

Hegemonic masculinities under the childhood perspective

Masculinidades hegemônicas sob o olhar infantil

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Background

In times of increasingly present discussions about gender and sexuality, new interpellations of feminisms, and challenging hegemonic masculinities, it becomes pertinent to reflect on how masculinities representations are processed by subjects self-identified and identified by others as "boys." In this sense, we start from the idea that children are full social actors who can interpret and act on social reality. Therefore, they construct gender relations according to what they experience in everyday life, where they express their feelings, personal experiences, and experiences with peer groups and other social actors.

Aims

This exploratory-descriptive work, with a succinct amount of material for analysis, aims to reflect on how male sex/gender children construct the concept of masculinity in an institutional setting: the school.

Method & procedures

The exploratory-descriptive research was conducted in a municipal elementary and junior high school. The study participants were selected according to the school period (kindergarten - morning shift). The Informed Consent Form (ICF) was sent to all guardians for authorization and data collection, along with the Term of Consent, so that the children were aware of the research. A drawing activity was proposed with a playful perspective with the following slogan: "Draw what you think it is to be a boy." Before the drawing activity, there was time to listen and answer any doubts or impressions that the children might have. To access the participants' ideas and constructions of masculinities, we used the graphic representation in the format of the children's drawings, asking what, in their perception, represented what it is to be a boy. The drawings produced by them were treated from the analysis proposed above to identify, in this material, the contents close to the representation of the proposal. After identifying the contents, they were grouped into categories according to the proximity to the proposal expressed in the drawings. This procedure was done to judge whether the categories were adequate to the representations and meanings offered by the children on the theme. Of all the children's graphic production, ten drawings in total, six were selected for being aligned with the proposal and the theme presented.

Results & discussion

Implemented in educational institutions, questions like "what does it mean to be a boy?" allow the expression and the production of idealizations and varied hypotheses of the actors about genders. They can also contribute to the revelation of the constructions about gender and its representations in the construction of the children's identities concerning masculinities, in the sense of what it would mean to be a man and a boy. The child learns, among other possibilities, through the reproduction of adult gestures. The six drawings selected by our research show, first, that

the construction of masculinity, in this case, goes through the possession/display of artifacts/tools, in the sense of Gell, which, however, can be used by subjects and subjects of any sexogenic system, are chosen as a representation of masculinity. These constructions, tied to the idea of power, mediated by specific tools, are not static but can be negotiated through interaction dynamics, as Mayeza and Bhana's research conducted in a primary school in the interior of South Africa demonstrates. Second, although women have increasingly conquered the labor market and achieved economic independence, changing gender relations is problematic and strongly represented in some drawings. Third, one realizes that the in the drawings the children are not playing with artifacts that, from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity, are sex-generic incompatible. Finally, it can be seen that the games and play experienced by children are passed on by adults (parents, and teachers, among others) as a way to preserve existing "family values" or to prepare childhood to be introduced into the adult universe and, especially, into the universe of hegemonic masculinities.

Conclusion

Being a boy or a girl is associated with accumulating specific learned characteristics that manifest themselves in certain spaces. In these spaces, a consensus is produced about gender expressions in the sense of a particular construction that can be summarized as common sense, or even more: a joint consensus. From our experience, it seems relevant that children are inclined, more and more, to reflect on the traditional model of masculinity but question themselves about the becoming of this conformation. The real advance within this theme for children should go beyond the speeches and start with actions at an institutional level, undoubtedly more meaningful for this collective, leading us to the idea of reflecting on masculinity and femininity. Through education in dialogue, new visions of society can be born. It is necessary to adopt between school and family, social spaces involved in processes of subjectivation, and a political attitude concerned with gender issues as an essential step in the attempt to democratize spaces and build a plural society.

Keywords: childhood, education, gender, masculinities, sexuality

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