



Is Sex Education Enough to Change Sexual Scripts, Promote Agency and Sexual Satisfaction? A Comparative Study Between Brazilian and Portuguese Women

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Abstract

Traditional sexual scripts (TSS) are associated with gender inequality for exposing women to vulnerabilities. Higher adherence to TSS has also been associated with deficits in sexual agency, contributing for decrease women's sexual health and problems with sexual satisfaction. The sexual agency is achieved through sex education, and comparing Portugal and Brazil that treat this issue in different ways may contribute to understand the role of sex education policies. This study verified and compared the association between TSSs, sexual agency and sexual satisfaction in Portuguese and Brazilian women and analyzed the predictive power of the variables on female sexual satisfaction. A cross-sectional online survey with 322 women university students, 161 Brazilian and 161 Portuguese, aged between 18 and 29, was made using measures to verify sexual scripts, sexual agency and sexual satisfaction, and data were analyzed using statistical analyses. Results indicate a significant moderate positive association between sexual satisfaction and initiation, and communion in both groups. Initiation, refusal, communion, instrumentality, and permissiveness were predictors of sexual satisfaction in Portuguese, and initiation, communion were predictors of sexual satisfaction in the Brazilian group. Despite higher rates of sex education and practices to prevent STIs and early pregnancy in the Portuguese group, there was no significant difference in adherence to sexual scripts in the groups. Compulsory sex education in Portugal contributes to increasing sexual agency in sexual practices, but programs focused on STI prevention and early pregnancy are not enough to change TSS, promote an integral agency, and sexual satisfaction.

Keywords Sexual agency · Sexual satisfaction · Sexual scripts · Sex education · Women's sexual health

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Introduction

Traditional sexual scripts (TSS) are social norms that guide sexual behavior by reflecting assumptions about how women and men should interact, specifically in romantic and sexual relationships (Ward et al., 2022). Traditional sexual scripts can be identified through the traditional double standard, which is defined as a difference in judgment, attitudes, and behavioral norms towards sexual practices between men and women (Reiss, 1964). These differences are expressed by less permissiveness for women's sexual behaviors and attitudes and greater permissiveness for men, for multiple sexual partnerships, or relationships without commitment (Reiss, 1964).

Significant social changes began to occur in gender relations, mainly from the 1960s onwards, increasing the participation of women in the workforce, and in the academic area, in the formation of undergraduate and postgraduate courses (Alon & Gelbgiser, 2011; Cortes et al., 2018). However, although the development of women's competencies has contributed to an increase in the perception of gender equality, studies show that this has not been reflected in an improvement in their capacity for agency (Alon & Gelbgiser, 2011; Cortes et al., 2018; Eagly et al., 2020). Furthermore, data show that the attitude of communion, associated with the feminine stereotype of caring for and prioritizing the well-being of others, prevails these days (Eagly et al., 2020). These data can thus reinforce the traditional sexual scripts of female submission versus male domination and power, associated with gender inequality, and can be associated with suffering and harm, especially for women (Klein et al., 2019; McCormick, 2010; Seabrook et al., 2017; Simon & Gagnon, 2003; Wiederman, 2005). Recent research has shown that women who transgress TSS tend to be socially marginalized through negative social judgments (Heise et al., 2019; Klein et al., 2019; Townsend et al., 2020), despite advances in women's sexual rights and social changes in gender relations in recent decades. Additionally, higher adherence to TSSs has also been associated with deficits in sexual agency (Cense, 2019; Chmielewski et al., 2020; Rossetto & Tollison, 2017; Seabrook et al., 2017).

Agency in sexual behavior is assessed by initiating or refusing sexual relations, perceiving the worthiness of feeling sexual pleasure and satisfaction, communicating desires and feelings, negotiating safe sex practices to avoid STIs and unwanted pregnancies, respecting one's own and others' sexual rights, among other behaviors (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Cense, 2019; Seabrook et al., 2017). Sexual agency, in addition to individual assertiveness in sexual behaviors, represents an adaptive and self-protective function for women (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Cense, 2019; McClelland, 2010). These result from individual psychological resources in interaction with the social, cultural and economic environment in which women develop. In this sense, behaviors that are not generally considered agents, such as remaining in relationships that pose some risk to women, may come to satisfy women's immediate needs for security and stability, and be considered agents (Bay-Cheng, 2019; McClelland, 2010). Furthermore, according to Cense (2019), some act to maintain the normative expectations of their cultures, partnerships,

parents, colleagues or communities, as a way of adapting to their social and cultural environment. So, to build effective policies for the development of sexual agency, it is necessary, in addition to the development of individual skills, to think about culture, the social and economic environment and the vulnerabilities to which women are exposed (Bay-Cheng, 2019).

Sexual agency competences have been associated with female sexual satisfaction (McCormick, 2010; Rausch & Rettenberger, 2021). Sexual satisfaction is a broad and multivariate concept that refers to the response that arises from the subjective evaluation associated with the sexual relationship (McClelland, 2010; Pechorro et al., 2014; Rausch & Rettenberger, 2021), and is considered a sexual right that includes physical and psychological dimensions, as well as an indicator of the general health and well-being of individuals (World Association for Sexual Health, 2014; World Health Organization, 2015). The notion of satisfaction can change according to social and cultural realities. For women in social and economic vulnerability, satisfaction can be associated with protection and integrity, in addition to the satisfaction of immediate needs (Bay-Cheng, 2019; McClelland, 2010). The female sexual satisfaction tends to be associated with committed relationships, safety, psychological and affective involvement (Meston & Trappnell, 2005; Rausch & Rettenberger, 2021). Although orgasm is not the only indicator of sexual satisfaction, many women do not expect to achieve it regularly in sexual activity, nor do they perceive the right to pleasure and individual sexual satisfaction (Curtin et al., 2011; McClelland, 2010; Morokoff et al., 1997; Rausch & Rettenberger, 2021). Women tend to report high rates of sexual satisfaction, despite the low frequency of orgasm. TSS validate the notion that women have low sexual arousal and agency, and that they remain passive and available to serve the desires of their partner (Klein et al., 2019; Seabrook et al., 2017; Ward et al., 2022). What a woman wants can be of little importance if she is with someone who feels encouraged by his social or economic position to override her desire (Bay-Cheng, 2019). In addition, due to the threat of a negative sexual reputation, women tend to restrict communication and expression related to sexuality, both in practices and in the expression of desires and feelings (Farvid et al., 2017). Some studies and instruments that assess female sexual desire and satisfaction may reinforce this pattern, as they emphasize concern with intimacy and partner satisfaction, demonstrating deficits in the individualized perception at female sexual desire and satisfaction (Meston & Trappnell, 2005). This interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors reinforces gender inequality, as it allows men greater sexual agency and rights, and can hinder women's ability to recognize or prioritize their desires and rights, and achieve sexual satisfaction (Klein et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2022; Woerner & Abbey, 2016).

The development of sexual agency must involve sexual education programs that question and make TSS more flexible, to reduce inequalities and promote empowerment, sexual health and citizenship for all (Alldred & Fox, 2019; Cense, 2019; Chmielewski et al., 2020; Heise et al., 2019; Najmabadi & Sharifi, 2019; Soster et al., 2022; Tolman et al., 2015). The comparison between Portugal and Brazil, countries with different social, economic, and educational realities, can contribute to understanding the deficits in issues related to TSS, women's sexual agency and female sexual satisfaction (Araujo et al., 2019). In Portugal, the most significant economic stability and

low levels of poverty have achieved good levels of social protection for its population, which contrasts with social and economic inequality and the high rates of violence that have been aggravated by the political and pandemic scenarios in Brazil (Cerqueira & Bueno, 2023; Schaefer et al., 2018; United Nations Development Program, 2022). In the education field Portugal is a country where sex education has been compulsory since 2009, whereas in Brazil, sex education is not compulsory (Araujo et al., 2019; BRAZIL, 2007; PORTUGAL, 2009). In Brazil, there is a 2007 bill (42-A) in which enrollment in sex education classes is optional in public schools and, to attend them, children and adolescents depend on their parents' authorization (BRAZIL, 2007). In the last 4 years, the government discontinued these initiatives, which have been resumed since the second semester of 2023 with primary health care teams and public schools (BRAZIL, 2023). In Portugal, Law No. 60/2009 establishes the implementation of sex education in primary and secondary schools, both public and private, throughout the country (PORTUGAL, 2009). In both countries there are challenges regarding the effective implementation of sex education and the training of teachers and professionals in the field (Araujo et al., 2019; Schaefer et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is necessary to expand the audience to which sex education programs are aimed and to diversify the topics covered (Alldred & Fox, 2019; Araujo et al., 2019). Even in contexts where sex education is provided, topics such as sexual rights, consent, sexual satisfaction and pleasure continue to be poorly addressed, especially in women's sex education, which can lead to more significant damage, especially for them (Najmabadi & Sharifi, 2019; Soster et al., 2022).

There is a great social relevance in studying women, as it is necessary to identify the deficits related to female sexual satisfaction and agency (Chmielewski et al., 2020; McClelland, 2010). Studying women is crucial for understanding the phenomenon of sexual satisfaction, as it is women who suffer disproportionately more from sexual dysfunction than men (Heise, 2019; Townsend, 2020). The in-depth study of the physical and psychological mechanisms related to female pleasure and satisfaction is incipient (Lentz & Zaikman, 2021). Understanding the variables associated with difficulties contributes to the development of sex education and professional training programs in line with policies that protect women from the vulnerabilities to which they are exposed in their cultural environment (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Najmabadi & Sharifi, 2019). These initiatives can expand space for the promotion of education, equity, sexual rights, sexual and psychological health, and violence prevention, which today are shown to be the major losses associated with adherence to TSS (Alldred & Fox, 2019; Rossetto & Tollison, 2017; Ward et al., 2022). This study aimed to verify the association between TSS, sexual agency and sexual satisfaction in Portuguese and Brazilian women, as well as to analyze the predictive power of the variables on female sexual satisfaction.

Methods

Design

This quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational, and comparative study aims to verify the association between traditional sexual scripts, sexual behaviours, sexual

agency, and sexual satisfaction in Portuguese and Brazilian women, thus allowing the two samples to be characterized and cultural differences to be assessed.

Participants

The sample included 1095 university students who responded to the online survey (193 were Brazilian, and 902 were Portuguese). The study was publicized on social media and at universities after authorization. The same procedures were adopted for recruiting participants in both countries. However, the greater number of Portuguese participants was due to the institutional referral of the dissemination and the collection period coinciding with the academic vacation period in Brazil. We terminated the data collection after the pre-established period of 4 months. The sample inclusion criteria were being a woman, being a university student and being between 18 and 29 years old, corresponding to the emerging adulthood. The first analysis revealed statistically significant differences between the descriptive characteristics of the samples, which led to the need to use the sample matching technique to reduce bias, which is an efficient way to correct differences in the distribution of predictors between groups. Matching is a direct approach in which individuals are selected and grouped so that each individual in one group has a similar counterpart in the other group based on one or more key variables. The pairing of the larger group was based on the critical characteristics of the participants in the smaller group. The main variables used to pair the groups were the participants' age range and relationship status. This resulted in a total sample of 322 participants, 161 Brazilians and 161 Portuguese, aged between 18 and 29.

The descriptive analyses showed that most participants in both groups were cisgender (BR 95.7%;/PT 95% df 2, $p = 0.606 \times 2 = 1.003^a$), lived with family members (BR 51.6%;/PT 65.2% df 4, $p = 0.011, \times 2 = 13.061^a$), did not have a defined religion (BR 35.4%;/PT 50.9% df 9, $p < 0.01, \times 2 = 65.621^a$), have Catholic parents (BR 41.9%;/PT 87.6% df 7, $p < 0.001, \times 2 = 85.932^a$), are currently dating (BR 44.7%;/PT 50.9% df 3, $p = 0.154, \times 2 = 5.256^a$), and has already had some kind of professional experience (BR 82.6%;/PT 74.5% df 1, $p = 0.77, \times 2 = 3.117^a$). Most Brazilian women share financial responsibilities with their families (BR 39.8% PT 28% df 6, $p < 0.001, \times 2 = 29.074^a$), while most Portuguese women have their financial needs taken care of by their families (BR 35.4% PT 47.2%, df 6, $p < 0.001, \times 2 = 29.074^a$). Regarding sex education received throughout their lives, more Portuguese participants than Brazilians (BR 87% PT 95.7% df 5, $p < 0.001, \times 2 = 71.599^a$), demonstrated that they had received some kind of sex education. School (BR 32.3% PT 75.8% df 5, $p < 0.001, \times 2 = 71.599^a$) was indicated as the main source of sex education, to the detriment of family, friends, and other institutions. Portuguese participants consistently used condoms more than Brazilians (BR 32.9% PT 52.2% df 1, $p < 0.001, \times 2 = 12.209^a$). Brazilian women showed greater frequency of gynecological consultations (BR 86.3% PT 55.3% df 4, $p < 0.001, \times 2 = 48.460^a$) and preventive gynecological exams (BR 77% PT 44.1% df 4, $p < 0.001, \times 2 = 51.704^a$). Most participants in both groups masturbated (BR 73.3% PT 75.2% df 2, $p = 0.919, \times 2 = 0.168^a$), and had only had sexual experience with men (BR 60.9% PT 71.3%, df 3, $p = 0.004, \times 2 = 13.291^a$). The groups had similar characteristics

in relation to having orgasms, with the Portuguese having them more frequently during sexual intercourse (BR 39.8% PT 44.7% $df\ 5, p=0.948, \times 2=1.172^a$).

Measures

The measures chosen to explore the variables and meet the objectives of this study, namely traditional sexual scripts, sexual agency, sexual satisfaction, and women's sexual behaviors, were as follows:

Sociodemographic Data Guide

This instrument was constructed by the authors to explore the sexual history, sexual behaviors, sexual education history, and sexual health of university students. Data was collected on schooling, age, nationality, one's own religion as well as their parents' relationship status, professional data, clinical data, self-care behavior and sexual and gynecological health habits, as well as sexual behaviors.

Sexual Double Standard Scale (SDSS)

The Sexual Double Standard Scale (SDSS) was developed by Muehlenhard and Quackenbush in 1996 to measure the adherence of respondents to the traditional sexual script (Muehlenhard & Quackenbush, 1998). This instrument makes it possible to assess traditional sexual scripts by measuring the double standard in university students. The SDSS consists of 26 items, using a 5-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Six individual items compare the sexual behavior of women and men in the same item (for example, "A man should be more sexually experienced than his wife" or "A woman having casual sex is just as acceptable to me as a man having casual sex"). Twenty items occur in pairs, with parallel items about the sexual behavior of women and men (for example, "A girl who has sex on the first date is 'easy'" and "A guy who has sex on the first date is 'easy'"). Based on the 26 variables of the scale, Muehlenhard and Quackenbush (1998) calculated a global index of the sexual double standard, adopting the following criteria: the six comparison items (after inverting the negative items) are added to the differences between the ten pairs of equivalent items between men and women. The total score of the scale can reflect: the acceptance of greater sexual freedom for men than for women, i.e. the traditional double standard (maximum score of 48); identical standards for men and women, whether restrictive or permissive (score 0); or the acceptance of greater sexual freedom for women than for men (score-30). As for internal consistency, calculated based on the 26 items in the scale, the Cronbach's alpha index found was 0.656.

Sexual Attitudes Scale (SAS)

The Sexual Attitudes Scale was developed by Hendrick and Hendrick (1987) and validated for Portuguese by Alferes (1999). This scale is made up of 43 items that assess sexual agency, through four sub-scales, related to the following attitudes:

sexual permissiveness (items 1–21): reflects attitudes towards casual sex, sexual experiences without commitment, and the diversity and simultaneity of sexual partners; *sexual practices* (items 22–28): this dimension reflects attitudes towards sexual health, assertive sexual behaviours, such as concern about birth control, gauging the importance of sex education, and normalizing the practice of masturbation; *communion* (items 29–37): reflects attitudes related to the perception of sex as an intimate physical and psychological experience, sharing, involvement and idealism; and *instrumentality* (items 38–43): this dimension reflects attitudes towards sex aimed at seeking pleasure. The EAS uses a 5-point scale for responses ranging from totally disagree (1) to totally agree (5). The result of the sub-scales is verified by adding up the answers for each sub-scale. The scores on the subscales can range from: sexual permissiveness (21–105); sexual practices (7–35); communion (9–45) and instrumentality (6–30). As for internal consistency, calculated based on the 43 items in the scale, the Cronbach's alpha index found was 0.779, which is considered satisfactory.

New Sexual Satisfaction Scale/Short Version (NESS)

The New Sexual Satisfaction Scale (NESS), originally called The New Sexual Satisfaction Scale (NSSS) developed by Štulhofer et al. (2010), aims to measure the sexual satisfaction of university students. This scale was translated into Portuguese and validated by Pechorro et al. (2014). This scale consists of 20 items with a two-dimensional factor structure and can be used with both men and women. The scale is made up of two subscales: the *self-centered* dimension (items 1–10) and the *partner-centered and sexual activity dimension* (items 11–20). The NESS uses a 5-point scale for responses ranging from not at all satisfied (1) to totally satisfied (5). The scores for each subscale can be obtained by adding up the scores for the items in the dimension analyzed. It is also possible to obtain a total score for the scale by adding up all the items. High levels of sexual satisfaction correspond to high scores on the scale. In terms of reliability and validity, the NESS showed good psychometric properties with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93.

Sexual Assertiveness Scale (SAS)

The Sexual Assertiveness Scale was originally developed and validated by Patricia Morokoff and collaborators in 1997. This is a self-reported measure of individual behaviors associated with the onset of sex, related to sexual agency, consent and violence prevention, based on the Sexual Experience Scale (Brady & Levitt, 1965). The aspects of sexual assertiveness in women assessed by the scale include communication about sex with an intimate partner and condom use. The scale has 18 items which are separated into three sub-scales: *initiation* (items 1–6), *refusal* (items 7–12) and *pregnancy and STI prevention* (items 13–18). The SAS uses a 5-point scale for responses ranging from never (1) to always (5). The subscale scores can be obtained by adding up the individual items of each subscale, with the need to previously invert the values of items 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14 and 16. In its original version, the scale obtained good reliability with a value of 0.82. The cross-cultural adaptation of the scale for the Brazilian population was carried out by Pereira and Souza (2021).

The SAS for Women was translated, its content validity assessed, tested in a pilot group, the final version was applied to 935 women using online forms and exploratory factor analysis was carried out. The results showed that the original three-factor model did not fit perfectly, but presented satisfactory results, explaining 46% of the variance, with adequate factor loadings, total Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 and alpha for each factor ranging from 0.69 to 0.81. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.788 for the internal consistency of the scale, calculated based on its 18 items.

Procedure

The Brazilian and Portuguese students were invited via social media and institutional emails of their respective universities to take part in this study. They were sent a link to an online platform containing a questionnaire with the study instruments. It took them around 40 min to complete the questionnaire. Participation in the study only took place after they had accepted the informed consent form, which informed them of all the stages of the study they were taking part in, as well as the time taken, risks and data return.

This study was designed in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and received a favorable opinion from the Ethics Committee of the University of Porto (Ref.^a 2021/08-04b). Data collection complied with data protection law, and the data obtained was stored in a secure location, with participants' identities kept confidential and databases passwords protected. The university women were invited to take part in the study and did so voluntarily. They were informed that they could withdraw at any time. They were given clear and explicit instructions in the informed consent form about their participation in the study, and if they had any questions, the coordinating researchers would be contacted if they needed any clarification. The forms were written in a way that was compatible with participants, with the language and expressions of each country (Portugal and Brazil), and pilot studies were carried out beforehand with the research scripts and surveys, before being applied to the participants.

Statistical Analysis

When analyzing the distribution of the data, it was observed that it did not follow a normal distribution. In this situation, it was decided to use non-parametric measures to analyze the data. Frequency measures were used for categorical variables and descriptive statistics for numerical variables. Comparisons between categorical variables were made using the chi-square test. The means of the variables were compared using the Mann–Whitney test. Correlations between numerical variables were calculated using Spearman's correlation coefficient. To assess the relationship between the independent variables and the outcome variable sexual satisfaction, multivariate linear regression analysis was used, with a stepwise criterion for selecting the variables. This model included the variables: sexual double standard (relating to sexual scripts), the dimensions of the sexual attitudes scale (sexual permissiveness, sexual practices, communion, instrumentality), and the dimensions of the sexual assertiveness scale (initiation,

refusal and pregnancy, STI prevention). For the statistical tests, a significance level of 5% was adopted, i.e. $p < 0.05$.

Results

When comparing the means of Brazilian and Portuguese women using the Mann–Whitney test, as described in Table 1, there were statistically significant differences between Brazilian and Portuguese women in the dimensions of: *instrumentality*, in which the Brazilian women had a higher mean (BR 28.725; PT 23.278; $U = 10.237$, $p = 0.01$); *refusal*, in which the Portuguese women had a higher mean (BR 22.720; PT 29.283; $U = 9.679$, $p < 0.01$) and *prevention of pregnancy and STIs*, in which the Portuguese women had a higher mean (BR 22736; PT 29267; $U = 9.695$; $p < 0.01$).

We can see that there was a difference in the comparison between the groups in terms of the correlations between the dimensions of sexual satisfaction and sexual agency, as shown in Table 2. Regarding self-centered satisfaction, in the Portuguese group there was a correlation with *initiation*, *permissiveness* and *communion*, while in the Brazilian group this dimension was correlated with *initiation*, *refusal*, *sexual practices* and *communion*. Regarding *satisfaction centered on partnership and sexual activity*, in the Portuguese group there was a correlation with *initiation*, *refusal*, *sexual practices* and *communion*, while in the Brazilian group this dimension was correlated with *initiation*, *refusal* and *communion*. *Total sexual satisfaction* in the Portuguese group was correlated with *initiation*, *refusal*, *sexual practices*, and *communion*, while in the Brazilian group this dimension was correlated with *initiation*, *sexual practices*, and *communion*. In all the dimensions of sexual satisfaction, the *initiation* dimension, relating to sexual agency, and the *communion* dimension, relating to sexual attitudes, were present in both groups.

The multivariate linear regression analysis (Stepwise method) as described in Table 3, showed that in the group of Portuguese university students, the dimensions *initiation* and *refusal* in sexual assertiveness, and the dimensions *communion*, *instrumentality* and *permissiveness* of sexual attitudes were the predictors of sexual satisfaction in the group of Portuguese university students. This procedure resulted in an explained variance coefficient (R^2) of 0.347, which means that the independent variables selected explained 34.7% of sexual satisfaction in the group of Portuguese university students. In the group of Brazilian university students, the *initiation* dimension of sexual assertiveness and the *communion* dimension of sexual attitudes were the predictors of sexual satisfaction in the group of Brazilian university students. The procedure provided a coefficient of explained variance (R^2) of 0.305, which means that the independent variables selected explained 30.5% of sexual satisfaction in the group of Brazilian university students.

Table 1 Comparison of variable means between Brazilian and Portuguese women

Dimension	BR N= 161				PT N= 161				Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	p
	m	Min	Max	Sd	m	Min	Max	Sd				
Double standard	8.34	-5	30	5.01	8.22	-4	17	3.73	12,674.5	25,715.5	-0.344	0.73
Permissiveness	62.47	32	87	9.95	62.36	37	82	8.28	12,622.5	25,663.5	-0.405	0.69
Sexual practices	32.81	14	35	3.43	32.85	23	35	2.62	12,392.5	25,433.5	-0.717	0.47
Communion	34.86	14	45	5.96	35.11	19	45	5.74	12,720	25,761	-0.288	0.77
Instrumentality	17.71	7	30	4.43	16.15	7	30	4.2	10,237	23,278	-3.27	0.001
Self-centered satisfaction	36.78	15	50	7.49	36.65	10	50	8.3	12,749.5	25,790.5	-0.253	0.8
Partner-centered and sexual activity satisfaction	38.1	21	50	7.31	38.83	12	50	7.38	12,119.5	25,160.5	-1.008	0.31
Total satisfaction	74.88	39	100	13.36	75.49	22	100	14.51	12,447.5	25,488.5	-0.614	0.54
Initiation	21.74	13	30	4.19	22.13	6	30	4.45	11,968	25,009	-1.191	0.23
Refusal	24.99	11	30	4.73	26.84	11	30	4.29	25,009	22,720	-4.002	0.00
Pregnancy and STI prevention	22.34	6	30	6.18	25.03	11	30	4.96	9695	22,736	-3.944	0.00

* $p < 0.05$

Table 2 Correlation of variables in Brazilian and Portuguese groups

Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Initiation		.276**	0.06	0.13	.165*	0.09	-0.05	.499**	.363**	.458**	-0.04
2. Refusal	.361**		.204**	-0.12	0.10	-0.05	-0.04	0.14	.254**	.205**	0.01
3. Pregnancy and STI prevention	.159*	.351**		-0.09	0.03	-0.15	-0.05	-0.01	-0.05	-0.03	0.03
4. Permissiveness	-0.05	0.09	0.08		0.13	0.02	.185*	.197*	0.12	.160*	-.177*
5. Sexual Practices	-0.02	0.11	0.14	0.15		0.12	-0.04	0.14	.215**	.174*	-0.15
6. Communion	0.09	0.04	-0.03	-0.07	.178*		.235**	.309**	.272**	.314**	0.13
7. Instrumentality	-0.01	-0.09	0.04	0.12	0.08	.178*		-0.15	-0.07	-0.12	.189*
8. Self-centered satisfaction	.446**	.248**	0.10	-0.04	.210**	.274**	0.14		.724**	.926**	0.00
9. Partner-centered and sexual activity satisfaction	.375**	.173*	0.08	-0.11	0.15	.311**	.166*	.658**		.919**	-0.02
10. Total Satisfaction	.454**	.240**	0.10	-0.09	.195*	.302**	.173*	.910**	.902**		0.00
11. Double Standard	-0.08	-0.04	0.02	-.170*	-0.13	-.192*	0.06	-0.13	-0.10	-0.12	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. ○ Brazilian group, ● Portuguese group

Table 3 Multivariate linear regression of predictors of sexual satisfaction in the groups

	Model	B	SE	β	t	p
Brazilian group	Initiation	1.413	0.213	0.442	6.625	0.00**
	Communion	0.640	0.149	0.286	4.284	0.00**
Portuguese group	Initiation	1.111	0.232	0.341	4.794	0.00**
	Communion	0.761	0.171	0.301	4.449	0.00**
	Instrumentality	-0.671	0.237	-0.195	-2.835	0.005*
	Permissiveness	0.307	0.120	0.175	2.551	0.012*
	Refusal	0.531	0.232	0.157	2.287	0.024*

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

This study aimed to verify the association and cultural differences between TSS, sexual agency and sexual satisfaction in Portuguese and Brazilian women, as well as analyzing the predictive power of the variables on female sexual satisfaction. When we compared the groups, we realized that there were differences in the variables

associated with sexual satisfaction in each group. We noticed that Brazilian women had a higher mean score for the instrumentality variable, while Portuguese women had a higher mean score for refusal and prevention of pregnancy and STIs. These data seem to reflect the implications for sexual conduct and behavior, based on the sexual education programs by each population (Allred & Fox, 2019; Araujo et al., 2019). In the Portuguese population, there were better rates in relation to the ability to express and refuse desires, better rates in relation to the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and the prevention of STIs, as well as greater consistent condom use, which may reflect the greater access to sex education by the Portuguese participants (Araujo et al., 2019). However, as the literature has shown in recent studies, the topics currently covered in sex education have not been sufficient to promote healthy sexuality in an integral way, and to change patterns that can lead to harm, especially for women (Allred & Fox, 2019; Araujo et al., 2019; Soster et al., 2022). The focus of sex education programs on the prevention of STIs and early pregnancy leaves a large deficit in topics such as sexual rights, satisfaction, pleasure, gender equality, consent and violence, which may not be enough to develop agency and make traditional sexual scripts more flexible, thus damaging female sexual satisfaction (Lentz & Zaikman, 2021; Najmabadi & Sharifi, 2019; Rossetto & Tollison, 2017; Soster et al., 2022). Although Portuguese women receive more sex education through compulsory sex education program, which has an impact on greater prevention of unwanted pregnancy and STIs, this does not result in statistically significant differences in sexual satisfaction or adherence to sexual scripts, as seen in this study (Araujo et al., 2019; Najmabadi & Sharifi, 2019).

The association between the communion dimension and sexual satisfaction in both groups is in line with the notion that satisfaction may be associated with the expectation of protection and security that a committed relationship can theoretically provide (Bay-Cheng, 2019; McClelland, 2010; Rausch & Rettenberger, 2021). Despite changes in the role of women in society, especially in the last 60 years, the feminine stereotype of caring for and prioritizing the well-being of others prevails until these days (Eagly et al., 2020). This subjugation to the power, caring for and desire of others to the detriment of their own, which goes against their agential role, can expose women to a series of social vulnerabilities and insecurities. Therefore, sex begins to play the role of maintaining emotional involvement with the partner as a way of pleasing and obtaining emotional intimacy and security (McClelland, 2010; Meston & Trapnell, 2005; Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Wiederman, 2005). However, this represents a risk for women who may fail to respect their sexual rights, fail to prioritize their satisfaction or even expose themselves to situations of violence (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Rossetto & Tollison, 2017). The expectation of security in the partnership can endorse men's power over them, which gives them control over the woman's body and desire (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Klein et al., 2019). This notion is also aligned with the traditional female script of passivity, which may be placing sexual agency and satisfaction in favor of preserving one's integrity rather than seeking satisfaction for one's desires (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Cense, 2019; Ward et al., 2022). The focus on satisfaction linked to formal relationships can prevent women from exploring their sexuality individually, failing to perceive individual pleasure or masturbation as a possibility for sexual satisfaction, as they still believe that they must seek

a formal relationship to have sex (Lentz & Zaikman, 2021; McCool-Myers et al., 2018).

It is noteworthy that all the dimensions of sexual satisfaction showed a moderate positive association with the initiation dimension, related to the sexual agency of initiating sexual relations and communicating desires to the partner, as well as proving to be a predictor dimension for sexual satisfaction in both groups. This is highly relevant data, as it contradicts the expectations of the TSS, which advocate that the female gender tends to behave passively in relation to the partner's desire (Simon & Gagnon, 2003; Wiederman, 2005). According to TSS, the male gender tends to take the initiative and give direction in the sexual course, and it is up to the female gender to interact according to this direction. The female role has little agency and is restricted to creating a climate and showing herself to be attractive and attracted to the partnership (Wiederman, 2005). Women with greater adherence to TSS fear that sexual agency will bring them a negative social reputation, so they restrict initiative-taking, communication and expression related to sexuality, both in practices and in expressing desires and feelings (Farvid et al., 2017). Waiting for the partner's desire and initiative tends to reinforce gender inequality, diminish women's sexual agency and sexual rights, and hinder their ability to achieve sexual satisfaction (Bay-Cheng, 2015; Curtin et al., 2011; Woerner & Abbey, 2016). The association between initiative and sexual satisfaction demonstrates the need to counteract TSS, encouraging women to recognize and communicate their desires, and validate the right to pleasure and sexual satisfaction (Cense, 2019; Lentz & Zaikman, 2021; World Association for Sexual Health, 2014). We realize that, despite the differences between the groups, it is necessary to highlight the role of initiative in sexual satisfaction. Initiation is a behavior that reflects psychological issues related to the perception of sex for oneself, one's self-esteem, one's self-worth. As sex becomes exclusively about satisfying the other person's desire, as TSS predicts, sexuality can become uninteresting, empty, not very active, devoid of empowerment, which may explain the female TSS that links female sexuality to lack of interest (Seabrook et al., 2017; Wiederman, 2005). Taking initiative, recognizing, and connecting with one's own desires, as well as communicating them, can bring empowerment, motivation, and agency to achieve satisfaction. In addition, through the development of skills for conscious, satisfying, healthy and respectful choices, sexuality becomes an exercise in citizenship (Najmabadi & Sharifi, 2019; Soster et al., 2022).

Sociocultural differences are also reflected in indices relating to adherence to sexual scripts. Despite similar averages, which reveal that participants from both groups endorse greater sexual freedom for men than for women, in the Brazilian population there was a greater variation between the minimum and maximum scores in the double standards than in the Portuguese population (Simon & Gagnon, 2003; Ward et al., 2022). These data may reflect social and economic differences between the two populations. Portugal has better economic stability, despite a per capita income in the lower range of rich countries, it has reduced poverty levels and achieved good levels of social protection for the population (Araujo et al., 2019; Schaefer et al., 2018). In Brazil, on the other hand, there are several challenges in income distribution, social inequalities and violence due to the lack of public policies to address the vulnerabilities that arise from these problems (Schaefer et al., 2018). There is not

possibility to expect sexual agency and assertiveness in sexual behaviors if there are no changes in social and educational policies to protect women from the threats to which they are exposed, whether or not related to their sexuality (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Cense, 2019). The inclusion of topics such as sexual rights, consent, satisfaction and sexual pleasure that remain little addressed, especially in female sexual education, is necessary to meet women's needs (Najmabadi & Sharifi, 2019; Soster et al., 2022). So, to develop women's sexual agency, it will be necessary to develop social and educational policies that aim to protect women from the vulnerabilities to which they are exposed in their social and cultural environment (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Najmabadi & Sharifi, 2019). For example, we can mention in Brazil the creation of the Maria da Penha law no. 11.340 (BRAZIL, 2006), which protects women from the high levels of violence to which they are exposed. Given the creation of the law, it is possible to develop curricular sex education programs aligned with the protection of the law and the importance of consent and women's sexual rights. This example demonstrates an effective way to develop sexual agency in all its forms (Bay-Cheng, 2019).

The proposal to include limited sexual education subjects in the compulsory school curriculum, such as prevention of STIs and early pregnancy in adolescents, is still a current reality, as is the lack of training for teachers and professionals in the field (Araujo et al., 2019; Schaefer et al., 2018). The creation of sexual education programs that meet the cultural realities of the target population, as well as the training of professionals to work with this audience, will make it possible to make social constructions that prevent women from recognizing their agency and their right to satisfactory sexuality more flexible (Alldred & Fox, 2019; Bay-Cheng, 2019; Cense, 2019; Lentz & Zaikman, 2021; Soster et al., 2022).

Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest that sexual satisfaction in women is associated with initiation and communion, dimensions that have been shown to be predictors of sexual satisfaction for Brazilian and Portuguese women. It was noted that there were differences between the groups that possibly reflect the cultural, educational, and socioeconomic differences between the countries, such as the Portuguese women being more assertive about refusing and preventing unwanted pregnancies and STIs. This is probably because there are compulsory sex education programs in schools in Portugal. However, sex education, which currently tends to focus on sexual and reproductive health, has not been enough to promote sexual agency and make traditional sexual scripts more flexible. Sexual agency plays an adaptive and protective role for women in the face of the vulnerabilities to which they are exposed, so sex education programs that seek to develop these skills must be aligned with the social and cultural realities to which women are inserted.

Guaranteeing protection and integrity may prevent women from endorsing the script of submission and inequality often attributed to them, and from subjugating themselves to risky situations, confusing this with love, protection, or satisfaction. Pleasure and satisfaction are universal sexual rights, as is the right to have one's

integrity preserved. Public policies that ensure sexual rights must contribute to promote the sexual health of the population through the development of agency and allow it to be exercised in all its forms. The development of effective and comprehensive sex education policies can contribute to the protection of women and help to broaden their citizenship. The data from this study clearly show the potential contribution to aligning social and educational policies that meet women's needs and protect them from vulnerabilities. Working on issues such as consent, gender roles, diversity, and sexual rights are measures that can reduce adherence to traditional sexual scripts that prevent women from recognizing their sexual rights.

The in-depth study of the physical and psychological mechanisms related to female pleasure and satisfaction in women is incipient, as are several components involving female sexuality (Lentz & Zaikman, 2021). In this study, we applied measures to investigate sexual agency, sexual satisfaction and sexual double standards, however, there would be a need for in-depth data on family, peers, religious, social and cultural influences, the influence of social media and websites on Brazilian women and Portuguese women who can influence the sexual behavior of these university students. Future research involving in-depth data collection or individual or group interviews is suggested to explore in depth the factors involved in these differences and, mainly, to look for variables that may bring greater risk or threat to sexual agency and predisposition to risks related to each culture.

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Declarations

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Ethical Approval This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of University of Porto.

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

Consent to Publish The authors affirm that human research participants provided informed consent for publication of the data collected in this survey. Resources were used to safeguard identities and not identify the participants.

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