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Generational confrontation and gender issues: An active struggle within and outside schools in Uruguay

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Abstract
This article reflects on the role that gender issues currently have in the processes of generational confrontation between adolescents and their adult referents in the framework of the construction of their identities, as well as the politicization of sexuality with a human rights approach based on the active militancy of the students within their own schools at the level of Secondary Education. To this aim, the paper presents a brief historical presentation of the formal education system in Uruguay, explores the characteristics of sex education in our country and theoretical conceptualizations about adolescence are approached as a stage in the life cycle. The theoretical framework adopted for this paper is predominantly multidisciplinary, highlighting the articulation between authors in the field of education sciences, social sciences and health sciences. The idea for this work arose from clinical experience with adolescent population, social research coordinated in the field of education on gender, sexuality and sexual diversity in the city of Montevideo, and outreach activities on the different topics that make up the gender agenda conducted with teenagers and teachers in secondary education institutions in Montevideo.

Keywords: sex education – secondary education – adolescence – gender – citizenship.

Introduction

The formal education system in Uruguay: A brief history

In 1874 José Pedro Varela wrote *La educación del pueblo* (*The education of the people*). This work became a cornerstone not only for the primary school but for the whole of education in Uruguay. It was a pioneering work, the reflection of the liberal and republican ideas that guided him, gathering the experience and educational work done in the world's most advanced democracies. The formal education system in Uruguay would finally be based on the French model (Errandonea, 2014). Barrán (1990) points to the Law for Common Education (Ley de Educación Común) of 1877 as a historic milestone because it was ahead of anything else done in the region. Making primary school obligatory also inaugurated a stage characterized by discipline. "The implementation of the public, secular, and free school imprinted obedience and study" (Barrán, 1990: 21).

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Varela's discourse also promoted the education of women, but a rudimentary education limited to an imprecise learning of reading, writing, arithmetic and some manual crafts. Women from the upper levels of society had access to a more comprehensive education, although this education was never intended for the exercise of citizenship (Errandonea, 2014). Thus, schools were at first co-ed until the age of eight. After finishing primary school, families usually decided not to enroll girls in secondary school despite the fact that it was legally possible. There was never a legal prohibition, but rather cultural impediments that did not allow boys and girls to share secondary schools because the modes of thought and knowledge were regarded as symbolically masculine (Errandonea, 2014).

From Errandonea's viewpoint, the model proposed repressed strongly any manifestation of sexuality and channeled aggressiveness and violence with the aim of promoting "economic progress". Thus, educators (teachers, professors) – as social and educational actors – played a fundamental role by idealizing values such as labor, discipline, punctuality, order, and hygiene.

The Law of 1865 decreed that secondary schools were to be called *Liceos* (Nahum, 2008). Then, the University Law of 1885 gave secondary school a dual function: building on primary school education and preparing for further studies, which generated a tension between an education that provided an unspecialized general culture (with the aim of educating for a full social life, citizen and family responsibilities) an one that required a demanding preparation for higher studies (Silveira, 2015). Later, in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, under the presidential mandates of José Batlle y Ordoñez, *liceos* were created in all departments because, in the view of the Batlle movement, fostering education and citizenship were the best way to strengthen democracy (Barrán, 1990). Women enrollment increased significantly in this period.

Nevertheless, we must point out that the Batlle motto "We are all equal" has its limitations because, despite its good intentions, it made differences invisible and helped institute a culture of homogeneity also in the realm of education. In periods characterized by nationalistic impulses in which the national identity continued to take shape, the opportunity to value diversity was missed, knowing that Uruguay was a country that received immigrants, which led to the encounter in our territory of individuals with different languages, customs and worldviews (Barrán, 1990).

Middle education began to become more democratic as recently as in the 1950s, but not until the 1980s did adolescents from socially vulnerable sectors have access to the system, with a quite homogeneous population attending school (Viscardi, 2003). Also, it must be underscored that during the military dictatorship (1973-1984) pedagogic devices and institutional structures underwent changes that led to what some authors called "educational deterioration" (Bayce, 1987). The dictatorial regime was characterized by, among many other horrors, persecuting, savaging and making sexually dissident individuals and bodies disappear. Disciplinary devices for gender and sexuality were strengthened in schools, always reinforcing the hegemonic models of masculinity and femininity, as well as the traditional gender order (Sempol & Graña, 2012). The expansion of private education also took place in that context, gradually generating greater social fragmentation.

In fact, nowadays, even though there are nuances, it can be argued that the educational trajectories of those who enroll in public and private education are different and run through – especially in the case of public education – by social inequalities that combine to produce social exclusion (Filgueira & Kaztman, 2001). From 1995 on, with ups and downs, the country began a process of Educational Reform known as Plan Rama (Freitas, 2016). Afterwards, well into the twenty-first century, with the advent of progressive governments, there were programs (in primary and secondary education) that opened up new informal spaces and pedagogical devices aimed to ensuring the permanence of students in the formal educational and trying to reinsert in it those who had dropped out.

At present, the structure of the educational system in Uruguay may be defined as pyramidal and centralized in a Central Directive Council (CODICEN, Consejo Directivo Central), from which four other councils derive: the Council for Primary Education (CEP, Consejo de Educación Primaria), which includes Early Education, the Council for Secondary Education (CES, Consejo de Educación Secundaria), the Council for Technical-Professional Education (CETP, Consejo de Educación Técnica Profesional), which includes Uruguay's University of Labor (UTU, Universidad del Trabajo del Uruguay), and the Council for Teachers' Education (CFE, Consejo de Formación Docente) (Silveira, 2015). The national education system is divided into two larger periods, one of them corresponding to Primary Education – including preschool – and the other to Middle Education, divided into Secondary Education and Technical Education. This system has historically had the middle class as an axis that articulates the expression of expectations and needs (Viscardi, 2008).

With that structure, in 2006 Uruguay's education extended the levels of obligatory education to include preschool (four and five year old children) and Middle Education in the Obligatory Basic Cycle (Ciclo Básico Obligatorio). Later, in 2009, the General Law of Education No. 18.437 was passed. This law proclaims education as a fundamental human right and asserts that "the State will guarantee and promote quality education for all the population throughout their life, facilitating the continuity of education (Law No. 18.437, 2009). Article 2 states that "the enjoyment and exercise of the right to education is recognized as a public and social asset […] of all people, with no exception" (Law No. 18.437, 2009), while Article 8, expresses that "the State will ensure the rights of those minority collectives or people in an especially vulnerable situation, with the aim of ensuring the equality of opportunities in the full exercise of the right to education and effective social inclusion" (Law No. 18.437, 2009).

Sex education in Uruguay's formal education system: design, implementation, evaluation and contemporary challenges

The present Law also includes sex education as a transversal axis at all levels, stating that, "its purpose will be to provide adequate instruments that promote in teachers and students critical reflection of gender relationships and sexuality in general, for its responsible enjoyment" (Law No. 18.437, 2009). It is important to underscore that schools have, since the appearance to the institutionalization of that program, always given students sex education with different methods and objectives according to the times. At first, even sex education was a pedagogy for the production of normality (Britzman, 1996).

In Uruguay there was systematic discussion between 1920 and 1940 about which contents constituted what we call sex education, what shape it should take, and what the best way to teach it would be. A referent of that time was feminist Paulina Luisi (Darré, 2005). According to Darré (2005), the institutionalization of sex education was probably delayed because of resistance from the Catholic Church, because of the different senses and meanings that individuals gave to sex education, because historically physicians have been granted more legitimacy than teachers to speak about sexuality, and also because such an education runs against a basic principle of the pedagogical discourse about the transmission of knowledge constructed as truths, since in the case of sexuality everything is very subjective. It can also be argued that sex education is and has been one of the areas where multiple discourses intervene in a political dispute of sexuality. This is due partly to the fact that sex education "is a space situated at the convergence of different dimensions that make it run through the realms of education, health, and demographic and sanitary policies" (Darré, 2005: 27). Thus, sex education appears as a social practice that has become a realm of possibilities where social discourses such as the scientific, pedagogical and legal discourse are articulated and confronted.

Foucault (1998) points out that "adolescent sexuality" is produced by a combination of different technologies that start from a pathologizing view (unstoppable desire, eroticism with no regard to its consequences, masturbation, etc.) that must be channeled and disciplined. The entry of discourses on sexuality into educational spaces took place by reproducing hygienists, biologicist and medicalized views that sought to emphasize a clinical outlook that promoted minimizing damage (sexually transmitted diseases) and dissociating this dimension from adolescent subjectivities.

However, with this new legal framework, in 2009 the National Administration of Public Education (ANEP, Administración Nacional de Educación Pública) created the Sex Education Program (PES, Programa de Educación Sexual) as a tool to fulfill the commitments made in the political-institutional stage. A key aspect to notice is that the philosophy that inspired sex education in Uruguay was agreed upon by the different political parties represented in the country's parliament, which represented a strength for its placement in the agenda and the transversalization of its issues (UNFPA, 2014).

At the level of Middle Education, the central figure was a teacher who would be the referent on sexuality in each school. That teacher would work transversally with other teachers of different subjects in each *liceo*, as well as with parents or representatives of adolescents and in specific workshops with students. The referents are organized in departmental lists and work 10 hours a week in each *liceo* (Abero, 2015), and are usually biology and citizenship teachers, generally reproducing the "dominant models" in the tradition of sex education (Morgade, 2006). With the nascent institutionalization of sex education in Uruguay's formal education system, sex education contents were included in different subjects and levels (Abero, 2015). The question is: is that enough? Is it possible to frame sex education? What kind of sex education is available? Are there unanimous criteria for the transmission of knowledge in this field?

After all we have said about the current Law, one may wonder if in the practice all children and adolescents can effectively exercise that right. What obstacles prevent them from doing it? What values do educational institutions defend in regard to sexuality? Based on what paradigms does one intervene? Is diversity promoted? How? Is there inclusion? What is included, and based on what? What messages about sexuality are divulged in schools? What kind of sexualities are discussed? How are students educated in sexuality? How does gender circulate through the schools? How is it constructed from the school itself? What happens when the gender (dis)order is made visible?

In this respect, despite the efforts made, it is important to recognize that there are still structural problems of the school that affect students and sometimes the teachers themselves: for instance, institutional heteronormativity, sexism, gender mandates, the gender norms promoted and the corresponding gender vigilance that still survives, racism, homo-lesbo-transphobia and latent classism (Louro, 2000; Marrero, 2003; Morgade, 2006; Marrero, Mallada & Cafferatta, 2008; Elizalde, 2009; Marrero & Mallada, 2009; Junqueira, 2013; Sempol, 2013; Schenck, 2014; Ovejas Negras & GLSEN, 2016; Gelpi, 2019).

As for the issue being discussed, in 2015 it was decided to conduct a new assessment of the implementation of sex education in all the subsystems involved, taking into consideration the perspective of the operators and the addressees of the program, especially because the transition to adulthood requires being informed and equipped with competencies and knowledge that allow us to choose responsible alternatives, both in our social and in our sexual life (UNESCO, 2010). An effective education on sexuality should provide culturally relevant and scientifically rigorous information that is adequate to the students' age and specific context. It should also include structured opportunities that allow students to explore their values and attitudes, putting into practice competencies that are essential to make decisions about their sexual life.

Different studies show that an effective academic program for sex education should be able to: a) diminish incorrect information; b) increase the knowledge and use of correct information; c) clarify and consolidate positive values and attitudes; d) strengthen the competencies needed to make well-grounded decisions and the ability to act upon them; e) improve perceptions about peer groups and social norms, and f) increase and improve communication with parents and other trusted adults (UNESCO, 2010).

In spite of that, and also that according to the assessment there is autonomy and flexibility to address the contents proposed in the program, some principal's staffs exercise controls that are seen by teachers as a risk for the full development of sex education. Female students show greater interest than their male counterparts in its different topics, especially sexual diversity, domestic and intra-family violence, sexual violence, gender and links of affection. When the topic is eroticism, however, male students' interest surpasses that of women by a wide margin. Also, in Middle Education the Sexual Education Program does not reach Montevideo and the rest of the country in the same way, and this hinders its implementation beyond the limits of the capital city (Peri, 2017).

In Uruguay, less than a quarter of the population is young. In the rest of Latin America for every 10 people over the age of 65 there are 52 young people, and in Uruguay only 17. The demographic trend shows a sustained aging of the population (Calvo, 2015). As for education, there are virtually no cases of children not attending school in the age groups corresponding to primary school. Therefore, it can be said that there is universal access, permanence and completion of primary education. However, there is an increasing rate of dropout after the age of 12. It must also be pointed out that the proportion of students who are excluded from the educational system is clearly lower in 2018 than in 2006 (INEEd, 2019). Statistics show that males have a significantly lower rate of completion than their female counterparts, who outnumber males in most available educational indicators. In general, authorities are concerned by the fact that four out of ten youths do not complete the obligatory educational cycle (up to and including the last grade of Middle Education). For this reason, a number of actions aimed at the continuity of education have been designed. Also, this educational reality shows that formal sex education does not reach all adolescents in the country but only has an impact in the life of adolescents who attend school, so most adolescents' sexual socialization agents are often only their families, their groups of peers and the Internet. And those who do attend school are taught an uneven sex education depending on who provides it, the school where it is provided and the geographical location of that school, among other aspects. This reality has repercussions on the possibility of having access to timely, quality and equal sex education that responds to the actual educational needs of children and adolescents and accompanies their processes of subjective appropriation of rights (Del Carmen, 2013).

Schenck (2014) suggests the coexistence of three types of discourse on sexual diversity within schools in Uruguay: the excluding discourse, the tolerant discourse and the discourse of rights. She argues that the predominant one is the tolerant discourse, and that the discourse of rights seems to be a possible horizon. Perhaps this conclusion, drawn after coordinating a research project, can be extrapolated to sex education in general. Gelpi (2019), in an article that presents the results of a research project on the relationship between homophobic bullying and exclusion from school in a level of the Basic Cycle at public and private *liceos* in the city of Montevideo, concludes that most students have been exposed to heteronormative sex education that reproduces inequalities among students self-identified as LGBT and their heterosexual peers, which impinges on their human rights and has an impact on the promotion and preservation of these adolescents' sexual health. To summarize, "one educates both through what is said and what is omitted, what is shown and what is sidelined, what is hierarchized, legitimated, devalued or sanctioned" (Bonder, 1994: 6).

The empirical evidence available leads us to believe that there is a tension between the explicit and the hidden or omitted curricula. Sometimes, the explicit curricula linked to sex education is affected by personal beliefs and by the sexuality referent's sexual mores and personal experiences, all of which replace scientific evidence during the transmission of knowledge. Sometimes the curricula are also affected by the institution's fear that parents may complain about contents addressed in the classroom. This has worsened in the region, especially after the consolidation of movements against gender ideology (Junqueira, 2018).

Parents are the first to be responsible for the sex education of their children. They must offer them explanations adequate for their age so their children may acquire the knowledge and respect of their own sexuality in an environment of trust. It is generally suggested that what is needed is explanation rather than prohibition; otherwise, children grow up disoriented, with doubts that will be answered by the least qualified person, not always with entirely correct information. Despite that, the school still has a fundamental role in sex education so students are not exposed to a single, less than rigorous discourse on sexuality. However, there is a lack of cooperation between the institutions of the family and the school, because sometimes the latter represents a threat to the symbolic world built within the adolescents' family nuclei. In this respect, taking greater co-responsibility and deconstructing the idea that sexuality is a sensitive issue that should be the exclusive domain of adults would be desirable (Del Carmen, 2013). On the other hand, adolescents may often feel confused by information provided by agents of a sexual socialization that is directly opposite or complementary but significantly distant from their own views on the subject, and thus face the permanent challenge of evaluating its contents and build their own truths on the subject.

For these reasons, although in the public opinion school is seen as an institution in crisis and it has been suggested that its contents are outdated, teachers are not properly trained and students have lost interest, claiming that the institution that presented itself for decades as "a powerful and efficient machinery, a center that irradiated knowledge, an apparatus that classified populations, a modernizing device, a privileged public building, a symbol of the State, a meeting and lockdown point for children, youths and teachers, a homogeneizing machine, that loses its power to become the last stronghold where such elements and processes resist, weakened, the onslaught of current times" (Pineau, 2007: 34), it is still possible to reassert that sometimes, at the different levels of education and despite the changes there have been, during the educational trajectory of children and adolescents there are still clear, differentiated and effective standards given through action or omission regarding what is expected socially of males and females, which may limit or potentiate their ability to perform the gender and sexuality of the students (Schenck, 2014). Based on gender norms, the school might reinforce or deconstruct the hegemonic models of masculinity and femininity, intervene in the production of subjectivity, masculine and feminine sexuality, and provide information linked to its exercise.

Gender norms are also dynamic, and vary depending on the culture and the socio-historic context. Individuals also have a capacity of agency. Beyond the effects of the messages and prescriptions spread by the different agents of socialization (the family, the school, the Church, the media and the groups of peers), individuals may build their own masculinity and/or femininity with varying degrees of success, just as the school may not be the only place that favors their sexual socialization (Ramos, Forrisi & Gelpi, 2015). Sometimes the school even functions as a space for criticism and reflection where alternatives to the traditional gender order and current patriarchal system are rehearsed, trying to deconstruct stereotypes and gender mandates that produce inequalities and introducing a discourse that is different from the one students receive within their family nuclei (Morgade, 2001).

Nevertheless, social change takes place at a pace that the school is only partially able to process, and reality, ever more complex, surpasses its response capacities demanded by the different institutional actors. Besides, by then it is no longer the same school, nor the same families, nor the same adolescents, nor their same problems, and even less the same society. It is to be expected that the institution move on because it is required if it is to survive with some degree of efficacy. There have been attempts to push for a formal and informal re-modernization that includes the dynamics of the linkage between buildings from the nineteenth century, teachers born in the twentieth and students born in the twenty-first. Some of the questions that may trigger it are: what school for which adolescents? What do adolescents today look for in a school? What does the school have to offer them? And if this were not enough, in everyday school life there is a tension between legality and legitimacy, and despite the fact that Uruguay is seen by the international community as an advanced country, characterized by its progressive stance and agenda of rights, these attributes are so far confirmed on a normative level rather than on the cultural one, at least in some contexts where the concern is to maintain the *statu quo*.

Etymology and emergence of the concept of adolescence

In the sub-system we observe in detail in this article, the students are usually going through their adolescence. For this reason, I find it pertinent to make some considerations about this stage in the life cycle. Throughout history, societies and cultures have conceptualized the life cycle in different ways and classified it in different stages. Science has yielded knowledge on the characteristics and bio-psycho-social manifestations of the periods of this evolution, ascribing different meanings to them (Ramos, 2015). The first modern association of the figure of the youth to the figure of the student appeared during the Industrial Revolution. It is important to point out that 'adolescence' and 'youth' do not have the same meanings. They constitute different units of analysis despite the fact that they are sometimes used interchangeably. Every category has a history, and even in Ancient Greece there was already a predominantly negative view of youths (Viñar, 2009).

Etymologically, 'adolescence' originated in the Latin word *adolescens*, from the verb *adolescere*; i.e. "to grow". In Spanish there is also a social construction of the concept, linked to the verb *adolecer* (to suffer), as a stage of life laden with suffering and affliction associated to an existential crisis (Amorín, 2010). 'Crisis' can also be understood as movement or change, which would make it possible to re-signify the concept, since adolescence continues to be linked to exclusively negative connotations by more than a few scholars and technicians.

Adolescence, as a product of Western society, came to cover new social needs, most of them linked to gender and social class relationships. The first to be regarded as adolescents were the children of upper classes and, in turn, the destiny of those children turned into adolescents would be different depending on their sex (Fernández, 1998). Klein (2004) refers to adolescence and the adolescent space as a creation of modernity, the result of the development of social, economic and political processes.

The influence of American psychologist Stanley Hall in 1904 was fundamental for adolescence to be established as a new field of study within the evolutionary psychology of the time. Hall's perspective of adolescence was predominantly negative. In his treatise he refers to the adolescent as a transgressor, a rebel, and frequently uses words such as 'tormented' and 'dramatic' to describe adolescence. He works on the tensions and addresses it as a passage of transition to adulthood, leaving it at first lost in the in-between, as something unfinished between childhood and adulthood (Hall, 1904). Until the late 1950s, adolescence was seen as the Cinderella of psychology, with very scarce research coming from this field.

Barrán (1990) places the social invention of the adolescent in Uruguay between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The creation of this new social figure would be surrounded by myth, and actors such as the police, physicians, teachers, priests, legislators and families were charged with the tasks of taking care, controlling and disciplining adolescents due to their tendency towards impulsiveness, lack of sexual repression, vagrancy and vandalism of public spaces. With the changes that took place over the years, it was only in the middle twentieth century that adolescents – as an age group with its own characteristics – became consolidated in the social scene. This makes adolescence a stage and a category of recent appearance in the history of humanity, which becomes a challenge – even an epistemic one – as a field of study, axis of policy and social category.

Starting in the 1970s and thanks to the phenomenon of globalization, especially in its economic and cultural dimensions, adolescence underwent significant changes. Capitalism and the cult of consumerism placed adolescence in the cultural industry as a target group, designing an infinite catalog of cultural objects exclusively for adolescents, thus inaugurating, according to Kancyper (2013: 49), a logic of differences: "the logic of the market is a logic of differences, a social destiny that makes it possible to legitimize and discriminate individuals and groups".

These milestones enabled new meanings for adolescence. They diversified it while seeking homogeneity, generated tensions among groups of adolescents, and installed a hierarchy of differences, gradually deepening even further the already existing social inequalities. Soon, adolescence ceased to be only a stage to become an image, a cultural product (Grosser, 2006).

Likewise, the values of the culture of the civilizing vertigo of recent decades brought into existence new modes of production of subjectivity, understood as "folds in a new set of social, economic and political relationships that set out the rules for specific ways of socialization and existence" (De Brasi, 2005). After the crisis of several institutions of modernity, identities became fragile and, among other things, people went from a cult to God to a cult of the body (Barrán, 1990). Bodies were no longer understood as production machines but as places of a *status* that grants social recognition, albeit with a different destiny and parameters, depending on the social class to which the body belongs.

Nowadays, in the best of scenarios, adolescents find in cultural objects (subjectively invested) and in their own corporality a reinforcement of their own identity. But, in order to obtain their peers' approval, in each context they must have certain objects, a certain body that meets today's strict aesthetic requirements, and perform some practices lest they run the risk of being discriminated against, stigmatized and/or excluded (Baudrillard, 1974). According to Weeks (1995: 90) now "the body is seen as the court for the final judgement of what we are or what we might become".

Amorín's classical definition of adolescence (2010) as an evolutionary category in its own right – avoiding the adult-centered view that what is important is to become a responsible adult as an ultimate goal – that is run through by specific psycho-social aspects (such as the social class to which the adolescent belongs, as well as the culture and the society in which he or she is immersed) is no longer sufficient. Given our complex social reality, Viñar (2009) argues that it is more pertinent to speak of adolescences, in plural, due to the diverse ways adolescents live, feel, and sometimes suffer. This will depend on the social, historic, cultural, economic, and even political, context. The characteristics of each adolescent "are the product of a number of interactions between the individual and the social, where categories such as sex, gender, age, socio-economic level, place of origin and residence, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, among others, are articulated in complex ways" (Ramos, 2015: 17).

Sexuality in adolescence, as in other stages of life, has its own and particular characteristics, manifestations, needs, and demands. In this period, the transformation of the body and the organism, autoeroticism, the beginning of masturbatory practices, the start of the reproductive capacity and sexual initiation become of vital importance (López, 2015). For non-heterosexual adolescents, other particularities related to their sexuality are added, such as the process of construction of their sexual identity and the need to "come out" to others about their sexuality (Ruiz, 2009).

Although there are different adolescences, there are processes and mournings that are shared in all contexts and that allow individuals to recognize themselves as adolescents and have their immediate environment recognize them as such, so despite the significant social changes there have been in recent times it can be said that there is still an adolescence that maintains its usual characteristics and that others have mutated. The processes and mournings that remain are the mourning for the body lost, the mourning for the parents (the de-idealization of paternal figures), the rites of initiation, the role played by peer groups, the need for peers' approval – especially of those of their same sex – and a new exercise of sexuality (Kancyper, 1997; Viñar, 2009; Ramos, 2015). Nevertheless, rites of initiation have also changed with the years and have acquired other meanings and senses, and it can also be argued that what has perhaps changed most is the generational confrontation due to the crisis of the family caused by ineffective parenting, which affects the shaping of the adolescents' identity (Dolto, 1990; Viñar, 2009).

At present there is no unanimous consensus to define the age when adolescence begins and ends. It depends on each author's theoretical approach. In this text we share the view of the World Health Organization, which states that adolescence begins at the age of 10 and finishes at 19. Also within that range, a number of sub-classifications referred to early, middle and late adolescence have been conceptualized, and the concept of puberty was developed (Ramos, 2015). For this reason, conceptualizing adolescence(s) "is a field in permanent construction, the object of debate among disciplines and even within the disciplinary fields that make it the subject of their study" (Ramos, 2015: 17).

When mentioning contemporary adolescents in Uruguay, we may identify some characteristics common to this age group: they were born in a democracy and grew up with globalization, the crisis of modernity, the scientific and technological revolution, the age of information and other technologies, the boom of online social networks, the crises in the economy and in the protective functions of the nation-state and its institutions, and profound changes in families and in subjectivity. They exercise their sexuality actively earlier than older generations, witnessed the revolutions of the feminist and sexual diversity movements, and many of them reject sexual labels.

A negative aspect is that adolescents in our country continue to have a place of less power and representation than adults in our society. Also, "within the adolescent collectivity there is great inequity in the possibilities of exercising human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights" (Ramos, 2015: 19). This generational inequity is associated with the inequality of access to opportunities, rights, resources, goods and services among age groups in the same socio-historic context (Ramos, 2015).

Generational confrontation and gender issues: the active struggle within and outside schools

First of all, it would be pertinent to introduce the concept *generation*, which refers to age, but age processed by culture and history. As Margulis and Urresti (1998: 6) show, one is generally in solidarity with the cultural codes incorporated during one's socialization: "there are affinities with other members of the same generation with whom one shares social spaces, and therefore through this generational perseverance one incurs in contradictions and disagreement with the following generational cohorts".

For some decades now, but especially in the last few years and in specific socio-economic contexts, the feminist and LGBT movements have provided at least a group of adolescents new elements for their process of constructing an identity.

Generational confrontation, as suggested above, is an essential process for the acquisition of an identity. Its first condition is the presence of the other as an alterity, neither smooth nor arbitrary, that makes the tension of the difference between two opposites possible, both parties admitting that being an opponent is not equivalent to being an enemy. Without this arc of tensions "the dialectics of identifications, dis-identifications and re-identifications that is deployed throughout a lifetime but especially during the period of adolescence is paralyzed" (Kancyper, 2004: 93). This stage is characterized by the final mental separation from parents by overcoming their Oedipus complex and completing their sexual development, so it can be related directly with the adolescents' subjectivation processes.

It is encouraging that adolescents are active and making their voice heard, but their efforts felt all over the world must be faced. They must become a reality thanks to an act of confrontation, which must be personal. Adults are necessary so that adolescents have life and vivacity, so they can modify society and teach adults to see the world in a new way – as much as possible, with violet-tinted glasses on – so that, wherever there is the challenge of a growing youth, there is an adult willing to confront him/her (Winnicott, 1972).

In this respect, nowadays gender- and sexuality- related issues occupy a preponderant role in the process of generational confrontation between adolescents and adults. There are nuances between both generations regarding their gender beliefs, gender norms, gender messages, gender stereotypes, models of masculinity and femininity available, and the permissions and prohibitions on sexuality that are always gendered for individuals. Besides, the notion of gender is part of the structure of the psyche, and it even preexists the sexual differentiation process that characterizes the castration anxiety in the phallic phase of the psychosexual development (Laplanche, 2006). This novel way of dealing with generational confrontation, more than ever run through by gender issues, has been largely enabled by the contributions of the feminist and sexual diversity movements.

Feminism constitutes a culture that, as a whole, is critical of a social subject – women – as well as of a dominant society and culture, but it is much more: it is an intellectual, theoretical and legal affirmation of conceptions of the world, a modification of facts, relationships and institutions. It is the learning and invention of new links, affections, languages and norms. It is embodied in an ethos and expressed in new forms of behavior, both for women and for men (Lagarde, 2012: 461).

This reality introduces in the discussion the possible need to retain a traditional gender order, hegemonic expressions of masculinity and femininity, and more conservative subjectivities in our societies, because their existence ends up orientating adolescents to make contact with what kind of adults they want to be and they can be. We insist on the word "possible", because there may be many adolescents who, at the level of beliefs and discourse, sympathize with a more egalitarian society, but are still hostage to affective and cognitive barriers that keep them from making changes in their behavior related to gender issues in their everyday lives. In short, it is one thing to become aware and another thing to make the changes in your behavior that lead to social change. Also, if we make an analysis considering the social class belonging, it is likely that producing certain narratives and conducting some social and political practices in some cities, towns, and neighborhoods in the country becomes even more complex because it leaves them exposed to violence and stigmatization from their peers and other adult referents, and therefore not all of them can carry out these processes of gender transit towards greater (sexual) freedom. In this article we base the concept of gender transit on Parra's production (2019). She argues that not every gender transit starts from cis-genderness and ends in transgenderness, but that many people move through their own gender identity by problematizing, revising, deconstructing and transforming some beliefs, attitudes and behaviors linked to gender and sexuality.

However, we must underscore that, in general, from these possible contexts emerge new ways of organization and resistance to the dominant sex-gender system and the patriarchal and heteronormative institutional structures. At the educational level, many adolescents nowadays even discuss the (lack of) contents they receive within the classroom and argue against the discourse and practices of different educational actors that reinforce heteronormativity and cisgenderness, all of which promotes the demand for the legitimacy of new ways of being within schools in the framework of a secular education. This in turn translates into proper conditions to exercise citizenship for a group of the population historically silenced and made invisible in their political potential. A group of contemporary adolescents moves away from monikers like "generation *nini*" [neither working nor studying] or "anesthetized citizens" that only express themselves through online social networks: they place their bodies in the public space in the context of the return of neo-liberal and neo-conservative governments in the region. In fact, their struggle is sometimes not necessarily to conquer new rights, but to defend those already enshrined in law and currently threatened.

The practices mentioned may resemble the concept of sorority, which started as an effort to de-structure the culture and ideology of femininity embodied in each woman, as a process that begins with the friendship/enmity of women and moves on in the friendship of female friends in search of new times, new identities. "Sorority to overcome the most oppressive relationship: the real, symbolic, imaginary and fantastic relationship that maintains an unequal and asymmetrical link between women" (Lagarde, 2012: 494). And this kind of practices is not carried out only by women: a group of males has also begun to problematize their own gender identities (Burin & Meler, 2009).

These actions allow us to re-signify the social construction of "being a citizen", which has a historical and direct relationship with the patriarchal system because it is a category created from the masculine imaginary. In this case, female adolescents have proved to be very active in their militancy, fighting against the fact that public voices are generally male and private silences generally female (Astelarra, 1990). However, it is pertinent to remember that there are sociocultural, political and economic restrictions that remain, and prevent especially that a large number of women exercise their citizenship actively.

We understand as 'citizenship' a concept that synthesizes the relationship between the State and people. "A construction with multiple levels, which is applied to the people's belonging to a variety of local, ethnic, national and transnational collectivities" (Yuval-Davis, 1996: 2). "Collectivities and 'communities' are ideological and material constructs whose boundaries, structures and norms are the result of constant processes of struggle and negotiation, or more general social developments" (Yuval-Davis ,1996: 6). This reflection provides elements to consider the personal and collective processes of identification with the feminist movement's struggle. In this respect, it is frequent to observe: a) the existence of gender commissions in middle education schools, b) open calls to participate in demonstrations to defend the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people, c) practices of gender solidarity organized after situations of gender discrimination in schools, and d) occupation of *liceos* after cases of sexual harassment of – predominantly female – students by teachers.

Faced with the inactivity of the adult world or the fear of teachers to discuss certain issues in the classroom, adolescents have become active political subjects, appeared in the public scene, and put their bodies to denounce structural inequalities and promote social change. One of the most significant contemporary milestones was the vindication of the use of bandanas as cultural symbols. In Argentina, green bandanas were worn in favor of legal, safe and free abortion. In Uruguay it became popular to wear yellow bandanas in favor of the Comprehensive Trans Law. They are usually placed on backpacks or worn around the neck or wrists of male and female students, are visible to the rest of the community, enter schools with them, show an ethical and political position on the gender agenda, and fight the historical processes of silencing and invisibilizing sex-gender diversity within the schools, destabilizing the hidden curricula, all the while running the risk of being the victims of stereotypes, social, sexual, and gender prejudice, discrimination, bullying and exclusion.

The identification with this cultural symbol may contribute to the task of deconstructing the direct association of gender with women problems, while showing the coexistence of multiple singular and collective subjectivities within the schools. On the other hand, the school is seen as a space for the negotiation of meanings related to gender and sexuality, where a struggle between subjectivities that defend the dominant system and another group of counter-hegemonic subjectivities that promote more egalitarian gender relationships becomes visible. Perhaps one of the keys is to reflect on the role to be played by formal sex education in all of this.

In short, a bandana is a garment or accessory that throughout the centuries managed to revert its symbolic fragility (associated with tears, farewells or even perfume, which gave it a romantic meaning) to concentrate in its small surface a strong capacity of representation. Argentinian sociologist Zambrini (2010) sees bandanas as cultural brands inscribed in the body. This reinforces the idea that it is impossible to think about gender and sexuality excluding the bodies (Glocer Fiorini, 2016), bodies of sexual and politicized adolescents willing to exercise their citizenship actively, sometimes challenging the social and sexual scripts intended by the school itself as a destiny for that collectivity. It is fundamental to point out that these are not sedentary subjectivities, nor docile bodies; in this article we have tried to show a generation of adolescents who have the ideological conviction that the revolution will finally be feminist or it will not be. Probably one of the questions that may be asked is whether the school will and can accompany them as they want in this transition into adulthood that has predominantly an intrapsychological dimension, an interpersonal dimension and finally a cultural one, which implies incorporating tools for the construction of autonomy, to appropriate subjectively their rights and become critical citizens able to have an impact on the public sphere.

Final considerations

This article presented a brief history of the formal educational system in Uruguay, its characteristics, objectives and structure, and addressed the design, implementation and evaluation processes of the Sex Education Program of the National Administration of Public Education. It described the main contemporary challenges regarding the definition of its curricula, its operation, and the resistances that prevent this program from being legitimized in the educational community as another kind of knowledge. The article also delved into the role of the institution of the family in the education of adolescents on sexuality, and explained the need for greater co-responsibility between the family and the educational institutions.

We may conclude that formal sex education does not reach all of the adolescents in the country, but only has an impact in the life of those who attend school. For this reason, the sexual socialization agents of many adolescents are often only their family, their peer group and the Internet, with all that this entails. Those who do attend school receive an uneven sex education depending on who provides it, the school where it is provided and the school's geographical location, among other aspects. This reality has repercussions on the possibilities of having access to timely, quality and equal sex education that responds to the actual educational needs of children and adolescents (Del Carmen, 2013).

Furthermore, sometimes the explicit curricula linked to sex education is affected by the personal beliefs and experiences of the referent on sexuality, as well as by his or her own sexual mores, all of which substitutes scientific evidence in the transmission of knowledge. This scenario often makes adolescents feel confused after receiving information from agents of a sexual socialization that is completely opposed or complementary but considerable farther from their own worldviews on the subject, and thus face the permanent challenge of assessing its contents and constructing their own truths on the subject.

We also developed theoretical conceptualizations about adolescence as a stage in the life cycle, reflecting especially on the generational confrontation processes between adolescents and their adult referent. For some decades now, but particularly in recent years and in specific economic contexts, the feminist and LGBT movements have provided at least a group of adolescents new elements for their processes of construction of an identity. In some possible contexts, new forms of organization and resistance to the dominant sex-gender system and patriarchal and heteronormative institutional structures have emerged, promoting the demand of legitimacy of new ways of being in the school in the framework of a secular education. This has translated into proper conditions to exercise citizenship for a group of the population that has been historically silenced and made invisible in their political potential.

Adolescents have become active political subjects, appeared in the public scene and put their bodies to denounce structural inequalities and promote social change. One of the most significant contemporary milestones was the vindication of the use of bandanas as cultural symbols. Bandanas are usually placed on backpacks or worn around the neck or wrists of male and female students, are visible to the rest of the community, enter schools with them, show an ethical and political position on the gender agenda, and fight the historical processes of silencing and invisibilizing sex-gender diversity within the schools, destabilizing the hidden curricula while running the risk of being the victims of stereotypes, social, sexual, and gender prejudice, discrimination, bullying and exclusion.

The identification with this cultural symbol may contribute to the task of deconstructing the direct association of gender with women problems, while it shows the coexistence of multiple singular and collective subjectivities within the schools. On the other hand, the school is seen as a space for the negotiation of meanings related to gender and sexuality, where a struggle between subjectivities that defend the dominant system and another group of counter-hegemonic subjectivities that promote more egalitarian gender relationships becomes visible.

This reinforces the idea that it is impossible to think about gender and sexuality excluding the bodies (Glocer Fiorini, 2016) of sexual and politicized adolescents willing to exercise their citizenship actively, sometimes challenging the social and sexual scripts conceived by the school itself as a destiny for this collectivity. It is fundamental to point out that these are not sedentary subjectivities, nor docile bodies. In this article I have tried to make a contribution to the exercise of imagining the sex education required to potentiate the adolescents' capacities, especially since this is a generation with the ideological conviction that the revolution will be a feminist one or it will not be.

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