Abstract
The objective of this study was to measure the social representation of sex through free evocations of 1,138 young Portuguese adults, aged between 18 and 25 years, with the goal of exploring an explicative approach of a possible influence of this social representation in risky sexual behaviors observed in this age group. Evocations were collected through an online questionnaire made available by Portuguese universities and professional schools. Data were analyzed according to Vergès' prototypical analysis for social representations. The results suggest a romanticized social representation of sex, based on love and pleasure ideas, in which risky aspects such as use of condoms or sexually transmitted infections belong to the peripheral system. These aspects are integrated in order to preserve the central nucleus without interfering in the way participants live their sexual experiences. In addition, the association between love and condom use seems to be associated to the concept of “who loves, protects” which reduces condom use, instead of increasing it. Therefore, social representation of sex, focused on love and pleasure, might include cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects present in the well-known socio-cognitive models used for explaining and predicting condom use behavior.

Keywords
Social representation, risky sexual behavior, condom use, prototypical analysis.