ABSTRACT

The present article is a following of studies and discussions about Contemporary Youth Literature and the sexual identities. With the writing of this article, it is intended to discuss cultural curriculums presented in some books addressed to these young people concerning LGBTQI subjects. The Cultural studies is the basis of this article, under the post-structuralist branch. This research uses the cultural analysis to realize reviews of artifact’s excerpts selected to the discussion. From the theoretical framework and the choice of the review’s tool, it is possible to verify that some youth literature books produce meanings about the sexual and gender identities, from the LGBTQI characters, while addressing these themes, the books teach to their reader’s normal and abnormal manners of being a LGBTQI subject.

KEYWORDS

Cultural studies; cultural artifact; youth literature; LGBTQI.

Introduction

It is remarkable how Brazil is experiencing an expressive moment in relation to debates about the expansion of cultural identities. In particular, it is noticed that there is a clash among social groups which defend that expansion and discussion about the legitimacy of multiple identities; on the other hand, there are groups that seek to maintain (or recover) the “morality” and the “good customs”. Bases on Fernando Seffner’s (2015) words, in the eyes of certain political leaders, the expansion and enlargement of the search for visibility and rights from social groups which were regarded as “the others” or even subordinates, it is synonymous of the failure of the holy principle of hierarchy. Those clashes take part as far as different groups of subjects are organized in order to claim recognition as rights’ subjects through the border demarcation, which approach and take away different social groups. In front of some news reports circulating on the internet, it was possible to notice that some Brazilian publishers began to invest in Youth Literature books that bring in their narratives lesbians, gays, transsexuals, queers and intersexual characters. In addition to news reports and articles that point out which books they are, also it is noticed a significant number of booktubers who post on their channels some tips for books that, in general, are called gay

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4 Booktubers is a group of literature lovers who realize the reading of some books and record a video commenting about the books that have been read. In general, the booktubers read, at least, one book per week in order to post on their channels. Through comments on the videos, YouTube users usually request to the booktubers which books they would like to have there.
Such movements indicate the search for particular social groups to make them visible, that their battles are noted, that they become subjects with rights without having to give up on their identities.

Ahead of this, it is realized that discussions about sexual diversity have been driven at the same time they are being challenged. In Brazil, it is possible to observe there are social groups, which fight for keeping the discussion on, as well as the visibility and the rights of LGBTQI subjects, especially in the school environment, while other social groups seek to silence those debates. Even movements seem to take different ways; it is possible to observe how the sexual diversity has been discussed in Brazil. In this sense, this article aims at analyzing the meanings that have been reproduced and produced by the youth literature about sexual diversity.

This text is proposing to discuss the meanings that have been (re)produced by youth literature about what is to be a LGBTQI subject. To that end, a questionnaire is launched to guide this research: how has the youth literature been expanding and/or fixing the LGBTQI identities through the process of representation?

The research’s question is presented here as a post-structuralist thought, which means that it seeks to get out of the metanarratives, that is, the great truths about the constitution of the subjects. In such a way that the objective is to put into question the absolute truths, questioning the knowledges that are socially taken as genuine, in particular scientific knowledges (Henning, 2009). Thus, it is comprehended that identities are not fixed; having in mind, the subjects are in constant process of transformation. Here, the idea that the subject has an essence is abandoned. That is, it is understood that identities are mutable, that they are processes. To the post-structuralist branch, there is no “truth”. Therefore, based on this thought, this article wants to show that there is no “truth” about the LGBTQI subjects, even there is no LGBTQI “identity”, but identities. In this sense, it is learned that the differences among the subjects are not from the natural order, but are culturally constructed.

Literature as a cultural artifact

This study presupposes we are educated in and by culture, which is comprehended in this work as a language understanding through which culture is viewed beyond its function of representing of reality, because it is considered as a meaning producer (Soares, 2011). In other terms, it apprehends all the knowledge, as far as it is constituted by a system of meanings, it is cultural, and there are systems that are structured through power relations (Silva, 2010). Thus, it is comprehended that education is beyond the school environment.

Thereby, we are educated in different social instances. Education does not happen only at educational institutions, because it is learned that family, church, work place, headquar-

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5 During the research, it has been come across different ways to classify those books, such as Teen Gay Literature, Gay Literature and Queer Literature. On this article, it has been chosen to classify the books as Youth Literature.

6 This terminology was assumed from the moment it is realized a movement from the philosopher Judith Butler in nominating the subjects in such way. This acronym was assumed for using in the master’s research; in this way, LGBTQI subjects are lesbians, gays, transgenders, queer and intersexual. This acronym was chosen in order to give more visibility to other sexual identities, bearing in mind, some books that compose the master’s research; they bring characters from several identities. It is known that this terminology is not very used in Brazil (LGBT); however, we believe this other acronym expands the view over identities.
ters, leisure areas, among others, also teach manners on how to behave in a certain social context. It is argued that “just as education, other cultural instances are also pedagogical, also have ‘pedagogy’, also teach something” (Silva, 2010, pp. 139). For this reason, it is believe that books, songs, films, advertisement, television, media, magazines, among others, are artifacts that contain pedagogies, because they are considered cultural processes oriented by asymmetrical social relations of power (Silva, 2010).

We understand cultural artifacts as resulting from processes of social construction, bearing in mind those processes circulate discourses that are capable of naturalizing truths while at the same time they can question and denaturalize. In this way, cultural artifacts also teach manners on how to be in this world. Therefore, this article takes the youth literature books as cultural artifacts, because literature, by words and images, constructs and reconstructs some truths regarding to how to be a subject in each society. Considering this study, it is realized that books produce representations of LGBTQI identities. Through the mimesis, the youth literature leads for instituting some truths about those subjects.

As a consequence, it is believed that the books, as cultural artifacts, bring discourses that heckle readers teaching them manners on how to be subjects, carrying discourses from the culture they are inserted, in the construction of not only LGBTQI subjects identities, but also in the construction of identities of readers of those books, independently of their sexual identities.

For this reason, the books comprehended as cultural artifacts that contain pedagogies are seen as producers and reproducers of a cultural curriculum, considering they express culturally built social meanings, because in a certain way, the youth literature books seek to influence people, even modify them. It is stated that such an idea on the belief that teaching, knowledge presented in those books, aims at producing certain types of subjectivities and social identities. According to Joanalira Magalhães (2008), the cultural curriculum gathers representations of gender, race, sexuality, they are representations capable of compounding socially established standards; at the same time they raise discussions in order to deconstruct certain truths. According to Silva (2010), those cultural artifacts are seen as part of the cultural curriculum, once the narratives that constitute the stories implicitly or explicitly construct notions of the social organization.

**About Queer Theory**

Together with Cultural Studies, it takes as a theoretical basis of this article some understandings of Queer theory. The term queer was used by North American people around the XIX century as a way of swearing at homosexual people. The term has no translation; however, in Brazil it is understood as odd, abnormal or even eccentric. After some years, this term was assumed by social movements in order to give another meaning to it. Considering this, it is observed that queer theory has a political nature.

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7 The origin of the term is from IV century (AC) which corresponded to “imitation”, “representation”, “indication”, “suggestion” or even “expression.” The term used by literary studies was nicknamed by the philosopher Aristotle, he discusses such term in his book “Poetics”, which he attributes two meanings to mimesis: imitation and emulation. Considering this article, the idea is that Literature seeks to imitate reality through the creation of a parallel world, but it parts from “real”.
Such theory arises from a problematization of the understandings of subject, identity, agency and identification. It was based on the meeting between the North American Cultural Studies and the French Post-Structuralism that such theory was spread. Thinking in a queer way is to comprehend that the subjects and their identities are not given a priori; it is to think that the subject is provisory and changeable, abandoning the idea of a single and steady individual. Considering the possibilities of reflection that the theory allows, it is observed that it is combined to analyze and problematize the contemporary society and their subjects. It does not mean that queer theory is capable of uncovering the truth behind several identities, but it is a tool that allows looking at individuals in a dynamically way, understanding their multiplicities (Miskolci, 2013).

Although it is a theory that has been thought for studies with, for and about LGBTQI subjects, it is not a defense of homosexuality, but a refusal of moral values that legitimize and construct lines of objections. In other terms, Queer theory thinks of subjects and sexual practices that trespasses the boundaries of binarisms, as woman/man, homossexual/heterossexual, because it is a theory that seeks to think about subjectivations, identities and practices that do not come within in the matrix that the philosopher Judith Butler classifies as the intelligibility of gender.

Methodological ways

As previously exposed, it takes Cultural Studies as a basis to think of contemporary youth literature that portrays different sexual identities of characters and their stories. The choice of this theoretical background is because it enables the analysis of the cultural productions of contemporary society.

It is important to highlight that the books here presented are not taken as a “minor” literature, because in Cultural Studies there is no distinction between the high and low culture; or even a single concept of what culture is. It is comprised that it configures as a field of productions of meanings, where different social groups that meet each other in different power situations, they struggle for definition, or even the expansion of the idea of social identity.

By means of cultural analysis, we search to deconstruct some discourses that are socially naturalized as truthful. Thus, the cultural analysis constitutes as a way to observe, to think of stories presented in those cultural artifacts.

In order to build this research, three books were selected: Boy meets Boy and Every Day by David Levithan, and Will & Will: a name, a destination, by John Green and David Levithan. The analysis of these books will happen by excerpts that were previously selected during the reading. The books were published in the North American context, and after years of circulation, they were translated and published in Brazil.

8 The books here analyzed are part of the corpus of my master’s degree research, which is still in progress.

9 The choice of those books is because the author David Levithan dedicates his writing to stories whose main characters are LGBTQI subjects. The author considers himself dedicated to discussions about sexuality and makes his point to portray topics about adolescence and several sexual identities in a “light” way, as on his own words. To know more about him and his work, access http://davidlevithan.com.

Presenting cultural artifacts

The selected books will be presented briefly in this section, so the reader can be contextualized with the excerpts that will be analyzed in the following section.

*Boy meets boy*, by David Levithan, has Paul as the main character, a teenager that had his heart broken at his relationship with Kyle. Paul’s best friend is Tony, a young homosexual boy who faces problems with his parents who do not accept their son’s sexual identity. Another best friend is Joni, a young heterosexual girl that gets involved with Chuck. Paul gets along with Infinite Darlene, a transsexual cheerleader and football player of the male’s team of the school. At a certain moment of the story, Paul meets Noah, whom he falls in love with. Noah’s arrival makes Kyle run after wasted time, trying to win back Paul’s love.

*Every day*, also by David Levithan, tells the story of A, which is not a person nor even a soul. A is someone who wakes up every day in a different body. In general, A wakes up every day inside a sixteen-seventeen-year-old body. At the day A “visits” the body of the teenager Justin, he/she meets Rhiannon, for whom he/she falls in love with. From that moment, A looks for her every day. Every chapter of the book tells a story of a different adolescent. Among the bodies that A visits, there are gays and transsexuals, so every time A meets one, he/she is in a different body.

The third book analyzed is *Will & Will: a name, a destination* by David Levithan in partnership with John Green, which tells the story of Will Grayson, heterosexual, in love with Jane. His best friend is Tiny Cooper, a young homosexual boy, with high spirits. The other Will Grayson is homosexual, has problems dealing with his sexual identity, because he sees himself as a monster, despite the fact he has to deal with depression. The two characters live and study in different places, but during a sexy shop visit, Will and Will end up meeting each other. From that moment, their lives become closer because Will Grayson (gay) starts dating Tiny Cooper.

Analyzing cultural artifacts

In order to continue the discussions that have been made throughout the article, in this section it is presented some excerpts withdrawn from the books previously mentioned. In this item, the intention is to think about cultural artifacts in the cultural analysis, in a way that the cultural pedagogies presented in the cultural curriculum of the selected artifacts are observed.

Will Grayson (heterosexual) at the beginning of the book, *Will & Will*, talks about how he feels after signing a public letter to support his friend Tiny Cooper:

> After some school-board member got all upset about gays in the locker room, I defended Tiny Cooper’s right to be both gigantic (and, therefore, the best member of our shitty football team’s offensive line) and gay in a letter to the school newspaper that I, stupidly, signed. (Green; Levithan, 2014a, pp- 9).\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\) The choice of using italics, the highlight of the excerpt, aligned to the paragraph, single-spaced and in letter size 11 to mark the passages of the books in order to distinguish between the excerpts taken from the cultural artifacts of theoretical quotes, also from the paragraphs.
In this selected passage, it is possible to notice the tension around the LGBTQI subjects who circulate at the school’s environment. The character Tiny Cooper makes other individuals feel uncomfortable for attending the dressing room. Will states that Cooper “is not the world’s gayest person, and he is not the world’s largest person, but [...] the world’s gayest person who is really, really large.” Because Tiny Cooper is outgoing, communicative and shameless, he is seen as a subject that unsettles the school. Maybe if Tiny was discreet, he would not be a target of criticisms, mockery and recrimination. Nevertheless, it is perceived that there is no problem related to Tiny being gay itself, except being gay and outgoing.

It can be noticed that there are heteronormative ideals behind the discomfort that Tiny Cooper causes at the school’s environment. It should be highlighted that this writing comprehends the heteronormative from Fernando Seffner (2015)’s perspective, and not as a writing rule, but as something that is present in the organization of the knowledge’s spaces, eligible knowledge; the heteronormativity standard legitimates “correct” and “appropriate” manners that run through gender identities and also sexual identities for any subject.

In the book, Boy meets boy, it is highlighted the passage that Paul experiences when he was a child at school, the experience of being categorized:

“I’ve always known I was gay, but it wasn’t confirmed until I was in kindergarten. It was my teacher who said so. It was right there on my kindergarten report card: PAUL IS DEFINITELY GAY AND HAS VERY GOOD SENSE OF SELF. (Levithan, 2014 b, pp.17)

From the relation with other classmates, Paul’s teacher classifies him as gay. Even though Paul declaring he always knew he was gay, it can be noted how much the classification of another person, his teacher, about his sexuality, destabilizes him. It is notable that Paul’s sexuality was established as different, abnormal, because in the following passage the character says, “Imagine my surprise when I went through all the other reports and found out that not one of the other boys had been labeled DEFINITELY GAY.” (Levithan, 2014b, pp.17). From Michael Foucault’s perspective, it is understood the abnormal figure arises when techniques of regulation and investment fail, that is, “abnormal” is the one who meets the attempts of being regulated. The “abnormal” subject is the one who escapes from a standard deviation person. Considering Paul’s case, it is understood that the teacher sees him as abnormal for escaping from the established standard, once he escapes from a great model, which would be the heterosexuality.

Classifying Paul as gay does not only imply in categorizing the subject according to his/her sexuality. As well as Fernando Seffner (2015) states, it is believed cultural identities set the subjects in different positions, because “being gay is not only a matter of man liking man, it is to belong to a gay culture, which means a complex group of attitudes, values, products for consumption, places to go, social networking places, life projects, etc. When Paul’s teacher says to the boy that being gay means a boy who likes another boy, she simplifies and even restricts or ignores the productions of symbolic meanings that are tangled in this nomination of the subject’s position. Furthermore, it is realized that the language constitute the subject from the markers that carry in its body, as well as Silvana Goellner, it is believed that “language has the power of nicknaming, classifying, defining normalities and abnormalities (...)” (2013, pp.31)
In *Every day*’s book, this article highlights the excerpt which A visits the body of a young transsexual girl. In this chapter of the book, A, in Vic’s body, talks about how it is to be a Trans.

*It is an awful thing to be betrayed by your body. And it’s lonely, because you feel you can’t talk about it. You feel it’s something between you and the body. You feel it’s a battle you will never win . . . and yet you fight it day after day, and it wears you down. Even if you try to ignore it, the energy it takes to ignore it will exhaust you.* (Levithan, 2013, p.220)

From the highlighted passage, it can be observed that the cultural artifact teaches their readers about being a young transsexual, signalizing transsexuality is something that brings certain sorrows while at the same time it is a challenge to the subject. In the book, a beautiful, joyful young woman, with a high self-esteem, who has the support of her parents in relation to her transsexuality, represents Vic. However, in spite of that, she suffers for being transsexual. The difficulty that Trans people face is portrayed on David Levithan’s book, signalizing how subjects break the sequel sex-gender-sexuality, realized through Guacira Louro (2013), are classified as weird and abnormal.

By means of some understandings of *Queer* Theory, and based on Guacira Louro (2013)’s thought, it is realized that LGBTQI subjects, particularly trans, are subjects that evidence the unstable and culturally invented character of the identity, because those subjects and their identities are “possibilities of proliferation and multiplication of ways of gender and sexuality” (Louro, 2013, pp. 23).

**Some considerations**

The youth literature books here analyzed as cultural artifacts bring transgressions in relation to other books that are produced for the contemporary young audience. However, it is still perceived movements that legitimate some truths or even end up determining representations about what to be a LGBTQI subject is. By describing the characters, or even the situations of interaction among LGBTQI characters with others, it is noticed there are certain culturally constructed truths in regards to LGBTQI identities, such as the sissy, the gay that shows him off and homosexuality with promiscuity, as the case of the character Will Grayson.

Thinking of those characters as *queer* subjects is thinking of the paradoxes that permeate the regulation rules, not only the LGBTQI subjects, but also all the other bodies. Those subjects visualize the compulsory normative experiences that conduct bodies and identities. It is believed a *queer* reflection about LGBTQI subjects problematizes the demanding rules that place and normalize the “how to be a man” and “how to be a woman” in society, considering the analyzed artifacts, the being gay, lesbian, transsexual, *queer* and intersex, showing those identities are not natural, they are cultural constructions.

However, it is valid to say that it is believed the identities that escape from rules are not out of the rule, because at the same time some characters break the idea of normality, they end up repeating certain gender and sexual rules. According to Judith Bulter, such a perception faced to the analysis lead us to think of identities as performatives.

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12 See *Problemas de gênero: feminismo e subversão da identidade*. 
In this way, it is assumed that the body is not from a natural order, just as gender is not. Considering that, it is intended to invite the reader to think of identities and gender as performatives, because doing this, as Butler proposes, is to comprehend that there are no female or male behaviors. In other terms, it is thought gender as a type of performance, which can happen in any body.

In order to conclude, based on Shirley Steinberg’s (2001) ideas, a question is launched, one that does not aim to be answered, but serves to tease people to keep thinking about meanings (re)produced by those cultural artifacts: who do these books think you are?

References