

Homophobia and the Male Body: A Study In Schools In Manaus, Brazil

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Abstract: *Homophobia at school is based on the existence of a normative sexuality to be followed. Since the school does not act effectively to extinguish it, young people decide to impose changes in their behavior to preserve their physical integrity. We start from the assumption that the body means a relationship between the subject and its socio-cultural insertion. The study data are derived from a master's dissertation research. It followed a qualitative descriptive design with non - probabilistic sampling, for convenience. We interviewed ten homosexual men between 18 and 30 years, victims of homophobic violence in schools in Manaus, Brazil. We used a semi-structured interview, conducted in place, time, and day combined between the participants and the researchers. Data were analyzed according to a theory proposed by Bardin (2002). We reached two categories: Embarrassment and stigmatization; and Changes, the body in focus. The first refers to homophobic aggression due to sexuality or body techniques that are not consistent with hegemonic masculinity. Once again, it brings the necessary changes to the prevention or defense of homophobia and/or the male hegemonic universe. It is essential to highlight the role of gender discussions and sexual diversity in schools, as well as the preparation of professional staff to act in cases of violence. The insertion of a school culture of respect for differences enables the reduction of discrimination. Besides, by enabling professionals to work directly with students, embarrassment and stigmatization can be avoided.*

Keywords: *Homophobia; school; body; masculinities*

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I. Introduction

Homophobic violence is a reality experienced by many young people in Brazilian schools (ABRAMOVAY, CUNHA & CALAF, 2009; ABRAMOVAY, 2015; ALBUQUERQUE & WILLIAMS, 2015). These aggressions are based on the conception that there is a correct sexuality to be followed, as well as in the validation of masculinity from manly behaviors (ABRAMOVAY, 2015).

The homophobia suffered within the school walls is not only materialized by physical or verbal violence, but through didactic materials, pedagogical relations, and curricular conceptions (ALBUQUERQUE & WILLIAMS, 2015).

The school, therefore, plays a fundamental role in the adoption of policies aimed at preventing and ending discrimination in terms of gender/sexuality. Since the school does not act effectively to extinguish the violence suffered there, many boys decide to impose changes in their behavior, gestures, and body etiquette in order to avoid and resolve homophobia in that context, as well as adaptation and inclusion in the hegemonic male universe. These changes are part of the reality of many students who have to deal with violence daily in

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order to preserve their physical integrity and, ultimately, their lives. Velloso, Rouchou and Oliveira (2009, p. 15) bring us that,

It is with the body that we mark our presence in the world. Through it, we express feelings, feelings, emotions and establish relationships with those around us, with the world and with culture. To think of the body is to face an open work, forever unfinished, as are the cultural bases that constitute, name and transform them, through time and history”

Le Breton (2007) contributes to the notion that the body expression is socially modulable and only makes sense when meaning from the symbology of a particular social group. In this concept, the body does not present gestures or sensations of its nature, but apprehended in the symbolic social interaction. Thus, it is necessary to understand how these men changed their experiences of homophobic violence through their bodies, behavior and body etiquette; understand the subterfuges inherent in the survival and resistance of these young people and how they relate to the culture of a hegemonic masculinity. This study starts from the perspective that existence is corporeal. Therefore, the body means the relationship between the subject and his socio-cultural insertion (LE BRETON, 2007). Also, the symbolic meaning of the body and its meanings reflect the logic of male domination (BOURDIEU, 2011), in which there is a socially constructed division to relegate everything of the female universe to inferior positions. Importantly, the data analyzed here come from a master dissertation research. Thus, we will try to address the meanings that underlie the corporeality of these boys at school, while experiencing verbal, physical and/or structural homophobia.

II. Method

The research followed a descriptive qualitative design with non-probabilistic sampling, for convenience. We interviewed ten cisgender homosexual men between 18 and 30 years old, middle-class, living in Manaus, who were victims of homophobic violence in a local school institution. The interviews were conducted at a place, time, and day previously agreed between the participants and the researchers. Because they are or have already been members of social movement (s), the subjects have some degree of knowledge of socio-cultural issues pertinent to homophobia.

2.2 Data Collection Procedures

- a) We contacted a member of the MANIFESTA LGBT+®, a local social movement, to obtain an indication of possible participants for the research. We explained the research theme, the objectives and relevance of the study to the area, as well as the ethical procedures. The member agreed to help us and performed the initial recruitment of the volunteers;
- b) We made telephone contact with each volunteer, and explained the research theme, its objectives and academic, social and scientific relevance, as well as the ethical care respected in the interview - provided for in the Brazilian resolutions 466/2012 and 510/2016 of the National Health Council. Subsequently, we scheduled date, time and location according to the participant's preference so that the Consent Form was read and signed;
- c) After signing the consent form, we conducted the semi-structured interview, recording it in audio for later transcription and analysis.

2.3 Procedures for data analysis

Semi-structured interviews were analyzed according to the thematic content analysis proposed by Bardin (2002). For data organization and selection of the material to be worked on, we followed the three phases proposed by the author: pre-analysis; exploration of the material; and treatment of results, inference, and interpretation. From this, we grouped the relevant themes for the research and produced the first and final categories, which were thoroughly analyzed.

2.4 Ethical Care

For the development of the research, the norms and parameters contained in the Brazilian resolutions n ° 466/2012 and 510/2016 of the National Health Council for research with human beings were respected. The project was submitted to CEP / UFAM with CAAE n ° 70469017.0.0000.5020, authorization 2,158,053.3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

III. Results

We present here two categories: Embarrassment and stigmatization; and Changes- the body in focus. The first refers to the experiences that participants had as a result of their sexuality or body techniques not consistent with those expected from hegemonic masculinity, culminating in homophobic aggression. The second category brings the changes made at the time to the prevention or defense of homophobic violence, as well as to feel belonging to the male hegemonic universe.

3.1 Constraint and stigmatization

Male and female stereotypes are socially imposed and instituted configurations without biological destinies (LE BRETON, 2007). In this category, we will see that the research participants suffered embarrassment and / or stigmatization due to their gestures, training, or some body etiquette regarding the female stereotype. Below we show a sample from the interview of E.P., which was stigmatized for performing gestures considered feminines:

There were those macho boys and stuff and they saw that I was more effeminate than I was Always with girls and in a way they went there and cursed 'oh you are gay', 'oh you are fag', 'oh you are little girl' (EP, 18 years).

Le Breton suggests that in addition to the physical differences between men and women, there is a "social interpretation of differences, a moral that develops them and confirms the man and woman in the status to which they are assigned" (p. 67). Thus, with the subversion of this moral norm, the effeminate boy is subject to punishment of all orders. In the following speech, we can observe that delicacy (a trait understood as feminine) and the inability to take revenge on aggression, inscribe N. in the field of oppression:

I was a delicate boy, so I tried to play, run, but then they push me down, then called me a girl, called me a little boy, faggot (N., 22 years old).

For Bourdieu (2011), belonging to the group of "true men" (p. 65) only comes from the validation of virility - understood as reproductive, sexual and social capacity and has the aptitude for the exercise of violence, especially in case of revenge - before other men. From this perspective, N. could never be validated as a "true man" as long as his body etiquette and passive attitudes referred to the female universe. In the speech below, the stereotype of man as cold and virile ends up being the parameter for homophobia to be instituted in F.'s life. The justification assumes that a real man cannot be delicate and much less educated:

People thought me 'oh, very polite', it's weird, right? Man is not like that, man cannot be like this. It's very delicate, 'ah, he is a grandma-raised son, can only be fagot (F., 30 years old).

The homophobia suffered during the school year led many of these boys to deliberately decide to modify their behaviors to avoid, neutralize, and still feel that they belonged to the "true men" select group.

3.2 Changes - the body in focus

In the present category, we have gathered the excerpts referring to behavioral changes and behaviors. Aiming at acceptance in the male universe and / or not suffering from aggression, these boys observed, studied and rehearsed the behaviors of other boys in order to reproduce them and add them to their daily experiences. Le Breton suggests that,

From the body are born and propagate the meanings that underlie individual and collective existence; it is the axis of the relationship with the world, the place and time in which existence takes shape through the unique physiognomy of an actor. Through the body, man appropriates the substance of his life by translating it to others, using the symbolic systems he shares with community members (2007, p.7).

These symbolic systems translated into the experience and coexistence in society were seized by the participants even at school. They learned early on that their bodies, gestures, and body labels by themselves and in themselves could pose a threat to an established norm. From this - and aiming at survival, they instituted new ways of relating:

The image of the male emerged in adolescence because of this fact, which I understood that the more camouflaged I was, the better. I had to change my behavior to avoid social judgment (F., 30).

The more I grew up, the more I realized that I had female gestures so I tried to camouflage this behavior with more masculine things (H. G., 29).

At that moment I also started to polish myself to look more manly (M., 25 years old).

From these reports, we can say that these young men at that time understood the ways in which hegemonic masculinity worked and its full acceptance in society and more specifically in the male universe itself. From this, they could study it empirically and add it to their behavior, language, and body etiquette. About this model of masculinity, Silva (2006) points out that,

[...] it is based on the traditional and predictive models of the personality of the male, that is, "macho, virile and heterosexual", in the same way that he must present emotional distancing, aggression and risky behavior in his daily life. (p. 121).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2013, p.245) state that even though this stereotype is not prevalent among men, it still ranks high in the hierarchy concerning other forms of being male:

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinate masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed normal in a statistical sense; Only a minority of men may adopt it. However, it is undoubtedly normative. It embodies the most honorable way of being a man, and It demands that all other men stand concerning it.

From this perspective, Connell (1995) suggests that there are three more patterns of masculinity: subordinate, accomplice, and marginalized masculinity. The first refers to the existing power relations between groups of men, such as the case of the domination of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men. Accomplice masculinity is related to partial adherence to hegemonic masculinity. They are understood as accomplices, for even if they do not fully agree with hegemonic masculinities, they benefit and realize advantages by not standing publicly against hegemonic thinking; marginalized masculinity, on the other hand, is related to the relations existing between masculinities and the dominant and subordinate classes and / or ethnic groups. It is configured as a marginalized masculinity due to its inferior quality in relation to social class or race.

In the case of the participants, the deliberate adoption of hegemonic male performance was understood as one of the only features that subjects had at that time. However, this performance change was not something that occurred free of anguish and conflict. In the account below, C. presents the tension experienced at that time,

I wondered how sad my life was to pretend I was something to fit into a group (C., 25)

The internal conflict and the tension were due to having to choose between acting spontaneously - but the target of violence - or deliberately choosing to act as a character that did not correspond to their internal reality. In the report below, N. details his planning and preparations for the construction of the masculinized character,

I started to study the boys' behavior, posture, how they behaved, how they, for example, carried the bag, how they walked, how they ate. So I started to study and insert myself more in this world so that I could try to make up myself, because I couldn't stand to go through an embarrassment anymore (N., 22 years old)

However, entering the hegemonic male universe involves not only body modification but also the field of virility:

So, as I wanted to include myself in their gang tribe - at that time the gangs were fine ... I can't tell you if it was a gang. It was a group of teenagers gathering to fight. I wanted to be part of it ... I was supposed to consider myself more macho, so to speak (N., 22 years old).

You join a group of boys who are homophobic and fight with other boys who are more effeminate than you. It's a form of protection right? (H. G., 29 years old).

It is essential to acknowledge that the participant N. suffered aggression in all schools and even had a friend hospitalized due to homophobic attacks, [...]

and then we were called "faggots", but as I was with him, we were both in the group. I was able to go home, so when it was night my mother calls me asking if I'm ok. I said yes and asked why, she said "oh, why R. is hospitalized, hospitalized because they hit him a lot". (N., 22 years old). [...] this was the fourth school I transferred to because of the violence (N., 22 years old).

We can say that acting and trying to match the male model of the time was a way of assuming and validating male hegemonic logic, thus reproducing toxic and oppressive stereotypes. However, the goal was to survive in a violent environment,

[...] if I didn't pretend like this, I don't know if I would be alive (N., 22 years old).

For H.G., once the male performance had been learned, it could be used anytime he needed it. In his particular case, it extended to his home environment,

You have to live wearing a mask all the time. My father asked where were the girlfriends? And I said, "Oh, I fucked so many, I don't care about dating," (H. G., 29).

Wearing the mask at that time meant having to live in conflict between social expectations and internal reality. The adoption of new ways of relating to their body and that violent environment resulted in new ways of relating in other environments as well. The mask, now conditional on social acceptance, was available whenever needed.

IV. Final Considerations

The present study aimed to understand how the male body correlates with homophobia in the school context and which sociocultural aspects permeate these relationships. We present two categories: Constraints and stigmatization; and Changes: the body in focus. In the first, we seek to address homophobic aggressions and how they relate to being homosexual and how body that subverts hegemonic masculinity.

Boys with feminine attributes and attitudes were perceived as inferior and therefore liable to violence. In the second category, we approach some strategies used by these boys to avoid aggression, as well as the insertion in the male universe. Some have modified their body tags, others have gone further and adopted virility as their standard.

From this perspective, to what extent can we say that the bodies of these boys were false evidence of themselves, since it was precisely this mask that was the cornerstone of a coexistence free of violence from others? Regardless of the answer, we can say that having to camouflage oneself in order not to be raped was something that also brought suffering.

Of course, the intention here is not to put body changes or the use of virility in check, but to emphasize that they were survival strategies used by participants within a sociocultural context that granted permission for the establishment and maintenance of homophobia. Precisely for this reason, we consider it essential to highlight the role of gender discussions and sexual diversity in schools, as well as the preparation of the professional staff to act in cases of violence. The adoption of a school culture of welcoming, respect, and coexistence with differences enables the reduction of discriminatory behaviors. Besides, by enabling professionals to act directly with students, embarrassment and stigmatization of marginalized students can be avoided.

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