



“EVERY TIME WE TALK ABOUT THIS I FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE IN OVERTHROWING THESE GAY-BI-HETERO POLARITIES”: TOWARDS THE QUEERING OF PEDAGOGY

“CADA VEZ ME SINTO MAIS CONFORTÁVEL EM DERRUBAR ESSAS POLARIDADES GAY-BI-HETERO”: RUMO À QUEERIZAÇÃO DA PEDAGOGIA

Dilton Ribeiro Couto Junior
Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro – UERJ

Abstract

This article, part of a recently concluded doctoral research, has the objective to question sexual identity based on the perspective of young Brazilian college students who do not identify as heterosexuals. These students constitute an online community on Facebook dedicated to questioning the regulatory norms of gender and sexuality. The theoretical framework adopted here, predominantly from studies of gender and sexuality that embrace a queer perspective, allowed me to analyse two online conversations held on Facebook with the Brazilian students. As the students contest traditional homo-bi and homo-hetero binary models, I was able to reflect on the queering of pedagogy in this article, setting the stage to reinvent the ways in which bodies, genders, and sexualities can be reimagined.

Keywords: sexuality; heteronormativity; queer pedagogy.

Resumo

Esse artigo, fruto de pesquisa de doutorado recentemente concluída, apresenta como objetivo questionar identidades sexuais através da perspectiva de jovens estudantes universitários brasileiros que não se reconhecem heterossexuais. Esses estudantes constituem uma comunidade *online* no Facebook destinada a questionar normas regulatórias de gênero e sexualidade. A fundamentação teórica adotada aqui, predominantemente dos estudos do campo de gênero e sexualidade que abarcam a perspectiva *queer*, permitiu analisar duas conversas *online* realizadas no Facebook com o grupo de estudantes brasileiros. Ao contestarem os tradicionais modelos binários homo-bi e homo-hetero, pude refletir sobre a *queerização* da pedagogia nesse artigo, preparando o terreno para reinventar os modos pelos quais corpos, gêneros e sexualidades podem ser reimaginados.

Palavras-chave: sexualidade; heteronormatividade; pedagogia *queer*.



1. Introduction

Why a queer pedagogy? To introduce in pedagogy and education the doubt and uncertainty in relation to the disciplinary norms regarding knowledge and bodies. This is, to unravel the limits of thought and think the unthinkable. Why at school? Because, in the name of rationality and science, school has produced a history of normalization, exclusion and violence around knowledge, bodies and subjects¹.

Maria Rita de Assis César (2012, p. 352)

César's quotation above bespeaks my intention in this article to articulate queer theory and pedagogy to question gender and sexuality norms, which are responsible for the production and maintenance of heteronormative practices at school. These practices are encouraged in times of extreme intolerance against so-called sexual minorities, who are constantly exposed to situations of prejudice and discrimination, frequently resulting in physical violence and even murder and suicide. There is no denying that heterosexual ideology more strongly affects children and youth who are part of home environments and educational institutions in which values in tune with a heteronormative perspective prevail (WARNER, 2004). The homophobic violence that individuals suffer because of their non-conformity to gender norms (BORRILLO, 2010) has been discussed in studies that argue for both the need to rethink the inclusion of sexual orientation and homophobia in the school curriculum (MCCORMACK; GLEESON, 2010) and the need to re-educate teachers on these issues (MSIBI, 2012). Homophobic violence becomes an urgent matter at a time when

¹ Translated from: "Por que uma pedagogia queer? Para introduzir na pedagogia e na educação a dúvida e a incerteza em relação à norma disciplinar quanto aos saberes e aos corpos. Isto é, para dilacerar os limites do pensamento e pensar o impensável. Por que na escola? Porque na escola, em nome da racionalidade e da ciência, se produziu uma história de normalização, exclusão e violência em torno dos saberes, dos corpos e dos sujeitos" (CÉSAR, 2012, p. 352).



many schools still struggle to allow gender and sexuality to be discussed openly, still failing to go beyond the approach of mere “tolerance” and “respect” of those who do not identify with the heterosexual model (SILVA, 2010).

In the Brazilian context in which this study is situated, homophobic practices are worrying. Recent data published in annual reports by the Gay Group of Bahia (GGB)² have been discussed in the study of Leite (2012) who demonstrates that the high number of murders in the country occur because of the conservative traditions surrounding gender and sexuality norms. According to GGB’s reports, in 2013 there were 312 documented murders of gays, transvestites, and lesbians in Brazil, which corresponded to a murder every 28 hours. The report of the following year showed an increase of 4% in the number of murders of members of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community in the country. Such hate crimes do not affect only the LGBT community. Moreover, according to the GGB’s 2015 report, Brazil continues to lead the rank of countries with crimes motivated by homophobia, even though not all cases of murders are registered, meaning that this scenario is probably even more alarming. In this sense, there is no denying that the LGBT movement in the country has faced a history of extreme violence that is now part of its members’ daily lives (EFREM FILHO, 2016).

Regarding conservatism and heteronormativity, Brazil’s political scenario also deserves attention. Approved by the Chamber of Human Rights Committee in June 2013, the project’s topic, commonly known as the “gay cure”, advocated by João Campos from the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), led to significant repercussions on various social media and television. The project aimed to allow psychologists to offer treatment to individuals who were interested in “reversing” their homosexuality, thus becoming “straight”. Even though the project was later archived, its popularity and repercussions

² Funded in 1980, GGB is the oldest Brazilian association created for the defense of the human rights for homosexuals. Its webpage address is: <http://www.ggb.org.br/welcome.html>



revealed new and intense prejudice and discrimination against so-called sexual minorities because many of the project's supporters perceived homosexuality as a disease that needed to be cured (OSWALD; COUTO JUNIOR, 2015). Today, creating resistance strategies against homophobic social practices in Brazil may be less effective when even the Chamber of Human Rights Committee still attempts political strategies to "straighten" every citizen in the country (OSWALD; COUTO JUNIOR, 2015).

The alarming situations briefly presented above demand our attention to promote educational efforts that would challenge heteronormativity and enable a better understanding of the naturalisation and normalisation of homophobic discourses. Faced with the Brazilian political and social context, I refer to the thoughts of Felipe (2007) for whom the creation of public policies requires an acknowledgment of the problems engendered by discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, and the problems engendered by the sexual exploitation of children and young people. Although there is no predefined path to disrupt heteronormativity, many studies on gender and sexuality are committed to queering pedagogical practices in order to fight homophobia in educational contexts.

Queer theory's analytical approach strives to contest the production of "normality", fomenting discussions on the need to problematize the hegemony of heterosexuality (LOURO, 2013). This approach focuses on the critique of a fixed nature of sexual identity and on the integration of gays and lesbians into the dominant culture of heterosexuality (PRECIADO, 2011). Queer theory not only operates through the denunciation of practices of intolerance but also "has the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalization... as the site of violence. Its brilliance as a naming strategy lies in combining resistance on that broad social terrain with more specific resistance on the terrains of phobia and queer-bashing" (WARNER, 2004, p. xxvi). Among Brazilian academic researchers such analytical approaches have had a considerable impact, allowing for the development of important theoretical reflections on the normative discursive processes produced by various social



institutions, including the school. In addition to this, I defend the importance of working with queer theory's contributions to deepen understanding of the body, gender, and sexuality in an attempt to discuss how the naturalisation of heterosexuality has produced various marks of abjection on those who do not identify with the heterosexual model.

As stated by Libâneo (2010), pedagogy is a field of knowledge focused on the study of education that is responsible for the configuration of human activity. Pedagogy inspired by queer theory seeks to disrupt heterosexual regimes by problematizing the already recognized and legitimate social settings based on heterosexist ideologies. These settings impose the superiority of a heterosexual model that privileges monogamous relationships for reproductive purposes, disqualifying those who seek other forms of existence (WARNER, 2004). Concerned about how many educators in Brazil today believe that homosexuality can be "straightened", Louro (2013) discusses the need to expand the comprehension of bodily pleasures and desires. She points out the importance of queer theory in questioning and denaturalising gender norms as a strategy to undermine certainties.

The queer pedagogy I advocate in this work does not seek "applicability" to existing educational practices. I am highly suspicious of the ways in which textbooks (recipes) describe (or prescribe) teaching practices as if all human formation could be sufficiently supported and conceived from such documents; consequently, it is not my objective in this essay to propose that the reflections developed here are to be implemented merely as a way to promote classroom activities with the students. Instead, I strive to propose reflections that would be important to question heteronormativity and all of its regulatory strategies that frame human life into the homo-hetero binary model.

Ever since the emergence of queer theory in the 1990s, studies have articulated the relationship between queer theory's analytical perspective and pedagogy. Discussions have ranged from queer pedagogy in sociology (SEIDMAN, 1994) to the queering of environmental education (RUSSEL; SARICK; KENNELLY, 2011), the queer potential in



physical education (LARSSON; QUENNERSTEDTB; ÖHMANB, 2014), the queering of pedagogy to reflect on the construction of gender and sexuality in cinematic narratives (NEPOMUCENO, 2012; CÉSAR, 2012), and the need to rethink educational curriculum in light of queer theory (BRITZMAN, 1995; BRYSON; DE CASTELL, 1993). Furthermore, these works provide important observations on the production of normality in society, enabling the emergence of a queer pedagogy concerned with ways to question heteronormativity. It is important to mention that pedagogy inspired by queer theory does not include only queer topics or promote only teaching-learning processes for queer students (LOURO, 2001). This pedagogy is addressed not only for those who do not identify as heterosexual, but to all the students, since queering pedagogy requires the participation of everyone against violence and authoritarianism produced by sexism (COUTO JUNIOR, 2016).

This article is part of a recently concluded doctoral research³ developed in Brazil that started in 2013. Even though my research focuses on a Brazilian context, it is not restricted to it. The theoretical framework adopted here is predominantly from studies of gender and sexuality that embrace queer theory's analytical approach, including research from Brazil and other countries of Latin America (LOURO, 2001, 2013; MISKOLCI, 2013; CÉSAR, 2012; COUTO JUNIOR, 2016), as well as Europe (LARSSON; QUENNERSTEDTB; ÖHMANB, 2014; PRECIADO, 2011, 2014) and North America (WARNER, 1999, 2004; BRITZMAN, 1995, 2009; SEIDMAN, 1994; SCHLICHTER, 2004; ALEXANDER, 2008). The studies of Guattari (1985) and Guattari and Rolnik (2008) are incorporated here because of their reflections on the process of identity and subjectivity.

The research field consisted of interactions on Facebook between 2013 and 2015 with a group of young college students, residents of the Rio de Janeiro state, who do not identify

³ In a broad view, the doctoral study aimed to investigate the marks of abjection of young Facebook users, questioning the limits and contingencies of heteronormativity.



as heterosexuals. In 2013, year of entry into the fieldwork, the subjects' age ranged from 16 to 35 years. These online interactions consist of conversations with them as well as observations of the subjects' interactions with one another. The theoretical-methodological approach adopted here is inspired by the work of Bakhtin (2008), which has allowed me to understand that researching *with* other subjects means there is no predictability of others' behaviours; each encounter is unrepeatable and thus unique. The Bakhtinian dialogical perspective views the research process as being gradually produced with the subjects (COUTO JUNIOR, 2013). In this sense, I defend an investigation in which the researcher does not conduct an investigation *about* the subjects but *with* the subjects as all participants are conceived as co-authors of knowledge during the dialogic relationship established between them and the researcher (COUTO JUNIOR, 2013).

I have chosen Facebook as an empirical field to establish conversations with the participants of the research because it is currently one of the most popular networking sites in the world and many Brazilian citizens actively participate in its social experiences. In addition to this, Facebook offers great communicative potential that allows people to connect with others by interacting with images, texts, and videos. The ways in which Internet users participate through social networking sites bring important implications to issues of sociability, subjectivity, expectations, and so on, as digital communication processes change the way we receive, share, and produce information with others (SANTAELLA, 2013). Youth political participation practices on Facebook today indicate that there are still privileged environments in which young people in Brazil can exercise freedom of speech as they engage in different social causes (OSWALD; COUTO JUNIOR, 2015).

The objective of this article is to question sexual identities based on the perspective of young Brazilian college students who do not identify as heterosexual. Concerned with the ways in which subjects strive to free their bodies from gender and sexual norms, this article also seeks inspiration in queer theory to advocate a pedagogy that defends the reinvention



of the body through the necessity of reimagining a non-normative way of life. I present and analyse two online conversations established on Facebook in 2013, one of which I had with the students and one of which the students had with one another. The conversations were in Brazilian Portuguese and were therefore translated into English. Also, the subjects provided me with fictitious names for the purposes of identification in my research.

The interactions with these students enabled me to critique the production of heteronormative privileges. This is owing to the fact that the subjects expose their concern with the ways in which gender, sexuality, and bodies are normalised and classified according to socially constructed attributes that reinforce hierarchies and disqualifications.

2. “o you know any ‘lexible-straight’?” debating sexual identities

The online conversation that follows was triggered by a question proposed by Jorge, who invites the group to participate in a discussion focused on sexual identities. The objective here is to analyse the subjects’ ideas when asked about “lexible-straight” a category that exposes the limits and contingencies of the binary comprehension (homo-hetero) of sexual identities:

Jorge: Do you guys know any “flexible-straight”? Any comments on this?

Polobio: So I think it’s very risky and wrong to discuss the sexuality of another person since you can only classify your own sexuality. Having said that, I think that’s just a reflection of sexism in our society, where it’s better to say you’re straight BUT, once in a while, you enjoy making out with guys, instead of saying you enjoy having sex with men and women.

JR Wilde: I know a straight guy who has already tried to kiss me several times — could that be it? But he doesn’t define himself as straight, but as bisexual. . . . Apparently he is bisexual at the very



end of the scale — you know, almost straight, but occasionally he fools around with men.

Thayane: It is difficult for a man to define himself as flexible, especially flexible-straight. I wish I could understand why men “define themselves” more than women and the women are more likely to say they are bisexual, even if in the end they date only men or only women. I think this is also a reflection of sexism, even for gays, who also suffer from the same pressure as other men of having to define themselves, having to give a concrete answer [on their sexual orientation]. . . . I really don’t know. . . .

Jorge: I have a group of friends. Some date women, some date men, others do not date. Some say they are straight (especially those who date women), and others say they are gay. So far, nothing new.

Once, during New Year’s Eve, my gay friends were making out (which is very common in our group), and my straight friends decided that they wanted to kiss each other. And they all kissed (at the same time) without letting any gay men participate. I found it very interesting because they wanted to make out with each other without letting a gay person participate. They said that only “flexible-straight” could participate. I thought this was very curious!

Thayane: Man, I wish I could have been at this party with your friends! That sounds like fun!

Nogan: There is sexism even among gays, and also a requirement for definition . . . you talk to a gay man and here comes the question: “Are you a top, a bottom, or versatile?” I think people have the need for classification.

As for the “flexible-straight” people, I think it is pretty cool that they behave like this in a world surrounded by sexism, and I have seen sexism coming from gay people who say “Oh! He hasn’t left the closet completely . . . he will still discover himself”. . . . But sometimes this is not the case; the person is... well... like this because he or she wants to experience a same-sex kiss but doesn’t want to be in a relationship. . . .

I just get a little overwhelmed to know if this is real, or if it is just another strategy by a “closeted” homophobic guy who will start bragging, “Oh, I just make out with guys once in a while; I do this to everybody.” But since everyone is different, I won’t be judging hastily. . . .



Patrick: Jorge, you just forgot to mention that nowadays straight guys let their gay friends kiss them in front of their girlfriends. Most of them can handle it in a good way. I love my flexible-straight friends although I think that the label only hinders rather than helps.

JR Wilde: Dude, I've seen the two types. There are different types of "flexible-straight." I'm pretty sure I know these two types, and both types somehow consider themselves bisexual.

Justgia: I consider myself lesbian, but I have kissed manyyyyyyyyyyyyy male friends. Jorge, do your friends consider themselves flexible-straight just because they kiss men?

Thayane: I feel the same; just take some of these yyyyy's off the "many". xD

Justgia: I don't remember if there were that manyyyyyyyyy. I wanted to exaggerate it to make a point.

Jorge: Justgia, I never talked about it with my friends, except in a joking tone. I'll investigate further!

Researcher: Nogan and Jorge, people have the need for classification! It helps with organizing sexual identities and with self-identification . . . but I agree with you, Patrick, that classification ends up creating a lot of confusion because it tends to encapsulate the subject within a MODEL. It's difficult to discuss gender and sexuality when we get stuck with models . . . on the other hand, I think classification discussions are great because they bring forth many questions to be thought through, just like you all raised regarding those who call themselves "flexible-straight"! :D

The subjects of this research refuse to be marked negatively by social and cultural values produced under the principles of a heteronormative perspective even though these values are deeply embedded in contemporary Brazilian society. I support that it is essential to ensure that all bodies can break free from identity representation as well as stereotyped behaviours and attitudes (GUATTARI, 1985). If our genitals produce social meanings that determine our gender and sexual orientation, there is no doubt that this process involves the imposition of norms that aim to frame *who* we are and *with whom* we should seek bodily pleasures. According to Nogan, even queer subjects disseminate ideas that restrict the possibilities of sexual intercourse: "ou talk to a gay man and here comes the question: 're



you a top, a bottom, or versatile?” I think people have the need for classification” Questions like “hat are you?” go in the opposite direction from arguments for the constant transformation of the self through dialogical interactions between groups of subjects (BAKHTIN, 2008). Thus, the need to identify as a top, a bottom, or versatile promptly causes desires and bodily pleasures to be oriented to a particular and restricted sexual practice, preventing the exploration of the body through new sexual possibilities.

Seidman (1994) shows how the homo-hetero binary can regulate and normalise bodies and social behaviours, leading to the silencing of several unorthodox sexual practices including sadomasochistic, bisexual, interracial, intergenerational, and transgendered practices. In addition, Warner (1999, p. 5) states, “We live with sexual norms that survive from the Stone Age, including prohibitions against autoeroticism, sodomy, extramarital sex, and (for those who still take the Vatican seriously) birth control”. The irreverence of Warner’s words both indicates how normative processes regulate bodies, genders, and sexual practices and urges the creation of strategies to disrupt heteronormativity.

Throughout this online conversation, Thayane elaborates a critique on the constant need of human beings to tell one another who they are: “even for gays, who also suffer from the same pressure as other men of having to define themselves, having to give a concrete answer [on their sexual orientation]”. Therefore, the classification in which others may frame us often differs from the ideas that we have about our desires and ourselves. Thayane’s critique resonates with the reflections of Guattari and Rolnik (2008, p. 90), who consider the notion of identity problematic: “Is it possible that what organizes a form of behavior, a social relation, or a system of production is the fact that it is limited to an identity? Or that it has a tag glued to it? Or even that it is exercised in accordance with preestablished laws of regulation?”. To reflect on gay identity in Brazil, where it is still considered immoral and unnatural by many, it is critical to question the pre-established laws of regulation in order to disrupt heteronormative practices, which would in turn create a favourable teaching-learning



environment for queering pedagogy. This educational effort should focus on the production of sexual identities, enabling the students to engage in discussion on why some individuals are socially recognised and legitimated while others are relegated to an abject condition and face situations of discrimination and prejudice.

The need to embrace an identity is also brought up in the assertion made by Patrick: “I love my flexible-straight friends although I think that the label only hinders rather than helps.” What meanings are produced with the idea of a “flexible” sexual identity? And what would bring people today to identify as “flexible-straight”? It seems that the establishment of a “flexible-straight” sexual identity is a new way of understanding genders and sexualities. Perhaps the most interesting aspect in this context is the fluid character of a sexual identity whose ambiguity exposes the fragility of the homo-hetero binary model (LOURO, 2013). In this regard, queering educational practices is one important way to enlighten discussions with students on heteronormativity and encourage teachers to have a better understanding of the processes in which identity classification and normalization are socially (re)produced. The focus of queer pedagogy on questioning normative processes allows teachers to explore multiple and varied ways to resist gender regulation norms in the classroom.

The relationship of individuals with thought, moral law, nature, and other subjects promotes ways of understanding the role of social institutions in the production of subjectivities (GUATTARI; ROLNIK, 2008). Thus the processes of subjectivity point to the need to “un-tag” individuals from values that are socially and historically produced. Guattari and Rolnik (2008, p. 47) reinforce the idea that “there is no ‘recipient’ subjectivity in which external things are placed and then ‘internalized’”. In this sense, the “tags” that are produced and “lued” to the Brazilian subjects by numerous forces of power are insufficient to represent the entire dimension of the self. Due to the fact that the subject is at the crossroads of multiple subjectivity components (GUATTARI; ROLNIK, 2008), binary classification models such



as homo-hetero and homo-bi do not consider individual singularities because they force the subject to be framed into one of these polarities.

Throughout the online conversation, Polobio presents an interesting perspective on the “flexible-straight” identity. According to him, the creation of another form of identification could be a strategy adopted by those who do not identify as heterosexual. In his words, “ think that's just a reflection of sexism in our society, where it's better to say you're straight BUT, once in a while, you enjoy making out with guys, instead of saying you enjoy having sex with men and women.” This argument shows how heteronormativity naturalises prejudice and discrimination against queer subjects, who feel obliged to be discrete as possible when it comes to their sexual orientation. In this context, Nogan's viewpoint on sexism in the city of Rio de Janeiro is also noteworthy: “I have seen sexism coming from gay people that say ‘Oh! He hasn't left the closet completely . . . he will still discover himself’ But sometimes this is not the case; the person is... well... like this.” In this case, the queering of pedagogy could be triggered by discussing “coming out” stories produced by queer subjects, which would allow students and teachers to discuss social practices “in a culture whose dominant narratives about sexuality are heterocentric and frequently homophobic” (ALEXANDER, 2008, p. 101). Heteronormativity, homophobia, and the production of sexual identities could be interesting topics to be discussed in the classroom as part of a strategy to reflect upon the different marks of abjection queer individuals suffer.

Even though the act of staying “n the closet” is interpreted as a strategy of resistance in response to various homophobic contexts (SEDGWICK, 2007), it is important to note that queer people who are “out of the closet” expose the limits and fragilities of the heterosexual matrix at the moment their sexuality is known. The amount of effort to hide non-heterosexual sexualities to others shows how heteronormative practices produce the naturalisation and normalisation of straightness. However, since gay shame is very strong and a part of



Brazilian culture, as well as many other cultures, there is no denying that the “closeted” life is very appealing to those who are not ready to face social consequences, such as discrimination and prejudice, “outside the closet”.

3. “e are not a dot. We are a spectrum” the need to proliferate multiple ways to constitute oneself as a subject

Preciado (2014) discusses the obsession of the West to restrict sex to a binomial comprehension and defends the need to extinguish this thought by questioning the normalization of bodies, genders, and sexualities. Interestingly, this has also been a concern of the subjects of this study who are dissatisfied with how biological sex (penis or vagina) determines the gender (male or female), imprisoning the body within social norms imposed by heteronormativity. The gendered and sexualised subject is then pressured to integrate oneself into the heterosexual model, which values desires and bodily pleasures for reproductive purposes. In this sense, numerous discussions are held with the subjects in the next conversation, which focuses on debating the limits of sexual classifications:

Nogan: I wanna cause controversy now: can a virgin be considered straight/ gay/bi without having had sex? Does the desire you feel really mean you are something?

JR Wilde: Personally, I didn't have to try it before I was able to know about my sexual attraction. I don't know if the idea of “to feel attracted” can define my sexual orientation. I think it can be defined before that. And confirmed afterwards. By the way, I believe that sexual orientation can vary over time, so it's all a bit complicated. . . . I speak from personal experience. I'm usually attracted to women, but there are times . . . when that is not the case. I don't know how to explain. And also it's not every woman that turns me on. Anyway, I don't think sexuality can be easily identified like that. As much as we embrace the idea of “sexual desire”, I believe that the intensity and also the sexual desire may vary (not in an



infinite way, but within personal boundaries) according to other circumstances.

Nogan: Every time we talk about this I feel more comfortable in overthrowing these gay-bi-hetero polarities because I read about some cases and I keep trying to “make it fit” as if that were some law to define sexuality. JR Wilde, this thing about sexuality changing over time, I think it’s a bit complicated, but I understand what it is. I am in a relationship, and nowadays I feel my bisexuality is speaking to me in a strong way. But when I was single, I felt I could look for “any” person whom I was attracted to, whether a man or a woman. I get involved (in order to have a minimally stable relationship) much more with my emotional side rather than with the physical attraction. (I was in love with my girlfriend during the whole time I was in school. We exchanged confidences, but I never did anything because I thought that if I was attracted to men I should be gay. Today I’m no longer sure of anything, but I’m okay with that).

Jorge: That is very complex. Next question! Just kidding. I find it all very fluid when thinking about sexuality. This invokes thinking about the very ideas of what is “gay” and “straight”. Everything is much more plural and dependent on variables. But I can say from my personal experience: long before I lost my virginity I already considered myself gay. Soon after losing my virginity (and It was with a man), I started dating a girl (very shortly afterwards, like . . . the next day hehe). And so what? What if I were still with her? Would I still be gay? I’m asking these questions because I don’t think there’s a simple answer of “yes” or “no” to your question, Nogan. And who knows, yes-and-no might be divided by a line that we establish between them.

Nogan: Yes, what I mean is that these “straight/gay” definitions are so arbitrary that they sometimes do not correspond to reality . . . and even if I don’t “know” what I am, I try to define myself. The other day I saw a scale that ranged from Straight to Gay, and right in the middle it had the Bi. Each person would be placed at a little dot in this scale. Today I think that each person actually has a range within that scale, which varies by factors we do not understand (completely) . . . and this could create a flexible-straight person and a gay man with bi tendencies. . . . We are not a dot. We are a spectrum.



This dialogue is in tune with the study of Louro (2001) who postulates that identity policies based on representation have a disciplinary and regulatory effect. Moreover, Louro argues that the emergence of a contemporary post-identity politics anchored in a queer approach embraces the fluidity of sexual and gender identities and understands the multiple ways to constitute oneself as a subject. This is what the subjects argue in the online conversation as they produce thoughts that go in the direction indicated by Nogan: “Every time we talk about this I feel more comfortable in overthrowing these gay-bi-hetero polarities because I read about some cases and I keep trying to ‘make it fit’, as if that were some law to define sexuality”. In this case, desires and bodily pleasures would be imprisoned by regulatory gender norms that prevent greater freedom for bodies to transgress and resist the “laws” of sex. Queering pedagogy would be an important approach as it could “lead to the discovery of how cultural norms are constituted and reflections on how they can be challenged and changed” (LARSSON; QUENNERSTEDTB; ÖHMANB, 2014, p. 148). Also, queer pedagogy would enable teachers to point out the limits and contingencies of heteronormativity, which affirms that the sole purpose of sex is mere human reproduction (COUTO JUNIOR, 2016)

According to JR Wilde, “sexual orientation can vary over time”, a perspective that is reinforced by Jorge, who defends sexuality as “very fluid”. Nogan clarifies such “fluidity” of sexual orientation and sexual identity as he presents an interesting narrative from when he was a middle and high school student: “I was in love with my girlfriend during the whole time I was in school. We exchanged confidences, but I never did anything because I thought that if I was attracted to men I should be gay”. His statement resonates with the thought of Britzman (2009) who argues that sexual desire has its mysteries, madneses, that result from one’s trying to find love. Nogan decided not to nurture the passion he felt for his girlfriend from school because he perceived sexual identity as being static. However, nowadays he understands that he is “no longer sure of anything”, a predicament that provides greater



freedom for his sexual desires to move from the perspective of “whom should I love?” to “how should I love this someone?”.

Queer pedagogy would be an interesting approach to discuss the various ways in which humans might fall in love, fantasize, and dream. This is owing to the fact that its theoretical efforts work toward the instability of all sexual identity and sexual orientation as well as the questioning of restricted views of the traditional binary models of bodies (man-woman), genders (male-female) and sexualities (homo-hetero) (LOURO, 2001). Going beyond these representative identity models, the queer theory approach focuses on creating opportunities for postulating an anti-normalizing and non-fixed perspective of identity (NEPOMUCENO, 2012). Therefore, pedagogy inspired by queer theory seeks to formulate a critique of the sex-gender-body system to find multiple breaches to rethink binary models that imprisons bodies (CÉSAR, 2012). Discourses such as “boys can’t do this” and “girls shouldn’t do that” are deeply rooted in many educational institutions, and are responsible for strengthening the permanence of heteronormative values (COUTO JUNIOR, 2016).

The initial questions formulated by Nogan also brought provoking reflections: “can a virgin be considered straight/gay/bi without having had sex? Does the desire you feel really mean you are something?”. To answer this, it would be necessary to overcome the idea of sexual orientation, which results in the normalization of identities and sexual practices (MISKOLCI, 2013). Also, it is important to reinforce that “orientation” is often mistaken for “directing”, “inducing”, and even “creating” a certain sexual desire (MISKOLCI, 2013). Just as queer theory understands the fluid character of sexual identities, there is no reason to presume that our sexual desire will stay temporally and spatially fixed. Jorge agrees that Nogan’s questions do not have “a simple answer of ‘yes’ or ‘no’. . . . And who knows, yes-and-no might be divided by a line that we establish between them.” Such “lines” could help reimagine modes of existence beyond gender identity, allowing for the queering of pedagogy



as teachers perceive sexual orientation and gender identity beyond the simple answers of “yes” or “no”.

In view of the complexity of working with these issues in the classroom, there should be a “concern with whether pedagogical relations can allow more room to maneuver in thinking the unthought of education” (BRITZMAN, 1995, p. 155). As discussed herein, the queering of pedagogy does not defend a “correct” way of understanding and discussing body, gender, and sexuality. Instead, pedagogy inspired by queer theory strives to question normative processes throughout varied viewpoints produced with the students. To do so, it is important that teachers create an open atmosphere at school in which students are encouraged to feel free to express themselves, making topics such as heteronormativity and gender norms susceptible to questioning (LARSSON; QUENNERSTEDTB; ÖHMANB, 2014).

Nogan suggests that “‘straight/gay’ definitions are so arbitrary that they sometimes do not correspond to reality”. Such thought agrees with Preciado’s (2014) perspective on the idea that the production of bodies, genders, and sexualities are naturally assigned to either male or female roles and sexual practices by an arbitrary set of regulations inscribed on bodies. The arbitrariness of these sociocultural values attributed to bodies reveals the fragility of heteronormativity. Also, bodies that expose the limits of gender norms could suffer serious social consequences in Brazil not only because people lack ways to understand them but also because such bodies threaten the already recognized and legitimated binary models (CÉSAR, 2012).

In response to how different forms of discrimination and prejudice emerge in educational practices, it becomes a fundamental task to challenge the production of categories such as normal and abnormal. Britzman (1995, p. 157) argues that queer theory “proposes to examine differential responses to the conditions of identities on terms that place as a problem the production of normalcy and on terms that confound the intelligibility that



produces the normal as the proper subject”. To question the idea of the “proper subject”, no identity should be the reference of normalcy; instead, all sexual and gender identities should be conceived as one of many possible ways for someone to identify. Preciado (2014) agrees to the idea that traditional binary models (man-woman, male-female, and homo-hetero) are very restrictive and do not embrace the multiple and infinite ways bodies, genders, and sexualities can be acknowledged.

According to César (2012), in Brazil there are currently a variety of arrangements such as men who produce feminine bodies, transsexual mothers, and transvestites – in short, a variety of sexual and family arrangements that break from traditional normative ordinances. Nogan ends the online conversation by stating “We are not a dot. We are a spectrum”, emphasizing the need to recognize and legitimize the search for the most unusual and interesting ways to rethink desires and bodily pleasures, and giving new meaning to constituting oneself as a subject in a variety of ordinances. Although social interpellations constantly try to identify and classify subjects according to their genitals, the “spectrum” metaphor proposed by Nogan seeks the reinvention of bodies through a need for the subversion of gender norms.

4. Conclusion

The desire for transgression motivates many studies to adopt queer theory’s analytical approach because it offers “a perspective on the potential reconfiguration of sociocultural relations and the creation of antinormative forms of sociality” (SCHLICHTER, 2004, p. 550). There is no denying the importance of queer theory in challenging and decentralising heteronormative practices spread throughout the use of discourses that are still vastly reinforced in many social institutions. I defend the need to articulate pedagogy and queer theory so that, as educators, we can put into practice the act of questioning discourses produced by students and constantly reflect on the classroom activities we have been



offering as this enables us to re-evaluate whether our work has been reinforcing gender regulation norms.

In the face of violence and authoritarianism produced by sexism, the subjects of this research demonstrate ways to resist the idea of being ‘straightened’ by heteronormative values that impose a certain way of life. They endeavour to break free from traditional gender norms in order to proliferate multiple ways to constitute oneself as a subject. The arguments produced by them throughout these online conversations respond to the naturalisation of a worldview that groups subjects according to their sex, predefines expected social behaviours for each gender, and (dis)qualifies sexual practices. Also, the online interactions with these subjects allowed me to analyse possibilities of formulating different critiques of sexual identities as the subjects reinvent the ways in which bodies, genders, and sexualities can be reimagined. Furthermore, the participants of this research helped in the promotion of insightful reflections upon the queering of pedagogy by questioning how the homo-bi and homo-hetero binary models are responsible for framing individuals into one of these polarities.

In times of extreme prejudice and discrimination against the so-called sexual minorities, we as educators need to move beyond clichés to “respect diversity” and “include with tolerance” with regard to queer students. In this sense, queer pedagogy seeks to challenge the principles that govern the naturalisation and regulation of heterosexual identity as it refuses the compulsory inclusion of subjects in a sexual and gender identity that reinforces binary models of representation. As we rethink educational practices through the lens of queer theory, we will certainly find theoretical contributions to reimagine a society that strives to free itself from a normative way of life.

References

ALEXANDER, Jonathan. **Literacy, sexuality, pedagogy**: theory and practice for composition studies. Utah: Utah State University Press, 2008.



BAKHTIN, Mikhail. **Problemas da poética de Dostoiévski**. Tradução de Paulo Bezerra. 4. Ed. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2008.

BORRILLO, Daniel. **Homofobia**: história e crítica de um preconceito. Tradução de Guilherme João de Freitas Teixeira. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica Editora, 2010.

BRITZMAN, Deborah. Professor@s e eros. **Revista Educar**, Curitiba, n. 35, p. 53-62, 2009.

BRITZMAN, Deborah. Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight. **Educational Theory**, Illinois, v. 45, n. 2, p. 151-165, 1995.

BRYSON, Mary; de CASTELL, Suzanne. Queer pedagogy: praxis makes im/perfect. **Canadian Journal of Education**, Canadá, v. 18, n. 3, p. 285-305, 1993.

CÉSAR, Maria Rita de Assis. A diferença no currículo ou intervenções para uma pedagogia queer. **Educação Temática Digital**, Campinas, v. 14, n. 1, p. 351-362, jan./jun. 2012.

COUTO JUNIOR, Dilton Ribeiro. Etnografia virtual e as contribuições de Mikhail Bakhtin na pesquisa com internautas. **Revista Teias**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 14, n. 31, p. 83-94, maio/ago. 2013.

COUTO JUNIOR, Dilton Ribeiro. Gênero, sexualidade e a teoria queer na educação: colocando em questão a heteronormatividade. **Atos de Pesquisa em Educação**, Blumenau, v. 11, n. 1, p. 250-270, jan./abr. 2016.

EFREM FILHO, Roberto. Corpos brutalizados: conflitos e materializações nas mortes de LGBT. **Cadernos Pagu**, Campinas, n. 46, p. 311-340, jan./abr. 2016.

FELIPE, Jane. Gênero, sexualidade e a produção de pesquisas no campo da educação: possibilidades, limites e a formulação de políticas públicas. **Pro-Posições**, Campinas, v. 18, n. 2, p. 77-87, maio/ago. 2007.

GUATTARI, Félix. **Revolução molecular**: pulsações políticas do desejo. Tradução de Suely Rolnik. 3. Ed. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985.

GUATTARI, Félix; ROLNIK, Suely. **Molecular Revolution in Brazil**. Tradução de Clapshow K e Holmes B. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008.

LARSSON, Håkan; QUENNERSTEDT, Mikael; ÖHMANB, Marie. Heterotopias in physical education: towards a queer pedagogy? **Gender and Education**, v. 26, n. 2, p. 135-150, 2014.



LEITE, Miriam. Violência e homofobia na escola. In: CANDAU, Vera Maria (Org.). **Didática crítica intercultural: aproximações**. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2012, p. 191-215.

LIBÂNEO, José Carlos. **Pedagogos e pedagogia, para quê?** 12. Ed. São Paulo: Cortez, 2010.

LOURO, Guacira Lopes. **Um corpo estranho: ensaios sobre sexualidade e teoria queer**. 2. Ed. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2013.

LOURO, Guacira Lopes. Teoria Queer – uma política pós-identitária para a educação. **Revista Estudos Feministas**, Florianópolis, v. 9, n. 2, p. 541-553, 2001.

McCORMACK, Orla; GLEESON, Jim. Attitudes of parents of young men towards the inclusion of sexual orientation and homophobia on the Irish post-primary curriculum. **Gender and Education**, v. 22, n. 4, p. 385-400, jul. 2010.

MISKOLCI, Richard. **Teoria queer: um aprendizado pelas diferenças**. 2. Ed. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2013.

MSIBI, Thabo. ‘I’m used to it now’: experiences of homophobia among queer youth in South African township schools. **Gender and Education**, v. 24, n. 5, p. 515–533, ago. 2012.

NEPOMUCENO, Margarete Almeida. Má educação ou uma pedagogia queer: esse colorido objeto de desejo. In: NUNES, Pedro (Org.). **Audiovisualidades, desejo e sexualidades**. João Pessoa: Editora Universitária da UFPB, 2012, p. 351-364.

OSWALD, Maria Luiza Magalhães Bastos; COUTO JUNIOR, Dilton Ribeiro. Juventude, redes sociais e participação política. In: PORTO, Cristiane; SANTOS, Edméa; OSWALD, Maria Luiza Magalhães Bastos; COUTO, Edvaldo (Orgs.). **Pesquisa e mobilidade na cibercultura: itinerâncias docentes**. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2015, p. 103-120.

PRECIADO, Paul Beatriz. **Manifesto contrassexual: práticas subversivas de identidade sexual**. Tradução de Maria Paula Gurgel Ribeiro. São Paulo: n-1 Edições, 2014.

PRECIADO, Paul Beatriz. Multidões *queer*: notas para uma política dos “anormais”. **Revista Estudos Feministas**, Florianópolis, v. 19, n. 1, p. 11-20, 2011.

RUSSEL, Constance; SARICK, Tema; KENNELY, Jackie. Tornando *queer* a educação ambiental. **Revista Estudos Feministas**, Florianópolis, v. 19, n. 1, p. 225-238, jan./abril 2011.



SANTAELLA, Lucia. Intersubjetividade nas redes digitais: repercussões na educação. In: PRIMO, Alex. (Org.). **Interações em rede**. Porto Alegre: Editora Sulina, 2013, p. 33-47.

SCHLICHTER, Annette. Queer at last? Straight intellectuals and the desire for transgression. **GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies**, v. 10, n. 4, p. 543-564, 2004.

SEDGWICK, Eve Kosofsky. A epistemologia do armário. **Cadernos Pagu**, Campinas, n. 28, p. 19-54, jan./jun. 2007.

SEIDMAN, Steven. Queer pedagogy/queer-ing sociology. **Critical Sociology**, v. 20, n. 3, p. 169-176, out. 1994.

SILVA, Tomaz Tadeu. **Documentos de Identidade**: uma introdução às teorias do currículo. 3. Ed. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2010.

WARNER, Michael. Introduction. In: WARNER, Michael (Org.). **Fear of a queer planet**: queer politics and social theory. 6 Ed. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, p. vii-xxxii.

WARNER, Michael. **The trouble with normal**: sex, politics, and the ethics of queer life. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Professor Annette Schlichter for her insightful contributions and support in the writing of this paper. I would also like to thank Professor Jake McDonie for copyediting this essay and providing extremely constructive feedback. It is noteworthy to mention that this text is part of my doctoral research funded by the Brazilian Foundation Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) (process number: 99999.006783/2015-05).

Sobre o autor

Dilton Ribeiro Couto Junior. Mestre e doutor pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (ProPEd/UERJ). Atualmente é pós-doutorando (bolsista PNPd/CAPES) no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Cultura e Comunicação em Periferias Urbanas (PPGECC) da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro/Baixada Fluminense (UERJ/FEBF). E-mail: junnior_2003@yahoo.com.br

Recebido em: 09/09/2018

Aceito para publicação em: 28/09/2018