

## Discourse and positioning in a dialogue meeting on LGBT violence<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The promotion of dialogue aims at the problematization of discourses and positions that crystallize actions and attitudes that favor violence practices. We aim to understand how different discourses demand for specific positions and vice versa, understanding this articulation from the effects of the dialogue structure proposed by the Public Conversations Project. A group meeting facilitating dialogue on the issue of violence against LGBTs was selected for analysis, considering their wealth in discourses defended and positions assumed. The full transcript of this meeting was analyzed from the contributions of social constructionism, in particular from the theory of positioning. The use of religious discourse, polarization of positioning, the effects of the gray zone questions, the positioning evoked in the sharing of stories, and the implications of context, social strength, conversation arrangements, and pre-group interviews for the assumption of certain positions in the meeting were discussed.

**Keywords:** discursive psychology, positioning theory, social constructionism, Public Conversations Project.

The term “dialogue” has been widely used in studies on group processes and communication with varied definitions. Buber (2008) and Bohm (2004) use this term to refer to a modality of communication that can only occur when the interlocutors suspend the attempt to convince the other and sustain a mutual curiosity by the speeches of each other. To the extent that dialogue emerges from a willingness to know the “other,” it has creative and transformative potential for the participants. While the arguments are directed towards dispute and convincing in the debate, in the dialogue the arguments serve to establish a relationship of exchange between the individuals, in which it becomes possible to broaden the knowledge of world perspectives.

Considering the limits of the debate, for example, the inability of people who disagree to act cooperatively and the intolerance that emerges among groups who are highly committed to defending their positions, it is understood that social psychology can contribute to the development of strategies that facilitate dialogues to promote a broader understanding of the nuances involved in the debate, as well as possibilities for cooperation in this difference. In this sense, the proposal of facilitating dialogues named Public Conversations Project (PCP), created by an American institution of the same name, articulating with the contributions of the social constructionist movement in psychology and invests in the dialogue as an alternative to the limits inherent in the debate (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

The PCP proposes a structured model of dialogue that begins with the agreement of its participants on:

(1) the importance of not speaking abstractly about their opinion, but by sharing their life stories to help them understand how they came to think of the current way on the subject; (2) the need to respect the other participants and the co-responsibility of all to create a safe and respectful environment to conduct the dialogue; (3) the facilitators’ need to control each participant’s speaking time to allow everyone to speak, and (4) the confidentiality of the conversation.

The dialogue meeting is defined by three moments of group conversation, starting with the request for everyone to share personal experiences and life stories that legitimize their convictions on the topic in conversation. In this way, the participants have the opportunity to get in touch with reports that they had not heard before and so they can understand each other without necessarily agreeing. Participants are then invited to explore their doubts, uncertainties and concerns regarding their opinion, with the aim of promoting a less polarized reflection on the theme in question, thereby recognizing the complexity of the topic in conversation (Stains Jr., 2012). Finally, it encourages a moment of interaction between participants in which they can ask each other questions based on curiosity aroused from what has been said, while following the agreements of the conversation, such as not judging the speech of others.

Considering such a dialogical structure, the purposes of the PCP are: 1) to propose non-combative ways of approaching differences among people; 2) to give visibility to life stories that give coherence and legitimacy to the participants’ positions and which are usually suppressed in the debates; 3) to offer the opportunity for people to overcome generalized, stereotyped and prejudiced

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descriptions of whoever thinks differently from themselves; 4) to test one's own perceptions about the another 5) to be able to speak one's opinion without judgments or attacks; 6) find common points and interests among people who think differently (Black, 2009; Herzig & Chasin, 2006).

During this dialogue model, a person can make use of different socially available speeches on the subject to defend his/her opinion. Discourse is understood, according to Spink and Medrado (2000), as a set of narrative descriptions, images, metaphors and constructions with linguistic regularity. That is, it is a specific, instituted and a preferred way of talking about something that persists over time, and is propagated by social groups and fields of knowledge, such as psychology and sociology.

Based on a psychology founded on social constructionism, it can be said that discourses participate in the construction of the *self*. To the extent that discourses allow the enunciator access to a preferential way of speaking, they imply the demarcation of limited modes of self-descriptions. Such descriptions of themselves circumscribe the enunciator's possibilities of action and, consequently, their way of being in that interaction. Therefore, what can be in a given relationship is restricted to the discursive possibilities accessed by the enunciator. In this sense, the social constructionist movement recognizes the importance of understanding how discourses can favor descriptions of oneself that circumscribe and crystallize actions and postures. Multiplying the possibilities of actions and postures becomes possible insofar as the discourses that sustain them are problematized and it is this that they crave as strategies for facilitating dialogues, such as the PCP (Gergen, 1999; McNamee, 2007).

One way of analyzing the relational process of constructing self-versions can be accomplished through the study of positioning games (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Positions are discursive constructions used to group generic personal attributes that imply the construction of a social place with specific rights and obligations. In order to position itself in a certain way the enunciator must become intelligible within an instituted and shared discourse. At the same time, positioning itself is a condition of legitimizing and reifying a given discourse.

The change or maintenance of positioning depends on two main factors: the social strength of the enunciator and the plot. The social force is related to power as being relationally and socially constituted in our culture (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). A teacher within our culture will have more social strength than a student, which will enable the former assume a position and position the student in a variety of ways. The same situation would not occur in a court, in which the same teacher would be as a defendant and would be before a judge. Student, teacher and judge occupy different social places that give each one different strengths in the positioning games. The plot is related to the context in which the positioning occurs, i.e., it is not any positioning that can be attributed in any situation. The teacher will not have the same possibilities of positioning

that he/she has in the classroom or in a supermarket, even if he is in interaction with the same student, for example. The games of positioning constitute our social relationships that are, therefore, influenced by the social force that we have and the context in which we are inserted. The conservation of these two factors, due to the constancy in the types of social interactions that we have, promotes the gradual crystallization of positions, which come to be considered as identities, personalities or basically as *selves* (Rasera, Guanaes, & Japur, 2004). The PCP proposal seeks to broaden the possibilities of positioning the participants by changing the configuration of social strength and context.

The PCP influences the social force based on questions that structure its proposal of facilitating dialogue. Participants, when invited to talk about their personal stories, without resorting to abstractions and theories, and being invited to think about their own doubts about their own opinions, can access a new positioning. From this new positioning, they can use arguments that they rarely use, since in normal day-to-day interactions they often can not be doubted because they have to maintain certainty of their opinion in relation to their social groups of belonging. New placements allow participants to explore other linguistic repertoires used to describe the situation in question.

The structure of the PCP dialogue also interferes with the "context" vector insofar as it organizes a peculiar mode of interaction. According to this structure, everyone has space to speak and everyone has the opportunity to be heard and respected. Everyone is guaranteed the same speaking time. This is a setting that does not often appear in people's everyday lives. During confrontations, for example, it is common for those who speak the loudest or who are in greater numbers to be privileged, often preventing the other from speaking or being heard. The PCP's proposal proposes to balance these forces, so that in doing so, the participants have more freedom to take or reject positions.

The context in which the PCP occurs is a group context. According to the presuppositions of social constructionism, shared by the theory of positioning, this is a privileged context for the construction and reconstruction of versions of themselves (positionings), since it allows the participants to make contact with speeches with which they have never had access until that moment (Herzig & Chasin, 2006). Theoretically, any change in context allows the change of positioning, however, we understand the PCP as being privileged to integrate participants who do not normally interact with each other in its configuration, and to operate in a setting adjusted to interfere in the social force, as previously said. The change of context also occurs due to the change in the way the interaction occurs, due to the participants who normally debate on different topics dialogue at that moment. Based on the dialogue, more defensive positions, for example, can no longer be assumed by the participants. Therefore, in this study we seek to identify how different discourses demand specific postures and vice versa, while understanding this articulation based

on the effects of the PCP's dialogue structure, highlighting the possible changes in the use of discourses and positions and understanding what caused them.

The scenario of violence in regards to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual and transgenders (LGBT) population was chosen as the topic of the dialogue because it is considered a controversial issue today, a polarizing opinion, a target for legislative disputes, a media conflict field and a catalyst for concrete situations of violence. Although the object of study of this research is not directly the thematic in conversation, despite the effects of the dialogical structure of the PCP in the production of discourses and versions of itself in the group interaction, we understand that such topic circumscribes discursive possibilities and identity descriptions from the form, such as issues of violence against LGBTs having been addressed in Brazilian society (Junqueira, 2009; Louro, 2009). In recent years we have seen the intensification of the debate regarding the rights of LGBT people. On the one hand, there is the struggle of militants in favor of guaranteeing the rights of this population, their denunciation of prejudice and crimes and the defense of legislation that punishes homophobia. On the other, religion argues against anti-homophobia laws that they believe will curtail their freedom of belief and expression and advocate the right to promote treatments to reverse homosexuality (Carrara, Ramos, Simões, & Facchini, 2006; Moscheta, 2011).

## Method

This is a qualitative and exploratory field research.

## Participants

This research used part of the material produced during the research execution: "Public Conversations: New Paradigms for Social Transformations in Brazil" (suppressed for peer review) carried out in an inter-institutional way with the objective of analyzing the limits and potentialities of using the PCP approach in the Brazilian scenario. In this research, 10 facilitating dialogues were held according to the methodology proposed by the PCP, placing different topics on LGBT rights in conversation, such as criminalization of homophobia, same-sex marriage and LGBT violence. For the discussion that we make in this article, we selected a meeting that had the issue of violence against LGBTs as a topic, choosing a session that presented a greater variety of discourses regarding this theme. We understood that this multiplicity would allow greater generative potential for the analysis to be employed considering the purpose of the study.

This meeting took place in a medium-sized city in the state of Paraná and involved the following participants: Mauro, 32, businessman and LGBT activist; Rosa, 32, police officer; Roberto, 30, university professor; Ricardo, 47, health agent; Maria, 38, a university professor; Uliana, 31, a health worker, as well as two facilitators, psychologists,

university professors with previous experience in group coordination; and two observers, students from the psychology course. Participants are described here based on the identity categories chosen by them to present themselves at the group meeting. The facilitators of this meeting are also authors of this article.

## Procedures

People who somehow considered that the issue of violence to LGBTs was relevant and marked their life trajectory were invited to participate in the study and therefore had personal stories to share in the group. For group composition, as proposed by the Public Conversations Project (2011), we invited people from different professions, social positions and opinions regarding the topic in conversation. The study participants were invited by means of contact with key community members who were part of the researchers' social network. Through telephone contact, the proposal of the study was presented with the objective of identifying the interest and involvement of the participant with the topic. Before the meeting, individual preparation talks were held with each participant using a semi-structured script Public Conversations Project, 2011. Each conversation lasted about an hour. During this conversation, the researchers verified the participant's involvement with the topic to be discussed in detail, as well as their opinion, willingness and interest to participate in the meeting.

The structure of the group meeting followed the PCP proposal mentioned above. The first two questions to the participants were: "Can you tell us something about your life experience that would help us understand how you are currently positioning yourself regarding LGBT violence?" and "What are your fears, difficulties and challenges regarding the subject matter?". The answers to the first two questions were offered with three minutes given for each participant to respond, without any interruptions from the others, following the order of the people in the circle of chairs. Finally, a facilitated discussion was held during which the participants were able to question each other in order to clarify what was said, in a less structured way, with no time for speech and no specific order between those who asked and answered.

The meeting was audio recorded in MP3 using a digital recorder and transcribed fully and literally. The contributions of the social constructionist movement in psychology substantiated the analysis (Gergen, 1999). In particular, we use the positioning theory of Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) to analyze the different versions of the participants gave of themselves constructed in the group. Transcription re-readings were performed to highlight discourses and positionings at the meeting. We sought to identify the way in which the different discourses demanded specific postures and vice versa, understanding this articulation being based on the effects of the PCP's dialogue structure, highlighting the possible changes in the

use of discourses and positionings and understanding what caused them.

This project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universidade Estadual de Maringá (Protocol 01647512.5.0000.0104). Participation in the study was voluntary and all participants formalized their consent by signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF) prior to the start of data collection, containing their agreement to the objectives of the research and authorization for the meeting to be audio-recorded. All the participants involved in the research are referred to here using fictitious names.

## Results constructed and discussion

We chose to present the results constructed from the different discourses and positionings highlighted in the speeches and interactions of each participant throughout the session. Throughout the discussion, we mentioned which question of the facilitators the analyzed section refers to, so as to allow the reader a certain visibility on the dialogical chain from where each speech fragment was withdrawn.

Mauro introduced himself as curious and it was this curiosity that motivated, according to him, his participation in the meeting. He said, in response to the first question in the group, that he lived in a small town in the countryside of Paraná as a child and that it was a quiet experience because he suffered no prejudice due to his homosexuality. Already an adult, he came to the “big city” and faced violence against LGBTs more explicitly, which left him “afraid and depressed.” Despite this fear, he positioned himself as one who knew how to defend himself against this violence. In response to the second question asked at the meeting, Mauro presented his opinion on the subject: affirming his belief that violence against LGBTs should be tackled with urgency and stated that religious institutions, while maintaining the current way of thinking about LGBT issues, “a disfavor to society”:

*I have the impression that it (the religion) reproduces a discourse that is a problem (homosexuality), right? . . . At least he/shewho was kicked out from home was because it was an abomination, which is why God does not like it, you know? Something like that. And where do people get this idea from? Whether we like it or not, it ends up being a reproduction and so for me it is a disfavor that these institutions do for the human being, it is a deep disfavor, you know? I have respect for some people like this, for some people, but for the institution, I do not have an ounce of consideration. (Mauro)*

The opposition to religious discourse may demand, in terms of argumentative coherence, a position of contemplation for the people who make use of this discourse. Hence the separation that Mauro made between contempt for the institution, but not for some people who participate in it. It seems to have been precisely to explore

this differentiation between talking about the church and talking about a religious person (considering that some people in the group described themselves as religious), one of the facilitators questioned:

*I wanted to ask you Mauro, if you ever have less disregard (for religion) or that you have any doubt about your neglect? (Facilitator)*

In response to this question from the facilitator, Mauro posed:

*I like people, I like some of those involved in religion, but those who are not so in tune with what religion stands for. These days I had to bend this thing to, to make a conversation with a person, a church, the Catholic Church. I had to hide everything so I could face her and make this conversation, I was biting my tongue like that, like a fucking frog, because I look, I look at the person and I see a lot of boys committing suicide, boys being expelled from home... You know it's something that moves me deeply, it bothers me. Now other people like that, those inside the church itself knows, through the speech you realize that the person is there because he likes it, he/she is there because of some aspects of the religion, but h/shee has that care for human beings, I usually say that people dirty their hands with blood unintentionally. (Mauro)*

Mauro's change of positioning marked the relativization regarding who the religious person of the Catholic Church is. In this case, the position of disregard shifted to understanding that one may like religion, even though it does not fully agree with the discourse it propagates.

Knowing and having affection for religious people was the discourse that allowed Mauro to position himself to understand how these people understand the issue of LGBT rights.

During the facilitated dialogue, in which the participants were encouraged to ask each other questions, Mauro was asked by a participant of the group Maria, if his previous answer could not be prejudiced:

*I wanted to ask Mauro... What I also find myself thinking Mauro, when you say this, you brought up the question of religion, right? During your speech, I was thinking about prejudice, right? While every day we try to combat prejudice with other prejudices, right? I wanted you to talk a little bit if you also identify this. (Maria)*

Mauro, in response to this question, wondered if he was even “a little prejudiced.” He stated that he was in this position, because he was sincere, relating that sincerity to the proposal of the PCP meeting. At that moment, Mauro was positioned as a reference in the LGBT community:

*For me, I never needed (religion), I do not know if I would, otherwise I see people who need it, right? To be happy. That it was created in religion and I know gay friends of mine who suffered greatly when they were excluded from the church because the pastor excluded them and such, then the criticism is not to the religion, it is perhaps this lack of openness of the church structure. I even helped foster an intra-religious dialogue group to talk about diversity, not because of me, but because of the people that I know are suffering, I know it's important to know. . . . As long as it (the church) has this posture of reproducing the discourse of segregation, of keeping what is put, it even does a disservice, it does not have to agree, but I seriously believe in it, knowing as long as it has a priest, there is a priest saying that, oh no, we love the sinner, but he does not love sin, it's still sin, you know? (Mauro)*

At that moment, Mauro did not speak further from the position of a friend of the religious for whom he has affection, but from the position of a gay activist, atheist, someone who “did not care about religion” and who did not have a religious family formation. This change of positionings had effects on the way Mauro put himself before religious discourse and its use.

There was a tension established between the two positions, Mauro who was a militant of LGBT rights could not be, from the discourse of the struggle for these rights, the same Mauro who understood the religious who condemn homoaffectivity. This tension is related to discourses that circulate in the daily life of the discussions regarding LGBT rights, especially among militants in defense of these rights. Putting oneself in the place of the different, in this case the religious and understanding their opinion from the affection towards the person can be interpreted as agreeing with what the person thinks, which is therefore a very risky position for someone who has identified himself as a LGBT militant.

In his first response to the meeting, Mauro defended the urgency in the fight against violence against LGBTs based on the statistics of the increase in the number of cases of aggressive actions towards this population. At the same time, he criticized the homosexuals themselves for self-discrimination by posing as being different and asserted their defense for a society in which “being gay” was not a problem. Another tension appeared in the use of these different discourses. The statistics discourse, which points out crimes of violence against these people, calling for a differential treatment of LGBTs. Whereas the discourse of self-prejudice seeks equality among all people.

The PCP's proposal for a question that seeks to relativize the opinions brought into the group and the format of the dialogue that allows people to speak frankly with one another without fear of being attacked seemed to have been the elements that allowed the change of positions from Mauro and the relativization of his way of looking

at the religious. In another study (suppressed reference) we discussed the extent to which this relativization, while permitting the non-generalization of all religious as prejudiced, must take into account the difference between the prejudice suffered by LGBTs and the prejudice towards the religious, considering the difference between these groups regarding their social marginalization and the history of exclusion experienced by LGBTs.

Rosa, during her presentation at the beginning of the meeting, positioned herself as someone who is interested in “knowing more about the topic” in conversation. In response to the first question of the meeting, she endorsed the discourse on the need for popular awareness regarding human rights and was in favor of ending prejudice with respect to LGBTs. To support this discourse, Rosa shared her life story, presenting a Rosa who suffered prejudice because she was raised in the countryside and had been a single mother.

From the position of someone who suffered prejudice, Rosa defended the equal rights argument. However, in answering the group's second question, Rosa stated that although she understood the suffering that prejudice might bring, Rosa could not defend this argument of equality in her working environment, since even if she witnessed violence and travesties directed towards her colleague officers, she feared reporting them:

*I saw lots of incidents, countless (stories of violence), getting to the point of arriving and wanting to shake someone on your side (work colleague), but you're working, it's a professional whom you have to respect. Only he does not respect the next one, right? Some act this way, you are prepared as you have to respect your colleague as a professional and as a person, you are working with a person who does not respect his neighbor as a human being. It's a really difficult situation, right? (Rosa)*

At that moment in the group, the power relationships established within the military institution participated in the positioning of Rosa who felt that she could not act against this violence. This impediment placed Rosa as being conniving with this violence by virtue of the hierarchical relationships in her profession. To assume this position in the group was not easy, and a feeling of tension was established, since the previous positions pointed to the need to defend non-violence against LGBTs.

Having a positioning is to get involved in the defense of certain ways of life (Rasera, Guanaes, & Japur, 2004). The context of the military institution circumscribes the possibilities of positions and even the actions of its members. The breach for another possibility of confronting the situation occurred in the position of Rosa as a single mother, who was able to identify with the social exclusion that LGBTs can go through. This Rosa came into conflict with the police Rosa, but the social strength of the police officer positioning won Rosa the position of someone would

like to end violence and travesties. Thus, if the structure of the dialogue did not sufficiently redefine the forces that constrain Rosa's positioning, at least she allowed this positioning to not be the only one to be presented, thereby multiplying Rosa's versions in the group. We believe that this was especially due to the secure climate of the group, an effect that results from the participants having made an agreement to allow conversation and the proposal of non-judgment of the speech of others, which allowed Rosa to put herself honestly about the ambiguity of positionings in her personal and professional life.

Roberto introduced himself to the group by emphasizing the importance of discussing the topic. In response to the first question of the structure of the dialogue, he presented himself as someone in doubt regarding the existence or not of the prejudice with respect to LGBTs. For him, as a homosexual, prejudice could present itself in various ways, and it is even possible to doubt its existence:

*I came to the conclusion that, well, until there is so much prejudice, why do not I see myself receiving this burden of prejudice in everyday life. So I do not know if I do not understand, I do not know if I do not want to perceive and I do not know if it is because I do not in fact receive it. (Roberto)*

When questioned about what moments he considered challenging to maintain his opinion, the group's second question, Roberto thought of a hypothetical situation in which he would be saying goodbye to his companion at an airport and imagined that in this situation he might feel intimidated to kiss him in public. In this way, he wondered if this would not be a self-prejudice, a kind of violence against himself:

*On the other hand, I feel this existence (of prejudice) when I find myself without strength, courage or reluctance to express behavior in society, whether it be a kiss on the street or a kiss at the airport, which has happened to me, giving a kiss and finding myself withdrawing, then something has been there, and then I start to realize that this society oppresses me in some way, or it is the society or myself who is making a reading of society and soon I incriminate; is this interpretation correct? Is this interpretation reasonable? (Roberto)*

Positioning oneself as someone who did not recognize prejudice was to soften the scenario of violence presented by other participants at the meeting. Roberto solved this conflict when he separated the religious context from his family context. In the religious context he felt discrimination, but in his family context prejudice would not exist.

*I have a sister who totally treats me, I will say the term, with no prejudice and she includes me in her*

*life as a brother who at the time had a companion and that presents my companion as a brother-in-law. I mean, she puts in the same form of treatment as reality is, let's put it that way. (Roberto)*

Again, the PCP's question about doubts and uncertainties regarding the topic seems to have potentialized the relativization of positions in the group, as is true with Roberto. Also participating in this change was the exploitation of the LGBT prejudice discourse propagated in the group by Mauro.

Ricardo introduced himself to the group as a gay militant who came to meet the PCP to learn more and to help inform others. In response to the first question in the group, he positioned himself as a victim of violence on account of his sexual orientation:

*I have already been through prejudice. When a friend of mine committed suicide and I had to testify and they (policemen) did not want to know. They wanted to know at the police station who penetrated whom, you know? So I think it's a strong and everyday thing, I've heard it, the fagot is funny at the bar table, everybody criticizes, even a lesbian, a transvestite . . . Inside the gay world itself there is a lot of prejudice, other gay people, for example, a kiss of the airport, if you have a gay and they see you giving a kiss at departure, they point at us. (Ricardo)*

Ricardo also positioned himself as a defender of LGBT rights:

*While this does not happen (the end of prejudice), it will continue in this society we live in, I think so know, my focus of life is my battle. (Ricardo)*

This was the position maintained by Ricardo throughout the meeting. From the discourse on the need to act as a militant in favor of LGBT rights, he defended the urge that no one should be silent about the injustices of which LGBTs are victims. Based on this positioning, Ricardo used the meeting to defend the need to inform people about the data of violence and how to combat it.

It is important to note that such discourse and positioning consisted of a response to Roberto's position in the group without believing that there was so much prejudice and living "a romantic life to a certain point", as Roberto defined it. Ricardo's positioning as a daily victim of violence ("we have this feeling every day") came in opposition to the argument that Roberto did not exist. At the same time, when answering a question about when he had doubts concerning his opinion on the subject, Ricardo stated:

*But it is obvious that I, for informing myself or for information, for seeking information, for information coming to me, I know that violence exists . . . Now, on the other hand, I question*

*whether the fact that this violence is stamped in the media is that it has a body or occupies a space large enough to inhibit me or is it sporadic, that is, situations that happen here and there and that one, but that do not occupy all the spaces and that they should not arrive at so much. (Ricardo)*

Ricardo questioned whether his perception about the prevalence of prejudice in society would be as a consequence of a supposed hypervaluation of the cases of violence portrayed by the media. This fragment of the meeting showed how it was not possible to understand the use of different discourses on violence against LGBTs outside the context of the conversation itself (here understood as synonymous with dialogue), since it is along it, in response to what emerges in it regarding its structure, that Ricardo as victim of violence can be complemented by Ricardo who was questioned about a possible media overvaluation of violence. In this case, the structure of the PCP allowed Ricardo to question the previously defended opinion and that sustained and legitimized his position as a militant.

Maria, in response to the first question in the group, brought to the conversation the discourse of valuing knowledge putting forward a theme of sexual diversity as being effective in transforming people's opinions:

*information can transform consciousness, it can transform the way you think, right? And trying to solve our struggles in a general way. . . . In order to transform my consciousness in the sense of not only this specific theme, but of thinking that regardless of the same question that I do not need to accept or need not agree, but at the very least I have to respect. (Maria)*

Maria spoke from the position of someone with a professional education. For personal reasons she could have different opinions on the subject, but from the professional position she should assume a discourse of tolerance and respect for sexual diversity. It is rightly interesting to note the negotiation between the different versions of themselves in the following lines of Maria in the group, especially when she answered the second question from the facilitators:

*I think my knot is connected to this question of this interplay between the professional and personal. In the professional I think it is very loose in relation to any kind of discrimination, I think there is no way to be a teacher to learn how to deal with it. But I think my big knot is thick because of my personal experience. Because I have no family history, I do not have people very close to me, especially in my family, which is a very large family, not having people so close that they directly experience discrimination. I wonder how I would react, how I would cope if someone I love, very close to my acquaintance, with my narrower bonds, suffered*

*discrimination, then I wonder if my position would be the same as my professional one. (Maria)*

At this moment, because of the PCP's proposal of self-reflexivity about one's own opinions, Maria moved away from the position of Maria the teacher and approached a Maria who had doubts about how to deal concretely with the situation. The ethical discourse that stated that in class no teacher could stigmatize any student was not enough for her to be sure she was instrumental in dealing with a situation in which her personal involvement was predominant.

Uliana began her speech about the meeting stating that she accepted the invitation to participate in the conversation out of curiosity. The possibility of Maria assuming a positioning of uncertainty in the group, as a result of the question of exploring one's own doubts and ambivalences, seemed to have created a space for Uliana to also speak of the moments in which she assumed a prejudiced stance. She also pointed out how college education helped her to understand the issue from alternative discourses that led her to look at violence towards LGBTs in another way:

*Well, I had an extremely traditional family, so the way to face this is very much like: "Oh, my God!." When I came in to do philosophy, I came across a number of situations and we begin to understand that it is not a seven-headed creature, and that it is more of a monster that we create than actually being a monster. This is to ask yourself: "Gee, it is even more exciting to be like this (homosexual) than we are. Are they more true and everything else more. And then, pull life, why create such an obstacle?". (Uliana)*

In answering the first question at the meeting, Uliana stated that she understood that religion alienated people from God, believing that such discourse was part of building a scenario of violence against LGBTs. And for Uliana, the possibility of not being prejudiced about the difference came from her experience of motherhood:

*Religion in fact, based on what I have been able to understand after some time, is also why I was already charismatic, I was once a "pretty much basically" catholic, who only goes to Mass once in a while. And now I'm fine. I go there. I realized that religion really does not matter. It is our coexistence with God. God in a full way. . . . I was a mother, you know. I have a little baby. And I understood love after I was a mother. So you begin to understand that love is such a wonderful thing and if you understand that God is full of love and that he is all this, this perfection. (Uliana)*

College Uliana and mother Uliana were positions that were negotiated with the religious Uliana position.

Here, the knowledge of different discourses in the university scenario and the change of role when becoming a mother collaborated with this change of opinion on the topic.

## **Broadening the discussion**

Based on the objective of building relationships between the positions taken in the group, the discourses used by each participant and their relationship with the PCP's dialogue structure, some points are worth highlighting.

The first point refers to the effects that the question about doubts and uncertainties regarding the opinion that the participant had in the studied group meeting, favoring the change of participants' positions. This question is referred to by the PCP's idealizers as a "gray-zone question," because it seeks to prevent people from continuing to address the issue based only on their polarities that come out of black or white and perceiving the nuances and ambiguities of social conflicts (Chasin et al., 1996). This is not to say that people need to doubt what they believe, but that they can open space for difference, proper to a world of plural visions. According to the social constructionist perspective, what is at stake here is the possibility of understanding any certainty about the world and people as historically and socially constructed.

In the proposal of the PCP, the possibility of knowing the personal histories of the people who personify "the enemy group" is a chance to precisely identify with these stories, to recognize similarities with their own and even to sympathize with them (Black, 2009; Public Conversations Project, 2011). This affectivity that was produced in the conversation would serve, for the PCP, not to weaken the arguments in defense of something, but rather as an opportunity to perceive violence between groups as a relational product, that is, as a result of the way that the two sides communicate, interact and position themselves. That is, the PCP bets that knowing the history of others will allow dialogue with the other, in the search for common interests, happens, perceiving the other from what the approach to the conversation allows. In situations of very polarized debate, the exploration of versions of oneself other than those usually assumed by the participants tends to be seen as negative, since when more force is given to their positions, individuals are forced to assume an apparently self-contained and immutable self. To think about positioning for the understanding of identity construction is to prioritize a person's view from the fluidity and dynamism of the self (Rasera, Guanaes, & Japur, 2004).

One effect of the gray-zone question was in regards to the use of religious discourse and the discourse of militancy in the group. At first, the use of religious discourse implied a positioning of those who are against this discourse, since they understand that it favors violence against LGBTs. Less polarized positions emerged as a position of opposition to religious discourse and not

necessarily to the religious. The discourse of LGBT militancy, which denounced statistics of violence and called for a discursive coherence, where a homosexual like Roberto was a victim was relativized in relation to the context in which this violence occurs and who is its author (the church, the religious, the other, the person himself). Thus, by proposing an exploration of the uncertainties regarding the way of seeing the world of the participants, and by betting on the changes that the differences in the group can bring, the PCP allowed a questioning of positions given as obvious from certain social discourses.

It is important to emphasize that the PCP's own proposal to favor the dialogue circumscribes the positions that will be maintained at the meeting, such as, for example, questioning positions and reflecting on the certainties. This does not mean that other positions and forms of conversation are not useful in the quest for an end to LGBT violence, in different contexts and for different purposes of conversation.

Institutionalized discourses usually have a longer shelf-life over time, and can crystallize as a truism in the daily life of relational exchanges. In this way, transforming discourses is an attempt that depends on macro-social actions and questions, a challenge marked by the fact that an institution is not a subject with whom I can dialogue in a conversational micro-situation. Hence, there was the difference made by Mauro between disagreeing with the institution and not necessarily agreeing with every religious person. That is, the church, in his perception, may be allied with a homophobic discourse, but not necessarily with a religious one. Hence the PCP's claim that when people speak not as representatives of an institution, but as ordinary people, based on their personal histories, the possibility of emerging from a polarized position increases, since personal narratives are more sensitive to transformations in the way of seeing and understanding a different opinion (Black, 2009; Public Conversations Project, 2011).

Understanding what holds a position capable of engendering violent actions is not synonymous with agreeing with them, although this may be one of the effects produced. Proposing a dialogue such as the PCP aims not to be naive due to the power relationships present in the different positions in a group of people who talk about a subject such as violence against LGBTs. However, recognition of what may prevent a police officer from reporting a violent act, for example, may be an opportunity for reflection and enhancement of an institutionalized mechanism for the reproduction of violence that is usually hidden, silenced and consequently little problematized, and which affects LGBTs and the police (although in different ways and with different effects).

It is important to emphasize the pre-group conversations, proposed by the PCP, as being fundamental for the proposal's functioning as a negotiation space of the possible positions assumed in the conversation. In the experience reported here, it was necessary to talk to the police participant, for example, in detail about which role



she understood she was invited to play, and how different versions of herself (policeman, mother, woman who suffered prejudice) could enrich the group in different ways. At the same time, it is fundamental to recognize how, as researchers, we position the participants beforehand when we invite them into the conversation by taking them up as homosexuals or teachers, or as a mother or father. In this interactional microcosm, positions are valued and this relates to how researchers and participants relate to the topic in conversation, how they understand dialogue and who should be present in it. In this sense, we emphasize the need to consider the positioning game that is established from the first moments of the group's constitution and not only those that operated in the course of the group conversation.

Another point refers to how the agreements of the conversation privilege certain positions to the detriment of others, since the proposal of the PCP is precisely to promote a conversation that is different from the habitual

one realized by the participants. Feedback from participants who have experienced a different way of speaking and listening on the subject is indicative of this specificity.

While we can not guarantee the effects of PCP in terms of social transformation beyond the group's own interaction, we can say that a distinct mode of conversation can bring new elements to favor a sense of connection between people in relationship building strategies in favor of the common good. The experience of genuine curiosity about the other person with whom one talks about in the PCP has been related, by its idealizers, to a reduction in responses of fear, attack and suspicion with respect to the group that thinks different within itself (Interfaith Mediation Centre & Public Conversations Project, 2014). Former participants of PCP meetings in different countries mention the impact of the talking based on a new way of looking at those who think differently and who have positively transformed their personal and professional relationships (Stains Jr., 2012).

### **Discursos e posicionamentos em um encontro de diálogo sobre violência a LGBTs**

**Resumo:** A promoção do diálogo visa à problematização de discursos e posicionamentos que cristalizam ações e posturas favorecedoras de práticas de violência. Objetivamos compreender de que forma diferentes discursos demandam posicionamentos específicos e vice-versa, entendendo essa articulação a partir dos efeitos da estrutura de diálogo proposta pelo Projeto de Conversações Públicas. Um encontro do grupo de facilitação de diálogo sobre o tema da violência à população de lésbicas, gays, bissexuais, travestis, transexuais e transgêneros foi selecionado para análise considerando sua riqueza em discursos defendidos e posicionamentos assumidos. A transcrição na íntegra desse encontro foi analisada a partir das contribuições do construcionismo social, em especial da teoria do posicionamento. O uso do discurso religioso, a polarização de posicionamentos, os efeitos das perguntas de "zona cinza", os posicionamentos evocados no compartilhamento de histórias e as implicações do contexto, da força social, dos acordos para a conversa e das entrevistas pré-grupo para assunção de determinados posicionamentos no encontro foram discutidos.

**Palavras-chave:** psicologia discursiva, teoria do posicionamento, construcionismo social, Projeto de Conversações Públicas.

### **Discours et positions dans un dialogue sur la violence contre les LGBTs**

**Résumé:** La promotion du dialogue est la remise en cause des déclarations et interventions qui se cristallisent actions et des attitudes en faveur de la violence. Nous cherchons à comprendre comment les différents discours demandent des emplacements spécifiques et vice versa, en comprenant que conjointe contre les effets de la structure de dialogue proposé par le Projet de Conversations Publiques. Une réunion avec le groupe de facilitation de dialogue sur la question de la violence contre des personnes lesbiennes, gays, bissexuels, transsexuels et transgenres a été choisi pour l'analyse compte tenu de la richesse de son discours défendu et placements effectués. La transcription intégrale de cette réunion a été analysé à partir des contributions du constructivisme social, en particulier la théorie de positionnement. L'utilisation du discours religieux, la polarisation des positions, les effets des questions « zone grise », les positions exprimées au partage des histoires et les implications du contexte, de la force sociale, des accords à la conversation et des entrevues pré-groupes pour la prise en charge de certaines positions à la réunion ont été discutées.

**Mots-clés:** psychologie discursive, théorie de positionnement, constructivisme social, Projet de Conversations Publiques.

### **Discursos y posicionamientos en un diálogo sobre la violencia contra las LGBT**

**Resumen:** La promoción del diálogo posibilita el cuestionamiento de discursos y posiciones que cristalizan acciones y actitudes favorecedoras de la violencia. El objetivo de este estudio es entender cómo los diferentes discursos están implicados en distintos

posicionamientos y al revés, entendiendo sus articulaciones a partir de los efectos de la estructura de conversación propuesta por el Proyecto de Conversaciones Públicas. Se seleccionó para el análisis una reunión de este grupo con el tema de la violencia sufrida por las personas lesbianas, gay, bisexuales y transgénero, teniendo en cuenta su riqueza en discursos y posicionamientos. La transcripción completa de esta reunión fue analizada desde las contribuciones del construccionismo social, especialmente la teoría del posicionamiento. En esta charla se discutieron el uso del discurso religioso, los posicionamientos divididos, los efectos de las preguntas de “zona gris”, los posicionamientos mencionados durante el acto de compartir historias y las implicaciones de contexto, fuerza social, acuerdos para la conversación y de las entrevistas antes de la reunión.

**Palabras clave:** psicología discursiva, teoría del posicionamiento, construccionismo social, Proyecto de Conversaciones Públicas.

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