

# "Does it bother you?": possible relations between sex education and serial television fiction based on the series *Feras* ('Beasts')<sup>1;2</sup>

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**Abstract:** Sex education is a controversial topic in Brazilian school life. However, narratives that encourage viewers' critical view on themes related to gender and sexuality are emerging in contemporary audiovisual productions. This study aims to understand how serial television fiction can motivate discussions around sex education in the contemporary Brazilian scenario, having the series *Feras* ('Beasts', 2019), as its object of study, focusing on female empowerment, and adopting a qualitative and primarily bibliographic methodology.

**Resumo:** Educação sexual é um tema polêmico no cotidiano escolar brasileiro; entretanto, nota-se na produção audiovisual contemporânea o surgimento de narrativas que fomentam o olhar crítico do espectador sobre assuntos relacionados a gênero e sexualidade. Esse artigo tem como objetivo entender o modo como a ficção televisiva seriada pode motivar discussões em torno da educação sexual no cenário contemporâneo brasileiro, tendo como objeto de estudo a série *Feras* (2019), com enfoque no empoderamento feminino, e adotando a metodologia qualitativa e prioritariamente bibliográfica.

Received: 02/26/2023

Approved: 08/30/2023

Our main results pointed out that the representation in the series avoids reinforcing gender standards and norms, while it values identity differences, and asserts identities that advocate a possible sociocultural transformation.

**Keywords:** television studies; serial fiction; gender and sexuality; identities; sex education

Os principais resultados apontaram que a representação na série não reforça os padrões e normas de gênero, mas valoriza as diferenças identitárias, enquanto identidades assertivas, que preconizam uma possível transformação sociocultural.

**Palavras-chave:** estudos de televisão; ficção seriada; gênero e sexualidade; identidades; educação sexual

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual education is a controversial topic in the Brazilian school system. Large-scale news reports indicate significant resistance from student's guardians<sup>3</sup>, despite the evidence showing that it should be used as a means to combat misinformation<sup>4</sup>. However, when discussing sexual education, we need to consider that it goes beyond guidance on preventing STIs and teenage pregnancy. According to Ferreira<sup>5</sup>, feminism, male chauvinism, sexual orientation, gender, and revenge porn constitute some of the topics that should belong in the curriculum.

We understand that providing information on matters related to sexuality plays a vital role in protecting students from fears and myths, contributing to their awareness of various issues related to this subject. According to Rosa, Zanette, and Felipe<sup>6</sup>, given that most sexual violence occurs within family environments, educational institutions become a place in which children and teenagers seek guidance for their questions and concerns. Therefore, it is necessary to break down barriers and dispel the misconception that sexual education sexualizes children and teenagers.

While formal education systems still face challenges to incorporate discussions on gender and sexuality in a cross-cutting manner within conventional subjects such as sociology and philosophy, media outlets are making progress regarding this. Contemporary audiovisual production has seen the emergence of narratives that innovate on themes, reshape environments, break stereotypes, and encourage viewers to critically analyze topics related to gender and sexuality. Specifically concerning television, one can recall Freire's thought, who said, "The fundamental question posed to us, whatever the intelligence of the phrase, literacy in television is not to fight against television, a senseless struggle, but to stimulate development and critical thinking" (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>7</sup>.

In this line of reasoning, Meditsch suggests that Freire's critical perspective, "[...] although it attributes a decisive and ideological role to the broadcasters in the construction of communication, is not based on theories that delegate the responsibility for the meaning of the transmitted information solely to the broadcaster" (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>8</sup> According to the researcher,

1. Translation reviewer: Jordana de Santi Alves.

2. A preliminary version of this text was presented at the 1st Meeting of Researchers in School Education at the University of Sorocaba (Uniso).

3. CAMAÇARI Notícias. Pais se revoltam com servidora que levou livro de educação sexual para escola de Camaçari. **Camaçari Notícias**, Camaçari, 2 set. 2022. Available at: <https://www.cn1.com.br/noticias/18/99576,pais-se-revoltam-com-servidora-que-levou-livro-de-educacao-sexual-para-escola-de-camacari.html>. Accessed: 27 Nov. 2023.

4. PORTELA, Maria Eduarda. Educação sexual deve ser usada como arma contra desinformação. **Metrópoles**, Brasília, DF, 12 Aug., 2022. Available at: <https://www.metropoles.com/brasil/educacao-sexual-deve-ser-usada-como-arma-contradesinformacao>. Accessed on: 27 Nov. 2023.

5. FERREIRA, Rebecca Kessel Sousa. **A educocomunicação em ficção seriada**: um estudo de caso de Sex Education. 2019. Monografia (Bacharelado em Comunicação Social: Radialismo) — Universidade Federal do Maranhão, São Luís, 2019. Available at: <https://monografias.ufma.br/jspui/handle/123456789/4323>. Accessed on: 7 Oct. 2023.

6. ROSA, Cristiano Eduardo da; ZANETTE, Jaime Eduardo; FELIPE, Jane. Da série "Sex Education" aos desafios contemporâneos de uma educação para a sexualidade. **Textura**: revista de educação e letras, Canoas, v. 23, n. 53, p. 238-259, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29327/227811.23.53-12>.

7. FREIRE, Paulo. **Pedagogia da indignação**. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2016. E-book..

audiences/receivers must develop a critical perspective on the information presented to them.

Hergesel's analytical reading on this subject indicates that "[...] Freire does not condemn the communicational ensemble we consider as media products" (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>9</sup>. By drawing a connection between Freire's theory and television products, the researcher suggests: "[...] it becomes clear that his discomfort is with the lack of critical—and therefore mistaken—reading of the media" (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>10</sup>.

Given these circumstances, this study has the general objective of understanding how serialized television fiction can stimulate discussions about sexual education in the contemporary Brazilian context. More specifically, it aims to discuss creativity and innovation in the representation of gender and sexuality, especially female empowerment, in the discourse of the Brazilian MTV series *Feras* ('Beasts', 2019), particularly in its dialogues and speeches.

For this, a qualitative and primarily bibliographic approach methodology is employed. Initially, an introduction to the series is based on documentary and emerging sources, considering the timeliness of the research object. Following that, a discussion on the culture of series and its relevance to the field of Educommunication is proposed. Then, certain scenes are descriptively and theoretically-interpretively brought to light and analyzed with a foundation in Cultural Studies.

The analysis protocol consists of an interpretative and well-grounded reading of excerpts from the series. To select the study material, we follow the guidance of Pucci Jr. *et al.*<sup>11</sup>, who emphasize the complexity of defining the scope of a serialized work of fiction due to its extensive duration, which forbids a detailed analysis of each shot or scene. As the authors explained, it is appropriate to focus on the crucial moments of the plot, those that may contain the essential elements to achieve the research objective.

For a well-grounded interpretation, which delves into issues directly related to feminism and queer theory, we rely on what Butler<sup>12</sup> advocates for gender and sexuality issues in his extensive work on the analysis of television products. The author claims three pillars must be observed: the sexual politics of the respective program (and, in the analyzed case, the identity markers of MTV); characters' behavior or personality (especially in the narrative arcs of the main characters), and audiences' experience with the spectatorship of the program (although this study avoids delving into its reception axis, it emphasizes the audience considered within the scope of production).

## 2. SPREAD YOUR WINGS, RELEASE YOUR BEASTS<sup>13</sup>

Created by Felipe Sant'Angelo and Teodoro Poppovic, *Feras* premiered on January 21, 2019, at 10 p.m., on Brazilian MTV. The narrative revolves around the life of *Ciro* (João Vítor Silva), a frustrated screenwriter who ends a long-term

8. MEDITSCH, Eduardo. Paulo Freire nas práticas emancipadoras da comunicação: ainda hoje, um método subutilizado no Brasil. *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias de la Comunicación*, São Paulo, v. 13, n. 25, p. 132-143, 2017, p. 17.

9. HERGESEL, João Paulo. A função pedagógica do melodrama na telenovela infantojuvenil brasileira: análise telepoética de Chiquititas pela perspectiva de Paulo Freire. *Contracampo*, Niterói, v. 41, n. 2, p. 1-19, 2022, p. 6.

10. Ibidem, p. 7.

11. PUCCI JR., Renato Luiz; GOSCIOLA, Vicente; FERRARAZ, Rogério; MAGNO, Maria Ignês Carlos; SILVA, Gabriela Justine Augusto da; PERRI, Giulia; NASCIMENTO, Thais Carrapatoso. Avenida Brasil: o lugar da transmediação entre as estratégias narrativas da telenovela brasileira. In: LOPES, Maria Immacolata Vassalo de (org.). *Estratégias de transmediação na ficção televisiva brasileira*. Porto Alegre: Sulina, 2013. p. 75-131.

12. BUTLER, Jeremy G. *Television: visual storytelling and screen culture*. 5. ed. New York: Routledge, 2018.

13. This item has, as its essence, a previous work revised and updated here. Cf.: MATTOS, Geórgia de; HERGESEL, João Paulo. Representação em *Feras* (2019): relações de gênero na série da MTV. In: ENCONTRO DE PESQUISADORES EM COMUNICAÇÃO E CULTURA, 16., 2022, Sorocaba. *Anais* [...]. Sorocaba: Uniso, 2022. Available at: <https://epecom.uniso.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Georgia-de-Mattos-Joao-Paulo-Hergesel.pdf>. Accessed on: 7 Oct. 2023.

relationship and must adapt to the life of a young single man in the municipality of São Paulo. In this journey, he experiences the world of casual relationships, bisexuality, threesomes, sexual encounters involving drugs, unwanted pregnancies, and other circumstances. The parallel plots also highlight aspects inherent to those in their 20s and 30s (the age range of the fictional characters and the potential audience of the series), such as open relationships, sexual fetishes, marital infidelity, and romantic obsession.

The series only had one season, consisting of 13 episodes, which were aired up to February 25, 2019, and later became part of Globoplay, the streaming platform of Rede Globo. In addition to the protagonist *Ciro*, the narrative also features other main characters: *Mari Maia* (Camila Márdila), *Ciro's* best friend, who advises him on how to reframe his macho perspective; *Raul* (Vinícius Beu), *Ciro's* friend who tries to present himself as socially aware but frequently makes sexist remarks; *Joana* (Mohana Uchoa) and *Peu* (Túlio Starling), a couple in an open relationship that challenges the monogamous view ingrained in society; and *Barbieri* (Rodrigo Garcia), who holds a sexist and often misogynistic discourse.

Henrique Haddefinir, in a review for the *Omelete* portal, classifies these characters as belonging to the "[...] group of the most insensitive and alienated young Paulistas in Brazilian serialized television drama" (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>14</sup>. According to the author, who discusses the first episode of the series, in its attempt to innovate and promote disruptions, the series creates shallow characters immersed in emotional dualism, equating it with what happens in products such as *Malhação* (Globo, 1995-2020).

In contrast, Cristina Padiglione, in an article for the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper, highlights differences between the structure of *Feras* and the productions of the Rio de Janeiro-based broadcaster: "It is always commendable to see products multiplying on TV with different forms and contents from the slew produced by our television drama, which, for at least five of the six decades of TV in Brazil, was very much endorsed by the Globo standard" (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>15</sup>.

To better understand the points raised in the critique and the process of structuring this work, it is interesting to revisit some external categories related to the narrative, such as the characteristics of MTV Brasil and the filmography of the series creators.

Founded on October 20, 1990, MTV Brasil is the Brazilian version of the international MTV network, inaugurated in 1981 and generally known as a television channel for broadcasting music videos. However, according to the historical account by Holzbach, from its very first hours of programming, it included "[...] in addition to the 58 music videos, four more elements: MTV's own promos and commercials, sponsor commercials, music-related news, and, guiding all these elements, VJ Mark Goodman" (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>16</sup>.

According to the author's historical account:

14. HADDEFINIR, Henrique. *Feras* | Nova série de MTV tenta falar com a juventude, mas só confirma clichês. *Omelete*, São Paulo, 21 jan. 2019. Available at: <https://www.omelete.com.br/series-tv/feras-nova-serie-de-mtv-tenta-falar-com-a-juventude-mas-so-confirma-cliches>. Accessed on: 7 Oct. 2023.

15. PADIGLIONE, Cristina. Comédia dramática, 'Feras' traduz novas formas de se relacionar. *TelePadi*, São Paulo, 18 fev. 2019. Available at: <https://telepadi.com.br/feras-captura-momento-de-transformacao-nas-relacoes-em-tom-de-comedia-dramatica/https://bit.ly/2qiuQuA>. Accessed on: 7 Oct. 2023.

16. HOLZBACH, Ariane Diniz. MTV: a remediação da rádio FM na construção de um canal musical de televisão. *Galáxia*, São Paulo, n. 24, p. 265-278, 2012. p. 274.

MTV also erases history through an aesthetic that places everything together without warning, piling up genres of films and artistic movements from different historical periods. Artistic videos are freely designed under the gothic, noir, western, horror, science fiction, and thriller looks, in addition to literary genres, from German expressionism to French surrealism, dadaism, American folk music, pop art, etc. This orientation of the texts means that, once again, in the realm of aesthetics, there is a continuous time in which everything exists (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>17</sup>.

With the establishment of the Brazilian version of the channel, experimental and innovative characteristics sought to stay, offering a novelty compared to the melodramatic structure and the tacky visuals Brazilian television proposed in the 1990s (especially in its open commercial model). As Gutmann explains, over the years, the channel “[...] incorporated the tastes and desires of the public and captured consumption patterns, making its materiality a membrane providing access to the sensitivities of a particular culture” (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>18</sup>.

The classic MTV Brasil, run by the Abril Group and broadcast on open air-waves, was discontinued on September 30, 2013. Speculatively (but also within a technical-scientific view), Gutmann suggests that this may have happened “[...] due to an inability to reinvent its repetition patterns in the face of so many segments, so many offerings, so many other possibilities of musical and audiovisual access, so many other youth cultures” (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>19</sup>.

Under the management of ViacomCBS (the group that owns the rights to the American channel), Brazilian MTV was reborn on October 1, 2013, as a cable channel. The programming schedule has been a mix of imported shows, adaptations of originals, and new (often co-produced) productions. Convergence with the internet (materialized through the MTV Play app and the MTV Brasil channel on YouTube) configured another strategy for this new phase.

It seems that the creators of the series, focusing on innovation, experimentation, and disruptions, were influenced by this environment. Felipe Sant’Angelo was a screenwriter for series such as the children’s show *Que Monstro Te Mordeu?* (TV Cultura, 2014), the youth series *Família Imperial* (Canal Futura, 2012-2013) and *Pedro e Bianca* (TV Cultura, 2012-2014), and the young adult series *Amigo de Aluguel* (Universal TV, 2018-2019). Teodoro Poppovic, in addition to *Que Monstro Te Mordeu?*, *Família Imperial*, and *Pedro e Bianca*, wrote for series such as *Motel* (Canal Max, 2014), *Segredos de Justiça* (Rede Globo, 2016-2017), *Destino* (HBO Brasil, 2012-2013; 2018), and *3%* (Netflix, 2018-2019).

In *Feras*, Sant’Angelo and Poppovic seem to have conceived an experimental product that breaks away from the melodramatic *telenovela* structure (villain *versus* hero, romantic couple that ends up together, etc.) commonly seen in Latin American serialized fiction. It also innovates by revisiting themes considered taboo by contemporary society, such as gender and sexuality relationships, facilitating reflections and dialogues on these topics. These aspects are explored throughout our analyses.

17. KAPLAN, 1986, p. 6 apud HOLZBACH, Ariane Diniz. Idem, p. 266.

18. GUTMANN, Juliana Freire. Sobre performance e historicidade: uma abordagem estética e cultural da MTV Brasil. *E-Com-pós*, Brasília, DF, v. 18, n. 2, p. 1-16, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30962/ec.1175>, p. 1.

19. Ibidem, p. 12.



### 3. DIALOGUES BETWEEN SEXUAL EDUCATION AND TELEVISION FICTION

The audiovisual sector has internationally stood out by the intense creation and consumption of television series, giving contemporary times a "culture of series," as Silva<sup>20</sup> calls it. This behavior leads to the formation of groups that specialize in spectatorship of series, debates, dialogues, and related demonstrations — whether in an online format or in-person meetings — that transcend the boundaries of academia and the market, as highlighted by Mungioli<sup>21</sup>.

When developing the idea of seriality on television, Machado<sup>22</sup> shows that series defragment and discontinue what is understood as a televisual syntagma, i.e., a television narrative whose plot is usually divided into episodes or chapters. Esquenazi<sup>23</sup> adds thematic issues to this structure, very well addressed by the North American series, such as culture, politics, feminism, economy, and society.

In the context of emerging technologies, analogue and digital media converge, generating what Henry Jenkins<sup>24</sup> calls "convergence culture." In the particular case of series, we see a path that goes from hybridism to interdependence between traditional television products (broadcasting) and serial narratives on streaming platforms, causing a certain cloudiness in understanding what could be considered "television," as per Lima, Moreira, and Calazans<sup>25</sup>.

The arrival of streaming platforms reconfigured the way of watching series, as Mungioli, Ikeda, and Penner<sup>26</sup> point out: it is no longer necessary to obey a frequency imposed by the transmitting channel and people can watch the programs at the time and place they want, as long as it is supported by a technological device. Added to these new ways of watching is the phenomenon of watching several —or all— episodes of a season (or even the entire series) at once: what is known as binge-watching, as per Castellano and Meimaridis<sup>27</sup>.

For scientific-academic studies, the field of streaming has become fertile ground, generating research that explores its most varied aspects. Only among Brazilians, we can cite research that revolves around the notions of transmediation, as in Gosciola<sup>28</sup> and Fachine<sup>29</sup>; of authorship, as in Picado and Souza<sup>30</sup>; of distribution strategies, as in Massarolo and Mesquita<sup>31</sup>; of media competence and fan activism, as in Sigiliano and Borges<sup>32</sup>; among other topics.

YouTube stands out among the main streaming services. Mungioli, Penner, and Ikeda<sup>33</sup> claim that YouTube is the most notable platform in the free model. Holzbach<sup>34</sup> highlights a space to broadcast products that has no room on conventional television. Lemos, Néia, and Santos<sup>35</sup> add that the possibility of the public interacting by comments creates a scenario that goes beyond the fictional.

The Brazilian MTV promoted its series *Feras* via YouTube in 2019 by making its first episode available in full<sup>36</sup>. A banner in the top left corner of the screen throughout the video invites viewers to follow the series on conventional television: "Watch the new episodes every Monday, 10 p.m., only on MTV" (freely translated from Portuguese).

20. SILVA, Marcel Vieira Barreto. Cultura das séries: forma, contexto e consumo de ficção seriada na contemporaneidade. *Galáxia*, São Paulo, v. 14, n. 27, p. 241-252, 2014. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1590/1982-25542014115810>.

21. MUNGIOLI, Maria Cristina Palma. Poética das séries de televisão: elementos para conceituação e análise. In: CONGRESSO BRASILEIRO DE CIÊNCIAS DA COMUNICAÇÃO, 40., 2017, Curitiba. *Anais [...]*. São Paulo: Intercom, 2017.

22. MACHADO, Arlindo. *A televisão levada a sério*. 6. ed. São Paulo: Senac São Paulo, 2014.

23. ESQUENAZI, Jean-Pierre. *As séries televisivas*. Lisboa: Texto e Grafia, 2011.

24. JENKINS, Henry. *Cultura da convergência*. 2. ed. São Paulo: Aleph, 2009.

25. LIMA, Cecília Almeida; MOREIRA, Diego Gouveia; CALAZANS, Janaina Costa. Netflix e a manutenção de gêneros televisivos fora do fluxo. *MATRIZES*, São Paulo, v. 9, n. 2, p. 237-256, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v9i2p237-256>.

26. MUNGIOLI, Maria Cristina Palma; IKEDA, Flavia Suzue de Mesquita; PENNER, Tomaz Affonso. Estratégias de streaming de séries brasileiras na plataforma Globoplay no período de 2016 a 2018. *GEMInIS*, São Carlos, v. 9, n. 3, p. 52-63, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4322/2179-1465.024>.

27. CASTELLANO, Mayka; MEIMARIDIS, Melina. A "televisão do futuro"? Netflix, qualidade e neofilia no debate sobre TV. *MATRIZES*, São Paulo, v. 15, n. 1, p. 195-222, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v15i1p195-222>.

28. GOSCIOLA, Vicente. Narrativa transmédia: conceituação e origens. In: CAMPALANS, Carolina; RENÓ, Denis; GOSCIOLA, Vicente. (ed.). **Narrativas transmédia: entre teorias y prácticas**. Barcelona: UOC; Barranquilla: Universidad del Rosario, 2014. p. 7-14.

29. FECHINE, Yvana. Transmediação, entre o lúdico e o narrativo. In: CAMPALANS, Carolina; RENÓ, Denis; GOSCIOLA, Vicente (ed.). **Narrativas transmédia: entre teorias y prácticas**. Barcelona: UOC; Barranquilla: Universidad del Rosario, 2014. p. 69-84.

30. PICADO, Benjamin; SOUZA, Maria Carmem Jacob de. Dimensões da autoria e do estilo na ficção seriada televisiva. **Matrizes**, São Paulo, v. 12, n. 2, p. 53-77, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v12i2p53-77>.

31. MASSAROLO, João; MESQUITA, Dario. TV online no Brasil: estratégias dos serviços de distribuição da Rede Globo. In: MASSAROLO, João (org.). **Produção de conteúdo: audiovisual multiplataforma**. São Paulo: Soul, 2020. p. 28-57.

32. SIGILIANO, Daiana; BORGES, Gabriela. Competência midiática: o ativismo dos fãs de The Handmaid's Tale. **Comunicação & Inovação**, São Caetano do Sul, v. 19, n. 40, p. 106-122, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13037/ci.vol19n40.5179>.

33. MUNGIOLI, Maria Cristina Palma; PENNER, Tomaz Affonso; IKEDA, Flavia Suzue de Mesquita. Ethos discursivo da marca Netflix no YouTube: interdiscurso e storytelling em estratégias de propagação de conteúdos. **GEMInIS**, São Carlos, v. 12, n. 1, p. 189-211, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53450/2179-1465.RG.2021v12i1p189-211>.

However, the discussion about the waves that pass between conventional television and emerging digital media can serve as a topic for future discussions. Based on the understanding of the field of Educommunication, our interest lies in the possibilities of working with socio-historical-cultural issues, especially feminist issues.

Soares, renowned in Educommunication studies, emphasizes the need to understand the relationship between human beings and communication, by emphasizing that “[...] man is a being of relationships and not just of contacts like animals; he is not just in the world, but with the world” (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>37</sup>. Within the scope of research that tries to understand the relation between the media and education, the author points out the visible “[...] existence of a process of theoretical systematization that points to interdiscursivity and interdisciplinarity as essential elements of the epistemology of the field [Educommunication]” (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>38</sup>.

But bringing discussions about gender and sexuality to television goes against thematic changes in contemporary serial narratives, as per Lopes and Mungiolli, who have *telenovela* as their object of observation:

By understanding gender as a discursive and cultural construct or even as part of the great reflexive project of the construction of the self, we can perceive, in media spaces such as *telenovelas*, alternative exercises of gender as a field of expression in permanent formation and transformation, articulating production and reception based on various resources and discursive registers (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>39</sup>.

As much as Esquenazi<sup>40</sup> defends the idea that the mix between pedagogy and fiction fails to produce a pleasant result, it is certain that it fails to entail didacticism to motivate reflections and contribute in a socio-educational way. For example, a previous work noted “[...] a media movement to contextualize sociocultural conditioning that, based on the critical reading of phenomena, can constitute an educational-liberating process” (freely translated from Portuguese)<sup>41</sup>.

More specifically on issues linked to gender and sexuality, some studies show how television fiction has explored these themes, whether in Brazilian *telenovelas* or in international series. In the context of *telenovelas*, Fechine *et al.*<sup>42</sup> observe that these phenomena are more prevalent in *telenovelas* shown at prime times, such as at 9 p.m. or 11 p.m. on Rede Globo, especially when they feature non-heterosexual characters. According to Cavalcanti, Ferreira, and Sigiliano<sup>43</sup>, who studied the representation of sexuality in Brazilian *telenovelas*, it is notable that whenever a character is openly identified as part of the LGBTQIAPN+ community, that character is often portrayed as a gay man, a lesbian woman, or a trans person, but it is rarely developed in terms of a romantic relationship, and when it is, it is usually in a subdued way.

Mattos<sup>44</sup>, analyzing the character Ivana/Ivan from *A Força do Querer* written by Glória Perez, argues that this *telenovela* promoted diversity by challenging essentialist notions of gender and exploring new gender identities. The author also highlights

that Rede Globo has stood out in addressing issues related to the LGBTQIAPN+ community in its programming, encouraging freedom of expression of gender identities and promoting greater social inclusion.

Regarding international series, the highlight lies in the *Sex Education* series, which addresses sexuality without taboos, leading many teenagers and adults to reflect on previously avoided or stigmatized issues. According to Manchini, Jacinto, and Silva<sup>45</sup>, it emphasizes the importance of professional training to approach sexuality with a scientific and didactic basis, avoiding inaccurate and distorted information and promoting the need to teach sexuality in a natural and understandable way to young people.

Unlike *telenovelas* (which tend to address social issues in a didactic way) or international series (which prioritize streaming platforms as a means of dissemination), *Feras* was born on linear television, although it converged with the internet in its debut and, later, was made available in full via video on demand. This is a rare case in Brazilian linear television as it avoids remaining silent in the face of sensual scenes or explicit nudity, especially when considering prime viewing time.

#### 4. FERAS AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

To understand the feminine identity the series *Feras* (2019) constructed, we base our theoretical framework on the studies of Butler<sup>46</sup>, who challenges the stability and veracity of the feminine and the masculine as stipulated by gender norms. She disrupts the essentializing foundations of a fixed and coherent gender identity that has been naturalized over time. As understood by the author, gender identity configures a process of construction that takes place within existing cultural possibilities. It is enacted by certain performative choices, which involve adopting or discarding behaviors recognized as signifiers of gender identities.

Based on this perspective, gender identities, rather than occurring causally, stem from the effects of discursive practices that regulate and normalize intelligible identities. In this sense, Butler develops a theory of performativity by criticizing the notion of sex as a permanent substance, referring to the "metaphysics of substance"<sup>47</sup>, which views sex and the body as material and natural entities. Butler opposes the idea of gender as a noun and emphasizes that "[...] is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence."<sup>48</sup> From the perspective of gender performativity:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its

34. HOLZBACH, Ariane Diniz. Galinha Pintadina runs the world: a made-for-children Brazilian cartoon in the global flow of television content. *Television & New Media*, [s. l.], v. 23, n. 8, p. 840-854, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/15274764211025611>.

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37. SOARES, Ismar de Oliveira. Educomunicação: um campo de mediações. *Comunicação & Educação*, São Paulo, n. 19, p. 12-24, 2000. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9125.v0i19p12-24>, p. 19.

38. *Ibidem*, p. 24.

39. LOPES, Maria Immacolata Vassallo de.; MUNGIOLI, Maria Cristina Palma. Brasil: tempo de séries brasileiras? In: LOPES, Maria Immacolata Vassallo de; OROZCO GÓMEZ, Guillermo (coord.). *Relações de gênero na ficção televisiva: anuário Obitel* 2015. Porto Alegre: Sulina, 2015. p. 117-160, p. 153.

40. ESQUENAZI, Jean-Pierre. *As séries...* Op. cit.

41. HERGESEL, João Paulo. *A função...* Op. cit., p. 16.



42. FECHINE, Yvana; LIMA, Cecília Almeida Rodrigues; MOREIRA, Diego Gouveia; CAVALCANTI, Gêsa; CHACEL, Marcela. Merchandising social transmídia na Rede Globo: uma análise da temática LGBTQIA+ em Malhação. *RuMoRes*, São Paulo, v. 14, n. 28, p. 103-125, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-677X.rum.2020.174622>.

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44. MATTOS, Geórgia de. *A produção de sentido da transexualidade na telenovela A Força do Querer*: uma análise comunicacional a partir do circuito da cultura. 2018. Dissertação (Mestrado em Comunicação e Cultura) – Universidade de Sorocaba, Sorocaba, 2018. Available at: <https://repositorio.uniso.br/entities/publication/04056a56-d64d-4aa3-bc1d-0782408e2739>. Accessed on: 7 Oct. 2023.

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46. BUTLER, Judith. *Problemas de gênero: feminismo e subversão da identidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2003.

47. The metaphysics of substance is an expression. associated to Nietzsche in his contemporary critic to philosophical discourse.

48. BUTLER, Judith. *Problemas...* Op. cit., p. 43.

49. Ibidem, p. 59.

50. Ibidem, p. 183.

constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender<sup>49</sup>.

Thus, gender identity is an ongoing discursive practice that is constructed by the repetition of acts over time. This enables us to understand, according to Butler, that notions of essential sex and true femininity or masculinity are constructed in a way that conceals their performative nature, which involves embodying gender marks.

Butler takes as a basis Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" to claim that the woman (or any other "subject") is a term in process, a becoming that has no origin or end. Thus, Butler indicates that the coherence of gender identity is a fictitious construction, presuming a causal relationship between sex, gender, and desire, as if desire naturally reflected gender and gender naturally and harmoniously reflected desire. By understanding gender identity as a performative construction, as an effect of power discourses over time, Butler suggests that the subject is a term in process, and thus, their actions or expressions rather than primarily originating from them, do so from cultural relations: "Indeed, the source of personal and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through (...) complex cultural exchanges"<sup>50</sup>.

However, Butler emphasizes that, although the subject is culturally constructed, this fails to eliminate the fact that they also possess agency; being constituted by discourse does not mean being determined by it. Butler states that subjects negotiate their constructions. This point of negotiation give rise to possibilities for subversive identities. Nevertheless, as Butler warns, no possibility for action or reality lies outside discursive practices, which maintain the intelligibility of identities in repetitive gender practices. Thus, repeating these practices is inevitable, and the task is how to repeat them while distancing from the gender norms that enable the repetition itself. Therefore, rather than involving entirely new possibilities, the process deals with redescribing existing possibilities within the cultural domain.

If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its "natural" past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities<sup>51</sup>.

Thus, it becomes clear that possibilities for subverting gender identities can only occur within the terms of culture. No reality or practices lie outside of culture. Their very production and discursive practices presuppose the realizable possibilities of gender configurations within the culture, setting the limits of a discursively conditioned experience. Therefore, no gender identity can be practiced or exercised outside of culture. Butler claims this as a cultural impossibility and as a politically unworkable dream. For the author, the possibility of subversion lies in critically rethinking the existing possibilities within the

terms of power; such conversion, rather entailing consolidation, as Butler states, involves displacement.

This displacement can be observed in the series *Feras* (2019), especially concerning the notion of sexual fluidity, and specifically regarding women as subjects of empowerment in the sense of exercising/having power over themselves as the power and right to choose and to have autonomy over their own bodies and their desires<sup>52</sup>.

Mari Maia, a co-protagonist of the series, represents this kind of feminine identity in her dialogues with Ciro and in her position in her relationships, including with Lígia (Marina Mathey)—her first boyfriend, initially named Diogo. Mari naturally understands Lígia's gender transition; her only dissatisfaction is that Lígia failed to tell her. In a therapy session, she tells her psychoanalyst Paula Ivone (Laerte Coutinho) that she would have supported Lígia during her transition. Transsexuality, is not a deeply explored theme in the series, but it is portrayed in a very natural and spontaneous way in Lígia and in Carol (Sophi Saphirah), a waitress known to Mari, Ciro, and their friends. Cartoonist Laerte makes her acting debut as a psychoanalyst without any mention of her transgender identity, only as a female psychoanalyst.

In general, all the girls and women represented in the series, regardless of the time and space of their participation, fit into this Butlerian subversive discourse that breaks with normative standards for gender identities. They are depicted as emotionally independent women who assert what they want and like in a relationship, whether in dating or casual encounters; they are portrayed in a more human way, outside the common representation of the myth of romantic love. One of the themes addressed in the series refers to unwanted pregnancy, and consequently, the issue turns to abortion. Regarding this, the women and macho characters (such as Raul and Barbieri) argue that the decision to have or not have the child is the woman's choice. When Ciro believes he got Rafa (Duda Carvalho) pregnant, he comments that it is a life, but Rafa corrects him: "It's not a life, man! Stop repeating that. It's a fetus, a fetus! Are you against the right to abortion by any chance?" Ciro affirms that he is not, that she can do whatever she wants, and that the choice is hers, but Rafa retorts: "It's not my choice, Ciro, that's the point. In this country?!" in a clear criticism of abortion still being considered a crime in Brazil, which takes away a woman's right to her own body.

Other women also have a prominent role in the series, such as Dora (Clarissa Pinheiro), who is married but lives in a separate apartment from her husband and, at the same time, has a casual relationship with Ciro. Open relationships are also present in the series and are always proposed by the women. When Ciro tells Mari about his affair with Dora, she says: "I'm respecting this killer Dora more and more," showing support for women who break free from monogamous relationships. However, unlike men, they do not cheat; they have direct conversations about their desires, as Mari points out: "The bad thing is lying. You're not deceiving or screwing anyone." But over time, Ciro starts

51. Ibidem, p. 139.

52. All dialogue transcriptions extracted from the series were freely translated from Portuguese.

to feel jealous of Dora with her husband, as in the following dialogue from the seventh episode:

*Dora:* What's bothering you?

*Ciro:* He came here, right?

*Dora:* He who? Humberto? My husband? Yes, he did, *Ciro*. Does it bother you?

*Ciro:* Sorry, but I don't want to be a spice in your relationship, I really don't want that.

*Dora:* You're not a spice, for God's sake. You're my boy, you're a hottie, you're my secret lover.

*Ciro:* Yes, and what else? What am I to you besides that?

*Dora:* Oh, you want more? Oh, I thought you were enjoying it.

*Ciro:* I was, I am. I don't know either. I think things became much more intense than I imagined, you know? Say something, what do you think about this?

*Dora:* Do you want me to say something according to what you're thinking?

*Ciro:* No. I want to know from you if our love has a future.

*Dora:* Love? Do you love me?

*Ciro:* No, but I... I feel like I could.

[...]

*Dora:* Isn't just sex enough?

*Narrator:* When Dora chose to have an affair with a young man in his 20s, she thought he would be fluid, as they say, and that she could have a light, carnal, carefree relationship...

(Audio transcription).

Dora is an older woman, and, as the narration explains, she believed she could have a non-committal and unburdened relationship with *Ciro* since she already had that kind of understanding with her husband. Only after the breakup did he realize—as Mari also warned him—that he was in a great relationship for all the people involved because everyone agreed, as narrated:

"She thought about what Dora was willing to give him and thought that, despite seeming little, it was already a lot. *Ciro* regretted it." However, in the last episode, Dora spends a night with *Ciro* and her husband together.

*Dora*: I felt loved. Doubly loved.

*Ciro*: Humberto? And you, how are you feeling?

*Humberto*: Good. I liked seeing Dora so...

*Dora*: Bitch.

*Humberto*: I wasn't going to say that.

*Dora*: Well, I liked it. I wanted to be a real bitch. It was hot.

(Audio transcription).

Dora has no problem declaring herself a "bitch," free from moral constraints and hegemonic social norms that establish strict standards for women's behavior, especially when married. On the contrary, she presents herself as a woman who chooses her relationships. Another woman who proposes an open relationship with her husband is Joana, as she tells *Ciro* when they meet at the club in the 10th episode:

*Joana*: Hi.

*Ciro*: It's great that you guys are here.

*Joana*: "You guys?" I'm not "us," *Ciro*.

*Ciro*: I know you're not "us." You're Jô!

*Joana*: I really needed this energy, you know? This is what I needed!

*Ciro*: Oh, that's great! I'm glad it's good.

*Joana*: Not good, it's great! Having an open relationship is great!

(Audio transcription).

Our patriarchal society commonly considers women as belonging to their husbands or their families, but Joana immediately corrects *Ciro*, saying, "I'm not 'us,'" disentangling herself from this precept and positioning herself as an individual.

At the same party, Joana reinforces this stance when she coincidentally runs into Raul:

*Raul:* Do I know you?

*Joana:* No, you don't.

*Raul:* Have we been in love before?

*Joana:* No. You're *Ciro's* friend, right?

*Raul:* You're the wife of that guy, right? He's *Ciro's* cousin?

*Joana:* I'm the wife of "that guy" and I have a daughter and I can't be at the club? Is that it?

*Raul:* No, as far as I'm concerned, you do whatever you want.

*Joana:* Wow, thanks.

*Raul:* No, seriously. Life is short and it doesn't make sense, so fuck it.

(Audio transcription).

In this dialogue, similar to *Dora*, Joana breaks away from the pre-established norm for a married woman and a mother who is confined to a life dedicated to family and, at most, work, vanity, and self-care. She goes out alone to have fun at a club. When Raul shows that he accepts it, she cynically says "thanks," dismissing the need for male consent.

This female empowerment, which opposes the patriarchal social structure, represents what Butler<sup>53</sup> conceptualizes as subversiveness, in which women are the "other" marked by their "difference" from men. Hall agrees that "every identity naming as its necessary (...) that which it 'lacks'"<sup>54</sup> because identity is constituted as such by marking the difference, by what it "lacks." Thus, identity depends on difference. The constructions of meanings given to identities function discursively to separate what is marked from what is not, and these differences are produced by the power that practices of representation exercise in society.

53. Ibidem.

54. HALL, Stuart. Quem precisa de identidade? In: SILVA, Tomaz Tadeu da. (org.). *Identidade e diferença: a perspectiva dos estudos culturais*. 15. ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2014. p. 103-133, p. 110.

## 5. CONCLUSION

When observing the world around us, especially the Brazilian school environment, it is evident that sexual education is still seen as a taboo, a subject that walks a tightrope: on one end lies the need to provide information, and on the other, the conservatism that attempts to silence feelings, actions, and even



thoughts that deviate from the rules of a patriarchal and heteronormative society. However, contemporary audiovisual production has been developing new narratives each day that can inspire viewers to critically examine topics related to gender and sexuality.

In an attempt to understand how serialized television fiction can stimulate discussions around sexual education in the contemporary Brazilian context, this study selected the series *Feras* (2019) as its object of study and adopted a methodology rooted in a qualitative and primarily bibliographic approach. What can be concluded is that the representation in the mentioned series avoids reinforcing gender standards and norms, valuing identity differences as assertive identities and advocating for possible sociocultural transformation.

The themes in the analyzed scenes — gender transition, abortion decriminalization, non-monogamous marriages, open relationships, extramarital affairs, and threesomes — are treated humanely, breaking the narrative free from the myth of romantic love or sentimental melodrama. Although this study avoids the reception aspect, it is undeniable that such citizen themes are emerging in the context of the contemporary young adult, the target audience of the series.

Although we are unable to propose ways to work with this series in the classroom due to its age group—perhaps it could be used as a teaching resource in Adult Education — it is clear that a dialogue can occur between sexual education and serialized television fiction in the context of non-formal education. In other words, viewers can appropriate the actions depicted in the series and stimulate their critical view of these subjects, desensitizing preconceptions and prejudices.

Future research must delve deeper into the different sexual education curricula in Brazilian schools, understand how schools have been discussing this topic, and, based on this, discuss how television proposes convergences or divergences from these guidelines. Moreover, television analyses that delve into how Brazilian television fiction has been addressing Brazilian biodiversity, especially in the realm of genders and sexualities, are welcomed.

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