# Part III
# Power relations and processes

# 12 Generational power relations in rural Bolivia

*Samantha Punch*

It can be argued that childhood is a relational concept which forms part of the generational order and that generational processes shape the nature of child–adult relations (Alanen 2001; Mayall 2002). When the social positions of 'children' and 'adults' are 'constituted, reproduced and transformed through relational activity' (Mayall 2002: 40), this can be referred to as practices of 'generationing' (Alanen 2001). Thus, as Alanen (2001: 21) argues, childhood and adulthood are connected and interdependent. However, children's structural position in society means that generally they have less power than adults. Thus, adults' generational location enables them to wield more power over children and this is an example of Lukes's (2005) relational definition of power as one social group exercises 'power over' another.

Power has different meanings in different contexts, and is linked to both agency and structure (Lukes 2005). Whilst there is some overlap between the concepts of power and agency (see Robson et al., this volume), at the level of individuals, power can be defined as having 'the will to effect changes in another actor's behaviour, context or view of the world' (Westwood 2002: 14). Thus, as Scott argues 'power is the capacity to influence others' (2001: 138).

Whilst it is generally recognized that children's power tends to be constrained as adults often use their generational power to regulate children's bodies and minds (Brannen et al. 2000: 178), it is also widely accepted that children have an ability (albeit often limited) to counteract adult power (Valentine 1999; Waksler 1996). However, as children are faced with unequal adult–child power relations, they may have to negotiate more than adults in order to assert their power and gain greater control over certain aspects of their lives.

Thus, practices of generationing involve a two-way flow of power where children and adults can significantly influence each other (Scott 2001). This coincides with the view of power as multi-dimensional and ubiquitous (Lukes 2005; Westwood 2002). Interpersonal power is also exercised within generations, as well as between them. This chapter explores both inter- and

intra-generational power relations (see also Bell; Dunkley and Panelli, this volume) in everyday contexts of social interactions in rural Bolivia.

As there are different forms of power (Lukes 2005), this chapter recognizes that power also operates at a more macro level, encompassing wider economic and environmental factors (see Bushin et al., this volume). The power of place should not be underestimated in relation to the opportunities and constraints which shape the lives of residents in particular geographical locations. Rural communities in Bolivia do not hold a strong position of economic or political power compared with urban areas, and are often marginalized in terms of resources and basic services. Furthermore, on a global scale, Bolivia is in a relatively marginal, fragile position in relation to the global economy, having suffered from the ills of two decades of neo-liberalism and increased indebtedness (Green 2003). Thus, whilst this chapter focuses on the micro level, face-to-face interactions of generational power relations and the spatial power dynamics of the local contexts of home, school and work, it also recognizes that the rural environment of this economically poor country has a strong impact upon the extent to which young people can yield power and control over their daily lives.

## RURAL CONTEXT

Bolivia is the poorest country in South America with approximately 60 per cent of the population living below the poverty line (Graham 1997). It faces a range of structural problems including 'low productivity, scarce investment, a weak capital market, and a precarious export economy' (Peirce 1997). In particular, Bolivia has experienced more than twenty years of neo-liberal economic restructuring (Gill 2000) which has resulted in increased unemployment, lower wages, and greater inequality (Green 2003).

Until relatively recently its population has always been predominantly rural, but the proportion of people living in urban areas increased from 39 per cent to 58 per cent during the period 1976 and 1992, mainly as a result of urbanisation and rural–urban migration (Preston 1994). There are marked differences in the quality of life between urban and rural areas. For example, the overall infant mortality rate is 73 deaths per thousand live births, but is twice as high in rural areas and life expectancy is 51 years in the countryside compared with 61 years in towns (Graham 1997). Urban areas have greater access to better health and educational facilities, as well as more opportunities in terms of employment. Rural areas suffer particularly from the lack of adequate medical, sanitation, and school services. For example, in 1996, 66 per cent of the total population had access to safe water, but 87 per cent of those living in urban areas have access compared to only 36 per cent who have access in the countryside (UNICEF 1997: 84).

The chapter draws on ethnographic research which I undertook in Churquiales, a rural community[1] in Tarija, southern Bolivia (see Fig-

*Figure 12.1*  Map of the study region, Tarija.

ure 12.1). Churquiales is an economically poor and relatively isolated agricultural community which lacks basic services such as electricity and safe drinking water. The opportunities for waged employment are limited, and schooling is only available for the first six years of primary education. The ethnographic fieldwork included participant observation and interviews with young people, parents, and grandparents from a sample of 18 households (Punch 2001b). At the community school I carried out a variety of task-based techniques including photographs, drawings, diaries, and worksheets (Punch 2002a). This chapter explores the extent to which power and place intersect by considering the ways in which young people's everyday experiences at home, school, and work take place within complex webs of power that are played out within and across generations.

## HOME AND POWER

In rural Bolivia, many daily household tasks need to be carried out to ensure household survival and they have to be distributed among the differ-

ent household members. However, the distribution and division of reproductive work is not clear-cut, but constantly negotiated between children and parents, and between siblings (Punch 2003). Parents depend on their children's help and need their co-operation, but it has to be negotiated. The following example taken from my ethnographic field notes illustrates parent–child and sibling negotiations surrounding the household division of labour:

> 'Go sons, and fetch water', said Felicia to her three sons, and off they went. Later, when she went out of the kitchen she saw the water containers still there. She went to find her sons but they were nowhere in sight: 'Lazy boys, they've escaped, I can't even see them.'
>
> Later, they came back, and one of her sons, Dionicio, was on a second-hand bicycle that his dad had recently bought.
>
> 'You lazy children, why didn't you go and fetch water? Put that bike away, Dionicio. Two of you go and fetch water and one of you sweep the storeroom'.
>
> Marco: 'I'm going to get water.'
> Dionicio: 'Me too.'
> Ramón: 'And me.'
> Felicia: 'And I'm going to sweep the kitchen, wash the cups, and cook.'
>
> In the end, Ramón swept the storeroom, Marco and Dionicio went to get water.
>
> 'And when you get back, you've got to feed the pigs.'[2]

The extract indicates that children do not always obey their parents, they also have their own agenda of activities which sometimes compete with their household responsibilities. After initially escaping from their assigned task, the brothers all showed a preference for fetching water rather than sweeping, most likely because two of them would go together to fetch water and the boredom of doing a particular job can be lessened with someone to chat to and play with along the way (Punch 2001c). Furthermore, collecting water can be more fun because it is away from the house and parental surveillance, thereby providing more opportunities to resist adult control and divert into non-work activities (see Figure 12.2). Exactly how the three children subsequently negotiated who was going to be the one to sweep the storeroom is not clear, but they managed to work it out amongst themselves. The boys' mother organizes the distribution of household tasks and attempts to control her children's division of labour. She emphasizes the importance of them sharing the work of the household, which is why she
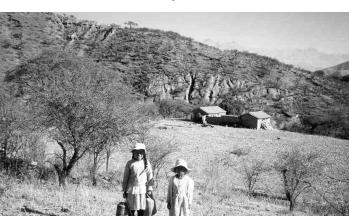
*Figure 12.2* Going on errands with siblings, away from the adult gaze, enables work to be combined with play.

stresses that while her children are fetching water and sweeping, she will be cleaning the kitchen and preparing their lunch. She also reminds them of the constant nature of domestic work, which is never complete, by telling them they must feed the pigs later.

The above example illustrates that in a subsistence-based, labour-intensive economy parents rely on children to work unpaid for the household and this results in children having more bargaining power to negotiate how their responsibilities will be fulfilled. Parents may enforce discipline, including physical punishment, but children have a range of strategies for job avoidance, including delegation to a younger sibling (and in this case, quietly escaping), or the lessening of job monotony by combining work and play (Punch 2000). Thus, as Foucault reminds us, 'Where there is power, there is resistance' (1979b: 95) and generational power relations within households are interdependent and negotiable. It is also worth bearing in mind that household power relationships do not always involve struggle, resistance, and contestation. When one household member strives to assert their power over others, their actions may be accepted and complied with in a co-operative manner with no attempts to compromise or negotiate (see also Kabeer 1994). Family expectations and obligations mean that most children have a strong sense of responsibility towards their household yet this has to be balanced with their own needs and desires.

## SCHOOL AND POWER

Mayall's research in the UK found that the social setting of the home offered children more possibilities for negotiation compared with the school:[3]

> … at home children are identified not merely as socialization objects but as participants in and negotiators of their social worlds, and thus as important family members. At school, they are essentially projects for adult work. (Mayall 1994: 125)

These findings have similar relevance in the arenas of home and school in rural Bolivia, despite the socio-economic and cultural differences between the two countries. As mentioned, in Churquiales, children's work enhances the negotiating power they have at home with their parents who depend to some extent on their unpaid work or economic contributions from their paid work. At school, children's potential for negotiation is more limited than at home because their relations of interdependence with teachers are weak (Punch 2004) and the classroom is much more the teachers' domain of control (Avalos 1986). For example, teachers use a series of punishments (often threats are enough) to enforce discipline: detention at break time, cleaning the toilets, rigorous physical exercises, leaving the classroom, and ear pulling.

Nevertheless, to some extent rural teachers depend on children's attendance at school because teaching is the main part of their livelihood. If all the children in the community are not registered at the start of the school year, the local government delays paying teacher's salaries and threatens to withdraw a teacher if not enough children attend. Although children's power in the classroom is limited, they can take advantage of the multigrade system as one teacher has to divide their time between several different year groups. Thus whilst the teacher is distracted, pupils may play at their desks instead of continuing with their assigned tasks (Punch 2004). The ways in which children create playspaces for themselves, often combined with school and work, indicates that they can assert some power and control over their use of time and space, despite being constrained by their work or school responsibilities and threats of adult discipline (Punch 2000).
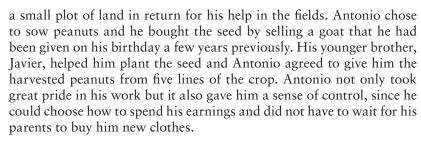
## WORK AND POWER

In Churquiales, once children reach about 12 years of age, their unpaid household work may be combined with paid work, depending on the opportunities and constraints which face them at home, work, and school. The following extract from my ethnographic field diary illustrates the work strategies of two siblings from a relatively poor household:

> When Antonio was 13 years old, he said to his father: 'Dad, I help you a lot but you don't help me. Perhaps you buy me some trousers, but if I don't ask, you don't buy me any'.[4] He said he now needed to start earning his own money to be able to buy clothes and save for a second-hand bicycle that he wanted. His father, Fulgencio, agreed to give him

a small plot of land in return for his help in the fields. Antonio chose to sow peanuts and he bought the seed by selling a goat that he had been given on his birthday a few years previously. His younger brother, Javier, helped him plant the seed and Antonio agreed to give him the harvested peanuts from five lines of the crop. Antonio not only took great pride in his work but it also gave him a sense of control, since he could choose how to spend his earnings and did not have to wait for his parents to buy him new clothes.

Victoria, Antonio's older sister, has worked as a domestic maid since she was 12 years old, at first for her godparents in a nearby rural community and later in the town of Tarija for the sister of a family friend. Antonio sometimes complains he is bored in the countryside while his sister is 'Taking it easy in Tarija without having to work very much'.[5] However, compared with Antonio, Victoria has no luck with raising animals, the only two goats she had both died. She does have a hen and seven chicks, but because her mum looks after them while she is working in Tarija, she will give her two of the chicks. She says she will either sell or eat the other ones. Antonio is lucky with animals and sold a goat to buy some clothes for school. He also bought some clothes for his younger siblings. They are allowed to buy what they want with their own money, but sometimes their parents tease them when Vicki buys makeup or Antonio buys toys: 'Eat what you've bought or put on what you've bought to wear to school!'[6]

Victoria and Antonio both actively contribute to the maintenance of their household which gives them a sense of satisfaction and pride. They balance responsibilities towards their parents and siblings with their own individual needs. Their example highlights the negotiation of interdependent relations between children and their parents, and between siblings. Antonio's unpaid work which he carries out for the household provides him with bargaining power to negotiate a small plot of land of his own from his father. His brother helps him and in return Antonio gives him some of the harvest. Household interdependent relations change over time, as can be seen when Victoria gives her mother two chicks in return for looking after them, even though originally she had been given the hen by her parents. This indicates that the nature of interdependencies between family members is renegotiated as individuals' situations and needs change over the life course.

The above example shows that children have different strategies for increasing their economic power even in a context of unpaid subsistence family labour. They make use of the limited but different economic opportunities that are available to them, such as negotiating the use of a small piece of their parents' land and sowing some crops for sale in the local market (see Figure 12.3). Another strategy that can be particularly effective

*Figure 12.3* Young people cultivating their own crop on a small plot of their parents' land.

around their birthday or Christmas time is if they ask their parents to let them have an animal of their own in return for helping to look after all the household's animals. Sowing their own crops or raising their own animals not only increases young people's sense of control over their labour but also enables them to start becoming more economically independent as well as learning and developing useful skills.

Furthermore, in the above extract, Antonio complains that his unpaid rural work is more strenuous than his sister's paid urban work, although she did not agree (see Chapter 7 for a discussion of urban domestic work in Tanzania). He is sometimes jealous that her paid work gives her greater access to a cash income and his concern echoes the recognition that subsistence-based agriculture requires a high level of physical labour, as Griselda points out:

> In the countryside they [children] have to see to the animals, help feed them, give them water. In the town they come out of school, some have their obligations to fulfil but most in the town don't. In the countryside we always cultivate everything, the only thing we buy is meat. In the town they don't cultivate anything, it's the hand into the pocket for everything.[7] (Griselda, parent)

Some people perceive the labour-intensive work involved in subsistence production in the countryside to be harder manual labour compared with many urban jobs. This coincides with Johnson et al.'s research (1995) in Nepal when they found that some rural girls preferred their families to send them to work in carpet factories because they felt that the work was easier than at home. In contrast rural children from a different village reported that

they would rather work at home as their factory work was relentless and the working conditions were poor. Similarly, some young people in rural Bolivia preferred to work in their home community rather than in rural Argentina because a day labourer in Churquiales works on average eight hours, but in Argentina they may have to work up to twelve hours, under a much hotter sun, at a faster pace (Punch 2007). Thus, in Bolivia, urban work was perceived by some people as lighter compared with rural subsistence production, but migrant work on agricultural plantations in Argentina tended to be perceived as tougher than rural work in Churquiales.

Consequently children's future aspirations depend to some extent on whether their imagined future (see Dunkley and Panelli, this volume) is rural or urban, in Bolivia or Argentina. Most are likely to end up working in agriculture or domestic labour (predominantly girls) whether that is at home, in the town of Tarija, or in rural Argentina. They have some choice, albeit greatly constrained by material conditions and family responsibilities (see Beazley; Bell; Klocker, this volume), and in some ways seasonal migration offers them an opportunity to try out possible pathways (Punch 2007). Their constrained choices impact upon the influence of collective imaginings of different types of work (rural/urban; at home/migratory), and they impact as well on children's actual place-based experiences of power.

## MIGRATION AND POWER

In rural Bolivia, household livelihood strategies are diverse and dynamic, adapting mainly to the amount of land and labour which is available. Since most people own smallholdings of approximately two hectares there is not sufficient land to be divided up between all the children of a household. Consequently it is necessary that most young people migrate and search for work or land elsewhere, at least temporarily, either to the nearby town of Tarija or more traditionally to the agricultural plantations of neighbouring Argentina (Reboratti 1996). Whilst farming in Churquiales provides mainly for the household's subsistence needs, migration facilitates access to a cash income (see also Beazley; Carpena-Méndez, this volume).

Migration is a good illustration of the ambiguities of power, as rural young people can be both constrained and enabled by their experience of leaving the community. Migration can lead to young people feeling empowered and powerless in different ways at the same time which is an indication of the complex, multi-faceted nature of power (Lukes 2005). Initially it can be very difficult for young people to leave their relatively isolated rural community, particularly because they tend to have had very limited experience outside Churquiales. This is reflected in the following quotations by parents who were explaining the perceived differences between rural and urban childhoods:

> There is a difference. In the town they are more talkative, not shy. In the countryside they are fearful even to talk. In the town they grow up with people. Here they just grow up with the family. I see it with my children when I take them to Tarija, they can't even eat because they are so embarrassed.[8] (Tomás, parent)

> In the countryside the child is timid, bashful, doesn't go out.... In the town there's television, maybe they go for a walk at the weekend, to the park, walking along the avenues, or go to the cinema. Children in the countryside, how are they going to know what a cinema is?[9] (Felicia, parent)

Young people's limited access to a wider social network and communications such as television increases their relative powerlessness outside their community. Leaving the familiar zone of their home rural community can be very intimidating. Mónica describes her first trip to Argentina when she was 17: 'I didn't go out and I didn't know anybody there. I didn't dare go further away or anywhere on my own.'[10] Hence, migration can make the young person feel quite vulnerable, lonely, and relatively powerless, especially at first with the unfamiliarity of a new place. In addition, new migrants are commonly paid less until they have learnt the appropriate skills, and in Argentina they usually receive less pay than an Argentinian for the same job. Migrant work also tends to require working extremely long hours in often quite poor conditions (Punch 2007). Consequently, despite the economic opportunities which migration offers, some young people prefer to stay in their rural community where life is more relaxed:

> It's more comfortable at home because you work when you want, and you can rest.[11] (Sebastián, 18 years)
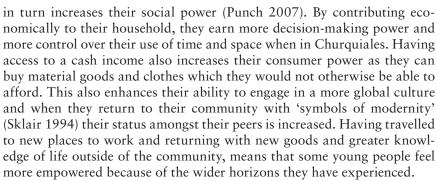
> We're from the countryside, we're used to this type of work, we're not going to live in the city.[12] (Edmundo, 24 years)

Nevertheless, most rural young people in Churquiales lack access to available land or permanent work, and this places them in a precarious economic position. It also means that they are vulnerable to fluctuations in the global economy because they are dependent on some form of migrant work. For example, the recent economic crisis in Argentina (López Levy 2004) will have impacted upon their agricultural or domestic work opportunities, perhaps resulting in much lower wages or no jobs at all for some migrants. Therefore, power is not only discursive or relational in the immediate circumstances of children's everyday lives, but is also 'material' in terms of global economic dynamics.

However, in another sense, migration can enhance young people's economic power and, when they are back home in their rural community, this

in turn increases their social power (Punch 2007). By contributing economically to their household, they earn more decision-making power and more control over their use of time and space when in Churquiales. Having access to a cash income also increases their consumer power as they can buy material goods and clothes which they would not otherwise be able to afford. This also enhances their ability to engage in a more global culture and when they return to their community with 'symbols of modernity' (Sklair 1994) their status amongst their peers is increased. Having travelled to new places to work and returning with new goods and greater knowledge of life outside of the community, means that some young people feel more empowered because of the wider horizons they have experienced.

Thus, in terms of power, the migrant identity is an ambivalent one (see Ansell and van Blerk, this volume), often meaning relative powerlessness in the destination but resulting in increased power and status back home. Furthermore, the impact of migration on the rural community has both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, it may lead to increased tensions with non-migrants who resent the migrants showing off their newly acquired goods. In particular, it can cause rifts between the generations as many older people disapprove of the young migrants spending their earnings on alcoholic drink and festivities during their time back in the community. Migration can also end up creating conflicts between old and new knowledge (Katz 2004) and ultimately it may exacerbate inequalities between households within the community (see Carpena-Méndez, this volume; Pribilsky 2001). On the other hand, migration benefits those who stay behind by reducing stress on limited resources and land, as well as decreasing competition for scarce work opportunities. Therefore, young people's lived migratory experiences illustrate not only a place-based and material link to power, but also demonstrate the fluidity and fluctuating nature of the relational aspects of power.

## RURAL INTERDEPENDENCIES

This chapter has shown that using a holistic approach, which considers the interconnections between home, school, work, and migration, is a useful way to explore the limits, extent, and interplay of power and resistance. It has argued that, despite their inferior position in relation to more powerful adult social actors, children develop a variety of strategies to resist adult control and negotiate their role within rural households. Household power relationships may involve conflict, tension, and negotiation but they may also be co-operative and compliant (Punch 2001c). Negotiating generational power relations may include compromises or balancing different interests, such as individual preferences and household needs. However, in the school arena children's agency is more limited than at home, but the spaces between home and school offer greater opportunities for asserting

control over their use of time and space (Punch 2000). Despite the limited economic opportunities for paid work within the rural community, children negotiate ways to increase their economic power, such as taking full responsibility for planting their own crops or raising their own animals. In contrast, migrant work opportunities may be more extensive but can be both enabling and constraining for young people. On the one hand, many young people lack power in relation to migration as they are almost forced to seek migrant work with relatively harsh conditions, but, on the other hand, it can increase both their economic and social power when back in their rural community (Punch 2007).

Thus, this chapter has argued that young people can be both powerful and powerless simultaneously with respect to different aspects of their social worlds. Their everyday lives move back and forth along a continuum of diverse experiences in relation to changing degrees of power and powerlessness. Power relationships are negotiated and renegotiated with different people in different contexts at different times. Interdependent power relations within rural households are dynamic and evolve over the life course. As children acquire economic power, this tends to increase their social power, and relationships between children and parents are renegotiated accordingly. For example, through time children may contribute more financially and parents may give children land or animals as part of their inheritance to enable them to establish a more independent livelihood.

Intra-generational relations also influence the ways in which power is distributed within the household. The hierarchy of the birth order shapes siblings' opportunities and constraints regarding work, education, and migration. For example, younger siblings are more likely to spend longer at school as their older siblings may be contributing financially to the household. However, when parents get older and are less able to carry out physical labour, there may be more pressure on the youngest sibling to stay and care for them rather than migrating in search of more lucrative work elsewhere.

Nevertheless, in the same way that inter-generational power relations are not fixed, power relations between siblings are also negotiated and worked out in practice (Finch and Mason 1993). Thus, whilst birth order position impacts upon siblings' responsibilities and obligations, the sibling order is not rigid in determining the ways in which economic and social power is divided amongst household members. Caring for parents in older age is related more to birth order rather than gender, but it also depends on whether an older sibling prefers to stay in the community rather than migrate. So although it is likely that the youngest sibling, regardless of gender, is expected to care for their parents in old age, this may not necessarily happen, as another sibling may choose to stay to look after them, remittances may be sent home instead, or parents may join their children at the migrant destination.

Similarly, just as daily power relations and responsibilities are not set but worked out between family members, longer term generational power

relations are also negotiated. Households renegotiate the ways in which power is played out in relation to family responsibilities, work, and education, according to the different constraints and opportunities which exist, including household wealth (usually determined by the amount of land and animals), household composition and available labour power, birth order, age and gender of siblings, and the competencies and preferences of individual household members. This chapter has argued that generational power relations are complex and reflect the interdependencies between and within generations as well as between the interconnecting arenas of home, school, work, and migration. Therefore, practices of generationing shape the ways in which the exercise of, and resistance to, forms of power are played out in everyday interactions in a range of rural contexts.

## NOTES

1. The names of the community and the research participants have been changed in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. The community has a population of 351 residents and it is 55 km from Tarija, the regional capital.
2. *Vaya hijos a traer agua.*
   *Chicos flojos, se han escapado. Ni se les ve.*
   *Hijos flojos porque no han ido a traer agua. Guarda esa bici Dionicio.*
   *Dos van a ir a traer agua y uno va a barrer la dispensa.*
   Marco: *yo voy a traer agua*
   Dionicio: *yo también*
   Ramón: *y yo*
   Felicia: *Y yo voy a barrer la cocina, lavar las tazas y cocinar.*
   *Y cuando vuelven tienen que dar de comer a los chanchos.* (Dionicio's household)
3. To some extent this may be changing given the introduction of school councils, particularly in Minority world contexts, although as Alderson (2000b) points out they are sometimes ineffective or tokenistic, which can cause additional problems of disillusionment amongst pupils.
4. *Papi, yo les ayudo harto a ustedes pero ustedes no me ayudan a mí. Talvez me compran un pantalón pero si yo no pregunto, no me compran.* (Antonio, 13 years)
5. *Echada en Tarija, sin tener que trabajar mucho.* (Antonio, 13 years)
6. *Come lo que has comprado o ponerte lo que has comprado para ir al colegio!* (Fulgencio, parent)
7. *Del campo hay que ver los animalitos, hay que ayudar a dar de comer, hay que darles aguita. En la ciudad salen de los colegios, algunos tienen su obligación de que van a hacer, pero la mayoría del pueblo no tienen. En el campo siempre siembra todo, lo único que compra es la carne. En la ciudad no siembra nada, mano al bolsillo para todo.* (Ariselda, parent)
8. *Hay differencia. En la ciudad son más habladores, no timído. En el campo tienen miedo hasta para hablar. Se crían en la ciudad con gente, con el pueblo. Aquí se crían con la familia no más. Así veo con mis hijos cuando los llevo a Tarija, no pueden ni comer están con la verguenza.* (Tomás, parent)
9. *En el campo el niño es timido, vergonsoso, no sale…. En la ciudad hay televisión, talvez va de paseo el sábado o el domingo, yendo al parque,*

*caminando por las avenidas, o va al cine. El chico del campo qué va a saber que es cine?* (Felicia, parent)

10. *No salía y no conocía anadie allá. No me animaba ir más lejos u a otro lugar sola.* (Mónica, 23 years)

11. *Es más cómodo en casa porque así uno trabaja cuando quiere, y puede descansar.* (Sebastián, 18 years)

12. *Somos del campo, acostumbrado a este tipo de trabajo, no vamos a ir a la ciudad.* (Edmundo, 24 years)