



## “They call you that because you sway your hips when you walk”: the production of normality/abnormality in the school context

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**ABSTRACT.** Numerous devices of control, normalization, regulation, subjection and imprisonment of subjects and their identities/differences were produced in modern times and still persist today, even at school. In this article, we discuss the production of normality/abnormality and the urge to control the identities/differences of subjects in the school setting. The analysis is the result of research using semi-structured interviews with teachers who work from the 6th to the 9th grade of Elementary School in a state public school located in the Central-West region of the country. The analysis of the teachers' statements is grounded on the post-structuralist perspective. Firstly, we problematize the production of normality/abnormality, especially relying on writings by Michel Foucault, Carlos Skliar and José Gil, among others. Secondly, we reflect on the attempts to normalize identities/differences in the school context through the control of behaviors regarded as undesirable/abnormal, which, as the research has shown, are mainly linked to the control of sexuality. The results have evidenced that the school suffers the effects of the modern discourse of a single project and a single identity; despite some resistance movements, most teachers involved in these discourses conceive of difference as a deviant, problematic identity that needs to be corrected and normalized.

**Keywords:** abnormality; normalization; differences; school.

## “Eles te chamam disso porque você fica rebolando”: a produção da normalidade/anormalidade no contexto escolar

**RESUMO.** Na modernidade, produziram-se inúmeros aparatos de controle e de normalização, regulação, sujeição e aprisionamento dos sujeitos e de suas identidades/diferenças, o que se mantém atualmente, inclusive na escola. Neste artigo, discutimos a produção da normalidade/anormalidade e a vontade de controle das identidades/diferenças dos sujeitos no ambiente escolar. A análise é fruto de pesquisa utilizando entrevista semiestruturada com professores/as que atuam do 6º ao 9º ano do Ensino Fundamental em uma escola pública estadual localizada na Região Centro-Oeste do país. A análise dos enunciados dos/as professores/as aproxima-se da perspectiva pós-estruturalista. Problematizamos, em um primeiro momento, a produção da normalidade/anormalidade, recorrendo especialmente aos escritos de Michel Foucault, Carlos Skliar e José Gil, entre outros. Em um segundo momento, refletimos sobre as tentativas de normalização das identidades/diferenças no contexto escolar por meio do controle dos comportamentos considerados indesejáveis/anormais, os quais, conforme mostrou a pesquisa, se articulam principalmente com o controle da sexualidade. Os resultados indicam que a escola sofre os efeitos do discurso moderno de um projeto único, de uma única identidade, e que, embora aconteçam alguns movimentos de resistência, a maioria dos/as professores/as, envolvidos/as por esses discursos, concebe a diferença como uma identidade desviante, problemática, que precisa ser corrigida e normalizada.

**Palavras-chave:** anormalidade; normalização; diferenças; escola.

## “Te llaman así por tu manera de menear al caminar”: la producción de la normalidad/anormalidad en el contexto escolar

**RESUMEN.** En la modernidad, se produjeron innumerables dispositivos de control y normalización, regulación, sujeción y encarcelamiento de los sujetos y de sus identidades/diferencias, lo cual se mantiene hasta la actualidad, incluso en la escuela. En este artículo, discutimos la producción de la normalidad/anormalidad y el deseo de controlar las identidades/diferencias de los sujetos en el entorno escolar. El análisis es fruto de una investigación basada en entrevistas semiestructuradas con docentes que

trabajan del 6° al 9° año de la Educación Primaria en una escuela pública estatal ubicada en la región Centro-Oeste del país. El análisis de los enunciados de los/las docentes se aproxima a la perspectiva posestructuralista. En un primer momento, problematizamos la producción de la normalidad/anormalidad, recurriendo especialmente a los escritos de Michel Foucault, Carlos Skliar y José Gil, entre otros. En un segundo momento, reflexionamos sobre los intentos de normalización de las identidades/diferencias en el contexto escolar, a través del control de comportamientos considerados indeseables/anormales, los cuales, como mostró la investigación, se articulan principalmente con el control de la sexualidad. Los resultados indican que la escuela sufre los efectos del discurso moderno de un proyecto único, de una única identidad, y que, aunque existen algunos movimientos de resistencia, la mayoría de los/las docentes, atravesados/as por estos discursos, conciben la diferencia como una identidad desviada, problemática, que debe ser corregida y normalizada.

**Palabras clave:** anormalidad; normalización; diferencias; escuela.

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

According to Skliar and Souza (2000, p. 267), the social norm demarcates “[...] an art of following precepts and correcting errors.” It is a concept that structures society, naturalizing behaviors and modes of coexistence. It establishes precepts and corrects what is considered deviant, imprisoning us within models of what is deemed normal. By naturalizing accepted ways of living together, society limits differences and underscores entrapment within models of ‘normality.’ As a social construct, the norm dictates conduct, and “[...] although it may seem true that we live in a world of norms and that there is nothing we can do about it, we must understand that norms are the product of a long history of inventions, productions, and translations of the abnormal other” (Skliar, 2003, p. 168).

As Foucault (2024) states in *Madness, Language, Literature*, we have known for some time that societies are defined “[...] not only by what they accept and welcome, by what they value; but also, and perhaps above all, by what they reject and forbid” (Foucault, 2024, p. 31). According to the author, interdiction was once seen as natural and positive by those who analyzed societies, shaping conduct and choices. Referring to medical institutions and the production of medical science, Foucault says that, from the eighteenth century onward, social institutions developed the habit of including those on the other side of the divide, the mad, the ill, the criminal, accepting, welcoming, and tolerating them as if they were part of their culture, as if they belonged to it. At the same time, “[...] this strange process of inclusion (simultaneously through assimilation and knowledge) perhaps amounts to no more than a very slight modification of the old function of exclusion” (Foucault, 2024, p. 34).

Reflecting on what has been said about inclusion over the past three decades, Skliar (2019) describes it as a constant yearning, yet to be fully realized in our reality. Inclusion, according to the author, expresses an unfulfilled desire, a lack, a void. Its repeated invocation would signify nothing other than a lack of vitality, its non-existence, a sometimes desperate appeal, and a ghostly presence. The constant mention of inclusion suggests a search for something that, despite being sought after, remains a chimerical presence, an objective that stubbornly resists full realization. This occurs, to some extent, because “[...] in speaking of norms, and of deficient, abnormal alterity, we are not even mentioning what should first be called into question: the issue of the normal body” (Skliar, 2003, p. 169), of the normal subject, that is, the issue of normality itself.

Considering the authors’ reflections on the numerous apparatuses of control, normalization, regulation, subjection, and imprisonment of subjects and their identities and differences, in this article, we discuss the production of normality and abnormality and the will to control subjects’ identities and differences in the school context. As the research showed, this occurs primarily around sexuality. The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with teachers working from the 6th to the 9th year of elementary school at a public state school located in the Central West region of the country. The analysis of the statements is situated within a post-structuralist perspective. Initially, we problematize the production of normality and abnormality, and then we present the analysis of the field research. Notable are the teachers’ attempts to control student behaviors considered undesirable or abnormal, given that the school coexists with the effects

<sup>1</sup> This research was approved by the Ethics Committee: protocol number 267.951.

of the modern discourse of a single project, a single identity. Thus, although some resistance movements occur, most teachers, immersed in these discourses, conceive of difference as a deviant, problematic identity that needs to be corrected and normalized.

## **The production of abnormality, or on attempts to correct, reclaim, and normalize identities/differences**

Conceiving difference as an identity deviation implies a biologicist vision, one that seeks to correct and normalize. This approach reduces social problems to biological determinism, ignoring their historical and cultural dimensions. In the biologicist<sup>2</sup> view, that began to take shape in the nineteenth century, behaviors such as crime, prostitution, and alcoholism were considered diseases. Any behavior that diverged from the majority was classified as abnormal, a specific deviation. With the consolidation of medical sciences, behaviors outside the norm came to be regarded as anomalies. The imposed medical norm created the concept of 'abnormality', associating those behaviors with diseases. This process exerts a power of normalization and social control over behaviors.

Foucault (2001) analyzes the various historical figures that enabled the construction of the concept of abnormality in the medico-social thought of the West. He shows that the abnormal individual of the nineteenth century derives from the convergence of a set of control institutions and the surveillance mechanisms they put into operation. Based on a genealogy of abnormality, he demonstrates that the figure of the abnormal in the nineteenth century stems from three earlier figures: the 'monster', the 'incurable', and the 'masturbator'. The abnormal is constituted, "[...] marked by this increasingly diffuse and diaphanous type of monstrosity, by this rectifiable incurability increasingly surrounded by certain rectification apparatuses" (Skliar, 2003, p. 174). Without intending to address the entirety of the discussions presented by Foucault (2001) in his work *The Abnormals*, we highlight certain issues relating to the figures of the monster, the incurable, and the masturbator, precursors to the abnormal person of the nineteenth century, which are relevant for thinking about the processes of correction and normalization of supposed deviant identities.

In the eighteenth century, the monster, according to Foucault (2001, p. 69), "[...] is essentially a juridical notion, [...], for what defines the monster is the fact that it constitutes, in its very existence and in its form, not only a violation of the laws of society but also a violation of the laws of nature." This positions the monster in a juridical-biological field, representing simultaneously an exception to the species and a disturbance to the regularities of the juridical order.

In this sense, the monster represents the counternature, the model of difference, all forms of anomalies. Hence, "[...] the different forms of the other tend toward monstrosity: unlike the animal and the gods, the monster marks the 'internal' limit of man's humanity" (Gil, 2000, p. 173, emphasis in original). By representing an 'aberration of reality', the presence of the monster, according to Gil (2000), disturbs, for it calls into question "[...] the belief in the 'necessary existence' of human normality, [...], since the monster is nothing other than the ultimate disfiguration of the Same in the Other" (Gil, 2000, p. 175, emphasis in original). Hence, the fear, the dread it represents, and the need for its correction or annihilation. In other words, we can say with Cohen (2000, p. 31, emphasis in original) that:

The excessively precise laws of nature as established by science are cheerfully violated by the strange composition of the monster's body. A mixed category, the monster resists any classification built upon a hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, requiring instead a 'system' that allows for polyphony, mixed reaction (difference within sameness, repulsion within attraction), resistance to integration, a system that allows '[...] a deeper play of differences, a non-binary polymorphism at the base of human nature'.

By refusing to be part of a classificatory system, the monster disturbs with its incoherent body, its hybrid constitution, and its resistance to inclusion in any systematic structuration. Therefore, it is upon the monster that, from the nineteenth century onward, the medical and juridical sciences focus. Uncovering what underlies the human monster, what lies behind anomalies, irregularities, and deviations, is the great objective of these sciences. To know anomalies means to enable the development of a series of techniques of control

<sup>2</sup> In the work *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault (1999, p. 307) states that, "[...] deep down, evolutionism, understood in a broad sense, that is, not so much Darwin's own theory but rather the whole set, the package of its notions (such as the hierarchy of species on the common tree of evolution, the struggle for life among species, selection that eliminates the least adapted), became, quite naturally, in a few years of the nineteenth century, not simply a way of transcribing political discourse in biological terms, not simply a way of concealing a political discourse under a scientific guise, but truly a way of thinking about the relations of colonization, the necessity of wars, criminality, the phenomena of madness and mental illness, the history of societies with their different classes, etc. In other words, whenever there was confrontation, condemnation to death, struggle, risk of death, it was in the form of evolutionism that one was forced, literally, to think about them."

over any and every deviation from the norm. After all, “[...] monsters are here, as everywhere, convenient representations of other cultures, generalized and demonized to impose a strict conception of group sameness” (Cohen, 2000, p. 46).

The individual to be corrected, or the undisciplined one, the second figure highlighted by Foucault (2001), appears between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, thus being more recent than the human monster referred to above. If the human monster “[...] is the correlate of the imperatives of law and the canonical forms of nature” (Foucault, 2001, p. 415), the individual to be corrected “[...] is much more limited to the family itself, in the exercise of its internal power or the management of its economy; or, at most, it is the family in its relationship with the institutions that are neighboring or supportive of it” (Foucault, 2001, p. 72). This individual becomes part of a game of interests that includes the family, then the school, the neighborhood, the church, the police, among other institutions, and comes to justify the existence of these institutions.

According to Foucault (2001), because it occurs very frequently, for example, in the army, in schools, in the family, the individual to be corrected is ‘regular in his irregularity’. Being commonplace and frequent, he seems familiar, very close to the rule, and therein lies the difficulty in defining him, in determining him. Foucault (2001) states that this individual is, in fact, incorrigible and possesses these characteristics because all familiar techniques of domestication have failed.

It is no coincidence that the individual to be corrected or the undisciplined one is contemporary with the disciplining techniques that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in various institutions, including schools. Vagrants, drunkards, bohemians, addicts, murderers, prostitutes, and beggars became targets of disciplinary power. For them, disciplinary institutions were created with the aim of training, correcting, and rehabilitating these bodies, making them docile and productive. Foucault (2001, p. 79) highlights the relationship between the incorrigible and a type of knowledge that was slowly taking shape in the eighteenth century: “[...] it is the knowledge born of pedagogical techniques, techniques of collective education, and the formation of aptitudes [...]”; thus, “[...] the new procedures for disciplining the body, behavior, and aptitudes open up the problem of those who escape this normativity, which is no longer the sovereignty of the law” (Foucault, 2001, p. 415).

It is in this context that psychiatry, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, established itself as an autonomous and highly prestigious science. Situated within the field of medicine, it viewed madness as a threat to the social body. Debates arose over the organic or psychic origin of mental illnesses, and physical and psychological therapies were proposed to combat this danger. Intrinsically linked to unhealthy social conditions, madness was perceived as a source of danger to public order. According to Amarante and Torre (2001, p. 20),

In the dispositif of psychiatry, the issue is prior to the very production of madness, or rather, the production of mental illness. It is a historical and political dispositif that does not operate solely in the form of law or prohibition, that proceeds through mechanisms which exceed the state, which has localized specific tactics in treatments and diagnoses, but also a defined global strategic effect, namely to establish a certain relationship with madness that serves specific objectives, such as the normalization of the health-madness process, the production of a *homo psychologicus*, and a standard of sanity as control over the psychological functioning of individuals.

The tension that the individual to be corrected, or the undisciplined one, provokes between corrigibility and incorrigibility serves as a foundation for the development of all institutions proper to the ‘abnormal’ individuals of the nineteenth century.

The masturbator or onanist, the third figure presented by Foucault (2001), is a completely new figure of the nineteenth century. He is contemporary with the new relations between sexuality and family organization, with the new position of the child within the parental group, and with the new importance given to the body and to health. Thus, a new family model consolidates, that is, the modern bourgeois family, to the detriment of the varied relations that characterized, using Foucault’s (2001) expression, the ‘household people’. In modernity, the family undergoes an intense process of transformation. The extended families of nobles, of country and city people, constituted by close and distant relatives, came to be seen as ‘promiscuous’, at the same time that the nuclear family, with father, mother, and children, began to be valued. A new parent-child relationship begins, and new intrafamilial relations begin. There begins, according to Foucault (2001, p. 417), an

[...] inversion of the system of familial obligations (which once went from children to parents and which now tend to make the child the first and unceasing object of parental duties, with parents being assigned moral and medical

responsibility down to the furthest reaches of their progeny), the emergence of the principle of health as the fundamental law of family bonds, the distribution of the family cell around the body, and the sexual body, of the child, the organization of an immediate physical bond, a body to body relationship between parents and children in which desire and power are complexly linked, and finally, the need for external medical control and knowledge to arbitrate and regulate these new relations between the obligatory surveillance of parents and the so fragile, irritable, excitable body of their children.

Around the sexuality of the child, the family model of the modern era is consolidated. The modern family becomes an institution, in correlation with other institutions, medical, judicial, and educational, responsible for the surveillance of child sexuality.

Surveillance is exercised over “[...] bodies, gestures, attitudes, faces, facial features, beds, sheets, stains” (Foucault, 2001, p. 335), to prevent, control, and even medicalize deviations, anomalies that may occur in children’s lives. Parents are summoned to watch over their children, to “[...] go hunting for smells, traces, clues [...]” (Foucault, 2001, p. 335) of any irregularity in sexuality.

The family, therefore, is an important instrument of social control. By turning to the medico-social sciences, its space was rationalized, that is, in the face of the widespread fear of incest and the dangers of child masturbation, from the late eighteenth century onward, medicine, like other sciences, presented itself as necessary and entered the family space. Doctors began to act as family advisors, especially on issues related to the body and sexuality of children, establishing what health and illness are. In this way, parents assume the position of agents of social normalization through the dispositif of sexuality, in conjunction with the medical, pedagogical, psychiatric, and psychological sciences.

We must consider, with Nader and Rangel (2019), that entry into a modern industrialized society also produced significant changes in the family institution, going beyond the gradual replacement of expanded domestic units by more restricted cores of coexistence.

This transformation was accompanied, among other adjustments, by a more precise delimitation between the roles assumed by men and women within the family. From then on, the family became synonymous with a harmonious, private, and independent domestic unit, thanks to this differentiation of male and female roles. The new domestic dynamic operated through a biological morality that naturalized woman as mother and protector of the home and man as an agent of authority and the sole provider of the material conditions of subsistence (Nader & Rangel, 2019, p. 24).

Thus, a naturalization of the family and, equally, of heterosexuality takes place, which comes to represent as unnatural, as abnormal, as deviant, any other family arrangement and all other forms of exercising sexuality. Homosexuality, then, renders unfeasible and destroys the family model constructed in modernity and, for this reason, is pathological, is a sickly identity, requiring correction, normalization, and even medicalization. The internalization of the family norm corresponds, at the same time, to an extremely efficient intrusion of power into the nuances of life and to its subjectivation.

Although there are many attempts and interests in controlling and regulating sexualities, it is worth noting that they

[...] are experiences of sensations, desires, and pleasures that, while they may imprint sufferings and exclusions, may likewise unlock emotions, instill an erotics of desire into the world, and shake the controls that seek at all costs to contain the life that gushes forth (Paraíso & Caldeira, 2018, p. 13).

As a dispositif of power, sexualities can do much, producing subjectivities, resistances, norms, and displacements.

As Foucault (2001) thinks, it is with the figures of the monster, the incorrigible, and the masturbator, along with a series of institutions with specific technologies, with knowledges and powers, in the attempt to correct, reclaim, and normalize these figures, that the abnormal individual of the nineteenth century emerges. As Castro (2009) states, the abnormal individual, with whom so many institutions, discourses, and knowledges have been concerned since the nineteenth century, “[...] derives both from the juridical-natural exception of the monster, from the multitude of incorrigibles in correctional institutes, and from the universal secret of childhood sexualities” (Castro, 2009, p. 33).

To put it another way, the abnormal is seen as a “[...] pale and banalized monster, [...] also an incorrigible, an incorrigible who will be placed at the center of a correctional apparatus” (Foucault, 2001, p. 73). Through disciplinary techniques, the abnormal becomes “[...] enclosed, cornered, grouped, without a group, isolated in time and space; the routine other, who must always repeat the same thing, administered, confined in a closed space, psychiatrized” (Skliar, 2003, p. 177).

Beyond disciplinary techniques, biopower enters the scene, setting in motion a knowledge and power that goes beyond the discipline of individual bodies. It is no longer sufficient to discipline bodies to make them docile and productive, a function performed by disciplinary power. The aim is also to develop a power of normalization and action upon life, populations, their processes, and regularities. According to Fonseca (2000), normalization societies are not merely disciplinary societies; rather, they are societies that cross the power of discipline with the power of the norm.

Hence, to recover the details of spatial distributions and activities, there would have been a first accommodation, the accommodation of power mechanisms over the individual body, defining the domain known as discipline. And to recover the global phenomena of group regulation, a second accommodation would have taken place, the accommodation of power mechanisms over population phenomena. Two series are then defined: the body series (organism-discipline) and institutions, and the population series (biological processes and security mechanisms) and the state. And the element that articulates them, or rather, that circulates from the disciplinary to the regulatory, is the norm (Fonseca, 2000, p. 226).

Biopower has the norm as the operator of its measures. Calculations, quantifications, qualifications, evaluations, and hierarchizations are technologies that normalize and provide the parameters for administering populations. The norm makes it possible to take from “[...] wild exteriority the dangerous, the unknown, the bizarre, capturing them and rendering them intelligible, familiar, accessible, controllable; it allows us to frame them at a safe distance so that they do not become incorporated into the same” (Veiga-Neto, 2011, p. 115). The number of inhabitants, birth and mortality rates, life expectancy, the incidence of diseases, and the frequency of behavioral deviations become targets of interest for biopower, which makes clear the representation that, to administer the lives of individuals, it is necessary to act upon populations.

In the intertwining of disciplinary power and biopolitics, biopower, a power over life, was constituted. On the one hand, a positive meaning about what is normal was produced; on the other hand, a pejorative meaning about what is deviation, anomaly, abnormal, or abnormality was produced. In this sense, Skliar (2003) says that if the normal is what is preferred, what is desired, what possesses positive values, then its opposite must be fundamentally what is considered detestable, what is repelled. Therefore, the ‘norm’ strives to attract to itself all identities and all differences. It wants to be the center from which everything emanates, where everything is organized, classified, and named. Everything different, uncomfortable, irregular, mysterious, deviant, or irreducible to identity either allows itself to be corrected or is suppressed by the power that normalizes.

This occurs, to a great extent, because modern Western epistemology derives difference from identity, taking the latter as a reference, starting point, and origin for thinking about it. In this sense, what comes first is identity, which, according to Silva (2014), leads us to take what we are as a reference and norm to describe and evaluate what we are not. This perspective tends to fix identities and differences based on a single, primordial identity, rendering invisible their social and historical production. Thus, difference was pressured to resemble identity: “[...] the other was persuaded to cease being other. Manipulated in every detail, to go after sameness. The other was naturalized as abnormal. And normalization was naturalized” (Skliar, 2003, p. 178).

Next, we analyze how teachers generally operate under the idea that there is a single, desirable, normal identity, and that difference must be controlled, corrected, and avoided, thereby reinforcing sameness and normality.

## **On control and normalization in the school context: difference as something to be corrected**

The modern school is a product and invention of Western modernity; therefore, according to Skliar (2003), the time of modernity and the time of schooling are temporalities that “[...] desire order, that become obsessive about classifying, about producing homogeneous, integral, textual samenesses, without fissures, safe from all contamination by the other” (Skliar, 2003, p. 198). Likewise, the space of modernity and the school space are spatialities that strive to reduce the other, removing him from his territory, his language, his gender, and his race.

To a certain extent, in the school where we conducted the research, discourses aimed at fabricating sameness circulate, and therefore, the other remains the target of attempts at control and normalization. The modern idea of a single project, a single identity, operates in this school through dispositifs of power and permeates the teachers, contributing to the production of school sameness, rendering the difference of the other invisible, and correcting what appears as a deviation from normal identity.

As we emphasized earlier, for Foucault (2001), the modern family is a central space in the control of sexuality. Within it, parents are summoned to exercise surveillance, detecting irregularities, abnormalities, deviations, and anomalies.

Our research shows that the family is seen as an important instrument for normalizing conduct and for social control. We perceive how some teachers start from the conception of the modern bourgeois family<sup>3</sup> and of its role in controlling and normalizing children.

For teacher Vera, for example, the family “[...] has a father and a mother, a home, thus at peace [...]”; she argues that students who come from such families “[...] are mature people, responsible, disciplined, and studious [...]”, which rarely happens with students who do not have this family profile. Speaking about children who are undisciplined, who do not perform well on assessments, who miss classes, teacher Roberto says: “[...] if you look at the history of these children, they are not in a favorable family environment [...] father and mother at home.”

What these teachers say shows that, in the school where we conducted the research, a single and universal conception of family circulates<sup>4</sup> – the modern bourgeois family – devaluing other family arrangements that are so prevalent in our society. In addition to valuing a single model of family to the detriment of other family formations, we observe that these teachers reinforce the family’s disciplining and normalizing role over children’s conduct, a role that Foucault (2001) already emphasized in his analyses.

This kind of ‘general sexual discipline’, with powers and knowledges that developed throughout the nineteenth century, in which the family, in conjunction with the medical, psychiatric, and pedagogical sciences, plays a fundamental role, positions sexuality, the sexual use of the body, “[...] at the origin of an indefinite series of physical disorders that may make their effects felt on all forms and at all ages of life” (Foucault, 2001, p. 417). According to Dreyfus and Rabinow (2013), every form of behavior can, from that moment on, be classified on a scale of normalization and pathologization of the mysterious sexual instinct. To the extent that the individual is scientifically diagnosed as possessing some ‘perversity’, correction technologies come into action for the good of the individual and society.

When the family fails in the domestication of children, other institutions come into play, such as the school and its power of normalization. Teacher Vera says:

Look, it is difficult now. When I first graduated, it was easier to teach, to give lessons. [...] Whenever we take this issue to the coordinator, what is the first step? To call the family, but then the family comes, and from their own mouths we hear, ‘I have no way of dealing with so and so anymore.’ So the family no longer has control. (Teacher Vera).

The fact that teachers understand that the family no longer fulfills its disciplining and controlling role as it once did, as we shall see, does not cause them to give up exercising surveillance over behaviors deemed undesirable. Teacher Laura, immersed in the knowledge and power relations of modernity that circulate in the school and reinforce a single identity, draws upon both religious discourse and psychological discourse to refer to a student with ‘effeminate mannerisms’. Based on religious discourse, she comments that the student knows the Bible, therefore he knows that God would have created man and woman for their specific roles and that we should be against homosexuality. The teacher emphasizes that this view is worked on at school and reflects a firmly constructed spiritual foundation. Based on psychological discourse, she further states that she does not attribute homosexuality to the boy but sees a family psychological influence. She observes that the student exhibits mannerisms and speech similar to those of his mother, as he is a child of separated parents and lives with his mother and sister, which would influence his behavior.

We know, based on Foucault (2004), that religious discourse also acts in the normalization of subjects. Although this discourse began to take shape in a period before modernity, it also starts from a single subject and directs its attention to matters of sexuality. Moreover, sexuality has always exerted a fascination over Christianity, which, according to Foucault (1998), never tired of commenting on it, discussing it, normalizing it, prohibiting it, and exciting it. Between the second and third centuries, Christianity had already instituted

<sup>3</sup> We recall with Foucault (2001) that the modern bourgeois family is nuclear, relatively small, and constituted through the parent-child relationship, unlike aristocratic families, which were very large and involved both close and distant relatives. For the author, the modern bourgeois family is traversed by power and knowledge relations arising from medical, judicial, pedagogical, and religious institutions. It constitutes itself, on the one hand, as an affective and sexual family and, on the other hand, as a medicalized family. However, for Foucault (2001), this does not apply to proletarian families. While the bourgeois family was assisted in the control and normalization of children by the medical, psychiatric, and pedagogical sciences, the proletariat was left to the police, orphanages, and corrective institutions.

<sup>4</sup> In the view of Nader and Rangel (2019), the term ‘family’ resists all efforts to delimit and universalize the concept. According to these authors, “[...] the history that marks the construction of the idea of a concept of family, based on theoretical reflections and empirical research underway since the nineteenth century, precisely reveals the interpretive limits of analytical currents that tended to project onto this institution an ideal of uniqueness, which is today widely contested” (Nader & Rangel, 2015, p. 237). In contemporary society, alternative forms of family (parents in second marriages, single parents, childless couples, homosexual couples) are increasingly present, challenging the model of family that claims to be unique and universal.

monogamy in sexuality, with the exclusive purpose of reproduction. It was necessary “[...] to make this body, these pleasures, this sexuality function within a society that had its needs, its family organization, its reproductive needs” (Foucault, 2004, p. 71). Christianity found mechanisms to establish a type of power that “[...] controlled individuals through their sexuality, conceived as something that one should be wary of, something that always introduced into the individual possibilities of temptation and fall” (Foucault, 2004, p. 71).

One such mechanism was the technique of confession, which enabled religious power to control the body, sexuality, acts, and practices of subjects, and to discover what they hid about their sexuality. This mechanism, “[...] which was at once a mechanism of knowledge, of knowledge of individuals, of knowledge about individuals, but also of knowledge of individuals about themselves and in relation to themselves” (Foucault, 2004, p. 72), set in motion relations of power and control. Through confession, Christianity organized the daily life of people. These people were, in a sense, obliged to speak about the most banal faults, their weaknesses, their thoughts, their intentions, and their desires. For many people, and for centuries, “[...] evil had to be confessed in the first person, in an obligatory and fleeting whisper” (Foucault, 2003, p. 210). Through these discourses and techniques, the lives of men and women were normalized, and homosexuality was constructed as sinful, against nature, against ‘God’.

Therefore, Foucault’s reflections on the history of sexuality become “[...] an interrogation of how the practices and discourses of religion, science, morality, politics, or economics have contributed to making sexuality, at once, an instrument of subjectivation and a tool of power” (Revel, 2005, p. 81). Religious institutions, among others, are “[...] effective instances of construction, maintenance, and reproduction of cultural practices, beliefs, and values” (Louro, 2003, p. 70). These institutions, through their discourses, insist on directing the conduct of subjects, on punishing all behaviors and actions that deviate from the norm.

Teacher Laura uses religious discourse as a strategy of normalization and governance over the bodies and sexuality of her students, and she does so to correct what escapes the norm, to correct ‘deviant identities’. The deviant identity, in this case, is the homosexual one, which would need to return to the normal, heterosexual identity.

As we saw in teacher Laura’s speech, psychological discourses also come into play in the process of normalizing and governing students. We recall with Foucault (2001) that the emergence and development of the psychological sciences in the nineteenth century, together with the medical and juridical sciences, produced a cartography of the social space through the opposition between the normal and the pathological, health and illness, by means of a set of knowledges deemed scientific. For the author, the single, momentary, traceless voice of confession, “[...] which erased evil by erasing itself, is [...] replaced by multiple voices that deposit themselves in an enormous documentary mass and thus constitute themselves, across time, as the incessantly growing memory of all the world’s evils” (Foucault, 2003, p. 210). In this regard, Castro (2009, p. 299) states that, “[...] if the jurists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries invented a social system that was to be directed by a system of codified laws, one can affirm that the doctors of the twentieth century are inventing a society of the norm and not of the law.”

The normalization of society was the great hallmark of modernity, the moment when various disciplinary and biopolitical practices strengthened, flourished, and found in the norms their concrete conditions of possibility. Concealing that which lies at the origin of ordering processes, modernity naturalized what the will to order produces. It is “[...] no longer codes that govern society, but the permanent distinction between the normal and the pathological, the perpetual task of restoring the system of normality” (Castro, 2009, p. 299).

Rose (1998) asserts that the psychological sciences are intimately involved with normalization processes, through programs, calculations, and techniques for the governance of the soul. By producing knowledges that aim to interpret, translate, and tell the truth about a supposed inner ‘self’, these sciences claim for themselves the power to govern subjectivities, for which purpose they resort to norms and criteria that they establish as objective knowledge. Rose (1998) further points out that investigations of the self should not start from a contained space of human individuality; the self should be investigated as historical. The question should concern the specific historical and cultural moment that caused us to become what we are.

Thus, we can say that these theories of subjectivity “[...] are developed to explain events that those very theories helped to produce, events that they planted along our existence, locating them within an interiority that they themselves helped to excavate” (Rose, 2001, p. 144). The author argues:

[...] the psy disciplines established a variety of ‘practical rationalities’, involving themselves in the multiplication of new technologies and in their proliferation throughout the entire texture of everyday life: norms and devices

according to which the capacities and conduct of humans have become intelligible and judgeable (Rose, 2001, p. 147, emphasis in original).

With the knowledge and power produced by these disciplines and by biopolitics, new languages, new conceptual systems, and new devices have been elaborated to speak about human subjectivity, to calculate human capacities and conduct, and “[...] to inscribe and calibrate the human psyche and identify its pathologies and normalities” (Rose, 1998, p. 39). Such is the power to judge, evaluate, correct, and even medicalize the subjectivities of men, women, and children, considering one identity as normal and all others as pathological.

When teacher Laura draws upon religious discourse and psychological discourse, discourses that speak of a unitary and universal subject<sup>5</sup>, as a strategy for normalizing the identities of her students, it reveals the capturing power of modern Western epistemology. Enveloped in these discourses, the teacher moves as if there were an essential, normal, coherent, durable, and individual subjectivity. Consequently, she strives to correct identity deviations, whether through the normalizing power of religious discourse or through scientific discourse. In other words, what is being proposed in this school environment aims to construct heterosexual masculine and feminine subjectivities, which mirror the hegemonic standards that persist in our society.

In this regard, Louro (2004) states that the school and teachers can question the naturalization of heterosexuality. For the author, if something is natural, why so much effort to maintain and guarantee it? Why so much effort to prevent ‘deviant identities’? If we admit “[...] that all forms of sexuality are constructed, that they are all legitimate, but also fragile, perhaps we can better understand the fact that different subjects, men and women, experience their pleasures and desires in multiple ways” (Louro, 2004, p. 81). As teacher Jonas says: “[...] for me, people’s character matters far more than their sexual orientation” (teacher Jonas).

In a Deleuzian language, teacher Jonas’s statement makes us think that if, through a specific configuration of forces, the school and teachers fold themselves into the discourse of a normal identity, and every fold unfolds, then other configurations of force are formed; many folds and unfolds compose the being of the school and the being of the teacher. For Deleuze (1991, p. 18), “[...] the unfolding [...] is not the opposite of the fold, but follows the fold to another fold [...]”, making life variation, not maintenance.

Starting from a single and normal identity to think about educational processes contributes to the school and teachers rendering invisible and silencing the singularity of difference, seeing it as monstrous. Homosexuality, in this case, remains confined to the realm of exceptions, seen only as opposition to the norm. This is what teacher Carlos shows when referring to students’ sexual orientation: “[...] I have never seen anyone discuss this here at school as something serious.” Teacher Jonas adds: “[...] the issue of sexual orientation here is not seen as something that happens; it is, like, veiled. I have never seen anyone talk about gender issues here in the teachers’ room. People think things are not happening, which I think is wrong.” He continues: “[...] what happens is that often this is seen as an enemy of morality and good customs, [...] so there is no discussion about it.”

We are struck by teacher Jonas’s position regarding the fact that the school does not provide moments for discussion on issues related to sexuality. By saying that he finds this silencing ‘wrong’, he points to a possible critique of heteronormativity, which is to some extent naturalized by his other colleagues. Even though he is inserted in a school context where heterosexuality is seen as the normal identity, he thinks that people cannot be judged by the sexual orientation they assume and states that he has been reprimanded by students for having “[...] some habits like putting my hand on my hip and sitting with my legs crossed [...] at first they [students] would come and say: ‘Oh! You’re putting your hand on your hip to be funny. Men don’t do that’” (teacher Jonas). He also states that he has been reprimanded by the pedagogical coordination for using the word ‘penis’ in the classroom to explain history content. He assesses that this happens because there are no discussions related to sexuality. Teacher Jonas is left to recant: “Oh! Try to recant! Because it’s not allowed! Because there is also that [...] it’s interesting, the numbers, we need numbers, and that’s it, numbers.” The numbers to which teacher Jonas refers have to do with the school’s demand to use all school time in preparing students for large-scale assessments, which do not involve discussions about sexuality.

<sup>5</sup> Although in different contexts, we can say that both in modernity and in Christian discourse, the idea of a universal and absolute subject is present. In Christianity, God is the absolute subject; in modernity, the absolute subject is the rational subject. Laclau (2011), in the work *Emancipation and Difference*, states that if in modernity transparency is ensured by rational knowledge, in Christian discourse it is ensured at the level of representation. According to this author, “[...] revelation gives us a representation of the totality of history, but the rationality that expresses itself in that history will always escape us” (Laclau, 2011, p. 34). For this reason, rationalism as it presents itself in modernity could not be present in theological narratives of salvation. Laclau (2011) says that the claim of modern science was to constitute itself without any appeal to the idea of God. Thus, “[...] once God is no longer in the foreground as a guarantee of full representability, the foundation had to demonstrate its totalizing abilities without any recourse to an infinite distance in relation to what it incorporates. Therefore, full representation becomes possible only as full rationality” (Laclau, 2011, p. 34). Hence the cunning of the rational subject, whether from a Cartesian, Kantian, or Hegelian perspective.

Teacher Jonas, even though he is a target of the control and normalization dispositifs at work in the school, feels uncomfortable when he realizes that everything “[...] comes already very indoctrinated [...] everything that is not heteronormative is wrong, just as everything that deviates from Christianity is wrong.” At the same time that he feels uncomfortable, he also feels constrained to adopt other pedagogical practices. This is the dispositif fulfilling its controlling role. The dispositif, “[...] drawing on repetition (of experiences, of laws) and functioning as a belief that has the effect of symbolic indoctrination” (Vieira et al., 2009, p. 228), produces normalizations and uniformizations in the pedagogical practices of teachers, but also leaves possibilities for resistance practices. Precisely because, “[...] not only is power, by producing effects of truth, positive, but power relations are only everywhere because individuals are everywhere free” (Revel, 2005, p. 76).

Considering the teachers’ statements, we can say that in the school where the research was conducted, although resistance movements occur, the tendency is toward the naturalization of a normal heterosexual identity in opposition to a deviant homosexual identity. In this binary opposition, heterosexuality and homosexuality, the first term is always the one that comes first and establishes normality; the second term must either resemble the first through control and normalization dispositifs, or be excluded, marginalized. Thus, the ‘deviant identity’ only enters the scene to be corrected, controlled, or even annihilated. In this regard, Placer (2011, p. 88) states that:

[...] for us, the Other only appears on stage as an object of action: reparation, regulation, integration, and knowledge; for the West and for us, it is above all a matter of identifying him, of making him visible and utterable, of recording, detecting, and diagnosing his similarities and his differences, of calibrating his integration, his threats, his goodness, and his dangerousness, of legislating his rights and obligations, of regulating his groupings, his displacements, his entries and exits. And if we seek him, desire him, and need him, it is largely for this purpose, to, by acting upon him, make him an interpreter, a witness, a defendant, and a proof of our universality, so that he too may face our gaze, so that our voice and our language may resonate in his words, thus concealing, in this kind of cold interactive bond of universality, our misery, our arrogance, our arbitrariness, our mortality, and our finitude.

Blaming and demonizing the other are, for Placer (2011), forms or strategies to make discourses and practices of the same and for the same function. Enveloped by these discourses, some teachers tend to blame and demonize students who deviate from the normal identity, and they do so to set in motion and legitimize their own practices and discourses. This is what teacher Carlos expresses when referring to a student with ‘effeminate mannerisms’: “[...] the only comment I saw was about this student, because of his behavior, but it was because of him, not even because of his classmates, it was because he provoked it, [...] that was the discussion we had.” From the same perspective, teacher Laura says: “[...] I told him, ‘You have to change your behavior, they call you that because you keep swaying your hips, you do this, you do that, so if you don’t do any of that, no one will say anything about you’.” The positioning of teacher Carlos and teacher Laura is the expression of a pedagogy that folds itself into the discourse of sameness and which, according to Skliar (2003, p. 201), needs to be problematized because in it the other “[...] never existed as an other of his alterity, as difference. And always existed as an other of the same, as a monotonous repetition of sameness.” It is a pedagogy that must be problematized because it consists of denying the other in his own experiences, in his own ways of being other, in his temporalities and spatialities, in his events, in his becoming.

We further emphasize that the investment in the image of a universal, stable, unified, internalized, normalized subject, which persists in the discourse of the teachers we researched, does not speak of what the school is and what the teachers are, but rather of what the school does and what the teachers do, for if human beings “[...] ended up knowing themselves as subjects, with a desire to be, with a predisposition to being, this does not arise [...] from some ontological desire, being instead the result of a certain history and its inventions” (Rose, 2001, p. 145). The school, the teachers, are an effect of discourse and, therefore, are not stable; they change, transform, move; thus, it is always possible to produce identities and differences that subvert the power of the norm. As Donald (2000, p. 67) states, “[...] the self does not adapt perfectly to social norms, despite the increasingly widespread techniques of education, government, or therapy.”

In short, we can say that, on the one hand, there is always the possibility of producing subjects, identities, and differences that subvert hegemonic normal identity, as mentioned above; on the other hand, strategies of normalization and control also persist.

## Final considerations

Although we conceive of the school space as one of the important places for the construction of alternative narratives about alterity, the research shows that this space is enveloped in the identity thinking of modernity

and names alterity from the place of sameness. Therefore, whenever difference disturbs the school order, the imposed norm, whenever difference does not allow itself to be assimilated into identity, it becomes a problem. The effort of the school and of the teachers, subjectivized by the normalization dispositifs of modernity, still consists of correcting 'identity deviations', that is, any behavior, attitude, gesture, thought, or way of being that differs from sameness. In other words, enmeshed in a school context where the power relations of modern Western epistemology present themselves as hegemonic, teachers fold themselves into the discourse that conceives difference as a deviant, problematic identity that needs to be corrected and normalized.

Religious discourse, as well as scientific discourse, has been used by some teachers in an attempt to establish one identity as normal and others as pathological, as well as to justify the mechanisms of correction and normalization prevailing in the school. In this scenario, supposed 'deviant identities' must either resemble the 'normal identity' or be silenced, subalternized, rendered invisible.

As we have seen, in the school where the teachers we researched work, the pathologization of sexualities that deviate from the norm is an effect both of the discourse of the medical sciences and of their 'medical advisors', and of the discourse of the 'guides of conscience', namely religious ones.

In this sense, we can understand Albuquerque Júnior (2009) when he says that Foucault

[...] suffered, felt himself to be an abject being, condemned to live on the margins of society, to live in a most unhappy limbo, almost went mad, almost killed or killed himself upon being informed that his body, that his desires, were named homosexual (Albuquerque Júnior, 2015, p. 113).

Similarly, we can understand how the student with 'effeminate mannerisms' felt when some teachers informed him that the fact he was ridiculed, that he was the subject of jokes at school, was his own fault, because of the behavior he exhibited, suggesting that he cease being what he is to be the same, to be a normal identity. It is not surprising that this student, according to what some teachers said, frequently misses class, arrives late, and leaves early, for evading school time seems to be a form of resistance to the processes of subjectification normalization at that school.

## Data availability

The data underlying this research are fully presented within the body of the article, and there is no associated external repository.

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