

## The trans girl and the lesbian girl: who's afraid of a subversive child?

### ARTICLE

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#### Abstract

This article aims to consider the tension and similarity between the categories “childhood subversion” and “adultcentrism” based on two experiments with children from different empirical research fields, based on a content analysis. Given the fear that adults demonstrate towards children (Gaitán, 2024), they surprise children by speaking and/or intervening in situations that are unusual for adults. They are also capable of destroying the adult representation based on an image characterized by the prefix “in”: incomplete, incapable, immature. The stories provoke us to reflect on how, instead of being subjects of rights, girls subvert adult expectations. To this end, the article is divided into three parts: 1) the intersection between gender and childhood; 2) the presentation and contextualization of the fields of participation; 3) intergenerational implications and reflections. Finally, it is concluded that there is a need for (de)hierarchization between generations, conditioned on the end of adult fear.

**Keywords:** Adultcentrism. Trans Child. Lesbianity. Childhood Sexuality. Intergenerationality.

#### A menina trans e a menina lésbica: quem tem medo de criança subversiva?

#### Resumo

O presente artigo tem como objetivo, a partir de duas experiências com crianças de campos empíricos de distintas pesquisas, pensar a tensão e a aproximação, entre as categorias “subversão infantil” e “adultocentrismo”, a partir de uma análise de conteúdo. Diante do medo que as adultas demonstram ter das crianças (Gaitán, 2024), elas surpreendem a partir de falas e/ou intervenções em situações inusitadas. São capazes ainda de destruir a representação adulta calcada em uma imagem caracterizada pelo prefixo “in”: in-completas, in-capazes, in-maturas. Os relatos nos provocam a reflexão de como, no lugar de sujeitas de direito, as meninas subvertem a expectativa. Para tanto, o artigo está dividido em três partes: 1) o cruzamento entre gênero e infância; 2) apresentação e contextualização dos campos de participação; 3) implicações e reflexões intergeracionais. Por fim, conclui-se pela necessidade da (des)hierarquização entre gerações, condicionada ao fim do medo adulto.

**Palavras-chave:** Adultocentrismo. Criança Trans. Lesbianidade. Sexualidade na Infância. Intergeracionalidade.

## 1 Introduction

Lourdes Gaitán (2024), in an interview<sup>1</sup> conducted by Maroja (2025), from her standpoint within the Sociology of Childhood, extensively discusses her concern with the ambiguous and contradictory movement regarding the increasing public presence and participation of children, especially in matters that interest or concern them.

At the same time, the author notes (at least in the Spanish context) a more or less directed response from adults, aligned in the same area but with an opposite intention: to silence, intervene, censor, and regulate what can or cannot be said by children and adolescents in certain contexts, particularly on topics considered controversial, such as sexuality and access to child pornography<sup>2</sup>. According to Gaitán (2024), this stance conceals an “adult fear” of children.

The question, however, arises: why start from Gaitán (2024)—a Spanish author—when there are so many other competent Brazilian researchers who also study children and childhoods? For instance, professors Márcia Gobbi, from the University of São Paulo (USP), who examines children’s drawings and expressions as historical sources; Sônia Kramer, emeritus at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RJ), a reference in Brazilian Sociology of Childhood studies; Lea Tiriba, from the University of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), with remarkable work on the inseparability of body, early childhood education, and nature; and in literature, researchers Kiusam de Oliveira and Sônia Rosa, whose works have unparalleled magnitude in fighting racism, promoting positive reappropriation of image and representation of Black populations, and advocating human rights aimed at fostering children’s participation, education, and intimate citizenship in the discussion of these topics, among many other authors.

<sup>1</sup> Conducted on February 8, 2024, in Madrid. Not yet published.

<sup>2</sup> In 2023 and the first half of 2024, this topic, together with debates on the legalization of the process of child transgender care, was one of the most relevant issues in the public debate on childhood across the entire Spanish political landscape.

The initial reference to Gaitán (2024), however, should not be interpreted as mere Eurocentrism—thus distancing from the decolonial stance on power and knowledge shared by the authors of this work. Rather, it represents an opportunity for more direct engagement with the researcher, made possible by a sandwich PhD period undertaken in 2023 in Madrid, Spain, within the scope of Maroja's doctoral research (2025). In this context, the author could draw on contributions from a country that ranks third in the world in approving both equal same-sex marriage and dual motherhood/fatherhood, with their respective social implications.

The aim was to conduct a comparative intergenerational study of families composed of Brazilian and Spanish lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and transvestite (LGBT) individuals, as well as the ways in which counter-hegemonic struggles occurred within this permanently tensioned field. Not only in the Americas but also across Europe, this is a dizzying moment for the far-right ultraconservative forces, in which it can be observed that for every achievement or advancement born for minorities, dissident populations, and outsiders, there seems to be a backlash of equal or greater magnitude. The outcome, however, ended up highlighting concerns that had not initially been considered, such as the strong presence of the “adult-centered” paradigm in various Spanish instances.

On the other hand, in Brazil, in the same year, Pacheco (2024) conducted a fruitful empirical field study for his research entitled “Through the Eyes of a Child: Diversity and Differences Demarcating Ways of Seeing the World,” in which he observed—particularly from his position as an adult researcher—the representative power and the capacity for articulation, negotiation, and agency of a girl to proclaim to the world—especially within a safe space enabled by distance from her family of origin—why she came and for what purpose, proudly asserting her identity and political perceptions without any hesitation<sup>3</sup>.

This discussion also proves to be relevant if we consider that it was only very recently in history—beginning in the 1970s—that the first negative representations of the

<sup>3</sup> The empirical fieldwork was safeguarded by Opinion No. 5,644,871 of the Research Ethics Committee of PUC-Goiás.

family emerged, which can also be characterized as “[...] spaces of violence, struggles, and multiple conflicts, in view of the predominance of hierarchical and non-egalitarian structures and logics, in terms of sex and generation” (Mello, 2005, p. 30). And not only as primary spaces of affection, care, respect, and belonging; places that provide the ideal conditions for the healthy development of identity in all its multiplicity, inconstancy, incoherence, instability, and mutability.

This is especially relevant if we consider the “adult-centered” paradigm and the persistent religiosity still present in Brazilian family spaces (Pacheco, 2024). After all, the Western, traditional, patriarchal, nuclear, and hegemonic family, as a historically conservative institution, is particularly valued by the state due to economic interests related to the control of property and capital (Canevacci, 1985). From this perspective, it reproduces and assimilates the ills of the society in which it is embedded.

According to Meirieu (1998), the act of “letting” or simply “allowing” the child to be and to exist fully with everything they are and bring from social, cultural, and experiential references—the difficulties faced by so many families and social spaces—is what we, as adults, need to learn in order not to fail in the task of mediating/educating the new generations, “[...] because it is necessary to create conditions for young people to express themselves authentically and create their own stories—something that did not happen with previous generations” (Meirieu *apud* Maroja, 2025, p. 137).

It is not difficult to understand why, as a generation, we seem already set up for failure, in the sense proposed by Meirieu (1998): it appears that we, as adults, suffer from a lack of memory regarding what we endured as children and adolescents, under the imposition or necessity of conforming to adults’ desires. “It is something that touches us so closely, something so intimate, that its evocation makes us shudder. Because we know perfectly well that we participated in this project, even though it frightens us” (Meirieu, 1998, p. 18). This underlies the deeper cause of fear discussed by Gaitán (2024), which sometimes manifests as adult moral panic.

Indeed, we can speak here of a fear that produces inverse and contradictory effects: the fear of non-protection—when, in fact, children need care, but shame silences

and prevents dialogue—and the resulting permissiveness. This is not progressivism, but a compensation for deficiencies, absences, and negligence in upbringing and education (hooks, 2021), as observed by hooks in one of her last and most innovative works, *All About Love*.

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Along the same lines, Bazílio and Kramer (2011, p. 133) note that “[...] the recognition of the child's social role has led many adults to abdicate from assuming their own role. It seems they use the concept of 'childhood as subject' as an excuse not to set rules, not to express their viewpoint, not to take a stand.” And when they do, it is often through an authoritarian imposition of strictly unilateral values, without dialogue.

Let us then consider all the premises deemed necessary for this discussion, presenting the current article in three parts: 1) the intersection of gender and childhood; 2) presentation and contextualization of the two girls and their respective fields of participation; 3) the implications and intergenerational reflections on the topic.

We also take this opportunity to clarify that, in Portuguese, the feminine form is used throughout the article to signal a feminist and epistemological positioning, in alignment with the substantive content of the text—which focuses on subversions enacted solely by girls. In this English translation, however, gender-neutral terms are employed, as English does not allow the same systematic use of feminine grammatical forms.

## 2 A political choice: the intersection of gender and childhood

There is nothing random about selecting, among so many children participating in these two research fields, precisely two girls for this analysis. In a way, they chose themselves when they dared, within spaces organized and bounded by adult researchers, to transgress and subvert the pre-formatted modus operandi of the proposed activities in both contexts.

There is no doubt that raising and educating girls is very different from doing so with boys, and the work of Machado and Salva (2024) makes an important contribution to the field, especially when it includes the social representations that children themselves

have of their identities in relation to gender representation<sup>4</sup>. It is already well established that children are important agents of assimilation, validation, and peer influence (Eisenberg, 1999). That is, they do care about what their peers think of them and how they are perceived.

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As Nascimento, Sobral, and Carvalho (2022, p. 5) rightly remind us, “[...] children are more relaxed when they are with a friend rather than alone with an adult. They help each other with responses. They also watch over each other and monitor lies.”

It should also be remembered that “[...] some situations, however, can be avoided so that the unexpected can emerge, considering that the unusual or surprising does not result from adult intervention but from the child’s own meaning-making” (Machado; Salva, 2024, p. 9). This speaks volumes about the difference and challenge between researching **about** children and researching **with** children.

To address this topic, therefore, one cannot ignore that the peripheral position of women and children occurs not only in society but also within scientific and epistemological fields. Society is not only “androcentric” but also “adult-centered.” According to Marchi (2016, p. 390), “childhood is seen as a ‘normal’ category and therefore easily ‘transformable’ into natural, as was the case until recently with ‘sex’ and ‘race.’”

In this same sense, the author adds that gender studies “have modified knowledge production regarding women’s actions, but have not, however, done the same concerning children, who continue to be seen as non-actors in their socialization” (Marchi, 2016, p. 392).

Thus, for Maroja (2025, p. 59), “perhaps this explains the fact that even feminist theories have not satisfactorily addressed the intersection of gender and childhood, because girls would not yet be properly women, but rather still a ‘becoming.’”

And—even more so for this reason—it may cause surprise and astonishment when two *girls* act contrary to what they are taught from an early age (beyond what is taught to all children, regardless of gender): “sit with legs closed, speak softly, refrain from

<sup>4</sup> Gender is socially constructed and self-perceived, not necessarily coherent or linear with biological sex/genitalia.

swearing, be discreet, show no interest, take care of siblings. These are some examples of specific and emblematic performances that produce the category of 'being a girl' during childhood" (Maroja, 2025, p. 59).

## 2.1 Presentation of the two girls in their contexts of subversion<sup>5</sup>

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### 2.1.1 Madrid, Spain – Cloe<sup>6</sup>, 12 years old – trans girl.

I had the opportunity to meet Cloe in September 2023 at the XIII LGBTI+ Families Conference: Activism and Family Diversity Against Hate, held annually by the Spanish LGBT Federation (the country's official entity), which brings together the main associations of the community.

It was an immersive two-day event that coincided with the period I was in Madrid for my sandwich PhD. Since my research focused on the direct relationship between same-sex parent families and their children's schooling, using a comparative intergenerational approach, even though I was not conducting a field study there per se, the discussions proposed at the event were of great interest to me. I thought that participating as an observer (with a field diary) and, at the same time, as a participant would be very enriching—and it indeed was.

Because the event was about "LGBT Families" and was organized in an immersive format—with lodging in an area surrounded by forests and leisure options—the location and format were already designed for children to be present. In addition, there was an intensive program planned for adults, so the organizing committee hired a group of

<sup>5</sup> In this section, the text will be written in the first-person singular, considering the individual experience of each researcher.

<sup>6</sup> Real name of the child who became a "child celebrity" in the Spanish media, representing the struggle of trans children and adolescents and their families. According to Article 1 of CNS Resolution No. 510/16 and Law 12.527/2011, an Ethics Committee opinion is not required for information in the public domain. Available on Instagram, YouTube, and RTVE (accessed March 24, 2025).



educators to create a specific program for the children while their mothers and fathers participated in thematic panels and workshops.

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However, it is important to note that, in the official program of the event, there was only one workshop that included joint participation of mothers, fathers, and children. Based on the book *Invisible – Stories to Tell Together* (own translation) by Eloy Moreno, the activity was conducted with great enthusiasm and interest from the children. They were visibly enjoying doing something with their mothers and fathers, since the event had separated the “adult program” from the “children’s program,” and this was the only moment designed for such interaction.

**Figure 1 – Workshop: Self-Esteem and Resilience in LGBTQ+ Families**



Source: Researcher's personal archive

By the end of the first day, some children decided to “break away” from the activities proposed by the educators and go play outdoors, in a space full of greenery, surrounded by idyllic woods and sports courts. These were far more attractive than the walls of a closed classroom, within which they probably had to spend most days of the week at school.

Let us consider the striking contrast:

**Figure 2 – Comparison between indoor and outdoor areas of the event**



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Source: Researcher's personal archive

Although the activities proposed by the educators were of high quality, creative, and related to the exploration and knowledge of local flora, landscape, and geography, they could not compare with the possibilities of being outside. I, as a keen participant observer, watched all their movements from inside, through a transparent glass window. Thus, the children, encouraged by Cloe's revolt, began to reject the programming planned for them without them: "they just wanted to play!"

Fernandes (2009) reminds us of the importance, when discussing children's participation rights, of three central categories: *subjection*, *negotiation*, and *refusal* in response to adult order and/or imposition. In that context, the children were evidently refusing the scheduled program and attempting to negotiate new conditions for their participation and well-being at the event.

The event coordination then called some mothers and fathers to authorize their daughters to play "alone" outside. Two points caught my attention: a) the controlling and overprotective stance of some parents (González *et al.*, 2002; Garcia *et al.*, 2007) (a fear conditioned by social homophobia that it "might not be safe"); b) the unconditional trust of others who immediately gave permission.

Cloe's mother—already knowing her daughter and suspecting that it was her idea—immediately authorized her, along with her siblings, to play outside, saying: "I bet it was Cloe who stirred the others to go outside! What a social agitator daughter I have." And she laughed.

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As if Cloe's "insubmission" were not enough, the last activity scheduled to close the event on the second day was a discussion circle for sharing family stories. However, children had not been officially considered or included in this programming.

Obviously, Cloe again refused to comply with the "adult-centered" approach, which did not even ask the children if they wanted to participate in the conversation. She made herself present, and even though she had not been officially invited or asked whether she wanted to give her testimony or speak, she asked for the floor at a delicate moment of intense emotion in which the adults present were unable to manage.

It was a reunion for reconciliation between the mother and father and their lesbian daughter—20 years after not seeing each other—because they had not accepted her sexual orientation. As they embraced and cried, all the adults present were visibly moved, with tears in their eyes, unable to continue the event. A long silence followed. Cloe then asked for the floor and simply said, navigating the situation as best she could:

*"You are lucky to have a daughter like her, and she is lucky to have parents like you. There is so much love that sometimes it is so hard to fix things"* (Cloe – testimony in the discussion circle at the XIII LGBTI+ Families Conference, own translation. Madrid, Spain, Sept. 2023).

After receiving a standing ovation from all present, she said she wanted to tell her story, since her parents were not LGBT (but she herself belonged to the "letters" LGBT and had forcibly outed her mother and father). At that moment, the entire room went silent. I realized that many people, including myself, had not known until then that Cloe was a trans girl. Much less that she had appeared on television and become a "child celebrity" in Spain, a symbol of the struggle of trans children and adolescents and their families. After a few seconds of silence, she began to tell her story:

*“When I was 8 years old, one day I simply came home from school and said: ‘Mom, I’m a girl!’ And we cried and hugged. Then she told me that it seemed she had known since I was 3 years old. So I asked her to create an Instagram account to share my challenges and show other children, mothers, and fathers how important acceptance and family support is” (Cloe – testimony in the discussion circle at the XIII LGBTI+ Families Conference, own translation. Madrid, Spain, Sept. 2023).*

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In the face of the emotion that overtook her mother and everyone present, a series of questions arose, especially regarding school (a topic of great interest at the event):

*“How do you deal with classmates’ comments and attitudes?”*

*“I don’t mind being seen as strange in this boring world where everyone wants to be the same” (Cloe – testimony in the discussion circle at the XIII LGBTI+ Families Conference, own translation. Madrid, Spain, Sept. 2023).*

I transcribe here some dialogues she described as “exhausting” with classmates at school:

*“1) You haven’t regretted...? [and the girl could not finish the sentence, just pointed from the waist down].”*

*“No, and it seems you haven’t regretted the things you already told me, and I see you will continue the same and keep talking.”*

*“2) But if you are a girl, why do you only wear boys’ clothes?”*

*“Hey, what century were you born in? Can’t I just be light and comfortable in the clothes I want, being myself in peace?” (Cloe – testimony in the discussion circle at the XIII LGBTI+ Families Conference, own translation. Madrid, Spain, Sept. 2023).*

Thus, Cloe continued: insubmissive, a “social agitator,” and a negotiator of speaking spaces that subvert adult logic. She thanked her mother and father for all their support, saying she could not imagine her life without them (they were present and very emotional), and also mentioned the importance for children (another trans child was at the event) to understand their parents’ timing, since this was a “forced coming out.”

Afterward, she excused herself and went to play with her friends, with the natural ease of someone who, on a daily basis, must learn to incorporate her sexuality as just one more aspect of her life.

## 2.1.2 Goiânia-GO, Brazil – Girl 1<sup>7</sup>, 11 years old – lesbian girl

12 Girl 1 participated, along with seven other children, in a group involved in the empirical field proposed in Pacheco's research (2024). There were six meetings with playful dynamics and activities designed to explore their perceptions of diversity and difference. The aim of the research was to understand the meaning of difference and diversity from the children's perspective.

The Work Plan designed and constructed for the empirical field was divided as follows: Meeting 1 – Image and Action: aimed to experience icebreaker dynamics as the children's first contact with the research theme; Meeting 2 – Bricolage: aimed to learn what children say/know about equality, difference, and inequality; Meeting 3 – Discussion circle on the Natura Father's Day video<sup>8</sup>: aimed to identify how children perceive issues of difference/diversity (which ones they can recognize); Meeting 4 – Discussion circle on the Burger King video<sup>9</sup>: aimed to identify how children perceive issues of difference/diversity (which ones they can recognize); Meeting 5 – Discussion circle on the Avon video<sup>10</sup>: aimed to identify how children perceive issues of difference/diversity (which ones they can recognize); Meeting 6 – Letter to the advertisement producers: aimed to evaluate the children's reactions to the videos presented in the previous three meetings.

The first meeting took place on November 17, 2022, at the facilities of the Community Education Center for Girls and Boys (CECOM) in Goiânia-GO. On that occasion, three children participated in a dynamic exercise in which they were asked to choose one word to express: a) what they knew; b) what they did not know; c) what they

<sup>7</sup> By requirement of the Ethics Committee, the designation "Child 1" was used instead of the child's real name. It is noteworthy that the removal of the child's attribute as a "subject" occurs as a condition for participation in the empirical field. Here, we use "Girl 1" to identify her gender.

<sup>8</sup> This concerns an advertisement from Natura's Father's Day 2021 campaign. In the video, the widower of the actor and comedian Paulo Gustavo speaks about the dream and fulfillment of becoming a father.

<sup>9</sup> The fast-food chain launched a campaign during LGBTQIAPN+ Pride Month in which children naturally present the composition of their families belonging to the community.

<sup>10</sup> It also refers to an advertisement in which a diversity of people is presented (white, Black, LGBT, among others) using Avon products.

had been told; and d) what they thought about it. Girl 1 stood out in the exercise, choosing the word **woman**, and responded as follows:

What I know about women:

*"It's that she can be whatever she wants, and she can also lead her own life because when a child grows up, she is no longer a child, so that's it"* (Data from Pacheco's empirical research, 2024).

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What I don't know about women:

*"I think about how the baby grows in a woman's belly. When the baby grows..."* (Data from Pacheco's empirical research, 2024).

What I was told about women:

*"Many people talk around, calling people whores, and women all sorts of names, but I think that's very wrong, because it's not always the woman following the man, sometimes it is, but not always. I've also been told many things about women, like, the girls fight a lot with me, right? The coordinator told me not to worry because I'm not like that, so that's it. They call me whore, ugly, fat, and many other things. And I think it's unfair because we don't do anything to them for them to be calling us these names"* (Data from Pacheco's empirical research, 2024).

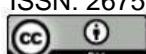
What I think about women:

*"I see women wearing short clothes, women wearing big clothes, trans women. I see many people being insulted like that. And I think nobody deserves to be insulted like that by other people. I see this happening right near my house; many people start shouting, you know? Men call women whores and say many other things. And I feel like going down and saying a lot of things, but since I'm a child, and even if I were an adult, I wouldn't, because it could bring many consequences to my life"* (Data from Pacheco's empirical research, 2024).

The second meeting with the children took place on November 21, 2022, and included the participation of seven children. During the activity, each child chose a poster that could contain images related to equality, inequality, or difference and explained the reason for their choice. Girl 1 chose the equality poster and justified her choice:

*"Because equality is the same for everyone, right? Like this one here (points to the poster), all of these are the same. So equality is very good because people don't need to be different from everyone else. These here are all different, but we are all equal no matter the color"* (Data from Pacheco's empirical research, 2024).

The third and fourth field research meetings with the children, held on November



22 and 23, 2022, had the participation of seven and eight children, respectively. Following the dynamics of the session, the children answered questions related to the video of the Burger King Father's Day advertisement.

**Figure 3 – Activity with Burger King Father's Day Campaign**

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Source: Researcher's personal archive

The question asked was: "What caught your attention the most? Why?"

*"It was... his dream of being a father. Paulo's dream. Because it's every man's dream, right? To be a father. That moved me a lot. Because, like, I never thought two men could have a child. [...] I really liked it because it's something really good for a person to recognize who they truly are. Because many people suffer. They suffer bullying at school. I also found it really powerful; everyone has the right to live. It's nature. [...] I think some people are very racist, right? That affects me a lot. Like, I keep imagining what these people go through on the street" (Data from Pacheco's empirical research, 2024).*

The fifth field research meeting with the children, held on November 24, 2022, included the participation of eight children. Following the session dynamics, the children answered questions related to the video of the advertising campaign "Avon tá On."

**Figure 4 – Activity with the “Avon tá On” Campaign**



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Source: Researcher's personal archive

The question asked: “Why do you think this video was produced this way?”

*“I think it’s so people can recognize people as they are. I don’t see any prejudice at all in showing a man putting on lipstick. If he wants to put it on, he can, whatever he wants on his face, he does what he wants with his life. So, like, he chose this for his life. That’s what he’s going to be. And women too, they can be whatever they want. They can wear whatever clothes they want, use whatever they want, because no one controls anyone’s life”* (Data from Pacheco’s empirical research, 2024).

Finally, our most transgressive participant was Black, very extroverted, participative, and communicative, with strong statements defending women and LGBT people. During the meetings, without being asked about her own sexuality, she declared herself lesbian to the researcher, the research assistant, and her peers, emphasizing that people “have prejudice about this.” The group showed no surprise. However, according to her mother, she would be sent to live in the state of Tocantins with her maternal grandmother.

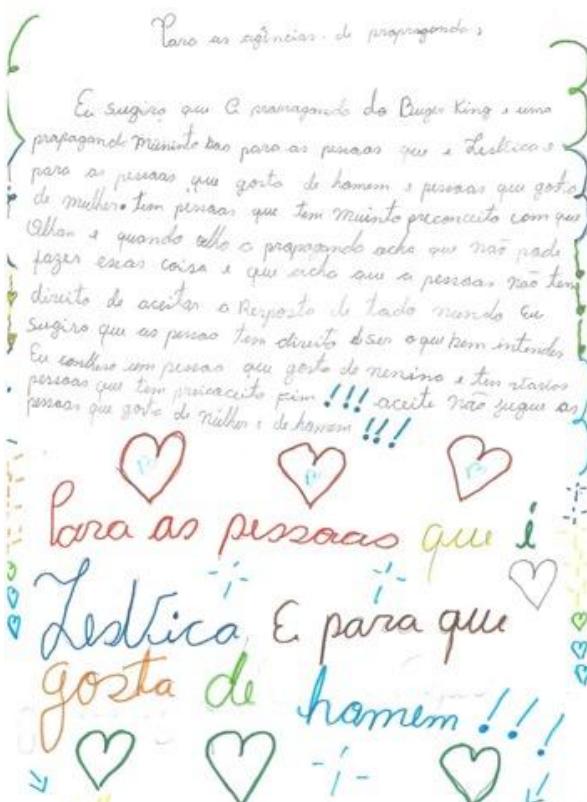
The text of the letter she wrote at the last meeting to the advertisement producers addressed exactly the right of people to be whatever they want and called for respect from society. She also asked that people not be judged.

It is noteworthy that she refers to being lesbian and asks for respect but does not explicitly mention the term gay when asking for respect for that group. Instead, she says: *“those who like men.”* She addresses judgment and the right to speak about her own

sexuality.

**Figure 5 – Letter produced at the last meeting of the empirical field by Girl 1**

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Source: Data from Pacheco's empirical research (2024).

It is interesting to observe, in this case, the stance of the girl's mother, who, while affirming that she accepts her daughter as she is—acknowledging that she will always be her daughter and that this will not change—at another moment declares that “[...] she doesn't really know what she wants,” thereby not recognizing her daughter's identity positioning and, in a way, delegitimizing it. Later, in conversation with the researcher, the mother revealed the reason for her disapproval:

*“It's like, it's very strange to see a woman with a woman, right? So I respect her, but I talked to her, I said, 'my daughter, does the Bible say that a woman can marry another woman? Which church accepts a woman marrying another woman?’”*  
(Data from Pacheco's empirical research, 2024).



In this sense, the words of Girl 1's mother—and not only hers—were highly emblematic and representative of the prevalence of religiosity in this context, serving not only as a source of prejudice but also as a form of moral panic and latent concern on the part of mothers<sup>11</sup> regarding the judgment of others and, above all, of God, who would never approve of “this” as a “sinful” choice.

Emblematic, in this regard, was the fact that although Pacheco (2024) obtained the authorization of all eight children, he received several refusals from mothers and grandmothers. Upon learning the objective of the research, these women displayed not only indignation at the invitation but also “horror,” justifying their refusal at length and vehemently based on religion and/or God.

### 3 Results and Discussion: intergenerational reflections

The influence of values and religious morality, in the case of the girl's mother—and as we have seen, not only hers—becomes very evident as an obstacle to intergenerational dialogue and support regarding the context experienced and “discovered” by the girl's mother.

The very invasion of the daughter's privacy exposes the mother's fear and fragility: concern with the outside gaze, lack of support and guidance on the topic—beyond religion—guilt for “going straight from home to work, from work to home,” and, above all, the fact of being judged both by the school and by the mother of the girl's partner seems to unsettle her even more:

*[...] I was called to the school. The girl's mother thinks my daughter is deceiving her daughter. I've received many letters already, but I already talked to her because what is happening is something very advanced, you understand? [...] It's too much, and the girl says she loves her, that she is in love with her. There are letters at home that I took from her backpack and kept. [...] And I don't know if it was they who told the girl's mother. I know that these days the girl's mother stopped me and told me a lot of things, so I took it and told her that what was happening wasn't from*

<sup>11</sup> It should be emphasized “mothers,” as they were the ones who, in most cases, either authorized or denied their daughters' participation. In some cases, grandmothers also played this role when they were the primary caregivers.



*my daughter. And a lot is happening; it's very painful [...]" (Data from Pacheco's empirical research, 2024).*

We cannot ignore that, in this context, there is also a double paradox: "Adults spend increasingly more time in the domestic space, both due to changes in work organization and to growing unemployment, while children leave home more often, especially due to their growing presence in institutions" (Bazílio; Kramer, 2011, p. 132).

This fact signals a positional exchange between generations, which also indicates the need for new adult stances regarding this new phase experienced by children: more intense socialization, questioning, and public participation, with new frames of reference and the broadening of horizons in coexistence with diversity.

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## 4 Final considerations

Finally, we return to the question posed in the title: "Who is afraid of subversive children?" This question, in light of the analyses and discussions carried out in the two empirical fields, unfolds into further questions—still unanswered—due to the quantitative and qualitative limitations of the presented fields: a) Why is there fear of children who, to some extent, subvert norms?; and b) How do families (or the adults who serve as children's points of reference) deal with their subversive attributes when they emerge publicly?

Indeed, in some cases, such as that of Girl 1 in the research, the school appears more as an "enemy" than as an "ally" (Maroja, 2025) in these subversive processes, exempting itself from the responsibility to discuss and/or address issues viewed as a "problem" solely belonging to the family. In this way:

The same school tacitly and predominantly embraces the vitality of representations that conceive the family as a "nest-institution," intended to protect individuals

against the adversities of the outside world, yet expects from the family what it refuses to do itself: "the psychic function not only to diminish the existential anxieties of human beings, but also to allow and facilitate individuation processes" (Mello, 2005, p. 30).

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In the cases analyzed here, we observe that Cloe's family successfully allows and facilitates these processes: beyond being initiated, the girl was embraced by her family, whose dialogue and the repercussions of her courage before them translated into the very essence of her subversion, as she wished to publicly share her experiences with more children/adolescents and families similar to hers.

Cloe's case, therefore, had as its effect not only an individual initiation but also a collective initiation of various children. Her family served as a true example of a desirable intergenerational stance, which simultaneously embraces, respects, and fosters "readiness" based on the concrete demands brought forth by the girl.

This is not merely about support, sustenance, or recognition of the child's identity, but especially about respect and validation of important subversive matters that she chooses to bring into the public sphere, where the endorsement and participation of adult points of reference (the family, in this case) become essential.

At the same time, when she succeeds in convincing her mother to create an Instagram page, we can observe how an individual initiative can intersect with collective belonging, as "the centrality of digital technologies in society also exerts effects on the production of these self-centered narratives" (Aymone; Lopes, 2024, n.p.). Similarly, the authors highlight how, in dedicating themselves to these narratives:

[...] A double 'movement of intersubjectivity' occurs, as digital influencers assume a reference role and take on responsibility for raising awareness, providing information, and helping other families, while simultaneously finding a safe space to learn and exchange" (Aymone; Lopes, 2024, n.p.).

The more children gain the courage to subvert, like Cloe and Girl 1, the more adults will come to understand that there is no need to fear them: they are not our enemies nor are they competing with us, adults. On the contrary, they can be our partners and allies in learning.

It is high time to stop separating “adult things” from “children’s things.” Society, as Bazílio and Kramer (2011, p. 135) remind us, needs to cease stigmatizing and segregating adults, youth, and children: “How will they learn to share if everything is offered to them in isolation?”

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It is possible to learn from everyone, regardless of the generation to which they belong. Such a process, however, requires democratization and horizontality within private life, as well as the existence of objective conditions that allow children and adults to exercise their intimate citizenship in every space of coexistence. For this purpose, it becomes necessary to revisit the norms, agreements, consensuses, practices, and values that structure intergenerational relations. It is worth noting that, even in the effort of subversion, children depend on being integrated and feeling supported by adult points of reference.

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