

Body, sexuality, gender and cultural mediations in young women's magazines: issues on sexual and reproductive health

Corpo, sexualidade, gênero e mediações culturais em revistas femininas juvenis: questões para a saúde sexual e reprodutiva

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Abstract

Actions on sexual and reproductive health care have required a constant dialogue between schools and health services. The increase in the number of actions of this nature requires improvement of interdisciplinary approaches and the development of appropriate methodologies for education aimed at youngsters involving sexuality, whether in the school environment or through health services. This ethnographic study is guided by anthropological and sociological perspectives that aggregate theoretical contributions of Reception Studies in the field of Social Communication. Through the combination of these perspectives, an analysis of the concepts of body and sexuality has been carried out, stemming from the critical perceptions attributed to two young women's magazines, "Capricho" and "Atrevida", among schoolchildren from 12 to 16 years old in a public school at Baixada Fluminense-RJ. Acknowledging magazines as cultural mediations in the communication / education process, gender relations involved in conceptions about preventive and sexual practices have also been considered. A greater understanding of the guiding logic of conceptions among youngsters has shown to be relevant to the formulation of public policies concerning health and education. The results indicate the relevance of these reflections produced in the critical and reflective activities involving cultural products and their application methodologies in educational practices within the field of health and biosciences, regarding formal and non-formal teaching. The contextualized use of such magazines with youngsters has indicated its potential in the analysis of cultural mediations and in expanded discussions

on sexual and reproductive health among youngsters upon their initial experimentation on sexuality.

Keywords: Gender. Sexuality. Reproductive Health. Cultural Mediations.

Resumo

As ações de atenção à saúde sexual e reprodutiva têm exigido constante diálogo entre a escola e os serviços de saúde. O incremento de ações desta natureza requer o aprimoramento das abordagens interdisciplinares e o desenvolvimento de metodologias adequadas para a educação voltada aos jovens envolvendo a sexualidade, seja no âmbito escolar ou através dos serviços de saúde. Este estudo de cunho etnográfico orienta-se pelas perspectivas antropológica e sociológica, agregando os aportes teóricos dos Estudos de Recepção do campo da Comunicação Social. Por meio da conjugação dessas perspectivas, foi realizada uma análise das concepções de corpo e sexualidade, a partir das percepções críticas atribuídas às revistas femininas juvenis *Capricho* e *Atrevida*, entre jovens escolares de 12 a 16 anos, em uma escola pública da Baixada Fluminense, Rio de Janeiro. Compreendendo as revistas como mediações culturais no processo comunicativo/educativo, as relações de gênero implicadas nas concepções sobre práticas preventivas e sexuais também foram consideradas. Uma maior compreensão das lógicas norteadoras das concepções entre os jovens é relevante para a formulação de políticas públicas em saúde e educação. Os resultados indicam a pertinência das reflexões produzidas nas atividades críticas e reflexivas envolvendo produtos culturais, e suas respectivas metodologias de aplicação, em práticas educativas nos campos da saúde e das biociências, em suas vertentes de ensino formal e não formal. O uso contextualizado das revistas entre os jovens indicou sua potencialidade na análise das mediações culturais e nas discussões ampliadas sobre saúde sexual e reprodutiva entre jovens mediante sua experimentação de entrada na sexualidade.

Palavras-chave: Gênero. Sexualidade. Saúde Reprodutiva. Mediações Culturais.

Introduction

Sexual and reproductive health care has been considered one of the priority areas of Primary Care provided by the Brazilian Ministry of Health and is based on a comprehensive approach and the promotion of human rights¹, including sexual and reproductive rights. According to the guidelines by this ministry, it is not a simple task, considering the complexity in approaching the topics pertinent to the sociocultural determinants that involve health situations, which requires more professionals' preparation, including the development of appropriate methodologies.

Professionals, whether in the health system or in education, feel unprepared to address issues related to sexual and reproductive health, including combating homophobia, preventing pregnancy and STD (sexually transmitted diseases)/AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome), as they are controversial issues involving prejudices and taboos. It is important to highlight that there are still health and education actions aimed at ensuring the achievement of the policy objectives in these fields, aimed at reducing social inequalities in relation to gender and sexual orientation. However, many of them take on a prescriptive character, being oblivious to the meanings of young people's life experiences, resulting in reduced reach of the actions in this field.

It is observed, in the midst of health and education regulations, that they intend to report on best behavior regarding body care – including dietary practices, drug use, disease prevention and pregnancy avoidance – in a reduced impact of these actions. In this sense, attention must be paid to the existence of social constructions of the body that guide conducts in the youth culture universe that can not be ignored.

As shall be presented later, we have identified, in the social discourses adopted by the magazines and developed by young people, that the body ideals associated with thinness and beauty are in line with the social set of means of sexuality control. The goal of reaching such ideals on the part of the young, especially the young, but also the adults, results in constituting a group that becomes one of the biggest victims of eating disorders.

According to Ferreira², obesity, bulimia and anorexia nervosa synthesize the learning mechanisms of social control and corporal stigmatization as discussed in the literature. In this sense, the subject of eating and controlling eating practices, when analyzed from the perspective of a cultural and social perspective, is intimately involved in the analysis of young bodies. This work aims, along with others already existing, to contribute to a better understanding of the topic among young people.

Sexual and reproductive health issues, albeit differently, are also covered in national newspapers and magazines. For Rios³, the social organization and the visibility of issues involving sexual and reproductive health in the media gain specific contours, depending on the topics addressed and

the media targeting different audiences. According to information from the Brazilian Ministry of Health¹, STDs have been much discussed in scientific forums as well as in the mass media, particularly because of their association with the increased risk of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection by sexual transmission among men, adult women and young people.

It is therefore assumed that there is a circulation of different topics reaching a large part of young readers, Internet users or TV viewers, helping to inform attitudes in different groups of society. Young women's magazines incorporate this scenario as another actor who comes to engender the social production of the meanings attributed to the construction of the body and sexuality in the phase of sexual initiation among the young.

In this scenario it is necessary to question: How have young people, immersed in a social context of intense circulation and access to information, built a critical perception regarding the experience of sexuality from the sexual rights frameworks that advocate autonomy and freedom of choice? How does the media reflect the young people's reality and sexual practices?

Focusing on sexual initiation and its modes of representations in the media and by young people, this study presents results obtained from a research carried out with lower class young students in a state public school located in the Brazilian municipality of Queimados, Baixada Fluminense (meaning "lowlands of the State of Rio de Janeiro," a region in the state of Rio de Janeiro), state of Rio de Janeiro, where they reside. The objective was to know the perceptions built about the body, sexuality and gender relations in the interface with social discourses through Brazilian teen magazines *Capricho* (published by publishing house Editora Abril) and *Atrevida* (published by publishing house Editora Escala) aimed at female teenage readers, two modalities of commercial publications.

The aim of magazines aimed at females, including *Capricho*, *Atrevida* and their congeners, is not to build a direct pedagogical structure, as we can observe in journalism and scientific publications, such as Scientific American [American popular science magazine (informally abbreviated SciAm)], *Ciência Hoje* [(Portuguese: Science today) a Brazilian science magazine] and ComCiência (Brazilian monthly electronic publication) when covering health issues. However, we observe that the discourses circulating in these magazines have repercussions among young people, producing meanings and reflecting the values present in society regarding gender relations and sexual orientation. Therefore, when we talk about information about sexuality with regard to women's magazines, we do not affirm that there is a commitment from this medium to the scientific contents themselves but a production of texts and images directed to the young audience that express social and moral values around sexual experience.

According to Fischer⁴, this is "knowledge that somehow addresses people's 'education,' teaching them ways of being and being in the culture in which they live" (p. 153). Thus, we

work with the premise that the media produces knowledge, although not specialized, in this field, among the young.^a

The main elements that characterize *Capricho* and *Atrevida* young women's magazines are presented here, contextualizing them in the scenario of sexual initiation as part of the experience of youthful sexuality. This learning was characterized by questions raised about gender relations, intrinsic to sexual practices, and about prevention and human reproduction. In this sense, the students' point of view was mediated by the production of the magazines analyzed, reflecting a permanent negotiation of meanings with women's magazines, whose analysis is guided by the socio-anthropological perspective combined with Social Communication references.

Sexual initiation in the pages of women's magazines: references and context of the investigation

The construction of a work methodology with magazines *Capricho* and *Atrevida*, aimed at school contexts, was characterized by the association of different theoretical perspectives. The approach between different perspectives, such as the socio-anthropological one, referenced in this study by Minayo⁵, Foote-Whyte⁶, and VÍctora et al.⁷, was coupled with that of Reception Studies, according to Martín-Barbero⁸, Sousa⁹, and Leal¹⁰. This provided a critical reading of media constructed in interaction with young people in the context of research.

Therefore, the purpose of the ethnographic study was to follow the process of interaction with magazines *Capricho* and *Atrevida*, the modes of re-signification, and the perceptions among students involving initiating sexuality with a partner. The analysis of reading magazines *Capricho* and *Atrevida* by young people, conceived as cultural mediations. Mediations having as an assumption the concept of culture introduced by Geertz¹¹ and Da Matta¹² as a system of meanings that allows us to understand the behaviors in their symbolic action. Reflections on culture from its mediations

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- a Among young women in Rio de Janeiro, when asked about where they first got information on STD/AIDS, there was a tie between health services and women's magazines, with 12% each. Regarding schools, 28% of these young women in Rio de Janeiro reported that those are responsible for the dissemination of information about sexual intercourse; 34% on pregnancy/contraception and 56% on STD/AIDS (Bozon & Heilborn, p. 160, 2006). While schools account for 50% of the men interviewed in Rio de Janeiro, a space to obtain information on STD/AIDS. Among the women who participated in the interview in the same city, this index reaches 56% for information acquisition and STD/AIDS prevention (ibid., p. 160, 2006).
- b A detailed description of the methodological course can be found in the study entitled "Body, sexuality, gender and cultural mediations in women's magazines: possibilities of use for non-formal education" under the guidance of Dr. Eliane Portes Vargas, developed in a Postgraduate Program in Teaching Biosciences and Health. Support from CAPES [Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Brazilian Coordination of Improvement of Higher Education Personnel)].
- c This result is described in the article Young Women's Magazines and Sexual Education in Teaching Sciences – Praxis.

represent the systematization of values and ideologies in social realities. Reception, as a concept within the Social Communication, is a place from which discursive practices are negotiated and constructed, and where power relations are also expressed. According to Martín-Barbero⁸, “The field of what we call mediations consists of sets of means through which hegemony transforms the meaning of communities’ work and life” (p. 274). The key concept of mediation is explored to produce a critical reading of the media in line with a socio-anthropological perspective, which, according to Minayo⁵, is that which privileges perceptions, relations and representations of the groups of students in view of cultural mediations.

Studies in Social Communication report that magazines published in Brazil follow the publishing market logic of segmentation, being produced from the delimitation of subject matters of interest for the consumer audience, including magazines aimed at female teenage readers. For Mira¹³, the editorial format of magazine *Capricho* (and its congeners) combines the emphasis on fashion, sex, and relationships articles. The discursiveness between magazines aimed at female teenage readers and women’s magazines such as *Claudia* (Brazilian magazine for women), *Marie Claire* (international monthly magazine for women), or *AnaMaria* (weekly Brazilian magazine for women) seems to play the role of maintaining and training this gender readers and consumers. According to Freire Filho¹⁴, consumption, and identity have become inseparable parts of the lifestyle advocated by such publications that translate female authenticity as a “strong personality.” Such distinctions between masculine and feminine integrate the communicative network of the young, contributing to the construction of a young social identity.

In a convergent way, data from the literature, from the anthropological perspective, point out that body images socially produced have distinctive marks of gender expressed from the biological difference. However, according to Heilborn¹⁵, sexuality, in this perspective, is understood as “a product of different scenarios, and not only as deriving from subjects’ biopsychic functioning.” (p. 35)

Women’s magazines correspond to a cultural mediation whose circulating discourses offer to analysis a set of meanings attributed to the body and sexuality. The study carried out with *Capricho* and *Atrevida* has focused on conceptions about body, gender, sexuality and sexual orientation using different resources and methodological strategies summarized here^b: 1) Characterization and analysis of magazines *Capricho* and *Atrevida*; 2) Activities of “Shameless bag” and “What is sexuality?,” developed with young people, where questions and answers were analyzed; 3) “Posters production” from articles produced in magazines; and 4) Discussion groups with young people on the experience of sexuality and the production of magazines. The fieldwork scenario consists of the school environment, an interaction and approximation of the researcher with the young people, and of these with the women’s magazines, especially the concerns and questions addressed to the researcher by the students themselves during the activities carried out.

The young people who voluntarily participated in the study were between the ages of 12 and 16, coming from the grass roots, with little or no access to cultural assets in the Brazilian municipality of Queimados, in the state of Rio de Janeiro⁴. The students were from two 8th grade school classes.

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Brazilian foundation Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (Fiocruz) after appreciation by a collegiate for meeting the requirements of guidelines in Resolution 196/96 of Brazilian government National Health Council (CONEP in the Portuguese abbreviation), under protocol no. 600/2011.

Fundamental and differences in sexual experience represented a relevant distinction between the two groups: (1) "Sexually less initiated," the students in a lower age group, belonging to the "non-repeaters" class, indicating traits of lower sexual initiation; (2) "Sexually more initiated," those whose age group would no longer correspond to the school grade, whose traits would indicate greater sexual initiation, for the most part. Thus, adopting the terms "more initiated" and "less initiated" arises from a perception of the students' involvement with their sex-affective experiences and not necessarily their sexual practices.

Body images, sexuality and gender from the students' perspective

The analysis of the magazines indicated the spread of a beauty pattern that, to greater or lesser extents, contributes to forming an aesthetic sense of femininity and masculinity. The reading of the magazines done by the more initiated ones expressed a shared image of themselves, with little choices of male bodies being one of the absences noted by the boys: "I have chosen this one because the magazines would show very few men and more women," opined 16-year-old Eduardo, a more initiated student. Among the less initiated adolescents, a reduced identification with self-image in the magazines prevailed, due to the idols' social condition, too far from their experience: "Such magazines show only playboys and girls fall in love but they do not even look like real people," opined 14-year-old Guilherme, a less initiated student. Guilherme's speech expresses a feeling of recurrent exclusion among boys in view of the patterns of masculinity and consumption conveyed in magazines.

The more initiated girls' identification was more related to personality or predicates attributed to the female sex. For 15-year-old Maria Eduarda, self-expression links femininity to affectivity, corroborating the argument that, according to Heilborn et al.¹⁶, "In the social construction of the feminine gender there is subsumption of sex to affectivity, here designated as a relational perspective referring to sexuality." The association of femininity with affection was also shown in the discussion between boys and girls about the correspondence between "being the woman" and "weak sex." In the discussion process, they confirmed the female fragility naturalization "because they fall

in love faster.” According to the more initiated boys and girls, protagonists in this discussion, the non-inclusion of girls in this gender prescription results in their identification as “easy lay” girls.

Conflicts with body self-image, portrayed by images in magazines, appeared among the more initiated girls when admitting to being embarrassed about their bodies’ shape and how this interferes with sexual initiation. Fifteen-year-old Monique and 16-year-old Sabrina, both students in the “more initiated” group, respectively mention impressions with body self-image:

My biggest concern with the first-time sex is threefold: fear of getting pregnant, of illness, and the shame on my body. That’s what most bothers me, more than the other fears. There is some insecurity, willing or not uncertainty is present because I keep thinking about what he will think later. Because I’m ashamed I don’t know what he’s going to say and think later. That’s it. Only if I’m very sure of what I want, but I don’t know I’ve had my first sexual relationship with my first boyfriend. We were together for two years. I’m very ashamed of my body. Therefore, it took us two years to get something done.

Note the magazines aptitude in capturing the feelings of inadequacy and corporal constraints, especially in girls during this period of biopsychic transformation and development. The relationship that girls demonstrated to establish with their own bodies and their reflexes on self-esteem and sexual performance was also reported in magazine *Capricho*¹⁷, as follows:

I just feel ready to get laid if I’m okay with my body. Besides, it’s always good to have a condom in your bag. What if he forgets it! It’s a little embarrassing to be stripped in front of him. Therefore most prefer to dim the room light!

Body constraints arise both in the magazines and in the young people’s speeches, building their social and sexual identities, linked to body image – that is, the referential of a beautiful and socially accepted body that, in this case, circulates in the discursive sets of means of magazines *Capricho* and *Atrevida*. Although this study did not aim at the construction of body image for the expression of sexual practices, the identification of the social discourses adopted in the magazines also articulated by young people delimits the expression of sexuality, revealing the ideals of thinness and beauty as social sets of means for control of sexuality.

For Ferreira², women (of all ages) are the main victims of eating disorders, in which obesity, bulimia and anorexia nervosa synthesize the learning of mechanisms of social control and corporal stigmatization. In this way, the body also appears as the main reference for the choice of the partner, being the young men’s main justification at the moment of flirting. Among the less and more initiated boys, physical beauty, the appearance of the body, and having an attractive body are determining factors in choosing a partner. Women’s appearance is the most valued quality

among them. Physical attributes are accompanied by other elements in this choice, relating to the partner's family values, experience and age. According to a testimony by 12-year-old Fernando, a less initiated student:

I don't have a girlfriend. But first, a pretty girl, who likes me and I like her. My father said something to me: "If you get a girl who is younger than you, then you'll groom her to your own tastes and she will not run away. A younger person you go on grooming to your own tastes and afterwards she gets her mind formed. Then it's a little easier." This is kind of an opinion for dating, right?

For girls, both the more and less initiated ones, some characteristics of personality prevail over the body and physical beauty at the moment of flirting. Boys need to know how to talk and be more experienced. This makes them more attractive to sexually and emotionally less experienced girls, integrating with partner idealizations and preferences. And according to 14-year-old Nicole, a less initiated student:

I think it's the body image that determines flirting success. But image is not everything. He may be a handsome boy but if he does not know how to talk I will not remain with him. If he opens his mouth and talks nonsense, then no way.

Girls stated that feeling safe with the partner would be decisive in the decision to have the first sexual intercourse. Being a lifelong partner or a boyfriend was not considered so important. In the result of the survey conducted by *Capricho*¹⁷, the girls' opinions came close to the young women's perception in the research, where "50.5% of the girls would have sex with a boy without commitment, as long as they liked each other," when opining about having sex without strings attached.

Consumer relations also show influence on partner preference and choice. The differences between boys and girls appear in their preference for famous boys because for these fame presupposes wealth. However, they are critical of the idols' functions in women's imaginary as an ideal of a handsome and rich partner. They recognize that famous boys are unattainable, as in the following statement by 14-year-old Luíza: "A famous boy is for us to dream several good dreams. We know we will not get one of these, but we admire them..." The less and more initiated boys do not consider it important that women be rich and famous, rather that they have beautiful bodies, bosom and buttocks. Body and beauty are the main attributes.

Male and female perceptions of partner preference and consumption complement each other. Females' emphasis on boys' interest in sex and males' emphasis on girls' interest in their money have brought to the surface aspects of gender relations that the media engenders in the presentation of the youth's affective-sexual relationships images. On the other hand, young people express a

critical view about the social discourses that circulate in magazines, as expressed by 13-year-old Fabiano, a less initiated student:

These magazines talk more about famous men, right? I think these women's magazines are not good because talking about every kind of boy would be the right thing to do. Wealthy boys, ugly ones, handsome boys. Talking about all the kinds of boys that exist... But they don't. They only talk about rich and handsome boys.

For Freire Filho¹⁴, the culture of consumption permeates contemporary identities “in which acts of purchase or consumption express tastes, values, worldview, social insertion...” The friendly rhetoric brought by *Capricho* and *Atrevida* involves the readers but has been shown to have an oppressive effect on boys, who have expressed a sense of marginalization and exclusion for not being up to the rich and famous stars in circulation in magazines. It is observed that women's compensation for the little importance given to males' beauty is structured through the desire that men have money to conquer them, which is translated in the social expectation of men's performance in society. Then, according to Louro¹⁸, it is assumed that the consumer power symbolism would be producing reverberations in these young people's sexuality with direct effects on their bodies.

The fact that “experienced boys” are as valued as virgin girls, or less experienced, brings together the ideals of partner in this group, forming the first trace of cohesion that identifies them as less initiated. Expectations of both characterize the complementarity in the search for a partner. In other words, boys want to relate to less experienced girls (or virgins) and girls prefer to get close to more experienced boys. Such preferences tend to make it unfeasible for them to develop their first sexual experiences with each other. The exchange of experiences in preference for more and less sexually initiated partners would characterize the transition in the intensity traits of sexual experiences.

Sexual initiation

Youth initiation practices culminate in the decision to have the first sexual intercourse. In these young people's perception, this decision is made mostly by the woman, being little discussed between the couple. The responsibility for prevention of STDs and especially pregnancy also falls on her. The decision to have the first sexual intercourse is part of the courtship game in which the girl's role is to deny, valuing herself for being a virgin, and it is up to her to decide when to give in. And to boys are reserved the role of pressing to get what, as they themselves acknowledge, they most desire: a sexual relationship. As found in Heilborn et al.¹⁶, “[r]esistance on the part of the woman and insistence on the part of the man are part of the ideal arrangement in gender relations. The woman must be able to judge in what moments she can grant greater bodily intimacy.” (p. 211)

Regarding the pressure they undergo for sex, identified as part of initiation practices, the less initiated boys and girls demonstrated identification with the magazines discourses when they found a response corresponding to the following question in magazine *Capricho*¹⁷: “Would you have sex with a person just to make them happy?” The students were able to express their opinions on the subject: “62% of the girls had already been pressured by a boy into having sex.” Also: “60% of the female readers would not comply to the boy’s will even if they liked him very much. Sex is something very important! Magazine *Atrevida* discussed the matter with the following statement in the March issue of 2011¹⁹:

I'm dating an older boy. He is no longer a virgin, but I am. Therefore we are experiencing a terror phase in our relationship because he wants to have sex and I still do not consider myself ready. We have already talked about it and he said it's complicated to wait so long. Our courtship is limited, because when he can not take it anymore, the only solution will be to end it all. And we do not want that to happen because we like each other very much. What do I do?

The group of less initiated students has also shown that they value specialists' opinions to confirm their convictions, as if they were also sending a message to the other colleagues when reproducing in their works the section clipped from magazine *Capricho* with an opinion from medical doctor Calvino Fernandes¹⁷:

If you are being pressured, do not give in just because he wants to. Otherwise you may regret it later! Talk to the boy and reinforce how much you like him but explain that you do not want to get laid yet. If he really cares about you, he'll understand. Now, if he gets angry, get out: a boy who thinks only about his own satisfaction is not worth it!

It turns out that, regardless of whether they are more or less sexually initiated, boys and girls recognize the legitimacy of the pressure that girls undergo to get laid. According to 13-year-old Luíza, a less initiated student: “I think girls are pressured to have sex because boys ask for proof of love. And girls still undergo this pressure a lot.” With less expressiveness, the more initiated girls have also recognized that there was female pressure on themselves to have the first sexual intercourse. For 15-year-old Tatiane, a more initiated student: “I think boys pressure but we have female friends who, even if we do not feel ready, encourage us.”

As discussed by magazines, male pressure is implicitly organized to make it appear that this is an exclusively female's decision. The decision to get laid appears, at times, influenced by males' will who threaten with the consequent termination of the relationship in case they do not give in. As these young people's opinion is represented in 15-year-old Renata's speech, a more initiated student: “Who is more anxious is the boy but it is the girl who decides because he will not get her

by force, although they press for it.” Or, according to 13-year-old José, a more initiated student, through an opinion with justification in physiological changes occurring in males’ bodies: “Men press due to hormones. Hormones are responsible for the pressure.”

Virginity appears to be more valued among less initiated boys and girls. The emphasis on males’ sexual experience is recognized, with female virginity being its equivalent among cultural values for entry into sexuality, according to 15-year-old Sofia, less initiated: “It is that for men there is no such a thing as the first-time sex. For them, the more times, the better.” The less experienced a girl is, this would be considered an advantage for boys. They were unanimous in rejecting the possibility of marrying a girl who is no longer a virgin. Whereas the girls were more forceful in their opinions, according to less initiated student 13-year-old Patrícia: “I think virginity has always been important.. Can you imagine a girl from the church who was always Mrs. Right to marry without being a virgin?”

In the group of the more initiated ones, virginity is already somewhat different from the other group, with different meanings, giving new contours to the discussion. Students recognize its importance and cultural value but they believe that young people of their age no longer cherish the expectation of marrying virgins or that the first partner be the only one, being with them for a lifetime. As explained in the testimony by 15-year-old Tatiane, a more initiated student:

I think that both for dating or having the first intercourse you have to make sure it’s what you want indeed and it is going to be worth it. As much as I don’t remain with the person forever but I would like to have the memory that it was a special person in a special place. Although sometimes it’s nothing of what we think. If you feel prepared, ready, and think it’s going to be special for you, I don’t think there’s any problem.

The expectation of the more initiated boys and girls is that the moment of the first sexual relation is special, signifying a rite of passage. It is important enough to be remembered throughout life and not necessarily accompanied by an affective experience, as a relevant love experience. What is considered more important, especially for the more initiated girls, is the safety with regard to their own body, even if it does not represent for them some negotiation for the practice of safe sex. A desire for security translates into trust for the partner’s feelings.

Although they have shown distinct expectations regarding females’ and males’ virginity, in common the two groups analyzed here recognize that this ideal arrangement in gender relations is what has served as a parameter for the construction of their perceptions. According to Bozon & Heilborn²⁰, the pressure that girls know they suffer is a common feeling for many women. Resistance to vaginal penetration seems to persist in relationships as the “central point of negotiation among couples,” and reveals itself to be sustained through discourses of self-confidence, the relation to the body, and female pleasure itself, influencing the decision.

Sexual practices and preventive practices

The adoption of preventive practices for sexual initiation appeared among the youths underlying the fear of pregnancy. This was the major concern shown by the girls involved in the study, whether they were more or less initiated. For 15-year old Renata, a less initiated student: "Getting sick does not worry me but getting pregnant like that..."

Males' attitude towards pregnancy was diffuse, that is, those who were or are dating showed greater concern about the possibility of impregnating their partners, as shown by 17-year-old Arthur, a more initiated student: "I worry about everything, illness, pregnancy. I ask her if she is well, if she is on her period." As for those who did not state being in a committed relationship, they considered that this should be females' concern, as demonstrated in a testimony by 17-year-old Peterson, a more initiated student: "Man, I don't think men think about it, they don't. But I think women must. When they're going to hit on a girl, they don't think about her going to get pregnant." The opinions expressed by the less and more initiated youth about the use of condoms resemble the results from the poll conducted by magazine *Capricho*, according to which "getting pregnant is the greatest fear after intercourse for most girls"¹⁷.

The use of condoms has also appeared, permeated by myths and resistance. The more initiated students raised the possibility of condoms breaking and not protecting against pregnancy, and having holes through which sperm would pass. This view suggests that, according to these young men, condom use would become dispensable, anticipating the potential for failure to prevent pregnancy.

Regarding the possibility of using other contraceptive methods, the more initiated girls acknowledged that many of them are still afraid of using contraceptive pills, which could even cause infertility. The justifications outlined by the more and less initiated ones about the use of condoms suggest males' resistance of adhesion to condoms, with the main allegation that, when girls are virgins its use would become dispensable, as opined by 14-year-old Nicole, a more initiated student: "Boys say it bothers and are not necessary. But even though both are virgins I think they have to use a condom." It is noted that the responsibility for the use of the condom is little discussed among the partners and the girls denounce the prejudices they would face if they decided to carry condoms in their bags. Therefore, for reasons that converge, more and less initiated ones agree that men should carry condoms. Such belief is shown in 15-year-old Maria Eduarda's speech, a more initiated student:

Who takes the condom on a first date is the man. If the woman does, she's a bitch. A woman can also take it but the right thing is for the man to do it. But if she does, she'll be preventing for herself too. But if we take it, the boy calls you a slut, and so what?

There is, however, a complexity in the issue involving gender relations, which lies between the responsibility of having the condom, attributed to the man, and the decision to use it effectively, recognized as being of women's. Consistent with what has already been recorded by Britzman²¹ and Souza²², it is observed that just as students mostly met the social expectations constructed for each gender, the formulations about the use of condoms are part of schools culture permeated by the discourse of prevention prevalent in the field of sexuality (or health), being its use imperative, without taking into account the understanding of issues that are part of young people's intimacy.

Human reproduction

Human reproduction was another aspect of students' interest explored from the biological functioning of the body. According to Leal¹⁰, the fertile period and the pregnancy appear bound to the menstrual blood. From these associations made by the students, it was possible to capture in which aspects magazines match the more and less initiated students' demands.

The forms of negotiation and representation produced through the content offered by *Capricho* and *Atrevida* could be understood from the following questions on the subject: "Can I get laid during my period?" This shows that more and less initiated students make connections from the fertile to the menstrual periods, thus increasing the risk of pregnancy at this stage. We can see that, in order to construct their answers, they have used the information contained in the magazines reviewed, as well as their conceptual universes, expressing their knowledge about body functioning. As published in magazine *Atrevida* in the June 2011²³ issue:

I've realized that when I'm menstruating, it's easier to reach orgasm in masturbation. Does the degree of arousal really increase during menstruation or do I get the wrong impression on the subject? Could it have been just a coincidence? Can you tell me if it is true that girls are more sensitive at this stage? **Answer:** Yes, it is true that at this stage many women report increased sexual desire and arousal. This fact has an explanation in biology. This is due to the production of estrogen and testosterone, hormones that greatly influence females' sexuality. Enjoy this period! There is no contraindication to masturbation and (safe) sex during menstruation.

Although the magazine did not mention that there is greater risk of pregnancy during the menstrual period, it also did not clarify to the readers at which moment of the cycle it could take place. However, the response from another group of less initiated students suggests that the bottom line raised by the class is that a girl may become pregnant if she has intercourse during menstruation. In the analysis of the set of answers constructed by the less initiated students, it is possible to capture the restlessness about the reproductive process with the reading of other complementary answers.

When returning to the question about the possibility of getting laid during the menstrual cycle: "It is possible. But it is not recommended because during menstruation there is more risk of the woman becoming pregnant." According to the less initiated students, this concern becomes more noticeable. And, in addition, in magazine *Atrevida* we can see, in the excerpt provided by this single sentence, that there is more than one question relating females' bodies' conception to their fertile period: "I would like to know if it is possible for a girl to get pregnant if she has sex while she is menstruating." Similar representations have already been recorded by Leal¹⁰, who, researching groups of women and men from grass roots, has found that the fertile period coincides with the menstrual period, the most conducive to conception, with sperm being its males' equivalent.

Sexual relation is represented as the moment where the exchange of bodily fluids occur; it is essentially a social relation where an exchange takes place, and bodily fluids are substances transmitting both what can be polluted as well as life, emotions, moral substances.

Body fluids continued to be explored by students, who were able to systematize their beliefs by relying on magazines to reaffirm or reconstruct their conceptions of sexual practices and reproduction. From the question: "Why does the discharge of semen take place?," it is noticeable that in the developments made by the less initiated ones there is once again the association of sperm with menstruation, encompassing ovulation and the fertile period. As demonstrated by them in the textual development of students combined with the response found in magazine *Atrevida*: "When it is secreted it is because the person is aroused. It is as if it were a discharge that comes out from men as it comes out from women." Also, as recorded by magazine *Atrevida* in a text published in March 2011¹⁹:

I got my period a little while ago but I already feel something different when it comes to sex. Generally, in my panties, a white liquid comes out, a goo. My friends say it's the discharge of semen. Is this true? **Answer:** Having already menstruated indicates that you are ovulating and producing estrogen – the sex hormone responsible for all body and girls' changes. You will also feel a secretion in the vagina because of this hormone action, which varies according to your menstrual cycle. It is normal for you to start feeling sexual desire and getting aroused. When this happens, your vagina gets moist but that's not sexual enjoyment, it's your lubrication. Most of the time, women do not eliminate any liquid when reaching orgasm.

The understanding of reproduction that students have shown indicates that their empirical knowledge overlaps with knowledge of the scientific basis of how bodies function. Although they understand menarche as the phase that symbolizes the transition from girl to woman, initiating the reproductive cycle, the less initiated ones do not distinguish the phases of the menstrual cycle – that is, that women do not ovulate every day of the month. Thus, associated with the

menstrual period, we have obtained the following of the students' constructions in dialogues with the magazines. "When do women start producing reproductive eggs?": "When the woman has her first menstruation, the menarche, around 12 to 13 years of age," a textual production by the less initiated students. This textual development juxtaposes itself with the more technical-scientific discourse of magazine *Atrevida*: "The fact that you have already menstruated indicates that you are ovulating and producing estrogen – the hormone responsible for all changes in girls' bodies¹⁹."

The less initiated ones resorted to a medical metaphor, the injection, to better represent the moment of fertilization or the sexual act: "When we inject the spermatozoon into the woman, is she at risk of becoming pregnant?" According to Martin²⁴, this is one of the manifestations of the existence of a medical culture permeating popular culture. "Certainly, it is a fact that happens a lot and many girls and women become pregnant because of this," from the less initiated students. As the answer does not inform that it will occur only if the woman is in her fertile period, we could tend to consider it incomplete or wrong. However, a closer look provides indications of how students would be understanding reproduction, in that from the menarche at any time of the month the girl (or woman) is at risk of becoming pregnant, without exception.

According to this development by the students, pregnancy is a risk that is taken on when sexual life begins, and that, as emphasized by Leal¹⁰, becomes "an event that may or may not occur and which is always subject to a universe of random possibilities." It is evident that the preoccupation with STDs appears as secondary not only in the students' speeches but in fact it is confirmed in practice when the young people suggest that they prefer to take on the risk of pregnancy than sacrificing sexual pleasure, resisting adherence to contraceptive methods.

Blood, besides appearing as a sign of fertility, is also shown as a bodily sign of "loss of virginity," with a strong symbolism, especially for boys. The notion that hymen rips or tears necessarily cause bleeding in women, and sometimes in men, is conceived as the proof of females' virginity and is therefore desirable to occur. The less and more initiated ones, when questioning, "When we lose our virginity, will it bleed?," have developed their own perceptions to the discourse of magazine *Capricho*: "Yes. Because small injuries occur during penetration, especially if there is tension and little lubrication," according to the idea development by the less initiated students. And in addition, from *Atrevida* they used the following excerpt, published in the June 2011²³ edition:

I'm a virgin, but sometimes my boyfriend will put his finger into my vagina. I have always liked it, but after a while it started to hurt and release a brown discharge [...] Since then, I will not let my boyfriend do this anymore. Is my hymen gradually breaking down? **Answer:** The fact that your boyfriend has inserted his penis into your vagina may have caused your hymen to break [...] However, this event is not much important. You practically already had a sex life with your boyfriend. After all, there isn't much difference between a finger and the penis when we think of intimacy.

The idea that small penetration injuries may occur in a woman's vagina is justified by the woman's tension and lack of lubrication. It is noticed that this answer developed by the students appears influenced by one offered by *Atrevida* to another question sent to the magazine, which was reused by the students in another context. The students attributed another meaning not only to the text extracted from the magazine but they also presented a different notion of the previous ones, explaining that the broken hymen would cause injuries in the vagina, thus the bleeding.

The more initiated boys mentioned that the first sexual intercourse can also cause bleeding in them, although by the impetus in the sexual act and not by any masculine fragility as it is attributed to women's case in which words that denote feminine fragility were used, such as "little" or "tense." Martin stresses the use of terms of negative connotation about bodily processes in female reproduction, since the presence of blood in the first intercourse acquires very different meanings for boys and girls²⁴. In men, bleeding suggests masculine vigor and virility in the sexual act. In women, bleeding, although also appearing as desirable, suggests a female susceptibility in sexual practices.

Final thoughts

The use of magazines among students has revealed strong questions among youngsters about the modes of expression of models and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Gender relations have been more systematically problematized, with the female role in relationships, prejudices and stereotypes being questioned at times by the students, although there is a naturalization in the perception about gender inequalities reflected in sexual and reproductive health.

One can observe approximations between corporal representations produced by the young people of the research and the magazines reading audience that had their questions published. In this comparison, the questions formulated by the more and less initiated students allowed to conclude that magazines *Capricho* and *Atrevida* have met some of the students' demands. However, there is a mismatch between the discourses and images produced about these questions in the magazines and the young people's subjective experiences, since they do not deepen the subjects of their interest, and the gaps in the construction of the knowledge provided remain.

Such gaps are especially noted in questions about human reproduction, affective relationships, and first sexual intercourse. This suggests, in the youngsters' relationship with the magazines, a relative participation of these publications in the midst of communicative networks in the construction of sexual identities. In changing social and political scenarios, with regard to sexual and reproductive rights, women's magazines have been found to be short of social discussions about the issue and the young's current demands.

As presented, magazines, often cited by young people as a source of information for starting sexuality with a partner, have aroused many questions and criticisms. In the modes of entry into sexuality, regarding the uses that the youth make of the media, the most comprehensive repertoire mentioned by the more and less initiated children stands out, as they credit more learning through magazines like (American men's lifestyle and entertainment magazine) Playboy and (monthly Brazilian men's magazine published by publishing house Editora Rickdan Ltda.) Sexy, pornographic movies and the Internet.

From the perspective of gender relations, there was the observation, on the part of the boys, that magazines and materials aimed at them more markedly include men's universe, since subjects of interest of the young people prevail. In continuity, boys claimed to be portrayed in magazines "more realistically" and closer to the experiences they actually have, suggesting ongoing changes in the experience of sexuality and male identity.

Considering the need to reflect on educational practices in sexual and reproductive health, it is worth mentioning the use of participative methodologies that consider the youngsters' previous knowledge to approach the subject of sexuality, in agreement with the Manual of Basic Care by Brazilian Ministry of Health.¹ In this sense, the language used by young women's magazines when producing young people's identifications with some of the topics about sexuality, favors its use in educational approaches among the youth. The critical reading that young people make of this medium of communication, however, goes beyond the approaches contained in these publications, which can be incorporated by educational actions in sexual and reproductive health.

The young people's expanded perception about the experience of sexuality shows some critical points in approaching this topic in schools contexts in view of the proposals in the field of public health policies aimed at guaranteeing sexual and reproductive rights. A political discussion about the topic of sexual diversity for the formulation of educational strategies in the classroom presents itself, above all, as a challenge among teachers/educators. The invisibility of this topic in schools contexts can also be identified in certain media, as shown by the young people's reading on magazines of national circulation.

According to the Manual of Basic Care by Brazilian Ministry of Health,¹ it is necessary to consider that integrated actions for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health, whether at school or through health services, advocate "a more comprehensive understanding of human beings and health-disease processes, understanding this process as complex, which can not be reduced only to a biological dimension." Finally, we understand that advances in acknowledging sexual and reproductive rights – for example, the recent legal acknowledgment by judicial branches of homo-affective unions – do not guarantee the implementation of effective educational strategies and actions among the youth. Reflections on "how to do it" are still poorly debated in schools and health services.

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