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Gendered Subjectivities in English Classrooms: A Critically Queered Examination of Sex-Segregated Education

Subjetividades generadas en las aulas de inglés: una exploración crítica de la educación segregada por sexo

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This study explores the link between gender and language in single-sex schools in Colombia. Using feminist theory, the study analyzes the gendered subjectivities of English-as-a-foreign-language learners in a private school in Bogotá. It examines how heterosexuality is forced upon learners and how their subjectivities are impacted by the heteronormative discourse surrounding sex-gender learning differences. The study utilizes conversation analysis and speech act theory to examine data. The findings reveal that gendered subjectivity is complex and constitutes an ongoing struggle. There is a need for further research on gender and English teaching in educational settings, emphasizing the importance of studying sociolinguistic power relationships.

Keywords: gender, heteronormativity, queer linguistics, sex-segregated schooling, subjectivities

Este estudio examina la relación entre género y lenguaje en escuelas exclusivas para un solo género en Colombia. Utilizando la teoría feminista, se analiza la subjetividad de género de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en una escuela privada en Bogotá. Se examina cómo el discurso heteronormativo que rodea las diferencias de aprendizaje de género y sexo impacta las subjetividades de los estudiantes. La investigación se apoya en el análisis de la conversación y la teoría de los actos de habla para analizar los datos. Los hallazgos evidencian que la subjetividad de género es compleja y constituye una lucha constante. Se destaca la necesidad de futuras investigaciones sobre género y enseñanza del inglés en contextos educativos que exploren las relaciones de poder sociolingüísticas.

Palabras clave: educación segregada por sexo, género, heteronormatividad, lingüística *queer*, subjetividad

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Introduction

Sex-segregated schooling, a practice involving the separation of students based on their biological sex, has been a topic of ongoing debate in the field of education. Over time, the understanding of sex-segregated schooling has evolved, transitioning from differentiation between coeducation and single-sex education to the recognition of its implications on learners' experiences and the perpetuation of gendered discourses. While this subject has garnered global attention, its specific impact on English language education has been relatively understudied, particularly in Colombia.

This study uses interpretive-qualitative methods to examine the gendered subjectivities of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners in a sex-segregated private school in Bogotá (Maxwell, 2012). It problematizes the compulsory heterosexuality underlying the sex/gender learning differences discourse in the context of sex-segregated schooling, drawing on critical and post-structuralist feminist theory. While highlighting the complexity and polyhedrality of learners' gendered subjectivities and the implications of these discourses for their overall development (Morgan & Clarke, 2011), the study analyzes how learners' experiences in this environment shape their gendered subjectivities, perpetuating heteronormative discourses during language learning.

The research problem is multifaceted, stemming from the problematic nature of gendered discourses that pervade Colombian EFL classes and the legitimization of pre-established, heterosexist, and discriminatory ideologies within the context of sex-segregated schooling. At the macro level, the study critiques the (re)emergence of sex-segregated schooling in Colombia and its potential implications for hindering inclusive identities among learners. Although coeducation remains the predominant schooling model in Colombia, an increased demand for single-sex education (Eliot, 2013; Sax, 2005) has prompted renewed discussions, often neglecting the diverse identities within the student population, including the LGBTIQ+ community. Sex-segregated schools create an essentialized discursive border (Yazan & Rudolph, 2018) that shapes students' identities, imposes discourse hierarchies, and restricts the spectrum of possible sexualities, thereby hindering language teaching and learning, and the interconnectedness of language, culture, place, and identity.

At the micro, the research focuses on examining the specific practices of sex/gender division within a private Catholic institution that explicitly supports and maintains segregation based on essentialist sex-gender learning disparities (Fairclough, 2001). The curriculum employed by the institution serves to legitimize biological deterministic discourses, thereby reinforcing the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990, 2004, 2010). Consequently, learners are separated by sex, restricting opportunities for cross-gender interaction and collaboration (McCall, 2020). This approach not only strengthens binary gender norms but also presents challenges for EFL learners, who must navigate the (re)configurations of their gendered subjectivities within the confines of a sex-segregated educational environment.

In Figure 1, I depict the enacted division within the school. This visual representation not only delineates the physical segregation but also implies the characteristics associated with each gender classification. For instance, "*campeones*" (champions) connotes strength and dominance, whereas "*princesas*" (princesses) suggests expectations of beauty, elegance, and acquiescence, thus perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes.

Figure 1. Segregation Practices at School: Mapping Gender Division

Note. Campeones = champions; Princesas = princesses

This study aims to address this research question: How do adolescent EFL learners configure their gender subjectivities within a sex-segregated educational setting? By exploring the experiences of EFL learners in this limited context, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on sex-segregated schooling and its impact on English language education and learners' overall development in a private school in Bogotá. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of teacher-researchers examining the asymmetric sociolinguistic power relationships that influence language learning environments, fostering a deeper understanding of gendered subjectivities and their interaction with English language learning in diverse educational settings.

Theoretical Considerations

The study adopts post-structural feminist perspectives (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1981, 1988a; Weedon, 1997) and queer theory (Barozzi & Ruiz Cecilia, 2020; Browne & Nash, 2010; Butler, 1990; Motschenbacher, 2011) within a constructivist paradigm. Post-structuralism emphasizes language's role in constructing and contesting social meanings and shaping subjectivity through discourse (Weedon, 1997). Drawing from postmodernist and poststructuralist scholarship, the study views subjectivities as dynamic and performative (Butler, 1988, 1990), rejecting the idea of a fixed, essential self. Instead, it acknowledges subjectivity as a discursive construct influenced by social and cultural conventions (Bonder, 1995), shaping our perception of reality and sense of self. Within this framework, the term "subject" refers to the discursive nature of an individual's perspective. The study explores how language and discourse contribute to forming and contesting social meanings and subjectivities in English language teaching (ELT) settings. Specifically, it analyzes the gendered dimensions of subjectivity in ELT, challenging anachronistic concepts and heteronormative expectations in sex-segregated schooling. These theoretical considerations provide a useful analytical tool for understanding how language and discourse contribute to forming and contesting social meanings and subjectivities in ELT settings.Distinctively, the study analyzes *the gendered dimensions of subjectivity in ELT* and challenges *anachronistic concepts and heteronormative expectations in the sex-segregated schooling controversy*. By analyzing the discursive nature of configuring gendered selves, this study highlights how language and discourse play a critical role in constructing and reinforcing gendered identities and how these constructions can be challenged and transformed in ELT contexts.

The Gendered Dimensions of Subjectivity in ELT

The field of ELT recognizes the significance of gender in educational settings (Castañeda-Peña, 2021; Delgado-Ochoa, 2021; Durán, 2006; Litosseliti, 2006; Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2017; Rind, 2015; Rojas, 2012; Rondón Cárdenas, 2012; Salami & Ghajarieh, 2016; Sunderland, 2004). Castañeda-Peña (2021) advocates for an approach that considers sociocultural and interactional aspects of language use, aligning with Foucault's understanding of subjectivity, which emphasizes the

societal and cultural influences on individuals (Foucault, 1981, 1988a).

Foucault (1988a) points out three modes of objectification that shed light on how individuals become subjects. *Dividing practices* involve organizing and locating individuals' bodies, which leads to objectifying the subject. In sex-segregated schools, for example, students are separated based on perceived gender and taught to conform to rigid gender norms and roles, perpetuating gender binaries and heteronormative ideals (Jackson, 2010; Serrano Amaya, 2011). *Scientific subjectivation* involves the clinical and scientific definitions of the subject by disciplines, thus classifying individuals according to scientific truths and defining what is normal or pathological. Thus, misrepresentations of evolutionary psychology in sex and gender textbooks have resulted in a call for sex-segregated schooling (Winegard et al., 2014). Conversely, *subjectivation* comprises a complex interplay of resistance and subjection to imposed perspectives, allowing for the invention of diverse subjectivities and possibilities for agency (Uicich, 2016).

Understanding the gendered dimensions of subjectivity is crucial for comprehending societal power dynamics. The subject's discursive nature is influenced by a system of signs and conventions that shape our perception of reality (Gómez-Vásquez & Guerrero Nieto, 2018; Pascoe, 2007). Weedon (2004) criticizes common language assumptions, emphasizing the need for a refined understanding of individual agency in relation to their contexts. This study recognizes subjectivation processes as vital, where physical bodies become subjects within power-knowledge relations (Foucault, 1981, 1988b; Uicich, 2016). Society's role in this process is significant, as it constructs subjectivities and identities to serve specific interests, often concealing their constructed nature (Weedon, 2004). Consequently, the subject is not entirely autonomous, influenced by external forces shaping various aspects of their life, including experiences, emotions, beliefs, and epistemologies (Fausto-Sterling, 2019).

Understanding gendered subjectivity is crucial as it emphasizes the varied and changeable processes involved in its production (Muñoz González, 2007). Physical embodiment accumulates remnants of past sociocultural, political, and personal experiences, leading to potential subordination (Fausto-Sterling, 2019). Sex-segregated education further perpetuates heteronormativity by dividing students into binary gender roles, limiting discursive opportunities for the LGBTQ+ community (Pascoe, 2007). This divisive practice hinders inclusivity and reinforces societal inequalities.

The Discursive Nature of Gendered Self-Configuration

In sex-segregated schools, language and discourse play a significant role in constructing gendered subjectivities. Institutional discourses establish a binary matrix that rigidly categorizes individuals as either male or female, ascribing specific behaviors and values to each gender group. These practices are presented as "natural" and "appropriate," leading to the disciplining of individuals' bodies into predetermined gender roles and the marginalization of non-heteronormative identities (Motschenbacher, 2011). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) serves as a valuable method for investigating the power dynamics of discourses in shaping social practices and identities. By unveiling particular perspectives and agendas, CDA sheds light on how discourses define social practices from specific viewpoints, contributing to forming individuals as subjects in their constitutive and non-constitutive essences. Moreover, discourses are influenced by—and have the power to shape—situations, institutions, and social contexts (Weedon, 1997). Thus, language and discourse act as powerful tools in perpetuating and contesting gendered subjectivities within sex-segregated educational settings.

According to Gee (1990), discourse encompasses various aspects of being in the world, including language, behaviors, values, opinions, attitudes, social roles,

movements, looks, body positions, and clothing. In sex-segregated schooling, learners encounter discursive convergence and divergence intersections, which they may accept or challenge through language (Sunderland, 2004). Foucault's (1981) concept of "forbidden speech" emphasizes the widespread control over discourses, whereby society organizes, selects, and distributes all discourses produced by individuals and their bodies, perpetuating dominant perspectives.

Fausto-Sterling (2019) challenges traditional biological determinism and advocates for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between biology and social identity. For example, gendered discourse influences learners' language use and embodied experiences, such as urinating seated or standing up (Fausto-Sterling, 2019). Gendered discourses (Sunderland, 2004) are constitutive, and research in Colombian EFL demonstrates an uneven dissemination of these discourses in classroom practices, perpetuating gender stereotypes (Durán, 2006; Muñoz Caicedo, 2017).

By analyzing gender-based disciplinary practices and heteronormative assumptions in sex-segregated schools, this study sheds light on the construction and reinforcement of gendered subjectivities. Understanding the role of discourse in shaping subjectivities is essential for addressing inequalities and promoting inclusivity in educational settings.

Challenging Heteronormativity in Sex-Segregated Schooling in Colombia

The controversy surrounding sex-segregated schooling in Colombia is deeply rooted in societal norms that perpetuate oppressive practices and marginalize diverse identities. Historically, such education has reinforced rigid gender binaries, limiting individual expression and self-identification (Álvarez Gallego, 1995). Proponents argue the benefits of sex-segregated schooling, but neuroscience research challenges the validity of cognitive disparities between sexes, revealing the influence of social roles (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Political and religious institutions impede progress towards dismantling sex-segregated education (Ramírez Aristizábal & Mena López, 2014), while cultural norms further dictate traditional gender expectations. The prevalence of heteronormativity exacerbates the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community, leading to stigmatization. Although efforts for LGBTQ+ inclusivity exist, they fall short of genuine acceptance and equality (McCall, 2020). To create a more inclusive society, educational norms must be challenged and dismantled, embracing diversity and rejecting oppressive constructs (Castañeda-Peña, 2021). Policymakers, educators, and communities must collaborate to foster an accepting and equitable environment that values all individuals' identities and contributions. By dismantling barriers, Colombian education can move towards genuine inclusivity and celebrate the diversity of gender and sexual identities.

Ultimately, gendered subjectivities observed in Colombian classrooms are deeply intertwined with broader societal constructs that perpetuate oppressive norms and marginalize diverse identities. Sex-segregated education, historically employed as a tool of social control since the 19th century, reinforces traditional gender roles and imposes limitations based on sex, further entrenching discriminatory practices in Colombian society.

Method

Context and Participants

The research was conducted at a multilingual private school in Bogota that serves a population of about 1,350 students from kindergarten to 11th grade. Founded in 1968 as an all-male, the school transitioned to a coeducational model in 2008. Under this model, students attend separate classrooms by sex/gender but share common areas for extracurricular activities. The school's educational project emphasizes comprehensive

education and societal contribution in alignment with the gospel. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference, the curriculum aims for a B2 proficiency level in English by graduation. The selection of this school as the research setting was deliberate. Its unique sex-segregated schooling environment offers insight into gendered subjectivity formation, a rarity in Colombian education. Additionally, the school administration's interest in evaluating and justifying its approach indicated a receptiveness to discussing non-normative identities. As an advocate for inclusive education, I sought to amplify student voices within this context.

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 50 eighth-grade EFL learners (25 young males and 25 young females) divided into two sex-segregated classrooms. The participants were chosen purposefully to explore their gendered subjectivities within the context of a heteronormative schooling environment. This sampling approach aimed to allow for a comprehensive understanding of how gendered subjectivity is shaped through diverse embodied experiences and positions. All students from both classrooms were invited to participate, aligning with the research's focus on providing agency to learners in expressing their gendered experiences. This decision was made in line with post-structural paradigms, emphasizing context-bound interpretations over generalizability. Rather than adhering to conventional coding and categorization practices, this study aimed to critically interpret the complex phenomenon of gendered subjectivities, amplifying student voices in the process. The teacher-researcher's role encompassed navigating ethical considerations such as reflexivity, trustworthiness, and participant confidentiality to ensure the integrity of the research process.

Corpus Collection Process

The corpus collection process employed three distinct methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences in a sex-segregated school. Firstly, the institutional landscape was mapped, including school structure, policies, and practices related to sex-segregation. In situ observations and analysis of students' artifacts provided further insights into their experiences. Secondly, participants and their parents were invited, and informed consent was obtained to ensure ethical considerations. Lastly, the main corpus for analysis consisted of interactions within sex-segregated classrooms, transcribed to study language use and speech acts. Online group semi-structured interviews were conducted to delve deeper into the students' perceptions and reflections, thus embracing a polyphonic exploration of diverse perspectives.

Queering the Framework of Analysis

The present research ventures into an exploratory approach by queering the analysis framework to explore a socially constructed phenomenon without the confines of absolute truth. By adopting a qualitative model (Croker, 2009), the study delves into gendered subjectivities in EFL classrooms within sex-segregated education. The analysis encompasses multiple iterative stages, incorporating CDA (Fairclough, 2001; Pennycook, 2001) and feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (FPDA) to investigate the intricate dynamics at play.

Queer theory (Browne & Nash, 2010; Butler, 1990; Motschenbacher, 2011) takes center stage as a crucial component in challenging conventional views of human subjects, power relations, and knowledge production methods. By intertwining queer theory with CDA and FPDA, this research unearths non-normative gender and sexual identities within the broader social context and prevailing ideologies. The amalgamation of these theoretical perspectives brings forth invaluable insights into the construction of gendered subjectivities and sheds light on power dynamics, individual agency, and resistance within the educational sphere.

Browne and Nash (2010) emphasize the significance of queer theory in unveiling institutionalized gendered

subjection processes. Integrating queer theory within the broader context of CDA and FPDA not only challenges traditional data collection methods but also provides a critical examination of gendered subjectivities in English classrooms. This approach enriches the understanding of power dynamics, resistance, and individual agency within the educational context, culminating in a more comprehensive comprehension of the complexities surrounding gender and ELT.

Corpus Analysis Procedure

The corpus analysis procedure employed in this paper took a systematic and comprehensive approach to examine the configuration of gendered subjectivities in sex-segregated education, focusing on language's role in shaping subjectivities. The *denotative analysis* began by carefully revising and describing the transcripts, paying attention to various linguistic events such as turn-taking, deixis, overlaps, and speech acts, with a particular emphasis on illocutionary acts and linguistic features like nominalizations, predications, and adjectivation. This stage acknowledged the social nature of language and its significance in shaping subjectivities.

A three-stage matrix was utilized to gain deeper insights into the participants' intentions, discursive strategies, and the influence of language and discourse on gendered subjectivities. This matrix linked conversation excerpts, participants' lexical choices, and identified speech acts to describe participants' positioning features. It revealed an emerging theme and two subthemes that highlighted explicit discursive practices and their impact on reinforcing the heterosexual matrix while marginalizing diverging identities and subjectivities. The analysis shed light on the implications of gendered discourses on participants' subjectivities within English classrooms, providing a systematic organization and analysis of the corpus.

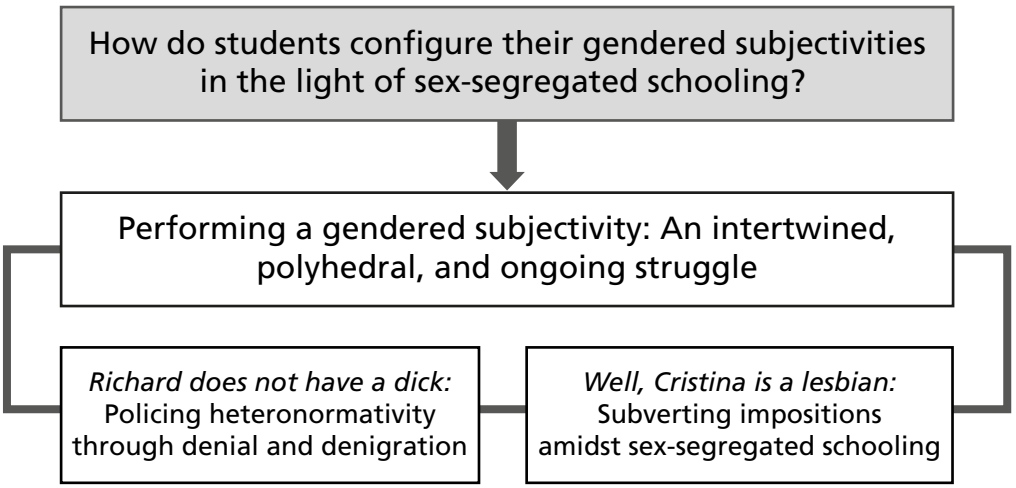
The *connotative analysis* further delved into the interactions between gendered discourses and their impact on participants' experiences, considering the conditions of their distribution and consumption. The intertextual analysis focused on how learners' representations aligned with the heteronormative matrix, wherein social actors engaged in producing, distributing, and consuming heteronormative discourse on gender/sex differences. This investigation revealed how institutional heteronormative discourses on learning differences reinforced social norms and ideologies, offering insights into the construction and reinforcement of gendered subjectivities in English classrooms.

To ensure rigor, the researcher conducted two rounds of manual thematic analysis, enhancing the intra-reliability and inter-reliability of the discourse analysis. The subthemes remained consistent during these rounds, with minor wording adjustments to maintain accuracy and validity in the research process. Overall, this corpus analysis procedure contributed valuable insights into the complexities of gendered subjectivities in educational settings, paving the way for further understanding and critical examination of the impact of language and discourse on students' identities and experiences.

Findings

This study delves into the enactments and interactions of participants concerning heteronormative sex/gender difference discourse. The analysis highlights the distribution of such discourse and reveals that gendered subjectivity configuration is a dynamic and continuous phenomenon. The findings suggest that the "Performing a Gendered Subjectivity: An Entangled, Polyhedral, and Ongoing Struggle" category is a suitable framework for comprehending the complex nature of gender identity. Figure 2 displays the emerging theme resulting from this study. This framework comprises two subthemes, namely top-down possibility and regimes of self-surveillance, that significantly influence gendered subjectivities and beliefs about gender.

Figure 2. Study's Main Theme and Subthemes



The sub-theme "Policing Heteronormative Through Denial and Denigration" focuses on the enforcement of heteronormativity by various social actors and how it is subverted within the heteronormative matrix. It examines family, school, and church's impact on individuals' gendered subjectivity configurations. The top-down possibility highlights how power dynamics shape gender norms and expectations, while self-surveillance regimes explore how individuals internalize and conform to these expectations through regulating and monitoring their own behavior.

Excerpt 1. Denotative stage

1 Teacher→class: what is happening in the picture story?
2 Isa→class: They are studying?
3 Teacher→class: They are studying? are they studying? No:: (2.0)
4 Class: No: (3.0)
5 Angie→class: Ben has something on the cellphone and [
8 Teacher→class: what do you think is showing her?
9 Oriana→class: a picture of Sam=
10 Nicky→class: =a ba::d picture of Sam! ((laughs))
11 Teacher→Nicky: what do you mean by a bad picture of Sam?
12 Nicky: you know! ((laughs))
13 Sara Me→class: Maybe like. hm... maybe something that you know that another person can feel bad or that can hurt him
14 Nicky: Mm…no maybe is some sort of gossip
17 Teacher→class: Do you have gossips in this classroom?
18 Ardila→class: what is gossip?
19 Class: (indistinctly) YE:::::SS- NO:::::
20 Teacher→class: Obviously, no::you are so Lasallia:n (1.2) you don't have that
21 Cuellar→class: *profe, somos mujeres, claro que somos chismosas [/teacher, we are women, obviously we are gossips/*
22 Ardila→Cuellar:]Y ESO QUÉ TIENE QUE VER! / *And what does that have to do with it!/*
23 Nick→Cuellar:]claro que no::o:! /*Of course not!/*

The class objective was to develop performing-playing roles based on the consequences of one's actions. Students engaged in a moral debate presented through a picture story regarding disclosing an individual's privacy. During the discussion, Oriana noted that the people in the image, especially Sam, were conversing and debating. Nicky expressed concerns about the picture being harmful to Sam. Cuellar remarked, , "Teacher, we are women, obviously we are gossips," but Mia, Isa,

and Nicky immediately challenged this statement. Isa questioned Cuellar's assertion with an accusatory tone, while Nicky agreed that gossiping was not acceptable. Mia disagreed with Cuellar and argued that gossip could lead to spreading rumors.

Excerpt 1: Connotative Stage

Although the discussion centers on hypothetical situations, participants find themselves in varying subject positions defending their viewpoints on gendered roles. This conflicts with the universal concept of womanhood, as there are diverse ways of performing femininity (Baxter, 2003; Butler, 1990). Conflicting viewpoints arise within the EFL classroom (Castañeda-Peña, 2018; Delgado-Ochoa, 2021). Highlighted in Cuellar's statement, there is a gendered stereotype that women are predisposed to gossiping. However, this assertion is challenged by Isa, who opposes Cuellar's belief that being a woman means being a gossiper. This conflict reflects the clash between gendered stereotypes. Young women negotiate idealized gendered discourses in their EFL spaces, encountering a range of femininities and masculinities amidst contradictions and ruptures of gendered ideals. Cuellar's subjectivities are shaped by her experiences and discursive representations, reinforced by her belief that women are talkative. This belief is supported by Cuellar's experiences in various social spheres. Cuellar's statement reinforces this belief and reflects the shaping of personal identity: "My opinion [about sex-segregated schooling] is positive because we feel more comfortable between women. We would not feel as much pain as we sometimes feel, for example, when we speak in a presentation" (Cuellar and Carolina, semi-structured interview).

Cuellar's embodied perceptions provide insights into sex and gender differences in her EFL classroom. Her experiences as a student in a sex-segregated school highlight the dilemmas that arise from such a divide. Cuellar posits that female students perform better without interruption from male students, which is consistent with Foucault's concept of differentiating as part of a dividing practice. However, Cuellar and other female students' direct encounters in the classroom contradict Sax's (2005) assertion of gender-segregated spaces as harmonious. Baxter notes that female subject positions are diverse, complex, and shifting, with an incessant interaction of contending discourses. Therefore, Sax's definition of differentiated education perpetuates heteronormative discourses and practices that limit the accessibility of diverse and alternative sexual-gendered subjectivities.

"Richard Does Not Have a Dick": Policing Heteronormativity Through Denial and Denigration

Learners in all-male classrooms socially construct their gendered subjectivity by opposing femininity and homosexuality through discursive actions. These actions include trivializing, rejecting, and demeaning feminine features, which are employed to police hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). One example of this behavior involves Richard, José, Simon, and Pipe (see Excerpt 2). The teacher was starting a class exercise to talk about a natural park when two pupils looked to depart from the heteronormative matrix:

Excerpt 2. Denotative stage

103 Teacher→class: give a short talk about.
104 José→class: ¿Qué están haciendo allá? */What are you doing over there?/*
105 ((Nestor bites Richard's ear))
106 Class reactions: ¡Ay:::! (5.0)
107 Simón→class: Richard no tiene pito. */Richard does not have a dick/*
108 Simón→class: Kiss, kiss!
110 Pipe→class: se están queriendo. */They're expressing their love/*
111 Lorenzo→class: Richard no tiene pito.
112 Monje→class: se están mirando los pi… */They're looking at each other's di…/*
114 Simón→Teacher: Profe, bájeles por eso. */Teacher, lower their grades for that/*

117 Class: ((laughter))
118 Teacher→class: HEY, SHUT UP: (2.0) guys. Respect!
119 Teacher→Nestor: Don't bite Richard in class, please.

In the classroom setting, Nestor bit Richard's ears, an event that was witnessed by their peer, José, who then utilized directed indirect speech in line 104 to draw attention to the matter to the entire class. Subsequently, Nestor's actions were met with mockery by the class, who derided them as "gay behavior" (Lines 104–113). Notably, Simón initiated a directive indirect speech act by requesting the teacher punish Nestor and Richard by reducing their grades.

Excerpt 2: Connotative Stage

Learners who do not comply with the heteronormative matrix are frequently subjected to unfavorable assessments and ostracism. In Excerpt 2, the group's emasculation of Richard, as indicated by their repeated usage of the term "Richard does not have a dick," is an illustration of this. It is worth noting, however, that Nestor, regarded as a classroom leader, receives little attention. This exemplifies the notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), which holds that several types of masculinity exist and that not all hold equal positions of power. Nestor, who deviates from the heterosexual matrix, is not subjected to the same level of scrutiny as Richard due to his positioning as a "bad lad." Hegemonic masculinity is in opposition to various subordinate masculinities, with external and internal hegemony defining the superiority of men over women and of a group of men's social status over all other men, respectively (Connell, 2005).

Therefore, as seen in Extract 2, masculinity is produced not just via the subjection of women but also through the submission of other types of masculinity. Men are traditionally trained in school to be aggressive in public and to remove themselves from anything deemed feminine or non-heterosexual, with any displays of affection scrutinized, particularly if they veer from the heterosexual matrix. However, with the increased participation of women in the public sphere and the acceptance of caring masculinities, masculinity's roles shift. In addition, when asked about his feelings at school, Richard stated:

> I have a good relationship with my friends, although they do no [*sic*] understand that I prefer to play golf instead of soccer. In [the classroom], they assume you have to like the same things. I go to a lot of golf tournaments there is very well sport [*sic*] and have two or three medals but here they don't really care. (Semi-structured interview)

Richard's interview also demonstrates the variety of masculinities that can be expressed, while not all occupy the same social position. Richard observes that people do not always understand or appreciate his choice of playing golf rather than soccer, which is more common among his friends. This demonstrates how schooling tends to normalize some male behaviors and interests while marginalizing others.

Simon's experiences also highlight how conflicting subject configurations might be. He functioned as a guardian of the heterosexual matrix in Excerpt 2, but he also thinks that sex-segregated education is absurd and is supported by prejudices about sex. When questioned about sex-segregated education, Simon remarked:

> I don't agree because, because…it does not make sense. Since the excuse of the brothers is that men and women learn differently, but that is not true . . . if that were a reality, why there are [*sic*] women who teach math to us? . . . This idea . . . promotes discrimination for sex [*sic*] because education is not different for women and for men. (Semi-structured interview)

Simon's perspective on sexism in the school explains the discriminatory character of sex-segregated schooling. However, his beliefs on the expression of sexuality in the classroom also demonstrate a form of ascription to homophobia, as seen in Excerpt 2. This reflects Foucault's (1988a) idea of subjection/objection,

highlighting the complex interplay of discourses in the EFL setting.

Excerpt 3: Denotative Stage

A speaking session in which learners were asked and answered questions on sports and injuries generated substantial findings about gendered subjectivity. Titina revealed that she had to stop playing soccer owing to her parents' displeasure because they saw soccer as a danger to her femininity, as evidenced by the objectionable implications of the term "*marimacho*" (tomboy). Meanwhile, Isa helped Titina articulate her thoughts and displayed an understanding of the gendered implications of Titina's experience.

4 Teacher→Titina: Are you practicing soccer?

5 Titina→Isa, Teacher: No, because the fathers don't like.

6 Teacher→Titina: Your father or mother?

7 Titina→Teacher: Both.

8 Teacher→Titina, Isa: Parents, both are parents. So, your parents won't let you pl[ ]ay because?

9 Titina→Teacher: [ir a una escuela] */Go to a school/*

10 Teacher→Titina: Ohh, they don't like you to go to a school of soccer.

12 Titina→Teacher: Porque dicen que uno se vuelve… hmm…espere, profe que esa palabra[*/They say one becomes…mmm…wait, teacher, what's the word?/*

13 Isa→Titina, Teacher: The woman hmm (0.4) no hmm (0.4) play soccer because it converts hmm (0.3) more] [

15 Isa→Titina, Teacher:][má::s (2.0), no sé cómo decir eso…(2.0) ..tiene una palabra. Eso tiene una palabra, sí. */I don't know how to say it…there's a word for that/*

19 Teacher→Titina: You mean machorra or lesbian?

20 Titina→Teacher: No, [

21 Isa: [Por ahí va. Pues también si uno juega esto entonc] [*/Something like that. So, if one plays that then…/*

22 Titina→Teacher: [Sí, porque camina como un hombre o empieza a:(3.0): ¿sí?, a hacer cosas como de hombre. Ay, se me fue la palabra. */Because if one walks like a man or starts to…do men's things…I can't recall the word/*

24 Titina→Isa: Have you ever (3.0) MARIMACHO ((points at the teacher)) profe, la palabra es marimacho. */teacher, the word is tomboy/*

25 Titina→Teacher: Mis papás dicen que cuando uno juega futbol se vuelve marimacha. */My parents say that girls become tomboys when they play soccer/*

Excerpt 3: Connotative Stage

Titina's representative speech performance emphasizes how gendered norms and expectations are forced on individuals in a variety of circumstances, including sports. Such gendered roles are reinforced at school and home through social interactions and subtle reinforcement of unequal behaviors, which lead to the adoption of differentiated behaviors and preferences as inherent to one's sex (for example, "boys as champions," "girls as princesses"). Butler (2010), on the other hand, claims that youngsters would act and "perform" their sex in an environment devoid of prescribed behavioral norms. Seen this way, Butler's (1990) invitation to particularize gender entails exposing it as a historically unique social construction. In this scenario, both parents and school tacitly encourage sexism. Furthermore, pupils act and express non-normative subjectivities when such normative systems become ambiguous.

"Well, Cristina is a Lesbian": Subverting Impositions Amidst Sex-Segregated Schooling

This subtheme highlights significant moments (Baxter, 2003) where students construct their gender identities and resist social norms through their struggles. By challenging heteronormative discourses and making taboo discourses visible, participants provide a space for their voices to be heard and for social norms to be queered (Barozzi & Ruiz Cecilia, 2020). It is essential to acknowledge that social norms are constructed and subject to change and that everyone has the power to

challenge and disrupt them. Feminist and gender studies provide an understanding of individuals' positions in patriarchal societies (Motschenbacher, 2011) and offer a means of queering social norms. In Excerpt 4, the teacher assigned a role-play activity for the students to demonstrate the potential outcomes of their actions. During this activity, a significant moment occurred when two students challenged the heteronormative matrix.

Excerpt 4. Denotative stage

11 Ariza→Cristina: hey hey look at thi::(3.0)s it's your girlfriend ((laugher)) ((performing manly))

12 Mariana→class: ¿Y ESA HISTORIA QUÉ? ((interrupting the performance)) */And what's that story about?/*

13 Nicole→Mariana: ¡Pues que Cristina es lesbiana! */ Well, Cristina is a lesbian/*

15 Ariza→Cristina: Yes, I have more.

16 Cristina→Ariza: No that is impossible ((takes her hand to this mouth performing as she was shocked))

17 Cristina→Ariza: What is your problem? [simulates to attack Ariza] [takes the phone and simulates to be talking on the phone]

18 Cristina: ((whilst talking on the phone)) we break up!

19 Cristina: ((Pretends to cry))

21 Mariana→Teacher: Profe, ¿Y ESA HISTORIA QUÉ? */Teacher, what's this story all about?/*

Cristina and Ariza's story depicts a homosexual relationship, as evident from Lines 11, 12, and 15. Mariana uses an interrogation clause as a directive indirect speech act. However, Nicole responds by revealing that "Cristina is a lesbian," thereby undermining the significance Mariana had attributed to the issue (Line 12). Notably, Mariana initiates the directive indirect speech act, asserting her agency. By asking the teacher, "What is this story all about?" (Line 21), it can be inferred that she considered the role-play as a challenge to the heteronormative matrix. Excerpt 4 reveals the students' perception of the teacher's role as a policymaker-regulator responsible for evaluating his students' conduct.

Excerpt 4: Connotative Stage

Excerpt 4 examines how Cristina and Ariza used role-play to challenge heteronormativity, acknowledging the diversity of sexualities. Drawing on Butler's (1990) theory, sex and gender are performative rather than causally or expressively related, with sex being the performance of gender. The girls' micro-practice of resistance to must-be discourses subverted the presumption of heteronormativity based on gender. Butler critiques the relationship between biology and sexuality, highlighting how the heterosexual matrix is replicated and concealed by cultivating bodies into discrete sexes with "normal" looks and "natural" heterosexual patterns (p. 65). The fact that their classmates paid attention to the plot and were willing to continue the role-play with the same characters indicates that the EFL environment provided a space for non-normative subjectivities to emerge, enabling a crossing of borders between school regulations and subject positions. Butler argues that "the possibility of parody is built into the structure of identity itself" (p. 140), and the use of role-play to subvert the presumption of heteronormativity at the school represents a significant challenge to the relationship between biology and sexuality.

Contrary to Nestor and Richard's punished behavior in Excerpt 2, Cristina and Ariza's resistance to heteronormativity was celebrated, highlighting the limitations and restrictions that gender discourse can impose on subject positions. Butler (1990) argues that individuals navigate their preferences with accessible roles, some of which are categorized as normal and natural, while others are seen as outside of the norm, limiting individuals' sexuality and sexual subjectivity. The persistent notion of boy/girl as a static, biological life further reinforces these limitations.

Building upon these themes, Excerpt 5 displays L2 interaction among students through predefined

questions without explicitly emphasizing gender-related subjects but on the issue of discrimination in Colombia.

Excerpt 5. Denotative stage

100 Teacher→class: Do you have any discriminatory thoughts?
101 Richard→Teacher: No, I am so respectful. (Ironic tone)
102 ((The class responds with laughter))
103 Monje: Uy sí nunca me ha molestado. */Sure, he's never bothered me/*
104 Joel→Richard: ahh, sí, claro */Yeah, sure/*
105 ((José raises his hand))
107 José→class: Sometimes accord [*sic*] to education than partners [ ] have…I think
108 Vallejo→class: Sometimes our fathers teach us the gays, the trans or travesties are bad influence for our life [*sic*].
109 Teacher→Vallejo: So, your parents teach you that homophobia is normal?
110 José→class: Yeah, sometimes.

The participants in this academic forum engaged in a debate on the topic of discrimination in Colombia and around the world. The moderator posed a series of pre-established questions that prompted the students to share their viewpoints and experiences related to discrimination. In Line 101, Richard asserted that he had never discriminated against anyone due to his respectful nature. However, his claim was met with skepticism from his peers, as Monje mentioned in Line 103, a past discriminatory experience in an accusatory tone. This exchange exemplifies the subjective and contextual nature of discrimination and the importance of acknowledging diverse perspectives and experiences.

In a subsequent moment, José provided insights into the relationship between parental education and discriminatory attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community. He mentioned that homophobic assumptions are often internalized and normalized due to the lack of critical reflection and education among parents. By highlighting the role of socialization and transmission in shaping discriminatory attitudes, he asserted that parents play a crucial role in the development of homophobic assumptions.

Excerpt 5: Connotative Stage

This excerpt demonstrates the complex interaction between individual agency, socialization, and cultural norms in perpetuating and reproducing discriminatory attitudes. Through Vallejo's representative speech act (Searle, 1969/2001), he presents his constructed belief about the social origins of homophobic and transphobic assumptions, arguing that parents play an active role in their formation. By highlighting the normalization of these assumptions within families, Vallejo implicates the broader societal forces contributing to the spread of discriminatory attitudes. This is further exemplified by the otherness-related values of LGBTQ+ groups (Guijarro Ojeda, 2005), who are viewed as "outsiders" by other families within the school community. These practices and beliefs are indicative of the heterosexual matrix, which Butler (1990) describes as the implicit and explicit activities, beliefs, and purposes that contribute to maintaining heterosexuality as the only acceptable way of being.

Vallejo's characterization and labeling of taboo identities—such as gays, trans, and travesties—underscores the pervasiveness of gender discrimination within the educational system. By contesting binarism at the school, Vallejo positions himself as a speaker who discursively challenges imposed imaginaries and taboo topics within his EFL setting. Additionally, his enactment of gendered subjectivity configuration becomes apparent as he adopts a neutral stance towards religiously based assumptions, thereby challenging the heteronormative binary that dominates the school's culture. In this regard, Vallejo states that while he considers himself a Catholic, he remains open-minded towards non-normative subjectivities:

> Yes, I am religious, but I don't believe too much in invented stuff. But I believe God made us. I think I am neutral about diversity at school. I think God is important; however, I don't have time to say thanks or read the bible [*sic*]. (Interview)

Vallejo's interview analysis highlights his family's limited understanding of gender as a binary system, disregarding non-normative subjectivities. However, he recognizes their existence, revealing the tension between social norms and individual identity. His contradictory beliefs on gender roles show how gendered expectations can shape self-perception and understanding of others. He critiques his parents' assumptions and recognizes diverse gender identities beyond the binary system: "I think that in my family, they think that they are only two genders, the woman and the men and the other genders are just a joke. And they do not exist, and they are just for mode [fashion]".

Vallejo's detachment from his family's limited understanding of gender has enabled him to recognize and affirm non-normative subjectivities, even those that challenge his family's assumptions. His critical approach to gender and sexuality issues exemplifies the role of agency in contesting discriminatory attitudes and resisting the propagation of heteronormative discourses. Gendered subjectivity is a complex and polyhedral construct shaped by subjection and objection (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1988b), as evidenced in Vallejo's choices to depart from certain religious considerations while maintaining a Catholic identity that recognizes and affirms the LGBTQ+ community, while still adhering to gendered roles and expectations (Connell, 2005; Sunderland, 2004). Vallejo's lived experiences demonstrate the need to challenge and resist heteronormative discourses and destabilize imposed gendered characteristics and ascriptions (Butler, 1990; Motschenbacher, 2011). These experiences also underscore the profound influence of language, knowledge, and experiences in the EFL classroom on shaping the subject's agency (Castañeda-Peña, 2021).

Conclusions

This study shed light on how EFL learners (re)construct their gendered subjectivities within sex-segregated schooling and the impact on their language practices. It revealed the complexities of gendered subjectivities and the role of heteronormativity in shaping learners' experiences. Transformative pedagogy is essential to challenge normative discourses and empower learners to contest oppressive gender constructs actively.

Learners' self-reported experiences demonstrated their agency in challenging gender norms and underscored the need for an inclusive pedagogical approach to support queer-gendered subjectivities. Language's role in perpetuating heteronormativity necessitates a reevaluation of pedagogy to embrace diversity and reject essentializing gender notions.

Implications call for *trans*formative pedagogical practices, fostering diverse representations of non-normative queer identities for inclusive educational environments. However, the study's focus on the English classroom may limit generalizability. Future research should explore gendered subjectivities in broader educational settings and across different subjects to comprehensively understand sexual identity discourses in education.

Further research avenues include investigating gendered subjectivities in multimodal artifacts, exploring teachers' micro-practices of resistance, and examining supra-territorial gendering knowledge to understand heteronormativity's broader influence.

By fostering fairness and justice in education, we can dismantle dominant narratives and create an empowering and inclusive learning experience for all learners. Embracing diverse gender identities and challenging oppressive constructs will contribute to a more equitable and supportive educational environment.

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