4.3 Rock music and rocker's lifestyles: looking at the social representations in the Portuguese contemporary society

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✕ ~~Abstract~~

As we know, rock performances and lifestyles have frequently been linked to a whole series of disorders, substance uses and abuses, and risk behaviours, commonly expressed in the epitome of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. In this context, there are countless enumerations of these themes in the lyrics and videos of artists or rock bands, and there is also a fascination with the mythical stories of rock and roll, its bohemian life, and the refusal to adopt conventional behaviours. These legends and narratives are crucial to the daily experiences of fans, particularly young people. In this context, this analysis aims to explain and understand the social representations and practices incorporated with the sex-drugs-rock trichotomy in contemporary Portuguese society. In other words, this article intended to explore the stereotypes, feelings, and interpretations associated with sexual behaviours and the consumption of illegal substances within the rock universe in a context of late modernity.

Keywords: Rock'n'roll, risks, social representations, contemporaneity, Portugal.

1. Introduction

It is undeniable, that rock music is a cultural symbol known and recognized on a global scale and, for this reason, the sociological study of this phenomenon continues to be extremely important in this context of globalized late modernity. In this regard, Townsend (1997) argued that rock'n'roll was never just a musical genre, but rather a movement, a lifestyle, an expression of culture and, possibly, an ideology of life. Thus, and considering the aspects already mentioned, we can understand and perceive rock music as a cultural manifestation that transcends social, cultural, and geographic barriers (Amaral, 2002). Therefore, the impact of rock'n'roll on society seems to be undeniable (Brake, 1980).

According to Guerra (2015a), teenagers who witnessed the rise and spread of this musical genre look ahead for this musical manifestation of rock music as a promise of a new social panorama, within which socioeconomic problems would be overcome by the freedoms that were provided in different dimensions of their individual and collective lives. With the first demonstrations of a rock culture, there were many social transformations that followed and that, in their essence, were crucial for the structuring of cultural practices of individuals and their daily lives, as well as for a further development and materialization of the urban space (Guerra, 2015b).

However, even today there are discrediting attitudes towards this musical genre. Encarnação (2019)

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argues that since the 1960s rock music has carried a stereotype associated with the consumption of illegal substances. And it was also from that date that the addiction on this type of substance began to be discussed academically within the scope of the study of youth subcultures (Oksanen, 2012). Furthermore, Ehrenreich et al. (1986) argue that rock'n'roll offered a new view of sexuality (both female and male) that was clearly new. This change in sexual attitudes draws attention of youth, because it contrasts sharply with the code of behaviour adopted by the adult age groups of the same time. Thus, there is no common consensus anymore among adults about sexual attitudes or about the role of authority in society, or even about expectations of how young people should behave (Hall & Whannel, 1964). Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the new sexual attitudes, the high consumption of tobacco and alcohol, or the contact with hallucinogens and other facilitators of 'artificial paradises' did not start in the youth circles of the 1960s and are far from exclusive to the beat generation, hippies or rock and roll and its genres. But since then, they have taken on their own expression, both in dimension and in ideological and cultural meaning (Guerra et al., 2016).

In short, this article presents a dual approach to rock music and its lifestyles, in relation to their social representations in contemporary Portuguese society. In other words, it looks both at the point of view of the participants of the rock music culture, and also at the perspective of society in general, in relation to the epitome of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll.

2. Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll in a Portuguese way

Psychedelic consumption in Portugal dates to the 1960s where it is already possible to observe, according to Costa (2007), the first government concerns about this issue. It was at this time as well, that youth groups inspired by the hippie movement began to emerge and take the use of drugs as one of their identity marks (Quintas, 1997). However, until the beginning of the 1970s, the drug issue still did not appear as a collective characteristic or as a social problem in Portugal (Marques, 2008). During this political period of the Estado Novo, the state power defended the country's isolation from international relations, and "(…) any allusion to individual or collective freedom of expression was rejected" (Martins & Guerra, 2019, p. 169). In this context of deprivation, the access to information and international goods was limited, which prevented the Portuguese population from having access to social, economic and cultural realities abroad. However, the progressive international spread of Anglo-American rock music in the 1960s ended up finding numerous supporters in Portugal, particularly among young students from Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra (Andrade, 2015), who felt increasingly angry against the state and its policies. In this context, from that moment on, the country was subject to multiple political, economic and social transformations, which also led to an intensification of government concerns regarding the drug phenomenon (Dias, 2007). Thus, in the early 1970s drugs began to be perceived as a crucial element for explaining several events that question the established social order, such as strikes and student movements, which pressured and preceded the fall of the Salazar regime (Dias, 2007).

As we can see, the regime's restrictive view in relation to the academic environment did not stop the emergence and growth of an active movement against the prevailing conservatism in the university and in society (Martins, 2014). In this context, these groups who were bearers of new values were the protagonists of the radical break with traditional political thinking. They helped to shape a consciousness that translated into structured political thinking, and which aspired to a cultural and political revolution. In this regard, equally important for Portugal was the holding of the first major edition of the *Vilar de Mouros Festival*, the oldest musical festival in the country, in 1971. It was during this event that the first collective exhibition of drug use in Portugal took place (Poiares, 1995; Ribeiro, 1999; Marques, 2008). About this festival, *Vilar de Mouros* materialized the emergence of a true rock culture in Portugal, characterized by moments, bands, audience, experiences and consumption (Guerra, 2010). According to Sarmento (2013), the spread of hippie culture and the Woodstock Festival had a great influence on how this festival developed (Sarmento, 2013). Later, after the April 1974 Revolution, many Portuguese from the former colonies began to return to the mainland and brought with them the routine of using certain substances, including *liamba*, and the use of substances ceased to occur in environments mostly private and become public. With this spread of consumption, a rudimentary drug market is established in Portugal, particularly based on cannabinoids, such as cannabis, *liamba* or hashish (Marques, 2008).

The issue of sexuality was devalued in the context of sociological research in Portugal until the end of the 20th century (Pais, 1998). Regarding the sexual trajectory of our country, Freire (2013) identifies two important

moments in the Portuguese intimacy experiences: "a deeply conservative first one (1930-1950), a second one tending towards reform (between the end of 1950 and 1970)" (Freire, 2013, p. 57). As we know, these two temporal periods in Portugal corresponded to a totalitarian political moment, and a deeply conservative, Catholic and rural society (Wall, 2005). Therefore, in this context, "only sexuality experienced within marriage, obviously heterosexual and primarily intended for reproduction, and the formation of a family was publicly acceptable" (Aboim, 2013, p. 10). Until the end of the 1960s, the role of women was mostly linked to the domestic daily life, and the very structures of the State, Catholic Church, family, school and media "converged in the mission of advising females (single and married women) for hiding her body, for the erasure of sensuality, for the prohibition of eroticism and for the demonization of pleasure" (Freire, 2013, p. 58). In this context, the man was responsible for looking after his wife and family. However, it was from the 1960s onwards that Portuguese couples began to effectively reduce the number of children, "as a strategy to adapt to the limited family economic resources typical of a country on the so-called periphery of the centre, characterized by low wage levels" (Vilar, 2009, p. 13). In fact, in addition to this reduction in the number of children there was a greater control of fertility as well, associated with the improvement of the national public health system. These two facts accompanied the strong involvement of women in the labour market, which, in turn, constituted a fundamental condition for the improvement in the living standards of Portuguese families and, in many cases, towards more acceptable living conditions (Wall, 2005).

In the period that followed the fall of the Salazar regime, Portugal opened its doors to popular and mass culture, especially music, cinema and literature. So, there is an increasingly diversified offer not only of cultural products, but also of others linked to issues of intimacy and relationships formerly prohibited by censorship (Neves, 2013). These new patterns of freedom, substance use and sexual experiences are also related to the revolutionary character of emerging youth cultures, influenced by Anglo-Saxon rock music and the lifestyles they share.

3. Methodology

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Regarding the methodological options used in this paper, it's important to start by highlighting the uses primary information collection techniques, such as in-depth interviews and the application of an online survey.

Through in-depth interviews, the purpose was to develop an analysis of the evolution of practices and representations of the uses of legal and illegal substances and the attitudes towards sexual practices in Portugal. From this methodological tool, this research sought to find "(...) different experiential postures, as well as the values and practices associated with them" (Dantas, 2016, p. 265). For Yin (2003), interviews are one of the most valuable resources in an investigation. The actors who gave voice to these 50 semi-structured interviews were selected using intentional non-probabilistic sampling, commonly called a convenience sample (Agresti & Finlay, 2012). This technique allows a direct approach to the individuals who moved and still move within of the Portuguese rock sphere. Also, the interviews were done in person.

Regarding the online survey, we resorted to the intentional non-probabilistic sampling technique as well. Our objective with this methodological instrument was to seek to identify the hetero and self-constructed social representations around the association of rock music with risky behaviours in the use of legal and illegal substances, and sexual conducts. As this was an online survey, its application was indirect, and its sharing and dissemination took place, mainly, in social networks (Facebook and Instagram), and in the institutional email from University of Porto. Therefore, our sample consisted of 383 individuals with a margin of error of less than 0.5% (Arkin & Colton in Bravo, 1995, p. 234).

Regarding ethical issues, it was crucial to develop informed consents, either in the context of interviews or surveys with the purpose of being able to inform, respect and guarantee the rights of the participants who voluntarily volunteered to collaborate with this research. The option for the anonymity of the participants in this particular investigation was related to the fact that we were dealing with personal, sensitive and controversial issues - since they involved the description of habits of uses of legal and illegal substances and of sexual and affective behaviours -; and with the possibility that this information, when made public, could have a detrimental impact on their personal and professional lives (Yin, 2003). Also, during the preparation and development of this investigation, we took into account the Code of Ethics that is in force at the Portuguese Association of Sociology (APS), not violating the principles of voluntariness of study participants, the identification of researchers and the objectives of the study or confidentiality of the data collected.

# 4. Surveys: the universe of representations about rock'n'roll

In this survey, we tried to organize the data collection according to the following structure:

*A: Rock universe, tastes and appropriations, with the purpose of explore the musical genres and the most appreciated artists and/or bands, and their influence on the respondents' lives; but also know the frequency routines of musical events and their importance;

*B: Interaction uses, rituals and practices, in order to collect data about the uses of legal (alcohol) and illegal substances routines; the situation regarding affective relationships and intimacies; and the possible relationship between these indicators with musical events, and with the rock culture in Portugal;

*C: Path and sociographic condition, centred on the sociographic contexts of our sample, in order to know its characterization

In general, our sample is composed of 383 individuals, aged between 18 and 66 years old, with 29 years old being the most frequent age in the sample revealing 23 respondents (Figure 4.3.1.). Although, 20 years old (with 20 respondents), 24 years old (with 18 respondents), 27 (with 21 respondents) and 28 (with 18 respondents) are also very frequent ages in our sample. Therefore, we can say that this is a sample mostly made up of young adults and balanced in terms of gender, as 51% of respondents are female and 49% male (Figure 4.3.2.).
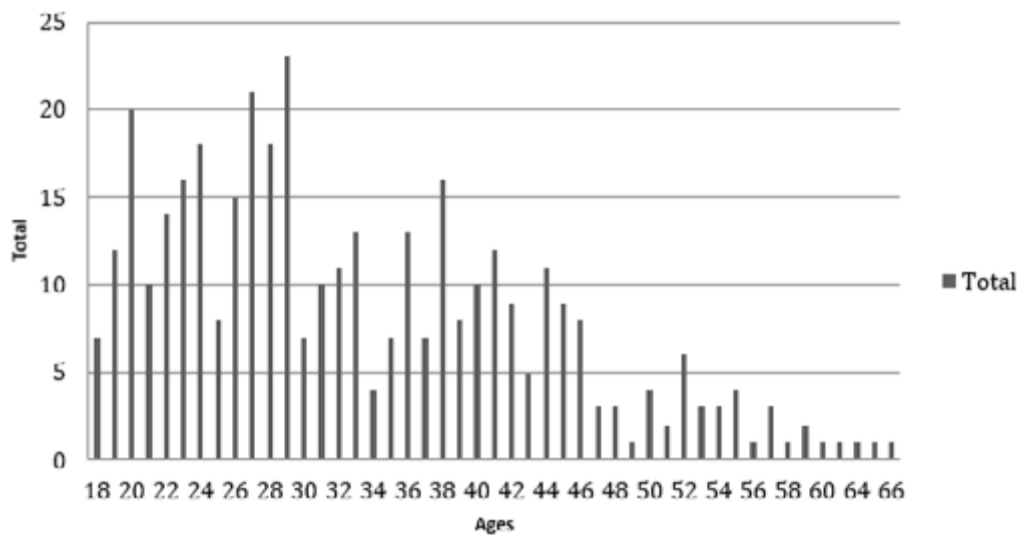
▶ Figure 4.3.1. - Distribution of total respondents by age
▶ Source: the authors.
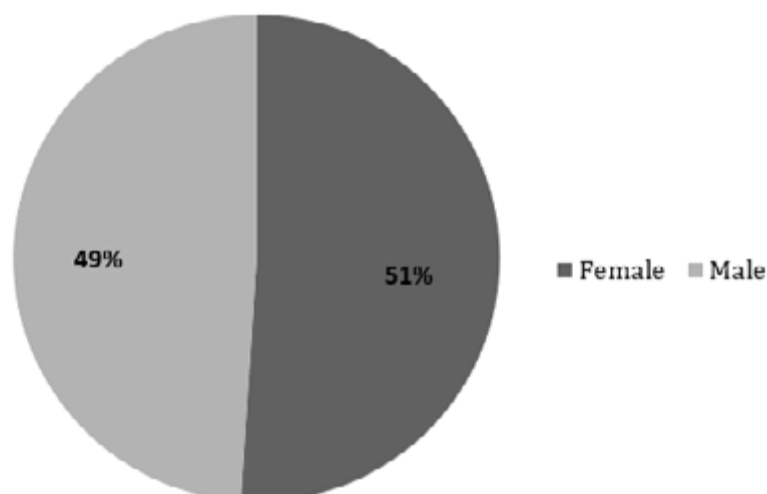
▶ Figure 4.3.2. - Distribution of total respondents by gender
▶ Source: the authors.

As we have already been exploring, one of the main points of this article was the application of the myth 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll' to the Portuguese social reality. Therefore, this question was asked directly to respondents in the survey. As shown in Figure 4.3.3., around 60% of respondents answered that the issue of 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll' was a reality in the Portuguese context. In fact, this result may reveal a collective stereotype regarding this association of rock music with sex and drugs. And often, this type of stigmatized rock image is based on discriminatory attributes associated with certain lifestyles, resulting in the construction of biased representations of all its participants.
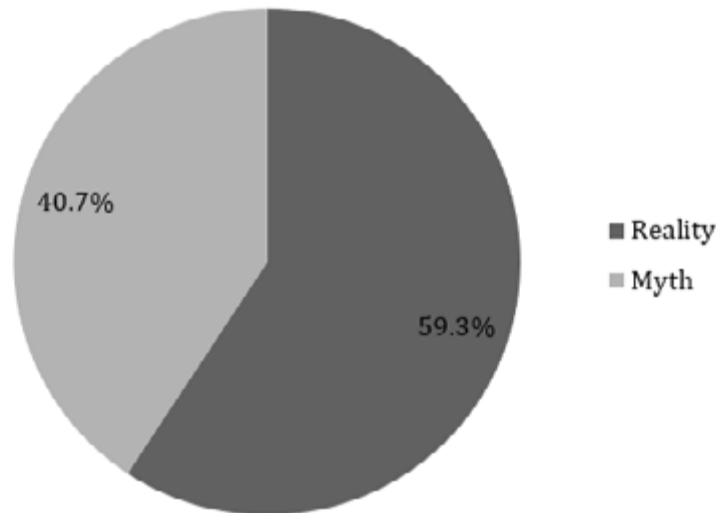
▸ Figure 4.3.3. - Relationship between the epitome 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll' in Portugal from the perspective of respondents
▸ Source: the authors.

5. Interviews: the voices of rock'n'roll

In the construction of the interview scripts, we assumed these four axes of transversal categorical exploration (general categories/macro) of the interacting agents, which are presented in the following diagram:

I. Discussion of the project and/or area of intervention of the interviewee

✖ Emergence and consolidation of their interest in music in general, rock music, and the cultural industry.
✖ Construction of a professional path in the musical/cultural field.
✖ Enunciation of the main moments of their professional career.
✖ Future plans, wishes and projects.

II. Positions and representations regarding rock music, ways of life and bonds

✖ Urban environment vs. non-urban, and its possible influences on the construction of their identity and tastes.
✖ Construction and characterization of their musical taste.
✖ Description of habits and routines associated with the musical and cultural bond.
✖ Personal and/or professional aesthetic considerations.

III. Uses, tastes and positions within the national rock culture

✖ Situation regarding the use of legal and illegal substances.
✖ Characterization of their relationships, sexuality and affections.
✖ Reports of moments of excess, risks and experiences.
✖ Personal/social importance of the rock culture to them.

IV. Approach about the experiences related to the processes of social stigmatization

- ✖ Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll in Portugal.
- ✖ Family and social considerations about their musical bond.
- ✖ Reports of social stigmatization, mistrust or marginalization.
- ✖ References to involvements with authorities and/or security forces.

As we can see in the graphics that follow, the ages of the interviews are between 29 and 78 years old, with the age group of 61 to 70 years old having the largest number of members (18 respondents), followed by the 31 to 40 years old group (with 11 respondents), as shown in Figure 4.3.4. Making a general reading, we then verify that, in terms of age, this is a group where the 60s age group predominates, closely followed by the 30s age group. In terms of gender distribution, this sample proved to be heterogeneous, from the point of view in which we interviewed men and women. However, it was not evenly distributed, since we verified the existence of 43 men and seven women[3], as we see in Figure 4.3.5. This result is in line with a reading about the genre within the global space of rock, and which in our country tends to assume an almost male exclusivity, particularly in the senior generations.
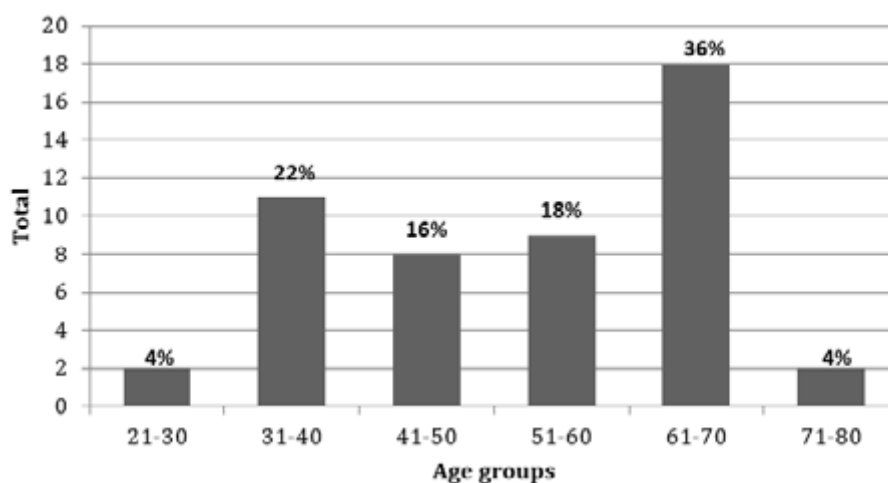
▶ Figure 4.3.4. Distribution of total interviewees by age
▶ Source: the authors.
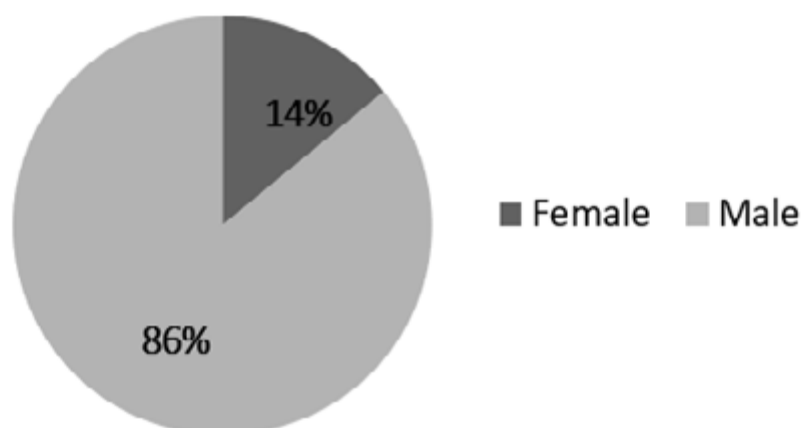
▶ Figure 4.3.5. Distribution of total interviewees by gender
▶ Source: the authors.

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3. The fact that our sample is mostly made up of males is due to the fact that the history of Portuguese rock, especially since its beginning, is marked by a strong male presence, since the political, economic and social conditions of our country, already presented in previous chapters, did not foresee great freedoms for women.

However, regarding the opinion of the interviewees about the application of the epitome of Sex, Drugs and Rock'n'roll in Portugal, the answers were divided. From Figure 4.3.6., we can see that 50% of respondents (25 individuals) answered that they consider it to be or have been a reality, justifying their perspectives with examples in the first or third person. However, opposing the main results obtained in our survey, 10 interviewees directly answered that it is and/or was a myth. Regarding the interviewees who claimed to have been and/or to be a reality in Portugal, all or almost all of them highlighted that it happened to our scale, that is, with a dimension applied to our country and, consequently, to a lesser extent than the Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. Also, in this context, some interviewees even claim to have personally lived this reality, and others give examples of musicians who lived it. On the other hand, among the interviewees who stated that it is a myth, the justification is linked to the small number of cases of individuals (of which they are aware), who had actually experienced or continued to experience this lifestyle in Portugal. That is, they consider that the few people who lived and/or live this lifestyle are not significant for us to apply it to our country. And also, that it is also a dated expression, which marked a specific socio-historical period, namely the 1960s in the Anglo-Saxon world and the 1980s in Portugal, which nowadays no longer makes any sense.
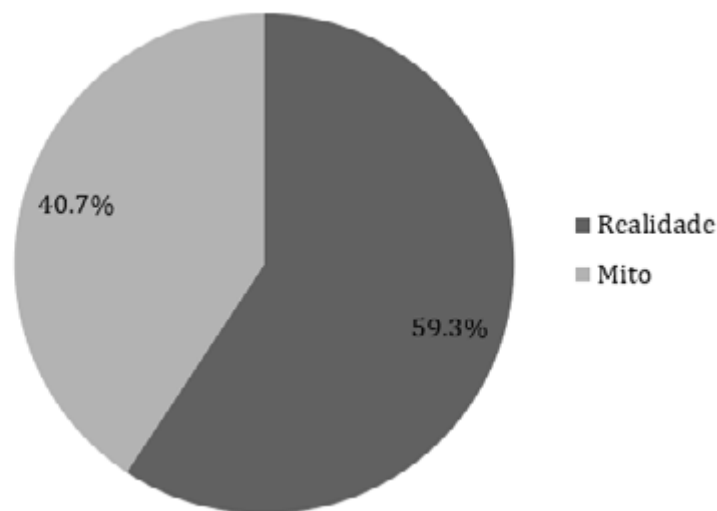
▶ Figure 4.3.6. Relationship between the epitome "sex, drugs and rock'n'roll" in Portugal from the perspective of interviewees
▶ Source: the authors.

6. Stigmas, moral panics and media representations

In the Portuguese context, as we saw earlier from the perspective of the respondents in our survey, the epitome of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll tends to be a reality within the social perspective. Consequently, these stereotyped images often result in the creation of stigmas, both individually and collectively, on musicians and other actors in the national rock scene, and on society as a whole. Therefore, to understand the construction of the reality of this musical universe in the current period, we must take into account the social representations that are linked to it, as well as the respective mechanisms of social domination, which are produced and reproduced within this same scenario (Martins, 2019). In this context, it is noteworthy, according to Cohen (2002), the privileged role that the media play in the dissemination of this type of representation, namely in Portuguese society, giving space to the emergence of 'moral panics'. In this light, Champagne (1993) argues that these 'moral panics' (Cohen, 2002) only become visible if the media address them. Therefore,

the media act on a given moment and collectively manufacture a social representation, which, even though it is far from reality, lasts despite denials or subsequent rectifications; as it does nothing more than reinforce spontaneous interpretations and pre-judgments, and tends towards this to redouble them. (Champagne, 1993, pp. 61-62)

Becker (2008) considers the concept of outsider, relating it to the distrust with which individuals identified as deviant face non-deviant individuals and vice versa. It is in this context that many protagonists in the rock music sphere were and tend to be judged and labelled as deviant or transgressors, given the norms established in Portuguese society. As we were able to verify through the application of our survey, rock music is traditionally associated with a set of marginal practices, experiences and lifestyles, which escape what most social actors

consider normal. Consequently, this type of labels that are applied not only to rock musicians, but to the entire set of actors that circulate in this musical field, end up becoming an evident and inherent stigma to the perception that these individuals have of themselves, and to the how they build their own identities.

Considering the three phases of deviation proposed by Becker (1994), it is possible to relate them to the evolution of the behaviour of rock musicians in Portugal. In other words, the first phase involves the intentional non-follow the social rules by a certain individual. That is, when some young Portuguese people began to listen to this type of music during the political period of the Estado Novo, knowing that they did not like the ideals defended by the authorities, they did so intentionally. This practice often happened through listening to international radio stations. And even though many young people did not understand the language, listening to that new and different music was enough to feed their urge to transgress.

The second phase proposed by the author is linked to the development of deviant interests and motivations. In other words, these young people showed a clear interest in rock music that erupted in Anglo-Saxon territory during the Salazar period, whether through contact with the specialized international press or with records brought from abroad by third parties. Therefore, they were already instructed on the progress of this musical genre on the international scene, and also began to express their fascination for this musical genre in their lifestyles and daily practices.

The third phase of deviation is part of the labelling process that these young people were targeted daily, even during the Estado Novo period. In other words, many of these young people who began to externalize visuals similar to those of their rock idols, which they saw through magazines or record covers, began to be despised by conservative Portuguese society. This often resulted in the creation and spread of moral panics about rock culture (Cohen, 2002).

The fourth phase corresponds to the process of internalizing the deviation and creating a perception of failure in society. That is, these young people end up becoming aware that they were judged as deviant and marginal. This phase corresponds to the post-revolution period and the beginning of the 1980s, when young people were still digesting the fall of the authoritarian regime, and reflecting on the social transformations that would ensue. Faced with this type of situation of marginalization and uncertainty, music was a very important emotional aid instrument for the interviewees.

Finally, there is the fifth phase proposed by the author, which relates to bringing these individuals closer to structured groups of deviants, who share the same feeling of exclusion. In the reality of Portuguese rock universe, young people ended up approaching those with whom they shared the same interests, practices and stigmas, reorganizing their own deviant identities. This phase corresponds to the period of the Portuguese rock boom and tends to remain until today. According to Martins (2019), this type of deviant labelling regarding individuals related to the national rock scene seems to continue to have a strong presence in Portuguese society, hindering and/or preventing the social daily life of these individuals, and distorting their own perceptions and identity constructions.

In short, the participants of the national rock scene are also the target of a homogenization process, which ignores the existence of the diversity of their experiences and ways of life, and which tends to designate them as outsiders (Becker, 2008). In fact, the identities created by these stigmatization processes are, subsequently, determinants for the social interactions of these individuals throughout their lives. Thus, from a symbolic point of view, the relation between rock music and the use of illicit substances brings together domains of exclusion. And rock music assumes itself in the collective imagination as a fruitful field for greater practice and experimentation with deviant behaviour. This issue is, then, inextricably linked to the fact that the crystallization of the image of rock musicians is often based on negative episodes (such as not complying with the norms of the authorities, for example), leading to the creation of these stigmas and moral panics. (Cohen, 2002), and increasing its break between established and outsiders (Elias & Scotson, 2000).

7. Conclusion

In fact, issues inherent to the rocker lifestyle, namely related to the visual aspect, patterns of substance use and affective practices end up colliding with myths, prejudices and taboos, and consequently this result in processes of social stigmatization. Therefore, these types of stereotyped images commonly shared mainly in the most conservative portions of the Portuguese society later end up being assimilated and conveyed by the media, transferring a devil's music stamp to the rock music scene. And often, these types of stigmatized

rock images are based on discriminatory attributes associated with certain lifestyles, which results in the construction of unreal representations of all its actors.

From the interviews, we found that despite the social transformations that have been taking place in Portugal over the decades, there is still some prejudice regarding the visual aspect of the players in this musical genre and that results, in many situations, in different treatments regarding the population. Still in terms of social representations, it was possible to conclude that there is also a belief in the epitome of sex drugs & rock'n'roll in relation to the Portuguese musical universe, as we were able to ascertain through our survey.

Indeed, although some interviewees apply this epitome with the respective reservations to the Portuguese social reality, there are many who confess that having already experienced situations of social stigmatization based on this myth and which, factually, do not correspond to reality. It is also important to emphasize that in the context of the social representations of our protagonists, media and society in general, this epitome is a cultural trait, despite there being a recognition that its special production and reproduction meets the socio-historical specificities of Portugal as a semi peripheral country in transition to the Global South. As the rock'n'roll industry was and is incipient and founded in a field clearly subordinate and peripheral to the Anglo-American reality, the epitome also has a special Portuguese translation.

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