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Sexuality Construction, Pornography, and Gender Violence: A Qualitative Study with Spanish Adolescents

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Abstract

Sexuality is a central aspect of human beings, and adolescence is a crucial period of transition from childhood to adulthood where sexual awakening occurs. As a critical aspect of life, adolescents should have quality sexual education to guide them through this transition. However, currently, educational institutions often lack structured and standardized sexual education programs that go beyond medicalized models focused on sexual and reproductive health and contraceptive use. A qualitative design using in-depth interviews with an ethnographic perspective to obtain detailed information considering the context. The Venegas model on sexual-affective education was referenced. This model identifies four significant areas: gender, sexuality, love/affection, and body. A qualitative design based on in-depth interviews was chosen to obtain detailed information about the issues mentioned. Forty semi-structured interviews were conducted with adolescents aged 13 to 20 in two groups: students of compulsory secondary education and vocational training. Results showed boys tend to prioritize physical aspects of sexuality, such as masturbation and intercourse, whereas girls tend to focus more on emotional connections and concern about contraception. Pornography, patriarchal cultural patterns, sexism, and traditional gender roles shaped these initial experiences. Meanings and practices were revealed to be conditioned by a sexist model of attraction, body dissatisfaction, and learning through pornography, which was related to experiences of normalized control and sexual violence in relationships. Some positive advancements resulting from feminist achievements were also discovered, such as understanding the value of consent, empathy, and the appreciation of alternative models of masculinity by some girls. These results highlight the importance of developing sexual education programs from a psychosocial and feminist perspective. Such programs should aim to transform cultural norms and attitudes surrounding sexuality, promoting agency and healthier and more equitable relationships among adolescents.

Keywords Sexuality · Adolescence · Pornography · Gender violence · Attraction

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Introduction

Adolescence, period from 10 to 19 years old constitutes a critical stage of biological and psychological changes, exploration and identity construction. During this stage, the development of sexuality plays a central role (Arruda et al., 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2006) defines sexuality as "a central aspect of being human throughout life [that] encompasses sex, gender identity and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction". Considering that sexuality is a central aspect of human beings, this work aims to delve into the narratives surrounding the construction of sexuality in Spanish adolescents. More specifically, we will deepen into discourses about body image and body dis(satisfaction), attraction and seduction patterns, pornography and violence.

Some studies place the age of onset of sexual relations between 12 and 17 years old (Espinazo-López et al., 2021). However, the WHO sets the age of 15 as the limit for what is considered early sexual initiation, warning of the negative health consequences of engaging in sexual encounters before this age (Arruda et al., 2020). Premature initiation into sexual activities, coupled with the lack or scarce sexual education received by adolescents (for 30% of Spanish adolescents, pornography is their only source of learning about sexuality, and 80% claim not to have received sufficient sex-affective education; Espinazo-López et al., 2021; Save The Children, 2020), can constitute a key factor in engaging in risky sexual practices and experiencing/exercising sexual violence. Furthermore, moral panic around adolescent sexuality, often amplified by the media, may contribute to the lack of comprehensive sexual education. This panic involves society's disproportionate response to certain phenomena, which can lead to restrictive measures like the "parental pin," limiting access to critical sex education during adolescence.

Gender Differences in the Construction of Sexuality

Sexuality is experienced and expressed through thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles, and interpersonal relationships (WHO, 2006). The prevailing cultural patterns in a society upon which the construction of adolescents' sexuality is based significantly influences the meanings they assign to it and the practices they engage in. Therefore, the relation between adolescence and sexuality can be influenced by countless factors, such as socioeconomic status, cultural and family norms, and high levels of social media use, among others (Gazendam et al., 2020). Sexuality, therefore, as a social construction, is understood as a set of meanings conveyed through different languages, defining what sex is, what it should be, and what it could be (Weeks, 1998). For example, in a study conducted in Spain with boys and girls aged 13–14 during sexuality workshops developed over several consecutive years (Barberá & Navarro, 2000), significant gender differences were found regarding concerns and ways of experiencing sexuality. Boys were more concerned about masturbation, intercourse, and female genitals, while girls significantly asked more about contraceptive use, menstruation, and tampons. Furthermore, when topics of interest were grouped around sexual behaviour, 45.7%

of boys were interested in these aspects compared to 19.5% of girls. In conclusion, by analyzing the content of adolescents' concerns about sexuality, it was observed that gender socialization exerted a significant impact on them. This aspect was also manifested in boys having greater freedom to talk about sex and masturbation and being influenced by pornography and peer communication, while girls showed more restraint in expressing pleasure and eroticism, as they conceived sex more in relation to the other (linked to romantic relationships).

Based on the premise that gender socialization has a decisive impact on how sexuality is constructed, it is necessary to adopt a social and feminist approach (Venegas, 2011, 2018), encompassing four general dimensions related to the constructions of sex-affective relationships in adolescence, bases of the feminist research agenda: gender, sexuality, love/affection, and the body. These dimensions illustrate cultural patterns, i.e., norms, values, and practices that constitute what Holland and Eisenhart (1990) call the "romance culture." Romance would be the sociocultural space where adolescent sexual relationships and practices develop. As these authors observe, this culture of romance is characterized by valuing women primarily for their attractiveness (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990), something that feminist literature recognizes as mediated by unequal gender power relations (Butler, 1997; Heise, 2011; Pratto & Walker, 2004). Traditional gender roles are emphasized in this vital stage (Contreras-Urbina & Navarro-Mantas, 2020), being from the dominant masculine perspective, where the values of femininity in adolescence are marked (Venegas, 2006). Therefore, the need to be attractive for girls is an imperative emphasized by current times of capitalism and virtuality (Bauman, 2007), where pornography, among other socializing agents, imposes polarized and unrealistic gender stereotypes, objectifying women and putting them at greater risk of experiencing violence (Stöckl et al., 2014). Hence, it is essential to analyze from this gender socialization perspective the construction of sexuality in adolescence.

Sexism and Gender Roles

One of the main mechanisms underlying differences and inequalities between men and women is gender-related beliefs and ideologies (Moya, 2010). The construction of sexuality it is strongly linked to a model of attraction/seduction tied to gender stereotypes and the expectation of romantic relationships. The need for intimacy during this period leads heterosexual boys and girls to develop beliefs and attitudes that allow them to approach the other gender. As a consequence, the onset of these relationships often leads to a greater polarization of sexist beliefs (Lemus et al., 2010; Montañéz et al., 2015). Additionally, there is significant social pressure to maintain heterosexual relationships (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; cited in Lemus et al., 2010), which leads individuals to adopt behaviours characteristic of their gender, being very concerned about the social meaning these behaviours carry (O'Sullivan et al., 2001). Girls' ideal of benevolence is further exalted, as they are mainly valued for their sensitivity, delicacy, and capacity to love (De Lemus & Ryan, 2010), since boys find girls more attractive when they are more "feminine". Similarly, girls consider benevolently sexist men more attractive compared to non-sexist men (Montañés

et al., 2013). Boys are socialized into a "being for themselves" where they are represented as the centre, fostering disregarding others' emotions (Beauvoir, 1949; cited in Alario, 2018). The effects of this differential socialization permeate all vital areas, including the sexual realm. Thus, in hegemonic male sexual desire, self-desire and lack of empathy towards women's emotions constitute two fundamental factors (Alario, 2018). Meanwhile, girls tend to remain expectant, trying to attract and contain the initiation of sexual relationships, granting power over boys, as boys' sexual desires will be fulfilled to the extent that girls allow it, thus shaping the attraction/ seduction model (De Lemus & Ryan, 2010). The ideal of romantic love completes this model, conditioning adolescents' expectations about their first romantic relationships (Carrascosa et al., 2019).

Body-Image and Body Satisfaction

Adolescence is marked by self-awareness regarding one's own body (Ata et al., 2011). Friendships become more important, and interest in romantic and sexual relationships increases, leading to greater concern about body image (Fabris & Longobardi, 2023). Western culture promotes rigid and unrealistic aesthetic standards for both men and women, praising thinness (especially in women) and muscular bodies (especially in men). The media constantly reinforces these standards (Noon et al., 2021). Currently, the most widely used media by youth are social media platforms (SMPs), utilized by approximately 94% of European adolescents aged 15–16 (ESPAD, 2019). SMPs facilitate multiple opportunities for social comparison through photos and information from other individuals (Cramer et al., 2016). In this regard, while traditional media show images of celebrities and models, the social media goals for young people's social comparison largely involve their peers (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Many of the photos shared on SMPs tend to be carefully selected and/or edited, promoting a culture of idealization, fostering unattainable standards, and contributing to body dissatisfaction (Jung et al., 2022; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Other studies also highlight the influence of pornography on body dissatisfaction as it imposes gender stereotypes and objectifies women's bodies, subjecting girls and boys to the pressure to emulate polarized and unrealistic gender stereotypes (Massey et al., 2021). An example is the statistics about surgery between 2000 and 2010, which show that the number of labiaplasty surgeries requested in the UK by teenagers quintupled (Crouch et al., 2011).

Numerous studies warn of the consequences of body dissatisfaction at both physical and psychological levels (Davison & McCabe, 2005; Dittmar, 2009; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Concern about physical appearance and dissatisfaction is more significant in adolescents than adults, and in women and girls compared to men and boys (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Some authors suggest that this may be because while pubertal changes in girls are accompanied by weight gain and adipose tissue accumulation (which deviates them from the female body ideal), boys tend to gain height and muscle, approaching the male canon (Davison & McCabe, 2005). Furthermore, as women tend to be primarily valued for their physical appearance, girls often feel more pressured and influenced by aesthetic standards than boys

(Thompson & Stice, 2001; Vartanian, 2009). Gender differences in body dissatisfaction are reflected in numerous studies (Fabris & Longobardi, 2023). In this regard, the literature highlights that 24–46% of adolescent girls and 12–26% of adolescent boys report marked body dissatisfaction, and almost three-quarters of adolescents would like to change the shape of their bodies (Wang et al., 2019). In another study, McLean et al. (2022) found that 37.9% of boys and 20.7% of girls experienced moderate body dissatisfaction, while 6.8% and 19.6%, respectively, experienced significant clinical body dissatisfaction. Recent research finds that approximately two out of every five male adolescents and nearly three out of every four female adolescents are dissatisfied with their body image and wish to lose weight (Grajera et al., 2018). Peers can influence body satisfaction in adolescence in various ways. Being victim of teasing and negative comments related to appearance and weight can increase concern and dissatisfaction with body image, especially in the case of women (Fabris & Longobardi, 2023). The influence of romantic partners has been less studied, but literature suggests that among adolescents, early romantic relationships with sexual involvement are associated with greater body dissatisfaction (Valle et al., 2009). Finally, differences in body dissatisfaction based on sexual orientation have been found, with individuals with dissident sexual orientations (bisexual, gay, and lesbian) showing higher levels of dissatisfaction, especially bisexual individuals (Shearer et al., 2015).

Pornography and Adolescence

Today, due to the emergence of the internet and easy access to electronic devices, it is challenging to discuss adolescent sexuality without mentioning pornography. Smartphones' widespread use has made pornography consumption a common practice among young people and adults (Ballester et al., 2019; Farré et al., 2020; Rothman et al., 2021). Pornography is understood as any sexually explicit material aimed to provoke sexual excitement (McKee et al., 2020). Statistics provided by Pornhub (a free pornography website) estimate an average of 115 million daily visits worldwide for the adult population (Pornhub, 2019). In adolescents, its consumption varies between 60 and 90% depending on the country (Save the Children, 2020). Repeated consumption of pornography can be a key element in the construction of adolescent sexuality, especially considering that for 30% of Spanish adolescents, pornography is their only source of information about sexuality. In Spain, 62.5% of adolescents claim to have consumed pornography and 58.4% of adolescents in Andalusia state that pornography has significantly influenced their sexual relationships (Save The Children, 2020). However, there is a significant difference between boys and girls, with 32.6% of girls stating they have consumed pornography compared to almost 90% of boys. Furthermore, consumption patterns of pornography also differ, as boys tend to access this type of content voluntarily to a greater extent, while girls access it involuntarily, either accidentally or because others show it to them (Massey et al., 2021). The average age of onset of pornography consumption is 12 years, although first exposure to pornography can occur as early as 8 years old, figures also reflected in other research (Ballester et al., 2019; Save The Children, 2020).

Pornography and Sexual Violence

Apart from prevalence data, there is growing concern about the content of pornographic videos and their potential influence on sexual violence. For example, Carrote et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review of pornographic content, finding that extreme violence was not so frequent, but "lesser forms of aggression" (e.g., spanking) were common, as well as gender inequalities represented by male domination. For decades, some authors have argued that pornography generates and reinforces sexist stereotypes as well as tolerance for violence, specifically against women, or the belief that women enjoy being raped (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981; Itzin, 1992; Malamuth & Check, 1981; Russell, 1993; Willis et al., 2022). However, the difficulty in generalizing these results has generated controversy and requires further research (Ferguson & Hartley, 2022; Fisher et al., 2013). At this point, it is a challenge to determine the impact of this consumption on adolescents and whether there is indeed evidence of a causal relationship between pornography use and sexual violence (Mestre-Bach et al., 2023).

In this regard, some studies have found an association between pornography use and harassment and poly-victimization through other forms of violence, but they have not been able to demonstrate a causal relation (Gainsbury et al., 2019; Spadine et al., 2020). Other authors have failed to find a significant association between pornography use and the likelihood of rape in young adults (Palermo et al., 2019; Taylor, 2006). However, other studies have found a predictive association between pornography use and sexual aggression, dating violence among adolescents, and experiences of sexual victimization (Carr & VanDeusen, 2004; D'Abreu & Krahé, 2016; Rostad et al., 2019). While there is no agreement on whether non-violent pornography use is related to the likelihood of committing sexual violence in adolescence, there is greater support in the literature regarding the existence of this relation in the case of violent pornography (Foubert et al., 2011; Huntington et al., 2022; Rostad et al., 2019; Yang & Youn, 2012; Ybarra & Thompson, 2018).

Another relevant result is the effect of pornography consumption on the objectification of women, meaning that men who consume porn more frequently tend to perceive women as sexual objects, which could accentuate gender hierarchy and lead them to tolerate more violence against women (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013). Other authors have found similar results regarding objectification and rape myth endorsement (Seabrook et al., 2019). Results from both studies are in line with those found by Ashton et al. (2018), indicating that women perceive the effects of pornography on sexual objectification. In this sense, literature shows a clear distinction between boys and girls in terms of perception and use of pornography. For example, girls tend to have a more critical view, perceiving it as unpleasant, degrading, and unrealistic (Massey et al., 2021). Additionally, in many cases, women experience internal conflicts due to feeling aroused by pornography that goes against their values (Ashton et al., 2018). On the other hand, although some studies find a relation between frequent pornography consumption in women and the likelihood of being more coercive (Hughes et al., 2020; Kernsmith & Kernsmith, 2009), others find an association between women's pornography consumption and the experience of having suffered sexual violence (Romito & Beltramini, 2011; Simons et al., 2012). In

any case, as indicated by Ashton et al. (2018), there is an urgent need to understand the meaning and relation of women with pornography, which is not without complexity and contradictory nuances. Some of the few studies conducted on this topic show in the discourses of some women the recognition that pornography mediates their sexual intimacy and this intimacy is still dominated by masculinity, the perception of pornography as a sexual demand or competition for which they have to objectify themselves to cope with, or the contradiction of pornography with specific moral mandates such as religious ones (Ashton et al., 2018). However, the pornography can also enhance solo pleasure, help them recognize new sexual practices and preferences, and normalize body diversity (Ashton et al., 2018). Other studies in both men and women, suggest that the consumption of pornography may have additional positive effects, such as promoting sexual exploration, aiding in the affirmation of sexual identity, and enhancing sexual enjoyment (Grubbs & Kraus, 2021). Therefore, while there is no consensus on evidence supporting the relation between pornography consumption and negative consequences on sexual construction or sexual violence, there does seem to be greater agreement that high consumption of this type of content has significant relevance in the construction of sexuality in adolescence. In this sense, several studies find that watching pornography is associated with engaging in practices typical of it and a greater likelihood of engaging in risky sexual practices (Cowell & Smith, 2009; Save The Children, 2020).

Sexual and Control-Based Violence Among Adolescents

Scientific evidence regarding the prevalence of violence in adolescent romantic relationships is extensive (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Hickman et al., 2004; Jezl et al., 1996; Smith et al., 2003). A meta-analysis revealed that 1 in 4 teenagers have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in dating or romantic relationships, with 14% of girls reporting some type of sexual violence (Wincentak et al., 2017). The World Health Organization's multicountry study shows that between 19% and 66% of worldwide female adolescents and young women aged 15 to 24 have experienced some form of violence from their sexual partners, with most countries reporting percentages exceeding 50% (Stöckl et al., 2014). While many studies with this population tend to report bidirectionality in dating violence, women experience more severe consequences for sexual and physical violence (Rubio-Garay et al., 2017). Therefore, young women are at a higher risk of experiencing violence than adults, making this a critical period for setting the stage for their future sexual and relationship experiences. Factors associated with the risk of experiencing violence include those related to hegemonic masculinity, such as boys' involvement in fights, controlling behaviors, and revictimization experiences like girls' first sexual encounter being non-consensual (Stöckl et al., 2014). Similarly, studies with large samples of adolescents in Spain (Diaz-Aguado et al., 2014) found that controlling behaviors and psychological devaluation were the most prevalent forms of violence against girls, followed by threats, intimidation, and coercion based on sexual blackmail. Benevolent sexist attitudes, adherence to romantic love myths, and double standards for judging sexual behaviors in boys and girls have been linked in Spain

to the likelihood of perpetrating violence against adolescent girls aged 12 to 18 (Guerra-Marmolejo et al., 2021).

Sexual violence, defined as a broad range of sexual acts that have not been freely consented, occurs in adolescent romantic relationships as well as in dating or by strangers. The high prevalence of this type of violence in adolescence and youth has been widely studied and analyzed in recent decades, with one of the explanatory frameworks being what is known as the "rape culture." The most relevant factors in this explanatory framework of sexual violence are rape myths and sexism, which are closely related, facilitating the normalization and justification of acts ranging from subtle to severe, such as rape itself (Bohner et al., 2023). In addition to justification, this rape culture sends a message to women of sexual terror and oppression, which is reinforced by fraternity and complicity among boys regarding these behaviors (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). In fact, according to Saldívar & Romero (2009), sexual coercion is widely normalized among young people, mediated by gender roles and traditional narratives regarding sexual courtship. On the other hand, controlling behaviours are the most prevalent type of violence among boys and girls in romantic relationships in Spain, with high levels of reciprocity. According to the CIS (2013), Spanish adolescents tolerate and experience abusive control and jealousy behaviours in very similar percentages (32% in girls and 34% in boys) and to a greater extent than adults. That is, the cornerstone of sexual and affective relationships is this conception of love and sexuality based on possessiveness and control. Some of these violent behaviours manifest subtly, making them even more difficult to detect (Luzón et al., 2011). The advent of technology in recent years has significantly aided these patterns of behaviour, making it much easier and instantaneous to stalk, harass, or exert psychological or sexual violence beyond physical presence (Ferner et al., 2019). Forty-seven per cent of adolescents and young people have experienced some form of cyber violence, with the statistic rising to 63% when referring to control behaviours (Martínez-Soto & Ibabe, 2024). In recent years, the Spanish government has significantly increased awareness campaigns about violence, focusing mainly on sexual and control violence (Ferrer & Bosch, 2013). Probably as a result, Nardi-Rodriguez et al. (2017) found that adolescents identified all warning signs of gender-based violence as violent. Furthermore, it was more common for girls to make this identification than boys. However, they were much more likely to recognize these acts in their peer groups than in themselves.

The present research aimed to gain a deep understanding of the bases underlying the construction of sexuality in adolescence through the discourses and norms in narratives, which can provide information about meanings, practices, risks, and consequences. The value of this study lies in that it fills an existing gap in research related to the study of adolescent sexuality from a social and feminist perspective. Most studies on sexuality in adolescence explore practices and consequences from a reproductive health and violence perspective. However, studies on the socialization of sexuality, attraction models, the relationship with body satisfaction, the pornographic models, fears, desires and longings of adolescents are not frequent. In Spain in particular, there are no studies in the last decades that, using a qualitative methodology, delve into all these issues related to sexuality in today's adolescence.

Because sexuality is a social construction, we are interested in investigating these norms and beliefs that shape the meanings and practices of young people, which are usually unknown to teachers and families. This lack of knowledge makes invisible a reality that leads to sexual education programs being ineffective. The high and growing rates of uncritical use of pornography and violence in sexual-affective relationships lead us to rethink the prevailing models of sexual education and propose others that go to the root of the problem. Therefore, these results look to propose critical practical implications for the design of sexual education policies and programs grounded in the realities of Spanish youth and that question the cultural patterns that may be avoiding achieving healthier and more satisfactory sexual-affective relationships free of violence.

Method

Study Design

A theoretical model of socio-affective policy (Venegas, 2011, 2018) was followed, and it identified four fundamental dimensions as units of analysis of sex-affective relationships: gender, sexuality, body, and love. Thus, the specific objectives of the study were to analyse (1) how gender socialisation affects sex-affective relationships, (2) the meanings and sexual practices in these relationships, (3) the role of body satisfaction, and (4) the love/attraction model in adolescent sex-affective relationships.

This study is part of two broader projects that analysed the impact of youth romantic culture in secondary education in Andalusia (Compulsory Secondary Education and Vocational Training) on the trajectories of success and failure/dropping out of school. Specifically, these projects intend to investigate the dimensions, meanings, relationships and practices of the youth romantic culture from a multidisciplinary perspective. A key element of the romance culture is the sexual-affective relationships, which increase in frequency in the period between 12 and 20 years (Collins et al., 2009) and acquire a central role in the lives of adolescents (Arruda et al., 2020). For this particular study, we focus on the construction of sexuality in adolescence. Through qualitative research based on interviews, we analyse the sexual-affective relationships of a sample of students from 3rd year of ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education) and 1st year of FP (Vocational Training) of the Degree in Administration of a High School in Seville (Spain). With a piece of deeper information, these results contribute to a global analysis of the social construction of sexuality by describing all their dimensions.

Participants

The sample consisted of 40 boys and girls from a Secondary School in the capital of Seville, comprising 25 students from the 3rd year of ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education) and 15 from the 1st year of FP (Vocational Training) in Administration. Among them, there were 19 boys and 21 girls, all self-identified as cisgender

and heterosexual, except for three girls who identified as bisexual. All of them were between 14 and 20 years old.

As exclusion criteria, it was determined that anyone with an intellectual disability who could not understand the interview and consent to the research would not participate. No participants with these characteristics were found.

There was a certain homogeneity in the sample's demographic characteristics due to the secondary school's location. All participants belonged to the same working-class neighbourhood on the outskirts of Seville, which had medium- and medium-low incomes and a growing immigrant population. The most frequent religious adherence was Catholic and agnostic, although one person declared themselves professing the Evangelical Lutheran religion and another a Jehovah's Witness. Only one person declared themselves to be of the Roma ethnic group.

Instrument

Based on the literature review on the culture of romance (Venegas, 2018), a semi-structured interview guide was developed to collect detailed and in-depth information about the experiences and opinions of adolescents regarding four main areas: school, affective-sexual relationships, social networks and future expectations. Within the block of affective-sexual relationships, the guide followed the itinerary of the questions identified from the theoretical model of the socio-affective policy body of Venegas (2011, 2018), from which categories related to the construction of their sexuality were selected for this study, namely: gender, sexuality, body satisfaction and attraction to others. Some of the questions asked to explore these topics were: "I would like to know what sexuality means to you" or "What type of person are you sexually attracted to? Or to inquire into erotic capital, "What should your desired sexual relationships be like?". In the development of the interview, two other very relevant categories emerged from the narratives: pornography and violence. The interview guide can be found as supplementary material.

Procedure

Given the qualitative nature of the study, to collect the data, it was necessary to access a medium-sized group of adolescents to allow us to explore different aspects of the topics on the construction of sexuality to be addressed. To do this, we looked for a secondary school in Seville that offered both academic pathways, ESO and FP, to explore the two different educational contexts at this age. After several calls to urban and rural secondary schools in Seville, one in an urban peripheral area agreed to participate in the study. The sample was selected using the WHO age criterion (2024), which identifies adolescence as the period between 10 and 19 years of age. To have participants within this age range and to represent the two academic pathways (ESO and FP), two courses were chosen, one from each path, with ages as similar as possible. Thus, a 3rd ESO course and a 1st FP course in Administration were selected, in which the majority of participants were around 13 years old, a critical age at which romantic relationships begin (Collins et al., 2009). Two

closed-classroom groups were chosen to obtain a sufficient sample size for the qualitative research and because the sample fit the heterogeneous criteria. This procedure also facilitated the ethical process of obtaining informed consent from family members and caregivers. As the majority were minors, to obtain consent to participate in the research, a letter was prepared for the minors' guardians and responsible parties, describing the project's objectives and ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality. This letter was returned from their homes on paper, signed by their parents or guardians, by all students. Two boys from ESO and one from FP chose not to participate.

The interviews were conducted between February and May 2022 in an office or private classroom set up for this purpose in the same schools from which the sample originated. With the prior informed consent of the participants, the audios of each interview were recorded, material that was essential for the subsequent transcription of the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The semi-structured format facilitated discussion and connection between different topics, as well as their deepening. This led to the subsequent categorization of multiple subcategories that emerged from the main themes within the block of affective-sexual relationships. Before starting the fieldwork, two interviews were conducted in another more accessible secondary school to measure the duration of the interview and comprehension of the question. Minor changes were applied to better understanding.

Only one interviewer carried out the fieldwork. The interviewer was a team researcher with extensive experience in the gender-based interview technique, as she has experience conducting numerous interviews in population-based studies on gender violence. Issues such as privacy, sensitivity in asking sensitive questions, empathy, active listening without judgment, and rapport with the people interviewed were taken into account in the development of the interviews.

Ethical Approval Process

The first step was to obtain approval from the ethics committee of the authors' University (Approval No. 1168/CEIH/2020) a year before the beginning of the fieldwork. The secondary school management team approved the research in the six months following. An initial project presentation was made by the researcher in charge at that school, along with the collaborating teacher who acted as an intermediary and was also a member of its equality commission. All necessary documentation signed by the project's principal investigators was provided. The procedure then began to obtain informed consent from the responsible parties of the minors. To ensure confidentiality, identifying data were removed from the transcription, and identification codes were used to refer to each participant. These codes contained information about various intersectional aspects of the sample, such as age, academic path (ESO or FP), sex, gender, sexual orientation, rural or urban area, and public or private school. These codes are used in the results section to identify each quotation with its authors, indicating their intersectional characteristics and adhering to the principle of anonymity. In this way, the initial number indicates the grade (1st, 2nd, or 3rd), followed by the initials indicating the path ("ESO" or "FP"), "PU" or "PR" to denote whether it is a public or private school, followed by "R" for rural area or "U" for urban area. Next, the group of codes identifies

the assigned sex at birth ("H" for male and "M" for female) and the sexual orientation of the interviewee ("HE" for heterosexual, "HO" for homosexual, and "BI" for bisexual), and the sexual identity if the person is trans "T" or intersex ("I"). Finally, the interviewer is identified as "R". To obtain materials and files with the coding, the reader may contact the reference authors. A potential ethical challenge encountered during recruitment and data storage was the protection of data and the privacy of adolescents. After some discussion with the research group, it was concluded that the data file information should not be kept in the cloud system and that the name and identification numbers should not be asked for in the consent format. No amendments to the ethical approval were necessary during the study period.

Analytic Plan

The interviews were recorded in audio format and manually transcribed by a hired person who received instructions to transcribe the testimonies. Subsequently, the data were coded using the NVivo data analysis software (https://nvivo-spain.com). Although we primarily employed a deductive approach for data analysis, we also incorporated an inductive approach, allowing for a holistic analysis of the information and facilitating theory development. We followed the six steps Braun and Clarke (2012) recommended for analyzing qualitative data, which are not necessarily linear or sequential. Firstly, the two researchers familiarized themselves with the entire dataset by thoroughly reviewing the transcriptions of the interviews. Secondly, semantic codes (explicit content) were created based on the categories used to describe the issue of sexo-affective relationships (Venegas' model). These categories were created as codes within the NVivo software. The interview information was classified within these codes by dragging in blocks of text with testimonies and context. Reverse analysis was then performed. From this classification into codes, a second analysis was conducted to extract latent subcategories (underlying meanings) in a parallel analysis by the two interviewers. New subcodes were created within each category corresponding to the emerging themes. The criteria for creating a theme are based on the recurrence and diversity of perceptions and are related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Next, both classifications were compared, looking for common patterns between the two coders, focusing on elements of adolescents' sexuality construction, discussing and organizing these themes, which allowed for the establishment of a final classification of semantic and latent codes that provided a comprehensive picture of the various aspects related to sexuality. Subsequently, we reviewed the data to ensure comprehensive coverage and refined the themes. Finally, we created a relational diagram and drafted the results following the main conclusions agreed upon in the joint analysis. This systematic approach ensured that the conclusions were firmly rooted in the data.

Results

Overall, the results provide relevant insights about how sexuality is constructed in adolescence. We found apparent gender differences in how adolescents perceive sexuality, with boys focusing more on physical aspects and girls on emotional factors and contraception, reflecting the influence of societal gender norms. We also identify patriarchal cultural patterns and sexism as significant factors impacting adolescents' understanding of sexuality. The findings suggest that many young people learn about sexuality primarily through pornography, which often presents distorted views of sexual relationships and reinforces harmful stereotypes. Adolescents are acutely aware of body image issues, which are exacerbated by societal standards and media portrayals. The pressure to conform to unrealistic body ideals leads to significant body dissatisfaction, particularly among girls.

Although violence was not one of the main objectives, the results driven by the interviews reveal troubling trends regarding the normalization of control and sexual violence in adolescent relationships. Many participants expressed experiences that reflect a culture where such behaviours are accepted or overlooked, highlighting the need for transformative educational interventions. With all of this in mind, we identified five main themes: (1) Body Satisfaction, (2) Attraction/Seduction, (3) Sexuality, (4) Pornography, and (5) Violence(s). They are described as follows:

Body Image and Body Satisfaction

Adolescence is a period when concern about body image becomes highly relevant. It is a vital moment of (re)discovery of sexuality and significant bodily changes that can lead to comparisons and body dissatisfaction. Although some interviewed individuals were satisfied with their bodies, many others expressed insecurity about it. Primarily, girls started comparing themselves with their peer group both physically and psychologically, a phenomenon that scarcely occurred in the case of boys. Although some declared perceiving themselves as equal to or better looking than their friends, in most cases, comparing themselves with their peers was associated with a worse self-perception and more verbalizations of body dissatisfaction, which was more common among girls. In the following quote, we can read a girl talking about how she feels when she compares herself with her friends:

> 3ESEPUUMBI3: Compared with my group of friends, and it happens with my family too; I feel like the ugliest, I mean, terrible, terrible.

This insecurity mainly revolved around the physic and, in some cases, affected them when dating and/or establishing relationships. In this regard, some of the girls who expressed feeling insecure and/or dissatisfied with their appearance also admitted to being jealous in their relationships. An example is the testimony of one girl below:

> 3ESEPUUMHE2: I'm very jealous.[...], I am jealous because I'm also very insecure, and then, well, I compare myself a lot to the other girls. [...] Espe-

cially in physical appearance, because maybe there are parts of my body, things about me that I don't like.

Among those who expressed body dissatisfaction, both boys and girls, various coping strategies for such dissatisfaction were observed. These strategies mainly focus on changing aspects of their appearance that make them feel insecure and striving to adhere to the prevailing beauty standards: thinness (especially in girls) and muscular bodies (especially in boys). Below is the testimony of a high school girl talking about how she can change the parts of her body that makes her feel insecure. Additionally, she talks about how, after her father's death, she stopped eating, which caused her to lose a lot of weight. To feel good about her appearance again, she started taking pills that helped her gain weight until she was satisfied with the result. This shows us how, in some cases, girls may resort to extreme methods to achieve their desired appearance.

2ESEPUUMHE6: I know I can change it, for example, I've been changing it little by little [...],because of my father I stopped eating, I lost a lot of weight and [...] I bought some pills that make you gain weight little by little and well... I've gained a lot of weight and right now I do feel good, but before, no, because before I looked terrible. If I want to change... for example, I'm going to the gym,[...], until I have the body I like.

Although few, there were also some testimonies of resistance regarding traditional feminine gender expression and adhering to aesthetic mandates. In this regard, two bisexual girls reflect on body acceptance and the importance of deconstructing gender stereotypes. An example is the testimony of this bisexual girl:

3ESEPUUMBI2: Well... girls, over the years, have usually changed. Before, they used to dress in skirts, now a girl can dress in pants and... of course, the problem here is also society because if you dress in sweatshirts, you wear pants, you dress... sporty they will say: "Oh, you look like a boy"... and I think that girls can dress however they want..

When asked about the type of content they consume on social media, it was widespread for girls to follow fashion and beauty influencers, which did not happen in the case of boys. This aspect may be related to the increased body dissatisfaction in the case of girls due to being exposed to unattainable beauty standards. Below is the testimony of a high school girl talking about the type of content she consumes on social media:

3ESEPUUMHE8: Well... Lola Lolita, (...) Sofía Suescun [...] They upload content about hair products, makeup, or clothes.

When delving into social media and aspects related to body self-image, some participants reflect on how social media can perpetuate prevailing beauty standards and generate unrealistic expectations in boys about how a woman should be. An example is the testimony of this girl, who talks about how social media images create the expectation of having a flat stomach:

FPGMSEPUUMHE1: I don't have any extremely unhealthy complexes. But it is true that in terms of having a flat belly, I don't have it, and I doubt that anyone else does either, but… I don't know, it's something that bothers me a little. Like when summer comes and I see all the girls with super flat bellies and I don't have one..., So I have to pull up my bikini to make look like them.

Moreover, adolescents are aware that, in many cases, the female body and its sexualization are used as bait for relationships, which could foster greater bodily hypervigilance and insecurity. An example of this is the testimony of these participants regarding the use of social media for dating:

3ESEPUUMHE1: If I flirt on social media, well, yes, but I don't go with that intention. R: Okay. Okay. And how do people use it for flirting? 3ESEPU-UMHE1: Well, by uploading maybe more compromising photos of themselves, I don't know.

In the case of boys, when asked about issues related to their bodies, the responses were more concise, and they verbalised fewer feelings of body dissatisfaction compared to girls. These differences in aesthetic pressure experienced by boys and girls reflect deeper societal norms that shape gender-specific expectations. While girls are often exposed to unattainable beauty standards and pressured to conform to idealised images of thinness, which can lead to extreme measures like dieting, taking weight loss pills, or even developing eating disorders, boys generally face less intense scrutiny regarding their appearance. However, this does not mean boys are immune to aesthetic pressure; they are often encouraged to develop muscular physiques, but the societal consequences of not meeting those standards are less severe than those girls face. Girls are frequently judged based on their beauty, while boys are often valued more for other attributes like strength, success, or intelligence. This imbalance underscores how beauty standards are not just about physical appearance but reflect a broader system of gender inequality, where women are disproportionately affected by the societal need to "look perfect."

Attraction/Seduction

Physical Traits

Most of the participants claimed to have never felt attracted to people of the same gender. However, five people acknowledged having felt attraction at some point in their lives or currently towards people of the same gender. All of these individuals were girls, and among them, three declared themselves as bisexual and two as heterosexual. Thus, only women spoke about their experiences regarding attraction and desire outside the normative heterosexual model. When asked about the characteristics of the individuals they were attracted to, there was quite a variety among both boys and girls. Although several individuals claimed not to have a defined prototype, most identified a series of characteristics that could depict models of attraction and the construction of sexuality, influenced by gender stereotypes and sexist beliefs reflecting society. Among those who said they had a

defined prototype, about half based it on physical characteristics, such as having a gym body, thinness, strength, height, good body, beautiful eyes, etc. However, in the case of boys, it was emphasised that girls should be thin, and primarily, they emphasised that the most important thing for being attracted to girls is their physical appearance, as shown in the following quote from a boy where personality is mentioned as secondary:

3ESEPUUHHE11: They have to be pretty and have a good physique [...] Nice tits and ass. [...] And that's it. Well, and the personality, but that's it.

Many boys and girls referred to personal preferences, such as hair, skin, or eye colour. However, it was very common for these preferences to be permeated by gender stereotypes, with characteristics valued differently in boys and girls. In this sense, it is noteworthy how several boys recognised that it is important for them that girls be shorter, and girls that boys be taller. The following testimony is from a boy who clarifies that the girl he likes doesn't have to have a perfect physique according to standards, but he highlights the importance of the girl being shorter than him:

2ESEPUUHHE9: [...]physically, I don't know, more or less like me, a bit shorter than me, about my height, but a little shorter, you know? I don't know, half a head or something like that. Brown hair, blue eyes. Mmmm... I don't know; I don't want someone with a great body, either.

The fact that girls also have this criterion of height indicates that there is also a socially accepted physical partner prototype that could represent the difference in naturalised power in the patriarchal heterosexual love model. The following testimony is from a girl who emphasises this as her most important characteristic regarding the physical aspect of feeling attracted to a boy:

2ESEPUUMHE6: I don't know, tall... because, actually, brunette or blonde, it doesn't matter to me. As long as they're tall, I like them.

There were some cases of boys who described a model of a woman physically entirely linked to the normative prototype traditionally related to hegemonic beauty, even aware that these are not characteristics so frequent in their environments or societies:

3ESEPUUHHE10: My prototype, my perfect prototype, is blonde with blue eyes, but. But right now there isn't [anyone].

In some cases, certain classist and racist prejudices were evident, showing how patterns of discrimination towards vulnerable social groups cross the attraction model. In this sense, the following example shows how a boy seeks a girl who does not identify with the lower class by her way of dressing and who is not a Roma:

FPGMSEPUUHHE7: That she's not a "choni" [term used to identify people who, by their way of dressing, denote belonging to a lower social class] or gypsy. [...] That she's just a normal girl [...] it has to be a girl who's just normal

Or as in the following example from the testimony of a girl where it is shown that clothing or brands are an essential status classification criterion to the point of considering style as the only attraction criterion:

R: ¿What model or what type of people are you sexually attracted to? 3ESEPUUMHE8: Men. R: ¿Men, what type? Not all of them, I suppose? 3ESEPUUMHE8: Cayetanos [colloquial term used in Seville to characterise people related to the upper classes of Seville society]. [...] Well, not so posh, but they dress like that, with tracksuits for school but then they know how to fix themselves up, not the "canis" [similar term to the previous one of "choni"]. R: Very neat, with a shirt...3ESEPUUMHE8: Of course, I don't know, or a posh sweatshirt and some pants and some "Converse" or something like that.

As sources of influence, we observed that pornography also had a significant impact on the configuration of these stereotypes, especially regarding the perception of beauty and the standard of the female body. Additionally, girls referred to pornography as a pressure on the physique they experienced in their relationships with male expectations. In the following testimony, a girl talks about how she feels regarding men who believe what they see in pornography and their expectations:

R: Do boys believe the models they see in pornography?3ESEPUUMHE1: Yes, and since the girls in the videos will be extremely beautiful, they'll have a great body... So then all girls have to be like that.

Psychological and Personality Traits

Regarding psychological and personality characteristics, it stands out that twelve students said that the main criterion for being attracted to another person is that they are good people. In general, other similar characteristics such as kindness, caring, treating them well, and empathy were highly valued. Additionally, other psychological characteristics that appeared in the descriptions of their attraction criteria were happiness, open-mindedness, seductive character, strong character, fun, not being conceited, family-oriented, responsible, enjoying going out and spending time with them, respectful, hardworking, friendly, creative, and active individuals. Besides all these characteristics, some patterns conditioned by their gender socialisation were identified, worth mentioning. For example, five boys expressed that the girl has to resemble them in character and hobbies, as shown in the following example:

R: What type of person are you sexually attracted to? 3ESEPUUHHE12: Uh, I don't know, someone like me, someone... like me [...] a girl like me. Who is... into the same things as me. [...]Who likes the countryside, who likes... I don't know.

However, none of the girls named this criterion as essential for them to. Instead, there were two cases of girls who said they were attracted to people different from them:

3ESEPUUMBI3: I like people who are totally opposite to me, I don't know why I'm like that.

Another aspect that stands out regarding their construction of attraction is the role of fidelity and jealousy. Although several boys emphasised the importance of the girl being faithful as the main factor to value her attractiveness, and besides the idea of "trustworthy women" was present in the discourse of many male testimonies, two boys and one girl emphasised that it was very important for them that the other person was not jealous. However, one girl even pointed out that for her, she feel attractive for guys to be jealous:

2ESEPUUMHE6: I like them to be good to me, and affectionate, I also like it when they're jealous.

Although there were some testimonies in which it was recognised that jealousy was something negative and leads to unhealthy relationships, in general, there was little questioning of controlling relationships, with these controlling behaviours described as "normal" patterns within the couple and under the umbrella of an idealisation of fidelity and therefore, justificating jealousy and control. The following testimony is from a girl who justifies a certain amount of jealousy and control in her relationships:

3ESEPUUMHE8: I wouldn't take his phone or anything. [...] R: Are you jealous? 3ESEPUUMHE8: Well, a little bit [...] you have to be a little jealous, otherwise… R: Do you think that's normal? 3ESEPUUMHE8: Yes, yes.

On the other hand, another aspect that stands out because it reveals how some ideas and new conceptions from feminist claims are gaining force is that many of the interviewed girls highlighted as a source of attraction for them that guys were not sexist or discriminatory. Girls said that they felt attracted to boys who were open-minded and respectful towards people of diverse sexual orientations and did not discriminate or exalt their hegemonic masculinity above the rights of others. Here's one of the testimonies:

3ESEPUUMHE3: I like them to be kind [...] That they don't judge people based on their gender.

Sexuality

Confusion About Concept

When we asked participants what sexuality meant to them, there was confusion in many cases; they didn't know how to respond or said they didn't understand the question. However, we obtained a great diversity of responses showing that many of them, especially secondary school students, have not yet had their first sex-affective experiences nor sexual education addressing these questions. Among the definitions, there were responses defining sexuality as love, or having a boyfriend, companionship, a feeling, a desire for another person, a stable relationship between two people,

being faithful and doing things together, or a display of love. Therefore, there were a large number of responses that assimilated sexuality with being in a couple, or even in its most Christian sense of reproduction, as shown in the following example where a boy is trying to explain what sexuality means for him:

> 3ESEPUUHHE7: Well, sexual relationships... they have to be done to create more people in the world.

We found, therefore, a large number of responses from boys and girls who understand sexuality as always linked to another person, whether it be for affection, intimacy, or companionship. In that group of responses, there was a significant number of people who defined it as the idealised relationship of intimacy between two people.

> R: What do you think the role of sexuality is in a person? 3ESEPUUMBI3: I mean, you have your partner and you're fine with them or whatever, well, I don't know, you have intimate moments, moments that are just yours, you know?

Another group of no less relevant responses defined sexuality as pleasure, release, masturbation, or sex, not necessarily linked to another person or a relationship. Those who spoke of this conception of sexuality were mainly boys. Also, it is important to note that a significant number of responses were in line with understanding sexuality as gender identity or even as sexual orientation. An example is the following definition of sexuality given by a bisexual person who is questioning her gender identity:

> 3ESEPUUMBI2: Sexuality..., I think it's how you feel when you're in society, for example, if you feel confident in yourself, because right now I can say... it's that I don't feel like a girl, because I act in a certain way [...] and I don't feel like that, I feel more... like a guy.

After analysing all the interviews, we identified a difference between secondary school and vocational training students in their degree of experimentation, which translates into different conceptions of sexuality. Most secondary school students have not had sexual relations yet, while most vocational training students have already had their first experiences. This circumstance causes their approach to sexuality to vary significantly. When asked if they have doubts or fears about sexuality, most say no and do not take the opportunity to talk about it. However, among those who say they do have fears, girls tend to mention more fear about not knowing what to do the first time, getting pregnant, feeling pain, or facing sex from their bisexuality. At the same time, boys express fears about breaking the condom, having sex with a trans person, acquiring a disease, or not knowing how to satisfy their partner sexually. In the the following example, we can see a boy talking about things he would like to know about sex before the first intercourse:

> FPGSMSEPUUHHE8: I would like to know if she is one hundred per cent satisfied because, for me…, what I am most curious about is knowing if what I am giving is what I am receiving.

When asked if sexuality is essential in their lives, we also observed a great variability. Although several people say that it depends on the person, generally, this is guided by the degree of experimentation or approach they have had to sexuality. Some people attach great importance to it, especially in the context of the couple's relationship, and mainly vocational training students who already have stable partners. However, more than half of the sample said that sexuality had little value for them or had no value at all. Among the people who said it was important, we found a significant gender difference about the reason for the importance; several boys said that sexuality helped boost spirits, provide support and fun, and as a stress reliever. In the following testimony, it is shown how a boy grants it an instrumental value for not to feel alone:

R: What is the role of sexuality in a person's life? FPGMSEPUUHHE7: Fucking. [...] Mmmm or not to feel alone. Or to try to satisfy oneself a little.

On the contrary, for girls, sexuality has a sentimental meaning. Only girls mentioned its importance in getting to know another person better, creating a bond, and being a necessary part of the relationship. Even one girl asserts that the meaning can be not to lose the relationship she has. Another girl considers sexuality as something offered as a show of love. This idea highlights a particular pressure: the fear that, if they don't engage in sexual activity, their partner may drift away or even end the relationship. This notion reflects how sexuality becomes a form of "change currency" within relational dynamics, generating anxiety about one's value and place in the relationship. In this context, sex shifts from being a mutual and pleasurable experience to becoming almost transactional, where one party, often the woman, uses it to express affection or to "maintain" the partner's interest. In all these cases, the pressure women feel stems from viewing sexuality as a duty or obligation within the relationship rather than as a mutual experience based on desire and full consent. In the following example, a woman expresses this sense of sex:

R: What is sexuality for you? FPGMSEPUUMHE3: Um... a display of love.

The Concept of the Ideal Sexual Relationship

Regarding how they perceive their ideal sexual relationship, we observed a significant trend in identifying a healthy relationship based on mutual respect and reciprocity in both men and women. Among the aspects they consider important for a satisfying sexual relationship are: love, affection, communication, care, empathy, understanding, equality, affection, attraction, eroticism, being with the right person, being with their partner, trust, consensual relationship, respect, no manipulation, being different from porn, to be in timing, having an equal relationship, mutual desire, being satisfactory for both, no jealousy, no judgment, foreplay, feeling comfortable, and protection. Among all these highlighted factors, it is noteworthy how the concept of consent permeates because several people emphasised that the most critical aspect of a healthy relationship was communication and reciprocity:

R: What do you think, you would need to live your affective and sexual relationships in a healthy, equal, and respectful way? 3ESEPUUHHE4: Talking about everything before anything happens..

The vocational training students gave many more responses oriented towards valuing healthy sexual relationships, such as those that involve care, trust, mutual satisfaction, respect, and equality. These characteristics represent a more mature conception of sexual relationships. An example is the testimony of this vocational student:

R: What would your desired sexual relationships be like? FPGMSEPU-UMHE7: Well, for me, I would prefer them to be based on trust, obviously, and to be something that I want, you know? It is not done out of obligation because there are many people who might not feel like it, and they do it just so they won't lose that partner or so they won't get angry. So, I think that when you feel like it, and both people obviously feel trust, that you can be comfortable with that person and that it's a relaxing, calm moment, you know?

The following testimony of a vocational training student emphasises the importance of reciprocity in the sense that both people feel satisfied and comfortable with the sexual relationship:

R: What is a good sexual relationship for you? FPGMSEPUUHHE4: That both of us are satisfied with what we do. [...]That we do things that... Don't end up saying 'I don't like it, I don't feel comfortable.

But only female students emphasised the importance of being treated well, the importance of equality, protection, and the absence of violence:

3ESEPUUMHE8: And that it's not too violent, no, that there's affection. R: With care, right? 3ESEPUUMHE8: Yes.

Pornography

While it is indeed accurate that a significant portion of individuals, spanning from those in secondary education (ESO) to vocational training (FP), perceive pornography as 'individuals engaging in sexual activities over the internet' or 'videos/photos containing explicit sexual content,' there exists a degree of confusion regarding other terminology. In fact, in attempting to delineate its meaning, some participants also allude to general sexual activity, 'sexting,' and 'sextortion.' Moreover, the majority of participants encounter difficulty in furnishing a precise definition of pornography, as evidenced by the following examples in which people are trying to define what pornography is:

FPGMSEPUUHHE7: Videos in which people are naked doing things.
3ESEPUUMHE4: Making movies or whatever, or also sending photos with other people, right? FPGMSEPUUMHE3: Photos of... of people... naked. That they share without their consent, or with their consent too, I don't know.
FPGMSEPUUMHE8: Pornography is... well, uploading photos... of... someone, right?, naked. I think, well, I don't know.

In the endeavour to elucidate the concept of pornography and its purpose, male individuals predominantly articulate their perspectives in terms of personal gratification, conceptualising it as a means of self-indulgence—an inclination less frequently observed among females. As for the characteristics attributed to pornography, it is commonly perceived as multifaceted, boundless, and easily accessible. They referred to the proliferation of thematic categories related to the fragmentation and objectification of female anatomy. This is exemplified by the following quotation wherein a male participant shows the objectifying lens through which women are often depicted within pornographic contexts:

> 3ESEPUUHHE2: There are many websites... I can tell you about at least 40 websites. [...] It depends on what you want, you can search for it. There are black women, blonde, fat, ugly...

Gender Differences and Criticism Toward Porn

In terms of gender, two different positions regarding pornography were shown. On the one hand, generally, girls reflect more critically on pornography, perceiving it as unreal, exaggerated, unequal, and lacking in affection and communication between the people involved. An example of this is the quote that follows from a girl:

> FPGMSEPUUMHE7: The relationships are very... exaggerated, right?. I already know that's not how it is because everyone says it too. That... maybe something happens to the woman, and she's already screaming. [...] I don't see it as natural. I see it as very forced, you know? R: In those relationships in pornography, for example, do you see care... affection... empathy...? FPGM-SEPUUMHE7: Mmmmm what I've seen, no. They usually go straight to it, you know?, they don't talk or say anything, they just do it and that's it.

Another criticism voiced is that pornography presents a stereotypical image of sexuality, potentially confusing consumers and fostering unrealistic expectations, as illustrated in the following reference. The participant expresses that pornography does not align with her desires and needs, and it creates expectations that are impossible to fulfil for those who consume it. Specifically, it addresses how many men ask their partners to imitate certain practices they see in pornography, which can often be painful or impossible for women to perform:

> FPGMSEPUUMHE1: I've met some guys who've said to me, "Hey, but do you like it when they do this to you?" and I say, "No, honestly, I don't", or friends of mine who've told me what happened with their partner, "Look, I've seen this, should we try it?" and the girl says, "But how am I supposed to try that? Don't you see that it's impossible?" So... It's surprising, it's a bit surprising when guys believe that, being a bit... Aware, right? I think.

These expectations provoke additional pressure on women, who may feel obligated to follow these unrealistic practices to please their partners or maintain the relationship. The depiction of sexual encounters in pornography often emphasises exaggerated acts that disregard the physical comfort and consent of the women,

leading to a distorted view of sex. As a result, women may find themselves in situations where they are asked to engage in acts that cause physical discomfort or emotional distress. Moreover, some girls point out that boys believe what they see in pornography and have made it the centre of their lives:

> 3ESEPUUMHE1: They [boys] talk about pornography all the time.

Similarly, especially girls, denounce that the relationships depicted in pornography are not egalitarian since men tend to assume the dominant role and women are objectified and submissive. Along these lines, one participant mentions how pornography often employs women's bodies as a lure to attract predominantly male audiences:

> FPGMSEPUUMHE7: They [pornographic videos] tend to focus more on women. And the majority of people who tend to consume it are men, although many women watch it, obviously. Well, I see there are usually more women [in the videos]. It's like they draw more attention.

In the following quote, another woman reflects on the violent and objectifying treatment exerted on women in pornography. She criticises how boys in her environment rely on pornography to demonstrate their virility and sexual prowess among their peers:

> 3ESEPUUMBI3: Sex isn't as rough as it's portrayed in porn, I mean, it's quite the opposite. They treat women as if they were toys and... people in my class talk a lot about things like that and many singers they listen who talk about such topics; and it's like... they have no idea what it is. I mean, and the ones who boast the most are the ones who know the least... who have no idea.

Another criticism voiced by the girls is the lack of affection and communication in pornography, and they emphasise its violent nature. An example of this is provided below:

> FPGMSEPUUMHE7: Mmmmm what I've seen, no... [referring to the lack of empathy and affection in porn]. Yes, they usually go straight to it, you know?, they don't talk or say anything, they just do it and that's it.

Additionally, girls, especially those in secondary school, often express feelings of disgust when asked about their consumption of pornography. This disgust is not as prevalent among older women in vocational training (some of whom may have already consumed pornography) or among men. Below is the testimony of a third-year secondary school girl discussing the emotions pornography elicits in her:

> 3ESEPUUMBI3: Um... it just disgusts me. Like, I don't understand the point of watching two people having sex, I don't get it, and I never will, I think, I mean, no...

We also find some testimonies from boys who present a critical view of pornography; however, they generally offer less profound and less radical reflections,

emphasising that pornography presents an unrealistic model of sexuality. An example of this is the quote from the following boy:

> 2ESEPUUHHE9: It's not real [pornography], it's something you watch to get aroused and that's it. But there are many kids who don't understand that very clearly.

There are also male testimonies like those shown below, which reflect on the concept of consent when reproducing sexual practices seen in porn and mention the objectifying treatment women receive in pornography. Below is an example from a boy in secondary school and another from vocational training:

> 3ESEPUUHHE4: When you're with a partner, it's mainly about talking, right? So if she doesn't like something, you can't just do it because you saw it in a video.
> FPGMSEPUUHHE3 [referring to how women are treated in pornography]: They treat her like an object rather than as a person.

On the opposing side of the spectrum, there exist testimonies, predominantly from male participants, which reveal a lesser degree of criticality toward pornography, instead advocating for its realism. When queried regarding their perception of the power dynamics depicted in pornography as being egalitarian, these individuals commonly affirmatively respond. Furthermore, they underscore the presence of autonomous decision-making among performers and the potential for establishing equitable arrangements within the realm of pornography. Presented below is a quotation from a female respondent addressing this topic:

> 3ESEPUUMHE2: Mmm... Let's see, I think that, for example, this girl that I told you about [who has a profile on Onlyfans], she has explained it 10. 000 times on Instagram, she does it because she wants to, she sees it as a way to earn money, it's true, she earns a lot of money just for doing it [...] Well, if she does it because she wants to, as long as she's not forced or anything like that, she does it for her own sake, well, that's up to her.

Pornography as a Source of Sex Education

Especially in the case of boys, the influence of pornography on their sexuality and desire becomes more evident, expressing that they use or have ever used pornography as a source of learning, which has influenced their expectations of what sex is and the practices they would like to try. Some women also express consuming pornography as a source of learning, however, they primarily learn about what is expected of them and how to act. An example of this is the quotes below. The first is a guy talking about practices that catch his attention from pornography that he would like to try as pleasure-seeking, while the second is a girl who puts the focus on women's behaviour as a model of what is expected of them.

> FPGMSEPUUHHE2: The one who sees it [pornography] every day believes it. I think that the mind sees one thing about what you want to

do in the future. The one who sees it every day believes it, for sure. Yes, because... Let's see, you see one thing and you say, "Oh, well, maybe this is good or...", you know [in response to whether he considers trying things he has seen in pornography].

FPGMSEPUUMHE5: Yes, maybe[responding to whether he considers trying things he has seen in pornography]. Maybe if I watch it out of curiosity to see what the girl does, maybe... I will put it into practice.

Thus, when adolescents are asked about the type of practices they would consider trying in sex, these coincide with the hegemonic sexual models represented in pornography. In this sense, boys show interest in dominance, in threesomes with two girls and in having anal sex with a woman, but reject practices that could question hegemonic masculinity, such as having a threesome with more boys, being the ones who receive anal sex or even having sex with a trans person. The latter, moreover, portrays the historical refusal of boys to find themselves having sexual relations that question their masculinity. An example of this is the two testimonies of boys presented below:

FPGMSEPUUHHE7: I wouldn't want to have a threesome with a guy or trans person. Eh... I wouldn't want to be beaten. It's not the same... R: And hit someone?FPGMSEPUUHHE7: Let's see, a slap... but without force. And already... I would like it.

FPGMSEPUUHHE1: Putting fingers up my ass and sucking ass and everything [referring to what he wouldn't like to try]. R: And things that you would like? FPGMSEPUUHHE1: Mmm... anal sex. R: And is it related to something you've seen in pornography?FPGMSEPUUHHE1: Yes.

While in the quotes above, the two boys make their desires and boundaries about sexual practices clear, for the girls, it was not as prevalent, as shown below; there does not seem to be such a clear pressure to stick to boundaries that would put their femininity at risk.

FPGMSEPUUMHE5: I don't know, maybe a threesome with two men and that, no... R: And with a boy and a girl, yes? FPGMSEPUUMHE5: I don't know, I really don't know R: You don't know. Would you be open to that? FPGMSEPUUMHE5: Maybe. R: Do you think it's related to porn? FPGMSEPUUMHE5: Let's see, there are things that are, because they are the typical things, yes.

As a consequence of the girls being less available in general to talk about their sexual practices, we observed that when they did, these testimonies showed less sexual agency and more willingness to adapt to the other person's desires and demands:

3ESEPUUMBI2: Mmmmm.... I wouldn't know what... I would adapt myself to what the other person likes [Responding to what she needs to feel satisfied in her sexual relations].

Consumption Habits

The majority of men reported having seen pornography at some point or currently consuming it. In contrast, most women reported not currently consuming it or never doing so. In the present study, the age of onset of consumption ranged from approximately 10 to 15. Among the reasons for consumption, curiosity (among women) and the search for sexual satisfaction (among men) stand out. Below is an example of a girl who embarrassedly describes how she sought pornography the first time, whereas a boy is much clearer about his motivations:

> 3ESEPUUMHE2: But, I mean, I don't remember, it was very... I don't know how young, I mean very young, not even 6 years old but... [...] Or 10 or... I don't remember. [...] When I was 12 or younger, I don't remember, I don't know why but I started to Google "Naked" or something like that. I don't know if it was a naked actor... I don't even know why, I mean I looked it up out of... curiosity... That's it.
> 2ESEPUUHHE9: Mmmm.... I don't know how to say it in a way that... that sounds polite, I don't know, to turn myself on, something like that.

Several boys in primary education report consuming pornography with friends, something that does not occur in the case of girls and boys in vocational training. It seems that group consumption may be one of the ways of initiation into pornography in the case of boys. An example of this is the following quote from a boy in the third year of primary education:

> R: Have you ever seen pornography? 3ESEPUUHHE11: With my friends, but not alone.

Gender Violence Experiences

Despite having a sample of 40 participants, several cases of gender-based violence were identified. Among the girls interviewed, there were a couple of them who had been victims of violence by their fathers or who had witnessed violence against their mothers by their fathers and were currently dealing with violent relationships, showing the intergenerational transfer of violence. In several testimonies, the girls declared having felt pressured to have sexual relations by their ex-partners, and on this description of these relationships, which they often refer to as "toxic relationships", we discover relationship patterns based on psychological violence and gender-based control, as well as sexual violence, and it is even suggested in one of the testimonies that there was an episode of "revenge porn". One example that brings all these issues together is shown below:

> FPGMSEPUUMHE6: My partner was... apart from being very toxic and very manipulative, he didn't let me be myself; my parents didn't like him at all; they didn't want me to be with him because of the way he was. He was very controlling; he had to control everything himself. R: Was he older than you?

FPGMSEPUUMHE6: YES [...] And... he wouldn't let me, he had to have all my passwords, he wouldn't let me go out with boys, he wouldn't even let me talk with them, he forced me to block them, everywhere.... [...] he usually used the sexual issue to mistreat me. R: To blackmail you? FPGMSEPUUMHE6: Yes. R: Implying that you didn't love him enough if you didn't do it? FPGM-SEPUUMHE6: Yes, yes, and with pictures he had, too. And so on.

In another case, a girl who was asked if she has ever felt as if she was in a porn movie relates an episode of sexual violence describing how she was forced to perform a fellatio, a situation that she described with clear symptoms of anxiety and trauma during the interview while specifying that she has not told anyone about it:

R: Have you ever felt like you were in a porn movie or have you ever been made feel like that? 3ESEPUUMHE1: Yes. [...] once a boy was… we were in a parking lot, and he made me to... to give him a blowjob.

Although it was not the objective of the research and it did not delve into past traumatic experiences, when reviewing previous relationships or their relationship with sexuality, in some cases, we discovered that their first sexual relationship had not been satisfactory because of the treatment received by the boy or because they found themselves practising certain sexual behaviours they did not feel comfortable with:

R: How was your first sexual encounter? FPGMSEPUUMHE6: The truth is that it wasn't very good. [...] I expected it to be different and... then I felt bad. [...], I felt that I had done something I didn't like.[...] Because of the way I did it, I don't know, it was...R: Did you think I was going to be more kind or something? FPGMSEPUUMHE6: Yes, and he was not.

That same pressure to carry out sexual practices with which they did not feel comfortable is revealed in the following testimony in which she describes how her partner proposed practices that he saw in porn and did not always respect her refusal:

R: Did he expect to practice something he had seen in porn? FPGMSEPU-UMHE6: Yes, and when I refused, he respected it… more or less.

While the girls relate experiences in which they had suffered sexual violence, one boy's testimony showed how the exercise of violence is normalised in their sexual practices and how sometimes it is difficult for them to be aware of it. The following is the testimony of a boy who became aware and became able to recount it:

FPGMSEPUUHHE7: I did it once. Thank goodness... no. R: She told you that she didn't [...] FPGMSEPUUHHE7: Let's see, I tried to do something that I liked, but she didn't, and when I was aware of that...so in the end, I stopped and tried to do something that she might like.

Regarding control violence, we observed, based on the testimonies, that it is the most widespread and, at the same time, the most normalised in the construction of sex-affective relationships in adolescence. Concern about fidelity is often present in the interviewees' discourse, and being jealous is frequently considered a natural and

even necessary part of relationships. Although, in many cases, jealousy and control were mutual, and there are both boys and girls who admit to being jealous and controlling, if we delve into the patterns and types of behaviours, we observe gender differences in the dynamics that are established. Girls' jealousy and control behaviours tend to be more based on asking who they are with, while boys tend to exert tighter control, often accompanied by prohibiting girls from hanging out with friends, sabotaging their studies or other activities, or even coercing personal decisions. Although some male students claimed not to be controlling or jealous, we recorded the same number of cases where episodes of control violence occurred in relationships, such as the following testimony from a girl describing her current relationship:

> R: Have you had any conflict situations? 2ESEPUUMHE6: Yes, with my current one because he's very jealous, too much, he doesn't let me be, for example, near boys, he doesn't let me go to a disco, he doesn't let me go to a party, he doesn't let me go to a birthday party if there are boys, those things. So, those conflicts....R: And how are they solved? 2ESEPUUMHE6: Well, I'm not going. And if I go, he has to come with me.

This control violence was even more present in vocational training students, probably because they are older and have had more experience. We find some cases where being in violent relationships had affected their studies to the point that they have failed a course and had to change their path or even been forced to leave their studies by their ex-partners, as in the following case:

> FPGMSEPUUMHE4: Before, yes [when asked if she has suffered control by her partner], not anymore now. I mean, with the one I was with before, yes, because I stopped studying because of him, but not anymore.[...] I stopped studying. I started doing arts in high school because I really like to draw. He manipulated me in such a way that I thought that wasn't good for me, and I quit because he said I didn't like it, that it had no future, and in the end, I gave up. [...]At the end of the relationship, he controlled my phone and everything.

Discussion

The overall results of this study show a qualitative portrait of the beginning of the construction of sexuality in a sample of 40 adolescents aged between 13 and 20, students in 3rd of ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education) and 1st of FP (Vocational Training). Sexuality in this period is marked by patriarchal learning on sex-affective relationships, sexism, and gender inequalities, permeated by the influence of gender stereotypes, the mandate of physical appearance, pornography consumption as a source of learning and sexual socialisation, and experiences of gender violence. But at the same time, with some hopeful messages by revealing an awakening towards equality, feminism, inclusion, care, consent in relationships, sexual and gender diversity, and awareness of violence, which grows as they mature and have their first sex-affective experiences. This impact of sexism and gender stereotypes in early adolescent relationships has been previously documented by the literature (Lemus &

Ryan, 2010; Montañez et al., 2013; Venegas, 2011, 2013; Swami et al., 2010), even pointing out some of these studies that the onset of romantic relationships in adolescence may precipitate the adoption of hostile sexist beliefs in girls and benevolent sexist beliefs in boys (Lemus et al., 2010; Montañez et al., 2013). This ideology is reflected in their narratives nowadays regarding their expectations of sexual relationships and patterns of attraction towards the opposite sex.

Construction of Sexuality

This study highlights two key findings regarding the construction of sexuality during adolescence. The first is the prescriptive nature of social mandates surrounding romantic and sexual relationships. Younger participants who have not yet experienced sexual-affective relationships tend to be more influenced by the dominant cisheteronormative model of attraction, as reflected in their descriptions of what they look for in a partner. In contrast, older participants, drawing from their own experiences, develop a broader and more diverse model of attraction and seduction. The second key finding, which stands out across all themes explored, is the significant gender differences that shape the construction, experimentation, understanding and expectations of sexuality and love. These differences underscore the varied ways in which social norms and gender socialisation impact influence adolescents' perspectives on these aspects of their lives.

These gendered patterns manifested both in the expression of the importance of sexuality in their lives and the desires, motivations, and fears associated with it. While boys perceive sexuality more individually and based on their pleasure, girls perceive sexuality related to romantic relationships and affection. These differences coincide with findings in other studies (Barberá & Navarro, 2000; Heras & Lara, 2009; Moreau-Grue et al., 1996; Petersen & Hyde, 2010). It is interesting how, more than 20 years later, narratives regarding fears and expectations towards sexuality have hardly changed in the Spanish sample, as was documented in Barberá and Navarro's (2000) study. In our results, very similar patterns are still observed, with a clear focus on sexual pleasure in boys, through an explicit concern to learn how to give and receive pleasure and an instrumentalisation of pornography for this purpose. In contrast, in girls, the expression of sexual desire is almost absent, much more concerned about what is expected of them, with less agency in their relationships, and with a very generalised rejection towards pornography. Regarding fears, among those expressed by boys, we found fears associated with issues that may threaten their masculinity, such as having sex with a trans person or not sexually satisfying their partners. On the other hand, girls' fears focus on sexual and reproductive health issues. Additionally, many of them expressed fear of experiencing pain during their first time, which can be associated with the myth that the first time is always painful. These results coincide pretty closely with those found by Heras-Sevilla and Lara-Ortega (2009), where girls presented more interest and concerns about issues related to sexual and reproductive health such as pregnancy, contraception, menstruation, or pain during sexual intercourse. Meanwhile, boys expressed more interest or concern about aspects related to their own pleasure, such as

masturbation, their genitals, pornography, prostitution, intercourse, or anal sex. To understand and contextualise these differences, it is essential to consider their origins, which date back to childhood where, through differential gender socialisation, girls learn the importance of taking care of others and "being for others," relegating their well-being to a secondary position. On the other hand, boys are socialised into a "being for themselves", where they are portrayed as the centre, which promotes disregard for others' emotions (Beauvoir, 1949; cited in Alario, 2018).

The effects of this differential socialisation impacts on how women are educated for their pleasure to be conditioned by reciprocity and the perception of the other person's pleasure, while men are educated for the satisfaction of their own desires (Alario, 2018; Holland et al., 2018). This gendered education highlights the existence of a (hetero)sexual double standard, where different sexual behaviours are expected and valued by women and men (Allison & Risman, 2013). This normative framework allows men to experience greater sexual freedom than women. Some of these standards or beliefs are reflected in statements such as "A girl who has sex on the first date is 'easy'" or "I admire a woman who is a virgin when she gets married," which are based on the idea that women's sexuality should be suppressed or tied to a romantic and emotional bond (Muehlenhard & Quackenbush, 1998). Furthermore, the literature in this area shows that in honour cultures, such as Spanish culture, these standards tend to be more rigid, and failing to conform to them results in more significant social sanction (Uskull, 2019).

It is encouraging, on the other hand, that when describing a healthy sexual relationship, there is a consensus in considering reciprocity, mutual respect and consent as important. Additionally, both girls and boys emphasise that these relationships have to be different from those shown in pornography. This aspect may be due to the advances that feminism has achieved in terms of sexual freedom and consent. However, we observe a difference between the theory they handle and practice, evidenced, for example, in the testimonies of girls describing sexual relationships coerced in various ways or a testimony of a boy who narrates how he was aware that he was pressuring a girl to do certain sexual practices during a sexual relation. In any case, we consider that there must be an advance in the sexual agency of women that will guide their desires and limits. But our results show that only boys dare to talk about their sexual desires and expectations, this being a topic to avoid for girls.

Body image and Body Satisfaction

The increased access to pornography among adolescents in recent years seems to have led to increased expectations and pressures regarding how sexuality and bodies should be. Although it was not the focus of the research, the presence of pornography in their daily lives was a topic that emerged throughout the interviews. Although some studies highlight potential positive effects of pornography, particularly for individuals from sexual minorities—such as affirming one's sexual identity or facilitating sexual exploration—other research warns of its potential negative impacts. These include its association with the objectification of women and the creation of unrealistic expectations about what sex entails (Grubbs & Kraus,

2021). These expectations were evident in their discourse, showing the objectification and hypersexualisation of girls. These results align with those found in the literature documenting greater pressure on girls' physiques to meet aesthetic standards (Thompson & Stice, 2001; Vartanian, 2009). In this regard, the literature documents greater body dissatisfaction among women and girls compared to men (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; McLean et al., 2022; Thompson & Stice, 2001; Vartanian, 2009), which is confirmed in our study where, in general, girls expressed greater insecurities related exclusively to the physical plane. According to the data from Wang et al. (2019), three-quarters of adolescents would like to change some part of their bodies. In our study, the girls expressed more dissatisfaction and desire to modify or change their bodies than boys. However, in contrast to what Shearer et al. (2015) found, in our case, this pressure and body dissatisfaction were greater for heterosexual girls compared to bisexuals, which would make sense due to the heteronormative pressure to conform to the standard in heterosexual relationships, but we cannot conclude this since very few girls in our sample identified as bisexual. In many cases, the importance of physical appearance was intimately related to the value they believed they had in relationships, mainly reflected when flirting. These findings align with those reported by Paxton et al. (2005), who found that when adolescent girls become aware of the thin ideal valued by their peers, this awareness was associated with increased body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Furthermore, the physical standards they want to adhere to gender stereotypes, and therefore, in our study, while boys aspired to more muscular bodies, girls aspired to thinner bodies. Other studies have found this result (Lagos et al., 2012; Noon et al., 2021). In Swami's research (2010), thinness was also related to sexism and objectification among girls, while the norm of greater height in boys was associated with higher scores in benevolent sexism in boys and girls (Swami et al., 2010).

Following the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson et al., 1999), beauty ideals are reinforced and transmitted by three primary sociocultural influences: peers, parents, and the media. The internalisation of appearance ideals and appearance comparison mediates the mentioned influences. With image-based social networks like Instagram or TikTok, influencing societies' ideas about body image becomes easier. At the same time, these type of networks offers the opportunity to constantly compare one's appearance with others, promoting body dissatisfaction (Walker et al., 2021). In fact, increased social media use has been related to more body image concerns and eating disorders (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016), which is concerning when considering the statistics on social media usage. According to a recent UNICEF report (2021), 98.5% of Spanish adolescents are registered on at least one social network, while 83.5% are registered on more than three social networks. Moreover, 92.2% of students in the first and second years of secondary school (ESO) already have their own smartphone.

Our data show that only girls reported following beauty influencers. All of this is further permeated by aesthetic ideals and prevailing fatphobia in the narrative (Gallardo, 2021). However, male dominance remains the prevailing force in dictating who conforms to the physical stereotype (Ashton et al., 2018; Venegas, 2006), as evidenced in our research by the fear expressed by girls of not being accepted by boys or being replaced by a prettier girl. For them, male validation was a

fundamental axis, while very few girls imposed physical criteria regarding attraction to boys. In fact, being immersed in a culture that constantly objectifies women and girls can lead them to internalise a self-objectifying notion of themselves, leading to hypervigilant behaviours, deep concern for beauty, and body shame (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Swami et al., 2010), which is evident in the numerous testimonies where young women talk about the different parts of their bodies they dislike and how they try to modify them. Additionally, they claim to compare themselves more with their peers and with influencers they follow on social media. The fact that this hypervigilance exists also has an impact on how sexuality is experienced differently by boys.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in aesthetic procedures and plastic surgeries worldwide, particularly among younger individuals (Walker et al., 2021). This trend is closely linked to what is known as "aesthetic violence," a concept that refers to social and media pressure promoting an unrealistic and homogenised ideal of beauty. In Spain the total number of cosmetic surgery procedures in 2021 reached 204,510, representing a 215% increase compared to the study conducted by IMOP Insights in 2014, with women representing 85% of those who undergo these procedures (SECPRE, 2023). This trend raises concerns about individuals' physical and psychological health and the gendered pressure to fit into beauty standards but also sparks a broader debate about the responsibility of society and the industries involved in creating and perpetuating these ideals.

Attraction/Seduction

Physical standards imposed on boys and girls are equally reflected in attraction models, mainly heterosexual ones. In our results, we find that, in general, boys emphasise the physical characteristics of girls, in contrast to the attraction criteria of girls, who are more oriented towards style and can look for more signs of personality or status. These differentiated attraction models have been documented by recent literature, which continues to confirm that boys value girls more for their physical beauty and normative bodies, while girls seek issues more related to love, relationships, and complementarity in personality (Hitsch et al., 2010). However, if we delve into the psychological aspects they value, our results showed evidence in favour of the "soulmate" myth in both genders, but with some different nuances; girls seek complementary partners while boys emphasise the importance of similarity, which could be interpreted as a demonstration of hierarchy as they emphasise that their interests come first and that the person with them has to adapt to them. This myth, identified with benevolent sexism ideology, could be explained by what scientific evidence has found in studies on the evolutionary development of sexism, according to which the onset of romantic relationships accelerates the adoption of sexist beliefs, with girls valuing benevolence more in boys (Lemus et al., 2010; Montañez et al., 2013; Swami et al., 2010). However, in other studies on attraction and gender stereotypes, it has been found that there is a tendency to desire or feel attraction to the counterstereotypical when it comes to short-term relationships and romantic dates. More

research is needed to see if this trend persists when seeking a long-term relationship (Chappetta & Barth, 2022).

The prevailing attraction model observed in the results of this study, although with small nuances, remains predominantly heterosexual. In the testimonies of our study, we find frequent evidence of pressure for heteronormativity -mainly among boys- and fear of risking hegemonic masculinity both in attraction patterns and in sexuality that has not fundamentally evolved in recent decades (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Kjaran, 2017). None of the boys interviewed admitted to having ever felt attracted to another boy, something that did happen at some point in the case of girls (5 testimonies). With this, we understand that boys' pressure to conform to the heteronorm is greater. In our study, we find that this pressure for heteronormativity is closely related to the fragility of hegemonic masculinity expressed both in sexual practices considered masculine versus those that may be more related to homosexual relationships, which was very present in the discourse of the boys, results that coincide with other studies on masculinity (Espelage et al., 2018; Pascoe, 2012) and highlight the patriarchal and sexist imperative that guides the onset of these sexual relationships in adolescence.

Pornography

The consumption of pornography emerged as a central finding in this research as the impact it had on imposed physical standards, attraction models, desired sexual practices, expectations, and even violence was observed throughout the interviews. Although the consumption of pornography was found to be quite common among adolescents, in this study, they are not sure about how to define it, mentioning everything from photos of naked people to forms of cyber-sexual violence such as "sextortion". The fact that they are not clear about the definition can be problematic because they may normalise violent situations by confusing them with pornography; in the case of "sextortion," it can hinder their critical evaluation and may pose difficulty in identifying the motivation for consumption. Among the vocational education participants, the definitions of pornography were more precise and more accurate, which may indicate greater familiarity with it. However, despite the function of pornography being to produce sexual excitement, we found apparent gender differences in motivations for its consumption. In this sense, boys highlight their own sexual satisfaction and girls, curiosity. Turning to pornography to satisfy sexual curiosity reflects the scarcity of references in this area. In fact, for 30% of Spanish adolescents, pornography is their only source of learning about sexuality (Save the Children, 2020). This data becomes particularly concerning when considering that one of the most searched terms on Pornhub in 2021 was "how to…," which reflects the potential of pornography as a reference model (Pornhub, 2021). Additionally, by considering the 3 AM model, we can understand how pornography may be shaping the sexuality of adolescents in the absence of other references. The 3 AM model by Wright (2005) focuses on three key dimensions influencing an individual's sexual perception and behaviour: Arousal, Attitudes, and Behavior. This model suggests that pornography consumption can affect these three areas in an interconnected way.

First, the sexual arousal generated by pornographic content can alter an individual's attitudes toward sexuality, promoting more permissive or desensitised views about sex. Over time, these attitudes can influence actual sexual behaviours, leading to unrealistic expectations or the adoption of sexual practices based on what is seen in pornography. In this context, the 3 AM model explains how frequent pornography consumption can shape not only an individual's physiological responses but also their beliefs and behaviours related to sex (Wright, 2020).

In the same sense, our results reflect an influence of pornography consumption on the sexual practices that both boys and girls would like to try as well as on their expectations about sex, which coincides with findings in the previous literature (e.g., Goldstein, 2020; Grubbs et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2019). In the case of boys, they expressed their sexual desires based on practices typical of pornography while rejecting sexual acts that could question their masculinity, such as being anally penetrated or engaging in a threesome with another boy. Additionally, girls acknowledged that they were sometimes asked to perform certain practices in their relationships that presumably originated from what boys had seen in pornography. However, girls did not show clear boundaries regarding what they would like to try or not; rather, they focused on what they could do to please the other person. This concern may lead women and adolescents to engage in unwanted or risky sexual practices. In this regard, Kaestle (2009) found that a higher proportion of young women than men had repeatedly engaged in sexual activities they did not like (12% vs. 3%) and were more likely than men to report having repeatedly engaged in these activities (odds ratio, 3.7), mainly fellatio and anal sex. Sexual practices that, as we see in our study, are desired and eroticised by men, probably due to the influence of pornographic imagery. In fact, the "Anal" category was one of the most viewed on Pornhub in the last year (Pornhub, 2023). Similar to previous literature, in our study, patterns of pornography consumption were strongly conditioned by age and the gender of the participants (Goldsmith, 2017; Hald, 2006; Save The Children, 2020). While boys consumed it mostly, few girls admitted to doing it. Additionally, many expressed rejection and disgust towards this type of content, especially the younger ones. It is noteworthy that in the case of younger boys, viewing pornography in groups was a relatively common practice, which ceased to occur in the case of older boys. These data are also found in other studies suggesting that peer groups can act as a mechanism for initiation into pornography, turning its consumption into a social practice of experimentation (Save the Children, 2020). On the other hand, none of the girls mentioned having consumed pornography in the company of their friends, nor did they even say that pornography or sexuality were common topics of conversation among them. This result is consistent with other qualitative studies in which there is shown to be greater openness to talk about sexuality among boys, while it remains a taboo topic among girls (Barberá & Navarro, 2000).

Differences in pornography consumption among adolescent boys and girls may be related to differences in their perception of it. Our results are in line with those of other studies where a greater critical attitude towards pornography is shown by girls (Massey et al., 2021). In our study, girls used the following adjectives to describe pornography: unreal, idealised, exaggerated, unpleasant, non-egalitarian, lacking in affection, and generating unrealistic expectations. However, as shown by the limited

literature on the subject, women's consumption of pornography is full of contradictory results and nuances that need further exploration. On the one hand, they express that it helps them recognise their sexual desire and normalise their bodies. However, it can also cause guilt and internal contradictions due to the way women are treated and represented in pornography and the construction of women's sexuality (Ashton et al., 2018). On the other hand, boys make a much more superficial critique of pornography, questioning its realism but not the power relations represented in it. These differentiated results can be explained by various issues reflected in previous literature. Among them, we can highlight rape myth endorsement, acceptance of violence against women, and objectification, ideological and attitudinal variables that are usually stronger among men and that may become more difficult to be aware of gender inequalities (Fakunmoju et al., 2021; Willis et al., 2022).

Evidence regarding objectifying gaze is found in both boys' and girls' discourses. The literature suggests that greater objectification of women may be related to greater acceptance of violence against them (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Seabrook et al., 2019). In the case of boys, it becomes especially evident when they equate body diversity with the diversity of categories in pornography.

One of the topics that emerged to debate was consent and free choice of people who decide to record pornography. On the one hand, any use of pornography was justified and tolerated as long as people involved gave their explicit consent, which is important to be reflected in discourses. However, on the other hand, they use individual free choice as a justification to overlook the structural differences in which pornography is produced. In this sense, the literature has critically addressed the concept of free choice in the context of the pornographic industry. It is argued that a focus based exclusively on individual freedom to decide to participate in pornography may overlook the complex structural dynamics that influence people's decisions (Dyer, 2024). This discussion highlights the need for a deeper analysis and further research into the complexities of consent and free choice in pornography. An interdisciplinary approach is required, considering ethical, psychological, sociological, and economic aspects to fully understand the dynamics at play and develop policies and practices that protect the rights and dignity of all individuals involved in producing and consuming pornography.

Gender Violence

Finally, although it was not one of the central themes of the research, several testimonies of girls who had experienced different forms of violence in their intimate relationships came to light when discussing sexuality and romance in adolescence. All testimonies of violence came from girls and were perpetrated by their male partners or ex-partners, sexual partners, or friends. These results provide evidence of what global statistics on violence against young women establish (Arriaga et al., 2004; Hickman et al., 2004; Jezl et al., 1996; Smith et al., 2003; Stöckl et al., 2014). According to Capaldi et al. (2012), based on a systematic review, witnessing violence against the mother by the partner in the family of origin is the most robust risk

factor for experiencing partner violence in adulthood. In most cases of violence in this study, there was evidence of intergenerational transfer of violence, based on the experiences that the mothers had suffered, which has been widely corroborated in previous literature (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Islam et al., 2014). In our study, the most frequent forms of violence mentioned were psychological, controlling, and sexual. Regarding sexual violence, experiences such as sexual coercion or imposition of unwanted sexual practices on girls by their partners or friends were common. These results align with what scientific literature points out as risks derived from pornography consumption in adolescence (Kaestle, 2009; Sanyal, 2019; Wright et al., 2015). Additionally, we also had a testimony from a perpetrator when one of the interviewed boys recounted an experience in which he had perpetrated sexual violence without being aware of it, reflecting the difficulty that men often have in identifying abusive behaviours in their learned models of masculinity and sexuality. On the other hand, in some cases, girls reported that their first sexual experience was unsatisfactory, which has been documented by the literature regarding the association between re-victimisation in young women and unwanted first relationships (Stöckl et al., 2014). In our results, those testimonies that identified having had "toxic relationships" described behaviours that can be identified with sexual coercion and control. Sexual violence and coercion are complex phenomena influenced by a variety of factors, including individual factors, cultural norms, power dynamics, gender stereotypes, and inadequate education about consent and healthy relationships (Oesterle et al., 2023). In this regard, The Confluence Model of Sexual Aggression (Malamuth et al., 2000) identifies various risk and protective factors associated with the likelihood of committing sexual aggression. Among the risk factors, the model emphasises individual traits such as hostile masculinity, which includes hostility toward women, adherence to heterosexual stereotypes, and endorsement of rape myths. These myths consist of stereotypical beliefs that downplay or justify sexual violence by blaming victims and excusing perpetrators, thereby fostering a degree of tolerance for such behaviours (Bohner et al., 2005). The acceptance of these myths also distorts perceptions of sexual consent, a critical factor in determining whether a sexual act constitutes assault. For instance, individuals who endorse these beliefs may perceive sexual aggression as stemming from a misunderstanding or miscommunication about interest in engaging in sexual activity (Jozkowski, 2022).

Furthermore, the consumption of pornography, alongside other cultural influences, appears to impact the recognition and perception of sexual violence. Pornographic content often portrays and normalises sexual encounters where explicit agreement between participants is absent, potentially skewing attitudes toward sexual consent (Willis et al., 2020). Such portrayals may eroticise and legitimise dynamics that undermine the essential role of mutual consent, further complicating the identification and prevention of sexual aggression.

Understanding consent as an explicit, enthusiastic, ongoing agreement is essential to identify coercion. Coercion often involves manipulating, pressuring, or intimidating someone into engaging in sexual activity without their full and voluntary agreement. Factors such as gendered power dynamics and stereotypes—such as expectations that men should be dominant or that women's refusal is a form of teasing—can perpetuate coercive behaviours. In fact, in our

testimonies, we observed that girls tend to express a more submissive attitude toward sexuality or are less clear about what they would like to explore. This ambiguity can result in more flexible boundaries, making it easier for boys to push or manipulate them. Conversely, boys often articulated their desires with greater clarity, including specific sexual practices they wanted to try, often inspired by pornography. In some cases, they even admitted to pressuring their partners to engage in these practices. This dynamic highlights a concerning imbalance in sexual agency and communication, where external influences like pornography and entrenched gender norms shape behaviours and expectations in unequal ways.

In line with previous literature, we found that boys and girls identify signs of control in their relationships. However, they incorporate these patterns into their attraction models so that in boys' discourses, it is very present that a "good girl" is faithful, and girls acknowledge that they find it attractive when their partner is jealous. The contradictions are evident in the way they navigate and discuss relationships. On the one hand, there is a growing emphasis on the importance of consent and the recognition of toxic relationships in their discourse. Many adolescents were aware of the need for mutual respect, communication, and consent in sexual and romantic relationships. However, despite these claims, their understanding of consent often remains unclear or underdeveloped, particularly when recognising it in practice. In fact, some of the testimonies showed the existing confusion about the boundaries of consent, often conflating it with other aspects of relationship dynamics, such as jealousy and possessiveness, which they may view as signs of attraction or love. This disconnect between what adolescents say they believe about consent and what they demonstrate in their behaviour is troubling, many still struggle with applying these principles to their own experiences, often influenced by external pressures, cultural narratives, and lack of proper sexual education. This contradiction highlights the need for more comprehensive, nuanced sexual education that not only teaches consent but also addresses the emotional and psychological dynamics that can shape unhealthy perceptions of relationships.

Previous studies have reported high prevalence rates of control violence in adolescents (CIS, 2013; Diaz-Aguado et al., 2014; Luzón et al., 2011; Rubio-Garay et al., 2017). However, in line with what Nardi-Rodriguez et al. (2017) found in their study, our results also identify control violence as a warning sign, but they did not do it in their own experiences but through third parties. This inability to recognise how the model of control and possessiveness permeates their relationships may underline the fact that jealousy appeared as something desirable and attractive in their narratives. All of this, coupled with the models they receive from the media, social networks, and pornography, as well as the deficiencies in sexual education from other socialising agents such as school or family, shapes the construction of sexuality presented in adolescence, which remains static through the decades, only altered by timid advances achieved from feminism and legislative steps towards equality, diversity, and the eradication of sexual violence.

Practical Implications

Our results point out the need to carry out a radical transformation of the perspective of sexual education in adolescence, leaving behind medical models based mainly on learning about contraceptive methods and reproduction and moving towards psychosocial models that influence the transformation of norms, attitudes and beliefs to sexual agency. That is, these results can have important implications in the design and implementation of programs and public policies that address the adverse effects of the construction of sexuality imbued with sexism, gender stereotypes, the mandate of the image, the use of pornography and gender violence. In particular, we believe that critical thinking should be promoted in their sexual-affective relationships, in their attraction/seduction models, in the acceptance of sexual and physical diversity and in a vision of the importance of healthy sexuality. These programs should aim to reduce or eliminate sexist attitudes (and promote more egalitarian attitudes), simultaneously with work on empathy, the transformation of eroticism and desire as well as sexual agency and healthy sexual practices. In other words, individuals who have more egalitarian gender attitudes may be more likely to refuse sexist and relationship patterns based on control, jealousy and violence to live sexuality in a more free and satisfactory way. This sex-affective education must start from childhood, and from the first years of life, work must be done to deconstruct gender stereotypes, equality and emotional education that lays the foundations for what will later be their future relationships. For this reason, it must be worked transversally at all educational stages and not only in schools; the involvement of families in this purpose is essential. In this sense, we need to make families aware of the importance of digital hygiene at home. Although parents or caregivers establish a series of rules regarding using different devices, it does not imply a decrease in the problematic use of the Internet. Still, it means a significant reduction in some of the online risk practices. Family members ' patterns in the use of smartphones also constitute learning models for their children. A recent report published by UNICEF (Andrade et al., 2021) shows that the differences are especially noticeable in adolescents, comparing those who rarely connect to the Internet after midnight and those who do so regularly. The rates of problematic Internet use and different online risk behaviours can triple among the latter. Additionally, the average score on the parental control scale (whose values range from 0 to 21) is only 5.36, which denotes a low level of parental control in Internet use. Added to this is the difficulty that parents often express in transmitting to their children a healthy sexual education and a critical view of pornography, which is why intervention programs and public policies should be aimed at working with schools and families. Finally, the results show that female sexual desire is still poorly visible, combined with social control over women's sexuality that continues to be maintained in our patriarchal societies. It means that girls experience sexuality through negative emotions and experiences in many cases. In other words, social norms influence sexuality to be experienced in a restrictive, coerced and punitive way in many women, limiting their freedom and pleasure. For all these reasons, sexual education should also be accompanied by spaces of safety and sexual learning for

women that promote sexual agency, starting with the recognition and validation of female desire to continue guaranteeing free and healthy female sexuality.

When implementing sexual education programs for children and adolescents, ethical considerations are paramount to ensure the programs are both practical and respectful of the participants' rights, cultural contexts, and developmental stages. One of the primary ethical concerns is ensuring that the content is age-appropriate and tailored to the cognitive and emotional maturity of the audience. It is crucial to balance providing accurate and comprehensive information with respecting the topic's sensitivity, particularly for younger participants. Educators must avoid causing unnecessary discomfort while fostering a safe environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and discussing issues openly.

Another critical consideration is obtaining informed consent from parents or guardians, particularly in contexts where discussing sexual education may be culturally sensitive or controversial. Transparency about the program's objectives, content, and methods helps build trust and ensures that families are aware of the material being taught. Additionally, sexual education programs must respect diversity and inclusivity by addressing the needs of all students, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, or cultural background. Promoting an inclusive approach prevents discrimination and ensures that students receive relevant and affirming information. Finally, educators should be adequately trained to handle sensitive topics with professionalism, ensuring that discussions are free from personal biases and aligned with the best interests of the students.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the significant contributions of this research, both theoretically and in terms of prevention and intervention with adolescents, it is necessary to acknowledge some limitations and how they could be addressed in future studies. First, the interviews were conducted within the framework of a more extensive study focused on how romantic relationships impact adolescents' academic trajectories, so there was little opportunity to delve into issues of pornography and violence that could have further enriched the results. Future research about sexuality should delve deeper into the concepts of consent, diverse sexual practices, empathy, and sexual desire. It is essential to analyse pornography consumption from a gender perspective, exploring its relationship with sexuality, satisfaction, and emotional development. Understanding how these factors interact can provide valuable insights into how people navigate their sexual experiences and relationships. Investigating the nuances of consent can shed light on knowledge gaps or misconceptions, while examining diverse practices and desires can help break stigmas and foster healthier sexual communication.

Furthermore, studying the emotional and psychological impacts of pornography consumption, mainly how they differ by gender, could clarify its role in shaping expectations, satisfaction, and emotional maturity in sexual contexts. These efforts would contribute to a more holistic understanding of sexuality and its multiple dimensions.

Second, only adolescents from Andalusia were interviewed, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, despite the inclusion of some bisexual women, our sample was limited in terms of diversity, as it included primarily white, cisheterosexual, middle-class participants. Future studies should incorporate participants representing diverse axes of intersectionality, including gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. This approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different life experiences shape sexuality. Intersectionality recognises that individuals' experiences of sexuality are not uniform, but are deeply influenced by overlapping social and cultural factors. By exploring these intersections, researchers can uncover the unique challenges and perspectives faced by people from marginalised or underrepresented groups, thereby offering more inclusive perspectives on the complexities of sexual development and expression.

Third, the nature of the study allows for describing the phenomenon but does not allow for establishing relationships between the themes analysed. Future studies could complement these results with other methodologies to establish relationships between the variables studied or employ a longitudinal method to examine variable changes across the lifespan. Furthermore, it would be valuable to complement the information obtained in the interviews with quantitative data and larger samples.

Finally, it is important to recognise the potential influence of the researchers' identities and perspectives on the interpretation of the findings of this study. We are women and psychologists, which naturally frames our approach. Furthermore, our gender perspective allows us to critically examine the social and cultural dynamics of sexuality, particularly about power, norms, and gender inequality. While this shared background could introduce a potential bias into our interpretation, it also offers a strength: our different generational perspectives. Coming from different generational backgrounds, we bring a broader and more nuanced lens to our analysis, allowing us to bridge traditional and contemporary understandings of adolescent experiences. This diversity within us enhances the depth and richness of our interpretations. However, we remain conscious of the need to critically reflect on how our positionality may shape the narratives we construct from the data.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Researching adolescent sexuality presents significant challenges and ethical considerations that require careful reflection. Adolescents are a vulnerable population, and exploring topics related to their sexuality demands sensitivity to their privacy, autonomy, and developmental stage. Obtaining informed consent is particularly complex, as it often involves navigating parental or guardian permissions while respecting the adolescent's agency. Ethical research in this area must also avoid imposing biases or stigmatization, ensuring that findings contribute positively to understanding and addressing adolescent needs. Additionally, researchers must prioritize safeguarding participants from potential harm, both psychological and social, and ensure confidentiality to foster trust and encourage honest responses.

Addressing these challenges thoughtfully is essential to producing meaningful and responsible research outcomes.

Declarations

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