

CHILDREN, GENDERS AND SEXUALITIES: ETHICAL-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF PARENTALITIES

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ABSTRACT. In dialogue with scenes from the Brazilian context of sexual and gender policies and based on feminist and queer studies, the article aims to outline lines and flows of thought about the tensions between parental relationships and the right of children to their expressions of genders and sexualities. For this, childhood is situated as a device of biopolitics that is intertwined with the devices of genders and sexualities in the models outlined by psychological and educational narratives. Then, the presence of familism in public policies is discussed in the case of families in Brazil, in which anti-gender discourses seek to reassert a hegemonic model of family as the place that safeguards heteronormativity and cisgenerity. The article concludes by outlining the field of tensions over the relationships between adults and children, which emerge from the previous sections, seeking arguments for epistemic and ethical-political positions of parenting.

Keywords: Parenting; childhoods; genders and sexualities.

INFÂNCIAS, GÊNEROS E SEXUALIDADES: IMPLICAÇÕES ÉTICO-POLÍTICAS DAS PARENTALIDADES

RESUMO. Em diálogo com cenas do contexto brasileiro de políticas sexuais e de gênero e tomando como suporte os estudos feministas e *queer*, o artigo tem como objetivo problematizar a dimensão hierárquica e das relações de poder parentais na determinação das expressões de gênero de crianças e discutir as contribuições dos estudos feministas e *queer* para o debate sobre os direitos de crianças e jovens a seus corpos e desejos. Para isso, situa-se a infância como um dispositivo da biopolítica que se entrelaça com os dispositivos de gêneros e sexualidades nos modelos delineados pelas narrativas psicológicas e educacionais. Em seguida, discute-se a presença do familismo nas políticas públicas para famílias no Brasil em que discursos antigênero procuram a afirmação de um modelo hegemônico de família, como o lugar que salvaguarda a heteronormatividade e a cisgeneridade. Encerra-se delineando o campo de tensões sobre as relações entre adultos e crianças, que emergem das seções anteriores, buscando argumentos para posicionamentos epistêmicos e ético-políticos das parentalidades.

Palavras-chave: Parentalidades; infâncias; gêneros e sexualidades.

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INFANCIAS, GÉNERO Y SEXUALIDADES: IMPLICACIONES ÉTICO-POLÍTICAS DE LAS PATERNIDADES

RESUMEN. En diálogo con escenas del contexto brasileño de políticas sexuales y de género y con base en estudios feministas y queer, el artículo pretende esbozar líneas y flujos de pensamiento sobre las tensiones entre las relaciones parentales y el derecho de los niños a sus expresiones de géneros y sexualidades. Para ello, sitúa a la infancia como un dispositivo de biopolítica que se entrelaza con los dispositivos de géneros y sexualidades en los modelos perfilados por narrativas psicológicas y educativas. Luego, se discute la presencia del familismo en las políticas públicas para las familias en Brasil en las que los discursos antigénero afirman un modelo hegemónico de familia, como el lugar que salvaguarda la heteronormatividad y la cisgeneridad. Se termina por delinear el campo de tensiones sobre las relaciones entre adultos y niños, que surgen de los apartados anteriores, buscando argumentos a favor de posiciones epistémicas y ético-políticas de las parentalidades.

Palabras clave: Parentalidades; infancias; géneros y sexualidades.

Introduction

Who is concerned with the gender and sexuality expressions of children? What are the narratives behind psychological and legal discourses about the family when defining the gender of children? Are the attacks on dissident gender expressions in children the product of a family power dynamic crisis that has been caused by criticism from heterosexual and cisgender hegemony? This work departs from these questions, which were raised by research conducted by the authors about the effects of feminist and queer studies on the field of psychology, as well as on childhood and youth studies. Such questions motivated us to provide in this essay, analytical considerations on the leading role of children and adolescents in their sexualities and gender identities⁴, the role of parental relationships when the right to their body and desires are not considered, and the gender and sexuality policies that emphasize heterosexual and cisgender models as dominant in the relationships between children and adults in the family setting.

In the recent debate, some works (Carvalho, Silva, Jobim e Souza, & Salgado, 2012; Mattos & Cavalheiro, 2020; Salgado & Souza, 2018) underscore the right of children and adolescents to express their gender and sexualities as a field to be further explored. First, because in the current scenario of family, children and adolescent policies, discourses have utilized the family institution to assert a hegemonic family model as the space for safeguarding heteronormativity and cisgenerity, concepts that should be ensured in the education of these individuals. It is the family, conceived in this normative framework, the guardian of the model threatened by the existence of dissident sexualities and genders (Leite, 2019). Second, it is important to discuss and question the place of children and adolescents in the production of desire and the expression of their genders and sexualities, as they are considered subjects without the right to exist as they wish in the fields of gender and sexuality (Cornejo, 2011; Guerrero & Muñoz, 2018). This is not always is an element

⁴ In gender and sexuality studies, which are in a permanent dialogue with social movements, it is widely accepted to conceive sexualities in terms of sexual practices and desires, and gender identities in terms of how an individual perceives themselves in relation to gender, agreeing or disagreeing with the assigned sex at birth.

emphasized in the defense of the rights of children and adolescents, since the family is the social institution chosen to draw the path for expressing genders and sexualities.

Childhoods (in plural), along with the parental and family relationships that give rise to the topic of this article, are far from the common references in the traditional and hegemonic literature on childhood studies. The dominant interpretations refer to a Eurocentric, white, Christian and patriarchy-based model that acts as a way of continuing the legacy of compulsory heterosexuality and cisgenerity. Furthermore, they originate from the adultcentrism and familism that operate on childhood in a universal and ahistorical model, being references for educational, social and health policies based on developmentalism (Burman, 2021). This developmentalist perspective, in which psychology is historically a strong ally, is related to the production of parental relationship models, which legitimize colonialist projects that defend and protect cis-heteronormativity (Castañeda, 2002).

In consideration of this contentious field, this article is an essay on how to draw lines and flows of thought and ethical-political parental and family relationships, which demand considering children and adolescents based on their sexualities and gender. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of hierarchy and parental power in the gender expressions of children, and to discuss the contribution of feminist and queer studies to the debate on the rights of children and adolescents over their bodies and desires. Some considerations about the epistemic and ethical-political implications were drawn because they require the revision of discourses that reinforce the determinism and control present in the perspectives for the trajectories of sexuality and gender across life, as well as for the role of family and parental models in that process.

In the path proposed, conceptual tools from feminist and queer studies are used to reflect upon childhood and its relationship with parental dimensions. Feminist studies promote a shift in the perspective of sciences, mainly human and social, which are dominated by an androcentric and patriarchal approach. Initially, after criticism from Western white women (global north), black, intersectional and decolonizing feminism gained strength. The debates promoted by these perspectives underscore the valorization of knowledge and narratives (about themselves or the world) produced by oppressed groups and the systems of oppression that are present in the composition of the multiple existences (ethnic-racial, gender, and class, among others) (Hooks, 2020). Queer studies, in turn, promote the acknowledgement of new significances to studies about sexualities and genders in diverse fields of human and social sciences. With an emphasis on the social construction of sexualities and genders, as well as the subjectivation processes of bodies and desires outside the standards of heterosexuality and cisgenerity, queer studies reject the discursive and social practices directed at pathologizing and disregarding such dissident existences (Lopez Penedo, 2008).

The way in which this field of study brings up childhood as an interlocutor of the movements that disrupt and dissent with the contemporary subjectivation processes of sexualities and genders is noteworthy. Attention has been placed on childhood as a device that is intertwined with the gender and sexuality devices, as it generates shifts and ruptures in the models drawn by scientific narratives, especially developmental psychology and pedagogy. In this sense, the power relationships between the education of children and reference models for the 'normal' development of sexualities and genders are challenged. This is mediated by adults/fathers/ mothers/caregivers, as well as the scientific narratives about that trajectory and how this is captured by gender and sexuality policies.

We argue that the function of families in the management of sexualities and genders of children is updated through media debate and governmental policies (which are permeated by religious and conservative fundamentalism) that tap into the pathologization and moralization of sexuality and gender trajectories across life, situating childhood as a moment of intervention by the State and specialized knowledge, in order to guarantee the 'no deviation' from normativity. A brief analysis of the current political context of Brazil is performed. In this country, discourses and public family policies have gained institutional momentum, shaping the agenda of election campaigns and calls for research funding. In this sense, we are interested in reflecting on the effects of this context and discursive practices on childhoods.

Finally, some considerations on the conflicts in the power relationships between adults and children in parental relationships are drawn, when these deal with sexualities and genders. The contributions of the transfeminist and feminist perspectives, which work with knowledge situated/located simultaneously in networks and connections, are reviewed in order to contextualize ethical and political implications of parenthoods for the expression of sexualities and genders dissident from the hegemonic models.

Childhoods in gender and sexuality norms: for the right to exist in diversity

Childhood as a time in human life and a historical category that defines and differentiates the social existence of children, appears and operates, from the 18th century and in the modernity peak of the West, as one of the most important power devices of that society. With the purge of sexuality from children's bodies and the relationship of children with the world, innocence is established as a cornerstone that seals the birth of childhood in modern Western societies. With and for childhood, bourgeois families and schools start organizing themselves and operating with the purpose of forming, protecting and reproducing their existence as a pillar of that social order (Foucault, 2006). A child welfare system is created, as analyzed by René Schérer (2009), which consists of a set of actions and attributions related to the prerogatives, duties and behaviors of children and adults, and is articulated inside the institutions where these people are involved. In this system, discipline is combined with the pedagogy of childhood and the emergent need for getting to know it and making it socially understood and acknowledged. Equally important is the sexuality operating in this system, as it is a device that materializes through disciplinary measures in the bodies of children, which are told, named, understood, classified and scrutinized by the ways in which this device deeply penetrates the diverse spaces and periods of childhoods. Michel Foucault (2006) is forceful in his analyses about the neat way in which sexuality is present and regulates the spaces of children at school: classrooms, courtyards, cafeterias, and the arrangement of tables and chairs are physical spaces that speak about the sexuality of children, and through these discourses their bodies are mediated.

Articulated on the concept and the nation project of the modern States, childhood is established as an important biopolitical artifact (Preciado, 2019) that, by producing the bodies of children, naturalizes the norm through adults, which itself is the incarnation of their *telos*, the target of the projections for childhood as a privileged time for the development and learning of gender and sexuality programs. Paul B. Preciado (2019) deals with the image of monitored cradles and the surroundings of babies and children in families, schools and parliaments, in order to explain the biopolitical management of childhood and its correlation with the future of the heteropatriarchal nation. Assumed as having a puerile presence and

original innocence, children are soon captured by the developmentalist narrative that introduces human life in the engine of progress, whose fuel is the reproductive policy that has a 'faultless' adult adjusted to the binary gender norm and to heterosexuality as a requisite (Haraway, 2016).

In the management of childhood as a political device, the rhetoric of development creates the illusion of ideal-typical children, withheld from political and social life. Erica Burman (2021) characterizes this traditional-rearing as the image of a prototypical childhood that becomes universal and functions as a norm and, under those circumstances, interdicts children's bodies and experiences based on their differences, as well as inventive and disruptive appearances. Rationality, efficiency, control, productivity, maximization, maturity and autonomy are combined with the mission of aligning the birth body to the gender and desire as they are compulsory requirements for the accomplishment of a normative childhood. It is not coincidence that these human development prerogatives, compulsory for children especially in the social institutions where they are educated, are coupled to the ideology of the nation state of Western modernity, which is cemented on the perspective of progress that subordinates lives to the colonialist project of exploitation of human and natural existences (Castañeda, 2002; Burman, 2021). From the perspective of progress, human development is established as the landmark of a life aligned to the competences and requirements for the operation of that nation project, which embraces normative genders and heterosexuality as the only possibilities for existence. In turn, what that perspective erases is the debris that such a landmark has left behind, as warned by Walter Benjamin (1985) in his allegory of the angel of history with his eyes staring at the catastrophes accumulated by progress.

Development norms produce an intelligibility regime that creates social visibility and acknowledgment zones scrutinize bodies genders, sexualities and subjectivities, (Butler, 2016). The roadmap of prototypical childhood is part of that regime, and the requisites for its fulfillment are implacable in the life of children from very early on. Its mandatory nature exposes children who do not follow it as targets of ridicule, insults and social obliteration due to the fact that they did not receive the seal of normality and escaped from the borders of social visibility zones. Children, with their existences erased by these norms, are named by the signs of abjection and are under constant threat since their lives do not matter because they did not pass the sieve of intelligibility, as underscored by Butler (2015, 2016).

What remains then when children do not have their bodies, gender performances (languages, gestures, movements and behaviors, among other expressions) and sexualities aligned with the development norms? Summarizing one of the concerns of Preciado (2019), what happens with the right of those children to define their own gender and sexuality? This problem calls into question two aspects: first, the unfeasibility of children to assert themselves as individuals with right to have affection, bodies, experiences and to what they feel, think and live in their relationships with others, as their existence is entangled in a development and future project that positions them as subjects who are not yet to be. Second, the alienation of children regarding their own body, despite this being immersed in social life since birth, which is looked over and taken care of by others, educated and protected by adults, could be violated and abducted by norms that produce more pain and suffering than protection.

Before birth, children already have received a name and a world to inhabit, which is permeated by gender norms and essential parts of the roadmap to prototypical childhood. Boy or girl, he or she: there are no other ways of identifying a child. Furthermore, there are no doubts about it since the denomination is implicit and decisive. What rights do children

have over their own bodies if their subjectivities are shaped for them to not see and feel themselves as bodies? In the most diverse social institutions - family, school and also scientific research - it is rare to listen to what children have to say about the feelings, thoughts and experiences with their bodies. These occasions become more common when they are focused on the childhood memories of adults, narratives that open to a dialogue in which the child from the past is interrogated by the adult of the present, who in the debris, searches for that abducted body and the possibility of constructing meanings for a body that was ordered and sometimes 'cursed' by adults. However, it is still children narrated by an adult.

In the field of childhood memories, the deviated-body as a sign of insult and the body that does not belong into school appear as some images from that child of the past, which are visible in the childhood memories of transvestites (Alexandre & Salgado, 2019). These memories of the child body, which moves through the spaces of childhood (in the family and at school), confirm that the more divergent from hetero-centered aesthetics, which are anchored on the dominant masculine and feminine genitalia that bifurcate into two single possibilities for existence— 'penetrating penis, penetrated vagina'—, the more monstrous and heinous these bodies are socially (Preciado, 2019). More than educational institutions, family and school are responsible for standardizing children according to gender and sexual norms. For example, in the view of Preciado (2019), at school, more than languages, what is taught and learned, albeit secretly and silently, is a single language that is the violence of the norm, which weaves a web 'between pedagogy, violence and normality'.

Existing as an unsustainable and unintelligible body is, during childhood, a sentence to threats and dangers that lasts for life. Declared as "[...] a human error [...]" (Butler, 2019, p. 99), the dissident bodies of children undergo a derealization process of what is human as a consequence of not fitting in the normative gender and sexuality frameworks. The withdrawal of humanity, and therefore the destitution of the subject status in the case of children that do not fit the normality frameworks, bear testimony of the violence against those lives. Being in the zone of the non-representable, affected by the command for social deletion, these children lose the right to have their lives protected and acknowledged as lives that matter and deserve to be defended (Butler, 2019). It seems very contradictory to realize that the same society that invented childhood is the one that created mechanisms for purging it; moreover to sentence it to death when its existence escapes the normality patterns centered on normative masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and whiteness. It becomes evident that not all children receive a right to the prerogatives of childhood. In the same way as the derealization of the human status is produced, childhood as a lifetime for care and protection dissolves and is replaced by the image of dissident bodies seen as threats and abjection.

Preciado (2019), in a manifesto for the defense of queer children, already stated:

What my father and my mother protected were not my rights as a 'child', but the sexual and gender norms that they learned painfully through an educational and social system that punished any form of dissidence with threats, intimidation and even death. I had a father and a mother, but none of them protected my right to free self-determination of gender and sex (Preciado, 2019, p. 98-99, author's emphasis).

There is a declaration of war against children who escape gender and sexuality norms (Cornejo, 2011). The battlefields to be confronted and barriers to be trespassed are hard on children who resist by showing themselves as different. In those existences, children express the right to be and live who they are, the right to feel and perceive their bodies as

misaligned with the learned norms without abandoning their own performance. The price to pay for this social visibility is high, but probably not higher than remaining in the shadows, invisible and erased, at the expense of a heavy burden of suffering that can be carried along life. Perhaps those children could teach us the meanings of coexisting in a democratic society when we admit that the defense of everyone's life, without exception, is worth more than the reproduction of the privileges and prerogatives that sustain a social structure rooted in inequalities and exclusion. Under this perspective, it is important to also discuss how, structurally and from public policies, exclusion mechanisms that strongly affect the rights of children and their families are forged.

Familism in the public policies of contemporary Brazil and its effect on childhoods

In this section, we will discuss how government policies, by choosing a specific family profile to be prioritized at the expense of plurality and social diversity, generate consequences for children and adolescents. The effects of familist perspectives on childhoods have perpetuated the exclusion of subjects and minority groups in terms of race, gender, sex and class.

Moraes, Nunes, Horst, and Mito (2020) discuss the incorporation of the term 'familism' into the public policy debates in Brazil. Furthermore, in a dialogue with Esping-Andersen, they define the term as "[...] an explicit partnership between State and family, and the protection *quantum* assumed by each is what determines lower or higher degrees of familism" 'Defamiliarization' would occur when "[...] the welfare regimes alleviate the responsibility of the family for providing social well-being, whether through the State or the market regimes" (Moraes et al., p. 805). The authors indicate that challenging the category of family has been important to discuss the naturalization of nuclear, white and bourgeois families as universal references for theoretical production and proposal of public policies. In this sense, they argue that the work of Marxist feminists was key in this political dispute, as it pointed out how the unpaid work of women contributed and continues to contribute to the maintenance of societies in capitalism.

The return of familism in the current context, in which reactionary agendas on customs have mobilized the Brazilian and international scenarios (see also Prado & Corrêa, 2018), is tightly intertwined with matters related to gender and sexualities, and the intersections with childhoods in those debates. It becomes necessary to understand such overlaps in order to determine how conservative agendas gained space even in more progressive spaces, such as feminisms and left-wing social movements. In 1984, Gayle Rubin started a debate on the assumptions and ideological formulations that were inhibiting the production of critical theories in the field of sexualities. The anthropologist analyzes the articulation of right-wing political positions and religious fundamentalist discourses that led to the conservative results of the 1980 elections in the USA. She even highlights the contribution of the anti-pornography and anti-sadomasochism feminist movement to the promotion of the moral panic that brewed in the American political scene of that moment. Understanding sexuality as a vector of oppression, Rubin proposes a hierarchy of sex with a scheme in which both the acknowledgement and the stigmatization of individuals is conducted based on their 'sexual behaviors'. In the words of the author, "[the] legislation on sex is the most implacable instrument for sexual stratification and erotic persecution. The State systematically intervenes sexual behavior to an extent that would not be tolerated in other areas of social life" (Rubin, 2017, p. 95).

The examples on that surveillance and scrutiny of the State over sexualities brought

up by Rubin are impressively relevant today. Our political present does not allow us to forget that scapegoating women and controlling their sexuality as the political agenda of the right wing has important spokeswomen, which is not new in history. Raquel Osborne (2002) analyzes the ultraconservative scenario that unfolded in 1980, especially in the United States, where in the name of 'protecting' motherhood and family, the ultra-right-wing movement aimed to strengthen masculine domination in the family. According to the author, due to a series of factors, patriarchal discourses found the support of countless women who, by doing so, "[...] are fighting for their submission" (Osborne, 2002, p. 218). This adhesion of women to the right-wing agendas is permeated by religious fundamentalist discourses and by the construction of opponents that should be feared and fought. Osborne (2002) identifies the LGBT⁵, sex-workers and sadomasochist communities occupied that position in the imagery of the Reagan era in the USA. The salvation of the family and the society depended on the monitoring of the sexual practices that would drag everyone into social corruption.

Thinking of the contemporary Brazilian scenario, we observe that political moralization is present in the ultra-conservative right-wing, but is also present in the left-wing, as in the case of the 2018 presidential campaign. In an electoral process that occurred after the coup d'état against the first female president of the country, with visible sexist attacks against Dilma Rousseff (PT), we witnessed how the campaign of Fernando Haddad (PT) emphasized his long-standing and 'respectful' marriage (i.e., monogamous and heterosexual), constantly referring to the suitability of the candidate by means of its marriage stability, as opposed to a Jair Bolsonaro (PSL candidate at that time). In social media, memes comparing the number of marriages, and even the age of the partners of each candidate were circulating. In a campaign marked by fake news from the right-wing, which spread moral panic and the dangers of 'gender ideology' for the education of children, it is worth noticing the bet taken by a good part of the left-wing on familism. Following Rubin (2017), we should ask ourselves what are the groups in the sexual hierarchy favored by that approach and what are those that once more are pushed to the margins of humanity and citizenship.

The election of Jair Bolsonaro established familism as central in its government program, producing narratives that overlook the agency and leading role of children and adolescents to address the topics that concern them. As discussed by Mattos and Cavalheiro (2020, p. 4), salvationist views on childrearing and family, used in singular and in normative perspectives, "[...] were mobilized in an electoral context marked by political polarization, by ultra-conservative agendas and by the emphasis on fear as political emotion". The authors analyze the moralizing narratives on childhood in the anti-gender offensive present in the public speeches of political figures of the 2018 election period and of Bolsonaro's government.

The mobilization of public opinion promoted by the articulation of familism in public policies with moral panic in the costume agenda has proved an effective strategy. More recently, a discourse dispute has shifted to the production of knowledge and scientific research. In the beginning of 2021, a notice call for research funding was issued by Capes (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) in cooperation with the National Secretariat for Family of the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (SNF/MMFDH), entitled *Família e políticas públicas no Brasil* ('Family and public policies in Brazil') (Brasil, 2021), which reproduces a series of stigmatizing stereotypes in the definition

⁵ Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites and transgender people.

of family adopted and in the fields proposed for research funding. As indicated in the document issued by the National Association for Research and Graduate Studies in Psychology (Associação Nacional de Pesquisa e Pós-graduação em Psicologia [ANPEPP], 2021), which analyzes this call from a critical perspective, the notice favors research that discards consistent scientific productions in the field of family, gender and sexualities studies, promoting "[...] a selective disqualification of certain family conjugations as well as a disincentive for investing and analyzing them not only from the funding program but also from public policies for the promotion and protection of rights" (ANPEPP, p. 1).

To favor perspectives that define and place the family as a central institution that provides well-being, sparing the State this responsibility, constitutes familism in contemporary public policies, as argued by Moraes et al. (2020). The effect of that movement at the micro-social level, for the authors, is the reinforcement of the sexual division of labor, which makes women responsible for care and domestic works. Regarding younger people, familism privatizes the care and coexistence spaces of children and adolescents when it becomes part of a government's agenda, relieving progressively public power and society of the responsibility of guaranteeing the right of that segment of the population. This aspect can also be identified as a characteristic of the public call for research funding above, as it reinforces "[...] an agenda for the invisibilization and denial of the right of children, adolescents and young people to be protagonists of their lives in family configurations" (ANPEPP, 2021, p. 3).

The ethical and political implications of parenthood in the experience of children with genders and sexualities

In the previous sections, we drew the paths of a discursive network about how gender and sexuality are devices for which the policies for family and 'childhood sciences' such as pedagogy and psychology, served as technologies (Lauretis, 1994) in the defense of heterosexuality and cisgenerity norms. Patriarchy is materialized in this defense when through its practices, the discourse on the duality of gender and the perpetuation of the heterosexual reproductive model are achieved by means of a specific model for parental relationships and family norms.

The control and discipline of the bodies and desires of women and children appear as property of the patriarchy that are managed by the family nucleus, which acts as a frontline against threats to its hegemony, in order to perpetuate the system. In this way, the family reasserts discursive practices about how to preserve gender and sexual roles of each of its components: efficiency and guarantee of reproductive capacity, continuity guarantee for gender and sexuality naturalization processes, which are places in the matrix of body anatomy.

Conservative groups and movements have generated responses that make a case for the continuity of those existence modes, particularly in interventions on children's experiences. They produce a semiotics of abjection, indecent assault and criminalization of sexualities and genders in childhoods that showcase dissidents from hegemonic masculinities and femininities, as well as sexualities out of the norm, especially when these disrupt the innocent, pure and asexual child model (Burman, 2021).

The defense is based on the fact gender and sexuality dissidences are attempted actions against 'nature'. Defense strategies smear and purge families that exhibit configurations out of the norm (homoparental, monoparental), which under the label of non-structured, threaten the healthy and linear course of gender socialization and the destiny of

(hetero) sexuality. This is present, noticeably, in the current practices of the anti-gender offensive carried out through educational public policies and policies for research on family in Brazil, as seen in previous sections of this article. These policies are oriented to give value to a nuclear and patriarchal family configuration in which the parental style perpetuates the culture of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality.

After mentioning these scenarios and discursive networks for psychology, family, gender and childhood areas of knowledge, and considering that these fields are linked to the current transformations of the sexual policy in Brazil (Leite, 2019), some considerations can be drawn on how parenthoods, from any family configuration, are divided into maintaining or breaking away from the reproduction of hegemonic models for sexualities and genders in the life trajectory of children.

When attempting to prove or verify the effects of the 'new' family configurations on the lives and bodies of children, some studies focus on scrutinizing whether family settings formed by same sex partners or by a homosexual parent would ensure or not the development of a psychologically healthy child, or even more, if the trajectories for gender identity and sexuality would follow a 'anti-natural path' (Lev, 2010; Araldi & Serralta, 2016). Their results unanimously indicate that these configurations are not a threat to the sexual life and gender identity of children. One common point of these studies is that they reinforce the representation of the family, specifically in parenting, as the original place of subjectivation of children, premises which were woven and forged in psychological and psychoanalytical theories (Amazonas & Braga, 2006).

According to Lucia Rabello de Castro (2013), it is necessary to have a critical interpretation of the ethical-political fundaments of these childhood subjectivity theories that start from the place of childhood, questioning the status of institutions from the adult world for children, and to whom serves the exclusion of children in these institutions. In addition, this needs to be complemented by a study of how childhoods are used to perpetuate the norms of certain systems when they are captured for the realization of an adult project. The ways in which the relationships between children and adults develop in this project can be analyzed, according to Castro (2013), based on two perspectives that derive in different narratives about ages and power relationships. First, there is a distinction between children and adults that is operated by developmental psychological theories, which exacerbates symmetry and classifies children into the categories of ineptitude and incompleteness. Second, the sociology of childhood bets on the symmetry of that relationship by erasing any distinction and situating children as agents and protagonists of their childhood and the construction of the society as well.

Regarding the sociology of childhood, Castro (2013) emphasizes the competence paradigm. Children are situated in that paradigm from an individualizing and rational perspective, as agents of themselves (protagonists) who can decide and choose their destiny. According to the author, a perspective that ends up often not questioning the concept of competence implied in a leading role predominates in childhood sociology studies, i.e., how this perspective reasserts adult-centered values and perspectives when children are approached as equally competent as adults. It should be noted how the idea of competence, originated from the condition of children as protagonists, is related to their participation in society and in the culture surrounding projects or debates, which are common topics in those studies.

But there is a concern to be addressed when this leading role is elicited in the biopolitical context regarding gender in child subjectivity. This can create the illusion that children themselves manage the disciplinary and control processes of their bodies, feelings

and desires in a power relationship context where adults reinforce asymmetries to defend a regime of truth for sexuality and gender⁶. Childhood is not defined by what it is but by what it is not (white, heterosexual, cisgendered), as indicated by Castañeda (2002) when resuming criticism of the subject in the post-colonial feminist perspectives and in the racial criticism theories. The author argues that, during the process of representing children as social stakeholders (not only in psy or social theories but also in other representations, such as art or media), childhood is automatically “[...] erased or occupied by adults [...]” (Castañeda, 2002, p. 143) as creators of that representation, whether as a theoretical resource or as a space or form of adults project (cisgender and heterosexual) aimed to reassert or realize the adult.

The notes in this work seek to contribute to a critical review of the ethical-political fundamentals of parenting in terms of the educational and social processes that surround sexualities and genders in childhood. This implies considering the power relationships between adults and children in the social field, as well as the adult-centered, masculine, white, class-based and western perspective of the knowledge production field about childhood (Castañeda, 2002; Marchi, 2011; Burman, 2021). Therefore, considering children as subjects with effective participation in decisions about their trajectories in their expressions of gender and sexuality expressions entails escaping the competence paradigm that individualizes, rationalizes and displaces them from the power relationships involved, as well as deviating from the incompleteness notion that makes children incapable of participation.

For example, the legal framework for the use of social names in the case of transvestite and transsexual people challenges parental positions by allowing children and adolescents to determine their own gender. Resolution No. 1 of January 19, 2018 (Brasil, 2018)⁷, of the Brazilian Ministry of Education guarantees and defines the use of transvestite and transsexual people's social names in school records. This law only ensures the free use of the social name to those of legal age (over 18 years old). Meanwhile, its use is also legal in the case of minors, as long as they have the authorization of their tutors or legal representatives. In the field of gender disputes, the screening and domination of parental authority define the gender identity children identify themselves with.

Some clues have been given by critical feminist and transfeminist studies (Haraway, 1994; Castañeda, 2002; Guerrero & Muñoz, 2018). A possible ethical approach is oriented towards the acknowledgment of the power positions of the stakeholders. The shifts in those positions are what promote symmetries and asymmetries in flows that at some specific times emerge in certain points of the map and take direction. When gender and sexuality related experiences occur during childhood, the asymmetries predominate in that map, and they are dominated by adult-centered perspectives as guiding principles for the experiences protecting heterosexuality and cisgenerity regimes (Preciado, 2019).

A need for regulating and authorizing through legal mechanisms how someone wants to be named is a biopower strategy that reinforces the radical distinction and submission of children by adults in a developmentalist interpretation. The dangers disseminated by legal, medical and psy discourses reinforce the tutelage of children and label child gender and

⁶ Marchi (2011) points to the fact that sociological studies on childhood do not deal with the autonomy of child-stakeholder under the structural and power dominance conditions in society. The author indicates that the child-stakeholder is present in research on the relationship between children and adults in concrete social situations. The contribution of the sociological perspective on childhood is to propose childhood as a social analysis category, as well as to assert its plurality through the introduction of the same into the socialization process and with transforming actions for social and cultural reality.

⁷ Prior to this resolution, the resolution No. 12 of January 16, 2015 (Brasil, 2015), of the National Council for Combating Discrimination and Promoting the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Transvestite and Transexual People (CNCB/LGBT) gave the possibility to use the social name from any age in educational and work contexts.

sexuality experiences as unauthentic and discredited, requiring monitoring to be validated. Regardless of the construction of an explicative narrative made up of diverse factors (genetic, cultural, social, etc.) or a naturalistic and developmentalist perspective of continuous gender expression, the point of arrival is always that of fixation and immutability, a stabilization that prohibits children to transition or not choosing a masculine or feminine gender (Guerrero & Muñoz, 2018).

Guerrero and Muñoz (2018) propose an epistemological transfeminist interpretation for the dominance of a cis-hetero phenomenological governance in the field of gender identity during childhood, especially in the gender experiences transsexual children have under the medical and psy discourse about the transsexualizing process. This interpretation jeopardizes the authority of such a perspective on children's experience, particularly when it comes to childhoods, and also creates possibilities of alliances that incorporate the role of transsexual witness as an alternative and vindication of the perspective of whom lives the experience in the production of knowledge about themselves. Together with the partial and feminist and queer approaches, which encourage shifts in the position of subjects, the witness would play a role that adds an ethical and political perspective rooted in the knowledge, desires and bodies of children in their experiences.

Nevertheless, the age-parental perspective needs to be brought to the debate. Despite the agency of children over the ways of expressing their sexualities and genders based on their social and cultural experiences, this agency does not stand without ethical-political criticism of parenting in terms of its adult-centered perspective and adhesion to the dominant system for gender socialization and nature of gender. This paper emphasizes the importance of an ethical and political perspective that departs from stances, situated/located knowledge, in which the adult not only acts/thinks/see from an identity but is open too to the partiality of the place they occupy (Haraway, 1995), in order to enable connections and networks with child experiences. Is there participation of children in gender and sex policies, without seeing and treating them as objects that attend to a cis- and heteronormative project? The exercise of parenthood in this field requires giving space for the rejection of radical, disincarnated asymmetries that produce exclusion, cancelling and unfeasibility in the experiences of children regarding their bodies and desires.

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