




An Erotic Skylight: Sexual Fantasies in the Portuguese Youth Under the Reflection of Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract

Envisioning sexual fantasies as any image or mental setting that is sexually exciting or erotic for the individual, the present work aims to study the nature of the relationship between sexual fantasies and gender, sexual orientation, and some of the different dimensions of psychological well-being, such as life satisfaction and satisfaction with sex life. The present study was developed through a sample of 569 participants, aged between 18 and 29 years old, obtained by completing a Sociodemographic Questionnaire, Wilson's Sexual Fantasies Questionnaire, Satisfaction with Life Scale, and Satisfaction with Sex Life Scale. The findings revealed that, although there are no statistically significant gender differences concerning the sex drive, there were differences in Exploratory content, favoring the male gender, and BDSM, emphasized by the female gender in comparison. The occurrence of cross-orientation fantasies was also verified, proving to be significant for the heterosexual group for the item "Being much sought after by the same-sex" with women reporting more frequently than men. There was also a significant mediation between Satisfaction with Life and Intimate Fantasies, through Satisfaction with Sex Life. These results reinforce the breadth that sexual fantasies have, both in areas closer to sexual expression (e.g., gender, sexual orientation) and in more peripheral areas (e.g., psychological well-being), proving that sexual fantasies – and their capacity for arousal – relate to one's psychological well-being.

Keywords Sexual Fantasies · Gender Differences · Cross-Orientation Fantasies · Psychological Well-Being Mediation · Sociocultural Context

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Introduction

Sexuality involves “rituals, languages, fantasies, representations, symbols and conventions” (Louro, 2000, p. 6), processes that depend on a particular subjectivity and sociocultural context (Tseng, 2003; Baker, 2014; Kasemy et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2016). The growing emergence of feminist and LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and more) movements in West Europe, namely in Portugal (Alarcão et al., 2015; Wouters, 2017; Aires et al., 2022), highlighted the plurality of sexuality (i.e., sexual identities, expressions, and practices) and shaped its social understanding (Weeks, 2017). The study of sexual fantasies in Portuguese youth makes it possible to advance theoretical knowledge of this issue and deepen the implications of sexuality in a cultural context where activism for citizenship and sexual rights has become more present (Aires et al., 2022).

Sexual fantasies, as a manifestation of human sexuality (PAHO & WHO, 2002), are a fundamental construct to study this area due to its characteristic of being a private matter yet influenced by societal norms (Leitenberg & Hennings, 1995; Rubia, 2009). They can be conceived as any mental image or scenario that is sexually arousing or erotic for the individual (Leitenberg & Hennings, 1995). These may be revealed through numerous forms, such as an elaborate story or a fleeting thought about sexual activity and can occur spontaneously or intentionally. In addition, there is the possibility of sexual activity taking place pre or during sexual activity, whether it is masturbation, pornography consumption, or sexual intercourse (Wilson, 2010).

Wilson (1988) operationalized sexual fantasies in two significant forms of expression: their total frequency, a sum interpreted as a measure of sex drive, and their multiple contents, which reveal the preferential tendency of the type of sexual imagery. Wilson and Lang (1981) organized sexual fantasies content into four distinct categories: exploratory - related to fantasies alluding to group sex, partner swinging, and scenarios socially considered promiscuous; intimate - whose thoughts focus on sexual relations with only one partner, or a minimal number, and include activities such as kissing, masturbation, receiving and/or performing oral sex; impersonal - which harbors content of a fetishistic nature and themes related to sexual practice with strangers; and, finally, sadomasochistic - which is related to the provocation of pain as a means to achieve sexual arousal, involving games of domination and submission. Bader (2002) and later Moyano and Sierra (2014) added that these contents should be interpreted as an outcome of socially and sexually constructed gender roles and a reflection of the interaction with sexual orientation, age, and sexual and psychological well-being (Lehmiller, 2018). As the various ways in which youth express sexuality is affected by societal norms (Lefkowitz, 2005; Pulerwitz et al., 2019) revealing contemporary representation of patterns and relationships in human sexuality (Levay & Baldwin, 2012), they compose emerging sexual identities, expressions, attractions, behaviors, and fantasies.

Sexual Fantasies and Gender

According to Wilson’s conception of sexual fantasies, the relationship between gender and sexual fantasies unfolds in two ways: total frequency (sex drive) and thematic

content (Wilson, 1988; Wilson, 2010). As for sex drive, evidence has pointed out that men presented a higher frequency of sexual fantasies than women (Leitenberg & Hennings, 1995; Rubia, 2009). Possible interpretations explain these distinctions based on biological sex differences (Ellis & Symons, 1990) or inherent divergence of personality traits (Buss, 2007; 2009) between men and women, stating sexual fantasies reflect a natural predisposition to higher sex drive (Ellis & Symons, 1990). As for the contents of sexual fantasies, it was highlighted that men more often present fantasies of an exploratory, impersonal, and sadomasochistic nature than women (Haus, 2020), whereas women tend to prefer intimate and romantic fantasies (Wilson, 2010; Bogaert et al., 2015). Ferreira and colleagues (2010) justify this difference by stating that gender is governed by expected societal norms, which creates this social distinction of sexual practices. Furthermore, Anzani and Prunas (2020) also proved that gender played a significant role in the preferred content of sexual fantasies and in their narratives, underlining the differences between cisgender and nonbinary individuals. Hence, it becomes crucial to understand if gender differentiation is maintained – regarding sex drive and content – and, if so, what differences are reflected given current societal norms.

Sexual Fantasies and Sexual Orientation

Studies on the relationship between sexual orientation and sexual fantasies are contradictory. If on the one hand, there are authors who concluded there are no differences in the frequency and content of sexual fantasies between homosexual and heterosexual men (Plaud & Bigwood, 1997), even pointing out the overlap of some fantasy contents (e.g., cuckolding) (Lehmiller, Ley, & Savage, 2018), on the other hand, further studies have inferred that homosexual men showed higher frequency levels in the categories of exploratory and impersonal than heterosexual men, while the latter reported a higher frequency of emotional-romantic content (Bhugra et al., 2006; Tortora, D’Urso et al., 2020). Lehmiller (2018), in his research, listed - among the “top 7 fantasies” of his total sample of 4.175 people - sexual fantasies that involved activities with someone of the same gender. This result was mainly significant among heterosexual participants (59% of heterosexual women and 26% of heterosexual men). This outcome is conducted to the concept of “cross-orientation fantasies”, which translate as sexual fantasies with someone of the same gender in heterosexual individuals, and fantasies with someone of the opposite gender in homosexual individuals. Kahr (2007) also proved the occurrence of these “cross-orientation fantasies”, suggesting that this phenomenon relates to sexual experience – heterosexual people who had never had same-gender experience had frequent homoerotic fantasies, and gay men and lesbians who never had a heterosexual experience had frequent fantasies about the opposite gender. This author emphasized the importance of understanding sexual fantasies as a complex domain in which all conventions and assumptions about human sexuality are challenged due to the private matter. Recent scientific literature relating sexual fantasies and sexual orientation in the Portuguese context is scarce, making it relevant to understand the relationship between both variables and to explore their nature.

Sexual Fantasies and Psychological Well-being

In the last decade, several fields have demonstrated the influence that sexuality – across its range of expression – has on well-being (Anderson, 2013). In the literature review conducted by this author, it was indicated that sexual health and psychological/mental health were positively associated with sexual satisfaction and sexual pleasure. Psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct (Machado & Bandeira, 2012) integrates different dimensions, such as life satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. Satisfaction with life is the cognitive component of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1985; Diener et al., 2002), and sexual satisfaction can be understood as an “indicator of sexual health that represents a positive outcome of sexual activity associated with general well-being, individual health, and relational adjustment” (Pechorro et al., 2015, p. 48). The existing literature has only related sexual fantasies to sexual satisfaction (Trudel, 2002; Golu & Gorbanescu, 2014). In Trudel’s study (2002), only a statistically significant relationship was demonstrated between sexual fantasies and levels of sexual satisfaction, not delving into the nature of their relationship. Ohri, Dubey, Rath and Grill (2021) corroborated the results by Trudel (2002), indicating even the predominance of the relationship between intimate sexual fantasies and sexual satisfaction. These authors further emphasized that the relationship between both components is not linear. Although several studies continue to focus on the relationship between sexual satisfaction and subjective well-being/satisfaction with life – even proving this relationship longitudinally (Buczak-Stec, König & Hajek, 2019) – the literature remains short about explaining the relationship between sexual fantasies and variables that do not fit into the scope of sexuality (e.g., satisfaction with life).

Purpose of the Study

The present study was designed to understand the phenomenon of sexual fantasies in young people within the Portuguese culture of the 21st century. We proposed a quantitative analysis of the phenomenon to explore the patterns of sexual fantasies in Portuguese youth, and current analysis of Portuguese sexuality, by studying the relationship of this construct with conceptions of gender, sexual orientation, and psychological well-being.

Hypotheses

For the purpose presented, the following hypotheses were formulated.

H1: Men have a higher total frequency (i.e. sex drive) than women.

H2: Men have different sexual fantasies content from women,

H3: There is the occurrence of cross-orientation fantasies in the Portuguese youth.

H4: Different contents of sexual fantasies (i.e., intimate, exploratory, BDSM and Seduction) have different levels of satisfaction with life when mediated by satisfaction with sex life.

Methodology

Participants

The present study included Portuguese youth, aged between 18 and 29 years ($M=22.08$, $SD=2.50$). Although this study perceives gender as a broad and diverse spectrum, in the present sample only cisgender male and female youth responded. The study comprised a sample of 569 participants, mostly female ($N=326$) (57.3%), corresponding to a total of 42.7% of the male gender ($N=243$). Regarding sexual orientation, most participants identified themselves heterosexuals (77%), followed by bisexuals (12.8%) and homosexuals (10.2%).

Instruments

Beyond the background information (e.g., gender, age, nationality, and sexual orientation), the survey included three scales:

Wilson's Sexual Fantasies Questionnaire of Wilson (WSFQ). The original Wilson Sex Fantasy Scale (Wilson, 1988) is composed of a total of 40 items and allows to perceive both the total frequency of sexual fantasies and the different contents implicit in the items. The contents are organized into 4 sub-scales: Exploratory, Intimate, Impersonal, and Sadoomasochist. The 40 items are evaluated using a six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 5 (*Regularly*). The final scores on this scale allow us to know both the level of sexual interest/ libido, through the sum of the total frequency of sexual fantasies, with higher scores indicating higher libido, and the most prevalent content, through the analysis of the highest frequency in certain items. Wilson's Sex Fantasy Questionnaire was adapted and validated for the Portuguese population (Saramago, Cardoso, Pimenta & Leal, 2017) and encompassed 24 items out of the original 40. The validated sub-scales are organized into Exploratory, Intimate, BDSM, and Seduction contents.

Item 25 was added to the present research, with content referring to sexual fantasies ("Being much sought after by the same-sex"). It is an item attached with the purpose of assessing the frequency of same-sex sexual fantasies among Portuguese youth. This item was created as a reflection of item 18 "Being much sought after by the opposite sex" of Wilson's Sex Fantasy Scale (Saramago, Cardoso, Pimenta, & Leal, 2017). Its intention was to serve as a referential measure to explore the sexual flexibility phenomenon.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). This scale was developed by Diener et al. (1985). The SWLS comprises five indicators of overall satisfaction with one's life, such as: "so far I have got the most important things I want in life". The answers are evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*), which higher scores indicating greater satisfaction with life. The Portuguese version was used for this study (Neto, 1993; Jovanović et al., 2022).

Satisfaction with Sex Life Scale (SWSLS). It was developed by Neto (2012) to measure the overall satisfaction with one's sex life. The SWSLS includes five items, such as: "I am satisfied with my sex life". The answers are evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*), with greater scores indi-

cate higher satisfaction with sex life. The SWSLS has adequate psychometric properties to measure general sexual satisfaction in the Portuguese population regardless of age and sex (Caycho-Rodríguez et al., 2021).

Procedure

This study was composed by a sample selected for convenience, voluntary type, obtained in snowball format. The data collection took place between December 2019 and January 2020, with the help of an online platform called “Google Forms”, where a self-report questionnaire integrating three scales mentioned previous, was preceded by an informed consent, which clarified the issue addressed, stating the possibility that any participant could refuse or give up filling out the questionnaire if they so wished. Anonymity was also emphasized.

All the procedures were in accordance with the ethical standards for the institutional and national research committee and with Helsinki declaration and its amendments or comparable ethical standards. Approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the FPCE-UP (protocol number: 2019/12–06).

Results

In a preliminary analysis, Cronbach’s alpha was performed for each of the sexual fantasies’ factors. For the Total Frequency of Sexual Fantasies (Sex Drive), a value of 0.90 was obtained, for Intimate Sexual Fantasies 0.86, for Exploratory 0.85, for those with BDSM content 0.81, and Seduction 0.72. Both the Satisfaction with Life Scale ($\alpha=0.87$) and the Satisfaction with Sex Life Scale ($\alpha=0.92$) were found to have good internal consistency values (Vaske, 2008). After ensuring the normality of each variable used, meeting the asymmetry $< |3|$ and kurtosis $< |8|$, according to Kline’s criterion (2005), the total number of responses was calculated to create a score for each factor of each of the scales used. Each of the factors was then computed by arithmetic sum.

The first analysis described the variables under study (Table 1). Considering the descriptive analysis of each factor of sexual fantasies (i.e., Total Frequency of Sexual Fantasies (Sex Drive); Intimate Sexual Fantasies; Exploratory Sexual Fantasies; BDSM Sexual Fantasies; Seduction Sexual Fantasies) it was observed that Intimate Sexual Fantasies are the most frequent content, followed respectively by Seduction Sexual Fantasies, BDSM Sexual Fantasies and, lastly, Exploratory Sexual Fantasies. When looking at the items, it was possible to verify that item 24 “Kissing passionately” was reported as the most frequent sexual fantasy ($M=4.25$, $SD=1.09$), followed by item 1 “Having intercourse with a loved partner” ($M=4.00$, $SD=1.23$) and item 7 “Receiving oral sex” ($M=3.57$, $SD=1.40$). Item 13 “Mate-swapping” was stated as the least frequent ($M=0.46$, $SD=1.05$).

Regarding Hypothesis 1 “Men have a higher total frequency of sexual fantasies (sex drive) than women”, a *t*-test for independent samples was performed, gender being the independent variable, to explore potential gender differences (in cisgender men and cisgender women). The difference found (Table 2) was statistically non-sig-

Table 1 Descriptive analysis for the Total Frequency of Sexual Fantasies (Sex Drive) and for the sexual fantasies' contents frequency

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sex Drive	0.00	120.00	2.26	0.82
Intimate Sexual Fantasies	0.00	40.00	3.62	0.98
Exploratory Sexual Fantasies	0.00	30.00	1.24	1.11
BDSM Sexual Fantasies	0.00	30.00	1.49	1.12
Seduction Sexual Fantasies	0.00	20.00	2.18	1.26
Satisfaction with Life	5.00	35.00	4.90	1.18
Satisfaction with Sex Life	5.00	35.00	4.61	1.65

Table 2 Comparison of means of Total Frequency of Sexual Fantasies (Sex Drive) according to Gender

	Female <i>N</i> =326		Male <i>N</i> =243		<i>t</i>	<i>sig</i>
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Sex Drive	2.22	0.78	2.31	0.87	-1.246	0.213

Table 3 Comparison of the sexual fantasies' contents frequency means by Gender

	Female <i>N</i> =326		Male <i>N</i> =243		<i>t</i>	<i>sig</i>
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Intimate Sexual Fantasies	3.63	0.97	3.60	1.00	0.403	0.687
Exploratory Sexual Fantasies	0.97	0.95	1.62	1.19	-6.974	0.000***
BDSM Sexual Fantasies	1.65	1.11	1.29	1.11	3.796	0.000***
Seduction Sexual Fantasies	2.12	1.24	2.27	1.30	-1.427	0.154

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

nificant [$t(567) = -1.246, p = .213$], even though the young males showed higher levels of sex drive ($M = 2.31, SD = 0.87$), than the young females ($M = 2.22, SD = 0.78$).

Regarding Hypothesis 2 "Men have different sexual fantasies content from women" (Table 3) it was found a significant predominance of Exploratory Sexual Fantasies in male youth [$M = 1.62, SD = 1.19, t(451,751) = -6.97, p < .001$] compared to females ($M = 0.97, SD = 0.95$), whereas female youth showed a greater preponderance in fantasies in sexual fantasies with BDSM content [$M = 1.65, SD = 1.11, t(567) = 3.80, p < .001$] compared to males ($M = 1.29, SD = 1.11$). Exploring the predominant items in each of the genders in the sample, women showed higher frequency in item 22, which falls under BDSM sexual fantasies, "Using objects for stimulation (e.g., vibrators, candles)" [$M = 2.51, SD = 1.62, t(567) = 4.272, p < .001$], while men showed a higher frequency in item 2 "Intercourse with someone you know, but have not had sex with", falling under exploratory sexual fantasies [$M = 2.58, SD = 1.65, t(567) = -5.09, p < .001$].

Table 4 Comparison of item 18 and item 25 means according to gender

	Female		Male		<i>t</i>	<i>sig</i>
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Item 18						
Heterosexual	2.87	1.61	2.87	1.64	0.005	0.996
Homosexual	1.17	1.47	1.25	1.62	-0.120	0.905
Bisexual	3.02	1.67	3.00	1.41	0.045	0.962
Item 25						
Heterosexual	1.03	1.50	0.64	1.34	2.850	0.005**
Homosexual	4.50	0.84	4.54	0.90	-0.100	0.921
Bisexual	3.45	1.53	3.89	1.18	-1.246	0.274

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ **Table 5** Correlation between total frequency of sexual fantasies (sex drive) and sexual fantasies contents frequencies with psychological well-being

	Satisfaction with Sex Life		Satisfaction with Life	
	R de Pearson	<i>sig</i>	R de Pearson	<i>sig</i>
Sex Drive	0.11	0.011*	0.06	0.133
Intimate Sexual Fantasies	0.31	0.000***	0.15	0.001***
Exploratory Sexual Fantasies	-0.14	0.001**	-0.05	0.283
BDSM Sexual Fantasies	0.10	0.015*	0.04	0.382
Seduction Sexual Fantasies	-0.02	0.604	0.02	0.565

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 3 “There is the occurrence of cross-orientation fantasies in the Portuguese Youth” was operationalized through two main moments: first, dividing the sample by groups according to sexual orientation (i.e., Heterosexual, Homosexual, Bisexual), and second, highlighting the analysis of items 18 “Being much sought after by the opposite sex” and 25 “Being much sought after by the same-sex”. For both items, a *t*-test for independent samples was performed, regarding gender. As for item 18, there was no significant relationship in any of the groups: Heterosexual [$t(440)=0.005$, $p=.996$], Homosexual [$t(56)=-0.120$, $p=.905$] and Bisexual [$t(67)=0.045$, $p<.965$] (Table 4). As for item 25, a significant relationship was observed only in the Heterosexual group [$t(396.576)=2.850$, $p<.001$] (Table 4), with a mean by female youth ($M=1.03$, $SD=1.50$) higher than male youth ($M=0.64$, $SD=1.34$).

Finally, the results of Hypothesis 4 “Different contents of sexual fantasies (i.e., intimate, exploratory, BDSM and Seduction) have different levels of satisfaction with life, when mediated by satisfaction with sex life” first revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship of Satisfaction with Life with Intimate Sex Fantasies ($r=.149$, $p=.001$) (Table 5). This indicates that the higher the frequency of intimate fantasies, the higher the life satisfaction.

In the interest of further exploring the nature of this relationship, the mediating effect of Satisfaction with Sex Life between frequency of Intimate Sexual Fantasies and levels of Life Satisfaction was ascertained. A statistically significant model

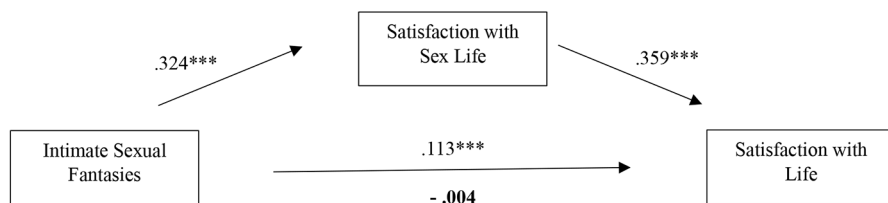


Fig. 1 Model of Satisfaction with Sex Life as a mediator between the Frequency of Intimate Sexual Fantasies and Satisfaction with Life

was found to predict levels of Satisfaction with Life [$F(2, 566)=94.487, p<.001$], explaining 25% of its variance, and an indirect effect of Satisfaction with Sex Life was also found to be present between Intimate Sexual Fantasies and Satisfaction with Life ($\beta=0.116, SE=0.0182, 95\%CI= [0.0819; 1541]$). Comparing the total effect of mediation with the direct effect, it was understood that the direct effect ($\beta=-0.004, SE=0.0288, t=-0.1346, p=.8930$) was no longer significant compared to the total effect ($\beta=0.113, SE=0.0312, t=3.599, p<.001$), so mediation proved to be total. In this sense, a higher frequency of Intimate Sexual Fantasies evokes higher levels of Satisfaction with Sex Life, which in turn leads to higher levels of Satisfaction with Life.

Discussion

This work arises from the need to explore sexual fantasies in the young Portuguese population, highlighting a contemporary view of the phenomenon. Sexual fantasies relating to gender (Haus, 2020; Bogaert et al., 2015; Anzani & Prunas, 2020), sexual orientation (Lehmiller, 2018), and different components of the psychological well-being (Trudel, 2002; Golu & Gorbanescu, 2014; Ohri et al., 2021) – a relation proven by the results of the present study – should be framed according to sociocultural context (Baker, 2014). This setting is crucial to understand and interpret the link between sexual expressions and sexual arousal in young people.

Considering Hypothesis 1, statistically non-significant differences were observed in the present study, which does not corroborate the results found in previous studies (Rubia, 2009; Wilson, 2010). This result can be explained by two reasons: the constrictions of the sample since it was a convenience sample; and the time difference that occurred between the mentioned studies and the present one. The first reason limits the possibility of generalizations, since we may have accessed the Portuguese youths who are more predisposed to talk about their sexual fantasies, not considering the more prude ones. The second reason is related to the emerging strength of political movements on the emancipation of sexuality in the last decade. With the growing emergence of feminist and LGBTQIA+ voices in Portugal (Alarcão et al., 2015; Aires et al., 2022), and considering that sexual fantasies are compatible with socially performed norms and roles (Moyano & Sierra, 2014), the non-significant outcome regarding total frequency/ sex drive may be the result of a countercurrent movement to the gender expectations imposed on bodies and their production of pleasure. Given

moments that fight for the emancipation of women, and of sexuality itself, these movements create a sociocultural context (a public space) in which women assume their sexuality and debate it through these same movements (Wousters, 2017). They also (re)create other expectations about their social roles and their sexuality, which may allow them to entitle them to a new role(s) that does not carry restrictions on their sexual desire/ sex drive and its expression. A growing outbreak of the emancipation of women, along with the emancipation of sexuality itself, conceives freedom of sexualization and eroticization in the way relationships are experienced, with others and with oneself (Wousters, 2017), and how sexuality is discussed. This evidence contributes to fighting the gender essentialism socially associated with libido - both men and women have the same capacity to produce sexual arousal.

Concerning Hypothesis 2, statistically significant differences were found. These differences occur at two junctures: exploratory content, more prevalent in young men, and BDSM content, more dominant in women. These gender differences, regarding content, are consistent with socially and sexually stereotyped roles, which are instilled in the form of culture (Bader, 2002). Therefore, because we live in a sexist society, the contents of the sexual fantasies generated are a response to these norms. As for the prominence of exploratory sexual fantasies in men, Haus (2020) has shown that although men more often engage in exploratory scenarios in their fantasies, they do not translate this fantasized pursuit into behaviors. Exposed to male socialization of their sexuality and, consequently, the creation of gender expectations for them to have a higher sex drive and a greater number of sexual experiences, they do not engage in exploratory behaviors, as the entire process of socialization of sexuality tends to integrate behaviors into a normative (not exploratory) framework (Tolman, & McClelland, 2011). The predisposition of women, compared to men, to fantasize about BDSM content does not corroborate previous studies (Wilson, 2010; Bogaert et al., 2015), since the latter stated that there is a female tendency to imagine fantasies of an intimate and romantic nature. Sexual fantasies with BDSM content refer to imagined scenarios entangled in power games and dichotomous pain-pleasure contexts. One possible interpretation for the presence of this sexual fantasy content in young women is that sexual desire fantasized and perceived, has the extension of being related to power games (Bader, 2002), both through dominant and dominated roles tightly linked to gender socialization and the organization of power relations between the pictured participants – roles that confirm or reverse the social construction of traditional roles of “man” and “woman” (Faccio et al., 2014).

Regarding the occurrence of cross-orientation fantasies (Hypothesis 3), the phenomenon was verified among the young Portuguese population, however, only in one of the groups - the group of heterosexuals. This result revealed that there were statistically significant differences between heterosexual men and women regarding having sexual fantasies about “Being much sought after by the same-sex” (item 25). Lehmiller (2018) linked the concept of sexual flexibility as a possible interpretation of such results. Sexual flexibility can be defined as a “predisposition to deviate not only from our sexual orientation but also from what our culture and society tell us about what we should want on a sexual level” (p.75). The author states that women exhibited greater levels of sexual flexibility, as evidenced in the present study, justifying the succession of such with the current social repression and historical crimi-

nalization of homosexuality among men, which may be one of the reasons for this greater willingness of women to assume homoerotic sexual fantasies. However, the same phenomenon was not found among homosexual men and women in the present sample. Kahr (2007) related the occurrence of cross-orientation fantasies to (the lack of) sexual experience – heterosexual people who had never had homosexual experiences showed frequent homoerotic fantasies and, in turn, homosexual people who had never had experiences with someone of the opposite gender experienced frequent fantasies with someone of the opposite gender. Since Portuguese youth are embedded in a heteronormative and homophobic culture – one that creates the expectation of heterosexual relationships for all bodies and discriminates against relationships that deviate from this expectation (Aires et al., 2022), experiences between opposite genders are more transversal to the homosexual population than homosexual experiences in heterosexual people. This may be a possible explanation why cross-orientation fantasies proved to be significant only in the group of heterosexual Portuguese youth.

Hypothesis 4 was formulated by the theoretical gap in the association of sexual fantasies literature with psychological well-being, especially about the Portuguese reality. Added to this, mediation emerged as a procedure for better comprehension of the correlation of Intimate Sexual Fantasies with Satisfaction with Life. In the mediation performed, it was understood that the levels of Satisfaction with Life are influenced by the levels of Satisfaction with Sex Life and these, in turn, are affected by the frequency of Intimate Sexual Fantasies, which explains, through this model, a quarter of the variance of the levels of Satisfaction with Life. Two possible reasons may explain the significance of this mediation: the first is related to the similarity of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Neto, 1993) with the Satisfaction with Sexual Life Scale (Neto, 2012) – an equivalence circumscribed in the construction of its items; the second reason may be explained by the erotic role of sexual fantasies since the arousal and eroticism created by them correlate positively with increased sexual satisfaction and the achievement of orgasm (Ohri et al., 2021). Sexual satisfaction showed a stronger correlation with intimate sexual fantasies (Ohri et al., 2021) possibly due to this category focusing on sexual activities/scenarios strictly related to individuals' everyday sexual experiences (e.g., sexual intercourse with only one partner, or a very limited number; masturbation; receiving and/or performing oral sex). As this category focuses on commonly pleasurable/satisfying and arousing aspects and views arousal as a positive emotion, the mediative relationship and interaction between the sexual component (i.e., intimate sexual fantasies) and the component outside the field of sexuality (i.e., satisfaction with life) make their relationship clearer. This reinforces the breath that sexual fantasies have, both in areas closer to sexual expression (e.g., gender, sexual orientation) and in more peripheral areas (e.g., psychological well-being), proving that sexual fantasies – and their capacity for arousal – relate to one's psychological well-being.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the progress that the results of this study allow for the comprehension of sexual fantasies in the young Portuguese population, this study had some limitations. Data collection was conducted using the snowball method. The choice for this method does not allow us to generalize the results, since we may have questioned Portuguese youths who are more predisposed to approach their sexual fantasies and, consequently, we may not have reached more playful youths in terms of expressing their sexuality – which may not correspond to the young Portuguese population. In addition, social desirability was not measured and, consequently, a more in-depth interpretation of the results could not be performed. In this study, few socio-demographic variables related to their sexual life were used, such as their current relationship status, the number of sexual partners they had had until then, and sexual experiences and interests which did not allow for an understanding of more influences on the construction/expression of fantasies. In this sense, it was not possible to obtain groups regarding sexual identity diversity, such as transgender and nonbinary people. Finally, we point out the qualitative non-exploitation of the answers given to “Do you have any fantasies that are not on this list? If so, I describe them”, not accessing new erotic and exciting thoughts, which were not contemplated in the validated version for the Portuguese population of Wilson’s Sex Fantasy Scale.

There is an urgent need to understand the phenomenon of sexual fantasies in Portugal. To understand it in all its extensions, it is necessary to create research projects that explore the scope of sexual fantasies, for example, regarding levels of religiosities and regarding political discourses on sexuality. Furthermore, it is recommended to study the reason for the manifestation in behaviors of certain imagined scenarios in sexual fantasies, considering, for example, social desirability, guilt, and shame. As there were gender differences in sexual fantasies contents, we recommend future studies to understand the phenomenon of sexual fantasies considering cisgenders, transgenders, and nonbinary people comparatively. As a final recommendation, qualitative research on fantasies would provide access to the description of each of the erotic scenarios, exploring the different focuses given at the time of this narration, and deepening the architecture of the fantasies themselves.

Conclusion

Why are sexual fantasies a skylight? Sexual fantasies allow some light/clarification on how sexual desire modulates and is modulated (or not) by sexual expressions - how sex drive relates to gender, sexual orientation, and psychological well-being; as well as an open horizon to look at the outside that surrounds them - how sociocultural context intertwines with sexual expressions and influence sexual desire and its various forms (i.e., contents of sexual fantasies). Sexual fantasies, despite appearing to be just a sexual product, are a construct and a reflection of who we are, individually and socially, and where we are spatially and temporally (culturally). Their study remains important nowadays because it allows us to access the constant construction of sexuality - to understand the erotic imaginary as complex (the product of multi-variables),

interrelated with diverse dominants (sexually and non-sexually), and its plural path to sexual arousal. This construction of sexuality highlights its social value. Understanding its multiplicity - countering the evolutionary, binary, and static views of sexual desire - paves the way to combat any stigma and form of oppression to how sexual arousal should be/ is experienced.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest Jorge Oliveira declares that he has no conflict of interest; Félix Neto declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the FPCE-UP (protocol number: 2019/12–06).

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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