

Abstract

Title: *La Mujer Sufrida*. The Suffering Woman

- Narratives on Femininity among Women in a Nicaraguan *barrio*

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This dissertation explores the construction of femininity among mestiza women in a Nicaraguan low-income neighbourhood called San Ramón. It is an ethnographic study, including participate observation and the collection of lifestories.

The general aim of the work is to capture definitions and meanings of femininity as situated in time and space. It is assumed that Nicaraguan women and men become gendered through and within the spatial and temporal division of street and house, *la casa* and *la calle*, the latter associated with men and masculinity and the former with women and femininity. One of the main questions investigated is the ways in which femininity is being created within the house as a specific social and relational setting. The dissertation argues that the notion of being a hard-working and self-sacrificing housekeeper guides the activities of the house.

Another basic assumption of this work is, that social and personal identities are constituted through narrativity. By using lifestories as a method, the ways that fifteen women represent themselves as daughters, wives and mothers are explored. The lifestories have been analysed in terms of content, form and the interaction between the narrator and the researcher. The book suggests that the women depict themselves through a rethoric of suffering and that this suffering is related primarily to their identities as wives. The cause of female suffering is attributed men's actions and inherent polygamous "nature".

Furthermore, it is argued that the women create themselves as suffering women by shifting between the positions of heroine and victim, linked to the emotions of pride and shame respectively. Finally, a third position is acknowledged, linked to the display of self-assertion. The dissertation recognises the representation of *la mujer sufrida*, the suffering woman, as being characterised by contradiction, multiplicity and flux.

Keywords: Femininity, gender, women, narrative, identity, Nicaragua, suffering, time/space, reflexive ethnography, feminism, the house.