

Cultures and Interculturality

23 November | 12:15/16:15 | Auditorium C

Youth sexualization and sexual diversity in Portuguese Schools

Sofia Santos; Laura Fonseca e Raquel Simões (CIIE/FPCEUP)

This paper analyses the way young people learn and confront sexualities in urban and rural Portuguese schools. More concretely, it focuses on the importance of education on sexual diversity and gender production, framed by intimate citizenship concerns. It attempts to develop a critical and gender approach to young people's discourses, in the sociological and educational field. Based on the Portuguese reality it could be assumed that there are heterosexual and homogeneous learning experiences confronting pupils in school. This interpretation is structured around the concept of "sexual diversity" as a form of respect and acknowledgement of multiple ways of sexual living; as well as it is built on the notion of local, age, gendered and sexualized "communities of interpretation" (Kehily, 2009), understood as the way young people learn their sexualities in a increasing culture of sexualization.

Under public and political pressure, media influence and the burden of tradition, schools are emerging as spaces of negotiation confronting policies and moral interests that regulate young people's desires, citizenship and cultures. Thus, it is our perspective that to perceive schools as powerful places of sexuality learning, free of the "discourse of victimization", it implies the compromise of educational institutions with sexual and intimate citizenship orientations (Richardson & Turner, 2001; Plummer, 2003). The work presented here is part of a research project called "Sexualities, Youth and Teenage Pregnancy in North-Western Portugal", financed by FCT (The Portuguese Foundation for Science). This paper analyses young people's discourses and perspectives through 3 case studies among 37 Focus Group Discussion. These young people are students, 13 to 18 years old, attending schools in the counties of Porto and Aveiro (in its periphery, as well as central towns).

This geographical distribution is justified since it intends to include young people attending major urban schools that may have spaces for greater freedom and of major acceptance of social movement views and the traditional and religious patterns of rural areas, even if their process of changing is more and more visible. FGD were organized in three modalities: mixed, male only and female only, distributed by different kinds of schooling: secondary and vocational schools. The topics of discussion were sexuality production, sexual and gender diversities, and sexual health, rights and education. The analysis of this data is based on content analysis through some analytical categories such as "cultural meanings of sexuality", "places of sexuality", "gender and sexual experiences", "feelings and sexuality", "sexual constrains" and "body perceptions". This paper attempts to understand the sexual heterogeneities among contemporaneous young people in a sexualized society. Their discourses reveal that lived sexualities in educational institutions are usually related to hegemonic views, silencing differences and rejecting a critical dialogue. Sexual desire appears as regulated in traditional terms, especially concerning girls who seem to support such regulation very much connected to strict gender regimes. Also the capacity for negotiation in sexual interactions and gender relationships appears as more fragile and restricted. On the other hand, sexual health and sexual education are not perceived as central conditions for transforming sexual relationships. Therefore, schools and, in particular, sex education, should be understood as spaces which must give access to knowledge and information about sexual and gender rights, along with tools to empower boys and girls that help them to change and control their relationships. Moreover, the analysis of the data also shows that youth cultures are immersed in a contradictory tension between the cosmopolitan path and the regulation of school. Educational fields have to re-think of sexuality as related with local/global dynamics as new forms of subjectivity and belonging.