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## **Promoting Admiration of Foucault Hiding his Defense of Rape and Pederasty**

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# **Promoting Admiration of Foucault Hiding his Defense of Rape and Pederasty**

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## **Abstract**

Foucault has been quoted as a great intellectual contributor to feminism and education, despite his defense of decriminalizing rape and pederasty. Since the MeToo movement, there is an increasing criticism of Foucault's persona and works. However, in order to avoid recognizing their mistake, some authors say that Foucault's defense of sexual violence was unknown before. This article shows this is not backed by evidence. Data was collected via interviews with 19 subjects with diverse profiles, employing the communicative methodology. The results shed light on the fact that some professors who have included Foucault's works in their classes hid Foucault's position in favor of sexual violence to their students. Interviewees state that there are several reasons why they think those professors hid this fact: a) the most critical thinker; b) the transgressor; c) a relativist intellectual; d) "a shield to hide behind"; and e) the idea that the intellectual must be separated from the person. This study indicates that in transmitting those images and hiding or even justifying Foucault instead of critically analyzing the implication of his works and his defense of sexual violence, perpetuating its justification, such professors act as his "hooligans".

**Keywords:** Foucault, rape, pederasty, sexual violence

# **Promoviendo Admiración hacia Foucault Ocultando su Defensa de la Violación y la Pederastia**

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## **Resumen**

Foucault ha sido citado como un gran contribuyente intelectual al feminismo y a la educación, a pesar de defender la despenalización de la violación y la pederastia. Desde el MeToo hay una creciente crítica a la persona y obras de Foucault. Sin embargo, para no reconocer su error, algunos autores y autoras dicen que la defensa de la violencia sexual de Foucault era desconocida hasta ahora. Este artículo demuestra que esto no está respaldado por evidencias. Los datos se recogieron mediante entrevistas comunicativas a 19 personas con perfiles diversos. Los resultados muestran que parte del profesorado que ha incluido la obra de Foucault ocultó a su alumnado la posición de Foucault a favor de la violencia sexual. Las personas participantes creen que hay varias razones por las que ese profesorado lo ocultó: a) el pensador más crítico; b) el transgresor; c) un intelectual relativista; d) "un escudo tras el que esconderse"; y e) la idea de que el intelectual debe separarse de la persona. Al transmitir esas imágenes y ocultar o incluso justificar a Foucault en lugar de analizar la implicación de sus obras y su defensa de la violencia sexual, perpetuando su justificación, dicho profesorado actúa como sus "hooligans".

**Palabras clave:** Foucault, violación, pederastia, violencia sexual

**F**oucault has been quoted as an intellectual referent by many authors from various social sciences and humanities. Despite his defense of the decriminalization of rape and pederasty (Cooper et al., 1977), he has even been frequently presented as a great contributor to feminism and education. For instance, Oksala says: “I argue in this article, however, that it is exactly the metaphysical implications of Foucault’s thought that make him a key thinker for feminist theory” (Oksala, 2011b, p. 282).

In the field of education, Lloro-Bidart and Semenکو (2017) wrote:

This article synthesizes feminist writings about temporality, relationality, and self-care alongside Foucault’s ideas about “care for self” and feminist environmental education scholarship that considers care in order to develop a feminist ethic of self-care for environmental educators that challenges neoliberal ideologies (p. 18).

Scientific literature has outlined that many authors, even those considered progressive, feminist, or leftist, make radical criticism to those who have committed sexual violence or defend it in their writings and declarations but simultaneously defend those “critical” authors who have committed or supported such violence. One example they raise is Althusser, who committed femicide to his wife. For decades, his defense stated that we should separate the person from his works. In that sense, Althusser’s followers used to present his critics as having misread his contributions and attributing a low intellectual level to them. Nevertheless, Althusser recognized in his book *L’Avenir dure longtemps* that he used to write about books he had never read, like Marx’s *The Capital* (Althusser, 1992). In reality, Althusser’s followers talked about *The Capital* without reading it, showing their deficient intellectual level; the authors criticizing Althusser’s works had rigorously read *The Capital*, they had a high intellectual level (Flecha et al., 2003). Literature has pointed out that the sociological reason for his defense by many critical authors for decades is the habit of those authors of doing the same things Althusser did. On the one hand, they used to teach, talk, and write about what they had never read. On the other hand, they used to commit sexual harassment or maintain silence about the sexual violence committed by their colleagues.

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Again, the need to separate the valuation of the author's life from his work is frequently claimed to defend Foucault after recognizing that he supported the decriminalization of rape and pederasty. Oksala (2011a) says:

My motive for defending him here is not to commend pedophilia or to advocate a more liberal or pluralistic sexual ethics. My aim is merely to show that his understanding of experience remains a theoretically fruitful resource for feminist thought despite his sexist treatment of this incident (p. 209).

As in the case of Althusser, it is also frequent to state that Foucault's critics have misread his works and have a low intellectual level, while his followers have a high intellectual level. For instance, Taylor (2009) says:

In 1977 Michel Foucault contemplated the idea of punishing rape only as a crime of violence, while in 1978 he argued that non-coercive sex between adults and minors should be decriminalized entirely. Feminists have consistently criticized these suggestions by Foucault. This paper argues that these feminist responses have failed to sufficiently understand the theoretical motivations behind Foucault's statements on sex-crime legislation reform, and will offer a new feminist appraisal of Foucault's suggestions (p. 1).

One of the authors criticizing Foucault for decades for defending rape and pederasty, for sustaining a conception of sexuality that justifies any kind of sexual violence (Foucault, 1976, 1984a, 1984b), and for the low intellectual level of his works is sociologist Ramon Flecha. In his book *Critical Education in the New Information Age*, published almost two decades ago, Flecha wrote: "... there are also educators, even feminists, who vindicate Foucault who defended an asocial concept of sexuality that led him to propose the decriminalization of rape" (Castells et al., 1994, p. 68). In 1990 and 1992, he had already published why such diverse authors who wrote in favor of feminism, solidarity, and emancipation admired Foucault. Flecha quoted Descombes and Rorty to sustain that one of the reasons was the postmodernist habit to talk and write about what they have never seriously read (Giroux & Flecha, 1992):

Descombes (1987, p. 3) pointed out that the particular appropriation that has been made of Foucault has created two different Foucaults: a French one and an American one. The American one is devoid of most of the Nietzschean background and linked to Dewey's pragmatist orientation. Rorty (1991b) has joined this type of interpretation (pp. 172-173).

Besides the lack of serious intellectual reading of the main books of social sciences and philosophy by postmodernists, Giroux & Flecha developed another explanation of the “postmodernism without Nietzsche” (1992):

In the eighties, the North American right has emphasized a cultural ideologization, while the French have promoted the cultural deideologization. The critique of metanarratives has served in France to combat leftist ideologies, while in the USA, it has been used by some authors to combat the new rightist cultural ideology. The American cultural right has launched itself into a positive determination of what is good and wrong...The leading sectors of French culture have had to fight against what was considered right or wrong in cultural environments often hegemonized by the left...The character of this type of appropriation of Foucault and postmodernism in North America hinders the assumption of Nietzscheanism (p. 173).

In an article published in *Harvard Educational Review*, Flecha (1999) also quoted Foucault to demonstrate the incredible lack of rigor of those followers that considered his works as theoretical resources to clarify the negative effects of power, when the author wrote against the description of power as negative and defended pointing out its positive effects. He also developed a rigorous theoretical and social critique of Foucault's referents like Nietzsche in his publications. This critique was particularly fruitful and had a significant social impact on readers. Its uncommon interdisciplinarity combines philosophical debates with a sociological analysis of the social context in which those insights were promoted or marginalized. Until now, there has been no refutation to these publications due to their also uncommon basis in the direct reading and dialogue of the main books of those authors.

One of the clarifying cases is the one of Henry Giroux. Until he published the quoted book with Flecha, he referenced Foucault in his publications, including another book published the same year (Giroux, 1992). Later, Foucault disappeared from his publications, but he has never publicly recognized his mistake. This is what most followers of Foucault are doing, which has very negative intellectual and human consequences. Still now, most followers of Giroux think and write that Foucault is one of his main referents, and even in Wikipedia, Foucault is shown as one of his seven leading influencers. Besides, the lack of rectification makes Giroux's publications to have the same intellectual weakness and negative social consequences, for instance, "creating a Derrida without Derrida", quoting it through other authors and minor articles, never from his main works like *The Grammatology* (Derrida, 1967).

Still, research has not been undertaken to inquire into the fact that those professors and authors who used Foucault hid the fact that he defended the decriminalization of rape and pederasty. On the ground of all the aforementioned evidence and given its crucial human and academic implications, this study sheds light on this matter.

### **Methodology**

The methodology used in this article is qualitative, with a communicative orientation (Gómez, Puigvert & Flecha, 2011; Gómez, 2021), which has co-led the inclusion of two current priorities of the European Scientific Programme of Research (Horizon Europe). The communicative methodology is based on the idea that research aims not only to describe and explain reality, but to study it in order to transform it (Gómez et al., 2012; Gómez et al., 2019), focusing on the fact that meanings are constructed through interaction between people (Gómez et al., 2006). In this sense, we have carried out a methodological design to include in the analysis the voices, interpretations, reflections and theories of people who have used Foucault's work in their writings, and of people who have been exposed to Foucault's work. A literature review (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019) was conducted in scientific databases (Web of Science, Journal Citation Reports, Scopus, and Google Scholar) to identify authors who have used Foucault's work in their research. On the other hand, as shown in Table 1,

we interviewed 19 people. These testimonies were trained in different periods, from the 1970s to the present, in 10 different universities in 4 different countries (Spain, Brazil, Chile, USA) in Social and Human Sciences (Anthropology, Communication,

Table 1.

*People interviewed working in Social and Human Sciences*

No	Pseudonym	Discipline	Profile	University	Country	Period
1	Manuel	Sociology	Former undergraduate student currently teaching at the university	1	Spain	Late 90s
2	Clara	History of Art	Former undergraduate student currently teaching at the university	2	Spain	2010s
3	Joao	History	Former undergraduate student currently teaching at the university	3	Brazil	90s
4	Miren	Sociology	Former PhD student currently teaching at the university	1	Spain	Late 90s
5	Andrés	Sociology	Former undergraduate student while he was a secondary school teacher currently teaching at the university	4	Spain	2000s
6	Júlia	Anthropology	Former undergraduate student currently teaching in a secondary school	1	Spain	Late 90s
7	Claudia	Political Science	Former undergraduate student and current researcher at university	5	Spain	Late 2000s
8	Natalia	Education	Former PhD student	1	Spain	Late 90s
9	Rebeca	Communication	Former undergraduate student currently teaching at the university	1	Spain	2000s
10	Sara	Education	Former undergraduate student	1	Spain	Late 90s
11	Leire	Education	PhD student	6	USA	2020s
12	Ruth	Sociology	Former undergraduate student and teaching at the university	1	Spain	2010s
13	Emilio	Sociology	Former undergraduate student currently teaching at the university	7	Chile	2000s
14	Raúl	Philosophy	Former undergraduate student currently teaching at the university	1	Spain	80s



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15	Luisa	Education	Former undergraduate student currently teaching at the university	8	Brazil	80s
16	Santi	History / Gender	Former undergraduate and master's student	2	Spain	2010s
17	Arnau	Literature	Former graduate student, currently a teacher in a language school	5	Spain	2010s
18	Miriam	Education	Former undergraduate student currently teaching at the university	9	Spain	2010s
19	Maria	Law	Retired university professor	10	Spain	70s

Education, History, Law, Literature, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology). Currently, most of them are working in these fields as researchers and university professors.

Based on the data collected from the articles and the interviews conducted, a communicative-oriented analysis was carried out (Gómez et al., 2012). An attempt has been made to identify the interpretation and use of Foucault's work in the social and human sciences through an intersubjective dialogic process. The categories of analysis have been constructed and agreed upon by the participants in the study, based on the postulate of "dialogic knowledge" (Gómez et al., 2006). Through the reading of the texts selected in the literature review, and the dialogues established in the interviews, we arrive at a knowledge that allows us to discuss the object of this study: to provide evidence on the fact that some professors and authors who have used Foucault and his work hid the fact that he defended rape and pederasty, even though authors such as Flecha (1989), among others, have pointed out evidence from Foucault's work clearly defending actions such as rape or pederasty (Roca et al., 2021).

### Results

The result of the current study is that participants confirm that the professors and other professionals who used Foucault hid the fact that he defended the decriminalization of rape and pederasty. The analysis of the data collected evidenced that there are university professors who have used the works of Foucault in their classes, despite knowing that he defended rape and

pederasty. However, such professors never explain Foucault's defense of sexual violence. Emilio is currently a professor in a Chilean university. From his trajectory and experience, he explains the strong legitimization of Foucault that still exists today among the teaching staff and especially in the Faculties of Social Sciences. However, the professors who rely on Foucault do not provide all the information related to the defense that this author made of pederasty or the decriminalization of rape: "No, no, no, no, they were only limited to the content of the books (...) what we know now, that he is a pedophile, was never mentioned, all these negative aspects that should be considered". When asked if these professors knew about Foucault's conception of sexuality and the sexual abuse of minors, Emilio responds: "I think they did, but they omitted it. I believe that it is information that is known but in the end it tends to be hidden, taking away the weight of this information".

In the interview with Manuel, when talking about professors and researchers from the USA and Australia who use Foucault as a reference author of the critique of the system, he affirms:

I do not know if they knew it or not, but I am sure it was not explained. In fact, I wanted to explain it to this colleague I was telling you about from Australia, I told him and he downplayed it, he didn't even pay attention to me, like he turned a deaf ear, he didn't want to hear it. (Manuel)

Sara explains that when she was studying Pedagogy, in the Philosophy of Education subject, students like her had been kept in the dark about what Foucault had actually advocated in his work. When talking about one of her professors, she states: "Of course, he hid from us that Foucault had defended pederasty and that Heidegger had been the foremost Nazi intellectual".

Joao adds that, today, when he tries to talk about it with the defenders of Foucault, they refuse to listen, remember, and/or recognize that, in addition to defending him in their work, Foucault (who was their reference) raped children:

I myself have recently become aware of this, and when I have recently commented on it with a Foucauldian professor who is a colleague in the faculty, he says, "but this is a lie, it is not possible, this is

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something of an anguished Marxist”. It is not possible to have a dialogue. (Joao)

From the analysis of the interviews, five themes which interviewees consider to be the reasons why these professionals hid the fact that Foucault defended the decriminalization of rape and pederasty appear: a) the most critical thinker; b) the transgressor; c) a relativist intellectual; d) “a shield to hide behind”; and e) the idea that the intellectual must be separated from the person.

### **Foucault, “The Most Critical Thinker”**

In his reflection, Emilio attributes Foucault’s legitimization to the need of some of the students in these academic environments to portray an image of being “rebellious” and wanting to pretend a kind of rebelliousness that goes against the system but that in reality they do not have: “wanting to be someone they really are not”. But according to his testimony, the professors who legitimize Foucault also do so in order to maintain an image of popularity, even if this is to the detriment of international scientific prestige:

Explaining everything is the right thing to do. They don’t do it here, this information is simply omitted here [referring to the defense of pederasty and the decriminalization of rape]. These professors were popular within the degree, within the bachelor’s, they were like the “intellectually superior” but in no case were they the most cited or the ones who did most research (Emilio).

When talking about the professor who hid Foucault’s defense of sexual violence, Sara explains that:

Students who declared their admiration for Foucault’s conception of power were immediately considered by this professor to be of a much higher intellectual level than the rest, even though they had never read a single book by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Habermas, or any of Foucault’s works. According to this very arrogant professor, intellectual level was given by his admiration for Foucault and not by reading and discussing the main theoretical works (Sara).

Even on the few occasions in which this professor participated in public debates, she states that:

I was told that some years earlier, he did a public debate with a progressive, feminist and very intellectual professor, he quickly ran out of arguments. There was a second debate in which that professor brought in a philosophy professor as reinforcement, but they both ran out of arguments. They did not want to participate in any more debates. In any case, I saw very clearly that both he and Foucault himself were not only sexist, but also very mediocre intellectually (Sara).

However, those who have read Foucault know that none of his proposals were transformative, as Miriam does. While studying her degree she participated in seminars with a professor who, despite not having read Foucault directly, was related to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. It was from this contact that she became interested in Foucault's idea of the porosity of power and read several of his works such as *Surveiller et Punir*, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, although she acknowledges that she has yet to read *Histoire de la Sexualité*. In her words:

Foucault is not critical, nor postcritical, he is an archaeologist, that's all. His intention was not to change anything. (...) Foucault is not someone who transforms anything (...). There are elements that are not sustained, that are not grounded, I think there were works such as the *Genealogy of Power*, which is a very great work, very good, but I think that as he advances in his works he is going down, his argumentation is no longer so deep, so archeological, etc. and he has been taken as a guru (Miriam).

### **Foucault, “The Transgressor”**

Part of academia has considered Foucault a reference author to make transgressive and groundbreaking analyses of social reality despite knowing that he defended power without any limits and that he never had any aim for social change. Manuel explains that a young researcher uses Foucault in his research work, despite having argued with him about Foucault's defense of

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rape and pederasty in his actions and work. However, even knowing this fact, the young researcher decides to continue using Foucault's work to present an analysis of power as a transgressive idea, to justify his position on the analysis of identities.

Along the same lines, Joao states that:

I saw Foucault as a conservative, which seemed very strange to me. But here in Brazil, everything arrives like that, in a hurry, like a fashion. At that time, we were transitioning from a dictatorship, and then all these texts came with great force... Foucault, Derrida... especially with great force in history (Joao).

Luisa, now a professor at a Brazilian university, explains that the Foucauldian discourse was non-existent in the 1980s when she and her colleagues studied the degree. However, among teachers and within Education, in the last 30 years the admiration for Foucault and his work has grown, which has ended up being dominant. In her words, the Foucauldian discourse “dominates the national organizations and those who do not follow the theory cannot present works. It is very widespread and for teaching positions as well”.

Similarly, this discourse has ended up dominating in journals and publishers, two areas of great relevance for those who decide to pursue an academic career to be university professors:

Here in Brazil Foucault's production has gained momentum in the 1990s and, especially, in the 2000s, there has been a change in Brazilian publishers and journals with the Foucaultian approach. I would say that it is currently the predominant approach in Brazil (Luisa).

In Spain too, Foucault was used by many university professors who saw power in all human relationships and everywhere and justified the need for violence to advance, for example, education. Andrés recalls the Foucauldian discourses of a group of professors who were known to be popular among the students in his bachelor's and who, despite not understanding anything they said, portrayed an image of groundbreakers. Now, among his colleagues, he also finds defenders of Foucault's work, as is the case of a

professor who defends violence, going so far as to affirm that even rights in education have been achieved thanks to violence while labeling those who criticize violence as moralists:

For example, with sexual options, with sexual orientation, they say “if it is heterosexual it is something obligatory”, that is to say, it is not something done in freedom, but when it is another type of orientation, then yes, it does have to do with freedom (Andrés).

Joao defines the 80s and 90s as “the fraud of the Foucauldian perspective and the postmodernists”. He considers that these theories have been discredited and lost the strength they acquired then, but that at that time, their influence was especially strong in academia:

The university professors (...), some embraced him, and then he had a huge influence because in history, especially in Brazilian history, the French historiographic current of the *Annales* had a very big influence, and Foucault was hooked to this current. He had a powerful presence in the university but not in the social movements... perhaps [he did] in the embryo of the LGTB movements... Foucault came to Brazil many times, hand in hand with a philosophy professor (...). To me, it has always seemed a very suspicious proposal because it annuls the subject (Joao).

Miren narrates that part of the student body is fascinated by some supposedly revolutionary university professors who use Foucault:

Under an “everything is relative” premise... there were colleagues who were fascinated by this postmodern discourse that does not contribute to improving society and solving such a severe problem as child abuse, but leaves the door open to continue destroying the lives of many children forever (Miren).

In addition, Claudia’s testimony shows the big and negative effects of Foucault's legitimation for the university’s intellectual level. She had a professor who had done his Ph.D. in the USA and who, in the words of the interviewee, “introduced us to Foucault as a very interesting, transgressive and very progressive author”. The atmosphere at her university was so

favorable to Foucault that she thought she could not go without reading *History of Sexuality* and bought one of his volumes when she went to conduct an Erasmus fellowship in London. Subsequently, she met critical professors of high intellectual level who presented evidence not only of how Foucault had defended rape but also of how much of his writings were his own witticisms already falsified by scientific research and by the rigorous reading of the main works on the subject.

### **Foucault, a “Relativist Intellectual” Widely Used as an Ally to Gain Supporters**

Júlia recalls that one of her professors became popular with a relativistic discourse that denied the idea of truth. This made it easy to do and say anything (anything goes) without the need to argue or act with ethical coherence between one’s ideas and practices, especially within the academic environment where, from a Foucauldian perspective, this demand for coherence would be interpreted as coercion:

Speaking of Foucault, the professor argued that everything was the same, that there was no absolute truth, defended his inconsistency and his practices, which were often not “normal” as a professor. This position led him to have an image of a “cool” person. Information about Foucault’s position on rape and pedophilia was hidden, so if he did it, nothing would happen, as Foucault said (Julia).

However, such a level of coercion towards Foucault’s legitimation cannot be understood without a favorable context that has been brewing for years and in which professors who have not read Foucault and other main intellectual authors actively participated. The testimony of Raul, a student of Philosophy in the 1980s, is especially revealing. He found an environment dominated by Foucault’s work where those who had a higher intellectual level were disregarded. With a great and diverse intellectual background, including the most important philosophical bibliography, he recalls that

I found myself in a Faculty of Philosophy where the Foucault-following faculty not only dominated but also considered the students who admired that author as very intelligent, and those who preferred

the work by authors such as Plato, Kant or Habermas, less intelligent, whether they were students or faculty. I was amazed at the very low theoretical level of the Foucaultian professors; not only did they recognize that they did not read the main classic works of philosophy, but their comprehensive reading of Foucault's works was very poor. (...) Well, at least it helped me to read the main works of Foucault and see that he was not only a supporter of sexual violence but also how he invented history and philosophy instead of reading it in first hand (Raul).

Moreover, the participants also referred to cases in which university professors who identified themselves with Foucault's postmodern theory and explained it in their classes justified pederasty publicly. Thus, Foucault's theory served to teach about unproblematizing child sexual abuse. Miren explained this when referring to a university professor of Sociology she had during her doctoral studies:

One of them explained his research line on sexuality and within it on sexual abuse of minors by adults. Based on the work of Foucault, he made a compelling defense that the social problem of this issue was when adults made a problem out of it by making children aware that it was something terrible. He would say things like "if they don't experience it as something bad, as something traumatic, why do we adults have to make them experience it as a problem? (...) It is society that turns these children into traumatized people with mental sequels" (Miren).

This same stance was reported by another participant, Rebeca, but in this case, she referred to the field of Communication studies:

In my first years as a professor of Communication Theories, a debate arose around the figure of Foucault. I presented him as a postmodernist author, who denied the value of science and ethics; everything was a question of power, according to the author. By showing his statements, his defense of the decriminalization of sexual violations and, therefore, of the sexual abuse of minors was evident. At that time, a student emerged in favor of Foucault and his position on abuse; according to him, a professor of another career defended in



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his classes the sexual abuse of minors as one more sexual option and was based primarily on Foucault. The student had assumed the positions of Foucault and the professor, mainly because everything was relative and “who decided what one could or could not do since everything was power?” The student was quite alone since the rest of the class perceived this position as absurd because, in reality, it was a defense of the abusers and a violent contempt for the girls and boys (Rebeca).

### **An Adequate Shield to Hide Behind**

Some participants shared that they thought some professors hiding Foucault’s defense of sexual violence talk about him and his work to justify and hide their behavior, either perpetrating sexual violence themselves or being allies of harassers. Not condemning Foucault’s behavior regarding rape and pederasty works to avoid questioning and condemning their own behavior as harassers or as allies of harassers. A graduate in Art History, Clara, deepened on this:

I think that a context has been generated in which nothing can be said about some authors, and I believe that having referents like these also serves some people to cover up things they do. I mean people who know what Foucault has done and justify it and cover it up... it’s great for them to have a person like Foucault who defended it and you don’t have to question what you do. And this is terrible, especially in the feminist movement, because of the enormous incoherence between what you say and what you do, which leads people not to trust the transformative power of that movement (Clara).

Similarly, Luisa attributes it to the fact that Foucault's theory represents a perfect alibi to justify one's own reprehensible actions:

How can they continue to admire him, knowing [that he has committed pederasty and rape]...? My analysis is that a small part of those people agree with that because it is a theory that has become very popular even to justify their own attitudes. I'm talking about both women and men: women who justify that love is nonsense and use the theory as a perfect excuse to abuse other people themselves. There are

very famous people I have worked with who are very incoherent in everything, and [Foucault's] theory helps them justify the incoherence (Luisa).

Andrés also referred to Foucault's defense of pederasty as an uncomfortable issue for some people. His testimony points out the refusal to continue talking about Foucault when the subject of his defense of pederasty within his work is brought up:

A couple of days ago talking with a colleague about this book on the history of sexuality, the conversation began with the seminar, well how interesting and so on, and then I said to him, "well we are now reading "The history of sexuality" which is very interesting", and I told him about this passage that talks about the industrial worker, well the industrial employee who abuses and is a pedophile and so on and well I realized that he did not want to continue talking about it... (Andrés).

In addition, testimonies such as that of Natalia highlight two fundamental aspects to understand the defense of an author who defended the decriminalization of rape and pederasty in his work and his life. On the one hand, these professors had not read Foucault nor other main authors. On the other hand, when faced with students who had read and questioned him, these professors used the only mechanism they had to impose themselves: to repress others using their academic status and their power of evaluation. This is what happened to Natalia during the reading of her Pedagogy thesis, when one of the professors who was part of the examining board accused her of not having read Foucault sufficiently and not having interpreted him correctly:

The anger with which he spoke to me was noticed not only by me but also by other people, including my family. I was shocked because I had worked with him for several years in his research group, and he had never read any of Foucault's works. Moreover, the interpretation of the quote that he considered incorrect was not mine but Chomsky's, as I had quoted in the text (Natalia).

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Arnau is a former graduate student in the literature field and is currently a teacher in an official language teaching center. During his bachelor's in the 90s, the figure of Foucault only appeared in one course, but without highlighting him above other authors. However, in the 2010s, he found him again in his master's, and in a very different environment where he was divinized. In his words:

They talked about Foucault here, Foucault there, the pendulum... and they started to make these head fucks... I mean, really, it was as if they were hallucinated, they talked a lot about him, but only about this work [Surveiller et punir] and basically among students and some professors, but basically among students. And it was a very revered thing, very reverential, as if talking about him gave status (Arnau).

Here it should be noted that mentioning the “pendulum” denotes a lack of knowledge about the work of Michel Foucault and shows that those who speak of it have not even read it, since Foucault’s pendulum has nothing to do at all with his work. Arnau explains that some of his colleagues talked about Foucault in order to flirt, showing they had not read Foucault nor other main intellectuals:

It was a matter of pontificating, rather than speaking or giving an opinion on such a thing. It was something to say to you: "wait, as he [Foucault] says, history, I don't know what, the pendulum, the swings...". Had they read it? Well, I don't think so, or at least not in depth (Arnau).

Maria was trained in law in the seventies, where she never heard of Foucault, nor during her teaching career as a law professor in a Spanish university. However, she did hear about him during her years of militancy in a political party identified as left-wing.

I have not read Foucault, and it rings a bell to me from references of other authors. From when I was reading something, for example in *El Viejo Topo*, which was a magazine we used to buy some time ago, and there were many references to Derrida, for example, to "modern" authors (...) To me, from the beginning, they were authors that seemed

to me very difficult to understand... Their discourse was that, very postmodern, that is to say, it was very far away for me (María).

Like other interviewees, when Maria is asked if those who had Foucault as a reference knew about his defense of pederasty and rape, she answers "I don't think so, they had no idea", although she specifies that she is referring to the people around her: "There would have been many people who did, who would have looked into his work and would have known [of Foucault's defense of pederasty], but the people around me did not". Even so, she also considers that if they had known about it, some would have continued to refer to Foucault (and Simone de Beauvoir) "because they had that halo of revolution, of rupture...".

### **Indeed, The “Intellectual Must Be Separated From The Person”**

Some testimonies collected explain the idea of the need to separate the work from the author to justify that the ideas defended in his books can be very transformative even if they do not correspond to his personal life. Joao points out that in some studies, such as in Philosophy, this separation is in great demand and explains that it is unfortunately very common in Brazil. However, he also points out that Foucault's work is clear, for example, in its defense of rape, and coherent with his actions:

It is very common with Foucault and others like Heidegger, for example. But when you read the book of the History of Sexuality, there I became very aware of what he defends, of rape, he has a conception of pleasure, as if the one who feels pleasure can do everything... and yes, people consider that those are different things... For me in History, Anthropology, Sociology, Linguistics, where I work more, there is this tendency to think that one thing is “the thinker” and another one is the person. Something totally contrary to what authors such as Paulo Freire, for example, said very clearly (Joao).

Likewise, Ruth studied Sociology and had a professor who defended pederasty and to whom Foucault provided a basis for defending “the right of children to feel pleasure”, thus vindicating sexual relationships with minors.

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In the interview, Ruth recalls the discomfort that these discourses generated in an academic degree that she had chosen with the motivation of working to contribute to the improvement of society:

I had a professor who defended pederasty and I was such a good student that I skipped his classes! Because I thought: 'I can't do this, what is this?' The first day of class... He said: "the right of children to feel pleasure". It was so disgusting! And he was showing off. Well, he and others like him were defending these people, but I think it was like an idea of: "I wish I could be like him". I think that since Foucault has been considered so much as a great author, many people have also wanted to be a great author or a great name, you know? I don't know if it was the case of this professor, but of course it is like: "I also defend what he defends to see if this way I get a little closer to being recognized for something" (Ruth).

Clara identifies the predominance of postmodern authors in her student days, especially in the field of Philosophy with which she had much contact through friendships (roommates). However, her testimony stating that Foucault's work has been considered a tremendous intellectual reference, separated from the author, by participants in social movements in the field of feminism, leisure education (esplai), and left-wing political parties is very relevant:

And later, in the esplai movements where I gave a training and talked about Foucault, a boy became very defensive of Foucault with the argument that in the philosophy course they were told that it was essential to separate the author from the work, that we cannot demonize them because if not, we are left without referents. Although it is known that they have done wrong things... it was necessary to separate and this, we have also seen it in artists (Clara).

Leire, currently a PhD student in Education at a university in the USA, explains that although Foucault is not included in most classes, he is present through some of the professors who are advisors of theses from a Foucauldian perspective. She is surprised to recall conversations with fellow doctoral students:

So that surprised me, like the calmness with which she said it [that Foucault defended pederasty and the decriminalization of rape] and then the calmness with which she defends this author. Like totally separating: one thing is that he defended this and the other thing is that he is a super smart and super important guy and that he has made a super great contribution to the Social Sciences. I mean, she didn't say it like that, but that's the feeling she had (Leire).

The lack of critical capacity may also explain the growing admiration for Foucault. Luisa expresses it: "New people have been hired who, at the beginning, it was more about an admiration towards a view they had never heard before about power relations. They seemed to be dazzled by an idea that seemed very intelligent to them". Luisa's testimony clarifies that this false image of Foucault is a key element to understand why an important group of professors end up supporting a discourse totally contrary to democratic values, equality and sexual freedom:

Another group that is larger, they join because it is a discourse that you think that way or you are not intelligent, you are naive, you are misplaced, you are authoritarian, you disguise your desire for power and you disguise it in transformation. Mainly people who were trained in that discourse behave by that dominant coercive discourse, they are afraid of not being seen as intelligent people, it is a trap. A famous example here is that of a 40-something teacher and a 16-year-old student, and their argument is that in Brazil we are freer in sexuality. (Luisa)

## **Discussion**

Teaching Foucault and hiding the author's defense of sexual violence, including pederasty, because of not having read Foucault's works or while knowing such defense but consciously deciding to hide it, means acting as hooligans of Foucault, that is, defending the author regardless of both his behavior and its human consequences, and the intellectual rigor of his publications. In this article, we have shown that many professors and authors who used Foucault and his work hid the fact that he defended the decriminalization of rape and pederasty. Portraying Foucault as the most

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critical thinker, the transgressor, and a “relativist intellectual”, while hiding his defense of sexual violence, contributes to perpetuating gender violence and child sexual abuse, two manifestations of sexual violence that Foucault pushed to be decriminalized. The social and academic implications of showing that these professors and authors knew this fact are important, both socially and academically.

Professors and authors who knew that Foucault had defended rape and pederasty but decided to hide it from their students or other audience and/or have not publicly acknowledged their error have ultimately supported harassers. This way, they have shown that one can act the way Foucault did and nothing will happen and, in turn, one can even get followers and become famous. Moreover, professors and authors doing this are lying to their students or audience, as they are consciously hiding crucial information from them.

Furthermore, participants stated that some professors and authors who knew that Foucault defended the decriminalization of violence and child sexual abuse have themselves done the same in their classes: support sexual violence as one more form of social relationship, considering that all social relationships are expressions of power for them. Some of these are university professors whose primary theoretical referent is Foucault, the starred postmodern and relativist author they explain in their classes. Of course, this not only legitimizes all kinds of sexual violence but also encourages it. In these cases, defending Foucault can become “a shield to hide behind”. That is, being a hooligan of Foucault, who defended the decriminalization of rape and pederasty, may have to do with oneself being related directly or indirectly with sexual violence, which can include its perpetration, protecting perpetrators, attacking victims, and/or harassing those who support victims, that is, perpetrating isolating gender violence (Vidu et al., 2021; Aubert & Flecha, 2021). When this occurs, the hooligan behavior can include insisting on the idea that Foucault, the intellectual, must be separated from the person of Foucault. Again, this separation can easily work to justify oneself. Overall, all these stances reproduce the same case as Althusser’s: saying that there is Althusser’s work on the one hand (despite their very poor intellectual level) and the fact that Althusser killed his wife on the other. There are many intellectual referents who are both brilliant academically and in their private life. Participants’ testimonies presented here could be

considered for understanding why some people might choose Foucault rather than many coherent authors.

### **Conclusion**

This article reports qualitative research that shows that many professors teach Foucault's work in universities hiding his defense of sexual violence, including rape and pederasty. As discussed, this has serious repercussions both for the academy (intellectual rigor) and for society. Moreover, and importantly, this research shows that teaching Foucault and supporting his work and persona while knowing his defense of sexual violence implies taking a personal stance regarding acts of sexual violence in society, such as rape and pederasty, about which Foucault wrote and acted to be decriminalized.

In a time when there is international concern about the social impact of the social sciences and humanities (Sordé Martí et al., 2020), community commitment to not praise authors who have defended any kind of violence in their academic work and life is crucial. Those authors' impact in the social realm is not only null in terms of eliminating social problems, but they have even worsened some of the most pressing and devastating ones, such as child sexual abuse. Yet this is not only what Foucault achieves, but also what others also contribute to by supporting Foucault's work and behavior while knowing and hiding the author's defense of sexual violence. This line of research requires more data of diverse nature to continue the inquire into these findings.

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