Introduction

Perhaps the song the DJ was playing was "María Rosa," which states, "She provokes you with her dancing/She is waiting for you to buy her a drink/She is a very easy girl/Her panties are very loose/If you don't take her to your bed,/she gets very angry." Or it could have been "Se Te Ve la Tanga," whose lyrics say, "You dance in a miniskirt; it makes me laugh/because we can see your thong, and you can't wait/to be taken by the hand and invited to a motel/You don't do it for money; you just do it for pleasure." David, one of the members of our research team, still can't remember which song it was. However, he does remember clearly what happened with the three girls he met briefly that night at one of the hundreds of *bailes* or *bailantas* [cumbia dance halls] that are packed each weekend with low-income young people who, joining a scene that has experienced explosive growth, go to dance to variations of cumbia music—including, most prominently, cumbia villera [shantytown cumbia].[1]

As he and a member of the group he was with were walking toward the bar, three girls younger than twenty, with braids and bangs and dressed identically in rolled-up sweatpants, tiny tops, and sneakers deliberately crossed their path. They fixed their eyes on the guys, and one said, "Wouldn't it be great if some sharp guy bought us a drink?" David looked at his friend Alejandro and, laughing, the young men turned away. Apparently, however, the girls took the laughter personally: a minute later, one of them butted her head into the middle of David's back. Surprised by the girl's reaction, David turned around, came face to face with her, and said, "Are you crazy, friend? How can you hit me like that? Do you think you're some kind of rich girl?" (an insult in this lower-class milieu), to which she responded, waving her hands in his face, "Hold on, prick. You think you're some kind of hot dick, but you're really a jerk. . . . You can't

treat me like that."[2] At that point, Alejandro tugged David's arm to get him to leave, and the other girls grabbed the headbutter. David said, "You're really crazy, friend. That's not the way to go about it," and the incident came to an end.

The lyrics of popular cumbia villera songs and the behavior of some girls who go to the bailes to dance to those lyrics reveal the profound changes that gender relations in the popular sectors of Argentina in general, and in Buenos Aires in particular, have undergone in the past decade.[3] Linked to the activation of women and expressed and fueled by the lyrics, music, choreography, and performances of cumbia villera songs,[4] the relationships between low-income young men and women have definitively changed. The goal of this book is to try to understand the most important vectors of the problematic gender scenario that now characterizes how young people of Argentina's popular sectors relate to one another.

In the chapters that follow, we present a brief history of cumbia villera and then analyze the complex and contradictory ways in which its lyrics portray this activation of women. From there, we move to how young men interpret the new attitudes of the girls they relate to, interpretations that range from the idea that cumbia villera portrays young women as they actually are to positions that point out that girls have become much more sexually proactive since cumbia villera lyrics appeared. What young women think about how cumbia villera lyrics portray them and their new sexual behavior is the topic of Chapter 4. On the one hand, they like their newly acquired sexual freedom; on the other, however, many do not like how cumbia villera lyrics portray the changes in their gender and sexual repertoires.

Cumbia villera is one of the most popular dance genres in contemporary Buenos Aires and is thus the perfect scene to study how gender relations have changed. Since its popularization in the late 1950s and early 1960s by groups such as El Cuarteto Imperial and Los Wawancó, cumbia, which originated in Colombia, has become a dance of choice in Argentina's popular sectors. While the genre initially followed the format made popular by the pioneering groups, it underwent a variety of mixtures with Argentine folk rhythms. Cumbia villera, a more electric variant of cumbia in which keyboards usually replace the traditional accordion and an electric drum set replaces acoustic percussion, developed in the 1990s. Thus, cumbia villera developed from a genre that had already been hybridized in Colombia, its country of origin.

Cumbia villera uses a limited register—generally a fifth—for its melodies, which is very accessible to untrained voices. The binary meter, in a moderate tempo, supports two rhythmic levels: the patient redundancy of the quarter-eight-eight figures, which represent the Andean element and simultaneously serve as a background for the rhythmic intervention of the Afro-Colombian level, and a sputter of syncopated rhythms released by the Latin percussion. All of these musical resources are enveloped by the sophisticated electronic sound that helps to sever many kinds of popular music from their places of origin and adapt them not only to international circulation but also to local re-terri-

torialization, as cumbia villera demonstrates. A very important non-musical element—the lyrics—has helped to give the cumbia genre its local specificity in Argentina.

There are several ways to dance cumbia villera that are related not only to the setting of the dance (e.g., bailes versus homes) but also to the many possibilities the rhythm suggests and the steps' uncomplicated choreography compared with salsa or merengue. Cumbia can be danced either by couples or in groups, which adds another layer of variety. We sketch here only two widespread ways to dance to cumbia—one linked to cumbia romántica [romantic cumbia], which we describe as traditional, and the other, meneaito [to wiggle], a more modern step that generally is danced only by women.

Traditional, or romantic, cumbia is danced, almost without exception, by couples holding hands. The choreography is similar to that of salsa, but the rhythm can be faster, and it consists of a combination of steps in four movements in which feet are moved back and forth and from side to side. The genre is characterized by very marked movements of the hips and waist; women's movements are more pronounced than men's. The male partner is in charge of turning the female partner around (as in rock and salsa), taking the lead role. The ideal way to dance cumbia is to travel around the entire dance floor.

The meneaito is a more individualistic way to dance. It features a step in which the dancer opens her legs with her knees apart and, moving her pelvis in circles, descends toward the floor. The move is then repeated to stand straight again. As this description illustrates, meneaito is a much more provocative dance step than those used in romantic cumbia, and when women dance it, they attract a lot of attention. Interestingly, romantic cumbia and meneaito are not exclusive to particular dance halls or groups of people; generally, they are combined and danced consecutively. Many people know how to dance both, but meneaito requires more expertise, and fewer people actually dare to dance it. Over time, meneaito has inspired other sexualized ways to dance to cumbia villera that are either variations of or innovations on the original step.

Finally, as noted, people dance to cumbia villera in halls popularly called *bailantas* or *bailes*. The venues are widespread in and around Buenos Aires and attract young people from the popular sectors. Entrance tickets to bailantas are relatively cheap; the consumption of alcohol is very high; and, thanks to laws whose execution depends heavily on negotiations among local mayors, the police, audiences, and entrepreneurs, the venues usually allow minors (sometimes as young as thirteen or fourteen).

Bailes offer both recorded music played by DJs and live music—usually one or two short performances (twenty to thirty minutes each)—by popular cumbia villera combos. The venues often resemble warehouses with dance floors in front of the stage, bars where drinks are sold, restrooms, places to check coats and jackets, and some seats that double as private booths for couples or for people who just want to sit for a while on the sidelines. Many provide special-effects lighting of the dance floor and, more markedly, the stage,

which makes the spaces look more like disco dance clubs than traditional cumbia venues.

Antecedents for the Treatment of Cumbia Villera, a Highly Sexualized Genre

In this book, we discuss the complex relationship many young men and women in Argentina have with the seemingly sexist and obscene lyrics of cumbia villera, which often portray young women as "sluts." In the process, we also show how a certain activation of women's sexuality is at play and how this activation produces the fear that the male-centered lyrics and men's commentaries about them seem to depict. That is, as Terry Lovell (2003, 4) points out, "Through performances that have no prior authorization in social norms," some young women in Buenos Aires are contributing to the derailing of sexist institutional norms and doing so "with authority."

Studies of music and identity are relatively rare in Argentina, which makes providing a thorough review of the literature and a positioning of the topic at hand in relation to that literature, as is mandatory in social science research, difficult. In most cases, only a small amount of previous research is available from which to glean ideas or with which to contrast our findings. Thus, most scholars of Argentine music have to rely (very unwillingly) on what has been written about similar musical genres elsewhere to "position" their research in the academic field. This creates a problem and an opportunity simultaneously: problematizing a particular musical phenomenon without taking the historical processes that make it unique into account can produce perverse effects of interpretive projection. However, if one is fully aware of those possible effects, it is still possible to illuminate the phenomenon under investigation and, at the same time, reveal the situated character of the interpretive proposals. This productive tension has been a constant in our research, and its outcome is a radicalization of the anthropological dimension that is its guiding muse.

Thus, while the genre of popular music we are studying approximately resembles something "out there" (e.g., there are variations of cumbia in several Latin American countries), during the research process our perspectives on the topic changed gradually, enabling us to understand the idiosyncrasies of cumbia villera in a novel manner. On the basis of an interpretation that recognizes the feminist perspective but, at the same time, radicalizes and singularizes its effects (we fully understand gender power dynamics and the need to dismantle male domination in both society and the social sciences), we stress the singular historical circumstances in which cumbia villera occurs to make visible nuances and complexities that we believe are very important. In addition, the current conditions of the performance of our research subject are so idiosyncratic that any comparison with musical genres elsewhere makes little sense.[5]

While looking for ideas on how to analyze gender relationships in cumbia villera, we did not find much previous academic research done in Argentina,

but we did find a few path-breaking studies done in Latin America on salsa and bachata (Aparicio 1998; Pacini Hernandez 1995). Therefore, our analysis of cumbia villera lyrics is influenced by what Deborah Pacini Hernandez and especially Frances Aparicio found in their research (which was highly influenced by feminism's second wave), but it departs from it in most cases, because the complex web of linguistic and non-linguistic practices (what we call "discourses") in which these lyrics are performed and interpreted (what we call the different layers of enunciation of the lyrics) is completely different. In this regard, as we pointed out earlier, we are fully aware that gender power relationships are constitutive of any social interaction, and as such they should always be present in any analysis of the social. But at the same time, we agree with Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley (1998, 159–160) when they point out that "most men benefit from patriarchal practices and most women do not. There is certainly a considerable 'patriarchal dividend' most men accrue which produces masculine characters. But it is also possible to identify 'subordinate masculinities' and complicit masculinities' where the alignment with hegemonic forms of masculinity is more complex" (see also Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985; Connell 1995).

In addition, we believe that gender power relationships are only one component (one of the most important, to be sure) of any social relationship, and such a universal presence is always actualized in a singular way because it is shaped by all of the other components of the particular whole to which it belongs.

If this is so, to fully understand how those power relations work in the specific case of cumbia villera, we need a brief detour to offer the reader background information about gender relations in contemporary Argentina, especially in Buenos Aires. It is also necessary to make explicit certain assumptions relative to how popular-sector experience is taken into account, paying special attention to the ever-present risk of underestimating the racism and classism that disavow the perspectives of social groups that, although part of the same society, are different and distant from the academic world.

Sexualization

In 1997, at a very special fifteenth birthday party, a girl opened her presents, announcing to the guests what each contained. Suddenly she fell silent and blushed, and the audience laughed when she showed the gift: erotic lingerie. The situation, which would have caused concern in any adult—at least, in those not present there—was striking, not only because of the event itself but also because it took place at a Pentecostal church, the female pastor laughing along with the rest. This first clue, which became a conviction over time, opened up a line of research whose results we have published in a series of articles (see, e.g., Gallo and Semán 2009, 2012; Gallo, Semán, and Spataro 2011; Semán 2010; Silba and Vila 2010; Vila and Semán 2006, 2008) and, with the addition of new data, is the subject of this book.

We postulate that in the course of the past two decades, sexual practices among young people from the popular urban sectors in Argentina have undergone a change that "has led to the erosion of their taboo nature, to sex being considered in an 'objective' light as a source of pleasure, amusement and interpersonal knowledge, and to sexual practices assuming explicit, visible and, according to a certain morality, 'transgressive' forms (a heteronormative morality and/or based on a romantic commitment emphasizing certain specific limits in the physical expression of love and in the number of participants in a sexual act)" (Gallo and Semán 2009). Or, to put it more succinctly, "There is a perceptible shift in the way young people who belong to the popular sectors perceive and perform sex, a shift that clearly goes towards the notion of sex as self-pleasure—as indulgence, treat, luxury and, above all, a right" (Silba and Vila 2010, 2). This shift, of course, closely resembles what is occurring in many Western cultures, in which Anthony Giddens (1992, 58) has underlined the contemporary plasticity of identities and with regard to which William Simon (1996, 29) and Feona Attwood (2006, 87) have described the decentered and dislocated sexualized expression of these identities anchored in individual desire.

The central theme that traverses the book is this: cumbia, especially cumbia villera, is linked both to the heteronormative and to the sexist dynamics that are present in most Latin American societies, as well as to certain dynamics of cultural change that tend to pluralize and objectify the sexual plane. In other words, this is a cultural change that has led to an increasingly diversified series of gender positions and relations that, at the same time, are formulated in terms of plain sexual practices—not simply in terms of courtship, seduction, or suggestion. Sex is the recurrent subject of everyday dialogue; it reigns in the mass media and, consequently, is present in both the production of music and the uses to which music is put.

As is happening in most Western countries, in Argentina we are living in what many scholars call a "sexualized culture," in which sex functions as a privileged site through which the ordinary, the personal, and the individual are embodied in the public sphere:

> "Sexualized culture" [is] a rather clumsy phrase used to indicate a number of things: a contemporary preoccupation with sexual values, practices and identities; the public shift to more permissive sexual attitudes; the proliferation of sexual texts; the emergence of new forms of sexual experience; the apparent breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay . . . ; all those manifestations that indicate that in our era, "Sex . . . has become the Big Story." (Plummer 1995, 4; quoted in Attwood 2006, 78–79)

In Argentina, sex as subject matter has broadened its scope and is thematized as never before. It has assumed a plurality of forms in the space where

products originating in the cultural industry circulate, running from Internet blogs to television programs during family viewing hours, formerly "protected" from sex exhibitions that were considered off-limits by a sexist ideology. This phenomenon is intricately intertwined with the gender positions and relations that characterize the everyday life of social actors, singularizing the kinds of gender relations generated through music. Thus, although sexism exists in most societies, and in most of Argentine society, in general, it articulates itself in particular as a peculiar relation of forces that is traversed by dimensions that are different from asymmetrical relationships between genders but, at the same time, intervene in them in complex ways. As a result, the norm (the asymmetrical relationship that is the effect of an androcentric definition of gender) becomes no more than an abstraction (the isolation of one feature and the taking of it as the whole).

In other words, sexism exists in every society. The novelty is that, impelled by women (even women from social sectors associated with traditional sexism and machismo) and through sex, a dense, conflictive sense of gender positions and gender and sexual interests is developing that has made the Argentine situation complex and idiosyncratic. It is precisely this idiosyncrasy that is made invisible by one-dimensional analyses limited to demonstrating masculine domination in general.

In terms that can only be precarious, it can be said that these interrelated dynamics are the context for the elaboration, reception, and putting into practice of the musical contents brought to bear by groups that interpret cumbia. In other words, the sexualization and objectification of sexuality that is found in the milieu in which cumbia villera circulates are present in a much broader series of social relations while also being part and parcel of the way this music is produced and received—as is the case for many other juvenile genres.

In this sense, in contemporary Argentina, as elsewhere in the Western world, gender relations (a tautological expression, because gender by definition is a relationship) are changing. In complex association with other aspects of Argentine society, the ways in which men and women relate to each other are quite different from what they were, let us say, thirty years ago. Those changes are not uniform, and different people in different social situations experience them differently. In fact, those transformations are not uniform in the everyday experience of a single individual either, because the changes impinge differently on his or her diverse identifications. Gender, like many other subject positions (age, ethnicity, race, and the like), is always articulated in how people live their other identifications as classed people, ethnic people, and so on. However, some common trends regarding gender can be identified, and those shared trends can be a good point of departure for understanding what cumbia villera adds to the picture of gender relations in Buenos Aires today.

Some of the changes we refer to have been at least forty years in the making and are related to what was called the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Others

are more recent and are linked to the profound change Argentine society has experienced in the past twenty years or so. In terms of the so-called sexual revolution, one of the most important changes was the separation of sexuality from reproduction that opened up the possibility for women to have a new relationship with their bodies, which in the past (much more than they are today) were under surveillance by the family, the church, and the state. In this way, sexuality by itself, and not because of its linkages to reproduction, became a valuable component of people's identities and a source of pleasure. A number of researchers have corroborated the incidence of the classic processes that implicate the accelerated transformation of the social space occupied by women in Argentina (when compared with that of men) and how those processes have changed both the patterns of women's activities and how women are perceived by men (see, e.g., Margulis, Rodríguez Blanco, and Wang 2003b, 51–52).

Argentina is completely different in many ways from what it was in the early 1980s. Gender and sexual relationships are not an exception in this regard. In the past twenty years, the public presentation of sexual subject matter has greatly changed in urban Argentine society. At a minimum, this transformation indicates a historical mutation in cultural aspects of Argentine society, especially in urban nuclei. We can point to a time in the not-so-distant past when sexual norms and the way sexual subject matter was presented were very different from what we postulate as emblematic in present-day Argentina. In 1983, for example, Argentina did not permit divorce. Although divorce was legalized in 1985, the law was passed against a backdrop of declarations by legislators that expressed a need to remain faithful to the ideal of a family-oriented society held by the Catholic church and leading sectors in the country (Pecheny 2010). During the same years, which saw the end of a military regime identified as "occidental and Christian," juvenile figures who identified with the symbols and trappings of rock music were viewed with suspicion and censured. In the 1970s, for example, the police compulsorily cut young hippies' and rockers' hair, and in the 1980s, homosexual rights did not figure in the platform of any major political group, with even the left taking a medical or moralizing view of the subject.

During the dictatorship, movies and TV programs were censored not only for political reasons but also for sexual and moral ones: nudity, sexually explicit language, and allusions to sex or sexual desire severely limited the circulation of, or caused notable transformations in, the cultural products that contained them. The rock group Queen's album *Fat Bottomed Girls* circulated in Argentina with a cover that did not show a partially nude woman riding a bicycle. In the film *Coming Home*, which starred John Voight and Jane Fonda, the act of cunnilingus performed by the paralyzed war veteran was cut out.

Allusions to homosexual love not only were censored by the dictatorship but also were greeted with disapproval by juvenile audiences (which would later become "tolerant"), as witnessed when Sandra Mihanovich and Celeste Carballo, two female singers closely linked to rock nacional, the musical movement that most directly embraced an egalitarian perspective, came "out of the

closet" about their sexual orientation. To this day, the government's decision to make sexual education mandatory is controversial in certain sectors of Argentine society, especially in the Catholic church and among conservative groups, and this affects the state's determination and capacity to fulfill the legal norm. Yet this is a far cry from the situation in Argentina when the Catholic church and conservative social sectors were dominant and the armed forces were in power. This is the case because, although the separation of church and state has been sanctioned for decades in theory, in practice the Catholic hierarchy had veto power over views that differ from its own and the capacity to transmit its views through the education system, in the political sphere, and in the mass media. Even today, with all of the changes described here, the Catholic church retains an impressive capacity to exercise concrete vetoes in these areas.

So twenty years ago, the expression of sexually related subject matter was scrutinized and regulated by law, in the mass media, and even in the expectations of society at large, if public, religious, and political institutions are taken into account. One must then add to this a series of institutions that guaranteed the predominance of machista and heteronormative perspectives, such as gender-exclusive schools and the legal authority of the father over children.

Between then and now, important social and cultural changes have intervened. The demise of economic policy based on the domestic market and import substitution opened the doors to global imports and financing, and reform of the state brought about, among other things, the destruction of millions of jobs, which were replaced by jobs inferior to those that existed before. In the 1990s, 10–12 percent unemployment (soaring far higher in certain years) became the rule, in contrast to unemployment that averaged about 5 percent (and full employment, according to other sources) in the 1980s.

In addition, new jobs are intermittent, offer few benefits, and are poorly paid compared with those that were available to prior generations. Perceptions of a state of pauperization that will extend far into the future thus have transformed the horizons of individual lives. These transformations have affected health care and education provided by the state. State coverage of education not only has diminished to some extent but also, in conjunction with the economic crisis, is no longer the privileged pathway for legitimate social mobility. Several scholars have suggested that the rupture in social-mobility pathways through education was one of the legacies of military rule from 1976 to 1982 (Wortman 1991), and others have pointed to the increased severity of the situation in the 1990s (Auyero 1993). The point of departure for this book is the radical change in secondary socialization brought about by these circumstances.

Which institutions and interpellations for socializing young people came to fill the place formerly occupied by a welfare system that, although inadequate when measured by European parameters, was one of the most developed and comprehensive in Latin America? The answer to this question is necessarily inconclusive and extremely complex. Our aim here is to offer clues that grant at least a certain degree of participation to the mass media.

In the 1990s, other factors added to the pauperization we mention: large segments of the mass media were privatized, and the margin of action for cultural enterprises, along with the scope of leisure activities and consumption, increased. These trends have contributed to the development of a new world of portentous imagery in Argentina. For the first time ever, Argentines have a multitude of TV channels, radio stations, and compact discs (CDs) at their disposal, not to mention the resources offered by the Internet. The segmentation of the media, the interaction among different media outlets, and the greater availability of those media are an important vector for understanding how young people are being socialized today, as, at the same time, young people no longer have traditional socializing referents such as school, state, the working world, and family.

This is the context in which the amplification, objectivation, and intensification of a sexualized agenda of feminine undertakings and the presentation of women in an active position with regard to sex (which may or may not correlate with egalitarian gender processes and the questioning of male predominance)—phenomena that are present in other Latin American countries and to some extent are global in scope—have been processed and accentuated in Argentina. The veil of prohibition that once covered sex has vanished, along with a number of closely related notions. Ideas based in religion that unite sex with and subordinate it to love, the couple, the family, and heterosexuality—at least, among certain age groups—have been weakened. Sex has become an end in itself for many social actors, with no need for further justification. As others have noted, because sex is no longer necessarily transcendental, it can now figure in a varied and challenging menu of leisure activities.

Below, we systematize significant dimensions of this panorama in six points related to the forms sexuality takes; the generational nature of sexual practices; the existence of legitimized variations of sexuality and the detranscendentalization, proliferation, and transformation of sexuality into an objective plane of interaction; and the specific usage acquired in this context by terms such as "slut" and "bitch," which plays an important role in this book.

1. Sex-related topics (e.g., sexual relations and how to carry them out) occupy more space in the mass media than ever before.[6] In Argentina, general advice and comments on how to engage in sexual activities now go beyond the "hygienic" (i.e., scientific) approach presented by medical doctors on TV and transcend the classic communications strategy of cloaking moralizing aims in appeals to morbid curiosity by displaying prohibited images while sanctioning their protagonists. The sexual scenario crosses the old boundary constructed by the media that associated uninhibited sexuality with "artists" and "special people," thus separating it from the average person. A prototypical case in point is the famous sexologist Alessandra Rampolla, who dispenses advice about sexual enjoyment grounded in scientific knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and psychology. At the same time, she appears to be just another woman, albeit a well-

informed one, who can broach any and all subjects of concern to her gender mates without blushing and yet remain somewhere between neutral and complicit regarding their individual preferences.

In live and telephone interviews, radio announcers also take a colloquial tone when discussing subjects such as ménage à trois and the innovative use of sex toys and pornographic movies. And on neither TV nor radio is this sort of sexual discussion the domain of late-night programs on specific channels and stations with limited audiences (what in Argentina is called "*horario de protección al menor*" [minors' protection time]). What we describe in the pages that follow is found in prime-time programming on network TV, when family viewing is supposedly the norm.

Thus it is that celebrities performing audacious choreographies, lascivious sexuality—bathing in champagne, simulated fellatio (acts that are not limited to heterosexual people or to couples)—appear in prime-time TV shows. In the 1990s, a middle-class neighborhood association, with the help of the mass media, expelled transvestites from its community, alleging that they were a bad example for children; in the mid-2000s, the star of a network TV series broadcast in the primest of prime time was a transvestite playing the role of a transvestite pursued by a male character. The plot turned on the male character's ignorance of the situation, and in at least some episodes, the plot structure positioned the audience to favor the relationship.[7]

Examples abound that confirm what can be deduced from the above: as never before in the history of Argentina, sex has a central presence in the mass media, a presence that, as we show, intertwines in complex ways with the growing sexualization of the daily life of the young people who participate in the tropical music movement, within which cumbia reigns.[8]

2. Everything we have mentioned up to this point can be applied generally to the audiovisual media, the Internet, the radio, and music. But it has a very peculiar expression that makes it specifically difficult to understand. Some generations more than others have become familiarized with, as well as affected and interpellated by, this communicational dispositive. People born from the 1970s on live in a social cartography in which secondary socialization is mediated more by the mass media than by the state through schools; more by peer groups than by the family; and more by relatively anonymous interlocutions than by more personalized ones.

For young people, this is the most frequent, most immediate reality. But when social scientists from earlier generations study young people, they either do not see this difference or, when they do, color the new panorama in a negative, moralistic way. This leads some to characterize the epoch insensitively as one in which ideals have been lost and "anything goes." By this we mean to say that if this way to conceive sexuality has spread among the members of one age group, that group is precisely the young people who are the audience for the musical genre analyzed in this book.

Yet if there is anyone who must make a persistent effort to overcome the tendency to transform a particular generational experience into specific parameters, it is precisely the analysts who belong to the earlier generation. They, like any veterans, tend to suppose that the younger generation has really gone beyond what is permissible, that the rules truly have been undermined. In short, the generational shift made by subjects with regard to sex has enabled an age ethnocentrism that, in magnitude, looks much like what was experienced during the so-called sexual revolution in Europe and the United States forty to fifty years ago. Although more silent and less labeled, the current phenomenon is no less radical and reaches beyond the social radius of its predecessor. While these phenomena have not escaped the perception and criticism of feminists, it is also true that they form part of a horizon for structuring action in which specific platforms of comprehension are created that prevent second wave feminism from taking them into account.[9] We fully agree with Feona Attwood (2006, 83–84) when she points out, "Although it is easy to criticize these attempts to re-engage with femininity and with sex, this may be to close down an important debate about how an active female sexuality can be materialized in culture, as well as working to position feminism in terms of an unhelpful and unimaginative 'anti-sex' stance . . . (Stoller 1999). It is also indicative of a feminist tendency to downplay any shifts in representation, so that new developments are only seen as part of the 'same old story' of sexist discourse."

This book is our humble attempt to contribute to the debate about the kind of active women's sexuality Attwood is asking for, showing that the shifts in discourses and performances we have encountered in our investigation are much more complex than the "'same old story' of sexist discourse."

3. Liberation that permits sexual possibilities far beyond encounters between members of a heterosexual couple is an equally important phenomenon. Thus, a radio station with a mainly juvenile audience broadcasts a midafternoon "micro"-program (a format in which a particular section, separated from the main program, repeats each day usually following a particular theme, or dedicated to a particular audience) titled "Truths of a Regular Guy." The announcer, Gabriel Schultz, a professional who in other circumstances lucidly and eruditely analyzes the mass media, refers to common sexual practices, which are then discussed by listeners. For example, he might announce that "women with dyed red hair like to suck two penises at the same time"; girls would then call in to confirm the allegation. We obviously do not know whether the callers are telling the truth, but we do know that, even if they are not and this is nothing more than a game, the program attracts an audience, the jest upsets no one and elicits no moralistic denunciations, and, finally, it is perhaps possible that "women with dyed red hair like to suck two penises at the same time."

A reading of the innumerable blogs by women circulating in Buenos Aires makes clear that, whatever their actual sexual practices happen to be, they have no problem incorporating certain novel sexual repertoires (formerly found in

books or practiced within the confines of the experimental morality of hippies and vanguardists) when constructing a character and formulating a discourse.

Finally, the sheer number and variety of ads offering anal sex for men in *Clarín*, the newspaper with the highest circulation in Argentina, removes any doubt that only so-called normal sex can be referred to in print.[10]

4. *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which is sold on newsstands throughout Argentina, publishes advice for the young female generation that, unlike the traditional recommendation to be demure, proposes a sexual etiquette that is attentive to the most diverse sexual variations and pleasures: how to masturbate a man; how to enjoy anal sex or organize an erotic evening in which food becomes part of the sex and sex a kind of food. Along with objectifying, intensifying, and multiplying the value of sexuality, *Cosmopolitan* formulates and legitimizes its autonomization and detranscendentalization. In this respect, *Cosmopolitan* contributes to what Brian McNair (1996) terms "'pornographication,' a process evident in both art and popular culture where the iconography of pornography has become commonplace, and in a more widespread fascination with sex and the sexually explicit in print and broadcast media" (quoted in Attwood 2006, 81–82).

Attwood points out that all of these changes occur in the context of the disruption of the boundaries between public and private discourse present in media trends that privilege lifestyle, "reality," interactivity, and the confessional. McNair (2002, 81, 87, 98) has described this change as a movement toward a "striptease culture" that can be interpreted as a new stage "in the commodification of sex, and the extension of sexual consumerism," and as part of a broader preoccupation with "self-revelation," "exposure," and "public intimacy."

Cosmopolitan reveals a second key element in casual sex practiced by women: in classic machista tradition, it excuses (and even praises) men for their sexual conquests while upholding the idea that, for women, sex should come after marriage or falling in love and making a commitment. (These are not innocuous alternatives, given that they are grounded in what can be viewed as lay statutes for sexuality.) If not, stigmatization follows (i.e., characterization as sluts, traitors, and so on.) In the immediate past in Argentina, it would have been hard to find a single cultural sphere that escaped this dichotomy, which was the rule even in so-called progressive circles.

Even members of the left-leaning middle class have found it enormously difficult to do more than pay lip service to new sexual ideas that have broken with the ideal of family-oriented heterosexuality. The panorama is radically different today and covers a much broader social range. *Cosmopolitan* magazine makes the case for casual sex in terms that, although timorous, find no moral problem in the practice, which it views as an exercise in self-control and the recognition of individuality: "If you control your sexuality and your desire, there is no need to feel guilty about one crazy night—or even two! What is important is *to enjoy sex* because, nowadays, you hold the reins and can manage

the situation any way you please. Be decisive, and *if you really feel like having casual sex*, without commitments, you have to try to make *these sporadic sexual relations satisfactory*."[11] But it is not only a question of canvassing what is happening at the "production" pole of the culture industry. Tracking blogs produced by young Argentine women today makes very clear that the symbolic repertoire that presupposes the validity of active, plural, detranscendentalized women's sexuality is alive and well—in the middle class, at least. In these blogs, women between twenty and thirty-five wager that they can give expression to a concept of sexuality in which what matters are conquests, frequency, and pleasure, with love, morality, commitment, marriage, and the family relegated to second place.

5. The terms "detranscendentalized" and "autonomized" refer to pleasure-giving and relational possibilities of sex as consummate that are far removed from the ideas of eternity and absoluteness that traditionally are attached to love. Magazines regale female audiences with advice for improving their performance as both givers and receivers of sex—advice that runs from recommending candy to sensitize and flavor the penis during oral sex to providing the right environment to achieve anal sex, or even advice on how a woman should ask a man to eat certain foods to keep his semen from tasting bitter. How much the size of the penis matters is endlessly debated in Internet blogs and forums, with women's testimony coinciding in valuing men who know how to give pleasure and criticizing those who may be gentlemen but are sexually clumsy and inefficient; some women even go so far as to complain about men's incompetence or about their lack of understanding that sometimes what women want is sex, not love. Even women who have not renounced the ideals of love and lasting relationships demonstrate desire for a rich and, to some extent, transgressive sex life. And even in cases where the ideology of the couple with a commitment to love is dominant, as in the sex blog published by *La Nación* (a newspaper that is so conservative that the fact that it has a sex blog serves as paradigmatic example of our affirmation in the third point above), the objectivation and discussion of sex in terms of technique for giving pleasure are a reality.

6. It is precisely within this context that what we refer to as the sexual activation of women emerges. Furthermore, it is this sexual activation that has led some women to change the connotation of the term "*puta*" [slut]. If it is true that the negative value assigned to the term they use (but whose connotation they want to change) demonstrates male domination, it is also clear that the proposed new meaning is very different from the accusative one. To be a "slut" in these terms is not to be bad, disrespectful, or a traitor; it is to be active, daring—in a word, a woman who is particularly interested in sex. This is the meaning given in one of the abovementioned blogs, for example, in which one woman states that she is as much a "slut" as another of the bloggers in the sense that both she and her friend hold challenging ideas about sex that reveal them

as active and daring: she wants group sex, and her friend wants another woman in her bed.

All of this transformation in the way sex is deployed and experienced in contemporary Argentina has been studied empirically, and what Vanina Leschziner and Silvia Kuasñosky (2003, 101) have found among university students illustrates what we are talking about:

> The younger women [in the poll] are the ones who indicate the existence of a new subjectivity that makes a place for potentially freer (with regard to traditional canons) emotional and sexual experience for women. The opinions of the women interviewed on how satisfied they were with their first sexual experience are significant in this regard: the most unfavorable responses are concentrated among the older members of the group, with the most favorable opinions found among the younger members. . . . [T]he increased impact on the youngest women of the new models for emotional-sexual relations may explain their tendency to regard their first sexual experience positively.

Therefore, young middle-class women also seem to enjoy their sexuality much more than the older female cohort. Other data from the same survey show similar findings:

> Younger women, as opposed to older ones, state in their response that privacy is not important when it comes to where to have sex, an issue we consider relevant because this attitude denotes a symbolic change in the meaning assigned to the act of making love by the society at large. . . . Sexual initiation also occurred earlier among the youngest group members. . . . This phenomenon indicates incipient changes not only in the level of beliefs currently circulating in the social imaginary on "sexuality" regarding what is permitted and what is not, but also in the relations of power between women and men about sexuality, particularly in the daily struggle to impose meaning on social classifications taken as legitimate by the society at large. (Leschziner and Kuasñosky 2003, 102)

The chapters that follow demonstrate how such a struggle for meaning, in the case of the social sector we are analyzing here, is played out around many significations advanced by cumbia villera lyrics—for instance, the meaning of being a "slut."

Something that is also present in middle-class young people's behavior becomes apparent when we show how young men and women of the popular sectors understand a new way to be emotionally involved that they call "*transa*," an affective casual relationship between a man and a woman in which sex often

is the most important part (similar to the American "hooking up"). Leschziner and Kuasñosky (2003, 104) write:

> Young people value an active, contingent relationship that assumes gender equality and even presupposes negotiating sexuality as a key part of the relationship, in contraposition to romantic love, whose origin and basis can be found in the sexual organization of society. Thus, the youngest people polled (both men and women) granted a central place in a relationship to sexual and emotional experimentation. The young people manifest a culture of forming relationships that are not oriented toward marriage or love; what they talk about is "sex" and "relationships." This position does not imply, however, that these young men and women do not desire a stable, lasting partnership; rather, there is a tendency to embark on relationships that do not necessarily lead to that end.

As Attwood (2006, 80) points out, in contemporary Western societies such as Argentina, "Within the context of a 'pure relationship' (Giddens 1992), sex has become domesticated and intimate relationships are eroticized, though at the same time there is a tendency to conceptualize the erotic as a highly individualized form of hedonism which is pursued through episodic and uncommitted encounters and through forms of auto-eroticism. . . . [What we are witnessing is] a 'shift from a relational to a recreational model of sexual behaviour' (Bernstein 2001, 397)."

That middle-class men think of their relations with women in this way can be seen as an extension of a very traditional understanding of masculinity in which, Marcelo Urresti (2003, 147) says, "to be male implies being impulsive and taking the initiative, always being in active situations, reducing sexuality to coitus and practicing it as a release, [and] making the woman the object of possession, passive and gratifying." However, the novelty lies in the fact that middle-class girls seem to be attuned to this kind of sexual behavior, as well. As Giddens (1992, 154) points out regarding advanced capitalist societies, "Pure relationships" have become "the prototypical form of personal life." As we have mentioned, this contemporary ideal of intimate relationship is based on a form of mutual, democratic self-interest: a relationship is "continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it" (Giddens 1992, 58).

As Attwood (2006, 88–89) correctly reminds us, Zygmunt Bauman has very important insights that go beyond what Giddens inaugurated:

> According to Zygmunt Bauman, contemporary sexual and romantic encounters embody a form of "liquid love" in which relationships have become "easy to enter and to exit" (Bauman 2003, xii) and human bonds have become "light and loose" (Bauman 2003, xi). Earlier conceptualizations of the binding love relationship—characterized by duty, family,

> fate or romance—are replaced by a vision of an individual love life as a series of effortless but intensely fragile encounters. . . .

According to Bauman, as the bonds between sex and reproduction, sex and commitment become looser and looser, eroticism develops "substance," becomes its own and only "reason and purpose." At the same time, it paradoxically acquires "an unheard-of lightness and volatility" (Bauman 1999, 21). A drive towards "excitation" and "adventure," already present in modern narratives of passion, is compressed in the pursuit of "choice," "variety," "transient but renewable pleasures" and the experience of intense and pure sensation (Illouz 1999, 176). According to Eva Illouz, the love experience is flattened and fragmented in postmodern consumer societies, typified by the "affair" rather than the stable relationship or grand passion.

In cases like that of Argentina, inscribing love and sexuality in a framework of egalitarianism and individualism does not necessarily signify the total transitoriness and fragmentation of a conspicuous postmodern condition (like the one described by Giddens and Illouz). While this may occur in parts of Argentine society, the lowest common denominator of such transformation is sexualization plus egalitarianism.

In the chapter on how our female interviewees relate to cumbia villera lyrics, we discuss the similarities and differences in how girls of the popular sector enact a freer, more transient, and more volatile sexuality on their own. Meanwhile, what Bauman (1999, 27) describes as a major characteristic of postmodern society merits further consideration: "Eroticism cut free from its reproductive and amorous constraints . . . is as if it were made to measure for the multiple, flexible, evanescent identities of postmodern men and women. Sex free of reproductive consequences and stubborn, lingering love attachments can be securely enclosed in the frame of an episode, as it will engrave no deep grooves on the constantly re-groomed face being thus insured against limiting the freedom of further experimentation." As we have mentioned, at the center of the changes that affect both women and men—as members of the couple—is the new place *desire* occupies in the interaction of the partners: "What used to take the form of a command—external impositions and regulations (family, community, social class) had to be accommodated—has given way to the absence of external restrictions: the couple, affection, and sexuality have become a private affair. The place occupied by *desire* has expanded, which makes the question a matter of internal freedom and the subjective aptitude to know one's own needs and assume one's own desires" (Margulis, Rodríguez Blanco, and Wang 2003a, 135).

Thus, desire was always part of how men understood their relationship with women. The open display of women's desire, however, is something new. One outcome of the sexual revolution of the 1960s is that sexual relations must be a source of pleasure for women, as well, not something that is done only for the pleasure of the "other." All of these changes, by definition, necessitate that men

modify how they understand their masculinity; no longer the sole repositories of desire, they have to develop new behaviors to deal with the now explicit and active desire of the "other." Therefore, what Raewyn Connell (1995) defined many years ago as "hegemonic masculinity"—the idea that a culturally normative ideal of men's behavior exists, an ideal that underlines as male characteristics aggressiveness, strength, drive, ambition, and self-reliance—seems to be unevenly changing among men. The problem that emerges in this context in contemporary Argentina, as well, as Urresti (2003, 154) points out, is that "models are lacking for present-day couple relationships: the old model, which to some degree is still in force, is breaking up into multiple, hybridized paradigms to which residual fragments of the past cling. Those fragments serve, in many cases, as opportunities for abrogation in the form of a violent regression, leading to the affirmation of outdated conduct. In this sense, some men opt to hold fast or return to models from the past or to exercise violence against women and children based on the putative authority of the figure of the breadwinner (a figure that is increasingly questioned)."

We think that it is precisely in this uncertain terrain that cumbia villera lyrics intervene to advance a proposal for gender relations to the genre's young male and female adherents. The reactions of many young men and women to those lyrics is the focus of the book. What we found articulated in cumbia villera lyrics and the reaction of boys and girls to their content is, among other things, the contradictory requirements a gender culture undergoing a profound change poses to women in contemporary Argentina—that is, an acceptance of their sexual activation but not to the point at which such an activation constitutes a serious menace to traditional men's roles and, perhaps most important, not to the point of creating a "performance" problem for the young men whose sexual repertoires still do not include the fundamentals that can satisfy the open desire of many young women. As Mario Margulis and his colleagues note:

> Norms with enormous influence in attraction and seduction games still carry weight in the cultural conditioning of men and women. As a cultural product, eroticism also responds to the patterns of a determined epoch. A woman who aggressively takes the initiative is likely to elicit rejection responses in men. She can make her advances, but in accordance with implicit rules, sending indirect messages with her body and couching subtle insinuations in her words that the recipient understands, as the codes for seduction and eroticism, and the legitimate conduct in force at any particular time and in any particular place and social sector, are included in generational and class *habitus*. (Margulis, Rodríguez Blanco, and Wang 2003a, 140)

However, this complex code of seduction and eroticism is not easy to grasp, above all because of the velocity of the changes gender relations have undergone in the past couple of decades and because many young men and women

continuously equivocate about them.[12] To guide them into this problematic territory, many of these young people rely on what popular culture has to offer and thus "use" what is advanced in cumbia villera lyrics (which can be quite explicit) as road maps. The diverse reactions of many of our interviewees to those road maps are the topic of the chapters of this book.

Young women now confront the question of how to master the intricacies of an ever-changing erotic and sensual etiquette; young men confront questions about how to perform in relation to women's newly activated sexuality, which poses challenges that they often are not able to meet. As Margulis and his colleagues (2003a, 140) note, "Women complain to their partner, seeking greater satisfaction and, in general, the externalization of desire and female needs that were formerly hidden," which implies "changes in a couple's equilibrium, influencing the performance and sexual satisfaction of males." The inertia linked to past models of gender relations can undermine the best attempts by many young men to accommodate the desire of the "other," itself ambiguously advanced. As Margulis and his colleagues (2003b, 55–56) note, "Males called upon to process the greater autonomy and freedom of women often cling to more traditional female models that guarantee them an active role and allow them to hold onto masculine models that make them feel more secure. With regard to women, virginity is no longer culturally emphasized nor is sexuality as stigmatized as before, and there is a high level of stimulation in society at large encouraging greater sexual freedom. However, the persistence of old patterns leads to great ambiguity in the cultural demands orienting their conduct." What a young man told the researchers is thus very revealing:

> I know intellectually that it's all right, I went on vacation with a girl too, and now we know each other, and why aren't we going to have sex if both of us have the same rights, . . . but I can't get it out of my head that she isn't a good girl.
>
> And what would a good girl be?
>
> A good girl would be a girl, I don't say she has to be a virgin, but, for example, a girl who had two long lasting boyfriends, had sex with the one she went with for three years, and the other for two years, and then she met me. (Quoted in Margulis, Rodríguez Blanco, and Wang 2003b, 56)

The picture, therefore, is complex. On the one hand, the interviewee did not expect virginity from his prospective girlfriend, but on the other, he still held a clearly normative idea of what constitutes a "good girl." In this regard, "good girls" are those who have sex within stable, more or less long, relationships. Fast girls—the "sluts" referred to in the testimonies and lyrics quoted in this book—are the ones who change male partners very often.

This last point brings us back to the issue of men's sexual performance and the threat to performance that a young woman with previous sexual experience

presents. It is possible for many young men to accept parity in their girlfriends' sexual experience in principle, but such parity constitutes an actual source of insecurity. As one of the professionals interviewed by Margulis and his colleagues (2003b, 56) pointed out, "Men feel under greater pressure with regard to their sexuality because there are elements for comparison; . . . they are comparing themselves all the time with these girls' earlier boyfriends, and this causes problems." Thus, it seems that, despite the transformations that Argentine sex and gender culture have experienced since the 1960s, many men are still attached to imaginaries in which they feel they should be the "sex experts" and women should passively accompany them as "good pupils."

All of the changes mentioned so far have been documented among middle-class young people. Nevertheless, many of them are occurring among young people in the popular sectors, as well—that is, the young people who constitute the public for cumbia villera and those who have been most affected by dramatic structural changes such as economic insecurity and uncertainty, precariousness of employment, social exclusion, and increased levels of poverty and unemployment. For obvious reasons, these changes also impinge on how people relate to one another, and gender relations are no exception. For instance, there is a well-documented trend toward fewer marriages because "unemployment and the precariousness of employment have, by necessity, a big impact on the possibility of family planning" (Leschziner and Kuasñosky 2003, 91; our translation). The traditional trajectory from education to employment, marriage, the establishment of an independent household, and the birth of children has been broken for many people. Although men and women are not marrying, however, many are still having children; moving back and forth from their own households to their parents' households; finding precarious way to insert themselves into the labor force; and attempting to return to formal education later in their lives. In this sense, it is not only the meaning of being a man or a woman that is being altered but also the meaning of being an adult.

"Unlike what occurs in the middle class where adolescence constitutes a kind of moratorium," writes Sofia Cecconi (2003, 189), "a short sequence takes place among the popular sectors where adolescence is short and early insertion into the working world—or the world of the street, given the high unemployment that characterizes the current crisis—is the rule; motherhood also frequently comes early to girls." Among the young Argentines who follow cumbia villera, this transformation of the historical trajectory from education to family formation has coined a very interesting pair of terms: "*pibes*" [kids] and "*pibes grandes*" [grown-up kids][13] (Martín 2004; Vila and Semán 2008). The terms themselves mark the strangeness of the new trajectories within these social groups' traditions; after all, historically, a grownup was precisely someone who was no longer a kid. The *pibes grandes* category describes subjects who are between twenty-five and thirty-five and in the past would have been parents, husbands, wives with autonomous households but who, although they have procreated, are not responsible for their households.

The complex compression and expansion of age stages that is under way among the popular sectors in contemporary Argentina has another characteristic. According to Cecconi (2003, 196), members of the popular sectors have less-elaborated relationships with their own bodies, which shortens the period of biological youth and opens the way for young people's self-destruction. Extreme impoverishment conditions possibilities for action that are oriented toward immediacy. In this sense, in Cecconi's (2003, 196) view, there is no "utopia" of the body. There is only a relation of immediacy that translates into practices that leave no room for midterm or long-term perspectives.

Therefore, at the level of embodied practice, according to the literature available on the topic, young people who follow cumbia villera would have a different experience from that of their middle-class counterparts. If this is so, it has very important consequences for our research, considering how centered on the body listening, dancing, and other activities that accompany cumbia villera are. In this regard, not only are the "bodies" that go to bailes different from the bodies that go to middle-class dance halls, but what those bodies do within the bailes is both similar and different. In this sense, we can claim that among popular-sector youth, the experience of the "fleeting moment" described by Bauman (1999) as one of the characteristics of postmodern life acquires an extreme expression.

Not only their bodies but also, according to research, the sexual experiences of these youngsters are different from those of their middle-class counterparts. Sexual relations come early and are imposed by men, often at the risk of HIV transmission and pregnancy (Cecconi 2003, 193). Thus, Argentina's popular-sector youth are living in an ever-changing gender and sexual terrain that is rife with ambiguity and uncharted territory and turn to popular culture to try to make sense of what is going on. Within popular culture, the lyrics, music, and performances of cumbia villera occupy center stage, considering their importance in the lives of many young people of the popular sectors.

However, these positions are noteworthy more for the questions they raise than for their veracity. First, the research provides a description that, following Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1987), is restricted to depicting the limits, elements of mimicry, and shortcomings of popular experience. As is the case with its matrix, this position is open to the same criticism Claude Grignon and Jean-Claude Passeron (1992) leveled at Bourdieu's work. A position like the one we are describing identifies the analyst with the group to which he or she belongs (i.e., middle class, with values that include prolonged adolescence, autonomy, reflexivity, and long-term projects), detecting in social groups with whom he or she cohabits conflictively and at a distance defective substitutes (or just plain defects) instead of concentrating on the positivity (ontological, not axiological) of the experience analyzed. Put simply, neither popular experience nor, by extension, popular gender experience can be analyzed in terms of what prevents it from being *the* gender experience (i.e., that of the middle class) rather than on the basis of what makes

it peculiar. This means that the analyst must comprehend popular gender experience in itself, not as the place it occupies in our scale of values (which, however, should not be renounced). This is the epistemological premise elaborated in more detail in Semán 2010, which holds that, when analyzing "popular difference," it is necessary to apply interpretive procedures that question the illusion that perspectives among social groups are continuous and undifferentiated, which leads to positions that appear to sustain the idea that all social groups ultimately want the same thing and that what really differentiates them is the resources they possess. This involves stressing both what is different in popular-sector experience and the heterogeneities that, except at a very abstract level, prevent the affirmation of cultural unity among subaltern groups.[14]

At the same time, it is necessary to retain a premise that is at the basis of both certain arguments wielded by critical feminism and some relativist considerations of popular culture: the agency and productivity of subalterns, which is at the heart of the analyses of scholars such as Sherry Ortner and Lila Abu-Lughod. On the plane we are concerned with here, in line with the premises deployed by Pablo Alabarces and José Garriga Zucal (2008), the perspective of the popular sectors on the body, highlighting the values of strength, resistance, the capacity to take or impose a stand, and the capacity to resist another's stand, has been documented. Within this context, and contradicting our values, a perspective appears that differentiates genders through notions of complementarity and hierarchy. What we end up with is a framework for androcentric action that is not simply a limit on modernity. Rather, it is an expression of a positive cultural matrix that enters into contact with an interpellation that is simultaneously sexualized and equalizing. Cumbia villera both leads to and results from this conflictive encounter.