

## **BULLYING AS A MOTIVATION FOR DEBATES ABOUT GENDER AND SEXUALITY AT SCHOOL**

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**Abstract:** This article is an excerpt from a study about the presence of LGBTQIA+ people in a public school in a national context of moral panic propagation by anti-gender offensives. During the course of the study, we came across, among school professionals, the circulation of the term bullying to name the violence experienced by LGBTQIA+ and which made it possible to articulate strategies to fight homophobia and protect its victims in the face of established fears. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with nine school teachers, coordinators and managers. The conclusions presented endorse the use of bullying as a strategy for debating topics related to sexual diversity, gender and the presence of LGBTQIA+ people in schools.

**Key words:** Bullying. Symbolic Violence. Sexuality.

## **O BULLYING COMO MOTIVAÇÃO PARA DEBATES SOBRE GÊNERO E SEXUALIDADE NA ESCOLA**

**Resumo:** O presente artigo é um recorte de uma pesquisa sobre a presença de pessoas LGBTQIA+, em uma escola pública, em um contexto de propagação do pânico moral disseminado pelas ofensivas antigênero. Durante a realização da pesquisa, deparamo-nos com a circulação do termo bullying para nomear as violências vivenciadas por LGBTQIA+. Isso possibilitou articular medidas de combate à homofobia e de proteger suas vítimas frente aos receios estabelecidos. Foram realizadas nove entrevistas em profundidade com professores, coordenadores e gestores. As conclusões apresentadas referendam o uso do bullying como estratégia para o debate nas escolas de temas correlacionados à diversidade sexual, gênero e presença de pessoas LGBTQIA+.

**Palavras-Chaves:** Bullying. Violência Simbólica. Sexualidade.

## **EL BULLYING COMO MOTIVACIÓN PARA LOS DEBATES SOBRE GÉNERO Y SEXUALIDAD EN LA ESCUELA**

**Resumen:** Este artículo es un extracto de una investigación sobre la presencia de personas LGBTQIA+, en una escuela pública, en un contexto de propagación del pánico moral propagado por las ofensivas antigénero. Durante la investigación, nos encontramos con la circulación del término bullying para denominar la violencia vivida por LGBTQIA+. Esto permitió articular medidas para combatir la homofobia y proteger a sus víctimas frente a los miedos establecidos. Se realizaron nueve entrevistas en profundidad a docentes, coordinadores y directivos. Las conclusiones presentadas avalan el uso del bullying como estrategia para debatir temas relacionados con la diversidad sexual, el género y la presencia de personas LGBTQIA+ en las escuelas.

**Palabras clave:** Bullying. Violencia Simbólica. Sexualidad.

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## Introduction

Since 2010 we have observed the advance of conservatism in the Brazilian political scenario, making use of moral panic to promote attacks to sexual and reproductive rights and, thus, reinforcing the control over bodies and sexuality (Junqueira, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2022; Galzerano, 2021). These attacks directly affect the access to rights of the most fragile populations, such as the LGBTQIA+ people, that is, Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Travestis/Transsexuals, Queers, Intersex, Asexuals, among others.

School education and the policies that organize it are one of the privileged targets of these offensives. Since the controversies about the use of the term gender during discussions on the National Common Curricular Base/BNCC are an indication of how the fallacious rhetoric expressed by the phrase “Gender Ideology” exercises vigilance over the school and its professionals, seeking to prevent themes related to gender dissidence expressed by LGBTQIA+ people from being worked on.

These postures cause impacts within the school, intimidate existing practices and inhibit new movements to emerge in the guarantee of rights and in the reception of those who are marked by abjection and diverge from the binarism usually imposed by the norms in which gender, sex and sexual orientation are profiled. However, there is resistance and the anti-gender impostures are not completely successful, mainly because, in schools, the themes are often brought up from the demands of LGBTQIA+ students, by these same subjects who, in their condition of unacceptability, claim a place for themselves within the classrooms.

Thus, when we carried out a study in high school classes of a public school of the Minas Gerais State Network, aiming to identify, on the one hand, the violence suffered by LGBTQIA+ students and the solidarity networks woven by them in the face of homophobia; and, on the other hand, as teachers and other professionals deal with these phenomena, we identified bullying as a strategic term allowing debates on gender and sexuality to reach classrooms, teachers' rooms and the school as a whole.

## Methods

This article focuses on in-depth interviews with nine education professionals from a state public school in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. These professionals were teachers,

people in the pedagogical coordination or in the administrative management of the school. All nine interviewees were informed about the study and its scope, as well as the risks involved in participating in the study and that there would be no gain in their contribution or any loss in case of their withdrawal and, finally, they all signed the Term of Free and Clarified Consent/TFCC, with the project being processed and approved under number 4.173.031 by the UFMG Ethics Committee. These interviews were then recorded, transcribed and analyzed with the help of software. Using the thematic analysis methodology proposed by Bardin (2008), we sought to understand how the analyzed categories are evident in the interviews and what they mean as textual articulators in characterizing the presence of LGBTQIA+ students in the school routine, the violence suffered by them and the processes of resistance.

In a first approach of the interview transcripts, it was evident that bullying plays a central role in the concerns of school professionals about what was happening among the students when trying to name the conflicts between them. It is evident in their speeches, on the one hand, that the occurrences of violence and mistreatment among students could be named as bullying and that, on the other hand, through this nomination, it would be possible to act on this violence in order to prevent its occurrences.

Thus, the term bullying establishes itself as a category for naming violence and prevention strategies for the same violence it names. This seemed to us to be very fruitful, since the term bullying was characterized as a significant record unit in the understanding of the interviews and very promising in identifying the conditions underlying its textual production. It is, thus, possible to understand the context of phenomena related to violence expressed by the circulation of the term bullying among students and, mainly, among school professionals.

The text presented here is divided into two parts: the first debate on anti-gender actions based on the propagation of fallacies conveyed around the phrase “gender ideology” and the moral panic caused by these activists in an attempt to promote silencing in schools; the second part characterizes bullying as a possible resistance strategy by education professionals to create environments for debate on gender and sexuality and, thus, circumvent the surveillance imposed by silencing.

### Anti-gender offensives and the moral panic in schools<sup>3</sup>

One of the hypotheses that drives this article is that conservative movements are not completely successful in their attempt to silence LGBTQIA+ students, they are unable to prohibit them from expressing their differences or prevent them from accessing information and sources which may allow them to find out about the different identities they may build. This echoes broader social advances conducted by different subjects in their collective actions and through organized social movements that fight for the rights of this population — thus building resistance responses that expand the materials that foment debates around this theme.

Facing moral panic, therefore, is on the agenda and becomes a requirement in the face of the difficulties of positioning themselves in educational environments as spokespersons for debates on gender and sexuality. This task is imperative, since for LGBTQIA+ people, giving up is not a solution, giving up talking about gender identities and expressions present in LGBTQIA+ themes means giving up on themselves, on their own work in making their existence viable within spaces that have historically not accepted their bodies.

Faced with the increase in these anti-gender attacks and the greater vigilance exercised over school professionals, we seek to ascertain the tools of resistance and how the term “bullying” emerges as a possible strategy to address, on the one hand, the violence conveyed by sexist and gender stereotypes. homophobic in school contexts; and, on the other hand, allow LGBTQIA+ students and professionals to feel minimally welcomed in the daily life of the school. We will discuss whether the use of the term “bullying” makes it possible to overcome reprisals by establishing strategies that jiggle with the cystem<sup>4</sup>. The phrase "makes it possible" must be marked with emphasis and we will discuss it in this text when investigating how to enhance and, in a certain way, make possible the debate on gender and sexuality within the

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<sup>3</sup> There are several reports across the country of these anti-gender offensives in schools, such as the production and circulation of fake news, the most emblematic examples being the statement that the Federal Government would be sending to schools a "gay kit" responsible for "stimulating homosexuality and promiscuity" or “penis-shaped baby-bottles” in order to eroticize children; the attempt to create laws that seek to prevent education professionals from freely exercising the professorship, more recently this effort has been focused on prohibiting the use of neutral language in schools; denunciation of education professionals by ordinary people, organizations, governments, politicians and legislators who allege that there is a plot to incite debauchery, debauchery and the shuffling of gender norms.

<sup>4</sup> The neographism "cystem" refers to the cisgender-heterosexual nature prevailing in the norms that hierarchize gender and sexuality expressions and identities by privileging people and behaviors appropriate to prevailing expectations to the detriment of dissident positions.

school environment.

In the 1990s, two conferences marked the debates on gender identity in the world, the International Conference on Population and Development, 1994, in Cairo, and the World Conference on Women, 1995, in Beijing. In opposition to these events, the Vatican articulates itself in order to mobilize social groups to question the debates of such conferences and reaffirm the Catholic precepts that naturalize the sexual order, redefining the social roles of men and women from a biologizing order of the sexual difference (Junqueira, 2018a).

It is consensual among researchers that the fallacious phrase “gender ideology” is “a Catholic invention that emerged under the designs of the Pontifical Council for the Family and episcopal conferences, between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s.” (Junqueira, 2017a, p.46)

Galzerano (2021) calls our attention precisely to this leadership assumed by movements of the Catholic Church, mainly by the Roman Curia, in criminalizing the debate on gender, and the attempt to make it a discussion of lesser value, distorting reality and based on ideological interests that would organize it with a view to the re-naturalization of sexual difference under biological bases. Thus, according to her, this attack “expresses an attempt to make gender issues ideological, preventing them from being debated and faced in the field of scientific studies on the subject. [...] By spreading the fight against a supposed ideology, these sectors defend their own ideological position: anti-gender and anti-science” (Galzerano, 2021, p. 88).

In a way, it is a strategic movement of the Church in the dispute with Science which, in fact, produces the truth. And as highlighted by Maria Machado,

(..) it is a dispute about meanings in which actors from the religious sphere appropriate certain ideas from the scientific field to defend the conception that links the truth to the belief in God and gives moral authority to priests, pastors and other leaders of Christianity to define the social and legal norms of society. (Machado, 2018, p. 1)

In Brazil, these movements gain prominence from the "Movimento Escola Sem Partido" (MESP, or "Non-Partisan School Movement", in free translation), created in 2004. However, at first, its main claim was the removal of debates on Marxist Theories of education. As this a cause did not significantly mobilize society, the MESP brought to its agenda the attack on debates on gender and sexuality in education, thus achieving a greater mobilization of

conservative social and mainly religious groups.

In this sense, the period in which the movement gains greater prominence is from its criticism, in 2011, of the program Escola sem Homofobia ("School without Homophobia Program", disparagingly nicknamed "Gay Kit". This movement led to the production of false information about candidacies of leftist parties for political office, thus contributing to the rise of the right and extreme right wings that, in the wake of the 2016 political coup, came to occupy political offices.

These strategies were on social media and news in different ways, reaching the breakfast table, in the television room, on the radios and cell phones of many people. In the political sphere, in several City Councils, State Parliaments, and even in the National Congress, there were attempts to pass laws that guaranteed the prohibition of debates on gender and sexuality in the classroom. The Superior Court of Justice (STJ), the highest body of the Judiciary, in several actions defined the unconstitutionality of these attempts, making the implementation of these laws by municipal, state and federal governments unfeasible, based on the argument that:

(...) fundamental constitutional values for the development of children and adolescents are put into effect in the "educational processes that develop in family life, in human coexistence, at work, in teaching and research institutions, in social movements and civil society organizations society, and in cultural manifestations" (Brasil, 2020, p.15)

However, it is important to point out that despite the fact that the highest judicial body emphasizes the importance of debates about gender and sexuality in the classroom, aiming at their training in different spheres of life, many political movements encouraged students to record and denounce any educator who worked this topic in class. Unfortunately, throughout the national territory, there were occurrences of these events, which ended up making it difficult and, consequently, inhibiting the work of many teachers of Basic and even Higher Education.

This whole movement, widely publicized in the media, established a culture of fear among educators who would like to bring debates about LGBTQIA+ people into the classroom.

And it is precisely this feeling of fear of being persecuted for doing something dangerous to social relations, condemned by the institutions, that has kept several professors away from debates that promote human dignity in defense of gender equity and sexual diversity and the

right to a healthy, dignified life of an LGBTQIA+ person. It is this phenomenon that configures itself as a moral panic that is established in schools, one of the main effects of this clash carried out by the promoters of the phrase “gender ideology” and the fallacious nature of its claims. Even if in effective disagreement with the scientific debate and after successive defeats established, not only by the STJ, but in different city councils and state legislative assemblies, the moral panic of the anti-gender crusade is felt:

By investing in the de-contextualization, labeling and caricatural distortion of any and all theoretical, legal, political, cultural or pedagogical interventions concerning or alluding to gender studies and the like, anti-gender moralists tend to assume a posture that is not characteristic of academic or democratic debate. It is clear that, according to the script for the production of moral panic (Thompson, 2014), opponents must be ridiculed, demonized and stigmatized. And, at the whim of a labeling strategy that deforms the adversary (Garbagnoli, 2014a), the epithets can vary: extremists, enemies or family destroyers, family phobics, pro-gay fanatics, "homosexualists", "gayzists", "gaystapo", "feminazis", doctrinaires, pedophiles, "heterophobic", "christophobic", "christianphobics", "genderists". It should also be noted that the use of these or other equally colorful insults and neologisms usually takes place in the midst of rhetorical devices, including appropriations and re-significations. (Junqueira, 2018b, p. 462)

What is at stake is the dispute of narratives and the deleterious effects that these clashes aggravate as a strategy of demoralizing an agenda and demonizing those who vocalize it, who have schools and their professionals as an effective target. Thus, as announced by Junqueira (2018b), panic performs a very effective inversion by turning the victim into the oppressor by creating a false sensation that the vocalizer is making an error, speaking of inappropriate issues that harm morals and the legal norm.

It is not a question of making a theoretical review of the uses that the concept of “moral panic” acquires in the literature<sup>5</sup>, but it is possible to recognize that traditionally the concept was coined from the contributions of sociologists adept of symbolic interactionism in classic studies on deviance. Thus, the epithets of “extremists, enemies or destroyers of the family” are established in the wake of moral panic and constitute one of its most harmful effects by

<sup>5</sup> We recommend the article by Machado (2004), *Pânico moral: para uma revisão do conceito*, which, in a very didactic way, presents an overview of uses that the concept of “Moral Panic” acquires in the English language literature. Another recommended reading is Thompson's (1998) *Moral Panics*.

stigmatizing certain social groups that, by serving as a scapegoat, incorporate detractor signs that must be eliminated and contained as a means of purifying bad conduct.

The fear of dealing with sexuality issues in the speech of Basic Education professionals is noticeable. When a pedagogical coordinator from a high school, when asked about the reason for the difficulty in dealing with certain themes associated with gender equity and sexual diversity in school, she says that:

[MÔNICA] Why? Because raising the issue, asking questions, talking about it, is to break some taboos, right?! ...then it's opening [space for] a new no. It's not even new, it was already here, it already exists, right?! {it is} in the system, in school, all the time. But we don't see it and perhaps there's no law that forbids me to talk about that, but there's also no space for me to go to the classroom and talk about it. It seems that we are still tied to prejudice, tied to what is permitted and what is not. How do I pass this information on? How do I say it and the parents may think that you are whetting the child... And then there is a whole system that restrains you, but does not restrain you by the law. Because no one has ever come here and said that you can't say that, but how are you going to approach this subject?

A discourse about an imagined “other one” is established as the frightening cause that discourages them from committing to the guidelines associated with the fight against gender prejudice and homophobia. After all, what can be said to parents/mothers, since they may be propagating wrong and inappropriate ways of expressing themselves?

The fact that these fears stem from assumptions or preconceived ideas — “no one has ever come here and said you can't say that” — does not change the prohibitive nature that weighs on these choices. After all, because the school is inserted within a context with several elements, it is crossed by what Norbert Elias conceptualized as Configuration. To think from the notion of configuration is to perceive the individual inserted in a relational web that conditions their actions by living immersed in different institutional contexts, in which they coexist with many other people — who also have needs, set goals and make decisions.

Elias reminds us that we speak of the individual and his environment, the child and the family, the individual and society, or the subject and the object, without clearly bearing in mind that the individual is part of his environment, his family, his society (Elias, 2005, p. 13). This allows us to indicate that schools are immersed in a community in which other subjects and institutions are found. From the person who opens the gates to the school to the person who

turns off all the lights at the end of the school day, they build a school, they build norms and a configuration within that influences their organization and daily processes.

There are several elements that contextualize the school and the people who are there as those that perform the interweaving of individual actions, which, in turn, are not always driven by reason, thus configuring relational contexts that go beyond the school community. This relational dynamics spreads throughout the social fabric in which the participants are inserted and circulate. Therefore, it is necessary to think that teachers and students, as well as parents and other members of the school community, may be moved by passions and emotions connected to values rooted in family cultures, religious contexts, among many other things. These turn sensitive issues such as gender and sexuality into some of the priority targets of controversy in this context.

Thus, in the speech of the school coordinator, she locates her fears in relation to a palpable or tacit perception that there is a persecutory atmosphere that prevents her from speaking and that may come to materialize in the speech of a co-worker, of a student or parent or other member of the community who may argue with her about the importance of touching sensitive points such as sexual and gender diversity.

In the literature about moral panic, there are constant references to how these points are repeatedly used to propagate a specific panic around debates on the sexuality of women and LGBTQIA+ people; of children and young people – by making use of sexuality and their fears to control them – or, still, by subordinating population groups in a colonialist perspective. In this sense, moral crusades are constituted around the control of women's bodies and their sexuality, such as those that occurred in the Middle Ages, when witches were persecuted, as reported by Federici (2017); or even the creation of sanitary cords to isolate prostitutes from the rest of the city (Walkowitz, 1995); the campaigns that fought masturbation, mainly by children and young people, (Foucault, 2001); the persecution of LGBTQIA+ expressions and identities (WEEKS, 1985, TREVISAN, 2000, D'EMILIO, 1983); the panic surrounding the spread of HIV and the characterization of AIDS as a “gay cancer” (Watney, 1987); and also how the British Empire made use of the over-determinations between race, class and gender to configure its territorial domains, (McClintock, 2010).

Thus, it is possible to state that such unfounded fears are justified as a purification action

in which certain practices associated with specific social groups are seen as sinful, dirty and obscene. Herdt (2009), in the introduction to the book *Moral Panics, Sex Panics*, from the US context, states that the link between religious, anti-sexual, and sex-negative attitudes and moral panic in the modern period is well known. America's Puritan background certainly provides support for chronic cycles of purity, hygiene, and Christian reactions to premarital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, and a variety of related fears and anxieties. In the late 20th century, these religious and moral campaigns target vulnerable populations. (Herdt, 2009, p.10)

Thus, these hate speeches towards the differences compose political technologies that affect these bodies and make them inferior, composing asymmetries in which the binarism of the sex-gender system operate. Rubin (2017), in *Pensando em Sexo*, states that sexual activities tend to function as a signifier of personal and social fears with which they have no intrinsic relationship. During a moral panic, these fears are projected onto a disadvantaged population or sexual activity. The media is outraged, the public becomes an angry mob, the police are called in, and the state enacts new laws and regulations. After the rage subsides, some innocent erotic groups have been decimated, and the state has expanded its power into new areas of erotic behavior. Moral panics rarely alleviate a real problem, as they turn to chimeras and signifiers. They take advantage of the preexisting discursive structure in order to make up victims that justify the treatment of "addictions" as crimes. The criminalization of innocuous behaviors such as homosexuality, prostitution, obscenity or recreational drug use is rationalized by portraying them as a threat to health and safety, women and children, national security, the family or even civilization. Even when an activity is recognized to be harmless, it may be banned on the grounds that it "leads" to something much worse (another instance of the domino theory). Large and mighty buildings have already been built based on these ghosts. (Rubin, 2017, p.109)

Given this, it is necessary to think of strategies that allow the school to protect itself from these attacks and break the constraint that is imposed on its professionals. Strengthening educators, creating an alliance and allowing these issues to be inserted in the school's pedagogical practice is one of the challenges in combating moral panic. After all, the school, the building, the structure is not education *per se*; education is built by people, and if a significant number of these people articulate and imprint in their practices actions to combat homophobia in its various expressions, we can indeed build an education based on respect for

LGBTQIA+ people.

When we think about the consequences for students, of the entire conservative movement, they are countless and devastating for an education that minimally respects LGBTQIA+ people. Especially in public education, since these institutions should be guided by paths that deconstruct social inequalities. Bourdieu and Parsseron (1975) have already demonstrated how educational institutions reproduce economic inequalities. And we can still think about how schools can also intensify gender and sexuality inequalities. Schools, following the rhythm of society, by reproducing specific, binary social roles for men and women, contribute even more to gender violence and sexual behaviors that are beyond heterosexuality. In addition to the fact that actions such as those of the MESP (Non-Partisan School) take away the right of students to access important scientific debates. These debates have been produced within universities around the world and become unavailable mainly to young people from less privileged social strata and who face greater difficulty in accessing different information sources.

All this is not recent. It is a historic struggle of the LGBTQIA+ movement to combat intolerance in schools. In 1978, in the United States, the politician and activist Harvey Milk was already on television defending the idea that homosexual teachers could indeed be in the classroom, and there was nothing wrong with that, nor with the possibility that students could be influenced to be homosexual. A bill in the city of San Francisco, presented by politician John Briggs, prohibited people engaged in LGBTQIA+ issues from acting as educators (Adams, 2013). The main arguments of this proposal are that educators have the power to influence children and young people to be LGBTQIA+, based on the view that sexuality is a lifestyle to be chosen by every human being, that is, a choice. Another law, applied in England, between 1983 and 1988, prohibited any LGBTQIA+ theme to be approached in schools. Known as *Section 28*, this legislation also prohibited educators from supporting the idea of families formed by LGBTQIA+ people (Lee, 2019). *Section 28*, in England, as well as *Proposition 6*, in the United States, mark historical moments of a conservative society that reverberates its actions through public policies, reaching the entire population.

These experiences show that even after these laws are overturned, their effects can still remain in schools for years. And that is why we are so concerned about creating new paths in

Brazilian education, so that the right of every child to attend the classroom is respected, including LGBTQIA+ children.

### **Bullying as a strategy**

Now that we know the context of the need to build ways of talking about gender and sexuality within the school environment, we need to think about strategies that make it possible to support LGBTQIA+ students and education professionals within schools, from kindergarten to postgraduate studies.

Those who work in educational institutions, especially in Basic Education, know about the difficulties in working on more sensitive topics such as racism, sexism, homophobia, among others. However, it is surprising when schools mobilize widely, together with families, for conversation circles, lectures, activities, posters that motivate students to respect each other, that somehow approach bullying.

Observing this movement, our attention is drawn to the fact that the concept of bullying is very welcome within the school space and its community, perhaps because it is not directly associated with violence related to racism, homophobia and sexism, for example. In this way, new paths open up the possibility of “enveloping” the debate on gender and sexuality with a concept widely used in school spaces, especially among children and younger people, such as bullying.

A brief digression on the possibilities of the concept of bullying and also its limitations is appropriate here, in order to think about its potential. The term appears for the first time in the 1970s, in the studies of psychologist Dan Olweus. Concerned about the large number of suicides among Swedish students, he identified that a large number of students went through specific situations of violence within the school environment. There was constant violence against the same person, verbal and/or physical aggression over a prolonged period of time showing that there was an imbalance of power between the person who committed the aggression and the person who was the target of the aggression. The victims found it difficult to defend themselves, in a context of apparent absence of motives to justify the attacks, since even the people involved enjoyed the same hierarchical social position as, for example, two female students.

Olweus categorized such processes, from the English verb to bully (Olweus, 1978). In Brazil, the term has not yet been translated, being studied by researchers such as Antunes and Zuin (2008), Diaz and Souza (2010), Silva and Barreto (2012) and Esteves (2017). Researchers work with different definitions, according to the perspective of the phenomenon to which they wish to draw attention. But everyone agrees that bullying occurs in the school environment, being a type of violence that persists for a while and that involves the person who attacks, the person attacked and the people who witnessed what happened, intervening or not. It is important to highlight that the term is no longer used only for violence within the school environment, but also in other spaces such as the work environment (Einarsen, 2010).

Although the term is already widespread not only among researchers, but also among education professionals, there is still a misunderstanding about what kind of attitude, within the school environment, we can classify as bullying. When asked about the process of identifying bullying situations during classes, an educator replied:

[VITÓRIA] Look, first the question is how do I identify bullying, right?! My classes are twice a week. One class is usually inside the classroom, they (students) have notebooks and at that moment I try to identify in their writing what really hurts them. For example, in the third quarter, we worked on the issue of obesity that... I don't know, if you saw it, I brought several texts to all classes since the eighth grade... I brought texts, cartoons to them talking about the issue of obesity, of which I see a lot of this in Physical Education. Some people may be bullied because they are chubby. That is, in my experience, what I see more often, right?! [...] the person, if they have it mainly in this phase of adolescence, if they have a hormonal problem, if the pancreas does not produce insulin correctly, they will be obese or they will be too thin and then to work on this issue of bullying, I brought this... and it hurts the kids a lot, right?! Of course!

From the speech of the Physical Education teacher, we can see that she recognizes the presence of bullying in her classes, and even works with the theme, however, she associates it with aspects related to the body, such as “obese” or “too thin” and not the other aspects related to differences, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, race/ethnicity and others.

[INTERVIEWER] Do you identify that bullying harms students in your classes?

[VITÓRIA] Look, it's so funny, that, for some students, bullying hurts a lot... it varies a lot from person to person, you know?! It may be that Thales suffers

from this issue of bullying and he manages to deal with it very well, however, here's the thing, I can see it even further, when the boy has a family that is present, that cares and gives support, a father and a mother present there, who care for the kid, who asks the kid how their day at school was, who, look, who follows the issue of bullying for this kid, sometimes it is easier to be treated, because they have a father and a mother. They have a safe haven, they can vent, they can talk, they can expose what they have suffered, sometimes the father looks at it or sometimes the mother comes, look, and we manage to deal with it... when they don't have, when the kid does not have this father, this mother present, they keeps it, they literally take it... absorbing it all and they start to expose it here at school, sometimes in an aggressive way. Or they withdraw, or they start cutting themselves and whenever the kid starts to expose it by cutting themselves, withdrawing, running away it is because they have not been able to talk to their parents or someone they trusts. So what I observe in the issue of bullying that it is harmful when they really don't have anyone to talk to and vent to and have the right guidance about it.

In turn, Carmélia, brings some perspective on the impact of bullying in the lives of students:

[INTERVIEWER] For the adult person, do you think it's a little easier to deal with it?

[CARMÉLIA] I think that, after they turn 10, they feel a lot, you know? 10, 12 years of early childhood are very sorry... they feel it, but if they have support, a little support from the family or structure, that some doctor passed on to them, or in any way they get over it. Now a little kid, I think it's worse. Because it is engraved in their memory, in the root of their being, you know?! It's something I think it's a more blatant thing, but people don't think so, because teenagers cut themselves, they try to commit suicide, right?! They're more aggressive, but they never forget the events in childhood... not with therapy or anything else. I think it's pretty tense. [...] I think the worst thing about bullying is the speech and the act right after, comes the procedures..., but what hurts the most are the speeches. So, if we start to control the speeches, we will control the actions. Do you agree?

Vitória's and Carmélia's statements demonstrate how bullying negatively impacts the school environment as a whole. Both emphasize that the family structure can help students to deal with these issues within the school environment.

Carmélia points out that bullying usually starts with experiences of non-physical aggression, and then it may also occur through verbal aggressions, which is worse than physical aggressions, as they have an even greater impact on the people who are being attacked, including situations of self-mutilation, which are increasingly common in the arms of high

school youth and also younger children. Carmélia demonstrates her concern with bullying situations, especially in early childhood, that is, until the age of 12, since the marks of violence can be greater and carried throughout life, in the words of the interviewee: “Because it is engraved in their memory, in the root of their being, you know?!” On the other hand, Carmélia points out that one of the ways to reduce bullying can be by avoiding verbal aggression and, thus, avoiding physical violence.

Mônica, one of the school managers, shows us that she agrees with the perspective of thinking about bullying from the perspective of the forms of prejudice present in the school:

[INTERVIEWER] In your opinion, what do you think of approaching bullying from the perspective of prejudice?

[MONICA] This is funny. We have an age difference. Like it or not, in my time there was no bullying. We called each other fat, white and bald, whatever, we didn't have that. But today, the human being, he is so mean... I think that from the moment it bothers you... my way of speaking, what hurts you... understand? Even, how many times have I said: the "fag" son of a \*\*\*\*, and this and that. They curse at the person, but it was different. Now if today, if I say: you "fag"! and this and that... It's what comes out of my mouth and how it comes out of my mouth that hurts the other. And then there's bullying. I see... it really hurts (inaudible) “wow, it was so aggressive, I didn't need that”.

In her speech, we notice that in the past acts that are currently considered prejudiced, such as derogatorily calling homosexual people "fag", were not recognized as prejudice, as a problem. In this way, we identified that there is a construction of what is or is not prejudice within the school space and this process depends on several factors, including those external to the school.

From this analysis, it is necessary to think about the perspective of the concept of bullying as a label that names phenomena associated with the processes of violence against differences present in the school environment. Esteves (2017) points out that bullying occurs due to the difficulty of students in living with/accepting their own cultural and identity differences that are constructed and reconstructed in the school environment. In this way, the author recognizes the school as a space of differences and intolerance in relation to them allied to maliciously banal behaviors, which configure violent responses. We can add to this perspective that not only students, but all professionals who perform their duties there have difficulty living with cultural and identity differences.

In this way, it becomes important to understand that homophobia, or in a broader sense, LGBTphobia, operates within the school space as a result of the difficulty in accepting difference, thus, being one of the ways in which bullying is presented in the classroom.

It is necessary to show that bullying with LGBTphobic motivation is not just violence against students, but also against teachers and other professionals. In other words, we understand that the mechanism of bullying can be present not only in the classroom, but also in the teachers' room and in any and all living spaces.

Getting back to the debate on the use of the term bullying, it is important to highlight some problems arising when referring to certain types of violence within the school space. Antunes and Zuin (2008) argue that it is necessary to “think to what extent the classification made possible by the adoption of this typology of violence does not mask the social processes inherent in behaviors classified as bullying” (p.35). That is, to what extent does thinking about prejudice and the difficulty in dealing with differences within the classroom, by treating them as bullying, take the focus away from the root of the problem and, ultimately, by using new terms, homogenizing different phenomena, standardizing the strategies used to deal with each one of them and ignoring the specificities that organize them? In some way, using the term bullying to “control” racism, sexism, LGBTphobia, fat-phobia, ableism and several other types of prejudice may not contribute to the debate of the mechanisms of such prejudices. Unfortunately, this is what has been happening in the debates of the main perspectives pointed out by renowned people who discuss school bullying, such as Teixeira (2014). There is almost no mention of issues related to thinking about and questioning the motivation of bullying. Normally, this action is associated with mental health issues, such as anxiety disorders and/or depression and social isolation. When we asked teachers about their analysis regarding the use of bullying as a category, one of the responses was:

[PAULO] [...] bullying, I think it's a way that was really created to give a name that is not the right one so that we understand the contradictions that it brings, like... So let's say that racism is bullying, let's say that LGBTphobia is bullying, let's say that male chauvinism is bullying, so it was a very insightful way, like, let's turn it into something puerile, right? Socially accepted, let's turn it into bullying not to discuss what the real contradiction is.

Paulo's statement is in line with the analysis by Antunes and Zuin (2008) on the possibility of bullying making important debates invisible related to the contradictions present in the classroom, in relation to the difficulties in dealing with differences. From this perspective, Diaz and Souza (2010) understand that:

(...) the exercise of classifying and naming violence at school, building a concept that dissociates it from the social context and restricts its temporal and spatial presence to the school as an institution can make it difficult to understand this phenomenon and restrict the scope of actions needed to deal with it. (Diaz, 2010, p.5)

However, it is not up to us to think whether the debate about bullying within school spaces is precisely due to its possibility of making situations of prejudice invisible, but, from a moment when it is already used, and to some extent, well accepted, to think about new possibilities that the term can contribute to the debate about prejudice in the classroom. Including, in order to benefit the entry of the debate on issues related to gender and sexuality.

At the same time, another defense of the use of the term bullying is the fact that it makes it possible to carry out the debate of prejudices in an inter-sectional way, that is, to think that homophobia, for example, is, in some way, acting within the space through mechanisms similar to other forms of prejudice, such as racism.

We do not defend in any way that the violence is the same and that the experiences are even similar. However, the mechanisms of violence used in order to oppress such identities can be similar, and this helps us to identify situations of bullying in the classroom. Note the response of an interviewed student:

[CAIQUE] I went through several different situations, so how can I explain? For example, in elementary school, I had teachers who bullied me, teachers, right? I was bullied by colleagues because I was black, because I was gay in a certain way, because as I was a child I wasn't gay, but I was effeminate, so people already excluded me, like that, you know? So I suffered a lot at school [...].

Caíque's statement shows us that in the school space, as well as in non-school spaces, violence in relation to differences occurs in an inter-sectional way, that is, social markers act in a network of non-excluding complexity. In other words, black gay men experience different

experiences from white gay men, and it is not possible to isolate such markers in order to understand just how Caíque would have experiences only as a gay man. We cannot talk about the construction of identities, violence, resistance of LGBTQIA+ people isolated from other social markers.

Returning to the advantages of using the bullying category, we can mention the fact that it is related to its possibilities of opening actions to combat such violence, including through legal mechanisms. In Brazil, an important milestone for the fight against bullying, as systematic violence in the school environment, can be pointed out by the approval of Law 13,185 of 2015, which establishes the Program to Combat Systematic Intimidation ("Programa de Combate à Intimidação Sistemática"), understanding bullying as:

[...] any act of physical or psychological, intentional and repetitive violence that occurs without obvious motivation, practiced by an individual or group, against one or more people, with the aim of intimidating or assaulting them, causing pain and anguish to the victim, in a relationship of power imbalance between the parties involved. (Brasil, 2015, p.3)

In this way, talking about bullying makes it possible to activate legal devices, not only facilitating, but legitimizing the entry of this debate in the classroom and, consequently, gender and sexuality debates. As of Law 13,185, violence against LGBTQIA+ people in the school environment is already classified as a crime.

### **Let us continue with the Commitment: by way of a conclusion**

Many LGBTQIA+ people experience processes of silencing during their journey in formal education, either due to insult, by the denial of their self-recognition - including the denial of their basic rights, such as the right to exist as their gender identity and the use of the corresponding bathroom. These and other processes not only expel these people from schools, but interrupt desires, dreams and lives.

The moral panic created in educational spaces by conservative movements has made it increasingly difficult for debates on gender and sexuality and reception strategies for LGBTQIA+ people to take place within the school space. However, education professionals, along with the entire school community, have built strategies that move with the context

experienced and allow the classroom to be a space for debates about LGBTQIA+ people. One of these strategies, presented during our investigation, is the use of the Bullying category, which at the same time denounces the violence experienced on a daily basis at school by non-cisgender or heterosexual people, as well as promoting debates about the reception of these people.

It is important to highlight that the term bullying, precisely because it serves as an umbrella, erases the differences between manifestations of intolerance towards those who are different and the differences within the school. Therefore, it can make it difficult to give visibility to the structures that would organize the processes of exclusion and degradation of the human condition of LGBTQIA+, as well as black men and women, indigenous people, women, the disabled, the obese and several other experiences that constrain an incorporeal and abstract universality when we talk about students.

This can lead us not to explain and not fight against the institutional reasons that organize intolerance and, many times, we have topical and psychologizing actions when attributing to the subject, victim of this violence, “the causes” that victimize them.

But it is up to us to emphasize that in the face of the silencing imposed by moral panic, bullying has proved to be a path to follow in this confrontation and in the protection of these subjects in their particular experiences. A mechanism for the strategic naming of violence that does not replace larger and more specific struggles.

It is urgent that teachers and the official school curriculum be prepared in order to take these debates into the classroom and, more than that, we need specific legislation to help us in this work. On the other hand, we need to pay attention to the reality that we have been experiencing in our country in recent years, a tragic moment for social minorities and that discourses such as anti-gender offensives gain more prominence than violence against LGBTQIA+ people. Perhaps this is not the time when such legislation and support will emerge. And so, let's not be naive, we need to act strategically, waddling with the system.

The school should not and cannot be alone in this whole process. Families, religious leaders, social movements are important players to position themselves in favor of discussions on gender and sexuality within the school. And they need to take a stand, we cannot leave the school alone in this tug-of-war.

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