

# Sexual diversity, gender and new forms of family organization: issues for education and commensality

## Diversidade sexual, gênero e novas formas de organização da família: questões para o ensino e a comensalidade

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### Abstract

This article discusses the issue of sexual diversity, involving the transformation of gender identities in the practice of sexuality and the new organizational scenarios of contemporary family as related to inquiries and challenges in the teaching of science and the educational practices in their intersections with health, including eating habits. This issue has not been the interest and object of study often enough in these different contexts. In the present analysis, this issue is approached together with the knowledge and content that shape these practices with a view to socially legitimized role of school in educational processes and in the construction of scientific knowledge. The qualitative nature of reflections combine sociological and anthropological perspectives based on the collection of data on official documents, projects and/or initiatives that make sexual diversity a theme addressed in schools in order to strengthen the respect and legitimacy of conjugality between persons of the same sex. The debate points out the current social achievements as regards the right to form a family, added to the tensions that pervade the debate on sexual diversity involving public education policies.

**Key words:** Science Education. Sexual Diversity. Family-School, Family-Edibility.

### Resumo

Este artigo discute a problemática da diversidade sexual, envolvendo as transformações das identidades de gênero no exercício da sexualidade e os novos cenários de organização

da família contemporâneos, relacionados às indagações e aos desafios presentes no ensino de ciências, bem como das práticas educacionais em suas interseções com a saúde onde se incluem as práticas alimentares. Tal problemática ainda se apresenta pouco contemplada como interesse e objeto de estudo nos diferentes contextos. Propõe-se abordá-la de modo não isolado dos saberes e conteúdos que conformam tais práticas, tendo em vista o lugar socialmente legitimado da escola nos processos formativos e na construção do conhecimento científico. As reflexões de cunho qualitativo conjugam as perspectivas sociológicas e antropológicas, tendo por base o levantamento de documentos oficiais, projetos e/ou iniciativas que tematizam a diversidade sexual nas escolas no que tange ao fortalecimento, respeito e legitimidade da conjugalidade entre pessoas do mesmo sexo. A discussão aponta as atuais conquistas sociais ao direito de entidade familiar, somadas às tensões que permeiam o debate acerca da diversidade sexual envolvendo as políticas públicas de educação.

**Palavras-chave:** Ensino de Ciências. Diversidade Sexual. Família-Escola, Família-Comensalidade.

## Food from mothers; families without mothers: initial thoughts

Intersections between food, gender and family are not specific and privileged objects of the present analysis. However, they seem intriguing and this is our intention: to think about the problematization of diversity involving the exercise of sexuality and transformations of gender identities in a way that is not isolated from the knowledge and scientific contents disseminated in teaching and health practices, including eating practices. These knowledge-forming practices end up considering subjectivity as a mediator of scientific knowledge as well as the new scenarios of family organization today.

Although there is no greater interest in approaching the topic of sexual diversity in the field of Food and Culture, where commensality gains meaning as a social practice, contemporary cultural studies highlight how much food knowledge and practices reveal the dynamics of family relationships and gender hierarchies.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the particularized problematization of sexual diversity through current social achievements of rights related to family as an entity and the contemporary debate about sexual diversity in schools can be a fruitful way to reflect more widely on practices and knowledge (whether in health or among schoolchildren). These are two social instances (family and school) that are relevant to the socialization and construction of social identities.

In this direction, it becomes pertinent to inquire how sexual diversity is expressed, for example, as part of social relations within the scope of commensality. In view of its different aspects and particularities in the field of culture, the designation “mother’s food,”<sup>1</sup> in the singular, expresses a particular family model in which females’ places are presented as socially and culturally constructed. Then, how do we think of a plural family consisting of more than one mother? Or more than one father?

Many other questions can be explored from this inquiry in the contexts of eating and health and/or teaching/school practices. However, we shall not dwell on them in depth. We are interested in the possibility of interconnections between them, especially regarding family models and conceptions that guide teaching and health practices. It is enough to remember that schools traditionally resort to families intending to present parents with questions about teaching and their children’s learning and school performance. But how do the different actors inserted in schools’ daily lives approach families consisting of two mothers? Or two fathers? Do they consider this different arrangement as being a family?

Considering the issues briefly mentioned here, this paper aims to contribute, in particular, to a better understanding of the elements involved in the current debate on sexual diversity as well as to identify possible gaps in the formulations and applicability of teaching/education public policies. Therefore, it highlights the challenges of incorporating the new scenario of sexual identities and practices and family arrangements in the proposals and projects focusing contemporary schools’ routine. In this direction, it is reaffirmed that it is necessary to broaden the understanding on the subject as well as the identification of tensions that surround it, with a view to the necessary improvements of actions in the scope of teaching and health practices.

## Background and contextualization of the topic

One of the topics inherent to sexuality, immersed in schools’ daily life, that transcends the contents addressed in science teaching, is the so-called “sexual diversity,” which has been a scenario for a dispute of meanings and has recently become more visible by its broadcasting in the media. This topic brings with it debates also fostered in the field of social sciences, whose objectives are aimed at consolidating a culture of respect for the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity. In Brazil, social differences, gender studies, sexuality and ethnic-racial relations have encouraged curricular content and teaching practices to not reinforce social differences between men and women, whites and blacks, heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Based on the literature on social and human sciences in the discussions around this topic, episodes of discrimination against the homo-affective population are observed in many cases, pointing to a persistent intolerance to sexual rights. According to a research on youth and sexuality

by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Brazil has an increasing index of homophobic attitudes and values in schools, although there is also an increase in interest in favor of broader actions in view of the violence, prejudice and discrimination against lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites and transgenders.<sup>2,3</sup>

Schools have been historically considered, based on the values and models of behavior transmitted and produced in society by formal education, as a place for debate and development of proposals in this field. Therefore, they play a decisive, though not exclusive, role in the construction of knowledge and in the development of actions aimed at such construction. In contemporary scenarios it is claimed that the relevance of this action is affirmed through practices based on respect for social differences, including those present in the experience of sexuality, and in confronting prejudice in its most varied aspects. It is possible to emphasize, within the current proposals, that families have been identified as potential partners for such projects. However, the view about families that is on the basis of such proposals and actions should be problematized. In other words, it is intended that schools be translated into society as privileged institutional sites for social coexistence and for the establishment of subjective relations favorable to the promotion not only of scientific knowledge but also of respect for diversity, often only tangential and associated with health practices within schools. -But what is the relevance of this topic in the context of teaching practices and schools?

As the topic of diversity is associated with episodes of discrimination against the homo-affective population and intolerance towards citizens' sexual rights, it is assumed that discussions about sexuality, and especially of sexual diversity in school settings, would involve cultural values and perceptions modeled by social representations on the topic.

Institutional managers, teachers, the students themselves and their families present different interpretations in relation to the subject, making complex not only the debates about it, but the development of proposals in this scope, especially those that aim to broaden discussions about approaching the subject in the context of teaching. It is important to understand how proposals addressed to the topic of sexual diversity are received, discussed and developed in school scenarios, whose models and values transmitted decisively act in the construction of critical thinking, as well as being perceived and dialogued together with the various family nuclei and constitutions present in school communities.

In this sense, the necessary problematization around the school-family relation with regard to the subject of sexual diversity is reaffirmed and it is pointed out as necessary to uncovering aspects that are not very visible in formulating proposals directed to schools through the formulation of public policies.

## Analysis trajectory

These reflections combine sociological and anthropological perspectives, considering studies carried out in the field of social and human sciences on the subject, with which they dialogue. In this direction, it is conducted from a qualitative approach that is characterized by privileging the study of individual and group social actions in a critical perspective.<sup>4</sup> The qualitative approach, present in research in the area of education, reaches a fundamental approximation and intimacy between subject and object, directly influencing the research context and ensuring the understanding of phenomena and facts of the analysis. That is, the qualitative research object is progressively built from the interaction of data collected from the field and its analyses.<sup>4-6</sup> In the context of public policies, qualitative research has much to contribute to the extent that it tends to consider the different aspects of a given situation, relating them to the general context, formulating propositions related to action and practice.<sup>6</sup>

The material obtained was gathered through a survey carried out in official documents and/or projects associated with the topic of sexual diversity in schools, namely: Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB, in the Portuguese abbreviation), the National Curricular Parameters (PCN, in the Portuguese abbreviation), the Brazilian Ministry of Education book collection “Sexual Diversity in Education: problematizations on homophobia in schools,” the “Brazil Without Homophobia” program, and the “Gender and Diversity in Schools” project, all from the Brazilian government. The analysis also includes the identification of initiatives and projects that strengthen respect for sexual diversity and the legitimacy of same-sex conjugality, ensuring them the right to a family entity, in addition to indicating issues that are intrinsic to sexuality and sexual diversity. These, in turn, permeate the school scenario and the new family relationships are also present as part of contemporary society.

The study is developed from these social references, aiming at the argument that the topic of sexual diversity and its implications in the family-school relationship are absent from school contexts. This reasoning is based on studies that deal with family as a social institution and its transformations in society, through the different forms of family organization that are present in society today. However, families, when approached in the context of schools, seem to be considered as an abstract and universal category that does not correspond to the complex network of social relations that characterize it. In addition, references to families suggest that a model of the modern conjugal family consisting of the father-mother-child triad prevails.

## Families as a social institution and the different forms of family organization: fundamentals and perspectives

Families, as participatory in the actions and projects developed in schools and characterized as a social institution, have undergone modifications throughout the development of contemporary society and such alterations have decisively influenced the form of family interaction, constituting different modes of relationship and resignification.<sup>7</sup>

Society institutions are generally conceived as naturalized forms of organizing collective life, reflecting defined behavior patterns. In this way, an institution standardizes, legalizes and legitimates the individuals' behavior in society, providing stability and security in social exchanges. Thus, an institution can be defined as a set of norms, rules, values, and social procedures, present and recognized in society, defining what is or is not legitimate, as well as taking on an influential role in the relations among individuals. They are critical elements for understanding the functioning and organization of a society. In such a way, a social institution can be defined as a socialization "tool" for the purpose of managing interpersonal relations.<sup>7</sup>

As examples of social institutions, one can mention Education, Family, State, and Church. Education, for example, is a social institution associated with the transmission of values, norms and knowledge produced by man with the purpose of forming citizens for coexistence in society, that is, for the fulfillment of their social role.<sup>8</sup> Since the Family is also an institution, it presents itself as the first instance of sociability in constituting individuals. It involves kinship relations, social regulation of biological activities (sex and reproduction), as well as their experiences, in which people begin to construct an identity reflected in family values normally imposed by society. However, changes in society have altered the forms of social interaction within families, constituting new modes of relationship between individuals/environments and between individuals/individuals. Such changes are important in the resignification of the family as a social institution.<sup>7,8</sup>

In the process of the family resignification, there is a tendency towards the naturalization of the heterosexual conjugal dyad with children as an elementary form of family. It is identified that there is a need to dissolve this naturalness in order to perceive the family as an institution that has undergone modifications and to conceive in a variable form the micro institutions – paternity, maternity, marriage –, privileging the diverse arrangements present in contemporary society.<sup>9</sup>

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, family studies have demarcated the diversity of family structures and configurations, thus demonstrating the multiple social and biological organizations in society.<sup>9-11</sup> Over the last few years, we have been witnessing in Brazil significant changes in social representations related to the family. The search for a social and legal legitimacy for same-sex relationships since the 1990s, technological advances and significant social, cultural, economic and political transformations have contributed to redesign the contemporary family and discuss the

ideals about the conjugal family. Topics such as divorce, single parenthood, autonomy in relation to conjugality and reproduction, and the redefinition of gender roles and marital roles have also contributed to changes in the way family and marriage are perceived by society, also analyzed from a heteronormative perspective.<sup>10</sup>

In an empirical reality, we observe that the category “Family,” as a social institution, has been culturally and socially constituted from a traditional conjugal or nuclear model (father, mother and children). However, we can see that there are different family organizations, in larger or smaller groups than the traditional nuclear model, matriarchal families, basically formed by mothers and children, and the new family arrangements that have emerged from same-sex unions. By the existence of this breadth of definitions in familiar forms, we can not deny the emergence of new forms of a conjugal family constitution in modern society. The family can therefore be understood as an institution constantly changing, being affected by the transformations of the social body field and where new arrangements are observed.<sup>11</sup> This indicates that, although there is a hegemonic family model, the unfolding of the diversity of family arrangements begins to gain ground and certainly influences the dynamics of social relations, even within schools.

### **Discussion on differences in the experience of sexuality: contemporary debates, new practice and regulation scenarios**

Debates on gender issues in public education policies, particularly demands on sexual diversity, have arisen in the field of public health and later in sectors of civil society and education, gaining visibility and initiatives in the field of legislation and rights from the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> Thus, struggles for gender equality and also respect for sexual diversity have been constant since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The affirmation of sexual diversity, as well as the changes involving the definitions of what is masculine or feminine, have gained prominence from the achievements of the feminist and LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) movements. These actions have provided greater visibility to gender and sexuality issues both in the health area and in the definitions of government agendas and policies.<sup>13</sup>

However, naturalized social attitudes and conventions related to sexuality are still predominant in the heteronormativity of sexual practices, whose actions restrict the development of individuals' potentialities. These conventions depart from the common sense perception that there may be a deviant subject opposed to a subject of reference, establishing the heterosexuality/homosexuality pair as a decisive and definitive opposition of practices and subjects.<sup>14,15</sup> As for these views and questions, the author<sup>16</sup> draws attention to the way in which modern societies culture does not allow a subject to be anything other than a man or a woman, reflecting a heterosexual character of desires and sexual relations known as heteronormativity. Therefore, it is a set of power relations, which privileges and promotes heterosexuality to the detriment of other sexual orientations.

Silence, bullying and the invisibility of potentialities are forms of social control and power relations over certain groups, acting against any manifestations of behavior in sexual orientation or in gender expression. In this way, people with homo-affective desires and behaviors often conceal their manifestations of affection and romantic relationships and until recently they were denied recognition of (Western countries arrangement) cohabitation as well as the family entity.

Social and legal recognition of cohabitation for same-sex relationships has gained ground in political discussions since the late 1960s and greater visibility in the late 1980s and early 1990s. European countries already had legal protection for homo-affective unions, while in the United States and France there were still debates about changing the legal understanding of marriage in an attempt to include all forms of romantic relationships.<sup>10</sup>

In Brazil, until the mid-1990s, the main struggle was for prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation, in any of its forms, and only later the achievement of civil rights for homo-affective couples would be claimed, although unsuccessful in the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil. Therefore, attempts were redirected to the state and municipal spheres, in their constitutions and organic laws.<sup>10</sup>

One more Brazilian attempt to legally support homo-affective unions was divulged in 1994,<sup>a</sup> although it was quickly suppressed by Catholic leaderships and by the perception that, moreover, an approval from the Brazilian National Congress would be necessary. From this initiative, the demand for homo-affective unions entered political scenarios and was based on a bill that would legalize and protect these unions, although they knew in advance the numerous resistance movements they would face from various sectors of Brazilian society.<sup>10</sup>

Since 1995, (Brazilian politician and psychologist) Marta Teresa Smith de Vasconcelos Suplicy, in a partnership with specialists and leaders of the homosexual social movement, defined the draft Act no. 1151/95,<sup>b</sup> which broadly “rules the civil union between people of the same sex and provides other remedies.” This bill was the first attempt to regulate the cohabitation between people of the same sex,<sup>10,17</sup> although it would not be at that moment the main claim, which would still prioritize the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation. In this way, the proposal to recognize stable romantic relations among people of the same sex has had repercussions in the media and in society, gaining strength in homosexual social movements, although it has had a resistance from religious groups in defense of family and moralization of society.

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a More precisely in the presidential election campaign of (35th President of Brazil) Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, of the Workers' Party (PT).

b Brazilian Bill 1151/95, consisting of 18 articles, began to be constituted as a proposition and would provide for the right to inheritance, succession, social security benefits, joint health insurance, joint declaration of income tax and the right to nationality in the case of foreigners.

By the end of 1998, the bill had only been approved by a Special Committee and not taken over to the House of Representatives. As a substitute, the bill approved by the Special Committee had undergone some changes, mainly with regard to the name of the legal instrument, which from cohabitation became the so-called registered civil partnership. This would be detached from the perspective of a homo-affective marriage and/or cohabitation, although it would ensure the patrimonial effects resulting from such partnership, although ensuring human rights. As a more substantive modification, an addendum that in the registered civil partnership contracts any provisions on adoption, guardianship or custody of children or adolescents together would be prohibited, even if children of one of the partners.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these and other changes to the substitute approved in the Special Committee, it was noted that the intention was to distinguish among types of union and to ensure that the civil partnership contracting parties would register their own family rights, with the exception of the above mentioned rights to adoption.<sup>10</sup> It can be seen, therefore, that in spite of the attempts to denominate homo-affective unions as registered civil partnerships, the unions were seen and constituted as a new modality of family, inasmuch as it guaranteed the same rights to the married or in cohabitation, although it had no such claim. For the author of Bill 1151/95, congress woman Marta Suplicy, denying such legal protection to homo-affective unions could also compromise the freedom of sexual orientation. She would further state that the proposition was not intended to characterize homo-affective couples as family units, which would calm down religious congresspeople, insofar as it is not intended to have any impact on family structures.

After numerous hearings and parliamentary speeches about the Bill, the social and legal recognition of cohabitation among same-sex couples came to be judged and approved by the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court (STF, in the Portuguese abbreviation) on May 5, 2011, representing another victory for the LGBTQ community. The actions were filed at the Court, respectively, by the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Republic and the 61st Governor of Rio de Janeiro, Sérgio de Oliveira Cabral Santos Filho. The reporting justice, Justice of the Supreme Federal Court of Brazil, Carlos Augusto Ayres de Freitas Britto, also argued in favor of recognition of homo-affective unions based on article 3, Item IV of the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil,<sup>c</sup> in order to exclude any interpretation that would prevent same-sex marriage as a family entity (p. 132)<sup>d</sup>.<sup>18,19</sup>

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c Art. 3º, Item IV, of the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil states: “These are fundamental objectives of the Federative Republic of Brazil: IV – Promoting the wellness of all, without prejudice of origin, race, gender, skin color, age and any other forms of discrimination.”

d An action proposed by the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Republic claiming that, owing to the federal legislature omission on the subject, non recognition of homo-affective unions would be contrary to fundamental precepts such as equality, freedom and the principle of human people’s dignity, all in the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil.

Minister of Culture Marta Suplicy, at the time an ally for the LGBTQ community, continued to support the homosexual community with the presentation of a draft for the Statute of Sexual Diversity,<sup>e</sup> which advocated, among many points, free sexual orientation and gender identity as fundamental rights. Adding to this point, other rights are presented: free choice of the family entity model; a homo-affective union with the same rights assured to heterosexual unions; the right to the exercise parenthood in relation to biological, adopted or socio-affective children, individually or in homo-affective unions; a proposal for educational institutions to adopt didactic materials that do not reinforce discrimination as well as to program their commemorative school activities taking into account the multiplicity of family formations so as to avoid any embarrassment for the students in homo-affective families.<sup>20</sup>

Analyzing the minister's proposals mentioned above for homo-affective unions, as well as to educational institutions, a close correlation among these and projects and initiatives of insertion and discussion of the topic "sexual diversity in schools" is observed.

### Acknowledging invisibilities and initiatives aimed at acting in schools

There has been a growing perception of the education and teaching importance as a bias towards coping with situations related to homo-affective discrimination. Schools have been called to contribute to confronting such issues, being a decisive site for constructing critical thinking and practices based on respect for diversity and human rights.<sup>3</sup> "Diversity" is the term used to define the multiple expressions of sexuality and it allows to demonstrate that there is no standard allowing to define affective and sexual involvements of an individual in relation to others. Thus, the need for the debate about diversity in schools is justified by the possibility of different institutional actors transmitting, reflecting and guiding school communities on important ethical values such as respect and the exercise of citizenship.<sup>21</sup>

Discussing such issues in the field of education becomes important insofar as one can observe the extent and incidence of homophobic crimes and gender violence in Brazil.<sup>2</sup> However, there is still great difficulty in proposing such debates and inserting questions related to gender, sexuality, equality and sexual diversity in educational institutions curricular proposals. Initiatives to enter these topics in schools have faced resistance, both at institutional and policy levels.<sup>22,23</sup>

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e The Statute of Sexual Diversity aims to promote the inclusion of all, to combat discrimination and intolerance due to sexual orientation or gender identity and to criminalize homophobia in order to guarantee the realization of equal opportunities and the defense of individual, collective and diffuse rights.

Debates on gender issues in public education policies, particularly demands on sexual diversity, have arisen in the field of public health and later in sectors of civil society and education, gaining visibility and initiatives in the field of legislation and rights from the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> Thus, struggles for gender equality and respect for sexual diversity have been constant since the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>, when innumerable events have promoted a greater visibility to gender and sexuality issues, both in the health and education areas and in the definitions of government agendas and policies.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, from the end of the 1990s, with the new LDB – Law No. 9394/96 – and the development of National Curricular Parameters (PCN) and its cross-sectional topics, that Sexual Education in schools – through the cross-sectional topic “Sexual Orientation” – and other associated topics, have become more visible, reaching a status for the development of projects and school classes focusing this line of education. Cross section, therefore, allows to establish, in educational practices, a relation between the disciplinary fields systematized knowledge and the citizens’ formation and experiences.<sup>24</sup> It is possible to affirm that the PCNs have allowed a very favorable educational context for the inclusion of Sexual Education and Sexual Diversity in the Sciences and Biology teaching curricula.<sup>25</sup>

The curriculum structuring involves different contents and activities that usually represent the cultural and pedagogical traditions of a locality. From this perspective arise the notion associated to controlling the pedagogical process and the establishment of goals, priorities and contents, maintaining knowledge pattern aimed at a specific target audience, with the objective of disciplining knowledge and obtaining results.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it can be said that it is the guiding element of the school practices, since it delimits the pedagogical action objectives and evaluation criteria, as well as indicating which contents and methodologies are considered adequate. .

In a post-structuralist perspective, the curriculum demonstrates the analysis of the concepts of culture, language and power, where pieces of knowledge intersect, making possible an association with the proposals aimed at school education.<sup>26-28</sup> In this sense, attempts are made to include social issues in the curriculum from a coordinated and open set of topics that include their complexity and dynamics, giving them the same importance of the conventional areas such as the already mentioned cross-sectional topics. This initiative therefore provides that the curriculum gain flexibility by prioritizing the different local and regional realities.<sup>29-31</sup> In this dynamic, ones has respect for subjects’ differences, inequalities, identities and diversity and the power relations that have been included in the current curricula through educational projects and proposals and polices aimed at debating such topics and in initiatives of teachers’ continuous formation.

In the scope of public policies, as a recent example we have had a backwardness in the 2011/2020 PNE’s general guidelines, which replaced the initial text of Item III of Article 2, which referred to “overcoming educational inequalities with emphasis on promoting racial, regional, gender and

sexual orientation,” being replaced by “overcoming educational inequalities with emphasis on promoting citizenship and eradicating all forms of discrimination.”<sup>32</sup> This retreat in the PNE text demonstrates that there are still sectors that see sexual diversity as an affront to “social control” and that think of gender and sexuality issues from a heteronormative perspective. Contrary to this, it is necessary to recognize the plurality of conceptions in relation to men and women and also that experiences are socially constructed and may present different gender identities.

Another initiative that provides for a coordination between the fields of public policies and education is the “Brazil Without Homophobia” program,<sup>f</sup> which presents, as central objectives, proposals of education and behavior change of public managers by means of implementing new parameters for the definition of public policies and a set of actions aimed at promoting respect for sexual diversity and combating various forms of human rights violation.<sup>33</sup>

In the field of education, its proposals for nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation include the development of guidelines for education systems, support for teachers’ initial and continuing training in the area of sexuality, training multidisciplinary teams for the evaluation of textbooks in an attempt to eliminate discriminatory aspects, encouraging the production of educational materials on sexual orientation and overcoming homophobia, as well as the production of specific materials for teachers.<sup>33</sup> Such proposals are valid insofar as it is known that new guidelines for the discussion of the subject in educational institutions are still necessary and that teachers’ initial training on this subject is not yet included in higher education institutions and they pervade personal questions regarding the discussions and adoptions of such proposals in the field of education.<sup>34</sup>

Among the initiatives to produce educational materials on sexual orientation and to overcome homophobia and materials aimed at teachers’ practice in teaching, the Brazilian Ministry of Education book collection “Sexual Diversity in Education: problematizations on homophobia in schools”<sup>3</sup> is being developed. The volume proposes a consistent and coordinated series of reflections on the production and reproduction of homophobia in education, especially in the context of schools and in sites related to them, seeking to provide support for the formulation of public policies in the area of education and recognition of diversity.

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f The Program “Brazil Without Homophobia – a Program to Combat Violence and Discrimination against LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) and to Promote Homosexuals’ Citizenship” – is a successful coordination between the Federal Government and the Organized Civil Society with the objective of promoting the citizenship of gays, lesbians, transvestites, transgenders, and bisexuals from the equalization of rights and the fight against homophobic violence and discrimination, respecting each of these population groups’ specificities.

In addition to the collection, there is also the “School Without Homophobia Project” initiative (ESH, in the Portuguese abbreviation),<sup>g</sup> which aims to contribute to implementing the Brazilian Ministry of Education “Brazil Without Homophobia” program by means of actions that encourage environments conducive to ensuring human rights and respect for sexual orientation and gender identity in schools.<sup>35</sup>

The “School Without Homophobia Project” initiative, in the scope of producing materials, has provided a set of recommendations designed to guide revision, formulation and implementation of public policies focusing homophobia in the management and technical processes of the Brazilian public education system. It has also proposed to incorporate and institutionalize a strategy to work more consistently on homosexuality topics in educational contexts, with repercussions on current cultural values. The strategy consisted in developing an educational material kit – Schools Without Homophobia Kit – addressing aspects of homophobia-lesbophobia-transphobia in school environments, aimed at school principals, educators and students, as well as for training education technicians and representatives of the LGBTQ movement of all Brazilian Federative Units for the appropriate use of the kit in school communities.<sup>35</sup>

The Schools Without Homophobia Kit was developed with the aim of combating violence against homosexuals in the country’s public schools and was intended for training teachers in general, providing them with support to work on the topics in secondary schools of six thousand public schools previously selected. It is a set of didactic-pedagogical instruments aimed at deconstructing stereotyped images of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites and transsexuals, and for democratically coexisting with differences in school sites. Each kit consists of a notebook, a series of six primers, three audiovisual materials with guides, a poster and cover letters for school principals and educators.<sup>35</sup>

The distribution of the Schools Without Homophobia Kit was planned for the second half of 2011 in the six thousand secondary schools with a total expenditure of BRL 1.8 million in its production. However, it was canceled in May of the same year after pressure from religious groups, which persuaded (36th President of Brazil) Dilma Vana Rousseff that the material was “sexually oriented propaganda” and that the “gay kit” – as it was popularly defined – would be distributed to six-year old children when in fact it was intended exclusively for high school students. The veto

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g The “School Without Homophobia Project” initiative is supported by the Brazilian Ministry of Education/ Department of Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity (MEC/SECAD, in the Portuguese abbreviations). It was planned and run in a partnership between the Global Alliance for LGBT Education (GALE), the Brazilian nongovernmental organization Associação Pathfinder do Brasil, the ECOS – Comunicação em Sexualidade (Communication in Sexuality) organization; Brazilian NGO Reprolatina – Soluções Inovadoras em Saúde Sexual e Reprodutiva (Innovative Solutions in Sexual and Reproductive Health), and ABGLT – Associação Brasileira de Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais, Travestis e Transexuais (Brazilian Association of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transvestites, and Transsexuals). All stages of its planning and execution have been widely discussed and closely followed by the MEC/SECAD.

was actually linked to the audiovisual material consisting of three videos: *Torpedo* (Text Messaging), *Encontrando Bianca* (Finding Bianca) and *Probabilidade* (Probability), while the remainder of the kit remained with the Ministry of Education, specifically the General Coordination of Education and Human Rights of the Department of Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD), awaiting final opinions and approval.<sup>36</sup>

However, after more than two years, there is still no definition for the “School Without Homophobia Project” initiative, although the MEC affirms to be developing some actions to combat homophobia in schools and to have established a partnership with the Fórum de Entidades Nacionais da Psicologia Brasileira (FENPB; Brazilian Forum of National Entities of Psychology) and ten federal universities to discuss and analyze all educational materials that address prejudice, violence in schools and any kind of discrimination, among them the “School Without Homophobia Project” initiative materials. Among the actions and initiatives, the MEC seeks to offer support to postgraduate courses in partnership with public universities for teachers and managers, to the production and dissemination of research, to the appropriate inclusion of the subject in the official notices of evaluation and selection of books, and to the inclusion of debates in university curricula, among other initiatives on sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>36</sup>

In the context of respect for sexual diversity and as an example of these initiatives there is the “Gender and Diversity in Schools” project, a successful initiative of the Brazilian government in a partnership with the Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights and Institute of Social Medicine (CLAM/IMS; Centro Latino-Americano em Sexualidade e Direitos Humanos e Instituto de Medicina Social) and the (British organization) British Council, which aims to promote discussion with teachers on issues related to gender, sexuality and sexual orientation in a global and cross-sectional way in terms of sexual rights and social processes based on gender and sexual orientation.<sup>37</sup> The project proposal in question problematizes the concepts of culture, cultural diversity, stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination. Discussions on gender and sexual orientation also take place in a cross-sectional perspective, promoting reflections on the relationship between sexuality and society, proposing conceptions of body, gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as ethnic-racial relations. In the context of the project, schools are still problematized as environments for eliminating prejudice and discriminatory practices, where different proposals for sex education are discussed. The importance of the topic of sexuality is also highlighted in school environments as being associated with adolescents’ experiences and perceptions that are closer to the students’ symbolic universe.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, it is possible to realize that many of the actions and initiatives in the field of education for the discussion of sexual diversity in schools are related to issues that go beyond the institutional scope, the performance of teachers and school principals and/or the development and dissemination of educational materials. There are questions that involve schools and families,

whether the latter are considered traditional or based on new family arrangements of modern society, as belonging to school communities, and therefore having an active and participatory voice in school institutions' decisions.

### **Differences in school, a necessary problematization: final thoughts**

Schools function as highly favorable environments for sexuality, as students are experiencing new relationships, getting to know each other and the opposite sex. Thus, there must be a dialogue between the school and the family as a critical foundation for the development of sexuality in adolescents, in addition to systematized and planned activities. Based on the arguments above, it is necessary to problematize the family-school relationship when it comes to gender and sex differences that permeate school experiences and educational practices at their intersections with health, including eating practices such as illustrated at the beginning of this text. In the expectation of a collaborative and participatory pedagogical action, from the 1980s a joint action by school managers, educators and specialists has been observed in favor of discussions and proposals that problematize the situations experienced by the different social actors in school communities, including families.<sup>39,40</sup>

Families, when invited to join school sites, need to expand their relationships with the school institutions by listing important discussions in their children's education, in addition to those traditionally considered as related to school knowledge and health. STD (sexually transmitted diseases), not only HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immune deficiency syndrome), obesity, anorexia and various eating disorders – the latter particularly in the scope of food and cultural concerns – are relevant because they reach the youth in terms of self-image and impression management construction and body ideals. In a way that is not exclusive to them in terms of recent social achievements, sexual diversity and the perception of the different family dynamics existing in contemporary society need to be included in the relationships between family-school.

It has been observed, however, that health education proposals directed to schools establish principles, objectives and recommendations for sexual education of adolescents and children without considering the school as an area permeated by social relations that constitute it.<sup>41</sup> In this process of adolescents' socialization, there is evidence of a decline in the family's participation in issues related to sexuality and the growing participation of educational institutions as places for integration among peers. According to the author<sup>42</sup>, families act in sex education but are faced with prejudices, taboos and the shame of talking about certain details with their children. In addition, there is, in many cases, nonacceptance regarding choices in sexual conducts and practices.

Many schools, in turn, are not yet open to dialogues, be them pedagogical issues or innovative initiatives and proposals that discuss “more polemical” issues such as sexual diversity, although it has been observed over the years that the school has extended its area of activity to domains previously reserved for families, such as the emergence of specialized services – affective-sexual education and antidrug programs – to support families.<sup>39</sup> These obstacles stem in part from the structure of our society and from the values and norms imposed by it, as well as from the composition of families, which have been structured over time, determining limits in their role in relation to their performance in schools, coming from different ideals arising from the various forms of family organization.<sup>40</sup>

Even in view of such obstacles, structural changes and changes in families’ way of life and school processes have contributed to constituting a system of mutual influences between families and schools, where we bet we can find different ways for dialogues and a harmonious implementation of initiatives in the school scope. Starting from a preliminary analysis of public policies from the perspective of gender relations and the context in which they are produced, the literature on the subject<sup>12</sup> points out that there is still a complex discussion about the negotiation process of reforms, projects, programs and actions coordinated and disputed between the State and social movements, where each one, with their interests, pushes for new public policies.

In this sense, it is reaffirmed that the problematization around the subject becomes necessary, as well as unveiling aspects invisible to its understanding, and above all the existing gaps among the formulations of public policies and their applicability in the scope of teaching.

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