

Sex education paradigm: dialogues with psychoanalysis

ARTICLE

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Abstract

The sex education has been crossed by different models that compose perspectives surrounding gender. From those, the biological and hygienist model, that naturalizes the social differences between genders, and the queer model, that tries to question essentialisms taking a non-normativity as basis, can be highlighted. The distinction between penis and phallus proposed by psychoanalysis can help this last perception, in the sense that it focuses in an imaginary question instead of the primacy of the genital organs. That way, this work of qualitative delimitation, explorative-descriptive, tries to explore which has been the approaches about gender in the formal school sex education through a literature review and the categorization of identified phrases in the selected articles using the eight models proposed by Furlani. Thus, it was noticed that there is still a biological and hygienist model hegemony, while a queer model still doesn't appear in the school educational practices.

Keywords: Sex education. Gender. Queer. Psychoanalysis. Phallus

Paradigma da educação sexual: diálogos com a psicanálise

Rsumo

A educação sexual tem sido atravessada por diferentes modelos que compõem perspectivas acerca de gênero. Desses, destaca-se o modelo biológico e higienista, que naturaliza as diferenças sociais entre os gêneros, e o modelo queer, que busca questionar essencialismos tomando como base uma não-normatividade. A distinção entre pênis e falo proposta pela psicanálise pode auxiliar essa última percepção, no sentido em que há um foco em uma questão imaginária, distanciando-se de uma primazia dos órgãos genitais. Dessa forma, esse trabalho de delineamento qualitativo, exploratório-descritivo, busca explorar quais têm sido as abordagens acerca de gênero na educação sexual formal escolar através de uma revisão de literatura e a categorização de sintagmas identificados nos artigos selecionados, em função dos modelos propostos por Furlani. Assim, percebeu-se que ainda há uma hegemonia do modelo biológico e higienista, enquanto o modelo queer ainda não aparece nas práticas educativas escolares

Palavras-chave: Educação Sexual. Gênero. Queer. Psicanálise. Falo.

1 Introduction

Foucault's work shows that sexuality is a historical device that articulates knowledge and power in order to reinforce controls, resistance, the formation of knowledge and the stimulation of bodies, in an attempt to control desires and bodies, preventing subjects from following their biological drives and impulses, leading to modes of subjectivation specific to Western culture, since his analysis is based on it. He brings the repressive hypothesis of sexuality, linked to the prohibition of sex, characteristic of the Victorian era, and propitiating the heterosexual bourgeois family ideal (CARVALHO; OLIVEIRA, 2017). In this way, sexuality is understood as a standardizing device, which leads to the process of excluding non-adapted sexualities.

In Brazil, the discussion about sexuality has gone through and is going through the development of conceptions linked to sex education, so that it has different moments and changes its objective depending on the moment. Bueno and Ribeiro (2018) point out that issues relating to sexuality began to be considered for inclusion in the school curriculum at the beginning of the 20th century. This paradigm is attached to essentialist attributes and is marked by teaching aimed at promoting physical health, focusing on human reproduction, STI prevention and puberty, but leaving aside discussions related to gender, since it considers the differences between men and women as something essentially bodily, naturalizing inequalities (FURLANI, 2005).

In addition to this paradigm, Furlani (2005) presents seven others that should be considered when discussing sex education: traditionalist morality, which links conservative and religious principles; therapeutic approach, which seeks explanations about sexual experiences that were qualified as abnormal, aiming to cure these phenomena; radical religious approach, which brings religious discourse as a dogma in the dissemination of what would be a "normal" sexuality; human rights approach, with a sex education that problematizes and deconstructs "excluded" identities; the sexual rights approach, which aims for sexual equity, promoting respect and recognition for historically marginalized groups; the emancipatory approach, which brings up the repressive context but also affirms

that it is necessary to fight for freedom and, finally, the queer approach, which proposes a non-normativity, refusing essentialism when it comes to issues of sexuality.

The importance of thinking about the approaches that guide sex education is based on the perspective that the educational context functions "as a field not only for the production and reproduction of exclusionary representations, but also as a place of contestation and resistance by subordinate groups" (FURLANI, 2009, p. 298). It is therefore interesting to assess the assumptions that guide these approaches and present theorizations that can contribute to this process of resistance and contestation.

The queer approach works, then, with the rejection of essentialisms about sexual identity, and can even be thought of as a queer epistemology whose basic premise is the rejection of normality, breaking with the heterosexual model of analysis when it comes to sexual and gender identities, trying to "discuss in Sex Education how each identity is constructed, (de)valued, assumed or not, and deconstruct the process that establishes normality" (FURLANI, 2009, p.316).

Considering this, psychoanalysis presents pertinent points when we think about notions that can be deepened to move from a medical-hygienist approach to a more emancipatory sex education or even a queer approach. An important notion that allows us to think about the issue of gender, understood as anatomy in the medical-hygienist view, is the phallus, which was already present in Freudian theory, but is taken up and deepened by Jacques Lacan.

Freud deals with infantile genital organization by proposing that for both sexes there is only one question surrounding the male genital organ, placing a primacy on the phallus, but not a primacy on the genital organs. The author states that the child perceives a distinction between men and women, but this is not linked to their genitals, but rather to a process of equality or difference to what they themselves possess, something that will be understood later, when they see the absence of penises in others, as a result of castration, of a punishment that would remove the penis, but this understanding is not quickly generalized to all women by the child (FREUD, 1923/2010). So, it follows that

the question of the difference between the sexes is approached by the child in the context of a psychic logic such as: why simplify when you can complicate? In fact, the reality of the sexes requires them to be anatomically different. However, we see that this real is immediately psychically elaborated by the child in an imaginary construction where this difference is subjected to the order of a lack (DOR, 1989, p.75).

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Therefore, the notion of the phallus, central to the construction of the Oedipus complex and castration, is no longer linked to the penis and is shown as something that marks the difference for the child. "What the child perceives as an attribute possessed by some and absent in others is not the penis, but its psychic representation, whether in imaginary or symbolic form" (NASIO, 1997, p.34). So, considering the phallic issue as a non-organic psychic mark, working with these notions in a sex education approach seems to distance the vision from a medical-hygienist approach, making it possible to question the inequalities that exist between the genders.

In addition, the phallus, in Lacanian theory, "allows the installation of the subject in a certain position as subject of the unconscious, that is, as a barred subject, which makes it possible for them to identify, from this subjective position, with "the ideal type of their sex" (RABINOVICH, 2005, p.11), marking that the subject of the unconscious does not have a defined sex, but has the possibility of identifying with one. Based on this identification, Branco, Thisoteine and Gellis (2022) argue that it is possible to think of a path of identities based on it, placing the question of the imaginary and the relationship with the other at the point of understanding gender issues, thus bringing psychoanalysis closer to this debate based on the structuring of the self.

Furthermore, in order to think about this process of identification, it is necessary to understand the structuring of the self in Lacanian theory, which involves a relationship between the exterior and the interior, so that the articulation between libidinal dynamism and desire is no longer linked to an organic force that comes from deep within the subject and presents a character associated with the outside world, a world that initially makes the subject from an exteriority (OGILVIE, 1988). In other words, thinking of the libido and sexuality from this point of view brings the aspect of a non-nature, a process linked to relationships and not just a biological and genital fact.

This raises the question that "there is no formation of the self through its exteriorization, a movement from the interior to the exterior, but the opposite occurs: the self is completely exteroceptive or does not exist" (JULIEN, 1993, p. 16-17). These aspects show that sexuality is constituted in conjunction with the symbolic environment in which the child has been since birth, given that

The importance of the symbolic in sexual fulfillment, whether in the constitution of sexual identity (subjectively situating oneself as a man or a woman) or in the realization by each person of their sex, of their sexual being in relation to a sexual other or in the destiny of erotic life, is incessantly reaffirmed by Lacan who, following Freud, gives full weight to the Oedipus, i.e. a symbolic relationship that orients and regulates the field of the drive and the field of the imaginary (the relationship with the image) and, consequently, the symbolic phallic function (castration) insofar as it legalizes desire and orders each person's sexuality. (DESPARTS-PÉQUIGNOT, 1996, p. 471)

This implies that

The difference between the sexes, in the biological or anatomical sense, therefore does not necessarily decide the question of claiming a sexual identity according to anatomical or biological sex and does not reflect the unconscious ways in which each person, man or woman, negotiates the question of the difference between the sexes and their subjective position as a sexed being who maintains a relationship with another sexed being (DESPARTS-PÉQUIGNOT, 1996, p. 471).

In this way, working on these notions when considering a sex education process seems to bear good fruit in the attempt to include sexualities that have historically been seen as strange and deviant from what would be "normal", something that is based solely on a biological aspect.

It's important to clarify that when working with sex education, it is understood that it is made up of attitudes, values, behaviors and manifestations related to sexuality that are learned over the course of people's lives. However, there are two spheres in which this education can be thought of: formal and informal. Informal sex education is unintentional and can be observed from birth (MAIA; RIBEIRO, 2011). It is made up of cultural discourses, such as religious, media and artistic, making up what are known as cultural pedagogies, cultural instances that go beyond mere representation and produce ways of being and seeing the world (SABAT, 2001).

Formal sex education, on the other hand, is characterized by planning and intentionality, in other words, it is configured as a project. From this point of view, the school environment is seen as the most suitable space for intentional, planned and organized action, since children remain in this environment for a significant part of their early life, and the school also has the social function of transmitting historically crystallized knowledge (MAIA; RIBEIRO, 2011).

With this in mind, psychoanalysis seems to offer interesting notions for thinking about the perceptions surrounding formal sex education. In this way, the aim of this work is to look at pedagogical practices in sex education that work on the issue of gender in an attempt to observe which of the paradigms they are most related to, proposing to discuss them through psychoanalytic theory, bringing the fields closer together, since thinking about gender in this interdisciplinary aspect can offer new paths towards a more inclusive society and sex education. To do this, it is first necessary to understand the current state of this discussion.

2 Methodology

This research is qualitative, exploratory-descriptive and bibliographical (GIL, 2002) as it is a narrative review of the literature (UNESP, 2015). To survey the articles in the literature, a search was carried out on the Periódicos CAPES platform in June 2023, filtering peer-reviewed articles in English and Portuguese published in the last five years on the platform. The following strategy was used to search for articles: "Sexual education" [Subject descriptor] AND "gender" [Subject descriptor] and "Sexual education" [Subject descriptor] AND "penis" [Subject descriptor] with the exclusion, using NOT, of "cancer", "disease" and "treatment". This search resulted in 55 items with repetition, from which articles were removed that did not deal with educational practices in formal sex education, specifically in the school classroom and articles that did not address the issue of gender in these educational practices, leaving a total of seven articles.

The articles were then listed according to title, abstract, keywords, introduction, methodology, results and discussion. Passages containing the phrases 'sex education', 'gender' and 'penis' were extracted from the articles. Content analysis (BARDIN, 2011) was used to analyze the data, prioritizing the development of mutually exclusive categories. Four categories were developed based on the approach to educational practices identified in the selected articles.

3 Results and Discussion

Seven articles were collected and analyzed. The table below gives information on the articles selected and the number of syntagmas found in each of them:

Table 1 - Selected articles

Article name	Author(s) and year	Available at	No. of entries
Child sexuality: the relationship between sex education and gender identity	OLIVEIRA; MUZZETI, 2020	https://periodicos.fclar.unesp.br/rpge/article/view/14288/10031	3
Pedagogies of sexuality: discourses, practices and (dis)encounters in comprehensive health care for adolescents	GUIMARÃES; CABRAL, 2022	https://www.scielo.br/j/pp/a/kGdyDSB9rjSKXKxLX6FBQPD/?format=pdf&lang=pt	4
Sex education in the context of remote education: a study with teachers	SILVA <i>et al.</i> , 2022	https://www.rbsh.org.br/revista_sbrash/article/view/1044/893	3
Sex education in formal education: music and poetry in pedagogical practice	DAMASCENO; BOUHID, 2022	https://periodicos.furg.br/divedu/article/view/12502/9765	1
Sex Education goes to Cariri, Ceará: approaches and	SOUZA; ROCHA, 2020	https://periodicos.furg.br/divedu/article/view/11350/7824	3

problematizations in school curricula			
School sex education: students' and teachers' perceptions	CHOÉ, 2022	https://revistahorizontes.usf.edu.br/horizontes/article/view/1340/652	4
Gender, sexuality and youth protagonism: an experience at CEFET-RJ	VALENÇA; CARVALHO, 2021	https://www2.ifrn.edu.br/ojs/index.php/RBEPT/article/view/10516/pdf	2

Source: Prepared by the authors

This is followed by the categories developed and the discussion based on the analysis method. The categories were drawn up based on the eight ways of approaching sex education proposed by Furlani (2005):

3.1 Category (1) Educational practices on gender with a biological and hygienist approach

As a historically hegemonic approach to formal sex education, the biological and hygienist approach appears more frequently in the educational practices featured in the articles, which indicates that it continues to prevail in school curricula. This perspective focuses on health-related issues, especially discussions about human reproduction, STIs, unwanted pregnancies and puberty, and assumes a biological deterministic stance, where the inequalities inherent in binary gender categories are naturalized (FURLANI, 2005).

It can be seen from the articles that an organicist view of gender is maintained in the discourse of teachers and other agents of formal sex education, such as managers and health agents. Guimarães and Cabral (2022), when they followed the work of professionals from a basic health unit in a public school in a suburb of São Paulo, came across this attitude, especially when discussing early pregnancy. They also noticed the incorporation of medical terms, such as the labeling of students as a risk group, for example. Several elements characteristic of the biological and hygienist approach can be identified in the speech of one of the professionals, for example:

As you get older, what do you want to do? [answers: sex, sex!] Girls want to date, boys often want sex. That's the difference. [...] The first sexual relationship needs to be in your own time. When you're ready for it. It's not because you're dating that you have to have sex. [...] It's in your own time... because you get pregnant, do you think the father of the child will stay with you? Sometimes he does, but it's rare. He stays for a year, the next year he's with someone else. Why is that? Because the other woman doesn't have a child. The other one goes clubbing, and you don't. [...] nowadays, girls are more outgoing than boys [a lot of fuss in the girls' class]. Does anyone see boys with babies on their laps? No. [...] And I see a lot of pregnant people without their parents. So don't kid yourselves. They're not going to stay with you because they had a child with you. Don't kid yourselves. Think about it, children are forever, relationships end. And what's worse, if in addition to pregnancy, I caught an STD [sexually transmitted disease]? What would that be like? Besides being pregnant with HIV. Well, that's it, huh? The world is over (GUIMARÃES; CABRAL, 2022, p. 10).

The speech highlights the centrality of the issue of preventing unwanted pregnancies and STIs, the naturalization of moral judgments, as in the statement that girls are more "outgoing", and of sex and gender inequalities and the neglect of socio-cultural aspects, as in the perception that girls mainly seek romantic relationships, while boys seek sex. It is also worth noting the use of the term "STD" instead of "STI", demonstrating an outdated vocabulary.

Silva et al. (2022) and Choé (2022) also note that discussions about gender were taught in Science and Biology. Even outside of these subjects, there is a significant recurrence of naturalized and biologizing notions of sexuality and gender (SOUZA; ROCHA, 2020; CHOÉ, 2022).

3.2 Category (2) Gender education practices with a traditionalist moral approach

The traditionalist moral approach is conservative and religious, often associated with sexual abstinence. This view is marked by censorship, which makes it impossible to access information about sexuality and the understanding that sex education is the responsibility of the family (FURLANI, 2005).

Thus, the articles selected show that teachers and managers have difficulty working on sex education issues, often delegating the task to the parents and guardians of students (OLIVEIRA; MUZZETI, 2020; CHOÉ, 2022). Even when there is an intention to

raise questions about gender and sexuality, teachers are instructed to avoid the subject (SILVA et al., 2022). In addition, there is an attitude of reprimanding the subject when it is raised as a demand by students, ensuring that discussions are silenced (OLIVEIRA; MUZZETI, 2020).

It can also be observed that there is an intersection between the traditionalist moral approach and the biological and hygienist approach, where conservative values are naturalized and treated as organic data in a fusion between religion and science. An example of this is the asymmetrical position on teenage pregnancy expressed by the health professional mentioned above and the presence of moral values in her judgment (GUIMARÃES; CABRAL, 2022).

3.3. Category (3) Educational practices on gender with a human/sexual rights approach

Despite the high incidence of biological, hygienist and traditionalist moral approaches, it is also possible to find educational practices associated with Human Rights and Sexual Rights. While the human rights approach focuses on the so-called *minorities*, assuming a stance of denunciation, problematization and deconstruction of marginalized identities, the Sexual Rights approach seeks to address, based on the mobilizations of social movements, the full range of topics pertinent to sex education, such as the affective and pleasurable order of sexual practices, non-heterosexual sexual identities, among others (FURLANI, 2005).

This perspective is evident in the perceptions and educational practices of sex education on the part of some teachers:

The main justifications given for the need to teach sex education are care for the body, respect for diversity and prevention of possible abuse. When asked about the interdisciplinary approach to sex education, the debate converged in the sense that the interdisciplinary approach would be necessary to normalize the subject and remove the "taboo" stigma about sex education. It was suggested that there are problems with the programmed approach, where it takes place on a certain occasion and then no longer touches on the subject, such as "STI and pregnancy prevention week", as this does not encourage the naturalization of the subject and can make this moment caricatured or shameful (DAMASCENO; BOUHID, 2022, p. 435).

In this context, there is a concern to discuss issues such as gender and sexual identity, mainly in order to combat violence and discrimination (SOUZA; ROCHA, 2020). There is also criticism of biological and hygienist approaches, which are described as very specific and inefficient.

Valença and Carvalho (2021) point to the presence of themes about sexual diversity, from the perspective of feminisms, LGBTQIA+ and racial issues and different forms of manifestation of sexuality. The aim is to promote and boost processes of self-acceptance, resistance and respect for diversity.

3.4 Category (4) Educational practices on gender from other approaches

In addition to the four approaches mentioned above, there was less recurrence of other approaches, specifically the therapeutic approach and the radical religious approach. According to Furlani (2005), the therapeutic approach aims to find explanatory causes for non-normative sexual experiences and the radical religious approach takes literal interpretations of the Bible as a basis for educational practices.

An explanatory perspective of manifestations of sexuality considered deviant or abnormal appears in the speech of the principal in Oliveira and Muzzeti (2020), where the interviewee states that there is a coordinator who supervises the students and that in cases of sexual manifestations, parents and teachers are contacted to find out what is happening to the child. This view ends up falling into immediate and reductionist conclusions, which fail to contemplate the complexity and breadth behind sexuality.

On the other hand, the radical religious approach is explicit in the training of educators. The majority of teachers claim not to have undergone formal sex education and those who did were mainly through science and biology subjects and parental teachings based on biblical principles (SILVA et al., 2022).

This approach also usually underpins the upbringing of the teachers' children, as can be seen in the following statement:

I believe very much in the word of God and I always follow the Bible, I respect this very much, but I try to raise my children and show them clearly that we shouldn't

be prejudiced, but we should follow the principle according to God's law (SOUZA; ROCHA, 2020, p. 221).

This points to the incidence of literal interpretations of the Bible in the transmission of knowledge about sexuality and gender, especially as a response to the advance of social movements, an action characteristic of the conservative far right (FURLANI, 2005).

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Thus, after identifying the syntagms and categorizing them for content analysis, the biological and sanitizing perspective prevails in formal school sex education, with a total of eight entries. In this way, educational practices about gender have focused on notions of health, such as STIs and reproduction, content taught mainly in science and biology. There is also a naturalization of gender differences, through an uncritical view that takes them as organic constituents of the genders.

The traditionalist moral approach and the Human Rights and Sexual Rights approaches have the same number of syntagms. With four entries, half of those identified in the biological and hygienist approach, there is a conflict between conservative notions, which favor sexual abstinence, and more progressive notions, which seek to embrace identities that dissent from the norm, promoting self-acceptance and respect for diversity. It is worth noting that teachers who adopt the Human Rights and Sexual Rights approaches are confronted by the moral and traditionalist perspective as one of the main obstacles to their educational practices.

Even so, it can be seen that no matter how progressive the approaches identified appear to be, none of them are configured as a queer approach to gender. The understanding of minorities that runs through the Human Rights and Sexual Rights approaches does not question normativity itself, thus also making up the dominant discourse (FURLANI, 2005).

From this point of view, it is pertinent to return to the process of structuring the self proposed by psychoanalysis, since this self only exists from a relationship with exteriority, constituting itself in relation to it and not being something biological, given at birth (JULIEN, 1993), requiring a symbolic articulation in order to think about the existence of this self (LACAN, 2009). This means, then, that it would not be possible to think of essentialisms in

psychoanalysis, something that seems to contribute to the more emancipatory notions of sex education, and even queer education, proposed by Furlani (2005).

4 Final considerations

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In view of the aim of this article to identify how gender has been dealt with in contemporary educational practices in formal school sex education, through a survey of these practices in a narrative literature review and the categorization of the selected articles, based on the paradigmatic models proposed by Furlani (2005), this work presented four categories: educational practices on gender with a biological and hygienist approach; educational practices on gender with a traditionalist moral approach; educational practices on gender with a Human/Sexual Rights approach; educational practices on gender with other approaches. In this sense, there is still a predominance of essentialist and biologizing discourses in formal sex education practices and an absence of more emancipatory and queer perspectives. Even some teachers' notions of human rights and sexual rights meet with significant resistance from a more conservative group of parents and managers.

Sex education in Brazil still seems to have a long way to go in order to achieve a queer and non-essentialist vision. In this way, thinking about psychoanalytic notions can bear great fruit, since based on the notion that the phallus and the assumption of sex has nothing to do with the biological, with the genital organ, it seems to allow a departure from the biological and hygienist conception, which presented the largest number of entries, allowing a new look at these issues.

Furthermore, this article does not aim to propose a psychoanalytic sex education, but to present some notions that are pertinent to the advancement of an education that really aims to include and end discrimination against sexualities that, as seen in the survey, are still considered dissident or abnormal, allowing a dialog between the areas in an attempt to be able to address the issue of gender more broadly, which is still so marked by stigmas.

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