interview, I learned that the program had been designed with a humanistic perspective that sought to empower students through information and safe spaces for conversation. Here is where I developed my research
question: theoretically, the program would be a great addition to school curricula, yet it did not take into consideration the immense complexity that sex and sexuality entail. Sex and sexuality is messy, and the perception of these topics depends on economic power, gender dynamics, religion, marriage practices, and socio-political context. This thesis examines the strong cultural element in sexual education that is often overlooked in Costa Rican public discourses and public policy.

Public policy in Costa Rica is created centrally and often fails to account for the country’s diversity; rural populations (40% of the population), communities of African descent (1%), and indigenous groups (2%) are largely ignored (INEC 2017). For this reason, I decided to conduct my research in a rural area of the country. While deciding which rural area, one of my close friends from medical school, Arturo Díaz, who also studied public health, encouraged me to do the research in the Brunca region, in a small town in southern Costa Rica that is next to a Ngöbe indigenous territory. My friend founded a small global health nonprofit in 2015 that focuses on global health education and research and urged me to conduct my research in the region to pilot the center’s services in research site facilitation and assistance.

Having grown up in Costa Rica, I find myself automatically categorized as a ‘native ethnographer’. Nonetheless, it is important to point out, for the purpose of explaining my own positions, unintended biases, inclinations, and views, that I grew up in a very different area of the country to where I conducted this research. I grew up in San Jose, the capital city of Costa Rica, and even though my family was not necessarily ‘rich’, I attended a very fancy private school, and lived in one of the most expensive districts in the country. Unlike the overwhelming majority of the country, we are not practicing Catholics, and my mother has had a very sex-positive
approach to my brother’s and my own upbringing and education. It is because of this that I find myself feeling shocked or surprised at comments or events during my fieldwork that probably would not be as astonishing to another person. I emphasize these positions to highlight the fact that the excerpts, stories, quotes, and narratives included in this thesis respond to my own positionality within Costa Rican society, as is the way I respond to them and discuss. Throughout my anthropological training I have learned to engage in cultural relativity, and dig for deeper meaning among practices that may seem different from my own. However, as Jessica Gregg writes in her book *Virtually Virgins*, “It is nothing new to note that anthropological research is colored by the subjective, personal lens of the researcher” (Gregg 2003, ebook). Further positioning myself within the category of feminist ethnographer, I embrace this ‘colored personal lens’ of my own, but stress that it is mine and mine alone.

It is my hope that this research can provide local teachers, school principals, and decision-makers at the Ministry of Education with valuable information to strengthen and improve sexual education programs. I am confident that with more research, training, and readjusting of certain policy issues, the sexual education program can lead the shift toward more engaged and critical pedagogy, and become a tool of critical thinking and empowerment for young people in the country.
2 METHODS

For this project, I conducted ethnographic research, including document review, participant observation, unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and free-listing activities for cultural domain analysis. “The goal of ethnography, to gain an insider’s understanding of a local culture, is achieved by conducting fieldwork via participant-observation in a specific cultural context over an extended period” (Bucholtz 2011, 37). I conducted fieldwork during the summer of 2017, from June to September, in the Brunca region of Costa Rica, in and near one of the Ngöbe indigenous territories. I carried out participant observation at two schools in the region, which were in session during the summer, as Costa Rican school session runs from February to November, and the equivalent of ‘summer’ vacation is from November to February. During July, there is a two-week break, during which I transcribed and analyzed tapes. During the months of June and July, I conducted participant observation at the first school, San Antonio school, which is approximately 8 kilometers outside of the Ngöbe territory. At San Antonio school, the students are predominantly non-indigenous, however there are several indigenous students as well. I spent August and September at the school in Carrizal, which is located inside the Ngöbe territory, where the majority of the students are indigenous.

I reviewed program documents, syllabi, curricula, and textbooks from the sexual education program through a thematic content analysis framework prior to fieldwork. I annotated the documents and created a preliminary code book to aid in the subsequent coding of field notes and interviews. After an initial round of coding, I grouped codes to determine emerging themes and overarching topics. This code book was a starting point for further coding of other qualitative data, but remained flexible as coding is an iterative process (Saldana 2009). Gamboa (2010) conducted
an analysis of the series of textbooks published by the Ministry of Education in Costa Rica from the 1960s to the 1990s. The framework utilized in her study was used as a guideline for the analysis of the most current curriculum and program documents.

From June to September I lived in a small town, close to Carrizal and San Antonio in the Brunca region of Costa Rica. During the first weeks, I rented a room at the house of a local retired doctor who has a very big home and rents rooms out to students and medical interns who come periodically. My aim initially was to nurture relationships with the local community and hopefully find a family that would be willing to rent a room in their home for the rest of the summer. In the end, I decided to stay at the doctor’s house for the whole duration of my research for safety and ethical reasons I detail in the following chapters. My friend who recommended I come to the region is involved in two local nonprofits, which facilitated my entry into the community and accelerated asking for permissions and approvals locally. The Ministry of Education gives autonomy to regional offices to manage their own decisions regarding research. I sought permission to engage in participant observation during school lessons where sexual education was taught, to interview teachers who taught the sexual education curriculum, and to interview students who received sexual education classes. As time went by, I extended participant observation from the classroom to other areas of life, as students became more comfortable with me and invited me to activities outside of school, such as festivals on the weekends, or coming over to their homes to ‘hang out’.

Over the course of the research, I kept notebooks with field notes. “Fieldnotes are traditionally used to systematically document the details and meanings of everyday social practice” (Bucholtz 2011, 37). Depending on the situation I would have my notebook open and take notes, while other times I would put my notebook away, and at the end of the day I would write down as
much detail as I could remember. I took special care to use pseudonyms in all notebooks to avoid any potential breaches in confidentiality. Over the course of the summer, I transcribed my field notes into a word document, to facilitate annotating in the margins and coding to draw potential themes and ideas to further study through interviews at a later stage. Participant observation allowed me to obtain a large amount of information, from several different sources, as well as become familiar with the topic and the environment to prepare for interviews to deepen understanding of sexuality and sexual education in the community.

During participant observation, as relationships developed with students and teachers, I conducted semi-structured interviews. The aim of the interviews was to deepen understanding of themes and topics that emerged through the course of participant observation. The sampling strategy was through a combination of convenience and opportunistic sampling, as well as respondent-driven sampling after initial interviews (Bernard 2011). The aim was to interview teachers at the local school, students (both male and female), and parents of students. The interviews were semi-structured, and I designed the interview guide following the participant observation phase. At the beginning of the interviews, I prompted participants to create a free-list. The purpose of the free-listing was two-fold: to act as an icebreaker and provide possible talking points during the interview, and to obtain data. The prompt for the free-listing activity was “Please list all of the words that you associate with ‘sexual education’”. I analyzed the data obtained from this activity using AnthroPac to determine whether there was a defined cultural domain for sexual education among participants (Borgatti 1994). At the beginning of the interviews, I briefed participants on the purpose of the research, provided them with an informed consent or assent form, and asked if they agreed to have the interview audiotaped. I transcribed interviews and coded
with the codebook that I had developed through the document review and participant observation field notes (interview guides in Spanish and English are in Appendix A).

Ethnographies conducted in school settings provide useful frameworks to approach methodological planning. Initially I was planning on interviewing only female students, because I believed that I could probably have more rapport with girls than with boys. In Goodwin’s *He-Said-She-Said* (Goodwin 1990), she explained she had the same inclination. Goodwin was planning on studying only girls’ interactions at play, until she found that boys approached her and insisted that their activities were just as interesting as the girls’. This led me to expand my sampling frame, step out of my comfort zone, and potentially collect a wider variety of meanings and understandings of sex and sexuality from different points of view. A study conducted by Susan Philips in classrooms in the Warm Springs Indian Reservation analyzed communication in the classrooms. Philips used ethnographic methods and conducted explicit comparisons of Anglo and Indian classes by conducting participant observation in two classes in the Warm Springs reservation where the student body was 95% Native American, and in two classes in the nearby town of Madras where students were 95% Anglo (Philips 1983). I decided to replicate this model of comparison on two different levels in my study, spending two months at the San Antonio high school, and two months at the Carrizal high school inside the Ngöbe territory. Within each school, I would observe classes at different grade levels to understand the different topics covered each year. Philips’ work also provided ideas as to what to observe in classroom settings in addition to the educational content of the class, for example, how to attract attention, hand gestures, facial movements, pauses while talking, next speaker’s turn, teacher/student roles, approaches to classwork, and class rules. While I observed two different schools, in and out of the indigenous territory, I maintained a flexible approach to analysis to avoid comparisons between schools, and appreciating the complexity and
variety within the same schools, as Mendoza describes “same schools, separate lives” (Mendoza 2008, 25). Other issues mentioned by Robert Crosnoe in his ethnography include experiencing typical days for students, understanding the impact – if any – of technology (cell phones, social media), peer cultures, notions of fitting in and marginalization, and which conditions are stigmatized in the school (Crosnoe 2011).

About halfway through my research I realized that my interviews were not yielding as much information as I had hoped. Interviews with teachers were extremely interesting and yielded lots of valuable information. However, interviews with students and parents were a lot more complicated. Students seemed to be intimidated by the pressure of a one-on-one interview, and the amount of information they were willing to share was minimal. This was even more pronounced with indigenous students, who would become very quiet and look down and the floor and reply “I know nothing” to almost all questions asked. I realized I would need a different approach to this, so I decided to develop a simple, anonymous survey with key information I wanted to know about the students (the survey is in Spanish and English in Appendix B). I felt it would be a good idea to highlight how different the two schools were, in a way that would not intimidate students as much. As an unintentional methodological advantage, I realized that students were very eager to help out with the survey. I conducted my surveys at the end of my four months in the field, which meant that students trusted me more, they had gotten to know me, and for this reason, I believe that the answers on their surveys are closer to the truth than they would have been if I had done the survey on day one.

Another way I worked around the interview challenge was by playing truth-or-dare games during recess or outside of school. This was probably a format of question-asking that was
more acceptable to students, as I was at the same level as them, and they were able to ask me questions as well.

**Table 1. Research Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2016</td>
<td>Interview former Minister of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall 2016</td>
<td>Background research and literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2017</td>
<td>Site visit guided by local nonprofit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>Completion of research protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2017</td>
<td>Submission for Institutional Review Board (IRB) review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Break 2017</td>
<td>Travel to Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(March 10-15)</td>
<td>• Meeting at Ministry of Education Regional Office</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Formal letter of approval to conduct research</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Secure accommodations for the summer</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2017 – May 2017</td>
<td>Revisions for IRB approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2017 – September 2017</td>
<td>Field-work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• San Antonio High School</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Carrizal High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2017</td>
<td>Analysis and write-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research was divided over the course of the year 2017 roughly in three sections: I devoted the spring to planning and preparing the research proposal and coordinating practical considerations, I carried out the ethnographic field-work during the summer, and I completed final analyses and write up in the fall. This timeline was based on Chang’s (1992) five procedural steps to conduct her ethnography: (1) Selecting the site, (2) Gaining entrée among adolescents and gaining rapport, (3) Collecting and recording cultural materials, (4) Analyzing data and interpreting cultural meanings, (5) Writing up.

I conducted three types of analysis on my data and findings: thematic content analysis, cultural domain analysis, and statistical analysis. I conducted a thematic content analysis of the
data I collected from participant observation, interviews, surveys, and official program documents. I coded field notes, interview transcripts, open-ended questions on surveys, and excerpts from official Ministry of Education documents. From these codes, I began my analysis, grouping data into categories and themes. For the cultural domain analysis, I collected free lists at the beginning of interviews, and as part of the survey for students that I conducted at the end of my research. My analysis of these free lists was informed by my participant observation. I carried out three separate analyses of the free lists: lists from Carrizal, lists from San Antonio, and lists from all students together. I used AnthroPac to execute the cultural domain analysis, and the aim of the three-way analysis was to determine if there was any observable difference in the cultural domain regarding sexual education between schools, and if there were any discernible patterns. Free list data from teacher interviews was not sufficient to conduct a separate analysis, but was taken into consideration for the overall analysis and ‘big picture’. Finally, the survey responses were coded and with the aid of SPSS, statistical analyses were conducted. The statistical analyses were aimed at establishing means, variation, and determining whether the difference between the two schools could be attributed to chance or true difference between the populations. The wide variety of data sources and types of analysis allowed me to constantly validate my own findings and dig deeper into the meaning and interpretation of information gathered.

2.1 Strengths, limitations, and practical difficulties

One of the main limitations for conducting an ethnography is time. Most traditional ethnographies take over a year for data collection and fieldwork (Bernard 2011), while this study was conducted over the span of four months of fieldwork. Being Costa Rican and familiar with
the local community, this limitation was mitigated as less time was required to gain access and adjust to the surroundings. Additionally, my contact with the local nonprofit was extremely helpful to get started and meet the right people. It was because of my relationship with the nonprofit that I was able to easily find room and board, get to know community leaders, and my paperwork for local approval with schools was fast-tracked. Another limitation was related to the point of access. As I was gaining access to the community through a local nonprofit, there was a possibility that the community would see me as part of the nonprofit or as part of the medical community. Fortunately, I was able to separate these elements, especially with the students. Some of the teachers would call me “doctora”, but none of the students referred to me that way, and just called me “Gaby”. I was very careful to emphasize at all times that I was not associated with the local clinic, and that their choice to participate or not participate would have no impact on their relationship with local organizations.

Sex, sexuality, and sexual education are somewhat sensitive topics, and I began my research knowing there would be a strong likelihood that adolescents would not want to discuss these topics with me. I considered that maybe female students might be more inclined to share their thoughts and ideas, while male students might feel inhibited and unwilling to discuss, or possibly offer exaggerated versions of their own experiences. A classic example of controversial data and interpretation is Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). In her research, Mead attempted to offer explanations to why adolescence was such a difficult period and sought to prove that it is not really a time of strain and stress, but “that cultural conditions make it so” (Mead 1928, 234), and so made a case for changing educational approaches in the United States. Mead’s work is part of classic anthropological studies, yet there is great controversy surrounding the veracity of her findings. Some modern critiques on Mead’s work propose that her work was “filled with
internal contradictions and grandiose claims to knowledge that she could not have possibly have had” (Freeman 2011, 213). These assessments have resulted from the contemporary comparison of her final work, correspondence with her advisor (Franz Boas), and her personal notebooks with field notes. Review of these documents have demonstrated that Mead’s main theory on adolescence were based on the information from her two female traveling companions, and that after she obtained the information that ‘matched’ her hypothesis, she ceased all further research. Additionally, other researchers returned to re-interview Mead’s traveling companions, who admitted to have agreed with the propositions and ideas that were presented to them, engaging in a common cultural practice called ‘recreational lying’ (Freeman 2011). While I have no concrete evidence that would support an actual practice called ‘recreational lying’ among the indigenous community where I conducted my fieldwork, I did encounter many situations where people were very reluctant to share explanations of certain cultural practices. I also encountered a few times when someone would tell me one version, and another person would tell me another.

Regardless of the controversy surrounding Freeman’s critique, the case of Margaret Mead being misled or misleading highlights the importance of adequate methodologies in ethnographic studies, especially those focused on sexuality. There are several things to learn from Mead’s experience, including the value of transparency, repetition, triangulation, and not having preconceived notions/ideas. In this research study, the wide variety of data collection methods (participant observation, interviews, document review, free-listing, pile-sorting, surveys) allowed me to conduct a critical analysis and cross comparison of data obtained from different sources.

As expected, interviews with students were challenging, as they seemed to be intimidated by the whole interview structure. This was even more pronounced with indigenous students, who
shared even less information, regardless of gender. To overcome this limitation in data collection, a simple survey was designed that would provide anonymity and less discomfort for students. Other practical considerations, such as how responsive students would be to by presence could not be anticipated. In the first school, I attended students were very friendly and wanted to be close to me all the time. They were all very interested in how life is in the United States (US), and I always had people to “hang out with” during recess. At the second school, inside the indigenous territory, developing relationships with students was much more difficult, and girls were less eager to spend time with me in and outside of class.

There is a frequent concern that in many settings, the first individuals to approach the researcher are outsiders within their own community and may even create a disincentive for other members of the community from interacting with the researcher (Bernard 2011). Chang (1992) conducted an ethnography of a US high school and referred that she did not encounter Agar’s ‘professional stranger handlers’, and that several popular students approached her to ask who she was and inquire about her research. Chang would regularly attend classes to help develop friendships, she would spend time where students would go during breaks and after class, she would accept invitations to ‘hang out’, and would often offer rides to students, as the car provided a private space for talking. In my personal experience, I did have to deal with the ‘outsider’ who approached me on day one. Kimberly was in my second class during my first day at San Antonio, and I could tell that she was immediately taken with me. By lunch time I had multiple notes and letters from her, and I had to be very careful in dealing with my relationship with her (in a later chapter I tell Kimberly’s story with more detail). One detail that stands out in school-based ethnographies is that the researchers are initially concerned with what to wear on the first days of school, whether it be to blend in better with students, avoid standing out, and not be associated
with teachers, but also to not dress in a way that would ‘place’ the researcher in a specific student category (Chang 1992; Bucholtz 2011). In Costa Rica, public schools have a uniform. This means that by not wearing a uniform, no matter how casual I kept my attire, I was always very visibly differentiated and separated from students. Often, the way I dressed was a topic for conversation with students, mainly female students. Once a few of them caught a glimpse of a tattoo I have, and for the next 10 days I was inundated with students from all grade levels asking me about the whole tattoo process.

2.2 Ethical considerations

From an ethical perspective, this study had numerous components that made it especially difficult to navigate and position. As the study was specifically on school-based sexual education programs in rural and indigenous populations, the study population was an extremely sensitive issue. Not only were the bulk of my research participants underage, but additionally, they belonged to an extremely vulnerable sector of Costa Rican society: indigenous communities. Obtaining adequate permissions and approvals to conduct research was also a lengthy process, as not only did I have to submit my study for review to the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Georgia State University, but I also had to obtain approval from each individual high school, and from the Association of Indigenous Development (ADI), who are an elected body of representatives from the community.

My main concerns when I was preparing for the study were related to sexual and reproductive issues I might encounter during my research. I was extremely concerned about disclosure of abuse and what the best way would be to deal with such an issue. Another
apprehension of mine was how to position myself as a student and not a physician, without being
deceptive about my professional background.

I began the process of approval for my research by approaching the local schools I wanted
to work with. The nonprofit was extremely helpful in this regard, as it made it easy to get
appointments with the principals at both schools to explain what I had in mind. The principals at
both schools were thrilled about the project and immediately gave me a green light. They asked
me to submit a letter, with a copy of my research protocol, but they assured me it was just a
formality. The principal at San Antonio high school was the most receptive. When I met him, he
had been on the job for two weeks, as he had recently been transferred. He admitted he was feeling
extremely overwhelmed with the teenage pregnancy situation in the school, and he implored that
I ‘find a solution’. I carefully explained that I was not the silver bullet, I explained that I could not
anticipate what my findings would be or the nature of my recommendations. Still, he remained
optimistic, and gave me all help I needed to conduct my research. The next stop after this was
meeting with the Association of Indigenous Development (ADI), who in accordance to the
autonomy of their territory stipulated through Convention 169 of the International Labor
Organization, must review research or other proposals for intervention. After the ADI had granted
me authorization to conduct research at the indigenous territory of Carrizal, I proceeded to prepare
for IRB review at Georgia State University (GSU).

I submitted for IRB review in April 2016, and after several rounds of revisions, was
approved in June 2016. Following IRB approval, an informative flyer was distributed through both
schools informing parents and students of the research that was going to be conducted at the school.
The flyer explained that participant observation would be carried out, and that there would be a
researcher observing classes, and taking notes. The flyer specified that if the researcher wanted to interview a child individually, consent would first be obtained from parents, and then assent obtained from the child. No parents were allowed to be present during interviews, as this could have introduced a great amount of bias in the participants’ responses. This process of sending forms and flyers to parents through the students is the standard form of communication in the Costa Rican school system. Whenever parents are to be informed of events at the school, permission for fieldtrips, or even requests for donations for bake sales, this is the standard process. As this is the usual mechanism for communication with parents, there were no significant issues that arose from using this same process to inform parents of research at the school.

During my initial meetings with high school principals, I mentioned the possibility of individual interviews and consent/assent forms. I was recommended to try to avoid forms where people would have to sign. Indigenous communities in Costa Rica, just as in many parts of the world, have been historically oppressed and stripped from their lands and belongings. This meant that communities were overly suspicious of ‘white’ people coming in with papers to sign. For this reason, I petitioned the IRB for verbal consent and assent forms for students and parents of students.

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1 I use the term ‘white’ in quotations because it is a very generalized term I have heard indigenous people use. When they say white, it seems to be referring to non-indigenous people. People who look Hispanic and have darker or tanned skin, would be considered white by indigenous people, as long as they are not part of one of the eight indigenous ethnicities in the country. There is also a generalization of the term ‘gringo’, where any foreigner would be called ‘gringo’, or in my case ‘gringa’, even though I am Costa Rican. The first time I realized that the students thought I was American was on a day there was a FIFA soccer match for qualifying rounds to the World Cup. Costa Rica was playing the US later that day, and kids kept saying to me “we will win”, or “we are going to beat you”. I had no idea what they were talking about, until one of them called me ‘gringa’.
for the interview process. I used written consent forms only for teachers and Ministry of Education officials.

Regarding confidentiality, I used pseudonyms to protect participant identity. Pseudonyms were used at all times, which includes interview transcripts, as well as field notes. Names of towns and schools have also been changed (San Antonio and Carrizal are fictional names), as to protect the identity of participants who may be easily identifiable, such as teachers, principals, and community leaders. Although this is a non-interventional study, there are many ethical implications due to the nature of the research topic. I was able to uphold confidentiality at all times, and there were no situations in which I felt I had to breach confidentiality to protect a student from a dangerous situation. Prior to beginning my fieldwork, I had committed to deciding where I would draw the line regarding confidentiality, and I decided that situations related to any type of physical or sexual abuse should be notified to the authorities since the student participants are underage. Participants would be informed at the beginning of the interview that in the case that the participant choose to share sensitive information related to physical or sexual abuse there would be a legal obligation on my behalf to report the incident. In such a case, special care would be taken to not place the participant in danger due to reporting of the incident. As I am a physician who has worked in primary care in other rural areas of the country, I have encountered situations of sexual abuse in the past. I am familiar with both the medical and legal systems in the country, and I know how to navigate the systems and the available resources. Fortunately, I did not encounter situations of abuse in which I was the first person to know about it, which meant that I did not have to make the difficult choice as to how to proceed.
Finally, as mentioned previously, I emphasized that participating or not participating in the study would not affect their relationships with the schools, the local nonprofit, or the local clinic. The founder of local nonprofit had aided in making connections with people at the regional offices of the Ministry of Education. From the perspective of the staff at the schools there might have been an unconscious association between me and the nonprofit; however, to the students and the community, I was seen spending most of my time at the school, which probably made the association with the nonprofit seem less important.

Chang (1992) mentions in her ethnography that the high school principal initially suggested that she pose as an international exchange student to gain a ‘true’ insider perspective. Chang struggled with the ethical and moral implications of this type of deception, and opted for presenting herself as a researcher from Korea, and being extremely open about the study. In another school-based ethnography, Mary Bucholtz discussed the balance between avoiding engaging in deception, while not highlighting her specific research interests to avoid bias in student interviews (Bucholtz 2011). We all have to position ourselves, not just the people we are studying, but as researchers we have to decide where we fit (Hodgson 2011). In medical anthropology, as with most applied anthropological fields, there is a very fine line between researcher and advocate (Cofresi 1994). Where do I draw the line? It has been challenging to witness so many social injustices and not fall into immediate advocate mode. However, I am confident that the results from my research can give social justice advocates valuable information to advance their causes.

Reading Heewon Chang’s (1992) ethnography made me think of all the areas in which people might ask for my advice, especially if they came to realize that I have a medical degree. If a student or community member asks for medical advice, should I offer it? After careful
consideration, and going back-and-forth on the issue I decided that if an individual approached me to seek medical advice, I would provide an informed opinion on the matter. I would emphasize that I do not have the resources available to make an appropriate diagnosis or suggest treatment, and thus recommend they seek attention at the local clinic if it is needed. I decided I would not offer opinions on doses or current treatments prescribed by other physicians, and I would not suggest any changes in medications. In the case of a medical emergency in which there were no other medical providers, I had decided I would tend to the injured or ill person, until adequate care could be provided. I currently have an active license to practice medicine in Costa Rica, and included in the dues I pay to the Costa Rican College of Physicians is malpractice insurance coverage. Again, to my great fortune, I did not have to tend to any medical emergencies, and I was never asked to provide medical advice. Students would sometimes ask me how different forms of contraception worked, but they never asked for a prescription or an opinion of any sort, just the ‘science’ behind it.

One last modification I made to my study due to ethical considerations was where to live. Initially, I had planned to spend some time renting a room in the nearest town, and afterwards, I would maybe find an indigenous family that would be willing to host me. In the end, I decided to stay at the town, and travel daily to the different schools and communities. The retired doctor I rented my room from was adamant about me not living in indigenous territories for several reasons, however, I sensed that he was mainly concerned about my safety. He told me of situations in the past where other female students have tried to live in the community and have been in the middle of violent domestic disputes. Additionally, he considered that living in the community was a form of exoticizing poverty, and to top everything off, Costa Rican law prohibits non-indigenous people from living on protected indigenous territories. I took all of his comments into advice, and agreed
that maybe living in the indigenous territory was not the best route. Instead, I developed relationships with community members who often invited me over to do crafts or drink coffee, which allowed me to learn more about their home lives, without interfering and imposing.

Overall, my study ran quite smoothly, and I felt that I had no situations with significant ethical conflicts. I had done quite a deal of reflecting on worst-case scenarios prior to entering the field, which helped me make decisions at times. This also allowed me to be self-critical on the stance I had taken previously and to note how my ideas and perceptions were slowly influenced by new perspectives and opinions. A final disclaimer I would like to make is that I have taken all photographs included in this thesis and have sought adequate permission when human subjects are included in the photo.
3 BACKGROUND

This study was conducted in Costa Rica in a rural area of the country in the Brunca region, which is located in the southern part of the country. There are several Ngöbe indigenous territories in the region, and this research was conducted in two high schools: one school (Carrizal) was located inside one of the indigenous territories, and its students were predominantly indigenous. The second school (San Antonio), was just outside the indigenous territory, the students were predominantly non-indigenous, and it was located just 5 miles away from the first school.

3.1 Ethnographic context

Costa Rica is the second smallest country in Central America, with 50,990 km$^2$ and a population of 4,301,712 in the most recent census (INEC 2013; Low 1985). Over half of the population lives in the Central Valley, and 97% of the population self-identify as having Hispanic descent (being ‘white’), 2% Black (who are located mainly along the Caribbean coast), and 1% indigenous, which in the 2011 census corresponded to a population of 48,500 (Low 1985; INEC 2013). In the 1550s Costa Rica had not yet been conquered, and the exploration of the Spanish was confined to the northern Nicoya peninsula, and the coasts (Perez 1997). Costa Rica did not have minerals that were considered valuable to Europeans, which meant that it was largely ignored during the initial periods of Spanish conquest (Cofresi 1994). When the Spaniards began to settle in the Central Valley, the Chibchan were the indigenous group that lived in the area, and as they resisted colonization, they were completely eliminated. The first assessment of indigenous peoples
in Costa Rica was conducted by Perefán de Rivera, in what he called ‘repartimiento’. Repartimiento means to ‘divide up’, as in divide up among the Spaniards as labor force (Perez 1997). Estimates and projections state that between 1500-1524 the indigenous population of Costa Rica might have been around 337,308, declining to 120,000 in 1550, 54,000 in 1580, declining even further to only a few thousand between the 1600s-1800s, and then a gradual increase in population during the 1900s until today (Perez 1997).

Following the initial conquest by the Spanish, indigenous populations retreated outside of the Central Valley. As agriculture became the main economic activity of the country, lands were seized for coffee and banana plantations, pushing indigenous communities further out to inaccessible and ‘hostile’ environments (Cofresi 1994). All over the world there is a history of repression by the majorities; slowly, marginalized communities realized that this type of exploitation between nation-states and indigenous people was “part of a global pattern” (Hodgson 2011, 29). These patterns of exploitation and repression included, but were not limited to land alienation, forced settlement, linguistic discrimination, economic marginalization, disparities in health and education, and cultural disparagement (Hodgson 2011). There were calls from communities and activists from all over the world to protect people’s rights to “cultural, social, economic, and political self-determination within the framework of the nation states in which they reside” (Hodgson 2011, 39). The international response to these calls was the creation of a working group within the United Nations, from which the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169 resulted, and was later adopted by the International Labor Organization (ILO).

It was after the United Nations declaration that the Costa Rican government created 24 official indigenous territories, where eight different indigenous groups reside, autonomous from
the state (Schliemann 2012). The eight indigenous groups in Costa Rica are: Teribe, Guatuso, BriBri, Huetar, Chorotega, Ngöbe, Cabécar, and Boruca, most of which maintain a traditional language in addition to Spanish (except for Huetar and Chorotega populations who are Spanish speakers exclusively). The map below shows the locations of the 24 indigenous territories in the country, most of which are southeast of the Central Valley, in areas of the country with very poor infrastructure and difficult access.

Figure 1 Map of indigenous territories in Costa Rica (INEC 2013)
This research was carried out in the Brunca region, where several Ngöbe indigenous territories are located. The region is situated at high altitude, and the main economic activity is centered around coffee. The Brunca region is comprised of parts of the provinces of San Jose, and Puntarenas, specifically, the cantons of Perez Zeledón, Buenos Aires, Coto Brus, Osa, Golfito, and Corredores. The schools at which I conducted my research were situated in the canton of Coto Brus, which has a population of 34,787, an extension of 933.91 km², and the highest poverty index in the country (23.073%) (Area de Salud de Coto Brus 2012). The Ngöbe in Costa Rica are now situated closer to the mountainous regions, and the Pacific, but there is archaeological data that demonstrates that the Ngöbe were originally located towards the Caribbean coast, between Costa Rica and Panama (Cortes Campos 2015). They were nomadic hunter-gatherers that established themselves as a majority group by dominating smaller groups. The Ngöbe structured themselves in cacicazgos, which are small tribes lead by a chief. These cacicazgos maintained temporary alliances during times of war, but that form of organization also made it easier for Spaniards to ‘divide and conquer’. When the colonizers begun the decimation of the indigenous peoples, the Ngöbe fled and found safety in the mountains, like many other indigenous groups did (Figure 2). Towards the second half of the 19th century, indigenous families were evicted by coffee plantation owners and transnationals expanding the banana industry (Cortes Campos 2015).

With the growth of the coffee and banana industry, indigenous and Black people became the source of cheap labor. The plight of the Afro Caribbean population has been discussed more at the national level, yet the indigenous population is always invisibilized. On the banana plantations, the Ngöbe occupied the lowest rung in the social ladder, far below Black workers. They were dismissed as savages and drunks, and called ‘cholos’, which means idiot or fool (Bourgois 1989). Bourgois’ ethnography demonstrated how the United Fruit Company reinforced
these racial and ethnic stereotypes as a form to control their labor force. When the majority of Black workers left the plantations in the 1940s, Ngöbe workers became even more exploited. They were given the worst and most dangerous jobs, paid poorly, and subjected to control and oppression tactics to avoid them from organizing in protest. While several different indigenous ethnicities worked in the plantations, the Ngöbe were at a larger disadvantage to other indigenous groups as they were unable to leverage their assets. The Kuna, on the other hand, mobilized their ethnic and social structures to mediate economic oppression and attain a higher ethnic status than the Ngöbe (Bourgois 1988).

Figure 2. The view from a high point within the Ngöbe indigenous territory
The Ngöbe, similar to most other indigenous populations in Costa Rica, have high unemployment rates, poverty rates, teen pregnancy (18.6%), levels of teenage marriage (22% versus the national average of 4.6%), and lowest investment in infrastructure and health (Fallas Hidalgo et al. 2006). On paper, through facts and figures it is easy to tell that the Brunca region faces immense challenges. Having spent several months in the area, I can confirm that the level of oppression, poverty, and neglect that these populations live with on a daily basis is hugely invisibilized. An example of this is the role of the local municipality. Among their many responsibilities, municipalities are charged with coordinating garbage collection routes, paving of roads, permits for public transportation, and permits for local businesses. The roads in Carrizal are all dirt roads in very poor conditions, with a bus that enters the territory only twice a day (7am and 3pm), and for many inhabitants, the bus stop is a 3 hour walk from where they live. There is no garbage collection, so the local Association for Indigenous Development has to make due with volunteer pick-up trucks every other month, and the rest of the trash ends up in the rivers and forests. There are three small convenience shops inside the territory that sell staple food items, mainly sugar, coffee, rice, beans, canned sardines, and soft drinks. The value of these shops is not the income it generates for the owners of the shops, but that food is available within “walking distance” for most people without having to take the bus to the nearest town one hour away.

One day, the municipality came in, handed out fines, and closed down the three pulperías (local convenience shops) because they were not up to date with their local permits. This to me, exemplifies how marginalized populations are treated in the region. The government does not provide basic infrastructure and living conditions (water, roads, electricity, garbage collection), but insists on collecting payment for permits to the same municipality that consistently violates their basic human rights. Unfortunately, ILO Convention 169 has been used as a justification for
situations like these. When it is convenient for the government, the territories are autonomous – meaning, they should figure out their own garbage collection, transportation, and roads. Yet, when it comes to collecting taxes and money for commercial permits, autonomy is not contemplated.

Figure 3. One of the three small convenience stores in Carrizal which was closed down by the municipality

Adolescent pregnancy rates and underage marriage are extremely high in indigenous populations in comparison with the rest of the country (underage marriage in girls is five times higher than the national average) (Fallas Hidalgo et al. 2006). Inside the indigenous territory where I conducted my research, teen pregnancy is significantly higher than the national average. The
population of the territory is about 1,600, and every year there are about 51-56 live births. In 2007, there were 18 girls under the age of 15 who were pregnant, in 2008 and 2009 it increased again to 37 and 34, then in 2010 back down to 11 (Area de Salud de Coto Brus 2012). Some argue that it is a reflection of poverty and lack of education, while others blame indigenous culture for these “unfavorable” public health outcomes. Since adolescent pregnancy is a very visible issue in the region, all teachers and principals at the local schools were extremely welcoming when I approached them seeking permission for my study. Not only were they all willing to have me conduct my research, but they were very vocal about wanting me to develop key recommendations, and come back to do workshops with both teachers and students.

In accordance to classic nonprofit theory, there are numerous nonprofits, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as they are referred to internationally, in the bordering region of Costa Rica and Panama. Classic nonprofit theory states that NGOs come in to place when there is a demand that is not being met by government or private services (Worth 2012). This matches the current situation in the region, where there is little investment on behalf of the government for infrastructure and public services. However, nonprofits in the region are mainly oriented toward environmental issues and employment in the area. Since Costa Rica has a universal health care system, access to health is not seen as a priority in the country. However, health outcomes in the region are among the poorest in the country (Cofresi 1994), demonstrating that health and well-being are not merely limited to access to a physician or clinic. Hands for Health is a nonprofit organization that “seeks to develop and collaborate on programs and projects that generate changes to the health and welfare of vulnerable populations in the Brunca area of Costa Rica” (Hands for Health n.d.). The organization has been working in the area since late 2015, and is currently developing an associated research center to promote global health research in the Brunca region.
The retired doctor from whom I rented a room is the president of the nonprofit, and my friend from medical school was one of the founders of the organization. He is also co-founder of the new organization that focuses on global health research and education.

During my time in the field I began working for the global health organization as a program manager, specifically in development and grant writing. This meant little interaction with local communities and more work networking with potential donors and granting agencies. I believe that this role had little impact on my position as a researcher. I also became involved as a volunteer with the other associated nonprofit that delivers health outreach and services to indigenous
populations. While volunteering I began to notice how non-indigenous people in the nearby towns resented that indigenous people would receive health care “for free” and not have to wait in line at the clinic for an appointment. Sadly, I slowly began to notice microaggressions and masked forms of racism everywhere I looked.

When I talk to Costa Ricans about my research in indigenous communities, I feel that by the looks on their faces, what they think, but do not necessarily say, is something along the lines of, “Oh right, those people exist”. Having grown up in Costa Rica, I can say first hand, that the school system does not teach us about the cultural diversity in our small country. I am positive I spent more time in my history lessons learning about the Russian Revolution and the struggle of the working class in Europe than I did about the struggles of people who live 110 miles away. As an informal exercise, I started asking acquaintances how many indigenous ethnicities we have in our country and if they could name them. The answers I obtained were downright embarrassing. Most were surprised there was more than one indigenous group, and a few were surprised they still existed and considered indigenous populations to be something that lived only in social studies textbooks and national museums. This persistent and constant invisibilization of indigenous peoples can be attributed to “Costa Rica’s White Legend” (Campo-Engelstein and Meagher 2011).

The ‘white legend’ is “A dominant cultural narrative within Costa Rica [that] describes Costa Ricans not only as different from their Central American neighbors, but also exalts them as better: specifically, as more white, peaceful, egalitarian, and democratic” (Campo-Engelstein and Meagher 2011, 99). This notion of Costa Rican exceptionalism is part of a master narrative that has resulted in the marginalization of Indigenous and Black citizens, as well as the Nicaraguan minority. The white narrative has deep colonial roots, and for centuries Costa Ricans have been
denying their non-white ancestry, and promoting an association of whiteness with positive qualities. In schools we are taught that we are all the same, and that Costa Ricans are a very homogenous society, however, little attention is payed to the fact that Black Costa Ricans were not considered Costa Rican citizens until 1949, or that many Indigenous people were not awarded citizenship until the 1990s (Campo-Engelstein and Meagher 2011; Alvarenga 2011).

The narrative of whiteness was not something that happened accidentally, and for decades, Costa Rican authorities made huge efforts to promote “ideal, well-directed (…) and desirable immigration” (Alvarenga 2011, 8). Immigration from Western Europe was promoted, while immigration of Black people was seen as a ‘necessary evil’ for the construction of the railroads. For a while, the immigration of Chinese, Arabs, Turks, Armenians, and gypsies, were prohibited in the country, and afterwards, there was a selective entry tax to discourage ‘undesirable’ immigration. People who were considered ‘undesirable’ would be charged a 1,000 colones tax to enter the country (about $2), while ‘desirable’ immigrants – white immigrants – would not have to pay such tax, and were further rewarded with free land (Alvarenga 2011).

While Indigenous people and certain immigrants are certainly discriminated against in Costa Rica, the Ngöbe get a double dose of intolerance. The Ngöbe are a nomadic group who live in Costa Rica and Panama. Settlements of Ngöbe people in Costa Rica date generations back, yet, they are perceived as foreign. Many Ngöbe groups in Costa Rica live permanently in five territories distributed in the Brunca region, while Panamanian Ngöbe engage in ‘pendulum immigration’ and travel annually to Costa Rica to work as coffee pickers (Loria 2011). Entire families travel along the ‘coffee route’ to earn the money that will get them through, until the next coffee season. My research was focused mainly on Ngöbe people who live permanently in Costa Rica, and immersed
in these complex social dynamics of national identity, race, poverty, exclusion, religion, and neglect.

### 3.2 Scope of the fieldwork

During my four months in the field I participated in a wide range of activities and under different roles. Going in, I had planned on attending sexual education classes, hanging out during recess, and maybe attending after school events if I was invited. As planned, I attended classes, played during recess, got invited to girls’ homes and would hang out at a local coffee shop where kids spend time after school nursing a cappuccino for hours. Almost every weekend there was a festival or activity going on in the community with dancing, sports, food, where I would attend in my official “anthropology researcher” capacity.

The house where I lived was also home to three medical interns who were doing a community medicine rotation in the area. One day they were planning a prenatal course for women in the indigenous community, but their boss did not give them permission because they did not have enough medical staff to send someone to “supervise” them. They asked the regional director if I could supervise them, as technically, I am a licensed physician. The director gave the green light, and I spent 3 days observing the prenatal course, how the interns interacted with the pregnant women, how they delivered information, and how they dealt with intercultural approaches to health.

During that period at the clinic I met Carmen, a traditional birth attendant. Carmen was extremely warm and welcoming and invited me over to her house to tell me more about local
views of pregnancy and birthing practices. I became very close to Carmen, and her husband, Carlos who is a traditional healer, even tutored me in Ngöbere for the following months. I met other older ladies who are also traditional birth attendants, and I became close to another woman called Delia. Carmen and Delia became my cultural compass and they were always so eager and happy to explain and teach me about their customs and way of life.

My third form of interacting in the community was as a volunteer for the local nonprofit, where I would usually help out with signing in, filing medical records, and playing with children to entertain them while the rest of their family received medical attention. The volunteering activities were always outside of the Carrizal/San Antonio area (about a one hour drive), and I never saw people I knew from school at any of the volunteering activities.

My personal life, outside of ‘the field’, became also a source of valuable information. Simply discussing my research topic with acquaintances and friends I went to medical school with, produced a wide range of responses and opinions that were both surprising and often concerning. The lack of awareness of the cultural diversity in Costa Rica is astounding, and the veiled racism I began to notice was not something I had expected when I began my work in this topic. Additionally, Costa Rican media has been plagued the past five months with stories on the sexual education program. When the sexual education program began in 2013, it was designed for students in 7th, 8th, and 9th grades. This year, the Ministry of Education announced its intention to expand the program to 10th grade for the year 2018 (Chinchilla 2017). The public outrage that occurred in 2012 when the program was initially announced has been reignited. The Catholic and Evangelical churches have joined forces and started urging parents to stop these programs from expanding due to their pervasive nature. My Facebook newsfeed is saturated with
videos that explain something they have come to refer to as ‘ideología de género’ (gender ideology). These inflammatory and factually incorrect videos say that the Ministry of Education is promoting homosexuality and attacking the foundations of Costa Rican families.

As there is scarce information on the actual implementation of these sexual education programs, I consider that my research has come at an extremely timely moment. It is my hope that my findings and reflections from inside the classroom can help people understand clearly what is being taught, what students understand, what is being said, and what is not being said. All of this is crucial for the improvement and strengthening of the current program, which I consider a crucial step before the proposed expansion.

### 3.3 Sexual education programs

Sexual education programs are a fairly recent addition to school curricula and can be traced back to the 1950s in the United Kingdom (Harrison 2000) and the 1960s in the United States (Bolin and Whelehan 1999). These programs were created following the categorization of adolescent childbearing as a social issue. Before the 1950s and 1960s, teenage pregnancy was ‘socially invisible’, and thus there was no need for public policies to address it (Furstenberg 2007). The notion of adolescence as a distinct period of development is also quite recent and only appeared in the ‘West’ in the nineteenth century, particularly among the upper classes (Bolin and Whelehan 1999). The definition of adolescence as a “period of emotional, social, and physical transition from childhood to adulthood” (Bolin and Whelehan 1999, 208) has been critiqued as a cultural construct that is not prevalent in all societies. Margaret Mead (1928) was among the first anthropologists to suggest that adolescence was not necessarily a period of angst and stress as most believed, but that
it was the cultural and social environment that generated these intense emotions in the adolescent period.

There has always been a history of early childbearing (Furstenberg 2007), but what generated the idea of early childbearing as an undesirable event – and sexual education programs as a solution? A classic approach to understanding change in public policy is through Kingdon’s Three Streams Model (Buse, Mays, and Walt 2012). The model proposes that change occurs during ‘windows of opportunity’ when three separate streams align or meet. The problem stream is when attention is drawn to a particular issue, the policy stream is when there is a potential solution available for said problem, and the politics stream is when there is an incentive and motivation to convert the potential solution into a concrete policy (Cairney and Jones 2016). In the case of adolescent pregnancy and sexual education programs, the problem was highlighted and brought to public attention by changes in marriage practices in young women. Before the 1950s and 1960s young women who became pregnant in their adolescent years, would get married. As time went by, adolescent mothers did not get married, and so there was an increase in demand for public assistance. This was exacerbated by Arthur Campbell who proposed in the 1960s that adolescent pregnancy had devastating, powerful, and lasting consequences for the young mothers, their children, and their families (Furstenberg 2007). Public health advocates responded to the problem by proposing that adolescent pregnancy resulted from lack of access to education, birth control, and safe abortion; this was later formulated into sexual education programs in school settings. Politicians took the opportunity to implement sexual education as they saw it as a way to decrease public expenditure, by reducing the number of teenage mothers who were on welfare (Furstenberg 2007). When these three streams aligned in the 1960s, there was a window of opportunity for the creation and implementation of sexual education programs.
Initially, sexual education programs focused mainly on promoting messages of abstinence and condemning premarital sexual relations. The main idea of sexual education in school settings was to encourage the prevention of ‘broken homes’, provide guidelines for ‘sexual morals’, and teach appropriate behaviors for personal relationships in courtship, marriage and family (Harrison 2000). As the availability of contraceptive measures became widely available to the public, a separation of sex and reproduction/marriage began. In addition to this, with the advent of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, there were more political justifications to support sexual education, and to support the shift away from abstinence only programs to include information on effective contraception and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Harrison 2000). Abstinence-only programs are still prevalent in many schools, particularly where there are strong religious and traditional foundations in the community (Furstenberg 2007). Overall, there are two main approaches to sexual education: abstinence-only, and a risk/disease focus approach which is centered mainly around teenage pregnancy and STDs (Gilbert 2014; Harrison 2000).

3.3.1 Sexual education in Costa Rica

Costa Rica began the introduction of sexual education in schools in the 1960s (Gamboa Barboza 2010). The textbooks were created and published by the Ministry of Education in Costa Rica, in collaboration with the United States government, with financing from President Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress initiative and USAID (United States Agency for International Development) (Gamboa Barboza 2010). In these early textbooks sexuality focuses on the biological aspects of reproduction, essentializing sexuality, and using images of domestic animals to explain reproduction in the most simplistic manner possible. In the early 1980s a new series of books called “Hacia la luz” (Toward the light) were introduced in the school system. These books
highlighted the differences between boys and girls to emphasize the importance of heterosexual relationships. These books still resorted to the use of animals to explain reproduction, but introduced the concepts of love, commitment, respect, and loyalty as differentiating factors between animal and human relationships (Gamboa Barboza 2010). The image below shows how animals were used to illustrate the concept of reproduction. Unlike the previous books, here the animals selected present sexual dimorphism (males with antlers, females with no antlers). To further reinforce the male-female coupling, the symbols ♀ and ♂ are drawn on the deer. The stages are labelled as ‘courtship’, ‘mating’, and ‘pregnancy’, and the caption at the bottom left reads “Mammals are viviparous. Inside the female, the ovum matures, which is the female cell. This one joins with the male cell, called spermatozoon, to produce fertilization. Inside the female’s uterus, which is a specialized organ for this function, the new being will develop. After a wonderful process, the son is born.”

*Figure 5. Illustration taken from one of the textbooks in the "Hacia la luz" series (1985) (Gamboa Barboza 2010).*
This approach to sexual education was firm on establishing sexual intercourse as a mechanism for reproduction, and nothing else. By using animals and biological terms such as courting, mating, and gestation they are establishing sex as an animalistic thing, that can be separated from humans. At the same time, conflicting with the biological style, family values are inserted into the narrative by phrases such as ‘after a wonderful process, a son is born’. There is no mention in these texts of actual human reproduction, and animals are always used as a proxy, as is the case in the figure above that shows deer.

Toward the 1980s, a new series of books were created for sexual education in Costa Rican schools. This new series of books was called “Un paso adelante” (One step forward), and insisted more on issues of family and responsibility in relation to sex. Great attention was given to anatomic differences between men and women and the promotion of personal hygiene; and for the first time, torsos and sexual organs appear illustrated (Gamboa Barboza 2010). During the 1990s, the last of these book series were published; they were called “Hacia el siglo XXI” (Toward the 21st century) (Gamboa Barboza 2010). In this instalment of books, the new topic included was sexual abuse, however, aside from this new topic, all sexual education was imparted from a very ‘scientific’ perspective, and focused on risks. Risk of teenage pregnancy, risk of abuse, risk of STDs. For over 20 years this was the standard approach to sexual education, if there was any at all. Sexual education was not mandatory in the school system, and there was no training for teachers to be able to deliver the contents of the curriculum to their students. The topics delivered were the result of adult and mainstream obsessions, instead of striving “to understand a population that is always defined by others” (Gamboa Barboza 2010, 141).
After decades of stagnation in the area of sexual education, in 2012, the Ministry of Education in Costa Rica announced the new standardized sexual education program, which was implemented for the first time across the country in February 2013 (Sancho 2013). Unlike the series of textbooks that came before, this program was mandatory in all public schools, and consisted of modules integrated into the ‘Basic Science’ curriculum throughout the whole year instead of just a session or two in the semester (Ministerio de Educacion Publica 2012). The emphasis given to the program is promoting emotional maturity among students, and enabling them to think critically and constructively about their life choices. The seven key topics in the program are: (1) Interpersonal relationships; (2) Culture, power, and responsibility; (3) Pleasure as a source of well-being; (4) Gender; (5) Psychosexual identity; (6) Reproductive health; and (7) Human rights (Ministerio de Educacion Publica 2012). Coupled with the new curriculum, the Ministry of Education implemented training sessions and workshops for high school teachers who would be delivering the content of the new sexual education program (Garnier 2016).

Earlier in 2017, La Nación (Costa Rica’s leading newspaper) published a story titled “Ministry of Education sexuality classes fail in the classroom” (Cerdas E. 2017). The article discussed findings from a small-scale study conducted at the Adolescent Clinic in the National Children’s Hospital. The survey demonstrated that teens did not know about proper contraception or prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, which in the eyes of the journalist, catalogued the sexual education program as an utter failure. While adolescent pregnancy has dropped in absolute numbers, the reduction cannot be solely attributed to the sexual education programs, yet it cannot be said either that they are completely ineffective. This small study only evaluated a very limited and narrow view of sexual health knowledge, and is not in line with the topics covered in the sexual education program. The fact that journalists and physicians were so quick to jump to the
assumption that the programs are a failure demonstrates the constricted view of sexuality and sexual health, with a predominance of risk-avoidance discourses. The article quotes a teacher who mentions that all of her students have opted out, and another one says that they cannot discuss certain topics, because it would ‘make parents’ hair stand on end’. The Ministry of Education had no data to counter the arguments presented in the article and continued to ignore the lack of evidence and research to support their program.

The announcement of standardized sexual education for students in the public school system generated a very violent public reaction back in 2012, with massive media coverage and even legal action on behalf of parents (Murillo and Vizcaino 2012). After months of back-and-forth, the Ministry of Education announced that sexual education classes would be mandatory for all students, however, students would be allowed to opt out if their parents sent a letter to the high school principal. Eventually, people came to accept the programs and public attention diverted to other issues, until this year, when the Ministry of Education announced its intention to expand the program to the 10th grade (Chinchilla 2017). According to Ministry officials, the sexual education program for 10th grade will be a stand-alone subject, instead of being integrated into the science curriculum, as is the case in 7th, 8th, and 9th grades. Additionally, they have announced that new teachers will be hired to teach this new class, and that the new teachers will be social workers or psychologists, to ensure they are adequately trained to deal with the complexity of sexuality in the classroom.

Ever since the expansion of the program was announced, groups of parents who are opposed to the program, and religious organizations have begun protesting against ‘gender ideology’ in the classroom. It is the belief of these opposing groups that school teachers are
indoctrinating students in an ideology that is corrupting the family values of Costa Rican society. Social media in Costa Rica right now is flooded with opinions and “alternative facts” regarding the current sexual education programs (see Figure 6). The mainstream discourse is that the sexual education program is teaching children that it is okay and normal to be a homosexual, and it is making women feel guilty about wanting to be mothers and having a family life. Both of these, upon review of the sexual education programs, are categorically incorrect. The language used in the texts is very careful in this regard, and the main approach to diversity that is in the program deals with it from a perspective of human rights, respect, and anti-bullying. Of course, few have taken it upon themselves to actually read the program documents, and the movement is gaining strength. The movement even has its own hashtag #AMiHijoLoEducoYo, which roughly translates into ‘I educate my child myself, and a big march is being organized for early December, where people will protest against the school-based sexual education programs.

Figure 6. Memes that have been circulating within my social media network regarding sexual education and the so called 'gender ideology'.
The memes above are only a few examples of the many images and ideas that circulate in Costa Rican social media networks. The meme to the left says “You are not born man or woman? But you are born homosexual?”, and the meme to the right says “We were born cats. But thanks to gender ideology we have decided to be chicken”. The first meme tries to convey lack of coherence and inconsistencies in the discourse used by LGTBQ activists, which people who oppose the sexual education program believe is the same discourse used by the program. It tries to point out that one argument is used in one instance (being born man or woman), but then does not apply to homosexuality. Something that can be noted in this meme that is frequent in this type of argument is the lack of differentiation between gender identity, sexual orientation, and biological sex. The second meme tries to reinforce ideas of nature as deterministic, and jokes with the idea of a kitten thinking it is a baby chick. If you are a cat, you must behave like a cat, and if you are a chicken, you must behave like a chicken. In the same way, if you are a man, you must behave like a man, and if you are a woman, you must behave like a woman. I find interesting that the meme actually proves the opposite in my opinion. It shows how behavior can be shaped by the environment, even for animals. This would seem to support notions that categories we place humans in are culturally and socially constructed. Here, the meme is literally comparing chickens and cats: animals of different species. Why do we insist on using such different beings to illustrate the difference between men and women? As Gayle Rubin insists, men and women are closer to each other than we are to anything else (1975).

The increased discussion of issues of sex and sexuality in Costa Rican news outlets and social media is a perfect example of Foucault’s discussions on the ‘silence’ surrounding sex (1978b). While the controversy surrounding the sexual education programs is that certain groups wish to avoid discussions of sex and sexuality – by opposing the programs – sex and sexuality are
being discussed everywhere, at all times and in all forms. Despite the fact that it may result bothersome for government officials to have to deal with public critique and backlash regarding the program, I consider there might be some unintended positive consequences. As I discuss in more detail further on in section 4.3, there has been a considerable decrease in pregnancies in women under the age of 19. In 2012, pregnancies in women under the age of 19 comprised 19.36% of all pregnancies in the country, and by 2016 it had been reduced to 15.6% (see Figure 11). Attributing this decrease solely to the sexual education programs would be inappropriate, as there are many factors that could contribute in a synergistic manner to this reduction. However, I consider that the great amount of media attention the sexual education program has produced, has had a positive effect in creating awareness for the general public in one way or another, thus contributing to the reduction of unintended pregnancies in young women.

Presidential and congressional elections are in February 2018, and sexual education has been highly politicized and used as a divisor. One of the first questions candidates are asked is their stance on sexual education programs. It has become such an important issue to the average Costa Rican, that many people are using it as the gauge to decide which party to vote for. Right now, I feel that Costa Rica is not divided by political party, but whether you are in favor of sexual education, or against. I cannot predict what the future for school-based sexual education programs will be, however, I can assert that more research is needed, and we need to step away from unfounded arguments, and look at the facts and evidence behind the matter. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education has not invested in monitoring and evaluation, which means that they cannot objectively review the programs and improve.
3.4 Sexual health in Costa Rica

As demonstrated by the newspaper article mentioned previously, the common perception regarding sexual education programs in Costa Rica is that its main function is to avoid teenage pregnancy and reduce transmission of STDs. In 2010, the first national sexual and reproductive health survey was conducted; in 2015 a follow-up survey was conducted and results were published in 2016 (Ministerio de Salud 2011, 2016). In 2010, 11.2% of 15-year-old girls, and 22% of 15-year-old boys had already had sexual intercourse. By 18 years of age, the percentages increase to 51.4% in girls and 67.9% in boys (Ministerio de Salud 2011). The results of the survey in 2015, showed that a slightly greater percentage of adolescents had engaged in sexual intercourse. By 15 years of age, 13.7% of girls and 23.7% of boys, and by 18 years of age 53.2% of girls and 69.4% of boys had engaged in sexual relations (Ministerio de Salud 2016). On the other hand, pregnancies in women under the age of 19 decreased: there were a total of 12,800 pregnancies in 2013, and in 2015 11,600 (Cerdas E. 2017). The most recent census in 2011 reported that 8.6% of women under the age of 19 have lived at some point with a male partner, 9.1% of women under 19 have at least one child, and that 18-19% of live births each year are to adolescent mothers (Gomez Gomez 2013). The census also demonstrated that 96% of pregnancies in adolescent women corresponded to men of legal age (over 18). When the percentages of adolescent pregnancy are categorized by ethnicity, marked differences can be observed. Of women under the age of 19 who do not self-identify as indigenous, 8.9% had one or more child, while among women of the same age group who self-identified as indigenous, 18.9% – more than double – have one or more child (Gomez Gomez 2013).
The use of family planning methods in Ngöbe communities is complex, as condoms are often considered to be exclusive for sex workers and contraceptive pills have a very low acceptance rate. The most commonly used birth control method in most indigenous communities is Depo-Provera, which is an injectable form of contraception which lasts for 3 months (Cortes Campos 2015). The reason for its high use is probably because it can be ‘hidden’, and that way, women do not depend on their partner’s collaboration or approval. In 2017, the National Health Service in Costa Rica approved the use of the implant for contraception in adolescents. However, I found during my time spent in the field that people were extremely uncomfortable with the idea of allowing their children to get these implants, and referred to them as ‘chips’. The ‘chip’ was seen as a way the government and white people can keep tabs on you.

Due to the medicalization and the problematization of adolescent pregnancy, there are preconceptions and stereotypes about women who bear children during adolescence, and harsh judgement of the families who ‘allow’ their daughters to get pregnant (Furstenberg 2007). Adolescent pregnancy has been blamed for poverty and marginalization, however, teenage pregnancy does not create poverty, yet it does represent “a marker of inequality and marginality” (Furstenberg 2007, 5). It is because of this marked difference in prevalence of adolescent childbearing in Costa Rica that I conducted this research project in an indigenous region of the country. I aimed to understand different approaches to sex and sexuality and how these are negotiated with the standardized sexual education curriculum that is conveyed in schools. I wished to understand what is really going on in the classrooms and whether the program’s intention is effectively being conveyed to students.
3.5 The Ngöbe in Costa Rica

Systematic reviews of online literature regarding the Ngöbe in Costa Rica yielded limited information, as the majority of the Ngöbe reside in Panama (Area de Salud de Coto Brus 2012). For this reason, I decided to visit the Costa Rican National Library. The National Library, by national decree, houses a collection of three copies of every publication made in the country (SINABI 2017). Sure enough, I discovered a wide range of theses and low volume print editions with information on the Ngöbe indigenous people, that were not available on the world wide web. The first title to catch my eye was ‘El indígena costarricense: una visión etnográfica’ by Rodrigo Salazar (The Costa Rican indigenous people: an ethnographic overview). The book was published in 2002, yet reading it, I felt I had been transported to Malinowski’s ‘Argonauts of the Western Pacific’. The language throughout the book exudes ‘othering’, and it felt like ancient anthropology due to the separation the author maintained between himself and the natives. While Salazar never refers to them as natives, he does have a choice in words that transmits similar connotations. “The indigenous man was expelled forcefully to lands that were not fit for agricultural labor” and “The indigenous man extracts from the forest what he needs to live” (Salazar 2002, 21). Throughout the book Salazar refers to people as ‘the indigenous man’, separating himself from them and identifying them solely as indigenous. They are indigenous first, then men; and of course women are never a part of the equation.

Salazar was not alone in his troubling presentation of indigenous people, a chapter in the edited volume ‘Shattering Myths on Immigration and Emigration in Costa Rica’ is loaded with broad generalizations, racist remarks, and offensive stereotypes. It is astounding to read a chapter
in a book where the introduction was so critical of racism and immigration policies in early Costa Rican society, and then flip so radically into such biased and uncritical remarks.

“The society of origin – ngöbe – is sustained through a patriarchal culture that maintains endogenous masculine control practices associated with incest, forced polygamy, and other practices where women are submissive (…) on the other hand, emigration has made it possible for ngöbe men to acquire skills which are used to abuse minors (whether they be daughters, relatives, or neighbors); they acquire one or more female companions through deception or by force; they exercise material violence (they find ways to take pay of their partners or children and use it to buy alcohol); they abuse both physically and emotionally…” (Loria 2011, 189–90)

Loría paints Ngöbe culture as completely savage and apparently sees no issue with stating that all men steal their family’s money to buy alcohol. I find as much truth in Loría’s depiction of the Ngöbe as saying that all Americans are like Donald Trump. Are there cases of incest? Yes. Are there cases of abuse? Yes. Are there cases of alcoholism? Yes. But, are there not cases of these in all societies and in all cultures? Can we blame alcoholism on Ngöbe culture? Can we say that men exert total control through incest and forced polygamy? Definitely not. I will not fall into the same grandiose claims and generalizations Loría does, but reading her work along with Salazar’s does mean that I am much more critical of what I read, and I take everything with a grain of salt. The ‘white legend’ narrative permeates through Costa Rican texts that refer to the Ngöbe; and the style in which some Costa Rican academics continue to talk about minority cultures in the country demonstrates how deep racism runs, yet few seem to notice.

Undesirable behavior is often attributed to culture – or lack of. Because of this, it is important to clarify that culture is not what determines human behavior. According to Geertz, culture is more like a framework or context within which events and individual behaviors can be compared to for interpretation and judgement. The analysis of culture, is “not an experimental
science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz 1973, ebook). In this regard, is where Lória and Salazar fall short: they are quick to establish laws of behavior and attribute behavior to culture. Rojas Conejo presents a less essentialized view of culture, and sees it as a matrix, in which there are multiple options for being, a sense of belonging, and collective life experiences that establish the identity of individuals and the collective people (2002).

Cultural identity and indigeneity are complex and dynamic concepts, which are influenced through external forces. Something that may seem merely practical, such as deciding to live on or off the territory, has massive implications in terms of identity. “Once invented, the Indian was forced to assume the role of the Indian. However, that human being, forcefully Indianized, tried to continue surviving, and from that assumed Indianity has had to continuously recreate their identities, always under new conditions and forms” (Rojas Conejo 2002, 16). And so, from this dynamic emerges an internal conflict, where at times indigenous people deny their own traditions – idealizing outside culture – while at the same time resisting and rejecting all new things as strange and threatening (Rojas Conejo 2002). The question then becomes, to be, or not to be – indigenous. And whether you can stop being indigenous.

The indigenous population in Costa Rica accounts for only about 2.4% of the national population (Carvajal-Jimenez, Cubillo-Jimenez, and Vargas-Morales 2017). Their small numbers, and remote geographical location make them easy to forget for Costa Ricans who live in the Central Valley, and when they are remembered, they are thought of as this homogenous, unified group. They are not a uniform group, and many do not even speak the same languages (Rojas Conejo 2002). There are eight indigenous ethnicities, distributed throughout 24 protected territories. The largest group are the BriBri, who account for 34.9% of the total indigenous
population, followed by the Cabécar with 28.9%, the Ngöbe in third place represent 11.9%, Boruca 8.9%, Huetares 5%, Teribe 4.3%, Chorotega 3.5%, and the Maleku 2.9% (Carvajal-Jimenez, Cubillo-Jimenez, and Vargas-Morales 2017). The Ngöbe are often referred to as Guaymi, and older literature uses this term frequently. Guaymi is an incorrect term, and it comes from an old barter system that existed among the Ngöbe. Different Ngöbe communities would specialize in different products, and then trade with each other, and the main products were fish (Gua), corn (i), and sweet potato (mi) (Sarsaneda Del Cid 2009). Another objection to the term Guaymi, is that in the Buglere language, another indigenous ethnicity that has historically lived alongside the Ngöbe, it means ‘sissy’ or ‘feminine’ (Cortes Campos 2015).

Figure 7. Jegue dance during a cultural festival at the Carrizal high school
The local school conducts cultural activities and festivals on a regular basis to promote that students embrace and be proud of their culture
In the 1970s, ILO Convention 169 began a wave of movements to protect the rights of indigenous peoples across the globe. In Costa Rica, this was done through the establishment of protected territories with autonomy from the State over the following decades. However, indigenous territories continue to be the object of invasion, and it is estimated that indigenous people only control about 60% of the lands declared as indigenous territories (Solano-Salazar 2000). Currently, about 35% of indigenous people live in one of the 24 territories, which might not be necessarily because they have been removed by white people, but because of the lack of job opportunities and access to services that exists in the territories (Carvajal-Jimenez, Cubillo-Jimenez, and Vargas-Morales 2017).

The Ngöbe are the largest indigenous group in southern Central America, and they are mainly situated in Panama, with about 4,000 permanently settled in southern Costa Rica, and about 18,000 who migrate seasonally from Panama for the coffee picking season in Costa Rica. There are 5 official Ngöbe territories, and it is emphasized by indigenous communities that the term territory is to be used instead of reserve or reservation because they reject the connotation of needing protection, isolation, and enclosing (Cortes Campos 2015). Historically, Ngöbe communities engaged in slash and burn agriculture, however, since they have been limited now to small territories, this agricultural practice is no longer feasible (Area de Salud de Coto Brus 2012).

In terms of sexual and reproductive health practices, the Ngöbe who live inside the indigenous territories have on average 4 children per couple, those who live outside the territory have 3 children per couple, and the national average is just below 2 (Area de Salud de Coto Brus 2012). Traditionally, grandparents have been in charge of teaching reproductive health issues to
children, and health experts in the area consider that the solution to teen pregnancy is not in the increased availability of birth control methods, but by reinforcing the authority of the elderly (Area de Salud de Coto Brus 2012). There is great difficulty promoting the use of condoms in the territory because there is a generalized perception that condoms should only be used with sex workers. (Area de Salud de Coto Brus 2012).

The Ngöbe have their own language, which is called Ngöbere, however, there is quite a fair amount of regional dialects that borrow different words from both English and Spanish (Sarsaneda Del Cid 2009). For example, bread in some regions is called ban, which derives from the Spanish ‘pan’. In other areas, it is called brete, borrowing from the English word. The word table, in some regions is called teblú, bearing a strong resemblance to the English word, while the Spanish version is mensa, from ‘mesa’. Ngöbere, as most Costa Rican indigenous languages, has been an oral tradition, and forms of writing were developed by Christian and Catholic missionaries (Rojas Conejo 2002). This is one of the reasons that Ngöbere writing is so inconsistent, as missionaries who spoke different languages (English, Spanish, and Dutch), created the writing structure independently.

Ngöbere has a very different grammatical structure than Spanish, for example, nouns do not have feminine or masculine, as they do in Spanish, and verbs are not conjugated either. Sentence structure varies as well, as seen in the example below:

In English we might say:
She is knitting a beautiful chacara (bag) for her granddaughter

In Ngöbere it is said:
Niara tó kra tuôre dôtdere büngróge

Which literally translates to:
Children are taught Ngöbere as a first language in their homes, and when they enter the school system, they begin their academic education in Spanish. There is a significant gap between children who learn Spanish as a first language in the rest of the country and those who begin at 4-5 when they enter the public-school system, because of this, children often repeat grade levels (Cortes Campos 2015). I am not advocating for one language over the other, yet I do consider that Spanish should be taught with a different methodology considering it is a second language, and be taught in the way that private schools in Costa Rica teach English.

Religion helps shape the identity of a people, it brings them together, or it creates boundaries to separate themselves from one another. “Religion is a cultural system. It is a set of shared beliefs and behaviors for interacting with divine forces and orienting one’s self to follow the teachings or dictates of a particular worldview. But in practice, religion is often so much more than that – it is a shared ‘style of life’ that shaped meanings and behaviors of both the sacred and profane” (Francois Dengah II 2017, 105). The Ngöbe territory where I conducted my research is very small, with a population of approximately 1,600, yet there are over 5 different religions that people ascribe to. The main four religions are: Protestant, Catholic, Bahai, and Mama Chi or Mama Tata. The Protestant church is called the Pentecostal Guaymi, which currently is led by a female pastor who is not Ngöbe, but has lived in the community for over 20 years and speaks the language well, and conducts the services in Ngöbere. The Madre Laura Congregation is the Catholic representation in the territory, and mass is conducted in Spanish by a non-indigenous priest. The Bahai Church is led by a Ngöbe pastor, and the Mama Tata is a
religion that was created by a Ngöbe Panamanian woman and brought to Costa Rica in the 1960s (Cortes Campos 2015).

The Mama Tata religion was developed in the 1960s by a woman called Delia Bejarano, who claimed that God had spoken to her and asked her to bring a new way of life to the Ngöbe people. Mama means mother and Tata means father, and the religion is full of syncretism, as many symbols and rituals have been borrowed and incorporated into Mama Tata, such as the use of crosses. The new religion was seen as a way to establish order in the Ngöbe community by prohibiting polygyny, balsería (a traditional game that is considered by many to be very violent), drinking alcohol, jegue (dancing), and playing music. The religion was brought to Costa Rica and it was adopted by the local caciques, yet, the many prohibitions the strict religion commanded were not considered binding, and in Costa Rican Ngöbe communities there is still polygyny, drinking, dancing, music, and balsería. The cacique in the territory where I conducted my research self-identifies as Mama Tata, yet the congregation is losing followers and has become a source of discrimination and marginalization. In recent years tensions over religions have intensified, and families have even been torn apart by religion. During my fieldwork, if someone from one religion found out I had been at the house of a person who was from another religion, they would try to explain how the people from said religion were dangerous or bad. Mainly it would be people who were not Mama Tata, complaining about the Mama Tata. Carmen, the traditional birth attendant, would tell me that the Mama Tata hated Western medicine, but they would not accept traditional healers or birth attendants like herself or her husband either. Carmen’s husband would get exasperated quickly when I asked him about the Mama Tata, and would just say “I already told you, they are crazy, they beat people to death with shovels because of evil spirits. They are bad people and you should stay away from them.”
Carmen later explained that they had a nephew who had some form of mental illness, and the Mama Tata chased him down and killed him during a religious gathering they had last year.

Originally, Ngöbe societies were matrilineal, and this pattern began shifting through the colonization by the Spaniards. Slowly, patrilineal influence increased to what it is now. Women now have much less power as they might have had previously, and most of them are now limited to activities in the home. Daily life in Ngöbe communities is determined by gender; until children are about 7 they are always with their mothers, and after this, tasks and activities are assigned differently to boys and girls. Women are usually limited to staying in the home, yet in some households, gender dynamics are shifting, and this could be in part to the Mama Tata religion, as it often preaches and advocates for gender equality (Cortes Campos 2015).

This overview of the Ngöbe, although in no way comprehensive, demonstrates key cultural aspects that differentiate the communities from other Costa Rican groups. It is important to be aware of these variations, as they may be the basis of how sex and sexuality are understood and lived in the community. This review of Ngöbe history and culture also demonstrates that sexual health is not an isolated issue that can be addressed individually; it has multiple ties with all other aspects of life such as economic power, language, gender dynamics, and religion.
4 KEY CONCEPTS

Regarding the use of theory in anthropology, I feel identified with postmodern tendencies and agree with Lutz in her assessment that theory has been gendered, “Theory has acquired gender insofar as it is more frequently associated with male writing, with women’s writing more often seen as description, data, case, personal, or, as in the case of feminism, ‘merely’ setting the record straight” (Lutz 1995, 251). I, personally, refuse to separate my personal style of creative writing from critical and theoretical writing. I want my writing to be “multivoiced and including biographical, historical, literary essays, fiction, autobiography, theater, poetry, life stories, travelogues, social criticism, fieldwork accounts, and blended texts of various kinds” (Behar 1995, 7). This being said, I position myself as a feminist ethnographer, distinct from a feminist anthropologist or an anthropologist of women, but seeking to bridge the gap between feminism as a world view and my personal style as an individual, allowing myself not only to be in the field, but experience the field.

4.1 Theoretical frameworks

Medical anthropology is often described as an applied discipline (Inhorn and Wentzell 2012); however, this research study intends on going beyond applied anthropology, and engaging in praxis. An anthropological approach is crucial for the advancement of social policies, education, and health in Costa Rica through a more in-depth assessment of the current situation, and future needs. Anthropological praxis strives to be an all-inclusive and ‘bridging’ discipline (Rylko-Bauer, Singer, and Van Willigen 2006), which is not just the integration of practice and theory, but a
higher level of ethic and civic consciousness (Kozaitis 1997). Kozaitis defines anthropological praxis as “intellectually mediated, ethically sound and socially responsible work” (Kozaitis 1997:13). This definition seems extremely appropriate for public health as well, as all public health interventions should be guided by intellectually sound evidence, solid ethical principles, and with the aim of carrying out work for the well-being of society.

This piece of research was concerned with understanding local perceptions of sex, sexuality, and gender, and attempting to include these views in public policy and public health interventions. There is a clear imbalance of power exerted by public health authorities; communities and societies that are often neglected and not taken into consideration in the planning and implementation of public health interventions. Indigenous populations are not the exception. With this research project, I aimed to obtain valuable information regarding the implementation and viability of the sexual education program, and informing results to the Ministry of Education. Outcomes from this research have provided useful and relevant data to better adapt or adjust existing programs to minority populations and to create inclusiveness and well-being for the entire population.

I conducted the analysis of the data collected under two main theoretical approaches: queer theory, and critical theory – specifically critical pedagogy. The term queer theory may bring to mind initial impressions related to the LGBTQ movement, however, this social movement was only the starting point of this theoretical approach. Queer theory, as Cameron and Kulick (2003) frame it, is a theoretical discourse that uses critical approaches on heteronormativity. Queer theory then emerges as an appropriate framework to analytically examine “those processes that produce sexed bodies, sexed relations and – importantly – sexual desires” (Cameron and Kulick 2003, 149).
Judith Butler developed queer theory using a performativity theory lens, shifting attention on the meanings that underlie behaviors and performances; it challenges the idea that how people behave is a true expression of their identity, instead proposing that “identity is not the origin but the effect of practices of signification” (Cameron and Kulick 2003, 150). Queer theory can help redefine what we consider ‘normal’ and helps challenge traditional understandings not only by questioning gender categories and binaries, but also by deconstructing the meaning of sexuality, identity, and the language we use to refer to them (Meyer 2010).

A great amount of the philosophical groundwork out of which queer theory was developed was conceptualized by Michel Foucault (Lyons and Lyons 2011). Foucault proposed that the current discourse that surrounds sex is the result of “modern ideologies of sexual liberation” and these modern ideologies are often framed around religious discourses, which frame what counts as sexual – what is permitted, and what is forbidden (Foucault 1978b). Foucault also produced work related to the intersection of sex and education in his ‘great strategic unities’ Sexuality revolves around a set of opposing and condensed power relations, that at certain moments merge in these strategic unities. These strategic unities were: (1) the hysterization of the woman’s body, (2) the socialization of procreative behavior, (3) the psychiatrization of ‘perverse’ pleasure, and (4) the pedagogization of children’s sex (Foucault 1978b).

The inclusion of sex in school curricula allows for the diffusion of specific discourses on sex, as schools are instrumental in reinforcing the dominant values of culture in certain groups (Meyer 2010). School systems are classic examples of exertion of power through discipline, as described in Discipline & Punish (Foucault 1978a). For Foucault, a key aspect of the operationalization of power is discipline. Discipline is a form of power, where individuals are
instruments for the exercise of power. Individuals are not enforcers of power, they are embedded in the structure of discipline and power. Disciplinary power depends on three elements: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and the examination (Foucault 1978a), all of which are present within school systems.

In reaction to this clear oppression and power imbalance in the school system, critical pedagogy stemmed from critical theory. Critical theory in the field of education goes beyond the traditional critiques of social class and oppression, but analyzes “how social forces work against them in overt and covert ways to maintain the power structures that privilege the dominant group” (Meyer 2010, 12). Education as a contribution to hegemony is also central to critical theories. The role of education from this point of view is to perpetuate power structures without force, by transmitting messages through the school system. These ideas paved the way for the formalization of critical pedagogy as a theoretical approach (Meyer 2010). Paolo Freire’s work, *The pedagogy of the oppressed* (1993), engaged in educational praxis, with an approach to teaching that focused on the empowerment of oppressed groups – specifically indigenous groups in Brazil. Other theories of multicultural education also call for critically reexamining power structures in education (Meyer 2010). Within critical pedagogy, two forms of education are described: banking and liberating, of which the latter creates opportunities for marginalized groups to actively participate and be invested in the design of their own educational practices, thus enhancing self-awareness and understanding (Martos 2016). I suggest critical pedagogy as an approach both to evaluate and to design and develop interventions for sexual education that are beneficial to individual students, and also their wider network and community. The use of critical pedagogy is particularly useful for the recommendation of feasible, adequate, and appropriate sexual education programs, considering the population at hand.
As a final point, models of biocommunicability and biomedicalization are also used as a resource to analyze the discourses that circulate regarding sex and sexuality, how these are framed according to different sources and audiences, and how sex has become medicalized. Biocommunicability is the study of how “knowledge about the [biomedical] phenomenon emerges and circulates” (Briggs and Hallin 2016, 8), while biomedicalization is the process of internal shifts in biomedicine that change the power of physicians and integrates the field of medicine and social sciences (Briggs 2011).

4.2 Anthropological perspectives

4.2.1 Sex and sexuality

The study of human sexuality is a cross disciplinary field encompassing biological, psychosocial, behavioral, clinical, sociological, and anthropological approaches and views (Bolin and Whelehan 1999). Sociological approaches to sexuality focus on how institutions and socioeconomic factors impact sexual behavior, while anthropology focuses on evolutionary and cultural approaches – emphasizing meaning in diverse cultural contexts (Bolin and Whelehan 1999). Malinowski was the first anthropologist to include sex as a part of the ethnographic context, and gained great notoriety due to a very public disagreement with Freud’s Oedipus Complex theories (Bolin and Whelehan 1999). Ruth Benedict proposed that sex was a part of patterned cultures, which later paved the way for Margaret Mead’s work on adolescence in Samoa (Freeman 2011).
Margaret Mead was a great advocate of the idea of adolescence as a cultural construct. She suggested that adolescence as a period of angst and stress in the transition from childhood to adulthood was not generalized, and it depended on education and cultural views (Mead 1928). The accuracy of Mead’s work has recently been called to questioning (Freeman 2011), however, there is evidence that the concept of adolescence did not appear in the ‘West’ until about 100 years ago (Harcourt 1997). The first appearances of adolescence as a developmental period began in the upper classes, before this, the shift from childhood to adulthood began at 10 to 12 years of age through increasing responsibilities and introduction into the work field (Bolin and Whelehan 1999). Age of marriage would be around 15 years old, and puberty occurred at 18 to 20 years old (Bolin and Whelehan 1999). Somehow, over a very short period of time, the issue of adolescent pregnancy began to be problematized in the public sphere, and this evolved into the creation and implementation of sexual education programs in the school systems (Furstenberg 2007; Bolin and Whelehan 1999).

Anthropological approaches to sexuality include the study of language and discourses. Through language people produce categories to organize and understand our desires, identities and practices. “To say that sex is ‘discursively constructed’ is to say that sex does not have meaning outside the discourses that we use to make sense of it, and the language in which those discourses are (re)circulated” (Cameron and Kulick 2003, 18). Sex and sexuality are also at the core of larger social organizations, such as marriage practices, property ownership and transfers, division of labor, modes of production, rise of the state, and taboos (Weston 2011). Each of these in turn influence the language and discourses under which sex and sexuality are framed and presented. Whenever a nontraditional notion of sex and sexuality came about, scientific discourse emphasizing degeneracy would take over to pathologize and isolate these alternate practices
Sex and sexuality are discursively constructed in Ngöbe communities, but this is also shaped by the discourses used in sexual education programs, and the approach to sexual health in the health system. This research study examines closely the underlying discourses in Ngöbe community, the discourses used in the public-school system, and how students negotiate the two.

Anthropology brings forward the notion that people’s realities and experiences are defined by culture, race, class, age, and ethnicity; not defined by biological characteristics that generate universal experiences (Harcourt 1997). Just like the idea that adolescence is a cultural construct, so are other ‘important’ moments in a woman’s life, such as the onset of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood, and menopause. These are not ubiquitous experiences; “rather, they are social and cultural constructions grounded in their unique historical and economic settings” (Harcourt 1997, 11). Before imposing certain ideologies and lines of thought in sexual education, we must critically analyze what the context is for that particular community. What are their views on adolescence? Is adolescent pregnancy considered an issue? Why or why not?

Research on adolescent sexual health in Tanzania revealed that traditionally, grandparents were in charge of imparting sexual education to young people (Obrist and Mlangwa 1997). By contesting this traditional flow of information, competing ideologies emerged, and the delivery of sexual education became impaired. The case of Tanzanian sexual education demonstrates the need to understand local conditions, and negotiate improvements in reproductive health that are respectful of adolescents, traditions, and environmental, cultural, political and economic context. Other anthropological studies are useful for the analysis of the sexual education program in Costa Rica, such as Gutman’s work (2007) in Mexico. Often, the discourse surrounding reproduction
and sexual education is centered on women, and Gutman calls to attention issues in men’s reproductive health and sexuality which are part of the larger system and contribute to discourses on sex and sexuality – men are the missing factors in a more inclusive and comprehensive perception of reproductive health. Just as there is no such thing as a single Mexican culture, there is no single Costa Rican culture, and no single indigenous culture in Costa Rica. This is why standardized sexual education curriculums might present a simplistic and unrealistic approach to what sexuality is in different parts of the country.

The perception of adolescent pregnancy is not just culturally variable, as presented by various authors, but it is also linked to changing systems of economics, modes of production, and education. Gayle Rubin explored the role of women and sex through a Marxist perspective, as traditional theories of class oppression tended to downplay gender and sex. Moreover, capital is produced at the expense of women through lower wages and unpaid roles as household administrators. We are embedded in a “systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products” (Rubin 1975, 158).

Before the 18th century, marriage was seen as an economic and political institution, ahead of anything else (Rubin 1975). It was not until later that century that “the radical new idea that love should be the most fundamental reason for marriage” started to be more widely accepted (Coontz 2005, 16). Marriage was not only about increasing patrimony and family labor force, but also spoke to the needs of wider society by converting strangers into extended family (Mauss 1990). It seems that love and marriage have not always “gone together like a horse and carriage”. The gift of women not only established a relationship of reciprocity, but also a relationship of kinship, this means that when barter societies shifted with the rise of capitalism, so did the need
for marriage to organize production and distribution of goods and people (Coontz 2005). Adolescent pregnancy has always existed, but how we view it has shifted. And a large contributor to this shift is its association with marriage. A pregnant teen who got married in the early 1900s would go unnoticed, but when empowered teens refused to marry because they were not in love, they became noticed by the government as they were now on welfare instead of depending financially on their spouse (Furstenberg 2007).

Marital ideals have undergone global ideological shifts, and this has had a significant impact on the perception of sex, sexuality, and family planning. This has led to the creation of family planning materials that reinforce the link between love and low fertility (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006). Below, Figure 8 shows an example of this type of materials, where you can see a couple in a romantic moonlit setting, happy and enjoying life because they have decided to delay childbearing.

Figure 8. Family planning promotional material produced by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community’s (SPC) Population Project (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006)
4.2.2 ‘The limits of education’

There is only so much a school can provide in terms of education on sex and sexuality. Jen Gilbert’s book *Sexuality in School – The limits of education* (2014) takes a close look at the implications of providing sexual education in such an ‘emotionally charged terrain’ as the school system. Gilbert notes one of the key issues of sexual education is that there is an inherent contradiction, as sexual education tries to reconcile the wildness and unpredictability of sexuality, with the rigid and structured environment of schools. In order to advance in this area, Gilbert makes a call to critically analyze and discuss the role of teachers in sexuality in school, the missing discourses on desire, the absence of discussions on pleasure, the passiveness of students, and the ‘ubiquity of prohibition’ (Gilbert 2014). She emphasizes that we are asking the wrong questions regarding sexual education. We should not be asking: How to discourage sexual activity? How to increase condom use? How to promote monogamous relationships? Instead, we should be concerned with understanding what sexuality is, why we see sexuality as a risk, and what makes sexuality susceptible to other influences. Current programs revolve around discussions on unwanted pregnancies, STDs, HIV/AIDS, and sexual assault. Instead, programs should strive to meet young people on a middle ground, understand and validate their concerns, recognize them as complex beings, and invite them into the process of creating meaning for the term sexuality. Children are often at the center of political efforts and discourses, yet their status as ‘not-yet citizens’ invisibilizes them and makes them powerless to construct their own realities (Gilbert 2014).

There is evidence that mainstream assumptions that adolescent pregnancy have profound and irreparable consequences on the mother, family, and child are categorically unfounded
Instead, critical analysis leads us to understand that more than a cause of poverty, adolescent pregnancy is an effect of poverty and inequality. This means that the key to solving inequality and poverty is not deterring early childbearing, but that resolving inequality and poverty might actually deter early pregnancies. However, if avoiding adolescent pregnancy is not the aim of sexual education, what is? The most common approaches to sexual education are a disease oriented approach, a risk factor approach, and a health oriented approach (Harrison 2000). Maybe none of these are the answer. We need a humanistic approach to sexual education in schools, where critical thinking and exploration is encouraged, where gender, power, and identity are discussed alongside the biological and clinical aspects, in order to encourage a holistic and well-rounded view of sexuality in young people. Yet, engaging in this form of sexual education would require familiarization and training in teachers regarding modern theories of sexuality and education that are often lacking in the school systems (Gilbert 2014).

The anthropology of education also provides useful information regarding how schools function as cultural units, that may also have subcultures (Crosnoe 2011). School-based sexual education is particularly complex, as the messiness and intricacies of sexuality have to be integrated into the convoluted systems that schools represent. Important aspects of high school cultures include social feedback mechanisms, social networks, ‘fitting in’, marginalization, stigma, technology, social media, and the impact of all of these on school dynamics and academic performance (Crosnoe 2011). Language and communication also play a central role in schools, and theories of socialization come to play a crucial role in the understanding of how schools shape young people’s way of thinking and behaving (Philips 1983). Simple class rules that are often taken for granted have cultural significance and have a strong impact on socialization (Philips 1983). Examples of these class rules include no interrupting, no blurting out, raising hands, asking
for permission, assigned seating, sitting up straight, and standing still – all of which tell us a great amount of information regarding the culture and community in which the school is embedded. Other school dynamics also provide insights into deeper meanings, such as type of school work: whole class interaction, small groups, one-on-one with the teacher, or desk work.

Costa Rica has an ethnocentric approach to education, and little attention is given to rural and indigenous communities (Gavarrete 2015). This problem is not unique to Costa Rica, and indigenous education is at the center of debates regarding cultural diversity, linguistics, and biology. In Mexico, where the indigenous population is roughly 8%, educational policies have not been able to bridge the gap in educational outcomes between indigenous and non-indigenous students (Schmelkes 2000). Yet, indigenous populations are not just a problem that requires a solution, they have valuable knowledge that if supported, empowered, and systematized, could yield sustainable solutions to these ‘problems’ (King and Schielmann 2004). “Day after day the indigenous student lives torn between two worlds. He flips through textbooks but finds no reference to himself, his family, or his culture. Even in history manuals his people are invisible. He exists only in the shadows – or even worse, if he is mentioned it is only as ‘an obstacle to colonization’ or simply as a ‘problem’ his country must overcome” (King and Schielmann 2004, 5–6).

4.2.3 Violence

When I initially conducted my literature review I focused on anthropological views of sex, sexuality, and education. It was not until I was in the field that I noticed violence as an
overarching theme in daily situations. Violence occurs in many different settings, cultures, and adopts different forms, however, when relating it to indigenous cultures it immediately becomes racialized. The violence is a result of their indigenous condition and not a result of their human condition. Cultures in their entirety cannot be classified as violent, however, cultural violence does exist in the sense that there are aspects of culture that can be used to legitimize and justify violence (Galtung 1990). Symbolic aspects of culture that may reinforce violence include art, religion, science, national symbols (flags and anthems), even the portrayal of national leaders (Lee 2016a). Appropriate definitions for the concept of violence have been debated for decades, and have been central to the field of peace studies. Violence can be understood as “denoting methods of struggle, that is actions, courses of actions, or activities considered or performed by parties to a dispute as means of conducting the conflict and trying to achieve the ends disputed” (Pontara 1979, 19). Pontara additionally establishes three requirements that should be met for an adequate definition of violence. (1) The definition of normative adequacy: this means that there should be the existence of a non-violent method that is considered morally preferable than the violent one. (2) The requirement of theoretical adequacy: how violence desensitizes and brutalizes those who engage in it, which results in more violence. (3) The requirement of descriptive adequacy: the meaning of violence in how it is conducted should not diverge from how it is referenced in political discourse (Pontara 1979). Methods of struggle are often expanded and included into the broader sense of social injustice, and from this arises the term of ‘structural violence’ (Pontara 1979).
Galtung, on the other hand, defines “violence as avoidable insults to basic human needs” (Galtung 1990, 292). He categorizes basic needs in four: survival, well-being, identity, and freedom; and based upon this categorization, develops an anthropocentric typology of violence (see Table 1). Cultural violence can make these forms of violence – direct and indirect – seem right, “or at least not wrong” (Galtung 1990, 291). From Pontara’s and Galtung’s definitions, I would like to extract what I consider to be the key elements of violence: struggle, performativity, conflict, achieving an end, intentionality, avoidable, and human needs.

The experience of suffering is inextricably linked to violence, but not all suffering is produced by direct forms of physical violence. Structural violence generates an institutionalized form of suffering that becomes normalized and embodied, as Paul Farmer exemplifies in the case of Haiti (2009). Suffering is often exoticized, but at the same time distanced through gender, race, and culture. These are “insidious and invisible forms of violence because they are taken for granted and part of social norm” (Fu 2015, 52).

Gender is a socially constructed hierarchy, and women are kept in place through violence (Rubin 1975; Fu 2015). Gender-based violence cannot be separated from structural violence, and “eliminating gender-based violence requires a questioning of the gender system itself” (Fu 2015, 51). There is a direct relationship between this type of violence and the construction of

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**Table 2. Galtung's Typology of Violence**

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masculinity. Through the performative construction of gender, the patriarchal system legitimizes the traditional male image, represented as strength, oppression, and violence (Beiras, Cantera, and de Alencar-Rodrigues 2015).

There is no clean cut way to understand violence, especially because forms of violence depend on complex dynamics of human interactions, which do not display clear cause-effect mechanisms, and have multiple co-occurring factors (Lee 2015). The value of anthropological perspectives in this regard is not necessarily to define and outline violence per se, but to demonstrate the variety of perspectives and manifestations of violence (Lee 2016b).

4.3 Public health perspectives

“Sexuality has been largely invisible as a category of interest in public health except in terms of commercial sex, sexual violence, and bargaining around contraceptives or condom use – all moments when the gendered optic is invoked in terms of conflict or domination, rather than pleasure or affect” (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006, 3). The World Health Organization (WHO) definition of health is a complete sense of well-being and not just the absence of disease (World Health Organization 1946). The WHO definition of sexual health mimics this original definition in establishing health as an overall state of well-being in relation to one’s sexuality, and not just the absence of a disease or condition. However, the definition has not been put into practice by the majority of public health institutions. Sexual health mainly has been limited to contraception, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, and violence. Sexuality has been broadly medicalized, and it is time that the term be brought back to the classic definition of health (Liew 2014).
Public health is very oriented towards evaluation and metrics; however, the way sexual health is being measured is inherently flawed. Sexual health is currently being measured in terms of number of unwanted pregnancies and prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases. It is because of this that the discourse of comprehensive sexual education is widely rejected, because it is not yielding demonstrable advances or improvements. In Costa Rica, the sexual education program has been called a failure on numerous occasions, “Boycotted by the prejudice of parents and poor training of teachers, classes on sexuality imparted in public high schools are headed right for failure” (Cerdas E. 2017, epub). Articles in local newspapers have called the program a failure following a small-scale study that was conducted at the Adolescent Clinic, housed within the Children’s National Hospital. The study revealed that 75% of surveyed teens considered *coitus interrumptus* to be an effective way to avoid pregnancy, and 67% were not aware of methods to avoid sexually transmitted diseases (Cerdas E. 2017).

![Figure 9. Graph that compiles data on births per year (data obtained from the INEC website)](image)
To determine success in a program like sexual education, first the objectives need to be assessed. Are sexual education programs exclusively aimed at deterring adolescent pregnancy and STDs? Or do they include a range of other topics that were not evaluated in the study mentioned above? While the program is being called an outright fiasco, in 2013, out of a total of 70,550 births in the country, 12,800 were in women below the age of 19, comprising 18.1%. In 2015, the total births were 71,819, of which 11,600 were in women under the age of 19, accounting for 16.2% (INEC 2017). Not only was the reduction observable in percentages, but also in absolute numbers. Although I am fully aware that sexual education and sexual health encompasses much more than the number of teen pregnancies, I decided to compile national data on births to determine if there was a significant trend or impact following the implementation of sexual education programs.

I compiled the data on total number of births in Costa Rica from the past 16 years, which can be seen in Figure 9 above. Although there is a general decreasing trend, total numbers fluctuate widely year to year. When the total number of births in women under the age of 19 is factored in, the trend is quite level, and then begins to decrease. This decrease is correlated with the date of implementation of the standardized sexual education programs in Costa Rican public schools (2012-2013). If you look closely at Figure 10, you can see that births in women under 19 fluctuated around 14,000 per year, give or take a thousand, but after 2012 steadily decreases to 10,000.
I am careful to use the word correlation, instead of causation, as causation is extremely difficult to demonstrate. I am fully aware that a reduction in number of adolescent pregnancy is a multilateral effort, in which multiple government programs and entities have generated an influence, but the data does show an observable difference between the years 2012 and 2013, which is when the sexual education program began. In public health, Bradford-Hill criteria are utilized to establish causation; in this case it would not be possible as there is no way to isolate the effects of one program from another, which means that causality cannot be established (Schünemann et al. 1979). However, I would venture to say that while the data cannot confirm that the sexual education program has been a success, it definitely refutes the notion that it is a failure. Figure 11 shows the percentages of births in women under 19, as compared to total births for that
year, and it is the most clear in demonstrating an accentuated pattern of decreased births in women under the age of 19 for the past 5 years.

**Figure 11.** Graph showing the trend in births in women under 19 (data obtained from INEC website)
5 LET’S TALK ABOUT SEX

Yo, I don’t think we should talk about this
(Come on, why not?)
People might misunderstand what we’re tryin’ to say, you know?
(No, but that’s a part of life)
Come on
Let’s talk about sex, baby
Let’s talk about you and me
Let’s talk about all the good things
And the bad things that may be
Let’s talk about sex

Song by Salt-N-Pepa (1991)

5.1 Let there be SexEd

The Minister of Education, Dr. Leonardo Garnier, held a press conference in 2012 to announce the new sexual education program (Sancho 2013). To an outsider, having a press conference to announce an update in school curriculum may seem odd, however, the shift in language and discourse in the new sexual education program was likely to create opposition in the country, which is why Dr. Garnier decided to make a public announcement and allow the press to ask questions and report on the issue ‘on his terms’ (Garnier 2016). As predicted, following the press conference, there was public outcry. The Catholic Church strongly opposed the sexual education program proposed by the Ministry of Education. In response to the announcement of the new program, the Catholic Church published their own guidelines for sexual education (Murillo and Vizcaino 2012). The Catholic Church is extremely powerful in Costa Rica as it is written into the Constitution as the ‘official religion of the state’, with 76% of the population self-identifying as Catholic (Villegas 2014). The Evangelic Church in Costa Rica was also strongly opposed, as they are much less powerful in the country they ‘partnered’ with the Catholic Church on this issue
to maximize resources (*The Tico Times* 2012). Recent surveys show that 13% of the population self-identifies as evangelical, making it the second most common religious affiliation in Costa Rica (Villegas 2014).

Parents of students also demonstrated opposition; following the announcement of the program, over 6000 parents filed complaints to the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, or ‘Sala IV’ as it is colloquially referred to (Cerdas 2015; *The Tico Times* 2012). The Supreme Court was emphatic on the fact that the number of complaints filed on the same topic would not sway the final decision, the only thing that would be taken into consideration for the decision would be the Costa Rican Constitution. The final ruling of the court was that students be allowed to opt out of the sexual education classes if their parents sign a form requesting so. Approximately 1% of students have opted out of the sexual education classes, however, Dr. Garnier explains that the 1% is not distributed evenly throughout the country. There are schools where there is 100% enrollment, and clusters of schools where opt out is extremely high (Garnier 2016).

In 2017, the sexual education program has entered its fifth year, however, no forms of evaluations or studies on the program have been conducted. A newspaper article in 2015 mentioned that INAMU (‘Instituto Nacional de la Mujer’, National Institute for Women) had conducted an evaluation and that results were pending (Cerdas 2015). However, Dr. Garnier and Giselle Cruz (Chief of Staff of the current Minister of Education) note that there have been no evaluations or studies conducted by INAMU that they are aware of (Garnier 2016). On February 12, 2017, *La Nacion*, Costa Rica’s largest newspaper, published a story on the main page with the following headline: “Ministry of Education’s sexuality classes fail in the classrooms” (Cerdas E. 2017). This claim was based on results from a study conducted by the Adolescent Clinic at the
National Children’s Hospital, which revealed that 75% of adolescents who were interviewed believed that *coitus interruptus* was an effective way to prevent pregnancy and that 67% claimed to have no knowledge on how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. The article does not mention details on the sample and representativeness of the study, however, it does demonstrate the narrow and outdated view of sexual education as only knowledge of birth control and STD prevention. The article refers to the fact that prevalence of adolescent pregnancy has decreased in the country over the past years, but maintains throughout the article that the sexual education program is a failure. This recent news article further reinforces the importance of this research project, as it aims to understand the less tangible aspects included in the current sexual education program, such as gender, power, pleasure, diversity, and other topics that are not associated with the traditional risk approach.

In July 2016, I conducted an informal interview with former Minister of Education, Dr. Leonardo Garnier. Dr. Garnier was in office for two consecutive terms (2006-2014), and was responsible for the transformation of the sexual education program. Dr. Garnier is an economist, and has held various positions in public office. He is famous for several changes in the public education sector while he was in office: the first being the sexual education program, but also for banning all junk food from being sold on school premises, and for eliminating a national policy regarding appropriate hair for boys; delegating the rules for hair and personal appearance of students to individual school headmasters. During the interview, he jokingly said “Look at my own hair! Who am I to tell young people their hair cannot touch their shirt collar?” (Dr. Garnier has longer hair that comes down to his shoulders). As a physician, with a Master’s Degree in Public Health, my views on sexual education were aligned with the disease and risk models, and speaking with Dr. Garnier opened a whole new meaning to the concept of sexual education. Per Dr. Garnier,
the four main intentions of the program were: to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes, to understand human sexuality as a source of pleasure and well-being, to understand diversity in all its aspects, and to manage affect in daily relationships. I was extremely surprised that throughout the whole interview he never mentioned teenage pregnancy or STDs. When I asked him directly why he did not mention these topics and why they were excluded from the program’s aims, he smiled and told me that sex is always seen under a negative light. Sex is generally associated with unwanted pregnancies, assault, diseases, infections, HIV, and it was the intention of the former Minister that human sexuality be seen as an integral part of human health, and not a ‘negative aspect’. The way in which Dr. Garnier expresses his ideas on the sexual education program seems very in line with the challenging of the medicalization of sex. Sex has been medicalized in its genitalization of sexuality and its androcentrism, standardization, avoidance of psychosocial elements, and emphasis on health risks related to childbearing and sexually transmitted diseases (Cacchioni and Tiefer 2012). Through the sexual education program, Dr. Garnier saw a way to challenge medicalization and heteronormative discourses.

After my conversation with Dr. Garnier, I felt it was very clear what his intention was when he designed this curriculum. Yet, I wondered whether his colleagues at high levels in the Ministry have the same intention? Did high school teachers implement the curriculum as intended? And did students receive the initially intended message, or did they have a different ‘take-home’ message? As program implementation, especially when dealing with ‘delivered messages’, is complex and multifactorial, this study used ethnographic methods to unpack the complex meanings and understandings that underlie the sexual education program. Following the conversation with Dr. Garnier, he introduced me to Giselle Cruz, who is the Chief of Staff to the current Minister of Education. Ms. Cruz answered some questions related to whether any type of evaluations have
been conducted to study the sexual education program (to which she responded no) and guided me on the process of doing research in the public-school system. She explained how regional offices have autonomy regarding the approval of research projects, and that there is no centralized ethics committee, nor a formal process for approval of studies.

The new sexual education program was developed over the course of 2011 and 2012, piloted in 2012, and launched nation-wide in 2013. The development of the program was led by Dr. Garnier, along with advisors and various stakeholders. Once the program and course outline had been defined, teachers were trained. As the sexual education module had been incorporated as a section within the science class, science teachers were trained to impact the new program. According to Dr. Garnier and Ms. Cruz, every single science teacher who taught 7th, 8th, and 9th grades was trained over the course of the year 2012. Teacher trainings were conducted in a sequential manner, meaning that for different geographical areas, representatives were selected to attend grand trainings in San Jose. These representatives were not only trained in the program, but were also provided resources to train their fellow teachers in their local school circuit. I asked whether any evaluations were conducted during the trainings and I was told no. I also asked if there were any follow-up trainings, continuing education, monitoring or evaluations after 2012, and again, the answer was no.

5.2 Reading between the lines

In an attempt to understand how teacher trainings may have been conducted and what information had been provided, I conducted an analysis of sexual education program documents. Students do not have a text book as they do for other classes like Science or Math, however, the
teacher is provided with a detailed syllabus with lesson plans and activities. This is the document teachers use to teach sexual education classes. The document is part of a 134-page booklet that also contains the syllabus and lesson structure for science for 7th, 8th, and 9th grades: the first 30 pages outline the science classes, and the rest of the document outlines the sexual education program. The first page of the document is a photograph of nine teenagers (5 girls and 4 boys) with varying shades of skin tone. In the photo (Figure 12) they are all laughing and hugging, which seems to be an attempt on behalf of the Ministry of Education to make the program seem ‘cool’. What is curious is they would choose this photo on the section cover, considering it is not a document for students. It is a document exclusively for teachers, and students never have access to this document.

Figure 12. Cover of the sexual education program: syllabus and lesson plans
When skimming the document, the first thing that I noticed was the dense language the document was plagued with. I admit, I had to slow down and backtrack on several occasions to truly understand what was being said. The introductory section is the hardest to get through; it seems like it was written in old-style academic Spanish from the 1980s. There is also a glossary of terms at the end, which contains very dated definitions as well. Moving past these two issues I first noticed, the topics are grouped into trimestral modules, and each module tabulates into a brief title/description, purpose, learning objectives, curricular content (divided into conceptual, procedural, and actitudinal), and values-attitudes-behaviors.

According to the document, the program was developed over the course of a year by a team of multidisciplinary professionals, including advisors and consultant internal and external to the Ministry of Education. The introduction is loaded with high level philosophical language presenting sexual education as “the construction of a human bond from affective, bodily, and spiritual dimensions, within a framework of emotional maturity” (Ministerio de Educacion Publica 2012, 35). They call for a critical analysis of reality, and call attention to these guidelines as an approach to policy because it is developing a project that will “reproduce, legitimate, question, or transform relations of power that prevail in society”.

The program has 7 themes it reinforces throughout the program: (1) interpersonal relationships, (2) culture, power, and responsibility, (3) pleasure as a source of well-being, (4) gender, (5) psychosexual identity, (6) reproductive health, and (7) human rights. The program continues to outline specific topics sexual education for \(7^{th}\), \(8^{th}\), and \(9^{th}\) grades. Each grade level has an overarching topic, which is divided into 3 modules per year; one related to affect and human bonds, a second one related to biological and cultural aspects of sexuality, and a third one focused
on health and decision-making. Additionally, five values are established as central to the three-year program: liberty, equality and rights, solidarity, respect, and responsibility.

Table 3. Topics matrix for sexual education in 7th, 8th, and 9th grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE LEVEL</th>
<th>HORIZONTAL THEME</th>
<th>TRIMESTER I: Affect &amp; bonding</th>
<th>TRIMESTER II: Biological &amp; cultural aspects</th>
<th>TRIMESTER III: Health &amp; Decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Basic concepts on sexuality</td>
<td>Affectivity and integral sexuality</td>
<td>Pleasure and well-being</td>
<td>Impact of family, social, and cultural conditions in the development of sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Physical, emotional, ethical, and cultural conditions in sexuality</td>
<td>Sexual urge and peer pressure</td>
<td>Myths about sexual life</td>
<td>Effects of family and social environments in the development of a person and their sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Strategies for a healthy, responsible, and pleasurable sexual life</td>
<td>Ways to express affect and harmonizing differences</td>
<td>Co-responsibility in men and women regarding sexual and reproductive health</td>
<td>Strategies to identify and mitigate negative impact of the environment in the development of sexuality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon review and analysis of the sexual education program documents, I was able to identify 5 separate themes, some of which overlapped with the ones established by the Ministry of Education, and others that were distinct. The themes are: (a) critical thinking, (b) emotional maturity, (c) biology, (d) managing relationships, and (e) human rights. I feel that the themes of critical thinking and emotional maturity are greatly emphasized, by accentuating dialogue, analysis, exploration, discussion, self-determination, respect, reflection, and spirituality. The biology theme includes contraception, genotype, phenotype, STDs, pregnancy, health, puberty,
reproduction, and anatomy. Topics that allude to managing relationships were friendship, parenthood, boyfriend/girlfriend, marriage, bullying, discrimination, power, violence, abuse and for human rights diversity, protection, respect, health, discrimination, gender, power, well-being, justice, and equity.

For each overarching topic for the trimester, the program outlines suggested strategies for learning, and suggested strategies to evaluate students. Below, I present sections from the second module in 7th grade, titled ‘The pleasure of living my affect and integral sexuality’ (pages 53 to 61). The purpose of the module is “for students to understand the concept of pleasure focused on well-being and health, and identifying different healthy and responsible sources of pleasure. Recognizing the role of sexual impulse and instincts of affective bonds. They will acquire knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and skills necessary to identify violence among peers, how to avoid and how to affront” (Ministerio de Educacion Publica 2012, 53). Specific learning objectives are:

1. Concepts of well-being and pleasure as a source of health
2. Knowing your body and how you experience emotions and pleasure
3. Recognition of healthy pleasure-seeking practices (eating, sleeping, playing sports, etc.)
4. Understanding instincts and the management of sexual impulse
5. Abilities and attitudes to avoid and deter violence
6. Understanding male and female reproductive systems, reproductive cycle, and attitudes, beliefs and myths
7. Consider the relationship between socialization and sex, sexual relations, and cultural practices
The first learning strategy that is suggested is identifying, living, and defining the concept of pleasure and well-being.

“Begin the educational session by greeting and introducing the subject including and emphasizing in each phrase that you pronounce, the word PLEASURE. For example:

- Good morning boy and girls, it is a pleasure to see you again
- It gives me so much pleasure to see these smiles on your faces!
- For me it is a pleasure to work with you
- Today when I woke up, it gave me pleasure to know that I would be with you today
- What topic do you think we will have the pleasure of learning today?
- Someone wants to enjoy the pleasure of answering my question?

Invite students to identify moments in daily life in which people use the word PLEASURE and hand them a strip of paper (preferably recyclable) so that they can write their answers. Motivate them to voluntarily share their findings and place them in a visible part of the room.

Invite 3 or 4 volunteers to come to the front of the class and make gestures that reflect joy, gratification, pleasure, or satisfaction. (If there are people in the group who have drawing skills they can be asked to draw faces with these characteristics)

Explore with students, guiding them with questions like the following: What do you feel or experience when:

- You get a good grade?
- You receive good news?
- Someone congratulates you?
- When you feel you did your job well?
- When you win a match or succeed at a sport?
- Receiving or giving a hug?
- When someone kisses you?
- When you see a good movie?
- When you listen to a song you like?
- In times of meditation or reflection?” (Ministerio de Educacion Publica 2012, 56–57)
On paper, this session seems very productive and generates safe spaces for conversation and discussion of topics that are sometimes overly sexualized, placing them in the context of the general well-being of individuals. They are simple concepts to understand and appropriate for a 7\textsuperscript{th} grader. The problem is that these contents and materials do not exist merely on paper, they depend on teachers to be interpreted and presented in the classroom. These topics are extremely complex and require a certain level of openness and honesty with students that some teachers might not feel comfortable with. Studying this syllabus, I consider that a science teacher who has received a one-week long workshop is not equipped to deal with the contents of this program in a classroom setting. These issues are more fitted for a social worker or a psychologist.

According to critical pedagogy, banking education is how the dominant groups exert their power to oppress people: “Teachers ‘deposit’ information into students, who accept the information without question” (Martos 2016, 189). On the other hand, liberating education seeks to liberate the oppressed. In this form of education, teachers present ideas and problems to students and work together to overcome challenges. The way that the program is written in the documents, it seems to aim for a critical pedagogy approach, however, the most important link is missing: trained and skilled implementers.

In many instances, suggested learning strategies, like the one presented above, promote a learning dynamic is slow paced and can become quite repetitive. Reinforcement of topics is absolutely necessary for adequate learning, but to what extent? Another issue to highlight is the lack of flexibility in cultural variations and socio-economic conditions. It seems small, but watching a movie is not something many indigenous students will have been able to do. Most do not have televisions at home, I can be certain that the majority have never been to a movie
theater, and films watched at school are mainly educational. Since this is such a rare event, difficult to relate to for many, should it be included in the list? Some may argue that different ideas for teachers may be on the list, and the teacher does not have to use all the examples. Then the question becomes, does the teacher have the awareness of understanding which elements fit their local context?

Another example of not taking into consideration different populations is a module that discusses roles of parents in the home. The lesson plan says to encourage students to draw a picture of their home and what activities their father conducts and activities their mother conducts. Beside the first instinct, which would be that not all children live with their parents, or not all children have both a mother and a father, something not contemplated either is the large proportion of adolescent girls in the indigenous school system who already live with their partners and have children. In these cases, the teens are the parents. Sections on dating as teens is also unaware of diverse cultural practices, as is the case of the Ngöbe, where dating is not an acceptable preamble to a formal relationship. If two young people want to be together, they shall move in and start a family at once.

My overall assessment is that the document is whatever you make it to be. A good teacher, skilled at interpersonal relationships would probably catalyze this document into a wonderful and comprehensive sexual education program, while a poor teacher, who does not believe in the program or is uncomfortable with the topics at hand, might limit themselves to reading out the lesson plan, with minimal effort or engagement. As a whole, it is a solid starting point, yet many aspects need to be revised, such as dated definitions, conflicting terms, and cultural omissions.
6 WELCOME BACK TO HIGHSCHOOL

Begin at the beginning, and go on until you come to the end: then stop.

Lewis Carroll

6.1 The beginning

In January 2017, I went on my first site visit to the Brunca region, guided by my friend and colleague Dr. Díaz. I was introduced to several people who work in health and education in the region, we visited the local clinic, the border with Panama, and went to the Ngöbe territory. As we took an exit off the main road toward the Ngöbe territory, we passed the San Antonio High School. Dr. Díaz said that this school had several indigenous students who would travel over 5 miles on foot to this school instead of attending the local school inside the territory because there was a perception that the ‘white school’ provided better education. I asked him why people would believe there would be a difference in education if they were so close, and both part of the public-school system. He clarified that indigenous communities, as part of their autonomy, can appoint teachers to the local high schools, bypassing the Ministry’s traditional hiring process. This meant that often high school teachers at the Carrizal High School (located inside the territory) were given their positions due to social influence, not merit. He provided anecdotes and rumors that several of the teachers at the school do not themselves have a high school degree. With this, it was clear that Dr. Díaz believed that the students were right in trusting that the ‘white school’ would provide them a better education.

When we arrived at the local clinic Dr. Díaz explained that it was recently built, through a participatory process in which the indigenous community was consulted on their needs and
preferences. The clinic is said to be built in “traditional Ngöbe style”, with small circular huts organized in a semicircle. Each hut is an individual office space; one of the huts is the secretary’s office and where patient records are kept, another hut is the pharmacy, the next hut over the nurse’s office, another hut for the primary health technician, one for the physician, and one for the dentist who shared the space with the traditional healer. In this clinic, the aim was that traditional medicine and ‘Western’ medicine work side by side, and patients allowed to decide which doctor they would like to consult with. In Figure 13 you can see special symbols painted underneath the windows of the huts in the clinic. In published literature, it is said that triangles represent the world above and the underworld (Gavarrete 2015). The triangles facing upwards represent the world of good that God inhabits, and the triangles facing downwards is the world of evil that evil spirits inhabit (Cortes Campos 2015). The Ngöbe call these triangle patterns ‘saltos’ and they say that it protects them from evil spirits. They place the pattern in vulnerable areas of the house (like windows where spirits can enter) and also on their clothing (Figure 14).

Figure 13. The local clinic in the indigenous territory.

The former director of the health area jokingly said that he thought the geometrical patterns were beautiful and they should paint them all around the huts. He commented how shocked people
in the community were by the suggestion, as it is only appropriate for the windows. I asked Carmen and her husband what the triangles and ‘saltos’ meant, and they gave me a different version than what I found in the literature. They told me that the triangles and squiggly lines represented the snake, because the snake was a very important animal in Ngöbe mythology. Carmen told me the legend of the girl and the snake, smiling, and with a cheeky tone.

A long time ago, a mother and her daughter lived alone in a very small hut. The mother told the daughter that it was time to find a man, and so, men began to pay her visits. There was a man who came who had long hair, split into two braids. The man would always bite on to the ends of the braids, and when he opened his mouth and the braids came out, they would drip water. The man with the braids courted the daughter and moved in. Eventually the daughter became pregnant, and when she gave birth, she gave birth to a child half human, half snake. The man tricked the mother into planting a seed that gave birth to two daughters, who also became snakes. The snakes grew and grew until the humans had to kill them to get back their lands. They now wear it on their clothes as a reminder to be vigilant of strangers and evil spirits.

Figure 14. 'Saltos' stitched on to clothing (Dresses made by Carmen and Delia)
Previous research in Costa Rica has already found evidence that patients who use a range of health solutions are more satisfied with their health care and treatments (Low 1985). Unfortunately, the model for multicultural health care failed quickly. The national health service is a government entity, and as such, has very rigid and bureaucratic hiring mechanisms, which meant that a new job position could not be created for the traditional healer. Even if a new position could be created, the institution requires that all employees have a completed high school degree, which the traditional healer did not possess. This meant that the traditional healer was never hired in any official capacity and initially volunteered at the clinic. Patients would bring him food and animals as a form of payment, but it was not good business for the healer. Traditional healers often do house calls, and having people come to him was something that the locals were not accustomed to, and they began to use the services of other traditional healers instead. Within a few months, the clinic was back to operating in its usual manner; the only difference was that now the clinic was housed in brightly colored huts. Throughout my time in the community I noticed that so many initiatives are developed and launched, but practically none have been sustainable in the long term. It is evident that there is a clear miscommunication, and people in the community are not really listened to. Most people I asked about the traditional healer at the local clinic said they knew it was not going to work, because no one wants to do a job for free, when they can get paid for it. If they could see it so clearly, how come decision-makers did not?

As we walked through the village I noticed there was a great amount of trash toward the sides of the paths and accumulated outside homes. Another thing I noticed as I walked, was that music was playing loudly in several homes we walked by. The music they were playing was Mexican Mariachi music, which is referred to in Costa Rica as ‘Rancheras’. I could see children peeking out at us through windows as we walked by, shyly waving back when I said hello. We
arrived at a sculpture, and while we were admiring it, a man in his sixties approached us and told us that he had it commissioned to honor his father. His father had been Pedro Bejarano, the founder of this indigenous territory, and he had passed away about 5 years ago. The rumors in the village were that he had lived up to 120 years of age. Now, in his absence, one of his youngest sons had been elected by popular vote to become the Cacique (chief).

Figure 15. Map of San Antonio and Carrizal. San Antonio is located on the main road, about 300 yards from the entrance to the indigenous territory.
To arrive at the indigenous territory, you have to drive northwest from the main town for about 30 minutes. This main road is well paved, and San Antonio high school is along this road. Right after you pass San Antonio High School, you turn left where there is a wide dirt road entrance. From this point, it takes about 10 to 15 minutes to travel the 5 miles that separate San Antonio high school and Carrizal high school. Carrizal high school is the last stop the bus route makes. The buses from the main town to Carrizal run only twice a day: at 7am and at 3pm. In Figure 15 I marked the locations of San Antonio high school, Carrizal high school, the local clinic in Carrizal, Carmen’s house, and Delia’s house. Carmen and Delia are sisters, both daughters of Pedro Bejarano, the first chief and founder of the territory. They are in their 70s, as far as I can tell, because they do not know what year they were born in. Carmen and Delia are both traditional birth attendants and community leaders, and they were both extremely helpful in teaching me about Ngöbe life. Carmen and Delia were now estranged, due to religious differences. Carmen was Catholic and Delia Bahai; neither was Mama Tata, which was the religion of their father and the religion their brother (the new cacique) maintains. Getting to Carmen’s house was possible by car, but only in large four-wheel drive cars, and it took about 15-20 minutes from the Carrizal high school. To get to Delia’s house, I would have to park on the side of the river, a couple hundred yards before the clinic, cross a hanging bridge by foot, and hike up a hill for about 15 minutes. Not an easy feat for 70-year-old Delia, nor for myself.

Following this initial site visit in January I was convinced this was the place to conduct my research. I approached town elders, the ADI, high school principals, and began the process to obtain the necessary approvals to conduct my research during the summer of 2017.
Figure 16. The hanging bridge in Carrizal to go to Delia's house
6.2 Breaking and entering: San Antonio and Carrizal

During Spring Break 2017, I returned to Costa Rica to meet with the principals at both high schools and to obtain written letters of support for my research from the schools and the representatives of the indigenous community.

At my meeting at San Antonio high school, I was greeted by the principal and the guidance counselor. They told me there are 280 to 300 children currently enrolled in the school, that spans from 7th grade to 11th grade. There are three 7th grade classes, three 8th grade classes, and two 9th grade classes. Of these, approximately 50% attend sexual education classes regularly. There are few whose parents have formally sent letters to opt out of the class; the rest just skip class. Students who do not attend sexual education class, must remain in the library and they cannot count the missed lesson as a free period. Andres, the principal, told me he was very happy to have me at their school, because they have no idea what the program is doing locally or nation-wide. Both Andres and Daniel, the guidance counselor, kept repeating throughout the meeting that the goal of the sexual education program was the reduction/prevention of teen pregnancy, “that’s the whole point of it”.

Half-way through the meeting, Daniel quietly mentioned that part of the problem with sexual education in this school was the science teacher. According to Daniel and Andres, the science teacher, Eduardo, was adamantly opposed to the implementation of the sexual education program. Eduardo has a bachelor’s degree in Biology and loved the ‘hard sciences’, and he saw little use for a program to talk about your feelings. Daniel said that when the Ministry of Education recruited volunteers to receive training in San Jose he decided to go, so when he came back to the Brunca region, he was in charge of conducting the teacher training, which included training
Eduardo. Apparently, Eduardo’s favorite phrase during the teacher training was “this is useless shit and I won’t do it”. During the rest of the meeting Daniel also made some remarks about emphasizing abstinence, which made me wonder what he really felt about the sexual education program. To conclude the meeting, I asked them what they thought about sexual health in indigenous communities. They said that at the school they had about 20-25 indigenous students, roughly 5 at each grade level. They called the territory 5 miles away “a world apart” and said that it was very difficult to handle because of “all the incest”. The way they perceived indigenous people seemed very much aligned with the views of the Costa Rican anthropologist Loría (2011) – using broad generalizations and demonstrating poor understanding or knowledge of the Ngöbe community. I wondered how Andres and Daniel had come to arrive at this way of thinking, and was very wary of not allowing myself to get absorbed by these narratives.

When I met Juan, the principal at Carrizal, he had been working there for only one month. He seemed clearly overwhelmed by the situation at the school, and his eyes would tear up as he told me stories of students who came to school on Mondays and wolfed down their food, barely taking a moment to breathe, and when he inquired about the behavior he realized that many students come from homes so poor that they do not have enough money to feed everyone during the weekend, so they prioritize for the elderly and small children. For many, the meals they receive at school are all they are able to eat each day. “Behind their little faces, there is so much mistreatment, abuse, and poverty”.

At Carrizal, the guidance counselor, Elena, and the science teacher Carla, both joined the meeting with Juan. They explained they were severely understaffed, the high school is classified as a rural school, which means it is built for a capacity of up to 150 students and employs 5
teachers. Of course, from theory to reality, there is a significant difference, and the school has about 250 students enrolled, 100 more than their maximum capacity, without receiving any additional funding or new teaching slots. The three of them agreed that sexual education was extremely important in this community, as there were many cases of currently pregnant girls at the school (at the time of this meeting, 10 girls were pregnant), teen mothers, and just as many girls who had dropped out after they became pregnant. Elena, the guidance counselor told me that just last week a 7th grader came to her in an absolute panic, “I spilled,” she said. Elena said the girl was terrified and wanted to go home, so she took the girl to her office to talk and understand what was going on. It turns out the girl had gotten her menstrual period for the first time and was completely oblivious to the process. This is Elena’s account of the event:

Elena: It’s ok, you don’t have to be scared, this is normal, it happens to all women. It’s called the menstrual cycle.

Girl: This happens to everyone? (gently crying, but calming down)

Elena: Yes, for the next four to five days you will bleed…

Girl: WHAT?? This lasts for five days???? (starts sobbing again)

Elena: Yes, but then it will go away until next month.

Girl: Next month?

Elena: Yes, that’s why it’s called a cycle, it happens every month – or every 28 (the student interrupts)

Girl: EVERY MONTH!!!!!!! (and bursts out into uncontrollable crying again)

Elena was very amused with the story, we all were, and we had a good laugh. It seems strange to think that a child would be so in the dark regarding a bodily process, but it is a constant reality. When I was a pre-teen I was in full knowledge of the hormonal changes that were about to
happen, and I was practically counting the days. I cannot imagine the terror one might feel if one second to the next blood starts coming out of your body. The inconsolable crying, I can understand – what I could not understand was why this girl was in the dark in the first place. “The program is late”, Carla explained. The sexual education program is structured in a way in which reproduction, biology, and human physiology are not taught until the 9th grade. By the time students are taught about menstrual cycles, all the girls have already gone through it by themselves. This was not the first time something like this had happened with the younger girls, Carla and Elena said that this past week alone they had three or four girls who were in complete shock regarding their periods.

Carla mentioned it was hard to deal with these topics because parents would often get upset. “You are giving them permission to have relations”, or “I will not allow my daughter to be chipped like a horse”, referring to implant contraception. She remembers a situation last year when a 14-year-old student came to her and said she needed advice. She told Carla that a man wanted to marry her, and her parents had agreed - but she did not want to get married. She wanted to stay in school. She did not love the man, and she felt he was too old. Carla took a deep breath and said, “You do not have to do anything you don’t want to”. The following day, the girl’s mother came to give Carla an earful: “We have always lived together, gotten married, had children, and no one has ever told us anything. Now you think you can come and tell my daughter different things?” Here we can see the effects of new perceptions of marriage and globalization influencing this child’s decision-making process. “I do not love him,” was what she said to Carla. Because shifting discourses on marriage now dictate that it is not an economic transaction, it is about love and companionship. On the other hand, Carla says she has come across parents who are more open and understanding, one mother once said to Carla, “I don’t want my daughter to go through the same things I have”, she is now 50 years old and returned to high school to get her diploma.
Again, towards the end of the meeting, when Carla, Elena, and Juan had warmed up to me, they told me about Eduardo, the science teacher at San Antonio. Juan and Carla had been at the training sessions, and they remember his attitude towards the sexual education program. They said he was very vocal throughout the 80-hour training, repeating over and over that he was not going to deliver sexual education in his classroom. Having heard this the second time, I was extremely anxious about meeting the famous Eduardo. Unfortunately, since he was not available during spring break, I would have to wait until the summer to meet him.

6.3 Indigenous autonomy: research implications

My last visit during Spring break was attending the ADI council meeting to request permission to conduct research in the territory. I sent a letter a week in advance, and was granted a 10-minute slot on their bi-weekly Saturday meeting. The meeting was at 10am and was at the community hall, located about halfway between the Carrizal high school and Carmen’s house. On my way, I drove past the President of the ADI and a group of people who were walking with him. I stopped, rolled my window down, and asked if anyone wanted a ride. A woman who was carrying a 2-year old baby accepted my invitation, and the second she closes the door behind her she took a deep sigh, and said “Oh, this feels amazing” (referring to the A/C in the car) – the things we take for granted. The path ahead was quite bumpy, and the toddler kept giggling and squealing with joy every time she jumped up and down. When we arrived and got out of the car the heat and humidity struck me so hard I felt I had been slapped right across the face. The community hall is a large wooden house, with lots of benches and chairs inside for people to convene.
Inside the hall, members of the community came up to greet me and introduce themselves. They ask me if I am a doctor, and they complement me on my Spanish, until I clarify I am Costa Rican. A man came up to me and asked me if I was a university student who had come to do research. When I replied yes, he asked me where I go to school, to which I replied “In the United States”. “In Miami?” he asked. I told him my school was in Atlanta, and his face lit up, “I’ve been there!” He was extremely pleased and continued, “Yes! I remember Atlanta, that’s where Coca Cola is!” Before I get the chance to ask him more about his trip to Atlanta, he flutters off, like a butterfly, making the rounds and saying hello to everyone in the room.

*Figure 17. Community hall used for events and ADI meetings every other week*
When the meeting began, I was asked to sit in a chair, facing five members of the ADI, and present my research proposal. I felt like I had been accused of something and had to defend myself. There were about 20 more people sitting behind me in benches, probably more interested in the following items in the agenda, rather than my research proposal. They were all very serious, until I mentioned that I considered educational programs did not take into account the cultural diversity of the country. They all nodded in agreement, and a few of them interjected, “Yes, no one asks us for our opinions on national issues”. They seemed quite pleased with my proposal and told me I had the green light to move forward with my project, emphasizing that they would like me to provide them with a brief of findings and conclusions at the end of my work.

6.4 First day of school

The night before my first day of school I chose what clothes to wear: jeans, sneakers, a t-shirt that says “ANTHROPOLOGY – The study of Humans” (I thought this could be an icebreaker), and a pink backpack. I decided to begin with my first two months of participant observation at San Antonio, which is the high school located outside of the indigenous territory. The majority of students at San Antonio are non-indigenous, although there are several indigenous students: some of them live close by to San Antonio, and several live inside the territory and choose to travel to San Antonio to receive a better education. The reason for choosing San Antonio first over Carrizal was mixed, in part due to logistical issues, as I had not procured a large car yet to be able to drive to the territory, but also, I considered that attending San Antonio first would allow me to practice my participant observation skills in an environment that was not so unfamiliar to me.
I am Costa Rican, and I have worked in rural areas of the country as a physician and as a volunteer on many occasions. Does this mean I am to consider myself a native ethnographer? Where did this concept of native ethnographer arise, and what implications does it have? The idea of a separation of native and non-native comes from the colonial origins of anthropology, and using the term feels unfitting. Calling an anthropologist a native anthropologist is a way of othering developing countries (Narayan 1993). A Peruvian anthropologist conducting research in Peru would be considered a native anthropologist, but would an American anthropologist doing research in a high school in Atlanta be called native as well? The essentializing tag of native or non-native does not allow for shifting identifications and diversity within cultural domains and across groups. Native is perceived as an ‘authentic’ point of view, however, education, gender, sexual orientation, class, and race may override this insider – outsider binary. Although native is seen as insider, and non-native as outsider, the native anthropologist has been perceived as providing only narrative accounts, while the non-native anthropology is more geared towards analysis (Narayan 1993).

While being Costa Rican has provided me with some clear advantages, for example, language-wise, it does not mean I fit right in. My accent and the words I use are different than in rural areas of the country, and inside the indigenous territory, no matter how much I insisted, the students thought I was American. So much for insider status… Narayan, caught in a similar dilemma to my own when conducting research in India, emphasizes that “calling for greater integration of narrative into written texts does not mean that analysis is to be abandoned, but rather it moves over, giving vivid experience an honored place beside it” (Narayan 1993, 682).

The first class I attended in San Antonio was with 8th graders, they were all whispering amongst each other and looking my way. The science teacher, Eduardo, is a very tall man, over
6ft tall, with a wide frame, in his mid 50s, and with a very neatly combed moustache. He seems intimidating, and does not smile much, but I could tell students liked him because when they enter the class they move they desks up closer to Eduardo’s desk at the front. They all gather in a cluster around him, and fight over who gets to sit the closest. One of the students walks up to Eduardo who is sitting at his desk, and whispers something in his ear. “Ah! Yes! Everyone, we have a visitor. This is Gaby and she will be with us for a couple of months.” He allowed me to introduce myself and then proceeded with the class. This dynamic of staring, pointing, whispering, and introducing myself was pretty much standard in the 8 different classes in which I conducted observation. During this first class, there were only 15 students present. Eduardo explained that about two had formally opted out; and the rest had skipped. The topic of the lesson that day was pleasure. Eduardo sat at the front of the class in his desk, did not stand up at any point, and discussed some of the topics included in the sexual education lesson plans. Below, I transcribe a portion of the class, where E stands for Eduardo, and S₁/S₂ stand for student 1 and student 2.

E: “What is pleasure? It is doing something we like, right? Like when we eat, that would be a physical form of pleasure, or sleeping, skating, playing, that would be also physical. There is also social pleasure, like having lots of friends, or being accepted in a group. What other types of pleasure can you think of?”

S₁: “Spiritual!”

E: “Yes, I guess that maybe when you go to confession at Church it feels like a weight has been lifted off you, and that would give you pleasure. What else? There’s also economic pleasure, intellectual pleasure, psychological pleasure…” Then, leaving it for last, and trying to make it sound extremely casual, “Oh, and there’s also sexual pleasure. Can anyone tell me what that is?”

S₂: “Ahhhh, I don’t know!!!” (giggles)

S₁: “I am not perverted, so I don’t know anything about that!” (looking very pleased with himself for coming up with that answer)

S₂: “Are you going to test us on this?”
Eduardo asked his class what sexual pleasure was, and no one answered. Another student changed the topic, and Eduardo never came back to the issue. He seemed uncomfortable with the class material and it seemed like he was just ‘going through the motions’ because I was there. I wondered how he taught the class when no one was observing. It seemed to me that Eduardo attempted to provide as little information as possible, in a way where he was technically teaching the program, but not engaging in a way where students would ask him questions he felt uncomfortable with.

In an attempt to mitigate the soft skills Eduardo was perceived to lack, orientation class was scheduled right after sexual education. The aim of this pairing was to allow students to discuss things during orientation that were not clear during sex-ed. The first time I decided to attend one of the orientation classes, the topic for the session was gender equity. As anthropologists, we are urged to be impartial, not judge, and engage in cultural relativity. However, every single activity during the session seemed to scream the opposite of gender equity – it was physically impossible for me to not feel uncomfortable. The first thing Daniel did was split the group up into boys and girls – so much for gender equality. He then had the teams of boys and girls compete in different things, like which team could pass the ball without dropping it the fastest, or which team could balance something on a tarp. The point Daniel was trying to make was that girls can win at games too, which means they are not inferior to boys. In the middle of playing games, I glanced up and noticed something I had not seen before. On the wall in front of me was a framed poster with a picture of the Virgin Mary.

“I would like us to take a moment to say a prayer”, said Daniel when the students started to settle down after the games. It all made sense now. The comment on abstinence the first time I
met him, the poster… All of these things going through my head as everyone stood up and gathered in a circle, heads lowered, getting ready to pray. “Let’s take advantage of this moment to talk to God, and give thanks to God”. While he said this, he clicked on a remote he had in his hand, and soft religious music started playing in the background. Over the music, in a New Age-y tone of voice, trying to sound mellow and peaceful, Daniel continued, “God is loving, God is caring, God created us man and woman, and we are worth so much. We ask God to allow us to feel loved. God loves you, he loves all of us so much. God sent us his only child to teach us that living and loving is worth it. And God gave Mary, a woman, the most important job of all. God gave Mary the job of bringing Jesus our savior to the world.”

So, the implementation of the sexual education program in San Antonio seems to have a bit of an issue. On the one hand, Eduardo is not comfortable with discussing feelings, emotions, or sexuality, and on the other hand, Daniel is extremely religious, believes strictly in a man-woman gender binary, proposes sexual education should emphasize abstinence, and considers that the true value of women – the most important job they can do – is giving birth. I wondered what Dr. Garnier would think if he knew that teachers were praying while they taught sexual education.

On my first day of class, second period, I met Kimberly, a very cheerful 8th grader. She was extremely excited to meet me. She sat with me during recess and bombarded me with questions: where did I live, what was Atlanta like, why was I here, did I have a boyfriend, do I own a car, do I dye my hair, do I wear contact lenses? After recess, she wanted to come to class with me, but I urged her to not skip class and to go to where she was supposed to be. Shortly after, while I was sitting in sex-ed class with the 9th graders, I had this feeling that someone was looking at me, so I glanced to my right, and there was Kimberly, peeking to the window, frantically waving
at me. I smiled back and directed my gaze toward the front and made an effort to not look at the window again. When class was over, I left the room and Kimberly was outside waiting for me. She had a hand-written letter she gave to me, and she gave me a hug. The first thing that came to mind was the concept of ‘professional stranger handler’. I started thinking about how to distance myself slowly from Kimberly, without making her feel bad. I could sense that Kimberly had problems socializing with the rest of her classmates, and having her around me all the time, would definitely prove problematic for my research interactions. It felt detached and cold to think of my relationship with Kimberly in this way, but I had to think of the wider picture.

Figure 18. Two letters that Kimberly wrote me on the day we met. The letter to the left says “Thank you for your lovely friendship. You are the best friend I have ever had. You are beautiful. You have pretty eyes! Your hair! And the truth is that I love you a lot. I wish you were my sister, but it can’t be. Ah, sorry. I love you. Contact me: (phone number)” The letter to the right says “Gabi I want to invite you to come to my house!! I don’t know if you can come today!! And I want you to come and visit, and get to know!! And I know that you want to!! Mark with an X Stay for a sleepover or maybe to visit. You decide. Aaah Gabi. Thank you for everything!! I love you. bye”
After a few days of Kimberly constantly calling and texting, and multiple letters, I decided to talk to the guidance counselor, Daniel, to ask for his help on how to deal with the situation. I wanted to be nice to Kimberly, I did not want her to feel bad, but I also sensed how students would keep their distance when I was with Kimberly, as opposed to when I was by myself or in the company of other students. When I spoke to Daniel I mentioned I had a situation with a student, and that I preferred not to say her name. Before I could say anything else, he interrupted, “I know you are talking about Kimberly”.

Daniel explained that Kimberly has had behavioral issues for several years now, and that it has been difficult for her to adjust socially. He mentioned that Kimberly had no friends at school, because she had a reputation for throwing tantrums. Sometimes she would have fits of anger, become violent, and beat people who would try to approach her. For the past two years, Kimberly has been seeing a psychiatrist who has prescribed some medications. According to Daniel, the medications make her less violent and less prone to outbursts of anger, but every so often, there is a new issue to deal with. For example, one day, Kimberly tried to leave the school at 10am. The security guard alerted the principal and guidance counselor, and after talking to Kimberly they found out she was on her way to meet a man she had met through text messaging. Daniel told me Kimberly showed him the text messages, and he was a man in his late 20s, who had suggested they meet at a park. Kimberly is 14. Last month, Kimberly took a picture of her genitals, and sent it via text message to all the students. The teachers found out because one of the 7th grade boys came to Daniel saying that he did not want Kimberly to send him pictures like that. Daniel encouraged me to explain boundaries to Kimberly, but try to make Kimberly feel like I was there for her and that if she needed help or advice, she should come to me. Daniel insisted that if any situation came up
with Kimberly where I was unsure on how to proceed that his door was always open. He felt happy that Kimberly had become close to me and hoped that I could be a good role model for her.

When I got around to talking to Kimberly, I explained that I had a job, and I had to work when I was not at the school, which meant that I was not available for calls and texts all day long. I explained that sleeping over was not appropriate because I was so much older than her, but that I could visit, as long as I spoke to her mom to make sure she had permission to have visitors over. Daniel also spoke to her separately, and her intensity level lowered a bit. This situation exemplifies what teen life is like. Kimberly might not be like most students, especially in terms of behavioral issues, however, this interaction does demonstrate how intensely adolescents experience their relationships. Scholars like Margaret Mead have argued that adolescence is a cultural construct, and that the time period in a person’s life did not even exist until the 19th century. This may be true, however, being surrounded by teens for four consecutive months showed me that teen angst is a very real thing. Labelling adolescence as a cultural construct does not make it any less true, and the design of an educational program should take into account the complexities of adolescent viewpoints.

6.5 Groundhog Day

On most days, Eduardo would pull out a giant board that included charades, Pictionary, and trivia. However, lessons were too short to be able to complete the game, so each week was like a déjà-vu, where we would start over, and play the same game, with the same clues, over and over. Lesson slots in the Costa Rican high school system are 45 minutes long. Sometimes, two
lessons will be grouped to have a longer session, for example in Math or Spanish classes. Sexual education would have only a 45-minute time slot per week. Every class Eduardo would begin by taking attendance, person by person, in a room where there might be only 10 students. Person by person he would call out the person’s name, and wait for the person to raise their hand and say ‘here’. Before taking attendance, Eduardo would also stall a bit, so that everyone would be in the class by the time he started taking attendance. By the time Eduardo had finished taking attendance, there were only 30 minutes of class time left. This pattern persisted throughout the two months I was observing classes at San Antonio.

Figure 19. Board games created by the Ministry of Education to accompany the sexual education program

By my second week at San Antonio, all of the students in 7th, 8th and 9th grades knew my name. The boys would nod, wave, or just say hi when they saw me, while the girls would run up to me and hug me or kiss me when they saw me in the mornings. Kissing on the cheek to say hello is a very standard way to greet people in Costa Rica, as is the case in most of Latin America. When two women greet, they kiss on the cheek. When a man and a woman say hello, they kiss each other
on the cheek. When two men say hello to each other, they shake hands. Machismo culture is rampant in Costa Rican society, and if two men were to kiss on the cheek, they would be subjected to enormous amounts of criticism. As the weeks went by, I noticed that more and more students attended sexual education classes. Eduardo noticed it as well: “They all participate in class so much when you are here, even the ones who have opted out are coming to class”.

Camila started attending sexual education classes after I had spent almost a month at San Antonio. The first time she walked into class, Eduardo said, “Hey, you are not supposed to be here, go to the library!” Camila complained that the library was boring and that she wanted to be in class, she promised she would behave. She immediately picked up a desk and placed it right next to me and asked me my name. Camila is a very pretty girl, and it was easy to tell by the way she behaved, and how others reacted to her, that she was part of the ‘popular’ crowd. She was very interested in who I was and what I was doing, so I took advantage of her interest and asked her if I could interview her. She smiled nervously and asked what I would ask her, and I told her I was interested in understanding what she thought about the sexual education program and how she had come to opt-out of the program. During our interview, she told me that she had convinced her parents to make a letter for her to be able to opt out of sexual education class. I asked her why, and she said, “It’s just so boring! It’s more fun to hang out at the library with my friends”. I was able to interview Camila’s mother as well, who confirmed that she wrote the opt out letter at Camila’s request. “She asked me to, so I made the letter.” A few other students mentioned opting out for similar reasons; one student said he did not have any free periods on Thursdays, which is the day on which sex-ed is taught, so he asked his parents for the opt-out letter so he could have a free period to catch up on his homework for the day.
None of the students mentioned anything about their parents’ religious beliefs as a reason for opting out. Granted, if I were a teenager I might feel embarrassed to admit that was the reason for opting-out of sexual education. Choosing to opt-out was much cooler. However, Camila’s mom confirmed her version, so at least I can believe Camila was not exaggerating her version. There were rumors here and there that parents opted out for their children because they did not trust Eduardo to be in charge of their children’s sexual education. In the survey I conducted at the end of my fieldwork, Eduardo was listed as the top thing students would change about sexual education class. When asked what they would like to change, the most common answers were: “The teacher”, “Eduardo”, “Eduardo is too grumpy”, and “Less strict teacher”. Among the parents I interviewed who had written opt-out letters for their children, most of them confirmed that the fact that Eduardo was the teacher in charge of sexual education had led to quite a bit of discontent among parents as they did not see him fit for teaching this subject to their children. When I asked them to elaborate they would respond similar things to what students wrote on the survey about his personality, some said they felt uncomfortable with the idea of a man talking to their young daughters about sex.

This highlights a neglected issue in the design of the sexual education program. Sexual education does not occur in a vacuum, and sexual education is imparted by humans. Humans have personalities, attitudes, beliefs, and there is no way that everyone will be able to deliver course content in the same manner, and as originally intended. Eduardo claimed over and over, that he did not want to teach sexual education, yet the system does not allow for Eduardo to opt-out himself. Since Eduardo is by mandate the teacher, a higher proportion of students ended up opting-out.
6.6  If you can’t beat them, join them

I decided to start interviewing after a whole month of participant observation in the classrooms. I felt that by doing so, students would be more comfortable with me during the interviews. However, the interview dynamic tended to intimidate students, which motivated me to think of a different way of obtaining information. One day, sex-ed class was cancelled, so the 9th graders and I decided to play a game during the free period. One of the students found a deck of cards and handed it to me. I asked them if they knew any games, and they all said they knew no games. I laughed and said that the only card games I knew were drinking games, but that that would be extremely inappropriate. They all laughed and begged me to teach them one of the games. They said we could modify the game so that it did not include any drinking. They were all very insistent, so I agreed to teach them Kings. Kings is a game where something is assigned to each card in the deck. In traditional Kings, if you draw a 6, the men around the table have a shot, or number 2 means you get to decide who drinks two shots. Some cards have games, like Categories or Vikings, and whoever loses gets a shot. I decided to substitute the “punishment” for losing for a Truth or Dare instead of a shot. About eight 9th graders joined me around a picnic table and we began playing.

The first game we played was a rhyming game, and a girl called Karen lost. Since she lost, she had the choice between truth or dare. She chose truth, and her friends did not hesitate to ask her what age she was the first time she had sex. Karen rolled her eyes, said 15, and urged the next person to continue playing and draw the next card. The next card drawn corresponded to the game Categories, to which I had given them the example: names of trees, or names of rivers. The category the person who drew the card decided was condom brands. The following questions in
truth or dare were all related to sex as well, number of partners, use of protection; all information I would have never dared to ask up front.

It was interesting that I never said this would be a game about sex, but they decided to make it that way. As the game progressed, I realized I was playing alongside the students. This meant that at any given moment I could lose a game, and would have to answer a question. I started having an internal debate regarding how to deal with that, and I started to get extremely confused. The moment inevitably came, and the question they decided to ask me was “What is your favorite thing to do in Atlanta?” I sighed with relief. This was such an innocent question. The following question was also fairly benign, “What was your first impression of this school?”

Figure 20. A week after I had taught students how to play Kings, almost all the 9th graders carried little bits of paper with the rules written down
This game yielded an amazing amount of information I would have never been able to obtain otherwise. By placing myself at the same level as the students, they felt they could trust me, and voluntarily shared information without me even asking for it. While we were playing, one of the students, Irina, told me that she had transferred to this school a year ago. Before that, she was at the school located in the main town. She said that kids at San Antonio were ‘goody-two-shoes’, but that the kids at the other school had wild parties with alcohol, drugs, and sex. Before beginning my fieldwork, my whole premise was that there was cultural variation between schools, especially in schools like Carrizal and San Antonio, where one school was located inside the indigenous territory, and the other was not. I had not contemplated such pronounced variation in school culture in schools in the same rural region, if they were both non-indigenous. This further reinforced the need for flexible curriculums so that teachers can better adapt to their local situations.

The new card game became a new fad, and within a week all the 9th graders carried little scraps of paper where they had copied the rules of Kings (Figure 20). I knew that playing Kings would not work with all teens, but with this specific group, it worked wonders.
7 “LEARNING TO NOT HAVE SEX”

Don’t have sex, because you will get pregnant and die! Don’t have sex in the missionary position, don’t have sex standing up, just don’t do it, OK, promise?

From the movie Mean Girls (2004)

7.1 What’s the point?

The purpose, or “the point” of sexual education changes depending on who you ask. When you ask Dr. Garnier, former Minister of Education, he will give you a high level, academic, verbose explanation, drawing from terms such as empowerment, gender, equity, maturity, healthy relationships, and affect. The program guides and documents are on the same wavelength as Dr. Garnier’s discourse, yet, when you ask those in charge of implementation, the misinterpretation begins. When teachers, guidance counselors, and principals at both Carrizal and San Antonio were asked what the purpose of the sexual education program was, they all agreed that the aim of the program was the reduction of teen pregnancy. Responses from students were more varied, however, the majority of answers were “To learn about sexuality.” The second most common answer in students from San Antonio was “To not have sex”, while the second most common answer in Carrizal was avoiding pregnancy. Considering that all teachers agree on the purpose of sexual education being the reduction and avoidance of adolescent pregnancy, they are not delivering that message adequately. The message of sexual education has become just as distorted as a game of telephone. The Ministry of Education is trying to develop emotional maturity and healthy lifestyles, the teachers are concerned about reducing teen pregnancy, and the student understood that sex is wrong.
The fact that students at Carrizal and San Antonio understand different things regarding the purpose of the sexual education program reflects largely on the teachers. At San Antonio, the science teacher dislikes teaching the programs and engages as little as possible, while the guidance counselor is biased by his own religious beliefs. On the other hand, the science teacher at Carrizal is overwhelmed with the alarming rate of adolescent pregnancy at the school, so the message she emphasizes often, and hard, is contraception. This dynamic of not talking clearly, and not talking openly generates more confusion for students. “If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom.” (Foucault 1978b, 11). There is a battle where individuals are chastised for talking about sex, but at the same time, sex is being discussed everywhere, and the act of silencing discussions of sex, boosts the conversations themselves.

Parents seem to have similar understandings on the purpose of the sexual education programs, but they give these understandings different value judgements. Parents in general, similar to the teachers, principals, and guidance counselors, believe that the purpose of sexual education programs is teaching students strategies to avoid adolescent pregnancy. Where parents diverge is regarding the best strategy to deter pregnancies in teens. Those who believe that abstinence-only programs are the only alternative are categorically opposed to the new program that offers information on contraception. They consider that offering information on contraception is encouragement for teens to engage in sexual activity at a young age and they firmly claim that the sexual education program is more likely to promote early onset of sexual activity. The other
group of parents are those who agree that it is better for their children to have knowledge and information to ‘be safe’ if and when the time comes.

According to Dr. Garnier, former Minister of Education, the group of parents who are vehemently opposed to sexual education are very often devout Catholics or Christians. The notion of premarital sex is what drives the insistence on abstinence, and it is not necessarily an issue of emotional preparation or maturity. It comes down to committing a sin. It is because of these strong religious beliefs that the rest of the sexual education program is also highly criticized. There is a module in the program for 8th grade that discusses the topic of gender identity and sexual orientation. The approach of the module is geared towards anti-bullying strategies and promoting tolerance among students. The program guides encourage teachers to discuss other issues that may cause discrimination, such as race, nationality, and socioeconomic status, and urges students to accept that we must always respect one another. There is no mention to whether different gender identities or sexual orientations are good or bad, it just explains that diversity exists. However, conservative groups have taken issue with this module, and claim that the program encourages homosexuality and promotes something erroneously termed “gender ideology”. The term gender ideology has spread through Latin America to refer to strategies that, according to these groups, promotes homosexuality.

Overall, parents who oppose sexual education programs affirm that the programs encourage sex, and that if these programs did not exist, students would not be thinking about sex. Nonetheless, just a glance at the school desks can reinforce that sex is an omnipresent thought for teens. The desks in the San Antonio classrooms are full of graffiti, and the most common things are love messages and drawings of penises. There was not a single desk that did not have at least
one drawing of a penis, and every other desk would have an anonymous love message. When I was taking photos of the desks, one of the students asked me what I was doing. I told him I was taking photos of the ‘artwork’ on the desks. He looked at me annoyed, “That’s not art, it’s just a bunch of perverted people who draw sick things on the desks”. I asked him why he thought it was perverted or sick, and he laughed, “I don’t know, because sex is bad”.

Sex is a taboo topic, and as Dr. Garnier pointed out in our initial interview, it is always portrayed under a negative light. Sex is bad. One of the aims of the sexual education program was to present sexuality as an integral part of human well-being, but Eduardo was not contributing to constructive conversations about sex and a healthy sexuality. “On the subject of sex, silence became the rule” (Foucault 1978b, 6). Here, the desk graffiti exemplifies how the mandated silence in one sphere, is compensated by expression in another. Yet the messages written on the desks highlight the importance of safe spaces for conversation, and the need for a general challenge to the machismo culture that permeates throughout Costa Rican society. Some of the messages on desks are simple, like “I love you”, others objectify girls by calling them “Yummy” or “Delicious”, and insults are based on homophobic slurs or slut shaming. The language on the sexual education program documents was very clear in establishing the aims of the program as encouraging emotional maturity, tools for a healthy sexuality, gender equality, and promoting human rights, among others. Unfortunately, this notion of the purpose of sexual education did not permeate all the way to students, as it is not reflected in the way they talk, or how they express themselves in their desk graffiti. Data obtained from student surveys asking the purpose of sexual education had a tremendous amount of responses similar to: “To learn not to have sex”.


Figure 21. Graffiti on the desks at San Antonio
Figure 22. Teens engaging in physical contact.
The top two photos are students in Carrizal holding hands and hugging in class. The bottom photo is two students kissing across the window in San Antonio.

Physical contact amongst teens occurs on a daily basis, whether we as adults are comfortable about it or not. Friends hug and hold hands, young couples stroke each other’s hair, some even kiss inside and outside of classrooms. Sex might not be on all of these teens’ minds,
but there is a clear need for education, empowerment, and information regarding healthy relationships.

7.2 What is said and what isn’t said

Sometimes, more information can be drawn and analyzed by what is not said, instead of what is said. The sexual education program guidelines for teachers are precisely that – guidelines. The guidelines are filled with ideas for activities, and questions to ask students to encourage discussion. The documents do not, however, detail how to follow-up on these topics, or how to respond to particular situations. For example, a module in the program might touch on the issue of diversity from an anti-bullying perspective, but it does not discuss in full what gender identity, sexual orientation, biological sex mean, how they are different, how they are similar, and how one can situate oneself along a spectrum. The program is limited to saying ‘people who are different exist – don’t bully them’.

From a practical perspective, it is understandable that in a socially conservative country, as is Costa Rica, openly critiquing heteronormativity, identity, and gender categories might be challenging. Nonetheless, if these issues are not addressed, discourses of oppression, male hegemony, and heteronormative domination will persist and permeate through generations to come. Here is where true critical pedagogy must take over and, through liberating educational practices, involve the students in the process of developing their own educational framework. Sexual education programs were developed by high level academics, according to their own perspectives on sex and sexuality, and never considered the target audience as a key stakeholder
in the issue. In this sense, the higher education system that educates high school teachers needs to undergo a serious reform as well, and instill new educational strategies that promote critical thinking, and analysis on behalf of students.

When students are asked the most important thing they have learned in sexual education class, the most common responses were related to contraception and avoidance of STDs. These are the topics that students were able to elicit first, even though they represent a small fraction of the topics taught throughout the three years of the program. If you look at the course schedule, more time is spent on feelings, emotions, healthy relationships, managing affect, abuse, gender, power, violence, substance use, risk behaviors, and the importance of staying in school. The list continues, yet the things that are immediately associated are contraception and STDs. This reflects the high level of biomedicalization that sexual education has undergone. The biomedical aspects of sexual education such as pregnancy and disease overpower the other issues that are related to psychosocial well-being.

From a biocommunicable perspective, we can see that the discourses of sexual education circulate in extremely uneven manners. Discourses related to biomedicine are dominant, while discourses related to emotions, personal well-being, and social wellness are all faded into the background. When we compare the three distinct responses as to what the purpose of sexual education is: critical thinking and emotional maturity, avoidance of adolescent pregnancy, and not having sex, it seems that the biocommunicable models circulate at each level in parallel ways and never intersect. At the level of the academics and Ministry of Education officials, the knowledge on sex and sexuality emerges from academic sources and circulates in a way that does not effectively transmit to the level of the implementers. At the implementer level,
knowledge on sex and sexuality emerges from personal perceptions, religious beliefs, and media portrayals, and it also circulates in a parallel manner that does not permeate to the levels above or below. The reason that these perceptions do not flow across levels is because the teachers are not trained for the transmission and communication of these types of messages. Additionally, the sexual education program guidelines are fairly rigid, and as such, the teachers limit themselves to practically reading them out for students. At the target level, the students have knowledge that emerges from their homes, schools, peers, the internet, media portrayals and popular culture, and none of this knowledge circulates or backfeeds to inform the policy makers at the top level.

In order to create true dialogue and constructive conversation surrounding sex and sexuality, these three levels need to be integrated and fed into each other. It is through analysis of
the multiplicity of biocommunicable models and the integration of various lines of thought, is that a true critical pedagogy strategy could be developed.
8 5 MILES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

8 kilometers – 8,800 yards – 316,800 inches – 952 double-decker buses
73 football fields – 79,200 hand spans – 4,705 smoots

Figure 24. The 5-mile dirt road that connects San Antonio to Carrizal

8.1 What’s in a domain?

“Every ethnographic study – indeed, every research study of social practice – is not a reflection of an absolute objective truth but a partial account in every sense of the phrase” (Bucholtz 2011, 40). From my participant observation and interviews, I had strong data to support my account of how different the schools at San Antonio and Carrizal were. However, since the student interviews in Carrizal did not yield as much information as I had hoped, and as I had noticed pregnant girls in class, but did not know how to compare that to San Antonio, I decided to develop a short survey. The survey was self-administered, anonymous, and included questions on basic demographic information, some questions related to the purpose of the sexual
education program, and a free-list prompted by ‘Please make a list of all the words that come to mind when you hear “SEXUAL EDUCATION”’ (full survey in Appendix B).

Free-listing is an exercise that can produce a large amount of focused information in little time, as informants are asked to “create an inventory of all the items they know within a given domain” (Quinlan 2005, 219). This ethnographic method rests on three assumptions: (1) people free list in order of familiarity, (2) people who know a lot list more terms, and (3) lists indicate locally prominent items. Since I was interested in what students understood as the take-home message of sexual education programs, free-lists seemed a good complement to my data that could be triangulated with my participant observation and interviews.

I decided to compile the free-lists for each school separately, and run the analyses on AnthroPac in separate manners to compare Carrizal and San Antonio. My participant observation at the two schools led me to believe that there was little cultural continuity between Carrizal and San Antonio, due to which separate free-list analyses were warranted. Quinlan states that a limiting factor to free-lists is that they reflect the terms that are in the individual’s range of vocabulary (2005). This means that I was expecting to have a significant difference between Carrizal and San Antonio if not necessarily because of cultural variations, but because of language barriers and the fact that Spanish is a second language to most students in Carrizal. I began with San Antonio school and ran the analysis without collapsing duplicates nor grouping general exemplars. From the 73 respondents, 157 distinct items were identified, with a total of 526 mentions. This means that on average each student listed 7.2 items. The list was organized in frequency, and after noticing that the top five were sex, relations, sexuality, learning, and sexual, I decided that I had to group certain overlapping terms and categories into a single term.
Examples of categories I grouped or collapsed include learn – learning, educate – education – educate oneself – teach – teach us, sexual organs – penis – vagina, gender – man – woman, and family planning – pills – implanon. I want to highlight that in binary terms that reflect female and male, such as man – woman, and vagina – penis, the male terms had higher salience than the female terms. Higher salience means that it appears more often and earlier in the list (Quinlan 2005). This might reflect perceptions of sex being linked to masculinity.

Following the clean-up of the San Antonio lists, I obtained 86 items, 359 total mentions, and an average of 4.9 items per person. Below, Table 4 lists the 20 most frequent items in San Antonio. I chose the cut-off value at 20 because Bernard recommends 4 to 5 mentions being a good cut-off point (Bernard 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Spanish Term</th>
<th>English Term</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sexo</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Relaciones</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Condón</td>
<td>Condom</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Educar</td>
<td>Educate</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Protección</td>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Emociones</td>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Órganos sexuales</td>
<td>Sexual organs</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sexualidad</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Género</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cuidar</td>
<td>Take care</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Embarazo</td>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Planificación</td>
<td>Family planning</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Orientación</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Respeto</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Aprender</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Enfermedades</td>
<td>Diseases</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Prevención</td>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Amor</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Cuerpo</td>
<td>Body</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 25. Graph showing the distribution of the 20 most frequent terms listed in San Antonio

AnthroPac was used to conduct a Multi-Dimensional Scaling (MDS) on the data, which looks at how items in a cultural domain are packaged into subgroups, and how these subgroups are related (Borgatti 1994). The MDS chart has a level of stress, and this stress is how well the diagram represents the actual degree of distance between all the terms. It is never going to be perfect, but the general rule is that stress below 0.1 is excellent, and anything over 0.15 is unacceptable. The MDS charts in 2 and 3 dimensions were both unacceptable for the free-list terms, however, this was to be expected as MDS analysis is better suited for pile-sort data. Pile-sorting is when the most frequent items in free-lists are given to respondents in separate cards and they are asked to group the cards into categories. Due to time constraints, I did not conduct pile-sorting activities with my research participants.
In Carrizal, the unclean free-lists provided 175 items, for a total of 578 mentions among 99 respondents, which provided an average of 5.8 items per person. This average per person is significantly lower than the 7.2 per respondent in the unclean lists in San Antonio, which was expected due to linguistic difficulties. However, once I conducted the same ‘cleaning’ up as I did with San Antonio, I obtained 111 distinct items, a total of 506 mentions, which provided an average of 5.11 items per student.

Table 5. Top 20 mentions in Carrizal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Spanish Term</th>
<th>English Term</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sexo</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Relaciones</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Enfermedades</td>
<td>Diseases</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Género</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Condón</td>
<td>Condom</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Protección</td>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Aprender</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Cuidar</td>
<td>Take Care</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Embarazo</td>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pareja</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Organos sexuales</td>
<td>Sexual Organs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Amor</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Persona</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Educar</td>
<td>Educate</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sexualidad</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Cuerpo</td>
<td>Body</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Clase</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Respeto</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Hijos</td>
<td>Sons (Children)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list from Carrizal in Table 5 has been cut-off at 20 items to maintain consistency with the list from San Antonio for the purposes of analysis, however, there are 6 other terms that also presented a frequency of 5 mentions each: Importante (Important), Masturbación (Masturbation), Jóvenes (Youth), Cambios (Changes), Edad (Age), and Higiene (Hygiene). The
The graph in Figure 25 shows a different shape as the plotted frequency distribution in San Antonio. While the graph in San Antonio has a logarithmic looking curve, the frequency distribution in Carrizal displays a more linear relationship.

Two unexpected findings resulted from the free-listing exercise. First, I found that after the lists had been cleaned up, each respondent in Carrizal listed an average of 5.11 items, while in San Antonio the average was 4.9 items per student. The initial list in San Antonio was longer, but when duplicates were collapsed, and similar items grouped, it turned out that the average decreased by 2.3 mentions. This evidences the higher Spanish language competencies in San Antonio in comparison with Carrizal. Students in San Antonio had less ideas and words to put in their list, and they resorted to synonyms and similar words that were eventually collapsed, while students in Carrizal had a wider range of categories of items that were not collapsed, suggesting...
that maybe students in Carrizal have a higher knowledge of sexual education than students in San Antonio. This is reflected in the curve of the frequency graphs, where the number of mentions per item decreases more slowly and steadily in Carrizal, in comparison with San Antonio. The second finding is that while the students in Carrizal listed more terms on average, the top 20 items in frequency were extremely similar to the top 20 in San Antonio. Only three words were different: the words orientation, emotion, and prevention from the top 20 in San Antonio, were substituted by partner, children, and class in Carrizal.

The fact that the free-lists in both schools demonstrate that the take home-message and understanding of the sexual education program is fairly standard across schools, regardless of local cultural differences. And the reality of what each of these schools live, is reflected in the change of two simple words in the free list: partner and children. Students in Carrizal associate sexual education with their partner and children, while in San Antonio, where teen pregnancy and marriage rates are almost insignificant, these words do not form part of the cultural domain. A word I found interesting, that barely made the five mentions ‘cut-off’ was Vegas Games. This name or phrase was repeated in four different free-lists, all from male students, 3 of them from students in the 9th grade class, and one of them from an 8th grade class. I did not know what Vegas Games meant, and when I conducted a quick online search, I found that it is an erotic, late night television show on Cinemax. I asked the guidance counselor about this and she laughed and said, “Yes, we have to confiscate boys’ phones all the time because they are watching porn in school! It is a big problem!”.

What does pornography in a setting like Carrizal mean? It means that the spread and globalization of ideals of love and marriage are not the only ones that have permeated Ngöbe
society, and that foreign, fabricated ideas of what sex should look like is where adolescent boys are obtaining information. Despite the fact that Carla, Elena, and Juan all received the sexual education training, none of them wanted to engage in a conversation with students about pornography. The only way porn is dealt with is through punishment (phone confiscation, detention), or remarks in class that watching pornography will make you sick or perverted. Instead of looking at the wider societal and cultural elements of pornography, the conversation is truncated, and students are not allowed to discuss what they saw, why they saw it, and what they make of it. I am sure that in Dr. Garnier’s utopic version of what sexual education programs should look like, this would include a riveting and heated discussion with students regarding how sex and sexuality are mediatized, the role and objectification of women, perceptions of body image and pleasure, and how intimate relationships develop. However, we need to realize that the teachers in the school are humans too, and they have their own set of beliefs and personal restrictions.

When I interviewed the teachers and guidance counselors individually, I asked them to do the same free-listing exercise as the students, and while the sample consisted of only four people, significant differences can be noted in the cultural domain and what sexual education means to students versus school teachers. The four teachers had a total of 30 different items, a total of 39 mentions, and an average of 9.75 items per respondent. The number of items per teacher is almost twice as much as the number of items listed per student at both schools. This reflects, according to our assumptions regarding free-lists, that the teachers have more knowledge about sexual education, because they are listing more items. However, this knowledge is not being adequately conveyed to students, consistent with the parallel biocommunicable models proposed in the previous chapter.
Table 6. Free-list terms elicited from teachers and guidance counselors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Spanish Term</th>
<th>English Term</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cultura</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Información</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Anticonceptivos</td>
<td>Birth control</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Comunicación</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Protección</td>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Relaciones</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Religión</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Abuso</td>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Amor</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Anatomía</td>
<td>Anatomy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Autoconocimiento</td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Comportamiento</td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Conceptos</td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Conocimiento</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Edad</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Educación</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Embarazo</td>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Enfermedades</td>
<td>Diseases</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Estado</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Familia</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Fisiología</td>
<td>Physiology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Jóvenes</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Mala preparación</td>
<td>Poor preparation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Metodología</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Obligación</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Psicología</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Quién</td>
<td>Who</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Salud</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Sexología</td>
<td>Sexology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Sexualidad</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common listed terms were culture and information, which were present in three out of the four free-lists conducted with the guidance counselors and teachers at Carrizal and San Antonio. It is curious that they all acknowledge the importance of culture, yet none of them feel comfortable or prepared to deal with the cultural complexities embedded in sexual education. As expected, Daniel included the terms Religion and Family, while Eduardo focused on ‘scientific’ words such as Anatomy and Physiology. In his list, Eduardo also included the terms Mandatory and Poor Preparation. When I initially read through the list I assumed he meant mandatory for
students, and that the students were poorly prepared and had little knowledge of sexual education. He elaborated on the answers and explained that the terms were for himself. He wrote Mandatory because that is the only reason he teaches the class, because as a science teacher, it was added to his job description. If he had the choice, he assured, he would never teach this class. Poor Preparation was also a reference to himself, “I am a biologist, I don’t know about these things. If I had wanted to teach sexual education I would have gone to college for something else.” At the end of the interview I asked Eduardo what he would recommend for the sexual education program. “You won’t like my answer”, he said. I told him there were no right or wrong answers, that he could suggest anything he felt would be useful, and he said he would just cut the program. “Look, there are kids here who can barely read and write, they are failing math, and we are taking time out of school lessons to teach them this garbage that has no use. It should just go. I told you, you wouldn’t like it.”

8.2 Count, measure, and label

In total, 227 students were surveyed at Carrizal and San Antonio. Of the 227 students, 113 were from the school inside the indigenous territory of Carrizal. The students surveyed in Carrizal were from 7th, 8th, and 9th grades, of which 93% were students who self-identified as indigenous. The total number of female students was 47 and 66 were male students, however, when it is broken down by grade level, it corroborates the data from my participant observation, where I highlighted the fact that as the grade level increased, the proportion of girls decreased. In the 7th grade it is almost 1:1, but by 8th and 9th grades, girls account for only a third of the class. The table below, summarizes key statistics.
Table 7. Summary of key statistics obtained from surveys conducted in Carrizal and San Antonio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Carrizal (N=113)</th>
<th>San Antonio (N=114)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students Who Attend Sexual Education Classes</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Female Students</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Male Students</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Active</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Students Sexually Active</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Students Sexually Active</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age in 7th Grade</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Students in 7th Grade</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Students in 7th Grade</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Female Students in 7th Grade</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Active in 7th Grade</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age in 8th Grade</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Students in 8th Grade</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Students in 8th Grade</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Female Students in 8th Grade</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Active in 8th Grade</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age in 9th Grade</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Students in 9th Grade</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Students in 9th Grade</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Female Students in 9th Grade</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Active in 9th Grade</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Students</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-indigenous Students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Indigenous Students</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who live with Partner</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Students who have ever been pregnant</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Students currently pregnant</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Students who have children</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding sexual and reproductive health, 34% of the surveyed students in Carrizal were sexually active, with the female students having a higher proportion of sexually active individuals (46%) over male students (26%). This is consistent with what I observed in the field, as the girls usually engage in sexual activity with older men, and not their peers. Among the female students surveyed, 15% have been pregnant at some point of their lives, 11% have children, and 9% are currently pregnant.
In San Antonio, the same pattern of decreasing proportion of female students as the grade level increased was also noted. Of the students surveyed, 12% self-identified as indigenous, and the average age was 2 years lower. In Carrizal the average age of students was 15.1, while in San Antonio it was 13.8, due to the fact that the proportion of students held back grade levels is much higher in Carrizal. In terms of sexual and reproductive health, 11% reported being sexually active, with the pattern of higher proportion in female students (22%) than male (3%) students similar to the figures observed in Carrizal. Only two female students reported having ever been pregnant (4%), none were currently pregnant, and only one had a child (2%).

I conducted a statistical test to assess whether the difference in proportions of students sexually active between Carrizal and San Antonio is a true difference, or if it can be attributed to chance. Complete calculations are in Appendix D. The Z-test produced a p-value smaller than 0.001, which indicates very strong evidence that the difference in proportions between Carrizal and San Antonio is due to a true difference and not due to chance. The quantitative data, on top of the qualitative data support that despite the small distance between them, the Carrizal and San Antonio high schools are very different. There is absolutely no way that a standardized sexual education curriculum would be able to address the needs of such different populations.

8.3 Beyond the numbers

The first day I walked into the 9th grade class at Carrizal, several of the boys whistled at me. Words cannot describe the disbelief, as I was objectified and verbally harassed by 15-year-old students. It is not unusual for women to suffer from a great deal of harassment in public spaces in Costa Rica, for example, running on the street is an open invitation for all sorts of
yelling, whistling, honking, and sexist remarks from men in cars, bikes, construction workers, and pedestrians. However, this was the first time that I had been so close to the cat-callers, and definitely the first time the unwanted attention was coming from children half my age. As soon as I sat down, two boys pulled their desks closer to mine and asked me whether I had a boyfriend, and how old I was. Half-way through the class, we were doing a group exercise, and a group of boys were laughing and saying something about me, which the teacher overheard. She decided to stop their comments, but without even realizing it, did so by reinforcing male hegemony. “What if Gaby’s boyfriend heard you say those things about her?”, she said to the group of boys. The remark, while well-intended, in my view completely missed the mark. It emphasizes how women are perceived: as property. I am to be respected as I am the property of another man, not because I am a person in my own self, who deserves respect regardless of my relationship status.

The whole dynamic in these first 45 minutes of class was completely unexpected. I am guilty of assuming and believing the stereotypes of indigenous people as quiet and submissive. My previous interactions with indigenous communities have been in medical settings, where I have been in a position of authority as a physician. I expected the students in Carrizal to behave as they had in my previous medical encounters: quiet, shy, looking down at their feet, and avoiding eye contact. I could not have been more wrong. The 9th grade class in Carrizal was loud, rowdy, vibrating with energy, and students were constantly yelling out things and offering opinions on the matter being discussed. Upon closer observation, I started to notice classroom dynamics underneath the loudness. When I took note of who was doing the yelling, commenting, offering thoughts and opinions, it was consistently the boys in the classroom. The girls were silent and motionless at their desks, while the boys dominated the classroom.
I started noticing the ratio of boys to girls at each grade level, and found that as the grade level increases, the proportion of girls in the class is reduced. In the same way, the manner in which the girls behave in the classroom changes, depending on their age and grade level. In both of the 7th grade classes, the ratio of boys to girls was closer to 1:1, although there was still a majority of boys. In these classes, the girls participated more in class, and seemed less intimidated by me. As the grade level increased, the proportion of girls in the class decreased, and so did their level of participation in class. There might be several explanations to this phenomenon. It may be related to the feeling of safety in numbers. When the girls are in higher number in the class, they might feel protected or empowered, and thus express their opinions more often. Maybe it is just a probabilistic issue, where the fewer girls there are, the less likely it is that one of them participates in class. Still, I consider that neither of these fully explain the classroom dynamics I participated in. My perception is that between 7th grade and 9th grade, girls undergo physiological changes that “turn them into women”. With this physical change, social implications are involved, and girls are expected to behave in different and more mature ways. In this setting, behaving like a grown woman means obeying your husband, or the man of the house. Women are expected to not challenge their husbands, or the status quo, and the older the woman, the more firmly they stand behind this.

The difference in numbers of female and male students in different grade levels is due to two main reasons. The first reason is that girls get married and/or pregnant and drop out of school to tend to the home and their children. Not all girls who have children and get married drop out, and there are many girls in school who have children and receive family support in the form of child care so they can attend school. This means that the figures and statistics obtained through my surveys do not adequately reflect the level of teen marriage and teen pregnancy in
the community, as only girls in the school system were surveyed, and many girls who are married and have children are not in the school system. Some boys have also dropped out when their girlfriends have gotten pregnant, so they can work and support the child. However, this is rare, as most girls who get married and have children are involved with much older men.

![Figure 27. Young girl attending the cultural festival at Carrizal high school. She dropped out of school when she got pregnant.](image)

The second reason for dropping out of school is actually a way for parents to protect their daughters. While each community within the indigenous territory has a primary school, there is only one high school in the territory. This means that primary schools are within a reasonable walking distance (less than one hour), while the high school is very far away for many. Some students told me that they live three hours away from the school. These students wake up at 3:30am, eat breakfast quickly, bathe themselves, and then proceed to walk for hours in the dark,
and arrive at school just before 7 when the bell rings. It is a long and dangerous journey in all aspects, and some parents consider that the risks of the daily trek outweigh the benefits of obtaining a high school education.

Figure 28. Children on their way to school in Carrizal. Children travel in groups for safety.

One of the community health workers at the clinic told me that her sister stopped sending her teen daughters to school because she did want them to get raped along the way. Incidents of sexual abuse, harassment and rape are rarely reported within the indigenous territory, so it is difficult to assess the true incidence and compare to other regions. However, the perception of sexual violence does seem to be high, both for outsiders, as it is for members of the community. It is very disheartening to see the choice parents feel obligated to make, and depriving their children of education in an attempt to protect them. I agree that safety must be a priority, of
course, but research conducted in other developing countries has shown that for every additional year of schooling in girls, it leads to a reduction of 0.26 children (Kristof and Wudunn 2009).

The Ministry of Education is going to great lengths to develop and expand sexual education programs in the public-school system, but gender empowerment and teen adolescent pregnancy can also be addressed by implementing policies to keep girls in the classrooms. Carrizal is a perfect example of situations that lead to girls not attending school, which unintentionally derives in early marriage, high number of children, poverty, poor nutritional outcomes, decreased job opportunities, gender inequality, and violence.

Gender-based violence is not just the physical violence that first comes to mind, it is also the patterns of inequity, and the normalization of this inequity on the basis of gender. A very clear example of the normalization of violence was one day when the class topic was about violence itself. The teacher explained that there were different types of violence, like physical violence, emotional violence, and sexual violence. After discussing each type of violence, Carla recreated a “what if scenario”. She asked students, “What if you are walking down the street and you see a person beating up another person?” In unison, the students chanted, “Call the police”. Carla proceeded, “What if you are walking down the street and you see someone yelling and psychologically abusing another person?” The response was less unified, but overall the consensus was that they would assist the victim in one way or another, asking the perpetrator to stop, comforting the victim, or calling for assistance. The last hypothetical question Carla asked was, “What if you are walking down the street and an adult man is abusing or sexually assaulting a young woman?” One of the more outspoken boys smirked and said, “I would say buen provecho”. Buen provecho is an expression similar to the French for bon appétit, meaning in
broad terms ‘enjoy your meal’. Carla laughed nervously and asked the student how he could say such an awful thing. She looked at me rolling her eyes, as if to say “boys will be boys”. The student said that if the young woman is allowing the man to abuse her, it is because she must want it. Carla opened her mouth, as if to reply, but nothing came out. She stopped and gathered her thoughts for another couple of seconds, and then said, “Well, what if it were your sister?” Again, as she had done previously when defending me on the first day of school, she resorted to the defense of women on the basis that they are property of a man. In my case, I deserved respect because I was property of an imagined boyfriend, and in this hypothetical case of a girl being abused, she would have to belong to her brother to warrant respect.

This example above illustrates how violence is normalized in certain situations, and it also highlights the importance of the issue of consent. The issue of consent is not only relevant in this context; all over the world, including college campuses in the United States, people are struggling with how to educate young men in innovative ways to encourage respect for women and take consent seriously. Another day in class, we were discussing myths related to sexuality. Carla had a list of statements and would read them aloud to the class, and ask students to say if it was true or a myth. This is how the class responded to Carla’s remarks (C stands for Carla, MS1/MS2/MS3 are male students 1, 2, and 3, FS stands for female student, and AS means all students):

C: True or false: women are always virgins when they get married.

AS: NO! NEVER! That never happens!

C: Why?

MS1: Curiosity, urges, needs.
C: True or false: when men are aroused they cannot control themselves or make decisions.

AS: True! False! (Students are all yelling and screaming at the same time)

C: And what does aroused mean?

(A male student stands up and thrusts his pelvis forward. Everyone bursts out laughing)

C: Women decide if they have sex or not, they are the ones that decide whether or not to open the gate.

AS: Yes (Yeses echo throughout the class)

C: So women have the final word on whether they want to or not.

MS₂: Yes, because if you forced it, that would be rape!

MS₁: Men are ready whenever, Teacher!

C: But not women. The man has to earn it little by little.

FS: When men don’t want to it’s because they are virgins and they are afraid

C: Why afraid?

MS₁: They don’t know

MS₂: They don’t have confidence

Female Student: That the girl might get pregnant

MS₃: That he is too big (everyone laughs) And if he is premature (referring to premature ejaculation)

MS₂: Because he is perverted

C: And why do they become perverted? Because they watch too much pornography! Ok, moving on, true or false: when a woman says no, she really means yes.

AS: Yes (general agreement that this is true)

MS₃: This is true! Lots of women are embarrassed to say yes, so they say no, but they actually mean yes.
C: Girls, what do you think?

(None of the girls speak up. A few gently nod and smile nervously, but none of them oppose the idea that no means yes)

C: True or false: men only want and think about sex

AS: (Mixed reactions. Some say yes, some say no)

MS1: Love and happiness are also important, but it’s not like you are going to have a partner without doing anything. Because that’s what women are there for.

Even though Carla is implementing the program as described in the Ministry guidelines, item by item, it is obvious that the group discussion is lacking in depth and complexity. Carla is going through the motions, but does not stop to deconstruct the answers her students are providing. She hears their remarks, and continues on to the next true or false statement. I do not blame Carla for her management – or mismanagement – of these critical situations. Her university education was focused on becoming a science teacher, and this was her first job straight out of college. Clearly, a two-week training seminar for the sexual education program is incapable of preparing anyone to answer and comment on what occurs in the classrooms in Carrizal. Liberating education depends on skilled teachers who can stimulate a learning environment in which teachers do not teach students, but rather students and teachers teach each other. In order to take the sexual education program to the next level, teachers need to engage in critical pedagogy and “acknowledge that each participant is capable of contributing meaningfully to the solution based on their own prior knowledge and experiences, and the ‘teacher’ is in turn taught new approaches to the problem during each new interaction with students” (Martos 2016, 191).
Among the issues that I found concerning during the excerpt provided above, was the reinforcement of the idea of women as gatekeepers to sex, and the notion that sex is something that men should earn or win. This is tied to the comments that follow regarding consent, and the true meaning of *no*. As women have this powerful tool at their disposal called sex, they cannot let men know that they want it too, which is why they “pretend” to not want it, when in reality they do. In this sense, saying no, is the ‘lady-like’ thing to do when propositioned with sex. Sex is not something that a woman herself wants, but it is what she must provide men with, as one of the boys commented, “that’s what women are there for”. When the topic of consent and the true meaning of no was brought up I was surprised that none of the girls objected to it. I asked some of the girls about this later during recess, but as usual, they just said “I don’t know” and avoided further eye contact with me.

The relationships I developed with the female students at Carrizal was drastically different than the ones I had in San Antonio. In San Antonio I was extremely popular with the girls: they all wanted to sit next to me in class, have lunch at my table, be on my team when we played games, hang out during recess, and even braid my hair. In Carrizal, if I sat with a group of girls during recess they would immediately stop talking. If I asked them questions, they would just answer “I know nothing”. Even after two months of attending classes on a daily basis, the female students did not warm up to me. The male students were a different story. In San Antonio, the boys were friendly, but very few would sit with me and the girls during recess and lunch. In Carrizal it was the complete opposite, and practically all of the students who voluntarily interacted and conversed with me, were male.
A final example of class conversations is the day we talked about relationships and dating. The community is in the middle of a transition of marriage and relationship dynamics. Similar to many other places in the world, and as was the norm until recently in Western societies, marriage for the Ngöbe is not an issue of love. As it is not an issue of love, dating is not a ritual that exists in the culture. Carla asked students about relationship dynamics, and asked the boys how they would ‘court’ a girl. One of the boys exclaimed, “For us that whole dating thing does not exist! You take her home two or three times and then you move in together (get married)”. Some of the other students objected to this, “No, that was before, young people are dating now”. “Yes,” one of the girls interjected, “because sometimes you don’t want to move in together”. This demonstrates how marriage and relationships are shifting in Ngöbe culture as they are in the rest of the world.

After spending four months at these two schools, I feel confident in saying that 5 miles really do make a difference. The students, their families, the homes they live in, their cultural milieu, are all significantly different between Carrizal and San Antonio. Because of this, I find it extremely unrealistic to think that a single sexual education program would be able to fit the needs of all schools in Costa Rica, when it is not even well-suited to address basic issues at these two locations.

8.4 Life outside the classroom

The time I spent in Carrizal outside of the classroom was mainly with Carmen and Delia. With Carmen, I learned traditional crafts, and her husband taught me basic Ngöbere. With Delia, I asked her more about traditional birthing practices, and she told me about how she met her
husband. I met Carmen first, and she was very enthusiastic when I told her that I liked knitting. She asked me if I wanted to learn how to make chacaras, and over the course of several weeks she showed me how the plant leaves were picked, cooked, dried, threaded, and dyed. Ngöbe people use chacara bags for everything. The bags are used to carry anything from personal belongings, to food and groceries, to babies! In addition to personal use, Ngöbe women weave chacaras to sell. A chacara measuring 8 x 11 inches is sold at $15. When Carmen finished weaving the chacara she was working on, she got out of her hammock, walked over to a large black plastic bag in the corner of the kitchen, and placed the chacara inside. I asked her what was inside the bag, and she said she had dozens of chacaras of all shapes, colors, and sizes to sell. I asked Carmen if she sold the chacaras in bulk to anyone in particular, and she said it all went to the Artisan House. Next to where Carmen lives, she built a little wooden house, and hung a sign that says “Traditional Ngöbe Crafts”. Women from around the territory bring their arts and crafts to Carmen to display, and if they get sold, Carmen gives them the money. There is a fair share of students and volunteers who come to Carrizal and eventually end up at Carmen’s house. Yet, I wondered whether the sign made any difference. Does anyone find themselves casually driving past Carmen’s house and decide to stop to buy a chacara or a bracelet?

One time when I went to visit Carmen, I noticed her husband was being dropped off by the doctor who I rented my room from. That night, I asked what that was about, and I learned that Carmen’s husband had a restraining order placed against him by the family of a young girl he had molested. Carmen’s husband was in his late seventies, and was found to be abusing a 12-year-old girl in the community. The girls’ parents were outraged, especially since it was not the first time that he had been found out to be doing this with young girls, and they decided to file a formal complaint at the police station. Carmen’s husband was given a restraining order, and was
forbidden to be within a certain distance of the girls’ home, which meant that technically, he was unable to live in the indigenous territory. To enforce said order, on the 1st of every month, Carmen’s husband had to go to the courthouse and sign a sworn statement saying that he was upholding the restraining order, which was of course untrue. He would live at home the whole month, then spend one night in the town, so he could sign the next day, and then return again to the territory. I asked the doctor why he would help him engage in an illegal activity, and cheat the system. He sighed and said, “It’s complicated”.

Figure 29. Carmen teaching me how to weave a chacara
Since Carmen built the artisan house, it has become more or less a mandatory stop for ‘voluntourists’ who come to the territory. A dentist who frequently visits and provides free dental care asked me to go visit his friend Delia. He told me that Delia was Carmen’s sister, but they were estranged, and Delia was jealous that every time people came to the territory, they would always visit Carmen and not her. Granted, visiting Delia is no easy feat. Carmen’s house can be reached by car, while Delia’s house can only be reached after a 20-minute vigorous hike.

My dentist friend called Delia on her cell phone to let her know I would visit her the next day. I had never met Delia, but I went, and I introduced myself as the tooth doctor’s friend, and Delia seemed extremely pleased. On my way to Delia’s house it started to rain heavily, so when I arrived at Delia’s I was soaked head-to-toe. She offered me a cacao beverage and I told her that I tried it before and found it to be too bitter. “Oh, but you haven’t tried it how I make it!” said Justino, Delia’s husband. He promised me I would like his version of the cacao drink, and went over to the wood stove to prepare my beverage. Delia sat next to me and held my hand, and thanked me visiting. I asked her about her family, her home, her work as a traditional birth attendant. When it was just the two of us talking Delia would talk a lot. Once Justino sat down, he did the talking for Delia. “How did the two of you meet?” I asked them. “I stole her”, Justino said, and followed the statement with a hearty laugh. I gasped and asked Delia, “Really? What does that mean?” Delia just smiled and nodded, and allowed Justino to continue telling the story.

Delia had been married initially to Justino’s younger brother. They had been together for several years, and had 4 or 5 children. Justino, a single man in his thirties who had never been married, found out that his brother was beating Delia, and so he stole her. Delia went on to have 4 or 5 more children with Justino, and they never saw Justino’s brother again. I asked Delia how
she felt about all of this, and again, she just smiled and nodded. Of course, one can ever know what goes on behind closed doors, but the way in which Justino prepared my beverage for me, instead of having Delia or one of the other women in the house do it, made me feel that household dynamics were different than they were in other Ngöbe homes. The idea that the woman tends to the kitchen does not necessarily apply all the time in this home. Other gender hierarchies, such as allowing the man to speak, did remain constant and in line to the female-male dynamics I observed in the classrooms. After a while of conversation, Justino excused himself, and left Delia and me alone again. And Delia began talking again.

I asked Delia if there were any traditional methods to avoid getting pregnant and she told me that you had to bury the placenta. After you have a baby, the woman must take the placenta, and bury it in the ground. Depending on how far down it is buried, that is when the woman will have the next child. If the woman wants to have her next baby soon, she buries the placenta close to the surface, if she wants a long time to go by before she gets pregnant again, she must bury the placenta very deep in the ground. I asked Delia how to avoid getting pregnant if I had never had a child, as burying the placenta would only be possible if I had a child to begin with. She looked at me as if I had asked the strangest question in the world. “Don’t have relations then,” she said hesitantly, unsure whether that was what I wanted to hear.

The topic of spacing births and delaying pregnancy led me to ask Delia what age she thought would be ideal for a woman to have her first child. She thought about it, and then said 12. “You think the ideal age for a woman to have her first child is at 12?!” I blurted out, recognizing immediately I might have reacted too strongly. She laughed, “Of course it’s not ideal, but it’s what happens in real life”. I asked again, emphasizing that if we lived in a perfect
world, when should women have their first baby? “Well, ideally…” she began, “you would want a woman to learn how to cook, and clean, and sew before she is taking care of a child. When girls have babies at 12 they are babies themselves, and they are not fit to take care of themselves, a husband, nor a child. I think… 20. Yes, 20 gives them time to learn everything.”

My conversation with Delia was crucial in proving that adolescent pregnancy is not determined by Ngöbe culture, as many propose. It happens. Yet, this does not make it a part of their culture, in the sense that it is not something they promote, or value. Delia said that the problem is that girls are developing too early, and so they have children earlier. Ngöbe society has considered traditionally that the onset of menses signifies that a woman is ready to bear children. Nonetheless, it has not been taken into consideration that since girls begin menstruating at earlier ages every generation, maybe the marker should not be the presence or absence of a menstrual cycle, but selecting an age, or a life event such as concluding high school.

8.5 The End

There are so many anecdotes and stories I would like to include in this thesis, however it is unrealistic to fully summarize four whole months spent in the field. I began my fieldwork hoping to prove that Carrizal and San Antonio were culturally different, and as such, required different approaches in the teaching and implementation of sexual education programs. In addition to the obvious cultural differences, I was also shocked by the level of inequity, marginalization, and injustice I witnessed. The government is failing the Ngöbe community in every level, and government services that are supposed to be universal and equal, such as health and education, are not.
The public-school system as a whole was probably the biggest disappointment throughout my research. Every week, for one reason or another, one day of school would be cancelled. The reasons varied, but every week, without fail, a full day of class would be missed. Reasons included parent-teacher conference meetings, teacher trainings, sick-leave, national holidays, rehearsals for assemblies, or cultural festivals. This was consistent in both Carrizal and San Antonio. However, the academic level of students in Carrizal was significantly lower than San Antonio. When I conducted my surveys, I was able to grasp the full severity of the issue, as in each class at least two students were not able to complete the survey because they do not know how to read or write, and several surveys only had the multiple-choice section completed. It is not acceptable that students in the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades do not know how to read or write. How did they get to that point? Even the teacher, Carla, struggled with grammar and spelling, and constantly wrote things on the white board with spelling mistakes. Communities like Carrizal, instead of receiving the worst of the worst, should be providing students with twice as much help, and double resources to ensure they attain the same educational level as the rest of the students in the country. Some universities have adopted affirmative action policies, but these measures become moot if students have subpar reading and comprehension levels.

I leave the field disappointed in my country’s mismanagement of public resources, but hopeful that this research has opened a window into current issues in the community, and can be leveraged into real change.

Then Stop.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A professor I knew told me that anthropology was not going to give me all the answers, but that it would teach me how to ask the right questions. That is the point where I find myself right now. Not as many answers as I had hoped for, and a plethora of new questions. Sex and sexuality are messy, complicated topics. On top of that, if you add issues of education, adolescence, religion, culture, and indigeneity, you are sure to never come to an end of the discussion.

The purpose of this study was to understand how students understood sex and sexuality following the implementation of the sexual education program. The data I obtained throughout my four months in the field not only provided me with valuable information regarding what students and teachers considered the purpose of sexual education, I also obtained information on cultural domains, learned about Ngöbe culture, and collected quantitative data through surveys. Overall, I can affirm that Carrizal and San Antonio are extremely different schools, with distinct socioeconomic conditions, cultural environments, and health outcomes. Although different in so many ways, the cultural domain regarding sexual education was fairly similar, indicating that there are potential unifiers between the schools.

As I have mentioned before, the whole sexual education program implementation is like a game of telephone. The discourses, knowledge, and circulation of ideas flow within limited areas, and do not filter down from the policy makers, to the teachers (implementers), and then to the students (target audience). Each group has their own conception of what sex and sexuality is, and what the purpose of the sexual education program is. Until this monumental miscommunication is addressed, the sexual education program will be unable to improve and
attain intended outcomes. In terms of intended outcomes, the aims of the program, as established by the Ministry of Education are extremely abstract, which means that conclusive evaluation is a challenge. If the purpose is a general psychosocial well-being in addition to reproductive health, implementers need to understand what the aims of the program are, and how they are going to be measured.

All around, the program, while good on paper, has suffered immensely at the implementation level. One-off two-week trainings are nowhere near enough time to develop the skills needed to deliver a curriculum as complex as sex and sexuality. Here is where critical pedagogy comes in again. Liberating education is an appropriate methodology for sexual education programs, and it is important to highlight that the programs need to be developed with and not for the students. The population who the program is intended for should take part in its construction to ensure that it is aligned with local ideas, perceptions, and is feasible to implement. Emphasis during this process must be placed in separating sexual education from biomedicalized discourses and embracing non-biomedical aspects of sex and sexuality as integral aspects of life and health. The science teachers who currently implement the program are not in a capacity to engage in critical pedagogy, which means that we must take a step even further back, and take a closer look at the way we are educating our educators.

I have specific recommendations for the sexual education programs, most of which are policy-level decisions that have to be carried out at the Ministry level, however, I consider they would generate a notable improvement in the quality. At the program level, I would recommend a careful revision of program documents, a inviting students from diverse backgrounds to the negotiating table so they can provide input as the valuable stakeholders that they are. The
discourses and language need to be revised, and there needs to be flexibility written into the curriculum. There should be a ‘bank of modules’ that range in topics and cultural approaches, from which teachers and students can select what materials they wish to discuss. These modules should be framed under a critical pedagogy lens, encouraging participation and critical thinking, yet it should be more explicit and offer more information as it currently does. Currently, there are lists of questions for teachers to ask students, but no suggested responses or ways to guide the conversation. Perhaps the guidelines could include suggested subtopics within questions, pros and cons to different arguments, and suggested readings to clarify certain topics.

Among the cultural adaptations and special modules that need to be included, the topics of gender roles and masculinity need to be reframed and taught in innovative ways. The way in which men treat women in Carrizal generate a multitude of social and health issues, which need to be addressed at the root. Having been in the classroom with very boisterous and rowdy boys in Carrizal, I also propose piloting sessions in which sexual education classes are conducted in smaller groups, where female students are potentially less intimidated and more open to engaging in discussion.

An established and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy is imperative for the sexual education program. Clear objectives need to be planned, and plans on how to achieve those goals. At this moment, the program has a very unclear path and goal. Regarding the teachers two important measures need to be established: first of all, more training, evaluation, and continuing education plans must be developed. Additionally, teachers should be allowed to opt out. The case of Eduardo exemplifies perfectly how detrimental to the program a teacher who is not on board is. Teachers who are not comfortable with the course content, who do not
‘believe’ in it, should not be forced to teach it. Having reluctant teachers implementing sexual education programs is extremely detrimental, and a different system needs to be assessed for the selection of sexual education teachers.

This study has revealed significant issues regarding the sexual education program in Costa Rica that have not been documented elsewhere; however, it also highlights the need for further research on sex and sexuality in Costa Rica, and the strengthening of monitoring and evaluation programs within the public-school system. While most of the recommendations I propose are at a policy level, I have been invited back to the schools by both principals, and I have been asked to deliver additional training for the teaching of sexual education programs at each of the schools. My intention is to develop workshop sessions at the schools in early 2018 when the school year begins again. The sessions will be directed both at teachers and guidance counselors, as well as students. Due to the level of positive responses I have received at each of the schools I worked with, I am sure that my work does not end here.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guides: TEACHERS

Original Spanish:

1. ¿Puede escribir una lista de todas las palabras que piensa cuando oye la frase “EDUCACION SEXUAL”?
2. ¿Me puede contar con más detalle por qué escribió cada una de las palabras en la lista?
3. ¿Cuáles considera que son las fortalezas y debilidades del programa?
4. ¿Cómo se siente dando el programa? ¿Cuáles son los retos más grandes?
5. ¿Qué cree que opinan los estudiantes del programa?
6. ¿Qué aprenden los estudiantes? ¿Cuáles son los elementos claves?
7. ¿Qué opina de las manifestaciones y huelgas recientes en contra del programa?
8. ¿Qué recomendaría para mejorar el programa?

English Translation:

1. Can you write a list of all the words that come to mind when you hear the phrase “SEXUAL EDUCATION”?
2. Can you tell me in more detail why you chose each one of the words on the list?
3. Which do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
4. How do you feel delivering the program? What are the biggest challenges?
5. What do you think students think about the program?
6. What do students learn? What are the key elements?
7. What do you think of recent manifestations and strikes against the program?
8. What would you recommend to improve the program?

**Interview Guides: PARENTS**

*Original Spanish:*

1. ¿Puede escribir una lista de todas las palabras que piensa cuando oye la frase “EDUCACION SEXUAL”?
2. ¿Me puede contar con más detalle por qué escribió cada una de las palabras en la lista?
3. ¿Cuáles considera que son las fortalezas y debilidades del programa?
4. ¿Su hijo asiste a las clases de sexualidad y afectividad?
5. ¿Por qué sí/no?
6. ¿Usted habla con su hijo sobre sexualidad?
7. ¿Qué información le aporta?
8. ¿Qué cree que opina su hijo del programa?
9. ¿Qué ha aprendido su hijo? ¿Cuáles son los elementos claves?
10. ¿Qué opina de las manifestaciones y huelgas recientes en contra del programa?
11. ¿Qué recomendaría para mejorar el programa?

*English Translation:*

1. Can you write a list of all the words that come to mind when you hear the phrase “SEXUAL EDUCATION”?
2. Can you tell me in more detail why you chose each one of the words on the list?
3. Which do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
4. Does your child attend sexual education classes?
5. Why? Why not?

6. Do you talk to your child about sexuality?

7. What information do you provide your child with?

8. What do you think your child thinks about the program?

9. What has your child learned? What are the key elements?

10. What do you think of recent manifestations and strikes against the program?

11. What would you recommend to improve the program?

**Interview Guides: STUDENTS**

**Original Spanish:**

1. ¿Puede escribir una lista de todas las palabras que piensa cuando oye la frase “EDUCACION SEXUAL”?

2. ¿Me puede contar con más detalle por qué escribió cada una de las palabras en la lista?

3. ¿Por qué existe la clase de afectividad y sexualidad? ¿Te parece importante?

4. ¿Asistís a las clases? ¿Por qué?

5. ¿Qué has aprendido? ¿Qué es lo MAS importante que has aprendido?

6. ¿Qué opinan tus padres de estas clases?

7. ¿Por qué crees que alguna gente se enoja por las clases de sexualidad?

8. ¿Qué te gusta de las clases? ¿Qué no te gusta?

9. ¿Cuál ha sido tu clase preferida? ¿Qué hicieron en esa clase? ¿Y la que menos?

10. ¿Cómo podrían ser mejores las clases?

11. ¿Qué le gustaría aprender? ¿Hay cosas que no sabe que quiera saber? ¿Hay cosas que nadie hable?
English Translation:

1. Can you write a list of all the words that come to mind when you hear the phrase “SEXUAL EDUCATION”?
2. Can you tell me in more detail why you chose each one of the words on the list?
3. Why does the sexual education class exist? Do you think it is important?
4. Do you attend classes? Why?
5. What have you learned? What is the MOST important thing you have learned?
6. What do your parents think about this class?
7. Why do you think some people get upset about these classes?
8. What do you like about the class? What do you dislike?
9. Which has been your favorite class? What did you do? And the least favorite?
10. How would classes be better?
11. What would you like to learn? Are there things you don’t know that you would like to know? Are there things no one talks about?
Appendix B

Survey

Original Spanish:

**Encuesta sobre el programa de afectividad y sexualidad**

Los datos de esta encuesta serán usados en la investigación de Gabriela Alvarado. El propósito de esta encuesta es conocer más sobre los estudiantes de 7mo, 8vo y 9no grado. No es obligatorio contestar esta encuesta, y si no desea completarla, no habrá ningún tipo de consecuencia negativa. Si decide colaborar con la encuesta, es importante que sepa que es totalmente anónima. Esto significa que su nombre no estará en la encuesta y que no se sabrá cual encuesta fue completada por cual estudiante. Los resultados se las encuestas se utilizarán en el estudio de la señorita Alvarado de manera agregada, lo cual significa que solo los totales y porcentajes de todas las encuestas se reportarán. Ninguna encuesta por si sola será utilizada.

Gracias por su colaboración.

1. Sexo:
   - □ Masculino
   - □ Femenino

2. Edad: ________

3. Etnia:
   - □ No indígena
   - □ Indígena
   - □ Otro: ________

4. Lugar de residencia: _________________________________

5. ¿Con quién vive?
   - □ Con su familia
   - □ Con su pareja
   - □ Otro: ________

6. ¿Usted asiste a las clases de afectividad y sexualidad en el colegio?
   - □ Si
   - □ No

7. ¿Cuál es el propósito de tener clases de afectividad y sexualidad en el colegio?
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
8. ¿Le gustan las clases de afectividad y sexualidad?
   □ Sí   □ No

9. ¿Qué es lo más importante que ha aprendido en clase de afectividad y sexualidad?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

10. Si pudiera cambiar algo en las clases de afectividad y sexualidad, ¿Qué cambiaría?
    __________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________

11. ¿Ya tuvo su primera relación sexual?
    □ Sí   □ No (Si contesta NO, no es necesario que complete las siguientes preguntas)

12. En caso de ya haber tenido relaciones sexuales, ¿Usted deseaba tener relaciones en ese momento con esa persona?
    □ Sí   □ No

13. En caso de ya haber tenido relaciones sexuales, ¿A que edad tuvo su primera relación sexual? _____

14. En caso de ya haber tenido relaciones sexuales, ¿Utilizó algún método de protección al tener relaciones sexuales?
    □ Sí   □ No

15. En caso de ya haber tenido relaciones sexuales, ¿Ha estado embarazada en algún momento? o ¿Su pareja ha estado embarazada en algún momento?
    □ Sí   □ No
16. En caso de ya haber tenido relaciones sexuales, ¿Se encuentra embarazada en este momento? o ¿Su pareja se encuentra embarazada en este momento?

□ Si            □ No

17. En caso de ya haber tenido relaciones sexuales, ¿Tiene hijos?

□ Si            □ No

18. Por favor haga una lista de todas las palabras que usted piensa al oír “EDUCACION SEXUAL”:

---

*English Translation:*

**Survey on sexual education program**

The data from this survey will be used in Gabriela Alvarado’s research. The purpose of this survey is to know more about students in 7th, 8th, and 9th grades. It is not mandatory to complete this survey, and if you do not wish to complete it, there will be no form of negative consequences. If you decide to collaborate on this survey, it is important you know it is completely anonymous. This means that your name will not be on the survey and no one will know which survey was completed by which student. The results from this survey will be used in Miss Alvarado’s study in an aggregate manner, which means that only totals and percentages of all surveys will be reported. No survey will be used by itself.

Thank you for your collaboration.

1. Sex:

□ Male            □ Female

2. Age: ________

3. Ethnicity:

□ Non indigenous □ Indigenous □ Other: _________
4. Place of residence: ________________________________

5. Who do you live with?
   □ Family     □ Partner     □ Other: __________

6. Do you attend sexual education classes in school?
   □ Si  □ No

7. What is the purpose of having sexual education classes in school?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

8. Do you like sexual education classes?
   □ Si  □ No

9. What is the most important thing you have learned in sexual education class?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

10. If you could change something in sexual education class, what would you change?
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________

11. Have you had sex before?
    □ Yes     □ No (If you answer NO, you do not have to answer the following questions)

12. If you have had sex before, did you want to have sex at that moment and with that person?
13. If you have had sex before, at what age was your first time? ____

14. If you have had sex before, did you use any form of protection?
   □ Yes  □ No

15. If you have had sex before, have you or your partner ever been pregnant?
   □ Yes  □ No

16. If you have had sex before, are you or your partner pregnant at right now?
   □ Yes  □ No

17. If you have had sex before, do you have children?
   □ Yes  □ No

18. Please make a list of all the words that come to mind when you hear “SEXUAL EDUCATION”: 
### Appendix C

**Raw Free-List Data**

Complete Free List – CARRIZAL

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<td>PREVENCION</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>AMOR</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>CUERPO</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>FORNICACION</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MDS (Stress in 2 dimensions is 0.72) – Carrizal

MDS (2 dimensions) – San Antonio
Appendix D

Statistical Test of Significance – Difference Between Proportions

1. The null hypothesis is that the percentage of students who are sexually active is the same in Carrizal and San Antonio => \( H_0: \pi_1 - \pi_2 = 0 \)

   Control Group = San Antonio

   Comparison Group = Carrizal

2. Data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Carrizal</th>
<th>San Antonio</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Active</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sexually Active</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Summary statistics

   \( p_1 \) (comparison group) = 34%

   \( p_2 \) (control group) = 11%

   \( p_1 - p_2 = 34\% - 11\% = 23\% \)

4. Z-test

   \[
   Z = \frac{p_1 - p_2}{SE(p_1 - p_2)} = 4.0746
   \]

   \[
   SE(p_1 - p_2) = \sqrt{\frac{\bar{p}(100 - \bar{p})}{n_1} + \frac{\bar{p}(100 - \bar{p})}{n_2}}
   \]
5. Derivation of p-value

Two-tailed p-value = 4.6E-05

6. Conclusions

\[ p < 0.001 \Rightarrow \text{Very strong evidence against } H_0 \]

The difference in proportions observed between the two populations is due to a true difference between the schools, and not by chance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( p )</th>
<th>Evidence against ( H_0 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( p &gt; 0.1 )</td>
<td>No evidence against ( H_0 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( p &gt; 0.05 - 0.1 )</td>
<td>Very little evidence against ( H_0 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( p &gt; 0.01 - 0.05 )</td>
<td>Suggestive evidence against ( H_0 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( p &gt; 0.001 - 0.01 )</td>
<td>Quite strong evidence against ( H_0 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( p &gt; 0.001 )</td>
<td>Very strong evidence against ( H_0 )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Short Stories

MOVIE NIGHT

One of the medical interns who was one of my roommates asked me to help her organize a movie night in the community. We screened an American movie called Defenders of Life, which was filmed inside the territory, and features several community members acting in the film. The intern did not let me watch the movie before the event, but assured me it was a great movie. We printed flyers, told people we would have free popcorn and Coke, and on the day of the movie night, over 100 people came.

The film is supposed to be fiction, and it tells the story of a Costa Rican female anthropologist, who comes to live in the territory with her son while she is conducting research. The woman who hosts her lives only with her 12-year-old granddaughter, Esmeralda. About half-way through the movie it is hinted at that Esmeralda is raped by an older man and becomes pregnant. The anthropologist then decides to take Esmeralda into town without her grandmother’s permission and tricks her into getting a pregnancy test. When the pregnancy test comes out positive, the anthropologist takes Esmeralda to the police station and tries to file a complaint, to which the police officers state that it has to be either Esmeralda or her legal guardian who files the complaint. Esmeralda runs away and gets lost in town, and the anthropologist leaves her there and goes back to the territory to urge the grandmother to file a complaint. When the grandmother refuses to file the complaint and refuses to accept the anthropologist’s help to get Esmeralda an abortion, she burns all her field notes in a dramatic scene, put her kid in the car, and drives away. The End.
As an anthropology student, I was horrified. The anthropologist portrayed in the movie has to be the worst anthropologist in the world, and I am not even going to go into all the gaping ethical faux-pas. What I do want to highlight is the way in which the movie presents a very exocitized version of Ngöbe culture: there is a scene where they do a ritual when Esmeralda gets her first period, which both Carmen and Delia told me no one has done for over 50 years. Also, the fact that the movie is called Defenders of Life seems to be congratulating Esmeralda’s grandmother for not accepting the abortion, instead of critically analyzing the events that led to Esmeralda’s pregnancy. The woman who stars in the film as Esmeralda’s grandmother did not come to our screening event. Later that week, I asked her why she did not come, and she told me that she did not like the movie. She was upset that the movie presented rape and teen pregnancy as part of their culture. “Rape is not in our culture. It is wrong. You can’t say that men rape girls and nothing happens. I don’t like how the movie makes us look.”

After the movie finished, I tried to ask those who attended what they thought of the movie. I knew that getting an answer from the crowd would be a long shot, but I still tried. I continued to ask how they felt about people like the anthropologist in the film, coming into their community and telling them what was right, and what was wrong. Again, no answer. After a few seconds of awkward silence, Carmen raised her hand, “Gaby, thank you for the popcorn and Coke, but maybe it would be best if the Cacique answer your questions. The Cacique speaks for all of us”. The Cacique then addressed the group for about 5 minutes in Ngöbere, then turned to me and the other medical interns and said, “Thank you very much for bringing us this film, it is very interesting, and we would love to have more movie nights.” When I asked Carmen what the Cacique had told them she said she did not remember.
Whenever a distant relative passes in my family, the last thing I want to do is attend the funeral. However, when the Cacique’s mother-in-law passed, and I was invited to the funeral, I jumped at the opportunity. I have attended many funerals in my life, young people, middle-aged people, and elderly people who have passed and have been connected to me in one way or another. Yet, never had I attended such a lively funeral. The Cacique’s mother-in-law was an elderly woman, and “it was her time to go” according to the Cacique. The cemetery is high in the mountains, and cannot be reached by car. I was told to meet up with everyone at the local pulpería, and from there we would walk together.

We walked for about an hour and reached the Mama Tata church, where the casket was waiting for us and the service was held. It felt vaguely like Catholic mass, but I could not be sure
of what was being said because the service was in Ngöbere. After the service, four young men walked up to the casket, wrapped rope and large rods onto it, and carried it uphill for another hour. About every 10 minutes the men would rotate out, and take turns carrying the casket. The casket was furry and grey. I later found out that it is the cheapest casket available at the local funeral home. The cemetery looked like any other piece of land, the only difference was that it had less trees. The Cacique explained that a tree is planted to mark each grave along with a cross, so each tree represents a person. The casket was placed underneath a canopy, and people were invited to say departing words. About five different men spoke, in Ngöbere, and after they were done speaking, people got in line and brushed the casket with some twigs and leaves.

*Traditional Ngöbe burial. The chamber contains the casket and is also filled with the person's personal belongings for the afterlife.*

After everyone had said goodbye, the casket was lowered into the ground and shifted towards a lateral chamber, where the spaces between the earth and the casket were filled with
clothes and other personal belongings of the late woman. After her personal belongings were arranged, tree branches were aligned at the opening of the chamber to close it off, and when the chamber was sealed, the hole in the ground was filled. You cannot throw the dirt directly on the casket because it is believed that the weight from the dirt would not allow the person to ascend to heaven.