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From Liberal Acceptance to Intolerance: Discourses on Sexual Diversity in Schools by Portuguese Young People*

- This article explores different layers of discourse about sexual diversity in Portuguese secondary schools.
- Focus groups discussions were conducted to 232 students.
- There are some discourses that make impossible a full access to an inclusive democracy for LGBT youth.
- In spite of changes, the dominant youth discourses gravitate between conditional acceptance and intolerance.
- There is a lack of critical and political discourse.

Purpose: This article explores different strands of educational discourse about sexual diversity in Portuguese schools, from the students' perspectives.
Method: The methodological approach consisted in conducting focus groups discussions: 36 with 232 young students (H = 106, M = 126) in 12 public secondary schools.
Findings: Students reveal a polyphony of discourses that gravitate between liberal acceptance, conditional acceptance and intolerance.
Research implications: Attention is drawn not only to discriminatory processes that question school as a democratic place for LGBT youth, but also to the gap between what is legally decreed and a lack of know-how in the approach to sexual diversity in school.

Keywords:
School democracy, sexual diversity, educational discourses, homophobia

1 Introduction

Even if the intersection between democracy and education can be traced to the writings of Aristotle (vd. Fraser, 1996), it was mainly during the 20th century that democratic theories of education came into being in the context of the institutionalization of public schooling, especially in North America (Haste, 2010; Meyer, 2010). This intersection has a double implication. It includes the idea that some principles of democracy (e.g., cooperation, dialogue, participation) should be immersed in the organization and management of the schools, the classrooms and the learning processes; but it also encompasses a vision of schools as contexts for learning and empowering citizens as critical and participative agents of democracies – as places where "one learns to appreciate politics (…), to be intolerant with injustices and to speak out" (Canário, 2008, p. 80). Both ideas are central to pedagogical conceptions known as 'progressive education' that flourished across Europe, North and South America. John Dewey's pioneer vision of education as an emancipatory experience of 'life itself' – opposed to a traditional durkheimian vision of education as conservation – is of particular significance. In his view, education should promote, through the child and youth involvement in experience and reflexivity, their personal and social development and their civic and political engagement in their community (Dewey, 1916).

However, democracy is far from being a monosemic concept, and democratic principles are multiple and, sometimes, ideologically diverse or even contradictory (Held, 1997). For instance, principles of equality and non-discrimination were always central in democratic theories of education – a discussion that was particularly vivid in the discussion of non-segregation in public schools (Coleman, 1975). As stated by Gutman (1987, p. 14):

> "A democratic theory of education recognizes the importance of empowering citizens to make educational policy and also of constraining their choices among policies in accordance with those principles – of nonrepression and nondiscrimination – that preserve the intellectual and social foundations of democratic deliberations. A society that empowers citizens to make educational policy, moderated by these two principled constraints, realizes the democratic ideal of education."

The growing pressure for the inclusion of diverse social "minority" groups, historically excluded from citizenship rights (Benhabib, 1996; Carneiro & Menezes, 2007; Young, 1990, 1995) has challenged classical models of democracy with the assertion of the need for a "differentiated citizenship" that would be "the best way of realising the inclusion and participation of everyone in full citizenship" (Young, 1997, p. 257). A similar recognition has also pushed educational theories, educational policies and the school curriculum to integrate and value diversity and to confront discrimination in its various

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forms (Bernstein, 2005; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Osler, 2012) – clearly, the growing democratization of education has been a strategy to promote social inclusion and reduce social inequalities, but also exposed the school's inability to deal with pluralism by remaining a sexist, racist and class-biased institution (Apple, 2000, 2004). As stated by Meyer "a positive school climate is an important goal in order to create the conditions that will encourage most students to succeed and thrive in school. Unfortunately, many school climates are hostile and toxic for many students." (2010: 8-9). In fact, schools frequently appear incapable to become safe and inclusive environments for youth marked by diversity in relation to social class, but also gender, race and ethnicity, nationality, disability and sexual orientation. This is particularly perverse as the experience of this diversity is one of the major advantages of public schools (Beane, 1990), contexts whose inherent pluralism generate, to use Geertz's metaphor, a vivid bazaar where there is a real possibility for "citizenship [to] express itself through the community of general rules that do not violate the differences of citizens" (Magalhães & Stoer, 2005, p. 98).

This study explores the production and reproduction of oppressive discourses regarding LGBT youth in Portuguese schools, inspired by Foucault's (2002) concept of "conditions of possibility". Conditions of possibility in schools would then be the possibility (agency) of LGBT youth (i) to be/affirm their (sexual) identity; (ii) to access (human and sexual) rights and (iii) to participate in the (sexualized) world of life, itself structured by a set of conditions (e.g., homophobia).

2 Democracy and gender/sexual diversity in and out-of-schools

In the last decades, there is a growing recognition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights as 'human rights' – and not as 'special rights' –, even if across the world this is still a challenge for democracies, with the persistence of both real and symbolic oppression in institutional (e.g., criminalization) and social (e.g., discrimination) forms, that transcend viola-tions of sexual rights (Aggleton & Parker, 2010; Lees, 2000; Kollman & Waites, 2009; O'Flaherty & Fisher, 2008; Richardson, 2000). For instance, the 'Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity' proposed by a group of human rights experts in 2007, resulted from the acknowledgement of

> "persistent human rights violations because of […] actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. These human rights violations take many forms, from denials of the rights to life, freedom from torture, and security of the person, to discrimination in accessing economic, social and cultural rights such as health, housing, education and the right to work, from non-recognition of personal and family relationships to pervasive interferences with personal dignity, suppression of diverse sexual identities, attempts to impose heterosexual norms, and pressure to remain silent and invisible" (O'Flaherty & Fisher, 2008, p. 208).

Only in 2011 the United Nations Human Rights Council passed its first resolution recognizing LGBT rights, urging all countries to enact laws protecting their basic rights. And, even in the European context, in spite of the growing recognition of same-sex marriage and adoption rights in many countries, there are problems with equality and discriminatory attitudes (Trappolin, Gasparine & Wintemute, 2012). Data from the 2015 Eurobarometer (EU, 2015) shows an increase in supportive views regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, but discriminatory attitudes still emerge: for instance, while 72% of the respondents say that they feel comfortable or indifferent with heterosexual couples showing affection in public, the percentage drops to 49% and 51% for gay and lesbian couples, respectively (EU, 2015).

Given this societal framework, it is not surprising that schools continue to be depicted as profoundly homophobic and heteronormative (Pascoe, 2007; O'Higgins-Norman, 2009). According to the LGBT survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2012), at school only 4% of the respondents were 'always open', with 30% being 'selectively open' and 67% 'hiding' their LGBT identity. Additionally, when asked to consider the most serious incident of harassment that ever happened to them, the school emerges as the second most frequent context (14% vs. 31% for public places). Not surprisingly, only 32% of the respondents never experienced negative comments or conducts during their schooling before the age of 18 (with 30% rarely, 28% often and 10% always); only 12% openly talked about being L/G/B/T; 64% always disguised their identity (vs. 9% who never did); and only 9% did not hear negative comments about a colleague being L/G/B/T (http://fra.europa.eu/DVS/DVT/lgbt.php) .

A recent report by the Council of Europe (2016) identifies "three central issues that prevent LGBTI children and young people from fully realising and enjoying their human rights: prejudice and discrimination, resistant educational systems and the targeting or negation of the work of civil society organisations" (p. 5). Access to education and the experience of violence in schools continue to be severe problems, together with "the lack of inclusiveness of school curricula" (p.6) and absence of teacher and other school personnel training in this domain. Homophobic bullying has been presented as a public health issue (Pascoe, 2013; Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni & Sheer, 2013; Rivers, 2011) leading the UNESCO to present two reports (2012a, 2012b) – "Review of homophobic bullying in educational institutions" and "Education sector responses to homophobic bullying" – that account for the global nature of the phenomena and call for the need for more intervention in this domain. Even if homophobic bullying can target heterosexual youth (Mahler & Kimmel, 2003; Minton, Dahl, O' Moore, Mona & Tuck, 2008), its negative impact, including mental health problems such as suicidal ideation and behaviours, is much more severe for L/G/B young people (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar & Azrael, 2009; D'Augelli, Pilkington & Hershberger, 2002; Rivers, 2004, 2011). Other long term

consequences involve school disengagement and poorer academic results (Poteat & Espelage, 2007).

The persistence of homophobic bullying is then a threat to school democracy not only because it denies basic human rights to LGBT youth, making them more vulnerable to oppression and limiting their possibilities for genuine participation as citizens in schools, but also because it questions the democratic ideal of schools as pluralist contexts where one learns to 'live together' with – to use Hannah Arendt's assumption (1995) – inevitably different others. However, as Touraine (2000) emphasizes, "it is no longer possible to believe that the education system, which refuses to take children's private lives into consideration, is the best means of promoting the equality of all or of reducing the real inequalities that exist" (p. 196).

3 The case of Portugal – circumstances and specificities

The progress of human and sexual rights in Portugal with respect to the LGBT community has been long, but LGBT claims only emerged after the instauration of democracy by the Revolution of April 25, 1974, that ended a 48-year long dictatorship. Since then, Portugal has gradually recognized equality of rights for LGBT people, like other European countries, being one of the three countries in the world where sexual orientation is included in the Constitution as a basic criterion for non-discrimination (Carneiro & Menezes, 2007; Santos, 2013).

In the educational field, the concerns regarding homophobic and heteronormative violence experienced by LGBT subjects were more strongly reflected in the adoption of the decree-law that regulates Sexual Education (ES) in Portuguese schools. Sexual Education had a long and gradual course in Portugal, which was characterized by advances and retreats (Rocha, Leal and Duarte, 2016), but only from 2009 – in the context of the political effervescence on the subject of civil marriage between same sex couples – it started to integrate "sexual orientation" with explicit references to respect for differences between people and different sexual orientations; and the elimination of behaviour based on sexual discrimination or violence based on sex or sexual orientation. However, there have been few studies in Portugal on sexual diversity in education, particularly focused on youth discourses.

Our goal in this paper is to explore the *conditions of possibility* that democratic schools offer to enable the affirmation of young people's legitimate sexual identities and their rights at the level of the *informal school*, involving interpersonal relationships with heterosexual young people. The relevance of "discourse" was essential, not only as a vehicle of transmission of these same attitudes, but also as a productive element of identifications and of realities (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). In this sense, discourse has the power to create certain conditions of possibility (or impossibility) for the emergence, legitimation or de-legitimation, naturalization or anti-naturalization of certain identities, rights or forms of participation, in short, of citizenship.

4 Methodology

This article rests on a qualitative research on homophobic bullying and on attitudes towards sexual diversity. The research was implemented in the North of Portugal, between 2015 and 2017, in 12 public schools with upper secondary education. School curriculum guidelines clearly emphasize the promotion of respect for sexual/gender diversity and the fight against gender violence and homophobic bullying (Decree-Law nº60/2009) and a government-led campaign against homophobic bullying was promoted in 2013. However, research regarding sex education shows a clear gap between guidelines and practice (Rocha, Leal Duarte, 2016).

4.1 Local context and participants

The contacts with schools began in January 2015 and only ended in February 2017 (2 years). Twelve urban schools of the coastal north of Portugal were chosen. Contact was established with the school board in order to set up the participating population and schedule the meetings to explain the research (objectives, ethical issues and pragmatic possibilities). Other contacts took place with the class director who would be responsible for the logistical issues of organization of the groups, only with recommendations for a certain level of gender balance and of the number of elements (between 4 and 10). The class director also took on the task of collecting written informed consent by the parents.

Thirty-six Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were carried out with 232 young people - 106 boys and 126 girls - from upper secondary education (mainly from the 10th grade), of different ages (between 16 and 19) and from pre-existing groups (the same class).

4.2 Method of data collection

Contrary to of the majority of studies on *bullying*, homophobia or attitudes toward people and LGBT rights, which favour a quantitative approach (Furlong, Sharkey, Felix, Tanigawa & Greif-Green, 2010), we used a methodological approach in which listening to the voices of subjects was constituted as "data". This means, a research centred "on the circulation of discourses on homophobia, and the social effects produced by their deployment in order to stigmatise circumstances, social groups or cultures" (Trappolin, Gasparine & Wintemute, 2012: 04). If in recent years homophobic *bullying* has become a *discursive object* in the public sphere (Pascoe, 2013), it is necessary to listen to what the subjects have to say about the problems that are said to affect them and/or their communities in a "natural" context.

Making methodological justice to an epistemology of the collective construction of meanings, focus group discussion was the method chosen for data collection as it is particularly suitable for accessing the beliefs, opinions, attitudes of groups of people on one or more discussion topics (mainly the ones that have been poorly debated), while at the same time allows for making the best in terms of the number of participants, availability, time and space (Bloor, Franland, Thomas & Robson, 2001; Dias & Menezes, 2013; Kitzinger, 1994). It was thus

sought that the FGD should be constituted as "discussion forums" that made it possible to glimpse *representations* about certain identities and *experiences* of discrimination. Even if the objective was merely investigative, an interventional intentionality that derives from the recognition of the own reflexivity of the discursive interaction is not rejected. In that sense FGD "can provide the occasion and the stimulus for collectivity members to articulate those normally unarticulated normative assumptions. The group is a socially legitimated occasion for participants to engage in `retro-spective introspecttion', to attempt collectively to tease out previously taken for granted assumptions" (Bloor et al., 2001: 5-6). FGD can even access some aspects of youth cultures (Hyde, Howlett, Brady & Drennen, 2005).

The concern with an open approach extends to the intentional choice of participants who are not necessarily LGBT, with the aim to access the ways in which discourses produce or make impossible the production of subjectivity (Trappolin, Gasparine & Wintemute, 2012). It is worth noticing that, on the one hand, this is not a classic study of "*giving voice to the oppressed group*" - on the contrary: [we take into account] the oppressive potential contained in the voices, in the community (and, indeed, even within the "oppressed group") as well as of the very method that can privilege certain dominant voices to the detriment of others (Bloor et al., 2001). On the other hand, one cannot assume a unilateral relationship between "being heterosexual" and simultaneously "homophobic". Hence the research assumes both the role of young people (of any sexual orientation) as active constructors of their realities, and the role of the school as a "community" in which young men and young women inherently interact (Dias & Menezes, 2013).

4.3 Procedures

We began by constructing a script with three main topics each of them with some open-ended questions: homophobic bullying, attitudes towards homosexuality (male and female) and sex education. It should be noted that "homosexuality" appears here as a symbol of non-heterosexual form of sexuality as bisexuality.

Taking into consideration that the classrooms were one of the preferred locations for the FGD, we started by organizing the elements of the group in a circle, around a table, and began by explaining the objectives of the research and highlighting the importance of the individual contributions and of the (voluntary) participation of each one. Whenever possible, a double partnership strategy was adopted in which the first author assumed the role of "moderator" and the other (usually a woman) the role of an "observer" whose task would be to take notes on non-verbal behaviours – both partners were experienced in the conduction of these groups. Sessions began with an icebreaker that allowed the presentation of each one.

Shortly thereafter, a video on homophobic *bullying* was displayed as the motor for script-driven discussion (e.g., "Dislike Homophobic Bullying"[1]). As the main character in the video is a boy, we explicitly referred that these type of discrimination involves not male but also female homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism – but then let the discussion flow based on young people's daily experiences in their school. In facilitating the groups, we tried to create open and voluntary conditions of participation where each one (young man or young woman) could express their opinion, always with due respect for the opinion of others. Some strategies were used to engage all young people in the discussion. The groups were recorded either in audio or video and lasted approximately 50 minutes each, with a further 10 to 15 minutes of exposition of doubts and/or more interventional exploitation of concepts (e.g., *bullying*, sexual orientation).

The data were complemented by some reflexive notes of participant observation outside and inside the FGD (e.g., to register, for example, *off the record* conversations) and some individual conversations that also took place, granting the research a certain *ethnographic setting* (Silva, 2004). There were also some ethical considerations before, during and after the research, such as informed consent (from schools, participants and parents), (relative) anonymity of participants and institutions (e.g., by changing the names of the interveners and naming the schools after names of colours), and data confidentiality and devolution, and data discussion, whenever possible.

It is important to discuss the role of the researcher in the process of data formation, particularly how his/her gender identity affects how FGD plays out (who feels safe or not, what kids think they can say and so on). All the groups were conducted by the first author who, contrary to McCormack (2012), did not assume openly addressed his gender identity to avoid "politically corrected" speeches. It should be noted that the initial video was already presenting a critique of homophobia, but we wanted to go further and discuss actually lived episodes in daily life at schools: to expose and not to cover homophobia. This implies that one of the ethical dilemmas we faced, similarly to other researchers (Braun, 2000; Kitzinger, 1994), was when majoritarian students voiced their views on the rights of presumably minority students in the context of FGD. However, we cannot run the risk of silencing certain public topics as we cannot presume neither a vulnerability of LGBT subjects nor the 'tyranny' of heterosexual subjects. In this case we strongly emphasised the significance of respect regarding other people so that each opinion, even if sincere, was followed by some reflection/ discussion on its implications regarding the rights and perceptions of 'the other'.

4.4 Method of Analysis

After being recorded and transcribed, the data were analysed. "Data" are assumed here as the discourse collectively produced in the interaction of those particular groups. We made resource to thematic analysis (TA), mainly inspired by Braun & Clarke's approach (2006). TA was essential to organize a large amount of data and to understand patterns of regularity of

meanings that allowed for meaningful analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). We followed the suggestions of Braun and Clarke (2006): reading, re-reading and annotation of some ideas, initial codification, search and revision of themes and writing. Notwithstanding the dissenting opinions, the excerpts displayed in the empirical discussion result from the condensation of meanings that became dominant and are sufficiently illustrative as representative of the ideas that were discussed. We operate on the discourse presenting it in the form of "typologies" only for the purpose of reading reality, since the meanings are too volatile to be reduced to tightly defined ideals.

5 Young people discourses - acceptance, tolerance and intolerance

By understanding the discourses not only as pre-constituted (by various forms of socialization, class *habitus*, linguistic structures, educational qualifications, etc.), but mainly as *constituents of social reality* (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), it is assumed that what is said about certain identities has effects on what people are (or think they can be). This is tantamount to saying that a homophobic discourse, for example, makes it difficult or impossible for people to identify themselves intimately with a certain sexual identity and/or to be able to express it. In turn, a discourse of greater "acceptability" that considers homosexual identities as a legitimate possibility among many, ends up validating and naturalizing such sexual identities. In short, the discourse ends producing, in one way or another, what Foucault (1994 [1976]) notably called "effects of truth".

5.1 The discourse of liberal acceptance

Through the discourses of young people one can access a vast and complex *polyphony* about homosexual people and on their rights. One of the most common or dominant discourses, which seems to oppose many perspectives that represent the school as unilaterally homophobic or heteronormative, is a discourse of some *liberal acceptability of homosexuality*:

"Sara - Everyone is like he /she is...
Marta - Who are we to judge? It does not mess me up...
Beatriz - Nowadays it is more accepted. We have no problem with that. I know some homosexuals. They are people just like the others "(FGD1, Red School)

"Ivo - Everyone knows about him/herself.
Telma - Yes. These are tastes. Each person has its own, is not it?" (FGD1, Yellow School)

If we analyse the liberal discourse on homosexuality with some detail, it is based on three main argumentative instances that can be ascribed to two notions of rights: human and sexual. In the field of human rights, we can refer to the recognition of a widely shared humanity that makes violence impossible ("we are all human beings"); an egalitarian in-distinction of the person ("homosexuals are people like the others") and the right to ‘difference’ ("we are all different"). In the field of sexual rights, the right to the individuality of the being ("each is as he/she is") stands out; the right to affective and/or sexual choice ("each person has its own preferences") and the general right to happiness ("everyone deserves to be happy as he/she is!"). It is no wonder that this discourse generally culminates in the recognition of *institutional rights*, leading to understand that the dominant values of young people sexuality are guided by a modern conception of sexuality (Giddens, 1992), which has already incorporated some democratic values, such as autonomy and equality:

"Maria: - I think that it is the same for everyone. If society has an enough open mind to accept homosexuality, it must also have to marriage [rights]. And adopt children as well!"(FGD2, Yellow School)

An ethnography by McCormack (2012) accounts for this shift in the discourse of young people. In the schools where he did his research, McCormack recognizes some smoothing of the homophobic discourse, as well as the fact that young people deal with other openly homosexual young people, without homophobic discrimination. A European study on lesbian and gay attitudes shows that in recent years there have been some changes towards greater acceptance (Takács & Szalma, 2014). Whether this results from a stronger awareness and ethical recognition of discrimination as something negative or to a mere moral obedience to what is legally designated is yet to be determined.

5.2 The discourse of conditional acceptance

Another common discourse, one that places an emphasis on an understanding of discrimination, is the discourse of a *conditional acceptance*, that is, homosexuals and their relationships may be acceptable, provided that they fulfil a certain number of *conditions*. In that sense, many discourses are rationally constructed with rhetorical recourse to a sequence of sentences in which, generally, the most socially accepted opinion is first enunciated briefly, and the most individually credited opinion is detailed shortly in the second place straight after an adversative sentence:

"Rui: I have nothing against, as soon as they do not flirt with me, for me, it is okay! If they flirt with me, then we have a problem..." (FGD1, Purple School)

Many times these conditions refer to potential situations based on a stereotyped projection of the group of ‘homosexuals’, followed by the generalization of some type of negative behaviour (e.g., as, in this case, alleged harassment), or to symbolic forms of non-heterosexual visibility. Three of these forms stand out here: the first is related to gender behaviour, i.e., to be "accepted", homosexual men have to behave as a "normal" man (i.e., heterosexual and thus "masculine"):

"Luis - I think it's because of this [homophobia]. Because to be gay is to be different, so being a boy with a "girl style" in the eyes of society, I think this is still much more open to

criticism. And yet I think many even exaggerate. Because one thing is to like men, and another thing is to be or look like sissies." (FGD1, Yellow School)

Young people constantly make this tacit separation between the "homosexual" man (whose orientation is homosexual and whose gender behaviour is derived from his biological, masculine sex) and the homosexual "sissy" (the homosexual man whose gender behaviour seeks, in some way, to mimic an archetypal "woman", according to young people). The "sissy" appears as the fictional identity figure through which the inclusion of homosexual men is thought but made impossible, above all. In an ethnography with schools in the Midwest, Kathleen Elliot (2012) explains how young people in school can accept certain homosexual identities and reject others when they become symbolically more visible. Elliot denotes that, while certain gay male homosexuals could be perfectly integrated into school activities, and even enjoyed a high degree of popularity, other homosexuals were generally excluded, precisely because they were more stereotyped (in terms of gender behaviour, preferences or activist positions). What seems to be unbearable for these young people, at least how they express it, is less the desire or practice directed towards a specific sexual object, but the performative femininity in men.

Homophobia is related to gender expression and, sometimes, this even implies a regulation of sexual behaviour and its expression, close to Butler's concept of "heterosexual matrix" as "a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility" that is founded on the notion of "a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (Butler, 1990: 194). This uncovers the second symbolic form of non-heterosexual visibility, related to the management of sexual conduct, particularly the *public manifestations of affection*:

"Rui - If they do not want anyone to take the piss out of them, they do not subject themselves.
Mariana [visibly irritated] - But they too, if they restrain themselves, more and more prejudice will prevail, and they will not be able to overcome it. So they have to overcome that barrier.
Sérgio - But they also have the notion that they are not exactly the most "normal" people on the planet.
Mariana - Yes, of course. They're not going to [show off] around here either, but I think you have to have, for example, [the right to] walk hand in hand at ease without having anyone pointing out their finger!
Rui - But even to go hand in hand, I've seen it [changes the tone of voice], I've seen it! Nobody gives a damn. But if two men pass by and they're kissing, that really bothers me. "(FGD1, Purple School)

That is, the homosexual can be accepted as long as s/he does not publicly express his/her affections just like heterosexual couples do – and this seems to be even more so for men. Here the homosexual conduct begets strangeness, with some boys expressing their "disgust," often as a performative exercise of their own symbollically heterosexual masculinity (McCormack, 2012; Pascoe, 2007). To complete the previous reasoning, the homosexual can be accepted, as long as s/he does not express his/her sexuality. Lisa Duggan (2004) applies the neoliberal concept of "privatization" to the domain of sexuality by explaining how the sexuality of the other may exist in neoliberal contexts as long as it is kept in the private domain, especially if it is not normative. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that this discourse on homophobia, which is more rationalized and "politically correct" (but not so subtle), often generates moments of tension with other group members (particularly girls) who perceive exactly the incompleteness of the tolerant posture and do not hesitate in challenging it, as illustrated by the above-mentioned excerpt.

The third symbolic form relates to the *tacit separation between "human rights" and "sexual rights"* denying above all the institutional rights (e.g., marriage and adoption). The rights of homosexuals are based on the minimalist logic of their "humanity", but their "sexual rights" (such as their right to express their sexuality) or their "institutional rights" (e.g., marriage or adoption) are less acceptable.

Cesar: - Look, I'm not a homophobe. I have nothing against gays, mark this! But I am against that they could adopt kids [some participants roll their eyes]. In school, how is it going to be? [Cesar imitates a voice]: «What's the name of your father? João [John]! And what's the name of your mother? José [Joseph] [some boys laugh]. I am against this, I am sorry! [GDF2, Green School]

These discourses have to be conceptualized as forms of "tolerance". In her work, Wendy Brown (2010) explores the idea that, even if tolerance is taken as an integral part of a civilizational project alternative to violence, tolerance can play a part in justifying violence by reifying the hegemony of the one who tolerates.

5.3 The discourse of intolerance

Notwithstanding these dominant discourses, there are other discourses that are expressively homophobic, although rarer; i.e., in the common sense they are what is understood as "homophobia" in a more uncontested way, that is, a monolithic notion of homophobia as a propensity for direct rejection. The boundaries that the discourse of intolerance establishes with the "discourse of tolerance" are rather tenuous, and perhaps the most striking feature is the demarcated focus given to expressive abjuration for homosexuality as Antonio's discourse seems to foretell:

Antonio - "It's not normal! It is not normal! For me the normal thing is man with woman! That's it! I do not like it and I do not accept it!" (FGD2, Green School)

These are discourses that are mostly enunciated by boys and in which the conceptual dispute about the "normal" (or "abnormal") seems to be the ultimate decision

maker on the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of homosexual identifications:

> Filipe – "Okay, but it's not like that [about same-sex marriage being accepted]. The normal has always been "man" with "woman"!
> Joana - Of course, but homosexuality has always existed, so it is also normal." (FGD1, Orange School)

These types of discourses have to be understood within a logic of performative masculine exuberance already evidenced by other authors (McCormack, 2012; Pascoe, 2007), giving meaning to the discourse of "gay but not queer" without its feminine equivalent:

> Andreia: - It is funny because guys never criticize lesbians like 'oh, I accept lesbians but since they behave like this, like this, like this' [gesticulates with hands]. They always go: 'Oh I accept homosexuals, as long as [imitate a hypermasculine voice], bla, bla, bla...' It is funny, I guess" (FGD1, Yellow School).

That is the reason why male homosexuality is more repudiated than lesbian as assumed both young men themselves and also the literature (cf. Pascoe, 2007; Pascoe, 2013). As Pascoe (2013) says, homophobia is a process of masculine socialization; that is not the only way how homophobia is produced but it is, undoubtedly, its more expressive form.

5.4 School as a homophobic institution

Regardless of these discourses, many young people recognize how school continues to be a homophobic and heteronormative structure, where it is very complicated for someone to express their homosexuality. Youth cultures in themselves are cultures where issues of pressure to conform to the norm, as a desire for popularity, potentiate schemes that make "different" people more susceptible to bullying (Rivers, 2011). This does not mean that young people do not contact with other homosexual peers within the school. On the contrary, their exposure to sexual diversity is much greater than it was a few years ago. Therefore, it is possible to find in school both practices of inclusion and practices of exclusion when facing sexual diversity that make it both a safe and dangerous (Elliot, 2012)—and, therefore, ambiguous (Gordon, Holland & Lahelma, 2000)—territory. For many, however, the school continues to be a place of discrimination.

Some homosexual youth expose their own negative experiences of discrimination ranging from direct discrimination to forms of "subtle homophobia". This is the case of Debora, who states at the beginning of the FGD in a tone of denunciation:

> Debora – I already [suffered homophobic bullying]. And this affects me because I'm homosexual and I've been criticized in the past for liking a girl here at school and people almost beat me over it. They called me "dyke", they said they would give me a "dildo", I do not know what else, that I should not be here because I was different from the others, anyway, I was constantly criticized and it hurt me immensely. (FGD2, Gray School)

When questioned how the school as an institution deals with the situations of bullying and homophobic bullying, young people demonstrate a discourse of discontent that extends to the nonexistence or shortage of (physical, but also curricular) spaces in the school as well as their dysfunctionality or lack of disclosure:

> "Hugo - How does the school deal with situations of homophobic bullying? Does the school want to know about these situations, does it not want to know about these situations...?
> Ivo - No! The school does not want to know anything!
> Telma. - No! They even know about it, but they are not here to be bothered." (FGD1, Yellow School)

The youth discourse is keen to stress that the school often renounces its responsibilities both in relation to situations of violence and bullying and in relation to topics related to sexuality.

6 Conclusion: school democracy in an age of diversity

Our analysis of the conditions of possibility for LGBT young people in Portuguese secondary schools, based on focus groups discussions, made it possible to unveil the homophobic character of the school and to recognize three main discourses: liberal, tolerant and intolerant. Obviously, the Portuguese case does not inform other contexts, but it can be a good starting point for thinking how this typology of discourses builds on a kind of democracy possible for LGBT young people. Intolerant discourses make the expression of an identity different from heteronormativity impossible – this is clearly not what one would expect from democratic living, and inevitably generates exclusion. The tolerant discourse allows LGBT youth to live their sexual identities, as long as they 'behave themselves'. It is a kind of supervised exposure: you can be 'different' as long as you keep it 'undercover'. As Wendy Brown says, "tolerance as a political practice is always conferred by the dominant, it is always a certain expression of domination even as it offers protection or incorporation to the less powerful" (Brown, 2010: 178). The challenge, then, appears to be making our schools more liberal and less tolerant. At least, a liberal discourse makes a liberal democracy possible: LGBT young people can live their sexual identities without the fear of being discriminated against as individuals, in an institutionalized way. However, this democracy does not contemplate a political reading of discrimination – and therefore any possibility to challenge or fight against oppression in ways that are collectively produced is limited. Liberal democracies emphasise individuals' rights to live their private lives and enforce legislation to protect these rights. However, it is not enough to have a law; it is important to find the means to put the law into practice: by training professionals, by promoting students' contact with LGBT realities, by fostering dialogue and an open discussion of these issues. It is here that a Deweyan notion of democratic

education is vital, with its emphasis on education as a cooperative process where new meanings emerge “in-between those who constitute the social practice through their interactions” (Biesta, 2006, p. 32). This implies confronting the risks of isolating individuals from the world by engaging them in joint participation experiences – an endeavour without which s/he cannot “understand the meaning which things have in the life of which [s/]he is a part” (Dewey, 1916, p.41).

In general, young people discourses reveal that attitudes about homosexuality are far more complex than it is sometimes suggested. It cannot be said that young people are either deeply homophobic in a homogeneous sense of the term, or that homophobia is a phenomenon that has become residual, since it takes on several forms due to societal changes. As Elliot explains, "(...) it is important to recognize that changes surrounding the acceptance of sexual diversity among young people do not occur in a simple progression, for example from homophobic attitudes to more accepting, equity-oriented perspectives, but rather are negotiated and contested (...) "(Elliot, 2012: 159). We must recover the concept of "antagonism" by Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) in order to explain how inherently conflictual are the meanings ascribed to LGBT people by youth reality in school. A rational process to understand homosexual identifications is not attainable. However, it is desirable that these issues are constantly debated and worked out (Meyer, 2010).

This paper also illustrates that discrimination against LGBT youth is still a problem in schools. In fact, if we were to answer the question ‘what are the conditions of possibility for LGBT youth’, we could reply that there is still some prejudice, discrimination and even violence, especially when non-heterosexual identities are affirmed. Nevertheless, school appears as a challenging and, at some extend, a provocative context against the idea of homogenous answers and perspectives regarding sexualities and specifically homosexuality. Following recent studies that highlight the fact that we are living a change of mind-set in what concerns homosexuality, school can be seen as a barometer of these changes (Tacacks & Szalma, 2014; Passani & Debicki, 2016) revealed by the less represented dominance of homophobic discourses among young people participating in this study. Therefore, if school is often seen as a place in which young people can be involved in experiences of discrimination, violence and inequalities, school can also be understood as the place in which different voices have the possibility to be produced and co-exist.

Young people seem to be aware of the main issues discussed in the public debate, encouraged by legal changes, and a significant amount of discourses reveal a liberal attitude towards gay marriage and childbirth or same sex adoption. In this type of discourse, they assume that gay people are “authorized” to live their lives freely, expressing concerns with human rights and dignity. The liberal and even the conditional acceptance perspectives of young people on diverse sexualities seem to be done from a completely different standpoint from former generations and this change happened over the last couple of decades. Not long ago we could find other, more often conservative, perspectives among young people in schools, about sexuality, masculinities or homosexuality (Silva & Araújo, 2007). The second type of discourse seems to be founded on an emphasis of the “distinctiveness” of the “other”, whose attitudes and behaviours should be supervised and even restricted, almost as if ‘we tolerate the individual, not his/her behaviour’. Less, but still existent, the article also reveals the persistence of essentialist views towards sexuality with some positions revealing a “gender panic”, anti-gay discourses, with a more visible adherence towards prejudice, condemning and normative attitudes. This type of discourses is found often among boys.

In conclusion, this article highlights how young people make sense of the diversity that is an inevitable part of school life. Schools are intergenerational contexts, where people with varied cultural experiences, power positions and exposure to sexual diversity coexist. Adults may have attitudes of ignoring, universalizing or turning the problem invisible, but the improvement of schools in dealing with diversity clearly benefits, as this research shows, from listening to young people’s perspectives. Clearly, their vision denounces schools as a place where LGBT young people are hardly supported in developing a positive self-identity. However, young people are also putting some pressure on the school context to become more inclusive and democratic. On the whole, even if the school seems to be still in a state of incomplete democracy, a democracy that is unable to genuinely include diversity, there are signs of hope in that the schools are also being pressed to change from within.

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