

Everything is more difficult when you are different: Analysis of the experiences of homosexual students in Physical Education

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Everything is more difficult when you are different: Analysis of the experiences of homosexual students in Physical Education.

The aim of this research is to analyse the experiences of seven homosexual students (four boys and three girls) in Physical Education (PE). Their families are also involved, looking in depth at how their children's experiences have affected their daily lives throughout their adolescence. A qualitative approach is used, in which three categories of analysis are established regarding their experiences in PE: a) body identity and role played in class; b) interpersonal relationships and social acceptance by peers; and c) limitations and discrimination suffered in the classroom. The data collection instruments used are interviews with the participants and discussion groups with their families. The results show how students' sexual condition directly affects their satisfaction and success in PE. They show how, on many occasions, their role is relegated to the background, presenting certain fears and insecurities about taking the initiative in activities. In some cases, the relationship with their peers is clearly limited, receiving gestures of mockery and insults from others. The families admit to having suffered a lot at certain times during their children's schooling. They explain that there is still a long way to go to achieve true acceptance and inclusion, especially in PE.

Keywords: physical education; homosexuality; body identity; discrimination; social acceptance.

Introduction

Certain stereotypes associated with adolescent sexual tendencies still exist today (Passani & Debicki, 2016). Homosexual people, implicitly or subconsciously, are victims of constant discrimination in their daily lives, affecting their personal and professional identity (Craig et al., 2017; Sykes, 2011). This is most acute in the field of physical activity and sport, where the body is constantly exposed to the oppressive gaze of others (Owens, LeBlanc & Brown, 2016), emphasizing the importance of body appearance for 'passing' and the fear of being unmasked affect their participation (López-Cañada et al., 2019). Therefore, Physical Education (PE) is a fundamental subject, using the pedagogical treatment of the body as a key tool to generate inclusion, respect and

acceptance among students. This pedagogical approach implies that the body and movement must be worked on from a social, comprehensive and inclusive perspective. This approach is essential, especially when the subject has historically been a repressive place for homosexuals (Landi, 2018). This has been widely documented in a recent systematic review on LGBTBI and PE (Landi, Flory, Safron & Marttinen, 2020), demonstrating the complex web of interconnected problems that constrain researchers. Although the changes regarding sexual identity that have taken place in the last two decades have been far-reaching (Sykes, 2011), there is still much to be done, both socially and culturally. There is an implicit and subconscious rejection of people who do not conform to the idealised parameters of heterosexuality, and there are certain pressures that are supported by some policies and the media (Ceplak, 2013). This results in a submissive and repressive attitude of many people who are afraid to manifest and express their sexual orientation. This situation is aggravated in adolescence, a stage in which the personality is affirmed and the relationship with and acceptance by peers becomes especially important (Li, Kung & Hines, 2017).

The theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997, 2004a, 2004b) is used as the theoretical framework on which this research is based. This theory seeks the recognition of sexual diversity and gender expression, framed within the paradigm of anti-essentialist deconstructive politics. With the objective of social transformation in the medium and long term, it is influenced by other theories such as Beauvoir's feminist approaches (1970), Derrida's theory of deconstruction (1974) and Foucault's constructionist vision of sexuality (1993). For this theory, sexual orientation, sexual identity and gender expression are the result of social, historical and cultural construction and production, and therefore there are no sexual roles or gender roles essentially or biologically inscribed in human nature. In this way, gender and sex are performances of

the authoritarian discourse of heterocentric hegemonic power in order to create socio-cultural realities. Performativity can be understood as a device of social and political power that uses sex and gender as a subjective construction of the body that ends up being naturalised within the framework of a prevailing culture (Mouffe, 1999). It should be noted that gender performativity theory cannot be considered synonymous with queer theory, as the latter is made up of a diverse group of theoretical contributions, gender performativity being one of them.

The approach emanating from this approach aims to put an end to the dualism of genders and sexes, as they oppress each other through the establishment of hierarchies (Dover, 1980). The reconstruction of gender and the struggle for the recognition of sexual difference and diversity is sought by searching for a new symbolic order, since the dichotomous categories of “feminine”, “masculine”, “heterosexual” and “homosexual” can be understood as repetitions of performative acts rather than natural values (Witting, 1993). It must be understood that peripheral sexualities are all those that move away from the imaginary circle of “normal” sexuality and exercise their right to proclaim their existence. It is therefore essential to give voice to all identities that are silenced by androcentrism, homophobia and racism (Mérida-Jiménez, 2002). According to Foucauldian ideology, homosexuality itself is an extension of homophobic discourse since it is a political discourse and a social hierarchy generated to be controlled, regulated and classified in a space of rupture, confusion and conflict. This perspective undoubtedly prompts reflection since there should not be a ‘masculine’ gender that belongs to men or a ‘feminine’ one that belongs to women, as gender is the consequence of a coercive system that appropriates the cultural values of the sexes, and consequently of sexualities. However, the subject does not choose the performance of gender freely, but rather such a

representation of heterosexuality is obligatory, under threat of punishment and violence for crossing gender boundaries (Renold, 2003).

In this sense, the preservation of the “proper man” depends on deviating, and keeping deviant, his own homosexuality. Gender norms only work by requiring the embodiment of some ideals of femininity and masculinity, which are usually coupled with the idealisation of heterosexual union (Fuss, 1993). Consequently, gender is performative, as it is the effect of a regime that establishes gender differences in a coercive way, with taboos, threats, prohibitions and even social rules being a ritualised repetition of norms.

In view of this approach, the school, as a fundamental social pillar, cannot look the other way. It is therefore necessary for educational institutions to generate protocols for action that promote awareness and critical reflection on gender diversity. Within this context, PE is a fundamental tool, as it constantly generates an infinite number of motor interactions between students that underlie ways of thinking, acting, being and feeling, both towards oneself and towards others.

Is there a place for homosexuality in today’s approach to Physical Education?

Traditionally, the teaching of PE has been linked to the development of physical fitness and sports. These didactic treatments are closely related to inherent social and cultural aspects, in many cases determined by body and gender stereotypes (Lambert, 2018). In this regard, it is confirmed that sexual minority youth engage in less physical activity than other populations of students. This disparity was more conclusive for sexual minority males than sexual minority females (Greenspan et al., 2019). PE context has been used to develop ethical encounters with queer bodies in order to address these forms of discrimination (Sykes, 2011). For example, changing rooms are experienced as embarrassing and unsafe for trans people (Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019). PE, which is

sometimes conceived for the exclusive purpose of preventing sedentary lifestyles, has not been able to position itself clearly in a pedagogical perspective, legitimising the muscular, masculine and heterosexual body as the truly valid one, something that directly influences the bodily subjectivities of teachers (González-Calvo, Hortigüela-Alcalá & Fernández-Balboa, 2019). Thus, students perceived that PE teachers never confront homophobic behaviors and one third of students perceived that PE teachers never openly confront heterosexist behaviors, although they perceive that PE normally create inclusion spaces (Silva, Jaeger & Valdivia-Moral, 2018). Forced heterosexuality is presented as the authentic, true and original condition. This approach, although rarely acknowledged by teachers, leads to school practices that subconsciously generate pressure, fear and insecurity for students who deviate from this established body and gender pattern (González-Calvo, Varea & Martínez-Álvarez, 2019; Velija & Kumar, 2009). In this situation, a system of control is established, although not explicitly, which results in the homosexual student feeling guilty for not conforming to the established “norm”, generating subliminal discrimination that is established over time and leads to silent suffering (Saraç & McCullick, 2017). These social and cultural barriers imposed on homosexuality are exacerbated through corporeality, with physical activities linked to strength being more associated with the male gender, while low-intensity and rhythmic activities are more associated with the female gender. This leads to the need for reflective and critical PE teaching. (Larsson, Quennerstedt & Öhman, 2014).

Therefore, school curricula in PE should intentionally address issues of gender acceptance and sexual identity, something that is not yet a reality. In many cases, the content of the subject is structured around physical tests based on standardised scales according to male or female gender, largely legitimising hierarchical and heteronormative masculinities (Mooney & Hickey, 2012). This situation, which has been perpetuated for decades, forces

students always to position themselves on one side or the other, lacking the freedom to express their bodily and sexual identity. This rigid structure generates certain empathetic resistance in students to break with what is considered normal (Devís-Devís et al., 2019). In a way, there is an implicit imposition on who one should be and how one should act, a model strongly supported by neoliberalism, consumerism and marketing. In the field of PE, this can be clearly seen in the type of clothing worn, with those who do not fit the 'norm' being judged and labelled. It is common to prejudge students' sexual orientations based on the way they speak, the clothes they wear and the way they use materials, with queer students often occupying the most marginalised areas in the gym (Larsson, Fagrell & Redelius, 2009). It seems that if a girl 'dresses like a boy' or a boy 'dresses like a girl', their sexual orientation tends towards homosexuality. This silent coercive mechanism can cause irreparable psychological and affective damage to students, and the attitude and role of the teacher is crucial to minimise it (Hall & Rodgers, 2019). The lack of initial and ongoing training for PE teachers on gender and sexual identity can lead to a shortage of ideological and practical resources that allow them to deal with certain situations that require such sensitivity in the classroom (Valley & Graber, 2017). Thus, teachers develop some practices that counteract the dominance of the heteronormative system (Devís-Devís et al., 2018). Further, PE teachers' tendency to defend heteronormative practices creates a paradox of 'tolerance' which works to marginalize non-heterosexuality (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021). As a result, there is a tendency to stereotype certain sports content, making students position themselves in their heterosexual, male or female side, without accepting the lack of a clear positioning or indeterminacy in their identity. This is highlighted that students use homosexually themed language as an instrument to discriminate against gays and lesbians (Piedra et al., 2016). Therefore, there is still a long way to go to achieve an open and non-judgemental model of PE, where equality and

acceptance of students' sexual identity take precedence over the work content (Chiva-Bartoll et al., 2021).

The aim of this research is to analyse the experiences of seven homosexual students (four boys and three girls) in PE. Their families also participate, describing how their children's experiences have affected their daily lives throughout their adolescence. This is a significant contribution, as this topic has never before been addressed in PE to our knowledge, including the perception of the families in an integrated way.

Materials and Methods

Participants

Seven homosexual students (four boys and three girls) with a mean age of $15.12 \pm .92$ years participated. All were in the last (fourth) year of compulsory secondary education in three different state schools in northern Spain, each with more than 400 students. All participants had attended all four years of compulsory secondary education in the same school. Throughout these years, each participant had had at least two different PE teachers, which ensured a diversity of experience in the subject. The main criterion for the selection of these participants was their willingness to take part in the research, as they all told the researchers that they were homosexual. Four of the participants had no problem admitting it openly, while the other three preferred to keep it private. To ensure anonymity, the pseudonyms used in the research were: Pedro, José, Raúl, Andrés, Sonia, Lara and Cristina. The families of all the participants agreed to take part in the research, arguing the need to draw attention to the problems and discrimination that their children had suffered during their schooling.

Data collection techniques

Two different instruments were used to collect information. On the one hand, interviews were used to ensure the analysis process with each of the participants was as in-depth and individualised as possible, thus guaranteeing their security and trust. On the other hand, a focus group discussion with the families was used, as the aim was to exchange a diversity of experiences with their children from different perspectives. The questions asked in both cases were directly related to the research objective and the three categories in which the results obtained were structured. This implies applying methodological coherence in the design developed in the research (Gregory, 2020). It should be noted that the three categories into which the results were structured were established from the outset, in line with the research objectives. The questions for each of the data collection instruments are based on these thematic lines. In this way, the results obtained can be filtered and assigned to each of the defined categories.

Student interviews

Each of the seven students was interviewed individually at the end of the first term of the 2020-21 school year. These interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and lasted 90 minutes. Parents were informed by letter about the nature and purpose of the study and written informed consent was required from both children and their parents/legal guardians. The researchers had previously held a meeting with each student and their families to explain the purpose of the research and how the interviews would be conducted. All agreed and gave their consent for the interviews to be recorded, allowing the researchers to transcribe the data. Eight questions were asked in each of the interviews (Table 1 near here). The content of these questions comes from the critical elements identified within the theoretical framework of the research. Taking these elements into

account, the interviews were semi-structured to allow each student freedom to express their experiences and reflections (Husband, 2020). These interviews are intended to deepen the scope of the research, examining participants' experiences in PE classes. Moreover, these questions are not closed and participants can express their opinions, feelings and personal character, allows a whole perspective of the study from a wide and reflexive point of view (Nowak & Haynes, 2018). An atmosphere of reassurance was created, reminding participants that their anonymity would be guaranteed and that they should not feel obliged to answer everything that was asked. There was a high level of willingness on the part of the students, as they wanted their experiences in PE lessons to be highlighted.

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1. What is the main role you have played in PE over the years? Why?
 2. Do you think your body and sexual identity have influenced the way you experience
Physical Education classes? Why?
 3. Have you always felt accepted by others in PE? Could you give an example?
 4. Have your relationships with your classmates ever been affected by your homosexuality? How?
 5. Have you felt that your sexual identity has limited you at any time in PE? In what way?
 6. Have you suffered discrimination of any kind in PE because of your sexual condition?
Could you give an example?
 7. Have you ever tried to talk to your PE teacher to explain your situation? What did he/she say?
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8. What do you think the approach to PE should be to make it more inclusive?

Table 1. Questions included in the student interviews.

Family focus group

This focus group was developed with the students' families at the end of the first term of the 2020-21 school year, after the interviews. Again, the Microsoft Teams online platform was used. The sessions lasted 90 minutes and were recorded for later analysis. The focus groups were developed with the aim to achieve the purposes of the research. In order to maintain the structure of the data collection instruments, eight questions were also asked (Table 2 near here). The researchers asked each question in the script in order, establishing a climate of participatory trust in which each parent intervened as they saw fit. They did not move on to the next question until all the families had participated in the previous one, with the researchers taking on the role of moderator in the interventions (Del Rio-Roberts, 2011). The families' responses were analysed as a whole in order to establish thematic blocks according to the categories generated. Subsequently, triangulation, purification and saturation techniques were used together with the rest of the interviews conducted with the students (Tortorella, Viana & Fettermann, 2015). The questions posed in the focus group address what families perceive in relation to their children's experiences and feelings.

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1. How has your child experienced PE over the years? How has it affected you as a parent?
 2. Do you think that his/her sexual identity has influenced this type of experience? Why?
 3. Do you think he/she has always been accepted in PE? In what way?
 4. What have the social relationships with peers been like at school and in PE?
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5. Has your child's sexual condition been a limiting factor for him/her in PE?
Has he/she shared any experiences of this kind with you?
 6. Are you aware of any discrimination against your child at school because of his/her sexuality? And in PE? Can you give an example?
 7. Have you ever tried to talk to your child's PE teacher and what did he/she say?
 8. What do you think the approach to PE should be to make it more inclusive?
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Table 2. Basic script used for the focus group discussion with families.

Design and procedure

The study analyses the participants' experiences in PE throughout secondary education from an internal and personal point of view. It is a retrospective design of a phenomenological nature, based on the analysis of their discourses (Fuster-Gillén, 2019). Before the start of the research, permission for a project involving human, non-adult, participants were obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of the main researcher. Moreover, the study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki Individuals were clearly informed about the aims of the study in order to give informed consent. They were encouraged to answer the questions as truthfully as possible and were assured of the confidentiality of the data. The study inclusion criteria were attending at completing all the questions and being presented 90 minutes. All participants met the inclusion criteria. Before starting the research, permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the principal investigator's university. All the students and families participating in the study were informed from the beginning about the study's objectives, guaranteeing the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. As the study dealt with a very personal subject, sexual identity, the participants were continuously accompanied throughout the process, resolving any doubts or fears they might have about it.

The research was structured into four phases:

Phase 1. Setting the study's objectives and establishing the timeline: the researchers reflected on the contribution of conducting a study that combined the PE experiences of homosexual students and their families. The researchers' close contact with PE teachers in the schools facilitated contact with the students and their families. Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, this phase was the key to building trust with the participants. Thus, a climate of trust and quiet is generated between the participants and the researcher, with the aim of normalizing and naturalizing the research. This fact is essential for complete complicity and to be able to improve the quality and validity of the investigation.

Phase 2. Conducting the interviews with the students: the questions were established in line with the research objectives. All of them were conducted individually, online via Microsoft Teams. They were recorded for later analysis.

Phase 3. Preparation of the focus group with the families: the questions were prepared based on the interviews conducted with their children, thus seeking complementarity in the answers. Subsequently, the discussion group was held online using Microsoft Teams. The entire discussion group was recorded for later analysis.

Phase 4. Analysis of the collected data: after being thoroughly reviewed, all the results obtained were transcribed and then transferred to the text analysis software. At the same time, the researchers reflected, first individually and then together, on the procedure carried out based on the research objectives (i.e. experiences of homosexual in PE, children's experiences and how they have been relevant in their daily lives throughout their adolescence...).

Analysis

A qualitative methodology was used with the aim of exploring the experiences of homosexual students in PE classes throughout their schooling. The approach was twofold: a) from the point of view of the students themselves, and b) from the perspective of their families. In this sense, it is essential to investigate both the academic and personal levels, thus connecting with the most honest and emotional part of the participants (Ngozwana, 2018). Therefore, all data were obtained directly from the assessments and experiences of the people involved in the object of study (Commander & Ward, 2009). Under a model of interpretative and critical analysis, this procedure favours a direct contribution to reflection and progress regarding issues of cultural and social relevance (Stynes et al., 2018), in this case, sexual identity. All the results obtained were triangulated between the two data collection instruments used, allowing us to analyse the information from a more global and interdisciplinary perspective (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). In order to ensure the credibility, reliability and transferability of the results, the texts obtained were coded according to the criterion of cross-matching patterns, leading to a saturation of the most recurrent ideas (Saldaña, 2009). The analysis used is in epistemological alignment with the theoretical framework, interpreting the results obtained from a more social perspective. Analysing the students' and families' experiences in an integrated way involves delving into what happened from different perspectives, all of which are closely linked to the emotional sphere. This analysis (through the categories generated) will allow us to understand to what extent the social construction of gender is perpetuated today, resulting in direct or indirect discrimination against those who do not comply with the established stereotypes. This assumes a linearity between the theory of performativity that structures the research and the results obtained. To this end, the data is investigated from the point of view of interpretability,

combining various instruments for collecting information and checking the most recurrent ideas. The researchers carried out this process together, making joint decisions on the assignment of texts to each thematic axis in relation to the three study categories by means of selective, open and axial coding. Thus, the objective is to carry out a correct cross-check by all the researchers, with the aim to guarantee the reliability and validity of the data obtained.

Category generation and categorisation

After the data obtained by the researchers had been thoroughly reviewed, they were transferred to the WEFT QDA computer and analysis program. Three categories of analysis were created based on three fundamental criteria: a) triangulation of the data between the two data collection instruments; b) saturation of the information based on thematic axes; and c) contribution to and linearity with the study objectives and with the theory of gender performativity on which the research is based. This process guarantees greater reliability in the analysis carried out, thus respecting the criteria of specificity and coherence that apply to all qualitative research (Trainor & Graue, 2014). The three categories of analysis are:

- *Body identity and role played in class*: this category addresses aspects related to the influence that the participants' body and sexual identity has had on the way they experience PE.
- *Interpersonal relationships and social acceptance by peers*: this category includes all information related to how being homosexual has affected the participants' social relationships with their classmates.

- *Limitations and discrimination suffered in the classroom*: information is recorded on examples of experiences in PE in which students have suffered some kind of limitation and/or discrimination because of their sexual condition.

Coding of data collection instruments

In order to identify each text extract with the data collection instrument from which it originates, a number of acronyms have been used. For the interviews with the students, different pseudonyms have been used. For the focus group with the families, (DG) has been used.

Results

The results are structured around the three categories of analysis generated. For each of these, the most coincidental and significant literal text extracts are presented (Saldaña, 2009), showing linearity and concordance with the theory of gender performativity on which the research is based.

Body identity and role played in class: (302 extracts).

Students recognise that in a number of cases they have felt strange, observed and even questioned for the simple fact of being different:

“In many cases, I have felt like the odd one out in PE classes, just because my sexual identity was not the same as the majority” (Raúl). “Sometimes they are not direct comments, but you feel observed by others, being afraid of making a mistake [...]” (Lara).

“On a number of occasions I have had to pretend to like girls just to be accepted by others” (José).

This situation leads them to feel displaced, preferring not to play an active role in class because of what others might think:

“I have felt self-conscious, with many fears and insecurities about having an opinion or giving a demonstration in Physical Education” (Cristina). “Sometimes I felt that my body did not respond when I wanted to move; I felt paralysed” [...]. “Faced with this, and although it was not what I wanted, I chose to stay in the background” (Andrés). “I always liked to be in the groups with the girls, as I felt much more comfortable with them. That made me receive, from the boys, insults like "sissy" on more than one occasion” (Andrés).

Students say that they have become accustomed to having a label attached to them. While this situation is hard in any context, it is even more evident in PE, as they are more exposed to others:

“In PE classes, it is impossible to hide, and when you don't feel safe, it is very bad [...]. You feel that you are in the wrong place and that your body doesn't act the way it should. It is a tremendously unfair situation” (Sonia). “Often, at a certain age, you feel pressured to be attracted to boys and to act like girls should” (Lara).

They recognise that, in many cases, the best thing to do is to go unnoticed, thus avoiding the commentary or the gaze of others:

“At first, I used to confront others when they laughed at me, although later on you realise that it is not worth it” [...]. “You prefer not to intervene in order to feel calmer and not be teased” (Pedro). “I've never liked football, and it seems that being a boy and not liking football are incompatible [...]. As I do ballet and classical dance, the others have always looked at me like a freak” (José). “I am outraged to see how some sports are considered masculine and others feminine, stigmatising each one to a sexual identity” (Andrés)

The families recognise that it has not been easy to put up with certain situations experienced by their children at school. They state that some of the most difficult

experiences have taken place in PE. They argue how these bad experiences have had a negative impact on their daily lives:

“From the beginning, we accepted Cristina’s sexual identity and supported her in everything [...]. However, this was not the case at school”. “Many of her classmates, even without knowing that she was homosexual, have questioned her and even insulted her at times”. “The most traumatic experiences have been in PE [...]. Raul came to loathe everything to do with physical activity and sport”. “In PE, being constantly exposed, the teasing and scorn were more direct”. “Sonia has often come home not wanting to talk to anyone and very sad [...]” (DG).

Families indicate that their children do not feel comfortable during classes because they do not show the same sexual identity as the rest of their classmates. They emphasise that they have not really known how to act:

“It is a very unfair situation [...]. To take away an adolescent’s freedom like this is incomprehensible in 2020”. “There is a hidden repression, in many cases to do with the body, that needs to be tackled at school”. “The first reaction I had was to go to the school and get angry with teachers and the management team [...]. Then you realise that this is not the best option, as you could do harm and put your child under more pressure” (DG).

It has been reflected within this category how students' sexual identities have led them to have a residual position in PE classes, in many cases in a marginalised way. Not complying with the canons of heteronormality means that they are relegated in many of the activities and pigeon-holed in many others.

Interpersonal relationships and social acceptance by peers (345 text extracts).

Students report that they feel rejected by some of their peers. They highlight feeling betrayed by others, especially in PE, where it is always more rewarding to surround oneself with the leaders:

“I have felt betrayed by some of my classmates over the years [...]. There are few people who stand by your side when they pick on you or make fun of you” (Sonia). “In Physical Education, I have never stood out, and that, together with the fact that I am homosexual, has often led me to feel lonely” (José).

They state that being homosexual has caused them to be rejected by others, which is clearly observed when their classmates decide to place themselves in other groups:

“It hurts a lot when you see how friends who have always been with you suddenly leave you aside because of peer pressure” (Lara). “They don’t want to be associated with you because you’re the gay one, and that could mean that people make fun of them too [...]. That’s why they prefer to separate themselves from you” (Andrés).

They indicate that, most of the time, it is not direct discrimination but constant day-to-day details that make them feel bad:

“The worst thing is that in many cases the discrimination is not through direct attacks, but you feel that people are talking badly about you, that you are questioned when you speak or do any exercise in PE”. (Pedro). “In PE, I have been questioned and looked down on just for the way I dressed or the way I hit a ball, which makes you feel really bad” (Raúl).

They recognise that at certain times peer pressure has led them to pretend and act in ways they did not want to. They only did this in order to be accepted. They emphasise that, as

the years go by, they accept themselves as they are, and there is no reason to change the way they feel:

“In the classes, you notice that only one body type, one way of dressing and one way of feeling is accepted, having to like girls [...]. I admit that, in some cases, I have faked emotions in order to be accepted by others [...]. Over time you realise that this doesn't make any sense and that you have to show yourself as you are” (Andrés). “Now with the passage of time you stop placing importance on certain comments, but they do a lot of damage [...]. Over time, I've ended up only trusting my real friends” (Sonia).

The families indicate that adolescents are very cruel at times, sometimes not with bad intentions, but they are influenced by others:

“I am aware that adolescence is a very complicated stage in which they care a lot about being valued by others and that the problem in many cases is more with the system than with themselves”. “Education, and more so PE, should focus on the acceptance of all ways of thinking, encouraging interpersonal relationships within the group”. “You can't learn anything if you discriminate against others, and this should be taught to students from the beginning” (DG).

The families state that their children had stopped liking PE, whereas they had been very motivated by it when they were young. They state that if this happens, it is because the teaching process was flawed:

“Pedro has always loved PE [...]. When he started having problems with others because of his homosexuality, everything changed [...] He said that he preferred to stay at home and play with his phone than go out to do sports with his friends”. “Lara loved PE until she began to feel complexes and insecurities due to the pressure she suffered in class [...]. What is clear is that, if this happens, there are clearly educational problems at school” “The teaching process in PE cannot be based solely on the contents or on the typology

of the sports played [...] It is essential to pay attention to the feelings, emotions and characteristics of the students” (DG).

The results of the present category have reflected how the sexual identity of the participants has limited largely their social interaction with their peers, being relegated to the background in a variety of situations. Even if it is subliminally, not complying with the heteronormative sexual identity defined in society generates exclusion. This situation is perpetuated in PE, where the movement accentuates this discrimination even more.

Limitations and rejections suffered in the classroom (365 text extracts).

The students indicate that much of the discrimination and pressure they have experienced in PE classes is related to the way they are grouped and made to demonstrate in front of others:

“I always felt a lot of pressure when we were being grouped [...]. I knew that either I would be quick to get into a group with someone, or I would probably be left alone”. “I got to the point of panicking about PE and not being able to sleep the night before a practical test [...]” (Sonia). “I have never been bad at PE, but the stereotypes attached to me because I was homosexual always hurt me [...]. I noticed how there were boys who didn’t want to play with me for fear of what others would say, and that hurts a lot” (José).

They highlight the insults they have received because of their sexual condition, associated with the way they dress, speak or express themselves. They express the pressures they have felt in PE for being a certain way and having to like specific content:

“My sexual condition caused me to receive discrimination because of the way I dressed and my physical appearance [...] On more than one occasion, I have been called a faggot”. “If I didn’t play football or basketball like the other boys, I was already labelled as the odd one out”. “I felt very displaced when the boys talked about which girls they

liked the most [...] they asked me and I had to make it up” (Pedro). “In several cases, I felt questioned because I didn’t dress the same as the rest of the girls or because my haircut was different [...]. These situations were exacerbated in PE classes” (Pedro). “I have always played rugby, and many of my classmates thought it was only a boys’ sport” (Lara).

Regarding the role of the teacher, the students stated that the teacher did not pay much attention to this type of discrimination:

“Honestly, I never felt the teacher’s support [...]. They were more concerned with the work content than with all the situations of discrimination that arose in class” (Raúl). “I do remember that a classmate was punished when she disrespected me, but then everything turned against me when the teacher was not there” (Cristina).

They recognise that there has been a considerable difference between some PE teachers and others, although they see the need for a change in the subject that is more focused on respect for diversity:

“Some teachers did take each of the student’s emotions into account more [...]. Others were only concerned with the work objectives and the results obtained” (Pedro). “It cannot be that a subject that seeks the wellbeing of the student allows these situations to arise [...]. Much more attention should be paid to diversity” (Lara).

The families report how their children have had a hard time in class, feeling bad about themselves for not thinking like their classmates:

“It is very hard as a parent to see how your child suffers unfairly, just because they don’t think and feel like others do [...]”. “If discrimination already exists in society, school should be a place where people are respected above all else” (DG).

They state that PE should be very inclusive, as values are the first thing that should be promoted through sport:

“What is the point of doing sport if it is not under an inclusive approach for all? [...]. The values of sport towards respect for others must be the priority [...]. If this is not done at school, we cannot expect it to be done anywhere else” (DG).

It has been shown how labels in relation to sexual identity affect different variables such as the type of clothing or the way students express themselves. This discrimination encompasses personal identity itself. Teaching processes, especially in PE, should pay attention to these more intrinsic aspects, something that does not seem to happen.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to analyse the experiences of seven homosexual students (four boys and three girls) in PE, also taking into account families perceptions about their sons/daughters ‘feelings. The results have shown how being homosexual has led to limitations and rejection in PE. This discrimination, in many cases indirect, has manifested itself in the student taking a more passive role in the classroom, mockery and scorn from their classmates and pressure and insecurity about the way they express themselves, feel and act in front of others.

In relation to the first category of analysis, homosexual students have stated that they are used to being undervalued or ridiculed because of their sexual identity, so they prefer to go unnoticed in PE. In this sense, Kite and Bryant-Lees (2016) indicate that society establishes a series of stereotypes in relation to people’s sexual identity, judging and questioning anyone who does not conform to the heterosexual pattern, which is assumed to be valid. These models are replicated by children from an early age, limiting their full freedom to feel as they wish (Williams, 2017). In many cases, far from being sensitised

to this situation, PE, through bodywork, legitimises these social behaviours, pigeonholing the typologies of sporting practices according to gender and hegemonic masculinities (Millington et al., 2008). In the face of this, students with other sexual identities choose to remain in the background in the classroom. The families of the students have expressed how difficult it has been for them to see their children suffer and not be able to do anything about it, highlighting that, in many cases, the worst experiences have been in PE.

With regard to the second category of analysis, students reported having felt displaced by their peers in PE, in most cases through indirectly discrimination. In addition, they indicated that, on more than one occasion, they have pretended in order to be accepted by others. Benítez-Sillero et al. (2021) reveal how one of the most relevant aspects for adolescents is the approval of their peers and that in order to achieve this, they do not hesitate to modify their patterns of behaviour, in some cases discriminatory, with the sole purpose of obtaining the support of the group. Kjaran and Kristinsdóttir (2015) show how homosexual adolescents, faced with the repression they have suffered for years from society, suffer damage to their personalities, expressing contrary emotions that even make them feel bad about what they feel. Some of the families highlighted that their children stopped liking PE because of rejection by their peers. When PE teaching is based on the development of corporal pedagogical practices that foster respect and inclusion of students, motivation towards the subject increases significantly. This motivation must be sustained by teacher support, with boys being more determined by perceived competence and girls by perceived autonomy (Rutten et al., 2015).

In relation to the third category of analysis, the students have highlighted how they have experienced traumatic situations in PE, especially when they have had to demonstrate in front of others. They felt questioned because of the way they spoke, moved and even dressed. In addition, they have established how the teacher did not pay much attention to

these discriminations. PE needs to set itself up as a subject that breaks with any stereotyped social pattern, fleeing from the corseted curriculum and promoting open and participatory practices in which no student feels pressured and discriminated against because of their sexual, social or gender condition (Cameron & Humbert, 2020). To this end, teacher training in the emotional sphere is key, using motor skills as a reflective and inclusive element and not with a merely physiological focus. In this sense, the results of the present research have reflected how the students' families state that PE should be more inclusive in order to respect the sexual identity of all students. Research such as that by Campbell et al. (2018) indicates that PE is taught in an orthodox masculine nature, which prevents students from discovering, exploring and expressing different gender identities.

All the results obtained are framed under the theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997, 2004a, 2004b) that structures this manuscript based on the sexual freedom that each individual must have. Under the fundamental principle that sexual identity is a social and cultural construct, the dichotomous approach that forces students to position and classify themselves should be eradicated from schools, and specifically from PE. This is the only way to break with hegemonic approaches based on heterosexuality, with PE being an essential subject in this regard, so that we can set aside neoliberal political impositions and the body can be approached from its pedagogical perspective.

Conclusions

It has been observed how the participating students have suffered discrimination in PE for the sole reason that they are homosexual. This has led to the students not experiencing school as a place where they can feel accepted by others. Their families have experienced

this process in a negative and powerless way, lacking resources to cope with this situation. It is essential that the teaching of PE be based on fundamental values such as respect, empathy and acceptance of others, regardless of their characteristics.

This research makes a significant contribution to previous literature on sexual identity and PE, as it not only analyses the experiences of students in their last year of compulsory education, it also gives a voice to their families. However, the research has some limitations: a) it does not give a voice to PE teachers, and b) it does not focus on specific types of physical activities and sports practices. As future lines of research, it would be interesting to carry out specific observations on what happens in the classroom, contrasting the students' experiences according to the methodological approach used and/or the contents applied. It is considered that the present research may be of interest to all PE teachers, as it will allow them to reflect on the importance of attending to the emotional needs of their students. It could also help educational administrations develop curricular and training plans at all levels of education to promote projects and educational resources based on affection and acceptance. It is essential to continue carrying out research along these lines to achieve a truly inclusive, emancipatory and democratic PE.

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