

From “Chastity As a Gift” to “Doing It As a Sign of Love”: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Discourses on Female Sexuality in Popular Magazines in Portugal

SAGE Open
October-December 2012: 1–13
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DOI: 10.1177/2158244012467341
<http://sgo.sagepub.com>


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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the media discourse about feminine sexuality produced by Portuguese magazines. Texts about female sexuality published in six types of magazines between 1965 and 2006 were content analyzed. The results showed that Portuguese media's discourse on sexuality is not only becoming more liberal but is also characterized by ambiguity and contradiction. Within a “progressive” discursive framework for sexuality, tensions and double standards for women are still noticeable. The media discourse in Portugal continues to reinforce the established gender hierarchy and inequality in heterosexual relationships and maintain traditional gender roles.

Keywords

sexuality, gender, women, media, culture, Portugal

Introduction

Many authors claim that sexuality is socially and culturally constructed (Andersen, 2005; Benkert, 2002; Jackson & Scott, 2007; Rosenblum & Travis, 2002; Seidman, 2002) and that the media play an important role in defining sexuality (Hust, Brown, & L'Engle, 2008; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Ringrose & Barajas, 2011; Vares, Jackson, & Gill, 2011). The study of sexuality and media has been developed particularly in the context of feminist research. The media were a focus of feminist attention (van Zoonen, 1994) during the three waves of feminist movements. The media assumed particular relevance during the third wave, especially in the context of postmodern feminism (Nogueira, 2001) and postfeminism (Genz & Brabon, 2009; Tavares, 1998, 2000). The postfeminism movement emerged from combinations and intersections between the media, consumer culture, neoliberal policies, postmodern theory, and feminist assumptions (Genz & Brabon, 2009; McRobbie, 2009). Today, feminist research on the media is an innovative project that joins cultural studies, media, and communication. Feminist research embraces a dimension that is political, complex, multidisciplinary (Gallagher, 2006), and socioculturally focused (Devereux, 2007) with respect to sexuality and female subjectivity.

For example, in the advent of feminist scholarship on the media, we highlight the work of Betty Friedan's (1963/2010) *Feminine Mystique*, which analyzes the representations of housewives particularly in women's magazines of the 1960s. Since then, many studies have focused on the role of

women's magazines in the construction of female subjectivity and the way in which women experience their sexuality (Carpenter, 1998, 2001; Currie, 1999, 2001; Jackson, 2005; Kehily, 1999; McRobbie, 1991, 1996; Pierce, 1990, 1993).

Cultural discourses and practices, which include the media, define norms and values for feminine and masculine sexuality and construct gendered standards for both expected and unexpected sexual behaviors (Jackson & Gee, 2005; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Magalhães, 2011). Sexuality is, therefore, the product of specific social, cultural, and historical factors, and it also outlines social and gender relations (Benkert, 2002; Magalhães, 2011; Saavedra, Nogueira, & Magalhães, 2010). It is used to justify gender differences and perpetuates gender beliefs, expectations, values, and rules. (Hetero)sexuality and gender are, therefore, intrinsically related—they are not the same, but sexuality reveals gender constructions, and both in turn constrain sexual practices (Jackson & Scott, 2007).

Cross-cultural studies indicate that these norms, values, and practices vary within different contexts (e.g., Benkert, 2002) and have suggested the possibility of more subtle microvariations. For example, Williams's (2002) study,

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conducted in the United States using two groups of adolescent girls, showed clear differences in the construction of femininity that was linked to the specific sociocultural characteristics of the two groups. Skeggs (2003, as cited in Jackson & Scott, 2004) added that norms for feminine sexual “decency” are different for each social class: For middle-class women with economic resources, sexual encounters are seen as a means to affirm autonomy, freedom, or status, while the same behavior from lower-class women incites social dislike and pejorative labeling.

Despite these macro- and microcultural variations, most cultures endorse different expectations, rules, and values for both genders, and the global tendency is toward the restriction and subordination of female sexuality (Benkert, 2002; Hust et al., 2008).

The notion that gender norms for sexuality follow a double standard (Alferes, 1997; Hust et al., 2008; Jackson & Scott, 2004; Nogueira, Saavedra, & Costa, 2008) that encourages women to marry (Cancian & Gordon, 1988; Erel, 2011; Press, 2011) and permits men to have multiple sexual liaisons (Alferes, 1997; Saavedra et al., 2010) is not new. What is perhaps more noticeable is the pervasiveness of these standards in a time of the apparent “liberation”/“banalization” of sexuality, in which several authors have discussed the “sexualization of culture” (Gill, 2008; Ringrose, 2011) and the “hyper-sexualization” of women (Gill, 2008, 2010).

In fact, although a discourse of apparent liberation and “openness” prevails in popular and media representations, some studies reveal anomalies and contradictions within these discourses (Alferes, 1997; Crawford & Popp, 2003; Jackson & Scott, 2004, 2007). Tolerance of casual and premarital sexual relationships occurs simultaneously with the hope of a serious, loving relationship (Jackson, 2001); tolerance of homosexuality and serial relationships coexists with the reinforcement of heterosexuality and monogamy as an ideal (Harvey & Gill, 2011; Jackson & Scott, 2004). This coexistence of change and continuity is, as suggested by Jackson and Scott (2004), “indicative of a persistent unease about the sexual that sits side by side with an acceptance of greater sexual freedom and diversity” (p. 235).

Whereas some authors argue that heterosexual relationships are more equal today—that is, women are encouraged to play an active role, to express their sexual needs and feelings, to have sexual pleasure and satisfaction (Andrews, 2003; Giddens, 1992; Johnson et al., 2001; Ringrose, 2011)—others assert that asymmetries persist (Cancian & Gordon, 1988; Harvey & Gill, 2011; Jackson & Scott, 2007; Jackson & Vares, 2011; Magalhães, 2011), mainly in specific sociocultural contexts. In Europe, studies indicate gender differences regarding sexual activity (onset and number of partners), and Portugal is the country in which this difference is most evident (Ross, Godeau, & Dias, 2004). A comparative study of several European countries indicated that only 20.3% of Portuguese girls claimed to be sexually active, compared with 30.2% of boys (Avery & Lazdane, 2008). Other studies

reveal that boys have a greater number of relationships (an average of three) than do girls, who have an average of one partner (Monteiro & Raposo, 2005).

Many studies developed in Portugal reveal the gender differences in the experience of sexuality: Boys become sexually active earlier than girls, while the rate of virginity is more pronounced in girls (Alferes, 1997; Monteiro & Raposo, 2005) and boys have more sexual partners than do girls. Studies indicate that there is a perpetual asymmetry of affective expectations: Whereas boys’ achievements are determined by the number of relationships, women are still attached to the romantic aspect and exclusivity of each romantic involvement (Saavedra et al., 2010).

In Portugal, along with these studies about sexual behavior and attitudes, some research groups and authors have also analyzed the media in relation to gender and feminist studies. For example, Silveirinha (2001, 2004, 2006) characterizes the evolution of feminist media studies in Portugal; Mota-Ribeiro (2002, 2005) analyzes the representation of women in the Portuguese press and in the publicity spots; Cerqueira, Magalhães, Cabecinhas, and Nogueira (2011) analyze gender representations in news magazines; and Magalhães (2011) analyzes the discourses of sexuality in a teenage girls’ magazine. Globally, these studies reveal the persistence of gendered representations in media content (Cerqueira et al., 2011) and show that women and girls are exposed to contradictory messages, from an emancipation discourse to a discourse of subservience (Magalhães, 2011; Mota-Ribeiro, 2005). The studies also reveal the presence of a discourse that objectifies and minimizes women (Magalhães, 2011; Mota-Ribeiro, 2005), therefore producing a hegemonic and androcentric vision that prevents an inclusive and equal citizenship (Cerqueira et al., 2011).

In fact, despite the transformations occurring in Western societies, there are differences between different countries and their sociocultural contexts (Benkert, 2002; Gill & Scharff, 2011). It is important to understand the transformations of sexuality within their social, cultural, historical, and political backgrounds. In this respect, Portugal is a country with cultural specificities that should be analyzed: Three decades ago, the Portuguese lived under a dictatorial political regime in which women were considered inferior and women were considered to be the property of the husband or father; women were not encouraged to work; divorce was not possible; and women were supposed to only have one boyfriend whom they should marry and have children with (Amâncio, 1998; Dias & Machado, 2007). In Portugal, which is a very Catholic country where politics and religion are united, the highest values are summarized in the following phrase: “God, Family and Country” (Pimentel, 2000). It was not until April 25, 1974, that a revolution took place and gave rise to a democratic period. Despite a period of struggle and the consolidation of rights and equality for women, in which the feminist movement played an important role, gender disparities still persist, and the old “values” remain in the

context of sexuality and relationships (Dias, Machado, Manita, & Gonçalves, in press; Saavedra et al., 2010). As Giddens (1992, pp. 12-13) states, “in many contexts, however, such transitions are happening against the backdrop of more constraining sexual values than were characteristic of American society several decades ago. For women living in these contexts, the transformations now occurring are dramatic and shattering” with respect to their social integration and acceptance and their own negotiation of their gender, cultural, and even religious identity (see Machado, Dias, & Coelho, 2010).

As mentioned above, social “reality” is mostly constructed by the media. Media discourses are important resources that people use to construct/support ways of understanding many social problems and phenomena, such as sexuality, sexual relationships, and gender identity. Several media studies on gender issues and gender relationships have been conducted in the last several decades (e.g., Cancian & Gordon, 1988; Carll, 2003; Firminger, 2006; Fraser, 2005; Jackson, 2001, 2005; Jackson & Vares, 2011; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Novikova & Raynor, 2003; Rogers, 2005; Tyler, 2004; Vares et al., 2011) revealing that the media reinforce specific gender images and meanings, namely, hegemonic masculinity (male authority, ability, and strength) and submissive femininity (dependency, sexual receptivity/passivity, and mothering). In fact, several studies of women’s magazines reveal their emphasis on heterosexual femininity, beauty, and fashion (Brown Travis, Meginnis, & Bardari, 2000; Magalhães, Saavedra, & Nogueira, 2008; Mota-Ribeiro, 2002, 2005) along with the reinforcement of predominant gender stereotypes about sex (Hust et al., 2008; Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Mota-Ribeiro, 2005; Taylor, 2005).

Many studies on this subject have been conducted, but few studies have used a longitudinal analysis (e.g., Cancian & Gordon, 1988; Carpenter, 1998; Jackson & Gee, 2005) through which it would be possible to identify and understand the variations in public discourses about this theme over time.

In this study, we develop a longitudinal analysis (over a 40-year period) of media discourses because the social construction of female sexuality must be understood in its sociocultural and political context given the profound changes in Portugal.

A Longitudinal Study of Media Discourse in Portugal on Female Sexuality

Objectives

The main goal of this study is to characterize the dominant sociocultural discourses (and their transformations) with respect to feminine sexuality in Portugal, from 1965 to the present, and to analyze the potential implications of these discourses on the construction of female sexuality.

Before presenting our methodology and results, it is important to note the way the relationship between media discourse and the meanings and realities of individuals exposed to this discourse is conceptualized in this article. A dialectic relationship exists between the media and society (Devereux, 2007; Gallagher, 2006). On one hand, the media discourse on sexuality is a product and mirror of predominant sociocultural representations and practices. On the other hand, those media representations contribute to the sociocultural construction of sexuality, thus reinforcing or changing social patterns of behavior and thoughts (Gallagher, 2006; Magalhães, 2011).

It is important to note that there is no cause–effect relationship between media discourse and individual beliefs or behaviors. From a social constructionist perspective, media discourse is anchored in social reality, reflecting not only the predominant social norms but also the diversity of values and behaviors that characterize the social world. These discourses constitute important resources for people trying to make sense of the world (Potter & Wetherell, 1992), but the public is not merely a passive recipient of media discourse. On the contrary, several studies suggest that people are able to critically analyze media content and that they seek information that reinforces their previous views of the world (Sacco, 1995). In this article, although we do not consider the way media content is understood by the public, this is an important point to keep in mind in order not to reify the results of media content analysis, such as those we will present next.

Method

Sample. An extended 40-year period (from 1965 to 2005) of media production was considered and included materials corresponding to different phases of the recent sociopolitical history of Portugal and the corresponding transformations in social practices and discourses. This framework allowed for the inclusion of materials from three distinct phases of recent Portuguese sociopolitical history: the fascist regime (that lasted until 1974), the revolutionary period (from 1974 to the late 1970s), and the democratic regime (from the late 1970s to the present).

Within this time frame, magazines were selected according to their accessibility (preference was given to large distribution titles), target audience (women, men, adolescents, and the general public), and the content profile (generalist, “society/celebrities,” and “romantic/interpersonal”). This selection led to a final sample of 10 magazines distributed according to six different profiles: “general content” for the adult public (*Seleções*), “general content” for the adult female public (*Modas e Bordados, Máxima*), “generalist content” for the adult male public (*Men’s Health*), “romantic/interpersonal content” for the female public (*Crónica Feminina, Maria*), “romantic/interpersonal content” for the

adolescent feminine public (*Menina e Moça, Ragazza*), and “society/celebrity content” for the adult female public (*Flama, Nova Gente*). Whenever a magazine was no longer published, it was substituted by a publication of magazines with a larger circulation and a similar profile.

It must be noted that the initiation of a true media culture only began at the end of the 20th century. Until the 1970s, illiteracy rates were very high (26%-40%), mainly in rural areas and among women. Therefore, reading was only prevalent among societies’ elites (Barreto, 2002). Moreover, the fascist government controlled editorial policies and continued to promote its rigid ideology. During the dictatorship, censorship acts were extremely aggressive. These censorship acts included the confiscation and destruction of books; the persecution of authors, publishers, and booksellers; the forced closings of printers; and the preliminary examination of all printed material (Medeiros, 2010). Consequently, the analyses of magazines of the 1960s and 1970s should be considered case studies that help to illustrate the representation of women (and female sexuality) under a dictatorship.

Moreover, because of this repression and censorship of publishers and printers, the magazines that existed during the dictatorship cannot be compared with recent magazines in terms of content or editorial policy. Nevertheless, we attempted to maintain equivalence in terms of target audience, circulation, and publisher (e.g., “Flama” was replaced by “Nova Gente” for the “Impala” publisher).

The sample was collected in 5-year intervals (1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005), and two annual editions of each magazine were analyzed (March and September).

Analysis, coding, and validation procedures. The analysis procedure consists of three main stages: (a) collection of magazines and the selection, within each magazine, of texts that addressed the theme of female sexuality; (b) transcription of all the identified texts (270); and (c) coding and analysis of data using the NUD*IST 4 (Nonnumerical Unstructured Data Index, Searching and Theorizing) software.

All coding was inductively derived using an inclusive coding approach (Fielding, 1993) based on the principles of grounded analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The coding unit was the phrase.

For validation purposes, 10% of the texts were randomly selected and co-codified by a “blind” researcher, reaching an index of fidelity of 0.8. This result was considered a substantial force of agreement.¹

Results

Descriptive Presentation of Media Discourse

A data analysis revealed substantial transformations in the media discourse about female sexuality over time.

In 1965, there were few references to sexuality (8)² and, when present, they were mainly indirect, conveying a

negative connotation of feminine sexuality. The importance of a woman’s virginity was stressed (8; “It is better to be a ‘no’ girl than a ‘yes’ girl”; “To have fun with a girl is a fling; to marry her is another matter”). Women’s sexuality was only accepted within marriage and, even in this case, references to sexual life emerged only using covert language (“The married couple should also reach physical harmony”).

In 1970, the number of references to the theme increased (23) and sexuality was described more explicitly. Sex was considered a basic need for men (2; “Sometimes the husband’s most pressing need is sex”) and a women’s matrimonial duty, whose denial justifies male dissatisfaction and even infidelity (3; “Some women don’t understand the urgency of their husband’s needs, and later they feel hurt and shocked when those needs cause him to pursue an affair”).

Women’s virginity (10) remained an extremely valued personal trait (“Chastity or dignity—as you prefer to call it— . . . is the soul’s beauty and a girl’s delicacy”). The defense of time-honored moral values was reinforced through strict societal norms by which young women were expected to abide. This expectation was in clear contrast to the sexual perverseness that was thought to be taking place in other European countries (8) (“Living in a consumer society, having money, being surrounded by an amoral culture, young people aspire to a natural ideal . . . : God, Family, Work, and Homeland”).

After the democratic revolution that occurred in Portugal in 1974, references to sexuality in magazines from 1975 decreased (5), but their content changed substantially. Sexuality was no longer understood as something negative or as a reason for feeling guilty (“Physical understanding and loving accomplishment are not accompanied by guilty feelings”), and the need for sexual education was mentioned for the first time (“There isn’t a rational preparation for marriage in many countries, and a few years ago, sexual subjects and the teaching of certain hygienic precepts to young people were considered awful”). Some references to sexual pleasure and women’s active role in sexuality appeared for the first time (3; “The woman should not have merely a passive role and should also achieve physical satisfaction”). It should, however, be noted that sexuality remained linked only to the marital couple and that the language used to describe it mainly emphasized the physiological dimension of sex (e.g., “hygienic precepts,” “physical reward”).

This period was also unique because of the emergence of a critical discourse on women’s social exploitation as sexual objects (5; “They are exploited as sexual objects by all consumer society structures”), namely, in the context of media discourse (6; “Publicity is the most insidious means of perpetuating women’s depreciative images as sexual symbols and inferior human beings”). It is important to note that this critical discourse will not reappear in the subsequent years of this analysis.

In fact, during the 1980s, sexuality nearly disappeared from media discourse, apart from tenuous references to

female contraception in 1980 (2; “The doctor spoke to us about the pill”). In 1990, sexuality continued to be scarcely referenced (6), even if sex was then, for the first time, described as a central aspect of life (4; “Sex is everywhere, and to speak of life is to speak of sex”; “sex is the cause of all pleasant and unpleasant things, of happiness and suicide, of connections and ruptures”).

In 1995, sexuality became a central theme in the magazines’ discussion of affective relationships (140). Couples’ sexuality was then described as a learning process (3; “To learn this language can take years”), and sexual communication was characterized as communication based on codes one should learn to reach satisfaction and mutual understanding (13; “Between husband and wife there is always a secret code to express what they want”). There were recommendations for a satisfactory sexual life that emphasized communication (“Open communication is the best way of achieving a satisfactory sexual life”) and romanticism (4).

Regarding male sexuality, we found that men were understood to have higher levels of sexual interest and needs than women (15; “Most of the men are ready for immediate sexual relationships”). Male worries about their sexual performance and their fear of female evaluation were also addressed (3; “A man is always concerned about a woman’s judgment of his masculinity, of his performance, of his penis, of everything!”).

Although with a critical tone, notions corroborating a traditional conception of gender roles during sex were conveyed (9). These notions were either presented as male dysfunctional beliefs (“When men begin to think about a woman as their future wife, they may begin to treat her as sacred rather than sexy”) or as patterns of thinking involving female inadequacy (14; “Instead of going to bed as the rapturous and crazy woman she was when they met each other, she now comes as a diligent and well-behaved wife, who becomes disturbed by ardent sexual practices—because now she is thinking about marrying him”). Following the same rationale, women were portrayed as self-restraining and men as more prone to engaging in sex (12). This fact, however, is no longer presented as a natural occurrence but as a result of socialization (“Women are conditioned to wait, independently of what they feel, whereas men are not. For men, sex is good and that is reason enough for seeking it”). Because of this female restraint, women’s sexual receptivity was described as ambiguous (14; “Many men think that women send them ambiguous signs, and it becomes difficult to know if they want to say ‘no’ or if they want to be persuaded”).

The double standard regarding sexuality was still present when discussing sexually transmitted diseases and their prevention. The use of condoms was mainly described as a male reaction to the disease, and sexual “withdrawal” was portrayed as the predominantly female way of coping with that risk (3; “In the AIDS era, sex has some dangerous implications, but most of the men handle this risk by using condoms”; “Women also think about AIDS when they

decide to make love with a man. And they think about other subtle implications of their sexual behavior. They ask if he will continue to respect them; they think about whether they will keep their self-respect and they think about the changes that sex can bring to the relationship. Because of this, it is less probable that women ‘move forward’ without further ado. Women become reserved”).

Adolescents’ sexual initiation was also addressed for the first time in the mid-1990s. Sex with a boyfriend was then presented as something positive and natural, but only under certain conditions: in the context of a loving relationship (7; “If you are truly in love and he loves you”), under absolute certainty about the partner and the decision (8; “If you are completely sure about wanting to do it,” “If you don’t have any doubts about the person whom you chose”), after prolonged discussion (3; “If you and your boyfriend talked honestly enough about the subject”), and if the girl had good self-esteem (5; “If you feel good about your body”). Following this logic, several pieces of advice were offered to girls about how to resist pressure from their boyfriends (7; “If he loves you, he will wait”). Curiously, despite the educational tone these magazines adopt when addressing their audience, birth control was only mentioned once (“You should visit a Family Planning Center or, at least, be seen by a gynecologist”).

This attention given to sexuality, especially adolescent sexual behavior, remained present in 2000 (57). The magazines provided advice regarding the girl’s first time with her boyfriend (17), techniques on how to discover the boy’s level of experience, and female initiative (7; “Make the first move: If you don’t want to wait for his decision, you should go for the attack”). Woman’s sexual pleasure was portrayed as something important (2; “Enjoy every caress, every word”), while contraception was scarcely mentioned although described as fundamental (2; “Even if he takes an oath that he will stop on time, or says that there is no danger because you are menstruating or because it is the first time, there always exists the possibility of you becoming pregnant or of contracting an STD”).

Finally, in 2005, the media continued to focus on sexuality (92), not only in magazines for young girls but also in ones for the adult public (male and female). For the first time, male heterosexual prostitution was mentioned (4) and the reasons behind women’s desire for these sexual services were discussed: as a means to achieve an affective relationship (5), to save one’s marriage, as a result of having marital problems, or just because they fall in love with the man and/or with “their athletic bodies.” Ambiguity was evident in the media presentation of this theme. On one hand, the media suggested that paying for sex is a form of sexual equality (4; “Women should have the same rights as men”) but, on the other, the media emphasized the emotional needs of female customers and not their search for physical satisfaction.

On the whole, differences between female and male sexuality were again emphasized, characterizing women as more reserved than men either because of biological reasons or

cultural conditioning (4; “For biological and social reasons, the female impulse is more socialized, more repressed. However, the costs of an unwanted pregnancy are much higher for women”; “Men are taught to achieve love through sex and women are taught to achieve sex through love”).

Integrative Analysis of the Results

As a second step in our analysis, we went back to the data to resolve three main research questions: (a) the possibility of distinguishing different time periods in the media discourse on sexuality, (b) the discursive continuities and discontinuities that are present in these magazines, and (c) the discursive differences between magazines designed for different target audiences.

a. Discursive changes over time

Changes in the number and content of references to sexuality make it possible to differentiate three distinct periods in the media discourse on female sexuality: (a) 1965-1970 was characterized by a “traditional,” negative discourse on sexuality; (b) 1975 was an important year and a landmark of change, with a more positive view of sexuality to be developed further in subsequent years; and (c) the years from 1975 to the present were marked by the importance attributed to this topic (especially since the 1990s) and by ambiguous language, alternating between a “liberated” version of female sexuality and a permanent return to traditional gender roles and behavioral prescriptions for women.

These three periods directly correspond to the three different phases of recent sociopolitical life in Portuguese history. In a more detailed analysis, magazine language in the 1965 and 1970 magazines, which was produced under the fascist regime that ruled Portugal between 1928 and 1974, presented female virginity and modesty as the main definer of a woman’s social and moral values and as essential conditions for marriage. Marriage, however, was perceived as a woman’s main objective in life and as her unique pathway to achieving social respectability and a personal sense of accomplishment and self-esteem. In this context, sex was constructed as something dangerous for women, and female sexuality was seen as a source of vulnerability; on one hand, a woman must be protected (by her family) and, on the other hand, the girl must restrain her own (rarely admitted) desire and simultaneously control her boyfriend’s sexual impulses without seeming to reject him (“say no with the mouth and yes with the eyes”). This difficult equilibrium is presented by the media as the means to preserve and enhance girls’ moral and social values and to protect their opportunities in the “marriage market.”

In 1975, the year after the democratic revolution in Portugal and when there were was a strong Communist influence on Portugal’s government and political life, this discourse was substantially altered, with sexuality presented

as a normal, physiological need for both men and women. At this time, the media discourse adopted a normalizing and educational tone, presenting a positive image of sexuality that clearly resonated with communist aesthetics of the body (functionality, strength, activity). This positive stance toward sex was not, however, free from ambiguity. The media essentially avoided the theme of female pleasure and instead focused on the sexual exploitation of women. While it is commendable that the media uncovered a widely known but unspoken reality, we must note that this theme once again resonates with the way communists perceive women as part of the explored classes, vulnerable not only by their lesser wages but also by the vulnerability caused by their gender. It must be noted that the female body and sexuality were still conceived of as sources of vulnerability and powerlessness for women (whereas the male body was represented as dominant, strong, and powerful).

From 1980 to the present (years of consolidation of the democratic regime), the political tone of the 1975 language vanished and “old” notions (e.g., female sexual modesty, virginity) reappeared, coexisting with numerous references to women’s sexual needs and rights, in a discourse marked by ambiguity and inner contradictions.

b. Changes and continuities in media discourse

Significant differences between the first years we analyzed and the present are quite noticeable. These differences refer both to the visibility of the theme in media discourse and to its content. Although sexuality was hardly ever mentioned during the first years, it has proliferated in magazines for female adolescents since 1995.

The discursive content is also quite different, as mentioned previously. Although in 1965 and 1970, sexuality was regarded as something to avoid and only conceivable within the context of marriage, in 1975, sexuality appeared with a positive connotation. At present, it is presented in an idealized and romantic way in adult women’s and adolescent magazines. Sexual life is not presented as restricted to married couples, and marriage is no longer presented as the main goal of entering a relationship. Adolescent magazines note that adolescent girls may have several boyfriends and sexual partners, and they focus on female sexual satisfaction, initiative, and pleasure. Female sexual satisfaction is, in fact, presented almost as a duty or as a goal to be reached, and sexual performance is described as a central ingredient for women’s self-esteem and sense of personal accomplishment and as essential to a normative and satisfactory intimate relationship.

Despite these important changes, traditional notions about female sexuality remain present, as shown in the following example:

1965: “For marriage, they want a girl morally intact, because . . . to form a home and choose their children’s mother—that is a serious thing!”

1995: “Can a boy notice that you are no longer virgin? Or is possible to deceive him?” “Tell him that all your sexual experience comes from hearing people talk about it”; “Act coy when he tries to find out your previous relationships.”

Virginity is one of these areas of discursive continuity, even though it is no longer viewed as a marker of a girl’s moral value. The emphasis is now placed on the social disapproval that the knowledge of the girl’s past could bring up and its effects on her present relationship with her boyfriend, assuming that he will be uncomfortable knowing about her sexual experiences. This orientation is thus more pragmatic than moral, with girls being told that it is normal to have several sexual partners but that they should lie about the fact (“act as if your boyfriend was the only one”).

The opposite occurs with male sexuality. Throughout the years, the expectation has been for men to have many partners, and this expectation is presented as something that is valued by society and comprises a central ingredient of masculinity:

1965: “A loyal husband is considered a silly man”
 1995: “He says that he already had sex with more than 50 girls”

Another area of continuity includes the conceptualization of female sexuality as inherently affective, or rather the notion that it is difficult for women to detach sex from love, while male sexuality is characterized by a “physiological” need. In addition, men are presented as less worried about finding a loving relationship and instead as actively avoiding it.

1970: “She wants to keep herself so that she may give herself as a gift to a true and complete love”;
 “The woman doesn’t understand the urgency of her husband’s needs . . .”
 1995: “‘I want to make love to you’ is a sentence commonly used by men when they aren’t actually thinking of love”; “That ‘monster’ called commitment makes me sick and gives me shivers down my spine.”

c. Discursive differences according to the magazine profile

In the magazines we analyzed during the first years before the revolution, there were no differences between publication profiles. A probable explanation resides in the hegemonic political regime, which is characterized by censorship mechanisms, a marked ideology around the theme of “family values” and the closed environment of Portugal regarding the significant social and cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s worldwide.

The present discourse is much more heterogeneous and diverse, and it is possible to identify discursive differences between publication profiles, these differences being stimulated by this ideological diversity and by a bigger specialization of the mass media industry.

Female adolescents’ magazines

Female adolescents’ magazines are, by far, the ones in which the topic of sexuality is most prevalent. As in other studies (e.g., Magalhães, 2011; McRobbie, 1996; Mota-Ribeiro, 2005), it is possible to observe the conflict arising from plural and contradictory notions of sexuality (e.g., the ideas that girls are sexually active and must take the first step toward intimacy co-occur with concerns about virginity and the alleged need for girls to hide their previous sexual experiences). The focus of many articles is on the girl’s decision to initiate sexual activities, which is addressed through an instructional approach marked by numerous pieces of advice (e.g., choose a loving partner, be comfortable with your body, do not rush into a relationship).

In these publications, sex is conceptualized as a technique or “ability,” something that can be learned and taught. Girls are given clear instructions about sex, assuming that they do not have information from other sources (friends, school, family). However, girls are told to instruct their boyfriends about how boys should act with them.

Another common theme found in these magazines is the notion that sexuality is placed on the affective/emotional realm of experience. Sexuality is linked with a long-lasting relationship, and sex is presented as something special, associated with feelings of love, confidence, and respect. This type of language suggests that love is the most appropriate or most desirable context for sex. This suggestion does not mean that casual sex is not possible, but that it is a less desirable one, one that girls need to differentiate from “special” sex. Furthermore, casual sex can create problems that girls have the responsibility to manage effectively. Romantic love is, in fact, presented in teen magazines as an ideal to which girls should aspire in their daily lives and use to make decisions during difficult situations (infidelity, fights) with their boyfriends, especially regarding the decision on whether to engage in sex.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that while teenagers’ magazines tend to focus on sexuality and sexual initiation, their actual discussions of safe sex are quite scarce, and the emphasis on sexuality overshadows other important areas of teenagers’ lives (e.g., school, family, friends).

Women’s versus men’s magazines

During the last few years, it is obvious that women’s and men’s magazines marketed for an affluent audience focus more on the analysis of gender differences. Both magazines

claim that these differences are explained by cultural and biological factors but still conceptualize female sexuality as inherently affective and describe male sexuality as a physiological function.

Double standards regarding sexuality also persist: Having many sexual experiences and partners is presented as legitimate and positive for men, whereas women must restrict their sexual experiences to fewer relations with romantic meaning:

Men's magazine: "What do males and females search for? Males: sex! They keep improving their technique without scruples; Females: an ideal partner . . . sex is important but only if there is commitment"

Women's magazine: "Because men usually desire sexual relations earlier than women do, they will sometimes insist with them or pressure them for sex"; "Women want a relationship in romantic terms."

Both publication profiles associate sexual initiative/performance with masculinity, conferring an active role to men, while assigning a receptive/passive role to women ("Most men are ready for immediate sexual relations"; "Women are conditioned to wait, no matter how they feel towards the subject").

Despite this common focus in both publication profiles, we also found specificities that are exclusive to each magazine. One of those unique aspects is that the discourse on the so-called "sexual ambiguity of women" appears only in women's magazines, formulated in a way that makes women responsible for clearly expressing their preferences to avoid male misinterpretation and hurting their partner's feelings:

"Given the different expectations, perhaps it is better for a woman to declare her intentions to him earlier—before they go to his house, for example, or before they go beyond the kissing phase. Tell him that you like him, but that you aren't ready for more."

However, the men's magazine distinguishes itself by a negative portrayal of women and their sexuality, either describing it as a means women use to achieve control and power in relationships ("Women can be controlling of men. It is as if women told us, 'if you do what I want, I'll go to bed with you'") or pointing out women's sexual inhibitions ("Women hide, even from themselves, their desires and sexual fantasies").

The reference to violent sexual practices is also exclusive to this magazine profile, while stressing the "make believe" and "controlled" character of these behaviors, and presenting them in an educational tone ("Before beginning, agree on a "word of safety" for the other to always know when to stop. The word *no* can be an integral part of the fantasy. For that,

you need to certify that the password is something totally out of the context").

Discussion

Media discourse on sexuality underwent great transformations throughout the years included in our analysis, both in its frequency and in its content. In global terms, a discursive inversion seems to have happened. The fascist era was characterized by sexual repression, negative connotations of sex, and its restriction to the marriage realm, whereas the present time is characterized by the proliferation of discourses about sex, both romanticized/idealized and "taught" as if it were a technique.

With regard to the fascist era, we cannot forget the political regime of the "Estado Novo": It was an authoritarian, conservative, nationalist, and corporate regime, fascist-inspired, Catholic and very traditionalist, which prevailed in Portugal under the Second Republic (1933-1974; Braga da Cruz, 1982). The regime has created its own state structure and repressive apparatus (PIDE [Policia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado], penal colony for political prisoners, etc.). It was a police state that relied on censorship, propaganda, paramilitary organizations (Portuguese Legion), juvenile organizations (Portuguese Youth), the cult of the leader, and the Catholic Church (Pimentel, 2000).

Therefore, the absence of female sexuality in publications until 1975 and the extreme suppression/annulment of women (viewed as inferior, devoted to her husband and children, and pure and chaste like the Virgin Mary until their marriage) have to be understood under the ideology of the "Estado Novo": (a) with a Catholic ideology, there was an alliance between the state and the Catholic Church (Braga da Cruz, 1982); (b) because of the political propaganda and censorship of periodicals, radio, and television, the state controlled the content of every publication in the country to "protect" its ideology defending "the moral and good behaviors" (Braga da Cruz, 1982; Pimentel, 2000); (c) the state relied on youth organizations (Portuguese Youth) to teach young people the ideology advocated by the regime and teach them to obey and respect the leader and the church (Pimentel, 2000); and (d) the educational system was controlled by the regime (a nationalist and ideological education) and focuses on the exaltation of national values (e.g., past history, the great Portuguese Colonial Empire, religion, tradition, customs, service to the country, human solidarity from a Christian perspective, the attachment to the land and family, etc.) and focuses on teaching and disseminating the state and catholic ideology (Pimentel, 2000).

Thus, in this context, sexuality was conceptualized as something negative and prohibited for women. On the contrary, sexuality was permitted and encouraged in men, and society distinguished between women who marry (pure and chaste) and women who have fun.

With regard to the current situation, sexual satisfaction is now conceptualized as a central aspect in the construction of one's identity, being construed as both a woman's goal and duty.

Although this conceptualization seems to confirm the idea that the present era is characterized by sexual "liberation" (e.g., Giddens, 1992; Gill, 2008; Jackson & Vares, 2011; Johnson et al., 2001; McRobbie, 2009), the pervasiveness of the social regulation of sexuality is also quite evident; it was a regulation that changed from repression and moral censure (in the years of the fascist regime), to a form of regulation (in the democratic years) that operates through the internalized control of women and organized around ideals of health, satisfaction, and self-esteem, as noted by Foucault (1976). This analysis is reinforced by the numerous ambiguities and contradictions that permeate this discourse, again consistent with what other studies have proven (Cancian & Gordon, 1988; Jackson & Scott, 2004; Magalhães, 2011; McRobbie, 1996): There is tension between describing women as more "naturally" reserved and the prescriptions to be "more active"; there is conflict between the social censure of women's promiscuity and the construction gender equality as the norm; there is a contradiction between viewing adolescents who have several sexual partners as acceptable and suggesting that they not reveal that to their boyfriend. Furthermore, success in love/sexual relationships is still construed as being a woman's responsibility, linked to her ability to regulate herself and the other person, to make good decisions, and to choose the "right" way to behave. This finding reinforces the idea that, while sex is not an interdict anymore, it did not become "free" or "liberated." As Foucault emphasized, the proliferation of discourses on sex that we observe in today's magazines constitutes an arena for an even more complex regulation of sexuality: a territory of prescriptions, techniques, and careful choices that continue to separate "good" from "bad" women.

Within this ambiguous framework, it seems important to highlight the recurrent emphasis on the supposed difficulty of women in separating sex from affect. The romantic discourse on the "specialness" of sex helps to reinforce this idea: For women, sex is represented as a way to share and to love, and it is this love/affect that makes women's sexual practices "special" and "positive." This romanticization of sex appears to constitute a discursive mechanism to reduce the tension between traditional and modern discourses on women's sexuality.

This discourse has a prescriptive nature, but it is not formulated in an authoritarian voice; the imperatives that characterized the prerevolutionary years are currently substituted by a tolerant and educational discourse, which establishes preferences within a framework that recognizes some variety of sexual practices and relational contexts. Women are, therefore, encouraged to experience their sexuality in a loving/long-term relationship (although casual/short-term relationships are accepted); exclusivity and monogamy are

presented as the ideal (despite recognizing the possibility of breaking-up, infidelity, and serial relationships); and the decision to engage in sex, especially for the first time, is characterized as crucial and requires certainty and careful reasoning.

In this process, the discourse directed at female adolescents merits particular attention, because it is in this publication profile that sexual concerns are more evident, as has been found in other studies (e.g., Gavey & McPhilips, 1999; Jackson, 2001, 2005; McRobbie, 1996; Vares et al., 2011). It is also important to study this discourse because these magazines are directed at an age group for which the social regulation of sexuality becomes more evident than ever and the construction of female sexual subjectivity is potentially consolidated. Many authors indicate the importance of the mass media in this process (Carpenter, 1998; Gill, 2010; Jackson, 2005; McRobbie, 1996, 2009; Pierce, 1990). Teenagers' magazines symbolize an important way to produce, define, and reinforce ideals regarding how an adolescent female and an adult woman should behave sexually.

This trend clearly relates to the focus on girls' decisions to initiate sexual life. As mentioned previously regarding magazines' discussions of female sexuality, the permanent association between sex and affect is also stressed in adolescent magazines, placing love as the appropriate or more desirable context for sex, as though love were the "excuse" to engage in sex without losing self and social respect. We considered that this speech constitutes an attempt to reconcile or diminish the tension between traditional visions of female adolescent sexuality (virginity as a value, fear of social censure) and the supposed sexual "freedom" of the present time.

Regarding the comparison of magazine profiles by gender, it is clear that gender differences are portrayed with essentialism, as something stable, enduring, and internal (caused by biological constitution or by the internalization of social roles and discourses). The same happens with the persistence of double standards of sexuality, namely, through traditional notions of male activity and sexual dominance and female passiveness and sexual reserve. These findings are consistent with the findings in other studies (Crawford & Popp, 2003; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Jackson & Scott, 2004; Magalhães, 2011; Mota-Ribeiro, 2005).

In addition to this common focus in both publication profiles, the specificities of each magazine also reinforce traditional sexual roles. The discourse on women's sexual ambiguity in women's magazines forces women to shoulder the burden of managing their own and their partner's emotions, while encouraged to attend to men's needs and provide for their emotional comfort. This expectation resonates with traditional notions that women are more competent than men in the emotional realm and also with the idea that it is a woman's responsibility to take care of other people's emotional well-being. Many authors consider that these ideas, if taken to an extreme, may make women feel pressured into having

sex to keep the relationship alive and not hurt their partners, and may even facilitate male sexual coercion (Jackson & Scott, 2004; Jones, 2004).

Another important aspect of men's magazines is that they convey a negative portrayal of women and their sexuality and express the belief that women use sex as a form to exert control and power over men. This message has important implications: On one hand, it limits women's influence and power to the sexual sphere, implying that their other capacities and aptitudes are negligible; on the other hand, it propagates the representation of men as those who withhold and control resources, power, and decision-making in relationships. The only way women may have access to that power is through subtle persuasion techniques acquired by having sex.

Finally, another important characteristic of men's magazines is the reference to violent sexual practices. While stressing the "make believe" characteristic of these behaviors and assuming an "educational" tone in their articles, this reference may be interpreted as male concerns about the current social challenges to male control and power and over dominant constructions of masculinity (Barker & Loewenstein, 1997; Fine, Weis, Addeleston, & Marusza, 1997; Hekma, 2006; Rogers, 2005; Totten, 2003).

This analysis showed that although there are significant changes over the last 40 years in the way women's sexuality is talked about in media discourse, including less repressive discourse, many traditional gender expectations and sexual differences between men and women persist. The social and internalized control over women's sexuality is still pervasive, although it is not exerted through such coercive means as before. This change constitutes a clear example of Foucault's (1976, 1987) conception of social changes during the last few decades, moving away from a repressive form of control, which was centered on the body, to a subtle, diffused, pervasive, and internalized pattern of control that is mostly exerted through self-regulation and directed to the "soul."

On a more alarming note, we also found that some of these discourses can legitimize female sexual submission or even male sexual coercion over women. We hope that this attempt at deconstructing media discourse has contributed to a better understanding of the ways social control over female sexuality has changed over time and how it functions during the present day, while contributing to the reinforcement of different and less prescriptive discourses on this theme. It is our expectation that such discursive changes may contribute to opening up new spaces, for both women and men, to construe freer and preferential avenues of communication and satisfaction in their intimate relationships.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Notes

1. This validity index was calculated using the formula suggested by Vala (1986), $F = 2 (C1, 2) / C1 + C2$, dividing the number of agreements among encoders for the sum of categorizations made by each one: $2 (110) / 125 + 150 = 0.8$.
2. The number that is placed after each category denomination corresponds to the number of text units (phrases) integrated in the category.

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