SEX EDUCATION AND THE VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE ON GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN PORTUGUESE SCHOOLS

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*This paper** draws upon the recognition of sex education as an educational space for the development of youth sexual citizenship and gender equality. Despite the more open political and public debates in Portugal during the last three decades, around the implementation of sex education in schools, the relationship between education and sexuality is still seen as a «problem» and not as a citizenship right. Going beyond the health centred approaches, the paper explores new possibilities for sex education based on sexual and intimate citizenship concepts. Firstly, a brief outline of the advances and setbacks in sex education and gender policies in Portugal is presented to better contextualize this question. Secondly, an interpretation of young people's views on sexuality, more concretely on sexual pleasure and sexual pressure and the implications of sex education for intimate relationships are taken into account, based on interviews from male and female pupils in Portuguese schools. Finally, the need to rethink sex education is emphasised with consideration of young people's views for overcoming revealed issues and constraints in order for an educational agenda on equality and citizenship to be created.*

Keywor ds: sex education, gender, citizenship, equality, youth

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Intr oduction

Over the last 30 years, sexuality and gender equality has come to the fore of political, educational, and theoretical debates. The moral panic around higher rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STI), in particular HIV-AIDS, the assumptions of an increasingly earlier start to sexual activity among young people and the emergence of new sexualities led governments to implement a set of health and educational policies, from which the implementation of sex education in schools was relevant. Therefore, sex and health education may be seen as emerging in Portuguese schools as a political strategy to control young people's sexualities that often emphasised both medical and moral values. Several researches have highlighted the gap between sex education and young people's practices (Vilar, 2002; Measor, Tiffin, & Miller, 2000; Kehily, 2002; Allen, 2005), as well as the devaluing of sexism and power relationships in young people's experiences. As Fine (2009) stresses, there is a total «missing discourse of desire» in sex education programs, in particular in relation to female sexual desire. This absence of female sexuality (Lees, 2000, 1993; Fonseca, 2009) and «female citizenship» issues (Arnot & Dillabough, 2000; Araújo, 2007) in school both denies the possibility for young people to be perceived as «sexual subjects» (Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2003) and privileges the «compulsory heterosexuality» (Rich, 1987) or the «heterosexual matrix» (Butler, 1990). Furthermore, different femininities and masculinities are also still marginalized in education (Mac An Ghaill, 1994; Nayak & Kehily, 2006; 2008; Alldred & David, 2007; Moita, 2001).

The main concern in this paper is to understand young people's views about sex education and its importance to increase their sexual knowledge and to discuss the way they relate to each other, particularly with regards to their experiences of *sexual pressure* and *sexual desire*. The focus on both dimensions is due to the fact that they have clear implications in gender inequalities concerning sexual experiences, as they are very much present in intimate relationships. Sexual pressure means the social gender pressure that is carried out by a partner and peer groups on boys and girls to become sexually active, sometimes assuming violent, oppressive, and abusive forms. It also refers to youth meanings of having safe sex, how they promote a context of negotiation, and how young women have control and power over their own safety and sexuality (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1990; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1991). This dimension is tightly bound with *sexual desire*, on the way young people feel and express their own sexuality. From young people's silence and conversations about sexual desires, fantasies, and pleasure, the relevance of gender power relationships is considered to shape the construction of masculinities and femininities. More concretely, this paper attempts to develop a critical gender approach to young people's perspectives and, additionally, it suggests a new approach to sex education, as a place of citi-

zenship and equality, throughout the concepts of *sexual and intimate citizenship* (Giddens, 1992; Plummer, 2003; Richardson, 2000; Fonseca, Araújo, & Santos, 2012).

The paper s starts with an overview of Portuguese legal documents about sex education, for a broader contextualisation on gender and sexual policies. Secondly, the relevance of sexual and intimate citizenship concepts for a new design of sex education programs in schools is examined. In the last part, sex education is supported as a space where young people can talk about and listen to experiences of equality, respect and recognition. Based on content analysis of pupils' interviews, a selection of analytical categories of young people's experiences is presented – *sex education*, *sexual desire*, and *sexual pressure*.

1. Sex education policies in Portugal: an equality issue?

After the end of the authoritarian regime in 1974, the Portuguese government has been challenged by cultural, political, and social movements to change policies regarding sexual freedom, gender, and family relationships. More recently, the state, through the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG), has reinforced its compromise with the promotion of gender and sexual equality, as expressed in several strategic documents[1]. Additionally, sexual and reproductive rights have been inserted in to the political agenda: the law on decriminalization of abortion was passed in 2007 and same-sex marriage was legalized in 2009.

Alongside these political changes, the educational field was also challenged through the implementation of sex education in the school curriculum. The claim for the education of sexualities in state schools has been a controversial political issue since the 1980s. At that time, sex education in schools was mainly concerned with the values of family planning and maternity. At the end of the 1990s, sex education acquired new meanings. It changed from a view on sexuality restricted to the family debate and reproductive health[2] towards a perspective focused on individual health and wellbeing[3]. Feminist struggles against sexism and gender inequalities inside private and public spheres and later Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) claims for sexual rights and denunciation of homophobic and bullying were important results of these changes (Nogueira, 2001; Santos, 2006).

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1 IV National Plan Towards Gender Equality, Citizenship and non-Discrimination 2011-2013 (*IV Plano Nacional para a Igualdade de Género, Cidadania e não Discriminação*) and the Strategy Towards Equality between Men and Women 2010-2015 (*Estratégia para a Igualdade entre Homens e Mulheres*).

2 Law No. 3/84.

3 Law No. 120/99.

During the 1990s, however, sex education was used more as a political strategy to fight STIs (sexually transmitted infections) and teenage pregnancies, a health concern – than an educational concern *per se*. Later, from the year 2000 onwards, new configurations of sex education have emerged. Indeed, an educational strategy of sex education began with the involvement of teachers, health professionals as well as young people in programs related to sexual rights and citizenship. This gave room for the Young People's National Health Plan (Marques, Prazeres, & Pereira, 2000) and the current Schooling Guidelines for Sex Education (Sampaio, 2007).

In spite of these developments, it was not until 2010 that Portuguese schools, after many conflicts, officially implemented sex education as a compulsory subject, based on health, well-being and citizenship rights[4]. The respect for sexual «difference, pluralism and orientation», along with a wider range of information, are stated in this new document. It also underlines the importance of affection and gender equality on the negotiation of contraception, in order to tackle the consequences of risk behaviours and situations of sexual abuse, violence and exploitation. Then, the inclusion of sex education in the curriculum, as part of citizenship education, appears to reveal a new political dimension in schools based on deconstruction of norms, myths and meanings (Spencer, Maxwell, & Aggleton, 2008). As Lees (2000) emphasises, social changes on this matter are only possible if schools and subjects, such as sex education and citizenship education, put into question gender power relationships. Framed by this new «status», sex education may be an opportunity and space to promote practices of sexual and intimacy citizenship, giving access to sexual information and knowledge, and an empowerment tool for boys and girls to transform their lives into relationships of equality, free from coercion and violence. Issues of heterosexuality, homosexuality, sexism, and homophobia should also be addressed as a way of questioning the dominant masculinity and femininity patterns.

To conclude this brief analysis, it is important to stress that, despite the important steps on gender and sexual policies in public life (for instance, attempts to implement equal wages, equal working conditions, and equal treatment in social security between men and women, cf. Meier & Lombardo, 2008; Ramalho, 2004), «equality of condition» (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2004) is far from being achieved to assure recognition, respect and participation of women and other social groups, in different social spheres. In the next section, a discussion of sexual and intimate concepts follows as a contribution to a new sex education approach.

[4] Law No. 60/2009, amended in March 2010, Portaria No. 196-A/2010.

2. Sexual and intimate citizenship: a new lens to impr ove sex education

Within the aim of contributing to a new framework for sex education in schools, it seems important to clarify the concepts of *sexual* and *intimate citizenship*, especially taking into account the perspectives of Giddens (1992), Richardson (2000), and Plummer (2003). Firstly, sexuality as a citizenship right implies questioning public and private spheres: while sexuality was always seen as a private issue, in the last three decades it has started to be seen as a public issue. Similarly, while citizenship has traditionally been considered in the political and public spheres, it is now called to protect private problems, respecting and recognising individual freedom (Pateman, 1988; McRobbie, 2009). As a result, intimacy began to be interpreted and understood as a citizen's right and responsibility, which lead us to the concept of *sexual citizenship* (Evans, 1993).

If the concept of *sexual citizenship* apparently emerged as a «contradiction of terms» (Weeks, 1998), it also represents a political claim for sexual respect and acknowledgement of the other in private and public spheres. It supports the access to citizenship and sexual rights for all and not only related with the institutionalization of heterosexual and hegemonic masculinity (Richardson, 2000). Beyond the scope of rights and recognition, this claim is also linked with the notion of intimacy stressed by Giddens (1992), as a restructuring of intimate relationships based on democracy (sexual and emotional equality, freedom, and right to pleasure). This idea appears not to restrict citizenship to «sexual rights» and to categories of «sexual difference», but it extends it to intimacy values. Therefore, the citizenship right also means «the control (or not) over one's body, feelings, relationships; access (or not) to representations, relationships, public spaces; socially grounded choices (or not) about identities, gender experiences, erotic experiences» (Plummer, 1995: 151).

This review of both concepts can frame the concerns with sex education in schools in order that young people would guide their social and intimate relationships as practices of recognition, respect, and freedom. In the next section, boys and girls voices are taken into account regarding their experiences of sex education in schools as well their own experiences with sexualities.

3. The interpr etative appr oach: some methodological notes

The interviews (100) with young people took place in 14 secondary schools from different areas in North West Portugal (including rural/interior, periphery/industrial settings as well as urban cities). Forty-seven boys and 53 girls, ages 13-18[5], participated in this process. The inter-

[5] The pupils interviewed were in different school years or courses: year 7 to 9 (77 students); year 10 to 12 (23 students).

views were mainly focused on their feelings and views on sexualities. In these conversations, young people shared with the researchers their learning paths around sexual, gender, and loving relationships. They were asked about their experiences and expectations of sex education in schools, the influence of family and peers as contexts of learning, regulation and pressure, among other issues.

In accordance with ethical concerns guiding the research, interviews were conducted with young people who volunteered to participate in this research. Informed consent was given by the parents and the interviews were tape-recorded. The names are fictional as well as are other aspects that could allow for identification of the participants, in order to keep their anonymity and privacy.

In this paper, we focus on only three analytical categories, among several others[6] that emerged from the content analysis of interviews: sex education experiences, sexual desire, and sexual pressure. These categories are important insofar as they aim to bring gender issues into the field of sexuality research. We are particularly interested in understanding how sex education, both in an explicit and a hidden way, is perceived to deal with gender pressures (in particular, the way they crosscut sexual experiences, the initiation of sexual activity; the feminine and masculine sex roles in those intimate moments; the way boys and girls talk about their sexual desire, the female reputation and male popularity according to sexual experience).

3.1. Sex education experiences in school

3.1.1. Sex education in school as a space of experimentation and a space of control

Before exploring youth experiences of sex education in schools, the focus is on understanding if, accordingly to young people, the school is a legitimate space for sex education. Based on the interview analysis, it is evident that ideally school is seen by the majority of students as the «right place» to receive sexual knowledge and to learn about *gender and sexual protocols* (Nogueira & Fonseca, 2010: 261).

> We spend most of our time in school… so I think it is the right place for sex education. (Deolinda, 14 years old)

[6] Topics and themes of the interviews were: sexualities and affections; dating and flirting; initiation of sex activity; abortion and STIs; teenage pregnancy; female reputation; places of sexual and gender learning; sexual information; and contraception.

> We should have it [sex education] in school… because we never feel comfortable to speak with our family about that… and sometimes looking in health centres or searching for information is not an easy task… the school is always our second home. (Helena, 16 years old)
> Sex education is an essential subject at school. (Juliana, 14 years old)

However, in practice, schools are still being defined as institutions which ultimately control, discriminate and forbid sexual desires, bodies, and behaviours. Expressions of affection and sexuality are apparently learned within a shame and «official silence» context, resulting in lack of information and ignorance (Epstein et al., 2003).

> Teachers told us that it was forbidden to smoke and to date at school. But people still date. Last year, one teacher advised one friend of mine, who was kissing her boyfriend, to stop dating in school. (Valéria, 16 years old)
> There are a lot of people watching us… like the staff/employees… (Graça, 17 years old)

In addition, as Louro (2001) notes, there is a visible attempt of «schoolaization of the body», to control the construction of masculinities and femininities and sexual behaviours by focusing on «proper ways» of using bodies and on delaying sex to adult life. The rational emphasis of «the mind» and of academic subjects in detriment of bodies and personal development explains the difficulty for the school to recognise young men and women's desires about sex and sexual relationships (Paechter, 2006).

These signs of schools as desexualized places generate both provocation and resistance to rules outside of the classroom, often increasing heterosexual and male power over girls and other masculinities. In fact, Nayak and Kehily (2006) highlight the importance of these behaviours, in particular the use of sexual jokes, as a cultural sign of male peer groups to regulate gendered and sexual hierarchies.

Therefore, what could and could not be said in relation to sexualities in schools and in sex education lessons has been censored by moral considerations. Thus, issues of sexual diversity, sexual desire and pleasure, or masturbation, for instance, have been excluded from sex education programs that still privilege heterosexuality as the «right» option. As Alldred and David (2007: 78) stress, «sex education in schools is about how norms, values and identities about gender and about the individual's relation to their body are produced». The following quotations are an illustration of the censorship for what can be said:

> Here, in school, nobody tells us anything about sexuality and homosexuality! (…) In our class, teachers just give us the required subject matter, they don't say anything else! (Carlos, 12 years old)
> Homosexuality… teachers never talk about that. Maybe, it is because of that that I don't understand it… I have heard very little about it. (Marta, 14 years old)

3.1.2. Experiences of sex education: «this is new for us»

In relation to sex education experiences, both boys and girls showed difficulties in remembering specific knowledge on sexuality and sexual health as practices of sex education in schools. Therefore, most of them have answered that they never had had sex education lessons. This leads us to the question of the importance and the status of sex education within the national curriculum. Since it was only implemented as a compulsory subject in 2010, this non-recognition of young people means that the initiatives of teaching about sexuality in other school subjects such as the sciences, during former years, are not perceived as sex education practices. This fact devalues the efforts of some schools and communities, which participated in the project mentioned above, and teacher's initiatives in particular, who have worked hard to improve sex education in and outside of the classroom in those schools. It also highlights the difficulties pupils experience in understanding and recognising non-formal practices in school as educational moments.

> We talk about sexuality in science… but this is new for us, we never had it before. It is just about menstruation. (Deolinda, 14 years old)
> We never spoke about sexuality. We spoke about women and men's bodies, but nothing beyond that. (Mafalda, 17 years old)
> We had some campaigns about AIDS, but never about sexuality. (Ânia, 15 years old)
> I remember talking about sexuality, but we never had a lesson or a subject of sex education. (Henrique, 14 years old)

3.1.3. Learning sex education is «pivotal»

Concerning the status of sex education, the majority of young people expressed the view that sex education needs to be an independent subject in the curriculum to «inform» but also to explore «new realities and to open young people's minds» regarding their own experiences. In their opinion, sex education should question dominant gender and sexual processes and discuss their sexualities beyond informational and biological dimensions. Their proposal draws upon a construction of an institutional educational space that focuses on social relationships between peers and teachers. Both boys and girls have recognised sex education as a safe place, contradicting the assumption that sex education is more related with girls' concerns (as some authors have pointed out such as Kehily, 2002; Measor, 2004). This point of view expressed by the interviewees contributes to conceptualize an agenda of sex education which, in accordance with our perspective, can be analysed through the lens of sexual and intimate citizenship as mentioned earlier.

Lessons could be to open up people's mentalities. (Aurora, 17 years old)
Sex education is important to give people a sense of reality. (Bruno, 15 years old)
Sex education would be good to clarify things for boys and girls. Mainly to girls who are very afraid… Girls think that virginity is like gold. (António, 16 years old)

In this way, it became important to understand in what way sex education contributes to the way in which young people express gender and sexual relationships, namely those intersecting with issues of sexual desire and sexual pressure. In the next section, the evidence to illustrate these analytical dimensions in the perspectives of young people is presented.

3.2. Sexual desire: a possibility for young women?

The second analytical dimension is based on *sexual desire*. The idea that schools are usually places of regulation and control of sexualities led us to go further in the attempt to understand how boys and girls are learning to deal with and talk about their sexual desires, wishes, and needs. We are aware that gendered learning of sexuality is not limited to the control of the schools, once it is crosscut by dynamics among different agents (peers, family, media), which shape power relationships and hierarchies. However, the aim here is to understand how sexuality is learned within the curriculum and school context, as reproducing, as resisting and/or confronting relationships of domination.

Following Foucault in Walkerdine that the «power is implicated in the power/knowledge relations investigated in the creation and regulation of practices» (1990: 42), it is important to rethink sex education as knowledge that could look critically to the «patriarchal culture» (Lees, 1993: 183) and could be a «discourse of possibility, where students would be empowered to examine their lives critically» (*ibidem*: 23). In our view, it is precisely in this contentious space of influences that sex education based on difference and citizenship could be created.

Young people have been asked if they felt able to talk about their sexual desires, needs, dreams, fears, and bodies.

This contradicts the idea that girls do not have sexual relations because they do not wish for it. Contrarily, it means that the perceived absence of sexual desire is more caused by the absence of a common language of female sexual pleasure and of communication with the partner (Thomson & Scott, 1992). The majority of girls talk about the fears of not being able to please boys, on a physical or sexual performance level, and of being «discovered» by their families. They also have fears of getting a «bad reputation» among peers. The power of others' expectations in the way girls can control and assume their own sexuality is a serious constraint to achieving sexual and intimate citizenship. For young women, the use of contracep-

tion and the decision to become sexually active are under the scrutiny of a «double standard» that condemns a girl for having sex, and especially for having sexual pleasure. «The operation of the double standard condemns a girl as irresponsible if she does not use contraception and as unrespectable if she does» (Lees, 1993: 199).

The tension between what is felt and what is acceptable to be said seems to justify gender inequalities in the way boys and girls face sexual relations and express sexualities in public. Some will admit as a «whisper» a similarity of sexual desire between men and women that undermines the myth that it is only a male issue.

> This is like a myth; boys are men, so they always have more desire. Girls have it but they don't talk about it as much because they feel «If I talk about that what will they think about me?». But for boys to speak about sexuality it is so common… they speak openly about that… girls don't, they are embarrassed. (Alexandra, 14 years old)
> Women also have a lot of sexual desire. At least I speak for myself. But the ones who express and show it more are the boys. (Barbara, 18 years old)
> Girls may feel desire, but quietly. They feel it as much as boys, but boys are able to speak about it. In regards to feelings, they feel the same. (Marta, 14 years old)

However, the silence still shapes this «dubious» relationship of sexual equality in terms of sexual desire and pleasure. This silence sometimes is so deep that some girls defined sexuality as an exclusively male need, distancing themselves from any idea of having pleasure or enjoyable sex. In these cases, they learn that proper girls «hold up well without it», as it was reported in the following excerpt, «Men have more of a need to have sexual relations than women. Women cope, they don't see it as a need, they can live without sex but men can't» (Aurora, 17 years old).

This female perception contributes to the constant power conflicts among peers and promotes a restricted view on sexual citizenship for young women. The idea that sexual desire is a male characteristic was supported by the majority of the interviewed boys. In their view, boys have more physical and biological instincts, visible through «wet dreams» for instance, which legitimates their fluent talk about sex in public and even their openness to turn to prostitution to have sex.

> If a woman has a boyfriend, only then can she become sexually active. But boys don't need a girlfriend; they can have «those» types of girls, or go to brothels. Girls have sexual desire, but boys have much more. (Simão, 17 years old)
> I think men have more sexual desire. They even have «wet dreams». (Norberto, 16 years old)

This position expressed by young men is due to the belief that keeping sexual reputation intact is a female problem. In fact, despite the appearance of some resistances to the «dating

career» and «marriage» ideals (Griffin, 1989; McRobbie, 1991; Phoenix, 1992; among others), the sexuality of girls continues to be seen as confined to socially legitimate relationships. «I don't want a virgin, but a girl who doesn't have a reputation…» (Filipe, 17 years old). «Girls should be more careful. If girls have had many relations with boys, I don't want them» (David, 16 years old).

A smaller group of interviewed girls and boys have sustained that in their view gender relations and young women's attitudes are changing. They felt that girls have more power to speak than in the past, though some of the traditional values remain.

> Before I become sexually active I felt more childlike, after that I started seeing myself differently as a woman. (Mafalda, 17 years old)
> I think that girls let themselves be persuaded by boys only in the past. Not now. Now they are more autonomous and they are also entitled to reveal and to express their sexual desires as boys do. There must be equality between both genders. (Pedro, 17 years old)
> The roles are reversed. What boys did, girls are doing now. (Diogo, 17 years old)
> Now, girls often take initiatives to flirt and to go to bed with them [boys]. (João, 16 years old)

This discussion about young people's feelings, behaviours, and desires exposes how school sex education projects and policies have repressed a discourse of desire that is present in the lives of young people. Also, it enhances that schools still privilege dominant views of experiencing sexualities within contexts of silence and morality. As Fine (2006, 2009) highlights, over the last 20 years, there was a «missing discourse of sexual desire» in sex education programs, particularly regarding female sexual desire. It is important to provide this view not only because it recognises young people's sexuality, but also it gives birth to new strategies and conditions for equality in sex education. Allen (2004) also notes the benefits of including experiences of sexual desire and pleasure into sex education programs as positive learning for youth health and well-being. Indeed, an egalitarian sexual relationship requires self-confidence, communication skills and knowledge of what sexual pleasure actually is. The potential benefits of a space for open discourse for young people inside schools does not mean that young people have to go in and talk, but that their capacity for and right to have good experiences of sexual desire is respected. So, in that way, sexual and intimate citizenship could be contemplated.

3.3. Experiences of sexual pressure: between girl power and violence

The third dimension under analysis is youth experiences of *sexual pressure.* This question interestingly brings out the inequalities of gender power in sexual relationships. Specifically, the loss of virginity seemed to be one of the most pressure-laden moments for young people.

It was common to hear from girls that they felt pressure from their boyfriends to have sex. This pressure can be physical, turning into coercion and violence usually towards girls, but can also be visible in the way boys blackmail girls, threatening that are going to leave them. This psychological pressure places girls in a fragile position of victimization by the boys' initiatives. Actually, the fact that girls do not have previous experiences and cannot easily talk about their doubts sometimes leads them to accept doing it even if they do not feel ready. In this situation, girls are more concerned about pleasing boys than with listening to their own desires and wishes. Moreover, this acceptance has to be seen as dangerous and risky to safe sex practices and not only as a lack of respect and recognition of the partner (Holland et al., 1990). Often, both the lack of information and knowledge and the anxiety of these moments result in not using contraception. This absence of negotiation expresses how gender power relations influence sexuality experiences, as shown below:

> If you don't have sex with me, I'll break up with you. (Júlia, 15 years old)
> I know a person who forced his girlfriend to have sex, but she didn't want to… and he slapped her. (Gonçalo, 16 years old)
> My first boyfriend beat me severely because of jealousy. He was my first partner and I was afraid of leaving him. I was afraid of not having anyone and being alone. He threatened that he was going to tell my mother that I was no longer a virgin. I couldn't go out; I couldn't talk or look at my male friends… He controlled my life, my phone, my house, my things, my drawers… Even my diary was controlled by him. If I protested, I got slapped. (Barbara, 18 years old)
> She has to have sex without a condom because he wants to. (Raquel, 17 years old)

Consequently, girls are not socially allowed to pressure boys to have sex. They have to wait for their initiative even if they are ready, in order to avoid the assumptions that they want to have sex, they have sexual needs or desires, and especially, that they already have sexual experience.

> Pressure is done more by boys. Girls also have a little sense. Pressuring a boy is a little bit stupid. It looks bad for a girl. For a boy it doesn't because a boy is a boy and a girl is a girl. (Vera, 15 years old)

This male control over sex initiatives, especially the «first time», may as well be seen as a burden on young men. Indeed, they also become victims of pressure and scrutiny from hegemonic masculinity to become sexually active. The rush to start sexual relations is often generated by peer pressure. This step is usually seen as a rule to be included in the male group. In this way it is seen more as a question of male virility and an allegedly better reputation among peers that control their sexual interest and desire rather than a feeling or a willingness to do it. As they highlight, the option to turn to prostitution just to feel included may be trau-

matic and constraining to the future achievement of a relationship based on sexual and intimate citizenship values, such as openness to talk about their feelings, bodies, pleasure.

> I think boys pressure us a lot. (…) It's that thing of telling our friends that we have already had our first time. (…) Some of them had already done it, and I hadn't and I felt excluded from the group. (Gonçalo, 15 years old)
> One friend and I turned to prostitution for our first time. If I could go back, I wouldn't do it. I am regretful. Boys turn to prostitution too early to lose their virginity, to not be exposed and discriminated in peers group, to feel comfortable to speak about it with the group and know what they are talking about. (Norberto, 16 years old)

To sum up, the pressure, judgment and control from others (peers, boyfriends, girlfriends, families, and media) still dictate how young women and men should control their sexualities to be «respected». Therefore, masculinities and femininities are still thought and built within a context of dominant heterosexuality. Schools, and in particular sex education, have a relevant role in deconstructing these gendered ideas about sexual relationships, sexual choices and controls.

Conclusion

This paper intended to discuss and explore how education, in particular sex education, can promote values of sexual and intimate citizenship within youth behaviours, concepts, and relationships. The data analysed reveal that, despite social changes and the apparent achievement of equality among all, moral scrutiny and inequalities still remain. This is particularly true for those who construct their sexualities and identities differently from homogeneous patterns of heterosexuality and masculinity. Indeed, young women expressed their difficulties to negotiate their sexualities and desires, as well as to ensure both their safety and pleasure. They remain restricted in the way they can express themselves through their bodies, behaviours, feelings, and wishes. It may be said that their sexual and intimate citizenship is more curtailed, despite that boys also appear to be under pressures to be proper enough within dominant male patterns and compulsory heterosexuality. The boundaries and complexities in which young people, and especially young women, control their sexual relationships were called into question. Sex education should be reformulated as a strategy of women's sexual empowerment, citizenship, and autonomy.

The cross-cut analysis of our data also shows that the practices of sex education in Portuguese schools are still contextualized by an «official silence» (Epstein et al., 2003), and apparently they aim to hide the way boys and girls experience and construct their sexual relationships. In fact, the interviews with young people demonstrate that the sexualities they are

living and learning in school are mainly hegemonic sexualities, which often silence people with different sexual orientations. According to Fine (2009), the sexual knowledge taught in sex education classes rarely offers a positive construction of female sexuality, supporting a «missing discourse of desire» and women as passive beings and victims of men's sexuality, rather than as autonomous sexual beings.

A political and educational agenda focused on sexual and intimate citizenship and gender equality is necessary to rethink sex education in schools in order for young people to be able to negotiate the boundaries of safe sex and of loving and sexual relationships in which pleasure, responsibility and autonomy are key concerns for their reflexivity and orientation.

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