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SEÇÃO: ARTIGO

## Affective-sexual Relations: Conceptions and Representations of Middle Class Young University Students<sup>1</sup>

*Relações Afetivo-sexuais: Concepções e Representações de Jovens Universitários de Classes Médias*

*Relaciones Afetivo-sexuales: Concepciones y Representaciones de Jóvenes Universitarios de Clase Media*

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to analyze the conceptions and representations of young university students of both sexes, belonging to the middle classes and of different sexual orientations, regarding their affective-sexual relationships. Twenty-four young people, students from a public university, participated in this study, whose ages ranged from 18 to 30 years, 13 men and 11 women. The data collection consisted of the application of socioeconomic questionnaires and the realization of five audio-recorded sessions of the focus group. The material was organized according to the Thematic Analysis, from which the following categories emerged: close relationship and open relationship. For most participants, representations about close and open relationships proved to be plural and flexible, as agreed by the couple. Affective-sexual relationships would not only be under the aegis of institutionalized rites (dating, engagement, marriage), but would be built gradually according to satisfactory agreements.

**Keywords:** college students, middle class, sexuality, infidelity, monogamy

**Resumo:** Este estudo teve por objetivo analisar as concepções e representações de jovens universitários de ambos os sexos, pertencentes às classes médias e de diferentes orientações sexuais, a respeito de suas relações afetivo-sexuais. Participaram 24 jovens, estudantes de universidade pública, cujas idades variaram de 18 a 30 anos, sendo 13 homens e 11 mulheres. A coleta de dados consistiu na aplicação de questionários socioeconômicos e na realização de cinco sessões áudio-gravadas de grupo focal. O material foi organizado conforme a Análise Temática da qual emergiram as seguintes categorias: relacionamento fechado e relacionamento aberto. Para a maioria dos participantes, as representações sobre relacionamento fechado e aberto revelaram-se plurais e flexíveis conforme acordado pela dupla/casal. Os relacionamentos afetivo-sexuais não estariam apenas sob a égide de ritos institucionalizados (namoro, noivado, casamento), mas seriam construídos paulatinamente conforme acordos satisfatórios.

**Palavras-chave:** estudantes universitários, classe média, sexualidade, infidelidade, monogamia

**Resumen:** Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar las concepciones y representaciones de jóvenes universitarios de ambos sexos, pertenecientes a las clases medias y de diferentes orientaciones sexuales, en cuanto a sus relaciones afetivo-sexuales. Participaron 24 jóvenes, estudiantes de una universidad pública, cuyas edades variaban de 18 a 30 años, siendo 13 hombres y 11 mujeres. La recogida de datos consistió en la aplicación de cuestionarios socioeconómi-



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cos y la realización de cinco sesiones de *focus group* grabadas en audio. El material se organizó según el Análisis Temático del cual surgieron las siguientes categorías: relación cerrada y relación abierta. Para la mayoría de los participantes, las representaciones sobre las relaciones cerradas y abiertas resultaron ser plurales y flexibles según lo acordado por la pareja. Las relaciones afectivo-sexuales no sólo estarían bajo la égida de ritos institucionalizados (relación, noviazgo, matrimonio), sino que se construirían gradualmente según acuerdos satisfactorios.

**Palabras clave:** estudiantes universitarios, clase media, sexualidad, infidelidad, monogamia

In Brazil, since the mid-2000s, there has been an expansion of access to higher education due to affirmative action policies, both at the public and private levels, such as PROUNI (Portuguese acronym for University for All Program) and FIES (Portuguese acronym for Student Financing Fund). In addition to these public policies, there were changes in the pattern of nuptiality and the conception of the offspring, anchored in specific lifestyles, consumption and leisure repertoires, according to segmentation by class (Heilborn, 2018). The public university, in particular, is a place for discoveries, contact with different patterns of behavior, beliefs, values and worldviews, which includes varied representations about gender and sexuality relationships (Afonso et al., 2018). The age group from 18 to 24 years old has a heterogeneous range of living conditions with regard to study, work and family.

This condition indicates that, during this period, young people experience transitions and displacements that do not necessarily denote youth closure (Sposito et al., 2018). For Bourdieu (2003), youths should be differentiated in the light of the amount of economic, cultural and social capital held by their parents and spread across generations. Young people belonging to the middle classes, the object of the present study, remain subsidized by their parents, who continue to guarantee them food, housing, leisure and clothing, so that they do not need, nor are they required to engage in paid activity to meet their needs. For Windle and Maire (2019), in this social group, the family invests heavily in the school education of the offspring, aiming at obtaining a university degree.

Entering the university represents a personal,

academic and professional milestone in the trajectory of any student, an opportunity surrounded by challenges, which projects the young university student in a whirlwind of ambivalent emotions and feelings, such as a sense of personal competence, but also anxiety and insecurity (Soares & Del Prette, 2015). This trajectory must be interspersed with the formulation of measures by higher education institutions to disseminate, among students, a culture aimed at the democratic coexistence of valuing human rights and citizenship. Among the values that must be cultivated and propagated in the university environment, we can highlight the respect for differences related to gender and sexuality (Afonso et al., 2018).

On the other hand, with the relaxation of parental control and supervision, these experiences can be very distressing. Which can lead the student to present difficulties of an interpersonal nature, as he has not yet formed his repertoire of psychosocial resources to face the stress arising from the demands of academic disciplines, making them compatible with the expectations of family, friends and affective-sexual relationships, beyond the demands and aspirations he set for himself (Soares et al., 2015). This study aimed to analyze how young university students of both sexes, belonging to the middle classes and of different sexual orientations, have experienced their affective-sexual relationships and the representations associated with different types of relationship.

Currently, social forces are entangled in a long and profound reformulation of the parameters of sexual and intimate life. Since the 1990s, dramatic changes have shaken the foundations of family and married life (Matos & Magalhães, 2019), with reverberations in the regulation of eroticism and bodies, the performative of sexual and gender identities, and changes in the relationships between men and women, men/men and women/women (Santos et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2019). These transformations occur unevenly in different countries, as they depend on specific social configurations and the historical and cultural condition of each one (Connell, 2016).

Substantial changes in the pattern of expression of sexuality, gender relations and forms of family organization (Risk & Santos, 2019) led to a certain legitimization of the legal order in relation to family arrangements distinct from the traditional nuclear model, such as rights of single-parent families. A research conducted by Heilborn (2018) found that young people aged 18 to 24 years, living in the capitals of the states of Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Porto Alegre, manifest greater acceptance of sexual practices considered "deviant" by the sense common, what the author interprets as an expression of sexual morality with modern features, marked by tolerance to differences in the exercise of sexuality.

On the other hand, this does not mean that this process is homogeneous between social classes and genders. Despite the diffusion of values related to gender equality among the middle classes, even in the different fractions that make up this segment, unequal views regarding some themes persist. For example, sexual desire is considered to be a male attribute, governed by instinct and, therefore, uncontrollable, whereas female sexual desire would be more moderate, regulated by will and, to that extent, docile and controllable (Heilborn, 2018).

In addition, in recent decades, especially after the re-democratization of the 1980s, there were advances in the agenda that proposed to settle the immense Brazilian social debt. Thus, affirming the rights of minorities, such as women, blacks, indigenous people and the LGBTQIA+ population (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite, Transsexual/ Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other possibilities of sexual orientation and/or gender identity that exist).

Even if social, cultural and political changes in recent decades, including revisions on the topic in the medical literature, have questioned the supposed and pernicious link between homosexuality and disease, recent events show the persistence of prejudices against the differences related to the expressions of sexuality and gender identity in different socio-cultural contexts (Balieiro & Risk, 2014). Thus, certain

social segments began to benefit from inclusion policies and showed significant changes in their ways of integrating themselves into the ranks of citizenship. On the other hand, according to Gaspodini and Falcke (2019), scientific production in Psychology reiterates "subtle discrimination" in relation to differences in the scope of gender and sexuality, in addition to omitting in the face of identities that do not fit the homosexuality vs heterosexuality binarism.

In contrast to the relatively vast *corpus* of research conducted in recent years on the subject investigated, there are still no studies available on the impact of the recent ultraconservative wave on young people's conceptions and beliefs about their affective-sexual experiences. The radical ultra-right movement that swept the national scene paved the way for the rise to power of forces clearly identified with the ideas of the extreme right. According to Schwarcz (2019), current conservative governments are not limited to the clumsy reissue of the ideology of fascism and populism typical of the first half of the 20th century. According to Balieiro (2018), groups opposed to the inclusion of themes such as sexual and gender diversity in discussions on human rights have spread "moral panics" in society as a whole. Specifically, these groups have distorted the discussion instead of strengthening the democratic and rational debate in this regard, which contributes to the reiteration of prejudices regarding gender relations and sexuality.

This conflicting field makes it imperative to qualify the public debate around representations associated with the notions of gender, sexuality and affective relationships. To what extent have the recent changes in the political-institutional scenario influenced youth discourses and contributed to change or reinforce prejudices embedded in the norms regarding gender and sexuality?

Data collection for this study took place in October and November 2018, a period marked by a polarized presidential election scenario, marked by tension between conservatives and progressives in the discussion of agendas rela-

ted to customs, gender relations and forms of expression of sexuality, among others, so that these issues were effervescent. Added to this fact, the guide/script used for conducting the focus group included these issues, seeking to explore the opinions about what the participants considered "moralizing" and "progressive" positions regarding affective-sexual relations, so that, in several moments, they expressed their conceptions and representations about these issues based on the heated electoral debate that was unfolding at that time. Thus, due to the fact that the focus group script itself was based on themes related to the customs agenda, it can be said that the study had as context the polarized discussions between progressive and conservative agendas, which persist in Brazil until today.

This study aimed to analyze the conceptions and representations of young university students of both sexes, belonging to the middle classes and of different sexual orientations, regarding their affective-sexual relationships.

## Method

This is an exploratory study with a qualitative approach. Qualitative research was chosen because it allows analyzing collective elaborations and individual intentions regarding an investigated object (Yin, 2016).

### Participants

The selection of participants followed the following eligibility criteria:

*Inclusion:* (1) men and women regularly enrolled in higher education; (2) being interested and willing to participate in a meeting based on group discussion. *Exclusion:* (1) evidence of serious impairment in language or communication skills; (2) sensory deficit (hearing) at a level that could impair communication and the feeling of comfort when developing the proposed task. To delineate the number of people who would compose the convenience sample, the data saturation criterion was adopted (Fontanella et al., 2008).

Twenty-four (24) young, single, students from a public university located in the interior of the

state of São Paulo participated in the study, 13 (55%) men and 11 (45%) women, with an average of 21.5 years (33.33%) ( $SD = 2.43$ ) and total range equal to 12 (18 years to 30 years). As for sexual orientation, it is a heterogeneous group composed of individuals who declared themselves to be heterosexual, gay, lesbian and bisexual.

Students from 12 undergraduate courses on the same university *campus* were included, most of whom were undergraduates in Psychology ( $n = 11$ ) (46%). Most participants attended Elementary School ( $n = 17$ ) (71%) and High School ( $n = 20$ ) (83.33%) in the private network. As for the level of education of their parents, 16 (66.66%) mothers and 11 (48%) fathers completed Higher Education. According to the *Brazilian Criteria and Social Class Distribution* (ABEP, 2018), the family of most of the participants belongs to the highest social class: B2 ( $n = 9$ ) (37.50%), A ( $n = 5$ ) (20.80%), B1 ( $n = 4$ ) (16.66%). Therefore, most of the participants' families of origin are located in the strata equivalent to the middle classes.

This categorization is based on the assumptions from Bertonecelo and Mira (2019), for whom the different classes and their respective fractions differ from each other both materially and symbolically based on specific lifestyles. According to Bourdieu (1979/2007), for whom the differentiation between social classes depends on the position that a given social collectivity occupies in the space of social positions, according to the amount of economic, cultural and symbolic capital held. Each social class expresses a certain lifestyle, that is, it has a certain level of income and properties (economic capital), includes a certain level of education and resources for the apprehension of high culture (school and cultural capital) and internalizes specific principles of the reality in which lives (values and worldview).

### Instruments

To carry out the study, the following instruments were applied. (1) *Brazilian Criteria and Social Class Distribution* (ABEP, 2018). (2) *Socioeconomic Questionnaire* (prepared by the researcher), these instruments were applied for the purpose

of collecting general information regarding the socioeconomic conditions of the participants and their parents. (3) *Guide for conducting a focus group*. The focus group is characterized as a type of group interview based on the interaction between its participants. Its main purpose is to collect information on a given theme, that is, to provide understanding about the representations and beliefs related to the topic in question (Souza, 2020). The interview script included moralizing and normalizing themes of gender and affective-sexual relationships – chosen based on the research by Ford et al. (2003), Heilborn (2018) and Paiva et al. (2008).

These contents were selected because they give rise to divergent and exemplary positions regarding the way men and women position themselves in relation to gender, sexuality and affective-sexual relationships. The contents covered on the guide for conducting focus group were: (a) to have sex before marriage - man, (b) to have sex before marriage - woman, (c) casual sex - man, (d) casual sex - woman, (e) sex between men, (f) sex between women, (g) married woman having an affair, (h) married man having an affair, (i) premarital sex - man, (j) premarital sex - woman, (k) abortion, (l) children raised by gay and lesbian parents.

### Procedure

**Data collection.** The recruitment of participants was carried out through the dissemination of posters on the murals of the various teaching units located on the *campus* of the interior of São Paulo at a public university. An additional strategy used to enlist the volunteers was based on the personal network of one of the research collaborators, a graduate student at the same university as the participants. Based on her personal network, the student invited potential participants through social networks or face-to-face contact. Each student participated in only one focus group session. Five sessions of focal group were held, in which an average of six participants attended, seeking to balance the number of men and women in each meeting, as the objective was to

put in dialogue conceptions supported by both regarding gender relations and affective-sexual relationships, considering also the relational character of the genre. The focus group technique starts from the proposition of basic questions, supported by theories and hypotheses related to the researched theme, which allows exploring the repertoire and discursive universe of the participants, encouraging new inquiries based on the responses of the people interviewed.

Based on the methodological foundations of the focus group technique (Souza, 2020), the sessions were conducted by the main researcher, in the role of moderator, with the support of a scholarship holder. An interview script designed especially for this study was used as explained above. The meetings took place in a reserved room at the university, with appropriate conditions of comfort and privacy. Each session was fully audio-recorded, with the prior agreement of all participants, and had an average duration of 90 minutes. At the beginning of each session, the moderator distributed the Declaration of Informed Consent and explained the ethical principles that governed the study. After reading, each participant affirmed his consent by signing the declaration. Then, they completed the Brazilian Criteria and Social Class Distribution and the Socioeconomic Questionnaire. After completing the questionnaires, a focus group session was started, guided by the application of the guide script.

**Data analysis.** The focus group sessions were transcribed in full and literally, respecting the sequence and the way the speeches were expressed. The complete transcripts formed the *corpus* of the analysis. The collected material was organized according to the principles of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun et al., 2019). Therefore, the methodological steps stipulated by the referred authors were followed: (a) the researcher's familiarity with the data (exhaustive readings and re-readings of the material); (b) establishment of initial codes characteristic of the data according to the general pattern of the material, comparing each code one by one; (c) comparison of codes with potential themes; (d)

checking the themes established with all the material, creating a thematic map of the analysis; (e) progress of the analysis to refine specific themes resulting in clear definitions and naming of each theme; (f) final stage of the analysis, extraction of examples and final analysis of these, relating them to the objective of the research and to the literature in the area.

### *Ethical considerations*

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee from Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras de Ribeirão Preto from Universidade de São Paulo (FFCLRP-USP), filed under the CAAE number: 85429418.3.0000.5407. Data collection and analysis were conducted according to the terms of Resolution No. 510/2016 (Brazil, 2016) from Conselho Nacional de Saúde (Brazil).

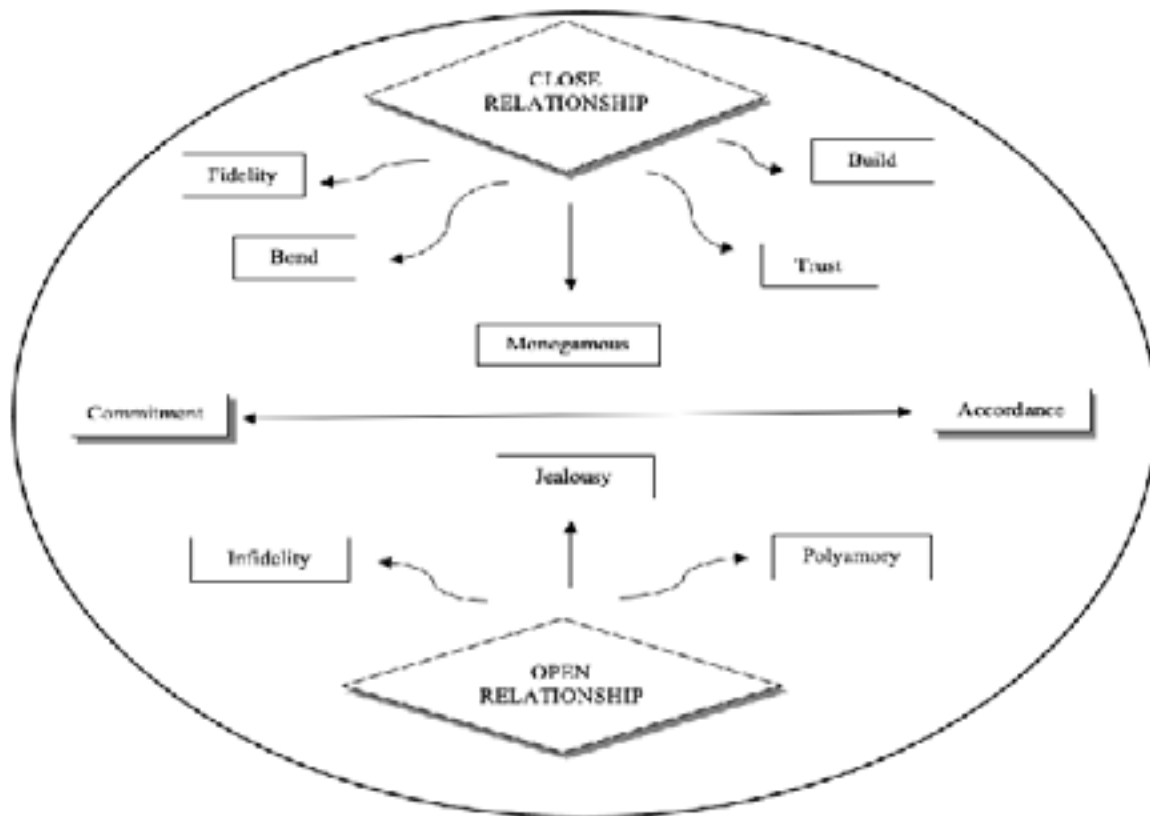
### **Results and discussion**

This study aimed to analyze the conceptions and representations of young university students of both sexes, belonging to the middle classes and of different sexual orientations, regarding their affective-sexual relationships. From the refinement of the analysis, the thematic categories *close relationship* and *open relationship* emerged, which make up the representations of young university students regarding their affective-sexual relationships. These categories were organized according to the principles of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun et al., 2019).

After an exhaustive reading of the transcripts of the focus group sessions, the initial codes were established, which, in turn, indicated the

following themes: fidelity, bond, monogamous, trust, construction, commitment, agreement, infidelity, jealousy and polyamory. These themes, in turn, were collated in relation to the collected material. Next, the thematic map for data analysis was organized. From this refinement, the themes were grouped into the categories *closed relationship* and *open relationship* that describe the conceptions and representations associated with the construction of the affective-sexual bond by the participants (Figure 1). Thus, these categories are based on the themes indicated from the analysis of the material, which, in turn, were collated in relation to the research objectives and the literature from the area.

The *close relationship* category describes that the young people's representations and experiences about affective-sexual bond are marked by the gradual construction of trust, commitment and love bond, with the fidelity agreed between the couple according to mutual interest. The *open relationship* category describes the representations and experiences of young people about an affective-sexual bond that is not guided by a commitment to remain faithful to their partner, as long as this has been agreed between both, as they consider the partner's affective-sexual involvement with another person to be unfaithful when this has not been agreed beforehand. As the representations associated with these two categories are tangent, because young people do not seem to conceive of these relationship modalities as tight, it was decided to discuss them together (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Representations associated with the category's close relationship and open relationship.

Young people consider that their generation handles the question of fidelity better than previous generations, because in their view, marriages were "arranged" in the past and not necessarily the couple maintained an affective bond, whereas, currently, marriage and/or relationship constitutes a choice of the couple and, therefore, depends on the existence of an affective bond. Before they have a relationship or even when they are "meeting someone", they usually reflect on whether they are willing to maintain an exclusive relationship or whether they are likely to maintain a bond without requiring exclusivity. This position is usually shared with the partner for each one to demonstrate their degree of involvement and present their desires regarding the assumption of sexual exclusivity or not. "Fidelity" would be represented as an establishment of trust between the pair, that is, it would represent the couple's ability to agree mutually satisfactory agreements, instead of being conceived only as a moral and

essentialized attribute of any relationship, as stated by one of the participants.

I think that [fidelity] goes beyond the issue of "not dating, not kissing another person, not having sex with another person". Yeah... you dedicate your time to someone, you make choices and stop doing some things for someone and, I think that to be healthy it has to be a mutual commitment, to work in a mutual way, without a person having more power than another. (Lara, personal communication, November 12, 2018)

However, for some people, the notion of fidelity, although agreed upon by the couple, involves Christian conceptions regarding the maintenance of the bond and the ability of each partner to abstain from wants, desires, fantasies, for the construction of the conjugal bond and the fulfillment of the sacrament of marriage. Participants commented that even today the separation of a couple is seen as something negative, although this concept has cooled when compared to past generations. A study by Falcke and Zordan

(2010), based on the application of instruments that measured attitudes of young adults of both sexes regarding family, romanticism, marital roles and sexual permissiveness, showed that love is positively denoted; however, it is not seen as an eternal, exclusive and unique good, which seems to demonstrate a less idealized view of its role in relationships. In another study, Zordan, Falcke and Wagner (2009) observed that the average age at the marriage has increased, as the dedication to study/career, as well as the search for a stable material standard of living have been considered to be more relevant to the life project than the marital bond itself.

According to the report of the participants in this study, due to Christian morality, for example, there is an imperative that "love must last forever", as it constitutes an unbreakable contract, despite the fact that there is no longer an emotional bond between the couple. However, even in this case, the participants consider that some extreme situations can lead to the breakdown of the marriage, for example, in cases of violence against women or when the couple exchanges the "desire to donate to the other" for an extrinsic demand to the bond, hindering the freedom of each one.

That, a sacrament, you made a promise before that person, before God and before several people, your family, friends, so you try to cultivate that, and keep being faithful. But when we take some isolated cases, themes that are difficult to deal with, for example, a woman who suddenly gets beaten by her husband. Are you going to be cultivating such a marriage? So, there are gaps that deserve a better debate and I think that it is not always worthwhile to continue, you, freedom, it has to exist, it is the principle too, of all things. So, if you have no freedom... then it does not make sense to continue, because at the same time that love is you being faithful and you give yourself to that person, is that you respect that person's freedom. So, from the moment you put that person in prison, and you don't get better, you don't try to change, you always remain the same, I think that, in this case, this love is questionable. (Rafael, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

For most of the young collaborators in this research, loyalty would be linked to love, as failure to comply with the exclusivity agreement

can cause damage to the partner, in addition to being harmful to the "health" of the love bond. Many participants consider "cheating" as "lack of character" and something more "reprehensible" than "in the past", as their peers can choose whom they will relate to and whether they are willing to maintain a close relationship, an unusual condition for previous generations and understood as a privilege that is enjoyed in contemporary times.

Nowadays, it's... I think it really doesn't make sense for you to be in a monogamous relationship and for you to break this deal that you have, you know? Because there are countless possibilities, I think it's really up to you to choose what you think you're willing and able to do right now and if you can't handle a monogamous relationship, why are you going to get in a relationship, you know? I think it is much more reprehensible today for you to cheat in a monogamous relationship, at least at our age. Because everything can be arranged, right? So, are you going to break this deal? What is the value of proposing another one, you know, before that? (Luiz, personal communication, October 29, 2018)

The issue of individual law and its limits circumvents the statements. The right of one ends where the right of the other partner begins. The dilemma is how to establish this limit, based on the assumption that it must be contractual – not in the formal sense of the word –, based on a negotiation in which the wishes of both parties are contemplated. The pact would take place between full subjects, recognized as rights holders. An implicit thread ties the representations, which is the ideal of an egalitarian relationship between genders. Therefore, each one has the same rights and duties. Regarding infidelity, most participants consider it a "breach of trust", as one of the parties broke with the agreement. However, although the conception that this is a reprehensible conduct prevails, if the pair has agreed on fidelity, some participants believe that the idealization of monogamy often prevents everyone from talking to their partner about the desire to "date" with other people, because the desire for someone is never exclusive, not everyone would fit the mold of a monogamous relationship.



I don't think that, I think that cheating is a wrong thing, there is no way to say that it is right, but at the same time I think that many of the cheatings are kind of the result of our vision of monogamous love, which we consider as right, you know? As if you had to love that person, you can't want anyone else but him, and it has to be that person, you know? And I don't agree with that view, I think there are people who feel that way, there are people who are really monogamous, and they really only like one person and just want to be with one person, but I think there are other people who are not like that... People that, for example, I can be with my girlfriend and love her and at the same time want to be with other people, that does not make my love for her diminish at all, that our relationship decreases, not at all. (Mariana, personal communication, October 15, 2018)

In addition, some participants point out that infidelity should not be analyzed only under the moral aspect, as it should be contextualized in the whole of the relationship, keeping its complexity on the horizon. In other words, aspects such as: couple involvement and physical satisfaction, desire to explore other relationship possibilities, among others, should be considered. This condition is attested by Giddens (1993) when stating that contemporary relationships would be based on the notion that love and intimacy depend on the confluence of the couple's desires. The idea of confluent love seems to be well suited to dialogue with the narratives produced by the young people in this study.

I think that you don't always cheat because you are dissatisfied, sometimes I think there are people who are satisfied, but it is the human nature to want more [...]. And then there is a cheating. But there is also cheating sometimes for... emotional issues, sometimes a person is not emotionally or sexually satisfied. But I think that if you are in a relationship and the two people agreed that they have a commitment, that it is a close relationship, the least you have to do, if you want to relate to other people, you have to contain that desire because you have a commitment, you agreed with the person. If you feel that it is no longer worthwhile to keep this commitment because your desire to relate to other people is greater than to be with one person, end the relationship first and stay with other people. If you think it's worth it, you can find a way to contain this desire, you can find a way... (Rodrigo, personal communication, November 12, 2018)

Currently, conjugal practices among young

adults, particularly among the middle classes, have adopted new tones for conjugality. For the young population cohabitation can be preceded by a short courtship period and, of their own free will, the couple unite informally and start to live under the same roof, forming what is called "a home". Engaged in this model of relationship for two, the boy assumes the condition designated as a husband by common sense. In this form of union, cohabitation is a process that takes place little by little, and there is no requirement for commitment regarding its continuity or formalization. It is a relatively flexible form of union, as it does not follow the traditional division of specific duties for each gender. The couple strives to find satisfactory and pleasant agreements, which produces consensus that generates comfort that trims the edges of marital dissatisfaction. Although the supposed equality between the pair does not occur in terms of the division of domestic tasks, which continue to be the primary responsibility of women, even if the household budget is already divided among the couple, it is no longer seen as the man's obligation, as the provider of the material substance of the home (Duarte & Rocha-Coutinho, 2011).

On the other hand, studies point out that one of the Gordian knots of the contemporary couple is precisely knowing how to balance the exacerbated individualism that characterizes our time with the ideals of conjugality (Vieira & Stengel, 2010). For women, however, there is an additional challenge, which is how to reconcile marriage and their professional career projects (Figueiredo & Diniz, 2018). Thus, the flexibilization of affective relationships typical of contemporaneity does not mean that there cannot be exhausting conflicts between the pair.

For Machado, Magalhães and Palermo (2016) when the couple's bond is marked by narcissistic elements, the affective space, instead of being a promoter of dialogue/confrontation between unconscious fantasies and reality in the conception of the other as a loving object, becomes to be the stage of the "attempt to carry out a total fusion with the other [...], pointing to the unsatisfactory

experience of the paradoxes union and separation, approximation and distancing, singularity and fusional, typical of conjugality" (p. 40). In these circumstances, the self becomes fragile and becomes precarious, as well as the creative power of the bond is lost in the vain attempt to control the other through regression mechanisms, to hinder his autonomy and stifle his individuality.

In addition to aspects related to trust, infidelity is still corrupted from different representations when practiced by men or women. For the participants, in the past, the "cheating" practiced by men was seen as justifiable and more socially accepted, unlike what happened when it was the woman who cheating. In the case of men, the justification would be given by the influence of an alleged predatory "sexual instinct", or because "the woman did not know how to satisfy him".

Tereza - I think it depends on who commits the cheating, right? I think it's different if it's the man who does it or if it's the woman. When the man commits, I think it was more accepted, more... Júlia - Forgivable, I think. Tereza - Yes. Júlia - Like: "Ah! That's how a man is". Júlia - Yes. Tereza - "It is the woman's fault, who did not satisfy him properly".

Marcos - I guaranteed him a stronger structure, right?

Tereza - Yes. (personal communication, October 29, 2018)

Thus, modern and individualizing standards coexist with ambiguous manifestations that reveal the permanence of the double sexual morality, a polygamous patriarchal device, typical of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2016); because for men it would be allowed the right to maintain sexual relationships within and outside marriage, due to their naturalized inability to contain their sexual impulses, while women should restrain "their sexuality", maintaining the subservient ideal of "beautiful, modest and a housewife".

The young people's conceptions of open relationships are based on agreements established by each couple regarding what they consider fidelity to the other, because the partner's affective-sexual involvement with someone at random, without prior agreement, is considered infidelity. Thus, the definition of what constitutes

an open relationship proved to be heterogeneous, because it can range from couples who have no exclusive commitment to couples who are sexually and emotionally related to the same person, which for young people would mark a polyamorous involvement, for example.

The participants consider that the polyamorous relationship involves the "ability to love" more than one person at the same time, a condition that most consider difficult to be handled, as they do not know to what extent it is possible to "love two people at the same time". On the other hand, some participants consider this possible and that there is a range of configurations in the polyamorous relationship, from a couple formed by three people who are faithful to each other, to couples who do not necessarily maintain a third fixed partner. For some participants, it would not be a simple matter to differentiate between what constitutes an "open relationship" and what constitutes "a polyamorous relationship". Most of the interviewees consider the importance of each one to preserve the autonomy of their choices in the context of relationships, as noted in Luiz's speech.

I think that the traditional Brazilian family has always crossed that line [fidelity], but nowadays... people seeing that this is a model, so, no matter how much people preach this as a savior of the country, it is a failed model, right? I think people deal with it in a more realistic way... or, in that way, there is a time in my life that I want to have a stable relationship and I want to have casual sex with other people. And this is my moment, I will respect it and I will find someone who wants to share this moment with me, I think it exists. I think... that these same people, they would enter into a relationship without having casual sex, but in another moment of life... And I think, I don't know, the successes of today's generation with this situation of casual sex are better balanced than in the past. (Luiz, personal communication, November 12, 2018)

Polyamory, according to Perez and Palma (2018), configures "amorous and/or sexual relationships that involve more than two people with the consent of all, and appears trying to strip the love of the rules that immobilize it, giving it new meanings" (p. 2). This type of relationship is congruent with the advent of "plastic sexuality", which started in the late 18th century, according

to Giddens (1993), which uses this concept to refer to "decentralized sexuality, free from reproduction needs" (p. 10), the result of contraceptive methods and reproductive technologies, in addition to decentralizing the sexuality of the male sexual experience.

Some participants consider that their generation is able to negotiate and deal with loyalty in a "more realistic" way when compared to past generations. In addition to the agreement that each couple makes regarding what they consider infidelity, each person has autonomy to choose which type of relationship he is prone to experience at a given moment. For example, there are phases when a young person may prefer to maintain a stable monogamous relationship, in others he may prefer not to commit to a single person and experience occasional relationships. This flexibility infuses a fluid and dynamic character to relationships, which are not captured by positions that seem crystallized, static and immutable. In this way, a relatively free space for experimentation in relationships is preserved, in which the affective and the sexual are not overdetermined, nor complement each other, but keep a field of permanent tension alive.

In this regard, it is noteworthy to note that the majority of respondents are not exclusively attached to the prescriptions of traditional rites, such as marriage, engagement, as they are not obliged to comply with them. In addition to valuing the margin of freedom of each person to establish relationship modalities that are more satisfying to them at certain times, which does not mean that they do not intend to form lasting relationships. In addition, certain social and family injunctions – religious beliefs, for example – lead some young people to strongly value the construction of a loving and conjugal bond since engaging in early relationships.

### Final considerations

In structural terms, the representations of young university students about affective-sexual relationships must be contextualized in the set of tensions caused by the reorganization of the

capitalist system in the globalized world. A world whose financial voracity breaks down barriers that oppose the free movement of capital, including and above all ethical limits, legitimizing class oppression, the withdrawal of fundamental rights and modifying sociability relations within the family, work, school and other social institutions. In the Brazilian scenario, this global movement is added to the ideological polarization of society with regard to the convictions, customs and rights conquered by those who, for centuries, remained on the fringes of society in a situation of liminality, such as indigenous populations, blacks and LGBTQIA+.

Despite some setbacks observed, for most participants the representations about close and open relationships proved to be plural and flexible, as agreed by the pair/couple. Affective-sexual relationships would not only be under the aegis of institutionalized rites, such as dating, engagement, marriage, but they would be built gradually according to satisfactory agreements established. Thus, the representations about these modalities of affective-sexual relationships proved to be heterogeneous. The collected results suggest that the profound transformations made in the relationship patterns in the last decades seem to live side by side with traditional beliefs bequeathed by the patriarchal system. This persistence of the "old" amalgamated with the "new" points, in the young people's discourse, to a peculiar pattern of permanence and ruptures in the way of living and understanding the Brazilian family, as well as affective-sexual relationships. The analysis of the historical process, especially with the resurgence of conservative discourses, may conclude whether this is due to the fact that the young people interviewed are going through a transition stage, or if this irregular mixture of the old and the new is a form of resistance to hegemonic discourses, more than a structural feature of the social organization of the family, marriage and relationships.

The representations of sexuality of contemporary young people are anchored in their experiences, which do not occur in a vacuum, but

in a certain scenario. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the socio-political context in which they are based, with its metamorphoses and twists. A limitation of the present study is the fact that, although it includes young people from a wide variety of undergraduate courses, in the human, biological and exact sciences, in its sample, psychology students predominated (46%), who may have peculiar views, fruit of ethos characteristic of students of Human Sciences. Another important limitation is that the sample was restricted to students from public institutions. As a suggestion for future research, it is recommended that these aspects be considered, especially the realization of studies that include students from private higher education institutions, as the area requires investigations in diverse contexts.

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Table 1 - Description of participants according to gender, age, education and economic classification

<i>Variables</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Gender</i>			<i>24</i>
<i>Male</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>55</i>	
<i>Female</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>45</i>	
<i>Age (years)</i>			<i>24</i>
<i>18</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8.33</i>	
<i>19</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8.33</i>	
<i>20</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8.33</i>	
<i>21</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>33.33</i>	
<i>22</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>16.66</i>	
<i>23</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>12.5</i>	
<i>24</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8.33</i>	
<i>30</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.17</i>	
<i>Elementary School</i>			<i>24</i>
<i>Private network</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>71</i>	
<i>Public network</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>21</i>	
<i>Both</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8</i>	
<i>High School</i>			<i>24</i>
<i>Private network</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>83.33</i>	
<i>Public network</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>16.66</i>	
<i>Both</i>	<i>0</i>		
<i>Undergraduate course</i>			<i>24</i>
<i>Psychology</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>46</i>	
<i>Administration</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8.33</i>	
<i>Biology</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8.33</i>	
<i>Nutrition</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.17</i>	
<i>Chemistry</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.17</i>	
<i>Economy and Accounting</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.17</i>	
<i>Economy</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.17</i>	
<i>Nursing</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.17</i>	
<i>Pharmacy - Biochemistry</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.17</i>	
<i>Biomedical Sciences</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.17</i>	
<i>Biomedical Informatics</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.17</i>	
<i>Applied mathematics</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.17</i>	
<i>Brazilian Criteria and Social Class Distribution</i>			<i>24</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>20.8%</i>	
<i>B1</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>16.66%</i>	
<i>B2</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>37.5%</i>	
<i>C1</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>20.8%</i>	
<i>C2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4.2%</i>	

