

**GENDER AND SEXUALITY AT SCHOOL IN TIMES OF GLOBALIZATION:  
PERSPECTIVES AND ADOLESCENT CULTURES IN THE PANTANAL OF MATO  
GROSSO DO SUL**

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**GÉNERO Y SEXUALIDAD EM LA ESCUELA EN TIEMPOS DE GLOBALIZACIÓN:  
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**ABSTRACT:** Masculinity and femininity, gender identity and sexualities expressed by juveniles nowadays, require scientific care and refinement for teacher formation, new cultures, and latent social expressions debate. This discussion brings together research and interdisciplinary approach, expanding epistemology and social dialogs on education, health and human rights. The proposal of knowing aspects and cultures of gender, sexuality, and diversity, offers a triangulation of methods for qualitative research, descriptive designs on themes, considering the challenges of collecting data, participant observation and cross-sectional studies over juveniles' representations. Scenario presents health and care observation of a high school in Pantanal of Mato Grosso do Sul and its repercussion in Undergraduate Course in Pedagogy. Results are presented when we debate school's responsibility for mediating knowledge on these topics, while it indicates the need for appropriate formation over gender, sexuality and diversity.

**KEYWORDS:** Education and gender. Gender and sexuality. Sexuality and school. Adolescence and gender. Teacher formation and gender.

**RESUMO:** *As masculinidades e feminilidades, identidades de gênero e sexualidades expressas pelos adolescentes na atualidade, demandam atenção e refinamento científico para a formação de professores no debate sobre as novas culturas e expressões sociais latentes. Essa discussão vem aproximando pesquisadores e áreas interdisciplinares, ampliando as epistemologias e diálogos sociais nas áreas de educação, saúde e direitos humanos. A proposição de conhecer aspectos e culturas em gênero, sexualidade e diversidade, traz a triangulação de métodos para a pesquisa qualitativa, os desenhos exploratórios sobre as temáticas, considerando os desafios para coleta de dados, observação participante e análises transversais sobre as representações adolescentes. O pano de fundo apresenta um experimento em educação e saúde numa escola de ensino médio no Pantanal de Mato Grosso do Sul e suas reverberações na graduação em Pedagogia na Universidade. Os resultados se apresentam no momento em que discutimos a*

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*necessidade de a escola mediar o conhecimento acerca dessas temáticas, bem como a necessária formação docente em gênero, sexualidade e diversidade.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Educação e gênero. Gênero e sexualidade. Sexualidade e escola. Adolescência e gênero. Formação de professores e gênero*

**RESUMEN:** *Las masculinidades e feminilidades, identidades de género y sexualidades expresadas por adolescentes hoy, demanda atención y refinamiento científico para formación de profesores, en el debate sobre la nuevas culturas y expresiones sociales latentes. Viene la discusión acercando los estudiosos y áreas interdisciplinarias, poniendo las epistemologías en expansión y los diálogos sociales en las áreas de educación, salud y derechos humanos. La proposición de conocer aspectos de la cultura de género, sexualidade o diversidad, trae a nosotros una proposición de triangulación de métodos, para investigaciones cualitativas, dibujos exploratórios temáticos, considerando los desafíos para la recopilación de datos, la observación participante y análisis transversales acerca de las representaciones de los adolescentes. Se presenta experimento en educación y salud en una escuela secundaria en el Pantanal de Mato Grosso do Sul y sus reverberaciones en el grado de Pedagogía en la Universidad. Los resultados se presentan en momento que discutimos la necesidad de la escuela como mediadora del conocimiento en estas temáticas, así como la necesaria formación de profesores en género, sexualidade e diversidad.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Educación y género. Género y sexualidade. Sexualidade y escuela. Adolescencia y género. Formación de profesores y género*

## Introduction

The school is the place of learning and sometimes, it is the only access that students find to resolve their curiosities, socializations beyond the domestic space and individual aspirations. High school, a period of deepening of theoretical and practical knowledge, of approximations of intellects and discoveries of the world that are enhanced in the school environment, where subjects are intertwined in tangles of information. These are times of globalization, when all subjects come up and liquefy in everyday life.

From the conception of the Brazilian Constitution (1988), which considers in its art. 205 education as a "right of all and duty of the State and the family, which will be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society, aiming at the full development of the person, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship and their qualification for work", the school has been the place for the formative increment of children and adolescents, youth and adults in almost all municipalities in the country.

According to the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, Law No. 8,086, of 19 June 1999, in Brazil, adolescence begins at 12 and goes up to 18 years of age, and can extend to 21 years,

when it comes of disabled person. This legal condition of protection of rights guides and supports so that this part of the population is not exposed to biases of sexual violence.

In reference to the full development and preparation for citizenship, it is essential to observe issues about education and health, where sexual and reproductive rights are found, which, at first, can cause perplexity, as there is a need to be addressed in school spaces for students and teachers.

The reality of Brazilian data on adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS in people under 18 years of age, leads us to necessarily have to consider the discussion and guidance on issues of gender identities, sexuality and understand the new masculinities and femininities that appear each day among teenagers.

Corumbá is one of the municipalities in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. It is located in the western region and is bordered by two countries, Bolivia and Paraguay, being a twin city with Puerto Quijarro - Bolivia, one of the possibilities for the expansion of culture and social behavior among residents of the region. In this cross-cultural perspective, high schools in Corumbá have enrolled Brazilian, Bolivian students and in some cases, with dual citizenship, when children of Brazilian/Bolivian parents and by offering free regular education in state and federal public schools, on the Brazilian side.

The municipality of Corumbá-MS, according to the database of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), had in 2020 an estimated population of 112,048 people, with the population of teenagers between 10 and 19 years of age it circulates around 20,775 people, which represents 20.6% of the total local inhabitants, which is quite representative.

With regard to access and follow-up in education, according to IBGE (2018), Corumbá has a total of 18 high schools, with 4,487 enrolled and a total of 387 teachers to serve them. This worrying situation demonstrates a difficulty in accessing and continuing studies, demonstrating that the municipality is in the last positions of the state and national ranking in the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) since 2015, as shown on the website of IBGE Cidades (2020).

Characterized as a municipality with a large adolescent and young population, Corumbá suffers from situations of sexual violence committed against children and adolescents, many children born to adolescent mothers and, consequently, early marriages and adulthood, little recognized by local society as a problem of social development, violations of human rights and low priority, as established in Brazilian legislation. These are, in reality, the ones left to follow their luck.

## Gender and sexuality in high school

The concept of gender indicates a social construction of female and male roles, which are established in each society. It contributes to the understanding of anthropologies and other views on the movement and control of bodies (RUBIN, 1975; SAFFIOTI, 1987; SCOTT, 1989).

Louro (2008) broadens the conceptual discussion of gender in the field of challenges, ideological changes, sexuality, recognition of multiple identities and dimensions of gender, which we understand today as binary classifications, being male/female, heterosexual/homosexual and the so-called sexual orientations: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, heterosexual, with new names that evolve rapidly.

Adolescent masculinities and femininities are important constructs for human development. It happens that there is an imposition of society for there to be a social representation of these processes, giving characteristics to what is a male or female behavior. In this sense, the dialogue between adolescents is an alternative to a new path, other than the imposition of power (BUTTLER, 2003; LOURO, 2001).

The difficulties of insertion and development of the themes of gender, sexuality and diversity in formal education in the country, is immediately mirrored for adolescents enrolled in elementary and high school, when they go through issues and mismatches between the Common National Curricular Base (BNCC, 2017), the State and Municipal Education Plans and the themes that are removed or not included in the documents. In a denial of reality, contributing negatively to a representative issue in the context of Brazilian socio-structural development, the country still does not want to offer knowledge about gender, sexuality and diversity, and takes little responsibility for the large number of girls and adolescents who suffer sexual violence daily, they become pregnant early due to varying exposure conditions and increase the picture of poverty and social inequality in health and education, which can be one of the barriers to understanding what sexual health and reproductive health means in Brazil.

The definition of sexual rights, which has been widely debated during the past 30 years, has not reached an arrangement by legal means, given the lack of consideration of the variable conditions of gender for this aspect.

Mattar (2008), elaborates a necessary legal debate, which points out the different attempts to separate sexual and reproductive rights over time, thus leaving the possibility of new concepts for sexual rights. Thus, in this study, sexual rights are the capacities of free expression of people's sexuality, without gender discrimination, without imposition of force or

induction, violence, exploitation, with respect to the body and psychosocial development since childhood and adolescence, to adult and elderly age.

Reproductive rights, in the context of public health, present themselves as an opportunity for the education of adolescents, young people and adults, about the functioning of the human reproductive system, their reproductive conditions, weaknesses.

Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, in all aspects related to the reproductive system and its functions and processes, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Reproductive health therefore implies that the person can have a safe and satisfying sex life, having autonomy to reproduce and the freedom to decide when and how often to do so (NACIONES UNIDAS, 1995, our translation).

It is necessary to do the exercise of understanding, since globalization is present for most adolescents due to the ease of access to the internet and other means of communication, which bring promotion to various types of knowledge. The information that is so facilitated does not improve the necessary discussion on social development based on living and health conditions, which include debates and information on sexual rights, which constitute the defense of the human rights of children and adolescents of not being exposed to sexualization, sexual violence, early marriages, unwanted pregnancies or degrading situations, such as sexual exploitation and national and international trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation, in addition to slave labor or servile marriage.

Furthermore, reproductive rights, which include the possibility of choosing maternity or paternity, for which it is considered a human right, access to scientific progress for the use of natural or medicated contraceptive methods, which include adolescent users (ONU, 1948).

Adolescences are different, the development of each individual is particular, and living in an urban-riverside-agricultural-border region translates into the possibility of an adolescence that welcomes the additions and deformities of culture, which, depending on how they are socially educated, they can apprehend homophobia, lesbophobia, xenophobia in its various representations.

### **Teacher formation, gender and sexuality**

Regarding the formation of teachers in the themes of education in gender, sexuality and diversity, the academic space in the area of education favors the development of content that can contribute to the increase of skills for a balanced professional performance and open to living in society, involving themes and issues related to the various genres under construction,

the development of sexualities in healthy and safe ways, cultures and non-discriminatory behaviors at school.

Cominesi (2011), presents the need to establish new 'resignifications in the teaching identity', so that it is possible to expand strategies and skills, in the face of the world panorama and new ways of life. For the author, the university is the new space for social and scientific advances, where teachers must be able to reconfigure their methodologies, their practices, their lines of research and reasoning. And what is the new one?

The heteronormative model of teacher education and formation, seen for a long time as the only way to understand the world, today passes through the modernization process imposed by society, which calls for a revision in its new-old speeches of respect and dignity, which end up translated into discrimination, bullying, misogynies.

Disciplines that present and discuss the theories of gender, sexuality and diversity, distributed in dialogued classes, workshops, seminars, present themselves as a historic achievement in the scenario of higher education institutions in Brazil today, in the 21st century.

The package of “taboo” subjects, considered necessary for the fulfillment of the legal provisions and the pedagogical political project in the undergraduate course in pedagogy, has the potential to support the elucidation of doubts, add knowledge and qualify future professionals.

The concepts and preconceptions acquired from the socio-historical perspective of individuals, whether students or teachers, point to emblematic theses for further studies. The themes cause an understandable discomfort for students and teachers used to the structuring contents, the protocols of how to teach and the relevant and important technical guidelines for the teacher formation process, which did not address the subject until the resolution of CNE/CP Resolution 01, of 15 May 2016.

For Silva, Brancaloni and Oliveira (2019), what is presented in the National Common Curricular Base - BNCC, in its thematic units, covers only the issues related to the biologist aspects, dealing only with the aspects of the health-disease relationship, without valuing other particularities, contributing to gaps on important issues for the development of healthy sexuality. Such aspects, when elucidated by means of explanations, debates, orientations, bring to adolescents possibilities of recognizing situations of violence and other vulnerabilities.

There is no blame for the difficulty in understanding and absorbing issues, which at times were not the subject of individual or social formation of individuals in other times.

The discussion on teacher formation in the themes of gender and sexuality is also the exercise that Groff, Maheirie and Mendes (2015) carry out, pointing out the individual

difficulties that arise when carrying out the undergraduate courses at their university. This phenomenon, which needs to be demystified, is in line with what happens in the Pantanal region. State denial regarding the themes represents an omission to the human rights of children and adolescents. In this perspective, coming to the understanding of what we can understand as the evolution of transformative education, which is essential to include human movements between genders and sexuality, so that the act of educating in all its complexity makes sense.

Gender, sexuality and diversity in teacher education face a dubious reality at the university. As a discipline that discusses such issues, it presents a search for the student's interest or the need to fulfill credits. In the list of teacher formation, it is introduced in the Pedagogy Course, at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, Campus do Pantanal, and started in 2014. It faced difficulties to be understood as an area of knowledge, adaptation to modernity as a timeless theme from of the 21st century or, still, the development of professional skills for future and future educators, to deal with real life in classrooms and in interpersonal relationships. The curious experience has been unveiling such subjects at graduation, involving the triangulation of active methodologies in education and new teaching and learning styles, so that heteronormative thinking introjected over the centuries in society is demobilized and remade by teachers of the present and the future.

In the search to understand the globalized world, where masculinities and femininities of different natures are expressed since childhood, and, as the school is a space for social representations, it is necessary to deepen the knowledge of future teachers, fostering a debate that evolves and qualifies the development professional.

In the classroom debate, the experience ponders how the new intellectual capacity and professional ability are being worked on and understood, to deal with real life issues, in classrooms, whether in public or private schools, and, as the development of methodologies that instigate the individual, support the reorganization of thought so that it is decolonized and remade by the professors who work in the academy. When discussing cases, doubts, shyness and individual issues in groups, supported by theories, there is a possibility of changing the context in schools for children and adolescents.

This formative desire, materialized in curricular content for an optional subject with a menu, like any other in the Pedagogy course, brings to the academy the application of the Law of Directives and Bases of Education and by Resolution CNE/CP no. 01, of 15 May 2016, which provides in its art. 5, that the graduate of the Pedagogy course must be able to: X - Demonstrate awareness of diversity, respecting differences of an environmental-ecological,

ethnic-racial nature, of genders, generational bands, social classes, religions, special needs, sexual choices, among others.

Expository dialogues, meticulous selection of articles, books, presentation of research, data, cases, documentaries, films, readings and guided debates, are evolutions of applicability of light technologies of education, for the development of the discipline at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do South, demonstrating that globalization, information and new ways of understanding the other in the world, in public and private spaces, present themselves to be worked on in all stages of formal and non-formal education, thus understanding a new moment for the teacher formation in social educators.

It is in the formation of teachers that we can work on the masculinizing and feminizing decolonization of education. It is to debate each possibility of the representation of the forms of non-formal or informal education to change formal education, to change the meaning of a heteronormative education, which appears in the teaching behaviors when they do not know the theories, and which changes when they make good readings and debates no prejudice. When they open up to the world as it is, made by people.

In 2020, joined the mandatory subjects in the UFMS Pedagogy Degree course: Ethical-racial education, gender and diversity, which, although in a short time for the necessary content, opens up the possibility for debate, work with individual conflicts and student and teacher learning. The discipline attracts students from other degrees, which reflects the need to expand the theme on Campus.

### **The challenge of knowing both sides: the social representations of students about gender and sexuality at school and university**

Knowing the social representations of high school and undergraduate students in Pedagogy on gender, sexuality, masculinities and femininities in the context of education and health, becomes a fertile field for the balance between the formation of the two collectives.

Research in education to improve information in the classroom corroborates the project developed by one of the high schools in the municipality of Corumbá, in three first-year classes, where adolescents are between 15 and 17 years old and participated in the *Projeto Saúde* (Project Health), a partnership between the School and the University and the local Health Secretariat, to address themes established in federal legislation, which in the period between 2017 and 2019 mobilized topics to be discussed and their interfaces with gender and sexuality.



Of these high school groups, with approximately 45 students each year, it was a question of selecting problem questions, in order to alert them to the care of their body and their sexual and reproductive health. The topics worked on aimed at orienting them about sexually transmitted infections and early or unwanted pregnancies, respect for individuals and non-violence. From the debates, the adolescents were indicating new themes to meet their needs and curiosities. The biggest mobilizations were, over that period, gender typologies, family and social prejudices, loneliness in moments of individual decision and the willingness to broaden the collective understanding of gender, sexualities, diversity and acceptance by their families and friends.

In the groups of undergraduate students, classes with an average of 35 students per year, people aged between 17 and 42 years old, with curiosities, doubts and understandings similar to that of high school teenagers. Resistant at times, shy at the time of debates, go over the months of the discipline, changing their behaviors, becoming more attentive, participatory, better listeners.

### **The triangulation of methods**

According to Gatti (2012, p. 13, our translation), research in education can present in a single study “multiple paths that bring them closer to understanding this phenomenon, also choosing the angle of the approach”.

For Minayo (2004), social research is an important tool for dialoguing with aspects of human life and its phenomena, which leads us to reflect on the condition of researching education and health in gender, sexuality, masculinities, and femininities of adolescent beings. Still, in the perspective of Minayo (2004, p. 13, our translation): “The object of the social sciences is historical. [...] provisionality, dynamism and specificity are fundamental characteristics of any social issue”.

In qualitative health research, Bosi (2014, p. 5) positions the “social arenas” as territories of “interdisciplinarity” and “inter (trans) culturality”, which demands theoretical deepening and rigor for the analyzes, to constitute science with ethics and respect for people.

The techniques for data collection are based on the tools of the focus group, or conversation circles, where dialogue and questions are placed by the groups, in participant observation, where the researcher interacts with the group to be researched, in order to understand aspects and processes of evolution, involution or stagnation of the actors. Still, the use of reports of meetings, so that it is possible to analyze the periods before and after the

application of the techniques. Finally, the realization of a sexed dolls workshop, where students build the body, sexuality, gender and the character's story for a later presentation to the collective.

In the group of high school students, social representation about the current discipline brought for some, novelty, an important subject, a moment of freedom. For others, an unimportant subject, things they already knew or preferred not to give an opinion on. In the answered questions, an annotated phrase marks the activity that happened for three years: "teacher... you arrived too late in my life..."

In the group of undergraduate students, the reflection was quite exciting. Of the four times that the discipline was offered in the period from 2016 to 2019, there were coincident comments. Some stated that the content is necessary, changes the perspective of the future teacher, presents a reality unknown until then. For few, they are unnecessary subjects, do not contribute to formation or will not be used in the future in the classroom; we note that religious issues are an impediment to dealing with such situations. However, all classes disapproved discrimination and homophobia. The striking phrase of the graduation: "Guys, I need to say something important, here I feel safe, I'm a lesbian". And the emotion takes over the class, including another striking phrase that answered the statement at that moment: "In another situation, I would never accept hearing a statement like that, my family and religious background does not accept this, but I am listening to you and it doesn't hurt me anymore ..."  
(our translation)

## Final considerations

Among high school teenagers, there is a positive attitude towards social issues of gender identity. They believe in social acceptance, in a "normality" among the group and present a distance from the expanded community spaces, beyond the school. Between them neutrality is the most recurring behavior. They did not present explicit prejudices or the determination that the one or the other is not part of the group. Adolescence is represented by groups and, in this case, the school confraternities do not regard sexuality or gender, in this context, as a matter of selection.

Among adolescents and young university students, the context presents itself differently. Many see the discussion about teacher formation in gender and sexuality or diversity as an important action, others make it explicit that they will not use the knowledge learned in their professional activities, whether due to their religious condition, their shame in

dealing with delicate topics or the fear of social reaction. It is a journey to be worked on by many generations of educators.

As for domestic spaces, they report important issues on both sides. As the dynamics of acceptance or non-acceptance of their gender identities and in some statements they try to explain physical displacements, such as moving out to other house, living with other relatives or being welcomed in a calm way, when they express, for example, being gay or lesbian in the family context, when dealing with high school students. Would this be a characteristic of the students at this school? What would be the social representation of gender and sexuality of all adolescents in the Brazil and Bolivia border region?

Interesting results of classroom debates during graduation. Although the age difference is small in years, adolescents and young university students still suffer the social pressures of regional culture regarding the themes addressed. The number of women who are unaware of scientific aspects about the body, sexual rights and reproductive rights is impressive. They report that nothing about these subjects was covered in high school. Sometimes they report that this is the first time that they have heard about such matters.

In colloquia on education and health, students demonstrated that they have knowledge about the aspects of prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, however, doubts and questions expressed that information is not always understood or correlated with their realities. A classic example is not having access to male or female condoms, never talking to health or sex education professionals, or receiving any guidance on body care in adolescence.

Regarding family orientation about sex and sexuality, according to high school and higher education classes, the subject was never mentioned, or was hardly mentioned. They considered this situation as lack of information from their parents or guardians, ashamed to deal with the issue with children, religious issues that do not favor dialogues on the theme or, simply, the absence of maternal and paternal or family perception that these adolescents are moving into adulthood.

Masculinities and femininities went through issues of individual development and were characterized by doubts and social attitudes not consistent with the present: for adolescents, most movements in society do not recognize that this perspective influences teaching behaviors. Teachers who perpetrate sexist, homophobic and discriminatory behaviors have difficulties in their activities, whether in elementary school or in the academy, when they are unable to accept or debate about gender variations, expressed sexualities and upward globalization. It is an agenda of connected warning lights, one cannot ignore it, pretend that it does not exist.

Modern authors promote a debate related to affirmative pedagogies when they affirm that cultural determinations for the behavior of people in accordance with conveniences and historical moments were developed over time, with the elaboration of these behaviors arising from spaces recognized as determinants, such as family, religion, health and justice.

Those with gender identities under construction seek information, in general, on the internet. They want to understand the ways in which gender is presented in the world and are able to discuss, even in a shy way, the issues surrounding their sexualities. Teachers in formation can and should seek further study and qualifications in the topics, in order to better contribute to tackling the various problems that misinformation can cause to the development of an adolescent.

Other aspects still need to be refined and systematized, so that we can identify and understand the expressions of these adolescents, who live far from large centers, have access to information, but who sometimes do not realize the similarities and differences that may exist in relation to adolescents in the same city in which they live, other places and the neighboring country, the border where they live, without, however, realizing that globalization and access to information put them on the same level of development, which needs to be relativized by access, individual interest and fear of accessing a different universe from everyday life.

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