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Experiences of diverse and queer youth with Sexuality Education in Lisbon, Portugal

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*Master in Sociology*

Supervisor:

Doctor PEDRO VASCONCELOS, Associate Professor  
Iscte - University Institute of Lisbon

November, 2022





SOCIOLOGIA  
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

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*In memory of my father,  
I would have loved to debate you on this one.*



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## Resumo

Este estudo qualitativo buscou os pontos de vista de jovens diversos e *queer* em relação às experiências, percepções e impacto da Educação Sexual, no contexto de Lisboa, Portugal. Apesar de um crescente corpo de investigação sobre o tema, continua a faltar uma abordagem interseccional aplicada aos estudos de Educação Sexual em Portugal. Baseando-se em onze entrevistas semi-estruturadas, este estudo explora as principais dimensões das fontes formais e informais de educação: família, escola, pares, pornografia e Internet. Através da análise temática, o autor examinou como essas dimensões moldaram a compreensão da juventude sobre a sexualidade, identificando tópicos emergentes sobre pontos de vista, necessidades, discursos dominantes e impacto. Fontes formais frequentemente perpetuavam mensagens heteronormativas afirmando estereótipos de género, déficit erótico ou silêncio, o que foi associado a um impacto negativo e sentimentos de exclusão. Fontes informais forneceram informações mais significativas e úteis, especialmente no caso de normalização de experiências entre pessoas do mesmo sexo entre participantes *queer*. No entanto, os participantes foram frequentemente expostos a mensagens contendo valores patriarcais e papéis de género, que indicavam a necessidade de equipar os jovens com lentes críticas enquanto navegavam nas dimensões informais. Esses achados sugerem a necessidade de uma educação sexual mais inclusiva e abrangente para os jovens na escola, tratando os indivíduos como sujeitos sexuais legítimos e fornecendo aos professores treinamento adequado.

Palavras-chave: educação em sexualidade, juventude queer, diversidade, interseccionalidade, género, LGBTQ+



## **Abstract**

This qualitative study sought the views of diverse and queer youth in relation to Sexuality Education experiences, perceptions and impact in the context of Lisbon, Portugal. Despite a growing body of research on topic, there remains a lack of intersectional approach applied to Sexuality Education studies in Portugal. Drawing on eleven semi-structured interviews, this study explores key dimensions of formal and informal education sources: family, school, peers, and pornography and the Internet. Through thematic analysis, the author examined how these dimensions shaped youth's understanding of sexuality, identifying emerging topics regarding views, needs, dominant discourses and impact. Formal sources often perpetuated heteronormative messages affirming gender stereotypes, erotic deficit, or silence, which was associated with a negative impact and feelings of repression and exclusion. Informal sources provided more significant and useful information, especially in the case of normalising same-sex experiences amongst queer participants. Nevertheless, participants were frequently exposed to messages containing patriarchal values and gender roles that indicated the need of equipping youth with critical lens while navigating informal dimensions. These findings suggest the need of more inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education for youth at school, treating individuals as legitimate sexual subjects and providing teachers with appropriate training.

Key words: sexuality education, queer youth, diversity, intersectionality, gender, LGBTQ+



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# Introduction

The benefits of comprehensive sexuality education are widely acknowledged and it is recognised that it can have a significant role in improving not only sexual health outcomes such as infections or unwanted pregnancies (UNFPA, 2021) but also in supporting youth with information and skills related to equally vital aspects of sexuality. For instance, sexuality education, according to The United Nations Population Fund, should cover topics like family life, relationships, culture, gender roles, sexual diversity, in addition to covering issues such as human rights, gender equality, bodily autonomy, sexual abuse, discrimination, and violence. By educating and raising awareness regarding these matters, young people can obtain valuable knowledge to navigate them along with societal pressure.

Despite the acknowledged significance and increased emphasis that is given to sexuality education nowadays, school-based sexuality education curriculum in Portugal vary from school to school and provision of sexuality education is said to be irregular, partly due to the lack of an official programme (IPPF European Network), which may lead to poor delivery across school. What is more, regardless of studies having tackled the issue of sexuality education, many have focused on primarily school-based sex education and homogeneous populations. This means that few studies have engaged with intersectional approach researching perspectives of diverse young people. In 2016/2017 The National Study on the School Environment (ENAE), conducted in Portugal, revealed a lack of information on sexual orientation, gender identity and the fact that many LGBTQ+ young people perceive school as being an unsafe place, in which discriminatory behaviours are frequent by teachers, staff and fellow students. The studies not only indicate the issues found in curriculum and classrooms but also the need to approach sexuality education from an intersectional perspective. Furthermore, research on the experiences of students who identify as LGTBQ+ is still limited and relatively new in Portugal (Saleiro *et al.* 2022:21), along with researching the perspectives of young people of minority race/ethnicity, particularly non-binary or trans. Lastly, in Portugal, little research has retrospectively examined the impact of sexuality education received by asking youth to reconstruct their experiences. Thus, given wide variation of formal and informal educational experiences diverse youth may have, it is fundamental to conduct an in-depth exploration.

The present case study aims to analyse retrospectively diverse and queer young adults' views and experiences with formal and informal sexuality education within the Portuguese context. The qualitative study asked youth to reflect on the subject, in order describe and evaluate sexuality education messages received and its impact within key dimensions. The latter are defined as formal sources (school and family), and informal sources (peers, pornography/Internet) that that are significant for obtaining information, forming attitudes and beliefs about sexuality and sexual behaviour of individuals.

The objectives of the studies are the following:

1. To reconstruct youth's experiences with sexuality education and evaluate its impact on shaping their understanding of sexuality. This will seek a reflective account of which sources and dimensions influenced their apprehension, what messages they received from it, and raise awareness about social processes that affect individuals in a non-dominant position.
2. To seek the insights from diverse youth to address deficits of sexuality education and explore needs and recommendations.

The study is comprised of six main chapters: Chapter 1 begins by discussing relevant theories of sexuality, followed by literature review on Sexuality Education and its dimensions and concludes by brief history, legislation and guidelines of Sex Education in Portugal. Chapter 2 is dedicated to procedures and methods employed by the study. Chapter 3 reports the findings of participants' experiences with Sexuality Education at home. Chapter 4 reports the results on experiences with School-based Sex Education. Chapter 5 is concerned with sexuality education and peers. Chapter 6 reports the findings of interviewees experience with pornography and Internet. The study concludes by a section discussing final thoughts draws conclusions about results, limitations and future research.



# Sexuality education: theories, dimensions and context

## 1.1. Theories of Sexuality

In this chapter, Social Constructionism theory will be discussed along with the work of prominent scholars Jeffrey Weeks, Michael Foucault, Steven Seidman. This sections aims to provide an understanding of sexuality as socially constructed in order to comprehend how formal and informal processes of sexuality education can shape individuals. Jeffrey Weeks has contributed to the field of sexuality by discussing its cultural and socio-historical construction, its relationship with power, and the State's role in rationalising and regulating it. Steven Seidman has provided insightful exploration of society's effect on sexual choices by investigating the political and social consequences of elevating certain sexual practices and identities while stigmatising others. Michael Foucault has contributed to understanding the relationship between power and knowledge and about how they are used as a form of social control through institutions and discursive practices.

Social constructionism<sup>1</sup> is a revolutionary and highly significant theory for sexuality studies. This is because it introduced a rupture with biological essentialism or determinism, which believes biological factors are the sole determinants of an individual's traits and behaviour. Saying that sexuality is a social construct is affirming that historical and cultural factors shape sexuality and that sexual knowledge is sustained by social processes constructed through interactions between people in society. For example, physically identical sexual acts may have varying social significance and meaning depending on how they are defined and understood in different cultures and historical periods (Vance, 1991).

Jeffrey Weeks deals with construction of sexuality and, in particular, the social construction of identity categories. He proposed five broad crucial areas in the social organisation of sexuality: kinship and family systems, economic and social organization, social regulation, political interventions, and the development of “cultures of resistance” (Weeks, 1986). For instance, family system could influence the likelihood of sexual life patterns, encouraging or discouraging the rate and age of marriage, reproduction, and attitudes toward non-procreative or non-heterosexual sex, the relative power of men over women amongst others. They are especially significant because the family is where most of individuals in Western culture gain sense of individual sexual needs and identities. In order to understand sexuality, there is a need to understand the relationships in which most of it takes place (Weeks 1990: 22). Another significant idea that Weeks discusses is power and its three major axes: class, gender, and race. For example, female sexuality patterns are inseparably linked to men’s historically rooted

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<sup>1</sup> Sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman introduced the theory of social constructionism in the 60s and Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and George Herbert Mead were among the thinkers who influenced this theory. Mead proposed the influential theory of symbolic interactionism which argued that social interaction is responsible for the formation of identity. Social reality or truth is actually constructed in our daily lives through a system of socio-cultural and interpersonal interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

capability to define and categorise what is necessary and desirable. Therefore, we see the world through the lens of our concepts of male sexuality<sup>2</sup> (Weeks 1990: 32). Moreover, the categorisation by class or gender intersect with ethnicity and race<sup>3</sup>. Rather than viewing sexuality as a united whole, the various forms of sexuality should be recognised: class sexualities, gender-specific, racial sexualities, and struggle and choice sexualities. The “invention of sexuality” was not a single event that occurred in the distant past but a constant process in which everyone is involved. These axes evidence how social constructionism still has a credible appeal in qualitative analysis, as it maintains a critical stance towards knowledge that is taken-for-granted: things that are perceived as “normal”, such as gender, race, and class, are socially constructed, transformed, and reproduced through historical processes within institutions and culture.

This is relevant when applied to the realm of sex education as social constructionist approaches can investigate a wide range of young people’s behaviour, beliefs, and subjective meanings within groups, as well as how they perceive the body, pleasure, desire, and functions as mediated by the culture in which they live and grow (Khan 2018: 9). The approach emphasises the importance of location (e.g., social institutions such as families, religious institutions, and schools) within a social structure (e.g., a specific culture comprised of norms, values, beliefs, systems, and rituals), which has a significant impact on the social construction of reality such as conceptions, experiences, and learning processes of sexuality (Khan 2018: 9). It further encourages us to question individuals’ sexual experiences and learning processes, as their experiences and narratives are shaped by the discourses in which they are immersed (Flannigan, 2011, as cited in Khan, 2018).

Additionally, Sexual Script Theory (SST) contributed to cultural and psychological views of sexuality. Sexual scripts are the accepted sexual norms that individuals embrace, internalise, and endorse, as a result of socialisation. Sexuality is learned from culturally available messages that set guidelines<sup>4</sup> for sexual behaviour, desire, activities and desirable characteristics of sexual interaction (Wiederman, 2005: 496). Everyday sexual scripts can contain informal sexual guidelines, rules, and norms symbolic and nonverbal components in specific time sequences of conduct. The scripts consider the participants, their personal and social characteristics, implied motives, and various behavioural cues.

Further significant contributions to sexuality studies comes from Michael Foucault. A main idea within his writings is that “sexuality created sex”, meaning that the discourse of sexuality shaped our views of what sex is, challenging essentialist view that sex as biological. He defines sexuality as an invention of the bourgeoisie, that ensures dominance and whose purpose is still to maintain power.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Weeks, female sexuality has been constrained by economic and social dependence, men's ability to define sexuality, marriage's restrictions, the responsibilities of reproduction, and the ramifications of male violence against women.

<sup>3</sup> Previous sexuality models by historians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century portrayed the black person as lower down the evolutionary scale. As a result, a civilised norm of sexual behaviour exists, encoding this belief in a variety of practices, ranging from immigration laws to birth control propaganda (Weeks, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Gagnon and Simon identify three types: cultural scenarios (i.e. guidelines for roles, class and racial identities), interpersonal scripts (patterns of daily interactions) and intrapsychic scripts (fantasies, expectations, desires).

Disciplinary power over our bodies is exerted via social organisations such as schools, religions, military, and hospitals amongst others. In this way, discursive practices and common sense truths of what is normal, are used to control people's behaviour, sexual feelings, and identities allowing control over their bodies and actions (Seidman 2015: 32). For instance, hegemonic powers exert pressure on individuals to exhibit heteronormativity, hence, non-heteronormative pre-constructions are widely oppressed. However, despite the contributions, Foucault has been criticised for not addressing race, age, class, gender, and how individuals create sexual identities and these are maintained by social forces.

Steven Seidman has tackled some of these issues as he explores the political and social ramifications of privileging some sexual practices and identities while stigmatising others. He highlights the social order that has an influence on non-mainstream sexualities. In his writings, Seidman discusses two notions of "sex" being "social": the first view holds that we are born heterosexual and driven to engage in a procreative behaviour, where social factors influence when, with whom and how we engage in heterosexual behaviour. The second and stronger view, suggests we are born with bodies that can experience sensual stimulation, and social factors determine which sensations are sexual, which ones are seen as identities, and which are considered appropriate. In this way, a classification of sex acts that are good or bad is created. This, and the idea that nature has created two binary opposite human types, namely men and women, has perpetuated the view that heterosexuality is natural. Therefore, our society has been organised around heterosexuality, marriage and the nuclear family, making heterosexuality "compulsory". Nevertheless, compulsory heterosexuality is a notion that only justifies how society divides people into binary genders but does not account for the creation of gender identities and how they are sustained. Seidman questions these ideas from a social and historical perspective and discusses how heterosexuality has always existed but the meaning and social organisation of it has varied through history. In the past, in many societies, sex was seen as a behaviour (for ex., sodomy) and the sexual practices between people assigned the same sex or gender existed but there were no identities formed based on behaviour (Seidman 2015: 46). This changed due to a gender crisis and changing gender roles leading to sexual identity becoming significant and "normal sex" was ascribed to heterosexual sex (Seidman 2015: 46). The naturalness of heterosexuality would cause people to see the difference between men and women as positive and natural. In addition, the culture of homophobia was a result of the emphasis on heterosexuality, making homosexuality be seen as deviant and stigmatised and people fearful of exhibiting any gender traits outside of established masculine or feminine roles, perpetuating sexual hierarchies. Therefore, we are expected to associate sex with love, monogamy, marriage, and starting families as we get older, not because of nature, but because of complex social dynamics.

According to Seidman, sex is not only an individual's desire or act but a social fact: laws, media, institutions, and social policies shape and regulate sexualities. Sexuality is not merely one thing, such as preference for sex or gender, but when and where you have sex, your preferences, number of partners, and monogamy amongst others. Heterosexuality is an institution that organises national life, from schools and mass media to government and justice system (Seidman 2015: 57). The sexual system does

not only oppress gay people but it controls all sexualities. People who like the type of “sex” that is not considered appropriate can too marginalise individuals. Despite integration of queer people, the inequality is visible in numerous institutions such as the military, marriage, schools and so forth. Therefore, when we consider sexuality education, many of these aspects come into play: institutions control formal education at school and informal sex education is influenced by messages embedding dominant ideologies present in every dimension of our lives<sup>5</sup>.

## **1.2. Sexuality Education - Object of inquiry**

Sexuality education, also known as sexual education, is the act of teaching human sexuality-related topics such as emotional relationships and responsibilities, sexual reproduction, human sexual anatomy, sexual activity, age of consent, reproductive health and rights, sexual health and safety, and birth control. Comprehensive sex education encompasses all of these subjects and is frequently contrasted with abstinence-only sex education, which focuses solely on sexual abstinence. Still in this regard, the preliminary report of the Portuguese Sex Education Working Group defines it as the “process by which information is obtained and attitudes and beliefs about sexuality and sexual behaviour are formed” (GTES 2005: 6). Here, sexuality education refers to both formal and informal education individuals receive. To avoid confusion, when referring to sexuality education at school, the term “school-based” sex education will be applied.

In a policy issued by World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and The Federal Centre for Health Education, it is indicated that sexuality education seeks to develop and strengthen children’s and young people’s ability to make conscious, satisfying, healthy, and respectful choices about relationships, sexuality, and emotional and physical health.<sup>6</sup> (BZgA, 2016). Sex education may have a great impact not only on individuals’ reproductive health but also can empower youth to develop healthy personal relationships. Social norms and gender inequality have an impact on how people express their sexuality and engage in sexual behaviour<sup>7</sup>. There is still stigma of sex education promoting early sexual activity and increase promiscuity, often conceptions related to religious or moral issue. However, good sexuality education has a positive impact on attitudes and values, and it can even out power dynamics in intimate relationships, thereby contributing to the prevention of abuse and fostering mutually respectful and consensual relationships (BZgA, 2016).

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<sup>5</sup> For example, by designating authorities to establish guidelines for public discourse and imagery, the state has regulated media portrayals and had legalised marriage as being exclusively between heterosexual people, in this way constructing and regulating people’s sexual lives (Seidman 2015: 169).

<sup>6</sup> According to studies the implementation of long-term national sexuality education programs has resulted in a decrease in teenage pregnancies and abortions, as well as a decrease in rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI) and HIV infection among young people aged 15–24 (BZgA, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, many young women may lack power in their sexual relationships and young men, on the other hand, may feel peer pressure to conform to male sexual stereotypes and engage in controlling or harmful behaviors (BZgA, 2016).

Sex education is an intentional process and programmed through the curriculum. In Portugal, the guardianship guidelines define it as a “formal, structured, intentional and adequate approach to a set of issues related to human sexuality” (López Sanchez, 1990). Informal education is not intentional, it is a process through which all individuals obtain knowledge, values, skills through everyday experiences and the resources and influences in their environment. For example, the family socialisation, friendships, romantic and sexual interactions, work, books, mass media<sup>8</sup>, social media, pornography amongst others. Furthermore, informal higher education often insinuates itself at the level of non-verbal aspects, which shape the syllabus (Vaz *et al.*, 1996: 20).

### **1.3. Dimensions of sexuality education**

Family, peers, schools, and the pornography and Internet all may play significant roles in teaching about sexuality, contributing to the construction of youth’ understanding of sexuality. In this section, relevant literature will be presented, addressing each dimension.

#### **1.3.1. Family**

Family exerts a significant force on sexual development through socialization of the children (DeLamater, 1987). There are many influential models of masculine and feminine behaviour that children can imitate, hence children frequently repeat behaviour that is deemed appropriate for their sex. Thus, children’s understanding of sexuality could be significantly impacted. Walker (2004) noted that mothers tend to be the primary providers of sex education at home, whereas fathers appear to be less involved when they delegate responsibility to the school or to a woman in the household (Walker, 2004:242; Turnbull, 2008). Dias & Rodrigues (2009) determined family was the main source of knowledge about sexuality but its importance was secondary to the peer group: this was the case for 62.9% of the respondents. This followed by the mother as a main source (58%), health professionals (37.6%) and, lastly, teachers (30.5%).

The topic of taboo, myths associated to sex education and embarrassment are recurring patterns seen in literature. Primary socialisation is influenced by a variety of factors, including educational background, social status, and parental values, and additionally, one generation may affect another, by similar experiences that had previously affected their parents (Walker 2004: 244). Own beliefs, morals, ethnicity, cultural beliefs, socioeconomic and educational status are all factors in the family that may affect sexuality. These can be related to delayed sexual experience, usage of more effective contraceptive and more confidence (Walker, 2004). Furthermore, parents’ differing approaches to raising their daughters and sons may have a direct impact on the formation of their identities and attitudes toward sexuality. In contrast to the representation of masculinity that emphasises strength,

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<sup>8</sup> According to Matos (2012) television, cinema, music and especially the internet are very influential as one of the first sources of modelling experience, in addition to family or peers.

virility, rigidity, control, and privileges boldness and freedom, the construction of gender and sexuality in our society still assigns values that reinforce female submission, a modest, cautious, shy posture, as well as control over women's bodies (Ressel *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, Calzo MA & Ward (2009) conducted a study on contributions of parents, peers, and media to attitudes toward homosexuality examining sex and ethnic differences. In line with previous literature (see Dubé, Savin Williams, & Diamond, 2001) they argued an adolescent's gender and ethnic group background are likely to have a significant influence on the specific types of messages received about homosexuality due to the fact sexuality beliefs are socially constructed. Additionally, homosexuality among men is seen as contradicting the culturally endorsed image of Black masculinity among many African-American populations, and Black lesbians face high levels of victimisation from their families, community, and church (Bowleg *et al.*, 2003). This may indicate that a strong heterosexist socialisation force works on Black women as well (Calzo MA & Ward, 2009).

### **1.3.2. School**

School as institution and school curriculum can be factors playing a vital role in regulating, controlling and shaping young people understanding sexuality. Sexual identities are not genetically determined, but rather formed through institutional and lived practices. Instead of being agencies that passively reflect dominant power relations, schools can be viewed as sites for the production of gendered/sexualised identities (Kehily 2002: 36). In this line, Warner (1993) noted that schools are fundamentally heteronormative spaces where homosexuality is "deviant" and heterosexuality is classified as "normal" and by exerting these everyday practices forming part of symbolic boundaries regulating sexuality in educational contexts. These techniques influence the constitution of youth sexuality as problematic and seeing it this way, people are deprived of positive and legitimate sexual subject positioning (Allen, 2005).

The studies that have explored school-based sex education focus on a variety of topics but there seems to be a shortage of studies exploring youth's experiences and perspective on sex education along with a lack of intersectional approach. Ezer *et al.* (2019) argued the perspectives of young people themselves influence the most successful sexuality education but there is little research on young people's experiences with it. Despite widespread recognition of the importance of intersectional analyses, few studies engage with or use intersectionality as a theoretical or methodological framework (Garcia & Fields, 2017). In another study, Martinez and Karen P. (2008) found that the teachers and young adults were ill- equipped to articulate sexual and reproductive health rights, and could be unable to prevent gender stereotypic, racialised or homophobic constructions of adolescent sexuality. Nova J. Bradford centre in USA (2018) analysed transgender youth education experiences revealing unmet needs, and lack of content diversity and voices delivering it. Unis & Sällström (2020) found that the exclusion of same-sex sexual experiences and relationships was sometimes interpreted as a discriminatory message that it is not acceptable to be a homosexual or bisexual young person.

Furthermore, Allen (2005) revealed the need for discussion about same-sex attractions and described schools as being heteronormative spaces. Heteronormativity in sex and relationship education, as well as the omission of the topic of sexual orientation can marginalise young people who are not heterosexual. This topic of school-based sex has also been tackled in Portugal by several studies.

According to a study by Saavedra *et al.* (2007), despite legislation, two of the main issues that programs address are adolescent pregnancy and HIV/AIDS still remain. It was found that programs neglected the significance of gender and class, ethnic culture, and local issues. Ramiro *et al.*, (2013) indicated sex education had no negative effects knowledge, attitudes belief of adolescents in their study. However, a difficulty in promoting the opportunities of sex education and a need for teachers and parents' training was revealed. Gato (2017) emphasised the absence of policies and intervention that protect LGBTI students. The National Study on the School Environment (ENAE), conducted in 2016/2017 in Portugal, revealed a lack of information on sexual orientation and gender identity. In general the investigation in social science regarding the experiences of students LGBTQ+ is still scarce and relatively recent in Portugal (Saleiro *et al.*, 2022: 21). A recent survey by Sagnier and Morell (2021) indicated that out of 85% of young Portuguese who received school-based sex education, only 28% evaluated it as being useful. The surveys showed that students would have liked to see the LGBTQ+ topic discussed in more depth at school. Furthermore, it was indicated that teachers/educators were not sufficiently capacitated to teach sex education (Saleiro *et al.*, 2022: 140). It was also found that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the students affirmed never having assisted a positive approach regarding 'the LGBTQ+' theme at school and 26.4% claimed they received specific information about sexual orientation or gender expression identity in the school-based sex education (Saleiro *et al.*, 2022: 25). This points that it is an on-going issue to be tackled.

### **1.3.3. Peers**

Several studies have discussed the role of the peers as a key source of information and its impact on behaviours. For many decades, young people have relied on peers and literature/media as their primary sources of information (King and Lorusso, 1997) and studies find that peers are considered the biggest contributors to sexual beliefs by adolescents (Ballard & Morris, 1998). According to Strange *et al.*, (2002) peer educators are seen as having more informal interactions, such as being able to talk openly, joke, and use humour while passing on important health messages. Another important factor influencing peer interactions is the biological sex of the peer educator, as well as power dynamics.

When looking into peer influence, similar patterns emerge. For instance, a consistent predictor of adolescents' engagement in sexual risk behaviour is their belief that peers are engaging in similar behaviour (Widman *et al.*, 2015). According to Matos (2008), the peer group has a considerable influence on the behaviour of many adolescents. Individuals who are close to the group have a tendency to try to conform to the attitudes and behaviours of the group. Consequently, the peer group can constitute itself whether as a protective or risk factor. Ramiro (2013) also emphasises the potential for

negative or positive factors in the process of peer-to-peer sex education. The common and varied experiences that allow testing references and behaviours acquired through imitation are highlighted as positive factors. As for the negative factors, the quality of the information might be questionable and inaccurate. However, according to Widman *et al.* (2015) not all youth are equally susceptible to peer influence. Gender differences in conformity to pressure for sexual activity, with girls being more resistant to peer influence than boys, are in line with the sexual script theory. They noted these findings were in agreement with gender socialisation theories that suggest that boys receive regular messages tying sexual behaviour to high social status, whereas girls receive more complicated messages by being treated as sexual objects while being taught that overt sexual behaviour may lead to lower social status Widman *et al.* (2015). As a result, girls may minimise or conceal their sexual experiences, in order to avoid being perceived as promiscuous. This tendency to downplay sexuality may be especially prevalent in the presence of other girls Widman *et al.* (2015). Another finding was that African-American boys were more likely than other boys to succumb to peer pressure when it came to sexual behaviour, implying that different peer socialisation processes may be at work (Widman *et al.*, 2015:327). Calzo MA & Ward (2009) noted that friends of Black participants were perceived to provide significantly more conservative messages about homosexuality than friends of White participants. These findings implied that Black participants' parents and friends are more likely to communicate that homosexuality is a moral and perverse issue.

#### **1.3.4. Pornography**

Pornography has been a central point for societal debates about the regulation of sexual expression. Since the emergence of online pornography during the 90s, it has been framed as a risk to young people's well-being, as well as a potential threat to their sexual development (Flood, 2009; McKee, 2010). According to McCormark (2017), numerous researchers have explored predominantly the negative effects of pornography on shaping behaviours and attitude towards sex (e.g. Flood, 2009; Klaassen and Peter, 2015; Mitchell *et al.*, 2003). It is claimed that pornography transmits a script for sexual intercourse acquired through consumption, which has an effect when the viewer applies it to their own sexual behaviour. Hence, where pornography is widely available and education about sexual intercourse is limited, it is argued that pornography can have a significant impact on how intercourse is understood and practiced (McCormark, 2017). Scholars have also argued that pornography might be sought by youth, as a source of information, when there is a lack of adequate sexuality education, and as a way to develop their values and beliefs about gender, sex and sexuality (Setty, 2021). Albury (2014) argues porn can be a vital source of education for sex and gender diverse youth, and that the explicit content may give support to sexual confidence and positive community formation for people who are attracted to the same sex (see Waugh 1996; Ruddock and Kain 2006; Hillier and Harrison 2007; Kubichek *et al.*



2010). There is also a stress on the lack of erotic discourse<sup>9</sup>. Allen (2015) conducted a survey revealing an erotic deficit in school-based sex education due to the school environment denying students as positive and legitimate sexual subjects.

Many see pornography as sex education as it allows youth to see genitalia and the mechanics of sex work, resulting in either liberating youth or creating sexual expectations (Davis, 2017). Sun *et al.* (2016) also discussed that the pornographic script may influence young men's sexual performance expectations, as well as what they want and expect from a sexual partner. Additionally, Davis (2017) found that pornography influenced the development of many respondents' sexual identities and preferences, on a conscious and unconscious level. To watch pornography influenced sex, pleasure, identity, and body image expectations, highlighting the importance for future research on this field. McCormark (2017) studied influence of pornography on non-exclusive sexual orientation, applying the concept of consumption of porn as a leisure activity, rather negative effects. The results indicated there are educational benefits for young men, in relation to the desires, sexual identities and the development of sexual techniques. The study emphasised the scarce research of lived experiences of the consumer and the need to develop a holistic understanding of porn in society. In another study, Setty (2021) found pornography was seen as a "normal" aspect of masculine sexuality as opposed to feminine, and gendered construct about sexual performances were taken for granted. Expressions of agency and control that were socially sanctioned were thus both insightful and constitutive of a gendered and heteronormative social order, indicating the need to attend pornography as a cultural resource that youth uses to express, build and designate sexual subjectivities and social roles.

#### **1.4. Sex Education in Portugal**

This section will briefly aim to summarise the history of formal sex education in Portugal in order to provide us with insights on the context, legislation and guidelines that exist. The rationale for focusing on explaining the context of school-based sex education lies in the idea that it disrupts the traditionalist scheme of reproduction. In other words, sexuality and reproduction have traditionally been seen as a part of the private realm of the family. In this line, school sex education is an emancipatory project that could benefit and influence individuals, and in particular, minority groups, such as women and queer people. It can provide empowerment of their sexuality and have control over their bodies and reproduction. In this way, school sex education can function as a tool, providing less dominant groups with resources to navigate the different dimensions in their everyday life.

In Portugal, the first legislation emerged in 1984 in the context of family planning and legal abortion. The aim was to become a more general educational subject and as a result, an education bill was passed for it to be a part of "Personal and Social Education". In the 90s, new disciplines emerged in preparation for marriage without discussing contraception, prostitution or masturbation. Furthermore,

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<sup>9</sup> Instructions on how to initiate sexual activity that may not be described in school-based education.

new health education programmes were created to promote projects and training of teachers, followed by an experimental project resulting in issuing “*Technical Guidelines on Sexuality Education*”. Since early 2000’s school-based sex education was obligatory in school until 9<sup>th</sup> grade and included in areas such as Citizenship Education (BZgA, 2016: 72).

In terms of statutory regulation, despite the obligatory status of Sexuality Education in Portugal, the school curriculum lacks an obligatory sex education component. Policy is the responsibility of the Ministries of Education and Health at the national level. Regional education boards are in charge at the regional level, while school assemblies and school boards are in charge at the local level.

Since there is no official sexuality education curriculum to be applied, but only guidelines containing a holistic approach and reproductive health, sex education, can be implemented in the school system during all cycles, without a standard age, with components being adapted to target group with numerous teaching methods. School teachers, health professionals and NGOs<sup>10</sup> are responsible for provision. Any teacher, usually Biology, Religious Education, Geography and Philosophy teachers with main methods of experimental learning and discussion, can teach it. Since 1985 – youth services developed, involving APF, health services and Portuguese Youth Institute (IPJ). Recently, many schools develop health promotion projects including sex education and Portuguese Youth Institute (IPJ), campaigns and materials produced on HIV/AIDS for youth. According to the official decree (Portaria n.º 196-A/2010), specific curriculum content have been indicated for each educational cycle. This would mean that, students are to receive formal sexuality education that covers a wide range of topics<sup>11</sup> (see Annex A). Furthermore, since 2009 the first law (Lei n. 60/2009, 2009) for sex education was approved in a school context, where sexual orientation is mentioned in a clearly inclusive manner. It is decreed that the matter should be addressed in the context of sex education activities (Saleiro *et al.*, p. 2022: 20). Therefore, this study can verify if this has been the case for the participants in the sample who would have been students at the time.

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<sup>10</sup> The leading NGO that operates in school-based SE is Associação para o Planeamento da Família (APF) and since 1998, IPJ and APF, run a helpline “Sexualidade em Linha” to educate about prevention of STIs and teenage pregnancy.

<sup>11</sup> Annex A contains the original decree in Portuguese and translation of the curriculum content is provided.

## Research methods and procedures

### 2.1. Aims, research questions and sample description

This study analysed the views of diverse and queer youth in relation to Sexuality Education experiences, perceptions and impact, by exploring key dimensions of formal and informal education sources: family, school, peers, and pornography and the Internet. The approach chosen aimed to be intersectional by sampling diverse and queer youth on the premise that intersectionality recognises an individual or a group with multiple layered social identities. These create a position in society that it may be either advantageous or disadvantageous for people, and can have an impact on how they behave and navigate many aspects of their daily lives, including sexuality. Hence, intersectionality may be used to identify underprivileged groups, differences within and between groups, and explain them. It is an especially useful for detecting the overlapping and co-construction of visible and, at first glance, invisible strands of inequality (Lutz, 2022). In order to achieve the study aims, the following research questions were addressed:

1. How did the participants interpret their experience with sexuality education within several dimension, in terms of feelings, attitudes and impact?
2. How did their narratives reproduce and/or disrupt dominant discourses related to sexuality education, including discourses around gender and sexuality?
3. Was formal/non-formal or informal education more significant in shaping youth's perceptions of gender and sexuality, and did that vary across individuals? What were the most significant dimensions participants identify?
4. What aspects did participants considered as required to cover their needs in developing a comprehensive school-based sex education delivery?

Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 1, the author had the following hypothesis:

1. Diverse and queer youth can benefit from sexuality education in gaining control over their bodies, reproduction and how they experience their sexuality.
2. School-based sex education can positively influence individuals but sexuality is multidimensional, hence other sources may have a greater impact on shaping youth's understanding.
3. School-based sex education curriculum lacks intersectionality approach and inclusivity.

The method chosen for this study was of a qualitative nature employing semi-structured interviews in order to allow in-depth conversation and discuss various topics with multiple themes. Qualitative interviewing can be particularly useful when the aim is to explore interviewees' point of view. It permits greater flexibility for the researcher to ask new questions and follow up on replies, obtaining rich and detailed answers (Bryman 2012: 470).

The sampling procedure used more than one approach. It was non-probability sampling, namely convenience sample, voluntary response sample and snowballing sample. All of the participants were young adults over eighteen year's old (the age ranged between twenty and twenty-seven), residents in Lisbon, Portugal (including Metropolitan area). The response rate was 62.5%: out of sixteen people who signed up for the study, eleven individuals responded to the invitation for an interview. Since the study has the objective to be intersectional in its approach, the participants were from diverse backgrounds, including young people with gender and sexual orientation diversity, and additionally with religious, ethnical and racial diversity. However, there were no participants who identify as intersex, trans woman, or lesbian. Hence, the study explores the intersectionality that the author could access. Four of the participants identify as cisgender heterosexual women, two of them as racialised (Black; and Biracial of European and African descent) and two as White bisexual women. Three participants identify as White cisgender men; one identifies as heterosexual and asexual, two as gay. Two participants as non-binary or gender-fluid person, one of Black ethnicity and the other of Mixed/biracial ethnicity (European and African descent). One person identifies as a White bisexual trans man. In terms of religion, two participants are atheists, two are agnostic, one is Muslim, one is Christian, one is Pagan, and three indicate they do not identify with any beliefs regarding religion. Regarding occupation, four of the participants are students and six are young professionals. Nine participants have completed a higher degree of education (Bachelor's or Master's degree) and two have completed high school (see Annex B).

## **2.2. Materials and Procedures**

The material used for the voluntary sampling procedure was comprised of a poster designed as an ad to invite individuals to sign up for the study. The poster was shared in ISCTE university Facebook group, distributed on campus and in ILGA official website. Furthermore, a consent form was created on *Google Docs* forms that participants would have to fill in prior to the interview agreeing to participate and their speech to be recorded, transcribed and used in the study. This form also contained questions regarding the demographics of the individuals. Further materials used included an interview guide that comprised the questions to be asked during the interview (see Annex C). The interviews duration varied between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted individually, either in person, or online via Zoom, as some participants did not have the possibility to meet personally. The setting for interviewing face-to-face were: ISCTE University, a co-working space and a coffee shop and speech was recorded via a mobile phone device. The materials were kept on a USB device that was safely kept (encrypted with password) and names of the participants were changed for confidentiality.

Regarding the interview process, once a participant signed up, they were contacted via email with an invitation for an interview. Prior the interview, participants were sent a reminder and the consent form. During the meeting, interviewees were given an overview of relevant information regarding the

study and the interview. They were also informed that the interview could be interrupted at any time if they did not wish to further continue. Moreover, participants were informed they can time during the questions to reflect. Questions for clarifications were welcome at any time. Once, the interview was concluded, the recording was transferred onto the USB external memory drive to keep the file safe and ready for transcription and analysis.

In order to analyse the narratives a thematic analysis was employed. This method, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), allows for a systematic way of seeing as well as processing qualitative information through "coding". Following this approach, first the data was transcribed, read and re-read to note initial thoughts and main ideas were highlighted for each transcript. Afterwards, initial codes were generated across the set to collect relevant data. This information was comprised in a table which allowed to identify the emerging themes and patterns.



## CHAPTER 3

# Sexuality Education at home

During the interviews participants' described feelings, perceptions, and attitudes regarding sexuality education within the family realm. To begin with, the data revealed a theme indicating a dominant discourse of sex and sexuality as a taboo, with most interviewees sharing that sexuality was “*never*” discussed, and the assumption individuals are responsible or expected to obtain this information. For example, José noted:

I would often talk about stuff like period pain, it was something I had to deal with a lot and what like was really impactful in my life. And I wished to talk openly with my mother and siblings and they like reacted like it was not supposed to be talked about and you had to figure it out. (José, trans man, 21).

Participants coming from small towns or rural areas where people, according to their statements, were more “closed off” or religious, considered this played a role in their experience with sex education. Some attributed the lack of sex education to their place of origin and the dominant culture:

My family they are from Cape Verde and culturally, they don't speak... I believe that is a cultural thing. They don't speak about sex with their kids. Because if they my cousins, everyone is the same. It's a taboo, and there are a lot of young mothers and probably also it has to do with the fact that parents don't speak about it with girls. (Ana, heterosexual, 24).

According to social constructionism, meanings are created within groups and mediated by the culture in which individuals grow up, such as family institution. This generates an impact of how people construct the reality of their experiences, and learning processes of sexuality. According to Walker (2004) ethnicity, class and cultural beliefs may influence sexuality and be related to contraception usage or cause a delay in sexual experiences. Ana explained, she avoided having sex to prevent pregnancy as her friends and sister had this experience very early on. Generally, the findings of sexuality as a taboo are not surprising, and in line with the literature reviewed within the family cultures, that have found silence and taboo are all recurring themes, and until recently conversation about sexuality was widely dismissed at home (Ressel *et al.*, 2011).

Secondly, when participants had any conversations regarding the subject, these covered matters such as menstruation, relationship status or protection, and the education they received was heavily gendered. These experiences would often be described as “*superficial*”, “*negative*”, “*embarrassing*” and even “*heteronormative*”. All participants' narratives, except one, exhibited that their sexuality education at home was intertwined with gender stereotypes. For instance, when Gabriel (21) was asked about if his family discussed sexuality with him:

No, they didn't. Well, it was like a taboo. I think the conversation about sexuality was only to ask if I have a girlfriend. And you know, that kind of thing we get in the heteronormative way. (Gabriel, gay, 21).

Moreover, several participants with “female” sex assigned by birth shared that the only conversation they had was regarding the menstrual cycle with their mothers. All of them mentioned having had a bad experience with their periods. Ana and José stated they had numerous issues with menstruation because

they did not receive information early enough and had no idea how to cope with it. The idea of suffering and accepting it is explicit in one of the participant statements, when describing the message that was given to them by their mother after their first period:

She said ‘once a month you’re gonna we’re gonna bleed, you’re gonna cry, you’re going to be angry. You’re going to... you’re gonna have a lot of emotions. You’re gonna you’re gonna have pain too.’ And I wasn’t ready. (Isabela, NB, 20).

The narratives regarding experience with menstruation seemed to reinforce the idea that menstruation is going to be a very negative experience, on a physical and emotional level. This may lead to forming a negative stigmatised discourse about the subject a priori. Which in turn, may generate fear and already unpleasant experience, perpetuating a stereotype that physical and emotional discomfort have to be accepted, unquestioned and endured by women. This is something that appears when sexual intercourse is discussed.

It is consistent that sexuality education is strongly linked to gender roles and stereotypes, that are reaffirmed through the taken for granted approach that heterosexuality is the norm and there is two binary opposite human beings. This, and also the idea that sex at birth will correspond to traditional social constructs of masculine and feminine features, identity, expression and sexuality. Therefore, people are taught based on this gender belief system. As a result, depending on the assigned gender, the sexuality education received may differ, along with the experiences and impact. For instance, during the analysis, it was found that participants who identify as either gay, trans man, or non-binary shared similar experiences with sexuality education at home. These experiences were described as extremely negative and characterised by feelings of exclusion, rejection, inner conflict and even interiorised homophobia. For instance, João noted:

In my house homosexuality was only ever a disgusting thing. But it wasn’t around us. We didn’t know anybody... gay. So yeah, it was a, it wasn’t a thing. It was like on TV, and then the reaction was of rejection and disgust, homophobic comments. (João, gay, 27).

João learnt it was wrong to display “femininity” or perform activities such as drawing, dancing, singing or ‘*training to be a nurse*, as they were only meant for girls. The discourse by João’s father reproduces the gender belief system and reinforces heteronormative behaviour. By punishing João, he internalises that it is wrong to be feminine and enjoy certain activities, supressing himself. This is in line with Foucault concept of disciplinary power: by using discursive practices, of what is common sense and what is considered normal, control is exerted over people’s bodies and actions. This is embedding what privilege of heterosexuality is, individuals are taught that homosexuality is abnormal, and expressing femininity features, or carrying out activities that are traditionally associated with “femininity” are not acceptable and deviant.

Similarly, Gabriel who identifies as gay, said his father disowned him and he had to go through a process of acceptance to realise he is ‘*normal*’. In addition, during family gatherings, family always asked if he had a girlfriend, and once they knew his sexual orientation, he was no longer asked about his romantic life. Likewise, José alluded that he felt like a “*secret*”, especially at family gatherings in



his partner's house, due to the family strong religious views. José's parents would never ask about his significant other, but would openly inquire about the relationships of his brother who is heterosexual. He described his feelings of being marginalised and hurt. Additionally, a reference was made to the lack of freedom to bring partners at home, unlike his heterosexual siblings, who could do it at liberty. Family would accept his sexuality, as long as "*it was not in their face*" (José, trans man, 21).

Daniela described that their parents made sure to give the space for discussions concerning some aspects of sexuality but that were never open about queer sexuality due to their conservative, religious and cultural background. They mentioned the discussions were limited to protection and that the experience was overall negative, due to their prejudice regarding queer people:

It was 'African education', a very conservative type of worldview. Heteronormativity it's very normal, there is not the same almost like queered does not exist, but you say that. And so, that's why my parents always passed those ideas as well regarding sexuality. That's, we have to find women and has to be a good women, buy a house, provide for the family, have kids, you know, the conservative type. And it can limit us a lot. (Daniela, NB, 24).

Daniela alludes to race/ethnicity and a cultural dimension that they believe has played a role on how sexuality education was delivered within the family and its consequences. It refers to a society that has strong patriarchal traditional values that construct a reality of what is expected for individuals, in this case for men, in order to be accepted as members of society. This is an interesting example of intersections: on the one hand, Daniela has had to deal with the impact of being gender non-conforming in a heteronormative society, and on the other, being from African-descent and raised in a religious family that gives value to morality and a patriarchal system, and in this case to certain hegemonic masculinity traits. According to Weeks (2005), the margins of race, gender and class unavoidably may overlap and the definition of membership within the ethnic group can frequently be determined by performing gender attributes successfully (Weeks 2005: 33). Hence instead of perceiving sexuality as an integrated whole, there are numerous forms of sexualities, amongst whose class sexualities, gender-specific sexualities, racial sexualities exist. Despite this type of socialisation, Daniela as a non-binary person disrupts the traditional discourses and trajectory expected, with other dimensions having a strong impact on understanding of sexuality, such as queer community.

When analysing the narratives of participants above, what they seem to exemplify is the social construction of privileging sexual practices or identities while stigmatising others, as discussed by Seidman (2015). For instance, in José statement, his heterosexual brother has the freedom to be open about his sexuality and partners, but José who has a non-mainstream sexuality is not acknowledged or silenced leading to social ramifications, such as exclusion, lack of freedom, and so forth. This is a process indicating how society organises around heterosexuality, marriage and family, making it "compulsory". Also, as we have seen, Daniela (non-binary) was expected to marry to a woman, have children and provide for a family, representing the structural order of gender binarism, male dominance and division of homosexual-heterosexual people. Moreover as making homosexuality be seen as deviant and stigmatised, people may be fearful of displaying any gender traits outside of established masculine

or feminine roles, as explained by João, and in this way creating and perpetuating sexual hierarchies (Seidman, 2015).

However, there were queer participants, such as Alana, Carina and Isabela that shared narratives disrupting the dominant discourse of silence, taboo and compulsory heterosexuality education in the family. They framed their experiences as positive, yet, this was still often organised around a gender belief-system. This was apparent as participants explained what they were taught explicitly, but also in the narratives as they implicitly reproduced interiorised gender beliefs, such as gender double standards and/or ideas related to social construction of femininity:

My parents told me that there were people that were homosexual, and that there is no problem about it. And we talked very early on about, like, almost actual couples adopting. Yeah, I cannot really go up and complain about the education that I got from our parents, because it was really nice. (Alana, bisexual, 27).

Alana mentioned that both parents participated in different ways: her mother spoke about sexuality aspects such as reproduction and her father initiated philosophical debates about different subjects, amongst them gay marriage, which she found positive. Nevertheless, she was afraid to come out as bisexual, as she was “*the older child, the perfect child*” and was fearful to be judged. Apart from reproducing a dominant discourse that older siblings are expected to behave perfectly, it may also refer to how women are educated to be “*good girls*”. This was identical to Carina’s discourse and the idea of a perfect girl and student. Additionally, it shows that since a young age, she was already aware of the idea homosexuality is “deviant” causing her fear to open up about her sexuality, despite her parents having normalised it. This raises the question about how sexuality education is multidimensional, and how different complex processes are interacting in the social construction of sexuality. It is also interesting to reflect on that the roles that parents take, in terms of sexuality education, fitting the allocation of gender roles. In several statements of the participants, mothers would usually be in charge of explaining reproduction, protection, menstruation and the father would either not be involved, or cover subjects such as sexual orientation, in this case positively, or openly stigmatise it as previously seen.

Carina explained that she had open relationship with her mother concerning sexuality and she taught her about female anatomy and child abuse. She noted feeling comfortable to ask all sorts of questions to her mom:

I remember when I was like, 11, I saw this video of a song on YouTube about two girls. And I was, oh my god, what if I’m a lesbian, I was really stressed out. And then I asked my mom, ‘what if I’m a lesbian?’. And she’s like, then you’re a lesbian, It’s fine but I don’t think you are, you’re actually very feminine. (Carina, bisexual, 20).

She added that her mom believed that her being bisexual is a phase, reproducing dominant ideas that people who claim to be bisexual are confused, and displaying the existent sexual hierarchies. Moreover, Carina added that despite her my mom was very open about sexuality, she taught her that girls should not be with many guys or dress a certain type of way. Carina mentioned she had deconstruct those ideas with other sources, such as social media accounts on feminism. Similarly, Isabela said she

was also comfortable coming out, as her parents were very open and her mother told her one day that is she likes girls there is no problem, also because she felt comfortable knowing her aunt is openly lesbian and accepted. Her parents would joke with her and say it is better to marry a woman, because “*men these days are not good*”, so she felt it was positive and normalising her sexuality. However, her parents discourse display gender beliefs about contemporary masculinity. Furthermore, Isabela, noted:

I already had sex I lost my virginity and like didn't tell my parents because I was not in a relationship, serious relationship. I went to a club, I met a boy, and that's what happened. So I didn't told them. You know, because they probably my thing that's not safe or not really common. (Isabela, NB, 20).

This could be an example of an interiorised belief that women's<sup>12</sup> virginity is a “*virtue*”, and has to be kept for someone special and consumed in a relationship or marriage. What is more, this and the previous discourse by Carina and her mother views, reproduce the gender double standard the notion that women should not have an active sexual life. In a way, women are desexualised as subjects but hypersexualised as objects in many dimensions. For example, Alana, Sara, Ana narrative indicated an inner conflict related to experiencing pleasure, such as masturbation or having desire to have sex. Alana and Sara allude to this, but also making a reference to religious beliefs in the family. Alana's family used to practice Catholicism and Sara's family practices Islam. Alana explains she felt guilt and thought it was a sin, because she would masturbate and not confess in church, and Sara's narrative explained that masturbation and consuming pornography is considered sinful, and received the education that having sex outside of marriage means that you are a “*whore*” and “*you will not find a husband*”. Hence, this is again is linked to Foucault idea of disciplinary power and control. Here, women's sexuality is conditioned and limited by certain beliefs that are imposed and can regulate sexual patterns. The feelings and perceptions describe guilt, conflict, and perception that it is wrong to have pleasure or have sex unless it is according to the established rules or expectations. Instead, there is a dominant discourse that normalises women enduring pain, apart from period pain as mentioned earlier, but as well pain during sex. Isabela, Alana, Sara referred to learning from family members and peers that intercourse is painful, especially the first time, but that you have to tolerate it. This type of discourse may be perpetuating women as to having a submissive role and that is acceptable to tolerate pain.

The experiences with sexuality education that participants shared indicated how these influenced the ways in which they understood sexuality, expressed their identities and constructed a relationship with their own sexuality. The narratives uncovered both positive and negative impact of the education received. Several themes were identified, in terms of negative impact: influence on sexual patterns, such as delayed sexual experience, psychological ramifications, such as repression, feeling of rejection, exclusion and inner conflicts. On the other hand, positive impact such as normalisation of diverse sexual orientation and inclusion was also mentioned in some cases.

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<sup>12</sup> Isabela now identifies as non-binary, however the experiences refer to when she was an adolescent, and thought she was ‘*straight*’.

Six out of eleven interviewees stated explicitly that they felt family culture had a direct impact on their sexual experiences, namely repression and delay. This was predominant for participants whose sexuality education at home was a taboo, or/and characterised by hegemonic heteronormativity. The delayed sexual experience associated not only to late start of first sexual intercourse, but also to a delay in developing a healthy and to fulfilling understanding of sexuality. The consequences of this had to do with inner conflicts regarding identities construction and how sexuality was experienced. For instance, Ana did not have sexual relationships because of fear to become pregnant as many young girls in her environment. Likewise, one of the reasons why Sara did not experience sexual contact for many years was due to concept of sin and virtue given to virginity until marriage, though this ideas was also strongly influenced by her peers. Moreover, Daniela mentioned that due to their family culture on queerness, they experienced a delay in developing their sexuality. In this line, queer participants indicated they struggled to accept their sexual orientation, as they had interiorised that it was not normal. The narratives revealed interviewees feeling excluded and restricted. For instance, João and Alana mentioned developing homophobic behaviours towards peers and supressing parts of their identity/conducts to fit in and avoid discrimination. José also felt psychological ramifications, such as feeling of marginalisation and constrain, leading him to have a very domestic lifestyle. Queer participants also identified feeling closed off, a fear of coming out, and for a long time, avoiding behaviours that would be outside their assigned gender roles.

The discourses of participants with female gender assigned at birth, both straight and queer, revealed guilt-focused relationship with their sexuality, in terms of experiencing pleasure or sex. This was associated with gender beliefs and stereotypes of how women are expected to behave when it comes to sex and sexuality. For example, abstinence from sex or masturbation, avoid promiscuity, endure period and intercourse pain, which were themes discussed in the previous section. These ideas regulated behaviours and sexual patterns, limiting the freedom, power and pleasure of participants.

Nevertheless, there were participants who claimed to have received positive impact from the education they received at home. Three of them, Alana, Isabela and Carolina noted their parents were open about diverse sexual orientation and their discourse normalised queer sexuality, which in turn allowed be less afraid to “*come out*”. Additionally, Omar and Isabela mentioned having openly queer members of their family, (uncle/aunt) and this fact contributed positively. This could indicate the importance of representativeness leading to a feeling of inclusion. They indicated it helped them view queer sexuality as “*natural*” and be open about doubts. Individuals who had a good experience with sexuality education at home seemed to benefit from developing a healthier relationship with their sexual orientation and sense of belonging.

## CHAPTER 4

# School-based Sex Education

During the interviews, participants were asked to share their experience with sex education at school. They were also asked about certain characteristics such as the content, frequency and delivery of the information. Individual's narratives gave insights regarding these features, along with their perceptions, feelings and attitudes about the experience. Besides, they spoke about the influence it had on how they understood sexuality. Furthermore, interviewees shared views regarding information they would have benefited from and was not present at the time.

Firstly, it was identified that most participants gave similar description in terms of content taught, frequency and delivery. Their descriptions of perceptions, attitudes and feelings were also quite similar. None of the participants attended a designated Sex Education class. In the majority of the cases, information was delivered during Science or Biology class and/or an external person was invited to give a session. This was typically a nurse from a local health centre or educators from an ONG project. In two of the cases, participants were taken to a health centre to attend these sessions. Secondly, it was established the instances of sex education delivery were extremely infrequent for all participants, except for two.<sup>13</sup>

When discussing content of the curriculum, it was identified that the majority participants, except for two, reviewed the same topics, namely: human anatomy, reproduction, pregnancy, menstruation cycle, STIs and protection. Only three participants mentioned they received information on more varied subjects. Gabriel mentioned they discussed emotions and relationships, respect, sexual orientation, abortion and helplines, and Carina mentioned attending a project that was about diverse sexual orientation. A recurring theme amongst participants was that the sexuality education was delivered late, and the information taught was already known from other sources. This could be explained by the fact that almost all of the participants received sex education when they had already began puberty, or at the late stage of it. It was often mentioned that the content was very repetitive, meaning that the same information would be delivered every time they had a session on sexuality education. Additionally, several interviewees stated they did not feel their teachers were fully-equipped to deliver sex education and there was a diversity lack in the voices delivering it. This could be because as per guidelines in Portugal any teacher can be appointed to deliver sex education classes and perhaps without any prior training. During one of the interviews, Gabriel shared that his mother is a teacher and she had to teach a class about sex education:

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<sup>13</sup> Two participants referred to having attended only one class or session, three participants had two sessions, three had between three and four, one had six, and only two individuals mentioned having classes that were more frequent. Carina indicated having it almost every year, at the school she attended until high school, and Gabriel received sex education three or four times per year from fifth to twelfth grade.

It's random teachers that are teaching it without training, my mother she had to give that lesson and she searching online for things on sexuality. Not everyone does it, but she followed the program. And she was uncomfortable because you know, she's a Catholic, more reserved, an older mind set. She was really nervous, she studied to be a Portuguese and history teacher. And they said, no, you're going to talk about sexuality to your students. (Gabriel, gay, 21).

When participants were asked to describe their experiences with sexuality education, their narratives indicated how they evaluated the school-based sex education based on how they perceived and felt during the experiences. The most recurrent observations were that sex education was *superficial and insufficient; conservative and outdated; too scientific technical or formal; genital-focused and heteronormative*. These topics all indicate general dissatisfaction with the school experience and numerous deficits individuals point out. For instance, Alana stated:

We had a couple of classes when in science, we talked about STDs, contraception, reproductive system, cycle, then all of that information was kind of like, pushed in there. Maybe like, not to make much fuss about it but to talk about it. I don't know. That's how I felt it was. Everything like that we felt it was just very, like the scientific. No emotional stuff, of course and then no reference to LGBT things. (Alana, bisexual, 27).

Participants often mentioned that when sex education was taught, this would be met with laughter from most students and would be perceived as “*embarrassing*”. On the one hand, this was a reason for teachers to skip the information, go through it very briefly, or assume it was already known. This is similar to conversations individuals had with their parents, the idea that they already know everything and the experience of talking about sexuality labelled awkward. What this could tell us, is that if content was delivered late, it is most like students already had obtained the information previously from other sources and that implicitly that they had already interiorised the idea of sexuality as a taboo subject.

The narratives revealed that, for most participants, the type of education they were exposed to was directed at a hegemonic group, heterosexual cis individuals, hence also heavily oriented towards the subject of reproduction. The individuals who do not identify as heterosexual or cis, referred to finding most of the information “*irrelevant*”, “*inapplicable*”, which would lead students to seek resources elsewhere, usually online, or information would be labelled “*limiting*” or “*damaging/hurtful*” their sexuality. For example, João stated:

We were given a talk about female anatomy and reproduction, how babies are made, and It wasn't anything that was I was interested in before. I mean, I didn't know I was gay but I had feeling, I wasn't looking at something I particularly wanted to do in that sense. (João, gay, 27).

Moreover, individuals in the sample who identify as trans man and non-binary, revealed that apart from the information not being applicable, it was genital-centred, appropriate for cisgender individuals, and brought negative experience:

It was really painful as a trans person to engage with sexual education, because it's very, like genital focused... and because it's really like in such like dogmatic binaries, it's really hard to engage in it without feeling left out or feeling like you're being like, first of all put in a box that you don't belong to. (José, trans man, 21).

Similarly, when Daniela was asked what they thought about the content delivered they stated:

Well, if we are talking about the surface, I will say may be enough, but if I were to speak as a queer person regarding it, it be very different. Speaking that type of topic with people who are queer, or not very sure, it can be very difficult, and very damaging to the viewpoint of queer identity. (Daniela, NB, 24).

The idea of the school as a heteronormative space is in accordance to the literature examined (see Unis & Sällström, 2020). What the statements are evidencing are that interviewees did not feel their existence was acknowledged or validated. The exclusion of information that is needed for people who have gender or sexual orientation diversity can discriminate and give the message that this diversity is unacceptable. All of this may make people feel alienated. According to Seidman (2007), schools are one of many institutions that may exert sexual regulation forcing people to conform. Sexual regulation is about social control and includes imposing concepts of what is normal and abnormal behaviour in this way shaping and controlling sexual beliefs, feelings, and actions. It includes the assumptions socialised to hold about men and masculinity, as well as women and femininity (Seidman, 2007: 339). Hence, topics that are absent from the curriculum may give the impression that certain practices are deviant, or pertinent only to a specific gender, in this way neglecting essential aspects that could empower individuals, such information about as pleasure, bodily autonomy, gender violence, and free people from gender roles stigmas that perpetuate inequality.

During the interviews, except for one participant - Gabriel, none mentioned having discussed the topic on pleasure or sex as an activity meant for anything other than procreation during their sex education sessions. What is more, that participant stated: *“Yes, we they talked about pleasure and I think I got the idea from there that it’s difficult for women to have pleasure, more difficult than for men.”* This message reproduces a common belief that women struggle to experience pleasure during sex, and it is harder to reach climax. This message can convey to women, or people with vulva, the idea that they are not going to enjoy sex as much as men, implicitly pointing out that is a *“deficit”* in women. However, if we consider Sexual Script Theory, according to Gagnon and Simon, scripts are integrally embedded in the cultural context where rules provide guidelines for appropriate behaviours, gender roles, emotions, for men and women in sexual experiences. Therefore, they are socially constructed and very often they may be male-oriented towards activities that prioritise male pleasure, hence it could be a possible explanation of why the dominant discourse regarding women struggle to have pleasure is being reproduced. This is also applicable for desires or expectations, as they desires are linked to social meanings and actions. Scripts can teach people what is considered *“sexy”* or what not and how to experience pleasure (Kimmel, 2007). According a study by Rubin *et al.* (2019) literature has revealed that heterosexual women may deprioritise their pleasure to conform to societal expectations, as gendered cultural scripts call for women to respond to men’s desire<sup>14</sup> (Rubin *et al.*, 2019)<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, the lack of information on pleasure, instruction on how to initiate sexual activities or the different types of ways

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<sup>15</sup> In Ruben *et al.* (2019) findings are consistent with the literature, gendered cultural scripts have a negative impact on women's subjective desire. Endorsement of gendered cultural scripts may inhibit sexual desire because gender roles inform and reinforce each other—just as men learn to desire sex, women learn to put other people's needs ahead of their own.

for people to have sex, such as how people with same-sex can practice intercourse, points out to a lack of erotic discourse in the school education participants received:

In school we didn't talk about consent or relationships, or that you can like people with the same gender as you, or anal sex and this can be helpful. I have more questions out of the 'normal', in science, we talked about what is the clitoris because it's part of our body but we didn't talk about if you do certain things here, you can obtain pleasure. (Isabela, NB, 20).

Isabela discourse reproduces this idea that there are activities that are considered "*abnormal*", in this case, they refer to "*anal sex*". Hence, we can infer that school curricula would include information only on matters that would be socially acceptable, and not as much considering what the needs of individuals might be. It also evidences the idea of limiting sexuality. What is more, it highlights the problematic of neglecting sexual pleasure de-erotising subjects. These findings are in agreement with previous studies mentioned in the literature. Allen's (2015) survey revealed students are negated positive and legitimate sexual subjects and tendency of erotic deficit at schools.

During the discussions about school-based sex education, participants addressed the impact that the experience have had on them, along with suggestions about sex education content or delivery they thought would have been beneficial and they wished they had at the time. This is important to give the opportunity to individuals to voice their needs and reflect on how the type of education they received shaped their understanding.

The majority of participants identified numerous deficits related to the education they were exposed to as illustrated by the descriptions provided in the previous section, although many also found aspects that were helpful. However, the analysis indicated that was when topics such as reproduction, menstruation, heterosexual sex or contraception were taught, this had positive impact on individuals who identified as cisgender as they felt this information could be useful/applicable for them. However, this was the case mainly for heterosexual or bisexual women. Cisgender male participants who identified as gay found this information irrelevant for them, as well as one participant who identified as "*asexual*" and stated he did not find the information particularly useful for him. Queer participants who received sex education that made reference to broader topics, in particular as sexual orientation, stated that it had a positive impact on them. For example, Carina explained that her teacher played a video that referred to same-sex relationships and it was good experience because it made her think of this as "*normal*" and "*natural*". Moreover, teachers gave the students opportunity to ask questions and speak about the topic openly, as a result, Carina learnt that is normal to have sex or have same-sex partners. In this line, Gabriel mentioned that he felt that sex education at his school reduced the instances of bullying, although they were still occurring. He described it as "*soft-bullying*" or "*exclusion*" targeted at boys who "*were feminine*". Two other queer participants made similar statements regarding witnessing "*feminine*" boys suffering from bullying. In order to avoid this, they felt they needed to hide their sexuality. Participants identified that when sex education was 'abstinence-oriented' or referenced to topics applicable exclusively for cis-gender people, the impact was negative and painful. When interviewees were asked about what content or delivery they would have benefited from at school and recommend the answers



were similar. The most repeated answer was that they wished sex education had included information about LGBTQ+ members, diversity of gender and sexual orientation. In regards to the need of information and raising awareness, Jose described the reality of being a trans man in Portugal referring to the inequalities they face in many aspects of their lives, such as health-care:

If I wanted to, to like go to a gynaecologist in our NHS, because I have my masculine name, and gender marker, yeah, I wouldn't be allowed to go anyway. So I would have to go to a private clinician to actually get a consultation. It applies to people who can get like a prostate check, one of the risks that are most common for trans people are like cancer cases, for something like breast cancer or ovarian cancer, prostate cancer, that aren't detected. And like it's not like the hormones cause the cancer but the trans people don't actually go to the doctor that often because they do not have the access'' (Jose, trans man 21).

This statement is alarming and highlights how essential is to have information on trans sexuality and how marginalisation and exclusion lead to numerous inequalities that individuals have to face.

Another issue to be tackled was about emotions, relationships and sex as social rather than just biological act. Moreover, pleasure and alternative sex practices, such as same-sex intercourse or anal sex was mentioned. Information about pornography, child abuse, abortion, sexting, STIs testing centres were also identified as important topics to be included in the curriculum.



## Peers as informal sex educators

In the course of the interviews, participants reported their experience learning about sexuality from their peers, mainly referring to childhood friends, classmates, partners and/or communities they were a part of. When asked what they learnt from peers many participants had doubts or hesitations. This might be due to the fact that learning from peers is an informal process and during our life trajectory, many diverse groups of people frequently surround us. In this line, reflecting upon the subject could be more complex and might require more in-depth examination. Nevertheless, themes that emerged were: *peer-pressure; importance of queer communities; perceived impact of peers as a source of sexuality education.*

According to the studies reviewed in the literature, peers have been identified as one of the most influential sources of information and impact on behaviours<sup>16</sup>. The majority of interviewees often addressed the importance of peers a key dimension that shaped their understanding of sexuality, whether the experience was positive or negative, as well as how they felt it influenced their behaviour or feelings at the time and/or long-term. There were participants that felt their peer interaction was not as influential as other dimensions, or that the information they were exposed to was not relevant or beneficial to them. Despite this, most did highlight their experiences with peer as essential. The narratives of six interviewees contained ideas that showed experience with peers often meant being a subject to certain pressures. They had to do with initiation of sexual activity, initiation of romantic relationship with members of the opposite sex and displaying behaviours associated to assigned gender. For example, Alana shared that she had pressure to initiate sexual activity very early on:

It was normal to have sex really early. Because I was growing up in an area where kids were a bit.. I don't know how to say it, they were sexual very early. So I felt like I was behind, at 14 all of my friends already had sex. When I had sex for the first time, I was 15. And I thought it was totally normal. And that was actually behind the curve. (Alana, bisexual, 27).

Similarly, João described how there was peer pressure to experience sexual intercourse for the same reason and in addition, initiate sexual activity with opposite sex he was not interested in.

One by one all the boys will start losing their virginity. I would hear what happened and what it was like, and to me, it sounded awful. It would just sound like why would you want to do that, but also there's the panic of, I'm getting older and older and people are losing it like at 15, 16, 17. And I was I was 19. And that's like, you know, then you start panicking, okay, like, I have to, I have to start doing something now I have to. Like, and also you don't know if things are gonna work, you know, like, I was interested in guys. (João, gay, 27).

The narratives refer to peer pressure and initiation of sexual activity where individuals learn they are supposed to have sex at the time as their peers. Alana points out to a pattern of socialisation associated with place of origin as a factor regulating sexual activity. In her interview, she explained she is from a small rural village. João also spent his adolescence years in a small village and his family and

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<sup>16</sup> See chapter 1.3.3. Peers

friends were predominantly from a working-class background. However, Ana's narratives pointed out to a pattern of early unwanted pregnancy of peers in her environment, which she found as a reason for her to delay sexual relations, in this way producing a disruption. Moreover, João statement evidences not only the need to have sex but also for it to be heterosexual. In his narratives, he alluded to beginning a relationship with a girl despite being aware of his sexual orientation, which was also the case for Gabriel who was often asked by parents or friends about "*getting a girlfriend*". These messages reproduce, as we have seen in both family and school dimension, the idea of heterosexuality as compulsory. Participants interiorise beliefs that they are supposed to form heterosexual relationships and do so regardless of being aware or suspecting that they are not attracted to the opposite sex. Some of the participants surrounded by peers who were homophobic felt the need to fit in and reproduce the same type of hegemonic discourse aimed at individuals who were openly queer or were believed to display characteristic outside of their gender: "*feminine*" or "*masculine*" respectively. João referred to insulting other peers in order to distract attention from himself, in a way affirming his masculinity, along with avoiding friendships with people who might have been queer. Similarly, Alana narrative indicated a similar experience with her group of friends where someone came out as queer:

I saw a lot of homophobia in our friend group. Yeah, it wasn't like open, we never said oh she shouldn't be talking with this girl. I think we behaved as if we had the right for her to tell us before she was with this girl. You know, as if we were entitled to come out to us. At the time, I didn't look at it that way, but now retrospectively I can, I know how homophobic we were and homophobic our group was and how awful it has been. (Alana, bisexual, 27).

Ana and Daniela also had peers who would openly make comments or bully others but in turn, they showed disruption in the discourse by condemning it or not participating. Similarly to the results in the previous dimensions, there were narratives reproducing common beliefs about female sexuality that embed gender norms women are subjected to. The discourses of some of the cis women in the sample emphasised on topics such as sex and pain, sex, promiscuity, and emotions associated such as a guilt and repression. For instance, the idea normalising pain during the first intercourse, highlighted by Alana: "*I think I remember talking to my girlfriend's about how much it will hurt, and how normal it was supposed to be to hurt. You just have to go through it and how you will bleed a lot*" but also, Sara<sup>17</sup>. She also spoke about the significance of virginity regularly reproduced by her peers and the guilt she experienced for being a relationship and having performed certain sexual practices without being married:

I had friends that were told from very young age to be careful with the hymen, because they are Muslim it has to intact. When I met those girls, I knew that you had relations when you marry but not about the culture of virginity, so I started to worry, like goodness, I am a Muslim, it is part of me, of my reality, right? I had a phase in which I was very worried about the hymen or have some kind of relationship with some extramarital man, I'm not going to find a Muslim husband. At the time I had some sexual contact with a man and I if don't stay with this person that and I have to meet another, he's not going to want me because I'm not pure. (Sara, heterosexual, 27).

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<sup>17</sup> In this case, she mentioned this idea was reproduced in the family dimension when discussing conversion she had with her grandmother: '*Well, the first time you sleep with a man it hurts a lot. Your grandfather hurt me a lot.*' (Sara, heterosexual, 27).

Likewise, other participants narratives refer to regulation of female sexuality and guilt, in this case this regulation is reproduced by the discourse of her romantic partner who is a cisgender heterosexual male:

I do remember feeling a lot of guilt around how much I enjoyed sex. I had this relationship when I was 14, and the guy I lost my virginity with was very surprise that I enjoyed it. He called me nymphomaniac because I enjoyed sex and ... and almost made me feel a little bit guilty, I guess. So I learnt that as a woman I shouldn't really enjoy sex, just endure it. Yeah, I was. I felt like I was wrong in some way. (Alana, bisexual, 27).

Isabela also mentioned discussing with her peers doubts regarding sexual pain and one-night-stands, which along with the previous statements indicates that youth relies on peers as a key source on sexuality education and gender performance. What these narratives seem to exhibit is gender-double standard and negative connotations, and/or consequences associated with women who do not conform to the societal sexual or gender regulations, either because of religious or cultural processes. What they have in common is the idea of power is attributed to men to define female sexuality, including needs and desires. Vance (1991) observes that lesbianism, promiscuity or non-traditional heterosexuality, depart from “*good*” woman status justify violation, while male privilege remains (Weeks 2005: 33). Mica Nava (1984) refers to the idea of boys enforcing girl regulation by referring to a concept of femininity that includes specific modes of sexual behaviour, deference, and compliance. Girls are observers of boys’ activity and guardians of girls’ passivity in this culture outside the home. In these narratives, we observe how participants received messages containing hegemonic patriarchal values that have brought emotions of guilt and regulation of sexual patterns.

During the discussions about experiences within peer groups, a recurrent theme was highlighted and repeated throughout narratives of participants who identified as LGBTQ+: the role of queer communities. It was found that positive learning experience about sexuality was associated with being a part of queer friendships and/or communities. Individuals referred to feeling represented and included. Having queer peers was crucial, as well, for participants to open up about their sexual orientation and feel comfortable: Carina, João and Omar described learning about sexuality from queer friend had a positive influence. For instance, José referred participating in a queer community online as the most significant dimension to explore and understand sexuality in positive way. He described the spaces as forums where people made online friends to exchange knowledge. These communities were based on fandoms, where they also could role play and interact with critical topics placing themselves in queer narratives:

It was very much an online process on forums around fan art and fiction, at the time I was like, relating to role playing male characters, because it would make me feel really good to be addressed in that manner. And so that will kind of like relate clues for me to figure it out myself. Also, in like writing, and interacting with critical topics in fanfiction really helped me because I was able to be like put myself in queer narratives and that for me was really important because real life there were there weren't many people who I could relate to. (José, trans man, 21).

In this statement José alludes to the significance it had for him to be a part from a community where he can learn, be represented or included, and able to explore his identity and sexuality in a positive way.

Furthermore, he refers to the marginalisation that a queer person, in this case trans individuals, might be subjected to outside of these spaces, that of “*real life*”. This exclusion could refer to the processes of privileging dominant groups (cis heterosexual people) while stigmatising others. This too may indicate that queer people have to seek alternative sources or spaces to explore sexuality.

Likewise, Isabela and Daniela claimed that queer communities was the most significant dimension that positively shaped their understanding of sexuality. In their discourses, it is observable that there have been a part of social processes that exclude or penalise people who have non-dominant sexual orientation or gender identity, making people feel unwelcome and outsiders.

I went to art school. So everything, it's open there and it's where I discovered a lot of things because the queer community there is huge. That's when I really revealed myself, I already thought if I didn't went to that school, I wouldn't be the same person that I am here because there I really could express myself. I was already doing that in the other school, but I was always the freaky one. When I went to there, I was just another person. (Isabela, NB, 20).

In this line, Daniela stated:

At least until maybe three years ago, I have never interacted as much as I do now with queer people. I've always had like, straight friends and people that were not very open. So learning about sexuality from them was the same, almost the same as learning sexuality from another sources that were not very open towards queer people. So until recently, I hadn't put myself out in the world as a queer person: it has been very good for me at least, to have that sort of community of people that understand my sexuality. It has been healing. And I wish I did it way before. (Daniela, NB, 24).

These discourses reveal that as queer individuals, they have not been able to openly and positively experience their identity and sexuality within spaces or groups characterised by heteronormativity. It evidences the limitations and consequences that people who do not belong to a hegemonic groups are encountered with. It also displays a pattern of queer individuals experiencing a delay in forming a positive identity and exploring, revealing or even understanding their own sexuality.

## Pornography and the Internet

The final major dimension discussed during the interviews included examining the experiences of participants with Internet and Pornography. Individuals identified television and porn websites as the key platforms of interaction, although other resources such as books and erotica were mentioned. All participants, except one, mentioned having engaged with pornography at a certain point in time, intentionally or unintentionally. Three participants claimed they do not consume pornography and the rest affirmed consuming pornography as a source of leisure. The main reasons for voluntary searching for pornography were ‘*curiosity*’, ‘*leisure*’ and ‘*as a source of sex education*’. Three major themes emerged *porn as fiction; porn and patriarchy, and positive aspects of porn a sex education*.

During the conversations, one of the most repeated statements was the notion of porn as fiction which meant perceiving porn as unrealistic and limiting. This was associated with the view that mainstream pornography presents the sexual act as being always smooth and perfect, in turn creating unrealistic expectations regarding mechanics of intercourse and as well body image. For example, when Ana stated: “*It was not something real, something of imagination*”. She proceeded to explain referring to body images she felt were not representative or realistic, lacking bodily and racial diversity: “*All white women and white men. Oh, white, white, white...Always the white woman, with a type of body like the chest and very skinny, blonde hair*” (Ana, heterosexual, 24). In this line, Isabela claimed:

I already know that pornography is not a good thing. I mean, that’s not real life. We are not always without pubes and not everything is so perfect, and the lips of our vaginas are not the same. (Isabela, NB, 20).

Similarly, Daniela referred to having contact with pornography very early on and that it was damaging to their sexuality at first, as they learnt sex is the only way to express your sexuality and that due to its lack of diversity, they felt it influenced body image and identity:

So at the time, those ideas that I would watch in videos, they will be like reality and it limited my perspective on sexuality, because I would always relate sexuality to sex. It can be very damaging someone that is young, and that has not formed a very solid idea on sexuality... It’s kind of stupid I’m saying this, but I watched straight porn and it can be a bit impacting because you watch people with certain physical characteristics, and you start to feel that you lack. Okay, that? It can be very damaging, not only to your view on sexuality, but your identity and image. Later I learnt sex is not the only way for someone to express sexually. Sexuality is something that is natural to everyone. But that’s pretty much what I’ve learned from internet and not porn. (Daniela, NB, 24).

The statement of Daniela alludes to not only representation and lack of diversity influencing negatively on body image but also that as young person who is in the midst of understanding their sexuality, contact with mainstream pornography could have negative consequences. Despite the fact that participant mention pornography is unrealistic now, but at a young age, pornography could pass on messages that individuals may internalise. In this case, Daniela was able to deconstruct these beliefs thanks to other sources. Additionally, other participants who have an ethnical diversity alluded to the

idea that whenever they had seen pornography that featured individuals who were ethnically or racially diverse the experience was not positive. For example, Omar stated:

I was irritated when I see those kinds of kind of contents. It's like, you have a specific category for people sexualizing or fetishizing specific thing. Yeah. So just because of the colour of the person skin. I felt that when I was on the apps, like Tinder or Grindr I felt like sometimes they were just talking to me because it I am Asian. (Omar, bisexual, 21).

Similarly, Sara observed *“there are porn movies with women with headscarves, right? And some people love that. It's kind of taboo. Exactly then, maybe there is a certain diversity, but I would say that white canons still predominate”* (Sara, heterosexual, 27).

Furthermore, in terms of sex mechanics, pornography was deemed limiting, because it taught individuals that sex is performed a certain way, also ignoring many parts of the body. For example, Ana thought that the only way to have sex is through penetration, which raised questions of how women have sex, showing the limited vision of sex that was transmitted to her. Furthermore, Alana felt women sexuality was restricted:

I remember watching a few videos, I think of more hard-core stuff. Those only focused on like oral sex. And I do think there's like a whole realm of, like, woman sexuality. There is a lot more. I don't know like it using other body parts. So, yeah, sex was pretty different from what I expected from porn. (Alana, bisexual, 27).

Alana's statement refers to the idea of pornography as restrictive and creating unrealistic expectations during sex. In this way, pornography may regulate sexual patterns. However, the discourse of Alana might be associated with the idea related to domination of women's sexuality in pornographic images.

Participants regularly discussed the idea of submission and domination, along with ethical issues about consent, human trafficking and so forth, especially in heterosexual pornography. The ethical concerns were one of the fundamental factors that would bring conflict to participants during their interaction with pornographic materials. Carina claimed she does not consume it for these reasons and added: *“I know porn is not very well seen”*, alluding further to morality concerns. Interviewees spoke of reproduced images of sexual hierarchy, sexism, and patriarchy, which was mostly emphasised by the cis women in the sample. For instance, Ana mentioned: *“One bad, bad idea that I develop is this woman need to serve men and they are like objects to be used”*. In this line, Sara observed:

For example, I don't always feel like doing oral sex. And they put it there, like it's an obligation that the woman has to do it to the man, or the man always orgasms in the same part of the body, so that's, well, maybe I want them to finish in another part of my body, I mean and also centred in vaginal sex. Thinking about the expectations that I have. (Sara, heterosexual, 27).

These narratives point out to a vision of porn they consumed was male-centred, scripted by men and for a male audience. They reproduce the patriarchal beliefs of women being sexually objectified and passive where men taking charge of the act, of where to orgasm, and taken-for-granted fact that women have to perform particular activities, such as oral sex, as a part of the ritual to *“serve”* men. What Ana says is in accordance with literature on the subject: that of pornography transmitting a script for sexual intercourse that the viewer applies to their own sexual behaviour (see McCormack, 2017). This could be



the case, especially for when youth is introduced to porn at a very early age and have had no sexuality education on the matter, hence leading to take for granted these hegemonic discourses. Sara also referred to dominant/submission script witnessed in porn, referring to it as “*typical*” script. This reproduces the belief of how it has been normalised that women in pornography are portrayed within these scripts having a passive role or in service of men.

It always begins with the typical preliminaries. The woman performs oral sex and then, after the different positions usually come during intercourse, everything is perfect from beginning to end, and then it finishes when the man orgasm tends to be on the woman’s body. (Sara, heterosexual, 27).

In these experiences, we see that consuming images of mainstream pornography with hierarchical script of submission/passivity is associated with negative experience. It can also be related to transmission of ideas about women’s assigned role in sex acts, and hence affect how they interact sexually. Nonetheless, the discourses also indicate that people define pornography as “unrealistic”. This raises the question, if pornography is unrealistic and people are aware it is not a true representation, to what extent can it shape and influence how they relate sexually? Alternatively, is it that individuals have deconstructed common beliefs in pornography because of other dimensions that have influenced them, as Daniela expressed? Alana statement also fuels that question:

I didn’t really enjoyed it, and a long time porn was not my thing. Now, I enjoy it but I see through a lens of like, this isn’t real, it is a fantasy. (Alana, bisexual, 27).

Pornography subject is extremely controversial and it has been argued that it may have negative impact on people; yet, from the narratives we can infer that several complex processes are involved in the building of that understanding. Moreover, it hints that if individuals have awareness of the issues that typically arise regarding the script in films, they may be able to see it through critical lens, question and deconstruct these beliefs. None of the participant discussed having received any information about dealing with pornography during their school education or family socialisation, or even discussing sex as a leisure activity, evidencing the existing taboo interviewees have faced during processes of sexuality education. All of the participants reproduced the discourse surrounding the negativity of pornography and embedded complex moral or ethical problematics, and messages concerning not only sexual intercourse but also gender roles and power. However, there were discourses that disrupted the idea of pornography having only a negative influence on their understanding of sexuality.

As discussed, interviewees who consumed pornographic materials described their experiences, attitudes and negative impact of pornography. Some of them also refer to the existing difference of how they perceived pornography at the beginning of their interaction with it, usually at an early age, versus currently. During the interviews, eight participants mentioned there were aspects of pornography that they found useful and/or positive. The emerging topics identified were concerned with *mechanics of sex; comprehend sexual orientation and normalise queer sex; porn as a leisure activity*.

To begin with, mechanics of sex was a common theme that emerged during the conversation: participants alluded to the idea that they did not know how sex works and even when they did, this had

not involved actual images of the act, which they found helpful in pornography. This also indicates that adolescents access porn, as a source of learning about sexuality, due to the lack of tackling this topic in other spaces, such as the school, where we observed that often time's students were not treated as legitimate sexual subjects and curriculum showed signs of erotic deficit. The search for online pornography can be associated with that deficit in school or other sources, as implied by participants.

I already knew how men and women have sex because of the books but I did not know how penetration actually worked; it is very different to see with actual images you know? And I thought it was very interesting to find out how it works, the different postures, although what I saw followed the typical pattern.<sup>18</sup> (Sara, heterosexual, 27).

The idea of mechanics of sex was strongly emphasised especially by participants who do not practice heterosexual sex or are bisexual, as in these cases, information was even scarcer, as no books or school-materials contained that type of information:

I when I was a teenager, I was mentally attracted to boys and masculinity, so porn taught me a lot about like, how cis men work because it's something I hadn't lots of knowledge about that, because it was something I was really interested in, not only from a sexuality perspective, but also from a gender perspective, because it actually like, went through some aspects of like having a male body and like interacting with another male person, like, romantic or sexual manner, that was that was educational, too. Yeah. I feel like that's important. (José, trans man, 21).

José also added "*a few years ago, sometimes the only contact people have come with trans people has been from porn, which is not very helpful.*" This means that despite porn being useful to educate about mechanics of sex, especially queer, it is still insufficient as an only resource about sexuality of trans individuals. Furthermore, Gabriel stated: "*Yeah, I think it was useful I didn't know like, how it works between men, I discovered it on porn.*" Again, reproducing the idea of lack of resources on non-heterosexual intercourse and porn being the only dimension at the time. This is in agreement with literature reviewed by scholars: youth may seek pornography as a source of information when this is not addressed at school (see Setty, 2021).

Queer participants also stated that consumption of pornography was useful to discover or affirm their sexual orientation and to normalise queer sex and relationships. For instance, Gabriel noted:

There was like this video that I was one of my favourites, this kind of history in which the men fell in love before. Going to bed and had sex. I have like this reference of this video and it think it gave me a sense of like, made me think that is what I want. You know that. I know that most of it is not like that. But that in specific I think I could say that. It helped me. (Gabriel, gay, 21).

Similarly, Alana mentioned she would always search for lesbian pornography: "*It was useful for actually to come out about myself because every time that I looked for porn, it was always lesbian, It was main thing that sparked my questioning about my orientation*". João also mentioned he used porn to understand his sexuality: "*I decided I just gonna delve on the research everything and see what kind of sticks out to me, you know, and then there was only one thing (referring to gay porn) that really did*".

All the above statements convey the idea that participants found porn useful as a way to explore their sexuality, such as desires and sexual orientation. This is also in agreement with studies reviewed

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<sup>18</sup> Earlier Sara was quoted describing what she thought the typical pattern of sex in porn looked like (see page 35).

about pornography, as being useful to give confidence and community formation for people who are attracted to the same sex (Albury, 2014).<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, eight participants alluded to the theme of consuming pornography as a leisure activity. For instance, Ana mentioned it was useful for her to discover how to pleasure herself and Isabela stated that despite not consuming mainstream pornography, sometimes she does view captions on Twitter that contain pornographic material, and does not feel that this is as damaging as porn. In this line, José mentioned they rather access pornography in the form of erotica readings. João also referred to consuming pornography for that reason but his statement further raised certain questions:

I never watched straight porn, I used to promise myself that I'd like next week I'll watch heterosexual. Okay, next week I'll do it. I never did it. Yeah, I still haven't. But I felt I had interiorized homophobia. So I wouldn't watch like a twink for example, will be way too feminine. I said to myself I can't watch that because that's how I don't want to be like I don't want to see that because I've been told it's disgusting. Yeah, I mean, so I don't want to be like that. So anything feminine I wasn't interested in. (João, gay, 27).

In his statement we can observe how because of socialisation with family and peers, João was reproducing hegemonic discourse about homosexuality as something deviant and the notion of exhibiting femininity as a man is penalised, therefore, he did not want to experience these consequences. This description conveys the idea of how these different processes interact. The way he related to pornography is influenced or shaped by stigmatised beliefs.

When discussing dimensions on sexuality education, apart from pornography, participants referred to using other online resources as a first source of information. They identified search engines, such as *Google* and *Yahoo*; social media, such as *Instagram* and *Twitter*; and *YouTube* influencers. Participants agreed that they had a positive experience with researching on the Internet. For instance, Ana described that she felt “*free*” and “*empowered*”, as she struggled with irregular periods, and was finally able to obtain knowledge and normalise certain aspects of sexuality. Participants in their early 20s mentioned social media and influencers on *YouTube* as one of the vital sources to comprehend and normalise their sexuality. For example, Gabriel observed:

There is an American guy who had like this coming out video. And then he had a boyfriend and they started making vlogs about the life you know, just living together as a normal couple, gay, transsexual, whatever. And yeah, it inspired me a lot and I think that it made me understand that it is possible and it's normal thing. It normalizes it a lot to me. (Gabriel, gay, 21).

Similarly, Carina stated that she also would watch the videos of an American YouTuber and follow Instagram accounts about Feminism:

And especially because in Portugal, gender, we don't talk very much about that, even on TV, or like, even on YouTube and online. But in Portuguese, there's no information there. And like, that YouTuber I was talking about is from the United States. In English, there's a lot more information about that. So that's why when I watched that video there were issues I didn't know about - I knew there were like bisexual and gay people. But I never met it like a trans kid until two years ago. So it opened my mind as well, in many things about the LGBT community. (Carina, bisexual, 20).

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<sup>19</sup> See Waugh 1996; Ruddock and Kain 2006; Hillier and Harrison 2007; Kubichek *et al.* 2010.

One of the aspects observable during the interviews was that most of the queer participants began to explore openly their sexuality much later in life, as they were not exposed to an inclusive sexual education. However, participants who were in their early 20s referred to sources such as *YouTube* or social media as extremely influential in validating and normalising their existence and experiences. As a result, having access to resources that deconstruct hegemonic discourses since a young age, may help people to positively relate to their sexual orientation or identity earlier in life. Additionally, Carina's discourse illustrates the lack of awareness and information, even nowadays, regarding numerous LGBTQ+ related themes and especially, and how trans people tend to be most marginalised and stigmatised, as often they are not mentioned in sexuality education, in this way negating their existence.

## **Sexuality education:**

### **Final thoughts, recommendations and limitations**

This study aimed to investigate sexuality education's experiences of diverse and queer youth, including perceptions, need and impact through the collection and analysis their narratives. This final section will be comprised of a summary of the key findings in each dimension, in the same order as the analysis, followed by a reflection on research aims and questions along with the general implications of the findings. Finally, recommendations and limitations of the case study will be addressed.

Firstly, we will review the findings related to sexuality education at home. Overall, the majority of participants' narratives revealed their experience with sexuality education at home was often poor due to silence and taboo surrounding the subject. Whenever aspects of sexuality were discussed, the topics covered were reproduction, menstruation or protection, and in some cases sexual orientation. In most cases, these reproduced discourses affirming hegemonic heteronormativity, dominant gender belief systems and stereotypes, and on several occasions homophobia. The results evidenced how certain sexual orientations/practices tended to be privileged over others, who are repressed and stigmatised. According to the narratives, negative impact was identified, such as sexual patterns regulation, delay of sexual contact, repression of desires and identity to comply with gender roles expectations. Moreover, social and psychological ramifications, including marginalisation and inner conflict were observed. A construction of guilt-focused relationship with pleasure and sex, in the case of participants who identify as cis women, was also identified amongst participants. However, there were individuals who presented a disruption in the dominant discourses. The participants who benefited from a positive experience with sexuality education, despite frequently accompanied by gender stereotypes, felt freedom to express their sexuality more openly with their relatives and seemed to display positive attitudes towards their experience with sex education at home. The narratives seemed to indicate a more positive understanding of sexuality that promoted a healthier relationship with themselves and how they experienced their own sexuality. In terms of dimension influencing sexuality education, some participants referred to religion, ethnicity, and place of origin as possible influences.

Secondly, in terms of the experiences of participants with sexuality education at schools, several significant patterns were identified. The majority claimed having had only few sessions on sex education at school. It was acknowledged that this was often delivered too late, and a result they had already sought the information elsewhere. A lack of diversity of voices was revealed and the frequency of lessons was scarce as well as diversity of topics, which also meant the repetition of the same content. Most of the participants reported being taught from a biological point of view and alluding to information relevant for cisgender and/or heterosexual audience, in this way excluding a huge diversity of people with queer gender and/or sexuality. By not including diverse information, people are silenced and their experience is negated, denying them corresponding rights. In this line, the privilege of heterosexuality in the school

context these individuals attended is evident. This is also reflected in the impact interviewees referred to: heteronormative curriculum and gendered discourse tended to influence negatively individuals who were not heterosexual, or be irrelevant, in this way leading students to seek alternative sources. Erotic deficit was discovered as subjects were de-erotised due to the lack of information on pleasure or mechanics of sexual activity outside of reproduction lessons. There was no mention of pornography, consent, gender violence and diversity of gender. The analysis revealed sexual hierarchy, such as emphasis on heterosexual sex for procreation, in this way, people who belong to a minority group had been neglected and marginalised more than others (i.e. transgender, non-binary). Discourse about gender allocation, such as performing femininity and masculinity were identified and myths surrounding female pleasure that culminate in perpetuating inequality or reinforcing sexual scripts were also present in the narratives.

Third, learning from peers was often associated with peer pressure either to initiate sexual activity or avoid it depending on the cultural context, comply with gender roles (i.e. expectations about feminine or masculine behaviour deemed appropriate, gender double standard) and heteronormativity. It indicated that peer dimension has a key role of how ideas about sexuality are shaped and as result - behaviours. These were often described as having a negative impact, as sexual regulations were imposed on participants. The analysis revealed that cis women in the sample received, and at the time, interiorised messages about their sexuality that were limiting and embedded patriarchal values regulating their desires and sexual patterns. Queer participants emphasised having experienced negative impact within heteronormative peer groups that led to feelings of exclusion leading them to seek alternative sources and communities, as they did not feel represented in any other spaces. Queer communities were linked to positive experience and impact as individuals felt included and represented, helping them to reveal and explore their sexuality in a way they could not in heteronormative peer groups. Members who identified themselves as LGBTQ+ indicated queer communities as one of the most influence dimensions to understand sexuality.

Finally, the analysis explored narratives regarding perceptions and impact of pornography and other online sources. Generally, discourses reproduced beliefs about pornography as a negative source of sexuality education due to portraying male-oriented, unrealistic, limiting and sexist scenarios that do not represent the reality of sexuality and sexual acts. It was revealed by some participants that exposure to pornography at an earlier age, when there is an absence of other teaching resources, might affect negatively on how they relate sexually. Yet, positive features were brought up as well, generally the idea of porn being useful to show the mechanics of sex, especially for queer participants who at the time had no other ways of informing themselves. Additionally, pornography helped people affirm their sexual orientation and normalise sexual act between people of the same-sex, in agreement with previous literature. Interviewees also emphasised consumption of porn as a leisure activity.

The data from this study supports the hypothesis that sexuality is multidimensional and different dimensions can shape youth's understanding of it: we saw that family culture, peers, school, and

pornography can all contribute to interiorising beliefs about sexuality. Regarding further hypothesis, findings suggest that sexuality education may have a positive impact on diverse individuals but only when it is of a comprehensive nature, addressing the needs of non-dominant groups. The results also supported the hypothesis that school-based sex education lacked an intersectional approach.

This study also aimed to evaluate if formal or informal education is more important in shaping youth's perceptions of gender and sexuality, and if that varied across individuals. The findings suggest that formal sources such as family or school, in the majority of cases, tended to transmit messages that perpetuate a heteronormative ideology, privileging heterosexual identities and sexual practices while stigmatising others. The impact mentioned by participants exemplified social and psychological consequences that people may suffer because of not having their needs addressed and not feeling included or represented. Informal sources were identified as the most significant dimension in shaping understanding of sexuality. In the majority of the cases, this was positive because they provided more ample and useful information relevant to diverse youth, which had no access to comprehensive formal sources, especially in the case of normalising same-sex experiences amongst queer participants. However, despite informal education being identified as more helpful source, the narratives indicated that participants might have benefited of sexuality education that had equipped them with critical lenses when being exposed to messages charged with patriarchal values or gender roles, as it was identified in the case of mainstream pornography or heteronormative peers groups. The findings implicate the need of more inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education for youth that could be delivered at school, where participants are treated as legitimate sexual subjects, eliminating the erotic deficit. For instance, since queer communities were one of the most significant dimension for LGBTQ+ youth, school peer and mentoring programs could provide guidance, safe space and have a positive influence on individuals' understanding of sexuality, along with implementing programs that collaborate with parents. Furthermore, teachers' training and having a plurality of voices deliver sex-education content would be beneficial for all students. Additionally, the findings were in line with the criticism of policies and laws regarding school-based education in Portugal, and I would like to quote one of the participants:

In Portugal the law is actually quite progressive. However, in practice, it's really hard to keep up, when usually most of the time is the other way around, people are progressive and the law has to keep up. (José, 21, trans man).

The results suggested that despite participants attending school when the sex education law was already implemented, few received sexuality education as per the topics outlined in the official decree.

The narratives indicated the need for an intersectional approach in sexuality education that englobes emotions and relationships, and racial/ethnic and bodily diversity as they were considered central aspects for how individuals related to their sexuality and were not tackled at all during their formal education. This can help deconstruct hegemonic ideas of how people should look like according to dominant standards as this can perpetuate exclusion, and/or promote unhealthy, unrealistic expectations of one's physical appearance. The dominant discourse participants received across all the dimensions in

the study also revealed a strong need to provide sexuality education from a feminist perspective that includes ample information on gender. This could help demystify numerous gender stereotypes, gender double standards and deconstruct the gendering of behaviours, conducts and activities that may lead to inequality and repression.

This study has important contributions as it analysed and evaluated retrospectively youth's narratives to explore their experiences of sexuality education within several dimensions. In this manner, we were able to see the impact certain messages have had on participants understanding of sexuality, in the past, and nowadays. By discussing these matters, we have been able to assess what dimensions that most influenced participants and in what ways, and which dimensions have been more helpful for developing a positive and empowered relationship with their sexuality. By reflecting upon these subjects, we have seen the implications and needs that diverse youth has had. This has assisted us in drawing conclusions of what type of content and strategies should be implemented at schools to address those needs.

Nevertheless, despite this contribution, the study has weakness and limitations. First of all, the recruitment of a balanced and diverse sample of participants was a challenging process. This was due to the fact that numerous participants that signed up did not carry out the interviews. One of the reasons why some participants did not wish to participate was because they felt uncomfortable discussing sex and sexuality matters. This could also indicate the existing taboo surrounding the subject, however it also means that the participants that agreed to take part could all share similar perspective on certain matters. It also may mean that interviewing about sex and sexuality could be difficult for individuals and some experiences or views may have not been revealed. However, the interview guide was developed in a way to minimise this issue and make sure participants are at ease and comfortable with the questions asked. Furthermore, all interviewees were students or professionals: nine out eleven participants had attended university and exerted occupations related to the professional qualifications they had obtained. Perhaps, the study would have benefited from a more diverse sample in terms of class to allow more in-depth observation of class sexualities. Furthermore, there was only one trans participant and two non-binary, hence a study with a bigger sample of people with these characteristic could have provided richer findings. Finally, the interviews were conducted in English, this means that it is possible that participants may have not been able to express themselves in the same fluency as in their mother tongue. However, all participants seem to have an excellent level of English and if they could not think of a word in English during the interview, this was remedied straightaway. It could be recommendable for future research to address these limitations and further investigate sexuality education with a bigger sample that addresses in more depth the relationship between gender, class, ethnical/racial and bodily diversity with sexuality education. An intersectional and feminist approach to sexuality education can empower individuals and pave the way towards more equal society.



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# **Annexes**



## Annex A.

### Legislation: Portaria n.º 196-A/2010 de 9 de Abril

1170-(2)

*Diário da República, 1.ª série — N.º 69 — 9 de Abril de 2010*

#### MINISTÉRIOS DA SAÚDE E DA EDUCAÇÃO

##### Portaria n.º 196-A/2010

de 9 de Abril

As matérias respeitantes à educação para a saúde e educação sexual têm merecido, em tempos mais recentes, particular atenção por parte da sociedade portuguesa.

Assim, já em 1999, veio a ser publicada a Lei n.º 120/99, de 11 de Agosto, que reforça as garantias do direito à saúde reprodutiva. Esta lei foi regulamentada pelo Decreto-Lei n.º 259/2000, de 17 de Outubro, que perspectiva a escola como entidade competente para integrar estratégias de promoção da saúde sexual, tanto no desenvolvimento do currículo como na organização de actividades de enriquecimento curricular, favorecendo a articulação escola-família (artigo 1.º deste último diploma).

A referida legislação incluiu a educação sexual nos currículos do ensino básico e secundário integrada na área da educação para a saúde, área da qual fazem parte, igualmente, a educação alimentar, a actividade física, a prevenção de consumos nocivos e a prevenção da violência em meio escolar.

O conceito actual de educação para a saúde tem subjacente a ideia de que a informação permite identificar comportamentos de risco, reconhecer os benefícios dos comportamentos adequados e suscitar comportamentos de prevenção.

A educação para a saúde tem, pois, como objectivos centrais a informação e a consciencialização de cada pessoa acerca da sua própria saúde e a aquisição de competências que a habilitem para uma progressiva auto-responsabilização.

A educação sexual foi integrada por lei na educação para a saúde precisamente por obedecer ao mesmo conceito de abordagem com vista à promoção da saúde física, psicológica e social.

Mais recentemente, o Governo, através do despacho n.º 25 995/2005 (2.ª série), de 16 de Dezembro, determinou a obrigatoriedade de as escolas incluírem no seu projecto educativo a área da educação para a saúde, combinando a transversalidade disciplinar com inclusão temática na área curricular não disciplinar.

Na sequência e reconhecendo que a educação sexual é uma das dimensões da educação para a saúde, a Assembleia da República fez aprovar em 2009, através da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto, um conjunto de princípios e regras, em matéria de educação sexual, prevendo, desde logo, a organização funcional da educação sexual nas escolas.

Neste contexto, consagram-se as bases gerais do regime de aplicação da educação sexual em meio escolar, conferindo-lhe o estatuto e obrigatoriedade, com uma carga horária adaptada e repartida por cada nível de ensino, especificada por cada turma e distribuída de forma equilibrada pelos diversos períodos do ano lectivo e, por último, estabelecendo-se ainda que a educação sexual deva ser desenvolvida pela escola e pela família, numa parceria que permita respeitar o pluralismo das concepções existentes na sociedade portuguesa.

Pela presente portaria procede-se à regulamentação da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto, nas matérias e nos termos nela previstos.

Assim:

Ao abrigo do disposto no artigo 12.º da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto, manda o Governo, pela Ministra da Saúde e pela Ministra da Educação, o seguinte:

#### Artigo 1.º

##### Objecto

A presente portaria procede à regulamentação da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto, que estabelece a educação sexual nos estabelecimentos do ensino básico e do ensino secundário e define as respectivas orientações curriculares adequadas para os diferentes níveis de ensino.

#### Artigo 2.º

##### Modalidades

1 — Para a prossecução das finalidades da educação sexual previstas no artigo 2.º da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto, a educação sexual é aplicada nos ensinos básico e secundário, no âmbito da educação para a saúde, nos termos fixados em despacho do membro do Governo responsável pela área da educação que regulamenta o âmbito das áreas curriculares não disciplinares.

2 — No ensino profissional, a educação sexual integra-se igualmente na área da educação para a saúde, sendo atribuída ao director de escola a competência para, em concertação com o professor coordenador da área da educação para a saúde e os directores de turma, definir quais os temas que devem ser abordados nas áreas curriculares disciplinares, sem prejuízo da actuação dos gabinetes de informação e apoio ao aluno previstos no artigo 10.º da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto.

3 — Os conteúdos da educação sexual são desenvolvidos no quadro das áreas curriculares não disciplinares e devem respeitar a transversalidade inerente às várias disciplinas, integrando-se igualmente nas áreas curriculares disciplinares.

#### Artigo 3.º

##### Conteúdos curriculares

1 — As orientações curriculares respeitantes aos conteúdos da educação sexual devem respeitar os objectivos mínimos constantes do quadro anexo à presente portaria, da qual faz parte integrante.

2 — Sem prejuízo do disposto no número anterior, os conteúdos da educação sexual são ministrados nas áreas curriculares não disciplinares, designadamente em formação cívica e completados pelas áreas curriculares disciplinares.

3 — A gestão curricular da educação sexual enquadrada na área de formação cívica deve ser estabelecida pelo professor coordenador da educação para a saúde, em articulação com os directores de turma.

#### Artigo 4.º

##### Elaboração do projecto educativo da escola

1 — Os termos em que se concretiza a inclusão da educação sexual nos projectos educativos dos agrupamentos de escolas e das escolas não agrupadas são definidos pelo respectivo conselho pedagógico e dependem de parecer do conselho geral, no qual têm assento os professores da escola, representantes dos pais e, nos agrupamentos de escolas e escolas não agrupadas onde seja leccionado o ensino secundário, representantes dos estudantes.

2 — Sem prejuízo do disposto no número anterior, o conselho pedagógico deve assegurar que os pais e encarregados de educação sejam ouvidos em todas as fases de organização da educação sexual no respectivo agrupamento de escolas ou escola não agrupada.

#### Artigo 5.º

##### Carga horária

1 — A carga horária dedicada à educação sexual é adaptada a cada nível de ensino e a cada turma.

2 — De acordo com os limites definidos no artigo 5.º da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto, a carga horária não pode ser inferior a seis horas para os 1.º e 2.º ciclos do ensino básico, nem inferior a doze horas para o 3.º ciclo do ensino básico e secundário, distribuídas de forma equilibrada pelos diversos períodos do ano lectivo.

3 — São ainda imputados à educação sexual tempos lectivos de disciplinas e de iniciativas e acções extracurriculares que se relacionem com esta área.

#### Artigo 6.º

##### Pessoal docente

1 — Ao desempenho do cargo de professor coordenador da educação para a saúde, na qual se inclui a educação sexual, é aplicável o disposto no n.º 2 do artigo 80.º do Estatuto da Carreira Docente, aprovado pelo Decreto-Lei n.º 139-A/90, de 28 de Abril, na sua redacção actual.

2 — O exercício da função de professor coordenador de educação para a saúde confere direito a uma redução da componente lectiva nos termos que vierem a ser definidos por despacho do membro do Governo responsável pela área da educação.

3 — As acções de formação realizadas por docentes no âmbito da educação para a saúde e educação sexual são consideradas, para todos os efeitos, como efectuadas na área correspondente ao seu grupo de recrutamento.

#### Artigo 7.º

##### Organização

1 — Cada agrupamento de escolas e escola não agrupada designa através do director de escola respectivo um professor coordenador da educação para a saúde, na qual se inclui a educação sexual, de entre os docentes que reúnam, sucessivamente, os seguintes requisitos:

a) Formação creditada na área da educação para a saúde e educação sexual e experiência adquirida nesta área não inferior a três anos;

b) Formação creditada na área da educação para a saúde e educação sexual;

c) Experiência adquirida na área da educação para a saúde não inferior a um ano;

d) Directores de turma.

2 — Cada agrupamento de escolas e escola não agrupada constitui uma equipa de educação para a saúde, na qual se inclui a educação sexual, com uma dimensão proporcional ao número de turmas existentes, a definir pelo director de escola respectivo, coordenada pelo professor coordenador da educação para a saúde e educação sexual.

3 — O director de escola designa os elementos que integram a equipa referida no número anterior preferencialmente de entre os directores de turma do agrupamento ou de entre os professores de escolas do 1.º ciclo.

#### Artigo 8.º

##### Formação

A formação a que se referem os n.ºs 4 e 6 do artigo 8.º da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto, é assegurada pela Direcção-Geral de Inovação e de Desenvolvimento Curricular do Ministério da Educação, que desenvolverá para o efeito as acções e os projectos necessários à sua concretização, estabelecendo parcerias com a Direcção-Geral da Saúde, as instituições do ensino superior e o Instituto Português da Juventude, I. P., bem como as organizações devidamente credenciadas.

#### Artigo 9.º

##### Parcerias

1 — Sem prejuízo do disposto no artigo 9.º da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto, a Direcção-Geral de Inovação e de Desenvolvimento Curricular pode estabelecer com outras entidades devidamente credenciadas na área da educação para a saúde e educação sexual acordos de parceria, visando o desenvolvimento das acções de formação previstas no artigo 8.º

2 — A educação para a saúde e a educação sexual é apoiada ao nível local pela unidade de saúde pública competente no âmbito da actividade de saúde escolar.

#### Artigo 10.º

##### Gabinetes de informação e apoio ao aluno

1 — Para a concretização do previsto no artigo 10.º da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto, cabe ao director de escola, ouvida a equipa de educação para a saúde, definir a organização bem como as normas de funcionamento dos gabinetes de informação e apoio ao aluno previstos naquele preceito legal.

2 — Para efeito do disposto no número anterior e em especial do estabelecido no n.º 3 do mencionado artigo 10.º da Lei n.º 60/2009, de 6 de Agosto, os gabinetes de informação e apoio ao aluno são, igualmente, articulados com os gabinetes de saúde juvenil e unidades móveis, ao dispor das escolas pelo Instituto Português da Juventude, I. P., e nos termos previstos na Portaria n.º 655/2008, de 25 de Julho.

3 — Os serviços competentes do Ministério da Educação asseguram o apoio técnico e o enquadramento de referência para a organização dos gabinetes de informação e apoio ao aluno.

A Ministra da Saúde, *Ana Maria Teodoro Jorge*, em 7 de Abril de 2010. — A Ministra da Educação, *Maria Isabel Girão de Melo Veiga Vilar*, em 1 de Abril de 2010.

##### QUADRO ANEXO

(a que se refere o n.º 1 do artigo 3.º)

Os objectivos mínimos da área de educação sexual devem contemplar os seguintes conteúdos que podem ser abordados nas áreas disciplinares ou nas áreas curriculares não disciplinares.

##### 1.º ciclo (1.º ao 4.º anos)

Noção de corpo;  
O corpo em harmonia com a Natureza e o seu ambiente social e cultural;  
Noção de família;  
Diferenças entre rapazes e raparigas;  
Protecção do corpo e noção dos limites, dizendo não às aproximações abusivas.



**2.º ano**

Para além das rubricas incluídas nos programas de meio físico, o professor deve esclarecer os alunos sobre questões e dúvidas que surjam naturalmente, respondendo de forma simples e clara.

**3.º e 4.º anos**

Para além das rubricas incluídas nos programas de meio físico, o professor poderá desenvolver temas que levem os alunos a compreender a necessidade de proteger o próprio corpo, de se defender de eventuais aproximações abusivas, aconselhando que, caso se deparem com dúvidas ou problemas de identidade de género, se sintam no direito de pedir ajuda às pessoas em quem confiam na família ou na escola.

**2.º ciclo (5.º e 6.º anos)**

Puberdade — aspectos biológicos e emocionais;  
O corpo em transformação;  
Caracteres sexuais secundários;  
Normalidade, importância e frequência das suas variantes biopsicológicas;  
Diversidade e respeito;  
Sexualidade e género;  
Reprodução humana e crescimento; contraceção e planeamento familiar;  
Compreensão do ciclo menstrual e ovulatório;  
Prevenção dos maus tratos e das aproximações abusivas;  
Dimensão ética da sexualidade humana.

**3.º ciclo (7.º ao 9.º anos)**

Dimensão ética da sexualidade humana:  
Compreensão da sexualidade como uma das componentes mais sensíveis da pessoa, no contexto de um projecto de vida que integre valores (por exemplo: afectos, ternura, crescimento e maturidade emocional, capacidade de lidar com frustrações, compromissos, abstinência voluntária) e uma dimensão ética;  
Compreensão da fisiologia geral da reprodução humana;  
Compreensão do ciclo menstrual e ovulatório;  
Compreensão do uso e acessibilidade dos métodos contraceptivos e, sumariamente, dos seus mecanismos de acção e tolerância (efeitos secundários);  
Compreensão da epidemiologia das principais IST em Portugal e no mundo (incluindo infecção por VIH/vírus

da imunodeficiência humana — HPV2/vírus do papiloma humano — e suas consequências) bem como os métodos de prevenção. Saber como se protege o seu próprio corpo, prevenindo a violência e o abuso físico e sexual e comportamentos sexuais de risco, dizendo não a pressões emocionais e sexuais;

Conhecimento das taxas e tendências de maternidade e da paternidade na adolescência e compreensão do respectivo significado;

Conhecimento das taxas e tendências das interrupções voluntárias de gravidez, suas sequelas e respectivo significado;

Compreensão da noção de parentalidade no quadro de uma saúde sexual e reprodutiva saudável e responsável;  
Prevenção dos maus tratos e das aproximações abusivas.

**Ensino secundário**

Compreensão ética da sexualidade humana.

Sem prejuízo dos conteúdos já enunciados no 3.º ciclo, sempre que se entenda necessário, devem retomar-se temas previamente abordados, pois a experiência demonstra vantagens de se voltar a abordá-los com alunos que, nesta fase de estudos, poderão eventualmente já ter iniciado a vida sexual activa. A abordagem deve ser acompanhada por uma reflexão sobre atitudes e comportamentos dos adolescentes na actualidade:

Compreensão e determinação do ciclo menstrual em geral, com particular atenção à identificação, quando possível, do período ovulatório, em função das características dos ciclos menstruais.

Informação estatística, por exemplo sobre:

Idade de início das relações sexuais, em Portugal e na UE;  
Taxas de gravidez e aborto em Portugal;

Métodos contraceptivos disponíveis e utilizados; segurança proporcionada por diferentes métodos; motivos que impedem o uso de métodos adequados;

Consequências físicas, psicológicas e sociais da maternidade e da paternidade de gravidez na adolescência e do aborto;

Doenças e infecções sexualmente transmissíveis (como infecção por VIH e HPV) e suas consequências;

Prevenção de doenças sexualmente transmissíveis;

Prevenção dos maus tratos e das aproximações abusivas.

First cycle - Notion of the body; The body in harmony with nature and its social and cultural environment; family notion; Differences between boys and girls; Protection of the body and awareness of limits; “no” to abusive behaviours.

Second cycle - puberty, biological and emotional aspects; The body in transformation; Sexual characters; Normality, importance and frequency of its biopsychological variants; Diversity and respect; Sexuality and gender; Human reproduction and growth; contraception and family planning; Understanding the menstrual and ovulatory cycle; Prevention of mistreatment and abusive behaviours; Ethical dimension of human sexuality.

Third cycle - Understanding sexuality as one of the most sensitive components of the person, in the context of a project of life that integrates values; General physiology of human reproduction; Menstrual and ovulatory cycle; Use and accessibility of contraceptives methods; Epidemiology of the main STIs in Portugal and in the World; prevention methods; Protecting your own body, preventing physical and

sexual violence and abuse and risky sexual behaviours, saying no to emotional and sexual pressure; Knowledge of: maternity/ paternity rates and trends and in adolescence and understanding of its meaning; rates and voluntary interruption trends, their consequences and respective meaning;

Secondary Education: Understanding and determining the menstrual cycle, ovulatory period; Statistical information on: Age of initiation of sexual relations, in Portugal and in the EU and pregnancy and abortion rates in Portugal; Contraceptive methods available and used and security provided by different methods; Reasons that prevent the use of adequate methods; Physical, psychological and social consequences of maternity and paternity of teenage pregnancy and abortion; Sexually transmitted diseases and infections and their consequences and prevention; Prevention of abuse and abusive approaches.

## Annex B.

### Participants' sample

Name	Ethnicity	Religion	Sex assigned at birth	Gender identity	Sexual Orientation	Education	Occupation	Age
Sara	Biracial (European and African descent)	Muslim	Female	Cisgender female	Heterosexual	Master's degree	Language and history teacher	27
Manuel	White	Atheist with catholic background	Male	Cisgender male	Straight/Asexual	Master's degree	Worker in finance	25
Isabela	Biracial (European and African descent)	None	Female	Non-binary	Pansexual/ Queer	Bachelor's degree	Student Artist	20
Omar	Asian/ Biracial	None	Male	Cisgender male	Bisexual	Master's degree	Student	21
Alana	White	Atheist	Female	Cisgender female	Bisexual/ Pansexual	Master's degree	Developer	26
João	White	None	Male	Cisgender male	Gay	High School	English teacher	27
Daniela	Black	Pagan	Male	Non-binary	Bisexual	High School	Professional	24
Ana	Black	Christian	Female	Cisgender female	Heterosexual	Master's degree	Student	24
Gabriel	White	Agnostic	Male	Cisgender male	Gay	Bachelor's degree	Software programmer	21
José	White	Agnostic	Female	Transgender male	Bisexual	Bachelor's degree	Student	20
Carina	White	Atheist	Female	Cisgender female	Bisexual/ Demisexual	Bachelor's degree	Student	20



# Annex C.

## Interview guide

### I. School dimension

**Main question:** Tell me about the sex and relationship education you received at school. What was your experience like? What did you think of it?

**Probes: (or sub questions)**

- What contents did your teachers cover and in what subjects? How did you feel about the topics? Was the information useful/enough?
- Did you feel that the SE was inclusive/integral/diverse?
- How would you describe the impact that it had on your understanding of sexuality?

### II. Family socialization

**Main question:** What did you learn about sexuality/sex education as you were growing up and who/where did you learn it from?

**Probes:**

- What was the family culture regarding the topic of sex ed?
- What was your experience discussing topics about sexuality and sex with your family?
- What was the religion in your family and did you practice it? If yes, how did you live that did you abide by that or you had different perceptions?
- How would you describe the impact that it had on your understanding of sexuality?

### III. Peers

**Main question:** Tell me about what did you learn regarding sex and sexuality from your peers? How was the experience?

**Probes:**

- What were the perceptions or feelings regarding sexuality in your group of friends? (i.e. different group of friends?)
- How would you describe the impact that it had on your understanding of sexuality?

### IV. Pornography

**Main question:** Did you have any information from the Internet, other mass media or pornography? How was your experience and what did you draw from it?

**Probes:**

- What were the ideas that you infer/had watching this or being in contact with it?
- Did consuming of content such as pornography change your perceptions about sex and sexuality after you viewed and initiated your sex life? (expectations vs reality). Did that change the way you viewed it? How was it?
- Do you feel it was helpful to understand sex and sexuality? Why/ why not?
- How would you describe the impact that it had on your understanding of sexuality?

Where would you seek information if you had any questions about your sexuality or sex education – which sources would you see and why?

What sources did you feel have most significance is how you understand and experience your sexuality?