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**Loreley Gomes Garcia**

Pesquisadora Independente CNPq.  
E-mail: [loreley@pq.cnpq.br](mailto:loreley@pq.cnpq.br)

**Marina Blank Virgilio da Silva**

Universidade Federal da Paraíba  
E-mail: [marina.blankvs@gmail.com](mailto:marina.blankvs@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

This article crosses gender and citizenship, addressing empowerment, feminism, violence and the notion of equality. Methodologically, we used interviews and self-defense workshops for women, approaching these themes with adolescents and young women participating in actions by partner NGOs that develop empowerment actions for young women. We propose to detect attitudes that involve the girls' agency and the perceptions they have about the themes, in addition to other important notions for the research, such as sexuality, femininity, leadership and life projects. We seek to understand the impacts of the projects in which these young people participate in their perception of these experiences and how the

stimulus for individual and collective actions is given.

The main objective is to analyze the connection between agency, implemented in practice, and citizenship. If the young women understand and act within the scope of the search for equality and rights, there will be speeches and actions that give clues about how this works, an exercise of decision and action on issues that go beyond the private sphere. Young women negotiate new discourses about femininity and gender equality while making decisions that affect themselves and others in social interactions, a personal and cultural construct. This conception will have a direct impact on the construction of the young woman's citizenship, which will also show several traces of incompleteness. We understand that when investigating the practices and performances that constitute 'girlhood', we can perceive young women as transforming social agents, whether in the choice of sociocultural discourses that will build on gender, whether in assertiveness in their projects or participation in the public space triggering empowerment.

**Keywords:** Gender, girlhood, citizenship, gender equality, empowerment.

**1 INTRODUCTION**

This article is part of the productions of the Feminism and Gender Study Group – Pandora, of the research "Owner of her nose: on an ephemeral and multilayered citizenship", currently in progress, which presents continuities and advances of the previous research projects of the Pandora Group, "The so difficult beginning: adolescents deciding on sexuality", from 2016, extended in 2018 as "Playing with fire: adolescents decide on sexual initiation," which ended in 2021. All received CNPq funding.

Does the nature of sexuality express a condition of citizenship, a social position, a way of relating to others and the world? Is it a citizen's sexuality or is the absence of citizenship reflected, in everything and for everything, also in sexual practices?

From this questioning, our work makes a cross between gender and citizenship, addressing mainly empowerment, feminism, violence and the notion of equality. Throughout *Wendo's workshops*

and,<sup>1</sup> from the interviews with our young interlocutors, we sought to detect attitudes that involve the girls' agency and the perceptions they have about the themes mentioned, as well as other important notions for research, such as sexuality, femininity, leadership and life projects. With these notions, we were able to perceive the impacts of the projects (promoted by NGOs that were research partners) in which the young women participate, in their perception of these experiences and how the stimulus for individual and collective actions is given.

We investigate the attitudes that express *the agency* of young women, in all its dimensions, including the exercise of sexuality through their conception of sexual consent.

To know about the relationship of our initial questioning, it is necessary to understand the relationship of young women with the concept of citizenship. What do you mean by citizenship and equality? How do they perceive themselves as citizens and how do they experience this condition? In the sense given by Lefebvre (2013), when he thinks of the triad of contradictions of Modernity encompassing the perceived, the lived, and the conceived.

Here the main objective is to analyze the connection between agency, affected in practice, and citizenship.

If young women understand, perceive and live in the scope of the search for equality and rights, there will be some discourse and action that give clues about how this works, an example is participation in the public sphere, in all its dimensions, since they imply in the exercise of decision and action on issues that go beyond the private sphere: school guilds, neighborhood committees, cultural, artistic and social movements, professional associations, volunteering and activities involving "political doing" and the exercise of democracy, including digital media networks.

What interests us most in the scope of the notion of citizenship is the feeling of self-respect: do you feel important when you help define the course of a community, school, organization, etc.? Many studies (BRANDÃO, 2006), point out that the lack of opportunity for young women and the feeling of unimportance lead to the almost absence of plans and projects, or low ambition.

Several productions of feminist theory (INNESS 2004), notably those that make up the theoretical production on *Girlhood*, denote the use of the concept of *agency* to create the theoretical framework that underlies these studies.

In these texts, the investigated subject is reconceptualized from the idea of *agency* (TOLMAN, 2002). With this, it is intended to unveil the effects of the transgressive engagement of young women and the potential of their performance as a social transforming agent and, to the same extent, to observe the individual effect of transgressions on their vision and their relationship with the surrounding

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<sup>1</sup> The "wen" is short for the word woman and "do" means "way" in Japanese. Wendo presents itself as self-defense for women or feminist self-defense and differs from simple self-defense in that it is not limited to physical defense. Available in <http://www.wendo.ca>

society. However, *for feminist theory, conceptions of agency* that have a voluntarist or deterministic nature (GIDDENS, 1984), are considered insufficient to account for the inventiveness of *agency* in feminist practices, with their complex and innovative forms, despite confronting structural restrictions and prohibitions.

It is important to mark on agency, that all action takes place within the social structures that constrict and shape life, but action can transgress and cause permanent ruptures in these structures.

The construction of the female subject occurs through the internalization of a cultural discourse about femininity (SMITH, 1990). At the same time, sociocultural ideas about femininity are processed by young women at the intersection with other discourses about race, class, sex, and social markers of differences.

Thus, young women, when making decisions, consider and are affected by the set of these identity constructions (ORENSTEIN 1994). Therefore, we can recognize gender as a cultural and also personal construct (CHODOROW, 1995).

Young women negotiate new discourses on femininity and gender equality while making decisions that affect themselves and other individuals in social interactions, a personal and cultural construction.

This conception will have a direct impact on the construction of the young woman's citizenship, which will also present several traits of incompleteness.

We understand that by investigating the practices and performances that constitute '*girlhood*', we can perceive young women as transforming social agents, either in the choice of sociocultural discourses that they will build on gender, or in assertiveness in their projects or participation in public space triggering empowerment.

It is notorious that feminist academic production has influenced political, sociological, and philosophical thought, causing great impact in the last Decades.

Despite this, in the field of citizenship studies, the voices of young women still have little space. For Caron (2011), this gap makes the *Girlhood Studies* subfield the ideal place for the development of a theory of citizenship that includes young women as subjects full of rights.

Before the age of majority, they are barred from participating in the formal political process, except to vote after the age of 16. For Isin and Turner (2002), citizenship is thought of as a social process, and not a passive formal status of rights and obligations.

Thus, individuals and social groups engage in these active processes with their demands, obtaining or losing rights. From a sociological perspective, citizenship can be better understood by examining the positions, understandings, and acts of those who do not have the status of citizen.

That is, citizenship, especially in the globalized world, needs to be seen as a social practice of belonging and disconnected from the borders of nation-states (YUVAL-DAVIS, 2007). Young women are rarely considered or treated as peers by adults. They are in a marginalized position when they are not heard, however, participating in decision-making processes brings a greater sense of self-worth and self-esteem (LISTER, 2003), it is this sense that will have a great impact on our field of research.

"Both a status, bearing a set of rights, including social and reproductive rights, and a practice, involving political participation broadly defined to include the kind of informal politics in which women [and girls] are most likely to engage" (LISTER 2003:195–196).

This makes us consider the theoretical and strategic relevance of including the points of view and experiences of adolescents in citizenship studies, from the feminist point of view. According to Budgeon (2001): "difference is not only about race, class, ethnicity but also age".

Overcoming this asymmetry requires understanding the different ways young women position themselves and how they are allocated within social relations and under what conditions.

In our current research, we introduced notions of what citizenship is, extracting from the experiences of the young interlocutors how they feel when their citizenship is affronted and how this has an impact on their life projects (dreams and expectations).

We question whether there is a rational model embedded in their attitudes. Is there continuity between the expectation of the future and the decisions they make in the present? What external elements support decisions consistent with projections for your future? What is the weight of family relationships, peers and partners in the fulfillment of expectations? Living in an urban environment (like most of our interviewees), the increase in the level of education, the entry into the labor market, broaden the horizons of young women beyond the traditional role of women, marriage tends to lose importance as the main life project. What's next? What is the feasibility and how do they articulate themselves to achieve other goals? Although gender inequities persist, especially in the intrafamily division of labor, women change their practices, their decisions and actions appear as decisive axes to understanding what young women want amid new social dynamics.

We want to draw attention to the fact that, in the globalized world, young women can experience a sense of belonging and experience multilayered citizenships that are not being taken into account (HALL and COFFEY 2007; YUVAL-DAVIS, 2007), due to uncritical assumptions and neglect of the condition of gender and generation. Sanjay Asthana (2010), states that "the convergence of development in globalization and media enables young women to create cultural political spaces that reshape notions of participation, citizenship and civil society in particularly important ways.

" In these new approaches to youth citizenship, not only do young women engage and belong differently than they did in the past, but they actively transform what citizenship is, what it represents, they transform the way young women are socialized to be citizens. (LOADER, 2007).

A feminist citizenship project encourages a theoretical and practical approach that is in agreement with the *agency* of women and young people (LISTER, 2003).

Before moving on to the analyses generated directly by our fieldwork, we need to introduce the theoretical discussion on *consent*, which will be reflected in notions of empowerment, violence and self-value, among others, for our young interlocutors.

It is necessary to understand that the definitions of consent continue to be debated in the legal and political spheres, which, in common sense, also generates noise in the exact understanding of what the concept is, which cannot generate a risky situation for women, whether young or old. There is still insufficient academic production on what sexual consent is.

We understand the socialization process as permanent and always inconclusive; gender categories are permanently reconstructed by people in their interactions, and in them, the values, roles, attributions and norms of interaction between the sexes. In this perspective, gender relations dynamically permeate the entire social fabric, manifesting themselves in a specific way in the different social groups, maintaining hierarchization as a brand.

There is the idea, in some discourses, that the contemporary young woman would be sexually liberated and free from gender imbalances, an image in which the young woman is active, unproblematic, desiring, independent and sexually empowered.

But not everyone shares this overly optimistic view that gender inequalities are in the past. Some approaches see contemporary sexualization as the reissue of old gender norms and disagree that sexual objectification is a new form of empowerment (GILL, 2007).

It is a fact that, despite the representations about the free and assertive sexuality of young women, they remain at risk of sexual violence (POWELL, 2010).

Research also demonstrates that the practice of unwanted, pressured and coercive sex happens as a common experience and that such experiences are often understood as 'normal' in the context of heterosexual relationships (ALLEN, 2003).

This feminist perspective assumes that contemporary relations between the sexes remain defined by male privilege, and are constrained by implicit pressures, making the sexual freedom granted to young women difficult to be transposed to other spheres of daily life (GAVEY, 2005; TOLMAN, 2002).

It is necessary to problematize the contradictory ways in which young women assume sexual empowerment while consenting to have unwanted sex.

There is little research on how consent is given in sexual negotiation, despite its importance in the field of sexual violence prevention (BERES, 2007).

For this, it is necessary to investigate how young women consent to sex in stable relationships and chance encounters. Studies reveal that sexual experiences are influenced by gender discourses and norms, which creates implicit pressures that disrupt and unbalance negotiations for consent. Burkett and Hamilton (2012) suggest that sexual agency is performed under a mixture of feminist and antifeminist elements in which women perceive themselves as empowered, although they continue to reproduce sexuality in terms of heteronormative discourse.

The discussion about consent is about how young women are constricted during the negotiation to consent and negotiate sex.

They also highlight the centrality of women's communicative gap when it comes to consent and victimization, leading to the conclusion that lack or failure in communication would be a reason for unwanted sex. As a result of pressures in gender relations, coercive sexual encounters appear as the result of their lack of assertiveness and inability to communicate their real sexual intentions (FRITH and KITZINGER, 1997).

The authors do not suggest that the 'fault' lies with the young women but rather detect that something needs to be done to make them more assertive and able to express their desires, at this point, we demonstrate the importance of the methodological choice of our research in carrying out with the interlocutors the workshops of *Wen do*.

For Gill (2007), the traditional objectification of women was transplanted by an insidious form of coercion in which they represent themselves as an active participant, desiring sexual subjects acting according to their interests (GILL, 2007:151).

However, the communicative barriers and norms that put her at a disadvantage when she must make sexual choices persist, we can observe implicit norms that would regulate casual sexual encounters and restrict their ability to actively negotiate consensus.

These norms are internalized by young women and are facilitated by the convergence of a discourse based on male sexual aggressiveness, which is difficult to contain; alongside the supposed female sexual passivity and the invisible subservient role, which they carry on their shoulders without realizing it (GAVEY ET AL., 1999).

Burkett and Hamilton (2012) list one more element that would explain unwanted sex, it would be an exchange that they would trigger in the expectation of achieving a relationship of intimacy. In this sex economy, women exchange sex, and bargain with sex to achieve intimacy, love and commitment, essential components in a loving relationship.

Sex is used both as a response to verbal and emotional pressures manipulated by partners, and to restore peace in relationships (GAVEY, 2005).

Women acquiesce to their partners because they still believe it is their responsibility to meet their needs (ALLEN, 2003). Thinking of sex in terms of the consensual or non-consensual norm, or rape (in the extreme case), is silent about women's experiences, which are much more complex (GAVEY, 1999, 2005).

## **2 MATERIALS AND METHODS**

We methodologically used interviews and self-defense workshops for women (*Wendo*), approaching the themes already introduced in this article with adolescents and young women participating in actions of partner projects.

During the period of 2020/21, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to postpone most of our fields of research, focusing on the online prospection of projects that worked with empowerment actions with the public of adolescents and young women, preferably of high school age (14 - 18 years), after the selection of a list of organizations, the Pandora Group team has dedicated a few months of dialogue and negotiations with these potential partnerships.

We will present here in this work results of the fields and interviews in three partnerships that received us in the first half of 2022 in their projects in the northeast region of Brazil: Plan International (Codó / Maranhão and Teresina / Piauí), Freedom Equality Sorority Project - LIS (João Pessoa / Paraíba) and Bethel (João Pessoa / Paraíba). In Codó, we conducted 14 interviews with young participants in Plan's "School of Leadership for Girls" action.

From the same organization, in Teresina we interviewed 17 girls, participants in another action, "Empower them". We interviewed 6 young participants of the action "But what is Empowerment?", of the LIS Project, in João Pessoa, also coming from other nearby cities of Paraíba and the interior, Cabedelo and Araçagi.

Also, in João Pessoa, 10 young people were interviewed, all residents of the community of São José, participants in the social project of the Bethel Church (the action is aimed at the low-income community, having no link to direct religious participation).

It was also part of our field, following the same methodology, in partnership with an organization from São Paulo, the Association of Residents of Alto da Vila Brasilândia (AMAVB).

Thinking about the questions raised in our questionnaires applied to adolescents, addressing the intimacy of young women requires the creation of a safe and trusting space.

We managed to create this space in the stage of the previous research, "Playing with fire: adolescents decide on sexual initiation", in which we investigated the decision for sexual initiation,

initiating the field and approximation with the young women not directly with the application of the questionnaires, but with self-defense workshops for women, with hired instructors of the *Wendo* feminist technique, which provide not only training in martial arts techniques but also theatrics and conversation circles about gender and sexuality.

Now, in the research "Owner of her nose: on an ephemeral and multilayered citizenship" we continue to offer feminist self-defense workshops, *Wendo*, for adolescent girls and apply the interviews soon after. The first part, the workshop, is held collectively with the group of young people, in spaces of the partner projects that they already attend, being familiar places for them.

The workshop is taught by an instructor of the technique (there were two instructors hired in these four fields of research, one for the actions of João Pessoa and the other traveled with part of the Pandora team to the locations of the Plan Internacional projects, both had already taught workshops in other stages of our research and are partners of the Study Group).

The second part is the application of the questionnaires, with Pandora researchers, individually with each participant of the workshop.

*Wendo's* workshops aim, in a short space of interaction, to provide practical knowledge about the capacity of body protection and sensory development. *Wendo* works on the perceptions of strength and reaction that can be instrumentalized by all women in self-defense.

We present in an articulated way, during the workshops, the main protective resources that young women can use - physical, communicative, preventive and psychological - from activities that integrate their physical and sensory capacities.

The workshops integrate knowledge and body control, protection and reactive force to ensure the safety of women in the spaces they circulate, with the teaching of efficient techniques and easy assimilation. In this format, the effectiveness of the blows is prioritized, based on the proper use of reactive energy, strength, intuition and agility.

The blows of attack and defense are fundamental, techniques of projections, blocks, dodges, immobilizations, twists, escapes and disarmaments from executions with simple and efficient applications that hinder, or neutralize attacks or adversities that can subject us to offensive actions.

Spatial perception activities, both internal and external, relaxation and concentration, contributing to the expansion of self-confidence will also be added.

The activity is built in a constant dialogue, in which the participants receive instructions and explanations about each exercise worked, paying attention to the body approaches and their benefits for the emancipation of the woman, being each one free to choose to practice a certain coup or not.

We emphasize that the teachings of physical techniques and blows for self-defense do not mean holding each accountable Young, each woman, for her safety.

Gender violence is a structural issue, and security should be the responsibility mainly of public policies. Self-defense is a last resort in an emergency.

There is also no incentive to violence, all blows must be applied in the just measure of protection of oneself in an attack. Direct physical confrontation is always oriented to be avoided whenever possible, seeking first for escape routes. In addition to physical techniques, the *Wen of values* the empowerment of women and the workshops integrate discourses on self-value and encourage the strengthening of the voices of young women.

Our experience has been extremely positive because the young women show great interest in participating and act very actively. And the most vibrant thing is that they leave feeling empowered.

As we mentioned, subsequently, the young women are interviewed in-depth, by young researchers from the Pandora Group (undergraduate and graduate students), most of whom are close in age to those interviewed.

The environment of intimacy, of the basic premises of the *Wen, do*, "what is spoken here, here stays", allows an opening for more intimate conversations that are complemented during the interviews to account for the diversity of situations and postures adopted among young people inserted in those sociocultural contexts.

### 3 FINDINGS

We will start the presentation of the results from the analysis of the interviews with coordinators and members of the technical team of the NGOs, projects and groups that were our partners in this research.

From this perception of the entities themselves about their actions/projects, we will then move on to the analysis of the impact of this participation on young women, in their notions about the themes already mentioned above in this article, presenting here, in a general way, how the groups of girls of each project, collectively, understand conceptions of citizenship, empowerment, life projects, action and other themes that we highlight in this research. In the discussions that will be brought in this article, we will deepen the contents that emerged from the interviews with the young women.

Plan Internacional mainly develops two projects, "Leadership School for Girls", with adolescents from 14 to 18 years old and the "Girl Network", with young people between 18 and 24 years old, this is currently Plan's priority because it reproduces the leadership schools. All projects are focused on empowerment having markers such as gender, agency augmentation, change leaders and influencers, political participation.

The entrepreneurial network empowers older participants. They seek to work in schools, with content on economic empowerment, employability and income.

It is not only about increasing income, but working at the roots of inequality (racism, sexism, patriarchy) and not just about training, it also leads entrepreneurs to have contact with the network. Plan's methodologies are well structured, there is a marked step-by-step in each project, with an evaluation plan and a keen eye for gender issues and power relations.

To close our partnership, we went through an internal evaluation process that sought to ensure that the impact of our workshops was positive and aligned with the ethical and care values that the entity reproduces, in addition to training and safeguard meetings, a great commitment to the contents that reach young women.

The projects last one year, primarily using dialogue as a tool for opening up learning. The School of Leadership builds an action/advocacy plan, but the goal is to create influencers, which is more than *advocacy*, a notion that is strict for effective policy change, the influencer can, and is encouraged to, engage the community.

There is an internal plan of the entity for cases of harassment and abuse. They receive support from regional education units.

Even with the seriousness of his work, national and international, Plan shared with us that there was in Maranhão an accusation from the management of a school that the entity's project makes girls "become lesbians".

As we will understand later in the discussions of this article, the conversations about sexuality and gender have a great impact on the young participants of the projects, in an in-depth, informative and respectful way, opening space for non-heteronormative identifications, without this being "encouraging to become a lesbian", only recognizing and respecting the diversity of sexual orientations.

In Teresina, they worked on rights for girls, equality, but they had to remove the word "gender" from the project, even addressing these issues, to ensure the institutional support of schools, because of the conservative context of the region.

Plan prepared a project and, with the school community, wrote a guide, but the Department of Education ordered the removal of the word "gender" and they had to make the switch. Another material developed by Plan, but national, is the Manual against censorship in schools, to assist educators and parents, within an institutional proposal of literacy in rights.

We would like to highlight here the care and kindness with which the Pandora Group team was received by equipe of the Plan partner in Codó, from the beginning to the end of our research work on the project in Maranhão, were with us, shared their concerns respectfully about possible scenarios that could become a risk for the young women, we talked about all the points and we woke up, at no time, both our team and the young women were unassisted.

We shared our impressions with the technical team and coordination after the end of the work with the young women and our suggestions and highlights were heard and valued. Plan's team in Codó is made up of women who are diverse – racially, ethnically and in sexual orientation.

Their competent and respectful work, of multiplication of leaderships, inspires young women to be protagonists of their life projects, empowered women, leaders in their communities, no one is there making young people simply "turn lesbians".

The participants in the actions of the Plan in Codó and Teresina have different repertoires of understanding the notions that we highlight in this article. The young women of Codó, most of whom have participated in at least one other project of the entity previously, demonstrate in their answers a greater knowledge about the notions of empowerment, feminism, sorority and even citizenship.

Many have an active voice in their communities and are multipliers, on a path of self-building as a leader. Even with all the support, information and welcoming by Plan, some still feel weakened when the subject of the questionnaire becomes specifically about self-worth (do you feel important?), tensions between projects and family relationships and silenced abuses (or not yet understood very clearly as violence).

Sexuality also becomes a sensitive subject, many do not identify themselves within a heteronormative expectation, which implies in some cases in a welcome felt within the project and sometimes in schools, but not in the home.

Racial issues are also a highlight, many young women understood themselves as black after participating in the project, can more easily identify racist offenses and be treated "in a different way" in certain spaces.

In the projects of Piauí, the notion of empowerment stands out as highly related to entrepreneurship. There is some confusion about notions of gender, which can probably be explained by the institutional obstacles faced by the Plan proposal already mentioned.

Life projects are marked by a desire to undertake but without yet a better-delineated path of how to do it.

The Sorority Equality Freedom Project was also a partner in this research, with one of its actions, "But what is empowerment?", held during the second half of 2021, in monthly online meetings and a face-to-face meeting that resumed the thematic dialogues and previous workshops, with young high school students and in the process of starting their graduation, of João Pessoa, Cabedelo and Araçagi. LIS is a feminist project of social articulation and cultural production, which carries out, supports and enhances intersectional debates, artistic manifestations and empowerment.

Two of the members of the Pandora Group are members of the group's team – Marina (creator of the LIS Project and one of the authors of this article) and Sonaly (one of the researchers who participated in all the fields brought here in this research).

In the action that generated our partnership, an empowerment debate was held through cross-cutting themes such as the role of gender, body, race relations, collective consciousness, violence against women, reproduction of femininities, etc.

The objective was to empower the participants in the political sense, with a collective perspective, liberation of patterns, learning to accept themselves and self-value, broaden the perception of women in society and about social markers of difference.

Each meeting had a methodology that combined dialogue circle, exchange of experience, photography workshops, dance, writing/narratives of the self, all mediated by concepts and provocations. A specific theme within the general discussion of empowerment was developed with a different workshop-by-encounter activity.

A major obstacle to the development of the action was that only on the screen, in the virtual world, there is shyness to open the camera, to show the face, body, their expressions.

Only the last meeting was face-to-face, but many knew each other from the beginning of the action, but not the group as a whole.

There was withdrawal of participation over the months, especially at the time of the National High School Exam (Enem), but the most assiduous participated until the end of the activities of this action with this class, at the end there were around 5 girls left, below expectations.

It is important to highlight the reports of violence, a recurring theme throughout the meetings, but mainly with the theme of Empowerment and coping with gender violence, but the stories reported were not about themselves, most were with neighbors, colleagues, friends and relatives.

As we will see in the next topic, in the discussions, violence is a notion learned long before empowerment, it is a situation almost normalized in several contexts.

Many participants only understood that the situations reported were violence after the dialogues developed in the LIS action and also the importance of collective confrontation.

The project highlights as results the possibility of offering a different perspective of life, rethinking abusive relationships, not submitting to violence, being able to change their relationship with body and acceptance, reinforcement of self-appreciation, ready to overcome, occupy and lead spaces.

To have a different vision of "woman", both as social roles of gender, and constructions of femininities. Young women are more politically aware, perceiving gender differences and other social markers of difference, disagreeing with hierarchies and facing inequalities.

They reject conservative agendas. The workshop in partnership with Pandora was the closing of the activities of this class of the action "But what is Empowerment?", the young women followed after the end of this cycle of activities getting involved in other actions and themes of the LIS Project, such as menstrual poverty, combating racism, dialogue about youth in partnership with the Malala Fund in Brazil and the photographic exhibition Cara de Feminista, that deconstructs stereotypes about feminisms.

The Bethel organization (social arm of Bethel Church in the São José community) operates in João Pessoa and was a partner organization of this research in Paraíba. Its activities are organized following the axes: citizenship, cognitive, physical and socio-emotional health.

As the young women have to be students to participate in the project, the time of the actions is in the evening, this was the only workshop/interviews we conducted at night.

Part of the workshop participants could not be interviewed in person, because, at a certain moment, we researchers were interrupted to be informed that we would need to end the interviews, both for the safety of circulating and leaving the community at night, and for a possible shot heard by the workshop instructor (who we later learned was not the sound of a gun and there was no risk of shooting).

A reflection that we can put is about the relevance of having a self-defense workshop in a region where even our work had to suffer an interruption for security. Another point to think about is doing research within a community and a certain "social panic" of being inserted within this field, without familiarity with it, one of the teachings of the *Wen* of is to be alert, something that can save lives, undoubtedly is an important learning, but beyond the state of healthy attention to the safety of women.

We also need to consider the security of pre-established spaces and concepts of insecurity (but this is a discussion that we cannot delve into further here in the space of this article).

Returning to the axes of the Bethel social project, the goal of the citizenship axis is to "change life". The health axis deals with themes such as reproductive health, sexuality and menstrual poverty. The social-emotional involves leisure, sports and championships, as well as lectures with psychologists.

Being a very poor neighborhood, they promote leisure activities such as going to the pizzeria, cinema, steakhouse, and luau on the beach, which would not be possible outside the project to the girls. Bethel receives financial support from the U.S.-based NGO Compassion, which helps evangelical churches working with young people.

To be supported it is necessary to transmit security, to be able to receive adolescents, people cannot have passed with a criminal record. Bethel is part of a protection network together with the Guardianship Council, PM, etc. for children and adolescents.

Compassion has a project but is flexible to local adjustments, operates in the areas of health, citizenship, spirituality and volunteering, but aims at citizenship training.

For the teens to participate, Bethel knows each family and home. They work on the prevention of violence, focus on listening to adolescents, breaking prejudice and welcoming.

Of the 90 participating adolescents, 3 are pregnant, which is the annual average reported by the technical team. The NGO helps the pregnant girl, but many do not know who the father is.

The project also works on vocational training for parents, distributes with food baskets, snack kit etc., the resources come from donations. In the pandemic the girls were discouraged and many dropped out of school, pregnant women also drop, in the Bethel social project the team tries to rescue these girls.

In the interview with the coordinators/technical team, they reported that the results of Bethel's actions are positive in training and education for work. Inserted in the market, they reach college, commerce, etc., in general, they leave the neighborhood when they change their lives. It promotes courses aimed at employment, income and entrepreneurship.

Among them makeup, eyebrow design, hospitality, cashier attendant, pharmacy attendant, marketing, audiovisual, preparation for the entrance exam.

Our young women interviewed, many of whom did not yet have a formal job, due to their age, did not yet have as an immediate plan to enter the labor market, but they show a desire to attend college, even if the course itself does not yet know.

The coordinators informed in the interview with the entity that an obstacle to the projects is to depend on volunteer work, they receive help from the World Vision funds and Children's Villages that donate baskets and volunteers, promote theater and literacy workshops, but it is not always possible to maintain a constant relationship with these actions.

We take the opportunity here to also highlight the welcome of the Bethel team to the Pandora researchers, by the time, it was not possible to prolong the presentations of the actions in detail, but the coordinators were very excited about the possibility of extending our work as volunteers in the future and taking with our didactic dialogues and activities on feminism, gender, sorority etc.

These themes, as the responses of the young participants themselves demonstrate, are still a point to be strengthened in the actions of Bethel, they need specialists in these areas to bring adequate information to the young women and undo confusions about these notions, which are sometimes put as positive, sometimes are averse.

On the impact of evangelical conservatism, they are understood as a social project without a flag, whose objective is to help and create opportunities.

"There is a church that preaches submission, but churches are different from a social project that helps women to free themselves and work.

That empowers against violence, brings liberation," says the Bethel team. As a social project, they know the reality of each case. About the workshop with the Pandora Group, the girls kept secret, the coordination understands that knowledge is more liberation.

#### **4 DISCUSSIONS**

As we were able to present throughout this article, we identified a relevant impact of the projects on the way girls understand (or do not understand) empowerment, feminism, equality, violence, life projects, citizenship.

Each project tends to guide from different bases what empowerment is. Some link with entrepreneurship and the job market, others with a more collective perspective combined with the individual.

Somehow, the protagonist of young women is encouraged in practically all actions, again having different relationships according to a more communitarian perspective or individual success, which will be reflected in the notion of citizenship and possibilities of a "political doing".

We note that feminist projects differ in this perspective from projects created by the church or focused on entrepreneurship.

There is great diversity in the understanding of what feminism is and if it is something positive, those young women who participate in feminist group actions have a greater repertoire on notions that make up the understanding of what are the diverse approaches to feminisms. The larger this repertoire, the younger women identify as feminists.

The notion of Sorority, many do not know how to explain exactly the concept, but practically all felt that participation in the projects impacted the way they relate to other girls, positively.

Life projects appear in the interviews focused on study and employment. Helping the family also appears within the planning.

Many do not see structural problems as impediments to achieving their goals, but as a matter of individual problems, such as effort and willpower.

A speech, in some cases, that sounds a lot like "meritocracy." But they can observe that there are gender barriers in the exercise of citizenship and relationships.

Age appears as a major obstacle to feeling respected and exercising citizenship. In addition to conflicts of opinion with older people in the family and social circle.

While almost all of them already demonstrated, even before participating in the projects, an understanding of harassment and violence, but only recognizing the physical violence before this contact with the contents of the actions.

*Wen's workshop* had an impact for many participants in broadening their understanding of various forms of gender-based violence. Violence comes before the understanding of agency.

As for consent, almost none in some projects know the term, even if they consider it important negotiation in a relationship.

This is still a confusing point, as we pointed out in the introduction, there are structural discourses that move away from a feminist understanding of this notion and related ones.

If considering important and empowered is a sensitive point, here it should be emphasized that one notion does not necessarily imply the other.

Not all the interlocutors presented coherent answers in this sense, at a certain point they can identify themselves as empowered, even by how much this term appears in most projects (with different conceptions, as we pointed out), while in more intimate issues they realize that they do not consider themselves important, sometimes for themselves, for families, sometimes socially.

Age, youth, is a factor for this feeling, which dialogues with the literature brought in the introduction. Another factor is racial (within a racist structure, being a young black woman has an impact on the perception of her value) and sexual orientation, especially thinking about the responses of young women who identify as bisexual and the relationship with families.

It makes sense within the set of these perceptions that in the question about Public Empowerment and Empowerment in the intimate life, the majority has answered that it is possible to be empowered in the first sphere and not in the second.

But at least within each of the projects most feel important and valued. The school also appears as an important space for coexistence, exercise of citizenship and expression of self, in addition to knowledge.

Also, friendships, since the family space is not always welcoming (here certainly the sphere of life in which conflict with the family appears the most is sexuality, when the young woman does not identify as heterosexual).

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