

SCHOOL-BASED SEX EDUCATION UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT OF SEXUAL AND INTIMATE CITIZENSHIP:

A FOCUS ON PORTUGAL AND ENGLAND

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A EDUCAÇÃO SEXUAL ESCOLAR ILUMINADA PELA CIDADANIA SEXUAL E ÍNTIMA: EXPERIÊNCIAS DE PORTUGAL E INGLATERRA

Resumo: Esta pesquisa foca a educação sexual escolar em Portugal e Inglaterra à luz da cidadania sexual e íntima. Para tal, analisa as políticas, concepções e práticas escolares e o modo como estas oferecem condições, resistências e impulsos para se discutir uma nova *ética* sexual, íntima e relacional.

A relevância da sexualidade nas práticas da juventude contemporânea, a permanência de riscos e vulnerabilidades sociais, culturais e da saúde, aliada à emergência de novos clamores sexuais, tornam pertinente reafirmar o lugar da educação sexual escolar na agenda pública dos direitos reprodutivos, sexuais e íntimos. Com este intuito, os contributos da *cidadania sexual e íntima* adquirem particular centralidade nesta investigação para “re-imaginar” uma perspectiva alternativa e mais democrática da educação sexual. O carácter heurístico que os estudos de sexualidade atribuíram ao conceito de cidadania lança o desafio para se transpor esta abordagem para o campo educativo, tornando-se estes fundamentais para sustentar uma educação sexual assente nas noções de *igualdade como condição* e diversidade. A acompanhar esta reflexão, algumas das problematizações feministas e de estudos de género são também aqui revisitadas, nomeadamente a necessidade de ultrapassar concepções dicotómicas e hegemónicas (masculinidade hegemónica, heterossexualidade compulsória).

Do ponto de vista metodológico, a pesquisa localiza-se em cinco escolas secundárias públicas distribuídas pelo Sul de Inglaterra e Norte de Portugal sobretudo de classe média. No quadro de uma pesquisa qualitativa a recolha de material estrutura-se em três níveis de análise: as políticas educativas, as práticas escolares e as concepções de docentes e estudantes. As entrevistas individuais e os grupos de discussão focalizada foram os recursos metodológicos utilizados.

As conclusões revelam como a implementação de educação sexual nas escolas continua a ser um assunto política, pedagógica e socialmente contestado nos dois países opondo visões institucionais, individuais, religiosas e culturais. Neste sentido, pode-se considerar que é uma questão que se encontra num período de transição e negociação entre concepções públicas de sexualidade mais abertas e livres, e a força da tradição. Apesar dos avanços legais, as práticas escolares ainda se encontram fortemente marcadas por abordagens tradicionais de saúde distantes das necessidades e experiências jovens. Nesse sentido, estudantes e docentes assinalam a falta de participação na construção do projecto de educação sexual, ao nível nacional e local, justificando assim um certo desinteresse e dificuldade em percepcionar a escola como um espaço de debate. Contudo, há sinais de mudança sobretudo na vontade que muitos/as jovens têm em falar e partilhar estes assuntos nas escolas, e no esforço que muitos/as professores/as fizeram para desconstruir os seus próprios valores e adaptar-se às novas exigências através de um maior investimento na formação.

Nesta linha de argumentação esta tese pretendeu contribuir para o conhecimento dos dilemas e experiências que a educação sexual enfrenta em dois países Europeus e realçar o seu potencial transformador das relações sociais e sexuais.

RESUMÉ

Cette recherche est consacrée à l'éducation sexuelle au Portugal et en Angleterre à partir de l'étude de la citoyenneté sexuelle et intime. Pour ce faire, nous proposons une analyse des politiques, conceptions et pratiques scolaires liées à ce sujet. L'étude des conditions, résistances et dynamiques que celles-ci génèrent permettront de débattre d'une nouvelle *éthique* sexuelle, intime et relationnelle. L'importance de la sexualité dans les pratiques juvéniles contemporaines, la pérennité des risques et des vulnérabilités sociales, culturelles et de santé ainsi que l'émergence de nouvelles revendications sexuelles montrent combien il est pertinent de réaffirmer la place prioritaire de l'éducation sexuelle à l'école dans l'agenda public des droits reproductifs, sexuels et intimes. Les contributions de la *citoyenneté sexuelle et intime* occupent donc une place centrale dans cette recherche qui s'emploie à « ré-imaginer » une perspective alternative et plus démocratique concernant l'éducation sexuelle. Le caractère heuristique que les études sur la sexualité ont attribué au concept de citoyenneté constitue un défi quand il s'agit de transposer cette approche dans le domaine de l'éducation. Ces études sont devenues fondamentales pour préserver une éducation sexuelle fondée sur des notions telles que *l'égalité comme condition* et la diversité. La réflexion que nous proposons est guidée par certaines problématisations féministes et d'étude des genres que nous avons revisités. Parmi celles-ci, nous pouvons notamment citer la nécessité de s'éloigner de conceptions dichotomiques et hégémoniques telles que la masculinité hégémonique ou l'hétérosexualité obligatoire. D'un point de vue méthodologique, notre recherche s'est déroulée dans cinq écoles publiques du secondaire. Ces dernières appartiennent surtout à la classe moyenne et sont situées dans le sud de l'Angleterre et le nord du Portugal. Le recueil de données de cette recherche qualitative est structuré en trois niveaux d'analyse : les politiques éducatives, les pratiques scolaires et les conceptions exprimées par les enseignants et les élèves sur ce sujet. Les entretiens individuels et les groupes de discussion focalisés ont constitué les instruments méthodologiques auxquels nous avons recouru. Les conclusions montrent comment la mise en œuvre de l'éducation sexuelle dans les écoles constitue toujours un sujet qui, au niveau politique, pédagogique et social, est contesté dans ces deux pays où s'opposent des visions institutionnelles, religieuses et culturelles. On peut ainsi affirmer que le sujet de l'éducation sexuelle se situe dans une période de transition et de négociation où se confrontent des conceptions publiques de la sexualité, plus ouvertes et plus libres, et la force de la tradition. Malgré les avancées légales, les pratiques scolaires sont encore fortement marquées par des approches traditionnelles de santé éloignées des besoins et de expériences des jeunes. Ainsi, étudiants et enseignants dénoncent le manque de participation dans la construction d'un projet d'éducation sexuelle, au niveau national et local, et justifient un certain manque d'intérêt et la difficulté à concevoir l'école comme un lieu de débat. Cependant, plusieurs signes de changement sont à noter. Ils concernent la volonté de nombreux jeunes de parler et d'aborder ces sujets dans les écoles et l'effort qu'un grand nombre d'enseignants et d'enseignantes ont produits pour déconstruire leurs propres valeurs et s'adapter aux nouvelles exigences en s'investissant davantage dans des projets de formation. Selon cet argumentaire, la thèse que nous présentons prétend contribuer à la connaissance des dilemmes et des expériences auxquels l'éducation sexuelle doit faire face dans ces deux pays européens et souligner ainsi la potentielle capacité de celle-ci à transformer les relations sociales et sexuelles.

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on school sex education in Portugal and England in the light of sexual and intimate citizenship. To this end, it analyzes the school policies, concepts and practices and the ways in which these features offer conditions, resistance and impulses to discuss a new sexual intimate and relational ethics.

The relevance of sexuality in the practices of contemporary youth, the permanence of social, cultural and health risks and vulnerabilities, together with the emergence of new sexual claims, make relevant to reaffirm the place of school sex education in the public agenda of reproductive, sexual and intimate rights. To this end, the contributions of *sexual and intimate citizenship* acquire particular centrality in this research allowing to "re-imagine" an alternative and more democratic perspective of sex education. The heuristic character that sexuality studies ascribed to the concept of citizenship launches the challenge to move this approach into the educational field. Hence, sexuality studies become crucial to support a form of sex education based on notions of *equality as condition* and diversity. Together with this reflection, some of the feminist and gender studies contentions are also revisited, including the need to overcome dichotomous and hegemonic conceptions (hegemonic masculinity, compulsory heterosexuality).

From a methodological point of view, the research is developed in five mainly middle class public upper secondary schools located throughout southern England and northern Portugal. Within the framework of qualitative research data collection is structured in three levels of analysis: educational policies, school practices and the conceptions of teachers and students. Individual interviews and focus group discussions were the methodological resources.

The research findings show how the implementation of sex education in schools remains a politically, educationally and socially contested matter in both countries that opposes institutional, individual, religious and cultural insights. In this sense, we can consider that this implementation is a question that is in a period of transition and negotiation between public conceptions of more open and free sexuality, and the force of tradition. Despite legal advances, school practices are still strongly marked by traditional health approaches detached from youth needs and experiences. In this sense, students and teachers point out the lack of participation in the construction of the project of sex education at national and local level, thus justifying a certain disinterest and difficulty in perceiving school as space for debate. However, there are signs of change especially in the will of many female and male young people to talk and share these issues in schools, and in the effort of many female and male teachers to deconstruct their own values and adapt to the new requirements through greater investment in their own training.

In this line of argument this thesis aims to contribute to the awareness of the dilemmas and experiences faced by sex education in two European countries and to highlight its transformative potential of social and sexual relations.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
APAV	Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CIDM	Comissão para a Igualdade e Direitos das Mulheres
CIG	Comissão para a Cidadania e Igualdade de Género/ The Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality
CITE	Comissão para a Igualdade no Trabalho e no Emprego/ The Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment
CRB	Criminal Record Bureau
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
EEC	European Economic Community
FCT	Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia/ Foundation for Science and Technology
FPA/APF	Family Planning Association
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GTES	Grupo de Trabalho de Educação Sexual
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus infection
ILGA	Intervenção Lésbica, Gay, Bissexual e Transgenero
INE	Instituto Nacional de Estatística/Statistics Portugal
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
LEA	Local Education Authority
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PNI	Plano Nacional para a Igualdade/National Plan for Equality
PSHE	Personal, Social, Health and Education
RE	Religious Education
SEF	Sex Education Forum
SE	Sex Education
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SRE	Sex and Relationship Education
STIs	Sexual Transmitted Infections
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Jointed United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Found
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
UMAR	União Alternativa de Mulheres e Resposta
VIP	Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy/Abortion
WHO	World Health Organisation

INTRODUCTION

Locating the Study: Arguing the research problem

The increasing number of recent debates over intimacy and the greater visibility of gender, sexual and social inequalities are among the factors that have stimulated interest in citizenship issues and schooling regarding democratic sex education. Never have sexual issues been so public and so easily accessed as today. So, why is it still so difficult to speak about sexuality and relationships in schools when we are increasingly surrounded by a “culture of sexualisation”? Why is sex education still contested between individuals, groups, sectors of society and generations? Is school the right place to foster this issue or could it be that the area of education is immune to sexuality? Going even further, can sex education achieve what Foucault (1986) called “the care of the self” as a “practice and right of freedom” (Britzman, 1999:107)?

These are some of the questions that make school sex education one of the most controversial and politicised curricular topics at a time when it seems increasingly less relevant to how young people learn about sexuality. Indeed, for some, continuing to discuss school sex education in the twentieth-first century seems to be outdated and distant from young people’s reality, since today’s pedagogy of sexuality frequently occurs through sex education online, based on media and the internet as the main vehicles of sexual expression (Herd & Howe, 2007).

Therefore, the subject of this thesis is the challenge posed by the changing nature of intimacy and rights-based discourses to reaffirm the locus of school sex education in the learning of emotions, affections and sexuality. It attempts to explore these issues by furthering the political and contemporary understandings of school sex education in two European countries - Portugal and England - referring to qualitative research with school teachers, practitioners and young people, with a special focus upon students’ perceptions and expectations.

The study emphasises the *conceptions, policies and practices* of sex education in terms of its potential for understanding social changes in the practices of intimacy, and its political role in the public regulation of sexual private life. This notion builds on the *argument* of this thesis that aims to recognise school sex education as an issue within the public domain concerned with the promotion of equality as a necessary condition for the exercise of sexual and intimate citizenship.

This argument is organised around three complementary assumptions and research questions. The first – *Why has school sex education been such a critical and contested area within the curriculum?* departs from the location of sex education as a political and a contested space influenced by socio-historical and contextual power relations. The implementation of sex education in schools has been surrounded by pressures and critical debates among different sectors of society (religious, political, cultural, educational, generational, health) that pulled in different directions opposing those who think if young people hear about sex will be more likely to engage in, from those for whom the real concern is that young people should have access to information. Behind this controversy lie taboos about sexuality and gender and the difficulty of accepting sex education as a public issue. Consequently, the design and implementation of sex education in schools has not been politically neutral but instead has probably been seen as a way of controlling individuals' private lives. Sex education emerges thus as an extension and a tentacle of governmental interest in a particular time and space. In this sense, at this point, one may discuss which sectors, actors, dynamics and debates of society have shaped the contours of school sex education.

This leads us to the second question - *Are the policies and practices of sex education meeting teachers' and young people's expectations and needs?* Several studies continue to point out the gap between the policies of sex education and teachers' conditions to put them into practice, as well as between the policies and young people's needs and expectations. It is frequently suggested that the assumptions about young people's behaviour embedded in sex education construct sexuality in a different way to young people's actual experiences, which renders these assumptions irrelevant. That is why the question - is sex education about what young people expect from it, or what adults think should be learnt by young people?

becomes relevant to understand it as a whole. Understanding the diversity of young people – how they construct their own meanings about their sexual and gender selves, and what they expect and need to learn in schools - is crucial to providing sex education that supports young people. Moreover, listening to teachers' difficulties and areas of embarrassment is useful and relevant when rethinking the resources, conditions and tools needed to improve sex education.

The third question is directed at understanding – *Can school-based sex education be considered as a dimension of sexual and intimate citizenship?* This question departs from the assumption that debates about citizenship and its relationship with sexuality and gender bring interesting challenges to reaffirm the relevance of school sex education. Sexual and social movements brought “sexual subjects” to the center of public attention, resulting in several conceptual and political changes in the gender, sexuality and intimacy domains. Together with the social awareness that people relate in different ways, sex is seen as relational; there is a reconceptualisation of sexual pleasure based on emotions and commitment. This links social issues to those of intimacy that require an extension of sex education beyond health and prevention to concerns with gender violence, equality, female sexuality and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT), among other issues. This implies a shift from the exclusive focus upon health to include issues of rights. This study proposes an alternative approach to school sex education, based on the contributions of sexual and intimate citizenship, to understand how social (in)equalities, particularly in terms of access, resources, power and recognition, also invade personal life.

Citizenship has also be understood as a conflict zone where the “geographies of exclusion and inclusion” (Hubbard, 2001:54) are extended to sex and intimacy which, subsequently, cannot be ignored by the way public institutions, such as schools, convey sexual meanings. Therefore, the way sexuality and gender are publically discussed and appropriated under a set of rights, obligations, expectations and norms influences the design of sex education. Consequently, it seems that citizenship debates offer a useful theoretical framework to rethink sex education contents, its messages and educational role. This issue is linked to the first two research questions to find new paths to understand the contested terrain around sex education and to empower

young people to think critically about their rights and intimate relationships, in order to reduce violence, sexual abuse and inequalities.

According to this argument, sex education is not isolated within the curriculum but it is developed in a context of social forces that link non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social movements, personal beliefs and more recently, the global market, media and internet. All these debates have infused our thinking, intimate relations and policies meaning that they contribute to make sex education a contested concept. In this sense, in this study the influences of citizenship, gender and sexual debates on the construction of school sex education will be developed from two angles: as historically linked, and conceptually dependent. They are, thus, closely intertwined to what Lister (2004:323) calls “a political and theoretical project”. In addition, this approach also tries to offer different paths of thinking on sex education as a multidisciplinary, but also autonomous, object of study.

Why Does Research into Sex Education in Schools Matter Nowadays?

Researching sex education in school becomes relevant and challenging for several reasons. At the heart of discussion lies a sense of massive and accelerating changes in attitudes to sexuality and intimacy and, simultaneously, questions about the place school education has in this field.

One of the reasons for being challenging, as already said, is the public controversy that sex education is still raising across cultures, countries and different sectors of society. Since the argument regarding whether sex education should be part of the curriculum became superseded, the controversy has channelled into new directions towards *who*, *how* and *what* should be provided. Far from generating consensus, providing guidance on and defining the contents of sex education seems to remain a thorn in the side of politicians. Decisions about the appropriateness of including *safer sex* or more controversial topics, such as sexual pleasure, sexual diversity or, even, sexual activity within sex education curriculum remain problematic. Furthermore, these debates about the contents of sex education influence further

debates on who is the best person to deliver it and whether classes should be single or mixed, interfering with social and gender dynamics inside the classroom. These decisions are influenced by the direct relevance of sex education to several public sectors, such as health and education, and collective and international actors, such as social movements and NGOs, rendering its understanding even more challenging. One cannot also forget the influence of religion and churches in shaping people's thinking and behaviours with moral concerns, as well as the influence of the institutional culture.

Another interesting reason to consider school sex education as relevant topic for discussion is the apparent lack of significance it seems to have within Portuguese and English educational policies and curricula, in contrast to the central place that sexuality occupies in contemporary societies. At a time when sex education is becoming internationally defined as a sexual right in several documents, guidelines and recommendations¹, it is surprising the difficulty still exists in its full acceptance at national levels. This paradoxical status leads us to question why sex education has been forgotten or rejected, or at least, identified as a secondary issue by governments, when its contribution might be important to interpret the increasingly "sexualisation of culture" (Atwood, 2006), and to protect future citizens from situations of violence, coercion and discrimination. This issue highlights that the greater visibility of sexual issues in the public space does not necessarily mean the reduction of inequalities and risks, since sexual rights abuses are still commonplace. Finally, given the contemporary nature of the theme, this study seems to be timely.

¹ For instance in the IPPF Charter Guidelines on Sexual and Reproductive Rights (IPPF, 1997).

Personal Involvement and Challenges that led to this Research

The choice of this topic was influenced by my participation in previous research on sexuality; the political changes that preceded the beginning of the project; and the apparent gap in Portuguese research in this field.

In terms of previous research, the direction taken by this study is directly linked to my participation in a sociological research project - “Sexualities, Youth and Teenage Pregnancy at the Northwest of Portugal”, developed in the Center for Research and Intervention in Education (CIIE-FPCEUP) between 2007-2010 and funded by FCT (the Portuguese national funding agency for Science, Research and Technology)². Some of its findings are highly relevant to this thesis. The lack of sexual rights many young people still experience in their intimate lives; the persistence of situations of sexual violence and homophobia among students and teachers; communication difficulties in negotiating sexual practices, as well as the failure of sex education in schools at the time³; and the strong willingness of young people to speak about sexuality in schools highlighted the urgency to re-imagine school sex education (Fonseca et al, 2012; Nogueira & Fonseca, 2010; Santos et al., 2012).

Therefore, because of my interest in understanding the gaps between schools’ programmes and young people’s views, as well as teachers’ anxieties and political demands, my PhD research goes beyond issues of sexuality and pregnancy and focuses upon sex education in schools from the point of view of Education Sciences. Moreover, I have become increasingly aware of the lack of attention given to the voices of young people on this matter, which has increased my interest.

Additionally, the changes and social debates about sexual policies, in which Portuguese society was involved during the first decade of the millennium, such as the referenda that gave rise to the Abortion Law (2007), the debates about same-sex marriage and LGBT rights, and the controversies regarding sex education in schools attracted the attention of the scientific community. In addition, at the beginning of this

² PTDC/SDE/67931/2006

³ This research project was conducted between 2007 -2010 before the implementation of the current law for the compulsory implementation of sex education.

study in 2009/2010, Portuguese schools were challenged to implement compulsory sex education (12 hours in middle and secondary levels). The controversy that this law created put this issue at the forefront of public discussion. Simultaneously in England, the national curriculum was being reviewed, and there were movements to force the compulsory implementation of Personal, Social and Health Education - PSHE (Macdonald, 2009; PSHE, 2010), that would cover sex education. These political changes have made the realisation of this study pertinent and current for the greater understanding of the advances, hindrances, controversies and polemics surrounding this issue.

This study also aims to contribute to the scientific development of sex education research in Portugal. During previous research, I realised that school sex education has been mainly theoretically constructed by areas other than education such as psychology, sociology and health (some examples such as Cabral & Ferreira, 2008; Matos et al., 2009; Marques & Prazeres, 2000; Moita & Ribeiro, 1992; Reis & Vilar, 2004), which raises the question of whether sex education in schools is still a matter of education. Apparently, only recently, some educational groups have started to work on sex education in schools beyond teachers' training and its links with health (Figueiredo, 2011; Fonseca et al., 2014), which has been the primary focus of studies of education (Anastácio, 2007; Baptista, 2014; Marinho, 2014; Nelas, 2010; Ramiro, 2013).

Therefore, conducting an educational-based study about sex education through the qualitative analysis of its policies, practices and young people's perspectives seems relevant⁴ to gather more knowledge about the problem itself, to outline its contours, to propose changes to educational action and to identify gaps between who designs, implements and receives sex education.

Recent developments in the broader field of sexuality research through national projects must be highlighted to suggest how the Portuguese scientific community is

⁴ It became clear that there was a lack of Portuguese education studies focused on young people's perspectives on sex education at an international level. Actually, only two comparative studies based on school sex education were found, between Portugal and France (Anastácio, 2007) and Portugal and Latin America countries (Gaspar et al., 2009).

increasingly concerned and aware of these issues (see Cabral & Ferreira, 2010; Fonseca et al., 2014, Mattoso, 2011; Nogueira & Oliveira, 2010).

These are some of the main factors that have challenged me to undertake a comprehensive and comparative work (practical and theoretical) between two countries with different realities but similar problems.

Portugal and England: International approaches and distances

The choice was made to conduct this study in two European countries because of the need to debate this issue beyond a specific social reality in order to broaden our understanding about it. Cultural globalisation makes it important to confront places and the way they are producing specific “communities of interpretation” (Kehily & Nayak, 2009), as local-global negotiations and appropriations of meanings. Given that school sex education cannot be decontextualised from *local* specificities, it becomes interesting to understand how different realities and educational systems answer to the same global and international demands and, simultaneously, to different national and local needs in the sexual context. That is why the use of citizenship and *rights* language helps to frame these local-global conversations and address legitimacy to discuss these issues at national levels. Consequently, this study investigates the similarities, differences and singularities in how school sex education is being designed, politicised and implemented in different countries as a way to contextualise the issues addressed in this thesis.

Portugal and England were chosen for study because they experience difficulties in implementing compulsory sex education in schools, in spite of significant political, social, cultural, religious and economic differences that separate them. Moreover, other similarities caught our attention. Regarding EU rates of teenage pregnancy in 2004, among the 15 member states the UK was the highest and Portugal the second, which upset public opinion and triggered a set of political actions and scientific studies (APF, 2004; Unicef, 2001). Despite these ranking changing with the entrance of eastern

block countries into the EU, in 2007 the UK⁵ still occupied third place; and Portugal was 11th among the 27 member states (Eurostat, 2010a; 2010b; Fonseca et al, 2012). Also in 2007, Portugal was identified by UNAIDS (2008) as having the highest AIDS rates, together with Spain. This observation was shocking for a predominately Catholic and conservative country. Along with these issues, concerns about domestic violence and abuse, as well as unsafe abortions, continued to increase.

Bearing in mind this information, it seems strange to me that, at the beginning of this project, the implementation of sex education in Portugal was not systematic, regular and compulsory, but frequently on teachers' initiatives⁶. Regarding England, my interest was triggered by the apparent mismatch between these findings and England's great theoretical production and activism in the fields of gender equality and diversity. Therefore, understanding how scientific advances have affected the educational contexts and the similarities between both countries constituted a personal challenge.

Constructing Theoretical Lenses on School Sex Education

The theoretical approach in this study is concerned with the challenge of stereotypical views on sex education through citizenship debates. Citizenship and sexuality perspectives, and the politics of difference in the context of changing masculinities and femininities, are central to this approach. Citizenship has already been considered as an heuristic concept in debates on social rights, gender equality, parity in participation and recognition for all in institutional and social life. However, little attention has been given to citizenship in sex education debates and research. This implies a reflexive process broadening concepts of both citizenship and sexuality to cover issues previously ignored, requiring articulation with education.

To achieve this, critics from feminist and gays and lesbian studies to gender power relations, essentialist categories (that maintain the compulsory heterosexuality

⁵ It refers to United Kingdom and not only to England.

⁶ It is worthy to stress that the educational policies under analysis at this study have recently changed.

and hegemonic masculinity) and the division between public-private spheres were considered in this study to explain how sexual rights became public issues (Araújo, 2000; Moita 2006). Concerns with sexual equality, diversity and democracy are thus placed at the fore.

These debates have been at the origin of an extension of T.H. Marshall's view of the three stages of rights (civil, political and social), developed in the 1950s, to a fourth dimension, that of cultural rights (Stevenson, 2000; 2001), as well as of broader understandings of citizenship as *equality of condition* (Baker et al., 2004). This more recent perspective of democratic rights of equality, and its focus on socially unequal conditions and power relations, are central to this study by virtue of how the place of education is considered in creating a set of conditions (equal exercise of educational resources, respect and recognition, power; solidarity, love and care) that may be applied to the exercise of citizenship. These conditions for equality bring important contributions to help analyse and rethink the relationship between sexuality, education and citizenship; and especially sex education.

Within the scope of the cultural rights and equality debates, the concept of *sexual citizenship* emerged (Richardson & Turner 2001). This is a complex concept with its boundaries becoming enmeshed with the concept of intimate citizenship (Plummer 2003). *Sexual citizenship* takes gendered power relations into account and accommodates the new challenges of contemporary society, including sexual health and well-being. It is an attempt to inscribe citizenship rights in the usually 'private' sphere of intimacy, thereby confronting a long history of hegemonic sexual politics, and stressing the need for a public acceptance of foster democratic sexual citizenship. This requires a restructuring of the social spheres, based on a new, broader and democratic public arena that covers issues considered until recently as private (such as family problems, domestic violence, reproduction, sex, abuse, sexual pressure and coercion) and simultaneously, a new intimacy. Therefore, the concept of *sexual citizenship* becomes essential in the discussion of what should be public and in the rethinking of citizenship itself.

While *sexual citizenship* was primarily focused on ensuring equal rights between sexual groups, the notion of *intimate citizenship* introduced by Plummer (2003), as a

democratic restructuring of intimate relations (sexual and emotional equality, freedom and the right to pleasure), refers to expanded forms of relationships, including sexuality and the rights of people to choose what they do with their bodies, feelings, identities, relationships and representations. The incorporation of both *sexual* and *intimate* citizenship has the virtue of including sexual rights previously denied to individuals or groups, extending the transformation of interpersonal relationships (Giddens 1992), the new politics of daily life (Plummer 2003) and the rights of sexual expression to new identities (Weeks 2010). They are understood as having both political and social status, constituted in everyday practices. These concepts are operationalised in this study as the right to experience sexuality with pleasure, health and well-being, in conditions of equality, freedom and respect, leading to the transformation of interpersonal relationships and the regulatory frameworks surrounding them.

This focus on freedom and equality has also raised concerns with the conceptual utility of sexual citizenship since lower income societies and groups seem to be out of its scope. This led Plummer (2005) to ask if sexual citizenship is a distinctly western concept; this draws attention to how the emphasis of rights needs to be placed within particular social-economic, cultural and geopolitical contexts. In many countries, some of these sexual rights are unattainable or women and injustices against sexual minorities are morally justified and accepted. This discussion brings insights not only when rethinking the traditional models of sex education, but also when reconsidering the rights-based discourses themselves. As with other forms of citizenship, behind the ways in which sex education is incorporated within rights-based discourses lies a “citizenship machinery” (Richardson, 2001) and its exclusionary dimensions, such as the rhetoric of equality within sexual relationships and sexual freedom to make decisions.

Methodological Dilemmas and Choices

In order to address the study's purpose of investigating how sex education is being lived, conceptualised and imagined in schools, this qualitative study on education requires an interpretative, open and in-depth approach to the several actors that are involved in it. Multiple perspectives on the delivery of sex education will be addressed through the views of teachers, school practitioners, head teachers and young men and young women from accounts I gathered in Portuguese and English secondary state schools.

Following the goal of researching a supposed "sensitive topic", qualitative methods seemed to be the most appropriate way to encourage participants to talk about their intimacy and schooling practices. This led me to choose focus group discussion and individual interviews. The use of both methodological resources leads to a greater diversity of social interactions, putting into evidence different issues and information about how to think about sex education. While the interviews emphasise the *dialogue* between the researcher and the interviewed, the conducting of focus groups favour *debates* and the different views circulating among young people. Thus, the debates and dialogues will be explored to access social perspectives as well as students' lived experiences, meanings and emotions. They complement each other since focus groups offer insights into themes that can be probed more deeply later in the individual interviews. Most of all, there is an interest in capturing individual and collective subjectivities and meanings through an "epistemology of listening" as the only way to access subjects' own terms and views (Araújo, 2000b; Arnot, 2006; Fonseca, 2009; Macedo, 2012).

Conducting comparative and international empirical research requires special attention to the settings' access; the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants; problems with language (slang) during the data collection; and the translation and interpretation of data. Therefore, entering state schools to talk about such a sensitive topic with young people, many of them minors, appears a difficult and challenging task.

Presenting the Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised in two parts. The first sets the political, theoretical and methodological context of the study, and the second concerns the teachers' and students' views, perceptions and expectations analysis.

The first part comprises three chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to the theoretical framework and explores different meanings and agendas of school sex education as a critical and contested space. It is concerned with highlighting how citizenship is related to sexuality and education. Firstly, it draws upon the contributions from international scholars to identify a set of dominant official discourses and agendas - frequently based on morality or health discourses - that have marked school practices. Secondly, the same chapter mobilises feminists and gender studies' debates and critiques to essentialist ways in which sexuality and gender have been learnt and understood. These contributions have not always been taken into consideration when researching sex education, but their significant impact on sexual policies and current sexual culture makes them key to rethinking sex education. The way by which these debates came to undermine the certainties of private life leads us to the field of citizenship and sexual rights in the third section of this chapter. At this point, an alternative approach to researching school sex education is proposed on the basis of the concepts of *sexual* and *intimate citizenship* and *equality as a condition*. Sex education is re-imagined as a necessary condition and right to allocate critical discussions about gender equality, freedom and diversity.

The second chapter discusses the socio-historical production of Portuguese and English legislation on sex education since the early 1980s, the date on which it was formally introduced in state schools, and became visible as an object of debate. The influence of global interests, international pressures and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the health and rights fields are taken into account as a way of legitimising the national policies. The critical overview of these paths illustrates the social demands and tensions of different decades that have led the organisation of sex education laws within a set of mandates. Additionally, the shifts in the legal framework are significant when exploring how sex education has become a public issue, and

highlight the political conflicts between traditional moral concerns, pragmatic health agents, local and central government, families and state.

The third chapter is focused on the methodological framework and the research design, and describes access to the schools settings and to the participants, as well as the procedures of data collection and the ethical issues involved. It comprises focus group discussions with students aged 14-16 supplemented by in depth interviews with students aged 16-18, and interviews with school sex education teachers and practitioners.

The second part of the thesis comprises three chapters that describe the analysis and discussion of the empirical data obtained. Chapter 4 presents the data obtained through interviews with sex education teachers and other school practitioners. It explores how these professionals' beliefs and perspectives towards young people's sexuality and intimate relationships might hinder or enhance the provision of sex education and, consequently, students' access to their rights. Moreover, through teachers' views, experiences and expectations, this chapter analyses how policies have been transformed into practice by considering the resources and conditions teachers need in order to improve their knowledge, power and familiarity with the topic.

Chapter 5 discusses young peoples' experiences and expectations of sex education in schools. What is intended at here is to understand what young people think about sex education in school, what they expect to learn, who the best educator is and how they interpret the messages behind the contents and the lessons in the classroom. This chapter seeks to deepen the way sexual issues are being debated among contemporary youth. Gender power relations are also taken into account by considering how they influence opinions and learning.

This chapter is complemented by chapter 6 which is focused on interviews with young people. Building on the previous chapter, this accounts for the perspectives of older students (15-17) who have already had sex education. So, while focus groups chapter focuses on students' expectations, this chapter is based on the memories and experiences of older students. Changes over time in sex education are outlined in relation to their usefulness to young people at specific points; this becomes highly relevant when trying to improve the practices of school sex education.

The concluding part of this work reiterates its main findings and their contribution to the understanding of school sex education as a right of citizenship.

The introductory framework of the thesis would be incomplete if I did not mention the opportunity to collaborate and work with the University of Cambridge (UK), in particular with Madeleine Arnot, for a period of seven months. This research period was essential to develop a relevant theoretical and social contact with English reality. It provided the possibility to discuss conceptual and methodological frameworks as well as to develop part of the fieldwork of this study through access to school settings, NGOs, state institutions and, essentially, to school teachers and young people.

A brief note

In this study the term “sex education” (SE) is used to mean the subject, programme or sexual topics that are taught and learnt in state schools. Although I agree that the concept of “sexuality education” is more comprehensive and consistent with what is advocated in this study, I employ “sex education” because it is the most commonly used term in policies and common-sense discourses and is best understood by the participants in both countries. I also recognise the limits of the definition of sex education itself as related only to the formal school subject, which may also be misunderstood by young people. Since in England the term used is “sex and relationship education” (SRE), I use this term, but only in relation to the analysis of English material.

PART I

THEORISING AND RESEARCHING SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS: CONCEPTUAL, POLITICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

CHAPTER I

CONSTRUCTING THEORETICAL LENSES ON SCHOOL SEX EDUCATION

TOWARDS THE AGENDA OF SEXUAL AND INTIMATE CITIZENSHIP

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the theoretical debates in which this study relies to interpret school sex education as a *critical contested space*. This contestation stems from the way sex education has been determined as a controversial and polemic concept by several theoretical traditions that very often are in conflict. Indeed, throughout the last thirty years, the western construction of sex education as a public issue has got several contours and paths shaped by medical, moral, educational and personal views and interests. This pervasive nature of the status of sex education is also based on its underlying concepts—of gender, sexuality, sex and citizenship—that are themselves *contested* concepts crossed by contradictions and negotiations, historical forces and struggles around the issues of sexuality, sexual cultures and affections. The understanding how these concepts have been conceived, accepted, discussed or denied is closely linked to how sex education has been conceptually and organisationally changed. And in that sense, exploring the theoretical positions that have informed discussion and the development of sexuality and gender becomes also relevant.

Therefore, having as a starting point the research problem of this thesis focused on understanding sex education as a public “space” for the exercise of sexual and intimate citizenship, this chapter contributes to drawing theoretically this approach. It begins by taking into account the dominant agendas of sex education in the western

scientific arena, initially focused on youth moralisation and on a hygienist and sexual “objectification” of the body, to extend educational debates to citizenship goals afterwards. This extension was mainly triggered by the criticisms of feminist, gender and sexuality studies to conservative interests of society, and its social institutions, to strengthen male and heterosexual power. Within this critical glance, sexuality is for the first time claimed in its plurality and as pleasurable for all (female sexuality and the various sexual groups). In this regard, the meanings and the public statement of school sex education result from negotiations between the state and various societal debates. This approaches the two moments defined by Weeks (1998) to interpret another phenomenon—the sexual movements, the *moment of transgression* (struggles of women and sexual groups) and the *moment of citizenship* (inclusion, recognition and respect for diversity), as interesting steps to understand the social construction of the concept of sex education.

Taking these links into consideration, this chapter is organised into three sections that highlight some of the main contributions of the theoretical debates of education, feminism and citizenship to inform the meanings of sex education.

The first section focuses on the significance given to sexual knowledge within the curriculum as the basis to determine the official discourses and agendas around sex education. The identification of these discourses organises the practices of school sex education into dominant agendas that are relevant to highlight the contested processes in which sex education has been included/excluded in schools, as well as to frame the prevailing school agendas in Portugal and England. Furthermore, access to sexual knowledge emerges as a condition for sexual and social change.

In the second part of the chapter, feminist and gender studies debates are brought to the fore as key to question some aspects of these school agendas and to reconfigure the relationship between sexuality and education. The way feminist scholars have problematised the issues of gender power relations, the debates of sexualisation, compulsory heterosexuality, essentialist sexual categories, female sexuality and sexual rights has to be connected with the way the messages and contents of school sex education are being structured and thought, precisely because these contributions are one of the most important to meet the foundations in which

western sexual cultures are based. Although it is not the focus of this thesis, this section also provides a brief reference to health's view to discuss sexual bodies and affections, due to its relevance to bring sexuality to the public domain.

Based on this analysis, sex education and its political and transformative nature is re-imagined as a condition for the exercise of *sexual* and *intimate citizenship* in a third part. Having as a backdrop the transformations of intimacy (Giddens, 1992) and the extension of citizenship debates to cultural rights (Plummer, 2003; Richardson, 2000; Weeks, 2010), I discuss the possibilities of building a fuller and safer sexuality, in particular with youth, through school sex education. In doing that, the concepts of sexual and intimate citizenship are introduced as gearshifts for the acquisition of new rights in everyday life, as well as the theory of *equality as condition* (Baker et al., 2004) to problematise the potential of sex education. Moreover, these concepts support the alternative purpose of this study of recognising school sex education as an autonomous object of analysis that is more and more distant from morality and health focus towards a holistic view of "sexual subjects".

1. Knowledge, Curriculum and Educational Agendas of Sex Education

This section focuses on two main issues: the significance of sexual knowledge within the curriculum and the official discourses that have regulated the scientific field of school sex education. It begins by questioning what makes knowledge be considered "valid" and worthwhile and how access to sexual knowledge is linked to power relations. Moreover, this debate highlights how the contents selection is not neutral but intentional, which led some authors to identify a set of dominant agendas of school sex education that are explored here in order to understand what is being done in schools. Thus, the analyses of Lees (1992), Britzman (1999), Lopez (2009) and Allen (2011) about the practices and policies of sex education are brought into contention, regardless of temporal and spatial differences between them.

Their contributions brought commonalities about morality and health agendas, as well as conceptual singularities that enable us to explore new messages and practices of sex education.

1.1. Thinking Theoretically about the Meanings of Sexual Knowledge within Curriculum

Education is not simply a “neutral assemblage of knowledge” (Apple, 1993:222), but rather, as Allen (2011:44) points out, is always part of a “selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge”. This issue was already discussed by Bernstein (1971:47) who stated that “how a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates educational knowledge reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control”. Habermas also stressed in 1972 that knowledge and its selection are neither “neutral” nor “innocent”. Instead, it is an “ideological” selection from a range of possible knowledge. Who makes that decision and on what basis is a complex issue. As Cohen Manion and Morrison (2011:36) state it is fundamental to know “not only what knowledge is important, but *whose* knowledge is important in the curriculum, *what* and *whose* interests such knowledge serves and *how* the curriculum and the pedagogy serve (or do not serve) differing interests”.

When it comes to sex education the same idea applies, as it cannot be taught in “a vacuum” (Harrison & Hillier, 1999). On the contrary, taking into account that sexuality is a socially constructed notion, what is taught and the ways in which it is taught are related to cultural norms that communicate to students what is considered valued in a particular society. That is why it is interesting to look at the contents covered by sex education as expressions of how a particular society faces the issues of sexuality, relationships and rights in this field. Taking this view as a starting point, here I discuss what makes knowledge socially valued and consequently, how unequal access to that knowledge and information generates unequal distribution of resources and conditions. As I do so, I mobilise some discussions from broader fields of curriculum and educational studies to place sexual knowledge within the curriculum.

- **Is sexual knowledge “valid” for school curriculum?**

With the aim of developing a deeper perspective on school sex education it becomes important to establish a critical relationship between knowledge, policy and curricular practices. More than trying to “fix” sexuality into the curriculum, this section focuses on how sexual knowledge might become *socially relevant* (Britzman, 1999).

Questioning the place of sexual knowledge within the curriculum implies discussing power and legitimacy between different types of knowledge and how these are selected, being aware that the task of selecting itself is intimately linked with the provision of (in)equalities of resources and recognition in education (Baker et al., 2004). To explore this issue, Michael Young’s (2010) question about what constitutes valid educational knowledge and what is fundamental to be learnt in schools seems to be significant, although these questions are hard to answer at a time education is being pressured by liberal changes on political, social and economic policies. Actually, the apparent contemporary obsession with school achievements seems to be neglecting the intrinsic value of education, assuming even sometimes an “anti-educational” nature (Young, 2010). In his view, the curriculum has been frequently embedded in social and political interests to meet market demands and maintain power relations. Curriculum is thus, “primarily a political not just an educational project” (*ibidem*: 176).

Against this apparent “crisis of curriculum theory”, Young (2010) advocates a *socio-realist approach* to knowledge as the unique way to promote equality, opportunities and access to resources. Under this approach two issues about school knowledge are safeguarded. It is simultaneously *social* because it “recognises the role of human agents in the production of this knowledge” and *realistic* by emphasising “the independence of knowledge relative to context and the discontinuities between this knowledge and common sense” (Young, 2010:12). This approach stresses the need to define a “powerful” and “context-independent or theoretical knowledge” for all, already advocated by Young in 2009 (Young, 2009:15), that overcomes power relations between groups, the local decisions and the political interests of each time. Otherwise, if subjects and topics are all put into the curriculum, the “real” and true knowledge is

lost and some groups are maintained in disadvantage. Therefore, what is at stake here is what school knowledge can do to change the uneven distribution of social opportunities. According to this perspective, sex education as well as citizenship education could be perceived as educational “drifts” that keep some groups away from this *powerful knowledge*. Little attention has been paid by Young to these issues, but his approach triggers some interesting arguments to rethink the significance of including sex education in the curriculum.

Firstly, this discussion raises the notion that sexual knowledge might not be considered “powerful” in comparison with other school subjects because it is not related to social change. This view meets the approaches that seem to ignore the profound effects access to school sex education, and its linkage with other resources, such as sexual health services (namely family planning), might have to avoid social risks, recognise sexual groups and decrease differences between social classes, men and women. Moreover, it forgets the power that the development of democratic equal relations in the spheres of sexuality and intimacy gives to girls and boys face wider situations of social oppression and domination.

Secondly, it contributes to rethink the links between sex education and social class. It seems there is the perception that sex education is a working class matter. This is built on the basis of two tricky assumptions: one is that working class students are the most sexually problematic and the other is that the middle-class groups have accesses to other sources of sexual information and do not need to talk about it in schools. Interestingly, this goes against Elley’s (2008) findings that discourses in sex education mostly represent the lives of advantaged young people with educational aspirations and Santos’ (2014) perception that middle-class families are still not very open to conversations about sexuality, even if this parent-child relationship is also changing. Additionally, Young’s discussion on powerful knowledge shows how “valid” knowledge is founded in *social class* over cultural, gender, sexual, ethnic and religious indicators.

Thirdly, what is advocated in Michael Young’s approach appears to be the enhancement of powerful knowledge as mostly rational, frequently focused on sciences and mathematical competencies. However, rational knowledge cannot be

detached from the social sciences and humanities. Without care—emotions and relational context in schools—rational learning is not possible. This issue matters to think about how relating rational, experiential and commonsense knowledge incorporates a larger notion of science itself. Moreover, it does not seem fair to limit the knowledge of school sex education to experiential (meanings) and commonsense knowledge (social representations), as it concerns rational, scientific and technical knowledge related to the body, reproductive system, contraception and sexual transmitted infections (STIs) among others issues.

Within these arguments it might be possible to theorise school sex education as a powerful knowledge towards citizenship rights. This is in line with Arnot's and Dillabough's (2000) perspective about the potential political agency of citizenship education and Lees' (2000) understanding that the provision of gender power relations and sex education in schools encourages a greater sense of citizenship. Under this discussion, school curriculum and knowledge, particularly that of sex education, might follow the *hermeneutic* and *emancipatory interests* raised by Habermas in 1972, in order to improve some conditions for equality, as it has been recently reinforced by Baker et al. (2004).

Understanding the place of sex education within curricula also implies realising which knowledge has been considered socially valued. This is the focus of the following point.

- **Which contents have been selected as valid and what is left out?**

Within the discussion about what is the place of sex education in curriculum, it becomes now important to understand how schools have used sexual knowledge to socialize people into particular beliefs and gendered and sexual identities. As previously mentioned, the selection of sex education's contents is dependent on what is considered socially valued. Immediately, the presumption that heterosexuality underpins educational policy and practice seems evident.

For many, schools constitute "heteronormalising spaces" and sex education "heteronormative practices" (Allen, 2011:3) (see also, Kehily, 2002a; Louro, 1999). This

means that schools are understood as “critical shapers” of “normative heterosexual identities” (Epstein et al., 2003: 10) in which it does not matter who people are as long as they fit in what Butler, already called in 1990, the “heterosexual matrix”. This heteronormativity is extended to health’s concerns with particular ways of being, talking, feeling and loving (Moita, 2006), reinforcing particular forms of sexuality.

Therefore, it might be said that the way the contents of sex education are included within curriculum is an attempt of schools to “fix the geography of sexuality” into dominant categories of gender, age and place (Britzman, 1999:101). This is directly linked with how gender is produced and reproduced through a set of “discursive practices” (Kehily, 2002) that define what is to be a “proper” girl and boy through a set of binary oppositions such as: heterosexual/homosexual; female/male; private/public; and ignorance/knowledge. This gendered and sexual learning cut across assumptions around love, sex and relationships as Nayak and Kehily (2008:111) highlight in their work with young women in schools: “Gender as a discursive practice is officiated in pedagogic discourse. The assumptions is that sex is a practice between couples, is about making love, is natural, is reserved for married citizens, is strictly an adult practice, and above all else, that it is heterosexual”.

These assumptions lead us back to the way knowledge is intentionally produced and selected. Knowledge that is socially valued defines itself by its legitimacy at school. In turn, knowledge that fails to be included in curriculum is de-legitimised. This knowledge inclusion or omission at the expense of other has, as Allen (2011:45) points out, “the effect of subordinating and devaluing that which is left out”. In the particular case of school sex education, it seems the contents that are deliberately left out of curriculum and educational discourse has stronger impacts and effects than the actual content as has already been acknowledged by Thomson and Scott (1992:13) who stated that “what is left unsaid can be more powerful than what is spoken”. This silence certainly reinforces stereotypes and inequalities in the way “students’ sexual culture” is being built (Kehily, 2002), and also privileges heterosexual males in detriment of others by the way they can exhibit and openly talk about their sexuality in schools.

One of the most remarkable criticisms to this issue came from Fine's work in American schools in the 1980s, reaffirmed later in 2006 (Fine & McClelland, 2006), which identified a "missing discourse" of women's sexual desire, pleasure and entitlement in the school context. According to her, female sexuality barely existed in the official agenda of sex education, which failed to empower young women in decision-making and placed girls as *victims* and boys as *dangerous*. As Fine (1988:40) said: "the authorized sexual discourses define what is safe, what is taboo and what will be silenced. This discourse of sexuality mis-educates adolescent-women. What results is a discourse of sexuality based on the male in search of desire and the female in search of protection".

This enhancement of hegemonic masculinity was reinforced by Epstein and Johnson (1998:180) who argued this silence was not only missing but was strategically omitted, "actively excluded if not forcibly expelled". This brings to the fore the presence of an "official silence" (Epstein et al., 2003) in schools regarding female sexuality and non-heterosexual practices, desires and feelings as a strategy of pathologising homosexual and queer experiences and perpetuating the lack of sexual recognition inside schools. This is, while heterosexuality is claimed and desired in schools, non-normative versions of sexuality are silenced "or at least, quieted" (Epstein et al., 2003:2). The way the curriculum has disproportionately placed the burden on girls and later on non-heterosexuals, keeps young queer and LGBT out of sex education programmes and consequently, out of schools. This issue has already been interestingly discussed some years before by Johnson (1996:176) who considered these groups were living hidden in a "closet", a term that was at the origin of a new dualism closet/education. According to him, schools are a place for knowledge but also a "place of concealment".

Fine's (1988; 2006) contributions remain relevant, almost thirty years later, to sex education research by questioning its influence in health development and sexual practices. Moreover, it highlights how sexual knowledge has an uneven impact on young people, which bring the equality issue to the fore. These views and concepts were useful to this study to analyse gender differences and expectations in the classroom, the gendered bias of sex education messages, and the way girls feel

entitled to have pleasure and sexual desire (see also, Santos, 2014). Moreover, it also brings interesting guides to understand how non-heterosexual students are living in schools. And to reflect on how the silence denies lesbian, gay and bisexual young people a legitimate social space and on the other hand, reduces the education of heterosexual students by keeping them ignorant in relation to sexual diversity.

Recent research tells us that the discrimination and non-recognition of sexual groups in schools is still a reality (Fonseca & Simões, 2014; Nogueira & Oliveira, 2010), despite political pressures on schools to deal with homophobic bullying and violence (developed in the Chapter of policies). This focus on teaching about homophobia is considered less politically sensitive and controversial than teaching about homosexuality *per se*, because as Redgrave (2009) suggests, talking about homosexuality turns heterosexuals vulnerable. This idea meets the previous perception of Nayak and Kehily (1996; 1997) that talking about homophobic performances consolidated straight masculinity.

Again, this shows how some knowledge becomes socially valued by its political nature. It is the case for instance of the political focus on homophobic bullying being often associated to young men, neglecting peer pressure among girls. This idea was noted by Epstein et al. (2003:66) again, who advocate that “while the government advises with homophobic bullying, the pervasive heterosexism within girls’ friendships which is potentially as damaging to young women is not questioned”. In turn, this leads girls to feel they do not have to consolidate their heterosexuality but have to police the production of “appropriate femininity” in order to avoid a sexual reputation.

This section shows how the traditional discourse in schools maintain a sexist, gendered and heteronormative view. There is a clear lack of the gender issue and of social groups’ recognition in curriculum, which highlights “cultural imperialism” to silence and deny diversity. Again, it matters to think about what is missing to include in curriculum to re-distribute access to sexual knowledge as a condition of citizenship for recognising diversity and empowering of groups beyond norms (Baker et al., 2004:154). This discussion also shows how the institution of schooling remains one of the most formative arenas to the production and reproduction of sexuality and gender

(Amâncio, 1994; Louro, 2000; Nayak & Kehily, 2008). All these notions enable the identification of a set of dominant agendas of sex education that are discussed in the following section.

1.2. Main Agendas of Sex Education: Contesting interlinked perspectives

In this section I crisscross the theoretically views of four scholars in the field of sexuality and schooling, who in different decades and countries critically identified a set of agendas of sex education that help to interpret and explore the multiple contents, messages and focus of school sex education throughout diverse political moments (further developed in the chapter of policies).

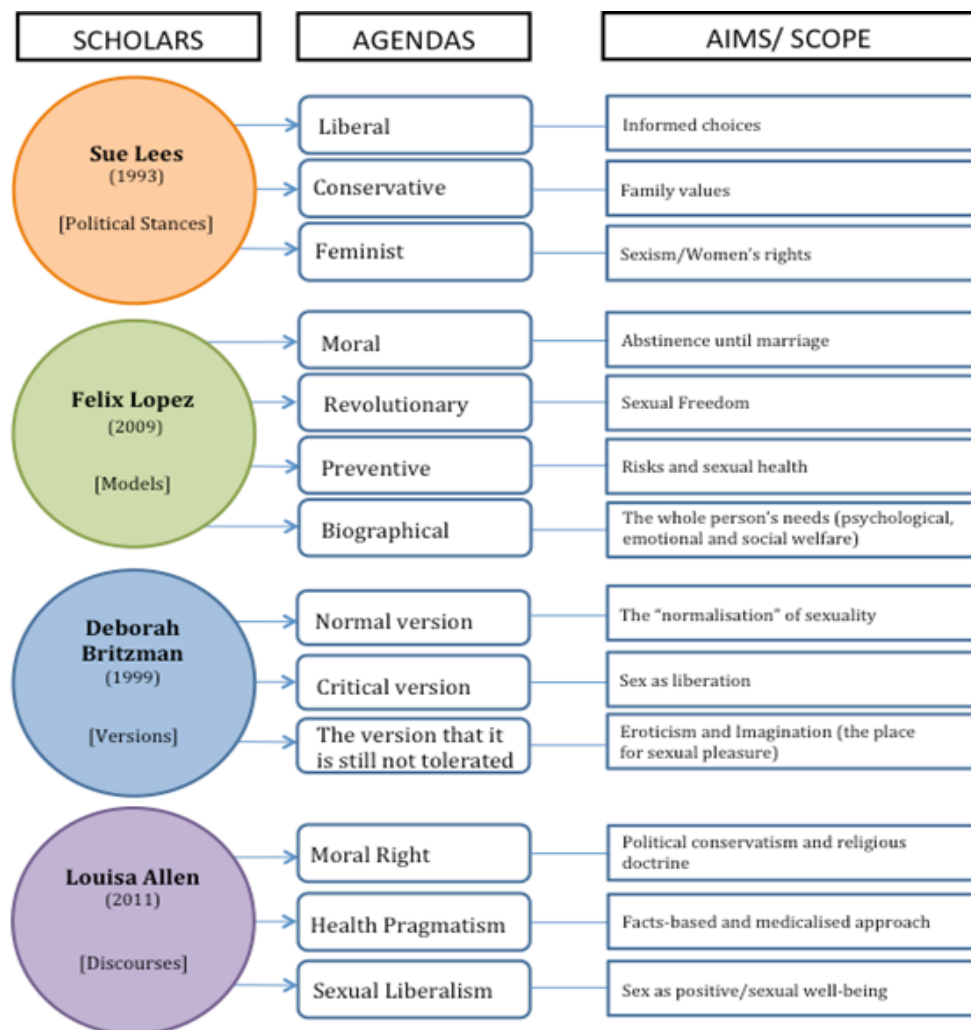
In this sense, the work of Lees (1993), Britzman (1999), Lopez (2009) and Allen (2011) are put together for three reasons. Firstly, they appear to be the few scholars who organised school sex education debates into main educational agendas. This commonality reveals a pattern in the way school sex education has been conceived that might be interesting to rethink the links between national and international influences. Secondly, their work represents two decades of theoretical debate, from the early 1990s to 2011, illustrating the political claims and social concerns of each period. The dates of their reflections accompanied the moments of political changes in Portugal and England, which emphasises the pervasive and global nature of this discussion. Thirdly, the multiplicity of the fields of knowledge to which they belong shows how sex education is a crosscutting issue through several sectors of society.⁷ Therefore, whereas Allen is the only one from education, there is here a combination of interests between health, sociology, education and women's studies.

There are of course many differences among these authors. But my aim here is to draw together what I see as their most important insights to the issue of sex education. Moreover, although the typologies are based in different logics (discourses,

⁷ Deborah Britzman (Canada), psychoanalyst: her work focuses on the emotional situation of education and critical pedagogy; Felix Lopez Sanchez and Angel Oroz (Spain), educational psychologists, who work on sex education, sexualities and youth; Sue Lees (England), Women's Studies: her research interests centre on the social control of young women; Louisa Allen (New Zealand), Education: her work centers on critical sexuality education studies.

models, versions and stances), either more focused on political guidelines, or in the curriculum, their approaches are interlinked and, so, it makes sense to appear together as a way to articulate public policies, school practices and social debates. These agendas are neither watertight nor explicit, existing sometimes simultaneously in the same institution. Besides they frequently complement each other by highlighting a continuity of dominant discourses or, otherwise, by bringing theoretical singularities to discussion. For these reasons, the authors' agendas and their focus are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Agendas of school sex education



Through this analysis it is possible to identify dominant agendas in school curriculum and simultaneously to grab specific stances, such as the *biographical model* (Lopez, 2009) or the *version that it is still not tolerated* (Britzman, 1999), that contribute to rethink other ways of conceiving sex education. It is not my aim to develop each stance, discourse, model or version, but instead to highlight some intersections between authors' theoretical thinking towards a global understanding of sex education practices. The following Figure 2 shows mainly the existence of a common sex education agenda of morality and another focused on health.

Figure 2 - Intersections among authors' agendas of school sex education



It is exactly on these two dominant agendas this analysis will be focused on. Starting with the moral and conservative agenda, it seems sex education has been primarily designed to moralise students into abstinence, marriage and family values, regardless of the different names the authors have assigned to it (as normal, conservative, moral). In favour of this view are the arguments that ultimately sex

education is best undertaken by the family at home, which continues to place sexual learning in the private and family spheres. Moreover, if it must occur at school, then it should be consistent with religious doctrine as Allen (2011:47) points out:

“Those who draw on discourses of the moral right often view sexuality education as a means of promoting religious teachings around marriage, sexuality and relationships. With this purpose in mind, sexuality education content should conform to these teachings with the aim of spreading political conservatism and/or religious doctrine.”

Accordingly, sexuality and sex are restricted to heterosexual marriage and to reproduction, while the issues of birth control (contraception), abortion, homosexuality and extra-marital sex are abolished and omitted from curricula. The main message of this agenda is to delay sex as an attempt to maintain childhood innocence —“the only safe sex is no sex”. This perception implies that children are denied by adults and schools as *sexual subjects*, which extends innocence to ignorance as stressed by Britzman. Actually, this author introduces a very pertinent question that sums up the ineffectiveness of this agenda that is: what can be the purpose of sex education if education’s aim is the renunciation of sex?

The four authors are critical of this agenda considering that the educational institutions that seek to silence this topic and to regulate morally young people are not truly concerned with sex education, but with the risks of sexual activity. Therefore, its adoption is surrounded by a moral panic about the public education of sexualities that can pervert the dominant sexual moral. This is clear for instance with the prevalence of heterosexual issues, as previously discussed. Britzman’s focus on ignorance is interesting because she highlights the way the silence around a topic might be dangerous and risky, turning displays of sexuality into something that is forbidden, hidden and subverted. This construction of a desexualized child was examined later by Kehily (2002) as a “fiction” from adults around children, who forgot the intersection of a range of broader influences.

A second dominant agenda of sex education is focused on health and prevention. According to Lopez (2009), this is a medical model that emerged to face health problems related to sexual activity (such as sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancy). The emphasis is placed on anticipating and avoiding problems

before they happen. For these authors, this model is a social need to avoid risks, rather than educating people to live freely and responsibly with the different possibilities of sexuality: pleasure, communication and affection. Sexual health is conceived as an absence of disease and not as sexual well-being. Within this view, the strategies adopted go through shocking young people about the consequences of risks in order to delay sexual practices.

Allen agrees with Lopez's perception that there is a "health pragmatism discourse" in schools focused on desexualising young people through scary approaches to avoid sexual activity, as she exemplifies:

"Students are expected to learn facts about sexually transmissible infections in ways that are disembodied and sanitised. This medical and scientific influence is seen in classroom activities which involve matching names of sexually transmissible infections with their symptoms or recalling statistics around incidents of HIV/AIDS. [...] It is common practice in many sexuality education programmes in Western countries to provide students with photographs of sexually transmissible infections. Despite displaying genitals, these images are distinctly un-sexual." (Allen, 2011:49).

In Allen's analysis this agenda is not only focused on preventing students from sex, but also on empowering young people to have control over themselves. This shifts the school's focus on negative sex consequences to equip students for safe sex. This view has already been identified by Lees' liberal stance (1993), almost two decades before. In the way she sees it, the educational focus on prevention supposes an individual autonomy and responsibility to make "informed choices" and put knowledge into practice. The liberal stance brings another interpretation of health agenda by perceiving young people as "sexual subjects" and "choosers", a fundamental condition to rethink school sex education as a space of students' agency and active engagement.

Despite the important focus that the liberal perspective on sexuality brought, two major criticisms were made to this agenda of sex education. One is the apparent devaluation of gender inequalities around choice. This critique was raised by Lees who asks how young women can be placed as *moral regulators* of sexual activity and contraception when simultaneously they have to be innocent in order to maintain their reputation. Actually, to speak about choice in respect to sex is complex and not true for everybody. Similar to Arnot and Dillabough (2000), who show the increased

emphasis on equal access policies did not necessarily build a more emancipated school structure, the mere inclusion of gender issues in sex education did not necessarily mean that there are no inequalities. The second issue is that the focus of safe sex on individual choice and responsibility separates it from debates about citizenship. This critique goes in line with Holland et al.'s (1991:5) considerations that the liberal view limits the chance to "place sexual safety on a public and collective agenda alongside such issues as child abuse, violence against women and new reproductive technologies". The responsibility is on the individual. This critique highlights the significance of theoretically building sex education within citizenship.

Along with these two agendas—health and moral—these authors offered other lenses to conduct current agendas of sex education. It is the case of the *feminist stance*, proposed by Lees, that highlights the potential of school sex education to change the sexism in sexual and loving relationships and bring female sexuality and rights to the fore. This stance is important because it highlights gender inequalities and power relations in both health and morality agendas. It recognises the conservative messages around the "double standard" that places women into motherhood, marriage, family and the ideology of *romantic love*, as well as warns how health contents were contaminated by gendered messages that have repressed female sexuality throughout time. This critique was reaffirmed later by other authors who also identified sex education curriculum for girls as limited to menstruation and reproduction (Prendergast, 1995), while it has been often open to talk about wet dreams, ejaculation and pleasure for boys (Allen, 2005; Thomson & Scott, 1992). On the basis of this assumption, sex education was even shaped as a *female thing* (Alldred & David, 2007; Coleman & Rucker, 1998). This idea illustrates the relevance of including feminists' claims to rethink sex education (developed in the following section).

At last, the *biographical model* (Lopez, 2009) and the discourse of *sexual liberalism* (Allen, 2011) also brought some contributions to this study as a way to provide new insights to school sex education as an open, relativistic and plural knowledge. The former introduces sexual well-being and sexual diversity as central to a new sex education. This model expects schools must create conditions so that one

can live a free and responsible sexuality. In turn the model of sexual liberalism emerges to criticize the medicalised and repressive approaches to sex education. It aims at promoting students' sexual health and sexual well-being in the broadest sense (the needs of the whole person). Both these agendas require a comprehensive approach of school and a critical attitude from students by encouraging them to think about the other dimensions that interfere with sexual health (such as emotional and spiritual). In terms of contents, they draw on a "sex-positive" rather than "sex-negative" approach that renders sexuality as something normal and enjoyable. Moreover, they should address sexual pleasure and sexual diversity as well as emotional relationships. The focus is on providing students with skills, information, choices, and more controversial topics such as abortion and same sex marriage, going a little further than the liberal stance from Lees.

Britzman (1999) brings a different rationale to analyse the agendas of school sex education because she is not focused on their contents but on the way they produce normal citizens. The author refers to the historical course of sex education and to these agendas as a path that began from a "passion for ignorance" to a "practice of freedom and self-care" that is "still not tolerated". This "passion for ignorance" places teachers in a "passionate work of denial" and intolerance to children's curiosity and sexuality. This is immediately clear in the vagueness of a sex language in the curriculum. If the silence is frequently installed when "sex language" is introduced in the curriculum, it becomes a didactic, explanatory and non-sexual language as it happens in the health agenda. In both situations, young are seen as having a problem that needs to be cured and schools are held as a place of contamination and sexual prevention. Within this scenario sex education is defined as a eugenic movement concerned with forms of normalising sexualities and relationships. Britzman's reflections are interesting for this study because she defines the dominant agendas as "normative versions" of sex education that are employed to standardise students and thus, as feeling pleasure, attraction and eroticism is out of censorship control it is not accepted at school, remaining confined to everyday life. Although it is a very psychoanalytic view, the fear of losing control over the imagination emerges to explain the difficulty of teaching about affections, emotions and sexuality. Moreover, her

contributions are also interesting to interpret teaching/learning processes. The idea that adults and teachers often forget that they have been children once and act within a “structure of oblivion” to repress sexuality and young people’s sexual desires offer an interesting line of analysis for thinking about power relations in the classroom. So, adults do not respond to young people in a neutral, natural and carefree way but through “cultural imperatives” and their own anxieties and fears that mark the so-called “hidden curriculum”: a concept used by many other authors to invoke strategies of control, power and resistance within school culture (Allen, 2011; Araújo, 2001; Kehily, 2002; Louro, 2000). This relationship between adults and children is key to understanding the difficulty in talking about sexuality in schools.

- **Summing up: challenges and contributions to the study**

The debates about school agendas of sex education and the significance of sexual knowledge as a condition for change raise some important issues for this study. Firstly, the outlining of the agendas (messages behind the contents) that have been more relevant sought to reveal what society expected from sex education. The legitimacy of who can and should talk about sexuality and who must be silenced, what is deemed appropriate or not to say, what is to be talked about and shown, or hid and repressed, depends on broader conceptions of sex and sexuality from a particular society. This highlights how sex education is political and how access to knowledge is intentionally redistributed by state regulatory bodies to control, protect or empower youth. It seems the two main agendas in western education have been surrounded by the moral panic to protect childhood innocence and avoid sexual problems. So, there is often an attempt to “schooling of the body” (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Louro, 1999) and desexualise schools by avoiding explicit representations of sexuality and sex language. Since the notion that not educating children about sexuality as a contraceptive seems to be very unsuccessful to avoid sexual activity, what is expected from school sex education is the provision of preventive skills and moral values about respect and compromise. On the other hand, the investments to maintain the sexual and gender order based on heterosexuality remain.

Secondly, these agendas show how sexual knowledge has been subjected to contestation by groups with contradictory expectations about the purpose of, the limits and the interests of sex education. Actually it is interesting to understand how moral and health agendas of sex education seem to pull in opposite directions but in reality both fail to promote an effective sex education and reproduce hetero(sexisms). But, which are the anxieties, risks and panics the implementation of sex education comprises? The clashes about what should be covered in sex education have been frequently wrapped in a moral panic by bringing sex into the public sphere, with the loss of power from family, and with the negative consequences access to sexual information could bring. For many if young people hear about sex they will be more likely to do it while for others the real concern is about young people having access to information. In this sense, the constraints to an effective implementation of sex education result from the controversial way in which the public/private division has been transgressed, which in turn made sex education more vulnerable to public scrutiny and engagement (Allen, 2011). Based on Britzman's view it seems to be primarily a fear of adults losing control, questioning in this way teachers' discourses and practices.

These anxieties also came from the pressures that are already taking place to influence changes in this area, in particular the inclusion of the issues of sexual diversity, intimacy, pleasure, emotional and sexual well-being. These pressures came from social movements, but also are coming from young people themselves and new technologies (internet, social networks). Thus, many doubts are still emerging for teachers; for example, should students be taught to restraint themselves from having an active sexual life or are schools already able to address sexual pleasure? Should sexual diversity be taught in discussions that have traditionally been confined to heterosexual relationships? To what extent might affections and relationships be taught? These issues are brought by emerging agendas that question how sexual knowledge has been delivered in schools through processes of heterosexualisation and normalisation. This has been the third contribution of this discussion.

Furthermore, this section also questioned the potential of sex education as a condition to provide access to scientific knowledge about sexuality as the only way to

break with the prejudices of common sense around gender and sexual relations. School sex education legitimises the significance of this issue. Within this picture, the following section mobilises some feminist and gender studies' claims and debates to understand, challenge and contest the messages of sex education.

2. Contesting School Sex Education: Feminist, gender and sexuality studies and health's contributions to the debate

Greater understanding of sex education as a condition for the exercise of citizenship requires taking into account the assumptions, meanings and debates of sexual and gender studies. Thus, analysing how gender and sexuality have been conceptualised and built as contested concepts becomes a key task to deconstruct, interpret and understand sex education as a "contested site of meanings" (Haraway, 1993:276). Furthermore, if we consider gender "one of the axes on which we interpret and give meaning to experiences" (Kimmel, 2000:1), greater understanding of these processes will provide a greater understanding of social life. For this, the interplay between theory and political activism, driven by feminists and gender studies, including gay and lesbian debates, were important to shake social certainties and bring new ways of interpretation, new subjects and claims. Moreover, due to them, the themes of sexuality were expanded to health, education and citizenship. In this regard, it is pertinent to recognise some of their contributions to inform the policies, concepts and practices of school sex education.

This section gives particular attention to the second wave of feminism by considering their central contributions for changing today's interpretations of sexuality and female subjectivity. Moreover, their dilemmas and demands were contemporaneous with the first legal attempts to implement sex education in Portugal and England, which allows a better contextualisation of the issue.

2.1. The Gender and Power Relations Crossing the Sex Education

The notion that gender is socially constructed and not the result of a natural order of things has altered how women and men are understood by society and science (Pereira, 2012). This perception contributed much to debates around the dichotomies of nature/culture and sex/gender. More than breaking essentialist binaries around the female nature, the concept of gender affirms its relevance for highlighting how this construction occurs within a structure of oppression and subordination that starts by the way women's bodies themselves are conceived. Driven by Beauvoir's remarkable stance that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" in 1949, the notion that women are socialised to act and be in specific ways was at the centre of feminist claims, regardless of their liberal, Marxist/socialist or radical orientation. They appeal to the fact they were not born a weaker and second sex, but have been socialised accordingly instead. This notion was the starting point for questioning the established context of patriarchy and male dominance in social institutions and to rethink cultural notions of gender as not fixed to structural constraints but as relational. This theorisation that it is not a biological condition that constitutes women's inequalities is significant to question the meanings assigned to the sexual body and to the apparent ambiguous picture of choice in the discourses of school sex education.

In line with this, women and men were placed within contexts of unequal relationships by what Connell (1995; 2003) called "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasised femininity". This issue is present right from the outset in how gender is learnt through "mutually defining and mutually exclusive relationships" (Measor et al., 2000:34) invoking a catalogue of dualisms such as: strong/weak, active/passive, hard/soft, rational/emotional that opposes men to women (Kehily, 2002; Louro, 2000). This gender opposition coincides, as Davies (1997:11) suggests, "with the binary powerful and powerless" that is present in the structures of social life and the institutions of regulation, such as school. But this process of "becoming gendered" through binary oppositions is not only a top-down process.

Societies cannot simply accept the gender regime and hegemonic power as something that is exclusively imposed as external by modern institutions, but it is also dependent on how people live their subjective culture and performances. People attach meanings and discourses to the body that define how to act in gender-correct ways, how to present yourself to be considered a proper man or woman (what gestures, styles of dress, ways of walking and talking) (Pereira, 2012). In this sense, as already anticipated by Butler (1990:137), power is discursively produced and reproduced in the interplay of culture and performances in order to maintain a “regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence”. This *performative* approach does not forget the role of social structures, discourses and pressures but it opens up possibilities to rethink the individual agency that is behind the way people construct themselves as masculine or feminine. This was later reinforced by gay studies, such as those developed by Plummer which came also to affirm that “individuals aren’t born homosexuals but learn to be homosexual” (Seidman, 2006:8).

This debate on gender relations and their contexts is important in this study in order to highlight how gender patterns are locally “done”, reproduced and reconfigured in school sex education through heterosexual, sexist and homophobic messages (Kehily, 2002; Louro, 1999).

2.2. The Relevance of Gender to Rethink Sexuality

Gender debates became relevant to shape sexual meanings and subsequently to research sex education. First its relevance departs from the fact that the concept of sex is often defined by its opposition to gender. While sex was seen as natural and biologically determined, gender was defined as culturally constructed (Almeida et al., 1994). Under this view, sexual differences between men and women were imposed as universal and genetically determined on the basis of physical differences. This is still present in some essentialist grounds, for instance that men have by nature more sexual desire or that women are naturally maternal leading them to motherhood and domesticity.

This distinction between sex and gender has been deeply challenged by postfeminist, gender and queer studies that argued that sex cannot be understood as a pre-social category, univocal and obvious to discursive practices and cultural structures of learning (Butler, 1993; Pereira, 2012;). Similar to the concept of gender, many of them affirmed that how we make sense of sex depends on the multiple ways in which power is exercised through discourses that influence and constitute the facts themselves. This notion was very influenced by Foucault's (1994:24) insights to produce a "new regime of discourses", "morally acceptable and technically useful", around sexuality. Thus, sexuality appears as a product of social power and norms, frequently shaped and reshaped by dominant discourses (medical, scientific, legal and religious) that place the sexual into the rational order of the state.

Additionally, gender debates were fundamental to highlight how sexuality was socially organised around a *compulsory heterosexuality* (Rich, 1980) taken for granted and somewhat unquestionable. According to Connell (2002b), it refers to a cultural dynamic by which a group sustains a leading position and a form of sexuality as a reference for all individuals. Thus, masculine and heterosexual power is institutionalised as a "coherent", "natural", "fixed", "universal" and "monolithic" form of practice and relationship (Richardson, 1996:2). This "social authority" assumed that all individuals have an innate attraction to elect the opposite sex as the object of their sexual desire and as a partner of their affections. Consequently, other forms of sexuality are constituted as unnatural, abnormal and peculiar.

These gender expectations are frequently applied to sexual relationships in which a submissive role is ascribed to women and an active and dominant role to men. Therefore, analysing how gender inequalities affect the sexual and intimate domains is important, since it remains very striking in the way "sexual protocols" (Nogueira & Fonseca, 2010) are still rooted in youth culture, for instance, the idea that it is the man who must take the sexual initiative or that sexual desire is a male feature feature (Fonseca et al, 2014; Santos et al, 2012; Tolman, 2002;). This causes social pressures both for women and men.

However, despite these social structures in which sexuality has been grounded in western societies, sex emerges as a site of contestation, resistance, agency and

transformation where female sexuality also takes place (Fonseca, 2001; Louro, 2000;). This means there is not a linear relationship of power in just one direction, but subjects are increasingly recognised as actors of their own power relations instead, in what Plummer (2003) called a “complex micropolitical relation of power and resistance” (see also Redgrave, 2009).

These views on sexuality and sex as culturally constructed appear as extremely controversial because they contradict several well-established understandings of sexuality and undermine the ideas that sexuality was pre-social and settled by God, evolution or hormones (Measor et al, 2000). The introduction of this changeable character is still hard to accept and to be understood by some people, in part because there is little room for fluidity and inconstancy.

These debates are relevant to place school sex education in the heterosexual scenario of romance, marriage, family and “the right way of living”, as well as to stress sex negotiation as a female matter. This raises the question of how gender roles and expectations in sex are being driven by sex education, i.e. if sex education messages are still being framed by compulsory heterosexuality or are already taking into account this “fluidity”, whose understanding is necessary to interpret safe sex practices, for instance.

2.3. Bringing New Subjects to Debate

Another interesting debate that feminists introduced to explore the messages of school sex education is the way they question the essentialist conceptions of gender. Does sex education already take into account the existence of plural masculinities and femininities? Does it deconstruct unified gender categories? Furthermore, is it possible to speak of sexual pluralism in the classroom? (Weeks, 2010). In this sense, the discussion that feminists bring about the deconstruction of the *category of woman* itself offers some clues to show, once again, how the concepts that are at the basis of sex education are themselves contested concepts.

This issue was initially grasped by socialist feminists who contradicted the quest for a unified female identity. While for radical feminist there was a collective

experience of oppression, suggesting that women would only be free through an alternative culture a - separate female world (Fonseca, 2001), and liberals took the category of woman as an individual (Arnot, 1993), for socialists there were also significant differences among women (Young, 1990). Black and working class feminists claimed their private interests have been ignored and diluted in the same category of white middle-class women as representative of all women (Macedo, 2003; Richardson & Munro, 2012). This was later extended to lesbian and disabled feminists, who contested the definition of womanhood as constructed under the “ideology” of heterosexuality. They argue that lesbians felt even more invisible in relation to men and other women, which led to greater involvement and investment in the scientific field during the 1990s,⁸ in order to give voice to lesbians’ experiences. According to these groups, the category of women is intersected by several dimensions: race, age, social class, white, disabled and sexual orientation that cannot be underestimated.

However, this intersectional and plural notion of women raised other dilemmas among feminists (Philips, 1993; Young, 1990). On the one hand there is discomfort and risks by keeping essentialist perceptions of groups, on the other hand there is a critique of how the deconstruction of a unified category of woman into women might weaken their political struggles (Lister, 1997). Taking into account both positions, Young (2004) states that if women are not conceptualised as a social collective, oppression cannot be conceptualised and criticised as an institutional process. Therefore, she advocates the reconceptualisation of women through the phenomenon of “serial collectivity”, which means that women are not understood as a group that self-consciously recognise themselves as being a unit but as a “series” who are passively unified by sharing routines and habits. The author gives the metaphor of women “waiting in line for a bus” as an example to illustrate how people might be oriented to the same goal having different reasons, conditions, constraints, interests, etc.

⁸ One example of the quest for visibility and recognition was the launch of the specialised *Journal on Lesbian Studies*; see http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wjls20?open=1&repitition=0#vol_1.

It is not my aim to go deep into the discussion of “seriality” or even of the relevance of intersectionality as a “leading feminist paradigm” (Nash, 2008; Taylor et al, 2010) because they are out of the scope of this thesis. However, I believe they are important discussions to be brought to a study on school sex education as a way to question the essentialist conceptions that are being learnt and experienced by young people, as well as to introduce the notion of diversity into gender and sexual debates.

In this sense, understanding that being a woman or a man is a “condition actively under construction” (Connell, 2002b:8) intersected by many aspects, gives us important lenses to analyse gender issues and hegemonic forms of control in programs of sex education.

2.4. Sexualisation Debates and Global Requirements

This section seeks to briefly place the debates on sexualisation around new forms of learning and living sexualities, especially femininity. This issue is relevant to enlighten contemporary school sex education towards young people’s needs and experiences, as well as to rethink its relation with other sources of learning, such as the internet. Furthermore, these feminists debates point out some issues that must be provided by sex education and again bring the issue of equality to the fore.

One of the most interesting current debates about femininities is related to the extent that female sexual freedom means effective equality to men. At a time when sex is not only easily available but also encouraged and celebrated as a recreational, hedonist and rewarding activity, it makes sense trying to realise how it affects the understandings of femininities and intimate relations. Regarding this issue, McRobbie (2009) wonders if the way “global girls” are approaching and performing traditional male behaviours (smoke, drink alcohol, have casual sex, watch pornography) makes them equal to men. This author suggests young women from western countries are currently under the spotlight of a *new sexual contract* that emphasises a set of opportunities, access and resources in terms of jobs, qualifications, education, birth control and consumerism. In these new contexts global girls are expected to be sexually free and available as a way to show publically the control and power they

have themselves. However, McRobbie calls our attention to the fact these “phallic girls”, also known as “ladettes”, are about a lot more pressure than men because their behaviours continue to be dictated by sexual reputation and the “double standard” (the “good girl” and the prostitute). Thus, despite this “alleged equality” young women continue to be under social scrutiny.

Another current debate in which attention should be paid is how the industry of beauty and fashion is controlling how women are and see themselves. The “digital sexual revolution” (Herdt & Howe, 2007) brought new aesthetic demands that dictate a “new gender regime” and a new sexual culture based on global consumption and communication. In this sense, if apparently girls are more autonomous and sexually free, their agency is still limited by the regulatory powers of this industry. For Nayak and Kehily (2008), these new forms of control are no more than a fantasy of a “community of freedom and security” where sex and sexuality are losing their “intimate equalities” (Seidman, 2006). This perception questions the role of school sex education in the global sexual culture and its articulation with new learning facilities such as the internet and social networks.

This focus of attention on consumption gives rise to another important current debate concerned with the premature sexualisation of children. The debates about the reconfiguration of the child in the twenty-first century consider that childhood has become a “spectacle: mobilised and invested in, commodified and desired” (Epstein et al., 2012:250), not only through the discourses of protection and risks, but again through the power of fashion. In this sense, society is divided between preserve and regulate the innocence of children as a form of protection, while simultaneously is increasingly investing in the erotic potential of girls as sexual consumption. Therefore, there is a gap between the status sexuality holds within everyday lives and in the political context, in particular education, where children’s interests are taken into account from an adults’ perspective. This is clear in the way childhood innocence is inferred within curriculum, distancing itself from youth’s experience and reality. The discussion of sex education around the innocence/protection of childhood illustrates public concerns with the early sexualisation and sexual initiation (Kehily, 2012).

To **sum up**, it is necessary to highlight how feminist discussions gain relevance to rethink school sex education as a condition for democratic relationships and a resource for women's recognition. They have been especially useful to question the role of the school in the way it produces and reproduces certain conceptions and discursive practices, in particular gendered and heterosexualised messages.

Interestingly for the purposes of this study, feminist contributions, in particular the second wave, have done more than simply expose and criticise pre-existing male and female identities. They have, among other things, challenged conventional understandings of gender, sexuality and power relations; problematised commonalities, asymmetries and differences between women and men; deconstructed binary dichotomies that hid and excluded the diversity of masculinities and femininities; and, most of all, brought sexuality into the public debate. Moreover, by critically examining the power relations within intimate and sexual domains, feminists brought new meanings for love, sex, marriage and family by denouncing inequalities, forcing disruptions, demystifying social certainties and asserting new values. Within this reconceptualisation, the bodies and the self are conceived as socially constructed in a "reflexive project" and no longer the fixed point on which identity is built. Without women's assertion in the political, health, educational and scientific fields, sexuality would not have had voice within citizenship and rights-based discourse. It is the case for instance of how their claims drew public attention to the issues of domestic violence, prostitution, rape and unsafe abortion. So, this notion of active and sexual women unveils a whole sphere that was previously relegated to silence, exclusion and subordination.

2.5. The Contributions of Health Discourses

Within this section it is also useful to briefly return to the contributions of health discourse to better understand the contested context in which the concept of sexuality had emerged. In addition, its influence in the provision of school sex education (messages, contents, teachers' training, the creation of resources) seems evident. Therefore, the analysis of health views over sexuality makes visible some of the

messages that have been behind the dominant agendas of sex education, precisely because the legitimacy and recognition of medical and scientific discourses has always been granted.

In line with this aim, one must recognise the significance of sexology - the science of sexuality, and its “laws” (Seidman, 2006) to define sexual drive as natural and heterosexual. This meaning has been at the basis of western sexual culture until the second half of the twentieth century, and still persists among some social circles, to maintain sexist and heterosexual perceptions. This notion exposes the contribution of sexologists to define the norm and strengthen the biological determinism and essentialist notions of gender and sex. In contrast, its concern for abnormal behaviours and searching for dysfunctions led to a “pathologising” of homosexuality through anti-nature discourses. In this regard, Moita (2006) considers that this genetic and biological focus reinforced the “ideology of disease” and heterosexism as a system that denies and stigmatises sexualities other than heterosexuality. Furthermore, the indication that sexuality is at the core of who we are defines a set of natural features that reinforce the gender regime. This medical-hygienist approach has marked discourses and the health agendas of sex education in schools, as already stressed.

However, other senses have emerged with the new wave of sexologists that highlighted the relevance of sexuality and sex within emotional relationships and introduced the issue of sexual intimacy. The focus has shifted from repression to sexual pleasure and fulfilment as fundamental for a happy marriage. There is a concern with a “mutual satisfying sexual relationship” as a dynamic and relational process (Gomes, 2003). Within this new meaning, sexologists assume the role of sex educators and advocate the significance of being sexually knowledgeable and skilled in order to have a happy sexual life. This contribution is new to rethink school sex education as strongly articulated with health, namely through the creation of student support offices, as well as to recognise young people as autonomous “sexual subjects”.

But different areas and pioneers on sex research that explore sexual behaviours and desires beyond the heterosexual man have contested essentialist views of

sexology. It was the case of the psychologist Havelock Ellis⁹ and the psychiatrist Krafft-Ebing to whom non-heterosexuality was not explained as a mental disorder but as part of an autonomous and continuous sexual instinct (Oosterhuis, 2012). This was further developed by Kinsey, one of the most famous of the next generation of sexologists, whose work¹⁰ on sexual behaviours challenged the prevailing moral codes by highlighting the autonomy of female sexuality and the frequent occurrence of same-sex experiences. He advocates that sexual behaviours were controlled and regulated by social conventions, rather than by natural instincts, which is useful to question how school sexual knowledge has been designed. Additionally, Kinsey states that sexual desires are independent from sexual categories and change over time, which introduces the issue of sexual diversity.

This focus on sexual behaviours frequently left aside the emotional, qualitative and subjective experience of sex, which became restricted to understand sexual expression as a whole. That is why Freud's emphasis on the influence of unconscious drives and family relationships, contexts and ties in determining sexuality is also interesting. His insights can be mobilised to understand how sexuality has been learnt in the conflict between sexual drives and social expectations, which gives a new dimension to individual subjectivity. In addition, Freud defines sexual instinct as primarily oriented to pleasure rather than reproduction that shifts the focus to non-genital and non-procreative pleasures (Measor et al, 2000; Seidman, 2006; Weeks, 1991). This leads us to ask how sex education can work on sexuality in schools within social conventions without covering the world of passion, emotional depth, conflict, repression and denials, as part of the experience of sexuality itself.

Sexology has been a turning point in the configuration of sex in society and in the development of research into sexuality. This short review recognised sexology's focus on heteronormative discourses of sexuality as natural, heterosexual and gendered, but also its advances to challenge it, putting into evidence several forms of sexual

⁹ Havelock Ellis in 1896 published the first medical textbook on homosexuality—"Sexual Inversion".

¹⁰ "The Kinsey Report" is based on sexual behaviour in the human male (1948) and later, in the human female (1953). Kinsey's work was strongly criticised at the time especially because of his research method (observation of sexual intercourse and individual interviews about personal experiences, fantasies, fetishes and eroticism) and his interest in children's physical sexual response.

expression to stress the significance of emotions and relational aspects of sex and to improve women's place into making decisions.

3. An Alternative Approach to the Study of Sex Education: Sexual and intimate citizenship

As clearly stressed in previous sections, the emphasis that social and sexual movements brought to intimacy and sexuality within the public space offers interesting contributions to question the agendas of school sex education and rethink them as a matter of citizenship. New meanings and power are thus allocated to it as a resource to access significant knowledge and opportunities. Therefore, this section exalts the educational, transformative and radical nature of school sex education to move emotions, affections, social and sexual relationships, beyond the caring and preventive nature of the health sector. It is my belief that citizenship and equality theories are central to explore the potential of a new educational path for sex education as a public space concerned with the promotion of equality for all as the necessary condition for the exercise of a full sexual and intimate citizenship. For that, this section suggests a new interpretative framework on the basis of the concepts of *sexual* and *intimate citizenship* (Fonseca et al., 2014; Giddens, 1992; Plummer, 2003; Richardson, 2000; Weeks, 2010) and how they might be enlightened by the theory of *equality as condition* for democratic education (Baker et al, 2004). Hence, to theorise around sexual and intimate citizenship in the educational field implies taking into account its basic principle of equality. In this sense, firstly a critical understanding of the relationship between sexuality and citizenship is conducted and secondly, how this might shape school education is outlined.

3.1. Sexuality and Gender: Rhetoric of citizenship?

The conceptualisation of school sex education as a right of citizenship requires firstly a brief understanding of the relationship of sexuality and gender with citizenship and how this occurred within a critical and contested socio-historical context.

Theoretical perspectives about citizenship have been shaped and dominated by T. H. Marshall's model since the 1950s, in terms of access to three sets of rights: civil or legal rights (the right to justice under the law), political rights (include the right to vote and participate in the exercise of political power), and social rights (the right to economic and social welfare). These rights are institutionalised through the law and other state services, such as education, social security and health, which emphasise at the outset, the importance of school in achieving those rights.

Furthermore, it was clear that Marshall's primary concern was with social class, while gender was largely absent from these debates. Once again, social movements, in particular, feminists (Lister, 1997; Philipps, 1987; 1995; Walby, 1994) were essential to identify the gendered, ethnicised, racialised, classed process from which someone was able to be a citizen and to highlight how women were relegated as Others to "the second-sex" by male privilege (Beauvoir, 1949). Behind this invisibility was a strong division of society into spheres of power - while women were relegated to private spheres, the public domain was delivered to men. The perception of this "gender-blind" came to question claims of universality in which the dominant discourses of equality and rights were based (Arnot, 2003; Young, 1997). Later, this criticism was reinforced by gay and lesbian arguments that public rights were not equally addressed for all citizens, which made them "non-citizens" (Plummer, 1995) or "partial citizens" (Richardson, 2000).

In part reflecting these critiques to Marshall's model for obscuring inequalities, claims for cultural rights emerge in response to social changes in the family, the economy and intimate lives (Stevenson, 2000; Turner, 2000). The concept of cultural citizenship is related to the right to participate and be represented in the popular culture of a specific society, to which the spheres of education (schools and media) have a particular impact (Richardson, 2000). Its most important aspect for this study is

the notion that the denial of “cultural space” to some groups and individuals means denying the “symbolic presence and visibility” of their lifestyles and personal choices. This is directly linked to a definition of citizenship as a form of belonging and membership, which is useful for understanding the processes of globalisation in which sexual rights are being learnt and stated.

Cultural rights are at the basis of equality and diversity discussions that in turn have crossed citizenship perspectives on sexuality and gender. These discussions gain particular importance to challenge the neoliberal model of equality as determined by formal heterosexist patriarchal principles. Against the search for *sameness* and homogenisation among men and women, Lister (1997) argues for the need to follow a “differentiated universalism” that does not reject universal access to rights, but rather rejects the “false universalism” present in the policies towards equality that in practice just effect unequal differentiations. Policies based on “gender neutral” (Lister, 2004) and “diversity neutral” (Richardson & Munro, 2012) have contributed to a false inclusion of differences in the scenario of citizenship.

This approach also emphasises an equality model based on ethnocentrism and tolerance that defines the “*Other*” according to normative standards, contributing to assimilation into the majority instead of their social inclusion (Stoer & Magalhães, 2005). This was very clear, for instance, in the non-recognition and invisibility of LGBT in the public discourses of education and health that as Moita (2006:70) states are embedded in heteronomy prejudices that are much more “difficult to combat and eradicate, because by being misunderstood with tolerance—and as tolerance carries in its genesis inequality, once it perpetuates scales of power—placing prejudice becomes less clear”.¹¹ The imposition of the dominant culture has been so strongly rooted in the cultural notions of rights that for a long time it was reproduced by many groups seeking social acceptance, which also illustrates how a rights-based agenda has been

¹¹ “Há um discurso, não tanto de homofobia, mas sobretudo de heterossexismo, o que é mais difícil de combater e erradicar, porquanto aí, ao poder confundir-se com tolerância—e tolerância comporta na sua génese desigualdade, já que perpetua escalas de poder—é menos visível a localização do preconceito” (Moita, 2006:70).

often based on processes of assimilation (Stevenson, 2001), normalisation and auto-regulation (Casey et al., 2004).

Recently, Richardson and Munro (2012) reinforce that contemporary societies are still based on a liberal equality that is premised upon “sexuality neutral” rather than a “sexually-differentiated model”, which means sexual diversity is not already grasped. These authors claim that even human rights discourses are based on “universal belonging” claims in the case of women and LGBT people. They add that “heterosexuality has not been displaced as the reference point for equality and normality” (*ibidem*:65). This is clear in the lack of recognition of plural sexualities and of the pressures of gender social relations in some of the state institutions such as schools (Fonseca & Simões, 2014).

Thus, these arguments are pertinent to this study because they enable a deeper understanding about the locus of sexuality within rights-based discourses and education. In fact, how could sex education be a right if sexuality and intimacy themselves were not seen as such? That is why this discussion on how sex and gender groups relate to policies and public discourses has to be done first. Moreover, this notion that citizenship institutionalises heterosexual and male privileges, as well as what are proper behaviours for boys and girls, offers some explanation to the previous discussion about the pervasiveness of heterosexuality in the agendas of school sex education. This discussion leads us to think about the significance of the fields of education and citizenship to destabilise the so-called *sexual protocols* (Nogueira & Fonseca, 2010) and sexual and relational *ethics* itself on which cultural rights have been based.

3.2. Sexual Citizenship: Extending citizenship rights into sexual issues

Theorizing about the relationship of sexuality and citizenship is from the beginning controversial because of the apparent contradiction of terms (Plummer, 2003; Richardson, 2000; Weeks, 1998). While sexuality was seen as a private and family arena “of pleasure and pain, love and violence, power and resistance” (Weeks

et al, 2001:197), the concept of citizenship was traditionally located in the political and public spheres (national identity, political participation) with “no significant meaning in the private” (Walby, 1997:176). However, the change that this relationship has suffered in recent decades due to social demands and the increasing centrality of sexuality within public arenas led to the theoretical development of the concept of *sexual citizenship*. In this study, *sexual citizenship* means the extension of the rights, duties and protection of citizenship to sexual issues in order to *recognise* sexual differences and sexuality free from coercion, abuses and violence. These purposes are translated into a set of public resources and conditions that are core to encourage safety, autonomy and care within sexual relationships. Therefore, sexual citizenship is a public strategy to answer social concerns with sexual discrimination and violence and simultaneously, to recognise “sexual subjects” in their diversity.

Sexual citizenship was first put forth by Evans (1993) in terms of consumerism and individual choice. Within this view, it was mainly focused on how access to global meanings of sex through consumption and economic resources influence who was included or excluded (for instance women, children, elderly and disadvantaged groups) from citizen status. According to Evans, the state and the market are not passive actors in “lifestyle membership”, but instead they “lead to the commodification of the personal, private, individual” (*ibidem*:2).

This conceptualisation was broadened by Weeks (1998) who presented another view. He departed from Evans’ focus on access to resources and advocated that *sexual citizenship* is also an issue of equity and justice. Weeks highlights that *sexual citizenship* is about the rights of “enfranchisement, inclusion, belonging, equity and justice, and rights balanced by new responsibilities” which contributed to extend conceptually its meanings and relate it to contemporary reality. It is interesting to put these positions in confrontation as ways of identifying the various contributions to the definition of sexual citizenship proposed in this study.

Recently, this perception was even deepened by Richardson (2000; 2001) on the basis of access to a set of sexual rights is granted or denied to certain social groups. In my view, Richardson brought a new density to the concept of sexual citizenship by specifying the arenas where sexual rights take place: *sexual practice* (includes the right

to participate in sexual activity, the right to enjoy sexual acts and the right to self-control); the *individual* (the right to self-definition, self-expression and self-realisation) and *relationships* (the right of consent to sexual practice, to freely choose our sexual partner, to publicly recognised sexual relationships). This is important not only because it extends the notion of “sexual subject” to all sexual groups/individuals and claims new forms of belonging, but also reconceptualises the concept of sexuality itself. Within this interpretation sexuality is no longer focused only on sex and its consequences, but also with the *relational* context of sexual intercourse (links among the practice, the individual and the relationship). This brings new dimensions to Evans’ conceptualisation of *sexual citizenship* and introduces the notion of sexual diversity in terms of subjects and sexual practices, contributing to deconstruct dominant structures around sexuality as being heterosexual, male and genital within the context of marriage and reproduction.

Thus, *sexual citizenship* is central in this thesis to rethink a new sex education in schools concerned with sexual diversity and the notion that all people are entitled to live their sexuality. On the basis of these authors’ emphasis around the social contexts in which sexuality occurs, the rights for all to a satisfactory and full sexual life and the multiple arenas of sexual rights, new forms of educating must be advocated to affect the lives of young people more effectively. Sexual claims have to be translated into social and educational structures in order to provide conditions that help young people to feel respected, protected and fulfilled. This framework is developed in the following section.

3.3. New Intimacies, New Citizenship

The relationship between citizenship and sexuality that has been discussed throughout this section cannot be considered without taking into account the *relational* context of intimacy in which it occurs. This draws our attention to a new notion of intimacy that goes beyond sex and sexual rights, and includes the multiple ways of sexual expression around bodies, feelings, expectations, fantasies and desires.

Actually, intimacy is ultimately based upon personal understandings, bonds of trust and emotional communication (Nayak & Kehily, 2008).

A heuristic work on this matter was the relevance allocated by Giddens (1992) to *emotional* life as the basis to *democratic* relationships. The concepts of “pure relationships”, “confluent love” and “plastic sexuality” in opposition to “romantic love” that is connected with heterosexual marriage, reproduction and women’s oppression, enlightens the transformations that relationships are undergoing. Within this framework, people relate to each other because they want to, which implies a new world of sexual negotiation and commitment based on dialogue, communication and equality. Therefore, by understanding the way emotional life and loving affections are being reordered enables to grasp contemporary lifestyles and to tackle gender power relations.

Why is the notion of intimacy important to this study? Intimate relationships become relevant because they are the context where sexual rights take shape. Affection, power to speak (dialogue), confidence and self-esteem, autonomy, love without pressures and respect are all dimensions that hinder or embody citizenship rights. Again the liberal public-private dichotomy comes to the fore. Not always what is alleged in the public sphere corresponds to what is lived indoors. It is the case, for instance, of women that claim publicly rights for gender equality and women’s autonomy but live undemocratic relations in family life; or people who claim to accept homosexuality as long as none of their children are homosexual. This shows how often public lives are disconnected with lived experiences and how the biographical is structural and relational.

Within this discussion, Plummer¹² (1995:151) proposed the concept of *intimate citizenship* as a “new politics of everyday life” that ensure the implementation of sexual and cultural rights. It relates to the rights of having “control (or not) over one’s body, feelings, relationships; access (or not) to representations, relationships, public spaces; and socially grounded choices (or not) about identities, gender and erotic experiences”. These rights go beyond public notions of “sexual rights” and categories

¹² Since 2009 there is a Centre for Intimate and Sexual Citizenship (CISC) in Essex University coordinated by Ken Plummer.

of “sexual difference” and are framed by the freedom, control, access and choices people have within different zones of personal life (self, relationships, bodies, gender, family, sex, body, sexuality) frequently known as “zones of conflict” (Hubbard, 2001:60) that are conditioned by structural inequalities (Plummer, 2005). Thus, the lifestyles and possibility people have to be the author of their life project is conditioned.

This was clear in the European project FEMCIT¹³ that shows how the demands of the global market, employment flexibility and migration have repercussions in intimate citizenship, particularly for women making them more vulnerable to make decisions (Roseneil et al., 2009). I take this author’s definition of *intimate citizenship* as “the freedom and ability to construct and live selfhood and close relationships safely, securely and according to personal choice, with respect, recognition and support from state and civil society” (Roseneil, 2008:9) to highlight the importance of conditions to support it. This is not only focused on access and choices as initially pointed out by Plummer, but it is a matter of conditions to the exercise of those choices themselves.

In this sense, it is my view that *intimate citizenship* comes to create a context for the full exercise of the rights of sexual citizenship. An effective realisation of both requires a discontinuity of the boundaries between the spheres of life since “the possibility of intimacy means the promise of broader democracy” and vice-versa (Giddens, 1992: 188). It is thus a dialogic process. In this study, this discussion is significant to rethink the potential of sex education in schools to provide inputs for young people to overcome this false dichotomy between sexual rights and intimate practices and develop a “life politics” concerned with how we should live (Roseneil, 2008). Schools embody the extension of citizenship to intimacy and sexuality. Only

¹³ FEMCIT—Gendered Citizenship in Multicultural Europe: the impact of contemporary women’s movements (2008–2011), aimed to evaluate the impact of women’s movements with the transformations of intimate life and gendered citizenship. They define six dimensions to analyse gendered processes across Portugal, the United Kingdom, Norway and Bulgaria: political, social, economic, ethnic/religious, bodily/sexual and intimate citizenship. There is no comparative research on differences and similarities between European nation-states in this regard. For more information see <http://www.femcit.org/about.xpl>.

then will it be possible to approach the contemporary experiences of young people and map the new era of plural relationships.

3.4. Sex Education and Sexual and Intimate Citizenship: Interrelated dimensions

Now that this point was reached, it is necessary to ask: How can school sex education be a public space for the exercise of sexual and intimate citizenship? Departing from the conceptions I adopted of sexuality for all and intimacy as a matter of communication in a context of democratic and equal gender and emotional relationships, both sexual and intimate citizenship bring a significant emphasis to rethink the “new equality agenda” for school education (Baker et al, 2004) and subsequently, for sex education.

What is at stake here is how the agendas of equality take citizenship rights into schools as a way to connect education with the demands of social and sexual movements. The concept of equality has been a major turn in the theoretical thinking of education for having extended educational rights for all individuals and groups. Recently, Lynch and Lodge (2002) and Baker et al (2004) brought interesting contributions to explore the agendas of equality in the treadmill of feminist work linked to political theory (Fraser, 1997; Young, 1997). They consider social inequalities and collective choices are determined by changing and changeable social structures that might be deconstructed and questioned by an agenda of “equality as condition” that reconfigure a set of key dimensions (redistribution, power, recognition and care) in education. It is this reconfiguration that will promote conditions for change and equality.

The mobilisation of this discussion seems to be essential to rethink the school as a space of citizenship and to restructure sex education as a condition that might enable and “empower people to exercise what might be called real choices among real options” (Baker et al, 2004: 34), overcoming what Phillips (2006) called the “opportunity paradigm”. Actually, giving mere access to sexual knowledge and information is not enough (Young, 2002).

Therefore, I consider the dimensions of *redistribution*, *power*, *recognition* and *care* applied to education by this agenda (Baker et al., 2004), and already worked by several authors in relation to different contexts (Araújo, 2007; Fonseca, 2009; Lister, 2003; Lynch & Lodge, 2002; Macedo & Santos, 2013; Santos, 2009), to discuss how sex education might provide communication, autonomous citizens and democratic relationships.

- **The provision and redistribution of resources in sex education**

Understanding sex education within the dimension of redistribution presupposes the potential of school to provide access to human and material resources that improve a healthy and safe sexuality. It means “access to a range of resource-dependent options” (Baker et al, 2004:34). This involves a public investment on teacher training, on the implementation of health and student support offices and on the choice of specific coordinators to create a structure inside schools that provides students access to contraception and qualified information. More than access to material resources, the dimension of redistribution presupposes that compulsory sex education guarantees access of all young people to sexual knowledge, educational and health resources and a democratic chance to talk about these issues. Without sex education in schools the hypothesis to be and speak with young people about their intimate relationships is not very feasible.

Under this dimension, schools emerge as a social and institutional condition in which one discusses the choices and limits to live a healthier, informed and safe sexuality, which consequently fights some educational and social inequalities within sexuality and gender (Arnot, 2000; Lees, 2000; Young, 1997).

- **Dialogues with sexual diversity: equality of respect and recognition**

Recognition is another necessary dimension to achieve citizenship because it is concerned with the respect for non-dominant and excluded groups that claim inclusion in sexuality debates, particularly women and LGBT. So, it comes to fill the exclusions

unequal redistribution brings. As previously discussed on the basis of studies on sex education, the lack of respect and recognition for sexual diversity in school is manifest in the silence and invisibility in which some groups are relegated in the syllabi and practices of schools (Carneiro, 2009; Marques, 2013). The silence in schools “denies lesbian, gay and bisexual young people a legitimated social space and language for reflecting upon a defining part of their personal and social identity” (Baker et al, 2004:155). Sexual citizenship rights are thus denied to those who are absent from the curriculum of sex education.

Therefore, exploring this dimension to overcome inequalities in education becomes essential to rethink sex education as a condition for the accomplishment of the rights of sexual citizenship. A school that respects diversity would be a school that exceeds the assumptions of compulsory heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity, much discussed by feminist theorists and gender studies. Therefore, this dimension is helpful to propose sex education as a condition to break with exclusion, denial and “official silence” (Epstein et al, 2003) about female sexuality and sexual groups that pervades all aspects of school life. Moreover, this dimension makes it possible for young people to live their sexuality without permanent fears of being victims of bullying and violence at school and in broader society.

- **Equal power in sexual and intimate decisions**

This dimension focuses on people’s opportunity, capacity and entitlement to “influence the decisions that affect their lives” (Baker et al, 2004: 164). The underlying issue here is linked to previous dimensions in the sense that unequal distribution of resources and recognition will disempower some groups over others. This dimension is fundamental to sexual and intimate citizenship because it emerges as a condition to free sexual relations from violence and abuse and for people to choose what to do with their bodies. Schools might be seen as public institutions that protect and, simultaneously, give young people opportunity to assert themselves in their most intimate decisions. This intersects with the “principle of autonomy” proposed by intimate citizenship as the capacity to be self-reflexive, make decisions, participate and

make their voices heard. This is particularly related to women when Giddens (1992:134) asks to: “let women define their own sexuality, allow them to speak out about how they feel about sex, how they define their own sexuality and what sexuality means to them”. In this sense, the provision of power is based on the possibility for people to fully protect, negotiate and live their sexuality.

- **The promotion of equality of love, care and solidarity as the context for intimate citizenship**

As said before, intimacy occurs within the relational context of affection, which implies to think about the relationships of care, love and solidarity as necessary conditions for the achievement of sexual well-being. This question is directly linked to the possibility of addressing sex education within intimate citizenship as the only space in school that will teach and talk about love and emotions. This has been the dimension less discussed in public spaces and schools and, therefore, the most innovative contribution of the theory of “equality of condition” to rethink schools and its learning environment as a context of relationships, trust and affection. This challenges the way education has neglected emotions and is focused only on rational knowledge that offers different meanings to sex education in schools.

Particularly in sex education, taking emotions into account requires changes in the curricular contents (for instance, by the inclusion of love and affection within sexual relationships or the valuing of communication skills) and in teaching/learning processes. If this issue is at the basis for the exercise of a more responsible citizenship, it is also a very delicate demand for education because it makes teachers and dominant knowledge more vulnerable. The difficulty to speak about unfixed, uncertain and subjective issues is large and may be misleading to easily fall into the prejudices of popular culture and romantic love. Moreover, this condition challenges the processes of desexualisation in schools only focused on the treatment of the physical body and intellect.

These four dimensions allow re-imagining a new agenda for sex education beyond mere access to sexual rights and sexual information as a cultural (recognition,

diversity, context, participation) and material (resources) condition for changing sexual, social and gender inequalities. The great aim is realising how the promotion of resources, respect, participation and trust/affection in school promotes sexual and intimate citizenship in the three arenas of sexual rights - sexual practices, individuals and relationships (Richardson, 2000). In this context, the areas of private life - in terms of freedom, choice and control - (Plummer, 2003) are now in the centre of sex education as a promoter of new sexual practices, autonomous and empowered individuals, democratic relationships and good communication between subjects.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter discusses the possibility of addressing sex education in schools from an enlarged citizenship perspective to issues of sexuality and intimacy. In the first section the relevance of sexual knowledge is discussed in the school context and its public agendas in order to understand why sex education remains a contested space. In the second moment, the contributions of feminist debates and gender studies were mobilised to refute and challenge school sex education, especially its contents and messages. At this point, the challenges facing hegemonic masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality have been critical to inform new models of sex education based on more democratic approaches. This discussion opens doors to a third section that proposes the implementation of sex education in schools as a condition of sexual and intimate citizenship. Here, the universal meaning of citizenship is undermined by the reconfiguration of the concepts of equality and diversity to a better understanding of the transformations of contemporary intimacy. Based on the idea that schools “construct the temporal project of the child” (Bernstein, 1996:65) sex education emerges as an attempt to construct and control a sexual-project for children as future citizens. In this sense, it emerges as training and preparation to extend democratic values to intimate and sexual experiences.

CHAPTER II

POLICIES OF SCHOOL SEX EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL AND ENGLAND

GLOBAL DEBATES AND NATIONAL POLICIES

“Sex education is political in two respects: it invokes party political conflicts over policy, and, in the wider sense, it reinforces particular meanings and power relations.”

(Alldred & David, 2007:1)

INTRODUCTION

Taking Alldred and David’s definition as the starting point, this chapter focuses on the political nature of sex education. Firstly, it emphasises the socio-historical context of sex education legislation in Portugal and England since the early 1980s, when it was formally introduced in both countries’ educational agenda. Secondly, national nuances, struggles and debates are contextualised at global and international policy level. This invoked conflicts and different meanings among social sectors and actors that enable a deeper delineation of the contours of sex education as a contested, critical and diffuse issue.

As Hall (2009) affirmed, the construction of sex education, and, especially at school, as a topic within the broader field of the history of sexuality has been relatively neglected by social historians, in comparison to other developments within this field, such as campaigns for legalised abortion, family planning provisions and homosexual laws. This may reflect the uncertain status of the subject among other school disciplinary areas. The difficulty in understanding whether sex education is part of the history of sexuality or the history of education and pedagogy, if it belongs to the

history of childhood, medicine and health or of social policy, makes it harder to get a proper grasp on. It certainly has links to the history of gender, the body and more recently sexual citizenship, to which more attention has been paid. This research is not intended to be just a socio-historical description of sex education, it also takes on debates and policy initiatives that have addressed sex education in the last three decades in Portugal and England.

In order to grasp the political meanings of sex education, it is vital to track the influence of global pressures and international non-governmental action of some associations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). In this regard, as Figueiredo (2011:v) states, sex education policies result from “the interaction among a wide range of actors – state and non-state actors – located in multiple organizational contexts and different levels of action (local, national and transnational)” that influences the process by which an understanding of sexuality has been acquired by individuals. These links between the formal educational system and other outside structures, such as feminist and health NGOs, consider different ways of learning and producing change in social relations. As Stromquist (2008:212) highlights, “NGO educational activity is a key vehicle for the creation of new identities, the diffusion of counterhegemonic knowledge and the development of assertive individuals”, which means NGOs relation with the state is essential to improve local conditions and foster new forms of democracy and equality. Thus, the interplay between theory and activism becomes relevant to interpret the political arena in which school sex education is grounded (Alldred & David, 2007).

This chapter is divided into two intertwined sections. The first section contextualises the history of sex education at a global level policy context. Some international milestones and turning points related to health advances and women’s movement struggles were identified as the first steps to rethink in regards to this issue within broader sexual and human rights. The second stage organises sex education legislation through a set of “mandates” that comprise specific social demands and tensions in each country. The term of mandate approaches that which Roger Dale defines in 1989 as “mandates for the education system”, i.e. projects for education

based on “conceptions of what is desirable and legitimate for the education system to bring about” (Stoer & Magalhães, 2004:319, see also, Robertson & Dale, 2008).

1. Global Policy Context: The influence of international dynamics in sex education

1.1. Health Milestones

The inclusion of sexuality into education implies a broader understanding of how sexuality came to the fore of public policy in the first place. Initially via health and further through citizenship debates, the concepts of sexual health and reproductive rights were key to inform SE provision. Two turning points that caught the attention of the world and the meaning of sexuality are highlighted here: the emergence of the female pill and the HIV/AIDS advent.

- **Female pill: the breakthrough of family planning movement**

The impact that access to the female pill had on the western conceptualisation of sex and female sexuality, on women’s independence in marriage, on the priority given to reproductive rights and on changing intimate and loving relationships has to be taken into account to contextualize frequent focus of SE in family planning.

As outlined before, for a long time and until too late, sexuality was only addressed in public health as a biomedical interest by psychologists and sexologists. Particularly after the Second World War, concerns with population growth and sexual dysfunctions brought public legitimacy to medical-hygienist discourses of sexuality (Herdt & Howe, 2007). Such conception of sex both as *reproduction*, where women were seen as mothers and breeders, or as *problem* and risk placed women’s health under the spotlight (Santos & Fonseca, 2013) and reinforced pro-natalist attitudes and policies that were oppressive to reproductive rights.

The emergence of the female pill¹⁴ in the 1960s was an unstoppable milestone for science and activism, giving room to the so-called sexual revolution (McLaren, 1999). Until then, sexuality was not supposed for women and contraception was morally denied. Women were finally able to decide *when, how* and *with whom* they wanted to have children. Birth control policies became a right for women, an empowerment within their own health and sexual life. This was a remarkable moment for the redefinition of the concept of sexuality and of safe sex practices.

However, the “new paradigm of sex as recreation” (Laumman et al, cit in Herdt, 2010) also raised some conflicts among social sectors, particularly the most conservative to which new sexual practices triggered new anxieties and fears. In this sense, family planning policies were essential for enhancing sexual health but sexual life, particularly the female’s, continued to be regulated within the family. The institutionalisation of sexual behaviours’ regulation is portrayed through risky and gendered messages as stated by Higgins (2010:153):

“Family Planning discourse portrays sex at best as the sanitized exposure to the risk of conception or, at worst, the cause of unfortunate outcomes such as violence, STIs or unintended pregnancy. This tendency to de-emphasize sexual pleasure, desire and enjoyment is especially strong when it comes to women, toward whom family planning efforts are disproportionately directed.”

This focus of health on prevention explains SE centrality on these issues.

- **AIDS advent: the acclaim for sexual rights**

By the early 1990s, the emergence of the HIV- AIDS pandemic released the panic and quick precautions were required to public health policies. This event was a turning point in the way sex and sexuality was publically conceived.

There was a health imperative in addressing contraception beyond the family context (Cottingham, 2010), and for the first time, the government waws forced to talk

14 The feminist Margaret Sanger and the millionaire Katherine McCormick challenged the scientist Gregory Pincus to invent a pill against pregnancy that was easy to use, efficient and inexpensive. Contraceptives were officially banned in the United States and on August 18, 1960, the new product was launched in the North American market: the Enovid-10.

about sex and sexual diversity. The association of AIDS to vulnerable sexual groups (non-heterosexual, prostitutes and drug addicts) brought new subjects and sexual practices to discussion but also new political responsibilities and actions.

Sexuality started being conceived both as an “empowerment” and a “destructive” possibility that raised issues of power, resources and opportunities (Aggleton & Parker, 2010). Not only were sexual risks and sexual infections delineating concerns with sexual behaviours, but sexual violence, abuses and discrimination were also considered. The international duty of covering these new sexual lives was visible in WHO’s attempt to extend sexual health definition:

“It is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.” (WHO, 2006a)¹⁵

Within this new framework health discourses were extended to citizenship rights covering issues such as the respect for others, gender power relations, sexual diversity and emotional attachment, through cross-cutting actions and partnerships with education. There was a general awareness that a medical approach was not enough to tackle AIDS crisis and a cross-disciplinary approach was needed. Therefore, education and prevention campaigns became the priority of health policies (Alldred & David, 2007) which brought a new focus to sex education (WHO, 2004).

In this sense, the AIDS advent and consequent development of gay and lesbian movements in order for them to distance themselves from social stigma that associated them to disease were key to perceive the access to sexual information as a sexual right. As emphasised by the Declaration of Sexual Rights (IPPF, 2008) and Aggleton & Parker (2010: 2) people have the right “to seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality; to respect for bodily integrity; to decide whether or

¹⁵ Pan American Health Organization (PAN), the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) work together in this definition.

not be sexually active; to consent sexual intercourse; to decide whether or not, and when to have children; and to pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life”.

These *two events* were essential in bringing new political subjects – women and non-heterosexual people – to educational discourses that in my view are relevant for rethinking sex education contents and partnerships.

1.2. World Conferences on Women

The emergence of social movements, particularly the feminist, was essential in setting sexual rights in the educational agenda and pressuring public policies for equal opportunities in education. Their mobilisation was essential to the United Nations¹⁶ recognition of sexual and reproductive rights (free access to abortion and contraception) as human rights and women education as beneficial to population growth policies. That is why a brief reference to some of their main global conferences became significant in rethinking sex education as a means to achieve social transformation and empower the most vulnerable groups. However, it must be said that little mention was made to school sex education.

- **The Cairo and Beijing Conferences: gender equality on health, education and rights**

The UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 was a major reference point for including sexuality and gender in both health and educational agendas¹⁷. At the ICPD, 179 countries recognised sexual and reproductive health and women’s education as the cornerstones for population growth. As stated in the 20-year Programme of Action, the universal access to family planning services and education was fundamental in empowering women’s sexual

¹⁶ It refers to the international conferences occurred from 1970s onwards: the UN International Women’s Year; the UN Decade for Women (1975 - 1985); Human Rights Conference of Vienna (1993); the Cairo Conference (1994) and the IV World Women Conference in Beijing (1995), among others.

¹⁷ The ICPD occurred on the trail of the Second International Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993) where women's rights were emphasised as human rights.

decisions free of discrimination, coercion and violence (UN, 1995; IPPF, 2008). This event definitely became a milestone in emphasising the role of education, in tackling gender inequalities and promoting social change. Moreover, women's sexual autonomy was seen as central in decreasing the HIV/AIDS pandemic (WHO, 1994) and unsafe abortion was recognised as a serious public health problem¹⁸.

This was reaffirmed in the following year by the Four World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, where women's education appeared as a priority. This focus on women's education resulted from the observation that five years after the World Declaration on "Education for All"¹⁹, at least 60 million girls were still having no access to primary schooling, which consequently hindered the increasing risk of unwanted and too early pregnancy, HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as the exercise of unsafe abortions. Aimed at challenging this situation, Beijing asked schools to create conditions for gender equality through the Platform of Action, as is stated in the following declaration:

"Creation of an educational and social environment, in which women and men, girls and boys, are treated equally and encouraged to achieve their full potential, respecting their freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, and where educational resources promote non-stereotyped images of women and men, would be effective in the elimination of the causes of discrimination against women and inequalities between women and men" (UN, 1996:26).

New issues were emphasised, which I consider interesting, in the rethinking of sex education within citizenship, such as women's freedom, empowerment, respect, and even the need to think about educational resources to fight inequalities. Those conditions pass mainly through teachers' recognition of gender bias on curricula and teaching materials. This agenda placed women's rights and female sexuality at the heart of health and educational debates and linked gender inequality to a wider social wellbeing, which is closely linked to citizenship issues. These conferences' alerted to the impossibility of separating the power relations within intimate relationships from other social forces (Petchesky, 2003).

¹⁸ (UN, 1995:58) - Program of Action, paragraph 8.25. In the conference no consensus was reached in regards to abortion and the priority was focused on expanding family planning services.

¹⁹ Adopted in the World Conference on Education for All held in 1990 in Thailand

- **UN Millennium Development Goals: glaring omission of sex education**

The mobilisation of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) seemed to be helpful to this study to contextualise sex education as a public service concerned with gender inequality. In 2000²⁰ leaders of 189 countries aimed at reducing poverty by half by 2015 and signed up to eight goals on poverty and hunger, universal education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability and global partnership work (UN, 2000). Despite these audacious challenges, Redgrave (2009), in her analysis, indicated that there was a “glaring omission” in the Millennium Declaration about sexual and reproductive health due to the United States anti-abortion and only-abstinence movement as well as Vatican pressures not to address the explicit use of terms such as “sexuality”. Only at the 2005 World Summit in New York, new targets focused on the “universal access” to “contraception and counselling” and to “age-appropriateness sexuality education” through “school and community-based programmes” were added to the Development Goals (UN, 2005). Based on the Practical Plan from the UN Millennium Project (2005)²¹ and the report: *Public choices, private decisions* (UN, 2006) this new agenda underlined the importance of investing in better sex education delivery in order to achieve gender equality, improving maternal and child health, fighting poverty and AIDS. Fourteen years later it seems there are some goals that are still far from being achieved (UN, 2013).

Although there is difficulty in implementing the same goals and recommendations in different countries (Barroso; 2004; Crossette, 2005) and the risk of carrying with them “imperial and colonial legacies” of “Western versions of modernisation” (Arnot & Fannel, 2008:3) references to the MDGs are significant to design an “agenda for dialogue” among countries and redefine global development

²⁰ They were a result of complex negotiations and previous international conferences that occurred during the decade of 1990s and goes in line with previous Cairo Conference’s values that higher levels of education are associated with women’s empowerment.

²¹ The UN Millennium Project is an independent advisory body to propose the best strategies for meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Its report “Investing in Development: A practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals” was fundamental to add key recommendations for change.

priorities (APF, 2008). In this study in particular they are helpful to understand how the sexual and reproductive health and sex education started to be rooted within the wider human rights framework (APF, 2008).

- **Declaration of Montreal: one first step to the inclusion of sexual diversity in education**

Still in this context of global policies, it is important to make a brief reference to the influence of LGBT pressures to bring sexual and gender rights to school. In 2006 there was the first International Conference on LGBT Human Rights in Canada, resulting in the Declaration of Montreal²². A set of freedom of rights was outlined to prevent discrimination against LGBT people in healthcare, education and immigration. This Declaration expressed disapproval from some LGBT associations, such as the International Gay and Lesbian Association to the UN Human Rights Council's refusal to adopt and recognise LGBT rights as human rights. AIDS Education and political participation were requested, which could have been linked to sex education pressures in the including of contents such as, non-heterosexual relationships, different family models, sexual prejudices, anti-homophobic education, etc.

Just from 2009²³ onwards, the UE legislation against discrimination based on sexual orientation was extended to equal treatment in education²⁴ which was essential in drawing attention to the situations of bullying and discrimination to which the LGBT population had been subject²⁵ to and took action on.

²² The Declaration of Montreal on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Human Rights

²³ According to the UE Letter for Fundamental Rights "it is forbidden the discrimination in relation to sex or sexual orientation" (Art.º 21), promoted by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) from European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights.

²⁴ The Comunitarian Legislation

²⁵ According to FRA (2009) the intimidation and verbal abuse in schools are often the cause to high dropout rates among the LGBT population, but most schools do not have concrete plans to combat prejudices. In health services, the LGBT population is confronted sometimes with biased attitudes of some health professionals that might inhibit them to seek medical assistance.

2. Links Between Global and National Policies: The role of NGOs

Although sometimes the international commitments remain on paper and not necessarily on the ground, it is possible to briefly trace links between global influences and national policies on SE.

International NGOs and commitments have been vital in creating *context* and *legitimacy* for national forces (such as academia, national NGOs, local institutions) pressuring governments (Rego, 2012)²⁶. In the particular case of international recommendations on SE, the influence of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)²⁷ had been clear in the action of national NGOs, such as the Family Planning Association (FPA) in Portugal and the Sex Education Forum (SEF) in England. It brought insights not only at the level of schools' strategies, practices and materials, but mainly in the way SE has been conceptually designed. For instance, in 2006 the IPPF²⁸ embodied by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)²⁹, brought a "gender-sensitive and sex-positive" approach of SE as highlighted in the following excerpt:

26 In Portugal, this was clear in the International Equality Act's push to create the Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment (CITE) in 1979, as a national mechanism for ensure the equality between men and women in labour and employment. The influence of Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 and, ten years later, the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 in each member state develop a National Employment Plan. The Strategy for Equality between Men and Women 2010-2015.

27 IPPF is recognised as the most influential international NGO in family planning, acting at a making decision level as a leader of national associations spread all over th world.

28 In the sex education field, IPPF launched in 2006 *"The Guide to Policies and Practices: Sexuality Education in Europe"* (The SAFE project) and more recently in 2008, the WHO Regional Office for Europe launched the *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe. A framework for policy makers, educational and health authorities and specialists*; in 2009, the UNESCO in collaboration with WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNAIDS, published the first global guidance on sexuality education – *"The International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: an evidence informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators."* In the same year the IPPF document *"From evidence to action: advocating for comprehensive sexuality education. From choice, a world of possibilities"* introduces intimacy and sexual citizenship as elements to be addressed.

In the sexual health field I highlight *"The Sexual and Reproductive Rights Guidelines"* in 2003, that was reinforced in 2009 by the Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV. Linkages: evidence review and recommendations; as well as the *"Safe Abortion: Technical and Policy Guidance for Health Systems"* published for the first time in 2003 and updated in 2013 by WHO.

29 In 2002 the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)* in 2002 re-affirm the right of all children and adolescents to receive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information, education and services in accordance with their specific needs.

Sex education is a “comprehensive, rights based approach which seeks to equip young people with not only the essential knowledge, but also the skills, attitudes and values they need in order to determine and enjoy their sexuality, both physically and emotionally, and individually as well as in relationships” (Knerr, 2006:9).

More recently, other elements were addressed, such as: gender, sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV/AIDS (including information about services and clinics), sexual citizenship, pleasure, violence, diversity and relationships (IPPF, 2009:3). This definition and recommendations gave legitimacy to FPA and SEF pressurizing national governments towards new legislation on education and health. An example of this national engagement was the Portuguese version of the IPPF *Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights* (IPPF, 1996) approved by FPA and the government’s Commission for Equality and Women’s Rights (CIDM)³⁰ that is responsible for the provision of National Equality Plans (PNIs³¹) addressing sexual health, gender equality, violence and sexuality as “structural axes” of education (PNI, 2014)³². These Plans emerged as a political measure to Portuguese Government meet legal obligations for having signed the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Also, English’s commitment to this convention (CEDAW) was visible in the set of national legislation for equality³³ and to provide “new protections for pupils from discrimination because of pregnancy and maternity in school” (SEF, 2011a:2)³⁴.

Another example of this influence of international recommendations was the simultaneous need to rethink schools’ practices on sex education in both countries. In 2007 the UNESCO commissioned a review of the “global state” of sex and HIV Education in schools. This happened at the same time a review of school practices was in progress in Portugal by an external Working Group of experts (GTES)³⁵ and in

³⁰ CIDM – Comissão para a Igualdade e para os Direitos das Mulheres. CIDM is now the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG), a change that reflects previously theoretical shift to citizenship rights.

³¹ National Equality Plans (PNI) are the governmental instruments for the promotion of gender equality and combat discrimination based on sex and sexual orientation.

³² V National Plan for Gender Equality, Citizenship and Non-discrimination 2014-2017

³³ Such as, the 1970 Equal Pay Act and the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act

³⁴ The promotion of “women’s agenda” (CEDAW, 2001)

³⁵ GTES resulted in two reports (Sampaio, 2005; 2007) that contributed to implement the current sex education law in 2009

England by an external steering group asked by English Government which resulted in an important report³⁶ and a positive response³⁷ from the government in implementing them (DCSF, 2008).

Thus, the socio-historical and political contours of sex education both in Portugal and England have been cross-cutting by external pressures of NGOs and the need to approach their wider commitments.

3. Sex Education policies: national pathways

3.1. The political framework of sex education in Portugal

Research on sexuality and sex education in Portugal implies to go back to the right wing dictatorship (1933-1974) of Estado Novo and the impact it had on the construction of the national public morality. This period was dominated by an agenda of social control and hygiene strongly influenced by the Catholic Church's exaltation of feminine virtue and men's power. Under the motto "God, Fatherland and Family" sexuality was repressed and confined to marriage, particularly the female one that was repressed by the values of chastity and moral obligations to please and serve men. Heterosexuality and male supremacy were thus advocated as unquestionable over all sexual practices (Aboim , 2013). This moral position was also reinforced by criminalisation policies against homosexual relationships and the submissive legal status of women, as referred to in some examples of the Civil Code (1967): "the lack of women's virginity at the time of marriage constituted a relevant factor for its legal nullity" (art.º 1636); "the domestic government belonged to the woman" (art.º1677) or even that women were forbidden from having a liberal profession or crossing the border without a husband's or father's permission (situations that only changed in 1969). Regarding schools' education, the gender "regime" and stigmatisation was also

³⁶ Review of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) in Schools. A Report by the External Steering Group (2008)

³⁷ Government Response to the Report by the Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) Review Steering Group (2008)

visible in the selection of contents and teachers' expectations. Single-sex schools were dominated by canons of sexual abstinence as a principle of presuming children's innocence and avoiding sexual "contamination" (Pillow, 2000).

Within this traditional context, the military coup d'état in 1974 was a key turning point for the beginning of democracy in Portugal. It was a turbulent period of political clashes and cultural cleavages between social classes, public interests and generations. Gender and sexual beliefs were not left out of these tensions and the changes that followed during the revolutionary period (1974-1976). Influenced by European feminist tradition, social and student movements (Magalhães, 2005; Vilar, 2002) were starting to mobilise themselves in challenging male supremacy and proposing gender equality, an issue that was contemplated for the first time in the 1976 Constitution. However, this was not easily accepted by conservative groups and the religious sector, which did not want to relinquish traditional values and offered a lot of resistance, as it became internationally known in the *New Portuguese Letters*, as the *Three Marias*³⁸ in 1972, which revealed the lived discrimination against women during the dictatorial repression and the power of the catholic patriarchy (marriage, motherhood, female sexuality).

Despite youth sexual practices were increasingly changing, there was no space for formal sex education within the educational system. Although there were already some references to a commission for the study of the Education of Sexuality aimed at including some sexual issues in the educational reform (1971-1973) produced by Veiga Simão before the 25th April. This work had no sequence or applicability. The inclusion of sex education into legislation seemed to be slower and in 1975³⁹ the focus was assigned to family planning, in line with what was happening in other European countries⁴⁰, which may explain the increased attention given to the health sector with regards to education. It was in this controversial context that the first law of sex education emerged.

³⁸ This book was written by Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa.

³⁹ Albino Aroso founder of the Family Planning Association while he was Secretary of State for Health in 1975 recommended that health centers must create family planning appointments.

⁴⁰ 1974 was a landmark year for FPA in England for instance, since Family Planning was part of the health services and contraception became free for all.

- **The 1980s: sex education for family regulation**

The first legal⁴¹ mention of sex education in schools was released in 1984. Accordingly, the State had the “duty” to “protect” and “support” the family in educating the sexuality of their children. Among its most relevant aspects, was the conceptualisation of sex education as a “fundamental right to education”⁴², the need to include “scientific knowledge about anatomy, physiology, genetics and human sexuality”⁴³ and the promotion of “initial and permanent teachers’ training”⁴⁴. Concerns with “discrimination on the sex basis” and “gender traditional division”⁴⁵ was also indicated. This law resulted in two years of extensive discussions, that began in 1982, with the presentation by the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) of three draft laws, one on voluntary interruption of pregnancy (VIP) and two about sex education and family planning. For Figueiredo (2011) the PCP did not want to be accused of using abortion as a family planning measure, proposing SE as a preventive strategy. In this regards, Vaz et al. (1996) also affirmed that parliamentary debates on the legalization of abortion during this period, whether favorable or against it, led parties to legislate on family planning and sex education.

According to these authors, SE policy was inherently linked to debates on abortion, family planning and maternity protection. This became clear in the title of the law itself - *sex education and family planning* and in the fact that only two items were dedicated to education.

Decisive for these advances was the entry of Portugal to the EEC (1986)⁴⁶, the need to answer European demands about the implementation of co-education and a wider range of choices (Fonseca, 2007), and a more general access women to the academy and the labour market that required new mechanisms of birth control. Along

⁴¹ Law nº 3/84: “Sex education and the family planning”

⁴² Law nº3/84 art.º1, nº1

⁴³ Law nº3/84 art.º2, nº2

⁴⁴ Law nº3/84 art.º2, nº3

⁴⁵ Law nº3/84 art.º2, nº2

⁴⁶ For this decision previous articulations with Europa such as the accession to the Council of Europe in 1976, its active participation within United Nations organizations, the creation of the Commission for Women in 1975, and the influence of the so-called “community law” produced by EEC - much contributed (CIG, 2009).

with these progresses, the growing number of divorce⁴⁷ rates and youth sexual freedom started to spark resistances from the political right-wing, parent confederation and the church. As a result, the 1984 law was never regulated and put into practice, leaving sex education to specific actions, whose protagonists were generally health professionals. FPA had an essential role at this time for being responsible for the first proposal of sex education contents and the first training course for teachers and other professionals in this topic.

Regarding the first mandate of SE in Portugal, it might be said to have failed. SE was not perceived as an autonomous part of health but rather as a support mechanism for a family planning movement. Its analysis enables us to understand how sexuality at this time was framed by family-focused policies, mainly concerned with reproductive control and enhancing the relevance of NGOs in its implementation.

- **The 1990s: leaning towards the individual's sexual health**

The second *mandate* of sex education policies in Portugal places the emphasis on personal decision-making and sexual health development. Only fifteen years after the first attempt to implement sex education, it was again subject of political debates. Once again it appeared in the sequence of the failing of the first referendum⁴⁸ for the legislation of abortion in 1998, promoted by the socialist government, as “the answer that was missing” (Figueiredo, 2011: 13). At this time an inter-ministerial committee⁴⁹ was approved for the development of an action plan on sex education and family planning. Its report was essential in identifying the controversy between those who were struggling to move forward or hinder the political decision.

This decade was also strongly marked by initiatives from the Health Ministry and the FPA partnership, which maintained the domination of health education agendas. The implementation in schools of programmes, such as the Programme for Health

⁴⁷ In 1974 there was known only 1,0% of divorces, while in 1984 it was reported 10,1%. (INE/Pordata, 2014)

⁴⁸ In the first referendum about abortion, the No won with 50,9% against the Yes with 49,1%.

⁴⁹ Council of Ministers No. 124/98

Education and Promotion (PPES)⁵⁰ and Education Programmes for All (PEPTI) among others⁵¹, were important in introducing wider topics of SE, providing teachers' training and producing the document entitled 'Technical Guidelines on Sexuality Education'. These guidelines were amended after inputs from several sectors.

As a result in 1999, the second law⁵² of SE was passed with the intention of strengthening the guarantees of the right to reproductive health. Within this law, SE was perceived as a "legal mechanism" to ensure the promotion of "healthy, rewarding and responsible sexual and reproductive life"⁵³. Its greatest focus was on sexual health and youth practices, mentioning the adoption of a "programme for the promotion of health and human sexuality". For the first time AIDS, STIs, gender equality and interpersonal relationships were included in SE contents. This represented a major breakthrough and the need to talk about sexuality beyond the family context. In regards to STIs, this law provided the need to "create support offices to students" in schools and recommended that "the access to condom machines" should be provided if parents and students agree. Pedagogically an "interdisciplinary approach" was proposed to develop a "responsible individual attitude" regarding sexuality and parenting.

In 2000, a set of measures on SE was approved. It was decreed to be addressed in the educational project of the school and the class work plan. In supporting these political measures, the School Sex Education Guidelines⁵⁴ were published (Marques & Prazeres, 2000) crossing several experts from different areas (medicine, sexology, psychology, education). This guideline directed at teachers was a valuable resource in developing sex education in community and school settings (Moita, 1997). Despite this production of resources to help teachers and schools, the proposal of implementing a cross-curricular sex education was not very successful.

⁵⁰ Dispatch nº172 (1992)

⁵¹ The National Network of Health Promoting Schools (RNEPS) in 1994 and the Commission of Coordination of the Health Education Promotion (CCPES) in 1998, through the Dispatch nº15/587, Dispatch nº271/98, 23 March and nº734/2000

⁵² Law nº120/99 was later regulated by the Decree-Law nº259/2000

⁵³ Law nº120/99 art.º1

⁵⁴ In 2000 it is launched a set of guidelines for sex and health education by António Marques & Vasco Prazeres through the *Educação Sexual em meio escolar: linhas orientadoras*

The SE advances during this decade must be contextualised in broader changes such as: the impact of the first cases of AIDS, the emergence of new lifestyles, the increasingly liberal youth and the contacts with international social movements, such as the women's conferences previously discussed, that contributed in increasing public concerns with sexuality. Moreover, the growing number of situations that were endangering women's lives, such as teenage pregnancy and illegal and unsafe abortions also enhanced the need to rethink reproductive rights. In addition to this, the moral panic around the growing number of gay associations, such as ILGA- Portugal in 1995 and Portugalgay in 1996 arguing for the respect of sexual rights required a new position from the Government. An example, was the political campaign called "Não façam do 13 um 31!"⁵⁵ to pressurise the Government in including sexual orientation and gender identity in Art.º13 of the Republic Constitution about discrimination, a fact that only happened in 2004 with the constitutional review.

Furthermore, this decade was also marked by the highest academic investment and the first sociological studies on sexualities. Albeit a little later than most European countries, as Ferreira and Cabral (2010:10) pointed out "without a context of AIDS it would have been difficult to have inquired as much as was inquired and gone so far on the issues addressed. Portugal was no exception". These events required another rationality of sexual protection focused on the promotion of wider sexual health and care.

- **From 2000: new impulses towards a greater recognition of the sexual subject**

The third mandate of sex education was surrounded by a set of political changes and controversies that took place during the first decade of the twenty-first century in relation to sexual and reproductive rights. It was clearly a time of tensions and debates that opposed conservative lobbies against new claims for citizenship. Three of them are highlighted here as particularly relevant to this study for having brought new light to sex education theorisations, they were: the approval of same-sex marriage; the

⁵⁵ Translation: "Do not make a mountain out of a mole hill".

contested law to decriminalise abortion and the moral struggle against the compulsory implementation of sex education. These debates were triggered by different sectors of society: political parties, community interests, national NGOs and left-wing movements.

As seen before, from the 1990s gays and lesbians were becoming “politicised identities” (Richardson & Munro, 2013) in contesting equality within public life and forcing the access to having the same conditions, respect and recognition. In 2001 the partnerships⁵⁶ between same-sex couples were recognised and a process for the right to marriage⁵⁷ began as a sign of the socialist party’s interest in being placed at the forefront of human rights. It lasted 10 years until it was approved due to the intense opposition of the Church and pro-life organisations that feared abdication from the institution of marriage. From the other side, pressuring the Government was the increasingly gay lobby, much influenced by international advances. Child adoption is still under discussion in Parliament after co-adoption was approved in 2013. Moreover, more and more cases of homophobia, sexual violence and bullying were becoming a concern for society. A tragic example that caught the attention of civil society and required rapid intervention was the case of Gisberta in 2006, a transsexual homeless person who was beaten up, drowned and abandoned in a garage by 13 minors.

Another important issue that was reinforced during this decade was women’s sexual and reproductive rights. Portuguese society was increasingly concerned with the maintenance of power relations, sexual abuse and domestic violence⁵⁸, as well as the lack of women’s agencies and sexual health autonomy. For greater awareness on these topics in schools much work was contributed by NGOs such as APAV and UMAR. In 2001 free access to the “morning-after pill”⁵⁹ was implemented, despite strong accusations from pro-life movements that it was just a mechanism to increase permissiveness and promiscuity among the youth. For these groups, it was an appeal to “irresponsibility” and lack of control. The controversial positions surrounding

56 Law nº 7/2001 Common-law marriage

57 Law nº 9/2010 “Same-sex Marriage” Portugal was the sixth European country to enable the marriage between homosexuals.

58 The Observatório from UMAR declared that 40 women were killed in 2014 victims of domestic violence.

59 Law nº 12/2001

women's stories of being arrested (patience, nurses, doctors)⁶⁰ for doing abortions and in particular the media coverage given to the "Women on Waves" boat⁶¹ began to be outrageous for society and encouraged women's organisations, health professionals and academia into pressuring the government to provide a new referendum on the decriminalisation of abortion. There was a greater civil mobilisation and political commitment, mainly from the socialist party, than in the first one. Movements *for* and *against* abortion crossed the country promoting debates and awareness campaigns. In 2007⁶² the law was passed and, based on a woman's decision, a voluntary interruption of pregnancy could be done in public health services up to the first 10 weeks of pregnancy.

All these processes affected how sex education was being held in Portuguese schools. In 2005, a moral campaign against SE provision started on the basis of media reports of apparent undesirable practices from some teachers that might have been putting children's safety at risk⁶³. This alarmism led a group of parents to release a petition online against practices of SE⁶⁴ and, consequently, the social democratic government to suspend what was being done⁶⁵. As previously said, the Working Group on Sex Education (GTES), compounded by experts from different areas, was launched in 2005 to revise policies and propose recommendations in terms of contents and pedagogical strategies. GTES's Final Report (2007) considered that sex education provision should be compulsory at national level and the health agenda should be extended to affections, gender power relations, sexual relationships and rights. This report occurred in a context of political tension against and in favor of the implementation of sex education in schools. For a long time, left-wing parties were showing their discontent with the absence of an effective sex education. The BE in

60 Women punishments were between 2 to 8 years.

61 'Women on Waves' a Dutch clinic-boat service that came to Portugal to do abortions against national policy.

62 Law nº 16/2007

63 Educar é Amar (2005) http://violada_mas_nao_vencida.blogs.sapo.pt/32183.html ; A (de)educação sexual nas escolas (2005) <http://oquedizele.blogspot.pt/2005/06/deseducacao-sexual-nas-escolas-diogo.html>

64 "APFN - Associação Portuguesa de Famílias Numerosas"; 17 May 2005; Subject: "Educação" sexual nas escolas - Online petition

65 Parecer nº6/2005, October 25, <http://digestoconvitados.dre.pt/digesto/pdf/LEX/377/194032.PDF>

2008 required the introduction of an autonomous SE subject within middle and secondary schools from the socialist government. Yet the Communist Party considered that an interdisciplinary and cross-cutting subject within the curriculum would be more effective.

Driven by these motivations, in 2010, the government committed to providing a more comprehensive and rights-based approach to sex education in state and private schools at all school grades. The Law nº 60/2009 resulted from a joint effort from the parties in negotiating and hearing several organisations and personalities in the field. Its final version was exposed to a Parliamentary Hearing where the church, conservative sexual and gender associations attended. There was a clear cleavage between those who advocated the need and requirement of SE, often LGBT associations, and those who were still against it, linked to conservative parent and citizens' movements. Despite this clash, the fact that they were all gathered in order to discuss SE, gave a different legitimacy to the issue.

This was the first law solely focused on Sex Education as an autonomous and compulsory subject. Its greatest innovation was the priority given to new contents such as "sexuality", "affections", "sexual-affective relationships", youth protection against "sexual abuses" and other forms of coercion, gender equality and the respect for pluralism and sexual differences. It was addressed in non-disciplinary areas of the curriculum such as citizenship education and project area, and a minimum of 6 hours in middle-schools and 12 hours in secondary schools were to be devoted to it. It was supposed to be implemented across the whole school curriculum, which meant it could be taught by any teacher, - frequently biology, religious, physics and philosophy teachers, coordinated by a school SE coordinator. Health professionals are still invited to give talks about STIs prevention and pregnancy. Parents are not allowed to withdraw their child from lessons and sex education can be implemented at any time in the school system with no standard age at which it begins. The implementation of this law remained a focus of political critiques and tensions. The most left-wing parties criticised the reduced number of hours (12) and SE pervasive-nature as being nothing more than a way to deregulate and weaken its practices. In their view there was no way of controlling how the 12 hours were going to be distributed. On the other side

the most right-wing parties (CDS) considered this law an attack on the Constitution, as it gave parents priority on their children and young people's education.

Thus, the third political mandate of sex education has started to place it within a more democratic and citizenship-based framework, despite the whole controversy around its practice.

3.2. The Political Framework of Sex Education in England

English legislation on sex education can also be organised in three political mandates that started in the 1980s, since the first law emerged in 1986. Prior to 1986, the decision to teach sex education was left to individual head teachers and local education authorities (LEAs). No attention was really paid to gender or sex issues (Allred & David, 2007), although the post war period in the educational system seemed to already include some references to “the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community”⁶⁶, giving thus the first steps to “argued that schools not only had *power* but also the *duty* to provide sex education” (Blair & Monk 2009: 38).

This view was reinforced by feminist movement (such as Women’s Liberation Movement) that since the 1970s⁶⁷ was pressuring the British Government to ensure more equality within the curriculum and new demands for women’s education (such as, limiting the creation of single-sex schools) (Arnot et al., 1999). Women were starting to contest “the reproductive cycle as a symbol of womanhood; the double standard of morality; the subordinate social and legal status in the family; and consequently the separation of home and work as the ideology of women’s place” (Smart & Smart, 1978:2), claiming social changes. Within this context, by the 1980s, sex education became a highly politicised debate between the right and the left wings, the central and local governments, moralists and health promoters, parents and the State (Monk, 2000). An example was LEAs accusation of “corrupting children” through sex education being used as a political “weapon” by the Conservative Party in election

66 1944 Education Act

67 For instance, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equal Opportunities Commission

campaigns, highlighting the polemical nature of this issue (Blair & Monk, 2009). Moreover, the apparent failure of innovative programmes offered by the FPA and the strong opposition of the Victorian society, to which Meredith (1989) calls “moral counter-revolution”, were clear in the controversy that surrounded the first law of sex education.

- **The 1980s: Sex education as moralization**

Sex education was formally introduced in English state schools by the Conservative Party through the *1986 Education Act*. For the first time, the education of sexuality was explicitly represented in law by requiring governing bodies and head teachers to ensure that sex education was given: “in such a manner as to encourage pupils to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life”. It was concerned with preparing pupils for the “responsibilities” and “experiences” of “adult life” by highlighting the family context as the foundational basis of good citizens.

The moral tone of this law was reinforced in the following year by the official guidance (1987⁶⁸), published by the Department for Education, with concrete directives and moral prescriptions towards governors about how sex education should be taught. This guidance went further than the 1986 legislation (Measor et al, 2000), making clear references to the importance of self-restraint and delaying sexuality until married life in order to maintain “dignity” and “respect” for themselves. Furthermore, it was expected it would help pupils to “recognise the physical, emotional and moral risks of casual and promiscuous sexual behaviour” (Harris, 1996:6/7).

The 87 Guidance was even restrictive regarding to issues such as contraception and homosexuality. Teachers were warned that they could be seriously punished if they gave contraceptive advice to girls under 16 without parental knowledge:

“Good teachers have always taken an interest in the welfare and well-being of pupils. But this function should never trespass on the proper exercise of parental rights and responsibilities. On the specific question of the provision of contraceptive advice to girls under 16, the general rule must be that giving an individual pupil

⁶⁸ DES Circular 11/87

advice on such matters without parental knowledge or consent would be an inappropriate exercise of a teacher's professional responsibilities and could, depending on circumstances, amount to a criminal offence." (DES, 1987: Section 26)

Its emphasis on girls' advice might have reinforced gender inequalities in the process of sexual negotiation. A strict position in relation to homosexuality was also stressed in this guidance in order to ensure that:

"There is no place in any school in any circumstance for teaching which advocates homosexual behaviour which presents it as the "norm" or which encourages homosexual experimentations by pupils. It must also be recognised that for many people, homosexual practice is not morally acceptable and deep offence may be caused to them if the subject is not handled with sensitivity by teachers."

This recommendation was further enhanced by the polemical "Section 28"⁶⁹ of the Local Government Act 1988 that explicitly prohibited "the intentional promotion of homosexuality" and "the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship". Even if the Section 28 was applied to the activities of local authorities rather than to schools, it maintained the silence and prejudices around the issue (Measor et al., 2000:21), attesting Meredith's (1989:32) argument that: "a large part of the debate on the theory and practice of school sex education in Britain continues to hinge upon attitudes to homosexuality."

This first law of SE occurred in a context of cultural tensions. There was an evident concern in Thatcher's⁷⁰ government with the growing "moral" crisis, "promiscuity" (Stafford, 1988) and sexual "permissiveness" (Durham, 1991). Pro-life and family movements were focused on developing moral campaigns against LEAs and health organisations, such as the FPA and the Brook Advisory Centre, by offering contraceptive methods and sexual information, which were seen as strategies to encourage early sex and corrupting children. Moreover, the growth of meeting-places for the defence of homosexual rights, such as, the Gay Liberation Front (Harris, 1990; Stafford, 1988), the Young Lesbian Group or the London Gay Teenage Group (Trenchard & Warren, 1984) and "the impact of HIV/AIDS during the 1980s worked to

⁶⁹ The Section 28 was not repealed until 2003. Law Government Act 1988, Section 28, 2A 1a) b) (:27)

⁷⁰ The Baroness Margaret Thatcher was the prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990.

both “revitalize” and professionalize the gay (less so lesbian) movement” (Richardson & Munro, 2013:15).

Therefore, it seemed the conservative fight was much more against the promotion of homosexuality within the curriculum than with sex education *per se*, as a number of different organisations linked to the right party (the Conservative Family Campaign, the Order of Christian unity among others) produced material on it as well (for instance CARE institution that produced a video on abstinence) (Measor et al, 2000:28). In other words, the battles over sex education in the eighties were about the maintenance of the hegemonic masculinity in the pursuit of what Durham (1991:4) called an agenda to restore the “traditionalist sexual order” and a heterosexual supremacist approach (Cavicchia, 1995) against the introduction of homosexuality in the curriculum.

As a result, on the basis of law nº3/84, the government devolved control over whether and how sex education should be included in the schools’ curriculum to school governing bodies and if so, to draw up a written statement of their policy. This “devolution of power to schools and their governors” (Hall, 2009) marginalised the role of LEAs and was marked by “the lack of central direction” (Blair & Monk, 2009:39), which might be considered one of the major reasons for the lack of systematic practices of sex education (Thomson & Scott, 1992).

This status quo of sex education changed with the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988⁷¹. A new ERA of “choice and markets” had begun in order to answer to a more and more competitive society (Harrison, 2000:27). It was required that all students be taught a basic curriculum of religious education and a national curriculum based on three core subjects: English, Mathematics and Science. Regarding sex education, only the biological aspects were covered by sciences, which established a legal and practical distinction between “science” and “sex and relationship education” (Blair & Monk, 2009).

⁷¹ The 1988 Education Reform Act

- **The early 1990s: attending sex education as a choice**

The political significance of HIV/AIDS debates became the second major reform of the law of sex education through the 1993 Education Act⁷² (DfE, 1994). For the first time, schools and local authorities were required to include AIDS, STIs and contraception issues in sex and relationship education (SRE) and a new educational agenda to control risk behaviours was implemented (Harris, 1990). The slogan “Don’t die of ignorance” had been replaced with “You know the risks, the decision is yours” (Holland et al., 1990: 17).

This proposal was very polemical and, once again, raised political struggles around health concerns and moral panics in exposing children to inappropriate information. Parents and conservatives argued this was an imposition of central government that was against the principle of autonomy of schools and parents previously established by the 1986 Act. As Blair and Monk (2009:40) stated, there was a “stark conflict” between moral conservatives and pragmatic health campaigners “solutions”.

In an attempt to please both groups, references of AIDS, STIs and sexual behaviours were recommended to schools and parents were given the responsibility to decide if their children should learn or not about these issues. The national curriculum in sciences⁷³ was still just focused on anatomy, biology, hormones and fertility (FPA, 2011). The Act imposed the requirement to consult parents, giving them the power to withdraw their children from sex education-lessons. This parental power was much criticised by the United Nations Committee on the rights of the child (Bibbings, 1996) as it did not take children’s interests into account (Thomson, 1996).

Furthermore, this removal from the curriculum seemed paradoxical once education was recognised by the DfE Circular 5/95 as a vital part to play in reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS and constructing the national health strategy (Cavicchia, 1995). As a result, “the Education Act 1993 conflicted deeply with the Department of

⁷² Further consolidated by the Education Circular 5/95 and the 1996 Education Act

⁷³ Section 241(3) of Education Act 1993

Health's policy on AIDS education" (Harrison, 2000: 64) and ultimately maintained the responsibility of sex education within the family.

AIDS discussion in schools was seen as a homosexual issue (Harris, 1990:8) highlighting the influence of the "Gay Plague hysteria". It took a long time for people to accept that HIV could affect everyone which left teachers at a crossroad. They needed to provide effective health education to decrease the spread of the virus, but they were not taken seriously by students. As a result, teachers were pressured to present facts in a balanced manner, but they were also forbidden to talk about homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle.

Therefore, despite this law was essential in making sex education a compulsory subject for all pupils in primary and secondary schools, it was also very restrictive in its scope and contents. The Circular 5/94 continued to restrict teachers' action in relation to contraceptive advice to pupils under 16 "for whom sexual intercourse is unlawful" (Measor et al, 2000:24), leaving that responsibility to school nurses. Only health professionals were allowed to give confidential contraceptive information, sexual health advice and counselling. This imposed a stark division between the legitimacy of health professionals and teachers in talking about sexual issues with students, reinforcing the boundary between education and health.

The second educational mandate of SRE policy in England was focused on fighting AIDS epidemic and keeps the moral and family values. SRE was perceived as a task of protection rather than education (Thomson & Scott, 1992).

- **From late 1990s onwards: sex education to make informed decisions**

The most up-to-date legislation regarding SRE was the 1996 Education Act (that consolidated all previous legislation). Accordingly, it was "still compulsory for all maintained schools to teach some parts of sex education i.e. the biological aspects of puberty, reproduction and the spread of viruses" (SEF, 2010). Additionally, "secondary schools are also required to provide SRE which includes (as a minimum) information about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS" within non statutory PSHE education, within the National Curriculum, despite not being mandatory (FPA, 2011).

This consolidation of previous laws was followed by the election of New Labour and a new period of social democracy. The conclusions of the Report of Social Exclusion Unit (SEU 1999) revealed that there was a high lack of knowledge about contraception, STIs, sexual coercion and young parenting, together with high rates of teenage pregnancy and homophobia which ultimately required new attitudes from the government. As a result, the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy was launched to tackle the general panic on teenage pregnancy and implement a political agenda for social justice and sexual inclusion (Thomson & Blake, 2002) as clearly illustrated by Prime Minister Blair at the SEU report:

“As a country we can’t afford to continue to ignore this shameful record”, “Our failure to tackle this problem has cost the teenagers, their children and the country”, “the role of education is clear in remedying the fact that too many teenage mothers – and fathers – simply fail to understand the price they, their children and society, will pay”, “I don’t believe young people should have sex before they are 16. I have strong views on this. But I also know that no matter how much we might disapprove, some do. We shouldn’t condone their actions. But we should be ready to help them avoid the very real risks that under-age sex brings. The fact is that unprotected sex at any age is dangerous.”, “We must give teenagers the confidence and the information so they don’t feel compelled to have sex. No one should become pregnant or contract a sexually transmitted infection because of ignorance.” (SEU, 1999:4)

The Prime Minister’s speech highlighted a new position of state to tackle this social problem by assuming State fault and duty to provide information, knowledge and confidence to teenagers, despite his disagreement with sex under 16. The government was forced to recognise and include sexuality into the public policy agenda. Unprotected sexual intercourse and an effective use of contraception became the main concerns of this period focusing on improving information, education and health services (Chambers et al., 2001; Swann et al., 2003). As Alldred & David (2007:28) considered the New Labour Government was “committed to education, education, education and with an overarching social liberal agenda, promised to transform equal opportunities beyond social and class and into issues of social inclusion/exclusion, gender and sex education”. Within this context schools were

recommended to provide SRE as a way of preventing teenage pregnancy which signalled a shift from a social welfare to an educational approach⁷⁴.

Other debates also marked the Labour Party's more democratic agenda for sex education; the case of the government's attempts to negotiate the equalisation of the age of consent for homosexual activity and the repeal of section 28. Again the issue of homosexuality dominated the reform of sex education policies. It was not until November 2003 that this controversial provision was abolished.

As a result of this new approach, teachers' Sex and Relationship Guidance was launched in 2000 where sex education was defined as:

"It is a lifelong learning about physical, moral and emotional developments. It is about the understanding of the importance of marriage for family life, stable and loving relationships, respect, love and care. It is also about the teaching of sex, sexuality and sexual health. It is not about the promotion of sexual orientation or sexual activity – this is inappropriate teaching." (DfEE, 2000:5).

Within this guidance, the government was deeply committed with the promotion of responsible and well informed decisions regarding sexual lives (DfEE, 2000:1). For the first time, young people were politically perceived as *sexual subjects* and *choosers* who were "confident, healthy and independent" to make decisions. This went in line with the theoretical advances promoted during the 1990s that defined the possibility of choice as a sex education outcome (Holland et al., 1990; Massey, 1995) although this "choice-centre" view seemed limited in regards to the context of "family life, marriage, stable and loving relationships and the nurture of children" (DfEE, 2000:5). The Guidance confined sexual activity to the heterosexual context of marriage and seemed very vague in relation to sexual diversity because it stated:

"Pupils need to be given accurate information and helped to develop skills to enable them to understand difference and respect themselves and others and for the purpose also of preventing and removing prejudice." (DfEE, 2000:4).

⁷⁴ The National Healthy School Standard (NHSS) was introduced in October 1999 to support and complement the new Personal, Social, Health and Education framework. Sex and relationship education is one of a number of specific themes which make up the Standard. The NHSS ensure the context for the delivery of SRE by involving parents, giving staff appropriate training and support and ensuring pupils' views are listened to (DfEE, 2000).

It is also asserted that:

It is not about the promotion of sexual orientation or sexual activity – this be is inappropriate teaching.” (DfEE, 2000:5).

Moreover, despite this principle of choice, gender was not seen as a major issue as well (Arnot et al, 1999). It continued to give power to parents’ consultation in developing SRE policy, although it already mentioned “the need to reflect” the views of teachers and pupils. Education about contraception ~~is~~ was also expected in secondary schools since the “key task for schools ~~is~~ was, through appropriate information and effective advice on contraception⁷⁵ and on delaying sexual activity, to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancies.”

Despite these significant advances, an emphasis on dangers of sexual activity still dominated SRE as became clear in the 2000 Learning and Skills Act. Accordingly schools emerged as a means of encouraging children to delay sex, teaching about the “the nature of marriage”, “family life” and “raising children”⁷⁶. Moreover, the age, the religious and the cultural background continued to restrict SRE contents. The fact that practical advice ~~is~~ was advocated only in the context of the negative consequences of sexual activity, in particular teenage pregnancy and STIs, showed how the guidance was not morally neutral. It notably failed to address sexual pleasure and alternatives to sexual intercourse which meant it neglected to acknowledge sex itself.

It must be said that sex education policies were still being surrounded by tensions among politicians and policy makers who as Harrison put it (2000):

“still need to be convinced that education for sexual and reproductive health is very important, particularly in terms of the non-biological aspects of reproduction. There are still others who believe that to discuss sex is to promote it. [...] There are some who believe that any discussion and debate should be linked to specific moral agendas. [...] There are those who would prefer it if sex did not exist at all.” (*ibidem*: 62)

⁷⁵ Several types of contraception are taken into account such as the emergency contraception, for instance.

⁷⁶ Learning and Skills Act 2000, section 148 1A a) and b)

3.3. Political Mandates and Focuses in Both Countries

On the basis of this analysis of political mandates for SE, it is interesting to identify changes between decades and countries. Immediately, the absence of a coherent national policy in this area both in Portugal and England, despite three decades of statutory intervention, attests the fact reaffirmed by Blair and Monk (2009:41) that sex education “remains a complex, problematic and politically touchy issue”. The controversy among the right and left parties, the most conservative and the most liberal movements about how sex education should be put into practice was very visible in the way the laws were hardly regulated. Their measures seem vague and not accepted by all. At the heart of the discussion remains the question of who should be responsible for youth education and how far the interventionist role of State should go. However, the progress towards a more democratic school is unquestionable as well as the increased recognition of social movements from both governments. The following table about the political mandates for SE shows how the focuses of laws have broadened into citizenship concerns:

Table 1 - Political Mandates of Sex Education by country

Mandates of Sex Education			
	1980/1990	1990/2000	2000/2014
Portugal	Family planning	Sexual Health	Sexual rights
England	Conservative moral	Choice	Sexual Health

In the 1980s there ~~is~~ was a predominant focus on family in both countries, although there were some nuances between them. While in Portugal, the recent socialist government was concerned with the provision of family planning services and discussions about sexual behaviours inside the family context, the English conservative government was more focused on delaying young people sex to family and married life. So, whilst the Portuguese educational agenda was framed by health concerns with the promotion of easy access to reproductive rights, using education as a means to spread it, in England its focus was placed on the moral values to convey. In this sense,

it seems that the way *sexual prevention* was thought of was different in both countries, as one was more focused on personal training and moralisation and the other on the promotion of health resources.

In addition to this, the regulation of these laws was difficult showing how its implementation was dynamic and contested. The Portuguese law, in terms of education, was never put into action due to political concerns against it and in England the fact that SE responsibility was given to schools and parents decreased its effective implementation. This meant SE provision was dependent on ad-hoc initiatives from schools and individual teachers. Thus, despite sexuality being explicitly represented in educational laws during the 1980s, its effective implementation in educational mandates was scarce in both countries.

In the 1990s the AIDS pandemic made SE implementation urgent. Both countries were being extremely influenced by global concerns with STIs, especially with AIDS, and with the need to educate young people in *safe sex* and contraception. The decision to include these issues in schools' programmes was taken earlier in England than in Portugal, whose law was only passed in 1999. However, the influence of English moral tradition seemed to be stronger and children participation became optional. This choice paradigm highlighted an apparent State disengagement due to parents' rights to withdraw their children from SE lessons. Thus, the second mandate of SE in England was surrounded by public struggles among parental power, health imperatives for AIDS education and NGOs' claims for children's rights around the risks of lack of information. In turn, in Portugal the greatest change of this period was getting the state to publically talk about sex and sexual youth behaviours. Its focus on reinforcing sexual health to fight STIs was an important advance in implementing student support offices in schools.

From 2000 onwards much changed in regards to sex education policies. In Portugal the third mandate of SE was marked by its autonomy from the health sector. For the first time, SE was broadened to sexual rights and accepted sexuality in its multiplicity. New resources were brought to discussion by this mandate, namely at the levels of recognition and respect for diversity and of redistribution of support structures. In England these advances seemed to be more diluted and SE was

conceived as essential in helping young people into making responsible and well informed decisions about their lives. Although the SE guide for teachers recognised that SE had to be educational about relationships, the law remained situated within the public health and individual choice paradigm. Moreover, while this guidance was concerned with taking steps to prevent homophobic bullying, there ~~is~~ was no mention of sexual diversity in the law.

In this chapter, the NGOs power to force the governments to go backwards and forwards on a particular theme became visible, i.e. as we saw, the pressure did not always run in the same direction as conservative groups also had great influence in how these processes were conducted in parliament. Another interesting idea was the notion that public health concerns were understood by policy makers in terms of the concept of *risk*. The focus of policy-making on the perceived need to reduce pregnancy and STIs rates seemed to neglect young people's educational needs. In Portugal this was clear in the way SE laws resulted in the sequence of abortion referendums. It was the case of law nº120/99 that followed the defeat of the first referendum and law nº 60/2009 that already included the signs of the second referendum's victory (Figueiredo, 2011). Its relevance to discussion was the fact that social and political debates around abortion always invoked issues of sexuality and SE policies, which might explain their close relationship. In England, it seemed school SE practice and theory was mainly shaped by attitudes towards homosexuality. Along with sexual practices, STIs and contraception were at the centre of conservative groups' concerns.

Therefore, until 2000 SE was conceived as a health measure aimed at addressing the consequences of sexual activity rather than positive understandings around sexuality (sex, emotions, behaviours, feelings and different sexual practices). Teachers' guidance in both countries constituted an important step into this direction. The distinction between health and education upheld a recurring controversy and historically political struggle throughout the history of SE. This might have explained previous school agendas both on *health pragmatism* and *abstinence*. New political stances might approach the more open agenda of *sexual liberalism*.

This chapter provided a critical reading of SE laws in order to locate them within a broader social and political context for the last thirty years. Looking beneath the surface of the law, this socio historical analysis demonstrates how this issue has resulted from political, social and cultural conflicts among parties, actors and different sectors from society. Health and social milestones in sexuality and gender issues have been essential in rethinking the *access, recognition* and *(re)distribution* claims within the educational field. They have been essential in the reaffirming of global concerns and the influencing of national commitments on women's and sexual rights. These changes have legitimated public discussion and NGOs pressures on SE and the following attempts to implement it within the arena of citizenship, as highlighted in international women's conferences.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCHING SEX EDUCATION

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes how research was designed, implemented and managed. The stance adopted in this research draws upon the ethical belief that decisions on appropriate methodological assumptions should depend on the research contexts, the research questions (aims and prompts) and the theory that guided those choices and views on reality and research. Following Tolman's (2002) advice, among other authors, this research tries to map coherence among these three (epistemological, ontological and methodological) axes to reinforce the "trustworthiness" of social research's choices. This search for structural cohesion throughout the research process brings "the quadripolar research model", a classical proposal from De Bruyne et al. (1974), to the discussion. The authors argue that research results from a dynamic interplay among four poles – the *epistemological*, *theoretical*, *technical* and *morphological*⁷⁷, which are determined by a set of social demands and personal values ("*axiological field*"). These instances and poles do not constitute separate and isolated moments of research, but rather particular aspects of a reality where discourses and practices are produced. It is the dialectic interaction among them that define the methodological path to follow and ensure the scientific knowledge production (Moraes et al, 2012).

⁷⁷ The ***epistemological polo***: it is concerned with the construction of the scientific object and the definition of the limits of the research problem; it is at the genesis of the proposals for both theoretical conceptualization and formulation; The ***theoretical polo***: it is focused on the researcher's rationality to approach the object, to formulate hypotheses, theories and operational concepts; The ***technical polo***: it is directly linked with data collection, research modes and practical choices; the ***morphological polo***: it is the results of research are formalized by exposing the entire process of research and analysis that allowed the scientific construction around it (Bruyne et al., 1974).

Therefore, this section seeks to provide a holistic view of research by tying up the theoretical framework and the suitable methodological choices to explore the empirical data.

With the aim of grasping the political and contemporary understandings of practices of sex education in Portugal and England, as countries that have been under the spotlight of sexual politics debates for the last three decades (as mentioned in chapter 3), this study raises theoretical and practical concerns related to youth sexualities and intimacy rights. In particular, I sought to investigate how sex education in state schools are being lived, conceptualised and imagined within the broader scenery of sexual and intimate citizenship.

Bearing these issues into consideration this chapter is divided into five main sections. The first highlights the methodological approach, locating the research within an interpretative stance and feminist perspectives. It intends to establish the necessary bond, communication and complexity between the subject and the research object. The second section discusses the choices and decisions about the research design as an unmaking process, highlighting the obstacles and challenges of employing a comparative research. The third part draws upon the selected methodological resources to collect data on the basis of their effectiveness in relation to the research aims and epistemology. This section is followed by a critical description of the whole research process (the presentation of schools; the negotiation of gaining access to the fieldwork and the practical conducting of methods). The data collection ends with a presentation of the procedures of analysis. I conclude the chapter with a reflection upon the challenges of being a young, female and foreign researcher on sexual knowledge, young people and schooling and attached ethical dilemmas. This writing section flows between what was expected to be done and what was really done at the end of this cross-national journey, illustrating the tensions faced during a PhD project.

1. Contributions from Qualitative Approaches: The interpretative dimension

In order to address this purpose, this qualitative study on education requires an interpretative, open and in-depth approach that highlights the perspectives of young people and teachers and helps unearth their lived experiences of sex education. This interest in capturing subjectivities and meanings enhanced an “epistemology of listening” to the “voices⁷⁸” as the only way to get the subjects’ own terms and views (Araújo, 2000b; Arnot, 2006; Fonseca, 2009; Macedo, 2012).

Moreover, it assumes that there is not a universal truth about the reality, but there are multiple ways of interpreting the same experiences depending on social interaction, cultural and political contexts. Reality is, consequently, socially constructed and interpreted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2010a; Bogdan & Biklen, 2010b; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Luttrell (2010:2) alerts us,

“Doing qualitative research involves a healthy skepticism about whether “to see is to know,” and instead calls upon us to look at people (including ourselves as investigators), places, and events through multiple and critical lenses.”

This relentless search for “knowing” more thoroughly about a phenomenon and for entry into the conceptual world of subjects, leads to the production of “grounded knowledge” discovered from the field-based, where only “time and context bound working hypotheses are possible” (Greene, 2010:69). In doing so, a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge is needed, as well as the recognition of the agency/structure debates that characterised a particular context. It is difficult to ignore the interdependence between youth citizenship and *agency*, structures of *control* and *power* dynamics with regard to the way gender and sexuality are being learned within an increased local/global “culture of sexualization” (Attwood, 2006). Though, taking these relations into account, it was crucial to share and create understandings with the participants.

⁷⁸ Although the concept of “voice” is not much developed in this study, its significance for qualitative and feminist research is central to rethink the possibility of power construction through pedagogy and schooling, as Eunice Macedo’s (2012) explores in her recent work.

In line within this approach, feminist perspectives were also relevant for this study. As Oduro (2010:74) asserts “what makes feminist approach unique are the motives, concerns and knowledge brought to the research process”. Far from being my intention to draw upon the great significance of feminist qualitative research and cover the multiple epistemological strands and controversies that compose it, I would just like to acknowledge their insights to frame the main theoretical concepts of this study, as well as acknowledge some ethical concerns in the methodological process. It is unquestionable that the role of feminist scholars, influenced by second-wave feminism, brought a new direction to qualitative research. Not only was this in relation to the topics of research (frequently engaged with political concerns and the promotion of social change), but also in the way research was conducted (participant’s subjectivity and experiences gain a prominent place). This reveals the feminist’s interest in women’s subjectivity, but more than that, places the researched as agent of the research process as well, reinforcing its dialectical feature. Following Haraway’s view (1991) that having a “vision” is always a question of power of seeing, the researched gained the power to see and talk about what they see, live and want (Fine et al., 2003). Furthermore, the multidisciplinary nature of feminist work has showed that it is possible to deal with small and large-scale studies employing a great variety of methods and other resources (life history, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, ethnography) (Allen, 2011; Araújo, 2000b; Arnot & Barton, 1992; Arnot, 2004; Ferreira, 2001; Kehily, 2002; Magalhães, 2005; Pereira, 2012; Plummer, 1995, among others). This has remarkably contributed to change conceptual, reflexivity and methodological assumptions in social research in general and on gender in particular. This is mainly because these approaches demonstrate the significance and ability of *intersectionality* to rethink the possibility of autonomy within deep-rooted structural relations of power. This way of understanding the social dynamics and scenarios of power relations was challenged by several postmodern and deconstructionist insights to rethink new forms of “representation” and “textual analysis” (Gamson, 2003). Again, I do not intend to engage extensively with the controversies and anxieties that postmodern perspectives, positions and criticisms brought to debate. However, I must recognise the importance of this theoretical shift to the rethinking of science and

gender as cultural; to the deconstruction of the dominant structures of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality; for “the deconstruction of phallogocentrism” (Dely, 2007) (see also, Derrida, 1978); and to emphasise “the lived experience produced through constitutive acts of subjective experience” (Butler, 2003).

In line with these proposals, among many others, queer theory emerges to deconstruct the notion of self as a natural essence. As with feminists, these studies are closely intertwined with political, sexual and social movements that want to stake out their place in science. They claimed the end of a binary, immutable and static vision that characterised the sociological analysis of gender, adopting a continuous deconstruction of sexual subjectivity as a way of resistance (Gamson, 2003). For many, this hybridity became subversive for male institutions but also for some feminists. Among many proposals, a brief reference is important to make to Judith Butler’s (1990; 1993) proposal to reconceptualise gender based on performativity, since it has changed and challenged common views on masculinities and femininities. These debates had effects on sex education studies by emphasising smaller-scale investigations and interpretative frameworks, against the tendency of quantitative surveys on sexual behavior and attitudes (Allen, 1999; Lees, 2000; Measor et al. 2000; Thomson and Scott, 1991).

Again, here there is no intention to generalise results about a population or standard curricula for school sex education, but instead to develop further knowledge within particular educational spheres and the social interactions inside the classroom (gender, age, class, ethnicity). Reflections on power/knowledge (Walkerdine, 1990) are, then, also useful to rethink strategies towards a democratic sex education.

Hence, some insights from both feminist and post-structuralism are visible in this study, in particular in its theoretical concerns with gender, intimacy and sexual diversity both on sex education and intimate lives; and also, in its methodological attempts to explore the power imbalance between the researcher-researched and among participants (Britzman, 1999; Plummer, 2003; Richardson, 2000; Weeks, 1998). Taking these contributions into account, this project is conceived as a multi-sited study located in four cities from Portugal and England, where I adopted a “subjectivist epistemology” (focused on the creation of understanding together with the research

participants), a “relativist ontology” (based on the belief there are “multiple realities” (Schwandt, 2000) and “critical lenses” (Luttrell, 2010). This places the study within a position described as *interpretative* and *socio-constructionist* with some post-modern feminist influences.

2. Constructing the Research Design: Preserve the enclaves of uniqueness in a cross-national study

Developing a solid research design is the linchpin of qualitative and interpretive research. It is more than the application of a set of skills, tools and steps to get knowledge about the field, but it also has to show what puzzle the researcher wants to explain. It is also a plan that has to take into account practical, theoretical and political contingencies that might possibly emerge during the whole process. More important is to accept that designing research is an on-going process and not a static and fixed structure. It is necessary to be prepared for unpredictability, especially when one is researching “sensitive” topics.

The choice of Portugal and England as research venues led me to design a cross-national study through case studies. More than a comparison I was interested in knowing more about the way these two countries were facing similar social problems and educational changes in the area of sex education and sexualities. Following the idea of Sztompka (1988:215) that comparative research may have to shift its emphasis from “seeking uniformity among variety”, to studying “the preservation of enclaves of uniqueness among growing homogeneity and uniformity”, the intention here was to highlight both commonalities and singularities between both countries by situating local developments within global trends and guidelines. This aim led me to ask myself the same question Oyen (1990:4) asked more than 20 years ago, whether “comparisons across national boundaries represent a new or a different set of theoretical, methodological and epistemological challenges?” In order to better answer this question, the same author explores the different intentions of the cross-national studies on the basis of Kohn’s typology. According to this typology there are

four types of cross-national research depending on the place countries occupy as:⁷⁹ (1) the object of the study; (2) the context of the study; (3) the units of analysis and (4) the trans-national. This systematisation helps us to understand in which way the two countries are compared in this study and the context and reality where understandings about the practices of sex education are going to be explored. With this aim of looking “for culturally-derived and historically-situated interpretations of a social phenomena” (Crotty, 2005:67), carrying out *interpretive* and *exploratory case studies* also seemed appropriate to access “to a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon ‘thick’ contextual descriptions” (Merriam, 1998:41-42).

Bearing this plan in mind and due to the limit of time, I planned to conduct four case studies, as unique instances, through a descriptive, subjective and interpretative analysis driven by the following research questions: i - Can school-based sex education be considered a space of sexual citizenship?; ii - How do young people relate sex education and their intimate relationships?

These research questions are grounded in five broader aims concerning different actors and research levels, as explored in Table 2:

⁷⁹ (1) the object of the study – in this case the countries are the primarily interest of researcher; (2) the context of the study – the focus of the study is not the countries themselves but “testing the generality of research results concerning social phenomena in two or more countries”; (3) the units of analysis – in this case the social phenomena is at the center, the researcher investigate “how social phenomena are systematically related to characteristics of the countries researched”, and the last one is (4) the trans-national – in this type of comparative studies singular nations are analysed and included as components of a larger international system (Oyen, 1990:6).

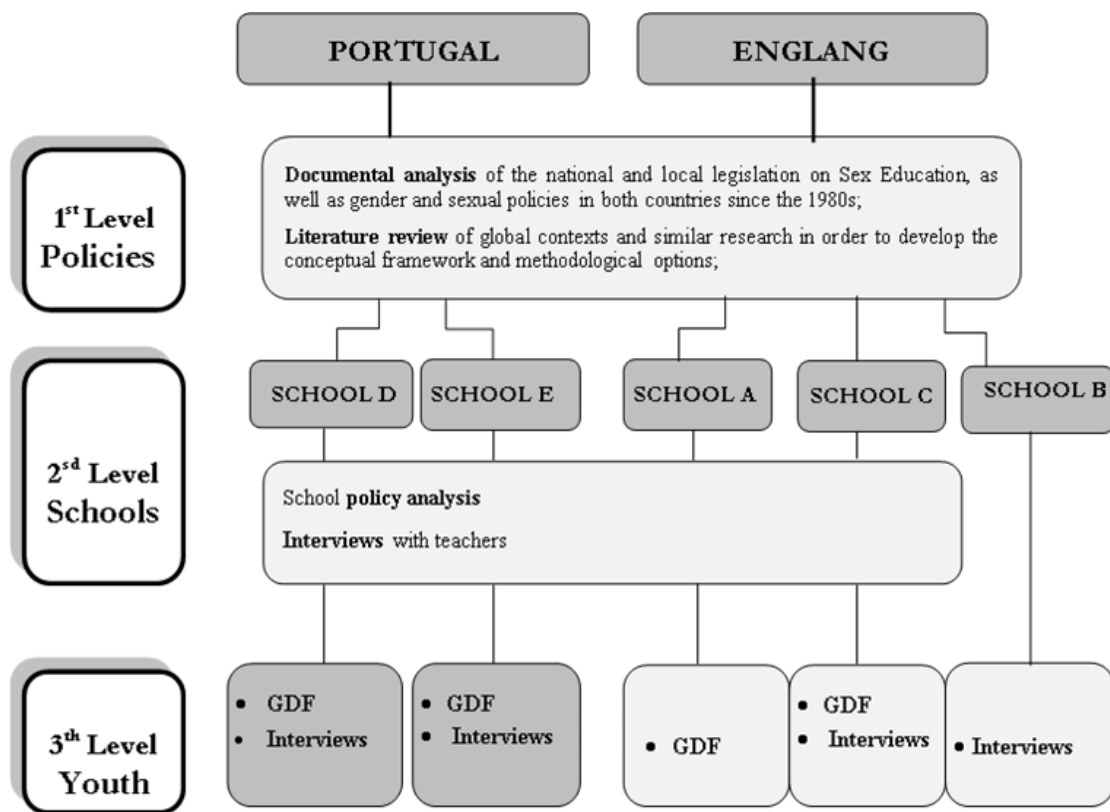
Table 2 - Aims and research sub-questions

AIMS	SUB-QUESTIONS
Explore the meanings of SE within national policies (legislative texts/documents)	• How is the agenda of SE being designed at national level? • What are the intentions and focus of SE legislation, in terms of gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and sexual rights? • What are the messages constructed for young people? • What are the implications of sexual claims for education?
Perceive the practices of SE in schools	• How are schools dialoguing with sex education policies and sexual health demands? • What are the pedagogic strategies (teaching and learning styles), the contents and messages of SE sessions? • How is formal SE being implemented in state schools (limits, intentions, projects, possibilities, changes)?
Identify SE practitioners' and teachers' views on SE, schools and young people	• In which way teachers are being involved within SE projects? • How do they see current youth and sexual, intimate and loving relationships? • How do they relate SE with the context of Citizenship Education?
Highlight young people's perspectives about school SE	• How are young people negotiating and interpreting the messages of sex education? • What are their needs, interests, expectations and criticisms?
Enhance youth's notions about sexual, intimate, reproductive and loving lives	• How do young people view and speak about their sexualities and loving relationships? • How are they seeing themselves and relating with the others?

The first aim relates to the understanding of political debates around the legislation of SE. The second covers school's practices and pedagogic strategies. The third is focused on SE practitioners and teachers' views on SE as well as on youth and sexual issues, and the last two refer to young people experiences and expectations on SE. So, there are different contexts and subjects in analysis here.

In order to address these questions and build a holistic view of SE I designed the study in three levels, as represented in Figure 3 (below). The **Political level** – explored the legislation of SE of both countries within broader sexual debates (sexual and reproductive health and sexual rights); the **School level** – acknowledged the school as the only context which allegedly promotes compulsory SE for all, as well as it is the place where young people stay more of their life-time. In this stage, practices of SE are mainly understood by teachers' views and school's policies. The **Youth level** – ensured the centrality of youth's perspectives and experiences.

Figure 3 - Research design



Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion seemed to be the best methodological resources to cover these levels. However, the construction of this research design was not an easy task, but rather was the result of a long period of changes, debates and configurations, as detailed in the following section.

2.1. (Re)design the Research from the Ground: Facing the first obstacles and social demands

The designing of this research was very dependent on the fieldwork's requirements and interests, which made it a grounded-field design that has changed throughout the process. This uncertainty is common in most qualitative research, and certainly increases anxieties about the paths to follow. With this study in particular, the obstacles raised by the first schools in England had shaped the research design's ambitions. The making and unmaking of research design illustrated the power of

persuasion a “stranger” (researcher) must have to negotiate and get into the fieldwork for the first time.

In this process the problems began in the very definition of what entails comparing two realities. Questions about what comparative research is, how we go about doing it and how we interpret similarities and differences between countries appear as a starting point. According to Oyen (1990), to conduct comparative research the researcher needs to set out particular phenomena and use the same research methods to collect, more or less, the same data. So, the researcher should try to have the same number of people and find the same conditions to research. Also researchers must find conceptual and linguistic equivalence, which sometimes result on cultural bias and problems of translation.

Facing this demand for equivalent places, finding similar cities between Portugal and England was the first major hindrance of this study to pursue a comparative method. The social, cultural, economic and religious differences between the two countries made me realised it would be very difficult to find similar research contexts, whose search would imply an approach that was out of the scope of this study. Thus, this study did not follow the rationale of the traditional comparative method, but the same criteria were applied in both countries in terms of research contexts and participants’ selection, data collection and the conducting of different methodological resources.

A second emergent problem in the initially planned research design had to do with the difficulty of implementing case studies. Based on Stake’s (2003) qualitative conceptualisation of case studies⁸⁰ this research was identifying itself as an *instrumental* (multi-site) case study approach putting the emphasis on a specific phenomenon studied across several cases. Accordingly, the case is examined and scrutinised in depth and its ordinary activities detailed in order to understand a more generic phenomenon, never forgetting their particularities (Tereshchenko, 2009).

⁸⁰ As “intrinsic”, “instrumental” or “collective” depending on the interest and purpose of research (Stake, 2003).

This idea lies in the definition of case study as a “bounded integrated system” (Merriam, 1998), that implies the presence of researcher in local settings, doing observation, making choices regarding whom to look or to talk with, meeting people and their dynamics. Seeking to understand the case in its totality, a variety of data collection techniques is needed (documents analysis, and interviews), and mainly participant observation. In line with this methodological requirement, I was planning to sit at the back of classroom and observe SE and health lessons, as well as wandering by school places like corridors, students union or cafeterias. The idea behind this aim was getting closer to students and understand in which way sexual knowledge was being produced within teachers-students interaction (e.g., how youth reacted to teachers’ messages and pedagogic strategies).

However, this aim of observing young people and teachers in various school spaces was denied from the very beginning by English schools for several reasons. Firstly, following the children protection laws, no researchers can walk freely in corridors or students’ spaces. Secondly, because SRE was often concentrated in ‘collapse days’ in the schools I was trying to work with, so there were no classes to attend. Thirdly, schools had very tight schedules (from 8.30am to 3pm) that gave little spare-time to students (intervals were short – 15 minutes). Facing these obstacles and constraints, the initial plan of doing case studies began to fall apart.

- **When is data enough?**

Another issue that emerged during the process of research design was the difficulty in answering the question: When is enough data to be considered a trustworthy study? According to the initial plan, the intention was to conduct focus group discussions with students. However, the issue of how I could have access to sex education practices just based on one side, started to trouble. Aware of the importance of working all the parts together to form a whole (Merriam, 1998), it became difficult not to collect all the pieces of the puzzle, listening to voices from different agents and points of view in order to create a more complete picture of reality. Understanding the interaction between the “agents of sexual knowledge”

(teachers and students) and the “institutional knowledge” (policy makers and schools) (McLaughlin et al., 2012) were essential to reach the study’ aims.

Therefore, I decided to include sex and health educators, despite the fact I was aware of the difficulty, indicated by Allen (2011:6), of reconciling data from different participants, especially between adults and young people, and the tendency to weaken the voice of students “in the face of authorial narrative of teachers which mobilised dominant discourses of young people’s sexuality”.

The issue of participants’ selection also raised concerns regarding the most appropriate age to study. The initial plan was to comprise students aged 14-15 years old (corresponding to Year 10 in England and Year 9 in Portugal)⁸¹ on the basis of the average age of the ending of compulsory education at the time research was conducted. However, the choice of this school Year⁸² seemed to be the worst within English curriculum, once students were working hard to apply to the GCSE exams – General Certificate of Secondary Education. The proposal made by some schools was shift the sample to the lower year (Year 9) that covered students aged 13-14. But Portuguese students in turn were busier in Year 9 getting prepared for the national exams. Due to these particularities I decided to cover an age range (14-16 years), instead of a school year. Nevertheless, another problem emerged. Lots of difficulties were set to conduct one-to-one interviews with minors (they need parents’ consent to miss school time and participate in research), which led me to opt to draw on “sixth form⁸³” schools and extend the age range of the study to 16-18. In Portugal this issue was different because all students need parents’ consent until up 18 years old.

Therefore, at the end two different groups of young people were covered through different methodological approaches: focus group discussions were conducted with students aged 14-16; and individual interviews with students aged 16-18. Once

⁸¹ At the time of the research school education was compulsory up until the Year 11 in England (age 16) and the Year 9 in Portugal (age 15). Since 2009 the compulsory education in Portugal was extended until the age of 18 (Lei nº 85/2009)

⁸² In England “Year” is used as school grade.

⁸³ Sixth form corresponds to the final two years of secondary school - Years 12 and 13 (aged 16 to 18). To better understand differences among years and schools’ stages between both countries see the Annex 15.

again fieldwork's deviations from research design constituted a methodological opportunity to add and explore the potential of another methodological resource.

3. Methodological Options for Data Gathering

Based on the graphical representation (Figure 1) this study implies specific methodological resources according to each research level (specific aims, purposes and research questions). As Ramazonoglu & Holland (2002:146) indicate "abstractions of theory, ontology and epistemology have to be translated into a practical research question with appropriate research techniques and practices." While the level 1 builds up on the analysis of documentary sources, namely legislation texts, in 2 and 3 levels the main aim was listening peoples' meanings and experiences of SE through "thick" descriptions (Merriam, 1998). Following this goal, qualitative methods seemed to be the most appropriate way to encourage participants to talk about their intimacy and school practices as well as to tap into their own understandings about the nuances of such a sensitive topic, which led me to choose focus group discussion and individual interviews.

As many other works on sexuality (Allen, 2011; Kehily, 2002; Measor et al., 2000; among others) and previous projects I have been involved in (Fonseca et al. 2014), the combination of methodological resources in what Fonseca (2009) called a "composite methodology", leads to a greater diversity of social interactions, putting in evidence different issues and information about how to think on SE. In line with Hedges (1985:71) "the two techniques (focus group and interviews) are best used together in the same project because their respective strengths and weaknesses can complement each other". This methodological underpinning positions the qualitative researcher as an "interpreter" (Bogdan & Blikien, 2010) who is encouraged to openly listen to people's views and to recognise their critical contributions to research. Researchers are, then, enable to enter young people's social worlds and gain an "insider perspective" of their meanings (Araújo et al, 2001; Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Elley, 2008). Furthermore, giving voice to a variety of groups leads the

researcher to reach multiple, contextual and non-generalisable conclusions from one setting to another.

Therefore, I attempted to articulate the methodological resources with previous research aims and levels, as shown in Table 3, where the aims are more specified:

Table 3 - Methodological options for each research level

Methodological resources	Aims
Level 1: Political	
Document analysis (legislative texts; statistical data; newspapers)	Map SE meanings within national and local educational policies
Bibliographic review	Inform SE practices and youth perspectives on the basis of previous academic research
Contact with NGOs	Contextualise the topic through civil practices
Level 2: School	
Document analysis of school policy and curricula	Characterise study localities Understand schools' perspectives on SE Define thematic priorities of SE curricula
Interviews with teachers	Reach teacher's perspectives on SE practices within citizenship context and how they perceive contemporary youth
Field notes	Keep a record of non-taped conversation and reflections
Level 3: Youth Stage	
Individual Interviews	Capture individual experiences on SE and intimate/sexual lives
Focus groups Discussion	Understand the collective construction of sexual knowledge and the way gender and power relations interfere on it

Drawing on Table 3, the relevance of each method to researching sex education and to this study in particular is presented below. Their actual implementation is discussed in a latter section about the study operationalisation in each school.

3.1. Focus Group Discussion: Creating multiple lines of communication

Focus groups discussion (FGD) with students was used as an exploratory method that enables my familiarisation with young people's language about sex education and

sexual rights, as well as “enables them to collectively control and direct modes of inquiry” by being aware of the issues that are under study (Elley, 2008:78). As Overlien, Aronsson and Hydén (2005:334) indicate, the social interaction among the group members gives “the moderator the opportunity to study the process of collective sense making and to learn the language and vocabulary used by the participants”. FGD minimise the control the researcher has in the gathering process. Participants’ agency to produce a “collective meaning” and “contextual knowledge” is what distinguishes FGD from other techniques and methods, even from group interviews (Allen, 1999; Frost, 2003; Wilkinson, 1999). It is the explicit use of the group’s interaction as research data that turns it:

“ideal for exploring people’s experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns” since it “allow participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary” (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999:5).

Though, while in market research, where focus groups were first used, the focus was determining consumer trends, in cultural studies focus group discussions are a possibility of building social knowledge (Bohnsack, 2004). This focus on interaction and language analysis raises some practical and theoretical implications for incorporating focus groups in the design of educational research projects that should be taken into account.

First, it is important to highlight if the relationship between participants has impact in the way knowledge and interpretations are produced, and going further, if groups are just the sum of the parts or exist by themselves (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987). An important idea regarding this point was discussed by Hydén and Bulow (2003:308) about whether

“the participants in focus groups interact as members of an aggregated group, a distinctive (small) group or as individuals who temporarily share a situation that focuses their cognitive and visual attention.”

Different groups’ constitutions achieve different levels of knowledge, as well as different social groups, if the method is used for that purpose. So, if participants

represent various distinctive groups outside the focus group, or just represent themselves as individuals or if they act as members of the group, topics will be differently negotiated and reproduced during the encounter. This approaches groups in two different ways: the group as a collection of individuals or as an entity in itself. In this study, Watts and Ebbutt's view (1987:31) on focus groups appears as relevant to think groups as an entity in itself that cannot provide results that are "representative of, or generaliseable to, a population group as a whole."

On the other hand, agreeing with this impossibility of generalisation, Terenshenko (2009:83) in her work based on focus groups considers that "meanings and interpretations are not produced in group themselves but are represented and reproduced by individuals with similar values and beliefs who take part in discussion". This leads us to Bohnsack's (2004) point of view that coming from the same "interpretative community" is the essential condition for a deep discussion and shared reflection over a topic that goes beyond the level of social representation. This feeling of belonging provides a secure and more relaxed environment (Punch, 2007) and a social support to talk about sensitive or risky topics. My interest in studying groups' influences on individuals' meanings about sexuality and intimacy led me to ask for groups who had pre-existed relationships based on friendship or, at least, are chosen by themselves (Kitzinger, 1994). I was aware that pre-existing groups have pre-existing structures and dynamics that might compromise the way discussion goes. Moreover, groups provide an essentially *social context* that must be contextualised and understood "as examples of particular sites in which data, and hence explanations, are grounded", not removed from the situations in which occur (Wilson, 1997:212). This brings me to the issue of power relations again.

For feminists FGD help create safe spaces for more equally balanced and democratic dialogue, not only between researcher and researched but also among participants, since they can take control of the interaction and, in some way, of the direction of talk. Therefore, I believe that, as Wilkinson (1999: 64) suggests, focus groups offer two key essential features in feminist research:

First feminist research utilizes a "*contextual method* that is, it avoids focusing on the individual devoid of social context or separate from interactions with others. Second,

focus groups are a relatively *non-hierarchical method*, that is, they shift the balance of power away from the researcher towards the research participants.”

Because of these features, focus groups offer a safe environment in contrast to the intimidating and scary interaction sometimes found in face-to-face methods (Madriz, 2000). This dialogical relationship raised concerns about the confidentiality which led us to think if focus groups could be employed for the discussion of “high-involvement topics”, such as sex talk and intimacy (Överlien, Aronsson & Hydén, 2005). These authors suggest FGD can be used not only for low-involvement topics and mainstream groups, as market research employment makes us think, rather they can give us ‘deeper’ insights and be seen as a ‘less intrusive method’ to be used in this setting. Here, there is an apparent incongruence between the use of this method and high-involvement topics considered “sensitive” (Allen, 1999) and even “risky” (Elley, 2013), in particular because of our notions of in-depth methods and “private voice” (Wilson, 1997).

“At a first glance, [...] our intuitive notions of in-depth are often linked to intimate dialogues or intensive contacts over time, which are in stark contrast to the multiparty encounters, involving ad hoc constellations of participants that characterize focus groups” (Överlien, Aronsson & Hydén, 2005:333).

So “intimate dialogues” are apparently put in question in focus groups’ public interaction due to peer pressure and social constraints. Moreover, in FGD participants take the lead in what Wilkinson (1999) designates a *shift of power* from the researcher to participants, which contributes to greater openness to talk about personal issues. A Macedo (2012: 192) states:

“This method gives the possibility to explore the dynamic interactions and richness of dialogue” and “leads to the construction of *extended thought* because it allows the individual to transcend the subjective approach to reach a more objective thought, within specific locations of power.”

These characteristics make FGD particularly seductive for research with young adults as well as the possibility of collecting a big amount of data in less time.

However, it is important to bear in mind the influence, pressure and the “performance” that participants exert over each other highlighting gender as an issue.

Within this approach, this study draws upon the potential of twenty-four focus groups discussion to develop deep research about how young people are debating specific issues and to demystify the idea that dyadic interviews are the only method to talk about intimate topics. Therefore, this format suited a social constructionist study framework in that participants were explicitly encouraged to talk and react to each other’s point of view, developing a critical eye on the subject is under discussion.

3.2. Individual Interviews: “It is not simply a conversation”

In-depth interviews proved to be very useful in generating data from both practitioners and young people involved in this study. I found it especially good to discuss teachers’ views, feelings and opinions since they felt freer to speak about school and policies than if they were with other teachers. It also appears to be very appropriate to talk to students about intimate subjects. If interviewing is apparently a conversation, it is also an instrument of data collection with specific schedule and intentions. In order to be successful it requires specific skills and sensitivity from interviewers to hear and, simultaneously, guide the interviewee towards the scientific searching. Thus, an interview is “not simply a conversation” as Oakley stated (1981; 1992:33). Instead it took a prominent position in feminist research and gender studies on sexuality by allowing girls to freely talk about sexual relationship without being in front of others. This opportunity empowers them which attribute a political nature to interviews, as well.

However, this new meaning required a change of the “masculine paradigm” in which the process of interviewing seemed to be shaped during long time, focused on: objectivity, hierarchy, instrumentalism, science and facts (*ibidem*). Changes in the role of interviewer were needed, especially by bringing a relatively intimate, friendly and non-hierarchical relationship (Madriz, 2000). This relaxed environment would be more beneficial to establish a relationship with the interviewees.

Another important issue about the way I conducted interviews in this study was the significance allocated in revealing individual subjectivities and singularities to explore the way young people make sense of lived experience and express their emotions. Their experiences emerge here as sources of heuristic knowledge (Fonseca, 2009; Hey, 1997). Influenced by my background in conducting life histories/biographical narratives I retained some of its features, notwithstanding the methodological difference with interviews. As Araújo (2000b) points out in her pioneer study with life histories with primary school teachers, the greatest focus is to keep the presence of subjects in the process. Therefore, the interactions collected from “social micro-relation” (Fonseca, 2009) within the biographical encounters were prized as insights to thinking and conducting interviews in this study.

In line with this argument, during the whole process the singularities of participants were highlighted without being generalised among all Portuguese and English youth, teachers or schools.

4. Conducting Research: Facing the context glitches and dilemmas

Similarly to research design, the operationalisation of the study was also scheduled in three stages. Firstly, I reviewed the literature at the global and local levels (policies, legislation, statistics, and news), as well as a set of scientific thesis, projects and researches on similar topics. From this overview, along with previous involvements in the field⁸⁴, I arrived at the concepts of sexual and intimate citizenship, intimacy, choice, diversity and equality and how these themes inform sex education practices and youth perspectives. These conceptual tools informed the design of qualitative methodological instruments as already mentioned. At this moment, it was also

⁸⁴ The background work which inform this study and my epistemological stance was developed in previous projects carried out with young people in the University, such as: my Master (2009) where I used *equality of condition* as the conceptual framework to support the implementation of an educative research-action project within the community of Rome; or my participation as researcher in the project ‘Sexualities, Youth and Teenage Pregnancy in the North-East of Portugal’ (2007–2010), funded by the The Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia – FCT), which has focused on young people’s sexualities, teenage pregnancy and their relation to education, among other research.

essential to contact renowned researchers on sexuality and gender, and gather information from bodies such as FPA (both in Portugal and England) and Sex Education Forum, whom I interviewed to contextualise the research problem. The second moment involved the selection and access to the research settings (cities, schools and people) through discussions with my supervisors about possible places, methods and samples. In a third moment the fieldwork was marked by data collection. The research design was operationalised during September 2011 and December 2012, for a total of a period of 15 months.

Table 4 - Timeline of fieldwork, data transcription and NVivo analysis

FIELDWORK	
England	
Sept 2011 to Dec 2011	Contacted schools; Made personal contacts with researchers, professors and schools' teachers; interviewing professionals from NGO'S ⁸⁵ ; literature review; meetings with the School A
Dec 2011 to Feb 2012	Collected data in the School A
Feb 2012 to May 2012	Collected data simultaneously in both Schools B and C Started the contacts with Portuguese schools
Portugal	
May 2012 to July 2012	Collected data in the School D
Out 2012 to Dec 2012	Collected data in the School E
Data analysis	
Oct 2012 to June 2013	Transcriptions
June 2013 to October 2013	Nvivo analysis
Oct 2013 to Dec 2014	Writing up the thesis

The study was conducted in two regions of both countries: East of England and North of Portugal. Within these two regions, the research was developed in four particular counties: Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire (EN); Porto and Braga (PT). Given the difficulty, already discussed, of finding similar cities and realities and the commitment of ensuring that my sample was manageable in terms of time, data collection and further analysis, the selection of cities was based on the geographical

⁸⁵ This material was not analyzed in this thesis.

proximity with the city where I was living at the time; students' heterogeneity; easy access and personal contacts.

Walford (2001:151) says "however difficult access may be it is crucial that obtaining access is not seen as the primary consideration in selecting an appropriate site". However, due to time and financial costs the access became the primary consideration in my study. Therefore, these four counties were not previously selected but rather represented the five schools where research was conducted.

Instead of funnel gently from the general to the particular, following a zooming movement that goes from the macro-level to the micro, this study departed from particular cases to contextualise the problematic of sex education at a cross-national level. So, this section gives an account of the necessary steps to conduct the fieldwork across two countries highlighting how places were selected, how the access to schools was negotiated and how data was collected. Due to particularities of each school, the approaches to the field are presented separately.

4.1. Framing the Study in England: Schools and samples

In England, I was initially interested in conducting the research in Cambridge and London, since its heterogeneity could bring great insights to debate and I was hosted at the University of Cambridge. I was looking for state secondary schools from middle and working-class areas that had sex and relationship education (SRE) in curriculum.

The process of selecting schools followed several steps: 1) an impartial choice of schools by the system of external standardised assessment of students that compare schools according to their performance (League Table); 2) research on schools' characteristics through the Department for Education websites and Ofsted reports⁸⁶; 3) a verification of each school's website to understand their sex education policy and

⁸⁶ "Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. We inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages" (Ofsted, 2014).

program; and 4) school contact of eight schools in Cambridge and London through a formal letter (Annex 1) by the University, an email and a phone call.

After 3 months trying to get into schools, I had no positive answers (the reasons will be detailed later on this chapter) which led me to pressure some personal contacts to help me finding schools. The effort of some professors and researchers suddenly got results and at the end of this process, three schools agreed to participate in the study. These schools were located in two counties from East of England: Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire and were researched at the same time (Dec. 2011 – May 2012).

Just to situate the places, the East of England is one of nine official regions of England which includes the counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk. Its population in 2011 was 5,847,000 and represents 8 % of the population of England and Wales. It is a very youthful area (the median age of the region is 40). In terms of religion 59.7% were Christian, followed by Muslim (Islam) 2.5%, Hindu 0.9%, Jewish 0.6% and Buddhist 0.4% (ONS, 2012). Regarding ethnicity, 91% of population declares itself as 'White'. This area has always been a rich area of England based on wool and textiles industries, and more recently presents high rates of employment, especially in business research and development expenditure (ONS, 2013).

- **School A**

School A is a secondary school plus sixth form located in a village. It is an *outstanding* academy with an average of 2000 students (Ofsted, 2011). Based on low number of students eligible for free school meals it can be considered a middle-class school. It also seems to be ethnically homogeneous since only a very small minority of students is from other ethnic backgrounds than "White British" (DfE, 2013). It seems to be a highly successful school (very well positioned within *Table League 2011*) concerned not only with the academic excellence achievement but also with the development of confident and mature pupils. The "high levels of respect and appreciation of difference", the system of sanctions in case of bullying and the call for

equal opportunities highlighted in the Ofsted report raised my expectations around school's agenda on sex education and gender gap.

These expectations became slightly blurred after the first meeting with the Deputy Principal. I got in contact with this school through a personal contact from the Cambridge Faculty. In that meeting, the PhD's aims were introduced, as well as the data I wanted to collect. Since the beginning I understood that sex education was a sensitive topic for the head teacher's Christian background. Half of our meeting was passed discussing sex education meanings and the role of school versus family in this matter. School A concentrated sex education teaching in one "collapse day" per year, where invited external professionals talk about contraception, pregnancy and sexual transmitted diseases in accordance with students grade. They have also daily meetings with tutors that sometimes are used to share personal problems related to sexual issues. This meeting was useful to understand the schools' main concerns with health and safety and to settle the boundaries of data gathering.

My initial request of doing 6 focus groups discussion (2 male; 2 female; 2 gender mixed) plus 10 interviews (5 girls and 5 boys) with students from Year 10 and 5 interviews with teachers was immediately denied due to the large amount of work that this age group had in the preparation for GCSE exams. As students from Year 10 were too busy and the Sixth Form level was in its first year of operation, I was only allowed to meet students from Year 9 (aged 14-15). Moreover, there was no chance of interviewing students. This demand forced me to re-design the research, as previously mentioned, once it limited the scope of the study and my action became dependent on parents' consent. Therefore, I returned to school to handed personal documents such as house bills, identity card and faculty letter.

However, the most difficult requirement to accept was when the Principal proposed to be present during FGD in order to facilitate and accelerate the process (in doing so, parents' consent was not needed). The FGD's schedules were also under analysis and scrutiny and some issues about homosexuality and sexual activity were removed. This approach led me to think that talk about sexual issues with young people is only accepted after school legitimates it. In addition, FGD had to be conducted during school-time, only in one session (45 minutes) each. I felt frustrated

but I had no option. I was getting behind my schedule and it was the only school interested so far. These decisions raised ethical and personal questions (further detailed) and enlightened the difficulties professionals have in understanding what researchers are doing.

After overcoming the obstacles to finding classes to work with, six focus groups (2 male, 2 female and 2 mixed) from the same class were collected, plus five interviews with teachers (from citizenship and science subjects, a tutor and the Deputy Principal). I did not interfere in students' recruitment that was done by the responsible teacher. Other requirements were set aside: the possibility of observing classes and circulating in school; asking personal details to students (parents' occupation; religion; if they were covered by free meals or pupils premium) or checking students' files. The data collection in School A took place during two months distributed by weekly meetings.

As this school did not allow the conducting of interviews, the fieldwork had to be extended to another different school (School B) to be completed.

- **School B**

Aware of the difficulties of conducting a study within secondary schools in England (tight school time; parents' consent; sex education as a sensitive topic) we found sixth form schools (Year 12/Year 13) as the easiest solution because students would have more spare-time and could freely participate without parents' consent. Even if sixth form schools have no practices of sex education, this decision extended the study sample to older young people (students aged 16 to 18) as previously mentioned.

School B is a state co-educational sixth form college situated in the Cambridgeshire county. Again this "outstanding" school is committed "to providing a learning and working environment free from discrimination, harassment or victimisation", where diversity and individual choice are respected (Ofsted, 2007). The first contact was made through the Guidance Office⁸⁷ responsible for supporting and

⁸⁷ Tutorial guidance is designed to enable students to make wise choices, discuss career plans, assess their own progress and seek help if problems arise. Weekly tutorial period will enable students to

offering tutorial counseling to students. Its professionals were very comprehensive and committed to helping but they could only facilitate the access to students. They proposed that I send an invitation (students' sheet – see Annex 2) to all students with some information about the project, the interview's contents and ethical issues, such as: the use of recorder, the anonymity and confidentiality. School B has no SRE policy or any mention about sexual support on its website, although I have seen some flyers about sexual abuse, harassment and LGBT bullying in the Guidance Office.

Initially only two girls replied to my invitation. After being interviewed I asked them to share the information with some friends, especially that I was a young researcher and there were no personal questions. But this request seemed to have no effect. Again, I had to be helped by a personal contact. I met a teacher from that school through friends and asked him to invite his students to participate. He could not influence them, but presented the project and its relevance for social research. This new approach to students had impact and nine students (2 boys and 7 girls) emailed me to arrange a day to be interviewed. All interviews took place at school.

- **School C**

The third and last English school was located in Bedfordshire. School C is a 13 to 19 mixed comprehensive school (secondary and sixth form) that covers an average of 2000 students. Again, it can be considered a middle-class school on the basis of its low percentages of pupils eligible for free meals (DfE, 2013). According to Ofsted report this academy is a “good” school that prepares students well both academically and personally for future success.

This school was contacted through a personal contact (a professor from the Cambridge University). All teachers and staff made me feel very welcome and were concerned about tackling all requests. As the school was one hour away from the city I was living, the teaching school administrator and I tried to manage all meetings in the

acquire information, develop skills and engage in discussion about a wide range of issues such as career planning, higher education application, financial planning, time management, study skills and health issues (Schools website).

most effective and quick way. She distributed both interviews and focus group discussion by three days (one per week – six hours each), so I did not have to travel too much. In an effort to collect similar data from other schools, I collected 6 focus group discussions with students aged 14-16 (from Year 9 and Year 10), 10 interviews with older students aged 16-18 (from Year 11/12) and 5 interviews with teachers from several areas, such as: Sciences, Religious Studies, Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). Students and teachers were recruited by the teaching school administrator according to my request for heterogeneity and parents' consents were solved in one week (See Teachers, Head-teacher and Students informational sheet Annex 2, 3 and 4). The meetings took between 45 minutes and one hour each. Even though the school made the effort of concentrating everything during the same days and gave me great conditions, such as an individual and very quiet office with clear acoustics, water and lunch, it was hard to be effective the whole time. Students and teachers followed each other with no break or interval between them, which put the quality of research at risk. At the end of those days I felt very tired but I collected everything in half of time of School A. There was some time to circulate in the corridors and teachers room and I attended an Assembly session about sex and relationship education. These Assemblies occur twice or three times a year about specific topics. SRE is one of them. Unlike other schools that frequently invite external professionals, School C opts to promote *peer education* with older students who had had training on SRE. These "peer mentors" provide sessions to students from lower year and seemed to be more interactive through role-plays and "break ice" strategies that make students comfortable. These "peer mentors" were interviewed as well as some students that attended those sessions.

4.2. Framing the Study in Portugal: Schools and samples

During my stay in England I started to contact Portuguese schools in order to accelerate the process. I was interested in finding one urban school and one school from a University City. Due to my previous work in several secondary schools in the North of Portugal the contact was easier and faster than in England. Based on these

aspects, two urban schools from Porto and Braga counties were chosen. Both state secondary schools are mixed and very well positioned in schools' ranking. Similarly to the East of England, the region of North of Portugal consists of five counties: Viana do Castelo, Braga, Porto, Bragança e Vila Real with a total of population of 3,689,682 people (INE, 2011) and represents 35% of the national population.

- **School D**

This secondary mixed school from 13 to 18 is a middle-class school located in Porto County. I was familiar with this school because of previous collaboration in other research projects and I knew its commitment with students' school achievement and well-being. In terms of sex education, this school implemented important measures in line with the national law (nº60/2009), such as: promoted teachers' training on sex education; created an office to support students (Gabinete de Apoio ao Aluno); organised guidelines and textbooks on SE for all school' levels. They gave me access to this information as well as to students' files, so I could check their backgrounds.

The first meeting in School D was in May 2012, one week after I returned from England. The documentation (formal letter from University of Porto – see Annex 5; and Students' informational sheet – Annex 2) was previously been sent and signed by both sides and we just had to plan the work. The request for volunteering participation was very well accepted and the school decided I would go to classes from Year 9, 10 and 11 to introduce myself and the study, in order to encourage and interest the students. This was the most democratic selection process among schools. Students were excited and asked questions about topics or anonymity aspects. They were alerted to the fact our conversation would be recorded and used only within the PhD. Initially I recruited more participants than actually needed because I did not want to leave anyone out and I knew that ultimately some of them would not attend, as our meetings had to be given in free periods. All students had to give back signed parents' consent (Annex 6) as they were under 18th. Over three months (October 2012 to December 2012) I collected 6 (2 male, 2 female and 2 mixed) focus group discussions with students (aged 14-16), and 9 interviews with older students (aged 15-18) in weekly meetings In

addition, 5 individual interviews were done with teachers (the Head teacher, Sciences, Informatics (ICT) Philosophy and the school nurse). The meetings were conducted inside school in different rooms and times.

- **School E**

School E is a secondary mixed school (age range 13 - 18) very well placed within the ranking of Braga County. It is an urban School constituted by rural areas and house estates that counts an average of 2000 students. Most students came from middle and low socio-economic families (an average of 30% of families has only the primary school or less, and 25% of students are supported by schools' funding). Braga used to be a very traditional and catholic area, but it has witnessed great changes over the last years. Recently, the capital of the county also called Braga was considered the youngest city in the country to which recent (30 years) state University has much contributed in order to captivated new people. This brought "new" life and social demands to the whole county.

Within school's commitments of "promoting and enhancing citizenship rights" and "respecting the diversity of human relationships", the school founded a Group of Health Promotion that was composed by several professionals with different backgrounds (teachers of Philosophy, Science, Sport and Citizenship subjects, a nurse and a psychologist) and was responsible for the implementation of sex education in school. The study was carried out with these professionals who recruited students from their own classes and also participated through individual interviews. Teachers took the students' informational sheet (Annex 2) to the classroom in order to catch their attention and talked to parents as well. I had to wait three weeks for parents' consent (Annex 6) so the research could start. There were no students from Year 9 to work with. So, six focus group discussions with students 15-16 aged (Year 10), ten interviews (5 girls/5boys) with students 16-17 aged (Year 11) and five interviews with teachers (Philosophy, Sports, Sciences, Psychology and the head teacher) were held in a private office during school time.

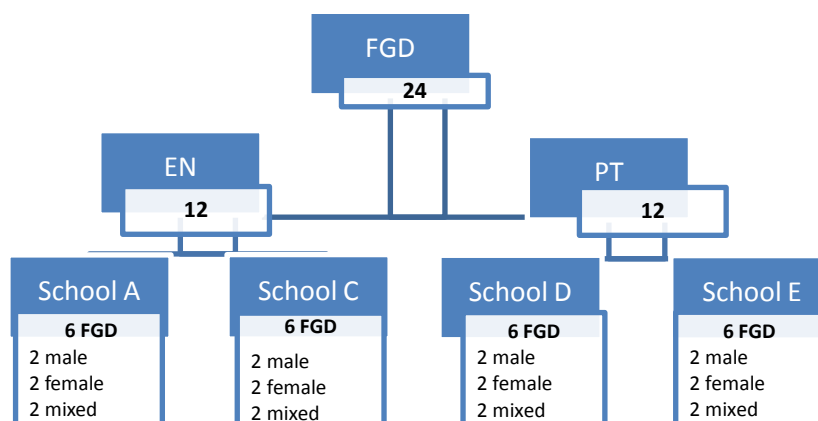
In order to make the most of my time, the school tried to book all meetings on same days. This is a decision that can be methodologically criticised but it has to be interpreted as a fieldwork's demand. The data collection took over 3 months (October 2012 to December 2012) with weekly meetings.

In sum, despite my initial intention of finding major differences between cities and schools in order to cover a heterogeneous group of young people and school practices, selection was mainly dependent on schools' access and interest in participating in research.

4.3. Conducting Students' Focus Groups Discussion: "It's hard to say my own thoughts"

One hundred students (forty-eight boys and fifty-two girls aged 14-16) contributed to this study in twenty four focus groups organised by gender to see if there were variations in the ways in which different groups discussed and performed. That made up a total of eight female-groups, eight male-groups and eight mixed-gender groups. This decision had to do, as said before, with the need of taking into account the interaction between participants (Agar & MacDonald, 1995).

Figure 4 - Focus group discussion per country



Focus group discussion lasted from forty-five minutes to one hour and comprised of 3-6 young people who were recruited in different ways by each school. Only in

School D were students personally invited by me to participate in research and groups based on friendship, while in English schools students were selected according to teachers' choices and opinions. Believing that, as Hyden and Bulow (2003:307) argue "the way in which the interaction is organised has consequences for the analysis": recruitment processes expressed different schools' cultures between countries and had different impacts in the way focused interaction happened. In line with this, English groups could be defined as "*focused gatherings* or encounters" of people who discuss a given topic during a limited period of time, and Portuguese ones were seen as "*small friendship* and *pre-existed* groups which basically had a life of its own" (Goffman, cit in Hyden & Bulow, 2003:307). Then, it was easier to establish a "common communicative ground" (*ibidem*) among Portuguese young people than with other groups that just shared a common focus and status, as being students from the same school and Year.

Interestingly, the relevance of having a relationship among participants as a condition to provide a relaxed environment to learn and communicate about sexuality was brought to discussion by some English students, such as one girl from a female FGD in school A:

Farah: It becomes awkward when you're not friends... I'm friend towards everyone here but if there were 3 people like, girls, but I wasn't very close with them I'd still find kind of very hard to say my own thoughts... just because you don't really know how they're like, so you don't really know what their thoughts...
(FG/A/Female 1/EN)

Groups started with a quick, reassuring explanation of what the project was about, what I was going to discuss with them and what I wanted them to do. I also explained that the session would be taped but that anonymity was guaranteed in order to make them feel comfortable. To avoid concerns about the subject, the most sensitive topics such as intimate relationships, sexual diversity and sexual activity were left to the end of the schedule when students would feel more relaxed. Focus groups were designed in two parts. The first section was focused on young people's perceptions, experiences and expectations on sex education in school, and the second

part was around some open-ended questions about their perceptions on intimate rights and sexual relationships. Table 5 lists the main themes (see Annex 7 of focus groups' schedule).

Table 5 - Themes for focus group discussion

Themes	Questions
1 st set of questions – Sex Education in schools	
Perspectives and Experiences on Sex Education	Have you already had lessons on sex and relationships (SE) in school? Can you describe those sessions? How did you talk about those topics? Was it the same for boys and girls? How has the information learned in SE affected your thinking (the way you relate to each other)? Should schools offer sex and relationship education? Why or why not? If you were the head-teacher of school what would you add? What do you think is missing in SE programme you had?
2 nd set of questions – Youth Sexual Citizenship	
Sexual Citizenship	How much control do girls and boys have on relationships and over their own bodies? What choices do boys and girls have that would help them have control on their relationships? What are the main constraints and fears young people feel, concerning sexual relationships?
Intimate Citizenship	Do young people view loving and sexual relationships differently? What does a relationship based in equality between partners mean to you? Do boys and girls you know, feel autonomous to talk about their bodies, emotions and relationships?
Reproductive Citizenship	Why is the use of contraception important? What do boys and girls of today, who are encouraged to invest in a professional career, think about pregnancy and marriage? Who should decide how and when is the right moment to get pregnant?

Based on this schedule, I began firstly by asking simple questions about their age, name and school year, followed by sex education issues. As sex education was legitimated topic by school knowledge, their social representations about it emerged naturally. I let group members discuss the theme as freely as possible without much intervention despite being aware of the social and peers' pressure that emerged on

that “artificial hothouse society created for the purposes of the research [...] that obliges participants to take account of other people’s views in framing their own responses”(Hedges, 1985:72).

In fact, in all groups some students were nervous about uttering views opposed to those of the rest of the group. I tried to minimise this anxiety by giving attention to those students feeling silenced. It is important to notice here that this fact goes beyond the gender question, and was also felt within single-sex groups, emphasizing the power of masculinities and femininities in regulating gender boundaries.

On the other hand, if this peer pressure apparently makes groups as less suitable for handling “sensitive or private topics”, as previously presented, most students of this study considered group discussions a good way to learn more about each other, as the following excerpt shows:

I:	How would you provide sex education?
Neil:	Probably do it in smaller groups, I think people would be better.
Henry:	Groups like this it’s ok.
Neil:	You can talk about it...
Ian:	Maybe like 10 people...

(FG/C/Male 1/EN))

The relevance of balancing power relations was considered methodologically important to my decision of conducting mixed gender groups. Unlike some feminist concerns that young women would not feel empowered enough to speak about sexuality in front of male peers, both girls and boys of this study enjoyed to being together within groups to learn and listen to the “other side” of the same story. As Allen (1999: 60) acknowledges in her study about the gap between sexual knowledge and young people’s sexual practices, a benefit of the mixed gender session was the “agency it appeared to offer girls”. However, it has to be said that in some mixed-gender FGD girls were shyer, waiting for boys’ answers (further developed in Chapter 6). Rather than this being a focus group in which I, as researcher, only studied them, young people utilised the research context as an opportunity to examine each other as well. In this sense, FGD emerge as a “regulatory form” of sex talk (Farquhar, 1999).

4.4. Conducting Students' Interviews: "If we have here a place where we can talk like this"

Along with focus group discussion, thirty-eight individual interviews with students (twenty two girls to twelve boys) were collected with students aged 16 to 18 years old. The initial purpose of meeting the same number of girls and boys was not realized due to the apparent less male interest in collaborate. As students were volunteers the majority of them seemed to be self-confident and spoke assertively. They were also more aware of their sexual rights and of schools' potential in stimulating sexual knowledge. These interviews were conducted inside school during free-periods and were open-ended and informal.

Initially students' interviews were thought to cover groups' silences and to go deep into some questions that were left outside the scope of FGD, due to time and social constraints (peers pressure, shame, and embarrassment). Students remembered former practices of sex education and had space to speak about their own intimate experiences placing sex, rights and gender differently. These interviews went beyond focus groups' schedules (See Students' Interviews schedule – Annex 8), by including questions about:

- deep understandings of SE, its messages, its relevance to young people's sexual and intimate relationships, its failures and their recommendations for improvements;
- the way young men and young women perceive sexual and intimate rights within their gendered relationships;
- the discussion on sexual diversity, sexual activity and safe sex, as topics that were removed from groups' schedules due to schools' impositions.

4.5. Conducting Teachers' Interviews

Teachers' interviews (twenty: five men and fifteen women) sought to promote insights to contextualise sex education provision and sexual knowledge production.

They were focused on how teachers construe sex education in schools' curriculum and policies, in particular within citizenship frame, as well as how they perceive young men and young women within contemporary loving and sexual relationships. Within these aims the study covered several key stakeholders from schools such as teachers with different backgrounds (citizenship education, science, moral, sports), tutors, psychologists, school nurses and head teachers. The schedule was divided into five parts that indicate teachers' political, pedagogical and social approaches to sex education and youth citizenship (See Teachers' interviews' schedules in the Annex 9 with prompts and probes).

Table 6 - Themes of teachers' interviews

Topics	Teachers' Questions
Political Agenda of Sex Education	Should SE be a responsibility of an educational institution, such as the school? Is SE an important educational concern in the policies of your school? In addition, how important do you think SE is within the political and educational debates?
Sexual Knowledge	How do you think young people interpret the knowledge they get in school? Are young people well informed (STIs, rights, contraception)? In your opinion, what are young people's greatest needs?
SE provision	Could you explain to me how SE has been implemented in this school? What are the contents of SE in your class? In your opinion, what issues should be discussed? Who else participates in the implementation of SE in your school? Do you feel any resistance to the implementation of SE? Have the students been involved in the SE programme designing?
Youth Relationships	What do you think are the current changes regarding young people's private lives? How do schools deal with these changes of values and generations (new boys and girls)?
Sexual Citizenship & Intimate Citizenship	How much control do girls and boys have on relationships and over their bodies? What are the choices do girls and boys have regarding to their relationships? How do you understand the teenage pregnancy rates? What is school/education able to change regarding to this topic?

It was interesting to feel that at beginning teachers were nervous with the fact they were being recorded and took a while to express their own views beyond formal

and institutional positions. Therefore, their spontaneity and relationship was mediated by the moment the tape recorded was turned on or turned off.

Table 7 summarises the number of participants by methodology and school in order to display an overview of the 158 participants (138 young people: 24 Focus Group Discussion and 38 interviews; and the 20 interviews with teachers):

Table 7 - Number of participants by method in each school

Country	School	Sample by Methods						Total
		Nº of participants in Focus group discussion's		Interviews to students		Interviews to teachers		
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Male	Female	
EN	School A	12	12	-	-	1	4	6 FGD with 24 students 5 Interviews to teachers
	School B	-	-	2	9	-	-	11 Interviews to students
	School C	13	11	5	4	2	3	6 FGD with 24 students 9 Interviews to students 5 Interviews to teachers
PT	School D	11	16	4	5	1	4	6 FGD with 27 students 9 Interviews to students 5 Interviews to teachers
	School E	12	13	4	5	1	4	6 FGD with 25 students 9 Interviews to students 5 Interviews to teachers
	Total	48	52	15	23	5	15	A total of 138 students and 20 teachers

4.6. The Process of Data Analysis: Transcription and content analysis

This section focuses the process of data analysis. The 158 interviews and 24 FGD were analysed through *content analysis* that combined pre-defined dimensions (such as experiences, messages and impact of sex education) with emerging ones (such as sexual bullying, media, marriage) employing a grounded theory approach to data analysis. I personally transcribed all FGD and the majority of interviews, to enable me to capture the silences, participants' intentions and the non-verbal communication. Due to the huge amount of data I gave some of data to be transcribed that I subsequently read and corrected.

This process was very difficult and challenging. The transcription is the most tiring and monotonous stage of research, although it is simultaneously very heuristic because of the opportunity it promotes of hearing the voices again. It took over nine months to finish the transcriptions. It is a time to disentangle the singularities from overlapping discourses, to discover and listen to each of them, not forgetting the dynamics of the whole. The dynamics of groups discussion is so intense to the researcher that frequently is more concerned with the pace and cadence of the process itself than with the information that is being collected. The main aim is to generate discussion and to assure that everybody participates in order to construct a collective knowledge. In this sense, there are always details that escape us. Only in the transcription process it is possible to have the necessary calmness to hear it and make visible all the voices. Increasing the difficulty and the length of this procedure, the language also presented itself as a problem. Sometimes it was difficult to understand the words and to find equivalents in both languages. I transcribed data in each language and then translated the excerpts I wanted to use in the thesis to English.

Both manual and computer-aided software (NVivo 8) were utilised for the analysis. I clustered the data into themes according to the research questions and feminist interpretative framework. The use of software was just helpful to organise the material. As Oduro (2010:111) points in her thesis "there is no software package that does the analysis by itself, rather they just aid the process". The whole process of transcription and analysis lasted 8 hard months that resulted in more than 1500 pages

(see the Categories of analysis in the Annex 10). All the transcriptions were code framed as well as the name of all participants and schools (see the information about participants in the Annex 11). This process took over four months until being completed.

5. How Difficult is to be a Researcher on Sexualities?: Facing the “moral suspicion”

Research about “young people” and “sexualities” in the context of “schooling” is a complex, controversial and fearful task. Understanding the combination of these three elements constitutes a great opportunity to grasp the resistance around sex education and the troubles I had to face during the fieldwork. This research is often entangled in more problematic issues because of the nature of the topic. As Allen (2011) points out, the construction of sexuality as a sensitive issue renders research a means of dealing with perceived risk. Despite this bias attenuation, in part because of the explosion of work in the field over the last three decades, Plummer’s feeling remains relevant:

“The study of sexuality was marginal to the key academic disciplines and threatened to marginalize those who ventured onto the landscape. The person who elects to work in the field of sex becomes morally suspect” (Plummer, 1975:4).

This “moral suspicion” about researchers on sexuality was truly felt in this study and the whole process of getting access to the fieldwork, as well as in being recognised within the academic community itself. I felt a little misunderstood by some academic colleagues who looked at the topic with curiosity, but somewhat astonished by my interest in choosing to work on that. This surprise stemmed from the idea that it was a matter of common sense, known for all and permanently present in life, contexts and individuals. Comments such as “Oh, how interesting!”, “Really?!” were accompanied by a face of distrust followed by a quick attempt to turn it in a scientific object with the question “But what are your hypotheses?” and the clearly surprised “Why have you

chosen these two countries?" This latter was firmly felt in England mainly by their lack of knowledge of Portugal situation in the panorama of teen pregnancy and STIs.

Moreover, besides the fact it is considered a more subjective area far from pure sciences, the discredit was reinforced by my own scientific area and context: education. Despite the pioneer and deep national (Araújo, 2000; Fonseca, 2009; Macedo, 2009; Magalhães, 2005; Silva, 2010) and international work (Arnot, 2006; Allen, 2011; Britzman, 1999; Kehily, 2002; Lees, 2000; Louro, 1999) of educationalists around gender, women and sexual issues, this area is still being dominated by sociologists and psychologists. This was very clear in the conferences' scopes about this topic. In most academic meetings on sexuality, gender and citizenship (such as ESA networks)⁸⁸ I was frequently the only person studying school sex education. For many, it was an outdated theme. In its turn, when I attended educational conferences, such as ECER⁸⁹, I also felt I had to highlight the role of school as the main focus of my thesis in order to be seen as an educational research. Therefore, the construction of an educational and sociological study was suspicious and contested by people from both areas.

This was mainly felt during my stay in English research centers when most of my colleagues (with backgrounds on sociology and psychology) tried to include me after I explained the project by saying "ah, that is a sociology of education project." Despite I agreed this is a study framed by sociology of education glance, I simultaneously felt I was betraying my identity on sciences of education as a distinct field of knowledge. I only realised that distinction when I was asked in Cambridge "Who else from the field of education, without having background in sociology, works on sexuality and sex education?" The effort to answer this question led me to understand how difficult was to find out my place within academia.

Still within academic context, I was confronted with another interesting aspect that made me feel "suspicious": the fact I was not involved in feminist or LGBT activism. This shows the politicisation of academic work on gender and sexuality, as well as its ultimate goals to cause change. This difference was again mainly felt in

⁸⁸ European Sociological Association

⁸⁹ European Educational Research Association

England where I attended several seminars on gender and LGBT meetings in order to understand their struggles, concerns and claims. Within these debates mainly focused on sexual rights, sex education in school occupied an invisible place, as if it was a lost cause.

Beyond these contexts the choice of studying sexuality seemed suspicious to broader society as well. In my social circles, the trivialisation and irrelevance of the subject as an important part of education was confirmed by comments such as “Oh, Sofia is doing a very interesting research, it is about SEX!!” “I wouldn’t mind to develop a PhD on that”. Despite I reinforced the fact it was focused on school sex education and how people are learning and discussing wider concerns with relationships, feelings and rights, the attractiveness for the topic showed how sex continues to raise attention, curiosity and embarrassment, and rarely it is recognised as a scientific issue.

Back to the fieldwork of this study, the uncomfortable feelings regarding this topic were clear during the school’s contacts. As previously described, gaining access to the research sites was not easy. I had two starting apparent problems: the topic itself and the context of research. There were many aspects that enhanced the difficulty of accessing sexuality research in schools, the most relevant were:

- **Talking to minors** under sixteen: The initial choice of students aged 14-16 constituted a problem since it implies parents’ consent and a major responsibility from schools. Gaining access to participants became increasingly difficult.
- **The class time:** I had to meet students during the class time because the students do not have free time. Teachers did not want to give me time of their own classes. (This problem was just found in England).
- **Schools are saturated with research:** in recent years schools have become a privileged educational research setting to undertake studies. The result was that schools are currently inundated with requests from researchers, post-graduate students, and interns. Teachers and students are under the political and academic spotlight, feeling observed and controlled.

- **Personal Contacts:** Without personal contacts with a school developing sexuality research in this environment is incredibly difficult. This was reported by many English researchers based on the time they needed to secure school participation (Measor et al; 2000; Alldred & David, 2007). Again Allen (2011:22) identifies this as one reason for that the “increasing marketization of education which has encouraged schools to regulate and safeguard their reputations more stringently” in order to “establish a brand of academic excellence”.

This happens in part because of the contemporaneous understandings and perspectives on sexuality and young people. The way they are socially constituted influences the way we are going to be seen and accepted by others. Therefore, it seems that frequently young people are still understood as vulnerable with uncontrollable wishes, rather than as “conscious” sexual subjects that make “responsible” decisions. In its turn sex education in schools is still perceived, by many, as dangerous and an encouragement to sexual activity. From this perspective, sexuality remains being shaped by discourses of privacy, shame, guilt, danger and pleasure which hinder the research in schools. Again Allen (2011:21) states:

“To make sexuality the explicit focus of research project contravenes notions of it as a personal and embarrassing phenomenon. Researching sexuality brings this discomfort into sharp relief in ways many schools would prefer to ignore.”

This stance reinforces our view that there is a visible attempt of «schoolarization of the body» in schools (Louro, 2000) and a rational emphasis of «the mind» and of academic subjects in detriment of personal and social education (Santos et al., 2012).

6. Ethical Concerns of Research

Ethical concerns are another essential issue to take into account during the methodological practice, especially when one is researching with minors about sexual and intimate issues. Thereby, not only the sensitive area of my study but also its

audience required high ethical standards. Issues around informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity were paramount. Concerns with the ethical relationship between researcher and participants justified the great focus on the process. Ensuring respect for participants and being prepared to deal with possible doubts and secret revelations raised within conversations were also undertaken in this study. Due to ethical rules, some of this information was not used in the thesis in order to guarantee teachers' confidentiality.

Research' ethics started from the early onset before contacting people. Several formal procedures were required to have access to schools. First, this process entailed contacting the head teacher and health/sex/citizenship teacher and providing them with written information about the research and the Consent Form. These documents invited schools to participate and established a formal understanding between schools and faculties.

In England the study was undertaken under the clearance from the Faculty of Education of the University of Cambridge through a formal letter presenting the project's aims, methods, intentions and giving an assurance in writing of ethical issues. Moreover, attached to these letters I sent the required Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) essential to work with children and minors according to the executive non-departmental public body - Disclosure and Barring Services (Gov.uk, 2014). This document was explicitly required only by one school (School A), in addition to other personal information such as proof of my address in Cambridge, my passport and that I was enrolled in both faculties of Porto and Cambridge.

In Portugal this formal relationship was established through letters from the Faculty of Psychology and Sciences of Education from the University of Porto. In School D this access was easier since there was already an ethical trust between us due to former partnerships in other projects. Thus, it was not just a question of having personal contacts but also of maintaining ethical commitments. Also in the first meeting with schools from both countries I gave them a factsheet about the PhD project highlighting the issues to be addressed in interviews and FGD.

Secondly, once consent forms were signed by the head teacher, student recruitment commenced. But first, I had to ensure some ethical issues were dealt with

before working with people. In case of minors students teachers and parents' consent were needed. In these consent forms, I outlined what the conversation would entail and made clear the whole conversation would be recorded, transcribed and used within academic context. The same document also stated students were free to leave at any moment or to not answer if they were not feeling comfortable. This information was set out in the students' factsheet I sent some schools in order to recruit young people to collaborate in research (See Annex 2). This ethical process was negotiated differently with the school A, as previously mentioned. In this site consent was signed by the head teachers responsible for students in school context, since she had the right to consent to students' participation in activities that were in line with school's activities.

Thirdly, before conducting each FGD or interview I reminded students again about the same issues project's topics, use of different names, that they were volunteers, and that the whole conversation would be taped). This consent was given verbally. Although this was a concern of mine, anonymity was not a big issue for the students involved in the study. Some of them just urged me to carry on without wasting time on that. Comments such as "we have nothing to hide", "I have no problem with giving my name" echoed throughout the project. There were no objections to the use of recorder. Most of them forgot it in the course of our conversation. I was also aware of the need to give back to the schools the results of the study as well as any help they need (meetings and lectures with both students and teachers) to compensate them for their time and their trust in sharing their most sensitive experiences, views and expectations. I was promised to send schools my thesis and any related publications.

Despite my caution in relation to ethical concerns, some constraints in terms of confidentiality, anonymity and volunteering of the participants were imposed.

- **Confidentiality**

Often group discussions and interviews were interrupted by teachers or other students entering the room (mainly in school D and school A). These interruptions

distracted and embarrassed students, breaking the atmosphere of trust. Students moderated their responses and stayed quiet, while I had to hold back from asking about personal things. When this happened during teachers' interviews, they frequently started talking with each other about other issues or even joined the conversation. Sometimes these new elements lingered in the room because they had to solve urgent things that they could not do elsewhere. This situation often left me very uncomfortable and concerned with ethical issues. The worst position was the one taken within school A where the head teacher insisted on being in the room. This was a difficult situation to manage because I had no alternative. Regarding the effects her presence had on young people, I felt students seemed very confident and feel at ease to speak. After the first minutes, I believe they almost forgotten her, and started discussing some "forbidden" topics such as sex. Therefore, I realised I felt more constrained, embarrassed and controlled than them. Ethically this school's rule shows how it is difficult to people in the fieldwork understand our role as researcher, mainly the ethical cautions and guidelines we have to follow. It can be said the primary concern of protecting respondent's safety and confidentiality was jeopardised.

- **Anonymity and volunteering**

Another ethical issue on which I had no control was the procedures taken by schools to select participants. As previously described only in one Portuguese school (school D) did students have the chance to organise themselves based on their own criteria (friendship, common interests etc). In the other schools, students and even teachers were selected by those considered "privileged agents" (head teacher, health and citizenship teachers) who consented to schools' collaboration. This decision is an ethical research concern because it meant I did not have access to teachers' decisions. However, I assume students' anonymity and their will to participate are dubious. In fact, in both English schools and one Portuguese (School E), teachers had a list with the names of participants which made it impossible for them to participate anonymously. Even with the use of pseudonymous throughout the whole work, their teachers knew who collaborated. Unlike other schools where parents' consent were given to

teachers, in the School D consent and parental permissions were given to me, which increased their commitment with the project and the confidentiality of their names before the school.

Moreover, the fact the selection was made by teachers also led me to think how far research on schools allows participants to be volunteers. I was confronted with this issue when many students arrived at my office without being clear about what they were doing there, what they were going to talk about, who I was, etc. I understood it was difficult for them to say no to a teacher, even if they did not care too much about the topic. In other cases, they had to choose between doing the survey or having regular lessons. For most of them, the former seemed to be more interesting because it was an unknown and a break in the routine. These conditions hinder the development of research.

Sometimes teachers also interfered in the constitution of groups. This was the case of both English schools where students from FGD were randomly selected without having any connections to each other. Although I did not sense that students felt too embarrassed, there was some lack of trust between students, and at times they seemed more concerned about causing impression among each other than if they were friends. In Portugal teachers just selected the classes where I presented the project and in the school E they proposed some groups inside each class.

- **Self-reflexivity in the production of knowledge**

All these procedures require a committed and heuristic engagement that kept under surveillance my personal bias by ensuring the constant application of “reflexivity” in the research process. It is necessary to be constantly aware of how personal values, attitudes and perceptions influence the research process. Within qualitative research and interpretative methodology it is even more important to be reflective, insightful, and sensitive to language and open to others’ experience. This awareness is central to produce a heuristic knowledge and subsequently the heuristic methodology (Fonseca, 2009). Regarding research’s ethics, self-reflexivity is a

preeminent skill to understand how I situated myself in relation to those whom I researched. As Luttrell (2010:4) defines:

“Ethical reflexivity is about making the research process and decision making visible at multiple levels: personal, methodological, theoretical, epistemological, ethical and political. Knowing why we make the decisions we do is what lends our research validity and credibility.”

It is an on-going process of self-monitoring and surveillance that brings the researcher into the research process. They are no longer seen as an instrument of data gathering and analysis but are central in the way the reality is understood and interpreted. Thus, the methodological process, the research choices and the paths I took cannot escape researcher’s subjectivity, social backgrounds, politics orientation, and relationship to the field site. As Ramazonoglu & Hollland (2002:149) also stated:

“You should commit yourself to a particular methodological strategy, once from the start, your project will incorporate your own values (whether explicitly or implicitly), your theory (your assumptions about gender and power), your ontology (what you believe to be the nature of the aspects of gender/power that you have chosen to study) and your epistemology (what will count as authoritative knowledge of gender).”

Only with this self-reflexivity it is possible to overcome the control the institution has over how the researcher conducts research. In this sense it becomes important to briefly mention the fact I was a foreign in England, young and woman researcher studying a sensitive topic with young people and the possible influence of these dimensions on data collection and interpretation.

Conducting research between two countries, since one of them is my native country, created some differences in how the process was embodied. Interestingly, if the fact I was Portuguese aroused curiosity among English students (“Why does she want to compare us?”), for schools it posed a problem. “What is she going to do with these records?” was the main issue that came to my mind every time I was rejected by a school. Thus, the fact I was a foreign researcher places me as a stranger between the “exotic” and the “dangerous”. Also for the Portuguese students my experience abroad became an aspect that captivated their interest. After I entered the educational

settings I did not feel differences in terms of relationship with participants, although I am aware my participation with English groups and interviews was more limited due to linguistic limitations.

Also the fact I was a younger female researcher had some influence in the way the data was collected and interpreted. Again, I was in an ambiguous position: on one hand the fact I was young seemed to influence students' will to collaborate, on the other hand to talk to adults this was not so rewarding, since some teachers did not give me so much credit. Thankfully this impression changed after the meetings.

The gender issue was also significant in talking about sex education, sexuality and relationships with both boys and girls. My request to talk to male teachers and male students was a bit controversial at the beginning because one thought it would be very difficult having boys wanting to join the research. Albeit in a smaller number, I contacted 63 boys (see Table 7 above) and felt they had no problems with sharing their experiences, doubts and thoughts. Actually, some girls seemed more nervous, which might indicate the greatest difficulty they have in speaking publicly about themselves. However, I think the age allied to gender also influenced male interest on this topic. This gender bias reinforces McRobbie's (1991:70) observation that "women are generally cooperative, good at talking and willing to give up their time for you".

In addition to these personal features, there were two processes in which self-reflexivity was essential: in the data collection and data analysis.

In terms of data collection, special attention was given to the power relations (between researcher and participants) in the production of knowledge. Acknowledging that power distribution in research creates "unequal power relations that make exploitation possible", Ben-Ari & Enosh (2013:422) propose a need for a "dialectical approach" and a critical stance that "bridge these gaps through egalitarianism and empowerment of participants". This concern deeply rooted in feminist research gives greater attention to the promotion of an "ethics symmetry" and "reciprocity" in research (Christensen & Prout; 2002; Young, 1997). In line with ethical reflexivity, this study tried to negotiate unequal distribution of power in the production of knowledge through the creation of an "ethics of communication" (Macedo, 2012:136) that it is focused on making the data speak.

Again Oakley (1981) identified several procedures for not objectifying the subject, in particular women, that we, as researchers, must take into account in order to conduct proper interviews. From all of them, I highlighted an interesting issue that emerged during the fieldwork when I was confronted with questions interviewees asked. Being able as interviewer to answer the personal and research questions asked back by participants allowed me to rethink the interview as a dialectic relationship that involves both sides. As the same author emphasised “the way I responded to interviewee's questions probably encouraged them to regard me as more than an instrument of data-collection” (ibidem:48). It comes as a strategy of mediating the power relations within the methodological processes. Similar to what Tereshchenko (2009:114) felt in her work with Ukrainian young people “I felt that I was myself exposed for ‘researching’ – for viewing, questioning and analysis by my ‘subjects’”.

Also in terms of data analysis I was concerned with being reliable and careful in relation to data translation in order to ensure that it was accurately interpreted. As Ramazonoglu & Holland (2002:118) pointed out, “translation and interpretation of data are processes of knowledge production in which researchers are accountable for the understandings they produce.” In addition to the usual difficulty of qualitative research to translate voices, experiences and subjectivities, I put in a huge effort to translate the meanings of the other language and age (slang and local expressions were common, mainly because of the topic that was being discussed). Thus, as said in the beginning, one the greatest block to knowledge production within comparative research is the difficulty of translating a concept and meaning from one cultural context to another without losing valuable information (Oyen, 1990). In this sense, this study was tightly conditioned and limited.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Going back to the beginning of this chapter, the initial question remains: Is it possible to conduct a trustworthiness research on sex education, sexuality and young

people in the school context? After this long journey it became clear that designing and implementing a research is not just dependent upon the researcher's decisions but also from local and institutional contexts. As Ramazonoglu & Holland (2002:149) indicate "the institution has control over how you do research. This context will structure expectations and possibilities for your project." Indeed, that was what happened. Sometimes I felt I was losing the control over my own research by constantly adjusting and redesigning the project towards the fieldwork's needs and conditions. This concession to institutional timings taught me to better understand how to negotiate leeway within research processes. Therefore, our space in the research site and our findings are very much dependent upon this agreement and compromise between both researcher and the research institutional demands. The fluidity of the process led to the modification of the methodological and theoretical approaches in order to be accepted and approach the research object.

This chapter began by highlighting how research was conceived, conducted and organised. I assumed the commitment of developing a social constructionist research project based on interpretation and feminist concerns. With this focus on participants' subjectivities, experiences and views, it is necessary to acknowledge the researcher's subjectivity as well as inherent bias in sampling and analysis. Taking into account these biases led us to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and to "(inter-) disciplinary dialogue" among methods and sources (Tereshchenko, 2009). The interpretative bond between ethical, theoretical and epistemological approaches seeks to rethink a critical and contextualised project around a "theorisation of the subject" (Fonseca, 2009), breaking the paradigm of production and objectivity.

Bearing these conceptual frameworks in mind this chapter moved to explore the research design, setting out the different stages and levels of analysis, framing the research question, the structure of argument and the logic of empirical research. At this point, the chapter describes the advances and set-backs in the definition of research design giving emphasis to the contact and entrance in the research sites, as well as to choice of methods and techniques. Locating this study in the interpretative tradition, interviews and FGDs were preferred for data collection, emphasising an inductive style of data analysis and focusing on lived experiences.

PART II
DEBATES, PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF SEX EDUCATION
TEACHERS, SCHOOL PRACTITIONERS AND YOUTH

CHAPTER IV

THE VIEWS OF SEX EDUCATION TEACHERS AND PRACTITIONERS

EXPERIENCES, RESISTANCES AND VALUES

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I discuss the role of sex education practitioners and teachers within school agendas and, more broadly, within the sexual health and citizenship scene. I explore here how sex education practitioners' beliefs and perspectives towards young people's sexuality and intimate relationships might hinder or enhance the provision of sex education and, consequently, students' access to rights. In addition, I discuss their experiences with sex education (SE) in order to outline the pedagogies employed in the research sites as examples of current practices of sex education both in Portugal and in England. Here, particular attention was given to two different dynamics structuring the teaching and learning of sex education: the generational and the intra/inter gender interactions within the classroom; and the relationship between the teachers and the hierarchical structure of school's investments, resistances, and demands.

This interest of bringing teachers into discussion starts from Iyer and Aggleton's (2013:41) idea that "school-based sex education should not be simply seen as a 'reliable, neutral and regulated source of information', but as inevitably influenced by teachers' values". As follows, teachers' values might result in gendered messages and fail to adequately account for students' needs. According to Iyer and Aggleton, only a few studies have examined how these processes affect gender and sexual knowledge. Indeed, most Portuguese and English research on sex educators has extensively focused on teachers' perceptions about curricula, programmes, and pedagogical

strategies (Buston et al., 2001; Ramiro & Matos, 2008); on teachers' attitudes and knowledge towards sex education (Reis & Vilar, 2004; 2006); or has shifted to other educational contexts such as youth services (Elley, 2008), family (Vilar, 2002), or even peers (Dias et al., 2007). Beyond these analyses, Kehily's (2002) work in how sex educators' sexuality affects their pedagogic practices and consequential implications on policies, is important. Additionally, Ferfolja's (2007) observation on how teachers negotiate their sexual subjectivities at work also has significant implications.

Despite these studies' strong contributions, analyses concerning how teachers' personal views on sexuality and youth affect their willingness to teach sex education have only rarely been covered. Therefore, contrary to the common perception of teachers as "holders-of-knowledge," I am particularly interested in acknowledging practitioners' as people with specific subjectivities, values, and approaches to sexual issues, and in how these aspects influence teachers' teaching of sex education in school (Kehily, 2002b).

Bearing this in mind, in this chapter, I try to provide some pointers to "re-imagine" a more effective school-based sex education, grounded on twenty in-depth interviews with SE practitioners and teachers from four⁹⁰ secondary state schools from both countries. It is organised into seven different sections: first, these practitioners are introduced in terms of gender, background, and school subjects. This brief presentation contributes to an understanding of how sex education is organised in each school and to identifying different intentions behind sex education messages. These introductions are followed by a second section about practitioners' perspectives on youth sexuality and supposed sexual rights. At this point, the interviewees were asked to share their perceptions and values on the way young people are living their intimate relationships, how they are dealing with the increased multiplicity of sexual offers and choices, and how they interpret sexual health and reproductive rights. The aim here was to understand more about the people responsible for delivering sex education, in order to find some links and coherence between their personal positions and their practices as professionals.

⁹⁰ This chapter is only based on four schools (A, C, D, and E), as School B was just a complement of the School A when collecting students' interviews. Teachers were not interviewed in School B.

I follow this section by a third part, this one focused on practitioners' views of school-based sex education. Then I move my attention to the school context by highlighting the several significances and meanings sex education has to these practitioners. Their perspectives led me to situate the discussion around sex education between two agendas: the agenda of school achievement and the citizenship agenda, which is discussed in the fourth section. These understandings come to frame their experiences and practices of sex education in a fifth section that explores the pedagogical practices, modes, and strategies employed in the schools of this study, as well as the main contents that are conveyed.

Moving from the schools' stances to the classroom, in the sixth section, I focus on practitioners' gender perceptions and attitudes towards students. These insights were very significant when analysing how teachers present SE messages differently to the boys in contrast to the girls. Finally, a last section is devoted to underlining the resistances and difficulties teachers find when trying to formulate SE policies, projects, and ideologies into practice. Throughout the whole chapter, the singularities and commonalities between both countries and the four schools are accentuated.

1. Sex Educators' Gender and Contexts of Sex Education Delivery in this Study

Before I turn to sex educators' perspectives, it is important to know who these educators are: their backgrounds, as well as from which knowledge field they come. I conducted five interviews in each school, for a total of 20 individuals (15 teachers, 3 head teachers, 1 nurse, and 1 psychologist). The selection of participants was the schools' responsibility after I told them I was interested in contacting all those who were involved in the practice of sex, health, and citizenship education⁹¹. In addition to the views of practitioners who were directly involved with SE activities, projects, and programmes, the views of head teachers also appeared as relevant in understanding

⁹¹ Individual, in-depth interviews lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour, were recorded, and were conducted inside the schools.

the schools' priorities and the conditions they promoted for settling and outlining the implementation of SE.

The first aspect worth mentioning is the participants' gender, as Table 8 presents:

Table 8 - Sex Education teachers and practitioners by sex and school

Schools' staff	England				Portugal			
	School A		School C		School D		School E	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
SE Teachers	1	3	2	3	1	2	1	2
Health professionals (nurse/psychologist)						1		1
Head teachers		1				1		1
Total	1	4	2	3	1	4	1	4

Table 8 shows how the gender marker is still high with a difference of 15 women to 5 men. This gender difference cannot be generalized, but it might reinforce Paechter's (2000) idea that being a sex educator is often a "feminised" role, which fact explains the feminized place that frequently seems to be attributed to SE within curricula. More than three times as many women held the post as men in line. This factor was evidenced among the head teachers. The three who participated in the project were women while in School C, the male head teacher could not manage the time to be interviewed. This apparent detachment of the male head teacher aroused my attention to the way in which teachers' gender might influence their positions towards SE and therefore, its implementation and agenda.

Another important aspect that should be taken into account when analysing the participants' characterization is the subject in which sex education is taught in each school, since teachers' backgrounds likely influenced their views and experiences on teaching sex education. On the other hand, this information gave some clues about the guidance and messages around SE in each school of this study that we will further develop throughout the chapter. Therefore, as Table 9 shows, great heterogeneity exists between who is responsible for covering sexual issues:

Table 9- Sex Education teachers by school subject

Schools' Staff	England				Portugal			
	School A		School C		School D		School E	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Teachers	Tutor (Sciences)	RE	RE	PSHE	ICT	Sciences	Sport	Sciences
		Sciences	Sciences	HSC/CD		Philosophy		Philosophy
		Sciences		Tutor (Sciences)				
Health professionals						Nurse		Psychologist
Head-teachers		Sciences				Sciences		Sciences

Subtitle: RE – religious education (the understanding of the religious and beliefs); PSHE – personal, social and health education; HSC – health and social care; CD – child development; ICT – informatics and computing technology

While in England, SRE is mainly covered by pastoral (through religious education studies and personal, health, and social care education teachers) and biological stances (by sciences teachers), in Portugal, it appears to be delivered within a wider range of curricular areas, such as sports, philosophy, and sciences. Interestingly, in England even personal, social, health, and education (PSHE) and religious education (RE) teachers had graduated with degrees in the sciences, which fact reveals a clear dominance of biology as the main curricular context of SRE. Moreover, there is a prevalence of RE in addressing this topic that does not exist in the Portuguese schools who have a strong participation from philosophy teachers. These specificities led us to interpret English messages as being more focused on moral modesty and biological facts, while in Portugal they appear to be more concerned with the body and mind dimensions of sexuality and relationships. These factors reveal different foci and inherent guidelines in both countries that result in different attitudes being expressed towards sex education.

In addition, the presence of “tutors” in England cannot be forgotten for its importance to students’ counselling, monitoring, and support, which mainly are about

personal issues. This institutional role does not exist in Portuguese schools. Every morning, each tutor meets one group of students from different school years to discuss school problems and to clarify issues related to exams or other difficulties students might have. In this context of informal conversations, sometimes sex education emerges.

Health professionals, along with teachers, also stand out as key providers. All of the teachers in the study mentioned their support, but only in Portuguese schools was I brought into contact with them as part of the team teaching. This occurrence might be based on the Portuguese SE law requiring a deep articulation between schools and local health centres, which requirement increases the health practitioners' engagement. In turn, schools' health services in England (like Brook⁹² clinics) involve professionals in medical positions attending students during individual appointments.

This brief presentation of sex education practitioners might indicate how the schools of this study explore sexuality through multiple perspectives and subjects. On the other hand, it questions the notion of SE's status within curricula. As I discussed earlier, in the chapter about policies, concerns about "soft-non-national curriculum subjects" and cross-curricular SE have been at the fore of educational debates since the 1980s. Marked by political set-backs and advances that have remained until today, with particular attention to the period in which the study was developed, between the end of 2011 and the end of 2012, the status of sex education within curricula is strongly dependent on the significance of the subject in which it is taught. Therefore, the fact that sex education is being carried out, apart from sciences, by humanistic subjects and that there still exists a notion that some subjects are mainly for female teachers, might be at the root of the apparent irregularities of its practices.

⁹² Brook is the UK's leading provider of free and confidential sexual health services and advice for young people under the age of 25. Brook is a trading name of Brook Young People. According to their website, "It is the only UK charity dedicated to supporting and empowering young people to take charge of their own health and to make informed, active choices to enjoy their sexuality without harm" (Brook, 2014). (See <http://www.brook.org.uk/>)

2. Sex Education Practitioners' Views on Youth Intimacy, Sexual Diversity, and Reproductive Health

This section explores the beliefs of the 20 participating SE practitioners and teachers towards youth's relationships and current ideologies about sexual rights, as conditions for the practitioners' willingness and engagement in teaching sexual issues.

Buston et al. (2001) argued that elements relating to feelings, values, and attitudes generate the most concern for teachers' remaining neutral. Aware of the difficulty of sustaining this neutrality, Kehily (2002:2) stated that learning practices are informed by "the identity of the teacher, the hierarchal structure of the school and teaching process". In this sense, teachers cannot approach sexual and gender issues in a decontextualised manner, putting aside their own cultural and moral values, as well as their students'. Instead, researchers of sexuality and sex education must recognise that the sexual knowledge conveyed at schools is clearly cut-crossed by individual perceptions that cannot be underestimated. Regarding teachers' involvement, also Elley (2008:54) claims:

"it is essential that all those involved on SRE understand the social, cultural and contextual influences within which it is taught and the barriers to its delivery [...] because it is a contested area of social life".

Therefore, in this chapter, one seeks to illuminate teachers' beliefs and perceptions in order to understand if they affect their decisions in the classroom to divulge or withhold information about the students' sexual and intimate rights (Iyer & Aggleton, 2013). Even though sometimes this connection is not evident, my interest was to highlight some underlying issues in teachers' pedagogic stances in relation to sex education. Within this aim, the interviewees were encouraged to reflect upon some issues considered "socially problematic," such as the way young people are currently living their sexual and loving relationships (in particular, the fact that they are supposedly being sexually active earlier); the increasing multiplicity of sexual offers and choices (mainly how they face homosexuality in schools and in broader society),

and their rights to current access to reproductive health information and support (how they deal with teenage pregnancy).

- **Youth's intimate lives: "We've lived through quite a period of decadence"**

The "sexual culture of students" is definitely changing (Kehily, 2002). This perception in the academic milieu was the starting point for talking with teachers about youth's intimate and sexual relationships. Most teachers stated that young people are becoming sexually active earlier through casual and, frequently, dangerous sex without taking into account the emotional consequences of this behaviour. They considered youth's loving relationships to be "fragmented," short, and changing quickly because these young people are just focused on experimentation, which focus gives room to pressures, risks, and abuse. These teachers seem to have found that the students have a lack of affection and emotions, and an exclusive concentration on bodies and physical pleasure. More of the teachers from England than from Portugal were concerned with the way youth currently understand relationships as it is following described:

Evelin: It is just about fancying people and it's very short term. "- I want gratification, I want to feel good, I want you to make me feel good." That's the end of it.

(Head teacher, School A, EN)

This excerpt shows how one head teacher looks at young people as selfish and authoritarian in achieving their wishes and sexual impulses. Young people are thus described and seen as living in a distorted and hedonist culture of sexual claims, only focused on the pursuit of pleasure and individual gratification. Therefore, one could say that the majority of SE practitioners from both countries revealed moralistic and pessimistic views about their youth's skills with communicating and respecting each other, with making conscious decisions, being romantic, and being careful. They also are against the central focus sex and body have gained in young people's lives.

The teachers attribute this apparent disconnection between young people's and adults' moral values to the increased "culture of sexualisation" that both media and new technologies have promoted (Attwood, 2006). Indeed, within this influence of media and internet as a strong source of learning sexuality, body and intimacy have gained new shapes. Regarding this some interviewees are referring to the trivialization of pornography on teaching abusive sexual relations, but also to the erotic dynamics of seduction that are currently being promoted to stable relationships as necessary for keeping the "love flame burning", such as girls sending naked pictures to boyfriends; the display of body pictures on Facebook, etc.

In this regards, young people are seen as misled by "images of perfect and beautiful people" (Evelin, school A, EN) developing unrealistic expectations of their partners and of intimate life. For some SE practitioners, girls are looking for rich and powerful men, and boys are just interested in female appearance. Boys are also getting far more body-conscious and demanding in relation to the desirable feminine look. These views seems to approach girls as dependent victims and boys as male chauvinists (Fine, 2009; McRobbie, 2009), seeming to forget the diversity of masculinities and femininities schools are currently facing (Nayak & Kehily, 2008; Pereira, 2012). For teachers, young people are frequently following sexualized images of women, forgetting their age, place, and the time in which they are living, in part because of media and internet access. Youth's values seem to be rooted in a "globalized consumption" (Kehily & Nayak, 2009) of "a hypersexualised culture in which the commodification of sexuality intensified pressures on young people to be sexy, attractive and sexually available" (Alldred & David, 2007:58; see also Fonseca, 2001). These SE practitioners' views portray media and "the celebrity world" as dangerous learning sources of sexuality because they reinforce heterosexual and hegemonic masculine values.

All teachers mentioned peer pressure as the most dangerous influence for boys and girls because it contributes to their losing control over their bodies, their sexual health, and their decisions. The teachers in England even indicated alcohol and drug addictions as massive in this issue as well. The sports teacher in Portugal went further about public displays of affection and said that students seem to be deprived of a

“human values code” based on respect and shame. In his opinion, they do not know how they should behave in public spaces, frequently crossing the boundaries between public and private spheres of life and thereby losing real intimacy.

Along with these views, some interviewees brought out some positive perspectives regarding contemporary youth. If for some, new technologies exposed young people to more risks and contributed to their losing control of their intimacy, for others, the new technologies also brought more information and easy access to help and support sources. For these others, today’s youth seem to have more control over their lives than youth had in the past because today’s youth are freer and have more options and conditions to prevent them from suffering the negative consequences of unprotected sex (contraception). These new conditions bring a new attitude towards sexuality, sex, relationships, and also gender power relations, as was emphasised by some SE Portuguese practitioners. For instance, the school nurse had a very optimistic and confident perspective about young people’s changes in sexuality, expressing her surety that they feel already entitled to openly talk about sexual issues without shame. In her opinion, the greatest change that Portuguese society faces with the sexual revolution is the end of guilt about sex, mainly female sexuality, which she felt had been imposed for many years by Catholic issues and social rules:

Bianca: I think they are living their sexuality in a much more liberated way, unapologetically and much freer... without feelings of guilt or shame... I think they have more freedom in the choices they make, and don’t feel restricted to rigid and moralistic social rules. I think they are overcoming this morality without fears... I think this is a big change compared to previous generations, the question of guilt.

(Female nurse, School D, PT)

About this issue, a female philosophy teacher (School E) showed more doubts regarding this apparent “girl power” and sexual freedom than the nurse. If she agreed girls were more confident, autonomous, and already concerned with their own sexual pleasure, she also criticized them for becoming sexualised earlier and for becoming more sexually aggressive than boys. In this strong excerpt, she argued that girls are forcing new relationships that are focused on the *objectification* of the other as a distorted representation and meaning of equality:

Amália: Changes on girls' values are upside-down. Girls from today say: "I rule my sexuality, I control my body... I am equal to boys." But then, they have no control over themselves in relation to another aspect when they say: "I want to do this and my partner must to give in, if he likes me, because I have my wishes." There is violence from women to men. It is not only from the male side. Nowadays, there are girls much more sexually aggressive than boys. It is something that we must know how to get controlled too. It is great to feel desire, but we must know first if the other is willing to have this moment with us. They say: "the boy I can use him as I want" – this is a sexual aggression. "- He is my sexual object! I want to have pleasure! Mine is first than his pleasure. I say no when I don't want, and yes when I want to say yes. We show we are equal. If they use us as objects, we will use them as well." In my opinion, this is wrong. (Philosophy, School E, PT)

Along with this teacher, many other teachers disapproved of this female attitude, seeing it as a lack of control. New ideas about masculinity seem also to have appeared, and some teachers are against such "lads' image of casual sex", advocating there are different meanings of sex and love to boys. Actually, again the school nurse stressed that sexual health is not just girls' responsibility anymore, but boys are increasingly concerned with contraception and STIs and not just their sexual performance. This contribution is very important because, according to Iyer and Aggleton (2013:50), "the construction of female sexuality as problematic has also led boys' sexual and reproductive health and general healthcare to be neglected at the school". Therefore, in line with our previous research (Fonseca, Santos & Araújo, 2014) the SE practitioners of this study also observed that some boys are becoming more romantic and some girls, more physical and sexual.

To **sum up**, this section highlighted SE practitioners' views on young people's sexuality and lifestyles. Surprisingly we found no significant differences between the countries, which finding strengthens the evidence that a Western culture of sexualisation exists. Most teachers seemed confused and perplexed with the speed of social changes concerning sexual issues, having some difficulties getting used to the new ways of love and sex. As the head teacher of School A stated, "It's not to do with the teaching of sex education, it's more with our culture aspirations and modern life." Apparently following Giddens' (1992) concept of "plasticity" to interpret new relationships, teachers pointed with visible preoccupation to the casual, hedonistic,

and individualistic aspects as the main features of modern sexuality. Moreover, the interviewed teachers continue to configure gender and sexual relations on the basis of a dichotomy existing between body and emotions, which attitude we believe threatens healthy sexual behaviours and intimate citizenship achievement.

- **Teachers and sexual diversity: “The institutional prejudice is one of our biggest challenges”**

Teachers’ perspectives and attitudes on *sexual diversity* emerged as essential to rethink a more democratic sex education. Despite recent legal and social changes around homosexual rights⁹³ in both countries, the normative presence of heterosexuality seems to remain in the teachers’ culture. In the majority of interviews, the interviewees conveyed an evident assumption that all of their students were heterosexual. All practitioners referred to gender differences, but only three of the teachers from England and two from Portugal spontaneously introduced the issue of homosexuality in the interviews, which fact provides evidence that talking about homosexuality still is difficult. The participating schools in this study, thus, rarely mentioned sexual diversity except when they had to face cases of sexual violence, bullying, and homophobic behaviours. This reinforces Kehily (2002:185) consideration that “sexual diversity frequently presents itself as an issue that teachers are fearful of and find difficult to incorporate into the sex education curriculum.” This apparent “official silence” around “non-normative” sexual behaviours within curriculum and classroom led one to believe that it must still be difficult for a gay student to feel accepted and to be treated with respect in a school context.

Specifically in England, the issue of including sexual orientation in education was strongly marked by Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988), which states that local authorities could not “promote or encourage homosexuality.” This issue was brought to conversation by Vivian, who clearly did not feel comfortable with the issue:

⁹³ Same-sex marriage approval, Lei nº9/2010 in Portugal; Marriage Same sex couples Act 2013 in England

Vivian: The homosexual side of thing is something that... It's not been on anything I've taught myself and I know that it was always the case that you could discuss what it was, but we weren't supposed to promote it in any way.
(Sciences, school A, EN)

Despite this Act was repealed in 2003 it seems there still a lack of communication and teachers' training about current laws. It might be said that there is still a "symbolic power" around this law that has a "silencing effect on individuals and institutions" as Kehily (2002:186) put it. Beyond the recourse to the law as a way of displacing issues of sexual diversity, for most English teachers of this study, the general absent and silencing around the topic happens because homosexuality is still culturally not well accepted by students', parents', and teachers' religions as Jackson said:

Jackson: What is interesting is that, of all the prejudices that we face in teenage minds, the worst and the most prevalent one, is homophobia. Without a shadow of a doubt. Very, very strong! Massively strong! Really, difficult and they just do not get it. It's stronger than Islamophobia. More boys than girls for sure. Some of the things that have been said about them by other boys is shocking. It's not taken as seriously... I mean, I have lads that say things about homosexuals, that if they said them about black people they would be absolutely destroyed. Clearly, it's taken seriously because it's against the law, but it still hasn't engrained itself in the culture of the teaching staff that that is as unacceptable as calling a black guy the n-word. It's institutional prejudice. We've got quite a lot of religious teachers here in this school and that can be problematic for them, because some of the religious ideas in school are strong. Not fundamental, but they are strong in terms of Old Testament beliefs and they have problems with homosexuals.
(RE, School C, EN)

This excerpt is important toward understanding the schools' and the curriculum's "official silence" as an "institutional prejudice" that is also rooted in teachers' practices, mentalities, and communication. It is not just an issue of blaming peers and young people for gay exclusion, but the school itself and its staff end up being in connivance with their homophobic attitudes by naturally allowing "homophobic language" (Kehily, 2007). Therefore, a naturalisation exists of sexualised violence, insults, and discrimination towards the most vulnerable groups, in which women and different concepts of masculinity are the preferred targets. Jackson showed outrage with the high levels of homophobia that did not allow the school community to make real use of the support structures that were being developed. In his opinion, a huge contradiction exists between the way the teachers and the students position

themselves against this issue, and the current “culture of coming out.” Therefore, the “blatant homophobia” and the fact that LGBT people are not treated respectfully leads school to deviate from young people’s needs and to lead them to other support groups such as the Brook clinic; Students Voice; “People People,” or other LGBT organizations.

Interestingly, Patrick, another teacher from School C gave us another picture of the problem. He sees himself as very “limited” in relation to homosexuality, but in contrast to Jackson’s complaints against students, Patrick was surprised and proud of young people’s tolerance:

Patrick: I’m very limited in it, but my observations are this school is very tolerant of homosexuality. I find that amazing.

S: Among students?

Patrick: Yeah! Boys... they’re not bothered in the slightest, they don’t take the mickey out, they don’t make fun out of them. They are very tolerant, and I find that very nice to see because I didn’t think that would be possible.

(Sciences, School C, EN)

These contrasting statements from two interviews from the same school show multiple ways of interpreting the same reality and, simultaneously, highlight how personal expectations and perspectives influence the SE knowledge transference. Actually, although Jackson was concerned with homophobia, looking at students’ and teachers’ attitudes as being very far from his own standards, to Patrick, any tolerance seemed to be good enough, since he had many difficulties dealing with gay people.

In line with this attitude, teachers from both English schools expressed signs of discomfort and embarrassment. Some of them felt isolated and poorly supported even by health professionals, as Liz reported. Once during a contraception session in an assembly, she asked a school nurse to include information about same-sex relationships, and the nurse’s answer was as follows:

Liz: I remember saying to one of the school nurses, who was going to lead a contraception session, “we do need to make sure that we’re giving good information to our gay students,” and she said, “Oh, oh. You need to go to an organization for that.

(RE, School A, EN)

This meets Elley's (2008:54) perception that school-based SE should offer "young people normative heterosexual practices, which accept and reify unequal gender power relations". These SE practitioners' views show some that schools are still not ensuring inclusivity. However, we must note that most teachers agreed that homosexuals' well-being and inclusion should be respected, acknowledged, and promoted by sex education. Thus, I believe the biggest challenge is putting these attitudes into practice. Answering this concern, Vivian said that if she had to speak about sexual diversity, she would start by paying attention to inclusive language:

Vivian: I would probably say something like "somebody you want to have a relationship with", instead of use "boyfriend" and "girlfriend" we use "partner", so that we are being inclusive to gay students as well.

(Sciences, School A, EN)

This issue was also polemic for Portuguese SE practitioners. Despite recent efforts of SE⁹⁴ law to emphasise sexual diversity on teachers' training and SE programmes, teachers still resist dealing with and speaking about homosexuality. This was strongly felt within School D where some traditional thoughts of homosexuality as "unnatural" remained (Fonseca & Simões, 2014). Edite spoke about homosexuality in the following way:

Edite: I do not understand homosexuality very well. It pains me a lot to watch them physically together. I can't say I see it in the same way as when a man is with woman, but platonically and theoretically I understand. It's more the physical relationship that impresses me. I cannot see romanticism in that.

(Sciences, School D, PT)

Although this view is not generalisable to other Portuguese interviewees, Edite gives a rationale for homophobic perceptions based on the light of romantic heterosexual relationships, which shows how stereotypes of dominant heterosexuality and versions of biologic determinism continue among SE practitioners. This heterosexist discourse was clear in her practices as well as in the way she approached students:

⁹⁴ Law n°60/2009

Edite: The fact that they are different doesn't mean they have to be inferior. There was a girl here who wanted to become transsexual. It was horrible because we didn't know what to do with her and how to proceed. So, in the beginning I thought she was very feminine, and I know we shouldn't run counter it, but sometimes I was saying, "You look so beautiful today" so she didn't feel excluded from the class. Then, she started losing those female traces in the way she dressed, for instance, and became more masculine... I love talking about this issue, but I would like to go to someone who could explain it to me. By the way, maybe I will buy some books about it.

(Sciences, School D, PT)

Moreover, similarly to Jackson from England, another teacher from School D was just focused on the homophobic practices among students in school, not recognising teachers' prejudices. Ângela says:

Ângela: I see that [homosexuality] with greatest indifference, but I see the kids, especially boys, and they totally reject homosexuality. In sports, boys don't even want to give hands to each other... That's the problem, it's a physical issue of touching other man. They are blind in relation to homosexuality. When I spoke to them about minorities' rights, I had a student who refused to say "same-sex wedding." It's very difficult to "come out" in schools... Everybody comments. We as teachers also commented and listened others comments in the staff's room.

(Philosophy, School D, PT)

Again, it seems there is a lack of self-reflexivity from teachers about sexual diversity when Ângela starts by saying she is indifferent and neutral in regards to homosexuality and ends with biased comments about seeing two boys or two girls together. Based on her excerpt, students "heterosexual presumption" (Epstein & Johnson, 1998) is not just related with physical contact but also in terms of their access to sexual rights. Against this homophobic criticism on youth, the school nurse Bianca assures that:

Bianca: Most students already deal with it [homosexuality] in a very open and light way... it's a normal thing, it's not a person's choice, it's how they are. So they are like us and have the right to their dignity as well.

(Female Nurse, School D, PT)

To **summarize**, dealing with sexual diversity is still a clear trouble for teachers from both countries. In interviews, teachers' concerns were focused on homophobic practices among students, and we noted a clear difficulty among them to recognise

their own prejudices in relation to homosexuality. Despite the apparent silence at schools, the SE practitioners of this study showed a greater openness to the topic. For instance, the teachers' from England recourse to LGBT organisations to help gay students reveals their consciousness about the situation as well as the strength of social movements in this country. In Portugal, the offer of these resources is not so common, but the teachers are making a clear effort to adjust to new sexual problems in order to give students support and answers.

- **Reproductive health: as a problem or a right?**

SE practitioners consider teenage pregnancy to be one of the greatest political concerns underlying SE programmes. They do not see pregnancy as a legitimate couple's decision, but always as an unwanted, accidental mistake. Most of them believe teenagers are too young and irresponsible to know what having a child means or to be capable of properly rearing children without putting an excessive burden on their own parents who still provide for these teenagers. But it seems that more than a condemnation of teenage pregnancy, the interviewees did not accept nor understand the current maintenance of unprotected behaviours. Taking risks, they, therefore, attributed to the lack of sexual knowledge and the illusion of immunity and immortal perceptions of "that won't happen to me". Suelen from England pointed to three reasons for this attitude: male pressures, alcohol abuse, and social background:

Suelen: There is no excuse for teenage pregnancies... because contraception is so readily available... It's probably three things: pressure from the boy, it's too much drink, so they don't know what they're doing, and random no one would say no. And you find, I don't want to stereotype, some of the children we can actually say "you'll be pregnant". Is their background, they often want a baby and somebody to love and to loves them back, which is never a good idea...

(HSC, School C, EN)

This excerpt highlights how teenage pregnancy is still constructed under gender prejudices that define girls both as *victims* of boys' wills and romantic ideals, and as *dangerous* for having improper behaviours such as drinking too much (Santos, 2014). Within this perspective, girls are seen as incapable of saying "no" to unprotected sex

and of controlling their own health and desires. Moreover, Suelen also maintained the perception of teenage pregnancy as a predictable “fate” of certain social classes, which notion might influence her views on students and reinforce the social stigma against those women who take pregnancy as an option, although we know this option are shaped by life conditions and constraints (Fonseca et al., 2014).

Against this social view, Wilson from School A considered teenage pregnancy not to be necessarily a result of a values breakdown or of broken homes. Instead, pregnancy could be seen as a life project and an ideal of a family that must be accepted, understood, and supported by schools.

Wilson: So, it's always easier to talk in terms of specific cases otherwise, I think you're in danger of becoming part of our right wing press media [laughs], and kind of casting all young people as being their decisions that they make as a result of broken homes. “Young people just looking for some sort of affection unconditionally, blah, blah, blah. They're not cut out to be young parents, so.” I think there will be those who come from big families who will want to become a mother as soon as possible. Clearly if you've got a supportive network, there are ways and means of making that work. It doesn't need necessarily be a disaster, it needn't necessarily be that this statistic is a reflection of a society which is broken in some way, but you know, increasingly I think that's how it's presented.

(Tutor, School A, EN)

Regardless of the different positions, many teachers blame parents for their lack of support and education in this matter, highlighting the idea that school-based sex education is still the only place where these girls can obtain reliable knowledge about pregnancy. Such perceptions bring different experiences of dealing with teenage pregnancy to schools. From observing the SE practitioners' accounts of Portuguese schools, we noticed a few things. Both Schools D and E had an average of one to two pregnant young women per year. Most of them dropped out voluntarily, leaving compulsory education because of peer pressure and social shame. According to the interviews, teachers encouraged them to stay in school by changing and improving their own practices (such as adapting the schedules, work deadlines, exams, etc.). For instance, Eduardo, a male teacher, decided to attend a course on sex education to learn more about how to deal with pregnancy:

Eduardo: I was heading a vocational course where there were two pregnancies, and I felt the need to gain more knowledge and training to address that issue. These students are very special ... and the pregnancy is a result of everything else and maybe if we had tackled it before, they would never have gotten pregnant.
(TIC, School D, PT)

Also in School E, Amália talked about positive experiences with some girls who stayed in school and others who left but have kept in touch with teachers.

Amália: We have been having several teenage pregnancies at school. I had one girl who got pregnant in Year 10 and she's already in the University. She was a great girl. The class included her without any problem. She remained an excellent student after giving birth.
(Philosophy, School E, PT)

Based on our previous research on teenage pregnancy, we know that these successful cases are not very common in Portuguese schools. Frequently, schools propose alternative paths such as “second-chance programmes” or vocational courses directed towards the labour market. We argue that these are “educational drifts” that force young women to become workers and responsible adults for their families, which means that the educational policy towards these young people has not been based on their right to an education, but rather on socially protecting them (Fonseca et al., 2014). Actually, thinking about teenage pregnancy through an educational perspective implies, as Pillow (2004:46) said, shifting from the common allocation of these young women on social policies as “welfare mothers” who are “unfit subjects for education”, to placing them as “educational subjects” (Fonseca, 2009) within a policy for equal educational opportunities, which entails drifts and moral discussions about female sexuality, too.

In England, the practitioners reported their experiences of having teenage pregnancies in schools differently. For Mariah from School A, the possibility of having a pregnant girl walking around in school was seen as follows:

Mariah: I think it would be shocking, I don't think it's something our school couldn't cope with because I think we've got a lot of children here in full body wheel chairs so as far as facilities and staff that could cope with that, I think they could. But I think it would be shocking because it's just never happened. But I'd have absolute faith that people would be very supportive.
(Sciences, School A, EN)

She sees teenage pregnancy as shocking and terrifying. Her statement indicates an attitude of panic but also an aversion to having “big bellies” in schools. This teacher also put these girls on equal footing with disabled people as a way of explaining the supply of existing resources in the school. Like Mariah, the majority of teachers from School A never heard of their school having a case of pregnancy, a fact that they justified by their being a middle-class and well-renowned school. In any case, they did not believe that such girls would come back to school due to peer pressure.

On the other hand, in School C, with a community generally perceived as having a very “poor reputation”, teachers said that they have one pregnant teen per year, but, as Suelen pointed out, these girls are never seen because they are directed to other educational offers.

Suelen: The girls actually leave school and go and get educated elsewhere, and then we send them work, and mark their coursework and things that come back to us. But we don’t actually get involved with the actual one-to-one teaching. When I was at school we had teenage pregnancies and they stayed much later. So you’d have the girls walking round with their bumps, whereas here it is just not known. Never seen them...

(HSC, School C, EN)

This perspective positions the school within the discourse of contamination described by Pillow (2004:62-63) that inscribes pregnancy as:

“an illness and female as the contaminators, to justify the removal of the school-age mother from the school setting based upon the fear that her sexual immorality will spread other students”

Apparently, teachers are not involved in these young women’s educational processes, which fact yields to practices of separation and segregation that might influence the way teenage pregnancy is taught inside SE lessons.

To **summarize**, teachers look at teenage pregnancy as a result of a lack of knowledge and of cautions. For these reasons, SE practitioners often condemn teen pregnancy, believing there is no need for a girl to be in such a situation revealing the continuing pressures of masculine hegemony. In their opinion, practices of unsafe sex are, thus, perceived as a structural problem of social class. Unlike what we have seen

in both countries where schools' teachers try to find other educational drifts for these young women, based both on both schools' reputation and on fears of other students being "contaminated" (Pillow, 2004), most of them believe that schools offer good conditions to maintain students in schools.

The review of teachers' views on sexuality, sexual and reproductive rights gives contributions to looking at the educational context and explores the significances of sex education in the next section.

3. Teaching Sex Education in School: Why it is important

Informed by previous discourses around sexuality, in this section, we highlight the relevance that sex education has for each teacher, school, and, consequently, country represented in this study. Based on SE practitioners' interviews, I organized the meanings about sex education into three groups: as a resource, as a relational promoter, and as a platform of rights.

3.1. Sex Education: A resource

- **A resource of information: equipping students to be safe**

One of the common meanings around SE among practitioners seems to be its focus on "safeguarding," "security," and "risks." Frequently, SE appears as an educational and political tool used to avoid the negative and unexpected consequences of sex, such as STIs, and unwanted pregnancies as Patrick (school C) said regarding to English practices:

Patrick: We've had lots of adverts about AIDS and other sexual transmitted diseases, so all health and welfare is very high in British government.
(Sciences, School C, EN)

The interviewees expressed their desire to ensure that young people have access to “correct” and reliable information about having safe sex. Even when approaching the risks on the basis of abstinence messages, teachers do not want to take the responsibility for young people’s behaviours. Wilson makes clear their role as teachers by explaining that they should give the youth information about contraception, but making the best decisions and choices will be up to the students:

Wilson: If they’re going to go out to take risks, we hope, we can say them, hand on heart, “- well, you were aware of these risks.”
(Tutor, School A, EN)

In line with this thought, Alcina, also, as the head teacher of School E in Portugal, highlighted the relevance of equipping young people with the necessary resources and tools to make decisions:

Alcina: It seems to me, without a doubt, that an informed student is a student that knows how to make decisions. Therefore, they need to know the resources they have and what can be done...
(Head teacher, School E, PT)

This statement positions students as “sexual subjects” and as autonomous agents who sometimes forget the structural constraints that frequently shape unprotected relationships, such as gender power relations and the moral shame of getting contraception, among others. Within this meaning, sex education is crucial to offering support so that young people know where they can go, to whom they can talk, how and where they have access to contraception, but also to give them information about legal responsibilities and moral rights. Regarding this, Jorge (School E) said, “Young people must be educated before making decisions” in order to construct a fundamental basis to growth and maturity.

- **As a resource of sexual counselling and health support**

In Portuguese schools, due to the recent SE law of, all schools were compelled to create student support offices headed by teachers together with health professionals.

This requirement brought another important meaning of SE not only as a means of access to sexual information, but also as an intervention tool to help in “repairing” and solving sexual problems. Within this perspective, sexual issues are still treated as problems, and schools acquire a medical position embodied in individual offices to serve the youth. Edite presented the sexual health office in the following way:

Edite: They can come to the office if they have any problems
(Sciences, School D, PT)

- **Empowering teachers to face the fear**

Another interesting meaning of SE that appeared in Portuguese schools was the power that the SE law and consequently, training have given to teachers. As the head teacher of School D said, “SE training ended with fears that teachers had.” The meaning of this is very important to understanding the change in the way sex and sexuality have been understood in educational contexts. This is because despite the educational political changes that have marked the implementation of sex education, at least they had an impact on teachers’ pedagogies, making them more available to speak about sex. They feel more prepared, open, and interested in SE, which feeling means they are taking a first step for a global change in institution prejudices.

3.2. Sex Education as a Relational Promoter

- **Sex Education compensates for family deficits in teaching and talking about sexual issues**

In both the Portuguese and the English educational agendas, SE appears as a need to make up for a parental neglect of talking about sexuality and sexual health with their children. Frequently, teachers wonder whether SE provision is a schools’ job once they “can be playing against parents” and individual values (*Female teacher, Philosophy, School D, PT*). The significance of this belief brings to discussion one of the most controversial aspects of SE, which lies in the dichotomy of family vs. school.

For most teachers, the lack of sex education in the family context frequently throws the responsibility to the schools (Reis & Vilar, 2004). Some of them were even against the provision of SE in schools, based on the assumption that it is a private matter and the parents' duty. However, they recognise the difficulty that still exists around family-based sex education. Regarding English families for instance, Patrick said they are still framed by Victorian "old-fashioned ideas" hindering adult-teenager relationships:

Patrick: Why should a man be talking about something that's very personal to me? He's never experienced it... so, they do find that difficult. Plus, sex is not talked openly at home in England. It is Victorian, very old fashioned ideas about sex and sex education. It's talked about at home... very rarely! It's talked in school amongst themselves, where they have all these rumours and ideas, which get over-inflated, but talk to a parent or adult is a bit more difficult, for some (Sciences, School E, EN)

Also in Portugal, this parental silence about sex is a real problem and acknowledged by SE practitioners. Amália, a philosophy teacher (School E, PT) called our attention to this resistance when she made a distinction between talking about sex as a mother compared to as a teacher. Though she feels extremely comfortable talking to students in sex education classes, she is nonetheless very embarrassed doing it with her own children:

Amália: I speak much better about sexuality with these kids than with my own children. Because I am their mother and there are issues we don't talk with mothers. But I also use my sense of humor by saying "- I don't wanna be grandmother so soon, be careful." And they say "We won't have that conversation with you. (Philosophy, School E, PT)

This excerpt shows that one cannot just blame families for their silence. Teenagers also have problems expressing their feelings about intimacy with adults. Thus, even those practitioners who think it should be mainly parents' responsibility see school as the only way to ensure that all students will learn and obtain safe information, as Suelen indicated. Together with mutual problems of communication, she even highlighted families' lack of knowledge as a serious reason:

Suelen: I think it needs to be, because I don't think parents will a) cover it in the depth we cover it, and b) the children don't talk to their parents about sex. So, I think it's important that the school goes over and I think the way we do it, with the Science and the emotional aspect is good..."

(HSC, School C, EN)

Therefore, for some practitioners, such as Celine, SE in school appears as a relief for many families who rely on schools' support to teach their children about sexual topics.

Celine: Once a students' mother who worked in the health sector, told me "- please, can you talk to my daughter about sexuality? Because we get along very well, but that question never comes up. We don't talk about that topic, so if you don't mind..."

(Sciences, School E, PT)

The interviewees seemed to understand that school-based sex education is a platform for improving communication and knowledge skills and for closing gaps between parents and children, and, consequently, between generations. This notion was particularly highlighted by both Rosário from Portugal and by Jackson from England:

Rosário: The school as an educational agent of human beings must also works the communication... Communicate with others, with themselves, with their bodies, I think it is important this work to be done. Even because there are lots of parents who don't feel prepared to do it and thanks if school does it.

(Female Psychologist, School E, PT)

Jackson: It's an *in* for them. If you talk to the kids about it, then the kids may or may not go back and talk to their parents about it. So it helps them, I think.

(RE, School C, EN)

Therefore, their opinion the implementation of an effective school-based SE in partnership with families is essential. Jorge even believes this sex education cannot be the sole responsibility of any one organization, but rather a "triangulation" among schools, youth's peers, and family.

- **Get closer to youth and break the silence.**

There is a common concern with the risks and the silence in which young people are learning their sexuality. As Araci said, “Kids cannot even call things by their names.” To counteract this position of silencing and void, sex education emerged as a relational tool to “deal” with and to “get close” to young people. More than an independent subject that exists by itself with a proper syllabus, teachers see SE as a way of interacting, understanding, and gaining confidence with students. In their opinion, it provides a good environment to access youth culture, filling the gap between teachers and students. The following speeches show how this perception was similar in both countries:

S: Is sex and relationship education an important concern for the policy of the school?

Vivian: Yes, because we’re dealing with young people and very much part of growing up is beginning to understand that you’re changing, your body is changing, emotionally you’re changing, and if we don’t interact and deal with that, then you’re not fitting them into the world. So, we need to get closer to them.

(Sciences, School A, EN)

S: Is sex education important to school’s agenda?

Araci: It is important because we are dealing with young people and we know how they are beginning to wake up to life. They are involved in so many different activities in their everyday life, they have so many things on offer, and more often than not, families don’t know what’s happening in their lives. We must create space to know more about them.

(Head teacher, School E, PT)

3.3. Sex Education as a Platform of Access to Some Rights

Besides giving sexual information and equipping students with enough skills for them to make decisions, SE was already beginning to be placed in the human rights setting as an important platform to the achievement of sexual and reproductive rights. Some teachers from both countries are concerned with providing a “humanist discourse of rights” towards equal opportunities and democracy. This approach is focused on promoting access to neutral and reliable sexual knowledge to all students in order to help them “fit into the world” and “feel comfortable” with who they are. This also means a higher level of training and sensitivity of these professionals towards

a more holistic view on sex education that goes beyond sexual health and shows some concerns with citizenship rights and sexual subjectivities. As Bianca asserted:

Bianca: We intend to promote sex education so that the experience of sexuality and, therefore, sexual health can be achieved. They are intrinsically linked. Sexual health is related to all those parts of sexuality that interfere with our health. And if we understand health in the broader sense of the word like well-being... it encompasses everything in there. Therefore, what we intend to get across with sex education is to give them [the students] a foundation and the opportunities to develop their sexuality fully in order to have a healthy sexuality.
(Female nurse, School D, PT)

To **sum up**, the four schools seem to consider SE as an essential tool to “compensate” for the lack of sexual communication within families. Most interviewees were against this “compensatory perspective” that perpetuates this family deficit and removes responsibility from parents, although they agreed that most parents do not have the right skills to cover sexual issues when approaching children. Therefore, SE was perceived in both countries as a resource that promotes conditions for helping students to make decisions within intimate relationships through providing sexual information, knowledge, and student support offices; as well as a pedagogical strategy to deal with and get close to youth.

In parallel, we also identified singular significant aspects. The SE practitioners from School A (EN) seemed to be mainly focused on risks and in the promotion of safety due to the strong legal and moral weight that continues in English SRE programmes. However, some of them went further and already saw SE as an inclusive means of sexual subjectivities in order to help people to feel comfortable. In School C, SRE was mainly envisaged as an essential tool to equip students for making good decisions.

In Portugal, however, an interesting significance of SE was brought to discussion by interviewees in School D that SE is an essential tool to improving teachers’ skills and to ending their own fears about teaching sexuality. In this school, SE helps students in solving “sexual problems” through health and student support offices. In School E, on the other hand, the interviews expressed a centrality of concerns around the

difficulties and troubles parents, teachers, and students have when communicating about sexual issues and the role of SE in overcoming those obstacles.

4. Discussions Around the Schools' Agenda of Sex Education: Is there a citizenship agenda?

Understanding the significance of the education of sexuality within schools' agenda and educational debates brought to discussion the tension between citizenship and schools' achievement agendas as political guidelines and educational priorities. Most teachers of this study believed policymakers to be increasingly pressured by liberal concerns with globalization and market competitiveness on one hand and, on the other, by social rights to promote "equal educational opportunities" for all.

In interviews, we observed this double pressure SE practitioners are facing in the way they spoke about schools' rankings (Portugal) and League table (England) to reach the best results at the national level and, simultaneously, the need to answer certain social demands by providing emotional and social education in order to decrease inequalities and relationships of domination.

This stressful environment had a strong impact on SE status within curriculum and its effective implementation in schools, mainly because the practitioners still have great difficulty imagining the conciliation of these two agendas. Alldred and David (2007:50) asserted: "Aspects of personal and social development, regarding citizenship, health or sex education are brought onto schools' agendas with little consideration of the links between emotional development and educational success". Similar to Alldred and David, the interviewees complained about the exclusive focus of success in school grades and schools' achievements, as if personal, social, and emotional development were not relevant to improve these measures. Then, Graça made clear her belief that sex education is not a priority on schools' rankings.

Graça: If you are asking me if sex education is a priority among other pedagogical questions, I tell you it isn't, because this school is on schools' ranking
(Female Psychologist, School E, PT)

Liz from England also said that despite individual intentions to enhance SE, teachers they are more committed to school results:

S: Is sex and relationship education a priority for the school's policy?

Liz: Probably not. They would say it was important, and if you asked every individual teacher here, they would say, "Yes, it's really important. Yes, our priority is to keep students safe," But we have such a big pressure on results and achievement that it becomes compromised
(RE, School A, EN)

The difficulty in managing both of these agendas leads most teachers to flee from teaching non-disciplinary curricular areas, which tendency lowers SE's status. In Portugal the management of this tension is reinforced by ongoing processes of teachers' assessment, bringing a "perverse cycle of participation", as Eduardo said, in unevaluated subjects. Afraid of losing their jobs, teachers must engage in a certain number of school activities. So some teachers are using their teaching of citizenship and sex education for the purpose of gaining extra points and not for an interest in investing in this personal and social education. This approach undermines a real engagement in SE provision and distorts its possibilities, as Eduardo stated:

Eduardo: Why have teachers some concerns? Because in teachers assessment, one of the things that is always evaluated is the effort one person does to include the student, to go beyond the pedagogical question. Therefore, I think all teachers are trying to grab anything they can because of that...
(IT, School D, PT)

This apparent depreciation of the citizenship agenda was exacerbated by the difficulty the SE practitioners of this study found when trying to identify a rationale behind allocating SE to citizenship education.⁹⁵

Most teachers in England⁹⁶ did not relate both areas explaining that SE was just another "strand" of the programme. Surprisingly, they took a while to understand and answered the question: "How do you relate sex education with citizenship education?"

⁹⁵ Citizenship education became statutory in England in 2002 and in Portugal in 2001 through the "Reorganization of Secondary National Curriculum" (Reorganização Curricular do Ensino Básico). From 2000 onwards it has suffered several changes.

⁹⁶ This issue was not so discussed with teachers from the School C because there was no Citizenship Education. Instead SRE was provided through PSHE, HSC and CD subjects.

Their first reaction was: “What do you mean by citizenship?” It seemed clear they were not used to thinking about intimacy issues through a citizenship lens. Particularly for teachers from School A, this disconnection was evident. Based on the analysis of the statements from Liz, who was responsible for organizing the SE collapse day and the Citizenship programme (1st excerpt), and from Mariah, a sciences teacher, we observed with interest the similar perceptions and opinions they both have, although they had different backgrounds.

S: How do you relate sex education with citizenship? Because SE is part of citizenship subject, isn't it?

Liz: It's not inside citizenship, I wouldn't say. *[pause]* So, citizenship happens in the humanities and on some of the conference days, so it fits within a broader context.

S: So, you don't relate sex education with citizenship concerns?

Liz: No! We wouldn't make, I mean, sometimes it comes into it because for example we'll be talking about sexual ethics and we'll be looking at the use of sex in the media. So it would come up then but we don't make the direct link to students

(RE, School A, EN)

S: Do you think sex and relationship question are issues of citizenship?

Mariah: No! I don't, not at all. I don't think if you asked the kids like, “Do you think, do you relate this to...” No.”

(Sciences, School A, EN)

Throughout both of these interviews, as well as through those of other English teachers, their strong perception of citizenship was patently linked to civic rights in the public sphere and in broader society, usually through political participation. One of them even made reference to the abortion law to justify the inclusion of SE within citizenship education, which statement elucidates how difficult construing civil rights beyond the legal context is for some of them. This discussion was significant toward understanding how SE is still far from being understood in the field of intimate citizenship.

However, when asked about that liaison between sexuality and citizenship outside the schools context of SE, Liz ended by indicating that being a “good citizen” is linked with “how people behave in a sexual way.” This perception indicates that Liz has establishes links between them but they need to bring them into the school structure as well.

Liz: Citizenship is all about behaving in a way that makes you a valuable person in society. That's being a good citizen. And part of that is treating other people in the way that you'd like to be treated, and that links right in with how you behave in a sexual way as well.
(RE, School A, EN)

In Portugal, SE practitioners seemed to be more familiar with the citizenship framework since currently teachers' training has been focused on sexual rights, emotions, and relationships. In both schools, teachers presented SE as a dimension of citizenship education and a condition for living and respecting others. Bianca from school D explains this association:

Bianca: Citizenship education is the way we relate to each other in society. Sex education touches here fully, it doesn't mean that sexuality cannot be lived alone, it may, but it is mostly experienced within a relationship, in how our body relates to others. So it makes sense that this be given in the context of civic education, because we are talking about interpersonal relationships and it is important that there is some civility within the sexuality.
(School nurse, school D, PT)

Going beyond these concerns with improving intimate relationships and schools' achievement, the discussion between both agendas places SE as a political "welfare measure" to fight teenage pregnancy. SE agenda is seen as directed towards disadvantaged groups who are supposedly not very interested in following school careers and are simultaneously seen as at-risk children who cannot get help at home. The following excerpts illustrate teachers' belief that government's main interest with SE is reducing teenage pregnancy:

S: Is sex and relationship education an important topic for the educational policy?
Vivian: Yeah if they want to reduce teenage pregnancy. I don't know whether it works, but it's definitely used as a strategy.
(Sciences, School A, EN)

Angela: I don't know where it started, but there have been pressures for this to go forward. Sex education has to exist in order to reduce teenage pregnancies...
(Philosophy, School E, PT)

This approach places SE outside both agendas and conceptualizes sexuality as an issue of social protection rather than as an educational need. Therefore, schools are being challenged in two directions: as promoters of knowledge (achievement agenda) and as welfare providers to compensate for society's shortcomings. However, the fact

that some practitioners are already critical in relation to this devaluation of the SE agenda might be the first step to rethinking it in the light of the aspect of intimacy in citizenship.

5. Pedagogic Strategies and School Practices: “How it is done.”

Evelin: I think we do have to do sex education. It's a question of how it's done. It not a joke, it's not silly. Sometimes it does sound a little bit joking going on...
(Head-teacher, School A, EN)

Following Evelin's concern, the central question in debating sex education and schooling is how schools should provide sex education under the conditions they have, regardless of if it is their responsibility or not. With the focus on SE practices and pedagogies, I was concerned with identifying the strategies, meanings, and aims that were being developed in schools, as well as teachers' contributions to rethinking alternative paths to their implementation. From the four schools under analysis in this chapter four modes of providing SE was identified: team teaching, collapse days, peer education, and monitoring in offices.

Team teaching seemed to be the best way to implement a cross-cutting SE through the curriculum because it benefits “from staff with specialist training and commitment to teaching SE and maintaining their pre-existing teacher-pupil relationships” (Alldred & David, 2007:61). The nature of this process addresses sex education in a coherent and systematic project beyond punctual sessions with invited speakers. Teachers design a specific SE project and afterwards each one selects a few topics to deliver. These teachers are usually from the biology, philosophy and sports departments. Portuguese schools in particular employed this pedagogical mode along with some external inputs by other professionals and outside activities, such as going to topic-related plays. This is how it happens in School D where “teachers had guidelines” through the whole curriculum.

School E also delivered sex education in a “continuous work,” but presented it by the Health Education Group where teachers were responsible for giving some support and for providing pedagogical materials (like books, videos, games, conferences, and

visits from external professionals) to other teachers. Above all, as Celine indicated, the main aim of this office is to give teachers a sense of confidence and security:

Celine: Our collaboration was not training teachers but search for help and support. Our group is very active. It is solid, willingly, but very insecure too. We have many doubts. We are working in partnership with the health center that is a great, dynamic and collaborative team.
(Sciences, School E, PT)

The team teaching option is highlighted by this teacher, for its multidisciplinary and inter-institutional aspects that stand out as a more comprehensive perspective on sexuality, sexual health and rights, as well as promote a feeling of solidarity between teachers. Moreover, team teaching involves all teachers by allowing them to choose the topics and strategies they feel most comfortable with, and makes the process easier because of the teachers' previous relationships with the students. However, if this seems to be an advantage, for most English teachers, this privileged relationship with students has some cons, such as the fact that students and other teachers do not recognise these teachers as specialists in sex and health education, which perception hinders the knowledge transference across national curriculum subjects. This mode of delivering is even criticized as becoming scattered and out of context when teachers do it as an isolated session within maths or history classes, due to limited time. In these cases, sex education might be counterproductive because students are not engaged nor do they realize they are participating in a session of sex education. It is my view teachers must be included in the design, planning, and evaluation of SE projects to really work as a team.

These feelings of insecurity led the majority of the teachers in England to prefer and opt for collapse days or assemblies called "Personal Development Days" (PD). In these timetable collapse models, students move a whole day between sessions with the external expert, school teachers and their form tutor. School A (England) has collapse days on an average of three to five times a year with their own staff, and they are about several topics, such as relationships, assertiveness, and sexual negotiation. As the SE coordinator (RE teacher) defined these assemblies: "it is not a subject, it is more like a programme," only inviting external professionals to talk about scientific

information (contraception and STIs). Although these collapse days initially seem to be a homogeneous and standard mode of providing SE, for some, having a whole day just for work on sexuality raises SE's status and the "quality improved with the greater preparation required of form tutors" (Aldred & David, 2007: 61), as expressed in the following excerpt from Wilson. He believes collapse days "prepare a decent atmosphere for discussion" later, because students feel more comfortable with the different voices, faces, and perspectives.

Wilson: Collapse days are better because it is a different *voice*, it is a different *face* and it is a different *perspective*. And it gives them that opportunity to talk about things, to engage. It has been positive. From a tutor point of view, I think it's nice to have that focus for a whole day because it feels students are all doing the same thing together. It gives them all of the same talking points at the same time. Sometimes you see students respond differently to different things and I think it's not unusual for heads of year and tutors to find that they are picking up on things that maybe they wouldn't have covered before, so through conversation and overhearing discussions in groups you maybe become aware of particular issues. I think it creates a full room for students, at least to feel comfortable talking about the topic most of the time. Prepare a decent atmosphere for discussing. If it was one lesson per week and they missed that lesson they will lose that knowledge.

(Tutor, School A, EN)

For Wilson, a collapse day is an extraordinary day that will be more memorable for students because it "breaks the ice," helping students and professionals to get to know each other better. It increases teachers' knowledge about students' needs, lives, interests, and ideas, and makes themselves more comfortable with talking about sex education. Actually, a collapse day helps both teachers and young people to get involved in SE. Against this idea, Louro (2014:59) considers these "special" days, such as those focused on HIV-AIDS or STIs, to have a separatist logic that "assumes that identities and practices are made in an autonomous way, denying they are interdependent. Thus, they create 'events' that circumstantially, highlight the different one. [...] the culture of the Other". In her opinion, these strategies end up perpetuating special and problematic specific identities. By bringing sexual issues to the spotlight during a whole day, the differentness and strangeness of SE knowledge and significance will remain.

The third mode referenced by teachers was peers' education and was implemented in School C (England). This mode involves developing diffuse sessions

and assemblies provided by sixth formers as well as by some outside experts. This school has also implemented specific subjects such as Health and Social Care (HSC), Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) or Citizenship in an attempt to provide systematic information on sexuality. However, as discussed later in this chapter, these teachers were not working as a team on the same project, which fact led me to not consider their strategy as a team teaching mode. The use of older students to teach lower years seemed to the teachers an alternative that helps them in overcoming embarrassments and communication gaps. According to Suelen, peer education is the best “way to go”, because it is not just a question of language but of generation differences, identity, and complicity.

Suelen: What I’m doing, as much as possible, is peer education. I feel that peer education is the way to go. They’re not going to listen to me because they don’t think I’ve ever had sex at all, so they don’t want to listen to me, they will listen from their peers. So the important thing is that their peers have been on courses and they have as much education as they possibly can.
(HSC, School C, EN)

In Portugal, this practice is not yet structured, but it is already starting to be mentioned in teachers’ discourses as central to transforming future SE programmes⁹⁷, once the small activities headed by students, such as doing plays for the entire school, have been very successful. Bianca emphasised this point, saying:

Bianca: Peers education begins to be privileged once we realised young people seek more information on peers than from health professionals, teachers or adults. Mainly because of the generational gap and that typical idea of teenagers that adults don’t understand them. So, they won’t seek advice from adults...unless when something wrong happens. Nowadays people talk about working with peers’ leaders to transmit correct information.
(Female nurse, School D, PT)

The teachers in Portugal even identified a fourth mode of delivering SE through the implementation of student support offices in all schools to help students with sexual, emotional, and health issues. In these support offices, teachers work in partnership with health professionals and develop an individual and private

⁹⁷ In 2012/2013 a national project of Peers Education in health promotion was launched by the Portuguese Foundation “The Community against AIDS” focused on sexuality and AIDS education in all secondary state schools. But it was provided by high school students.

relationship with a student in the light of medical appointments, as already mentioned. This is an important achievement of state schools that are already able to offer support and resources that improve students' access to sexual knowledge and health cautions. As noted before, in English schools, teachers count on the collaboration of nurses from the Brook clinics, but they are not involved with teachers or the schools' departments. Unlike team teaching, teachers from both Schools A and C preferred nurses coming in as a way of highlighting professional distances and matters.

5.1. Sex Education Main Contents

Most SE practitioners present SE contents as being closer to biology and factual information by using the "discourse of knowledge" (Alldred & David, 2007:59). This discourse seemed essential in order to break with conservative approaches, but, as Alldred and David (2007) also pointed out, this approach simultaneously devalues teachers and students as embodied and gendered individuals, which perspective might constitute an obstacle to SE's effectiveness. In this regards, for instance Liz states that being distant from students' experiences makes teachers feel safer and more comfortable in front of the classroom:

Liz: I think it's crucial that you set up ground rules at the beginning of sessions. Make it clear what is acceptable and what isn't. And you see that every person in that room will follow those ground rules, and you decide that as a class. I think the strategy is that distance, the subject from students' own experience in the classroom, so that you make it safe.
(RE, School A, EN)

This distance is facilitated by the choice of health issues such as menstruation, body evolution, the reproductive system, pregnancy, contraception, and STIs (mainly AIDS). This idea goes in line with what Trudell (1993) called "defensive teaching" in order to control uncomfortable meanings. The recourse to "defensive teaching" to maintain control in the classroom by formal methods and pedagogies were also referred by Kehily (2002:172) in her study of sex education in EN when she says: "The recourse to defensive teaching can be understood as an attempt to seek safety and

avoid controversy in an area where risk can be seen to engender personal vulnerability, parental complain.”

The citizenship and philosophy teachers from both Portuguese schools were also concerned with the impacts of the media in the objectification of the body, and with tackling discussions about the right moment to have sex. Specifically the sports teacher addressed the issue of hygiene and body expression.

Also in the assemblies in School C, with sixth form tutors talked about risk behaviours, contraceptive negotiation, and the legal age to have consensual sexual relations. References to other contents, such as teenage pregnancy rates, alcohol consequences, or sexual abuses, as well as emotional aspects and individual lifestyles (sexual diversity and homosexuality) were barely brought to discussion during some of these interviews.

Furthermore, despite the apparent focus on sexual health, teachers argued that several strategies (“written work, discussion work, and visual work”) and perspectives (social, secular, and religious) on sexuality are being covered throughout these fourth modes of SE delivery.

5.2. The Pedagogical Relationship within Sex Education Activities and Practices

Relating to SE practices, the interviewees had opposing opinions concerning the best sex educator for students: teachers or external professionals. While some teachers believed that students feel more comfortable in sharing their own experiences in the context of the classroom, others agreed that the anonymity of external professionals leads to a greater openness. In the latter opinion, students assessed outsider speakers more positively because of the different “confidentiality rules” (Buston et al., 2002) that prevent teachers from guaranteeing confidentiality around child protection issues, and which have generated insecurity and mistrust among some students. This attitude was mainly felt at School A in England, where teachers believed there was little or no possibility of students openly speaking about sex with them without their having to report to parents. Clearly pressures from legal

and moral institutions over schools limit students' engagement and teachers' actions, as Vivian said:

Vivian: What we do as a school policy is if a child comes to disclose something to you, we always do the whole, "- you can tell me anything you want, but I can't keep it to myself," and so if the 16-year-old said it, you'd obviously report it to our member of staff who deals with those issues, who would always say to the kid that are going to have to tell mum or dad at some point.

(Sciences, School A, EN)

Again the previous issue of shared responsibility among families and schools come to the fore, which leads me to consider that parental and young people's rights should be rethink by schools. It is clear parents have to be acknowledged as essential to educational picture as well as have the right to know about their children's behaviours. However, it is also known that sometimes this "right" put at risk young people's to get information about sexual issues. Moreover, it seems this rule ignores young people's right to confidentiality and anonymity, and it also increases the gap between educational and health policies in the way they empower or limit schools' action, in particular in England. In fact, while most teachers have the professional and ethical obligation to tell the school and, consequently, parents about students' sexual lives, external professionals are able to maintain confidentiality without judging them. Moreover, sexual health offers and school sex education demands seem not to match when students can get free contraception at age 14, but when they are reproved and taught in school that they can't start their sexual life until after age 16. I believe this discrepancy shows a conflict of powers between the health and the education systems that requires some changes. Evelin indicated a point in this position by saying that schools are trying to adapt to health laws and family planning, by treating students as "adults":

Evelin: When we have some information that sometimes come to us about people being involved in sexual relationships and say they're in year 9, 10 or 11, it used to be that we had to tell the police and their parents if we suspected this. But now, we don't have to tell the family if they're over a certain age... Like, it used to be 16, but now it seems to me more like 14, because if you're 14 you can go into a doctor and you can get contraception without your parents knowing. So they have that right. The girls can actually go... so, we try to treat them as adults.

(Head teacher, School A, EN)

This information shows again a lack of communication about the laws and contradicts other teachers' thoughts about the lack of confidentiality and the consent sexual law as being after 16 years old as a main topic of their activities. In these cases, treating students as "adults" seems to be difficult since they are not accepted as *sexual subjects*, which perception might jeopardize pedagogical relationships with teachers.

I found a different scenario in Portugal where some teachers see themselves as students' confidants. This fact highlights a different pedagogical relationship that sharply contrasts with the rules of confidentiality referred to in the English system. A dialogical process between teachers and students as "agents of sexual knowledge" (McLaughlin et al., 2012) seems to exist beyond the formal relationship experienced in the classroom. In spite of these differences, most teachers from the four schools feel more comfortable and confident with external professionals coming into schools, which fact endorses the idea that experts are more valid and more powerful in teaching sexual knowledge.

Against this supremacy of outsider speakers and the preference for collapse days, some teachers are sceptical in relation to these practices, arguing that diffuse sessions do not help to build trusting relationships. To solve this implication about who is the best educator, teachers from Portugal and from England suggested the articulation of their work with other professionals through the distribution of a different set of contents: the fact-based information related to contraception and STIs is better delivered by external experts; however, talking about feelings, relationships, and intimacy should be teachers' responsibility due to their closer relationship with the students.

According to this suggestion, the teaching of sexual knowledge remains divided into the scientific information and moral attitudes, which separation reinforces the fact that teachers are not neutral. On the other hand, experts are likely in school to *teach*, and teachers are there to *talk* to and *discuss*, which notion indicates that the pedagogy has a very important role and place in the learning process of information. Liz mentioned this distinction on the basis of the feedback she gathered from students when organising a collapse day for School A:

Liz: It's a combination of the two. So, tutors lead activities with students because I they have got a relationship with them, and visiting speakers might have expertise in certain areas, but often they're not teachers, so they're not experienced in setting up activities. A lot of their input is very didactic, just from the board and it's not very engaging. So, visiting speakers make an important input when they're talking about contraception, STIs... That's the main thing. Once we did have somebody coming in and talk about relationships, but the feedback was, "the session was boring," "she just kind of talked," so I took what she had said and made it into some activities that teachers could lead.

(RE, School A, EN)

In Liz's opinion, schools should adjust "confidentiality rules" to students' needs by giving more power to teachers to make decisions without always being obliged to inform the schools' hierarchy or the parents.

To **sum up**, SE pedagogical practices seem to be more academic in Portuguese schools, since teachers are more implicated and engaged in their design and provision. English schools, on the other hand, often opt for inviting external professionals or older students (sixth form) to SE delivery, being only responsible for the mandatory topics of the sciences curriculum. This results in great differences among SE practitioners' experiences, feedback, and interferences between the countries. The most interesting thing is not really the comparison between the assemblies, the collapse days or the cross-curricular SE, but the understanding of the impact on teachers' engagement in pedagogic processes for the development of SE.

6. Going into the Sex Education Classroom: Gendered dynamics

Following the previous point about school-based SE practices, now we move to inside the classroom to analyse teacher-student interactions. Research on school sex education lessons has shown that a particular climate and environment must be created in order for students to feel more at ease, valued, and comfortable, and to trust their colleagues and the teacher (Elley, 2008). Only within that atmosphere of trust do students truly participate and talk about sexuality (Buston & Wight, 2004). Vivian (Sciences, School A) seemed to be aware of this fact when she said, "The most

important thing is creating an atmosphere where they can talk about those things [sexuality].”

Despite the fact that most interviewed teachers affirmed that students’ reactions to sex education lessons were very good, they also identified many students as being reluctant and uncomfortable participating and talking to their teachers, using their own culture of sexuality and gender to challenge and embarrass teachers. As Elley (2008:56) wrote, “Often by making sexual remarks, innuendos and referring to the teachers’ own sexuality and body”. This raises distinct questions: Are teachers able to attract students’ attention and interests? Or do teachers feel that their power is challenged and, consequently, threatened by the informal atmosphere created in the classrooms?

Manifestations of disruptive behaviour by the use of humour and “silly” jokes, mainly among male students, seem to be essential to regulating peers’ interaction and to contest teachers’ authority as “holders-of-knowledge” and as being “in control” of the classroom (Holland et al, 1998; Kehily, 2002; Nayak & Kehily, 1996; Thomson & Scott, 1992). Rather than viewing these occasions as moments of sharing experiences, fears, and doubts, teachers believe that young people use their own culture, language, and codes against those of adults (teachers and parents), which attitude compromises an effective transmission of sexual knowledge and increases teachers’ insecurity. Teachers even feel they are not perceived as “sexual” by students who think they do not know how to speak about sex and do not realize the desires they are feeling. SE classrooms suddenly become stages of power but also of fears where “students are afraid to ask questions, and teachers are afraid to give answers,” as Alcina from school D (PT) said.

Moreover, gender dynamics seem to intensify the difficulties found in these generational dynamics. Gender issue is thus analysed here in the way teachers interpret boys’ and girls’ attitudes and participation in SE lessons, which perceptions might influence teachers’ own expectations about them and, consequently, their practices. Based on the interviewees’ experiences, the classroom also appears as an opportunity for gender-sexual hierarchies to arise, particularly masculinity in the boys’ disruptive behaviour (Kehily & Nayak, 1997). The following excerpt from Vivian

illustrates how teachers feel “appalled” and shocked with the bravado of students’ talk.

Vivian: Some of the opinions they were sharing were, to me, quite shocking, if my son would come out with those kinds of things, I would have been appalled. It was usually the lads and their complete disregard for females, you know, the idea that women were just play things to be used and abused any way they wished, and the more they could get when they were older, the better. There were a few that sort of the idea of having one night stands being a good thing for lads to do. I wasn’t expecting to come across quite so much.

(Sciences, School A, EN)

Like other studies, the majority of teachers perceived girls’ participation as being constrained by their fear of revealing knowledge in sexual matters that could jeopardize their reputation among their peers (such as Alldred & David, 2007; Measor et al., 2000; and already Lees in 1993). Interestingly, some teachers described their perceptions and experiences as going against this idea, having seen that boys are less comfortable than girls and that they use the humour as an escape. According to the latter, boys also appeared to be pressured to react through a typical and masculine way in order to reaffirm their identity. The fact that they are powerful and freer to talk publicly about sexual experiences and desires does not mean that they are more knowledgeable than girls. On the contrary, these teachers noted their belief that such expressions were the only way for boys to affirm their masculinity in front of each other and to appear relaxed with the topic. Buston & Wight’s (2004) work on pupils’ participation, for example, also highlights teachers’ perceptions that girls were more likely to participate than boys. Jackson from England summarized very well this difference between participating and being knowledgeable. He asserted that girls only speak when they are confident and know about what is being discussed, while boys speak to overcome their own embarrassment:

S: Do you think students feel comfortable to talk with you?

Jackson: They get better. When they first start at year 9 they’re quite embarrassed. I’m quite frank, so you know, they can be shocked. Actually, usually the boys rather than girls.

S: Why do you think that happens?

Jackson: Well, it’s possibly because a lot of the girls who don’t speak probably are uncomfortable but they don’t speak, so they hide in the class. The girls who do speak are confident enough to speak about it and therefore don’t show it. The boys sometimes try and be silly through it, and that fails. Therefore they get embarrassed quite quickly. Or they say

something stupid because they are generally less knowledgeable than the girls are. What we find most boys have very little knowledge and a lot of it is tainted with sarcasm. So their knowledge is not great. They think they know a lot but the girls know a lot more.
(RE, School C, EN)

Here, Jackson defines girls as being more knowledgeable because, again, they have to be more concerned with sexual consequences than do boys, to whom sex education appears to be just a place of exhibition. Despite the fact that they appear to know more, they are still afraid of talking about sex in public. Thus, this perspective that girls are more attentive to lessons comes to reinforce the silence in which girls seem to learn about sexuality.

Teachers did not recognise that they were conveying different messages to the boys and to the girls, despite the fact that some female teachers from both countries had assumed their lessons were mainly targeted towards girls. Talking about sex and sexuality is not easy for teachers, as well, who opt to use a technical language to control students' jokes and disturbances, as previously discussed. This attempt to promote an informal environment through a technical, medical, and distant pedagogy seems to be a paradox of sex education practices. To reinforce this apparent inconsistency among pedagogic strategies, Suelen expressed her belief that they must break from formalities sometimes in order to get closer to students, since if they do not properly explore SE concepts through the youth's own language, the lessons become meaningless.

Suelen: I found that the students, they know the words, but they don't understand what it means. So I'm very open in trying to explain in a very soft way some of the questions they have. So, at first I thought they were pulling my leg, because they said "- oh miss, what's an orgasm?", but they were perfectly serious, they heard this word in the playground and didn't know what it meant... they felt they couldn't ask the parents and in Science it's much more factual... Whereas mine is much softer... I was glad they felt happy to ask these questions. So, in a very subtle way I tried to explain what it meant. And one of the girls said "-what does ejaculation mean?" And I said "- when the man comes", and she said "oh, yeah, I know what that is now". But she didn't feel embarrassed to actually ask what it meant.
(HSC, School C, EN)

Unlike previous ideas that girls learn their sexuality in silence and in secret, Suelen shows that these students are already feeling powerful enough to ask

important questions. The Portuguese nurse also noted this greater openness about female intimacy in relation to Students Support Office visits:

Bianca: There are here some gender aspects... On one hand, if we look at sex education, the tradition is to give the responsibility of contraception to girls. Because the girl is who gets pregnant. This idea still exists and, therefore, it is the girl who is looking for help to protect herself. Boys see things in a different way. While the girl sees it by the fear of getting pregnant, the boy lives his sexuality with the fear of "not being able to." For them it is easier to share the fear of pregnancy like "what can I do to avoid it?" than to say "I'm afraid of not being able to do it, of having a bad performance." This is very difficult to share. In addition, there are clear gender differences because girls are more open to talk about these issues than boys. It's cultural.

(Female Nurse, School D, PT)

However, both of these excerpts convey experiences where girls were alone or within single-sex classes, which again limits the possibility of thinking of gender tensions inside SE classroom as being overcome. But, the fact that girls are already talking and asking questions in front of other girls cannot be undervalued nor can the fact that they are taking the initiative to refer to support offices. Furthermore, these experiences highlight the need to better address boys' attitudes and needs in SE. However, some teachers described experiences in which boys were already becoming more and more sensitive and talkative about their own sexuality. This was underlined for instance by Evelin that felt surprised with boys' values:

Evelin: They just try to show off in front of each other and once they're separated, they can just concentrate on the work. I've had some interesting gender-focused discussions in the past, which had allowed me to see that some of my own little prejudices against boys were wrong and they're more interesting than you think in some things. They're more sensitive than you think.

(Head teacher, School A, EN)

To summarize, the generation and gender gap seems key to understanding the relationship between students and teachers. According to the interviewed teachers, the SE classroom is a space of authority contestation and insecurity. A visible clash exists between students and schools' official discourses that sometimes separates adults from young people and boys from girls. Moreover, teachers do not feel they are

taken seriously by young people who do not see their teachers as being sexual, which perception undermines the communication and the impact of SE lessons.

Another idea that came out in this section is the gender gap that teachers made between *participation*, *talk*, and *knowledge* skills. Most teachers noticed boys as participating and talking easily in SE classroom, while girls participate less but are more knowledgeable. SE practitioners from both countries agreed that girls are more open to talking about their intimacy in private spheres, but they are shy when speaking in public for fear of being excluded or unwanted. Boys, on the other hand, do not speak in private environments as they appear to have many difficulties verbalizing their emotions. We found no significant differences between the countries, but the English interviewees seemed more aware of and attentive to gender dynamics.

Beyond the pedagogic obstacles faced within the classroom, teachers identified broader obstacles at institutional level discussed in the next section.

7. Obstacles and Resistances to the Implementation of SE: Difficulties in teaching

SE practitioners identified some obstacles to implementing an effective sex education. Similarly to Alldred & David's findings (2007:55), this study also grouped together the obstacles given by teachers into "two interlocking factors": "resources and pressures" (*ibidem*:55) that occur at the "legislative", "school" and "teacher" levels (Martinez et al., 2012:425).

Therefore, in this section, I start by emphasizing the lack of educational resources and political support teachers are feeling in order to properly implement SE. Secondly, I explore this absence through the political and social pressures that still exist around pedagogic practices. Due to the large amount of material, I just chose the perspectives that stood out most.

7.1. The Lack of Resources

- **Political resistance: the lack of educational guidelines and budgetary resource**

The previously discussed focus on achievement agendas leads teachers to identify cuts on budgetary resources and the lack of external guidelines, as the first obstacles schools are facing in the promotion of SE programmes.

Since 2011, driven by a right-wing government, the education in Portugal has witnessed heavy cuts in schools budgets. Teachers complained about the reduction of resources and the reorganization of the national curriculum that led to the extinction of non-disciplinary areas such as Citizenship Education and, consequently, have jeopardized the continuity of the SE implementation. The “short-term thinking,” as a result of “short funding,” increases the disappointment among teachers. They feel exhausted because they invested a lot in the construction of sex education projects and materials that are no longer being used.

Moreover, the financial cuts have also affected the promotion of schools’ support, such as having an available Students Support Service open five days a week, doing study visits outside schools, and inviting external professionals to lead awareness campaigns. Consequently, activities were no longer free nor even affordable for all students.

The teachers in England also felt budgetary constraints as they were challenged to employ new pedagogical strategies, such as gathering the whole students groups for each form year together in assemblies in order to profit from invited professionals’ time, which actions, they felt, also undermined participatory aims.

In addition to the lack of financial funds, teachers have felt helpless without political guidelines about what they should do. This lack reinforces their anxieties and mitigates their educational practices. Two teachers from School C in England gave examples of this outrage:

Deise: But they don't provide us with any of the guidance of how they want us to do it... It's just, as usual, "- this is what I would want you to do", but "just get on and do it". There's no help, there's no anything, really. I think they like to be seen to care, but I don't think actually it's very high on their priorities. The way they're looking at it is in terms of how much it costs them and how much it costs them extra benefits, and how much it costs the health service, rather than actually care about the children.

(HSC, School C, EN)

Patrick: They don't tell us how. So we are at this school, interpret the "how" ourselves. Whether that's right or wrong... It's the same for all schools because they all read the same words and will be "what does it mean? How do we do it?"

(Sciences, School C, EN)

Both revealed that political support is short and weak and that they are suspicious about policymakers' intentions. This lack of guidelines seemed to put at risk the whole work, raising misunderstandings and promoting inequalities among schools. This feeling of insecurity was similar among Portuguese practitioners, despite the important contribution of social organisations, such as Family Planning Association⁹⁸ in providing materials and guidance. In particular, teachers from School E seemed critical and emphasised the huge gap between policymakers' perceptions about what schools must deliver and what schools are actually able to do with the conditions they have. Regarding this issue, Amália expressed anger because politicians did not take teachers into consideration nor did they consult any teachers before launching the law:

S: Is sex education a priority to policy-makers?

Amália: Is it? There is actually a program, of course, but a program that was not discussed previously with the teachers. Who makes this program, as I always say, are those in the Ministry of Education, with their air-conditioning, comfortably seated and don't know the reality of the situation. There is a gap between what they say and what we can do. And quite frankly I think that we as teachers should be congratulated, if I may because there's only one truth: everyone has a go at the teachers and we are already doing miracles with what we have been given. We have no training!

(Philosophy, School E, PT)

Amália believes that SE projects are too theoretical and lacking in context. In addition, her opinion about policymakers also seemed to ignore youth's needs. Confirming this idea, Jorge from the same school, also pointed out that politicians

⁹⁸ Despite the several materials provided by the Family Planning Association indicating the theme and activities teachers must follow to work with each Year group. In both schools teachers had constructed their own SE projects based on these materials.

seem to be disconnected from youth experiences and the new “culture of sexualization” promoted by media, internet and networks (Attwood, 2006).

Jorge: I’m convinced that the political decision makers and concretely those who are at the Ministry of Education frequently depart from what is the school reality. They have no idea what it is to be inside a school, they have no idea what it is to be in front of a classroom that often make fun of how sexuality is approached. They have no idea what it is for a teacher to be limited in transmitting certain values in the presence of a class where there are students that maybe know more about the subject than the teacher, because this reality exists too. So in this case, the politicians have a big responsibility, because they do not draft a document within an interaction paradigm of cooperation with the teachers. This process is, as is any other process in any company, only valid when being done in cooperation. [...] It isn’t possible and, therefore, they ask us to certain things that we aren’t prepared for. This creates a clash! And this situation doesn’t make it easy to talk about Sexual Education in the classroom.
(Sports, School E, PT)

Therefore, “teachers’ consultation” emerges as crucial to promoting an effective understanding of the guidelines and to adapting SE programmes to the schools’ conditions, the teachers’ skills, and the students’ needs. They claim politicians must work *with* rather than *for* them through an “interactive paradigm of cooperation,” which approach is the only way to produce a contextualised and dynamic SE that makes sense to all participants. Teachers are, thus, aware of the gap between what adults think is important for young people to learn and what young people are really interested in. This perception might bring a great contribution to rethinking schools’ SE programs.

- **Curricular resistance to sex education status: “There are first- and second- class subjects”**

The teachers also identify the low status of SE within national curriculum as an important reason for their lack of motivation and commitment (Strange et al., 2006). In both countries, teachers feel frustrated that important issues related to sexual and intimate well-being are still neglected. This concurs with Carrie Paechter’s (2000) findings that there is a subordination of non-academic subjects, such as those associated with the body. As previously discussed, this tension is crucial to understanding teachers’ greater or lesser involvement, in particular male teachers,

once “PSHE remained politically lightweight and feminized compared with the academic, especially the more masculine associated subjects” (Alldred & David, 2007:53). Once again, SE is interpreted as a gendered subject, creating resistances and reinforcing “the construction of the political as masculine versus the personal as feminine” (*ibidem*).

There has clearly been hierarchy of subjects and knowledge in which SE is at the bottom of political interests. Throughout the interviews, we could clearly see the reference to this gap between “sciences” and “us.” Suelen felt angry with the “separatism” and “isolationism” between teachers, highlighting the idea that teachers themselves do not recognise personal and social knowledge as “academic” for their own children, which attitude seems to perpetuate the stigma around these subjects.

Suelen: Other teachers will see it as not being as important, and they just look at it... and that why we try and called it child development rather than child caring... If someone is doing human biology, nobody would look at it and say that's not an important subject... yet, they look at my subject and say, that's not important. Because they think you don't need to learn something that you know when you're old enough and you become a mother, you'll learn it then. Even teachers in this school that got children here, they won't let them take it. They'll say to them “- oh, you're not taking that, it's not academic” or, “- don't do that for A level because.” Bu there is so much resistance mainly men. Male teacher... male fathers. Parents think it's child development, so therefore it's a girls subject. “You're going to have children one day, you take that.”

(HSC, School C, EN)

She even said that she had to resort to other strategies, such as changing the name of the subject, in order for her colleagues to accept the subject. Suelen also highlighted the feminization of SE as a “girls' subject” based on parents' perception that contraception and reproduction are the girls' responsibility. This low status of SE compromises its good practices because teachers are not working together for the same aim, which status results in duplicating the work, as Jackson said:

S: How does your subject relate to sciences and to personal, social and health education?

Jackson: Not very well! We've tried quite a lot. There's a barrier between us and sciences, which is difficult for us to bridge. But we tried to synch up, certainly from terms of evolution and sex education and yet we've had no success so far... They would talk about exactly the same topics in English, biology and religious studies but using a completely different language.

(RE, School C, EN)

Interestingly, opposing opinions in the same school exist about the disorders the low status of sex education would create at the level of teacher cohesion. While Deise suggested that the cross-curriculum SE is the only direction for overcoming the communicational problems highlighted above by Jackson.

S: Do you organize the programme together?

Deise: No, no... And that's in the direction that we do need to go, because we need to see what they covered. Because I talk to the different teachers I know what they cover.

(PSHE, School C, EN)

Suelen ultimately found it difficult for herself to find a consensus with the other teachers, which finding does not make sense with her previously noted dissatisfaction with colleagues' removal of children from her lessons.

Suelen: We don't actually work together. So, the religious education teacher gave me his pack, so I can actually use some of that if I wish to, but really I don't want to cross, I don't want to spread on their toes, and I want to perhaps tackle it in a different way.

(HSC, School C, EN)

Although this debate was predominantly in School C, the teachers in Portugal also reported some experiences of discomfort due to the lacking in SE's status. Amália, for instance, felt disrespected because of the disdain attributed to sports and philosophy as "second class" subjects:

Amália: There are first class subjects and second class subjects, so it's a bit like this: "You teach it, because you're a philosophy teacher!", "You teach it because physical education isn't assessed!", "You like these kind of things, you're best at it!", This can't be shoved around! But there is plenty of this here in school, plenty! There is resistance: "You are more at ease with the students." This isn't a question of being more at ease with students or not.

(Philosophy, School E, PT)

Hence, it seems the greatest resistance to SE implementation comes from colleagues who devalue SE's significance. Additionally, the fact that SE educators are volunteers has made its low status more acute.

Another aspect that lowers SE's status is the lack of time allocated to the teaching of sexual issues. The conditioning of having a tight "school schedule" seems

to be incompatible with the promotion of social and personal education.⁹⁹ This complaint was common between both countries. Deise expressed her anxiety with the lack of time to work with students on important issues. In her opinion, having an impact on students and promoting social change is impossible to accomplish in one day or with only one lesson:

Deise: SE is not a priority, no... It is an important concern when something happens. We don't have time... Because the government has the curriculum so tied up in knots that that's what you have to do... It's really difficult because we don't have time in schools... You have the information, but they are not going to change behaviours because you don't have long enough to be with them. You've to talk about relationships. I can't do it in one day... it's really hard to come up with a program. We've got the curriculum to follow up at the end of the day.
(PSHE, School C, EN)

Rosário from Portugal also believed that teachers are currently more worried with giving up time than in talking about sexual issues:

Rosário: People's concerns now lie more in giving up their class time, than in leading and discussing the issues.
(Female Psychologist, School E, PT)

- **Educational resistance: "I was not made for that. That's nothing to do with me."**

Another important obstacle that arises as a consequence of the lack of priority that educational policies attach to sex education is the lack of offering specific teacher training on sexuality, sexual health, and sex education. This argument was found in interviews from the four schools but mainly felt it in Portugal due to the involvement of teachers from different subjects in SE programmes as well as due to the need of some teachers to pay for training on SE, which fact compromises their interest and availability. Teachers feel reluctant and avoid being involved in SE now, not because they are uninterested as noted in the previous point, but because they lack scientific knowledge about some sexual issues, such as homosexuality, STIs, or sexual problems. For instance, Araci who as a head teacher had to manage these insecurities among

⁹⁹ In Portugal, according to the Law nº60/2009, each class should have a minimum of 12 hours of SE per year. In England the requirement is different from school to school.

teachers believed the lack of training just to be used as an excuse for teachers' not wanting to take risks in front of the classroom and therefore "passing the buck" on to others:

Araci: There is always some reluctance, everything is new, their first reaction is saying, "- but I was not made for this. I do not have to, it does not have to be me." This is their first reaction, then people end up getting involved, but the first is always this. "I am a teacher I do not have to do that part." But the law says that all people must be involved because they always think that other teachers' subjects are more suited to it. But then, they know, for instance, a text or a theme that can be approached, perfectly, in health and sex education. With time, people get used to it and simultaneously they start to understand it and look at it from a different perspective.

(Head teacher, School E, PT)

Aware of the risks this lack of knowledge may produce on teaching sexuality, some teachers from Portugal appeared eager to be trained. This manner seems to be the only way to standardize sexual knowledge among schools and classes, to prevent its being contaminated from teachers' personal values and also to overcome embarrassment and discomforts. Jorge made clear that the fact that some teachers did not have enough training is a great obstacle to the provision of SE:

Jorge: Again I stress, the way it has been implemented is wrong. It could and should be also a responsibility of school when its staff has proper training to do so! Without training, it's difficult! It's hard even because they might transmit personal values that can jeopardize other people's values. I don't think we were prepared. Thus, this was an obstacle that existed and which was not taken into account when the legislation was drafted. The law was made without any caution to the difficulties that could arise.

(Sports, School E, PT)

This teacher's claim appears to contradict the indications of a recent Portuguese SE law (Law nº 60/2009) for schools, promoting teachers' training for those who were involved in sex education, and it contradicts the fact that all Portuguese interviewees have had specific and free training on it. However, according to Jorge, the practices they are having seem not to be enough.

Regarding the level of teachers training in England, we found heterogeneous experiences among the SE practitioners of this study. Science teachers from neither School A nor C received any specific support nor any training in SE, except for those contents that are part of the national curriculum (contraception, conception, and

female and male reproductive systems). In their turn, the PSHE, HSC and RE teachers had some individual training in sexual issues (for example, national certificates for teaching PSHE) that the schools did not promote. This resulted in different skills, strategies, and perspectives about the same issues and, consequently, unequal experiences among the students (Buston & Wight, 2004). Despite institutional recommendations from Sex Education Forum and Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) (1999) to the promotion of SRE training, there is still non-uniformity among teachers.

Therefore, teachers' training is organised differently in both countries, which fact has implications in practices and in the modes of delivering SE. The fact that teachers from Portugal are being trained and conceiving SE projects together might explain the adoption of team teaching and cross-curricular SE as the best pedagogic strategy.

Training the teacher has also been shown to reduce teachers' embarrassment with sexual issues. This fact is important to highlight because it constitutes a strong resistance that influences their behaviours and attitudes towards sex education (López & Fuertes, 1999). As Edite reminded us:

Edite: People who dedicate themselves to certain activities risk having some embarrassing questions being asked, and people don't want that.
(Sciences, School D, PT)

This discomfort increases when teachers admit to having been "forced" into providing SE by the law or by prejudice of being seen as prudish by others teachers. The idea that "we must face it as part of our job because it is on the law" seems to be counter-productive because they feel thwarted and unprepared. Reis and Vilar (2004; 2006) in their quantitative study about the attitudes of 600 SE teachers in Portugal verified that the higher the comfort level when addressing issues of sexuality, the more positive attitudes will be towards SE. But, as Bianca also reminds us that getting used to teaching sexuality must be a progressive process:

Bianca: Sex education is not an easy topic to talk about. Teachers might not feel at ease talking about this issue because they are not used to it... We cannot now suddenly ask teachers to re-transform themselves and be other people just because they must implement sex education to students, with all consequences that could have in terms of more negative effects than positive.
(Female Nurse, School D, PT)

To **sum up**, the fact that teachers “get used to SE” after an initial discomfort indicates that demystifying embarrassments and insecurities through teacher training is the greatest challenge of educational policies on SE. We must help teachers to be more confident and secure about their own values, their sexual knowledge, and SE messages.

7.2. Family Pressures: Is Sex Education a social class issue?

Both teachers from England and from Portugal identified resistance from families and from young people against effective implementation of SE, based on moral, religious, and academic factors.

Occasionally some parents disagreed with specific content and messages, which fact raised some problems. In England, this resistance often lies in religious differences, while in Portugal it is more linked to social and moral prejudices. Alcina stated that some parents are even afraid of letting their children think and talk about sexuality because it might encourage them into sex”:

Alcina: There were parents’ resistances against some terms we were using, because parents don’t talk to children about that. It was very difficult, because there were parents for who was impossible to use some terms in front of their children, as more put them think about those issues. They simply do not want to address it. Those ones who have resisted more were people with higher education that think their kids should not speak about that. Some questions were almost a scandal.

(Head teacher, School D, PT)

These families’ fears the need to talk about sexual issues as a matter of “sexual rights” or “scandal.” I believe these attitudes keep young men and women within childhood and therefore increase the generational gap between adults and students and configure innocence as a disguised way of maintaining ignorance and putting children at risk. On the other hand, this excerpt contradicts previous ideas that SE compensates for the communicational deficit of communication about sex among families. Moreover, family resistance in regards to SE seems to be also linked to social class expectations.

The aspect of social class emerges as a central dimension of SRE discussion in England (Elley, 2008), but we are not covering it in this study due to lack of space and time. However, two ideas regarding this issue stood out from the interviews: the perception that SE is a strategy of social and moral control and the pressure middle-class students and families place on teaching processes.

Many teachers defined middle-class students as “academic kids” who were concentrated on professional careers and school grades, having no time nor interest for unevaluated subjects. This fact was highlighted by Mariah, among others:

Mariah: Sometimes students, especially in this kind of school, are quite negative about subjects or lessons where they don't see a qualification at the end.
(Sciences School A, EN)

Therefore along with political demands, schools and teachers are also pressured by families and young people to enhance higher achievement levels that, in turn, are pressured by labour market requirements. In some teachers' opinion, many students look at sex education as a “waste of time because they are not studying” and prefer to review school matters instead. Families' expectations and demands on school achievement distinguished students among each other and interfered with teachers' attitudes and practices. Mariah again emphasised this social distinction based on students' needs and expectations:

S: Is sex and relationship education an important concern for the school project?

Mariah: I think probably... as far as safeguarding, but I don't think it's a priority, we're not from a school that has a high teenage pregnancy risk, so when we're doing policies a lot of things are designed around that. We've got other issues that we would concentrate more on, we're quite lucky that we've got academic kids, so our overarching school policies are much more about leadership projects and getting kids to excel in sports for instance. That's really where we as a school are pushing. If you went in a London school maybe, where you've got a high percentage of young girls getting pregnant, you can see why they might do a big drive to actually educate them more. I think we're just very fortunate because of the area...
(Sciences, School A, EN)

Behind this is the basic idea that students from privileged classes have access to sexual health information through other sources, like family and the Internet, which fact indicates a social bias in relation to those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and contradicts parental resistance from high classes about openly

talking to students. According to these views, sex education is not in the agenda of academic young people. In turn, some teachers stressed the point that less serious students would choose sex education rather than other curriculum areas because they would have less work. This notion coincides with Buston and Wight's (2004:294) study about teachers' perceptions of pupils' participation during SE lessons when they wrote that "low-achieving classes tend to be less inhibited leading to greater participation... than classes which were determined by setting for academic subjects". Within this idea, teachers provide a very middle-class view on SE as being restricted to "risky population." Therefore, SE remains defined as a welfare measure for minority groups that supposedly need to learn about sexual issues in schools as the only source of learning sexuality, which notion goes against middle-class students that have other resources and conditions.

To **summarise** this section about the resistances to an effective implementation of SE, several criticisms were made towards policymakers to whom sex education seemed not to be a priority. Teachers perceived political unwillingness as affecting the lack of support (mainly money and time) teachers are facing in the fieldwork. Therefore, similar concerns and claims crossed both countries and all four schools: Teachers' embarrassment, their lack of training, and the low SE status within curriculum are common obstacles. The Portuguese teachers mostly emphasised changes on educational policy (School D) and the lack of teachers' training (School E) while the teachers from England strongly focused on the lack of time and SE status (School C), plus family pressures (School A). Clearly, teachers stated that SE views on rights are few among political guidelines, mainly because the argument that better emotional well-being leads to better learning is still devalued. Consequently, looking at this relationship between self-esteem and academic success presents itself as a first step to "re-imagining" sex education within a sexual and intimate citizenship agenda.

Teachers' views about SE practices and about youth's sexuality were at stake in this chapter. In general, teachers from both countries have a positive attitude in relation to SE, despite their common fears and controversies. This might be because the most implicated teachers have been the ones who volunteer to participate in the study.

Regarding the sample is mostly female I found no significant gender difference in teachers' attitudes and beliefs. However it must be recognised men's lower involvement in SE and higher acceptance of sex education activities among female teachers, which indicates that many still view SE teaching a women's responsibility. Moreover, the common perception still exists that teachers are "trusted sources of knowledge and skills in all education systems" acting "as neutral delivery mechanisms in schools," and I believe this system must be challenged. Teachers, by majority, feel insecure and blame educational systems for not promoting the support and background they need for SE implementation. In fact, this perception seems to lead politicians to not invest nor design a systematic SE training for all, which standpoint has greatly increased teachers' vulnerability in dealing with political and social demands (Warwick & Aggleton, 2002; UNESCO, 2009).

- **Commonalities between teachers**

Sex education in the classroom was presented by SE teachers and practitioners as both limited and insufficient in the four schools, and its provision is almost totally dependent on teachers' initiative. Albeit with different emphases in each school, all teachers identified several obstacles to an effective implementation of SE. Teachers' lack of motivation and confidence are understandable considering the lack of recognition given to teachers' efforts to obtain training; the lack of resources and knowledge; the external demands made on teachers' action; and the enormous social and educational pressure for "academic" results and lower concern for personal,

social, and health education. In revealing their own lack of knowledge in some specific topics, teachers claim the need for an appropriate teacher training and are proud of their work in finding strategies to provide good SE practices.

Just for a point of curiosity, I found it interesting that teachers also use humour when talking about sexuality and approaching students. In line with young people's reactions, their humour is always used as a strategy to hide embarrassment.

Furthermore, the lack of training increases the interference of teachers' personal values in the transmission of reliable knowledge, for instance in relation to homosexuality and sexual pleasure. There is a clear "missing discourse of desire" (Fine, 2009) in the four schools that continues to teach a "sexual code based on the fear of the body" (Reis & Vilar, 2004). These outcomes indicate that schools are conditioned by political and social factors along with problems on professional or scientific knowledge, allocating sex education between compensatory social policies and achieving the agenda's priorities.

According to this reflection, policymakers must understand that a correlation exists between teachers' knowledge, their level of comfort, and their attitudes. Creating conditions for teachers to feel motivated and secure through encouraging and improving training in sex education is becoming increasingly necessary. As Martinez et al. (2012:432) stated, "Efforts should be made to clarify the sex education professional role [...] however this will not happen until a more concrete and stricter law is enforced". Confirming this view, the political instability and the excess of work required for teachers in Portugal appear to jeopardize the construction of a healthy, satisfying, and structuring sexuality. Additionally, the battle between who is responsible for sex education - family or school, remains. Teachers frequently accuse parents of providing too little support on sexual issues and the media for provoking emotional, sexual, and behavioural changes.

In addition, teachers have some negative attitudes towards homosexuality and young people's sexual activity, as being expressed too early and being seen as disposable, and as underlining the gender stereotypes of dominant masculinity and vulnerable femininity. Teachers presented young women's sexuality as problematic, which notion seems to be reinforced in the formal curriculum and interactions

between girls and boys in SE classrooms where boys are the more talkative while girls appear to be more knowledgeable, in part, because they continue to be seen as responsible for contraception. However, teachers also recognise boys' difficulties in verbalizing feelings and talking seriously about sexuality. It is essential that male sexuality be included in the curriculum and in teachers' attention. Despite these teachers' best intentions, these perceptions perpetuate socio-cultural values that limit students' access to accurate sexual and reproductive information and services (inside schools), and consequently, place their citizenship rights at risk. An effort to encompass all of these issues about teachers' beliefs towards youth's sexuality would seem to include a comprehensive approach to sexual education and must address not only the health and wellbeing of young people but also their legal rights. It also has to work in partnership with families and with health professionals.

- **Different views among teachers**

The main difference between Portugal and England was related to SE practices (the modes of conducting SE, the message, and the area of the curriculum in which sex education is taught). While both Portuguese schools opted for a team-teaching strategy, including teachers from different areas to cover several aspects of sexuality, English schools tend to prefer collapse days with external professionals or sixth form tutors. This reveals different choices at different levels: the political and the teacher. On one hand, the fact that there is an educational law in Portugal that implements SE as a national curriculum imposes and "forces" teachers to participate, but it also guarantees its delivery to all students. Behind this decision is the need to compensate for society through state education's need to overcome social problems related to unprotected sexuality, such as STIs and teenage pregnancy, but also the principle of implementing an education towards sexual democracy and equality. Despite some discomforts, positive results were identified. The teachers from Portugal feel more powerful and capable of talking to students, which fact means that the big short-term impact of SE law has been on teachers' views and willingness to teach, and, consequently, on the school cultures'. On the other hand, English schools bet more on

the know-how of experts than on the power of pedagogical relationships inside the classroom with teachers. This option leads to less training and implication of teachers, but this position, we believe, undermines the confidence students could have in them. Only the English schools addressed the problems of confidentiality and pressures on teachers to denounce inappropriate behaviours.

The great question that arises at this point is if a cross-sex education is an obstacle or a possibility to its provision. Most of the teachers from Portugal and two from England believed that if sex education is a cross-curricular subject, then its contents should be incorporated throughout the curriculum rather than in only one specific subject and that this approach might enrich sexual meanings and significance among youth and the broader community. Portugal is one of the few countries in Europe that follows this model (Knerr, 2006).

Another great difference between both countries is the status of health professionals in the schools and in the curriculum. Portuguese health services share a strong partnership with support, while in England the roles of these two entities and their responsibilities are differentiated. English schools see a greater fragmentation and distinction of professionals. Therefore, while in the Portuguese schools SE is defined as more school-based, for the English ones, it is more “externalized,” to be delivered by other experts.

Despite this different interpretation between the countries, teachers’ beliefs and discourses displayed a new approach to sex education research that again highlights dilemmas, paradoxes, and confusion. According to them, SE is a consistent “space of sexual knowledge” to inform and to protect new generations from risky sex. By covering relational, interpersonal, and ethical issues, the four schools of this study drew on comprehensive SE programmes based on three main ideas: how to keep safe; what it means to have a positive relationship; and what youth are looking for in an intimate relationship. Therefore, it is not just about “information giving”, but also about exploring their behaviours, their convictions, and their communication skills. This approach is a starting point to re-imagining SE as a platform of sexual citizenship and overcome the “official discourse of silence” (Epstein et al., 2003) that prevails in

sex education by consulting students and involving them in the production of the curriculum.

CHAPTER V

YOUNG PEOPLE'S DEBATES ON SEX EDUCATION

PRACTICES, PERSPECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores young people's debates on school-based sex education (SE) practices. In line with the earlier chapter based on teachers' accounts, this is concerned with SE meanings, messages, pedagogies, teaching and learning processes, but from students' points of view. It aims to understand how students discuss, feel about and understand sex education within the school context and, consequently, how they position themselves in relation to the changes which are taking place in this field. In doing so, the chapter positions SE between dominant discourses, youth agendas and broader social debates.

To analyse this tension and better interpret youth debates the contribution of Allen's work (2011) on the three dominant discourses of SE contents – moral rights, health pragmatism and sexual liberalism – is a central resource. Although moral approaches to SE assert that it “should be consistent with political conservatism and religious doctrine” (*ibidem*:48), the logic encompassed by health pragmatism discourses is that students must be provided with the right knowledge and fact-based information to avoid the negative consequences of sex. More open perspectives and liberal discourses on sexuality have been identified in some educational contexts where teachers and practitioners attend to the needs of the whole person, “including their psychological, emotional and social welfare, in order to foster sexual well-being” (*ibidem*:49). Allen, in common with other commentators on schooling and sexuality such as Lees and Kehily, confronts young people's and schools' taken-for-granted

sexual and gender assumptions. In this context, the idea that the “sexual culture of students” and, consequently, their understanding of the experiences and pedagogies of SE are built from resistances, changes and re-signification, leads us to Kehily and Nayak’s (2009:25) concept of “communities of interpretation”. According to these authors, youth debates should be understood as “local-global conversations”, spaces of meaning production based on global media consumption. This perspective is useful for interpreting how SE significances are socially built between regulatory forces of schools and young people's performances. In parallel, gender issue needs to be addressed not only as a key element in the constitution of groups (male, female, mixed-gender) but also as an analytical variable for interpreting young people’s conversation.

Within these aims, methodologically the data of this chapter are taken from 24 focus group discussions (12 in each country) with students aged 14 to 16 (from Years 9 and 10). The chose schools but also singularities. The text is organised into six important debates: the first one is about the troubled definition of SE that is directly linked with the variety of practices, meanings and impacts of students’ experiences in schools; a second set of debates was developed around SE dominant messages (moralisation, prevention and protection) and how they are treated by students; the third debate is focused on the advantages and criticisms attributed to different sex educators (teachers, experts or peers) in order to explore pedagogic relationships in SE sessions. This understanding is followed by a fourth cluster of debates on SE pedagogical practices. In this part, beyond who is educating, students discuss the way they feel in SE lessons and are critical of SE practices. In opposition to these criticisms, positive experiences of SE are presented in a fifth debate about schools’ resources and potential to increase young people's knowledge. These tensions highlight strong gendered debates and views on SE contents, messages and classroom interaction that bring creative insights to the rethinking of sex education as a promoter of a “relational ethics” in a sixth section. The last part of this chapter includes young people’s views by nationality in order to do justice to the differences between countries.

1. “Did we Have or not Sex Education?”: A troubled definition

One of the major concerns of this study was to understand how youth understands and defines sex education as well as what it expects from it. Rather than knowing if these students had had SE or not, group discussion was focused on understanding what they meant by SE. However, this understanding was constrained right from the start because of the difficulty students had in remembering *if* and *what* they had been told within school-based sex education. Many students did not remember what they did or had to be reminded by each other during the discussion itself. In most cases, their first reactions when asked to describe their experiences at school were: “Sorry, I don’t remember”, “I don’t know”, “I can’t remember”, “I’m afraid, no”, “vaguely”, “there were just lessons, quite large classes. I can’t remember my last I think that was the last memory of sex education. I mean, it wasn’t particularly exciting, the majority of the stuff I learned I can’t remember. I don’t think we’ve done anything else”, “we didn’t have it, did we?”.

In other cases, especially in Portugal, students’ accounts were produced and revived within the discussion, highlighting how students perceive and live SE experiences differently. One example was the following conversation in which Elsa had to convince Gonçalo they had had lessons on sexuality:

Gonçalo:	No, I have never had sex education...
[silence]	...
Elsa:	Yes we had M., it was about sexuality. In Sciences, we talked about sexuality and we were taught about contraception as well.
Gonçalo:	Oh, ok, but...
Elsa:	We learnt a lot about sexual organs and teenage pregnancy.
Gonçalo:	Yeah, but that’s matter of Sciences. Now we are talking about sex education...

(FG/E/Mixed2, PT)

This forgetfulness is directly linked with their notions on sexuality and schooling and the way they interpret the several practices of SE they had experienced. Apparently, most of them had troubles in defining SE. For instance, in Gonçalo’s discourse this idea stands out in his distinction between science and sex education

issues. This suggests biological messages and sexual health are not necessarily perceived by students as sex education knowledge (Santos & Fonseca, 2013). Moreover, it illustrates how students seem to not recognise schools' efforts in designing and implementing issues related to sexuality.

Although this initial blank was observed among several groups, ultimately most of them agreed they had had some SE activities. Students from both English schools identified having “collapse days”, assemblies with experts or peer mentors and regular lessons on science and ethics. In their turn, most Portuguese students mentioned cross-curriculum sex education with some expert sessions. This inaccuracy in terms of *when*, *how* and *what* they did, also noted by Elley (2008), illustrates a large variety of SE practices at national and local levels.

Interestingly, this inconsistency appears to promote unequal opportunities, rights and responsibilities among students, schools and geographical regions. This issue was brought up by three boys from a mixed FGD in the EN that emphasised how the absence of a national set of SE promotes different levels of knowledge between schools and classes.

- Travis: They seem to focus on different topics if that makes sense.
 Larry: Yeah! There's no set on the curriculum.
 Travis: The ones they're more comfortable with.
 I: It's not part of the national curriculum?
 Larry: No, there's no continuity between each one... With Science they do teach you the pure... they teach you what you have to learn about...hormones but some teacher will go more in depth and some won't. It needs to be a more national sort of thing. It isn't just one school knows this. I know that School C used to have ex-reputation for lots of teenage pregnancies but... it needs to be done all over the countries so that everyone has an equal thing like our middle schools. Each did a different thing whereas if it became more of the national curriculum, then that it would bring it down.
 Daniel: I think that all country should... have the same thing to teach you about, so then as soon as they all go to the next schools they will know everything, than every else knows and they would just be equal to what they know.
 Travis: So, you'll learn like at different levels. So, you are equal.
 (FG/C/Mixed1/ EN)

As these boys supported teachers' autonomy to provide SE issues they are more comfortable with limits on students' access to a holistic view on sexuality that takes into account the emotional, psychological, moral and social dimensions along with the biological ones (Santos et al., 2012). Arguing that different access to information will

constrain people's choices, knowledge and decisions these students claimed that provision of a national set of SE was a necessary condition for a more democratic school. Within this thought, English students challenge us to rethink the SE agenda as a powerful opportunity for citizenship based on "equality of condition" (Baker et al., 2004) and social justice.

However, when asked what they would like to add to SE programmes, most students did not know what they wanted to learn, which fostered uncertainty around the topic. They found themselves in a dilemma. Although they frequently criticise schools' options about contents and strategies to justify their absence from their own discourses, they presented obstacles to suggested changes. Most of them had "no idea what to propose" and continued to prefer health issues, such as: contraception, STIs and pregnancy. This reproduces preventative assumptions about sexuality and shows that students are not used to being consulted about their sexual interests and needs. Furthermore, it indicates that despite the apparent excessive focus of schools on biology, health topics are not being explored in detail, leaving many questions missing, as echoed by the following group:

- Will: Well, they kind of covering everything really... in the school. I don't know what they could add.
- Greg: I think more detail in some of those smaller things... I don't know... Because they don't always... *[Laugh]* It is tricky to explain but... They don't include, so I am not sure if we'll do it later these issues, but include details like STIs.
- Will: Yeah!
- Greg: I don't think they fully explain how it works or diseases or things than can happen, case studies or... *[Nervous/laugh]* things that could go wrong...
- Will: Yeah!
- Greg: I just think it might make pupils a bit more aware of what could happen...
- I: When you talk about contraception in PD day don't talk about STIs?
- Greg: We do but just not in fine detail.
- Will: Yeah! We get taught that contraception stops you from getting... well, reduces the chances of you getting pregnant and that condoms are the only one that are used as a barrier from STIs... but we didn't go into detail like G. said.
- (FG/A/Male2/EN)

This group highlights the difficulty students have in re-imagining SE. Will started by asserting that everything was already covered but when confronted with Greg's complaints he changed his opinion. Unlike Will, Greg did not feel sufficiently informed and asked for change, although his proposals ended by just focusing on the negative side of sex such as "diseases", "what can happen" and "what goes wrong". This

emphasis on negative consequences makes me wonder if they do realise they are able to learn about positive aspects as well, or if they believe these are the natural results of experience.

The sense of uncertainty and silence around SE experiences, activities and contents crossed the four schools of this study and led me to realise how sex education is still missing from young people's perceptions on school and, even more alarmingly, from their sexual lives.

2. Debates about School's Messages of Sex Education: "They are trying to really hammer this in! It is always the same!"

- **"Don't do it! Delay it! The school is quite old fashioned."**

Although abstinence SE is not being delivered in Portuguese and English curriculums, there are still traces of it in the frequent message that "sex is wrong". Supported by the "discourse of moral rights" (Allen, 2011) presented at the beginning of this chapter, this approach was visible in some schools' assumptions that the best sex education is within family and that sex should be delayed until marriage. This stance is criticised and contested by students who do not want to be controlled or lectured about what they should do but want to be taught about what they need to do in order to have safe and pleasurable sex. This outrage was clear in the following group where students criticised moralistic messages and the "patronising" and "lecturing" tone in which teachers give "sermons" about proper ways to behave.

Michael: It's like, this is what you have got to do this is how you have got to do it, instead of...
Carol: You could do this, you could do that.
Clare and Michael: Yeah!
Michael: They kind of say "It's actually dangerous, never do it." But people do and teachers are trying make you avoid and makes you seem like should never do it, until you are about fifty.
[Laughs]
Michael: Because they think that is the best for us, but it's a bit too much.
Clare: Teachers should be more open minded about it, instead of telling us exactly what we need to have.
(FG/C/Mixed2/EN)

Like Michael, many students think moral concerns around sex and abstinence goals are “a bit too much” and far from the reality, because they will have sex all the same. In this context, the only option teachers have is to urge protection and safe sex.

The same opinion was shared by some girls in the female debates as well, in which they were against moral approaches based on right and wrong sides. School messages seem to be neither impartial nor neutral, putting at risk the conveyance of reliable sexual information. As the following debate showed, girls want to be both heard and informed about the choices they have. They want to make decisions by themselves and feel powerful as a result.

- Sarah: You can give your own view but what you find quite of lot is, teachers just said “- Never do it at all.”
- Sally: But the students... obviously it shouldn't be do it now, but this is for when you're sixteen.
- Adele: They are always like “- This is not now. It's not time.” But they should do it like us make our own choices, they should just tell us without saying what they think is wrong or not.
- (FG/C/Female1/EN)

However, despite these claims, they reproduce moral discourses as well. Adele, for instance, said that sex “is for when you're sixteen”.

Albeit fewer in number, abstinence messages were also present in some experiences of Portuguese students. The following mixed group indicates at least four different ways in which students learnt conservative and moral discourses on sex:

- I: Can you describe me how those lessons were?
- Manel: I had nothing.
- Camila: In my experience, teachers were “-Don't do it!” They have never encouraged us to try.
- Marta: Yeah. It was the same with me. In Year 9, I had sex education in Sciences and the teacher was talking about it as something wrong, a mistake.
- Mateus: We all came from different schools. I had few lessons in Year 9 based on prevention. They were always encouraging us not to do it, to delay it and if would happen to do it safely. They were a bit narrow minded... Maybe because it remains a taboo.
- (FG/D/Mixed1/PT)

Whereas Manel “had nothing” about SE, learning it in silence, Camila had an authoritative and punitive model focused on the “Don't do it” message. Marta's teacher went a little bit further by exploring it as something wrong and a mistake. In this case, sexuality was learnt by fear. Finally, Mateus was also encouraged to delay

sex but his teacher broadened the message to include preventative measures. All these debates show how students perceive SE messages as disconnected from their own realities and simply reinforce the gap between sexual knowledge and sexual subjectivities.

- **Health pragmatism: “They don’t tell you how sex happens but only how to stop it!”**

Young people’s debates identified a shift in schools’ messages from the abstinence discourses of “Don’t do it” to “Do it safely. Wear a condom”. Safe sex, health and prevention appeared as the main SE contents in the four schools, as these several groups described:

Oscar:	They basically gave us the basics and then talked about how we can stay safe in sex and they informed us about the STIs.
Jennifer:	The body.
Oscar:	Fertilization, menstruation. (FG/A/Mixed2/EN)
Bretta:	Usually it’s just “- wear a condom.” That’s it!
Larry:	Yeah!
Betty:	They never tell us a bit more.
Larry:	They just say “- This is a condom.”
Bretta:	Wear it. <i>[laughs]</i>
Larry:	I mean, they don’t talk about the ideological sort of aspects behind that...
Girls:	<i>[laughing]</i> (FG/C/Mixed1/EN)
Duarte:	I just remember having it in Sciences where we talked about the reproductive system, contraception and how AIDS is spread...
Gil:	We also spoke about contraceptive methods and STIs. (FG/D/Male2, PT)
Bruno:	We have talked about the risks, diseases, precautions, contraceptive methods... man’s and woman’s physiology. We also have talked about health.
Gloria:	Family planning, AIDS...
Elsa:	STIs... (FG/E/Mixed2, PT)

These excerpts show how schools maintain the logic encompassed by the “discourse of health pragmatism” defined by Allen (2011:48), focused on giving the right knowledge about how to avoid the negative consequences of sex. Also, the pressure of the “AIDS discourse” was very relevant here, compelling a new perspective

on sexuality that brought into the discussion other issues such as STIs, the use of condoms and risks. Moreover, it further showed how health education continues to be based on heterosexual and male messages exclusively focused on condoms without talking about “the ideological aspects behind it”.

These official discourses on prevention confirm Elley’s (2008:210) findings that SE is frequently “confined to narrow definitions of sexual health and prevention rather than a more holistic view” on health promotion. Similarly to her study, students also stated that “sexual safety is more than simply being prepared to use a condom” and “raises questions about agency and power in sexual encounters”. These lead me to explore the messages behind health contents.

For most students, safe sex messages are exclusively focused on the risks and dangers with little attention being paid to relationships. The focus on protection is seen as an important knowledge resource which helps them to make decisions but, simultaneously, it is quite old-fashioned by not making clear “what sex actually is”. SE information does not tell them much about sexuality in order to decrease their anxieties about the whole situation that involves sexual performance, as the following male group complaint:

Carlos: I don’t know if I am the only one who is worried about it, but I am afraid of... premature ejaculation. It’s a strange situation. It lets you in the act...
Rodrigo: The person feels embarrassed.
Carlos: It is in an uncomfortable position, “- oh, it’s done...”
[Laughs]
Carlos: I think...it is more for fear about what the girl will think. So it is good to be informed that is not a problem. That happens to everybody and through the time it is natural it happens even less.
I: Did you talk about it in Sciences or Sex Education?
Dinis: No, we don’t talk about that.
Carlos: No!
Rodrigo: Sometimes we for thinking like that, it influences our performance and sometimes it is not at all what we were expecting and we feel disappointed with ourselves.
Dinis: There are even some people who become depressed.
Carlos: I think it’s important for girls to know about that as well because if the boknows and the girl doesn’t, he will be in an uncomfortable situation and even if he explains to her she might not understand why that’s happening. I think it’s good that both sides get informed about that.
(FG/E/Male2/PT)

The following female group also observed, safe sex messages were abstract, theoretical and rational, in which sex was frequently approached as a problem. On the

basis of Sally's experience we understand that schools' concern is mainly to avoid the consequences of sex instead of improving sexual well-being and life. Therefore, students do not feel engaged in this health pragmatism:

- Sally: It was interesting because by Year 7 I knew three girls that already had sex, so it was like this is...
- [Interrupting and looking at other girls' faces] "Yeah!"...
- Adele: [Laughs]
- Sally: It was relevant not for us, and obviously our sex education was moved on a lot fast, because the teachers knew what happened, so... from Year 7 we move on from learning about puberty and how it changing to what is actually sex? What is actually consisting of what you have to do? Like the cautions, so it kind of changed for us...
- I: In which way did they talk to you?
- Adele: They only teach you about protection and it's great but... you've can learn about the actual thing as well, what would happen afterward... so they should actually taught you about it or how you get into the situation...
- Sally: Then I've learn what the sex was, what you did in sex, how it happened, how we got in there, how to not get let yourself getting there...
- Adele: It was just... they were literary saying to us, you have to use it because of this, because of that and they gave us their reasons.
(FG/C/Female1/EN)

In addition, factual information is also used to remedy unforeseen situations and to prevent students from "social contamination". The message here is designed to control youth's behaviours and attitudes towards sex. This debate positions schools' intervention on patronising messages of contraception focused on "teachers' reasons", and on the moral obligation of schools to protect girls from "bad influences". In this sense, the emphasis on health has also a moral message that might undermine its necessary pragmatism. Resisting these messages, many girls said they wanted to explore sex for itself and practise contraceptive negotiation (when and how to use contraception), which underlines a new female attitude towards sexuality. They are aware of the importance of having reliable information but also that the decisions are not only made on the basis of information (Ramiro, 2013; Reis et al., 2013). They are determined by a number of affective, emotional, subjective and gendered dimensions that motivate the adoption or maintenance of certain attitudes. This requires a change in health education towards gender, sexual and reproductive rights.

Another EN debate echoes these claims of learning more about sexual health beyond ways of controlling sex. In fact, students seem very concerned with what sex is, what one does in sex, how it happens.

Jennifer: It was more about how things all work...
 Nate: It's... we had discussions about...it's more like how you control... instead what actually happens.
 Jennifer: Yeah! Make whose job is and stuff.
 Oscar: What time is the good, what age is the good age to start thinking about having sex and stuff.
 Jennifer: And like, it isn't just one person's job, the contraception should be together.
 I: The responsibility?
 Jennifer: Yeah, the responsibility is together, you can't blame just one person.
 I: O. you talked about control. In which way did you talk about that?
 Like how much you as a person have control over what you do, so... you... the fact you can have contraception and I think some people... go into abortion but not that much...
 Nate: (FG/A/Mixed2/EN)

Interestingly, however, these students also indicate that safe sex messages in their school are already underpinned by notions of choice (in terms of whose job is; what is the best age to start having sex; how you get there, how not to let yourself get there, which contraceptive options you have; co-responsible control). English groups were the ones who explored these issues more, reporting specific talks on decision-making (abuses, how they should treat each other, how to avoid bad situations) and pressures.

- **“I’m sixteen. I’m having sex!”: the next level**

English FGDs also brought to this study another message of SE that does not exist in Portugal: that is, the legal base of the discourse of “don’t do it”. It seems that schools and teachers are pressured by the age of sexual consent that defines sixteen as the right age for people to become sexually active. Some schools even invited police officers to assemblies to talk to students about the legal risks of having sex under age, since they realise the abstinence messages are no longer accepted by youth. This approach appears to spread the fear of illegality among students and teachers and, subsequently, conditions the practices of learning and teaching sexuality.

Regarding this issue, one of the girls of the FGD describes how teachers arm themselves with the law to scare young people about the need to delay sex at least until the end of secondary school. Going further than Adele, Sally introduces another element to the discussion based on the idea that teachers use the issue of illegality to protect themselves. She comprehends teachers’ position and their need to protect

“their own backs” in the face of criticism from school, parents and the broader community. They do not want to be seen as if they are encouraging young people to “break the law”.

- Adele: Teacher only say – “Don’t do it, at all. Sex is for when you’re sixteen, this is not now. It’s not the time.”
- I: Do you think that point is very important for teachers?
- Adele: They just always say that to us.
- Sally: I think they do it because of their own backs to be fair... because it’s illegal, so if they encourage it, they are practically forcing, encouraging us to be illegal.
- Sarah: Telling us... Yeah!
- Sally: To break the law.
- Amy: I think what they should do is that they should say “- Don’t do it because it’s illegal, but if you’re going to do it use this contraception, do this”, you know? Do it properly. But then, they just say “- Don’t do it.” And that’s it!
- Sarah: I think they should know... At the moment they’re just like “-don’t do it, you shouldn’t do it. It’s against the law.” But what I don’t think they realize is that there’s actually quite a few people are still doing it when they’re under age, they might have an older boyfriend or even... they are “- Don’t do it... use a condom” and that’s it. Only you can be taught about is a condom. So, surely it’s better to be prepared completely than not prepared, because they still gonna do it.
(FG/C/Female1/ EN)

However, the other girls contradicted her by saying they still did not understand why teachers continue to insist on those messages, since they are useless and endanger positive practices of sexual rights. Therefore, these girls claim health pragmatism should be apriority instead of conservative discourses, albeit the same group complained in the previous section¹⁰⁰ about the excessive focus on protection. According to them, the “only thing you can be taught about is a condom” in order to have sex “properly”.

On the other hand, this focus on age makes the age of 16 a time of pressure, anxiety and release. At 16 young people “go to the next level” and feel entitled to become sexually active. The problem is that this sexual entitlement seems to be enforced by the age threshold and social reputation among peers. Culturally they are expected to have sex when they reach independence at 16. This highlights how the question of “readiness” is central to discussion of health and SE messages:

¹⁰⁰ (focused on health pragmatism)

I: Do you feel pressure because you are near Year 10?
 Travis: Yeah, you kind of go up to the next level.
 Larry: It's when you get sixteen, when you are allowed to have sex. There's this person in our form and he turned to 16 last week, I remember our form teacher asking what people will do in this weekend and he says to me "- I am having sex!" because he is now sixteen.
 [laughs]
 Larry: So, it's like that entitlement you get to sixteen and suddenly you feel...
 Travis: You feel like now you have to do what you want, the independence.
 Larry: It's pressured from the whole country, because everyone has sex when they are young... it's even what your dad probably did, it's what everyone did at that age.
 (FG/C/Mixed1/EN)

Therefore, "being ready to have sex" is not only related to individual choice and loving feelings but also and mostly to moral and legal laws around sexual activity. A strong example of that is the EN's SRE Guidance (DfEE, 2000), which discusses the idea of being ready to have sex as being not just dependent on age, but also on the type of relationship young people are in, which continues to confine sex to marriage.

Along with these criticisms, some English students agreed the legal approach has a positive impact in terms of making them aware of their rights too, particularly the most vulnerable, being a way of giving them tools to control themselves under the social rules. In this regard students want to be responsible for their acts instead of being underestimated or scared by teachers.

3. Debates about Pedagogic Relationships: Who is the best educator?

There is another area of controversy relating to *whom students prefer for the delivery of SE*. Finding "who's the best educator" was not an easy task since students were frequently divided into friends, parents, teachers, experts or peer mentors. However, here we will just look at the qualities attributed to school professionals (teachers, experts and peer mentors) to understand the extent to which the educator interferes with the effective implementation of SE at school. In this study, two main criteria were identified as essential in choosing a good educator: the relationship of trust and their level of training and knowledge. Young people are attracted both by the emotional and by the cognitive aspects. In addition, age proximity and being good at

talking were also brought to the discussion by girls and boys. Alldred and David (2007) defined in their work with English students four important aspects of the pedagogical relationship in SE: “being good at talking about this sort of issue”, “information and training”, “being listened to” and “not being embarrassed”. Similarly to my study, Hilton’s (2003) work with boys highlights the importance of teachers adopting practices such as “a relaxed style of pedagogy, being non-judgmental” and “controlling the classroom”. This need to control the social dynamics within the classroom was particularly stressed by Portuguese boys, whereas being an expert on sexual issues was identified by girls from both countries as essential in improving teachers’ performance.

Apart from some Portuguese students who saw teachers as intimate confidants, most of them found great difficulty talking to teachers about sexuality, preferring external professionals or peer mentors. This discomfort was common in both countries and between boys and girls. All of them mentioned the fear of being remembered, criticised and judged by teachers, who are barely perceived as helpers. As emphasised in the following debates, there is a moral tendency by teachers to patronise and judge young people’s choices instead of simply informing them. This means SE knowledge is not untainted by teachers’ values. Moreover, young people do not feel comfortable about facing teachers in other examined subjects which constrain them to reveal personal things to teachers, as the following groups show:

- I: Do you feel comfortable to talk to teachers?
- All: Not really.
- Hugh: It’s awkward.
- Jaime: Because you can get judged very easily by a teacher.
- Hugh: Then you’ll know what they’re thinking in... if you say “should I have sex with this person”, they will say “-why did you do that? This is stupid, you’re so young” and stuff like that... Or like, they don’t generally know with it... then they might judge you from there on...
- Julian: They lecture you on why not to do rather than try to help you. So, it would be more a bias opinion whereas if it’s your friend would just be more helpful...
(FG/C/Male2/EN)
- Alice: If it was with the teacher it would be different.
- Sara: They may comment. Then we passed by them and feel a bit bad...
- Alice: You might be worried that they were kind of remembering of what you’ve said and think differently about you.
- Eva: Exactly! We look at him: “-Hey, I told him a thing of my life.” Now, I do not feel so comfortable looking at him.
- Alice: Then, how I will look at him in class?
- Eva: If it was with a nurse who doesn’t know us.
(FG/D/Female2/PT)

The fear of telling a teacher “a thing of our lives” shows how intimacy is still confined to moral and private spheres leaving no place for open discussion. The suspicion of what teachers might do with this *revelation* limits the implementation of a healthy pedagogical relationship and reinforces its secretive sense. Ultimately their fear is always of being discovered by parents and reinforces the need to include families within SE projects as well. This discussion raises the issue of confidentiality as an obstacle that explains the preference for external professionals in any debate. For most boys and girls from the four schools health experts are the best SE educators because they are more qualified, more experienced and do not have to follow the strict confidential rules of schools. English students even mentioned they feel freer talking to external professionals because they will never see them again. Once again, anonymity is seen as essential within sexual talk.

Contrary to this preference for regular sessions with experts, Portuguese students were critical of lectures as boring, formal and impersonal. In their opinion the experts just “talk, talk, talk” without either listening to them or interacting, which reduces their participation and interest. The result of this approach is that most students “switch off” so they do not have to hear the same things over and over again.

To overcome the embarrassments and the obstacles in talking to teachers, students at school C stated *peer education* is the best pedagogical way to provide SRE. All of them think it is easier to learn from older peers who went through the “same sort of things” recently than adults who “may not know or understand what they are talking about”. Therefore, the use of the same language and the complicity among students emerge as the main reason to prefer learning with peers. It makes them feel comfortable about speaking about their feelings, doubts and fantasies and, consequently, becoming engaged in SE processes. With teachers this communication becomes more “awkward”, especially when teachers employ “youth” language in an attempt to approach students, as the following group says:

- Adele: They don't get it.
 Sarah: They don't know we face with other words.
 Adele: Yeah, it's like a joke...they don't use the real words. The teachers don't really know.
 Sally: A lot of people don't use the ...for example, people don't say my penis. They don't say that. My vagina, they don't say that. They just say some other words. Informal words. When teachers then use those words it becomes more funny and maybe they want to get with us, like get into our language even if it is a little bit cringe, like just get into our language 'cause it will make us feel more...
 Sarah: Like we will understand it. We'll relate to it
 (FG/C/Female 2/EN)

Another reason presented by the same female FGD to prefer "peer mentors" is the informal environment they create as more "relaxed", "enjoyable" and "funny" than teachers who just adopt a "deadly serious mode" and do not let students laugh. In their opinion, teachers "don't fit in".

- Sally: Because if they were students it was more acceptable to laugh, whereas if was the teacher to be talking about it...
 Adele: These teachers just came into us and most just shout in about rape and stuff. And we, as she said, like we are all having a laugh, then he just came deadly serious mood and some people start laugh and he is like "- don't laugh." He didn't really fit in. It wasn't really the right way to do it. He needs to make it a bit funny to people accept it more.
 (FG/C/Female2/EN)

This distance between teachers and students is nothing more but a defence mechanism to hide their embarrassment and impose control over the class. Buston et al. (2002:92) noted that a "strong sense of humour and making SE fun could make pupils more likely to participate". However, this is not sufficient. "Willingness to discipline the class, prohibiting comments about individual pupils and hence engendering trust was the most important thing" (*ibidem*). The problem which some teachers had was difficulty maintaining discipline without imposing unequal power relations, as a boy from a mixed FGD at school C pointed out: "The teachers are 'I am right, you are wrong. I am teaching you, you are supposed to learn'. They talk down to you in a way you know nothing" (*Michael, Mixed FGD, Year 10, School C, EN*). With teachers students feel subordinated to the "authority figure" while with peer mentors the relationship is more egalitarian.

However, peer education is contested by some Portuguese students who do not assign them enough authority to lead a classroom which, consequently, might lead students to make fun of SE contents. They are suspicious about their potential to

improve students' understanding because they are not qualified as teachers or experts. Moreover, they think they will feel more embarrassed revealing their doubts in front of colleagues.

All these perceptions justify why young people still hear a lot more from friends because even when they take what teachers say as “solid facts”, what friends say “sticks in your head”. Table 10 helps to turn this debate more visible:

Table 10 – Sex educators in the views of young people

Educators		
Teacher	Peers	Experts
More proximity than experts	More proximity than teachers	Less proximity than other both
More knowledge than peers	Less knowledge than other both	More knowledge than other both
Less confidentiality	Less confidentiality	More confidentiality
More embarrassment	Less embarrassment	Less embarrassment
Permanent relationship	Punctual relationship	

4. How is the Classroom Context of Sex Education?: “No one really takes it seriously: it’s the way they do it!”

Several debates emerge in Portugal and England regarding the way in which sex education has been implemented and carried out in schools. This section offers important ideas to guide us through young people’s accounts and views on the practices of SE. The failure to take the lessons seriously because of how teachers, schools and, consequently, politicians “do it” seems central to any understanding of young people's engagement and SE status within the curriculum. At these views and opinions about teachers’ performance and choices, we will look now:

- **I wanted to be taught about it, not... underestimated!”**

Within a discussion about the pedagogical devices used inside the SE classroom, a girl from an English school said shyly “I think people know more than the teachers and parents think they do” (*Female FGD, Year 10, School A, EN*). This seems to be the starting-point for understanding how young people perceive SE practices and how they reaffirm the distance between their and adults’ ideas. There is an apparent gap between what adults think young people should learn and what youth already know (Kehily, 2002). This was very clear from the outrage with which the following group recounted their experiences of SE:

Amy: In the middle school I remembered there was one movie, they, like, showed us like this movie thing, and it was the most awkward movie ever... it was cartoon people HAVING SEX!!

Adele: Oh yeah...

Amy: And they were like showing this like how everything happened and we were like... [Face of disregard like what’s the point?]

Adele: It’s a cartoon...

Amy: And it was a cartoon!!! [surprised] What’s this??

I: Did you discuss or debate it after watched the movie?

Amy: Yeah, but they didn’t really tell us about it, they just said “Watch the movie.” and we were like...

Sarah: Like, “no”...

Amy: It was... I wanted to be taught about it, not... (FG/C/Female1, EN)

These girls feel underestimated by watching cartoon characters “having sex” instead of actually being taught about it and disappointed with teachers’ attitudes of “made them watch it and leave the room” without talking to them. This outrage was increased by another English FGD that used “videos of cats having litters” to explain the reproductive process. These two examples express the “official silence” (Epstein et al., 2003) that continues to exist around sex and exhibiting sexual body parts. Similarly to these young people’s accounts, most English students feel infantilised, dehumanised and not taken seriously because of the way in which schools try to disguise sexuality and sex through these strategies. Criticisms by Portuguese students of pedagogical practices also emerged in debates:

I: Why do you have no memories about sex education lessons?
 Ana: The lecture was not very interesting...
 [Laughs]
 Ana: To be honest, it was boring...
 Ines: I think it was the way they talk to us...
 Ana: They were there talking, talking and talking, and we would listen to them if we wanted to, but we didn't if we wouldn't.
 Ines: It was just the power point.
 Beatriz: To us they never explain.
 (FG/D/Female1/PT)

The use of PowerPoint creates a barrier for communication since teachers just “talk, talk, talk” without listening to or exploring the information, although it is very illustrative. This criticism had already been made in relation to external professionals in section 3, and highlights how Portuguese schools are frequently focused on technical and academic discourses, as the following young people show:

Alvaro: It was just the teacher giving the material, nothing else. It was not a lecture.
 André: We did not share our doubts.
 Nuno: The teacher said “-We’ve got to give this material. Let’s get on with it.”
 (FG/D/Male1/PT)

Duarte: I think teachers just follow what is in the handbook and don’t open up.
 Gil: They don’t want to expose themselves.
 Duarte: At least our teacher was like that. She just gave us the material and didn’t want to open up too much or speak to us about it.
 (FG/D/Male2/PT)

Teachers in Portugal are, therefore, criticised in students’ debates for their clear attempt at *schoolarising* the processes of teaching and learning sexuality in the light of other curriculum subjects, such as doing “exercises”, “factsheets” and “homework”. Both male groups complained about the fact teachers were focused simply on giving the material without opening up too much, which shatters the assumption that boys are not interested in SE practices. They feel sorry for teachers’ detachment and end by losing interest. Again, they feel desexualised by formal strategies such as PowerPoint and anonymous “question boxes”, which maintain the learning of sexuality in silence and shame.

Beyond criticisms of pedagogical strategies, teachers’ embarrassment was also found in the EN. Many teachers were described as “insecure”, “immature” and “ill-equipped” and this increased the anxiety experienced inside the classroom and prevented a good learning environment. An explicit case of teachers’ embarrassment

was described by a girl from a female FGD at school C who reported that her teacher just laughs during class. Interestingly, she shows how young people want to change the way sexuality is perceived by education and schools, as well as reaffirm their need to be seen as *sexual subjects*:

Sally: In my middle school my teacher was really immature... and she laughed when we talked about wet dreams and she just couldn't stop laughing.
Others: [Laughs]
Sally: And we were like... no one of us were laughing because we didn't find it funny... we wanted actually learnt and then she was like... she couldn't stop laughing. It was so awkward.
(FG/C/Female1/ EN)

These debates brought two essential contributions: clamour for change and criticism of how pedagogical devices are used to facilitate the teacher's job rather than engage students in participation.

- **Shock strategies: are they counterproductive or beneficial for sexual health?**

Alongside these childish strategies, the debates also highlight the use of shocking strategies on the negative side of sexuality. Some students talked about SE with horror and *aversion*. Matt at school C was one of them. After an initial silence, his first memories described SE as a disgusting and negative moment.

I: Have you already had lessons of sex education?
[Silence]
Matt: Yeah!
I: Can you describe me how it was?
Matt: Boring... all it is just like... they talked to us and then they showed us a clip and then they showed us disgusting pictures... I don't wanna look at a diseased penis.
[Laughs]
Carol: We did some in Science.
Clare: We learned about like the biology.
Matt: I think it should be compulsory but they should make it less monotonous; just all the same is all boring.
Carol: It's the same.
I: How would you do it?
Matt: I don't know how I would do it, but all I know is not really getting in the message across students, because it's just boring.
(FG/C/Mixed 2/EN)

Fear and danger appear to be the main tools used on moral, legal and health grounds to persuade students of the benefits of delaying sexual activity (McClelland & Fine, 2008; Allen, 2011). The provision of “scary discourses and strategies” prevails mainly through shocking videos about “giving birth” and pictures of bodies and sexual organs infected with STIs. For many students these strategies are counterproductive, particularly for boys, generating *aversion* to sexual practices and sexuality. Nonetheless, they do not seem to prevent youths from having unprotected sex and rather reinforce a construction of sexuality based on fear. Such an approach underlines students' lack of entitlement to pleasurable information about sex.

However, even if *scary discourse* was seen as “traumatic” by many of them, for others, the excessive repetition and predictability make it “natural” and decrease its impact. This information is important because safe sex is at risk when students are assumed not to be taking “discourses of protection” seriously.

- Amy: The other thing is that we also do it in Science, then we've Assemblies and then we have in ETC as well... They repeat the same thing over and over again.
- Sarah: Yeah!
- Amy: Then we actually don't listen to it anymore because we get bored and they might teach something that we are not listening anymore... it gets really boring because they just repeat the same thing but... As well they don't give us any good things, it's like if you don't use protection you will get AIDS, you will get this... They don't actually teach us anything that is good about it.
(FG/C/Female1/ EN)

Interestingly, an opposing view about the use of “shock strategies” was debated by a mixed group at school C. In the opinion of these students, scary strategies might be beneficial if they “made them really wanna take care or make sure that doesn't happen”. They only started to have fears and concerns regarding sexuality after being informed in schools. But it again shows how sexuality is learnt on the basis of care and caution.

- Larry: I don't think that many people would feel scared of anything until they have the sex education lesson. It's once they have been taught about...
- Adel: The dangers.
- Larry: About the dangers, about the STIs, about pregnancies and about all of those possibilities that could careful on it, it's only then you would be scared of those things and that's when you would take action for.
(FG/C/Mixed1/EN)

In this context SE is crucial in alerting students to the dangers and risks of sex without which knowledge they would be more vulnerable and susceptible.

- **Students feel suspicious and cheated by teachers' strategies**

Alongside the disappointment with teachers' performances felt in both countries, Portuguese FGDs at school E also criticised the excuses teachers found not to provide SRE: pretending they had forgotten; skipping SE activities; or even asserting that they did not have enough time in the schedule. Most students from school E feel cheated by teachers' promises of 12 hours of SE per year, since in practice they just end up with five or none. According to them, teachers rarely keep their promise and students' expectations increase their lack of interest and reinforce inequalities among school classes, as previously noted. As the following debate shows, there is a difference between the *official discourse* and the *school practice* that increases the distrust of young people:

- Silvia: Supposedly we should have had, but we didn't.
Paulo: Officially I had it.
Silvia: Me too. Officially yes, but the teacher doesn't... She skipped that matter.
Rui: We had those films in the Citizenship Education lessons.
Silvia: Yeah, but the teacher didn't say anything.
Paulo: We had some factsheets; we wrote about some information and debated it. Watched a film too... It was Juno.
Silvia: I had it as well but teacher didn't say anything. There was a programme...
Rui: That was compulsory, a block of 45 to 90 minutes.
Silvia: Thus, we told we officially had, but we've never talked about it... My teacher didn't feel at ease.
Paulo: Ours was because she had other more important things to do.
Silvia: Ours didn't, because every time we asked her about something she said "- Go search for it."
(FG/E/Mixed1/PT)

This excerpt indicates how the implementation of sex education was still uncertain and dependent on teachers' initiatives at the time of research. Sara's account about teachers sending students to search for information instead of helping to clarify issues also demonstrates how ill-equipped and badly prepared teachers are to treat young people's doubts and issues. This insecurity of teachers was also felt in other FGDs, where students were very critical in relation to cross-curricular SE,

considering it a bad mode of delivery. According to them, inclusion of sexual issues within other curricular subjects decontextualised them and jeopardised *team teaching* efforts and SE messages. Furthermore, it does not confer expertise on teachers who are not trained in health and sex education. As the following female group states “it is ridiculous” to have maths or geography teachers teaching SE:

- Dulce: In my class the responsible for SE was the Geography teacher. I think that was not quite right. It could have been at least the Sciences teacher doing it. She wasn't prepared... Because we did some questions and she told us to find the answers in the internet or in books. She didn't feel at ease to speak about those topics...
- Diva: Having SE in a Math class is ridiculous.
- Emilia: Many teachers just say about what they know, it's too general! And when a person knows about what is talking about, explain it better.
- (FG/E/Female2/PT)

Their belief that teachers “just say what they know” compromises the provision of neutral SE free of judgments and personal values. However, this view is contradicted by other messages that have emerged throughout the discussions. Although the majority of these students were critical in relation to teachers' excuses for not providing sex education, they were also understanding of their attitudes and uncomfortable feelings. Teachers' accumulation of work, their lack of training and their embarrassment at being forced to talk about sex, appear in students' speeches as valid reasons for teachers' apparent *aversion* to SE.

At school E for instance, some girls even mentioned the difficulty teachers face in dealing with the demands of both *achievement* and *citizenship agendas*. As we can see in the following female FGD, while Vera and Cláudia are spelling out the excuses their teacher gave for having not provided SE such as “pretended had forgotten”, Elisa tries to find some reasons to explain that behaviour. In her opinion, teachers are forced by schools to provide SE without the necessary support, but simultaneously they are also forced to succeed and attain positive results.

- Vera: My History teacher had to teach about that but she didn't do it. Actually, she pretended she had forgotten.
- Cláudia: It was the same with my head-teacher.
- Elisa: But I think teachers did it because they were forced into it.
- Cláudia: They get a bit annoyed, I think...
- Elisa: It's not just the fact that they feel annoyed by it, but as it is a whole class they say “-oh... we'll be wasting lesson time...”
- Lorena: And sometimes they don't want to give it, as well.
- (FG/E/Female 1/ PT)

All these debates about how teachers and schools are providing SE give us very important clues to better understanding and rethinking SE practices from the perspectives of boys and girls themselves. The way students feel underestimated by the permanent repetition of health contents, teachers' embarrassment and their choice of pedagogical strategies shows how young people have an essential say in the designing and evaluation of SE programmes. On the other hand, it explains why SE lessons are described as a "waste of time", a "mocking around period" and a "switch-off" moment distant from youth realities and not having an impact on their sexual lives. As Alexandra from a female FGD highlights, students' expectations about teachers' work and involvement are disappointed: "those sessions were not interesting enough to make us be there listening to them and participating", which decreased their interest, their participation and, consequently, their learning skills in sexual matters. Students feel "scared", "bored" and "cheated". Buston and Wight (2004) observed that pupils' interests and teachers' relationships with the class were identified as important factors, among others, which justify the different *level of participation* in sex education lessons. In this study, students blame teachers for their lack of interest to justify their own detachment. The discredit students attached to teachers as sexual educators and to the knowledge learnt in the classroom as irrelevant were similar in both countries.

- **The significance of health within educational contexts: "If I had known it was with a nurse maybe I would have come..."**

Viewing the implementation of SE as a resource implies reflection on the support it provides to students. Despite the apparent overrepresentation of sexual health information, the access to health services inside schools still seems to be ineffective. In particular, the way in which the Portuguese groups debated the issue was very important for rethinking the place of health and student support offices in schools. In Portugal the nurses from local health centres have a strong involvement in schools' activities; however, this partnership does not seem to have been introduced to students on a wide scale and they apparently knew very little about its existence. For

instance, in school D, most students had never heard of it and those who knew never went there because they thought a teacher was in charge of the office. The fact they thought it was a teacher rather than a health professional raised the issue of “confidentiality”, since students do not believe in teachers’ fairness and feel ashamed.

- I: Do you know you have a nurse in the Guidance Office to help you with any health or sexual issue you might have?
All: No.
Eva: I even not knew that there was a nurse here. I had no idea.
Sara: They had already told us we could come here to talk.
Alice: I thought it was with a teacher, so I never felt at ease to come. If I knew it was with a nurse maybe I had come...
Sara: Yeah, actually now I’m feeling interested.
(FG/D/Female2/ PT)

After focus group discussions, students became enthusiastic about the possibility of having these services available to them. In contrast, school nurses (like those in Brook Clinics) had a different status in English schools because they were completely independent from teachers’ practices. Students were ashamed of visiting them, all the same. Another difference in school health services between the two countries is the access to condoms in English schools, in Portugal schools must redirect students to a health centre. This lack of articulation between institutions (schools and health centres) and the clear lack of interest by students in their support jeopardises plans/policies for the promotion of health education and raises obstacles between sexual health and sexual education (Santos & Fonseca, 2013).

5. Debates about Sex Education as an Open Space of Possibilities

- **Sex education in school is patchy, but “if we don’t get it from school where will we find it?”**

Beyond the negative views on SE practices, most students from both countries highlighted the relevance of talking about sexual issues (sexuality, sex, contraception, gender, relationships) at school. Therefore, this section explores the possibility of perceiving SE as a powerful educational resource.

SE appears in FGD as a reliable and valid source of sexual knowledge, when it is not the “only information they have got.” This centrality of school was identified by a Portuguese male group that asked, “If we don’t get information from school, where would we find it?”

- Gil: We must be informed about sex to one day when we will have it, we should be informed.
Lucas: And if we don’t get it from school, where do we find it? We don’t feel comfortable to look for it elsewhere.
Gil: The school takes the initiative and we don’t.
(FG/D/Male 2 /PT)

More than emphasising the significance of school within the panorama of sex education, this debate underlines the difficulty many young people still have to take the initiative and search for sexual information by themselves. As Gil indicates it was easy to learn about sex at school because it “takes the initiative by us” to talk about it. Even when students just laugh during sessions, they are internally taking it seriously and always learning some key ideas. Thus, they can keep their willingness to know more about sex and sexuality hidden and restrained from public judgments. From this approach, it seems that many students still do not feel empowered to speak, but want to know more.

Similar to other international studies, such as “HBSC—Health Behavior School Aged Children/OMS” (Currie et al, 2004; Matos, 2010) developed in Portugal, schools appeared crucial to “clear rumours and myths up,” break taboos, and clarify students. Moreover, there is a common belief in school’s knowledge as 100% correct that seems inconsistent with previous suspicions and disappointments with teachers’ performance. Factual information emerged as the most valid to reduce sexual risks and dangers.

This valuing of school seems to be enhanced by the *communicational gap* between young people and family. SE at school is also defined as essential to “compensate” for the lack of family sex education, as the following group indicates:

- Jack: I think the school is more direct, straight to the point but with your parents you might sort of...
Ben: You drift, yeah...
Jack: They don’t talk about it as direct... I don’t think it’s difficult to talk with parents, you just go off subject easier, but when you’re being taught, it’s just direct...

Ben: They're teaching you that and that's what you're going to learn about it... at home you're just talking about anything, if it comes up you talk about it for a little while and then it just changes. But here you spend the whole day on it and that's why they are teaching you.
(FG/A/Male1/EN)

These boys indicate two different attitudes depending on the relationships and contexts. While they might occasionally *talk* and share with parents their sexual experiences and feelings, in schools they *learn* more than discuss. Thus, the way the information is addressed, treated, and discussed in schools makes them unquestionable sources of knowledge. Schools go more straight to the point than parents who might drift from the actual key points. On the other hand, schools are the places where teenagers spend most of their days and have the necessary human and material resources for the realisation of sex education without parents' judgments and control (Marques et al., 2000; Reis & Vilar, 2004).

At School A, some girls also pointed SE is crucial to keeping students alert and aware of underlying dangers of public displays of sex and body. Reflecting on "how we see sex so much" and "how much they advertise sex in the media," SE is valuing and deconstructing some effects of an increased "culture of sexualization" (Attwood, 2006), in particular the emphases of the media on sex.

Sophie: How it was the influence we've got in the media, how much they show it, how much they advertise sex in the media. We did that as well... I think it influences everybody cause of the way that is on the TV so much... we kind of like see them all, so I think it is just make you think about and how we see it so much.
Farah: Because like a lot of TV shows, they sort of provoke sexual relationships but then in TV they show younger people doing it and then parents naturally think "oh, it's just a TV show." They can't relate it to us.
(FG/A/Female1/EN)

Going further on this issue, these girls reported they were always seeing magazines and different shows on TV with young pregnant girls, which might influence their views about what being a mother really means (Kehily, 2014). This excessive focus on teenage pregnancy is scary, but also increases their familiarity with it. What is at stake here is girls' perceptions of the "communities of interpretation" (Kehily & Nayak, 2009) from which youth sexual culture in general is being constructed. The impact of the media is not explored in this study, but its relation to schools and education must be taken into account in order to "re-imagine" SE (Allen, 2011).

Besides being defined as a source of *information* and *awareness*, SE was also defined in particular in debates from School A as a *source of empowerment*. More than a tool to convey sexual information, SE is seen as a tool to equip young people with choices and confidence to speak about sex, sexuality, feelings, desires, etc.

- I: So, how the information learnt in those sessions affected the way you relate to each other and the way you look at relationships?
- Anne: In some senses yes, but not really in the way, because we already knew quite a lot about it... because we have been taught a little bit more every year... but I guess it kind of changed it a little bit because... just getting people's opinions in a way... because when we have class discussions I didn't realised that it meant stuff to other people and it was everyone as well.
- Sophie: Yeah, and we did know stuff from things that our friends had talked about but then when they actually talk about in school it kind of means more, because now they think that you're gonna get to an age where you need to know about it more, we will kind start to think it more... because instead of just being like amongst us, in your friends, the teachers now want to talk about with us.
- Farah: It's seems like it is not as much gossip as you have with your friends, as soon as teachers talk it's like, "ok" you see that it's important.
- Alice: When you learn about stuff that it gives to you an option like you feel more comfortable saying no...
- I: Do you feel more confident?
- Alice: Yeah! Because you know what to do and what not to do [*laughs*] and everything.
- Farah: And you could feel kind of confident that everyone there weren't be like immature, like you feel confident that everyone there it's going be maturate serious.
(FG/A/Female 1/EN)

For these English girls, school SRE "means more" than the information they get from other sources (family, friends, media) because they feel it allows them to talk with "experts" in the area and in front of each other. Unlike their previous descriptions of SE experiences, these girls now do not feel intimidated in asking questions in the classroom because everybody is hearing and sharing opinions. There is a sense of "collective power" among students that makes SE provision easier at school because, as Farah pointed out: "When someone has a question, no one is gonna be like 'What?!' Everyone wants to know the same thing." It is almost a "public permission" to learn, talk, and explore sexual issues, which makes them more mature, autonomous, and responsible. This thought is interesting because it shows how sexual knowledge becomes more valid and legitimated from the moment it is given at school. This girl's idea seems to be disconnected with previous embarrassments about talking to teachers, feeling engaged in lessons, and their common preference for learning with friends.

Similar perceptions seemed to have another group, this time constituted by boys, that schools make students feel more powerful and confident to make decisions. Arthur, for instance, highlights sex education gave him “voice” to speak about his wishes, desires, and loving expectations. Lily from the same group also felt SE sessions helped girls to cope with difficult circumstances, including abusive and violent situations. In this sense SE means a *space of possibility to listen to*:

- Arthur: Because... it just helps to maturity a lot, so... if you start to understand girls, because in primary schools girls were smiling and I didn't like it and then after sex education you started to realise stuff about them and you started to... like know how they work which is good in my opinion.
- Adrian: If you've never spoken about that sort of things before and you start randomly talking to your friends about it, then they might tell you "- why are you talking to us you are being weird." But if you have people who you respect, like the teachers are talking about it, then it's gonna make a lot more normal for the people to talk about it between themselves.
- Arthur: I generally, If I like a girl, I talk to girls about it because they know the... girl I am talking about better than boys would. So, I don't think gender really comes into it, because it's just a personal relationship, you can just talk to them, as you should to a boy which is good. I don't think without sex education I could done that. So... if I wasn't taught about it, I wouldn't be able to speak...
- I: So, do you feel more powerful now?
- Arthur: Yeah!
- Lily: I think just the knowledge of the contraception day that you had, it was... really... different, cause there we find out there were loads of different types of contraception in one of discussions that we did and I think the one about the abusive relationships as well, or about any relationship. So, if you are in that situation and you are being pressured then you know what to do, of precautions to take, how to say no if you want to and I think that's quite powerful and really, really useful
(FG/A/Mixed1/EN)

Such comments emphasise how knowing more about sexual issues might contribute to reducing gender power gaps within intimate relationships. Interestingly, while boys feel powerful for being able to speak about emotions and feelings, girls feel it by learning more about how to protect themselves, which means they are more aware of their sexual rights. This issue of gender is developed in detail in the next section.

To sum up, these more positive debates around SE define it as a means of *information, awareness, and empowerment* that comes to compensate for the silences of the family and the excesses of the media.

6. Gender Debates: Is sex education a feminine subject within a male-dominated space?

- **The sex education classroom: controversy, noise, silence, and openness**

Another essential debate that came to the fore of FGDs was the significance of SE in the construction of gender and sexual identities. The ways *inter* and *intra* dynamics regulate each other are here analysed as being strongly influenced by the expectations teachers have towards students and the gendered messages of SE. Beyond the constraints of “who is teaching,” the pressures of who is in the classroom were also brought up by youth. Boys and girls from both countries showed discomfort and embarrassment talking about sexuality in SE classroom, in part because “it is not normal to talk about sex and everybody feels embarrassed” (*Male FGD, School E, PT*). Students are clearly afraid of sharing their doubts and experiences in front of teachers and other colleagues, which contradicts the previous blame thrown at teachers for not talking. In order to avoid embarrassing situations, students transfer the focus of attention to teachers, “putting them on the spot” and speaking about them with compassion and sorry. Suddenly, the relaxed atmosphere of the class becomes the only space in school where students feel able to contest teachers’ power by “giggling,” “laughing,” “confronting,” and “making fun of” them, just because it is “a good way to get over that.”

These reactions of contestation are gendered as well, since they are frequently attributed to young men by teachers and themselves. Actually, they say teachers are expecting boys to be irresponsible and funny while girls are quiet, but they end up behaving as they are supposed to. Therefore, most of them state girls learn about sexuality in silence and boys opt to learn it from peers in public displays of hegemonic masculinity, such as “mocking around,” “making light of everything,” and laughing when questioned. Boys even agreed to not take sex education seriously under the penalty of ruining their social reputations. This peer regulation was particularly noticed

during males' FGDs, where boys were teasing each other and making funny comments all the time, as we found in the following group:

I: So what kind of practices would you like to learn?
Ian: Put condoms and stuffs...
Paul: On!!
[laughs]
Ian: Not actually on but like put on them like cucumbers and stuff.
[laughs]
Neil: You know... like... what contraception... you will need to use but you don't know exactly what to do... don't really get taught like/
Grant: How to do it.
Neil: How to... but ok, it's like more...
Grant: Like positions...
Ian: You can't tell that.
Neil: You can't really.
Henry: He said we should learn positions.
[laughs]
Neil: I am saying you don't know what to do, you know about contraception but you don't know what... like, anything else...
(FG/C/Male1/EN)

For some, the use of humor appears as a male strategy to cover their evident lack of knowledge and embarrassment (Kehily & Nayak, 2009), which means boys also feel vulnerable to talk in front of peers, especially girls. A Portuguese boy (Male group, School D) called this need to protection "a feeling of brotherhood." This feeling is interpreted by girls as a sign of immaturity, as was evident in the accounts of the following female group:

I: Do girls feel more embarrassed than boys?
Anite: Yeah, definitely!
Amanda: Yeah!
Anita: Cause boys just laugh about it.
Amanda: Boys don't want you to think they feel embarrassed. They want to turn the school a cool environment.
Anita: Sometimes if you want to ask a question feel embarrassed, because obviously there is boys in our lessons and they will laugh about everything you say 'cause they are immature.
I: So, you prefer to still quiet?
[Silence]
Anita: In those lessons...
Amanda: If we say anything will be worst.
Anita: I laugh a lot... but I don't put my head in asking serious question.
(FG/C/Female 2 /EN)

SE classroom appears as a *space of exhibition and show off*, where students reaffirm the boundaries between who is mature and experienced and who is not. Based on debates girls do not feel strong enough to make sexual jokes in front of boys

because they are afraid of being taken seriously and ruining their sexual and social reputation. On the other hand, they considered that boys have to make jokes about sexual issues in order to act like their peers. Therefore, the moment of SE is marked by “inter- and intra-gender policing” (Duncan, 1999), in which the priority is to impress the other instead of actual learning. These gender pressures were felt during mixed-group discussion, where girls were shyer and less talkative, taking more time to answer and show their own ideas than boys.

To **sum up**, this debate is relevant to understanding how the SE classroom is a space of male exhibition and female restraint. It seems young people’s discourses are still marked by the scrutiny of gender, where speaking about sex means being experienced and knowledgeable. Consequently, the girls are still afraid of being seen in a bad light, and boys create disturbances to assert themselves against peers. Therefore, SE dynamics involve not only age, but also gender and sexual pressures between students and teachers (Measor et al., 2000).

- **Intra-gender policing: how to be gay in school?**

This intra-gender policing processes in schools and in particular in SE classes, address gender but mainly sexual “norms.” As a space strongly marked by heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity, the emergence of other sexualities is still very turbulent. The following groups give us accounts of experiences of *sexual bullying*:

- Marta: The school is not prepared to deal with it. Not at all! There are still many prejudices.
Manel: A friend of mine suffered from that.
I: From that?
Manel: From pressures. A lot! Because they suspected he was homosexual, it was not the case, but they suspected. So, they did many things to him. In the dressing room, boys did not undress until he left. They treated him badly; insulted him which had consequences later. He started to self-mutilating, he dropped out of school, he did not eat and he lowered his grades... Suddenly, one day he was in the classroom and rebelled. He stood up and reported everything they had done to him. At least, he had that courage to assume and face them. After that they stopped teasing him. Teachers usually don’t know these things. Nothing ever happens inside the classroom; outside is where it all happens.
(FG/D/Mixed 1/PT)

This boy told a story about a friend who “suffered” from pressures and violence just because other students thought he was homosexual. The way young people respect the courage of this boy to “come out” and face the whole class gives us clues about the importance of improving the confidence and decision-making skills of students through education. However, it helps to see how it remains difficult to be gay in secondary schools and what gay students have to face. Another example of this discrimination was raised by the following English mixed group:

- I: How about the sexual diversity, how do you think the school deals with that?
 Clare: I don't know, I think... it is improving, but people still not being very open about it.
 Michael: I've got an experience on that... I've got a friend who obviously he is attracted to men and to women as well... So, he is bisexual, but he prefers men, but he feels so confuse that some people take advantage on that. They never accept the fact he is gay and then he might lie, which I don't mean is right but he does.
 E – I do think they are mainly cruel about it.
 Carol: They should respect them early.
 I: How about the teachers?
 Michael: Teachers have got to deal with it, whether they like or not.
 Matt: From my experiences, my teachers just ignore what's going on which I think it's a bit bad.
 Clare: They are really old fashioned/
 Matt: They don't think they have to deal with it really, because they don't really have that experience, I mean the teachers are very, I won't say old fashioned, but not really in our generation, so they don't know how to deal with it, how to cope with this new thing.
 I: So, you have never spoken about homosexuality in sex education?
 Clare: Not that much, a couple of times but it is not like a big subject.
 Carol: No, not a big topic.
 Michael: It was just the basic. They just say, you should treat your partner right and if he is gay it doesn't matter and that's it.
 Clare: Yeah! And like treat them as equal because they're the same but that's all of it. I suppose they can't really go too depth, but I suppose they can do more, they can just, kind of, do more about it.
 (FG/C/Mixed 2/EN)

This debate brought three different ideas about this issue. First, as boys highlight, young people do not accept homosexuality yet and are frequently cruel to those who are different, which leads them to lie and feel apart. Second, that this issue is not just problematic for students, but for teachers as well. They consider that most teachers ignore gay students because they are old-fashioned and do not know how to deal with them. This position is contradicted by Michael, who think that this not a teacher's choice, but they must deal with it. Despite these negative points of view, they ended by indicating they talked about equality and partnership within same-sex

relationships, which means that schools are making changes to approach homosexuality in classes.

Again, another male FGD also highlighted they have the “tendency” to make fun of those who are different when they are together with friends. Their homophobic attitudes usually change if they are alone or with peers.

- Carlos: I think it is important to learn how to respect and react in the same way with everybody. Here at school it has not been told yet.
- Rodrigo: For instance when we see a person that looks, by the way they dress, they talk, as a homosexual... if we are in group we immediately tend to make fun of them, but if we are alone we look at situation as if it was normal... It is more outrage when they are boys.
- Salvador: Yeah, because for instance when a girl gives hugs and kisses and holding hands with another girl, it's a normal thing. Now, if it is a guy it is a scandal.
- Rodrigo: Seeing girls it's not quite normal but ready. It is “weird”.
(FG/E/Male2/ PT)

Unlike these boys, other debates have shown to be more homophobic basing their arguments on moral, religious, and natural issues. In the following debate André considers homosexuality “wrong” and unnatural, Tiago reiterates it through the weight of religion, and Hugo already accepts it since they do not mess with him (Fonseca & Simões, 2014). However, this sign of tolerance maintains the social discrimination because it breaks the natural order of the world. Interestingly, they invoke moral issues and simultaneously assume they are not religious, which highlights the contradiction that young people are facing between the tradition and modern life:

- André: We think it's wrong to be homosexual.
- Alvaro: I disagree with you. I can be a friend of a gay since they don't mess with me or flirt with me.
- André: I'm against because I think the society has been established in a particular world.
- Alvaro: But if it was a couple of lesbians you would enjoy.
- André: Of course not. I think it's bad for both sides.
- Alvaro: Eating popcorn.
- [Laughs]
- André: I think it's bad for both sides. The world was made with a ... I don't know how to explain, with a purpose and now many people are trying to change it...
- Nuno: For instance, to the Church... God created the world to be man and woman, they are the perfect match.
- Alvaro: Nowadays it is more embarrassing to see 2 men than 2 women For everyone.
- Nuno: I don't think so. For me it is more embarrassing to see 2 men than 2 women, but for women it is more embarrassing to see 2 women than 2 men.
(FG/E/Male1/ PT)

The girls from FGD have revealed higher tolerance in relation to sexual diversity, although it is still very distant from a perspective of rights and recognition for difference (Sennet, 2003). As Rita pointed out she accept it “super well” but she still comments.

Rita: People accept them. I accept it super well but when I see them I make comments. Everybody comments when they see them.
Sara: It takes a lot of courage and personality to come out.
(FG/D/Female 2/PT)

- **Preventive messages conceived in the masculine: “It’s just wear a condom.”**

Beyond the reactions and attitudes in the classroom, also the messages of SE emerged as being gendered, since sexual practices continue to have different consequences for boys and girls, such as getting pregnant and the sexual reputation among peers and broader society. For most of them, SE messages are directed towards girls since they are “the ones who suffer if something goes wrong” (Female FGD, Year 10, School D). This not only perpetuates gender differences within sexual relationships at contraceptive and intimate levels, but again it limits SE knowledge about prevention. But the biggest problem is the way young people place themselves within this information. If most girls were critical and against this female focus of SE, they eventually end up accepting the responsibility of being more attentive to the class. As the following discussion shows, girls criticize boys’ indifference but simultaneously are comprehensive with them because they are immature and childish. This complacency reinforces the notion of SE as a “female subject:”

Rafela: I think boys don’t pay attention to it.
I: Why not?
Rafaela: I don’t know, maybe because they think they know everything... and that they don’t need to be taught. In my class no one paid attention. Boys were just taking the mickey of or making those questions to disturb. In my opinion, girls were more interested, at least in my class.
Teresa: I think we have those sessions too early, so we are very immature. Boys usually were very childish.
Rafaela: Immature.
Teresa: Not that girls aren’t as well, but they are more than us. Boys start to make light of the situation and joking around.

Vitoria: I think it's normal girls pay more attention, because normally they are the ones who get pregnant.
(FG/D/Mixed 2/ PT)

Also many boys agreed SE is frequently focused on girls because they are more responsible and, consequently, victims of boys' immaturity. The following groups show the way boys see themselves and girls within SE messages:

Nuno: We are always mocking around... there are always laughs...there are always perverse thoughts. Sex remains a taboo...
[laughs]
Alvaro: Girls don't laugh...
Nuno: We are more open.
André: They take this more seriously than boys.
Nuno: It's because they have to be more careful than us...
Alvaro: It's to maintain the pose.
Nuno: Because they take the pill, have the menstruation.
Daniel: It's at ease with us. We don't have to be with those cautions.

(FG/D/Male1/PT)

Simão: It's easier for girls than boys to speak to teachers about these topics because boys are more childish. It doesn't mean it is my case. Because girls have... it's not the obligation but... they are almost forced to gain responsibility earlier... Most boys don't pay attention to contraception because talk about that to them it's the same as not speaking. It's important but they don't have that consciousness. For them is, have sex and then forget...
Xavier: But they are not all the same.
Simão: Yeah, some aren't but the majority...
(FG/E/Male1/PT)

Again, this debate emphasises how boys see themselves as girls do, as being irresponsible and childish, and they use that to justify their lack of interest in learning about sexual issues at school. However, as Xavier shows, dissonant voices are already emerging among boys who recognise the emergence of multiple masculinities in relation to sex. "‘They’ are not all the same," said Xavier to make the difference and demarcate himself from the homogeneous group.

At this point there are contrasting views among male debates about towards whom the message of SE is targeted. If for some of them, as said before, SE is associated with girls, some English male groups asserted that SE is directed at them because they are the ones who have to take care, seduce, teach, and lead the girl into sex. This has directly to do with the way boys face intimate relationships, since they are not expecting girls to take the sexual initiative, even if this changes in a steady relationship, but rather to be passive (Holland et al., 1998). There is a visible male

dominance in youth sexual lives and, consequently, SE messages. Regarding this, in the following male debate some boys underestimated girls' knowledge about contraception and made fun of the fact that girls did not know how to put a condom on during one assembly. Despite this teasing, they excused girls because they did not really have to know how to do it since that is the boy's "job." Boys' common assumptions that "it is the way it is, boys know more" leads them to perceive girls as victims, which is an indication that men are supposed to know everything there is to know about sex in order to secure proper masculinity.

Neil: They asked four people to go and put a condom on, and no one really put that hand up.

[Laughs]

Ian: I did it.

They just picked me, cause the guy knows me and he was "- Come on." And I "- All right..." Because no one wanted to go. I didn't care. It was quite funny, I just laugh about it. The girls couldn't do it, while the boys is just... it's so simple, it's not really like doing this, it's just like...

Neil: Some girls put it on. Then, one girl put it on a wrong way. I don't think they had been taught about condoms like much.

Henry: In the middle school we learn a lot how, but it's just boys on that.

Neil: Sometimes, we have the Assemblies just for boys and then girls might have the Assemblies for girls.

Ian: I feel it's more directed at us, I think, cause it is always about condoms, and never about... it's always about boys needs to be sensible and there is any say it's like a tiny bit on girls, that suit them directed. Because it's fair enough because boys are more stupid and they don't ever really think about it, but if it's, obviously, it is... Two people involved in it, so both have got to be sensible.

(FG/C/Male1/EN)

This activity of condom demonstration practices through the use of a banana or on plastic models shows how masculine and heterosexual meanings continue to shape the sexual knowledge provided in schools (Elley, 2008).

The occurrence of this activity was very common in the four schools and highlights how the great emphasis and attention given to condoms and their "correct" use reinforces the gender difference on preventive messages. Moreover, it also stresses the strong impact of AIDS discourse on SE messages to set the condom as the only contraceptive that prevents STIs. Once again, boys in this debate also set themselves as irresponsible and "stupid" without thinking too much about the consequences of their behaviors, but simultaneously as more knowledgeable. This male auto-criticism

seems an excuse for maintaining the stereotypes about male disinterest in sexual risks, feelings, and female well-being.

In line with this approach, some girls also considered that safe sex and sexual health messages were thought towards boys. In particular, the Portuguese girls disagreed with the excessive focus on male condoms as made clear in the following debate:

- Beatriz: I think there is one thing that is wrong. When they speak about contraception, they focus more on the male rather than the female ones. And I think that's wrong.
- Ana: We all agree with you.
- Beatriz: Firstly, they teach the male contraceptive and only later it comes the female one.
- Inês: The condom is more accessible. You can find them in supermarkets. I think it's because of that they speak more about it. Because not everyone has the confidence to go to a pharmacy and buy other methods or go to a doctor asking for a pill. Of course, girls have to know how to put a condom on, because boys might not know. Girls must know. But I think they speak much more to boys than to girls.
(FG/D/Female1/ PT)

All this discussion seems a paradox towards the previous comments that SE is a feminine subject. Actually, if SE is conceived for women, why does it almost limit the preventive messages to male contraception? Also, girls are wondering about this contradiction, arguing this focus on male condoms in SE lessons is incongruent with their real relationships, where they are mainly responsible for contraception. Or other constraints such the fact that the majority of boys do not want to use them or the fact that girls are still not very well socially accepted to bring condoms with themselves. Therefore, they claim the inclusion of female sexuality and sexual rights within SE curriculum, which shows new attitudes and initiatives from girls towards sexual relationships. This may constitute a turning point in SE, and consequently to intimate citizenship, since girls want to be under the educational spotlights, they want to learn about ways of protecting themselves in order to have control over their own choices and decisions.

On the other hand, this focus of SE also seems to be a public and social strategy to engage boys in sexual health discourses. But for these girls, it is a way of losing power over their own sexual history and positioning them as vulnerable and victims. This position creates a gap between the way prevention, in particular condoms, is conceived by public health policies and youth. Because, despite condoms having been

produced as a unisex contraceptive method, due to its symbolic significance, practically only boys feel able to buy and carry them, which perpetuates male dominance over sexual intercourse. Moreover, this debate also highlights how girls do not view condoms as their own method.

Girls are against these preventive messages and the gendered way teachers look at them. One clear example of that was the confrontation brought in a female FGD by Sally, who contradicted teachers' stereotypes by arguing boys are not always "irresponsible" and girls "victims":

- Adele: They used to do something really awkward that was split the boys and the girls, so they made it really like... this was no...
Sally: There was, in my class, the teacher was like "- Girls, boys are pricks..."
Adele: Yeah!
Sally: And us: "- What? They are not. They are lovely!!"
(FG/C/Female 1/ EN)

All these debates, in particular the female ones, show how SE is replete with conservative "values of an older gender order" (Kehily & Nayak, 2009) that students already disagree with and want to change. Therefore, one can say young people are challenging teachers to overcome that binary and to recognise the existence of multiple masculinities and femininities. This confrontation implies that schools, particularly SE programmes, pay attention to the importance of "local-global negotiations to the making of gender" (*ibidem*, 2009:25). Otherwise, the distance between youths' lives and SE messages will be even bigger. Hence, the sex education class has to be thought of as "a forum within which the two worlds of adolescent sexuality and the authority of school culture come into open confrontation" (Thomson & Scott, 1991, p. 12). These young people's accounts of teachers' prejudices allied to the feeling they are seen differently are very important to the practitioners' understanding of how young people are receiving their messages.

Alongside this gendered perspective, another debate argued that the preventive messages of SE are the same for both sexes, but in practice the sexes interpret them differently, which might interfere in the way they absorb and understand it.

I: Is the message of SE the same for girls and boys?
 Girls: Yeah!
 Nate: I think we talked about the same but...we interpreted it differently.
 Jennifer: We were taught the same thing but I think...that is different views... I think the guy would think of it differently.
 Nate: It means/
 Oscar: Yeah! It means different things for different people.
 Jennifer: I think it means something else for a girl that it would for a guy...
 Oscar: Because there's a massive contrast how girls' brains work and boys' brains work, so that's kind of make difference, so we interpret it differently.
 Molly: A girl, I mean, potentially, they would be the ones who are risking pregnant on the guy, so we have to think about it differently.
 (FG/A/Mixed 2/ EN)

- **The promotion of *relational ethics*: single or mixed sex classes?**

As a result of previous discussions, the potential of SE to transform gender power relations within intimacy also emerged in several debates. SE effects on deconstructing the “double standard” of gender were enthusiastically emphasised by girls from School A, who felt surprised by boys’ views about emotions:

Anne: We had this activity where one side of the classroom was “Yes” and “No” and then they asked us big questions like: Do you think it’s up to the boy to bring contraception? Then they go to the other side of the classroom to see which everyone thought... if the classroom was split you’ve get everybody’s opinion. Like, they asked a question “when you’ve had sex did it really mean something?” All the girls would think that it didn’t mean anything to the boys, but then when the boys went to talked about it they said that they did want it to mean something when they did have sex.
 Sophie: We learnt a lot about what boys can do and they learnt what we can do.
 I: Do you think it is important to be mixed?
 All: Yeah!
 Sophie: Because you can get the boys’ side of story too because sometimes if you have it just with girls, then girls have a really opinionated idea about it, but then if you have it with the boys we can get their side about what they think as well.
 Farah: And I think it is important the boys were aware of what the girls know and the girls were aware of what the boys know. Nobody sort of underestimates anything.
 Sophie: Cause girls normally have this idea that boys just wanting to have sex for no reason that they just want to do it and if we all learn it together it would mean more to all of us rather than all the girls have one idea and all the boys have one idea about it.
 (FG/A/Female 1/ EN)

This feeling of “surprise” seems essential to challenge past stereotypes about sex, such as that “sex does not mean anything to the boys” and “girls are the ones responsible for contraception,” among others. It seems that new masculinities and femininities are emerging to shake dominant patterns of hegemonic heterosexuality

and, consequently, to change the way young people look at each other. Regarding this idea, some Portuguese debates also pointed out new perceptions of gender. As the following extract from a mixed group shows, girls argue against the social assumption of *manhood* and are already confronting gender stereotypes:

Raul: Boys have to know but girls are the ones who have to be careful.
 Rafaela: I disagree.
 Raquel: I'm gonna hit you. (*Looking at R*)
 [laughs]
 Raquel: I think boys think sex for girls is a sentimental thing whereas for them is a natural thing, that they do or not do when they want.
 Teresa: It's not quite like that. You cannot put them all in the same bag. There are different people.
 Raquel: At least following the perspective he gave about us now. For us that sex is sentimental, it's just love, there are deep feelings and for them it isn't, it is something they simply do it either like or don't.
 Filipa: I don't think it's exactly like that. There are boys like that, but there are girls too. Anyone has their personality...
 Rafaela: There are two sides.
 Filipa: Exactly, because sometimes there are boys who even care more than their own girlfriends.
 (FG/D/Mixed 2/ PT)

Within this debate there is a female willingness to overcome the gender binary and force new attitudes on boys. Both debates raised the significance of relating and learning with each other, questioning whether SE should be provided in single or mixed-sex classes. In response to this, most students from the four schools consider SE should be taught in mixed groups, as a way of everybody learning the same thing, seeing both sides, and being aware of what others “know,” “think,” and “want.” This was the same for boys and girls. The key point here is getting different points of view to know how to act in practice. As a boy from a male FGD (School A) said, “It is important we both learn about both sides, because otherwise if you are in a relationship and something happens you don't know all of what is it about or if they became serious you really can't do anything: you're stuck.” The fact that boys also prefer having mixed gender classes shows their commitment and engagement in emotional and loving relationships as well. Again at School A, young men stress the importance of understanding, hearing, and knowing girls, despite some of them agreeing with the benefit of having some gender-split moments to feel more comfortable talking about specific gendered issues:

I: Do you prefer to have it in a mixed class?
 Ben: Yeah...probably it would be more confidential if it was just boys and stuff, because you could talk about it more, but...
 I: Do you feel comfortable to talk about it?
 Ben: With boys yeah, but if there's girls around it's kind of weird...I don't know why... You can't really say as much, because they wouldn't understand, it's different/ ...
 Tommy: Different for boys and different for girls...
 Jack: You don't say as much as you would with just boys... it's embarrassing...
 Ben: They've got the same as me and stuff, so...
 Jack: Because we're going through the same thing and girls are going through something different...
 I: And do girls feel comfortable to talk?
 Ben: Depends. Not really though...
 Tommy: Not in front of boys and stuff...on their own, just girls and just boys...they do but I think, not like mixed classes...
 Ben: Because when they're mixed if there's a question about condoms, maybe girls wouldn't understand because they have different body parts.
 Jack: Then if boys had any questions, when you're with girls, you like hold back on your questions, but if it were just boys...
 (FG/A/Male1/EN)

This combination of split- and mixed-sex classes goes in line with many schools that opt to provide single-sex SE as a way of putting students at ease, and leaving the joint sessions about contraception, STIs, and sex for later years. This position continues to separate female from male issues, and when they put them together they are frequently accused of being too late. On the other hand, this debate also expresses boys' fragilities to speak in front of girls, reinforcing previous views that boys just want to *show off* in order to cover up their own fears.

In line with this idea, SE emerges as a resource for blurring gender boundaries and, subsequently, becomes a relational tool to enhance equal rights and responsibilities within sexual relationships. Therefore, SE is seen by many students as preparation for real relationships even if this topic is usually missing from curriculum. As girls, in the previous section, claimed greater visibility of female contraception as a means of bringing their sexuality and rights to debate, also boys want to be engaged in parental rights, complaining about the way they are badly represented in public discourses. New masculinities seem to also be emerging in male debates, as Oscar and Nate highlight:

Molly: We have to think about it differently.
 Oscar: Definitely.
 Jennifer: Because although... it's kind of the guy I mean, obviously, you are like together but in the end it's gonna be the girl that would end up.
 Oscar: Pregnant.
 Jennifer: Not the guy... So, cause the guy can just walk away. That's why people think about it differently, because the guy wouldn't be worried about the same things the girl would be.
 Molly: Yeah...
 I: Do you agree with that boys?
 Oscar: I have just known the male side of it. I definitely think the... guys do worry about that cause not all men are kind of... like tough guys who walk around just... you know? Looking for the next woman to have sex with so... I think, it's quite a common mis-conception that it what happens quite a lot when it's actually quite a rare occurrence.
 Nate: It does happen but... it is completely different, it's not separated into male or female, it's in different groups inside of which behave like this...
 (FG/A/Mixed2/EN)

This will of either girls being part of preventive messages and boys of pregnancy and parental issues means that youth are already starting to internalise some sexual and reproductive rights. The notion that learning and talking about sexuality at school helps in deconstructing gender boundaries is essential to rethinking an SE towards democracy and a new *relational ethics*.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In line with research on youth, sex education, and schooling carried out over the last 30 years (Alldred & David, 2007; Epstein et al., 2003; Holland et al, 1998; Kehily, 2002; Measor et al. 2000; Ramiro & Matos, 2008; Reis & Vilar, 2006), the analysis of students' debates highlighted the common dissatisfaction with the sex education they are receiving in schools. They usually complain about the programmes being "too narrow, too little, and too late" (McLaughlin et al, 2012; Measor et al., 2000). Classes are often described by students as "boring," a "muck around" period, where disruption from other students, usually boys, interferes with learning. In their opinion, teachers fail as well, often being depicted as disinterested, ill-equipped, or unsupportive of their lived realities and interests (Allen, 2011).

SE programmes are mainly *fact-based* and embedded with the assumption that young people are well informed and making rational decisions in relation to the use of contraception, forgetting the gender and social tensions around sexual negotiation. But paradoxically, they were very critical in relation to the way teachers and the curricula continue to place teenagers as incapable of knowing what they need because they lack life's experience. In practice, they are rarely conceived of as free "sexual subjects," with the necessary agency to make positive sexual decisions by themselves.

Along with Allen (1999), other studies alerted to the clear gap between what young people learn in school and how they use that information in their practice, highlighting the impact of *individual subjectivities* on the construction of sexual knowledge. Elley (2008), in her study of the way young people absorb, accept, or reject sexual information from school SE, considered that the 'gap problem' suggests that young people are not gaining knowledge about how to avoid STIs and unplanned pregnancies, but in practice they fail to act upon SE information.

Therefore, SE programmes often seem to fail to acknowledge students' realities and experiences, as well as their expectations, and so they are less likely to capture their attention and engage them through their messages. This emphasises the need to add and listen to "students' sexual culture" as a "way of 'giving voice' to who *receives* the curriculum but "play no part in the structuring of the school as an organisation or the planning of the curriculum and teaching of lessons" (Kehily, 2002:2). Here, "students' consultation" emerges as a strong pedagogical device to improve their participation (Buston & Wight, 2004; Measor et al., 2000) and, consequently, to "re-imagine" SE. Unlike these findings, other studies highlight the positive impact of SE on sexual behaviors. For instance, Kirby, Lori, and Roller (2007), based on a meta-analysis in 83 countries, showed that after having SE 42% of students significantly delayed their first sexual experience for six months at least; 48% increased their use of condoms; 90% increased their knowledge about VIH/AIDS; and 100% developed more positive attitudes towards people with HIV (also see Ramiro, 2013). Also in Portugal, many studies (Cabral et al, 2010; Fonseca et al., 2014; Vilar & Ferreira, 2009;) explore the impact that knowledge has on increasing preventive practices, as well as sexual satisfaction.

Now, I look at the three main ideas that came to the fore of six main debates on sex education.

- **Youth experiences: a necessary shift in the focus of sex education messages**

In both countries the main messages of SE focus knowledge about the use of contraception (mainly condoms, followed by pills and implants), STIs (mainly AIDS), and the prevention of unplanned pregnancies (reproductive system, family planning, and menstruation). All this information was conveyed through scary discourses that seemed to weaken preventive practices instead of increasing them. Even the notions of *choice* and *decision-making* were underpinned by prevention and the dangers of sex. Only after being prompted to speak in more detail about SE practices did students add to the discussion the topics of love, love at first sight, relationships, marriage, the “right” person, and the “readiness” to become sexually active.

These accounts allow us to understand that school-based SE has shifted from a more repressive attitude to an approach on safe sex practices. This move from “don’t do it” to “do it safely” highlights the greater weight of public health policies, triggered by AIDS concerns, over moral pressures. On the other hand, the insistence on abstinence messages starts to be pointless for increasingly less religious youth who continue to have under-age sex. However, it also seems this over-biological focus is still not engaging young people in safe sex practices, since schools leave out many other dimensions (such as emotional, psychological, social, and gender tensions) involved in the sexual negotiation. As Elley (2008) notes, there is more a discourse of sexual health “prevention” than health and rights “promotion.” In this sense, it seems SE is still not attending to all the needs of the whole person in order to foster sexual well-being, as conceived by the discourse of *sexual liberalism* (Allen, 2011), and much less sexual and intimate citizenship.

This was particularly visible in the difficulty young people continue to have to openly talk about sex, emotions, and desires. Frequently they referred to sex as “that,” “this,” “it,” or to sexual orientation as “that kind of thing” and “those kind of

people". They rarely mentioned the words "sex," "sexual intercourse," "genital organs," or "homosexuality" during the debates. They showed embarrassment and constraint even in naming it. This highlights how students continue to learn about gender and sexuality within an *official discourse of silence* (Epstein et al., 2003) that shrouds the whole structure of school. This was also felt in the way students externalised themselves from the discourse when they were reporting their experiences. They never talked about themselves or their own lives and ended by reference to others as "they" instead of "we," as if they were not part of the group. This was very common among boys.

- **Sex Education is designed to safeguard teachers**

Another common idea between the two countries is the political concern of schools in protecting, socially and legally, teachers from embarrassment. Students recognise teachers are making efforts to provide SE from a rights perspective, due to the pressures of health and human rights agencies, but they are also suspicious of the pedagogical practices they have used. Most of them consider the use of academic discourses, power points, and cartoons as serving to protect teachers under the law (law of sexual consent) and the class. In this sense, ultimately schools' aim is to transmit the messages required by law without exposing teachers' fears, doubts, and difficulties. As result, students do not feel listened to, which hinders their interest and engagement.

Criticisms of teachers' performance and the difficulty they have in implementing good practices, as well as the fact they are repetitive about "those things that everybody already knows," were similar complaints that crossed all schools. Moreover, SE becomes predictable by the compulsory inclusion of some sexual issues in Sciences, which increases students' lack of motivation. Most of them are also critical in relation to schools' attempts to infantilise and desexualise them through the scary approach that accompanies the moral, legal, and health discourses.

This was mainly felt in English schools, in particular School C, where students discussed with outrage the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers. That is why

they challenged SE programmes to look at them as “sexual subjects” and “sophisticated thinkers” (Elley, 2008) mature enough to make their own decisions and choices.

Also, the Portuguese students were skeptical of and uninterested in SE pedagogical practices. The cross-sex education also seemed to be neither well accepted nor understood by young people, which leads us to conclude that having SE in extraordinary days is more striking even if not necessarily more productive. Therefore, students argue for a more realistic, detailed, lived, and experienced view against learning sexual knowledge in the abstract. Comparing the practices of SE in both countries, it seems that it is more theoretical in Portugal and more practical in England.

- **Gender rights towards a sexual and intimate citizenship**

Students’ reactions in the classroom are gendered and very similar in the four schools. Girls remain identifying themselves as more curious and quiet, while boys assume they have to find strategies to disturb the class and to hide their own lack of knowledge and embarrassment, as the only way to maintain their masculinity. In their words: girls feel embarrassed to ask about some issues in front of boys, and boys feel embarrassed for hearing about it, “making fun of it.” SE is a space of *peer regulation* that more than sexual knowledge it contributes to reaffirm their own masculinities and femininities in front of the class. Therefore, the environment of SE classrooms is still conditioned by concerns with social reputation, which reinforces heterosexual assumptions.

Regarding this, specifically the English boys from the School A and the Portuguese girls from School E raised interesting debates about the male dominance of SE that determines pregnancy as a female issue and contraception as masculine. They want to change this structure and break the binary approach in which sexuality seems to remain. This allows us to recognise that young people show some concerns with their sexual and intimate rights and, simultaneously, with rethinking SE as a tool to improve the “relational ethics” that empowers boys and girls within loving and sexual

relationships. This “relational ethics” emerges from a view of “equality of condition” as an opportunity to gender equality and, consequently, to sexual and intimate citizenship where the dimensions of *respect, recognition, power, love, and care* must be taken into account (Baker et al., 2004). Moreover, it was surprising the way young people do not make gender distinctions in their discourses. They talk about personalities instead of gendered features, showing how they are being constructed in the multiplicity of masculinities and femininities. Only when specifically asked about gender differences do they invoke them.

- **Which is the direction towards a democratic sex education?**

Especially in this study, despite the different teaching strategies of SE between Portugal and England, it seems that students have very similar perceptions of what they *have, want, and expect* from sex education. Some recommendations to improve the SE programmes were made by young people in order to better enhance interpersonal skills and meet their needs. It is my opinion that young people’s views should be addressed by school culture so, as Allen (2011) proposed, “re-imagining sex education” could be possible.

According to Portuguese students’ debates, SE is not taken seriously. They want to end teachers’ *filter* and *censorship* by being answered and clarified. In their opinion it is crucial to fill the gap between what adults think students should know and what students really want to know. SE needs to be meaningful to youth and for the moment they are living. Therefore, they wanted to be consulted and more involved in the construction of SE projects. They want to feel part of it, so sex and sexuality can be accepted by everybody at school and in the broader community, in particular parents.

There are clearly gendered concerns about the contents. While girls asked for more talk about love and sexual negotiation, boys would like to explore sex outside relationships (such as casual sex, one-night stands, and flings) and learn about mistakes and problems that can happen during sexual intercourse (such as early ejaculation and erectile dysfunction). Again, they pointed to the importance of being taught together in mixed-sex classes (Buston et al., 2002). In their opinion, splitting

boys from girls into different classes and sexual topics will just reinforce gender boundaries within intimate relationships. They also prefer having SE in small groups based on friendship than big lectures with people from all years. In their opinion, focus group discussion is the best pedagogic strategy to talk about, discuss, and learn sexual issues.

Furthermore, they stated that the only way for SE to become normal and well understood is when everybody can talk openly about everything without fear and shame. This is not a way to trivialise sexuality but to consciously protect them and to accept it as a healthy aspect of their lives. Regarding this issue, the debates from School D also called our attention to the relevance of confidentiality in these processes. Most students are afraid of being judged by parents and other friends, assuming they prefer to find other sources of information. This suspicion undermines the support of school nurses and consequently the practices of sexual health. In this sense it is important to rethink the role of health professionals as well as confidentiality rules in order to give more confidence to students.

English students also showed difficulties to stand out suggestions to SRE practices, strategies, and contents. The teaching and learning strategies must be taken seriously by teachers and should be more appropriate for teenagers; otherwise, they will “switch off” and not pay attention to it. Furthermore, schools must be more open, and teachers must be well prepared. They also highlighted the relevance of being observed and consulted to increase the significance of SRE to their practices. Teachers must make an effort to create a comfortable environment, to make sure that students feel empowered to talk to them.

Schools seem very disconnected from real life and popular culture (media). They really want to break this gap between schools’ SRE and “students’ sexual culture” in order to avoid misunderstanding and disinterest. To meet this goal they consider schools must replace the abstinence discourses of moral right with more liberal advice about contraception and prevention. In their opinion, stating the idea of “don’t do it” must be avoided; rather, they have to be taught why it is important to delay and take time before have sex. Moreover, schools should discuss how sex is depicted in the media by musicians and actors because it completely changes how young people look

at sex. Instead of demonising their exhibition of bodies, sensuality, and erotica, schools should deconstruct and explain the pros and cons of adopting such lifestyles. Especially girls appealed to teachers stopping them just because they are young. They want to know about “real questions” and “real teenagers.”

They also emphasised the fact that SRE should start earlier since people are having sex earlier, too. In current SRE they learn from the experience to theory, and they wish to learn from theory to experience, i.e. usually they start having sex before they have SRE classes, so their sexual knowledge is learnt from practice. Consequently, they think they already know everything and get bored. Within this thought they consider SRE cannot also be provided in the primary school because they face the problem of immaturity. In turn, students suggest SRE should move at the same pace of their sexual experiences within small groups, as the Portuguese students suggested as well.

Furthermore, they expect that SRE should become compulsory because people think they know more than they actually know. They should not be just bombarded with information just in a day per year, but they should spread it out over a period of time (a lesson once a month). Despite SRE messages that are still based on health and moral rights, students’ experiences seem to be changing. They agree schools are making an effort to get closer to young people’s interests, but they continue to be very focused in giving them contraception (keep safe) without exploring their options and choices. Therefore, SRE has to extend sexual knowledge to issues of intimacy and relationships.

Moreover, two interesting dimensions to rethink SRE were brought by debates from different schools: students from School C complained about the inconsistency of the practices of SRE, claiming a stronger status within national policy. This concern shows how young people are aware of their sexual rights based on an agenda of equality. In addition, boys and girls from School A gave us a positive approach to SRE as a means of information, empowerment, and awareness. These students define schools as a trusted resource of knowledge that has a strong impact on the construction of a “relational ethics,” which in turn is essential to the promotion of *sexual* and *intimate* citizenship. Moreover, they showed how being recognised as sexual subjects gives

them power to live a safe, full, and healthy sexuality. The possibility to openly talk to teachers helps them to come out of the “darkness,” oppression, fear, and surveillance. This reveals the power of “discourse” in giving trust and openness.

CHAPTER VI

“THE MISSING DISCOURSES” OF SEX EDUCATION AND DRIVES FOR CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

We need to observe the contexts in which messages about sex education are given, and listen to what is said in them, but also to what is not said, and to observe the silences very carefully. In this way we can start to build up a picture of what is defined within the school setting to be safe, good and even sacred and what is positioned as taboo, bad and dangerous in relation to sexuality.

(Measor et al., 2000:125)

Within this attempt to observe "what is not said" and the "silences" highlighted by Lynda Measor in this excerpt, this chapter examines other understandings from students' experiences of sex education. It sought to make young people's voices heard about what is missing and failing in sex education programmes and, simultaneously, what is significant to be learnt in schools, but from another methodological stance. Therefore, it is not just another chapter based on youth, but another way of listening to them in order to go deeper into their perspectives, discourses and subjectivities. Thus, this chapter continues the dialogue of the former, focused on youth debates, but this time it seeks to bring the singularities to the foreground through one-to-one interviews. The basis of analysis is not the relational debate and the knowledge built within the discussion, but instead the expression of individual wishes, experiences, secrets and feelings. This is consistent with Oakley's (1981) idea, that an interview is not just a conversation, but a dialectical relationship of power, proximity and sharing that is created with the participant.

In this discussion, Habermas' (1983) contributions of "hermeneutics" to give expression to what others say through "symbolic communication" and "interaction" puts youth subjectivity at the centre. Understanding what is said and what someone is saying requires the researcher to participate within a "communicative action" (Habermas, 1981) through a triple hermeneutic relationship that gives expression to "what is in the speaker's minds", to how the speaker relates to the listener, and to understanding "something about the world" (Habermas, 1983:40). In this sense, this chapter tries to express how young people shared their thoughts and expectations about sex education in their own realities.

The pursuit for what is "missing" or absent from SE policies and practices, so well developed by Michelle Fine (2009) in her typology of discourses¹⁰¹ of sexuality in schools, can not only be seen as a negative criticism in relation to current models of sex education, but more as guidelines, hints and clues to what young people want. It appeared to be a good way of "consulting" (Arnot, 2004; Macedo, 2012) with young people to bring them to the construction of a more significant sex education.

Methodologically, this chapter is based on 38 semi-structured interviews with students aged 16-17 years old. The age difference is also an important issue to be highlighted in comparison to focus group discussions, since interviewees' accounts referred to memories of past experiences of sex education in schools regarding what young people were taught and expected. It is organised into three sections: first a brief overview of students' experiences in sex education. Not wanting to be repetitive, this point does not replicate the reported experiences in debates, but rather it comes to complement them by showing similarities and differences over time. Moreover, even if it is not the central focus of this chapter, it is included as an attempt to not overlook the vast amount of data within the interviews. In the second section, special attention is given to the failings of SE according to these students. This information pushed us towards a third section about students' expectations and opinions to improve SE

¹⁰¹ Fine's typology of prevailing discourses of female sexuality inside public schools: sexuality as violence, sexuality as victimization, sexuality as individual morality and a discourse of desire that remains a whisper. (see also, Santos, 2014)

practices. Gender issues crossed the whole chapter and are enhanced in this last section focused on separate views of boys and girls.

1. Memories of Sex Education Experiences

This section seeks to highlight the memories of students (aged 16-18) about their past experiences of sex education. Despite having common resentment with FGD's participants, these students brought a more critical and interpretative approach to schools' efforts to improve for more open and comprehensive sex education. This sense of change was unanimous in both Portugal and England. Many interviewees considered that schools are currently offering much more in the way of resources, conditions, support, choices and information by comparison with the time they attended SE lessons, as Jane pointed out:

I: Have you talked about sex in schools?
Jane: Not really, because it's only really been recently introduced. They're bringing it in a bit younger, so when I was that age I think they were still a bit more restrictive on how much information they were actually going to give out. I know that now compared to when I was in year 9, it's developed a lot more and that people in my year were given the opportunity to actually train in how to deliver sex education to younger years. They have a lot more access to support than I did.
(School C, EN)

According to Jane, the *access to support* and the *commitment and engagement* of students are the major improvements they have witnessed. In Portugal, Mariana also considered that there is currently a different approach from schools because unlike in her experience it now exists. However, in her opinion students are still not recognising the relevance of SE in their lives and do not make the most of the opportunity.

Julia: I remember few years ago, one of students' claims for a long time was that we should have sex education in schools because at that time there was nothing, and now students have it and don't want it...
(School D, PT)

Mariana's comment shows that there has been an investment by the government to respond to students' demands by implementing sex education

practices in schools. Additionally, she also realises that students need a certain level of maturity to recognise the potential sex education might have in their lives. Despite their appreciation for the political efforts to provide sex education, most interviewees' memories of sex education practices were scarce and limited to isolated and vague activities as presented below. This was slightly surprising since these experiences had occurred 2-3 years prior.

1.1 Sex Education Experiences: Shocking, scary, intimidating, new...

Apart from brief references to the focus of SE on reproduction, contraception and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), what the majority interviewees highlighted the most was how they felt in regards to the messages of SE and the way in which they were conveyed. Many students, regardless of gender, reported uncomfortable feelings the first time they heard about sex and sexuality in schools. For instance, both Samantha and Bob from school C said they were surprised and shocked as soon as they heard about sex because "it was all new" for them:

Samantha: I think people were a bit shocked, they didn't know... there were things that I learned that I was just like, "oh, I didn't know that." I think it's good that we have... We should know it but it is very shocking to know. For instance I didn't know how to put a condom on properly, and I was just a bit shocked about that. And I didn't really realise everything about it, I was just a bit naïve and less experienced. I think it's quite an embarrassing subject to talk about.
(School C, EN)

Bob: I was too frightened [laughs]. It was all a new thing to me.
(School C, EN)

This feeling of discomfort was similar for boys and girls, which went against the trivial idea that boys already knew everything about sex and did not care about SE lessons. They were simultaneously curious and scared to learn more. Even if these two perceptions cannot be generalised, the way they felt surprised with "how to put a condom on" shows how other information sources (such as internet, tv) were not being used so much as we thought. Their idea that everything was new confirms previous opinions of some teachers that students are frequently naïve, ignorant and not sexually active. Moreover, their surprise shows that it was not common to talk

about these issues in schools, which contradicts FGD's indifferent view that talking about sexuality is boring and repetitive because "it is always about the same thing". This shows that young people's accesses and resources are evolving rapidly.

Jane believes that they felt shocked because they were not previously prepared to hear about sexual themes, and suddenly they were overwhelmed with technical information about sex. It was all too rushed and not progressive at all:

Jane: So it's kind of like shoving sex down your throat, as opposed to engaging people that may not be ready and may not be comfortable to hear all about of this now.
 (School C, EN)

Samantha shared Jane's opinion that talking about sexuality is a difficult and sensitive issue that should be introduced gradually and not through scary discourses focused on the dangers and risks. The issue of shocking strategies was mainly highlighted by young men, primarily English students from School C, who felt they were traumatised by being obliged to watch "bad" videos and very graphic pictures of STIs. Some of them even considered that it negatively affected their sexual life for a while, but that it had been effective in preventing teenage pregnancy, since boys were "terrified" of "coming close to girls". For instance, Bob noted that boys "freaked out" after a session about reproduction and pregnancy by seeing how women give birth.

Bob: All different types of contraception and STIs were very graphic. So the way of warning us was to try to sway us into contraception, so have big pictures on PowerPoints, showing the results of what unprotected dangerous sex can cause... I found it a very good strategy [laughs]. I'm not sure if it worked on everyone else because they would've thought it was in the vast minority of things and they would rather take the risk. Once we watched a video of a birth, a child being born, and all the boys in that class freaked out, terrified of even coming close to a girl thinking that's what happens. Freaked out, just large, cringing... Some people even left the room, they were so surprised.
 (School C, EN)

In the experience of this young man, pregnancy was learnt through horror and fear, which might increase gender bias and power relations in future relationships. The idea that boys were terrified of coming close to girls leads us to imagine how girls would have felt after watched that video and the anxiety they might have had regarding virginity and sexual relationships. This brings me to wonder if these practices are more linked to abstinence and moral agendas of sex education, or instead with

public health concerns. Bob's opinion that "shocking strategies" are more persuasive to change youth behaviours was reiterated by Tiago, among others:

Tiago: I think they should shock us, for example, have pregnant teenagers come in and talk. This to cause an impact on people, to get them to think, "if I do this, my adolescence is over..." (School E, PT)

However, for some, this strategy is not positive. Rob, for instance, felt that the point of school should not be to scare students, but instead to emphasise that sex can be dangerous if not taken seriously. He pushed for the employment of other pedagogical strategies that do not seek to only frighten students.

John: One teacher sat in the front and talked to us, it wasn't particularly interactive with us. It was her telling us the dangers of it and basically to be protected, and that was pretty much it. It just seemed a bit basic, like trying to scare us a bit almost... I think the point should be put across that it's dangerous. But I don't think it should be put across in such a way that it scares everyone... (School C, EN)

However, he also does not feel comfortable with the idea of talking openly about sexual pleasure in the classroom. This reveals how students seem to have the same doubts as teachers in defining what their limits are and how far they can go. This expectation is in line with Joane's perception that the focus on dangers of sex and scaring strategies hinders the promotion of an "actual" sex education, and in my point of view, of practices of sexual and intimate citizenship.

Joane: Rather than actual sex education, it was focused more on the STD side and the dangers of it, rather than promoting the positive side of it. (School B, EN)

The "desexualized" and "distant" way schools conducted sex education practices is also criticised by many older students, in line with FGD. Most of them considered that they were being "lectured" and "patronised" about proper ways to behave instead of actually being "engaged" in full sex education lessons. David from Portugal (school E) even refers to SE lessons as "sermons" to prevent students from "going down paths" such as getting pregnant. Being lectured through power point, worksheets, exams and factual-based information in the academic style of other curricular subjects did not seem to be the best "format" to catch students' attention.

Young Portuguese women feel particularly disconnected from this strategy, deeming it as “nothing new”, “boring”, “repetitive” and “tiring” as Luisa pointed out:

Luisa: I think they don't always pass it on in the most correct way because they use PowerPoint to talk about, for example, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, we look at it... “ahh, sure, whatever!” It's one of those things, sometimes, despite how much the teacher talks, we need something as an incentive to be more attentive, and lessons might not be given in that way and end up generating no interest in the students.
(School E, PT)

Another example of being “told off” was brought up by Peter, a student with a different status in this study since he was an SE peer mentor. He described his experience of having a police officer come in to give students a lecture about the legal consequences of having sex with girls under the age of 16. His account was interesting because he contradicts Bob and Samantha's initial perceptions that students were naïve and less experienced. In Peter's opinion, this assumption is taken for granted by sex educators who underestimate students as “sophisticated thinkers” (Elley, 2008), which might hinder their self-confidence and empowerment to make choices.

Peter: They got a police officer to come in and talk to us which wasn't the best format to doing things... It felt a bit more like you're being told off or lectured rather than advised which didn't really work for me, and I can't remember many people finding that particularly useful. [...] I don't feel they took it very seriously because of the age (13) of the kids they were talking to... they thought “- oh they're not gonna...” I didn't feel they felt it was very relevant in our lives at that stage.
(School C, EN)

Georgia, from another school (B), also complains about this academic style as a strategy that protects teachers from embarrassment and weakens students' accesses to “real” knowledge. Her description of how students and teachers are disconnected from the practices of sex education highlights that students recognise teachers' fears, embarrassment and discomfort. Like Georgia, other students also feel that the teachers are intimidated:

Georgia: In secondary school it seems the teachers are a bit scared of getting too detailed or too in depth about it, or saying things that aren't appropriate and then you end up with not good education at all. None of the students ever viewed it as a proper lesson. So there was a lot of chatting and talking over the teacher. It wasn't strict. Which I think made it worse because obviously you're getting even less information when you're not listening. It wasn't from teachers own knowledge, they were just reading off a PowerPoint or student worksheets, which wasn't that helpful.
(School B, EN)

Unlike the students who were being told what to do, there were three interviewees who interpreted the messages from their experiences of sex education as being focused on the provision of a range of sexual *choices*. Both Mark and Katie, from the same school (B), felt they were equipped with “medical suggestions” about different types of contraception:

Mark: They weren’t specifically saying, “you should use this, you should use that.”
(School B, EN)

Katie: They did say “Don’t do it if you don’t want to”, but they don’t say “don’t do it.” They just said, “if you want to have sex, be safe”.
(School B, EN)

Tomás from Portugal also remembered being taught about sexuality in a positive way, rather than how to avoid it. The focus here was developing a rational strategy for making decisions instead of moralising students.

Tomás: They gave us one more positive example that we should try, have loving and sexual relationships and basically, to prevent rather than necessarily to avoid. It was more to be sensible, think about it and always be careful.
(School D, PT)

These other experiences show how sex education practices are also inconsistent and dependent on the individual initiative of those teachers who are more open and interested in the issue. For Mark, Katie and Tomás, the activities of sex education provided students’ access to a high range of choices and information to make decisions.

To **sum up**, young people generally experience sex education in schools within dominant pedagogical strategies (Fonseca, 2009). Sexuality is besieged by fear, disease and violence, while teachers seem to have difficulties in linking sexuality to desire, pleasure and life. The negative focus on sex prevention persisted in these students’ experiences. Moreover, young men seemed to be more shocked than girls with these lessons, which is in line with the philosophy teacher’s perception (school C) that girls are more knowledgeable, although quieter.

1.2. Power Relations: “There’s no room to speak, just to hear”

Despite the limited memories interviewed students have of sex education, the reported practices reveal authoritative, unequal and vertical relationships between teachers and students that did not allow them to openly engage in SE classes. Sara, Cláudia and Márcia were a few of the Portuguese students who expressed disappointment with the teachers’ imposition in the sex education classroom. According to these three, there was a need to silence students and control the possibility of awkward conversations arising. As with other curricular subjects, a formal and professional environment is created, not leaving space for social interaction and trust.

Mariana: The teacher spoke and we had to listen.
(School D, PT)

Luisa: I am giving you my lecture; you must listen to it and be quiet.
(School E, PT)

Patricia: There’s no room to speak, there is only room to hear. Many times, we don’t know how to explain why we do those things and how we do it. It’s complex
(School E, PT)

Concerning a similar relationship she experienced in an English school, Katie also highlighted that these power relations are socially institutionalised in school and are legitimised by public arena, i.e. they are culturally learnt and rooted in the way people identify their role in a given structure.

I: Did you feel comfortable to talk with teachers or not?

Katie: No, I don’t think that will ever change because there’s nothing wrong with the teachers, there’s nothing more they can do, it’s just you’re not going to feel comfortable talking to an authority figure about your relationships. And I think that’s always going to stay like that. [laughs].
(School B, EN)

In this sense Jane adds that there is an insurmountable barrier between teachers of sex education and students that is closely linked to the barrier between public-private spheres. For her, talking about intimate relationships and telling “something personal” to a teacher is giving them space to enter into a private land that belongs to just her. There is a fear of being judged, which impedes the development of Baker’s

(2004) conditions of care and love that would facilitate teaching – learning relationships.

Jane: I think it's not judgment, I think you just instantly think, "they'd judge me and that would affect all of my..." well it wouldn't affect, but in your head you think, "oh my god, they know something personal about me" and they're your teacher, you're the student. I think there's a barrier that some people may think that it's too far to cross.
(School C, EN)

This fear of being judged is also shared by boys as shown by Will, who believes that students must be discreet with regards to what they say in order to not be counterproductive.

Peter: If you said something you'd think it would reflect badly on you.
(School B, EN)

Therefore, there is an established power relation in the classroom defined both by teachers and students who do not feel the confidence and the necessary security to talk and have a close relationship with teachers.

1.3. Positive Experiences of Sex Education: Breaking from dominant school models

Unlike being lectured, moralised or scared, a few students remembered having good experiences with school sex education. What defines the good experiences is the greater engagement of students, either through peer education, individual initiatives to collaborate in the teaching process, or even by using other less dominant learning resources. In this sense, it is understood that the major focus of these good memories occurred from more relational experiences and when power dynamics are apparently blurred. These accounts were stronger among English students, from which I chose three to illustrate the heterogeneity of the group.

As SE peer mentors, Peter, Tim and Carrie from School C were responsible for the delivery of sex education to lower years. They consider this approach as more effective due to the age proximity and greater influence on younger students. It implies more commitment from both sides (mentors-students) and more pressure to pay attention,

to get involved and to follow their debates, since they will be together in other contexts outside school. Therefore, it is a good strategy for auto-regulation among young people. It seems to be a successful initiative that decreases the generational gaps, the language and identification problems, and the hitches previously reported by adult teachers and FGD participants. Despite the fact that other interviewees from this school did not have this experience, they share the same opinion of these peer mentors that “the way they speak”, the terms they employ and the “funny” activities, jokes, videos they provide allow them to be closer to each other.

Additionally, other students remembered having actively participated in their school’s SE planning. This was the case with Samantha, again from school C, who organised and gave a talk about teenage pregnancy to other school classes in order to spread information about services to get help and advice. Both these experiences show a strong mobilisation from youth towards education and social change. These students wanted to feel useful and were clearly concerned with the sexual practices among youth and their consequences.

Along with these initiatives, some students even gave examples of good practices of sex education through the use of non-dominant resources, such as watching the *Sex Education Show*, a TV programme that was mentioned by Patrick as a completely different approach that he did not forget.

John: I think recently sex education has become a lot more apparent. Last year we did it differently though. We watched, in ETC, the sex education show. And they went to the school and did the sex education show. It was good to watch it. It was a completely different approach to the way teachers do it here, where they sat in the front and just talked to you.
(School C, EN)

Therefore, students more easily remembered dynamic activities that were engaging and participative than lectures, which provides some clues about how SE could be improved. Georgia, from other school and city, also recommended this TV show as an interesting guidance for SE in schools. This highlights how young people share the same expectations about what schools should do:

Georgia: The best sex education that I’ve ever had was with this programme that was on TV, called “The Sex Education Show”. I think lessons at school need to be, well obviously not just like that because there were naked people, but it wasn’t patronising towards you

just because you're young and it was just real, real questions and real teenagers. It was just more relevant. So I think that's how it needs to be.
(School B, EN)

These statements once again show that, contrary to what was said before by Samantha and Bob, young people want to speak about reality and are not so innocent any more. They want to be taken seriously to talk about the real issues involving the experiences of young people, not just about the rhetoric.

2. Curriculum Invisibilities: Emotions, sex, sexual diversity and violence

This section explores young people's ideas about what failed to be addressed in their sex education experiences. This information is particularly important to identify previous agendas of SE and what was intentionally denied and omitted in those schools, but also to expose that young people do recognise those absences and intentions. For this purpose, the choice of conducting interviews with older students was made because they could already establish more of a relationship between what they learned in schools and their first sexual experiences and confrontations with difficulties. Based on student accounts from both countries, four missing dimensions from SE programmes were explicitly pointed out: the emotional side of sex; sex as pleasure; sexual diversity; and risky situations.

2.1. Lack of Intimacy: "Schools forget the emotional side of sex"

One of the main criticisms of sex education programmes in schools is the lack of discussions around the emotional, psychological, loving and affective aspects of sex. Despite greater openness and increasing changes in SE laws, feelings and emotions remained scarcely explored in schools at the time this study was conducted, and even less when these students had their experiences of SE.

In order to provide a general impressions about this issue among interviewees: In England, at school B most interviewees agreed with Simone's criticism that "we're just literally being taught the physical act of sex, the physical consequences of sex and not

the emotional stuff”; at School C, girls mainly had the same perception stated by Carrie that “you should feel 100% happy with the person you have before you think about sex. We don’t speak about it at school”.

In Portugal, most girls at School D had similar views as Alexandra, that “they only speak about the technical side of sexuality and forget the psychological side of it.” At school E, female students such as Sara even commented that, “it is crucial to explore sex meanings through love feelings”, while Luisa felt that “to have sex you must have feelings and people do not focus on that” and Mafalda expressed that “Young people give much more importance to do it and do it safely, but they forget the reason for doing it. Teachers did not cover much of it.”

It is not my aim to point out the consensus, but as this complaint was unanimous I opted to give a general view. Two main assumptions are revealed within this silence about the emotional side of sex. The first is that the school sought refuge in the fact-based and technical conception of sex, keeping the classical opposition body – emotion. According to these students, there was a centrality of SE in the “physical act of sex” and its consequences, and a neglect of the “emotional act of sex” and its consequences. The second piece of evidence is that students already have a broader notion of sexuality linked to intimacy. They seem to have the notion that sex is a relationship cross-cut by several dimensions, of which feelings are also a part. As explained by Katrina this perception is not governed by the imperative of *romantic love*, but rather it emphasises youth concerns with how emotions affect decision making and are part of sexual relationships:

Katrina: In primary school they really stressed, “when you love someone, you do it,” but in secondary school, lot of the students already had sex, so maybe there wasn’t much point in expressing the whole romantic side of it. Because I don’t remember a whole lot of that, it was just: “this is sex, if you do it, this is what will happen”, they didn’t really talk about relationships. They should encourage more the, not love, but you should at least have feelings for someone when you’ve had sex... I’m not saying you have to marry them, but I think it was too black and white. I think that might make people think a little bit more before they did it.
(School B, EN)

The absence of the emotional meaning of sex is extended to body changes and other experiences such as the loss of virginity. Jane, for instance, gave the example of

virginity and the symbolic significance it has to girls. In her opinion, SE did not tackle the emotional and social changes that encompass sexual initiation, which might have repercussions in the process of becoming sexually active. This step is particularly strong for young women and interferes with their self-esteem and future relationships.

Jane: They should look at the deeper emotional issues connecting with sex because it's a massive thing for a young person, and I don't think that sex education accommodates for that deep emotional meaning and the bond that it basically creates for you. Ultimately it's a sign about your childhood, it's that virginity is gone, you're becoming more of a woman, and I think it is just not considered as like really important.
(School C, EN)

To Inês, this focus on the body emerges paradoxically as an attempt to desexualise the context of SE. Talking about emotional ties as positive consequences of sex might encourage students. Again, this raises the debate about how far one can speak as a way to positively inform students without necessarily encouraging them to have sex. It is my view that one speaks of emotions not as a way to encourage young people, but rather to help them to deconstruct the anxieties, fears and disappointments that come with sexual experiences.

Antónia: We had a lesson about the body. It was only about the body, they don't really speak a lot about emotions and feelings because they don't want to encourage us to have relationships.
(School D, PT)

Unlike in other studies (Alldred & David, 2007; Measor et al. 2000), young men also complained about the lack of the emotional side of sex. I did not include them with previous female views in order to highlight their perception. Young men came to challenge the gender stereotypes that associate men to body and women to feelings, and highlighted how new generations are changing (Fonseca et al., 2014; Ferreira & Cabral, 2010). Male interviewees showed that they are interested in investing more in loving and affectionate relationships, claiming that they also suffer, feel pressured, are emotionally dependent, and need to better understand how to deal with each other:

Tomás: They must speak about the psychological and feelings and how they interact with sex.
(School D, PT)

Peter: I reckon we should talk about more the relationship side... like, devoting yourself to your partner and giving kind your life to her and her to you... it's about building a relationship

together... Because if you just learn a lot of sexual stuff, you just think the relationship is just about sex, then it's not and it won't work...
(School B, EN)

Mark: We never really spoke to anyone about relationships. The only kind of sex education we did was about the sex and it wasn't about how sex can be in a relationship. Generally it's good, but I think what it was missing was putting sex into context of life and where it's used in relationships. That's probably not so easy to teach someone, as it is to, you would learn by yourself, but I think if they were to add something about, in the context of sex, then it would be useful to know.
(School B, EN)

Based on these discourses, mainly the last one from Will, one realises boys are committed to building a relationship of mutual understanding, communication and respect. This notion is fundamental in considering the relevance of creating spaces in schools to discuss sex within democratic relationships of equality. Moreover, Mark recognises the difficulty for schools to teach about feelings and relationships, but emphasizes the usefulness of talking about them.

Therefore, it seems there is a tendency in the public health agenda of SE to neglect the *emotional subjectivity* that surrounds the practices of safe sex. Once again this leads us to the core question of SE in schools regarding the education of sexual health or the education of sexuality in its wider sense. Within this approach, both sexual health and sexuality are at risk, since loving ties are frequently at the origin of unsafe sex and unsafe contraception, as well as abusive and coercive situations (Neves, 2008; Santos, 2014;).

Actually, as LeBreton said in 2002,

“persuading young people to avoid potential risks through discourses of health prevention fails to acknowledge that the emotion of individuals always permeates decisions. Human thinking and action is laden with paradox and ambivalence rather than reasonableness” (cit in Elley, 2008:130).

As this study was also concerned with the singularities, Afonso emerges as one exception among these complaints, affirming that he was taught a progressive and open approach to intimacy. His teachers established a relationship between sexual and affective relationships, highlighting the centrality of sex to nurture and support the relationship, and simultaneously the relevance of a loving relationship context for sex to occur:

Afonso: We learnt about relationships with the opposite sex, that if it is in a loving relationship is perfectly natural that people have sex... they addressed that issue without any problem and told us that is a way of cultivate the relationship and try new things with a person who we feel at ease.
(School E, PT)

Although this contribution was very positive to understand that some schools are already teaching students how to deal with the opposite sex, one realises that even in these cases, intimacy is just discussed regarding heterosexual couples, as will be discussed later.

Therefore, one might conclude that at the time these students had SE, it failed in providing intimate citizenship rights that might have jeopardised sexual protection and well-being.

2.2. Bringing Sex to Sex Education: “They don’t speak about what actually happens”

Similarly to other research on sex education (see Measor et al, 2000; Allen, 2005; Elley, 2008), this study also identified the controversy of including sex in SE programmes. Students from the four schools echoed that what is given as SE is education about reproduction, and sexuality in its broader sense is rarely covered. This raises the difficulty, which has recently been researched by several authors (Fine, 1988; 2009; Epstein et al, 2003; Kehily, 2002; Allen et al, 2013; Tolman, 2002), of addressing the issues of sexual pleasure and desire in a school curriculum. Sex as hedonistic and individual pleasure, and the several forms through which the body expresses itself sexually are not spoken about in schools. The problem seems to be that sex is not only absent from curricula, but there are negative messages about it. Ann, for instance, explained how her experience was clearly marked by a moral agenda in SE, concerned with sexual abstinence. Sex was taught as dangerous and confined to reproduction.

Ann: We were definitely taught that sex is just dangerous, they say, “don’t do it”. It was never seen as a good thing. “- Sex is for reproduction.”
(School B, EN)

Other girls such as Maria and Laura reported similar situations, in which sex is condemned as an institutional taboo they do not understand.

I: Have you ever talk about sex as pleasurable?

Maria: No! Never! It is always taught as a bad thing, “- you must protect yourself”, it’s basically that. Which is bad because they make people to be naïve about what sex can be... and they get well below the standard.
(School E, PT)

Laura: No. No. No! Absolutely nothing! What I found strange because I talk to my parents about it. I think it is normal [laughs] the other day we were commenting that here nobody talk about any of this. It reminds me a bit my grandmothers’ mentality and of her generation that women couldn’t have any pleasure. It is a huge taboo! Then many men fail to sexually satisfy their women because they don’t know their body.
(School D, PT)

On the basis of these discourses, it is important to realise that these young women feel entitled to have pleasure, and how these “official silence” discourses may hinder sexual relationships, gender expectations and male and female anxiety.

Within this moral agenda, some students felt that in their schools there was already an attempt to speak about sex by moralising them to have it just within stable relationships, which seems incoherent with the lack of information about feelings and relationships previously mentioned. This is pointed out by Bob, who expressed that SE educators only speak about sexual pleasure within relationships, forgetting the other sexual relations young people are involved in, such as one-night stands, flings, etc.

Bob: They mainly focus on the goal of sex to reproduce. And then they go to the point of sometimes it’s pleasurable if you’re in a relationship. They don’t really talk about sort of one-night stands, people you’ve just met, that sort of sex.
(School C, EN)

Along with a moral agenda focus to reproduction, sex also seems to be approached by schools in the realm of safe practices and prevention, following what Allen (2011) called the *health pragmatism contents* focused on the consequences of sex. Katie, Georgia and Mariana all have this perception that schools were more concentrated with safe sex than discussing sex per se.

- Katie: It wasn't really about the sex itself. It was more concentrated on safe sex rather than the actual mechanics of it.
(School B, EN)
- Georgia: I do not remember doing much about what actually happens. It was more about the safe practice of sex as opposed to what it actually is. I don't even remember them saying that much about being careful, just "use a condom" and that was it, really.
(School B, EN)
- Mariana: They just spoke about the female and the male bodies and hormones. It wasn't about the sexual act per se.
(School D, EN)

The question that remains is how one can get the message to prevent something that is not discussed. Sex education seems a little inconsistent with the purpose of protecting children's health and rights, since several studies have shown that not talking about sexuality does not avoid it, but rather increases the risks around it.

Lack of discourse regarding sexual pleasure was also clear in the absence of references to masturbation, orgasms, eroticism or the clitoris for female corporeal pleasure (Diorio and Munro, 2003; Santos, 2014). Sexuality as a pleasure sometimes appears in discussions of puberty by mention of "wet dreams", reinforcing Allen's account (2011:88) that "when pleasure is acknowledged it often materialises in ways that perpetuate dominant discourses of male and female heterosexuality and can sustain unequal gender relations". This gendered difference in SE messages about sexual desire and pleasure might affect female sexual entitlement. Moreover, Fine also argues that this focus on the consequences of sex, such as pregnancy and abortion, had a greatest impact on young women's conceptions of sex, reinforcing their vulnerability. Accordingly, sexual consequences are associated to girls and sexuality is associated to boys, which demonstrates that there are still "few clear models of female sexuality" (Measor et al., 2000:125).

However, the difficulty seems to be to define how to promote what Allen (2011) called a "pleasurable pedagogy". Similar to her latest study, the interviewees in this investigation also recognise the pressure on youth towards a sexual pleasure imperative. Based in the media and internet, young men and women are increasingly focused on having and giving sexual pleasure as a means to gain or lose a sexual reputation. Therefore, appeals to a positive SE based on a "pleasurable pedagogy" do

not mean an exclusive emphasis on sex for pleasure, but rather a deconstruction of the possibility for sex to be pleasurable or painful in return. Furthermore, it is important that young people learn that they can have pleasure from their own body in many ways, deconstructing heteronormative discourses around sex.

Students' ideas about incorporating pleasure in the classroom draw from wider dominant discourses about sexuality and an understanding of "the social constitution of pleasure" (Allen, 2011:84). Antónia, for instance, assumed that talking about pleasure might encourage people to have sex.

Antónia: They don't want to encourage us to have sex and I think if they talked about the good things, they could encourage some people.
(School D, PT)

John's speech also shows that it must be delivered with good sense and care, so people do not feel "awkward".

I: Is it important to talk about sex as pleasurable and enjoyable?
John: Yes, but in a way it doesn't just make everyone feel awkward in the class. I don't think it should be put across as "-you can just do what you want". It needs to be like a mixture, in the middle, in between.
(School C, EN)

Thus, it seems to me that the SE shortcomings in conveying messages on sex hinder the development of an educational approach within sexual and intimate citizenship.

2.3. No Space for Non-Heterosexual Relationships: "Maybe they did not want to shock us"

The two main aspects missing from the sexual diversity discourse in schools were identified by all interviewees: the almost total absence of homosexual issues in SE curricula and the social obstacles that persist around gay students in schools. There was a similar silence and oppressive situation in Portuguese and English statements, but due to its significance I decided to go into detail on how sexual diversity is being tackled by SE in each country.

- **Homosexuality in English schools: “Sex Education does not accommodate to “those people”**

For English students, homosexuality was never considered a “big bird”, as some girls said, to schools. For some, it was even treated as an illness, as highlighted in students’ accounts of gay friends who had faced “horrible” experiences of oppression and discrimination. According to those students, school was a hostile environment, strongly marked by power relations and a heterosexual normative. For instance, Jane shared a sense of incomprehension in the way people have the strength to “come out” in schools on the basis of a gay friend who was frequently the target of prejudiced comments:

Jane: I’ve never personally received education about that. I just can’t comprehend if you’re a young person and you’re having those feelings that you just don’t know your sex... I can’t comprehend... because it must be a horrible situation... I don’t think that the education accommodates for those kind of people, definitely not. I had a friend who was gay and he was subject to horrible comments by other guys in the year.
(School C, EN)

Schools seem to be little prepared to support people who do not fit the norm and to educate others regarding sexual differences. Within this context, SE seems to have an inability to manage and deal with these situations. Contrary to the *noise* that a gay student causes among their peers, there is an official *silence* in the curriculum and official SE discourses. Actually, all of the students but two girls revealed that there was a total absence of this issue in SE programmes. Ele reports that gay students were invisible in schools since they were not even mentioned in SE curricula:

Ele: The thing I don’t like is that we’ve been taught just about sex between man-woman... We haven’t talked about any other sexualities at all and when they mentioned coming to puberty, it was “boys you’ll be attracted to girls and girls you’ll be attracted to boys.” Just about heterosexual relationships... I think they should at least mention non-heterosexual...because they are in school. They will be there and they might not get the sex education everybody else does, because it’s just not mentioned. I know all we had was one of those gay campaign posters “are you gay? If you want to talk about it phone this number” and that was all we ever had. That’s what I remember...
(School B, EN)

However, she also mentioned the existence of gay support campaigns and organisations in schools where people could go. This absence of representation is

referred to in relation to specific topics such as pregnancy, as John points out, which reveals a lack of information from schools about other models of family as well.

John: There's a few people in our year that have come out and I think, when they get sex education it's always about pregnancy and that may not related to them particularly much. So I do think it's something that needs to be highlighted a lot more.
(School B, EN)

Claudia also considers that there is a lack of respect and recognition for other sexualities when she says that her friends did not feel entitled to be homosexual because they did not know if it was "okay".

I: Do you ever talk about sexual diversity?
Ann: No, not really at all. We should definitely be taught about that because I've got friends who I went to school with who are gay and I think they weren't ever told that was okay. They were just told "this is the way you have sex".
(School B, EN)

In line with these interviews and other studies on the topic (Louro, 2000), education about heterosexuality appears as the norm to follow. Measor et al. (2000:9) also note that "school sex education has an exclusive focus on heterosexuality: one view of how sexuality is expressed and acted upon is prioritised and privileged and any other form of expression is made marginal or 'other'."

On the other hand, there were two girls who discussed sexual diversity at school. However, Simone (School B) just remembered that they had "briefly touched" on same-sex relationships, and highlighting that teachers were concerned with providing non-judgmental messages:

Simone: They said "it's okay to have same-sex relationships" but didn't go into the same depth as heterosexual relationships.
(School B, EN)

Katrina, from the same school, remembered an invited guest who came to her school to lead a session on sexual rights, which she considered very useful and good:

I: Did you ever talk about sexual diversity?
Katrina: Yeah, they did do some of that. There were some people that came in to talk about it. They were homosexuals themselves and talked about their lives and what it meant to them. I think they covered that quite well.
(School B, EN)

Despite the positive impact this session might have had on Olivia, homosexuals were still positioned as the “other”. The case was even worse for lesbians, since it is more common for “guys to come out as gays” than girls. This gender issue was brought to light by English girls who considered lesbianism as more confined to silence and shame. Again, Simone considers that even when discussed, the issue of sexual diversity is related to men.

Simone: The diversity thing was more orientated towards boys, the coming out as gay, it wasn't really aimed towards girls as coming out as lesbians. That's the kind of message that you got from it.
(School B, EN)

In addition to these memories of secondary school, the students currently in sixth form (Year 11-13) recognise that schools at that level offer help and support to students by referring them to the LGBT union. This reveals a great distinction between secondary schools and the sixth form agenda with regards to this topic.

Georgia: In sex education that was never mentioned. Here [sixth form] it's much different. There's a lesbian and gay society where you can go, there's meetings and there's emails about it, it's really open and equal, which is completely different from secondary school where would never be brought up.
(School B, EN)

- **“Portugal is very religious: it does not accept homosexuality”**

For the older Portuguese students, homosexuality was barely mentioned in the few SE initiatives they remember having in school, except in sporadic links when they were told about sexual activity. They mentioned the sexual reputation and homophobic bullying such as: not getting naked in the school changing rooms or being insulted as “butch”, “fagot” and “gay”, which continued to hinder young people from “coming out”. According to most, gay students had no support, information or space in school. A moral, cultural and religious perception that condemns homosexuals as “demons”, “sinners” and “transgressors” seems to remain in some schools by distinguishing students as “us” and “them”. Most interviewees were critical of this position, although they employed that distinction in their own discourse.

Both Tomás and Antónia defined homosexuality as a taboo subject for school and even demonstrated difficulty in expressing it, replacing the word “homosexuality” with “those things”, “that” and the “untouchable issue”. This discomfort might be related to the scarce discussion on the topic:

Antónia: We never talked about that because maybe there are people who do not want to speak about that and are afraid of others’ reactions. No one speaks about those things.
(School D, PT)

Tomás: That was never covered by school. Never! It’s an untouchable issue.
(School D, PT)

Only Patricia stated that they had spoken about homosexuality several times, but always on the basis of moral positions of *right* and *wrong*:

Patricia: Homosexuality was spoken several times. We spoke about adoption between homosexual persons, if we agree or not with homosexuality and “why” we were or we weren’t homosexuals.
(School E, PT)

The few students who remembered having spoken about this topic did it in a very “theoretical”, “awkward”, “formal” and “embarrassing” way. Some of them even remembered past debates about *pros* and *cons* of same-sex marriage, showing how public concerns and media are pushing schools to more democratic, but with little success. The silence from students about this topic does not mean indifference. On the contrary, the ignorance and curiosity about it seems evident, as Barbara pointed out about students’ conversations in corridors and on the playground.

Barbara: Students never mentioned homosexuals inside the classroom but in corridors they are always questioning each other about: “how do gays do it[sex]?” Just to tease and make fun of them.
(School D, PT)

Regardless of these prejudices and insufficient discussions about sexual diversity in SE, young people are considered to be living in a *phase of transition* toward being used to multiple sexualities. For Mariana, for instance, homophobia is something experienced by “old” people who have not accepted that values and relationships have changed:

Mariana: For older people, for them according to the Bible it's a man with a woman, that's the right thing. I think young people are now connected to new experiences. It is also the generation itself that says "-Let's try it!" they don't care too much about it
(School D, PT)

This approach contradicts the apparent casualness of homophobic insults among young people. Many boys and girls agreed they naturally use sexual insults as a way of hurting and making fun of someone or even as a way of joking with friends. They are so accustomed to such terms that they do not realise they are offending those who are homosexuals through a sexualised violence. It seems that popular culture is out of the control of schools and SE.

This shows how the acceptance of gay people is "mitigated" and looked at with "strangeness" (Fonseca & Simões, 2014). Homosexuals are "tolerated" but not necessarily "included", as boys and girls continue saying: "I have nothing to do with it, as long as they don't meddle with me". An example of that approach was Zé's self-perception of how he feels in relation to gay people.

Zé: As time goes by, I changed my opinion a bit. In the beginning, I didn't accept it and couldn't see, hear or even think about it. Then gradually I changed my mind and realized that everyone can like who they want to like and from any gender. We have nothing to do with it and we cannot influence it, then I began to accept it. The only thing that still gets to me is when they are next to me... [Laughs] But it doesn't bother me...
(School D, PT)

Based on these opinions, we can recognize that Portuguese youth continue to face several dilemmas in relation to homosexuality. Within the school context, this difficulty is evident in the way most interviewees considered that talking about feelings and sex between same-sex couples is even more hidden, subordinated and taboo than learning about sex between woman-man.

2.4. Missing Discourses on Risky Situations: How to avoid getting yourself in that situation

Other issues, such as teenage pregnancy and domestic violence, were also identified by two interviewees as important missing issues from SE curricula. I decided to give them relevance by considering the important contributions to re-examine what

is being done in schools. First is the case of Joane, who brought an interesting insight by explaining that she had never properly learnt about teenage pregnancy itself, but rather about how to prevent it. This disconnect with the previous complaints about the exclusive focus of SE on teenage pregnancy has to do with the way it is differently conceptualised by young people and adults. In her opinion, SE practitioners and teachers just mentioned teenage pregnancy as a negative consequence of sex, associated to risks and dangers:

Joane: One of the things that wasn't too heavily emphasised was pregnancy and how devastating that can be for a young person. I think a lot of girls, especially in secondary school, are like: "- well, if I have a baby, that's fine because I can get a job and it will be fine and I've got a boyfriend." A lot of people were just under the illusion they could deal with having a baby at that age. It should have been more important to show people actually how difficult it would be and how it's not the right option for people at that age. Because we didn't really do that much about pregnancy, there was a lot about preventing pregnancy, but not much about why you should not get yourself in that situation.
(School B, EN)

In Joane's view, young women are deluded by the media and magazines about what Kehily (2014) called the "increasingly public celebration of pregnancy". Girls feel attracted by this notion of 'pregnant beauty' (Tyler 2001), ignoring the changes (economic, personal, social) that getting pregnant will have on their lives. Concerns with female autonomy are at stake here. This insight surprisingly shows how a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy is still lacking from SE programmes, with a disconnect from the problems, experiences and dilemmas.

During her interview, Sara indicated that the issues of dating violence and abuse are still missing from school programmes.

Patricia: Violence within dating is a subject that isn't really spoken about at schools. We speak about it, but it's thrown in the air and then left there. Teachers don't really go there despite being a country which has one of the highest rates in domestic violence in relation to other EU countries.
(School E, PT)

According to this view, people's well-being, rights and citizenship appear to be compromised by overlooking the violent situations. The lack of references to the effects of alcohol, self-esteem and respect seem to be essential to put into perspective the effect they can have on determining sexual relationships and practices of safe sex.

To sum up

This section demonstrated how sexuality was addressed by schools through danger- and health-related agendas, rather than being understood as pleasurable, enjoyable and complex. Issues such as male concerns with sexual performance or women's complaints about the silence around sexual desire were brought up in interviews with older students, highlighting how absent conversation in SE interfered with their experiences, expectations and gendered anxieties. The missing discourse on sexual diversity came up as a common problem for all students. Homophobic attitudes among peers and teachers embarrassment in including homosexual issues within the curriculum are still recognised by students as an obstacle to decrease general prejudices. Together with the failures often highlighted by SE studies, the students in this study also pointed to teenage pregnancy and violence, indicating that they not only have different conceptions from teachers, but that they are also more demanding with regard to their own relationships. They seem to be more aware of gendered messages around loving and sexual relationships.

3. Student Contributions to Overcome the Failings of Sex Education

After students underlined what failed in their experiences of SE, this section focuses on student expectations in order to improve SE curricula. Their contributions were aimed toward emphasising young people's voices in order to recreate a meaningful SE agenda. Views of boys and girls are presented separately, since gender was an issue in this study.

3.1. Girls' Expectations: The school is "the starting point" to knowledge

School SE is recognised as a reliable source of sexual knowledge, along with family and friends, despite some disbelief in its potential to really change behaviours and attitudes. Some girls, such as Jane, highlighted that positive decision-making skills are cross-cutting by cultural and familiar dimensions, which sometimes clash with SE

messages. Therefore, according to these students, SE teachers and practitioners should put an end to school attempts to deny young people as *sexual subjects* who are legitimately seeking sexual pleasure and free relationships. The interviewed girls, in line with the younger girls from FGD, already showed interest in learning about sexual intercourse, sex itself, sexual desire and pleasure and eroticism. In their words, it is “what sex represents and what it should represent”. Their will to know more about their bodies and feeling entitled to have sex is key to create conditions towards more equal and democratic relationships. The fact that some girls are already seeing themselves as sexual means an advance against masculine domination of sexuality. This suggestion reinforces the belief of Holland et al. (1998) that viewing students as “sexual subjects” is essential for making positive sexual decision. Also Allen (2011:89) in regards to safe sex practices argues that:

“students who view themselves legitimately and positively as sexual are likely to be empowered and better equipped” because its subjectivity “provides space for a sense of entitlement and control which can contribute to positive sexual decision-making and successful relationship negotiation.”

Therefore, both English and Portuguese girls asked for the inclusion of the “positive side” of sexuality in the curriculum. Some Portuguese young women raised doubts about body parts, sex positions, virginity, pain and excitement, while most English young women saw themselves as “quite confident persons” concerned with ways of getting into sexual relationships and being comfortable with someone. More than “saying No”, students complained that they were never taught about the emotional tension of how to decide, respect and negotiate their own sexual desires, wills and fears. Therefore, they also would like to learn how to say “yes to sex” without being judged. In this regard, Mafalda proposed including masturbation as a way of empowering female sexuality and deconstructing masculine dominance over sexual pleasure, especially through pornography:

Mafalda: Empathy and love connects us to each other. There are taboos that need to be demystified and that's not happening at the moment. If I were director, I would focus on the topics that are not spoken about, teachers need to shake off all the pressure that they have on them, because they think that the students are too immature so they prefer to hide things. They should firstly talk about having sex as part of a loving relationship because a sexual relationship is not only about feeling pleasure, but feeling pleasure in giving pleasure to the other person. We should talk about what masturbation is, many students don't know what that is and when they say girls do it, they say "how is that possible? They're girls, they mustn't be doing that!" They also don't speak much about pornography sites and I think that sexuality is so misrepresented to students.
(School D, PT)

The girls also consider that SE should address discussions about sexual pressures, social and media influences (networks and new technologies) as well as self-esteem and communication skills. Joane, for instance, believed that it is pointless to tell people not to have sex because they will do it in the same, but she also thinks that giving them all the choices is not enough to avoid risky behaviours.

Joane: They would say "- at some point you're going to need it", it would be wrong for the school to say, "- don't have sex, you can't do it" because inevitably some people would. So they were giving us the preparation for whenever you need it. But I think they should talk about it a bit more, because sometimes it felt they were saying: "these are all the options" but they weren't saying to you: "don't have sex unless you have contraception." They weren't making it sound like it's essential. So, I think maybe that's why some people were, "well, I know there are lots of options but it won't really matter this time". Maybe, if they made it more of a point, that you shouldn't put yourself in that situation unless you're prepared and what you should do if you get drunk.
(School B, EN)

According to Joane, it is important to include information on how to get control in uncontrolled situations, such as: the pressure in stable relationships to not use condoms or drinking situations must be considered because they put safety at risk. Following what had been previously criticised, there is a need to go beyond contraception and prevention to address sexual and emotional relationships. Girls want to "be aware of what they can do", as Katrina pointed out:

Katrina: I think they could go deeper into it, not be afraid to say things to the students, just break the barrier, don't just talk about contraception, but really go into it and talk about relationships and remind people that sex is an important thing, even if you don't do it to have a child, it's still a valuable thing.
(School B, EN)

These claims require new concepts of sexuality and sex that bring greater insights to “re-imagine” SE through intimate citizenship. It is my view that girls are more aware of their intimate rights and look at schools as a helpful resource from which they might improve their lives and relationship experiences. Most of them want to create a context in schools for talking about the themes that cannot be discussed, which implies more time and teacher training. Specifically, Portuguese girls emphasised their need to have a person to speak to about what might happen and what they should allow others to do with them. They believe that young students should understand the impact that sexual initiation will have on their lives, bodies and relationships.

Again, the promotion of *relational ethics* is at the foreground of girls’ demands. For instance, Maria believed schools should promote young people’s tools to negotiate and discuss the right moment to have sex:

Maria: When should we have sex? Is it when the other person asks to? Is it when you feel good? Some people still have some doubts about that issue.
(School E, PT)

Luisa also stressed that it is essential to address how we relate to each other, beyond the couple:

Luisa: It is important to broach the other side of relationships between couples. The fact of how we all relate to each other, we should all be aware of what we’re going to do, what we really want. We should speak about the relationships that we have with one another, as people, as friends. I believe that even if it is through Sex Education it would be an important aspect.
(School E, PT)

Mariana even brought up the need to learn communication skills to talk about sex with parents. English young women also highlighted the potential for SE to develop the *relational* and *emotional* as strongly articulated with the need to gain more awareness about the problems and needs that affect them. Schools and particularly SE might help young people to learn how to be more reflective and assertive in their lives. Simone, for instance, stressed that the focus needs to be on “equality in relationships” and “the control” they have in their sexual decisions, desires and behaviours. Ele’s opinion is that she considers they should learn how to communicate and deal with

common situations, such as breaking up with the boyfriend”, “going out and meeting someone in a club”; “how to be in a relationship, how to listen to their partner”, “who they are and who they are with”:

Ele: They should focus more on relationships, like “oh you will break up with people and you will feel sad, but it's not the end of the world”, they haven't taught us anything about romantic relationships at all... and of course I think they should at least mention them in some way. I know a lot of people who are always confused about romantic relationships and they don't teach us anything about how to deal with those feelings
(School B, EN)

In this sense, one does not need to directly teach about sex. SE is more about gender discussions (violence, stereotypes, autonomy, romance) in youth lives and relationships, including the sexual.

Moreover, most girls would like to require schools to add sexual diversity to the SE curriculum in all of its dimensions: sexual, relational, social and emotional. As Philips (2001) mentioned earlier about women, there is a “demand for a public and political presence” in order to recognise a frequently marginalized and silenced group. It seems that the girls in this study are already challenging notions of “fixed” gender identities by refusing the mere association of homosexuality to sexual activity. Julia advocates that what matters is loving and relating to the person on the basis of who they are, rather than their gender:

Julia: It must be a generational thing... I have no taboos, no problem in relation to homosexuality. I think a person doesn't like a particular genre, likes a person. Not have to be male or female. Of course, there is always the question of having children, but nowadays there is so much evolution they can already have kids. I think homosexuality is... love... whether it's a boy with another boy, a girl and a girl or a boy and a girl, it doesn't matter, that was in the past, it was a stereotype. Now, I think people are being educated to love! Not to love a man or a girl. But just to love. There is no information in school.
(School D, PT)

Although this approach seems a bit naïve, it emphasises current changes in the way gender and sexuality are being conceptualised. They want to end sexual coercion and harassment through more peaceful relationships.

To conclude, girls from both countries considered that SE should provide more discussion about normative assumptions about the body, the ideal of righteousness (starting to have sex with the “right” person in the “right” moment), sexual

performance, violence and abuse, as well as other health matters, such as abortion and the morning-after pill. They want to learn about and discuss multiple issues related to rational and relational skills in order to increase their awareness to negotiate and implement human rights in their own practices.

3.2. Boys' Views: They want to be involved

Despite their arguments and criticism, some boys considered that the SE they had in the past was enough for what they needed to know at that time. It was useful and complemented what they picked up from life experience. In Alldred & David's (2007:83) study, they also reiterate that some boys felt that learning about sex and relationships is important but private, which "reflects the liberal notion that private concerns are a domestic matter distinct from the historically male public sphere". This marks an explicit gender difference regarding the relevance of talking about these issues.

However, many boys were not content with how SE was delivered, affirming that it should be delivered earlier and schools have to change "how they are doing it" in order to get male students involved, as Peter stated:

Peter: I think the only reason it doesn't have impact is because people don't take it seriously and listen to it. I don't think there was anything they particularly missed out covering. I think it's just the way they do it. I'm not sure how you'd get people to listen. I think they need, just change it, so people actually become aware, rather than just watch it and walk out the room.
(School B, EN)

This starts by changing how young men are positioned within sexual and intimate relationship in SE messages. That is, young men agreed, their communicative skills are limited due to cultural pressures to not verbalise and share intimate issues with adults, teachers, girls, etc. In their opinion, that must be changed, albeit with difficulty. As some indicated:

Peter: If boys genuinely have problems they won't speak. They do it as a joke and that's fine, but if they actually had a problem they wouldn't go to teachers and talk about it.
(School B, EN)

John: I think sex education in school is important. But I just don't know boys would go and start talking to teachers about sex. I think it's quite a big jump to talking to your friends to talking to a teacher or your parents about it. I wouldn't feel comfortable.
(School C, EN)

These opinions illustrate that it is urgent to develop communication skills in boys and support them with resources and conditions to learn how to discuss. Zé even added that SE must educate "how to be" in a rights perspective. This approach is linked to the education of values and choices. As he makes clear in his position, schools should explain the ideological and biological aspect of sex, by giving practical information about contraception, choices and risks.

Zé: Firstly I'd give them the ideology, I wouldn't be so conservative in relation to the issues because I think that that just doesn't get us anywhere and we need to be more direct in relation to this. The biological aspect is important but not as important as the other issues, being that the other issues are of a more practical nature and it's these issues that become problems later on - How to use contraceptives, where to buy them I think is more important and is more to our advantage. I think that choosing the right person, the right moment, and the right state to have sex is also very important, because nowadays people have sex with whomever, wherever and however.
(School D,PT)

This view on human rights is a little different from the SE focus proposed by Peter on delaying sex and providing contraception. This shows how conventional agendas in SE persist with some nuances, such as the need to take peer pressure and sexual reputation into consideration:

Peter: The main topic is to delay it and to use contraception when it happens. A lot of kids jump into stuff, just thinking "oh, I'm getting over with, as long as I'm doing it now", and it's not important to do it really early. But peer pressure does make them do stuff that they don't want to do, and then they regret it... it's just not worth doing until you're 16 anyway, and even when you are 16 you don't get to your 16th birthday and think "right, now I can go have sex."
(School C, EN)

Young men also want to learn, talk and discuss issues related to feelings; emotions; drugs and alcohol; sexual performance and "things that can go wrong during intercourse". Exploring these aspects seems crucial to create effective SE, since boys' insecurities and ignorance is often the origin of pressure on girls. Interestingly, many boys also pointed to their will to know more about girls' sexuality, desires and

troubles. This perception contributes to the reconfiguration of the sexual act for current youth and improves SE towards citizenship.

Similar to girls, although less, boys also considered that the issue of homosexuality should be included in SE programmes as a way of promoting sexual equality and respect. This idea has emerged to think of sexual knowledge as a sexual right and SE as a platform of resources and choices. In this regard, Afonso makes a good suggestion for transforming these aims into cross-cutting issues in school culture. Only when sexual issues are seen as normal by the school community will SE be more effective:

Afonso: Of course it is important to talk about homosexuality because it exists. It has to become an ordinary thing, people have to be accepted as they are. All human beings are born free and with equal rights to choose their sexual orientations and principles. If it is an option for a large group of people, homosexuality, metrosexuality... It must be covered, talked and given in the best way possible. [...]
It is covered, but is not addressed by all elements of the school. If it was addressed by all teachers, by employees, by psychologists, for all the people from the school community would gain much more strength and it would be something normal [...] that in fact is! It would be part of our principles, of our way to be...
(School E, PT)

3.3. Boys and Girls: Learning together or separate?

The aim of learning *relational ethics* was implemented in the way girls and boys want to have mixed pedagogical practices. A difference between “discussing” and “learning” about sexuality was identified, as well as *cons and pros* of having SE in single-sex or mixed-gender classes. Most students from both countries agreed that they should have single-sex lessons *to learn* about specific aspects (such as menstruation, the loss of virginity) and to be more beneficial, plus sessions with mixed-gender groups *to discuss* common fears (such as the “doing” of sexual intercourse and experiencing sexual pleasure).

Some girls like Olivia advocated that single-sex groups are better to make girls feel comfortable asking questions without being “made fun of”. This reiterates the shame girls feel when talking about sexuality among peers.

Katrina: I think it might have been better in a single-sex group because a lot of people would have maybe liked to ask questions but maybe didn't want to if there were boys in the room. They'd be a bit afraid to put their hands up and say, "well, what does this do?" because you don't want to get made fun of. A lot of the boys laughed and it would've made everyone a bit more comfortable if we weren't together.
(School B, EN)

This embarrassment was shared by boys, who agree that single-sex group makes it easier to clarify gender-specific issues. However, as Mark explains, they are simultaneously aware of the importance of knowing both "sides of the story". Many boys considered the school as the only opportunity to learn about the opposite sex, since the family just talks to them about condoms. They claim the relevance of learning about pregnancy, menstruation and pills to better understand girls' problems. This signifies an important step to start demystifying gender power relations:

Mark: I guess that if you were in split classes it would be easier to ask more gender-specific, personal questions, especially ones that if you asked, people would be able to infer if you were talking from experience or not. But if you're in a mixed class you can hear things from girls that you wouldn't if you were in a gender-specific class. You would learn about both sides of the coin.
(School B, EN)

The difference between mixed or single-sex classes has to do with self-regulation, gender power pressures and influences. What is at stake during these moments is sexual reputation and the construction of gender identity by peers. During mixed-sex groups, they are mainly focused on affirming their gender and sexual identity. Teachers could take advantage of these reactions and explore "intra" and "inter" gender dynamics.

Moreover, all interviewees proposed the use of smaller groups instead of big assemblies, peer education and inviting people to speak about "real" problems as the best pedagogic strategies to teach about sexuality in schools. Students from both countries recommend being more practical and more interactive. As Helena said, they want to communicate, share, discuss, ask and listen.

Helena: A different approach would be to have lectures without being with teachers, perhaps a more experienced person who could approach us in a more dynamic way, a more fun way and that would ask us about our opinion about the matter; that would get us talking to each other, having discussions, having debates that would be more dynamic, that would be like " Ah! That lesson had an impact on me!"
(School E, PT)

FINAL CONSIDERATION

This chapter highlighted the impact of SE on young people's lives, based on what they remember about it years later. Most interviewees had difficulties remembering lessons and just mentioned receiving information about reproduction, contraception (condoms) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), but this, nevertheless, failed to satisfy their needs. They stressed that the missing issues in SE in both countries failed to present a holistic understanding of sexual health and intimate citizenship by not incorporating positive discussions about pleasure, desire, emotions, sexual diversity and teenage pregnancy. This idea corroborates other studies, such as Measor et al (2000) and Elley (2008), with English students who highlight the themes of relationships, emotions and sexual practice as keys to challenge heterosexual and masculine assumptions.

This was reiterated by both young men and women in this study, who recognise the potential of SE to deconstruct notions of sex and sexuality in order to become more equal, safe and respected. Some girls feel confident enough to assert that they want to speak about sex and sexual pleasure, and some boys are already concerned with emotions. The possibility to blur these myths would promote greater gender equality among youth and freedom to face normative heterosexuality.

Regarding homosexuality, students from both countries generally seemed to be more open and understanding about other sexualities, suggesting new school agendas on *sexual rights*. Student perceptions on homosexuality are still influenced by the gender issue. Young women seem to be more tolerant in relation to gay males in schools, while young men considered it almost impossible for a gay student to “come out” in front of teachers and colleagues. It is noteworthy that English schools seem to offer more support and resources for LGBT students than Portuguese schools.

The most important insight and contribution these interviewees brought to this research on sex education was configuring SE as full of paradoxes and proposing new paths for re-imagining it on the basis of *relational ethics*. Regarding the paradoxes,

students made it clear that SE is ambiguous in schools: on one hand, they explained that they never talked about the emotional side of sex, just the physical, and on the other hand, they complained that they never learnt about sex itself outside steady relationships; at the same time, they also revealed that they were never taught about teenage pregnancy and sexual violence, as SE programmes are mostly focused on pregnancy and contraception. These perspectives show how young people and schools share different perceptions of sex, sexual pleasure and love.

Therefore, SE school agendas focused on prevention and dangers through shocking approaches do not seem to meet youth experiences, expectations and desires. As Elley (2008:138) says about SRE practices in England:

“SRE’s portrayal of young people as sexual beings governed by reason rather than emotion is far removed from young people’s emotional lives, intimate relations and expressions of sexual identities. Young people do not make rational conscious choices about everyday life in an uncomplicated manner despite an abundance of available information.”

Confronted with this ambiguity, young men and women from this study want to change schools through the inclusion of communicational relationships based on life experiences. Only then would it be possible to achieve democratic sex education. The students seemed to be against the arguments that talking about sex encourages sexual practices. This chapter also recognised young people as capable of defining their own SE needs, rights and responsibilities, which reinforces the need to include their perceptions in future SE development.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis intends to establish a dialogue between the way school sex education is designed and delivered in two European countries. Within contributions from the sociology of education, this study analyses the contemporary practices and policies of sex education as well as the relevance of citizenship debates and feminist studies to re-imagine it within broader transformations of intimacy and sexuality. These theoretical and activists' views, particularly regarding the concepts of gender and sexuality, seem to be relevant when questioning the more classical research on this issue and to rethink the potential of sex education to include social practices of equality, affections, power, and democracy within sexual and intimate relationships.

Therefore, the central purpose of this research, conducted in schools in two regions of Portugal and England, has been reaffirming the locus of school sex education as a meaningful subject to contemporary society by discussing the approaches, tensions and influences that compose it. These concerns are based on broader interests of understanding how state education is dealing with the neoliberal pressures of the school achievement agenda and, simultaneously, with citizenship and youth challenges.

In this study, sex education is seen as a product of specific cultural and educational contexts intersected by different dimensions (political, social, historical, cultural, individual, institutional interests) in a particular time and space. It was not my aim to produce a general analysis for Portugal and England of this problem but rather to illuminate how sex education has been internationally perceived, nationally implemented and locally discussed in the 2010–2012 period. Moreover, drawing on empirical data from focus groups and interviews with teachers, students, head teachers and health professionals, I sought to develop a holistic approach through listening to numerous voices about sex education experiences. This heterogeneity has

led to a continual recast of my methodological choices and conduct as researcher in order to address the ethical requirements and participants' subjectivities and singularities. Broader concerns regarding uneven power relations between researcher–researched, the promotion of reflexivity and research conditions to speak about this sensitive topic and having the same number of boys and girls, were some of the decisions that contributed to positioning this study within interpretativist epistemology and feminist contributions. Moreover, following the canons of comparative studies proved to be a difficult task due to fieldwork constraints, although I was concerned with finding schools, participants and contexts between both countries on the basis of similar criteria.

What follow are the main research findings and their implications for future research in sex education. As I do so, I emphasise the need to take into account: teachers' and students' interests but also schools' conditions, the contributions of feminist and gender studies to bring new meanings and more diversity to sex education research, and the scope of sexual and intimate citizenship as sex education's ultimate goals.

Sex Education: A Controversial issue and fragmented practice

The debates furthered in this study have shown how sex education in schools remains a controversial issue. Despite clear advances in legislation and individual engagement on the topic, mainly from teachers, it might be said that sex education continues to be asserted through a *fragmented status* that echoes conflicts between political parties, social forces and agendas for sex education. This controversy is especially noticeable in the different ways actors, groups and social sectors resist implementation of mandatory sex education and simultaneously challenge official discourses. Therefore, understanding this contested nature of sex education, and above all the difficulty of including the issues of sex, emotions and affection in schools, seems essential to understand what has hindered its public and universal assertion in education, but also seems useful to challenge new approaches and agendas.

At a political level this controversy became visible in the irregular way sex education has been legally addressed in both countries and educationally constructed by different sectors such as the family planning movement, public health concerns, religious doctrines, sexual and social groups and humanist demands, among others, that have stressed critical points and pulled it into different, and sometimes even opposing, directions. The parliamentary clashes between left and right-wing parties, the influence of NGOs and global demands for gender equality and health rights, religious campaigns and civil society pressures have contributed to the advances and setbacks of sex education laws revealing its complexity and dynamism.

For instance in Portugal, the political and social controversy around its implementation was evident in the intentional 'overlooking' of the government when regulating the 1984 law as well as in the fragmented way in which it was proposed in the late 1990s. The cross-cutting status it acquired within the curriculum was contested, mainly by left-wing parties which considered it as a strategy to hamper its provision.

Moreover, the focus of the health agenda, initially concerned with family planning movements and later with AIDS and safe sex, has dominated Portuguese laws of sex education as well as its provision. This focus was broadened to gender equality issues in the late 1990s which illustrates the impact international conferences on women's sexual and reproductive rights have had on national debates over abortion and the need to take these issues into schools. In its turn in England the controversy around sex education laws was mainly introduced by parents that succeeded in making it optional. Despite pressures, traditional values remain stronger than the health imperative of informing all students about contraception and sexual transmitted infections (STIs), which highlights the clash of power relations.

The main controversy during these decades was between public health and educational agendas and their perceptions of young people's sexual rights. In the context of education it seems young people have been constructed as ideally non-sexual, vulnerable and dependent which contradicts health's perceptions of youth as autonomous and entitled to confidential advice on sex. It is my view that public health

agendas should be consistent with educational practices in order to promote ideals of responsible sexual citizenship.

Since the 2000s, there has been a greater openness of the law to citizenship and diversity issues, revealing the influence of new social movements, new teachers (having had more up-to-date training) and students (with new requirements and needs). This indicates how social forces are pushing sex education into new paths and agendas. This shift was more explicit in Portuguese law while in England it emerged in a more diluted shape based on an individual choice paradigm and supported by higher associative networks on these matters.

Teachers' Views: Sex Education Policies are Disconnected from Schools

This study indicates that there is a general discontentment among teachers in both countries with the inconsistent manner sex education is being designed, supported and conveyed. Teachers were critical in relation to the lack of schools' involvement in the political definition and construction of sex education. They are not consulted about the limits, conditions and specificities of the school context which hinders the transformation of policies into practice. Sex education is presented to schools in a vacuum. Further, most teachers still consider they are asked to provide more than they can offer. They complain about the lack of appropriate conditions such as sufficient time within the curriculum, teacher training, guidance, resources and partnerships to implement an effective sex education. Moreover, sex education continues to be complex due to the anxieties and fears associated with discussing sex, defining what can be spoken about, how far they can go and what their limits are. This difficulty in knowing how policies should be formulated was present in the majority of teachers' interviews.

Thus a disconnection between what schools are prepared to provide and what policies aim to cover appears to exist. Solving this problem seems to be complex since if, on the one hand, laws must be contextualised to local specificities and conditions, on the other hand, teachers also need national guidance. I believe that one should

take into account the need for teachers to have more tools and resources, especially in order to feel empowered, self-confident and knowledgeable to be able to work across the various themes in schools and classes.

This disconnection has different impacts on teachers. Many seemed to be actively engaged in sex education provision as an essential resource to compensate for family embarrassments in talking about intimate topics. In England there was even a case of teachers paying for their own training, which reinforces their individual commitment. This emerges as an important contribution to reaffirm the role of the school and, especially, the place of adults in the education of youth sexuality. At a time when adults seem to be increasingly undermined in this role often dominated by peers and the media, it is essential that school takes advantage of its potential to link the generations and knowledge. There was also a minority of teachers who were resistant to its provision and limited themselves to fulfilling what was legally expected.

Apart from these differences, most teachers face authority problems with other curricula subjects and lack legitimacy for students and parents. In this regard, teachers in England in particular introduced the perception that sex education is also a matter of social class. Many of them feel pressured by families and young people to neglect knowledge that is not intrinsically related to the school achievement agenda. This reinforces the clashes between school agendas and social class. These teachers' views are based on the assumptions that working-class students are likely to be more sexually problematic and middle-class students less focused on sexuality to the detriment of other pressures such as their professional career. Furthermore, these teachers also appear to believe that these students would have more financial and family resources which neglects the possibility that working-class students might be exposed to other sources of learning about sexuality (such as the internet, peers, youth associations). However, these teachers' perceptions were challenged by many students in this study who refuted the idea that middle-class students have all these supports and reaffirmed they are also interested in starting their sexual lives. Therefore, it seems students are facing several agendas (sexual interest, school achievement, professional careers, being a young person) which they cannot handle.

Beyond this perspective of social class, some teachers also seem to reinforce gender scrutiny within the classroom where girls are seen as most in need of care and intervention. In their turn, boys continue to be accepted as irresponsible and impulsive. Interestingly, for some teachers, girls are not seen as innocent anymore but are believed to be quieter because they are more cautious about their sexual reputation.

Sex Education Fails to Address Young People's Needs, Experiences and Intimacies

Most students do not feel represented in sex education messages finding them gendered, promoting a heterosexual normative and distant from their own experiences. Sex education centrality in rational decision making about sex and contraception for prevention and on future relationships, such as family and marriage life, seems to be embedded in inappropriate assumptions that neglect the diversity of young people's experiences. These messages overlook the ways in which differently located and resourced young people make constrained choices. For instance, the failure to use contraceptives or the 'say no to sex' messages are never seen as decision making within particular circumstances that are cross-cut by expectations of romantic love and gender and power dimensions. With regard to gendered messages many girls complained about the explicit focus of sex education on male condoms and the apparent absence of female contraception, while boys critique the lack of relevance given to the male side of parenting. Therefore, it might be said that the logic of sex education 'rationality' neglects the dimensions that affect people's decisions which might hinder the development of sexual and intimate practices of citizenship.

Moreover, most students feel teachers see them as naïve, innocent, childish, immature and unexperienced, discouraging them from getting involved in sex education messages. They feel they are not consulted regarding their needs and values included in sex education programmes and so, feel disregarded from its practice.

Interestingly many of them also consider teachers to be immature, ignorant and badly equipped to provide sex education.

Despite this apparent disconnection, most young people proved to be critical thinkers in relation to sex education. Older students, particularly, identified a set of invisibilities within the curriculum as well as what they would like to learn such as more information about female sexuality, non-heterosexual groups, emotions, and violence and sex. It is interesting to see how young men and young women already want to know about the opposite sex which means they are concerned about and attentive to their own sexual and loving lives, intending to bring diversity to discussions and to challenge dominant views. These students, but mainly the English, recognise the existence of other educational contexts and institutions beyond schools, being more aware of their rights and resources than their Portuguese counterparts.

This greater awareness among young people helps to question how the citizenship movement might be taken into schools. Young people are claiming for change alongside advances in the law which requires a new approach to sex education.

Portuguese and English Singularities Regarding Sex Education

Despite the apparent similarities between Portuguese and English perceptions about sex education, there are different logics and paths in the way the theme is being designed and implemented. The differences at political level and in school practices were the most evident, as well as the research access.

At the time the study was conducted, the compulsory nature of sex education was different in both countries. In Portugal, since 2009, sex education had been compulsory in secondary schools for at least 12 hours per year as a cross-cutting subject, while in England only the biological elements of sex education were compulsory, wherein the remaining information was optional. This shows how both countries are tackling school equality of opportunities differently, since English sex education laws seem to be shaped more by a paradigm of choice. Law's contents and teachers' guidelines also seem to dictate different agendas for sex education. While

English legal documents continue to highlight the nature of marriage and stable relationships as their main focus, in Portugal the legislation already includes references to pluralism, sexual pleasure, sex, and gender equality.

This impacts on the way sex education is provided and supported in schools. In England there seems to be further fragmentation of the sectors responsible for sex education delivery and greater partnership with the community and its institutions. In its turn in Portugal there seems to be a higher concentration of requests to and demands placed on teachers who are required to have training in sex education and in implementing their projects. This does not necessarily mean Portuguese teachers are more aware of young people's needs, but they appear more involved in their private lives. Apparently English teachers are more concerned with referring students to external sources of support and health services, for instance to the LGBT. The important fact to be highlighted here is that all schools already have student support offices as an essential and helpful structure on this matter.

At a research level, particularly in terms of methodological access to school settings and young people, there have also been differences in the way research processes involving young people were controlled. In England there were strict limits , e.g. in terms of my presence in the school environment and my contact with young people. Surprisingly even when surrounded by schools' constraints, I felt many young people had the opportunity to clearly put across their views.

Regarding participants' perceptions it might be said that teachers' and students' universes for both countries are wide, revealing there are several *communities of interpretation* (Kehily & Nayak, 2009) about the issue of sex education. Along with the multiplicity of individual positions, cultural differences are also evident. During interviews, the English teachers seemed more restrained, careful, formal, reflexive and professional in the answers they formulated than the Portuguese who seemed to be more spontaneous in the way they talked about their students and colleagues, without constraint and revealing their personal positions – which might be linked to the language and reticence due to being recorded. This shows how the conditions for producing research knowledge also differed between countries.

Rethinking Sex Education: A proposal

- **The relevance of valuing young people's views**

The discrepancies between the content of sex education and young people's experiences and expectations showed how sex education is conventionally adult-defined, does not necessarily offer what young people really want and need to learn. As already mentioned, adults are focused on prevention and risks while young people are interested in knowing more about sexual intercourse, relationships, loving experiences and disappointments.

This study wants to contribute to a successful and comprehensive understanding of sex education through students' views about what they want to be taught. This interest has been theoretically discussed by some authors for whom the responsibility of sex education cannot be just determined by youth's fluid ideas. Accordingly, the simple and irregular consultation of young people is not sufficient. I agree there are limits to the incorporation of young people's perspectives in educational pedagogy but, as this study emphasised, students' perceptions are simultaneously essential to make sex education more meaningful.

Despite the generality with which students came up with conventional recommendations, such as increasing the amount of information on STIs and contraceptives – showing they have still little idea of what services are available – many students in focus groups and interviews seemed assertive and knowledgeable in relation to the schools' responsibility to take their needs into account. Furthermore, the difficulties for some students in talking about topics such as homosexuality provide insight for rethinking which topics should be addressed.

Thus, it is my view that an effective implementation of sex education must pay attention to youth's complexities and contradictions in order to best support them in experiencing their sexuality positively. Educational contexts and classroom environments need to be reconfigured in ways that enable such conversations to occur. In order to expect young people to successfully engage in safe sex they must be understood to be exercising agency. Schools need to establish links between the

rational and emotional sides of decisions making. If on the one hand young people need to introduce some rationality to control their emotions and impulses, on the other hand the school has to include emotion and affection in its practices. One must know how to deal with the context and circumstances that influence their decisions and experiences. Therefore educating students to be sexually autonomous and independent in their own decisions requires this articulation between emotion and reason. The difficulty of taking these issues into account shows how schools and education continue to express the difficulty of connecting the body and the mind in the school context.

- **The significance of gender issues to rethink Sex Education**

Feminists' debates were emphasised in this study as significant in order to analyse and challenge the political nature of sex education. As highlighted in previous findings, the way gender and sexuality have been built as regulatory categories of social practices have conditioned the discourses of sex education and, consequently, students' and teachers' perceptions. The implementation of a feminist agenda to emphasise the Madeleine Arnot's (2009) notion of the 'gendered citizen' was undoubtedly a turning point in bringing sex and sexuality into the educational arena. The refusal of some feminist scholars such as Ruth Lister (1997), Silvia Walby (1994) and Iris Young (1990) to accept the masculine ethnocentrism, heterosexual domination and unequal power relations seems essential to rethinking sex education. Later gay and lesbian studies such as those developed by Mac and Gail (1993), Ken Plummer (1995) or Guacira Louro (2004) brought new subjects, claims and rights to education. As became evident in students' accounts, gay students are still facing significant challenges in coming out in schools. It seems that anti-homophobic education that simply refers to gay people within sexual activity and risks, as being the 'other', is not sufficient to challenge heteronormativity and fulfil democratic and equality aims. These movements become central to question and propose the greater comprehensiveness of Sex education.

- **Sex education moving towards sexual and intimate citizenship**

Along with sexual debates I consider the citizenship framework to be essential in introducing elements against patriarchal and oppressive gender systems in educational and social discourses. Discourses of gender and sexual equality require a guarantee of equal rights and duties, responsibilities and opportunities. Education has a role to play in this issue. Schools must be up-to-date on contemporary sexual relationships and their inherent problems such as violence or gender inequalities. A collective consciousness about the phenomenon should be established, and the adoption of active strategies of citizenship and the politicisation of domestic space might help foster social responsibility towards intimacy. Within this aim schools gain a prominent place since they could guarantee that all young people have access to information, will hear about their rights, and learn about support offices that might help them into changing their practices. It is here that *sexual* and *intimate citizenship* much discussed by Ken Plummer (2003), Diane Richardson (2002) and Jeffrey Weeks (2010), among others, are significant to extend sex education meanings to contemporary relationships. By bringing sexual subjects to the fore, as well as the private arenas where citizenship should take place – the *individual*, the *relational* and the *sexual practice* arena – sexual and intimate citizenships enlighten new potential for sex education as a condition for respecting diversity, to having safe sex, making informed choices and discussing emotions and feelings.

This search for democracy and equality within intimate relationships, as advocated by Anthony Giddens (1992), implies new requirements for sex education. Access to sexual rights is not enough. Boys and girls must be educated to feel entitled to want equal relationships free of coercion and violence. Students as well as teachers must be critical in relation to their own practices in order to provide a transformative education. In this sense through the concept of *equality as condition*, developed by John Baker, Kathleen Lynch, Sara Cantillon and Judy Walsh (2004), I suggested how sexual and intimate citizenship may be carried to schools. Framed by this, sex education is constructed as a social, cultural and emotional condition for social transformation and equality promotion. It can be said that in the specific case of the

schools in this study, sex education was mainly seen as a resource for accessing knowledge and services, such as health advice and contraception. Only the redistributive dimension seems to be ensured, while the other dimensions – power, *recognition* and *care* – are far from being achieved, as became visible in homophobic and sexist situations in the classroom.

Within this framework sex education emerges as a ‘question of dignity’ as Moita (2006) and McLaughlin et al. (2011) highlight the need to tackle inequalities and promote new ways of being, feeling, living and respecting bodies, feelings, desires and frustrations.

- **Putting this theoretical conceptualisation into practice: a delicate mission**

As in most studies on sex education, the question of how to put this theoretical conceptualisation into practice remains. Answering this question continues to be problematic and very difficult. Several questions emerged during teachers’ interviews for which I was unable to find concrete answers during this process. Some of them were concerned with: How can we support students to exercise sexual agency and ensure they have safe sex? How should their sexual experiences be enhanced? How can we talk about sexual pleasure and deconstruct its apparent imperative nature among youth? How can teachers teach about sexual diversity if they do not accept homosexuality? How can teachers leave out their personal values and beliefs about a subject that is not neutral? The issue of promoting a good-sex education was beyond the scope of current research but on the basis of what teachers and students said it is possible to point to some steps.

At a fundamental level these questions require a reconfiguration of institutional power in schools so that teachers feel capable and legitimised to provide sex education and students can shape their education and be engaged in its design. These questions also address pedagogical changes in terms of contents and relationships adult–student. For instance, many students considered peer education as the most effective because they are closer to their experiences, but affective ties to teachers in Portugal

also led them to be chosen as the best educators. This shows how trust and affection are essential within educational relationships. Findings also highlighted the potential benefits of sex education disrupting gender normativity. The focus that sexual knowledge and information is not enough to transform practices does not reduce its huge relevance in the process of raising awareness. Dominant agendas might be challenged to develop communicational and relational skills. Engaging with Debbie Epstein, Sarah O' Flynn and David Telford (2003) suggestion, young people should be introduced to the ideas, understanding and meanings produced by those working in the field of sexuality as an innovative strategy to implement a more effective sex education. What is at stake here is deciding on what type of rationality should be conveyed to include social movements' claims and theoretical knowledge produced by social and human sciences.

Similar to other subjects, students should leave sex education lessons with more knowledge about the contributions of the great thinkers on the topic. This belief aims not to just develop a theoretical glimpse of sexuality and gender, but instead to engage young people in critical and contested debates and views. Therefore, young people are consulted about their own education by being given space to talk, think and produce new meanings. This would enrich classroom discussions and a more confident pedagogy would be promoted because students would feel more supported and knowledgeable.

Given the richness and extent of the material collected I choose focus only on the views, experiences and expectations regarding the practices of sex education in schools, leaving aside the issues linked to the sexual and intimate rights and the other contexts of sexual learning, such as the media, family and peer groups. Important topics have emerged about the influence of sexual reputation and gossip, the difficulty young people still have in defining relations of equality and having control over their sexual and loving relationships, as well as the contested meanings of marriage. Along with these topics, the view that young people are living changeable and vulnerable sexual and intimate relationships that should be articulated by schools released some

hints for future research on sex education and its need to address in depth the issues of reproductive citizenship.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1 – Formal letter from University of Cambridge

APPENDIX 2 – Students’ informational sheet

APPENDIX 3 – Teachers’ invitation

APPENDIX 4 – Informational sheet for the head teacher

APPENDIX 5 – Formal letter from University of Porto

APPENDIX 6 – Parents’ consent

APPENDIX 7 – Focus group discussion schedule

APPENDIX 8 – Students’ interviews schedule

APPENDIX 9 – Teachers’ interviews schedule

APPENDIX 10 – Categories of analysis

APPENDIX 11 – List of participants

APPENDIX 12 – Transcriptions per school

APPENDIX 13 – NVivo analysis

APPENDIX 14 – Table of educational system