

Reflections on homophobia and education in schools in the interior of Sao Paulo state

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Abstract

This is a survey conducted in 2009 with 2,282 students of both sexes enrolled in the three grades of high school in three cities of the west of Sao Paulo state (Assis, Presidente Prudente and Ourinhos). The data collection instrument was a self-administered and anonymous questionnaire with 131 questions. In this article, we reflect on how in schools the research participants reproduce and reinforce the hegemonic discourses of control of sexualities guided by the attempt to promote heterosexuality as the only form of sexual intelligibility, to the detriment of other forms of expression of sexuality. We discuss how homophobia and the devices of social control of sexuality (re) produce prejudices and stereotypes, resulting in vulnerabilities that non-heterosexual teenagers have, such as homophobic victimization, social and affective isolation, ideations and suicide attempts. The study shows that the invariant were discrimination, homophobic violence and the insults that are perpetrated in the values and discourses of adolescents at school and in their family, demonstrating the institutionalization of homophobia as a regulatory practice of the psychological and social construction of gender and sexual identities. We highlight how important it is for the school to appropriate the means of deconstruction of heterocentric normativity to preserve the rights and citizenship of the people who do not identify with the prevailing models of heterosexuality.

Keywords

Homophobia and education – Homophobic violence – Adolescence – Sexuality – Homosexuality.

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Reflexões sobre homofobia e educação em escolas do interior paulista

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Resumo

Trata-se de um estudo do tipo survey realizado em 2009 junto a 2.282 estudantes de ambos os sexos cursando as três séries do ensino médio em três cidades do interior do Oeste Paulista (Assis, Presidente Prudente e Ourinhos). O instrumento de coleta de dados foi um questionário autoaplicável e anônimo com 131 questões. Neste artigo, reflete-se sobre o quanto @s participantes da pesquisa reproduzem e reforçam, no espaço escolar, os discursos hegemônicos de controle das sexualidades pautados na tentativa de fazer prevalecer a heterossexualidade como a única forma de inteligibilidade sexual, em detrimento de outras formas de manifestação da sexualidade. Discute-se como a homofobia e os dispositivos de controle social das sexualidades (re)produzem preconceitos e estereotípias, resultantes em vulnerabilidades que os adolescentes não-heterossexuais apresentam, tais como: vitimização homofóbica, isolamentos sociais e afetivos, e ideias e tentativas de suicídio. O estudo mostra que o invariante foram as discriminações, as violências homofóbicas e as injúrias que são perpetradas nos valores e discursos dos adolescentes em situação escolar e familiar, demonstrando a institucionalização da homofobia como prática regulatória da construção social e psicológica de gêneros e identidades sexuais. Destaca-se quão importante é, para a escola, apropriar-se de meios de desconstrução das normativas heterocentradas, visando preservar os direitos e a cidadania de pessoas que não se identificam aos modelos vigentes da heterossexualidade.

Palavras-chave

Homofobia e educação – Violência homofóbica – Adolescência – Sexualidade – Homossexualidade.

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The formation of citizens is currently a central objective of education, which implies that schools should seek equity and respect between people. This issue is not only educational but also political. However, schools have difficulty in reconciling effectively the complex relation between public education policies and social demands, at least when it comes to dealing with gender equality, minimization of homophobia, prevention of STD / HIV-AIDS, human rights and related topics. Addressing these issues becomes conflicting, because schools must inevitably negotiate between what public policies and laws believe to be the possible direction for the production of free critical and educated citizens, and what teachers, in their personal beliefs and values, and families, in their groups and/or isolated, expect from the education of their children. Therefore, it is about equating individual interests that are opposed to collective ones.

From the 1990s on, there have been changes in the approaches to sexuality in schools, in an attempt to go beyond the knowledge of its biological aspects. Then, discussions about gender and sexual diversities were introduced (Vianna; Unbehau, 2004). Thus, at least in intention, there has been some deepening in relation to standards, rules, and expectations of male and female behaviors, power relations between genders, fantasies, desires, sensations and laws related to reproductive rights, conjugality, parenting and autonomy in the care of oneself, reproduction and use of pleasures, as well as an increment in the approach to sexual diversities thanks to the work of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in partnership with the federal and state governments.

In addressing these issues at school, from a paradigm which Jimena Furlani (2009) calls *queer* pedagogy, we inevitably discuss the discourses, their ways and means of production of *truths*, and in the case of discourses on sexualities, the norms supporting what we understand or not as

normal/pathological, true/false, male/female, hetero/homosexual etc. Michel Foucault (1999), when studying the mechanisms of disciplining in society, developed the idea that sexuality is a regulatory device in the construction of subjectivities. To compose it as such, homophobia permeates several discourses, such as the religious, legal, scientific, political, and educational ones.

When using the term homophobia we mean fear, aversion, distrust and hatred of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites and transsexuals, to devalue them for not *performing* their gender (Butler, 2003), for not corresponding to what is socially and culturally assigned to their biological bodies. Therefore, homophobia is a regulatory device of sexuality which aims to maintain heteronormativity.

So, those who do not fit this heteronormative model suffer the effects of homophobia, are stigmatized and excluded because they subvert gender norms that, as we know, privilege heterosexuality (Welz-LANG, 2001).

Homophobia standardizes gender identities and assures them hierarchies of privileges through compulsory heterosexuality, in which relationships should follow the rules of the system sex/gender/desire/sexual practices (Butler, 2003). Seeking its maintenance, these rules rely on sexism, or on

one sex dominating the other, based on binarism, the dichotomy man/woman and masculine/feminine and the rigid boundary between the sexes and genders. (Toledo, 2008, p. 13)

The work of Jane Felipe and Alexandre Bello (2009) leaves no doubt as to the regulatory role of learning about gender norms based on homophobia, which establishes a surveillance around the infantile sexuality in order to *normalize* the subject, enter such subject in the standard arbitrarily considered *appropriate* and normal to the gender according to the values of the culture in which the school is included.

Because of homophobia, we have witnessed various forms of violence, both physical and psychological, against people who are considered *different / dissidents* of heteronormativity. The increasing number of assassinations of LGBT people (Mott, 2000) and the different forms of everyday aggression on the part of our social institutions evidence this.

Sergio Carrara, Silvia Ramos and Márcio Caetano (2003), Regina Facchini, Isadora França and Gustavo Venturi (2007) show that most of the LGBT interviewed had been the victim of some kind of homophobic aggression, usually at school, such as humiliation, denial of access to some premise, problems at school, at work and at home.

Homophobia is an institutionalized discourse, which *allows* exclusionary practices. Thus we can say that in the school environment we also find the reproduction of homophobia reflected both in playful practices (play games of boys and girls), and in textbooks (Vianna, Diniz, 2008). In textbooks, the reproduction of homophobia takes place through the invisibility of LGBT relationships or the presence of stereotypicals of the so-called homosexual behavior.

According to Guacira Lopes Louro (2000)

Schools are fully committed to ensure that their boys and girls become true men and women, which means men and women who correspond to the hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity. (p. 41)

Thus, in the school context, a place of socialization and which aims at promoting human rights and citizenship, we still find homophobic discourses and practices due to which adolescents who do not *fit* the heteronormative standards are stigmatized and victimized by homophobic jokes, mockery, insults, humorous nicknames, physical and verbal aggression aimed at discrediting, signaling that being *different* is not good and needs to be punished, starting with the injury

that produces in *non-heteronormativized* people an embarrassment that accompanies them for long periods of their lives (Eribon, 2008).

There is a lack of reflection on gender and sexualities in schools beyond binarism (man/woman) and heteronormativity, which favors homophobia to manifest itself, often indirectly. Different forms of discrimination and violence against people openly (or supposedly) LGBT are tolerated and displayed by teachers, staff and young people, and every thing is considered “a joke”, “something typical of the young”, “unimportant” and so on (Castro; Abramovay; Silva, 2004). There are also situations in which

instead of resorting to a critical and reflective pedagogical practice, one resorts to repressive pedagogy that aims to render the homosexual orientation invisible. (p. 299)

For example, when one student calls another *deer, fag, dyke*, teachers, rather than proposing a discussion of gender oppression, stigma and discrimination, try to silence the discourse with another oppression, saying: “*Swearing is not allowed in the classroom!*”. Therefore, homophobia excludes and as such leads to suffering, pain and hopelessness of the young people who become its targets (Baker, 2002).

In our culture, it is during adolescence that sexual practices, passion and love for *the other* take subjective forms and trajectories that are specific and contingent on the contexts that produce them. But we wonder: what is it like to experience this life trajectory in a homophobic school environment? How and with whom can LGBT young people talk about sex, pleasure, desires, and feelings that do not meet the heterosexual normative without being discriminated and/or victimized? For some authors (Castañeda, 2007), such trajectory is always more difficult for LGBT adolescents, because they know that besides being different their sexuality is not accepted by their group of friends, by their family and society in general, and the young realize how negatively their

difference is treated in comedy shows, soap operas, movies, jokes of colleagues, teachers, religious institutions etc. (Santos; Couto, 2008; Natividade; Oliveira, 2009).

Thus, these practices and discourses that disqualify non-heteronormativized sexualities generate devaluations in homosexual people about themselves, which, as studied by Kimeron Hardin (2000), are born of the negative messages widely disseminated by society about homosexualities, making *non-heterosexual* people subject to abjection in the interplay of language and communication (Butler, 2001). Such messages are, therefore, internalized by everyone, regardless of their sexual orientations and gender identities, but are experienced differently in function of the cultural relations with sexual trajectories and *gender performance* (Butler, 2003). Since an early age, we learn (even though we do not know what it means) that to be gay, lesbian, etc is something bad or undesirable. More than knowing about it, for those who are aware very early of their same-sex attraction or who feel that they belong or feel attracted to things and contexts that relate to another gender, it is about feeling devalued. According to Hardin (2000), such feelings are related to certain risk behaviors which are of course common in adolescence, but which in the case of homosexual adolescents have a greater degree and differentiated modes of expression, since they have difficulty making themselves recognized as subjects beyond the negative stereotypes which we learn from early childhood.

We shall now see examples of these homophobic discourses and stereotypes reproduced by highschool students, as well as their possible consequences for the young people who have or have not disclosed that they are LGBT.

Methodology

This is a cross-sectional study conducted in 2009 with public highschool students in three

cities in the west of São Paulo state (Presidente Prudente, Assis and Ourinhos).

The sample consisted of 2,282 adolescents of both sexes, with 714 students (31.3%) of Presidente Prudente, 779 (34.1%) of Assis and 789 (34.6%) of Ourinhos.

The instrument used was a self-administered, anonymous questionnaire with 131 questions, mostly closed. Such questionnaire was adapted from the one used by Mary Garcia Castro, Miriam Abramovay and Lorena Bernardes Silva (2004) and from a study conducted in 2001 by the *Centre Gai & Lesbien de Paris* (Verdier; Firdion, 2003) in collaboration with researchers from the *Centre National de Recherche Scientifique*.

In each city, there was a raffle of 50% of the classes from the first to the third grade of highschool of the schools which participated in the study. Students belonging to these classes were informed about the research objectives and invited to participate. Those who wished to contribute to the work completed the questionnaire during a class.

In this study, we used descriptive statistical analyses such as frequencies and percentages. To study the relation between events, we calculated indexes (Pereira, 2008). We used the chi-square test, with a 5% significance level, to study the association between qualitative variables.

The project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Paulista State University (number 547/2007), Assis Campus, and complies with the requirements of resolution 196/96 of the National Committee of Research Ethics (CONEP / MS). The free informed term of consent was signed by the principals of the participating schools.

Results

Out of 2,282 respondents, 2,159 (95.2%) identified themselves as heterosexual, with 1,245 (57.7%) females (Table 1).

Table 1 - Distribution of participants by sexual orientation and gender, 2009.

Sexual orientation	Sex		
	Masculine n (%)	Feminine n (%)	Total n (%)
Heterosexual	914 (95,4)	1.245 (95,0)	2.159 (95,2)
Bisexual	15 (1,6)	23 (1,8)	38 (1,7)
Gay	12 (1,2)	0 (0,0)	12 (0,5)
Lesbian	0 (0,0)	11 (0,8)	11 (0,5)
Others*	17 (1,8)	31 (2,4)	48 (2,1)
TOTAL	958	1.310	2.268**

* (Transsexual, refused to identify, did not know)

** 14 (0,6%) did not identify their sexual orientation

In 2265 respondents, 1009 (44.5%) had had sex with someone of the opposite sex regardless of sexual orientation, and 1,204 (53.2%) said they had never had sex.

Ten (0.5%) of the students who identified themselves as heterosexual had had sex with someone of the same biological sex (Table 2).

Table 2 - Sexuality, information on AIDS, suicidal attempts and ideation by sexual orientation, 2009.

	Sexual orientation	
	Heterosexual n (%)	Non-heterosexual* n (%)
Have you had any kind of sex?		
I have never had sex.	1.169 (54,3)	30 (29,1)
I've had sex with someone of the same biological sex as mine.	4 (0,2)	18 (17,5)

I've had sex with someone of the opposite biological sex as mine.	973 (45,2)	31 (30,1)
I've had sex with both.	6 (0,3)	24 (23,3)
Thought about killing yourself		
Yes.	444 (20,7)	39 (38,6)
No.	1.704 (79,3)	62 (61,4)
Tried to kill yourself		
Yes.	145 (6,8)	21 (19,8)
No.	2.002 (93,2)	85 (80,2)
Thought about and tried to kill yourself	137 (31,0)	18 (47,4)
Thought of but did not try	305 (69,0)	20 (52,6)
Unprotected sex		
Yes.	90 (9,9)	13 (24,1)
No.	817 (90,1)	41 (75,9)
Do you think you are well-informed about STD / HIV-AIDS?		
Yes.	1.480 (68,9)	75 (70,1)
No.	78 (3,6)	10 (9,3)
Kind of	590 (27,5)	22 (20,6)

* (Bisexual, gay, lesbian, transsexual, refused to identify, did not know).

Although most heterosexuals, 1,480 (68.9%), and most non-heterosexuals, 75 (70.1%), have declared they are well informed about the prevention of STD / HIV-AIDS (Table 2), we have found that for every 100 non-heterosexuals who have unprotected sex, there are 14 heterosexuals in the same situation.

Table 3 - Sources of information about sexuality and sexual orientation by sex, 2009.

With whom or how do you get information about sex?	Sex					Sexual Orientation				
	M n (%)	C**	F n (%)	C	Total* n (%)	Hetero n (%)	C	Non-hetero n (%)	C	Total n (%)
Friends	527 (38,3)	1	850 (61,7)	1	1.377 (60,8)	1301 (94,7)	1	73 (5,3)	1	1.374 (60,6)
I talk with my mother	251 (30,1)	4	583 (69,9)	2	834 (36,8)	803 (96,7)	2	27 (3,3)	3	830 (36,6)
My boy/girlfriend	153 (27,2)	8	410 (72,8)	3	563 (24,9)	539 (95,7)	3	24 (4,3)	4	563 (24,9)
On the internet	294 (52,5)	2	266 (47,5)	5	560 (24,7)	527 (94,4)	4	31 (5,6)	2	558 (24,6)
On TV shows	201 (44,4)	5	252 (55,6)	7	453 (20,0)	431 (95,4)	5	21 (4,6)	5	452 (20,0)
Through advertising on TV, newspapers and/or the radio	193 (45,3)	6	233 (54,7)	9	426 (18,8)	410 (96,5)	6	15 (3,5)	8	425 (18,8)
Reading specific books	139 (35,5)	11	253 (64,5)	6	392 (17,3)	374 (95,7)	8	17 (4,3)	7	391 (17,3)
Reading specific articles in magazines	142 (36,7)	10	245 (63,3)	8	387 (17,1)	375 (97,2)	7	11 (2,8)	11	386 (17,0)
My teachers	151 (40,2)	9	225 (59,8)	10	376 (16,6)	363 (96,8)	9	12 (3,2)	10	375 (16,6)
I talk with my father	252 (73,7)	3	90 (26,3)	13	342 (15,1)	336 (98,2)	10	6 (1,8)	13	342 (15,1)
I talk with doctors	62 (18,3)	13	277 (81,7)	4	339 (15,0)	321 (95,0)	11	17 (5,0)	7	338 (14,9)
I don't talk with anybody	161 (60,5)	7	105 (39,5)	12	266 (11,7)	248 (93,2)	12	18 (6,8)	6	266 (11,7)
My brothers and sisters	101 (41,2)	12	144 (58,8)	11	245 (10,8)	231 (94,3)	13	14 (5,7)	9	245 (10,8)
I talk with my neighbor	39 (45,3)	14	47 (54,7)	15	86 (3,8)	78 (90,7)	14	8 (9,3)	12	86 (3,8)
I talk to psychologists	23 (30,3)	15	53 (69,7)	14	76 (3,4)	64 (84,2)	15	12 (15,8)	10	76 (3,4)

* Value obtained by dividing the total of each option by the total number of respondents (n = 2265)

** C = Order of search of information source

Regardless of sexual orientation, adolescents prefer talking about sex and sexuality first with friends, and there are *nuances* between the sexes with respect to talking to other people (Table 3).

We also found that, regardless of sex and sexual orientation, for approximately 17% of the adolescents teachers are the 9th or 10th source

of information, and 17% seek information in books, articles and specific magazines. Using statistical analysis by sex, we can infer that there seems to be a differentiated route for boys and girls with regard to the search for sources of information: 1) for boys: friends – internet – father – mother – TV – ads – do not talk; and 2) for girls: friends – mother – boy/girlfriend

- medical doctors - internet - specific readings. Using statistical analysis by sexual orientation, we find another route: 1) for heterosexuals: friends - mother - boy/girlfriend - internet - TV - ads - reading, 2) for non-heterosexuals: friends - internet - mother - boy/girlfriend - TV - do not talk - medical doctors.

Using analysis by sex and sexual orientation, we also observed variation in the prioritization of informational sources. For boys, the internet is the 2nd source of information, while for girls it is the 5th. The internet is in 4th place for the heterosexual youth and second for non-heterosexuals.

When asked what subjects they would like to talk about in school, girls answered they

prefer to talk about sexual violence against children and adolescents, and boys prefer to talk about drugs and alcohol. Also, compared to boys, girls prefer to talk about sexual diversities and contraception. However, regardless of sex, both seem to be interested in HIV modes of infection, prevention and testing, with special attention to its symptomatic manifestations.

Regardless of sexual orientation, rape was considered the most violent act by both sexes (Table 4). However, the issue of homophobia was in 3rd place for both sexes, tied in the case of boys with stealing. Among those who consider all alternatives equally violent, girls and non-heterosexuals are the ones who proportionally signaled this understanding the most.

Table 4 - Distribution of opinions about violent acts by sex, 2009.

Order from what you consider the most violent. By sex, regardless of sexual orientation.	Order	Masculine N (%)	Order	Feminine n (%)
Shooting someone	2	298 (49,9)	2	413 (57,2)
Rape	1	383 (63,7)	1	509 (70,1)
Hitting homosexuals	3	180 (30,9)	3	251 (35,1)
Using drugs	6	188 (32,4)	5	214 (30,1)
Stealing	3 4	200(34,4) 187 (32,1)	4	236 (33,0)
Being armed	5 6	186 (32,1) 185 (32,0)	6	301 (42,2)
You can not order them, they are all equally violent	- - -	262 (34,5)	- - -	498 (65,5)

There was a difference of opinion about the act *beating homosexuals*: non-heterosexual respondents considered this the 2nd most violent act, tied with *shooting someone*, and, for heterosexuals, *beating homosexuals* was in 3rd place, tied with *stealing*. In both cases, rape was considered the most violent act of all.

As for the question about jokes told in school which are offensive to homosexual

people, we found that although 42 (43.8%) non-heterosexuals have shown an attitude of confrontation of homophobia, the rest chose alternatives that showed typical reactions of those who feel embarrassed, abused, or of those who have internalized and accepted homophobia, that is, who *think it is normal to laugh about people because of their sexual orientation*. Overall this alternative was proportionately the most chosen (Table 5).

Table 5 – Distribution of reactions to homophobic jokes by sexual orientation, 2009.

What do you do when you hear someone telling jokes that offend people who are not heterosexual?	Sexual Orientation	
	Heterosexual	Non- heterosexual
1) Get angry, but pretend to enjoy them so that they do not think you are homosexual.	258 (12,5)	17 (17,7)
2) Get angry and ask people not to laugh at people's sexual orientation.	628 (30,4)	42 (43,8)
3) Get angry, get upset and leave the group discretely for fear of their saying you are not heterosexual.	172 (8,3)	14 (14,6)
4) Enjoy it, because you think it is normal (right) to make jokes about people who are not heterosexual.	1.009 (48,8)	23 (23,9)
Total	2.067 (100,0)	96 (100,0)

Table 6 presents questions about beliefs and values that influence the discourse and practice of people with regard to living together with and accepting non-heteronormativized sexual and gender orientations. The results show that the level of acceptance of non-heterosexuals varies with the context, gender and people involved. There was homogeneity in relation to the rejection of transvestites and transsexuals compared to lesbians and gay men, regardless of sexual orientation. Equally important was finding frequencies

that point toward interiorized homophobia in non-heterosexual people, such as the fact that 24 (22.9%) *non-heterosexuals* say they would never kiss / make out with someone of the same biological sex, or 18 (17, 6%) and 15 (14.4%) say, respectively, that they would not like to have a gay or lesbian teacher. Similarly, 34 (31.8%) *non-heterosexuals* are afraid of being recognized as such, which also explains the incidences of around 20% of rejection to having openly gay or lesbian friends.

Table 6 – Distribution of homophobic statements by sexual orientation, 2009.

	Sexual orientation			
	Heterosexual		Non-heterosexual*	
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
	Disagrees	Agrees	Disagrees	Agrees
I would not like to have a gay classmate.	1.594 (73,7)	568 (26,3)	84 (81,6)	19 (18,4)
I do not mind my parents having gay or lesbian friends.	1.049 (48,5)	1.112 (51,5)	33 (31,4)	72 (68,6)
I would not like to have a lesbian teacher.	1.574 (72,8)	587 (27,2)	89 (85,6)	15 (14,4)
I would not like to have a gay teacher.	1.434 (66,5)	724 (33,5)	84 (82,4)	18 (17,6)
I support it when they keep transvestites dressed as a woman from entering the school.	1.256 (58,1)	904 (41,9)	71 (67,6)	34 (32,4)
I accept having a gay friend as long as he does not have female mannerisms.	1.215 (56,2)	947 (43,8)	57 (54,3)	48 (45,7)
I accept having a lesbian friend as long as she does not have masculine mannerisms.	1.129 (52,3)	1.031 (47,7)	70 (66,0)	36 (34,0)
I am afraid that my classmates think that I am a homosexual.	1.518 (70,3)	641 (29,7)	73 (68,2)	34 (31,8)
I would never kiss / make out with someone of the same biological sex as mine.	292 (13,5)	1.868 (86,5)	81 (77,1)	24 (22,9)
I would not like to have a lesbian classmate.	1.607 (74,4)	552 (25,6)	83 (79,8)	21 (20,2)
I would not like to have a transvestite classmate.	1.328 (61,4)	834 (38,6)	80 (76,2)	25 (23,8)
I would not like to have a transsexual classmate.	1.344 (62,3)	815 (37,7)	75 (70,8)	31 (29,2)
I would never have sex with someone of the same biological sex as mine	210 (9,7)	1.953 (90,3)	71 (68,3)	33 (31,7)
Living with a gay person can influence another person to become homosexual	1.416 (65,5)	746 (34,3)	81 (77,1)	24 (22,9)

In 100 non-heterosexual adolescents, 54 (54.0%) said they had disclosed their sexual orientation to someone, and the ones who had disclosed the most were gay men, 11 (91.7%), followed by lesbians, 9 (81.8%) and bisexuals, 19 (52.8%). The most cited people in all groups are close friends, followed by schoolmates and mothers.

Among the 38 bisexuals of the sample, 33 (87.0%) answered the question about whether they had suffered any discrimination because of sexuality. Of these, 18 (54.5%) said yes. For the group *others*, aggressions were less frequent, as only 9 (30.0%) in 30 respondents said they had already been victimized. All gays and lesbians in the sample responded to this question, and in the case of lesbians, nearly 80.0% had suffered abuse and they were, among all groups of non-heterosexuals, the ones who had disclosed the most. However, in 32.6% of the 86 young victims of aggression, only 8 (28.6%) said that they would change their sexuality if that were possible. Those 8 people are bisexual or are inserted in the category *others*.

For those who said they had experienced verbal abuse or threats of aggression, 11 were bisexual (9 girls), 6 were gay, 3 were lesbian and 4 were *others* (2 girls). Seven bisexuals (4 girls), 8 gays and only 2 boys in the group of *others* declared that they had been the target of jokes and/or mockery. About having been looked upon or appointed by other people with contempt and/or rejection, we found that 11 bisexuals (8 girls) and 7 gays had been abused this way.

Such abuse / discrimination occurred at school [30 respondents (14 bisexuals)], and at home [18 respondents (9 *others* and 3 bisexuals)]. Only 15 of them said they had reported this abuse to friends. We stress that 31 young people remained silent in relation to abuses.

We found that for every 100 heterosexuals with suicidal thoughts, there are nine non-heterosexuals in the same situation. Among the non-heterosexual, 17 (48.6%) bisexuals and

17 (38.6%) *others* reported they had already considered suicide.

There was a similar relation to suicide attempts: for every 100 heterosexuals who have attempted suicide, there are 14 non-heterosexuals who have attempted it. Among the non-heterosexuals who have attempted suicide, nine (23.7%) are bisexual and 10 (21.7%) are *others*.

Regardless of the sexual orientation of respondents, girls had a higher prevalence of suicidal thoughts than boys: 74.2% (359) and 25.8% (125), respectively (Yates correction = 67,831, $p < 0.0001$).

We observed that several non-heterosexual adolescents who considered killing themselves were victims of discrimination and abuse, perpetrated by people close to them and in several places where they circulate. Regardless of whether they had disclosed their sexual orientation, the most common type of discrimination was being marginalized by a group of friends or neighbors, followed by discrimination by teachers and schoolmates, and in the family environment. However, except for the school context, we noticed that those who disclosed their sexual orientation experienced more discrimination in these areas in comparison to those who did not disclose it.

However, not all of those who disclosed their sexual orientation who suffered discrimination attempted suicide. However, of those who attempted ($n = 14$), only two suffered discrimination and they had disclosed. The others, 7 who have disclosed and 5 who have not, did not suffer discrimination and attempted suicide. Thus, it seems that the ones who disclosed who did not experience discrimination attempted suicide more than the others.

Here, we found that among those who attempted, five who had disclosed (36.0%) were discriminated against by a group of friends or neighbors, teachers and/or schoolmates. We highlight that those who identified themselves as *others* and that were did not

disclose were proportionally less discriminated against. Bisexuals, who disclosed or not, are those who think of themselves as the most discriminated, followed by those who have identified themselves as *others* and who have not disclosed. With respect to suicidal attempts, openly bisexual people attempt more, and the *others* who did not disclose are the ones who attempt the most.

As for those who experienced homophobic victimization and thought of killing themselves, we found that 13 (41.9%) had experienced verbal abuse, followed by nine (29.0%) who were threatened with having their sexual orientation revealed to others, eight (25.8%) who said they were being looked upon or appointed by other people with contempt or rejection, and 7 (23.3%) who were the target of jokes and/or mockery. Among these, again, young people who disclosed were the most victimized.

Among those who attempted suicide, five were threatened with having their sexuality revealed to others, 4 were cursed and felt humiliated, and 3 were looked upon or appointed by other people with contempt or rejection. As expected, most of these young people had already disclosed their sexuality.

Here, we found that those who identified themselves as *others*, having disclosed or not, were less victimized; however, in comparison to those who disclosed, they thought more of suicide and attempted it more. In the case of bisexuals, the ones who had not disclosed were less discriminated than the ones who had.

The aggressors most frequently reported by those who identified themselves as non-heterosexual are boys from school, 21 (23.6%), followed by girls, five (5.6%) and by both, four (4.5%).

However, we emphasize that in the case of the youth who have considered suicide and attempted it, besides the boys from school, the most frequent aggressors were their parents.

In 49 respondents, school was the most reported place of aggression, 30 (61.2%), followed by home, 18 (36.7%) and public places (streets, malls, parks, etc.), 15 (30.6%), both for

those who thought about suicide and for those who attempted it.

Discussion

Victimized by homophobia explicitly (physical and / or verbal aggressions), implicitly (irony, heteronormativity) or silently (no discussion of sexual diversity), the LGBT youth in the sample, as well as the so-called heterosexuals look for teachers to discuss issues related to sexuality even if teachers are not their first option. But are teachers prepared to deal transversally with sexual diversity at school from a critical paradigm (Furlan, 2009), to the detriment of essentialist values? According to the study of Castro, Abramovay and Silva (2004), teachers lack critical reflections on the ideologies and prejudices embodied both in their own personal opinions and in the scientific discourses on sexuality that they convey in the classroom.

So it is not surprising that teachers are not the primary source of information for pupils. The fact that students first go talk with friends evidences the need for investment in peer education and youth leadership, and teachers may well be accompanying this process of knowledge construction, without restricting themselves to the position of masters or holders of *the true* knowledge about sexuality.

Although adolescents feel well informed about STD / HIV-AIDS prevention, they often have unprotected sex. This conflicting picture of what is known and what is done seems to be more serious with the non-heterosexual youth, because they have more unprotected sex in comparison to the heterosexual youth, especially in sexual intercourse with persons of the same biological sex, corroborating, thus, the data of the latest survey from the Ministry of Health on condom use among the population of gay men and MSM (men who have sex with men)¹.

What is the cause of this higher risk of unprotected sex among the non-heterosexual

¹- News July 18, 2010. Source: <http://portal.saude.gov.br/portal/arquivos/pdf/clipping_18_06_2010.pdf>. Accessed on: 03 July 2010.

youth? Here again, as a space for socialization, the school appears as a context of reproduction of naturalized homophobic perspectives on sexualities and genders. Although all the interviewees in the research cited are older than 18, the overwhelming majority have attended school for a long time (about 11 years). According to Mariangela Simao, director of the Department of STD, AIDS and Viral Hepatitis of the Ministry of Health, the difficulty for non-heterosexual young people to talk about sex is even bigger, because they suffer discrimination at school and at home. For her, "it makes them lower their guard when it comes to prevention, which makes them more vulnerable to HIV."²

According to this study, "53.5% of homosexuals have been discriminated against, cursed, humiliated or beaten because of their sexual orientation." Mariângela adds: "homophobia leads homosexuals to a kind of underground, which reflects on their health conditions, as it happens worldwide."

We agree with this position. Moreover, although there have been advances in terms of public health and education policies to combat homophobia, there are very few informational materials, produced by the government or not, for the population of young LGBT. People feel insecure to position themselves on the formation or the visibility of LGBT identities in adolescence, and the few educational materials produced for teachers to work on the issue of non-heteronormative sexualities in schools are in general never or almost never used. Therefore, the issue of homoerotic and affective relationships in adolescence remains invisible, or such relationships are treated as *phases of adolescence that will soon pass*. Ironically, the reverse is not true.

Two other explanations that could justify not using condoms in this context come from the heteronormative paradigm of sexuality

and the experience with AIDS. For Castro, Abramovay and Silva (2004),

the most cited reasons for not using condoms differ when considering students by sex, in a clear indication that gender counts for the organization of sexual and reproductive lives, and that in such divisions the construction of affectivity, feeling, or how one conceives the relationship can be a predictor of preventive behaviors. (p. 189)

In the heteronormativized society we live in, no one is educated to be LGBT. Therefore, it is not absurd to believe that the prerogatives of gender and heterosexual practices are also internalized by the LGBT youth. Thus, just like young heterosexual men, the gay youth may be assimilating for themselves the values of masculinity guided by chauvinism, which would justify claims "that guide the decision of young men not to use condoms because of considerations related to sexual pleasure" (p. 189), so it is common for young men to say that condom use *decreases pleasure, sensitivity, it is not natural*. Or, as demonstrated in this research, there is a construction of masculinity based on omnipotence: if, on the one hand, young women do not use condoms because they love and trust, on the other, "young men rely on their female partners because they trust themselves, projecting idealizations" (p. 190). Another issue that can be raised from this perspective is the fact that condoms also have the function of preventing pregnancy and, in the case of sexual intercourse between two persons of the same sex, it is automatically dismissed.

In addition, there is a magical thought that "this is not going to happen to me", "it was just once" (p. 193); besides, according to the study of the Ministry of Health, there is an increase in condom use as the age of respondents increases, which means AIDS might be understood as *something of older people*, not

2- News February 3, 2010. source: <<http://www.aids.gov.br/data/Pages/LUMISE77B47C8ITEMID6D8CEDA778C341CC95E0E0CBE86F9075PTBRIE.htm>>. Accessed on: March 15, 2010.

of adolescents, since these would not have had time to have as *many sexual partners* as the adults.

With regard to violence and what we understand as a violent act, we repeated the questions already worked on by the research of Castro, Abramovay and Silva (2004). We believe that the gender regulatory devices reported by those researchers as generators and boosters of homophobia help explain the results we found. However, we wonder how can the openly LGBT youth or the youth still discovering themselves agree that to be offended, attacked or embarrassed can be less severe than other types of violence? In fact, regardless of sexual orientation, how can they value the violence presented here as more or less violent? We have seen that the proportion of young people who believe it is impossible to assign a value order to the typologies of aggression presented is virtually the same both for heterosexuals and for *non-heterosexuals*. We inferred from that that violence – in this case, homophobic violence – is already naturalized in the gender discourse and education of these young people, which evidences that such violence has been an internalized and constitutive factor of subjectivities in our society.

Commonly, the so-called non-hegemonic sexualities are devalued and harassed, which causes pain and suffering to those who do not correspond to heteronormative standards. Thus, we found that in each specific category of the non-heterosexual group, the most openly gay and lesbian young people are the ones who suffer discrimination and homophobic violence the most. But no less significant was the number of bisexuals and *others* also victimized by homophobia. Among those who identified themselves in this latter category, there is some relation between homophobic expressions and the act of disclosing their non-heterosexual identity. That is, the homosexuals who have disclosed their sexual orientation think less about suicide and try less to kill themselves in comparison to those who have not disclosed

it, but they suffer more discrimination and homophobic violence.

Homophobic social pressure favors the internalization and maintenance of stigma which, because of their repeatability (Austin, 1976), early learning and reinforcement in their reproduction, sediment the production of a state of melancholy in the subject (Butler, 2003), who, victimized by these injuries (Eribon, 2008), makes it difficult to mourn heterosexuality, a fundamental step for the construction of sexual identities in which subjects recognize themselves and feel entitled to express their wishes. Such heterosexuality, as shown by Marina Castañeda (2007) is inculcated ever since.

Clearly, this mourning is directly related to the value that each culture grants to heterosexuality (and the tasks associated with it), and likewise to the equal rights granted to LGBT people, so it may be modified or even not exist. But here, young people showed evidence of homophobic discourses and practices that put the LGBT youth at risk, especially with regard to suicidal thoughts and attempts that, as shown by the specialized literature, from the psychological point of view, have to do with a melancholy that remains constant, preventing the elaboration of losses, that is, mourning (Remafedi, 1994; Dorais, 2004).

Bisexual persons can be the target of both homophobia (by some heterosexuals) and of heterophobia (by some homosexuals), thereby constituting a biphobia. The data show that non-heterosexuals, many of whom are bisexual, get upset with jokes about homosexual people, but *pretend* they are having fun *so that people do not doubt* their sexuality. As pointed out by Castañeda (2007), bisexual people are not understood by society or science. This is because, as we have seen, there are young people (both sexes) who have sex with both sexes, without considering themselves bisexual or homosexual, “and there are young people who claim to be bisexual even though they have never had sexual experiences, neither homosexual nor heterosexual” (p. 289).

Therefore, besides being important, the self-designation as bisexual also implies defining oneself in opposition to the homosexual and heterosexual categories. Much of the difficulty to accept the possibility of bisexuality as a reality has to do with the fact that genders are organized following a binary logic that restricts people to man / woman and hetero / homosexual, therefore making bisexuality invisible. Apparently, this context of invisibility produces different effects comparatively to young people who openly identify themselves as gay or lesbian. If for these the existential condition is already established due to the binary organization of gender and due to the fact that what one has to fear and face is already known, the same does not apply to the social reaction to bisexuality.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in this study bisexuals are equally (or more) vulnerable to discrimination / aggressions that come, as we have seen, especially from the school itself, followed by the family space. It is not surprising either that the bisexual youth as well as those who have not identified themselves (*others*) are the most vulnerable to ideations and suicidal attempts in comparison to the youth who have already disclosed their sexual orientation. These findings partly support those of international studies (Remafedi, 1994; Dorais, 2004; Savin-Williams, 2005).

But what about the fact that those who have not disclosed their sexual orientation are the ones who have attempted suicide the most? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), in her study of *the closet*, shows that this is a strategy to protect themselves from fear, shame and discredit caused by injury. However, *the closet*, as well as injury, obliges those who use it to split their feelings and desires, to seek strategies to express them in a double way, being different in each situation. Castañeda (2007) problematizes the issue of *the closet* saying that if on the one hand coming out of the closet means entering other forms of category (*my gay neighbor, my lesbian friend*) that give intelligibility to the subject,

on the other hand, citing recent research, she reveals that the price of clandestinity is high. She says

We have observed that homosexuals who have publicly disclosed their orientation, especially for their family, are much less exposed to depression, anxiety and somatization; their self-esteem and their ability to relate to the other are much more developed. (p. 110)

The author concludes that in this binary logic, for homosexual people, *coming out of the closet* ends up being a measure of maturity equivalent to leaving home and getting married for heterosexuals.

Being *in the closet* produces psychological distress and vulnerability, so there are benefits about getting out of it. But people should not be forced to come out of the closet. It would be more interesting and necessary to promote a change in the educational system, which is still stuck to the heterocentric rules and regulations, hindering the free expression of non heteronormativized desires and behaviors, and reinforcing homophobia, gender inequalities and exclusion.

Finally, we say that the homophobic context in school, analysed using the beliefs and values that influence young people with regard to living together with and accepting diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, leaves no doubt as to the rejection of those who are unable to render themselves invisible: transvestites and transexuals. These are people who confuse the binary intelligibility essential to compulsory heterosexuality to such an extent that there is no other place left for them than that of abjection (Butler, 2001) and of radical exclusion from school (Peres, 2009). However, the question to be raised is: why do we feel that these people are in a state of gender confusion and not ourselves? From what position does one feel entitled to say what is right/wrong or natural/artificial in relation to sexuality and gender?

Final thoughts

We have seen how the values and opinions of young people participating in the research are impregnated and modulated by the homophobic discourse of gender education, which is reiterated in schools. Such discourse reproduces sexist stereotypes and prejudices that, for those who do not *fit* heteronormativity, lead to the serious risks mentioned here.

Similarly, we have observed how bisexuality seems to be a differentiated target of homophobic discourse precisely because it is doubly forced into invisibility, which launches it onto a complex context of denial of sexual identity, hindering its intelligibility.

Also, it was clear that there seems to be a close relation between the acts of disclosing a non-heterosexual sexual identity and giving it visibility as factors of coping the risk which those who remain *in the closet* are subject to. However, we also pointed out the risks of the institutionalization of this practice as the production of one more *compulsory truth* about sexualities.

This critical positioning opens a new field of research for the humanities, especially in the fields of education and psychology, which in different historical moments worked on the intensification of prejudice against people

who, for whatever reason, did not conform to normativities of gender and sexual identity. We believe this is a challenge and a political cause to be embraced in the direction of a society that respects human rights and citizenship, including sexual rights (Conselho, 2004). This is because gender and sexual identities are not essences, are not fixed elements in a person's life; sexuality and gender are events, and even if they vary little throughout life, we found evidence that shows their variations.

The question that remains is: why do we still need the institutionalization of homophobia as a regulatory practice of social and psychological construction of gender and sexual identities if we live in an era that dispenses with sex and therefore the presumed heterosexual practice of those involved for the generation of other human beings? In a time when social inequalities, violence and disregard for human rights affect us much more than sexual practices or the love between persons of the same biological sex, why do we still favor heterosexuality as the norm of establishment of family ties, for example? What will we teach and leave to our descendants if we still rely on prejudices and obsolete misguided devices of regulation of genders and sexualities, since they only produce and reinforce exclusions?

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