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### Changes in Gender Ideology among Professional Women and Men in Cuba Today

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# CHANGES IN GENDER IDEOLOGY AMONG PROFESSIONAL WOMEN AND MEN IN CUBA TODAY

MARTA NÚÑEZ SARMIENTO<sup>1</sup>

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How do professionals living in Havana behave as women and men? How do they reflect upon their behaviors? Which sociological facts have promoted these changes? I elaborated on these questions in order to understand some of the changes, which have taken place in gender ideology in Cuba.

I wish to use the interdisciplinary framework of this Conference, to share my findings on these matters.

I have been studying women and employment in Cuba since 1985, but this is the first time I have compared women's and men's patterns in gender ideology, concerning their jobs, their homes and their personal relations.

This presentation summarizes the reflections of what it means to be women and men in Cuba today, among a group of Havana professionals. I asked them to emphasize the influence in this process of women's employment and decision making among women, two citizen rights which have been strongly promoted in Cuba in the last forty years. I also asked them to think about the socialization processes, which took place in Cuba and which contributed to these changes. Therefore, this paper is divided into two main topics: First, changes in gender

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ideology among Cuban professional men and women under the influence of women's employment, and, second, sociological processes leading to these changes.

Just a few words to describe the sample and the methods used in this research. It is a case study carried out in 2003 among thirty professionals living in Havana. Among them, fifteen are women and fifteen are men; fifteen are black and fifteen are white. All of them graduated from higher educational centers. According to their ages, twenty average thirty-two years and the other ten range from fifty to sixty-two years of age. Ten are married, ten are single, eight are divorced and two are widowed. Fifteen have children and fifteen do not. The methods were in depth interviews, statistical analysis and document analysis.

#### I. CHANGES IN GENDER IDEOLOGY UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Professionals in the sample were asked to reflect upon four topics concerning women's and men's behaviors in their everyday lives: attitudes at their jobs; willingness to become managers; influence of women's employment at their homes and in their intimate relationships, and if men blame women for their problems at the work places and in their personal relations.

I will explain what I mean by decision making, as it is one of the main concerns of this paper:

Decision making is the ability shown by individuals to understand given scenarios; that is, to be able to point out its main problems, explain their causes and propose solutions. It also includes the capability to evaluate the gains and losses of each situation, and, according to the knowledge acquired, to determine the course of action to attain one's purposes. I am interested in discovering how women and men in the sample have developed this ability in their everyday lives at their jobs, at home and with their partners. I exclude from this definition the concept of leadership, which incorporates decision making as well as other institutional aspects. Nevertheless, both concepts of leadership and decision making are related to empowerment, which is a relevant trait in gender ideology.

In my research on Cuban women and employment during the last eighteen years, I have tried to demonstrate that changes in gender ideology in Cuba, basically among working women, have promoted in them decision making abilities in all spheres of their day-to-day lives. These changes have been possible because they are part of the Cuban project to transform society, in order to build one based on independence, justice for all and erasing all forms of discrimination.

##### A. *Women's and Men's Ideologies at their Work Places*

All respondents in the sample said women and men knew the complexities of their jobs. But women were less afraid than men to admit that there were things they did not know. Women also confessed their insecurities at the workplace, while no man acknowledged this. These recognitions could support those images of women, which portray them as unable to decide and lacking self-confidence.

These ideas are demystified by the perceptions of women in the sample and by the facts and figures on the situation of Cuban women. Women in the sample declared that they are willing to upgrade their knowledge on matters dealing with their jobs. Their educational training is higher than that of men in the sample. For example, they have more MBAs and PhDs; they have attended more graduate and language courses, and have participated in more scientific conferences than the men

in the sample. Global comparative data edited by Cuban official institutions on women's and men's behavior in fields related to knowledge in Cuba also contribute to unveil these myths.

In the year 2000, Cuban working women, considered as a whole, had higher educational levels than Cuban working men. 18.4% of all working women had university degrees, compared to 10.7% of all working men. 47.5% of all working women graduated from high school, compared to 35.9% of all working men.<sup>2</sup> This trend has been going on since 1978.

Of all professional and technical workers in Cuba, 66% are women and 34% are men.<sup>3</sup> This statistical behavior has been increasing since 1979.

The category of "Professional and technical workers" groups the majority of all working women: 37%. Among working men, this category groups only 12%.<sup>4</sup>

In 2000, 60% of all faculty members at higher educational centers in Cuba were women, as well as 51% of all scientists, 52% of all physicians and 50% of all lawyers.

In the 2001-2002 academic course, women's enrollment in higher educational centers represented 62%. They made 64.7% of BA graduates.<sup>5</sup>

Women and men in the sample considered that the presence of women in the Cuban labor force (38% in 2000) has altered men's attitudes at their work places. In their answers, women reason more than men. Men tend to describe new behaviors and offer socially accepted "slogans."

According to male respondents, men acknowledge the presence of women professionals as colleagues and even as their chiefs. They admit that professional women are over worked, due to the double shift. One of them mentioned that "they sacrifice themselves, because they work at home and at their jobs." They referred to traditional and non-traditional women's characteristics which influenced men's attitudes at work. "Men should imitate women." "Men should treat women delicately at work." They believe that women demand equal treatment at work. "Women defend their professional spaces at work." Finally, they acknowledge that "macho" attitudes prevail at the institutional and individual levels.

Women in the sample consider that professional women have supplied clearer ways of approaching tasks at work, whether they are the short term ones or the ones requiring longer terms. They are capable of linking general goals with specific actions needed to fulfill them. They dedicate more time than men to think over the plans of actions at their jobs, and they reject improvisations or simple solutions. One of the respondents said "that is why women are capable of making utopias come true."

Women use "traditional" feminine traits to convince their male colleagues at work. They are "delicate," "affectionate," and "charming." They are able to listen to

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<sup>2</sup>Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas (ONE), Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2000, La Habana, table V.10. Reproduced in [www.cubagob.cu/otras info/one/education.htm](http://www.cubagob.cu/otras%20info/one/education.htm).

<sup>3</sup>*Id.*, table V.12.

<sup>4</sup>*Id.*

<sup>5</sup>Dolores Corona, "Language Education, Globalization and Citizenship. A View from Cuba", paper presented at "Language Teaching and Citizenship in International Contexts." Loughborough, Great Britain, 2003.

others. They are intimate with their coworkers, men and women, to exchange personal experiences. Performing simultaneous chores at their work place is another female characteristic. Older women in the sample have had to demonstrate their professional abilities for longer periods than men. This has not been the case among younger women. Women workers are able to “hitch hike” to and from their jobs, while men cannot do this. In summary, women believe that they have become “indispensable” at their workplaces.

Many women respondents believe that the processes to “accommodate” men and women at work have been mainly negotiated, and not the result of confrontations. Women have been the ones to lead these negotiations.

Women workers in society have indirectly influenced working men’s attitudes. When their wives work, men become involved in some house chores, which modifies certain male behaviors at their jobs. For example, fathers taking their children to day care centers must wake up earlier in order to arrive on time at work. Some men buy food and other supplies for their homes near their work places.

The high professional level of women has resulted in new ways of relating at work, very different from those traditional ones at home: relations between women and men managers; among men managers and women subordinated to them and vice versa; among women and men sharing in task forces; distributing vacation periods among women and men; deciding who will substitute for women on maternity leave; organizing tours for kids in primary schools during their three weeks of recesses; and sharing responsibilities and discussions at trade unions and political organizations.

#### *B. Disposition to Occupy Managerial Posts*

The answers according to gender were quite different.

Eight of the fifteen professional men presently hold managerial positions or have done so at some time. Eleven would like to work as managers. Only three of the fifteen women have worked as managers, and five would like to hold these managerial posts.

In Cuba in the year 2000, 33.5% of managers were women. Of all women workers, 6.5% were managers.<sup>6</sup> This has been the trend during the last ten years, for the percentage of women managers has increased just two points. It is a low proportion, considering that women have raised from half to two thirds of all professionals, which should be the natural supply for managers. In 2000, men represented 68.5% of all managers, although their proportion among professional workers had decreased.<sup>7</sup>

Men in the sample, who have been managers or are willing to become such, consider that they are qualified to perform these jobs, or wish to be trained. They are seeking these posts. According to them, they are qualified to perform as managers because they “have organizational competence;” “are qualified to establish goals and to accomplish them;” “like to lead;” are “capable to express their criteria and find solutions;” and “are good at establishing personal relations.”

Women explained why they did not want to become managers. Almost all of them admitted that they “are not prepared.” Others answered “it would rob me too much time and pays very little;” “it would overload the second shift;” “I prefer to

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<sup>6</sup>*See supra* note 3.

<sup>7</sup>*Id.*

keep training myself in my career than in managerial matters;" "it would take time from looking after my child;" "I have directed small groups, and enjoyed it. My managerial aspirations end there. At that level, I could see the fruits of my work, which would be impossible to evidence from a higher post;" "being a manager would not add anything to my personal aspirations;" and "I am already a decision maker at my work, in my field."

Nobody could infer from these answers that these professional women lack self-confidence. What actually happens is that they know what they want to accomplish in their fields of work, and they consider that being managers would be an obstacle.

The few women in the sample who were or had been managers, declared that they did not seek such posts. They had been appointed to those jobs. Some of them had previous experiences as trade union leaders at the work place level. They acknowledged that they have or had authority among their colleagues, are capable of solving problems and had to perform as managers, although they did not like it, but they responsibly worked at it.

Being women managers, and wanting to be so, is a part of the gender ideology, which has not been accomplished in Cuba. However, all conditions to fulfill this goal exist at the social level.

I have worked out five hypotheses, explaining why women's leadership at work has not been attained, and why this goal will be accomplished in the medium range.

First: Professional women, who should be the source of managers, appeared at the Cuban labor scenario as a strong and stable social figure in the threshold of the crisis of the '90s. During those crisis years, women workers, and not only the professionals, had to keep their jobs, in order to maintain their salaries, and add them to the family budgets, in case they were married, or play their roles as main bread winners (one third of all women workers headed their households in the middle of the '90s). As the real value of their salaries in pesos was depressed, they had to perform a second job that allowed them additional incomes. Working as managers did not allow them to earn enough money, either at that time or today. When managerial positions provide material motivations to those employed as such, then there will be more women inclined to become managers.

Second: Cuban managerial culture has been designed by men and for them, and this has to be transformed. Female students must be motivated to become leaders in organizations at the high school and university levels. Both ideas are being seriously worked out by the Federation of Cuban Women and the Council of Ministers.

Third: Professional women have the prerequisites to become managers. As part of the Cuban labor force, they are present in all economic sectors; they are two thirds of all professionals and have been the majority among them during the last twenty years; they have high educational levels; they perform complex tasks and are qualified to develop several activities simultaneously; they are decision makers in everyday life at their jobs and their homes; they have a relatively long labor curriculum, which begins at the labor grass-root level, which enables them to understand their labor environments; and they have all conditions to be trained as managers.

Fourth: When the conditions to promote women's access to managerial posts in Cuba flourish, it will be an irreversible process. One of the main reasons for this assertion is that the future women managers, as is the case of the present ones, have been "coming up," starting from the basic levels of the employment structures. They therefore know the different levels of complexity of the jobs they are going to lead.

It has been and will continue to be a “natural” process of constant feedbacks and learning.

Fifth: Women’s wide access to managerial posts cannot wait for radical transformation of Cuban patterns of patriarchal culture. It has to contribute powerfully to change these patterns. This was the case of women’s incorporation and permanence in the labor force since the ‘60s and ‘70s in Cuba, and has been widely argued by the Communist Party, the Federation of Cuban Women and the government. It is part of the Cuban model of women’s employment, which has taken place with actions and reactions from “the top-bottom” and from “the bottom-top” during more than forty years. It has included a comprehensive array of legal frameworks, social policies, economic measures, ideological actions and, basically, a strong political will and a wide participation of all society, not only women.

### *C. Working Women’s Influence at Home and at the Personal Level*

A woman sociologist interviewed said: “At the personal level, men acting according to patriarchal behaviors do not have to put on a mask, because in this scenario they do not have to obey the social rules or institutions prevailing in the sphere of labor or in other public ones, which prohibit such behaviors. In the personal and intimate spaces men freely conduct themselves as superior human beings.” The rest of the women in the sample agreed with this view. They explained that their husbands are jealous because they dress up to go to work, where they meet other men. Jealousy is sometimes veiled and otherwise it is simply aggressively expressed. But women always sense it. They feel permanently surveyed and judged by their partners. One of them observed: “People say that women are jealous, but in fact men surpass us, although some are very subtle in their ways.”

Women in the sample expressed that the fact that they are workers and professionals compel men at home, and not only their partners, to get involved in house chores. These women become role models to their daughters, in the sense that they want to become workers when they grow up. Their sons are growing up knowing that they will work with women and marry working women, whom they have to “respect.” They acknowledge, however, that they continue bringing up their sons with male oriented patterns. And as to their daughters, they teach them to use their “liberties” in a still very “macho” society.

Women accept that being professionals has made them more independent, not only in economic terms but also in decision making, and therefore, they do not have to suffer “unwanted” husbands. Some of them confessed that, as professionals, they cannot find stable partners. They pointed out some reasons for this. They compete with their partners in professional matters. Competition is worse if they develop similar careers. Other reasons for confrontations are when women earn higher salaries than their husbands, or worse, if they occupy leading posts and their partners do not. Professional women under thirty-five cannot find professional men as their partners, which is their expectation. This is practically impossible in Cuba, because during the last twenty years professional women exceeded professional men.

Many of the women in the sample have had several partners, and some of the reasons for breaking up are listed above. Cuban statistics confirm these trends.

Divorce rates in Cuba are high. In 2001, it was 3.3 for each 1000 inhabitants, while the marriage rate was 4.8 for each 1000 inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> Cuban social scientists

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<sup>8</sup>See [www.cubagob.cu/otras\\_info/one/indicadores\\_demog.htm](http://www.cubagob.cu/otras_info/one/indicadores_demog.htm).

have demonstrated that this trend has persisted for several years. Among the reasons for this is women's employment getting a divorce is easy, and the Cuban tradition of consensual unions rooted in colonial times (coming from slavery and the flow of male immigrants from Spain). Cuban social scientists Sonia Catusus, Olga Mesa and Digna Castañeda have argued in favor of these ideas, while new findings by historian Maria del Carmen Barcia explain that blacks in Cuba along the XIXth century formed their own families.

Women and men in the sample consider that working women have fewer children. In Cuba, the crude birth rate (children per woman) in 2001 was 1.53.<sup>9</sup> This rate has been decreasing for the last two decades, and Cuban scientists underline among the causes both the women's employment and the wide use of family planning policies free of charge. Sociologist Juan Carlos Alfonso insists on using a gender perspective when studying fertility in Cuba, in order to examine men's behaviors and not only women's. This relational approach would enable scholars to understand fertility as a matter involving men and women, and not only focusing on the latter, as is customary among demographers.

Women and men in the sample believe that women's employment has affected sexuality behaviors among Cubans. They noted that family planning policies, established since 1964 as part of the public health care system, permit women and men to separate the practice of sexuality from unwanted pregnancies. They added that sexual education programs taught throughout the educational system and directed to adults since the late 1970s, have allowed women to act sexually with a stronger sense of self-confidence and freedom. Respondents of both sexes consider that the fact that abortions are legal and practiced free of charge at the public health services, make women use them as contraceptive methods, which is a mistake, because they can harm their reproductive systems.

Men in the sample sparingly refer to the influence of working women at home and in their relations as part of a couple. As one of the women respondents said, they are afraid to acknowledge that they act in a more male oriented way in their private circles than at their workplaces. Therefore, they express that "men should be proud of women who are able to work and look after their house chores" and that "everyone must share domestic chores with women." Nevertheless, surveys carried out in Cuba in the 1990s show that working men spend twelve hours a week doing house chores, while women spend thirty-six hours. Two of the fifteen interviewed men declared that they must perform all house chores, while their wives are studying to upgrade their professional degrees. However, the social trend runs the opposite. This was the case of a university professor, who had just defended his PhD thesis, and was helping his wife at home while she wrote her PhD dissertation. Whenever he went out to the roof to dry the clothes he had washed, some neighbors mocked him and called him "Bacan." This was a character in a humorous and very popular Cuban TV program, who portrayed a man who was exploited by his working wife, because she made him stay at home and do all the house chores.

Some of the men in the sample confessed that they are highly attracted to professional women, but at the same time, they are afraid of them in the intimate sphere. Cuban studies on sexuality reveal that men feel threatened by "strong"

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<sup>9</sup>*Id.*



women in their sexual behaviors. Paradoxically, this challenge impels them to show their virility.

Women respondents said that, thanks to their jobs, they have met interesting men (and not so interesting ones); that they demand “equal pleasure” in their sexual relations; and that they ask them to use condoms, to prevent AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, although many do not like to use them. They admit that it is hard for them to find professional men as their partners, and that this has traumatized them, because they have high expectations when they are looking for their partners. This has made many of them stay alone, without stable partners.

*D. Do Men Blame Women for their Problems at Work, at their Homes and in their Intimate Relations?*

Practically all the men in the sample denied this. Only two considered that those who accept these words are “old timers” or “masked machistas.” Two others said that such guilt has to do with professional competence, and has nothing to do with gender differences.

Men veil their actual fears toward women at work, mainly those who compete with them, because they would be criticized by the anti-discriminatory rules prevailing in social spaces.

Women in the sample repeated the same ideas expressed previously. They believe that men react paradoxically toward professional women, at least in Cuba, because they feel attracted to and threatened by them. They fear competing with them “designing projects at work and fulfilling their ‘responsibilities’ in bed.” They consider that men are attracted because this challenge promotes their desire to conquer this “difficult prey,” but if they are able to do so, their male ego would be lifted. Women in the sample also said that this “conquering process” happens also at work. There, men have to show that they are better trained than their female colleagues and they are compelled to impose their leadership status, therefore reassuring their “official” power.

Almost two thirds of the women confessed that men feel threatened by women at their jobs. They named the following reasons: professional women are better prepared than men in terms of educational levels; professional women, who do not work as managers, spend more time developing their specializations and gaining more knowledge in their fields than men who lead them, which could lead to conflicts between well trained subordinate professional women and men leaders who are dedicated more to bureaucratic activities; professional women can organize their schedules better, thanks to their activities at their jobs and at their homes; men fear that women could take their managerial posts from them; in the annual evaluations, women accomplish more tasks than men; men underestimate women’s intellectual abilities, although they don’t declare it; women are less dependent on men; men feel menaced by women’s economic independence, but they need their incomes for the family budget.

II. SOCIALIZATION PROCESSES, WHICH CONDITIONED CHANGES IN GENDER IDEOLOGY IN CUBA

I asked the respondents to comment on some cultural patterns, which ruled in Cuban society during their childhood, adolescence and their early adulthood, and which influenced them and society as a whole in becoming men and women. I also asked them to explain how they had benefited from several measures, included in the

revolutionary project to struggle against women's discrimination and to promote women's role in society. Finally, professionals in the sample reflected upon six popular Cuban sayings, which are highly sexually biased.

#### *A. Cultural Patterns in Childhood*

Men and women in the sample pondered about the tradition to dress girls in pink and boys in blue.

All the men said that this was correct, because pink is a "delicate," "feminine" and "sweet" color. If boys use pink, they will be considered homosexuals. Women reacted more flexibly. They all admitted that this is an old tradition, which some parents follow and others do not. Eleven out of the fifteen professional women considered that girls have the advantage of dressing in pink and blue, "specially after blue jeans are so popular," But boys are not allowed to dress in pink. Many of the women respondents added as something positive, that primary school uniforms are burgundy red for both sexes. By the way, primary students surveyed in the early 70's, selected red as the color they preferred for their uniforms. There was little or no preference for blue and pink.

Games for boys and girls was another topic in the interview. Even the youngest respondents, both men and women, said that their parents lead them to play with children of their own sex. This sexual division of roles is highly visible when they are playing in their neighborhoods. Boys play baseball on the streets, or they practice whatever sport is popular on TV at given times. Girls play inside their houses or in their porches with dolls; they organize "schools" or "homemaking." Outdoors they play "hop-scotch" or jump the rope. Both sexes ride bicycles and roller-skates or play hide and seek together or in their separated groups. At the day care centers, public institutions for infants up to five years old, where the majority of the working women's children have attended, there is a policy headed to promote that boys and girls exchange roles while they are playing. However, sex biases in games prevail when they are free to decide who to play with. At primary schools, attended by 100% of all Cuban children from five to eleven years of age, classmates of both sexes jointly participate in sports, camping and cultural activities. But they divide by sexes when they play during recesses. Cuban psychologist Patricia Ares, who has studied how masculine identities are constructed in Cuba, explains that Cuban men are not trained either during childhood or adolescence to adjust themselves to the enormous changes, which have taken place in gender ideology, and which emerge essentially from women's development. When they are kids, they are forbidden to cry or to express pain. This leads them to be unable to freely express their feelings. They are compelled to fight with other boys who challenge them, even if they are bigger. This promotes violent behaviors. They are not appointed to perform house chores, and this does not train them to participate in the second shift.

Girls have more opportunities to act less dogmatically than boys. While playing as "school teachers," they invite younger boys to be their pupils, and therefore have the possibility to exercise power on them. Girls can cry whenever they wish to, and they can fight others (even boys). In the class rooms, they compete with boys, and win, because they have better grades than them. They lead the children's organizations (pioneers).

*B. Cultural Patterns in Adolescence*

“Sweet fifteen” is a very popular Cuban tradition. Today it is widespread, but before 1959 it was mainly celebrated among social groups which could afford it.

The majority of men and women in the sample agree that parents should make every possible effort to celebrate this party for their girls, because it means “entering adolescence.” They said it is “something beautiful,” “it happens only once in the girls’ life” and “it is the best thing that can happen to a girl.” Only three men and three women considered that this party is a way to “show off” economic resources which parents don’t really have.

At present, these “sweet fifteen” parties underline the most sexist traits of what it means to be a woman. They dress in pink, with long dresses full of ruffles. They pin flowers in their hair. The father “gives away” his daughter to her escort for that evening, and they dance a waltz with fourteen other couples. Girls change outfits several times to pose for the camera. What is interestingly paradoxical is that these same girls, who enact all these sexist roles, started attending junior high schools at twelve, under the same coeducational system they have been attending since day care centers. They work and live in camps in agricultural farms together with boys, away from their parents, for fifteen days every year. They continue having better grades than boys. They go out in mixed groups to parties, the movies or just for walks. They practice the same sports as boys: softball, basketball, volleyball, track and field, martial arts, etc. They openly date, and they can become pregnant. They attend high school at boarding schools, and visit their families on weekends. Therefore, the “sweet fifteen” parties are a sort of temporary “freezing” of gender role interactions among teenagers. But it has become a socially indispensable “freezing.”

Respondents pointed at certain contradictory behaviors during adolescence. Young women continue being better students than boys, but the latter lead the students’ organizations, which was not the case in primary level. Cuban scholars consider that one of the reasons for this behavior is that girls are more interested in their training to enroll in the university, and that their parents promote this interest. Boys and girls “uncover” their sexuality, guided by patterns committing boys to demonstrate their virility: they must have sex frequently, and perform it efficiently; they must have many girlfriends, and they should not reject girls who approach them. Cuban public institutions promote “responsible sexual behavior,” including the use of all resources of family planning, but adolescent pregnancy is still a problem.

*C. Cultural Patterns at the University*

Women’s enrollment at the higher educational levels in Cuba is higher than men’s, as was explained before. This is due, partially, to the fact that access to the university considers the average grades of students during their high school years plus the grades of the entrance test to the university. As part of the sexist traditions along all educational levels, girls are better students than boys. During the last years, the percentage of young women graduating from high school is higher than young men (in the course 2001-2002 girls represented 60% ).

Another reason to be considered is the General Military Service (GMS). Young men who leave school after graduating from ninth grade, which is the compulsory educational level in Cuba, and are sixteen years old, have to enroll in this service. This is also the case of those who graduate from twelfth grade and are not admitted to the university, plus those who are admitted, but have to pass one year at the GMS

before entering the university. Of these three groups serving in the GMS, the first two generally do not enroll in the university after they finish their military service. What they usually do is start working. The professional men in the sample explain this behavior with two reasons. "They want to become independent from their parents" and "they want to start earning money to create their future families," because they consider themselves the main bread winners.

Respondents of both sexes believe that women students continue to act according to the cultural patterns followed through high school: they have better academic records than boys, and do not wish to lead students' organizations. Students of both sexes increase their independence from their families, especially if they are living in students' dormitories. Men and women in the sample said that the students' sexual patterns at this stage are "totally independent" for both sexes. As was the case during high school, young men cannot reject "sexual approaches" from women, while the latter can refuse them from men. Students of both sexes accept gays and lesbians. They start living in couples at some of the parent's houses or at the dorms.

Respondents of both sexes consider that at this stage of their lives, young men and women are preparing conditions to incorporate themselves into the labor sphere. They elaborate strategies to get the jobs they want during the two years of "social service," which is a period when all university graduates are assigned to jobs. They try to start working in places which offer them the possibility of doing a second job, in order to increase their incomes. At this point, there were differences among the respondents over fifty years of age and those averaging around thirty-two years of age. There were no differences concerning sex. The older ones said that they could fulfill the professional expectations they had when they graduated. They also feel satisfied with their careers, in spite of the difficulties suffered during the crisis of the 1990s and the decrease in their salaries. This is not the case among the younger professionals. They declared that they had very high expectations for their future jobs, which have not been completely fulfilled, because of the crisis of the 1990s. Their salaries are relatively low; they were assigned to jobs during the two years of social services which did not meet their aspirations; they could not study abroad as their parents or members of previous generations had, who finished their BAs, MBAs and PhDs in the Soviet Union or in other ex-socialist countries. These high expectations were promoted by the upward social mobility that Cuban society experienced during the 60s, the 70s and the 80s, and by their parents.

According to these reflections and realities, I infer that men in the sample are less prepared than women to act flexibly before the challenges they encounter in Cuban every day life while playing their roles as men and women. Men's gender ideology seems to be more inflexible than women's, because they have been required to act according to more dogmas than girls during childhood and adolescence. Maybe they are as repressed as women or are even more repressed. The same course of arguments could happen when analyzing the myth of women's insecurity. These are hypotheses needing more analysis.

#### *D. Benefits of Certain Measures to Promote Cuban Women*

I selected several measures or actions enacted since the early 60s to promote Cuban women's participation in society, and asked women and men in the sample to comment on how they personally benefited from them –in the case of women- and –in the case of men- how they helped women. These measures are: daycare centers for newborn children from forty-five days old up to five years of age (1961); a

variety of public health services –breast and uterine cancer tests; vaccinations; access to institutions at all levels of public health (family doctors, polyclinics, hospitals, specialized research centers); family planning policies (1964); free education from nurseries to PhDs (1961); the right of all those working for the State to a paid month's vacation every year; scholarships for all students needing them at all levels of education; the Maternity Law of 1974, included in the Labor Code, regulating maternity leaves for working women. It was modified in 1993 in order to extend the length of time given to mothers to look after their newly born children; and the Family Code (1975).

I divided the answers according to the two age groups of the respondents: older than fifty and around thirty-two years of age.

The members of the first group were at least six years old in 1959. They benefited from the upward social mobility experimented by society as a whole, and especially by those coming from low income families. They knew these policies and profited from them. Their answers show that these policies or measures helped them finish high school and even graduate from universities in the ex-socialist countries. They used them also to join the work force and stay in it. They saw how much the quality of life in Cuba increased, and they observed the gains and obstacles in the struggle against women's discrimination. I will point out two examples. A lawyer said: "The Family Code is a very advanced document. However, in spite of the many divorces in Cuba, no one has used as causes to ask for their divorce the two articles which legalize shared responsibilities among married couples." A professional woman said: "I consider that free education and health services have created 'cultures of education and health care' among all Cubans. As everyone knows they are free, and some of them are compulsory (education up to ninth grade; vaccinations; prenatal consultations and those for the newly born), people use them without paying attention to its meaning. They consider that they are 'things they are entitled to'. And they do not understand how many 'headaches' you relieve yourself from, mainly when your children are growing up."

Women and men of the younger group commented very little on these measures. They barely answered with a "yes, it benefited me," and that was all. I infer that they used these measures as something they were entitled to, and they did it in a natural way. I add that their parents contributed to these attitudes, since they wanted their children to continue climbing the social ladder, even more than they did, and they tried to make sure that their children did not suffer from the scarcities they lived through.

The crisis of the 1990s, which has been extensively studied by Cuban scholars, put a "ceiling" to the aspirations of these younger professionals.

The case of women professionals from both age groups needs another reflection. In the threshold of the crisis, mainly at the end of the 1980s, these women entered the Cuban labor scenario to stay and to increase their presence. These professional women could not fulfill their expectations dealing with jobs, salaries and infrastructure to improve their living standards, as had been the case with professional men up to that moment. Moreover, during the crisis they were the ones who worked out survival strategies to maintain their jobs and to insure their families' well being. The State policies enacted during these years to help the country surpass the crisis were the framework that helped individual survival strategies. Women came out of this crisis with a high social recognition, much more than men were granted.

The professional men and women in the sample are the result of the socializing processes, which have constructed a contradictory and an ever changing gender ideology, with more gains than losses, which exists at present in Cuba. With their own words and based on their personal experiences they referred to these processes in this part of the presentation.

#### *E. Popular Sayings on Cuban Women*

The respondents commented on six popular sayings, strongly sex biased. As they are commonly used in Cuba today, I considered that they manifest trends in gender ideology in my country.

“Every woman needs a man beside her, who is able to represent her.”

Two thirds of the men in the sample said that this is false. However, some of them added “explanations,” which reflected doubts of women’s complete independence. Here are some examples: “Women are physically and spiritually beautiful, and they don’t need anyone to represent them. But, as men are stronger, when a woman and a man form a couple, the man must make decisions, because he is more energetic, and answers more quickly.” “This saying undervalues women, although they always need a good man beside them.”

Those men who consider that the contents of the saying are true, underline the idea that men are the main bread winners at their homes, and they are the ones who decide. “The majority of Cuban women wish to marry men capable of fulfilling their desire to be maintained economically.” “Every woman who respects herself must have a strong man beside her to defend her.”

Women in the sample strongly refused the sexist contents of the saying. Of the fifteen respondents, just one acknowledged that this happens “sometimes.” The rest expressed their feelings with the following words: “It ridicules women, because they portray us as dependent to men.” “It grotesquely discriminates women.” “Men appear as the most capable, the best, the ‘supers’ who maintain their homes, and this is nonsense in Cuba.” “Men are needed as persons to share material and spiritual needs. But I don’t need them to represent me.” “I represent myself.” “Women who think that way have lost their economic independence, and have fallen behind the rest of society.”

“Women have to give birth, in order to trap their men, and tie them to their hems.”

All male respondents disagreed with this saying. They said: “It is a mistake, because children do not tie up marriages.” “What is more important is love among members of the couple.” “Children do not tie up men, when they fall in love with other women.” “Men grow accustomed to live without their children, and life goes on.” “Women who say so, undervalue themselves, and are unable to trap their men.” These masculine reactions could reflect that many Cubans, when they divorce their wives, divorce their children as well, in spite of the laws that oblige men to fulfill their parenthood responsibilities. They also underline the myth that women are the sole or main parent responsible for bringing up their children. And they reinforce men’s supremacy in love relations: they are the valuable preys, which must be ‘hunted’ and ‘kept.’

All women rejected the saying, considering it a lie. They said it is “stupid,” “a lie” and “immature.” But they agree with the men in the sense that children belong to their mothers, for they are responsible to bring them up and take care of them during all their lives, whether they are separated from the fathers or stay married to

them. This evidences the relevance of motherhood in women's identity in Cuba. They declared: "Children belong to their mothers." "Mothers have to take care of their children, because this is their main role." "It's a joke that children tie up men." "When men divorce their wives, they divorce their children as well." "Men stay beside women, while they feel attracted by them." "Only when men see that their children are grown ups, when they confirm that they are prepared for life, then they return for them."

"Women have to be mothers in the first place, then workers and lovers."

Thirteen out of the fifteen men answered that this is true, because to be a mother is the basic responsibility of a woman. Only three of them considered that the three roles could be performed simultaneously. This is what the men said: "It is true, because many women have been more involved with their jobs than with their children." "The most important role of woman is to take care of her children." "Cubans always say: my mother goes first of all." "Women who constantly are changing their partners, end leaving out their roles as workers and as mothers."

Women in the sample expressed that those three roles must be played simultaneously. I selected the following expressions: "The three situations run together, although the most important role has to do with children." "To be a mother is the main condition of a woman, but the three roles must be played together." "You have to be able to combine all three." "You have to be a mother first of all, but you have to work in order to maintain your child."

"I don't want intruders in my kitchen."

Ten out of fifteen men said that this is not true, especially if it concerns working and professional women. They esteem, at least verbally, that men should "help" and "collaborate" with women in the kitchen, although it implies more work for men. One of them said: "If he can't cook, then he can wash dishes, or peel vegetables, or mop the floor." Men who considered that the saying is true, commented that "women who say so, do it because they do not believe in collective work," or "I don't question that. Congratulations!"

All women respondents believe that the saying is false. They insist that everyone in the house must "help" women, unconsciously reinforcing the idea that women are "naturally" responsible of the kitchen. They believe that they must train men; that all help must be decided and directed by women, because men waste too much. Three of the women used the same phrase as the professional women I interviewed in 2000: "I give away the kitchen to whoever wants it."

"The situation is so bad, that if my wife leaves me for another guy, I'll join both of them."

Respondents of both sexes rejected this saying.

Men felt more criticized than women: they are portrayed as "betrayed," "horned," "cuckold," "immoral," they lose their women, because they are incapable of maintaining them; they run after their lost women and their new couples, so they can maintain him. They also managed the idea that "a man never shares what belongs to him, even during the worst situations." Several acknowledged that it is true that nowadays men and women marry those who have more money than their previous partners, as a personal way to run away from the bad economic conditions prevailing in Cuba. "There are certain 'abandoned' men and women, who agree to be supported economically," said one of the men in the sample. All agreed that the content of the saying is shameful, and none of the men laughed at it.

The female respondents considered that the saying is discriminatory toward women, for both male actors -the one who is left behind and the new one- treat them as their private property. "Only pimps act like that," reacted one of the women. Most of the respondents believe that it does not reflect how Cuban men act. Many laughed at it, contrary to men's "seriousness."

"The man is the one who wears pants at home, and is in command."

Women and men in the sample answered that this is a very old saying, and has nothing to do with today's reality in Cuba.

Women pointed out its discriminatory meaning. According to it, women are unable to make decisions, and they are not bread winners. It is superficial, because it identifies manhood and power with a piece of cloth. It is outdated, for women and men wear pants nowadays. Wearing a skirt does not mean that women are "dumb." "Power is not reflected in what you dress." "If men want to make decisions at home, because they wear pants, I'll let them do it. I'm fed up with it! Let's give them a try!"

The following ideas, constructed after analyzing the answers to the sayings, approach the question of how much gender ideology has changed among men and women in the sample.

The myth of the "woman-mother" is sustained by respondents of both sexes, with certain differences. Men use it to get away from their children, while women accept the role, strongly criticizing men who abandon their parental responsibilities.

Women acknowledge their capability to perform simultaneously their roles as mothers, workers and lovers, insisting that the first is the most important one.

Men criticize women for having affairs with several men, arguing that they put aside their roles as mothers and workers. On the other hand, women criticize men who are womanizers, because they do not take care of their children.

Women explain their points of view concerning the sayings, arguing much more than men do. Maybe this is due to the fact that they have lived through the "settings" of subordination described in the sayings, and have experienced the difficulties of running away from these situations. Men are less reflexive, because they have acted their roles in a passive way, roles assigned them by the traditional patriarchal society. Women have constructed new attitudes in Cuban society, while men are being compelled to deconstruct them, and they have not done this completely. They have not formulated the new ideas and behaviors, which the changes in Cuban society require.

As women have simultaneously performed roles as mothers, workers and wives, they have generated more abilities in life, including decision making.

Women's preponderant role in the double shift persists. It is expressed in the sayings referring to child care and the kitchen. When respondents use the verb "to help" regarding men's participation in house chores, they are using a sexist language. "Help", in this case, means that Nature has made women responsible for domestic work.

### III. CONCLUSION

Changes in Cuban gender ideology summarized in this paper, have taken place thanks to a social project, aimed at transforming the economic, political and ideological structures of an underdeveloped society. Its basic goals are to construct an independent society, with justice for all, struggling against all forms of discrimination, and improving the quality of life of all of its members.



Women's decision making abilities are the most important changes in gender ideology. They not only empower women as human beings, but insure them their right to act independently. This is a basic civil right, which was denied to women in the past.

Cuban women have generated the major transformations in gender relations, much more than men.

Scholars should continue studying the Cuban model of promoting women's development, emphasizing their incorporation into employment and changes in gender ideology. These studies should include the developments in these fields during the crisis of the 1990s.

Research on Cuban masculinity should continue, as well as relational studies focusing on women and men.

Comparative studies with other regions of the world should also be developed on topics of gender ideology.