

Sexual scripts of Brazilians at Sexual Debut

Introduction

Gender roles as they relate to the sexual interaction and sexual scripts are critical pieces that shape the sexual interaction. Any modification of sexual behavior such as contraceptive use or sexual intercourse avoidance must start with an understanding of the sexual dynamic according to the social pressures at play on the actors. This analysis is an attempt to contribute to what is known about sexual behavior in Brazil by analyzing the gender roles and sexual scripts of a qualitative sample of individuals in the cities of Belo Horizonte and Recife.

Methodology

I carried out 25 focus groups in Belo Horizonte between April and July 2002 and in Recife between October and December 2002. The focus groups were broken down according to age, economic status, and city of residents. I conducted focus groups with 18-21 year olds and 30-39 year olds of lower-income and middle-income socio-economic status. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and the topics covered included dating experiences. The focus groups ranged in size from three to eleven participants. They were all moderated by a native speaker and I was present at every one and took notes.

Results

Society defines appropriate gender roles in the sexual sphere that are the most socially acceptable roles for males and females to live out. Gender-based expectations that are brought to the sexual encounter are critical to understanding the constriction to individuals' actions related to sexual agency

and negotiation (Tolman 2003). Any study of sexual scripts needs to be grounded in an understanding of gender roles more generally. The overarching theme among the focus group respondents of sexual scripts was the idea of male sexual prowess and female passivity.

GENDER ROLES

Gender roles are the backdrop to the sexual interaction. It is how individuals perceive their entitlement and their power that they bring with them to any sexual experience. While gender roles can encompass a broad range of behaviors since gender is inherent to all aspects of our lives, in the section below, I attempt to elucidate aspects of gender roles that are directly pertinent to the sexual interaction and that play a significant role in shaping sexual scripts

Defining woman & boyfriend

To gain insight into gender roles, I asked the focus group respondents to tell me about women. The respondents from Belo Horizonte described women as independent, determined, strong, mother, wife, feminine, elegant, sexual, fragile, docile, tender, responsible, important, fighter, serious, peace, flexible, courageous, truthful, intelligent, beautiful, in equilibrium, independent, dedicated, a fighter, a worker, stubborn, a companion, a friend, and happy to be a woman. The descriptions are positive, stressing fragility as well as strength and naming laudable personality characteristics such as courageousness and truthfulness. The women also described themselves relationally as mothers and wives. The need to wax, which came up in numerous middle-income focus groups, was a way for women to talk about the need to keep up appearances.

P1: I think the most Brazilian thing (...) women and men alike, every Brazilian has it (...) this thing of what will others think. It's just like waxing, you know? *Putá merda!* Waxing hurts like crazy! [laughter] You know? And we don't do it out of our own vanity, it's so that we can show our boyfriends, you know?

P2: Exactly.

P1: You know?

(...)

P3: You have to show him that you are well, all cleanly waxed, that's what we're talking about here.

P4: (...) You have women that don't bother waxing. I, for example, wax because I think it's more hygienic, it's better, you understand? It's not because Brazilians think that if they don't wax they'll lose their boyfriend. That's not important. It's not for him, it's for me, you understand? (middle-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 8)

One of the only times feminism was mentioned in the focus group discussions was to say that feminism had simply added burdens to women's lives since women are still expected to keep up exquisite appearances on top of engaging in the workforce and raising a family.

P1: I think that, feminism, when it came, I think that we actually went in the opposite direction than we wanted to go. We wanted our freedom so much and this liberty came back to haunt us. Because today we have to be super-women, super-mothers, super-employees, sup- and in truth we weren't emancipated, at least those of us from traditional families. So, what happened? Today, waxed, we have to be really great.

P2: Yeah.

M: Waxed?

P1: You know, it's much harder than being a man. (middle-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 8)

While one respondent quoted above emphasized that she did it for herself, the rest of the respondents spoke out the importance of being cleanly waxed to keep up appearances for others.

There was a marked difference in the way the Recife respondents described women since they put more of an emphasis on how difficult it is to be a

woman. Their descriptions included the following words: intimacy, love, respect, dedication, tenderness, desire, beautiful, wise, intelligent, patient, simple, a reproducer, certain, good, and optimist, as well as sufferer, very discriminated against, very mistreated, many think women are sex symbols, there are men that see women and only think of sex, and women do not get respect. One respondent spoke about how women are frequently dependent on men because they cannot support themselves.

P: Many times [you have a boyfriend/husband] but you're with him and you have to submit to many things. I even said this during the car [on the way to the focus group], many times women stay with a husband or boyfriend tolerating everything. Because you have a child, so you give in. You had a home life with your parents that was very rigid. They passed that on to you and you maintained it like you had to because that's what your mom and dad would have wanted. You get married and you resign yourself to a lot of things. Why? Because lots of times you don't have support from your family and you don't work anymore because you've gotten to a certain age and the employment market is consequently closed to you. Like I said, there's age discrimination against women once women hit 25...I think here in Recife it's like that. Once you pass 25, you're old. Personally, I'm very discriminated against because I am 38 years old. 'You've already passed [over the hill].' (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife, Group 18)

Therefore, while the Recife respondents talked about the positive characteristics such as intelligence and patience, they brought up spontaneously that they are mistreated and viewed as sex symbols. One respondent elaborated on how women find themselves in negative situations where they suffer. She identified traditional family values and economic dependence as root causes of why women stay with men and may not treat them well.

Yet I wanted to get to an understanding of how women viewed themselves in relation to a boyfriend or male companion since women define themselves

largely in their relation to others and there is a tendency for this to be even more pronounced in developing country settings where kinship is frequently how people socially position themselves. Women described boyfriends as a friend, a companion for the good times and the bad times, a sex partner, intelligent, loving, sincere, honest, truthful, traditional, tasty, “comfort, a lap, security,” complicated, and the most frequently voiced idea what that a boyfriend is necessary to have. One group talked about how there has always existed pressure to have a boyfriend (middle-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 8). Dating and having a boyfriend was seen as constantly desirable. In another focus group, the following interchange occurred:

P1: [I don't have anything to contribute] because I don't have a boyfriend. [laughter]

P2: But you've had one [laughter].

P1: Thank god I'm single for the time being.

P2: We need to be alone so that we can date more. (middle-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 14)

Having a boyfriend was socially valued by the other members of the group. On two different occasions, a participant in a focus group who was single actually ask another respondent if she could call that respondent's boyfriend. On both occasions, it was done in a teasing manner but the message was clearly that the single respondent would like to be dating the other respondent's boyfriend.

Lower-income respondents were much more likely to describe males in negative terms. Lower-income 18-21 year olds in both Belo Horizonte and Recife used the most negative language to describe boyfriends: someone to fear, jealous, requires a lot of work, he deceives you, he is a bad person. One respondent from a 30-39 year age group said:

P: [Men] are a lot of work, you know? Thank god, you know? I personally don't live with my husband; I am the owner of my life. I have someone in my life, he's married, but he's better for me than my husband. He's married, he's 54 years old and he doesn't harass me or anything, I don't do anything for him. I suffered a lot with [my husband] in the house, but now I am living well. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife, Group 18)

The male partners of the lower-income women were perceived by the participants to be demanding and labor intensive: they demanded that their female partners take care of all the domestic chores even if they worked and that included child-rearing responsibilities.

Female gender roles taught at home

The older focus group participants related how they had been taught gender inequality at home.

P1: Oh Júnia, I'm going to tell you a saying, I don't know if you are from a big city or for from the countryside. When a female was born, it was 'weight for the donkey.' When a male was born it was a 'donkey who can carry weight.' [Participant laughs.]

P2: Yeah, that's right.

P1: I don't know if it's like that here anymore, but in the countryside, when a boy is born, he's a donkey who can carry weight, he's a macho (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte Group 15)

P1: I remember at home, it was me, my mom, my sister and my dad and three brothers. My mom wanted me and my sister to absorb the information that her role and that of me and my sister were to do everything that my dad and my brothers wanted.

P2: Because they were males.

P1: Because they were the men of the house. (...) This was the biggest sore point at home. I remember one time that my brother had clothes outside on the clothesline, it was raining and he said, "Hey, go there and grab my clothes on the clothesline because they'll get wet." I said, "You get them." My mom said, "You go get them because you're his sister and you have to do this for him." (...) There was also this lesson that a woman was born to get married, have kids, have however many kids, because it looks like we were born to serve. So we also had that, the question of

reproduction, the lesson that we learned was that. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife Group 16)

There is an inherent incongruity in the two attitudes towards females expressed above. The first quote illustrates that the female was perceived to be a burden on the home, a weight for the donkey or male. Yet as the second quote illustrates, the females were expected to cater to the needs of men. For the participant in the second section quoted above, the males of the family were a burden for her because they expected to be waiting on. Therefore, while a female child was perceived as a burden, the female's experience was that she was expected to shoulder the burden of taking care of the males in her household. The more traditional roles for females were more common among the older lower-income participants.

Women were taught that their appropriate role in life was to get married.

P: In my family, women had to get married. (...) There is a history of placing women in specific spheres. Women, since childhood, are taught to be mothers (...) I think families help a lot with that since from childhood, in my house I played with dolls, dollhouses, so that's to say, women have this sphere. The feminine sphere, you understand? (...) Let's take away subjective experiences and look over time, the profile of the majority. (...) I'm talking historically, situating the question of women, who never had a place in history. Historically speaking. What were we raised for? To be mothers, women, we were raised for the private sphere and not for the public sphere, you understand? (...)

P: (...) I agree with her. I think that in my situation it was the same, and your family, you, the only reference that you have is your family. (middle-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 14)

While this self-reflexivity was rare in the focus groups, the social expectation to form a union with a male was verbalized in many focus groups.

Numerous respondents spoke about being raised in a strict home with a dominant father who enforced his will on the family.

P: My father confined me to such an extent that I left the house at 14 years of age. I think, I blame the majority of things on the fact that my father confined me to the home because if he hadn't confined me so much, I would not have gone and found a husband, had a child. I would have dated more, enjoyed life a little bit more. But he confined me to the home so much, clothes, hair, lipstick, he didn't want me using any of those things. I left the interior and came to Recife to a friend's house and when I got there, I got to know him and had sex with him. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife, Group 16)

They would speak with irony about how their desperation to get out from under their fathers' rule led them to marriage at an early age. Once married, they found themselves then under the strict will of their husbands and so they had not actually achieved the freedom they had hoped to achieve by leaving their father's house since they simply traded one dominant male in their lives for another.

Violence within relationships

There was awareness of the ubiquitousness of relationship violence among the focus group respondents. Most people had had a least indirect experience with the consequences of domestic violence.

P1: It has nothing to do with education. We have a lot...I think we have a lot of ideas that we associate with a specific economic class and things happen, problems happen, for example, violence against women happens to women with low education levels.

P2: No, that's not it. That's not it. I think they [lower-income women] accuse the men in a certain way, in a certain way they accuse them [I.S.] (...)

P1: Exactly. They accuse the men with much greater frequency, but accuse them with the actual bruises and marks they show on their bodies. It's different, that's why I say women of a particular class, they hide behind makeup and glasses and all. (...) So I'm here to tell you that this doesn't just happen in one specific socio-economic class. (middle-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 14)

Lower-income 30-39 year old women had the most direct first-person stories about relationship violence.

P: I lost a friend because of this [relationship violence], she got pregnant fast and her parents forced her to marry and she married. A few months later the guy gave her a real thrashing. To really hurt her. She went to her mom's house and she was pregnant again. She arrived at her mom's house completely beaten up. The ignorance of her mom who believed that women have to be submissive to their parents [told her]: 'No. He's your husband. He was nervous. Certainly you made him nervous.' And she said, 'Mom, but he'll beat me.' Her mother made her go back. He gave her so much that he killed her. In a fight with her, her head hit the floor and she died. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 9)

In the narrative related above, not only was the victim sent back to her abuser by her mother, but she was even blamed for the violence. Her mother told her that she must have "made him nervous." While extreme cases such as this one alarmed the respondents, the respondents treated stories of less extreme violence with the greatest casualness including laughing at stories of domestic violence (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 9).

An exception to this acceptance of male violence was a lower-income 18-21 year old group participant who felt that violence was not common in relationships.

P: I never heard of a case, never heard of it, but I believe it could happen. It could happen with a guy who you think you know well, ne? I think the majority of women are very insecure. Therefore, they need quite a good deal of time to get to know a guy and everything. Therefore, I think...until you get to those things...it's really difficult. The guy could be a real jerk, but to get to the act of violence, I think it's unlikely. Because you'll have already been with the guy a long time, you'll have been dating him. (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 12)

It was especially notable that this individual was lower-income since stories of domestic violence were more common among the lower-income respondents.

Submissiveness of female

The submissiveness of the female to male authority was a theme that frequently came up in the focus groups. Financial dependence was frequently cited as a reason for being submissive to males. One focus group participant related how a friend of hers had been kicked out of her parent's house after she lost her virginity. She came to Belo Horizonte alone and soon moved in with someone. The friend has become submissive since moving in with this male out of fear of displeasing him and having to live alone again. She fears financial insecurity because if she became unemployed, she could not return home. The man she's living with is 18 years older than her and does not allow her to go out with her friends. Her friends told her, "You are always submissive to him. This is not a life. It's no good to always be under his wings and have him take care of you, with you always submissive to him. This is not a life" (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 12). The consequence of her having lost her virginity was that she chose to live submissive to a male to obtain some financial stability. Yet her friends perceived her to be in a situation where she was too submissive.

Respondents spoke about how losing one's virginity to a boy made women more submissive.

M: Do you think that at first sex girls are thinking about pleasing the male?

P: Please him...you have to please him so as not to lose him. 'I'm already having sex with him, I am with him, let's pretend for the first time, I have to please him.'

P: Women think in pleasing him more than in pleasing herself.

P: Yeah.

P: Yeah.

M: Why is that so?

P: I don't know.

P: A lack of information at that time, that women exist, that she has to first love herself before she can love someone else.

P: We think like this, that a man is a man all of the time, but a woman isn't, a woman is...the majority of people...we think like this, that a woman is only a woman while she has her virginity. If she loses it with a guy, she has to be with him forever...we thought like that, didn't we? Men aren't like that. (...) If you had sex with him or if you married you had to be with him always so as to not get a bad reputation, defamed, whatever. It's not like that for them. Nothing sticks to them. Everything sticks to women.

P: It all begins there. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife, Group 19)

Therefore sexual debut can increase a female's submissiveness out of her desire to maintain the relationship so as to not get a bad reputation. This theme was definitely more pronounced in the 30-39 year old age groups.

Another reason why loss of virginity made females more submissive is because having sex with someone introduced an element of ownership into the relationship.

P: If you were talking to her [a friend who had lost her virginity in a relationship], and the boyfriend comes up because he saw her in the street talking with her female friends, he'll ask, 'What are you doing in the street?' Because boys always think that because he had the first [sexual] relation, he can order her around. 'Now I make the rules, I'm the owner [of you].' He orders her around, she has to do everything that he wants, she can only leave if he wants to. She only goes where he permits her to go. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 9)

This possessiveness was a common theme that was raised by the participants when discussing romantic relationships. Respondents related how males felt

entitled to dictate the actions of the females. While many respondents expressed annoyance with this, it was perceived as a normal aspect of romantic relationships.

One participant in a low-income 30-39 year old group talked about how she was criticized for not being submissive.

P: You know that at times, I've heard lots of people criticizing me, saying that I'm bold, that I want to be the man of the house because of my way of not being totally submissive to men, you know? (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 9)

She related how a friend of hers had been beaten and killed by her husband and continues, "This left me being against this authority, this power, this liberty that they use to dominate a woman, you know?" Interestingly, this same participant was almost not able to participate in the focus group because her husband did not want to let her attend.

While most complained about this expectation, one participant voiced that she felt it was important for women not to usurp the position of men.

P: I think women are behaving very badly. (...) I think women like to be directed, to let themselves be submissive, and to not occupy the position of men. (...) I think it should be so that the two don't take the other's place, that they be, not equal, I think women are very different than men. (...) So it's not necessary to take the place of the other, there's space for everyone, you know? Just respect the differences, do you understand? (middle-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 11)

Coming from a middle-class background, this participant is more likely to have witnessed traditional relationships where there is a sharp division of labor. It is noteworthy that even among the younger respondents there was support for the idea of traditional gender roles including female submission.

This submissiveness was salient in the sexual sphere.

M: When women aren't interested in having sex, why do they have sex? Is there some form of reward for doing this?

P4: Only if it was like this, I was thinking of the other side, like...these women, for example, who are together with men for a long time, she has to do it [have sex with him] because it is her service. Do you understand me?

P6: How many women at home, how many women at home, talking about...I think there are women at home [I.S.] that are more submissive, when you talk about the question of life and the question of sex, it's like this, I think that there are many women who within four walls are much more submissive to their partners in relation to sex than many sex professionals.

P8: [Nodding yes]

P6: Therefore I think it's like this, there's also this history, this tradition and this education that we received, but anyway we know, every single one of us here knows this history very well that there are many women that are much more like prostitutes inside the house to their own husband, to their own partner than a woman on the street who puts a sign around her neck that reads that she's a prostitute [I.S.]

P7: I think that the women, even if they don't want to [have sex], they feel rewarded by the harmony in the home, of the relationship [I.S.] because for us, for men, when a woman says no, they are immediately irritated.

P: Oh, yes.

P7: There are fights in the home; he mistreats the child, he provokes/attacks the woman...

P: He'll look for another woman in the street.

P6: She is left without things she needs in the household.

P7: For her to maintain harmony in the home, she gives in so as to avoid all of this confusion in the home [I.S.]

P6: Because women don't have a way to question, to negotiate, principally on this sexual question because we still have this history of the mother reproducing in her child her own history.

P: That a woman has to marry, give in, have sex.

P6: That women have to serve men (...)

P: You don't have to want it, but you have to give in. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife, Group 16)

Therefore, speaking about sex post-debut, these respondents explained an aspect of the sexual dynamic that disempowers women. If women are not willing to have sexual intercourse when the male wants it, it creates tension in the home

and the withholding of financial support. One respondent even talked about how the male takes his frustration out on the children and another talked about how men would seek sexual gratification outside the home. The respondents acknowledge that this pattern exists because of mothers reproducing their own life experiences in their daughters.

One exception to this sexual availability is during menstruation. All of the respondents voiced that it was not appropriate for a man to instigate sexual relations during menstruation.

P: Not every hour can you be available to him, principally during menstruation (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife Group 16)

The respondents spoke about it being an issue of shame for them if their partners sought out sexual intercourse during menstruation. Respondents even quote the Bible to demonstrate that sex during menstruation was taboo. Therefore, being expected to violate this taboo elicited shame on the part of the respondents.

The gender roles voiced by the respondents emphasized how women were taught to cater to males at home. Dominant fathers oppressed their daughters to such an extent that the daughters would sometimes enter a relationship so as to get out from under the oppressive father. Stories of domestic violence were familiar to the vast majority of respondents with lower-income women offering more first person accounts of violence in the home. Yet there was one younger respondent from a low-income background who perceived domestic violence to not to be common. Financial dependence, losing one's virginity were cited as reasons that increased female submission to male

domination. Sexual submissiveness post-debut among lower-income women was frequently voiced.

SEXUAL SCRIPTS

Sexual scripts are the dominant discourses in the sexual sphere. They determine the acceptable way to behave. They are one way that individuals understand their own sexual behavior, particularly in relation to other people. Some sexual scripts such as the constantly sexual male influence the way females perceive male sexuality. The most dangerous sexual script that disempowers females is the need to say no to sex under almost every circumstance. Not adhering to these scripts can have severe social consequences such as being called gay if a man is not perpetually sexually aggressive or being called a slut if the female shows an interest in sex. The virgin/whore dichotomy continues to divide and categorize women into the “good girls” and the “bad girls.” Therefore, understanding the constrictions placed upon social actors in the sexual sphere through understanding acceptable sexual scripts furthers our understanding of social pressures at play on the sexual interaction.

The image of the constantly sexual male

The way the respondents perceived male sexuality was that males needed to be sexually experienced; they needed to have many sexual partners; that they would never turn down the opportunity to have sex; and when they wanted to have sex, it would be such a need for them that if their partner was not willing, they would go elsewhere.

Again and again, the respondents voiced the importance of having a sexually experienced male partner.

P1: I think the first time with a person who is more experienced. He'll know much more than me, where to touch me, what to do, and he'll allow me to feel pleasure. He'll do it so you like it, you know? (...) Sometimes you want to do it but don't know how. 'I'm going to do what?' I don't know how to do things. That's why your partner has to get you there, stimulate you. You don't know anything. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 9)

The respondents stressed that older men were more desirable because they were more sexually experienced.

Male sexual experience was broadly socially encouraged. Fathers would encourage early sexual experiences in their sons by taking them to prostitutes.

P1: Males always had sex, starting around 12 years old
P2: Parents would even take them to a prostitute to become a man
P1: That's right. Women were like, "I have to be a missus, put together." In this way, males were much more advanced/developed than we were. By the time we learned the things, they had already passed us. Males already knew how to do it and we just learned after we got married to the extent that if a woman had sex in a way that was different, he would be very impressed. We were very repressed. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife, Group 19)

This respondent connected a lack of sexual information given to females with repression creating a situation where females were behind males in terms of sexual 'development.'

Female perceived males needing to have sex with many of different partners.

P: Males have the need to have sexual relations with numerous women. I want to marry one that has lots of experience so that because he's had these experiences, he won't go looking for other women. (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 12)

P: The man that I marry, I want him to have had relations with lots of other women. That's because men have a need to have sexual relations with many women. A woman doesn't have that need. Because they want to...it's always been like this, this thing of taking full advantage, you know, taking advantage of life, taking advantage of life and having lots of women. So I always thought that my husband, the person with whom I would marry, has already had lots of other relations, he won't feel the necessity to look for other women. (...) I don't have any interest in having sex with anyone else to find out if it's as good as or better than, or to see if the relation is good or not. I don't have this curiosity. But that's not true for males. Males are curious. Normally they have this, whatever, I don't know if it's a necessity or, I don't know what it is [laughter] (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 12)

Females wanted a male who had had sexual relations with numerous women and 'gotten that out of this system,' so to speak, by the time she married him because she perceived that this would decrease the probability that he would cheat on her.

Further feeding this idea that males are extremely sexually demanding, females perceived that males would never turn down an opportunity to have sex.

M: How do women react when men say no? [laughter]

P: I never said anything

P: He was gay, she turned on her side and tried to sleep

P: It depends

P: You're indignant. [You think:] 'If he reaches out for me now, I'm not going to react/give in.' (middle-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 14)

M: Are there males who would reject sex? [laughter]

P: Depends on the male [I.S.]

P: There aren't. [laughter]

P: In the entire world there's probably one.

M: Who doesn't insist and all that...

P: I think if he's not like that he's ashamed of something on his body (...)

P: I've never heard of this [a male rejecting sex] [laughter]

P: And if he doesn't eat¹...[laughter] (...)

¹ To eat is used to Portuguese to mean to have sexual relations.

P: It's not that males are more shameless about these kinds of things, it's just that if he wasn't a man, or he lost his erection then and there, that could also be a problem. (...)

P: I know a guy who is not a man, but he tells everyone that he is [I.S.] He goes out with girls but doesn't do anything [laughter]

P: But why?

P: It also depends a lot on the character of the guy.

M: How so?

P: It's rare to not have a shameless male, but there are some even though it's very rare to have them (...) It's rare, but they look for the right person [with whom to have sex].

P: And there are some who refuse to have sex with a virgin under any circumstances. I don't know why. [I.S.]

P: They say, 'Ah, a girl's easier to do when she's already been done,' (...)

P: They want to find it already done, they don't want work or any commitment

P: Yeah. (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Recife, Group 17)

If a male is not sexually predatory, he is not seen as a male. The majority of the focus group respondents found the idea that a man might ever reject sex amusing. They mentioned that he might be gay, that he might be ashamed of something on his body, or that he might be scared of the commitment he perceives a virgin would demand of him.

Respondents talked about how they would not tolerate being told no.

M: And when a male says no, what does the female say?

P: [I.S.] Today women don't accept that. [I.S.]

M: So you're saying that males never say no?

P: I never heard a male say no [I.S.]

M: Males used to be able to say no?

P: They could [I.S.]

P: Yeah, he was the owner of the word 'No.' (...)

M: If a man rejected sex, did women call him something? Did they say something about him?

P: There are some [women] who would go to into the street [looking for sex]

P: The man would hunt for another [woman] [I.S.] He'd look for another in the street. Definitely.

P: Oh, I would give him horns², he'd see [laughter]. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 15)

This exchange supports the idea that women need to have sex just as much as men do via the comment that some women would look for sex in the street if the man rejected intercourse. The respondents do not accept the fact that the man may not want to have sexual intercourse, but rather assume that he would go find someone else with whom to have sex. It also demonstrates a desire to punish a male who turns down an opportunity to have sexual intercourse.

M: How do females seen males who don't want to have sex, who don't take the initiative [to have sex]?

P1: Jeez.

P2: We used to say that he was gay [laughter]...the father of my boy...when I got married I wanted to have relations with him and he didn't want to have relations with me because when we went out, I kissed him, we made out, he had an erection, but he didn't want to have relations with me. I thought...I was getting traumatized because I was thinking that it was his fault, that he was like this and I had already had sex. When I want something I completely go after it. I was always like this. And he, I waited, I think he was thinking that I was very advanced to have sex with him and at the same time I was thinking, 'This boy has got to have some kind of problem! Some kind of problem. It's not my fault so it must be his! He's gay, or he has another woman and he's just spending time with me.' That's the first thing I thought. 'But I'll keep on insisiting. So I kept on insisiting, but it was after two months that we were together that we had sexual intercrouse for the first time and when I finished, I said, 'I was thinking that you had some kind of trauma, or a testicular malformation, or you were a hermaphrodite, or you were gay.' I told him all of this and he started to laugh. He said, 'No, Eliane, it's because I think that a person...when I want a person to be with me I don't want to have sex right away, I want to get to know the person.' He was different than me, completely, his head. He said, 'I want to get to know with whom I will be living with.' And that's how it fell and I understood.

P3: There are males that as soon as they get to know a girl want to go to a hotel

P4: As soon as they meet, they want to go...(..)

² In Portuguese, the expression giving someone horns means cheating on him/her, leaving someone cuckold.

P2: I was used to having sex with a guy after one week, two maximum, that's to say that I was used to that and when I got to know [my current boyfriend] it was totally different (...) I was taking course at this time and he'd pick me up and take me home. I was so angry with him that he picked me up at the course and brought me home, there was one day that I threw rocks at him because I was so angry with him. He would leave work and come from work with fruit that he would bring to me, give me a kiss and leave. There was this one time that he brought avocados and I smashed them up completely and gave them back to him. I was watching him like this because everything he gave me was like I was a porcelain doll and he only wanted me behind glass, to see, to kiss and not touch and so I lost hope. 'There's something wrong here, stop right now! I'm going to find out what it is!' That's when we had sex for the first time and he said, 'When I'm going to live with someone, I want to know that person!' It was totally different.

M: This was not your first sexual relation.

P: No it wasn't (lowerer-income 30-39 year olds, Recife, Group 19)

The respondent telling the primary narrative above highlights how entrenched the sexual script was in her mind that males try to pursue sex at the first possible opportunity and to not do so means that the male has something wrong. The respondent was so annoyed by the fact that her boyfriend did not follow that sexual script that she threw rocks at him and mashed up the fruit he gave her as gift.

In a scenario presented to the focus group respondents where the male rejects sex with a virgin, the respondents' reaction was that the female would need lots of therapy to get over that (middle-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 4).

P: Something must be wrong with her because he doesn't want her, maybe she's fat, I don't know, something's wrong. She must think that the problem's hers because they're alone (...)

P: She'll need lots of therapy

P: Lots [laughter]

M: Are there reasons that she would accept [for him rejecting sex]?

P: I think women are more understanding, but nonetheless, her situation is complicated [I.S.]

P: Her boyfriend's already had sex with another girlfriend but did have sex with her, 'Or instead he doesn't like me [I.S.] He likes another.' (...)

P: I don't think she'd ever admit it, really, really comprehend what his reason was [I.S.] whatever was his reason, I think women, I think she'd be inclined to think that it was her fault.

P: Very much so.

P: It could be a thousand things. (middle-income 30-39 years old, Belo Horizonte, Group 4)

One of the dominant sexual scripts for males is to appear constantly sexually ready. Females expect males to welcome sexual encounters at every opportunity. Even when a male might not be interested in sexual intercourse, females acknowledge that there is sexual pressure on the male to still pursue a sexual liaison.

P: There are women who really stick it to the guy. And men have an image of themselves as being very *machista*. [...] Therefore, it's like this. 'If I don't have sex with her, she might think I'm gay.' You know? And they wind up having sex, actually hooking up, you know? Even if he doesn't like her, he does it. (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte Group 10)

The respondents perceive that when males want sex, it is a need for them that has to be satisfied by someone and if their partner is not going to do it, they will look elsewhere.

P1: This business of you saying that you'll marry her because she's good in bed, for a while it could be so. You get married, at a certain age, he becomes impotent [laughter]. She, whatever, she has a kid, she becomes traumatized, has a kid through vaginal birth and so for six months she says, 'Don't touch me!' What's he going to do? He'll go into the street and look for someone else. [I.S.]

P2: Yeah, he'll go.

P3: He'll go, get it? (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 10)

M: When a female doesn't want to [have sex] and she says no or is thinking of saying no...does she have some fears in saying no?

Everyone: She does.

P: I think she does.

M: Why?

P: Look, the majority of men are scoundrels. We're not. I don't trust my boyfriend. I love him, I think he's the man of my life [laughter] [I.S.] And I say to him that I don't trust him. [I.S.] I know that he could find another woman, you know? Of course I wouldn't be the same with him after that. I don't think I'd even look in his face because I wouldn't accept this...especially if I knew, you know? Obviously. But it's just like I said [I.S.] get another woman. So even though he tells me that he'll wait and tolerate me and give me what I want, I want to believe him [laughter] but women have fears. I have fear. [I.S.] Now I'm really scared that he'll find someone else to satisfy him, you know? (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 10)

P: Men want sex all the time, you know?

P: And when he wants it, we have to give it to him.

P: All the time, you know? (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 12)

Respondents who were having sexual relations with married men disapproved of the fact that their wives did not sexually provide for them and thereby understood the reason for the males cheating.

P: He's a sweetheart, he's married. He says to me, 'Adriana, my wife is very cold. I look for sex with her and she doesn't want it. [disapproving noises from the group.] She's not even present. That's why I eat out. You're superior. Better.' He's like this, 'You're not feeling guilty about the situation?' Scolding. He says, 'She's cold. She's not good for me.' Really, he's passionate. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife, Group 18)

Middle-income 18-21 year olds talked about how males maintain this image. In this particular example, the respondent relates how she hears males strategize as to how to have as much sex as possible.

M: What did you hear males say, exactly?

P: They said that they didn't like their girlfriends or they had an annoying girlfriend, stuff like that. But that they could have sex and

it was guaranteed sex so they stayed with her. But there's this thing where they hooked up with other girls, left their girlfriend at home; I've heard this scenario various times. (middle-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 8)

It was so rare that a male did not pressure the female for sex and instead concerned himself with the interests of his female partner that this respondent felt like she had someone very special.

P: [My boyfriend] sleeps with me at my mom's house every weekend. I was really tired because I had to work early, you know? And jeepers, he thought of me, you know? He said that I was exhausted, you know? I thought this was really cool. And we got even more out of it [sexual intercourse] because women aren't objects. We are to be loved. (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 12)

The image of the constantly demure female

The dominant sexual scripts for women were the virgin/whore dichotomy, not to take sexual initiative, and to say no to sex no matter what the female actually wants.

The respondents felt that the virgin/whore dichotomy was still a dominant discourse among males. The danger of displaying one's sexuality or being a sexual agent is that one might be labeled a 'mulher da rua' [woman of the street=whore]. The younger, lower-income focus group respondents perceived males to divide women into two categories: women of the street and women they could marry.

P1: At home, I'm the only girl. My brother's going to be 19, but he only hangs out with older boys. Like the cousins and stuff who are older, like 27, like 28. What I see of their conversations, there are two types of women. One of them has a girlfriend just like he likes it. And he has that one in the street that is more shameless. So there are still lots of boys that dream like this, that desire both types

of women. Most guys are like that and they think they can have everything. (...)

P2: Just like you see in the street, a woman walks by in little shorts and a plunging neckline, [the boys say] "That's tasty." A girl walks by nicely made-up, [the boys say], "That's the woman of my dreams."

P3: Exactly. (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 10)

When it came specifically to sexual scripts regarding sexual negotiation, women spoke about the need to act more sexually coy than they perhaps felt at that moment so as to give the boy the 'right' impression. The older respondents spoke about how they had to make sure that the boy did not touch them on the first date since if he did, he would not want any contact with them in the future. The boy who tried something on the first date was someone who slept with lots of people and only wanted to have sex with them (middle-income 30-39 years old, Belo Horizonte, Group 14). At least within this middle-income group, girls were expected to be virgins at marriage, and if they were not, they were in danger of being returned to their parents' house.

Respondents talked about how saying no was important irrespective of their own feelings.

P1: When a woman likes that person...a woman has that history of prohibition of expressing her desire. We're very much blamed, everything is prohibited for women, so we have this history of prohibition of expressing our desire, 'No, no, no' [while grabbing the woman next to her in a sexually suggestive way to demonstrate the disjuncture between what is being said and what is being shown] (...) saying 'No' is not a question of wanting...it's more about that you want it, but you have to say 'No' because...it's not that you don't want it, you are crazy with desire, you want it but you have to play this game, you have to make a little drama [I.S.] Like, 'Get off me, get off me.' [laughter]

M: You have to play this game?

P1: It's not a question of having to, it's the obligation that society imposes, this blame that's not just from today. I think that the more we evolve, we still have a pile of things that we're blamed for, you know? I think that we women blame ourselves an awful lot so it's as if there are certain things that are laws for us.

P2: I think that even though the modest times have passed, a woman can be independent, she can have her own attitudes, decision, but we let ourselves be dominated.

P1: But that's completely cultural

P2: To take initiative, even if she wants him to continue, but for her to be conquered she says 'No, no, no' and lets him come and grab her so that he doesn't think that she's easy, you know. (...) If we give in the first time, you have no backup, the person that does that cannot dominate [the sexual situation] with 'No.'

P1: On the other hand, it's not cool that we lose a lot of time blocking, in the end we're putting up a lot of things, lots of taboos that we have. In reality, you don't want to say no, you want to say yes and even take initiative, but you see, there is the blame and accusations, the rules, preestablished, that you run into. (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife, Group 16)

P: My other boyfriend, he would come and I would reprimand him, 'No!' Even if I was dying of desire I said, 'No!'

M: Oh yeah?

P: It's that 'No Yes,' right? (lower-income 18-21 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 10)

P1: And when a man knows how to conquer you? When he knows?

P2: Dating is different.

P1: Yes, it's different. 'You don't want it, my love' [I.S.] [laughing] but it's different [covering her face with paper saying 'No, my love' in a coy manner]

P: Leave your tiredness aside and let's see what happens! (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Belo Horizonte, Group 15)

P: There are women today that don't live like the girls say...according to the way they were raised, 'Look, you can't do that, a woman can't do that, can't do that...'

P: Work, house, sex, you always have to say, 'I don't want to, I didn't like it, I don't want to...' (lower-income 30-39 year olds, Recife, Group 18)

These quotes demonstrate that across age groups and cities, women are aware of the game they play by saying no to sex because of the social taboo of saying yes to it.

The preference of females for more sexually experienced males puts them at risk of being exposed to more sexually transmitted infections (STI) because they have a preference for partners with more sexual experience which translates into someone who has had more sexual partners. The increased risk to women of their male partners possibly having an STI is further increased by women's preference for males who have had many sexual partners because they perceive that this will decrease the probability that the male will cheat on her. The idea that a man would ever reject an opportunity to have sex was scoffed at by the respondents.

Females are aware of the need to say no to sex so as to give the right impression to show that they are not sexually experienced or eager. This prescription is dangerous for women because by saying 'No' and demonstrating 'Yes,' males are being taught to not respect 'No.' Therefore, for a woman to say 'No' does not necessarily demonstrate that the woman means it so males are less likely to continue trying to 'get to yes' through negotiation and possibly coercion since they know that 'No' does not necessarily mean 'No.' The value of saying 'No' is that then for sex to happen, the male must sexually conquer the female and some of the focus group respondents voiced how this conquest was integral to the sexual dynamic and served as a reaffirmation of masculinity and male sexual prowess.

Citations

Tolman, Debra L. 2003. "Improving Women's Sexual Assertiveness."
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