



Portuguese College Students' Perceptions About the Social Sexual Double Standard: Developing a Comprehensive Model for the Social SDS

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Abstract

Research on the sexual double standard (SDS) indicates its maintenance among college students, despite some attenuation and the emergence of alternative standards. Results show some inconsistencies, however, which highlight conceptual and methodological weaknesses that limit conclusions about the existence and expression of the SDS. One response entails distinguishing personal acceptance of the SDS from its social existence; maintenance of the SDS may reside in the latter, as there is some evidence for a decline in personal but not in social SDS. We aimed to analyse Portuguese college students' perceptions about the social SDS and to develop a comprehensive model for it. Four male (n=30) and four female (n=17) focus groups were conducted with data analysis framed by Grounded Theory. The social SDS emerged especially with regard to casual sex and multiple partners, legitimized by the accepted/recognized existence of sexual gender roles and stereotypes. It is maintained through conformity with SDS and gender prescriptions in order to prove/protect femininity, masculinity and sexual reputation. The process reduces sexual autonomy and has drawbacks for sexual health and wellbeing. Our comprehensive model can inform deconstructive strategies to promote egalitarian, liberal, and positive sexual experiences.

Keywords Gender · Sexuality · Sexual double standard · Social sexual double standard · College students

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Introduction

The Sexual Double Standard (SDS) defines an unequal standard for sexual conduct and the evaluation thereof, apportioning more sexual freedom to men, while imposing more negative judgment and more severe penalties for women engaging in the same type of sexual conduct (Reiss 1960). The concept was first used to describe the tendency of American society to reject and sanction the involvement of women, but not of men, in pre-marital sex (Reiss 1960), however, its content changed and broaden over the years (Endendijk et al. 2019). Now it is used to refer to the different degrees of acceptance of a diversity of sexual conducts (e.g., casual, or uncommitted, sex, and multiple sexual partners) and the concurrently different evaluation of men and women (Endendijk et al. 2019; Petersen and Hyde 2011). Actually the SDS is considered to assume different expressions (e.g., social labelling and marginalization, desirability as romantic partner) and to manifest in any given society (Bordini and Sperb 2013; Crawford and Popp 2003; Endendijk et al. 2019), although investigation has been mainly produced in Western countries (e.g., The United States of America, Western Europe) and evidence gathered from samples of young people (e.g., university student). The dynamic and fluid nature of the concept contrasts with the potential social and cultural specificity of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, makes arguable the assumption that the understanding of the SDS would benefit from research studies detailing the characteristics of its manifestation and maintenance, in particular social and cultural (western) contexts or groups. This is the general goal of the present study, which aims specifically to contribute with a comprehensive model of the social SDS, this is of the existence, manifestation, and maintenance of the SDS as a social shared (and not personally endorsed) standard among Portuguese university students. Supporting it are general arguments for studying the SDS and others, more specific, related to the social existence of the SDS in Portugal and other western countries, detailed in next pages.

The SDS, although lacking a conceptual structure of its own (e.g., Fasula Carry and Miller 2014; Zaikman and Marks 2017), is firmly sustained in the social shared belief that men and women are different—that is, gender. Gender is the social construction of difference behind the dichotomous definition of masculinity and femininity (Brickell 2006). It establishes what traits (stereotypes) and behaviors (roles) are appropriate and expected for men and for women in sexuality and other dimensions of human experience (Blakmore et al. 2009; Howard and Hollander 1997; Marecek et al. 2004). Sexual gender roles and stereotypes describe and prescribe what is sexually accepted or prohibited for men and for women (Eagly et al. 2004), which can be summarized in the dichotomies: sexually active men versus passive women; sexual men versus emotional women. Such roles and stereotypes include the belief that men have more sexual desire than women, the belief that men focus on individual and sexual gratification, while women concentrate in relational and emotional gratification, and the belief that men must drive or dominate sexual interaction, whereas women must comply with partners desires and pursuit of sexual interaction, even as they should

control male advances and guard against sexual risks (Chmielewski et al. 2017; Fasula et al. 2014; Rudman and Glick 2008; Sanchez et al. 2012). And, are these social shared assumptions of difference that explain why the SDS teaches men that sexuality is the key to masculinity, while teaching women that sexuality should be minimized and controlled (McCarthy and Bodnar 2005). The SDS reflects and reinforces sexual gender inequality, being there consistent evidence not only of its existence but also of its potential negative impact on sexual and non-sexual dimensions of life.

Research developed over the last decades has evidenced the consistent manifestation of the standard and has additionally pointed to a growing emergence of alternative standards (Bordini and Sperb 2013; Crawford and Popp 2003; Endendijk et al. 2019). More specifically, a single sexual standard (SSS), prescribing equal sexual freedom, judgment, and punishment for men and women, and of a reversed sexual double standard (reversed SDS), prescribing less freedom and more negative/severe judgment/punishment for men than for women, have been shown to alternate with the SDS (Table 1). Despite this alternation, research allowed the authors of a recent systematic review to conclude that the SDS remains in place and that gender differences in personal endorsement of the standard have not been observed (Endendijk et al. 2019).

Although the SDS is more restrictive and punitive for women than for men, deviation from its prescriptions may have negative impact on both men and women. Involvement in casual sex has been considered to be a source of masculine social status (e.g., Jonason and Fisher 2009), but to come with heavy costs for femininity and sexual reputation (Lyons et al. 2011), with vast evidence showing that women who do not conform the norm may be labelled as “easy” or “promiscuous”, rejected as romantic partners and, ultimately, exposed to sexual victimization (Bordini and Sperb 2013; Crawford and Popp 2003; Fasula et al. 2014). In a similar mode, men who do not actively express their sexuality may put their masculinity and sexual reputation at risk (Fasula et al. 2014). However, although endorsement or compliance with the prescriptions of the SDS is a way to preserve socio-sexual image and reputation, such compliance also imposes heavy costs for both sexes, limiting sexual autonomy and, by extension, sexual health and well-being (Bordini and Sperb 2013; Crawford and Popp 2003; Endendijk et al. 2019; Fasula et al. 2014). The SDS has been shown to negatively interfere with female sexual decision-making, increasing risk of unprotected sex (Danube et al. 2016), and with women’s entitlement to sexual pleasure (Armstrong et al. 2012; Emmerink et al. 2016). It also explains women’s silencing of their sexual needs or preferences, compliance with partners’ expectations (Fasula et al. 2014; Impett and Peplau 2003; Jackson and Cram 2003; Petersen and Hyde 2010), or adoption of passive sexual roles, associated to poor satisfaction and sexual problems (Sanchez et al. 2012). Likewise, to preserve masculinity and reputation, men may be pressured to conform to the SDS, being exposed to stress, internal conflict (e.g., decision-making about sexual relationships or partners), or sexual risk taking (e.g., unsafe sex, multiple sexual partners) (Berkowitz 2011; Clarke et al. 2015; Kalish 2013; Soller and Haynie 2017).

The investigation of the SDS in Portugal is still limited, but the results parallel, to some extent, those observed in international research. According to some of

Table 1 State of the Art: Evidence on social SDS and alternative sexual standards

Period	Evidence	Observation
Final decades of 20th century	Experimental research highlighted a weakening of the SDS that, in some cases, was associated to the emergence of a conservative SSS (e.g., Gentry 1998; Sprecher et al. 1997) and, to a lesser degree, of a reversed SDS (e.g., O'Sullivan 1995; Sprecher et al. 1991)	e.g., Negative evaluation and desirability of sexually experienced men and women (SSS), or just of men (reversed SDS)
First decade of 21st century	Experimental (e.g., Jonason and Marks 2009; Sprecher et al. 2013; Young et al. 2010) and qualitative (e.g., Hamilton and Armstrong 2009; Shoveller et al. 2004) research evidenced SDS emergence, punctuated by discourses of resistance	e.g., Negative evaluation of women (unconventional and casual sex, condom provision) and justification of women's sanctioning; silencing/alienation of female sexual desire
Most recent decades of 21st century	Evidence of the SDS continued to be gathered through qualitative (e.g., Mascheroni et al. 2015; Ringrose et al. 2013) and quantitative (e.g., Esterline and Muchlenhard 2017; Jones 2016; Kreager et al. 2016; Marks et al. 2019) research, with some also pointing to the simultaneous presence of a reversed SDS (e.g., Hackathorn and Harvey 2011; Papp et al. 2015), a conservative SSS (e.g., England and Bearak 2014), and a liberal SSS (e.g., Damme and Biltreyest 2013; Fjaer et al. 2015)	e.g., Negative evaluation of sexually experienced women or of women's involvement in sexting or performative making-out. e.g., Negative evaluation of men involved in cyber-infidelity or humiliating talk scenarios (reversed SDS) and of men and women with multiple hookup partners (conservative SSS); positive attitudes towards casual sex (liberal SSS)

the few Portuguese studies, the SDS is recognized and negatively associated to contraception use (Frias 2014; Ramos et al. 2005; Marques et al. 2013). This is, the SDS emerges more as a perceived social shared belief than an internalized personal belief, highlighting a distinction that has been undervalued by the great majority of research studies. As it will be discussed next, the strong focus on the study of the personal endorsement of the SDS may be concurring not only to the existence of dissonant results but, more importantly, to an incomplete understanding of the phenomenon, and the present study hopes to contribute to the minimization of this major limitation.

Research has also showed inconsistent results, like the emergence and non-emergence of the SDS for the same behavior, time period, and population (Bordini and Sperb 2013; Crawford and Popp 2003; Endendijk et al. 2019), suggesting the potential existence of limitations of conceptual and methodological nature in research studies. Inconsistent results may be seen as a reflection of the dynamic and fluid nature of the concept that, summed to the absence of a specific theoretical structure, allowed for great variability in operationalization, measurement, and indicators used to identify the SDS (e.g., Bordini and Sperb 2013; Crawford and Popp 2003; Endendijk et al. 2019; Zaikman and Marks 2017). Likewise, inconsistencies may be reflecting the tendency of most research studies to investigate the personal acceptance of the SDS (personal SDS), without considering individuals' recognition of its social existence (social SDS). In other words, the tendency to consider the SDS a unidimensional, rather than a bi-dimensional concept, and the reduced exploration of the social SDS, may have produced partial results or results containing some degree of bias, an assumption supported in evidence. Although limited, international, but also national, results of research studies considering the social SDS have pointed to its strong expression, compared to that of the personal SDS (e.g., Milhausen and Herold 1999, 2001; Ramos et al. 2005; Marques et al. 2013), to its existence and maintenance for particular sexual conducts, such as casual sex or multiple sexual partners (Marks and Fraley 2006, 2007; Marks 2008), and to its negative impact on sexual experience, like negative labelling and social stigmatization (e.g., Conley et al. 2012; Damme and Biltreyst 2013; Farvid et al. 2016, Fjaer et al. 2015) or misuse of contraception (Frias 2014), for example. The importance of considering the SDS as a bi-dimensional concept and, particularly, of exploring the social SDS, thus, goes beyond the need of controlling for inconsistent results. The social SDS appears to be a social shared belief, whose existence does not depend on the presence of the personal SDS but can, like this, produce deleterious effects on sexual experience, health and wellbeing, and, for that reason, must be further explored. In Portugal, research points to a potential prevalence of the social, over the personal SDS, additionally, and specifically, justifying the choice of the social dimension as the object of the present study.

In summary, the initial conceptual and evidence-based justifications for deepening our knowledge on the SDS, as is our goal, include, on one hand, the absence of a theoretical framework and its strong foundation on gender—the SDS reflects and reinforces sexual gender inequality. On the other hand, justifications include evidence of the SDS manifestation among western young people, of its potential to compromise male and female socio-sexual image and reputation, sexual autonomy,

and health and well-being (Bordini and Sperb 2013; Crawford and Popp 2003; Endendijk et al. 2019), and of the existence of inconsistent results and of conceptual and methodological weaknesses in SDS research. Specific evidence-based arguments include the weak exploration of the social SDS and evidence (although limited) showing the social SDS manifestation, predominance over the personal SDS, and negative impact in sexual experience, health and wellbeing, in Portuguese and other western societies. Together, these arguments guided the specification of our goals—to ascertain if, and how, the social SDS is perceived to be present and to perpetuate among Portuguese university students, and to develop a comprehensive model of the social SDS, detailing the characteristics of its manifestation and maintenance.

To accomplish these goals, we opted for a qualitative design, using men-only and women-only focus groups for data collection and employing the Grounded Theory (GT) perspective for data analysis. This selection of methods is anchored in two justifications. The absence of difference between genders in personal endorsement of the SDS alerted us to the importance of assessing whether this is also the case for the recognition of social SDS. On the other hand, GT is strongly recommended for constructing theory based on data, as we sought to do in the development of our comprehensive model.

We expected the social SDS to be perceived as a social shared belief, alternating with other sexual standards. Manifestation was expected to relate to traditional sexual gender roles and stereotypes, whose acceptance or recognition was explored in addition to the perceptions about social sexual standards. Discourses about the reasons or mechanism for the maintenance of the standard was expected to emerge in a spontaneous manner, a product of deepening the discussion on social SDS.

Materials and Methods

Participants

The participants in the study were 47 White Portuguese university students attending the Universities of Lisbon and Coimbra, who were between 18 and 33 years of age ($M=21.4$ years, $SD=2.9$), of mostly heterosexual (85.7%), and of whom 30 (64%) were men. Of these, 46 (97.9%) indicated being unmarried and 44 were then or had previously been involved in an intimate relationship (93.6%). In terms of academic qualifications, 40 were undergraduate (85.1%) and seven were graduate (14.9%), with participants coming from 13 different degree programs—Psychology (40.4%), Computer Science (23.4%), Law (10.6%), Economics (4.3%), Journalism (4.3%), IT Systems Management (4.3%), Nursing (2.1%), Social Services (2.1%), Geospatial Engineering (2.1%), Mechanical Engineering (2.1%), Business Science (2.1%), and Management (2.1%).

The pilot study of the data collection instrument involved six undergraduate psychology students, of whom two were men (33%).

Recruitment took place in classrooms ($n=22$) and academic informal contexts, where contacts with students were made directly by the researchers ($n=6$) or

mediated by researchers' institutional collaborators ($n=19$). The objectives of the study and the conditions of participation (including being entitled to a raffle ticket for a gift certificate) were presented to the students in person, and those interested in participating filled out a form consenting to future contact for informing about practical issues (e.g., date, place). Before the interview began, a summary of the study was given, informed consent was obtained and confidentiality guaranteed (destruction of the audio recordings after transcription). The study was approved by the ethics committees of the institutions involved.

Procedure

Eight focus groups were formed—four female and four male—consisting of a minimum of two and a maximum of 11 participants, with an average duration of two hours. The groups were moderated by the first author using a semi-structured interview script. The clarity and comprehensibility of the questions, whose construction was informed by the literature on the SDS, were tested in the pilot study.

The first question presented was neutral in character and intended to facilitate communication, after which followed a question that introduced the theme of sexuality. Next followed specific, or “transitional”, questions about the experience of sexuality in the university context, then “key questions” about gender differences and similarities in these areas. Key questions were complemented by requests for clarification or specification (“probes”), requests for additional information about the topics being discussed (“follow-ups”), and by “unscripted questions” seeking to explore details (Krueger 1998). Introductory, transitional, and key-questions were presented in all groups; the first two sought to gather information about student's perceptions on the experience of sexuality in the university context, while key-questions searched for detailed information about student's perceptions on sexual gender roles and stereotypes, and on sexual standards. A high number of probes, follow-ups and unscripted questions were also presented but varied widely, in number and content, through male and female groups.

Participants were never asked to share their personal positions and experiences, although they could do so if they wished.

Material

Our semi-structured interview guide included introductory questions (“What do we talk about when we talk about sexuality?”), transitional questions (“How is sexuality experienced in the university context?”) and key questions (“How do you perceive men and women's experiences of sexuality to be?”; and, if differences were identified, “What characteristics or behaviors do you perceive to be different?”; “What are the rules for sexual conduct and for evaluating the sexual conduct of men and women?”). A reasonable number of probes, follow-ups and unscripted questions were also included (e.g., “So you perceive that there is the idea that women are oriented towards romantic relationships and men towards sexual and physical pleasure. Could you please elaborate?”;

“Is there a difference between how men and women are expected to conduct their sexuality in casual and regular relationships?”; “You believe men are as emotional as women but don’t show it. Can you please explain why this happens?”).

Analysis Procedures

The interviews, conducted in Portuguese, were transcribed, analysed, and codified, in a first moment, by the first author and, in a second moment, by the second author and a master student developing investigation on the SDS, after adequate training. These three collaborators delineated the categories and subcategories and evaluated its clarity and coherence, while second and third authors acted as consultants in the analytical process that ran from the codification to the construction of the theoretical model.

The analysis was conducted based on the principles of Grounded Theory (GT), using software specifically designed for this (ATLAS.ti version 6.0). The data analysis followed the guidelines set forth by Strauss and Corbin (1998), with the appropriate adaptations. We began with open coding, with identification of the units of analysis (interview excerpts) and of the concepts present in them, and by assigning codes to represent meaning found in the data. In this phase the codes were grouped into broad abstract categories, and subcategories, a task that continued in the intermediate coding phase (naming favoured over the axial coding proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) because the axial coding paradigm was not used). Some minor (less abstract) categories were added and relations between categories studied until they appeared to be sufficiently developed and related. In the final stage of analysis, called selective coding, categories were integrated into core categories—and not just a unique core category, as proposed by Strauss and Corbin in 1998—with high analytical power (Charmaz 2006). Analysis was supported in an ongoing process of comparison and refinement of codes, categories, and subcategories—and of the relations between them, described in memos and diagrams—culminating in the development of a comprehensive model of the social SDS.

In a final step, the theoretical model was revised and its validity tested by comparison with the raw data. Because of potential observer bias, a university professor, from an outside academic institution, was asked to code a random ten percent of the excerpts, and Cohen’s kappa was run to determine inter-rater agreement. The codification made by the external collaborator was then compared with that proposed by the researchers, and disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached. The degree of agreement for the 27 analyzed excerpts and the 77 applied codes showed a good inter-rater agreement, $k = .77$ (95% CI .61; .93), $p < .001$.

Results

Responses to introductory and transitional questions, about sexuality in the university context, revealed a perceived preference on the part of male and female college students for casual sexual relationships. When discussing involvement in this type of relationship, and with the multiple partners that it presupposes, participants referred

to a differential social Sexual Double Standard (social SDS) and, to a lesser extent, to an egalitarian social Single Sexual Standard (social SSS). The social existence of the standards was recognized but participants made no reference to the personal endorsement of the personal SDS and SSS. On the other hand, participant's discourses associated the social SDS to the social recognition and personal acceptance of sexual gender roles and stereotypes, and the social SSS to assumed or perceived positions of resistance towards the traditional prescriptions. These themes corresponded to the core categories extracted, Sexual Standards and Sexual Gender Roles and Stereotypes (SGRS), each with its constituent categories, subcategories, and codes. Constituents and relations between them are presented in the next section, ending with the representation of those that explain the manifestation and maintenance of the social SDS or, in other words, of those that integrate the comprehensive model of the social SDS.

Discourses produced by male and female groups didn't evidence relevant differences, in general, but discrepancies observed for particular topics were described in this section and some further discussed in the last section of the article.

Excerpts of young people's discourse were identified as coming from women's (XG) or men's (YG) groups, with the number of the focus group plus the individual participant identified by a second letter and number pair.

Perceptions About Sexual Gender Roles and Stereotypes (SGRS)

Perceptions about the sexual characteristics (stereotypes) and behaviors (roles) of men and women constituted the core category Sexual Gender Roles and Stereotypes (SGRS), composed of two categories and a total of six codes. The category Pure SGRS defined the personal and social acceptance of traditional gender norms and was composed of two pairs of codes, corresponding to stereotypes and sexual gender roles, while the category Contrary, Oppositional Positions towards SGRS defined the personal or social rejection of these norms and integrated two codes (Table 2) corresponding to resistance to stereotypes and sexual gender roles.

In the category Pure SGRSs, stereotypes were observed in explicit references to the idea that men focus on sex and sexual gratification, while women focus on affections and emotional gratification; references to the idea that male satisfaction is concentrated in orgasm, whereas female depends on the association of orgasm with tenderness, affection, communication; and references still to the idea that women prefer steady, and men casual, sexual relationships. References to sexual gender roles were far less prevalent than references to stereotypes, and focused mainly in the idea that men are responsible for guiding and controlling sexual action and pleasure, while women are expected to adopt a complementary or passive position in sexual interactions.

No relevant differences were observed in the discourses of male and female groups, with the exception of references about the different valuation of sex and affection for male and female sexual satisfaction, which were more often observed in male groups.

YG1_Y1: (...) it's something innate in men, to seek sex more than women do. (...) I think it's the nature of men (...) it's instinct!

XG2_E1: (...) the girl seeks affection more, having someone to send a good-night message to... and the boy does not.

YG6_B2: [the man] needs less affection and communication to have that pleasure. (...) the [orgasm of the] woman, sometimes to be fully experienced (...) has to be with communication, with attention (...)

XG5_E3: Normally it's always the boys who have to take the initiative (...) because the girls are girls, they can't do it! There's always that thing of "I'm a girl, if he's interested he has to come to me, I'm not going to him!"

YG6_B2: In general I think that it's very much expected that it's the man who brings all the technique and ability to the relationship. (...) the man is who controls the pleasure.

Discourses of resistance towards stereotypes and sexual gender roles—Contrary, Oppositional Positions towards SGRS—were less expressed than those referring the Pure SGRS. Alternative discourses were observable, for example, in the idea that men and women are more similar than dissimilar, and that women are ceasing sexual passivity and assuming a new, active, positioning, especially regarding taking initiative for sexual encounters.

Like for Pure SGRS, no salient gender differences were found between male and female discourses in this particular category.

XG4_M2: This question of men being more carnal and women being more emotional – I disagree because it's 50/50 for both sides. There are emotional men, there are carnal men, there are carnal women, there are emotional women. What is different here is really the view of society on this subject, which is: women are supposed to be more emotional, and therefore those who are more emotional show it, and men are supposed to be more carnal, so those who are more carnal demonstrate it. And the remaining 50% of each stays hidden because it's not accepted in society.

YG8_Z0: in the old days it was supposed to be the man who pursued. It was the man who paid for the drinks, it was the man who went up to the girl, and nowadays you don't see this as much. (...) there is a balance in that respect.

In summary, sexual gender roles and stereotypes were personally accepted and socially recognized, in male and female groups (Pure SGRS), with stereotypes appearing to be strongly rooted, and sexual gender roles appearing to be weakening. Rejection or perceived rejection of these traditional norms was equally observed in both groups (Contrary, Oppositional Positions towards SGRS), but these discourses of resistance remained less expressed than those reflecting Pure SGRS.

Perceptions About Sexual Standards (SS)

Perceptions about the social sexual standards and their negative effects on sexual and nonsexual experience embody the core category Sexual Standards (SS), composed of two categories, and one subcategory integrating four codes. The category

Social Sexual Double Standard (social SDS) defined the perceived social existence of a differential sexual standard, and the category Social Single Sexual Standard (social SSS) the perceived social existence of an egalitarian sexual standard. The subcategory Consequences of Social SDS defined the costs of deviance from, and compliance with, the social SDS prescriptions on sexual, but also other dimensions of human experience such as personal, social and relational (Table 3).

Compared to a low number of references to Social SSS, more prevalent in male groups, references to a social SDS were substantially more predominant and observed, in similar proportion, in male and female groups. Among a set of behaviors considered socially acceptable for men but not for women (social SDS), references to casual sexual involvement and/or multiple partners were particularly frequent. Some even reported a popular saying (the “key/lock enigma”) to explain social SDS existence (e.g., *XM1: a key that opens any lock is a master key. But a lock that opens for any key is worthless*), showing the strong social and cultural roots of the standard. Others stressed that it is women who more often and more severely judge other women for their sexual conduct, men being considered less critical of both female and male sexual behavior. Still others, suggested that a social SSS is emerging as the result of changes in the way women perceive and experience sexuality, and of a reduction in the importance attributed to the SDS prescriptions by women and men.

XG4_F0: (...) For example, in the nightlife, if we have a (hypothetical) girl who arrives every night and leaves with a different boy... - XA1.: She's (considered) a slut (...) and the boy is [just being] a boy.

XG3_V1: (...) Women themselves point the finger at each other in these types of situations (casual relationships), and this type of behavior is seen as much more normal in relation to men. The strangest thing is that women police themselves more intensely.

YG6_B2: There's still always some gossip, and there's always that little comment (...) but I think they themselves don't feel it anymore... they don't feel so humiliated about doing it... just as the man himself doesn't feel so humiliated for not being a stud.

Concerning the consequences of the standard, a small number of references were coded as General Effects of the social SDS. Male and female participants associated deviation from the prescriptions of the social SDS with a poor socio-sexual image or reputation, and with personal (e.g., self-esteem), and social difficulties (e.g., integration among peers).

XG2_O0: but among the girls, if you know that one has been around a lot and so on... we girls won't have anything to do with her.

XG5_M4: There are also many boys who suffer because they don't really have such an easy way with the girls, and they suffer because of it.

A large number of references were coded as Proof/Protection of Femininity/Masculinity and/or Sexual Reputation. Participants reported on the idea that men and women may comply or enact compliance (i.e. make others believe they do

conform) with the prescriptions of the social SDS for the sake of their socio-sexual image and reputation, abdicating their sexual autonomy and inhibiting, limiting, or silencing sexual experiences. References to the consequences for men were more predominant than references to the female equivalent; consequences for men were discussed by both male and female groups, whereas consequences for women were mainly referred in female groups. Participants highlighted the pressure felt by men to affirm masculinity and sexual reputation through sexual success (e.g., number of conquests, frequency of sexual activity, or quality of sexual performance), with some even referring to the possibility of involvement in unwanted or unsought relationships. Finally, one female and several male groups reinforced this idea, stating that men enact being less emotional than they really are, hiding romantic demonstrations or emotional difficulties in steady relationships, in order to prove and protect socio-sexual image and sexual reputation.

XG5_M4: I think the girls are more reserved because they have an image to live up to, that they aren't so "easy" (...).

YG7_J4: When I realize that (...) my experiences are different from the others', then I shut up because, "okay, I won't be approved of – it won't be accepted here." Whether it's good or not, your experience should be accepted.

YG1_Y5: I think it's that, socially, it's also not looked on very well for the man to be upset [about the end of a relationship], and (...) Maybe, to show that he's macho and doesn't care, he'll go and say (to his friends) "well come on, let's find some girls to hook up with" and so on, but in reality he could be quite hurt.

Lastly, some participants, particularly males, remarked on the lower desirability of sexually experienced women as sexual partners for casual and, especially, steady relationships. Alternative discourses also emerged. A male group rejected the negative consequences for women's Desirability for Relationship (*YX1: If she's been around, it doesn't matter—she enjoys sex, it's normal—everyone does*), pointing to a liberal SSS, while a female group and several male ones, suggested that a reputation as a "player" could make men less desirable, pointing to a conservative SSS.

YG7_J3: Girls really get labeled forever. "Oh, that chick was really easy" and so on... - YA5: Now nobody is interested in having her as a girlfriend, right?

YG1_Y3: there are always those girls who think [the players] are fun, but there are others who, if they want something more serious and if they want to be with someone, don't want a person like that. (...)

Discourses about SS did not differ greatly between male and female groups, however, references to the social SSS, to the enactment of masculine stereotypes and to the consequences of the social SDS in Desirability for Relationships were more prevalent in male groups, whereas references to Proof/Protection of Femininity and Sexual Reputation were prevalent on female groups.

In short, the social SDS was perceived by both male and female groups to be the dominant sexual standard in Portuguese university context, whereas the social

SSS was considered an emergent, alternative one. The social SDS was also considered to negatively interfere with diverse sexual and non-sexual dimensions of human experience and, among the negative consequences of the standard, those related to the pressure felt by women and men to Prove/Protect Femininity, Masculinity and Sexual Reputation were particularly prevalent. Within these, references to consequences faced by men were much more expressed than references to the female equivalent.

The Comprehensive Model of the Social SDS

The analysis of discourses culminated in the integration of our data—now organized under specific, interdependent, conceptual structures—into a comprehensive model of the social SDS (Fig. 1). The model corresponds to the schematic representation of the dynamic relations among codes, categories, and subcategories drawn from the

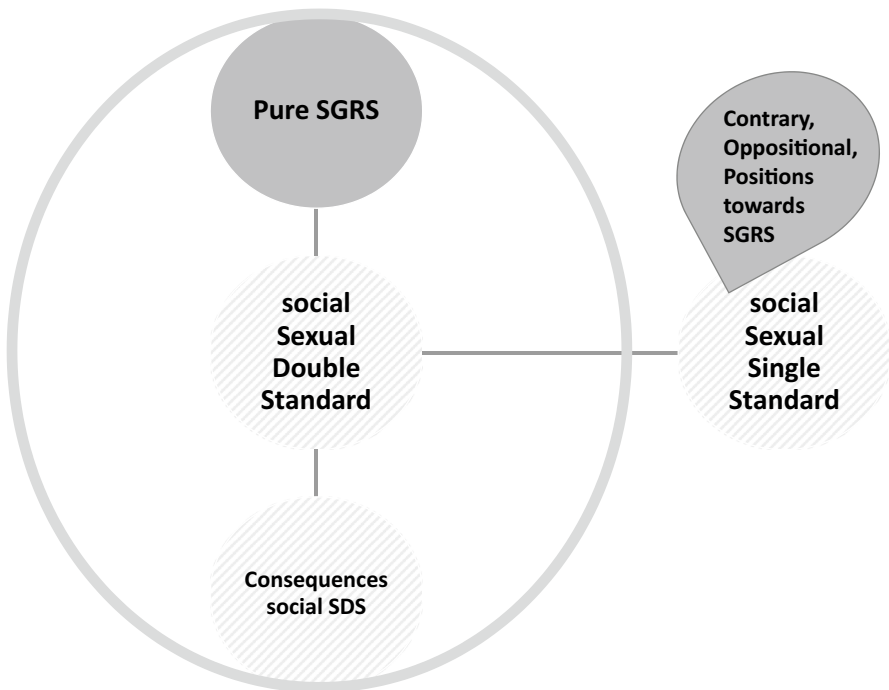


Fig. 1 Diagram of the comprehensive model for the social Sexual Double Standard. Circles represent categories and subcategories and lines the main relations between social SDS and other categories and subcategories. Pure Sexual Gender Roles and Stereotypes and Consequences of the social SDS are integrated with the social SDS in a larger circle, representing that they are part of the total comprehension of the social SDS. Social Sexual Single Standard, as the alternative standard is represented as not pertaining to the comprehension of the social SDS, but in relation with it. The relation between the social SSS and the category Contrary, Oppositional, Positions towards SGRS is not represented with a line because data do not allow to formally establish it, but the closeness of the concepts is represented through the partial overlap between them

Table 2 Categories, subcategories and codes belonging to core category Sexual Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Category	Code	Definition
Pure SGRS Stereotypes	Men are More Sexual and/or Less Emotional	Men are more sexual and less emotional, more oriented towards themselves and their own sexual gratification, less towards the other and affective/relational gratification
	Women are More Emotional and/or Less Sexual	Women are more emotional and less sexual, more oriented towards the other and affective/relational gratification, less towards themselves and their own sexual gratification
Roles	Men are Active, Dominant, Experienced	Men are sexually experienced and take the initiative. They drive and dominate sexual interactions
	Women are Passive, Dominated, Inexperienced	Women are sexually inexperienced and wait for men to initiate, drive, and dominate sexual interactions
Contrary, Oppositional Positions towards SGRS Stereotypes	Gender Similarities	Men and women are equally emotional and sexual, and value, in an equal mode, the physical/sexual and affective/relational gratification
	New Female Sexuality	Women are breaking with gender prescriptions, adopting more active, dominant sexual roles

Table 3 Categories, subcategories and codes belonging to the core category Sexual Standards

Category/Subcategory	Codes	Definition
Social SDS		Differential standard of sexual conduct, and of evaluation, judgment, and penalization, that is more restrictive and punitive to females, and more liberal to males
Social SSS		Egalitarian standard of sexual conduct, and of evaluation, judgment, and penalization, that is equally restrictive and punitive to male and female sexuality or, on the contrary, equally liberal and free of penalties
Consequences of the social SDS	General Effects of the social SDS	Costs of deviance and of negative or poor socio-sexual image and reputation on sexual and non-sexual experience
	Proof/Protection of Masculinity and Sexual Reputation	Costs of compliance: need to prove/protect socio-sexual image and sexual reputation and reduction of sexual autonomy
	Proof/Protection of Femininity and Sexual Reputation	
	Desirability for Relationships	Costs of deviance/compliance and of negative or poor socio-sexual image and reputation on one's desirability for romantic relationships

discourses of Portuguese university students considered to explain the manifestation and maintenance of the social SDS. It further advanced clues about what may explain the emergence of the social SSS as an alternative sexual standard.

Discourses about sexual gender roles and stereotypes and about sexual standards appeared in close relation through group discussions and this allowed us to propose a model centered on the category Social SDS, with relations to other categories, subcategories, and codes explaining its existence and perpetuation, as in the case of its opposition to a social SSS.

The manifestation of the social SDS found to be tightly anchored in the category Pure SGRS, with its maintenance in the subcategory Consequences of the Social SDS. The personal and social acceptance of the traditional sexual gender roles and stereotypes (Pure SGRS), which dichotomize male and female sexuality, were seen to inform and legitimize the existence of a differential, unequal, sexual standard. On the other hand, maintenance was first explained by the shared belief that deviance from the prescriptions of the social SDS enhances the likelihood of poor or negative socio-sexual image and reputation, both of which compromise various sexual and non-sexual dimensions of life. In a second-order effect, the anticipation of negative consequences and the efforts to avoid jeopardizing femininity, masculinity and sexual reputation were perceived as pressure towards compliance, or enactment of compliance, with the social SDS, potentially compromising sexual autonomy. Together, deviance and compliance (Consequences of the Social SDS) explain why and how the social SDS is maintained. Finally, as opposed to the social SDS, the emergence of a social SSS was considered to be closely related to the rejection, or perceived rejection, of traditional stereotypes and sexual gender roles (Contrary, Oppositional Positions towards SGRS).

Discussion

The primary goal of our study was to explore if, and how, Portuguese college students perceive the social SDS to exist and to perpetuate in Portuguese university contexts. This goal was motivated in light of the evidence on the manifestation of the SDS, with its potential to compromise male and female sexual health and well-being, and of the lack of investigation of the social dimension of the standard, despite national and international evidence indicating that the SDS may now be less a reflection of personal acceptance than of individuals' recognition of the standard's social existence and choosing to go along with it. If, as expected, the social SDS was identified in participant's discourses, we intended to develop a comprehensive model of the social SDS, detailing the characteristics of its manifestation and maintenance.

As expected, the social SDS was recognized as a dominant sexual standard, alternating with a social SSS, and justifying the construction of a comprehensive model of the social SDS that also considers the social SSS. Before discussing the model, results about the standard's manifestation and maintenance should be discussed independently, given their relevance to a deep and critical understanding of the social SDS and social SSS, and of the model itself.

In the first place, our results indicate that the social SDS is a strongly-rooted sexual standard that manifests frequently in the evaluation of involvement in casual sexual relationships or involvement with multiple sexual partners. The first observation is consonant with the conclusion of a recent systematic review about the expression of the SDS over the years (Endendijk et al. 2019). The second, however, is somehow paradoxical, considering our observations, and that of international research (e.g., Garcia et al. 2012), about uncommitted sex being increasingly common among young people. The “normalization” of casual sex would make one expect a weak expression of the social SDS and a more prevalent number of references to a liberal social SSS but, on the contrary, we found a minor expression of the social SSS (liberal and conservative), suggesting a relative independence between normality of the conduct and the norm used to evaluate it. The liberal, more than conservative, nature of the egalitarian standard, on the other hand, is consonant with the expectation, and aligns with evidence on the simultaneous presence of the SDS and a liberal SSS (Reid et al. 2011, 2015), and, to a lesser extent, with evidence pointing to alternation of the SDS with a conservative SSS and a reversed SDS (Allison and Risman 2013; England and Bearak 2014; Kettrey 2016). In fact, in the present study, a reversed SDS is not identified, while a conservative social SSS is almost limited to the idea of sexually experienced men being, as with sexually experienced women, less desirable for steady relationships. One way the liberal social SSS is observed is in the idea that women’s sexual conduct has become more like what is considered dominant and associated to masculinity. These observations indicate that gender equality has been achieved not only through depenalization of female sexuality, but also through penalization of the male, reminding us that alternative standards may be, like the social SDS, restrictive and punitive.

Secondly, our results indicate that deviance from the prescriptions of social SDS compromise socio-sexual image and reputation, and other sexual and non-sexual dimensions of life (e.g., self-esteem, social integration, desirability as a romantic partner). Compliance, on the other hand, may have costs for sexual autonomy (e.g., inhibition of, silencing of, or unwanted involvement in, sexual experiences). Effects of deviance are extensively demonstrated in the literature (e.g., Bordini and Sperb 2013; Crawford and Popp 2003; Endendijk et al. 2019), while those of compliance are consonant with the results of some international research. There are studies showing that preoccupations with socio-sexual image and reputation may limit or constrain male and female decision-making in casual sexual encounters (Conley et al. 2012; Hess et al. 2015; Rudman, Fetterolf, and Sanchez 2012), male agency in acceptance or rejection of casual sex and sexual partners (Kalish 2013), or female disclosure of sexual experience (Farvid et al. 2016), for example. One unexpected result, though, is the high number of references to the consequences faced by men, since the SDS is, by definition, more restrictive and punitive for women than for men. In fact, men are perceived to be strongly pressured to affirm masculinity and sexual reputation—to comply with the social SDS—and to comply with other sexual gender prescriptions, such as stereotypes (e.g., men enact being less emotional than really are). These reasons cause men to appear to be those at greater disadvantage in terms of sexual autonomy. Lastly, this observation, added to the idea that compliance with traditional masculinity is beginning to come with its own costs (e.g.,

reputation as “male sluts”, poor desirability for steady relationships), as highlighted here and in other studies (Flood 2013), make us believe that men may now be caught in a kind of double-bind opposing the traditional social SDS to an alternative, conservative, social SSS.

Based on these first results, we believe that it has been demonstrated the importance of deepening our knowledge of the social SDS; more specifically, of developing a comprehensive model detailing the characteristics of its manifestation and maintenance, which also addresses the emergence of the social SSS.

The model attributes the manifestation of the social SDS to personal and social acceptance of a set of beliefs that define male and female sexuality as each other’s opposite pole. The naturalization of beliefs such as the innate character of high sexual desire in males, or of female emotionality—and the concurrent justification or normalization of male, but not female, active expression of sexuality—are believed to inform and legitimize a differential, unequal sexual standard. This result is not unexpected, finding support in the literature on the SDS (Endendijk, et al. 2019). However, an apparent weakening of sexual gender roles, but not of stereotypes, introduces some specificity, raising the hypothesis of being the latter that primarily explain the manifestation of the social SDS in Portuguese university contexts. This weakening of sexual gender roles—together with the discourses of resistance that question the naturalization and normalization of traditional sexual gender roles and stereotypes—casts light on the emergence of an egalitarian social SSS.

Our model attributes maintenance of the social SDS, on one hand, to the recognition that deviance from the prescriptions of the social SDS has costs for various dimensions of human experience, and on the other, to the compliance or enactment of compliance perceived to be needed in order to prove/protect femininity or masculinity and sexual reputation. That is, negative effects such as a poor sexual image and reputation, poor social integration, or diminished value as a romantic partner are perceived to exist for those who deviate from the norm; added to the perceived anticipation of such effects and to the resulting conformity, these negative effects explain why and how the standard is continuously reproduced and perpetuated, in spite of the costs of conformity to sexual autonomy. This particular result is relatively new, and it is our belief that it is one of the most important contributions of the present investigation. In fact, although there are a reasonable number of studies showing that the (personal and social) SDS may have deleterious effects on sexual and non-sexual experiences, the role that consequences of the social SDS play in the maintenance of the standard has not been addressed in the great majority of research studies. Here, on the contrary, references to consequences were the main emergent theme, explaining why and how the traditional standard is maintained as a social reality, independently of an individual’s self-identification with it. This is all the more important because it helps shed some light on why the SDS continued to be a dominant sexual standard over the years even in the face of contradictory information and of the aforementioned costs to male and female sexual autonomy.

No salient gender differences were observed in the perceptions male and female participants had about gender and the SDS, which is in line with the results for the personal SDS (Endendijk et al. 2019). However, some particular perceptions raise the possibility that men and women contribute differently (or specifically) to the

manifestation and maintenance of the SDS, and the emergence of the SSS—a possibility that has not been addressed elsewhere. Among these are the references to the idea that women are more critical of each other than men are of women or of other men, and the higher number of references to the social SSS in male groups, suggesting conservatism among females and liberalism among males, respectively contributing to the manifestation of the SDS and the emergence of the social SSS. Likewise, the higher number of references to consequences of the social SDS for men and to the concurrent pressure to comply, or enact compliance, with the SDS and gender prescriptions, suggests that men may be actively contributing to the reproduction and maintenance of the social SDS. These are hypotheses that should be tested in future research.

Two major limitations in the present study concern the substantive nature of the model and the potential for observer bias. The model reflects the perspective of a particular group—young people studying in the cities of Lisbon and Coimbra—with particular characteristics—White and heterosexual. Due to these substantive features, the model may or may not be generalizable to other university groups or contexts and needs to be further validated. Lastly, because there are no results about the personal SDS, the model does not integrate that dimension of the concept, and the challenge for the future is to conduct research on the SDS while keeping the bi-dimensional (personal and social) character of the phenomenon under consideration. Given that our results on the manifestation of the social SDS are not far from what has been observed for the personal SDS, while results on its maintenance are new, future investigation should pay special attention to the latter; understanding the mechanisms through which the social SDS is perpetuated is essential to act on its deconstruction.

Despite these limitations, if it comes to be proven that the SDS is first and foremost a recognized (but not internalized) social reality, as we believe, this model constitutes a first step toward the development of more complete, detailed models that might broaden and refine our understanding of the phenomenon; in that sense, it responds to the lack of a proper conceptual axis. In the meantime, our results allow us to affirm the presence of the social SDS as a dominant sexual standard in Portuguese university contexts, and as opposed to the social SSS, a relatively new standard that is the product of recent changes in gender discourses. More importantly, results about the consequences of the social SDS—including pressure toward a sense of inhibition, silencing or, on the contrary, exaltation of sexuality—raise the possibility of the social SDS limiting male and female sexual autonomy, and, indirectly, male and female sexual, and general, health and wellbeing. These factors, plus the possibility that alternative standards may be as restrictive and punitive (conservative SSS) as the traditional one, make clear that an important investment has to be made in the comprehension of the social SDS and of the alternative standards, if we want to promote sexual gender equality and, at the same time, a free and positive sexual experience.

From an applied point of view, forming a strategy for deconstruction of the social SDS is all the more important in order to promote sexual equality, freedom, and, by extension, health and wellbeing. The comprehensive model can help to map out sexual health education in the university context, for example

by indicating the need to actively question how and why stereotypes are deeply rooted or how compliance with the prescriptions of the SDS is different from deviance, since both have negative consequences. This can be done, for example, in small groups of students moderated by sexual educators. In that protected context young people can be motivated and orientated to adopt critical perspectives concerning socio-sexual gendered discourses and interactions. Likewise, they can be guided to comprehend that few are those who self-identify with traditional gender and SDS prescriptions and that there is no need to comply with them. Finally, university students can be asked to reflect on the diverse alternative sexual standards because sexual freedom, health, and wellbeing can benefit from the deconstruction of the SDS and of the alternative negative sexual standards.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have 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 (Comissão de Ética e Deontologia da Investigação, Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação, Universidade de Coimbra) and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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

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