

# Gender, sexuality and age: Heteronormativity in pedagogical practices of Physical Education in schools

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the production of (hetero)normalization of gender and sexuality in conjunction with age in Physical Education in schools. It presents some findings of a study that sought to analyze the pedagogical practices of teachers of Physical Education in state schools located in seven of the nine municipalities of Vale do Jiquiriçá, Bahia state, Brazil. To access these subjects, we conducted a teacher education seminar and used focus groups and interviews as methodological strategies. Taking as theoretical, methodological and political references feminist poststructuralist studies, queer theory and Foucauldian studies, we discuss how the chronological dimension is treated in a fixed and stagist way and defines what can be known in school and how. The research points to a sometimes continuous and sometimes discontinuous connection between gender, sexuality and age in the Physical Education classes of the region investigated. On the one hand, teachers indicate that sexuality is manifested in school early on, in childhood, due to regional factors, and in an exacerbated form in boys. On the other hand, the chronological age of the bodies of students works as a regulatory norm when it comes to sexuality themes, which contributes to enhance the promotion of the sex-gender-heterosexual practice assumption as natural from adolescence onwards.

## Palavras-chave

School – Norm – Gender – Sexuality – Heteronormativity.

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# **Gênero, sexualidade e idade: tramas heteronormativas nas práticas pedagógicas da educação física escolar**

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## **Resumo**

*O artigo analisa a produção da (hetero)normalização do gênero e da sexualidade em articulação com a idade na trama da educação física escolar. Apresenta parte dos resultados de uma pesquisa que buscou analisar as práticas pedagógicas desenvolvidas por docentes que ministram aulas de educação física em escolas estaduais distribuídas em sete cidades dos nove municípios que compõem a região do Vale do Jiquiriçá (BA). Para acessar esses sujeitos, foi realizado um seminário de formação de professores e utilizaram-se grupo focal e entrevistas como estratégias metodológicas. Tomando como referências teórico-metodológicas e políticas os estudos feministas pós-estruturalistas, a teoria queer e os estudos foucaultianos, discute-se como a dimensão cronológica é tratada de forma fixa e etapista e torna-se definidora do que se pode conhecer e de como se pode conhecer na escola. A pesquisa aponta para certa conexão, por vezes contínua e, em outros momentos, descontínua, entre gênero, sexualidade e idade nas aulas de educação física da região investigada. Por um lado, docentes indicam que a sexualidade se manifesta na escola desde cedo, ainda na infância, em função de fatores regionais, e de forma exacerbada nos meninos. Por outro lado, a idade cronológica dos corpos dos estudantes funciona como uma norma regulatória quando se trata dos temas da sexualidade, o que contribui para reforçar a promoção/assunção do pressuposto sexo-gênero-prática heterossexual como natural a partir da adolescência.*

## **Palavras-chave**

*Escola – Norma – Gênero – Sexualidade – Heteronormatividade.*

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## **The school and normalization of gender and sexuality processes: an introduction**

What, where and how does one learn about what is conceivable in school as expression of desire and/or different ways of living pleasures? What times and educational spaces are triggered as suitable for schooling and make viable knowledge about body, gender and sexuality? What (and when) can a body do in the field of gender and sexuality experimentation in school?

These initial questions introduce and enhance themes concerning the various spaces in which the normative interplay of gender and sexuality works in school. In this sense, Dagmar Meyer (2012) argues that there is a need to evidence the various intramural and extramural social relations that constitute school life, and thus achieve and shape school bodies/subjects.

To educate means to invest in conducting the other, a process by which others are brought or conducted to our culture<sup>1</sup>. In the words of Meyer (2009, p. 222),

[...] becoming a subject of a culture involves a complex of forces and learning processes that today derives from a multitude of institutions and 'educational places' beyond the family, church and school, and encompasses a wide and varied range of educational processes.

Thus, we assume that school life consists of school and non-school educational processes.

Understanding education this way implies considering a set of plural and broad, schooled or non-schooled practices, which invest in conducting the conduct of the other. It also implies to indicate how we are performatively produced as social subjects by

the various educational processes constituted and legitimated in our society. For this, we consider ambiguous directions, the movement across borders, and sexual practices, which cannot be described by terms or classifications, as paths of analysis of the normative processes managed by the state in shaping what is human, viable and worthy of being considered a body/subject that matters in society.

In line with the understanding that "identifications are never fully and finally made" (BUTLER, 1993, p. 105), this political position indicates an analysis of education involved with 'erasures' in relation to the stable subject of Marxist and/or Piagetian approaches, for example. Such theoretical lines consider that schooling is one of the most important social processes for its alleged extended capacity of (trans)forming subjects in rationality and awareness aiming at emancipation from the oppressive power relations of society and/or aiming at full cognitive development.

We approach the Foucaultian perspective, both to think about the field of education and to understand the age-gender-sexualized normative 'choreographies'<sup>2</sup> present in everyday physical education classes in schools. In this sense, we consider the subject decentered as 'breeding ground', constituted by a wide and varied range of educational processes that aim to bring the other close to 'our culture', to 'our ways of being'. Thus we indicate a shift in the focus of discussions on the techniques and/or pedagogical practices themselves for questioning how what we call subject is shaped, or, in the words of Michel Foucault (2013, p. 30), it is necessary to examine "[...] how is it that the human subject took itself the object of possible knowledge? Through what forms of rationality and historical conditions? And finally at what price?"

**1-** According to Luis Castello and Claudia Mársico (2007), to *educate* comes from the Latin word *educare*, which is connected to *educere*, a verb composed of the prefix *ex* (outside) + *ducere* (conduct, take), and literally means *to conduct outside*, or to prepare individuals for the world.

**2-** Regarding the use of quotation marks and italics, we would like to inform that: we have used single quotes for words under suspicion and words used with meanings other than the conventional ones; and we have employed double quotes for quotes and italics to highlight words in the text or in quotes.

Analyzing the relationships between school education and norms, from a Foucauldian perspective, highlights the investment in life that is made by many modern institutions<sup>3</sup>, including the school, understood by the author as a learning apparatus that acts throughout the social fabric, setting in motion forms of domination by producing specific and local tactics, yet linked to global strategies of power – typical of modernity (FOUCAULT, 2004).

Considering the school as a product of modernity, Júlia Varela and Fernando Alvarez-Úria (1991) call into question the universal and natural character of this institution and its relation to an alleged evolution of Western civilization. The contributions of these authors allow us to state that *the school is a modern and normalizing institution*. As such, it uses individualization, distribution, comparison, correction and normalization strategies to regulate subjects. These strategies are part of physical education classes, for example, when there is the assumption of age and gender criteria for the organization of lessons, the division of classes and the content covered. How do pedagogical practices trigger normalization processes based on these criteria? And with what effects?

For understanding the specifics of the norm, François Ewald (1991) explains that normalization is constituted as a basic strategy of the normative functioning, because “within the normative system, values are not defined a priori, but instead through an endless process of comparison that is made possible by normalization” (p.152).

Foucault (2009) distinguishes forms of normalization indispensable for the management of life from power technologies. As for disciplinary normalization, the author points out the foundational character of the norm in the production of the normal and the

abnormal. That arrangement of norm, normal, and abnormal frames the disciplinary normative game closer to a proposal of normation. The norm is defined and, on this basis, the distribution of the normal and the abnormal occurs, according to their potential for suiting this norm, which is constituted first and as a basis for the normative logic.

In security apparatuses, according to the author, the normalizing operation happens in another way. There is here the first definition of normal, from which what approaches/departs from the normative reference is distributed in differentiation curves. At that time, it is produced what we call normality zone, which encompasses these distinctions and places them in a normative dynamic of approaching the normal and of regulating this distributive and normative level. The norm is deducted from the normal<sup>4</sup>.

These forms of normalization are presented as the basis of this new political rationality that organizes the management of the life of the individual and of the population, reconstituting the social fabric in rules whose core is the norm at the expense of the law/legal system. First, because “the variables on which population depends are such that to a very considerable extent it escapes the sovereign’s voluntarist and direct action in the form of the law” (FOUCAULT, 2009, p. 71-72). Second, because the law and the legal system are now part of an operation that “refers to natural laws, which allows them to be applied indistinctly in the name of a naturality of life which must be precisely preserved” (REVEL, 2006, p. 56-57). In this logic, the norm acts with social legitimacy for being “a means of producing the common standard [...] that makes law possible in modern societies” (EWALD, 1991, p. 155).

Thus, in this article, the analysis of (hetero)normalization of gender and sexuality

**3-** Foucault (2012) shows us the multiplication of “institutions of power” such as schools, hospitals and prisons, for example, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a fact that occurred with the composition of numerous and various techniques for subjecting the body and controlling populations.

**4-** We do not intend to discuss the idea of overcoming the legal and legal, disciplinary and security mechanisms. As Edgardo Castro (2006) warns, it is a change in the prevalence in the relationship established between these mechanisms.

points to the assumption of a critical attitude towards the foundational normative frameworks of the subject “as a dynamic set of social relations” (BUTLER, 2009, p. 162)<sup>5</sup>. This position allows us to undertake analyses of intelligibility fields through which school subjects become (im)possible and (ir)recognizable in physical education in schools. This means conducting a type of investigative movement that seeks to round them up and examine the normative layers that surround and constitute them.

Examining these normative layers also means disputing the meanings attributed to education in the formation of social subjects. Thus, asking about how the subject is produced in physical education in schools is an interested way of problematizing what we do and what is done to us. It means to focus on the ontological assumptions produced by the state, such as fixed conceptions of subject, culture, identity and gender, which present themselves as “versions [that] remain uncontested and incontestable within particular normative frameworks” (BUTLER, 2009, p. 149) and that work in the school environment and outreach it. Calling into question these normative processes is tensing their assumptions and, at the same time, to politically put on the agenda the possibility that “alternative modes of description [of the subject] are available within power structures” (SALIH, 2002, p. 13).

### **Gender in physical education in schools: heteronormative traces**

Involved by the political movements of transsexual groups and of the intersex movement, Judith Butler (1990) asserts the existence of a new gender politics<sup>6</sup>, constitutive

**5-** For Judith Butler (PRINS; MEIJER, 2002), a queer theoretical engagement reviews the traditional critical role (comprehensive in solutions regarding social ills) to appoint it as a way to evidence and to denaturalize the forms of knowledge established and associated with the management of subjects in modernity.

**6-** The author refers to a contemporary gender politics which results from the combination of the movement of the intersex, transsexual and transgender and the possible link between feminist studies and queer theory.

and constituent of contemporary feminisms, which invests in challenging gender norms. In line with this provocation, Guacira Louro (2007) formulates strategic indications of analysis of that power mechanism, “where the normalization process passes, where it infiltrates and how it infiltrates” (2007, p. 146).

It can be said that these authors take an anti-normalization stance. A stance that implies assuming: nonconformity and restlessness as a political condition; the displacements and the estrangement that question from within the processes that constitute the groups and by which one claims for equality. The new gender politics is not guided by the emancipation of a new subject position, but aims to “flirt with forms of freedom that are unimaginable to those who offer freedom as the freedom to become dominant” (HALBERSTAM, 2012, p. 136) and to seek subversion by its own ‘folds’, where there is room for the unnameable and abjection.

We approach this position – of feminist poststructuralist studies and the queer theory – which elects as a priority the questioning of state agendas guided by a heterosexual life model as a defining standard of what matters in certain notions of humanity.

Thus, we reaffirm that this article discusses the (hetero)normative production of the subject also because it considers that the relationship of desire, in the field of experience, is broader than the expression of an identity by an acronym (LGBTTI<sup>7</sup>, for example). Therefore, we treat gender identity (male/masculine and female/feminine) both as epistemological products and as a binary basis necessary for the operation of a heteronormative logic.

This way, we consider “a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire” (SPARGO, 1999, p. 9) when we assume a queer willingness to invest politically and analytically, (re)applying this theoretical place in relation to the academic fields of education and especially of physical

**7-** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersex.

education. We adhere to provocations of authors<sup>8</sup> interested in the promotion of questioning about the relationships between sex, gender and sexuality, in order to break away from a concept of body and subject regulated on the basis of the linearity of these terms.

For this, we consider the concept of gender as performative doing (BUTLER, 1990), as a series of constricting normative actions that classify subjects as masculine or feminine, differently from a willful tone of the subjects themselves. This position challenges the male-female dyad, treating it as an effect of the binary sexual distinction (sex), which is assumed to be an eligible and intelligible basis to recognize what a viable body is, and which, at the same time, indicates the statement of coherence between sex-gender-sexuality.

This theoretical position indicates and justifies the interest to propose “looking [at physical education in schools] awkwardly” (DORNELLES, 2013), questioning the way this discipline produces (and is produced by) a normative ‘arena’ of age, gender, and region which defines the individual and social body that is productive in school. In dealing with body culture (teaching object of this school discipline) what comes ‘into play’ to make up this body?

In Butler’s argumentation (1996), knowledge-power regimes constitute sex as a natural definer of identity, that is, sex appears as the main object produced for social normalization. Also according to Butler (1996, p. 65),

This constraining production works through linking the category of sex with that of identity; there will be two sexes, discrete and uniform, and they will be expressed and evidenced in gender and sexuality, so that any social displays of non-identity, discontinuity, or sexual

incoherence will be punished, controlled, ostracized, reformed.

By assuming it, classifications of social subjects are inexorably produced based on this “principle of intelligibility for human beings” (BUTLER, 1996, p. 67). Its production is related to the circumscription movements of sciences of reproduction and of reason, which, to some extent, have brought into play supposedly unequivocal links between sex, gender and sexuality. Butler reiterates Foucault’s argument of denial of repression, for she signals that it is through normalization strategies that sexuality has become one of references for objectification (the relationship with yourself and others) and for ordering the subjects since the nineteenth century. Similarly, articulating school, gender and production of bodies, Louro (2007) evidences the concept of heteronormativity for analyzing education and problematizes the management of sexuality by nation-states in modernity. For this author, addressing this concept with rigor also means challenging the dichotomous thinking that institutes sex and defines gender and the heterosexuality versus homosexuality relationship (and the compulsory action of heterosexuality).

For Butler (1993, p. 2), sex is “one of the norms by which this ‘one’ [subject] becomes viable, this norm that qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility”. The author urges us to problematize the materiality of bodies by our exposing the performative mechanism by which they are shaped, and thus to challenge the idea of sex as a priori of the body. This also means calling into question another potent binarism that locates sexuality at the heterosexuality-homosexuality poles.

On this theme, Tamsin Spargo (1999) leads us to think about the original-supplementary attribution naturalized in the binary pair heterosexuality-homosexuality. For the author, it is essential to evidence how both terms “could be seen as a product of [...] the same conceptual framework” (p. 46), that is, both are

**8-** Louro (2004, 2007), Butler (1990, 1993, 1996, 2009), Halberstam (2012), Salih (2002) and Pocahy (2011).

composed of their own epistemological level of a heteronormative power. Following this line, the author also questions: "If homosexuality and heterosexuality are categories of knowledge rather than innate properties, how do we, as individuals, learn to know ourselves this way?" (SPARGO, 1999, p. 50).

Such a question indicates that intelligible genders and sexualities are those that are displaced through a continuist and naturalized logic between sex-gender-sexuality. Thus, one can visualize the arbitrary character of the categories created to describe the ways of being and living as there are many lives in physical education in schools, for example, which occupy the place of discontinuity, incoherence and non-humanity. Before we specifically discuss school practices of Physical Education discipline, we need to situate the importance of the notion of performativity for the theorizations about gender developed by Butler<sup>9</sup>.

For Butler (1993), the production of gender identity can be analyzed as a matter of performativity. As performative utterances carry out the action described at the time of their naming, for the author, when dealing with gender norms, expressions are always performative. Jonathan Culler (1997) refers to the discussions undertaken by Butler on gender performativity, defining this concept as "compulsory repetition of gender norms that animate and constrain the gendered subject [...] but which are also the resources from which resistance, subversions and displacement are forged" (CULLER, 1997, p. 103). Therefore, asking yourself about the production of bodies in physical education in schools is to focus on the action of gender norms, on how this action occurs in a repetitive and replayed way.

However, the effectiveness of gender performativity is not complete, nor dwells in full and once and for all subjects, who therefore

**9-** The concept developed by Butler is based on John Austin's propositions on linguistic acts described from two types of utterances: constative, which describe a state of affairs and are true or false, and performative ones, which in describing an action, make something occur (CULLER, 1997).

are necessarily and repeatedly produced<sup>10</sup>. An analysis of the regulation processes of bodies in the physical education in schools should also evidence the recitations that operate resistance and possible counter-conducts at the core of heteronormativity. This means considering the possibility of analyzing disaccomodation and movements from possible *zones of abjection*<sup>11</sup>, like a destabilizing return to regulatory gender norms that define such zones.

### **(Hetero)normalization of gender and sexuality: an analysis of sex and age**

In this last part of the article, we shall analyze the production of (hetero)normalization of gender and sexuality in the fabric of school education. In this sense, we are interested in understanding what prescriptions and (perform) actions are called into action in Physical Education in schools, focusing on three related categories: gender, sexuality and age. How do these categories cross and influence normative practices that fix models of intelligibility and hence of corporeality and age for school subjects?

To be able to address this issue, we present some of the results of a study<sup>12</sup> which examined the pedagogical practices of Physical Education in schools in the interior of Bahia state, specifically in Vale do Jiquiriçá region<sup>13</sup>.

**10-** Citationality steps in to lead repetition to the possibility of escaping and of typical re-appropriation of linguistic signs. Thus, the same repeatability that can reinforce the performative act also creates conditions for challenging hegemonic identities and for the production of other identities.

**11-** The articulation between abjection and education evidences the disputes about the meaning of life and focuses on the questioning of the production of subjects constituted from the inside out of certain discursive regimes. (POCAHY; DORNELLES, 2010).

**12-** The research titled *A (hetero)normalização dos corpos em práticas pedagógicas da educação física escolar* [The (hetero)normalization of bodies in pedagogical practices of physical education in schools] was developed under the supervision of Professor Dagmar Estermann Meyer, at the Education Graduate Program of Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. For details, please see Dornelles (2013).

**13-** The subjects are teachers who teach physical education classes in state schools located in seven of the nine municipalities that make up the region of Vale do Jiquiriçá (BA). To access these subjects, we conducted a teacher education seminar and used focus groups and interviews as methodological strategies.

We have invested in making visible the relationship between the (hetero)norm and the production of (im)possible, (not) viable and (in) explainable subjects in schools from a gender sexuality-age discursive network.

Considered a key category for the organization of the school structure, and also normatized by laws and decrees, age is treated in the regulation of subjects during school life and presented as a criterion to assess the quality of basic education in the region investigated<sup>14</sup>. In the introduction to this debate, it is noteworthy that the concept of age cited in the school legal plan is limited only to a chronological dimension of individuals, and unrelated to the social conditions that constitute such dimension. Its task is to function as a means of ordering and categorizing the population classified as 'school age'. This means to view age as a category that is in dispute and that needs to be made visible as the vertex of contemporary policies of body regulation in nation states.

Associated with the idea of bodies as strictly material and natural entities, the chronological dimension seems to work in physical education classes in Bahia's interior. Here, this dimension is restricted to the materiality of the effects of time on the body until death. Going against this position, as Alfredo Veiga-Neto (2000) does, the age dimension can also be assumed as mobile and changing.

The school works with the unilinear assumption (sex-gender-sexual practice) of sexuality from adolescence onwards. This occurs through the power of biological and chronological discourse in the definition of adolescence as 'the' moment at which desires and pleasures can come into play in the lives of social subjects. The idea that each one will live age processes in different ways throughout life is possible and can be discussed; however, this

**14-** As a goal for strengthening its basic education policy, Bahia State Education Department declares, "the commitment to teach children up to eight years old how to read and write and extinguish school illiteracy". Translator's note: In Brazil, *basic education* comprises early childhood, primary and secondary education. Available at: <<http://www.educacao.escolas.ba.gov.br/node/9>>. Access on Jan. 17, 2013.

line of argument does not work at the power level in the same way when it comes to school pedagogical practices that invest in the theme of sexuality.

When discussing how normative regimes operate in schools, it is important to demarcate the representations of this or that age constituted by certain discursive regimes. For this, it is assumed that the chronological dimension, gender and sexuality are intertwined in the production and maintenance of school norms. However, this is not tension free.

In the wake of the productive friction between biological and chronological discourses, pedagogical work models are produced, which presuppose 'natural development' for the production of recognizable subjects, who, when cited, occupy the spaces of eligibility and intelligibility of what a body is in school. Despite its strength in proposing a reality, we understand *development* as a *discursive practice*, as proposed by Valerie Walkerdine (1998).

The author questions epistemological propositions that claim the materiality of "stages" and of the "subject of stages" as previous to the discursive practices of developmental psychology which constitute such propositions by enunciating them: "Relations between the 'real material' object and the practices of its production are complex: there is never a moment of 'reality' that is comprehensible or possible out of a framework of discursive practices that make it possible and transformable" (WALKERDINE, 1998, p. 156).

Therefore, the relation with knowledge is often marked by the evocation of biologized and maturational progression of development as a condition for the relation with knowledge. This assumption contributes to legitimize the classification of developmental stages (constituted within Piaget's theory) used in the definition, normalization and regulation of school subjects. However, despite its strength, in the analysis of the empirical material, we invoke a dispute over the meanings attributed to the phases and stages, as well as over the



very meaning of phases and stages as criteria for the formation of the school subject and for the possibility of saying what sexuality is:

#### Chart 1

Morgana: There are students who, when reporting, for example, the issue of sexuality, "Oh, all you gotta do is get in there and take the girl and do this and tell her to do that and so on"... So they describe, they know, for example. I don't mean a 10-year-old student, I'm talking about students who are seven or eight.  
Priscila: Do they describe the [sexual] act?  
Morgana: They describe the act, describe that one tells the girl to take off her clothes and they describe the whole production process. And his body's reaction, the pleasure, it can be a different pleasure, and it is, from that of an adult. Because he's doing, he's feeling something, but I think it's still something innocent because he's a child, it's as if he were eating, for example, a sweet and thought naively that that sweet is very tasty, then it gave that differentiated pleasure. The same thing applies to making out, to touching an intimate part of a colleague or to being touched. So it's something he's discovering.

\*At times in this section, we present excerpts from speeches of teachers, placing them in the text or in tables. Names used are fictitious.  
Source: Focus Group, 2012.12.22

#### Chart 2

Élida: In the game, girls also raise their T-shirts to play because it is hot. The boys want to take off their T-shirts. There is always this questioning about... But I think it's more because of their age, of puberty itself, it's normal. And behaves the Physical Education teacher to debate this in a natural way.

Source: Interview, 2012.3.8

In the materials produced with the interviews and the focus group, there are several accounts of situations that evoke the chronological age to distribute, classify and normalize school subjects according to a gender-chronological norm. The action of this norm sets in motion age representations that operate with certain 'natural conditions' as necessary for dealing with the sexuality themes recognized in schools. These age meanings are proposed by an intelligible level made from the biological-chronological discourse articulated to the heteronormative regime. This amalgamation of knowledge-power works to insinuate, performatively and on a daily basis, that sexuality crosses the lives of school subjects "because of their age, of puberty itself".

The speeches that make up the body only in its biological dimension, linked to the epistemological propositions of 'natural

development' of the subject, enunciate childhood as innocent and immaculate in physical education in schools: "Because he's doing, he's feeling something, but I think it's still something innocent because he's a child". Therefore, one should promote pedagogical practices that ensure this puerile time in school so that there is a natural progression from a supposedly asexual stage to the experience of penile-vaginal intercourse, considered by the school as the culmination of what one should know. In this supposedly naturally ordered process, it is critical to have pedagogical accuracy for maintaining this 'nature', avoiding any 'blossoming' ahead of time: "I do not mean a 10 year-old student, I'm talking about students who are a seven or eight".

When challenging arguments about the danger of the sexualization of girls due to access to cultural pedagogies such as dance and music, among others, Walkerdine states that "[...] the nature of the child is not discovered, but produced in regimes of truth created in those very practices that proclaim the child in all his naturalness" (1996). The idea of discovery – "So it's something he's discovering" – is linked to the existence of a previous asexual infantile stage for school subjects, surpassed with the 'discovery' of experiences, experimentation, desires, sensations and recognitions of sexuality, which are duly ordered and previously expected with the arrival of puberty.

Walkerdine (1998) questions the classifications and suspects of them as definitional of subjects a priori to think of them as strategies legitimized by science and pedagogy so as to produce (and monitor) the very object for which they propose potential solutions - the developing child.

In another study, one of us (DAL'IGNA, 2005, 2013) examined the ways school performance is produced in pedagogical discourse. More specifically, it focused on the analysis of the ways in which different characteristics considered essential and universal are made discursive objects and establish child

normativity. Such analysis allows us to extend the reflection on the issue discussed in this section, because the nature of the child is usually presented on the basis of universal elements and classificatory systems of knowledge, and not as a result of historical, social and cultural experiences. This makes it possible to analyze the school and its curriculum components as producers (and normalizers) of this 'developing' subject, who is subjugated by age and curriculum stages that "allow classifying, measuring and evaluating the performance of all children" (DAL'IGNA, 2013, p. 181).

In the analyzes carried out in the research mentioned in this article (DORNELLES, 2013), childhood, puberty and adolescence phases are taken as legitimizing reference for the construction of educational practices aimed at dealing with sexuality in physical education in schools. When actions to approach the theme of sexuality are mobilized by adolescent students, there is the election and the unquestionable proposition of methodologies to work on sexuality content, such as the choice of videos and the organization of debates on the theme in schools. The proposition of interdisciplinary seminars and fairs centered on contraception and sexually transmitted diseases, for example, is indicated as a relevant strategy for secondary education, due to the naturalized risks for this school population (in the age group correspondent to secondary education). It is assumed that active sex life is a 'reality' at this stage. For some of the staff, this may be true also in the final years of primary education:

#### Chart 3

Gabriela: I think we should start from the beginning, because nowadays you see kids aged 10, 11 and 12, we see how it is, right? We see, and there are things that even surprise us. A pupil comes to primary education from first to fourth grade, we see fourth graders saying things, my God, that we do not even have time to see, watch the scenes they bring from soap operas, these things. [...] I think we have to prepare them from an early age. I think.

Source: Interview, 2012.3.6

The excerpts present the 'tone' of the political dispute over the meanings given to the

stages of development in Physical Education in schools. In the previous excerpt, teacher Morgana explains that "they describe the act, describe that one tells the girl to take off her clothes, and they describe the whole production process." This description is accompanied by the teacher's pedagogical anguish because she realizes the initiation of sexual intercourse by students aged seven or eight years. Although the teacher reaffirms naivety and innocence as natural attributes of these ages, the fact that Morgana mentions the situation promotes disruptions to the unequivocal operation of stages of development in physical education in schools. In addition, her account also indicates conflicting meanings for the theme.

Suspecting the daily effectiveness of these stages in defining subjects, Gabriela characterizes the public of primary education (and not only that of secondary education) as eligible to deal with 'advanced' levels of sexuality. The cultural context 'outside' school (and its pedagogies), for example, is identified as an important additive to the education of school subjects in relation to sexuality themes, challenging the fixity and the supposed naturalness of development stages. Clues to the conflicted and disputed character of the discourses come into play to entangle and make visible the political interplay that regulates bodies in schools:

#### Chart 4

Eulalia: As I told you about the seminar, it is not about presenting, bringing material. As I have already asked: "Go to a health center and see what contraceptive methods you can get". Even with eighth graders, I think you can do it. Now, fifth graders have no maturity for such a proposal of seeking contraceptives, of discussing sexually transmitted diseases. So I think, in fifth grade, I had to do something much lighter.

Source: Interview, 2012.3.5

When asked whether the sexuality theme and pedagogical proposals listed to be addressed in secondary education could also be used with the public of primary education, Eulalia expressed disagreement and conflict with the position taken by Gabriela. An analysis of empirical materials allows us to point out

that, like most teachers, Eulalia indicates the need for pedagogical adaptations – “You can’t talk straightforwardly about the issue. You have walk around it [...]”. This position is based on the premise of stages and lack of maturity for these themes in such school phase.

When the ‘repertoire’ of sexuality appears in childhood, there are certain professional distress and pedagogical question about the proposals to be applied in physical education in schools. In general, the normative discipline investment produces sanction as a pedagogical practice commonly aimed at students who use foul language associated with penile-vaginal intercourse and genital organs. In addition, there is a normalizing investment when there is a certain silence and/or a refusal to debate

on the theme with students. This happens also in referral to specialized educational sectors of the school when two boys display their genitalia to each other. In this logic, ‘advanced’ subjects need to be repositioned in heterosexual chronological ordering brought into play by the school and Physical Education in schools.

The logic of ‘progressivism’ has crossed the speeches of teachers during the research, who cite (and constitute) the gender-sexualized subjects from the frame of linear and supposedly harmonious development of body (in childhood, puberty and adolescence), respectively, during school life (early childhood, primary and secondary education). This conception guides pedagogical teaching practices in Physical Education in schools.

#### Chart 5

Morgana: Yeah, but this is real.  
Roberto: That’s it. We can’t establish an order of ours in a setting in which several other factors lead to this adherence.  
Morgana: Actually, maybe I will be contradictory with my speech, but the order we will establish is to try to alleviate this situation. Because the order that we establish in our minds, that the child has that stage and will have those reactions, which go until a certain age, we see that it has caused a mix there. We should try to work on that reality. Trying to establish the order accordingly in that situation and not ordering the way he sees and believes that every human being should be. I do not know if I was...  
Roberto: [...] I think you’ve been clear. So you should seek within what the child is displaying, to adapt to his or her way. You don’t support everything s/ he does, but you should change a little our view that only one form of work is correct. But rather adapt the work to the reality of that girl, according to the knowledge she already has. So, that way, you can at least try to guide her within what she already has, already brings, but you can’t fail to consider it. Yes, because if we try, if we try, try to convince that child that the right way is just the way we think, this will create more disorder in her head. It will be more contradictory.

Source: Focus Group, 2012.12.22

In the excerpt above, the teachers indicate that, for sexuality to be treated pedagogically in a “peaceful “ and “orderly way”, it is important to recognize sex and chronological age as intertwined and regulatory categories. However, they also insinuate the need to think of other interplays of intelligibility posed by cultural pedagogies and family, for example, which produce “knowledge s/he already has” intertwined with “what the child is displaying”.

To pedagogically deal with this sexuality that enters school, teachers indicate the need for investment in methodologies such as student-teacher dialogue and the education of these school subjects to avoid recognizing sexuality manifested in a vulgar manner. These pedagogical strategies work in the arena of power, because

“discipline fixes the processes of progressive training and permanent control and, [...] on the basis of this, it establishes division between those considered unsuitable or incapable and the others” (FOUCAULT, 2009, p. 85).

“So it behooves us to know more about our students, we must understand the context in which they live in order to interpret the behavior they have in the classroom and with others” (Roberto, meeting I, p. 14-15), states the teacher. It is an example announcing the observation and study of the conditions of students ‘out of order’ as necessary practices in physical education in schools. Besides these practices, one can think of the action of surveillance and disciplinary examination (FOUCAULT, 2012) as normalizing strategies

to polish the edges of the manifestations of sexuality that present themselves explicitly and/or out of the adequate time and space for the heteronormative and chronological standards that regulate school education.

Finally, although centrally recognized in its chronological dimension, age is bent in the speeches of some teachers. Disputes over its conceptualization and crossing in the definition of school subjects evidence the political games guided by distinct epistemologies. In another conceptual arrangement of age and its political treatment, Pochay (2011) discusses how age can be taken in the definition of sexuality experimentations of old men involved with other men in billed sociabilities. In the discussions posed by the author, it is possible to think that “the age that we assume is also a way of giving intelligibility to what can be considered a socially possible life on the basis of institutional political engagements and cultural arrangements” (POCAHY, 2011, p. 14). In this line of argument, Veiga-Neto (2000, p. 217) shows us that it is important to analyze “the processes by which we learn (and teach) to be this or that age”.

Regarding the chronological perspective of age with suspicion can magnify humanity margins of school subjects, which are constituted by heteronormativity, putting physical education at the service of everyday and possibly democratic questioning of corporeality and age.

### **Final thoughts**

Taking a critical stance in relation to school does not mean celebrating it as space free of norms or demonizing it because it is constituted as a normalizing space. Moving away from the illusion of a ‘school without norms’, we have discussed how the school and physical education in schools put into operation a (hetero-age)normative entanglement. By this proposal, we make visible not only the epistemological levels that define what can be

known and the restrictive strategies that shape school subjects, but also the inhospitable zones that also define which subjects matter.

The findings presented in this article point to a certain connection, sometimes continuous and other times discontinuous, between the categories gender, sexuality and age in physical education classes in the region investigated. Clues of this contingency are displayed when the teachers of basic education indicate that sexuality is manifested in school early on, in childhood, due to some regional factors mentioned above, and in an exacerbated form in boys. Despite this indication, the chronological dimension is treated in a fixed and stagist way when it is articulated with sexuality in physical education in schools. Thus, the chronological age of the student bodies is triggered as a regulatory norm when it comes to the theme of sexuality, and therefore strengthens the unilinear sex-gender-heterosexual practice assumption as natural from adolescence onwards.

Thus, in the analysis of this complex constitution of the subject, it is possible to discuss potent forms of bending the norm in the configuration of the margins and of the possible disruptions to the normative level, i.e., loopholes can be open for us to think about the reversibility of prescriptive-restrictive marks that cross this institution. This means

[...] to take things, as it were in their environment. [...] not asking ‘Where does power come from, where is it going? but rather, ‘In what way does it happen [...]’ (FOUCAULT, 2013 [1999], p. 127).

Following Foucault’s provocations, we discuss how age, understood in a chronological and stagist way, is mobilized intertwined with a heteronorm in shaping school subjects in the practices of physical education discipline in the interior of Bahia. This normative gender-heterosexual-age operation is potent in the production of bodies/subjects allied with the

perspectives that assume the idea of natural development in schools. Thus we seek to problematize the school in its environment by addressing it from the perspective of power and knowledge practices that are ordered around gender, sexuality and age norms.

We believe that the discussions presented in this article may contribute to examining some of the practices mobilized in physical education and in school, which

are involved with the production of (hetero) normalization of gender and sexuality. By investing in the analysis of contemporary modes of understanding life and of shaping social subjects, we hope to have contributed to make us regard educational practices and knowledge with suspicion. Such educational practices and knowledge have determined who can know, when one can know and what can be known in school education.

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