

Lesbophobia in the family: techniques to produce and regulate heterocentric femininities^{1 2 3}

Lesbofobia familiar: técnicas para produzir e regular feminilidades heterocentradas

Lesbofobia familiar: técnicas de producción y regulación de feminidades heterocentradas

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Abstract

This article has the purpose of understanding, from narratives of lesbians from the interior of the state of São Paulo, the ways in which gender performativity and educational trajectories are articulated. In order to do so, we conducted seven open interviews from a narrative perspective, and these interviews were analyzed from the contributions of Gender Studies with a feminist perspective. Based on the data constructed during this study, we came to the conclusion that the visibility and hypervisibility were conditioned to the participants' gender performativity, and their corporealities were observed, controlled, negotiated, refuted and educated in such a way that lesbophobia acted as an educational resource.

Keywords: lesbophobia, family, female masculinity, resistance

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Resumo

Este texto tem como objetivo compreender, a partir de narrativas de mulheres lésbicas do interior do estado de São Paulo, os modos como se articulam as performatividades de gênero e as trajetórias educacionais. Para tanto, realizaram-se sete entrevistas abertas de caráter narrativo que foram problematizadas a partir das contribuições dos Estudos de Gênero com Perspectiva Feminista. Com os dados construídos no decorrer deste estudo, chegou-se à conclusão de que a visibilidade e a hipervisibilidade estavam condicionadas às performatividades de gênero das participantes e que suas corporalidades foram observadas, controladas, negociadas, refutadas e educadas de tal modo que a lesbofobia atuou como recurso educativo.

Palavras-chave: lesbofobia, família, masculinidade feminine, resistência

Resumen

El propósito de este texto es comprender, a partir de las narrativas de mujeres lesbianas del interior del estado de São Paulo, los modos como se articulan las performatividades de género y las trayectorias educativas. Para esto, llevamos a cabo siete entrevistas abiertas de carácter narrativo que fueron cuestionadas a partir de las contribuciones de los Estudios de Género con una Perspectiva Feminista. Con los datos construidos en el curso de este estudio, surgió el hecho de que la visibilidad y la hipervisibilidad se vieron condicionadas por las performatividades de género de las participantes y que sus corporalidades fueron observadas, controladas, negociadas, refutadas y educadas de tal manera que la lesbofobia actuó como un recurso educativo.

Palabras clave: lesbofobia, familia, masculinidad feminine, resistencia

Introduction

The reflections presented in this text aim to discuss, based on the narratives of seven lesbian women (between 25 and 34 years old), how gender performance and lesbophobic educational practices articulate in the family. To do so, we conducted a PhD research, connected to Gender Studies in a feminist perspective, with open interviews inspired by the narrative-biographic methodology. The interviews were conducted in the countryside of the state of São Paulo (SP).

We recruited the study participants by three strategies: a) personal friendship networks and LGBT sociability spaces in the city of Presidente Prudente - SP; b) articulation with research groups or activities that focus on the study and activism on sexual diversity; and c) interactions in internet groups, exclusive to LGBT groups.

We did not establish fixed questions. The conversation would start by explaining our intentions and institutional belonging. We have opted to not use a script for two main reasons: the fear we might lose some important content using specific questions and our care to lead a research more focused on the careful listening and gazes. Similar to Caetano (2016), we wanted our bodies to be in that moment and the simple act of, during the interview, having to check the questions on a paper could hinder the interaction.

Initially, we had informal meetings and conversations with the participants to “break the ice” and establish a connection with the researcher. During the recorded interview, we explained once more the study. We presented our interest in understand the life story of lesbian women in educational spaces. In other words, that they were free to tell, in any way they wanted, their experience as a lesbian at home, in school, church, and university. Some interviewees tried to establish a linearity in their narrative, going through their childhood, teenage hood, and adult life. Others ignored some cycles in their lives and opted to approach each institution separately. Finally, others mixed contexts and times.

The participants were: Luna (25 years old), Patrícia (29), Cristiane (31), Jenifer (25), Mia (27), Caroline (29), and Towanda⁴ (34). All women define themselves as lesbians. Four of them consider their gender performance connected to masculinity, and three to alternative femininities. Regarding ethnical-racial characteristics, Caroline and Towanda identify themselves as black; the others, as white.

Our theoretical perspective – especially the contributions of philosopher Judith Butler (2004) – allowed us to think, regarding the interviews, the complexity and difficulty to qualitatively investigate gender and sexuality. The themes is so connected to intimate issues and, therefore, little verbalized and “confessed” by the subjects that the act of collecting such reports has a certain dose of “violence” and pain. The participants are not activists nor are part of feminist/LGBT public political fights - their stories, thoughts, and perspectives, regarding lesbianity, and are not often asked to discursively mobilize and elaborate their experiences. They confided to the researcher some facts and experiences that they had not related to anyone else previously.

⁴The study uses fictitious names chosen by the interviewees. The study was approved and followed by the Research Ethics Committee, CAAE: 68135317.4.0000.5402.

When listening to someone, we do not listen only to the content. Communication on life actions means another action, presenting that life and, thus, the speech is full of expectation on who listens. When formulating a word, the subject that submits themselves to someone else's listening wishes the listener can understand what is said and, simultaneously, expects or fears some type of reaction (Butler, 2004). Butler (2004) believes that the spoken words can be seen as "body offers", they can be indecisive or convincing, seductive or painful. Summing up, in the interaction between listener and confessor, the body- pervades by these experiences and subjectivity- is not on the sidelines; on the contrary, it is subjected, in a certain way, to unveiling itself through speech. Therefore, narrating something personal and intimate is, at the same time, to expose the body that has lived through these facts, participated in them, made them and, in a way, bring it back to the present and expose it to someone else's gaze. This creates tensions in the moment of narration because that speech had not yet been in a vulnerable situation, evaluated by another perspective (Butler, 2004) and, now, it is subjected to different and small reactions (or even thoughts on it) from the listener which can lead, at that exact moment, to the need of a new interpretation, choice, and/or intonation of the words and the facts lived, so as to make them more bearable to verbalize.

In the line of thought proposed by Butler (2004), we can say that the narratives brought through memory, during narration, are not merely descriptions of facts and situations lived in the trajectory of life processes, but the (re)creation and (re)constructions of meaningful moments. The narrations are means to produce senses to the experiences, as when narrating what was lived, the narrator also incorporates, in the narrative process the experience of being listened to, because the experience grounds the narrative and also produces the reality and/or incorporates it.

Our proposal is to debate the narratives on educational experiences in the family context of lesbian women. What do we understand by lesbianity? On the subject that considers oneself as lesbian, we agree with lesbofeminist author Norma Mogrovejo (2006, p. 03), when stating that "[...] to say 'I am gay' or 'I am lesbian' is declare a belonging and assume a specific posture related to the dominant sexual codes". Such sexual-political identities are cultural, historically situated, embodied by us among a multitude of possibilities of experiencing and representing our sexuality. In other words, they are not attributed to a mere sexual impulse, but produced with and in political relations assumed in society.

We argue that lesbianities, in educational institutions, such as family and school, followed by church and university, are not primarily “tolerated” or ignored, apart from (hetero) corrective practices and actions, mainly when intersected with gender performances that diverge from the hegemonic standards of femininity or subscribed to feminine masculinities.

In this article, we selected the parts of the narratives on families. In the beginning we present what is lesbophobia, through the debate of authors in the area of Gender Studies in a lesbofeminist perspective. After, we discuss how lesbophobia can appear in the end of childhood as a technique to produce and/or re-adequate the performances of a hegemonic standard of heterosexual femininity.

Lesbophobia, sexism, and misogyny: conceptual aspects

When we started the investigation on the theme of lesbianity in educational institutions, we soon realized that the classic discussion on homophobia would not be enough to understand the complexities experienced by women who differ from heterosexual sexuality. Through readings and debates specific to lesbophobia we could find concepts and the (little) production of knowledge on the theme. In this part of the article, we present the discussions and conceptual synthesis of specialist authors on the theme.

We share the theoretical elaborations of authors Crawford (2012), Gimeno (2010), Lorenzo (2012), Platero (2010), and Viñuales (2002), when arguing that lesbophobia is a cultural construction whose nucleus is sexism, articulated with misogyny and homophobia. Furthermore, it is a great ally in the process to deeply devalue women who break away, in any sense, with rigid gender norms, subjects that establish alliances among themselves and/or explore and/or live a sexuality without the phallus. Sexism does not propagate in the vacuum, it is not established with a “ground” or a support because its emergence and institutionalization establish an alliance with Western misogyny itself that unequally differs feminine and masculine (Braidotti, 1994; Viñuales, 2002).

Therefore, we understand sexism as a historical organization of social relations still based on the differentiation between men and women, according to which the feminine is dominated, subjugated, and inferiorized by the masculine. It is a complex set of applied methods, in the core of patriarchal societies, to maintain the situation of inferiority,

subordination, and exploitation of one gender (Lorenzo, 2012). It is on all scopes of life and human relations, so it is almost impossible to describe and analyze all its forms of expression and occurrence (Sau, 2000). In this sense, it is characterized as a situation/position that can be enacted and occupied by men and women. This framework takes place because, as part of an androcentric culture, sexism propagates in the collective imaginary and imposes itself through a set of representations/presentations, socially shared, of opinions and practices that disdain and/or violate women and/or the feminine (Caetano, 2016).

Moreno (1986) indicates that sexism is expressed in the practice, in social life, in different degrees, as well as in its relation with ways to produce knowledge. When analyzing its effects, it is possible to identify forged views and representations of the feminine, based on hierarchical distinctions. Lesbophobia is composed as one of the elements that support sexism as it helps, through violence, to oppose genders and forcibly reiterates heteronormative educational practices.

Thus, girls are, in general, pedagogized from a young age to “invest” in themselves (regarding aesthetics, behaviors, rules) so that, in the future, they can be chosen by some man, as well as competing among themselves, destroying the possibility of love between women. In the words of Molinier and Welzer-Lang (2009):

to women, homophobia, less studied, ensures...the production and reproduction of gender frontiers that rectify male dominance and the binary perspective of gender. Under the pretext of femininity, women should choose an appearance that signals their incorporation of aesthetic codes thought by man and adopt in front of them a submissive and non-competitive attitude regarding power. “Lesbophobia” [emphasis in original] designates the stigmatization of the sexuality between women that escape male control. (pp. 102-103)

In this line of thought, we believe that male control could not be present in women’s bodies without lesbophobia. There is the need to create sexist mechanisms that severely devalue the passionate, sexual, affectionate, “romantic” encounter between women and female partnership, so that heterosexuality does not seem obligatory, but the best pathway, a destiny, the future for women, as argued by Rich (2010).

The use of the term/concept lesbophobia to study lesbianities in the field of education can serve as a way to help the general criticism established by the concept of homophobia. We have conceived this connection because we believe that, together with Rubin (1989), we should not restrict the analysis of lesbian situation in terms of oppression to heterosexual women.

Lesbophobia produces specific contexts of vulnerability within which some behaviors are enacted, from brutal violence, as murderers, “corrective” rape, and sexual harassment, until verbal hostilities, micro punishment, subtle vigilance, restrictive control movements, (re)education and (re)adequation to norms, actions that exposes not only sexual dissidents, but all women – even heterosexual ones – that do not fit hegemonic models of femininity.

Though sharing the mediation of sexism, homophobia and lesbophobia are understood, in this text, as distinct categories. In its general sense, homophobia presupposes different punishments and ways to control those who transgress the rules of gender and sexuality. We could say that a subject that behaves, acts, and dresses outside their gender and/or wishes to have affective/sexual relations with subjects from the same gender are the main target of this type of violence. However, regarding lesbian women there is another very serious fact not explored: the historical and misogynistic understanding of women as inferiors.

In patriarchal societies, women, regardless if lesbians or heterosexuals, are led to submit themselves and be available to men, not necessarily sexually, but in terms of obedience, admiration, and dependence. And, in this process of keeping women subservient and dominated by male power, there is the need to use ways to subject women. To keep women dominated and subservient by male power, there is the need to use ways to form women for passivity, outside the scopes of autonomy, confidence, and freedom. Misogyny has been greatly successful in reaching this goal. That is, we believe that lesbophobic violence and exclusion does not emanate from the double need to produce subjects that respect gender rules and guarantee the cis-heteropatriarchal supremacy, but we also highlight that in the process itself of “being” woman is implied a hate to the feminine (misogyny) and its forms of alliance (lesbophobia). Thus, even if the woman is heterosexual and reasonably follows the expectations to her gender, she will have to negotiate the weight of inferiority, almost irresolvable, constant, and alienating.

In Viñuales’s (2002) perspective, misogyny is a hate, a disdain, a disgust towards women, simply for “being” women. Its motivation is to inflict violence (physical, psychological, symbolic) to subjects marked with a feminine identity, due to the historical believe of their insoluble inferiority. Misogyny is so powerful and omnipresent that, in many cases, its materialization – femicide, domestic violence, intrafamiliar sexual abuse, rape, subtle processes of humiliation, deprecation – is constantly justified, without reflection, on everyday discourses and, often, by other oppressed subjects. According to this author, misogyny is present in

comments, jokes, and attitudes that aim to ridicule feminine subjects, simply for being women. Routinely, many heterosexual and/or gay men make humiliating comments towards lesbians, mostly related to their feminine condition.

For Viñuales (2002) and Gimeno (2008), regardless of the concept and definition of lesbophobia, any disdain, violence, and ridicule of lesbianity masks a profound misogyny in social life. This is because, when hostility against the union of women is explicit, it is generally based on the denial of the “possibility to experience sexuality, femininity, summing up, to celebrate life if not *beside or under* [our emphasis] the patronizing gaze of a man” (Viñuales, 2002, p. 43). “Beside” refers to amorous and sexual matrimonial partnerships in heterosexuality. After all, as pointed out by Swain (2000), two women together “are alone”, have no validity and autonomy, cannot be seen as symbolically relevant because it is the man who legitimates the partnership, even sexually, it is the coitus (anal or vaginal) that proves a legitimate sexual relation (natural or “unnatural”) and, finally, “under the gaze” refers to the performances of gender in the prescription of hegemonic femininity.

The criteria that define how feminine bodies should present themselves are also built for and to satisfy men, aiming to expel and repel women’s “ugliness” (Ponce, 2014). This “ugliness” is, nowadays, closely related to having body hair, menstruation, excess body fat, stretch marks, sagginess, white hair, wrinkles, extremely muscular body, dark skin, speaking loudly, some masculine traits, among many others connected to race, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, gender performance, etc.

Family lesbophobia mediations when creating heterocentric femininities

We are *gender making* subjects, as stated by Bento (2014), when commenting on Butler (2003). After all, from the moment we wake up till we sleep, during the whole day our clothes, accessories, body movements, voice, among other aspects are drenched in gender. In everyday life we interpret and evaluate the way of *making gender*. Often, without noticing, for instance, we make comments we are developing affections and animosities, making decisions from what we know about men and women (Pereira, 2012). We also organize our appearance based on the

knowledge and aesthetic resources aligned with masculine or feminine. On the other hand, the norms and rules that guide gender also cause discomfort, violence, and death (Butler, 2015). They limit the field of opportunities, create a hierarchy, and attribute different values to lives (Swain, 2006). They stop us from doing different activities that attract us (Halberstam, 2008); silence us in the face of different situations in which our word might not be authorized (Gimeno, 2005); hurt us by imposing how we should “see” our bodies (Bordo, 1997); reduce loves that diverge from the prescribed (Eribon, 2008; Mogrovejo, 2006); and, finally, segregated and severely punish as we get farther from their assumptions or challenge them (Bento, 2011; Pelúcio, 2011; Peres, 2010).

Generally, families, schools, churches, universities, among others, are educational institutions that are closely related with those norms. We want to situate the experiences of lesbian women participating in our study in these context of learning spaces. From their testimonies, we perceive that, when the narrators were children, families were more tolerant regarding their clothes, tastes, games, and behaviors culturally understood as boyish. Lesbophobic techniques of gender correction, as a way to expel the lesbian threat, appear in the narratives only in the transition to teenage hood.

We present below the gender experiences during childhood and how the narrators perceive themselves and the way they were perceived by their surroundings:

Cristiane (31 years old) has a brother just one year apart, this has allowed them to share games and establish a partnership:

He didn't have a girl's manner, but I had a boy's one. I liked to play ball, I liked to play with cars, I played with everything that was for boys and I didn't like anything for girls! This is a fact"...besides playing, I defended him at school, when the boys hit him, I would go and hit them, I defended him.

She also adds that, when the family gathered with other children besides her brother and sister, she preferred games socially seen as ‘for boys’:

for instance, I didn't play with my female cousins, I played with my male cousins, soccer, running, skating, rollerblades, while my girl cousins played house and school. These games were more liberating to me, there were no sexual meaning. They came with no exaggerated concerns.

Jenifer (25 years old), an only child, was a “very quiet” child. She says that when she was little, before completing 6 years old, she played alone in her fantasy world, surrounded by the dolls bought by her mother and father:

I had dolls, I had all types of dolls, like, I had the full Barbie house, those type of things, but I preferred to, for example, play kitchen, like “I’m the owner of a restaurant” or like in an office, I didn’t like to play doll...you know?!

With time, Jenifer started to have company and participate in new games – thanks to her friendship with her male cousins, when she stayed with her grandmother after school:

We grew up as siblings, really, and my greatest joy was when I’d go to the house of my other grandma, the mother of my father, there I could do everything, I could eat candy, play, water the backyard, do soap slides, there I could be a child...I could play soccer with them, I’d go to the country house and ride horses, fly kites. We played in a little dam, the waterfall...I was a boy indeed! I was a boy.

Caroline (29 years old) says that, from an early age, she liked “boys’ universe” and wanted to keep her hair short, use blue, and T-shirts. In her immediate family this was never a problem, on the contrary:

They always let me be very comfortable, I always used the clothes I wanted, the sneakers I wanted, the flip-flop I wanted, you know? So, I had no problems with my parents but...in my home it was okay, on the streets that was different, you know?! Then it was “you are a tomboy”, “Ah you are a tomboy”, “you are maria-sapatão⁵”, you are this and that, people normally say.

Towanda (34 years old) was raised by her grandparents, 40 years older than her, as her mother had to leave the city for a job. She retells her privilege of living free from societal restraints which dictate girls’ childhood:

I always had a short hair, used Bermuda shorts, shorts, t-shirt, I never liked all these ruffles and frills...And as I got older...as I was the granddaughter and my aunts and uncles were leaving the house, I ended up being the last child...I had a very cool childhood, because my father...he helped a lot with these boys’ stereotypes, because, like, he never denied doing things with me, so, since I was very young, he did my toys, he’d take me fishing, hunting, all those things we think are “boy things”, my dad did them with me! And my mother also let it! My mom never had a problem with all this...maybe they didn’t know that this was part of me, that this is who I am. But I had a very privileged childhood, very loving, I was raised in a very loving atmosphere.

⁵ Translator’s note: The Brazilian expression. *Maria-sapatão* is a derogatory term connecting the feminine name Maria and *sapatão*, roughly translated as dyke.

Mia (27 years old), despite her wish to play with her brother and the family permission to do so, found difficulties to enact this wish as she had to do the household chores with her older sister, so her mother could work:

I wanted to play with my brother's toy cars, I didn't want to help my sister dry the dishes. I wanted to be like my brother, playing with his cars, playing soccer, playing on the street, doing karate, but I had to do that...many times I would go to sleep and ask: "God, make me wake up a boy tomorrow!", many times...At the same time, I didn't want to dress up, I had no vanity. I didn't want to dress up, to do girly stuff. No dolls, nothing, I asked for dolls because my sister convinced me and asked dolls for her to play with, but I didn't play with the dolls. I wanted to do boy things and stuff.

Patrícia (29 years old), an only child, was raised until 9 years-old in a much more comfortable situation – family's own house and with a maid– when compared to the other children in her neighborhood. She retells that up to this age she would observed through the gate the children playing freely on the street, but she couldn't leave due to her family's overprotection. She remembers the negative comments her neighbors would make about Paulo⁶, "a black girl, very boyish, short haircut, T-shirt, shorts", who played "with the boys" and looked like "a boy", but reinforced to her parents how she, contrary to Paula, was "such a nice girl [that] doesn't go to street". However, as Patricia states, the privilege of being "a nice white girl who didn't leave the house" did not last long, first due to the financial crisis caused by the bankruptcy of the company her father worked, and later her first performances dissonant from the expected femininity. Patrícia, like many children with no babysitter, started to follow her father at work (as a street vendor). It was in one of these occasions that the social environment read Patricia through her gender performance, as an outsider of hegemonic femininity, perceiving her as a boy:

I had a T-shirt on, shorts, flip-flops, and a cap, then a guy asked my mom: "Is this your son? He's cute", my mom: "No, it's a girl", she was very embarrassed...of course, right?

However, this did not affect, until her teenage hood, the family relationship; on the contrary, she also remembers the connection established with the father, permissive in several games/plays, such as flying kites, playing video games, and cards.

⁶ T.N.: In this case the insult is hidden in the use of -ão at the end of her name (Paula). In Portuguese the augmentative suffix -ão is added to masculine words, while -ona to feminine words. Therefore, by using -ão (Paulão), instead of -ona (Paulona) speakers were referring to Paula as a man.

We can analyze these narratives through the concept of feminine masculinity proposed by Halberstam (2008). In his theoretical discussion, as before mentioned, the author distances himself from Rubin's (1993) explanation and the thesis that gender is an interpretation of the sex, considering that this line of thought suggests that masculinity only makes sense in the bodies of biological men. Disagreeing with Rubin (1993), Halberstam (2008) advocates that masculinities were not only enacted by women's bodies, but that nowadays new masculinities have been built that should be recognized as possible life experiences and not inconsistencies: *"there are new masculinities that are being produced by women, hoping that these re-writings of masculinity can be finally recognized as part of the history of masculinity"* (p. 295).

In this sense, Halberstam (2008) explains that in a family the demonstration of preferences for "boys" activities are not always frowned upon during childhood. They became a way of "protecting" girls from conventional femininity that, excessively, sexualize girls and precociously initiate a sexual life, exposing them to undesirable pregnancy and interrupting, in many aspects, the flourishing of other interests that are not exclusively the male gaze. Thus, some families start to rethink their daughters' interest for "more comfortable" clothes, games, books, and mathematics as a way to postpone to their adolescence the heterosexual femininity and its sexual and reproductive implications.

This is more evident in Patricia's narrative:

I have this 'way', this body language, quite strong...my voice is not so masculine, only if I make it be, but my ways, the way I sit, moving my shoulders forward, totally...I was always like this, since I was a child, sitting with my legs open, not sitting as a girl, crossing my legs and all. So, I think, like, everyone always knew, all my uncles, aunts, my family, everyone knew it, my friends. [My parents] were in doubt, just in case, if they incentivized me to be with men, what if I turned up pregnant? This would also be a humiliation, it would be as shameful to be as lesbian as to show up pregnant, but being pregnant is much harder to hid, the belly pops, then the child comes. So I was best to keep me like that, I wouldn't have sex with boys, that I didn't have very intimate relations with sex, real sex. Risking having sex before marriage, it was best to prevent this even. Just in case...she is different, but maybe it is just her way! Because, for example, in my family there are women who are this way, but they are not...so, like, there was always that doubt: "My daughter is not so feminine, but maybe if I give her more freedom..." Then there is another part of the narrative from the side of my father's family, I always remember my father and mother saying that my cousin José, he had a daughter very young, he had it with 16, 17 years old, a daughter...today he has three daughters...So, I think, like, in any case "if she is a lesbian we can deal with this later, first let's worry about a pregnancy" [her parents thought faced by the story of Patricia's cousin who was a young father and now has 3 daughters]...I had a masculine way, a masculine way to be, but preventing a pregnancy was a priority.

The participants of the study are between 25 and 34 years old and, in these period of almost 10 years, from the late 1980s to mid-1990s, emerged and developed many discourses on children and teenagers' rights in Brazil, starting with the redemocratization process, which culminated on the *1988 Federal Constitution*, known as the Citizen Constitution, up to the Children and Teenage Statute (Lei Federal n.º 8.069/1990), and the Law of National Education Guidelines (Lei Federal n.º 9.394/1996). Therefore, these interviewees grew up in a period of democratization of school access, educational reforms, study understood and valued as a way to improve life and, even, the stimuli for girls to develop other activities beyond house chores, problematized by the feminist movements and the recommendations of international bodies connected to the United Nations (UN).

In this perspective Halberstam (2008) explains how western societies, some more than others and in different ways, have gradually changed the “*concepts on what is the most adequate way to educate girls*” (p. 296). In fact, the social problems that affect many girls have been denounced for decades by feminist movements, especially, those related to pedophilia and sexual exploitation, undesirable pregnancy, low intellectual interest, exposure to violence and dependence of romantic partners, forcing mothers, fathers, and grandparents to tolerate masculinity as a way to prolong childhood.

The gender performances of our narrators, when closer to masculinity, were not confronted and repelled by the families at first. The testimonies tell us of pleasurable moments, of a greater freedom to blur gender lines. Something very different from the femininity in boys' bodies during childhood. Several studies on gender and sexuality (Cornejo, 2012; Silva, 2014) during childhood show us that the construction of masculinity in boys' bodies is watched over and reiterated from a tender age. Boys who display behaviors socially attributed to the feminine are constantly punished in families and schools.

We understand, together with other authors on the theme as Platero (2009) and Halberstam (2008) that masculinity is not exclusive to lesbians and can be experienced by all women, including heterosexual ones. However, it is undeniable that lesbian experiences are a privileged *locus* to an array of masculine expressions and identifications, considering that heterosexuality has rigid pre-established limits and degrees for masculinity to take place (Meinerz, 2005; Platero, 2009). Halberstam (2008) supports that feminine masculinity will only seem bothersome when it intersects with lesbianity. In other words, when the “girl-boys” do

not give any “proof” and/or “signs” that the heterocentric destiny is guaranteed in the families, these families will then start to regulate and apply lesbophobic techniques to re-educate the gender.

Cristiane’s narrative shows us this, when she points out that her childhood “boys” games “weren’t followed by exaggerated concern”. It was only during her teenage hood that her mother invested and intervened in her clothes and her hair. Nowadays, at 31 years old, and a gender performance aligned with feminine masculinities, she does not recognize her teenage self in the images of family social events:

Nowadays I look at the photos and say: My Goodness, why? Like, that wasn’t me! I remember that when I used girl’s clothes, because my mother would make me, she said I had to wear a skirt, a dress..., I didn’t feel well, I looked at myself...I felt horrible! It took me a long time to build, it took me long to create my style...When I started to work [as a teacher], I didn’t know what to wear...to reach the point to dress myself masculine, was a process, because I had to use a blouse, these things and I didn’t feel well, I didn’t!

The hair, a very important sign of feminine norms, is until now a point of conflict for Cristiane:

Oh, my father, until today, when I cut my hair shorter, he says: “ah you have to let your hair grow, you look so beautiful with long hair”...until now I haven’t found a haircut I can identify with, so I just tie it.

From Cristiane’s testimony, we can understand the continuous re-education forces. Halberstam (2008), as a researcher on the theme of feminine masculinity, argues that it is very hard for a “tomboy”/“marimacho”⁷ to go through their teenage hood and youth with a masculine gender performance. According to him, the re-adequation forces are so intense, even if subtle, that many girls, before finding the tools of autonomy and resistance to establish a feminine masculinity, often as adults, go through a period in which they are captured by (hetero)corrective investments. Therefore, we understand why Cristiane took a while to refuse the clothes that made them uncomfortable in her own skin and why, even today, she cannot deal with her hair, for example. There is a tension between what her family considers beautiful, adequate, and what she likes herself. Due to this opposition, she keeps her hair in a “neutral” space, in her words: “tied”.

⁷ *Marimacho*, an expression in Spanish that associates the feminine name Maria with Macho used, often derogatorily, to refer to girls with characteristics, tastes, and, mainly, a corporal style aligned with masculinity.

To Britzman (1996), the practice of re-education lies in the belief that to have the “correct” sexuality there is, a pre-requisite, the development of the adequate gender, one established in the coherence among the genital organ, the performance, and the sexual desire. Thus, after the first period, the breast growth, and the emergence of the first pubic hair, starts the process to (re)feminize girls, to guarantee the heterosexual desire and eliminate the threat of lesbianity (Halberstam, 2008). As a result, Berenice Bento, in an interview to Dias (2014), affirms that she believes that homosexuality has not been completely de-pathologize, as it is through intense regulations of gender and the breach of “gender dysphoria”⁸ that such institutions, health clinics, families, or even schools, try to prevent it or even cure it.

The authors’ argument is visible when Cristiane tells that her childhood experiences of masculinity were resignified by the mother when confronted by her daughter’s lesbianity as an adult:

Then my mother started to freak out...she'd look at me and start to cry...she had some talks with me...she would say “I've noticed when you were a child, you were different, but I didn't believe this would happen” and other things would emerge.

Cristiane mentions several episodes of suffering and culpability felt by her mother when confronted with her dissidence. Her mother started to remember Cristiane’s childhood, and the different circumstances that made her alarmed about her daughter’s sexuality. Her interest for soccer, toy cars, study, freely running and playing, wear sneakers and T-shirt, were mobilized in the mother’s memory as mistakes, errors, or permissiveness, symptoms that she should have faced to guarantee Cristiane’s heterosexuality.

We understand that sexuality is not an essence denounced by gender deviations. Any idea that gender performance might “denounce” homosexuality is a fragile thought faced by the many possibilities of the subjects to establish codes of masculinity and femininity. However, this connection does exist in the social imaginary. Or better, it is produced: women have been educated, especially after childhood, to have their bodies aligned with normative femininity,

⁸ “Gender dysphoria” is a medical term to designate a pathological state of non-conformity with the gender attributed at birth. It is catalogued at the ICD-10 (International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems) as “Gender Identity Disorder”. Up to 2018, this was followed in various countries, including Brazil. Currently, the 11th issue of ICD does not consider transsexuality a disorder, but a theme related to sexual health.

exclusively to complement another subject, matched with normative masculinity. In other words, heterosexuality demands a gender alignment (Wittig, 2006).

To Bordo (1997), a historical way to produce femininity is through physical restrictions and demands repetitively exercised on the bodies: how to seat, walk, eat, speak, smile, clean yourself, dress up, etc. In a feminist Foucauldian perspective, in contemporary times and the new beauty standards prescribed to women, vigilance and the regulation of girls' diets has been a hardly visible way to produce hegemonic femininity and its fundamentals of lightness, nicety, delicacy, graciousness, towards masculine appreciation. To raise "girls-boys" to become "beautiful young women" also means processes to give them thinner bodies, different from the "chubby" and child-like ones.

Mia remembers that at the end of her childhood, between 10 and 12 years old, she started to be incentivized by her mother to change her clothes and to start dressing more appropriately following what her mother understood as common to a pre-teen: a light lipstick, clear nail polish, etc. Though she was not overweight she was taken by her parents to an endocrinologist and stimulated to lose weight: "*I just thought: I need to diet and I will lose weight*". Together with this, she started noticing that her mother, who seemed liberal – having lesbian acquaintances and a gay relative in the family- started to make frequent negative comments, in front of her daughter, regarding lesbianity, especially, on the "way" of masculine lesbians:

When I was younger and started going to soccer...my mother didn't say anything, it was later that she started to say...there was a couple with whom my parents were friends with, and the sister of this woman was a lesbian, they would always through parties, barbecue, couple things. Once this woman was visiting her sister and my mom came back from the party criticizing this woman "does she need to be like this?", "does she have to be this way", "fat like that?", "does she need to talk that way?"...There was another time, I remember that I came downtown and in one of these Chinese snack bars her in [Presidente] Prudente there was a couple, they were older, you know?! There was a feminine woman and very masculine one, loose clothes, military. She was really butch. I remember my mom didn't say anything, but she kept looking at the woman, she didn't stop looking...that bothered me, and she was there just looking at them with the corner of her eye, she didn't need to say anything. Later, when I was around 14 years old, we were in a mall and, according to her, there was a lesbian looking at her and she said: "Look, look, that thing keeps looking at me" and the woman had a lesbian way, she was big, square shoulders, short hair and she said: "Ugh...what is that, she keeps looking at us, staring". She didn't say "go to hell", "this person must die", but it was like...this person was wrong....She didn't explicitly say it was wrong, but I'd noticed that for her there was a right way to be.

The behavior of Mia's mother allows us to speculate two aspects of corrective education: first, women are educated in very subtle (Lamas, 2015), but strong and powerful ways through the relations between mother and daughter (Lorenzo, 2003); the second aspect reveals

that it is through the definition of the other as abject that one teaches what is desirable (Butler, 2004). When Mia explains that her mother did not have to say anything directly for her to learn that it was grotesque to be a “dyke”, “fat”, “big”, “masculine”, we can relate with the discussions held by Lamas (2015) on the ways through which women use subtle violences to change the behaviors of those around them- in this case, her daughter’s. To the author, feminine aggressiveness is frequently culturally expressed, allowed, and feed though indirect ways, with no confrontation, and without a concrete discursive elaboration. In the perspective of this anthropologist, this non-confrontational way of acting aims to *“succeed to change someone else’s behavior that affects, shames, or disgusts us, but without exposing yourself, through a malicious comment or coldness”* (Lamas, 2015, p. 52). Sometimes, correction is enacted as a way to impose shame on the other, for something considered an offence. In the researcher’s words: *“Often, it is enacted with the hope that the person will reconsider their behavior and learn: it is a way to give a lesson”* (p. 52). These corrective and aggressive practices, as they are veiled, are not commonly discussed, what hinders its problematization and overcome.

The second aspect, connected to this, regards the different ways, almost invisible to inferiorize the other to establish “our normality”. In the discussion on homophobia, Borrillo (2010) and Eribon (2008) debate on the different ways subjects show their disgust on sexually-dissident people and one of these actions is the use of grotesque, bizarre, and dehumanized descriptions. In Mia’s testimonies, her mother teaches her, through the look, how disgusting is a woman that is not thin, petite, feminine, and heterosexual.

Towanda could be one of the women despised by Mia’s mother. She has undergone a bariatric surgery and performs a gender performance aligned with feminine black masculinity, throughout her life she has received these same looks and heavy judgements as a result of the intersection between fatphobia and lesbophobia:

I’ll tell you something...never in my life I’ve suffered so much prejudice as I did for being obese...my whole life I was severely violated because of my obesity...it was an invisible prejudice, few people talk about this...when you are fat you are not accepted anywhere...you are belittled, you know?...people use that speech “you have to lose weight because of your health”, but it isn’t, people don’t accept obese people...If you’re fat, you have no sex appeal...people don’t look at you...I’d say the greatest violences I’ve gone through were more...of course, it does match with others, but it leans much more towards obesity than the others [racism and lesbophobia].

Often, these lessons of standard femininity can completely extrapolate the limits and end up punishing girls' bodies, as happened with Jenifer, who would starve because her maternal grandmother wanted to "fix her" through fasting:

My mother's mother was the devil, she didn't let me eat, you know, because I had to be thin...I cried because, during the week I went to my mother's mother and, on the weekend, to my father's mother. So, during the week, it was 07:30 breakfast, 12:30 lunch, and 6 pm dinner, that was all I ate the whole day, because I had to be thin!

Jenifer believes that her grandmother's desire to make her thin and more gracious was related to her lesbophobia.

Patricia's case, her mother's incentive for her and her father, who was also overweight, to lose weight were very frequent. The family investments made Patricia have a constant relationship with diets, which increased in the beginning of her adult life, when she was admitted in the university:

My mother had this demand, a demand to lose weight, lose weight, and lose weight, so when I was thin, oh, she would say: "oh how gorgeous, how gorgeous..." it was her show, you know? "Now you'll have a boyfriend!". I think that was her highest expectation, each weekend when I came home [at this time she studied in another city], she would say "How beautiful you are, thin, with this long hair...look at your photo!", like "How come boys don't want to date you?". She was shocked, when I was thin, my mother thought I was beautiful and incentivized me to keep thin...So, my mother looked at all that "You are young! How beautiful you are! You go to a public university, oh...". And I think my father did it to "What man wouldn't want to be with you?" "Look at you, wow" you know? "You look very beautiful! You have a very nice body! Such a pretty face!...and that kept going, going and not going, not going, frustrated!,"

Patricia's testimony echoes Butler's (2003) arguments that subjects are understood in the rigid logic sequence sex-gender-desire. Patricia's family bet that the changes on her body and her long hair would be enough to leave behind, in her childhood, the feminine masculinity and, consequently, a heterosexual desire would "emerge". Maybe the issue was not, in fact, to make the "right" sexuality 'blossom' but to make Patricia apt to enact it. There are discourses that, aiming to de-potentialize lesbianity, point out that dissident experiences are the result of a certain bitterness, insecurity, rejection caused by men.

In other words, now with the gender performance "adjusted" by family education, the interviewee would be "free" to love men and be corresponded by them. Still in this aspect, we must highlight Brazilian actress and comedian Claudia Jimenez, when in an interview to the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, in 2011, declared she had been a lesbian a great part of her life

because she was fat: *“I had no sensuality, I was much fatter than I am today. I had no shape, no vanity. I thought I had no power to seduce a man. As I had to be loved, I threw myself in the women”* (Neves, 2011).

Gender regulations established by Patricia’s body weight did not stop because the problems to keep the weight and the lack of a first boyfriend during her under graduation, always exposed her to more explicit investments to change, culminating on her father’s intervention that directly asked the wife to stop her comments and evaluations, as the situation became unbearable:

“You were so pretty, why are you letting yourself go? Why are you letting yourself go? Don’t you put on weight!”, “You were pretty, gorgeous, perfect! Don’t you put on weight!”, “This is so ugly, look at your aunts on your father’s side, you want to be like your aunt, fat, like that, huge, don’t do that”...Lose weight, lose weight, lose weight! There was always this incentive to lose weight, it was always something very present, and something that was irritating in my mom, you know? There were fights between my mother and my father. My father said “For goodness’ sake, Ana! It’s horrible you say that to her!”, “I’m fat too, if you aren’t happy find yourself a thin husband, enough!”, “Yeab, she is fat, she is my daughter!”, “Look at the women of my family, she won’t be like your family, your sisters are skinny, just Mara [narrator’s aunt] is a bit fatter, but all your sisters are thin, but in my family that is not the genetics! Stop saying that, stop saying it!”, then my mom let it go...but...wow, it really pissed me off with all this fat talk, she would say “Why eat? Why is he fat? Do you think this is beautiful? Do you think this is healthy?”

Patrícia explains that to her mother there was a direct connection between being beautiful, thin, and feminine and, thanks to that, she could have a valuable boyfriend, that is, a man with physical characteristics and a personality good enough for her daughter to fall in love. Among the possible explanations she used to understand lesbianity, her mother’s perspective was that only rejected women, those who could not be loved by good man, the valuable suitors, would be susceptible to this deviation from “normal sexuality”.

To end up, we understand, from the participants’ narratives, that the home, besides being a place of refuge, affection, safety, care, and education is also a space of control and vigilance over gender performances and experiences of sexuality. Family appeared, in many moments, as responsible to detect deviations and create ways to correct them. The “correction” of the interviewees’ lesbianity, through the realignment of gender in hegemonic femininity, is what we call here family lesbophobia.

We have noticed, after our theoretical discussion and the analysis of life stories, that lesbophobia in families is a complex phenomenon, difficult to grasp as it appears and develops differently from homophobia. Narratives indicated a first idea of acceptance and tolerance of

masculinities in girls' bodies. However, after childhood, this masculinity, intersected with lesbianity, starts to be seen as a concerning deviation of gender (Halberstam, 2008). Lesbophobic violence, as a way to produce heterosexuality, emerges and camouflages in several ways within the home, with the aggravating circumstance that mothers are those who are generally responsible for girls' gender performance and, in this mother-daughter relationship, many lessons and violences are employed in silence (Lorenzo, 2012).

Final remarks

In our meetings with academic feminisms, reading texts that question the relations women have with knowledge – communication, silence, subjectivity, sexuality, among others- we have tried to ratify that lesbianities in the spaces of the powerful institutions that educate us (family, school, church, university, among others) are not primarily accepted, tolerated, or ignored, immune, foreign to (hetero)corrective practices, especially when intersecting with gender performances dissonant from hegemonic femininity or aligned with feminine masculinities.

In this sense, the hypothesis was that subjects constituted in lesbianity are targets, in the family and during formal education, of heteronormative educational investments- even if in silence and veiled – that sometimes are grasped by them, adjusting depending on the expectations of these institutions, while in other times, resist, in different ways, and create their own strategies to survive the lesbophobic violence and represent themselves as lesbians.

In our opinion, the key discussion of the work was the discussion on prejudice and violence, to think lesbophobia as a teaching technique and the conformation of girls to the (hetero) norm, because, beyond conceptualizing lesbophobia and identify them in the life narratives, we should think how participants' gender performances were tolerated, accepted, observed, watched over, negotiated, refuted, and (re)educated by the families. The institution family is the first to zeal for the intelligibility of gender. Furthermore, we have noticed the use of lesbophobia to prepare girls' bodies for compulsory heterosexuality: to lose weight, wear feminine clothes, to beautify oneself were seen as ways to put away the lesbian threat and make girls more mature, that is, women apt to exercise their (hetero)sexuality.

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