

REFLECTIVE GROUPS OF MEN WHO COMMIT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A DISCURSIVE READING FROM A FOUCAULDIAN PERSPECTIVE

GRUPOS REFLEXIVOS DE HOMENS AUTORES DE VIOLÊNCIA CONTRA
A MULHER: UMA LEITURA DISCURSIVA EM PERSPECTIVA

FOUCAULTIANAGRUPOS REFLEXIVOS DE HOMBRES AUTORES DE VIOLENCIA CONTRA LA MUJER: UNA
LECTURA DISCURSIVA EN PERSPECTIVA FOUCAULTIANA

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RESUMO: O presente artigo empreende, sob a ótica dos Estudos Discursivos Foucaultianos, uma análise acerca da emergência e da discursividade dos grupos reflexivos de homens autores de violência contra a mulher no contexto brasileiro. A investigação busca desvendar as condições históricas que possibilitaram a institucionalização desses grupos, bem como os processos de objetivação do sujeito participante e o regime de verdade que constitui o campo jurídico, tendo por finalidade analisar os efeitos de verdade e subjetividade dessas discursividades. Para tanto, o arquivo da pesquisa é constituído por um conjunto de documentos legais e regulatórios extraídos de normativas produzidas por instâncias do Poder Judiciário e por órgãos governamentais responsáveis pela implementação e regulamentação desses grupos. A fundamentação teórica explora conceitos-chave como a governamentalidade, o cuidado de si e a produção de subjetividade. O objetivo central é analisar a emergência dos grupos reflexivos como dispositivos de saber-poder, que não apenas intervêm na vida dos indivíduos, mas também produzem modos específicos de subjetivação masculina. Assim, este texto almeja contribuir para uma compreensão crítica desses dispositivos, cujos resultados apontam para a sua função estratégica na gestão contemporânea da violência de gênero, ao deslocar a mera punição para a reeducação e a transformação das condutas. Esta abordagem permite situar os grupos reflexivos como peças centrais na governamentalidade jurídica, evidenciando como o discurso, o poder e a subjetividade se entrelaçam na administração das populações e na produção das masculinidades em face das respostas sociais à violência

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Violência de gênero. Dispositivo. Subjetivação masculina.

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RESUMEN: El presente artículo emprende, bajo la óptica de los Estudios Discursivos Foucaultianos, un análisis sobre la emergencia y la discursividad de los grupos reflexivos de hombres autores de violencia contra la mujer en el contexto brasileño. La investigación busca develar las condiciones históricas que posibilitaron la institucionalización de estos grupos, así como los procesos de objetivación del sujeto participante y el régimen de verdad que constituye el campo jurídico, teniendo como finalidad analizar los efectos de verdad y subjetividad de estas discursividades. Para ello, el archivo de la investigación está constituido por un conjunto de documentos legales y regulatorios extraídos de normativas producidas por instancias del Poder Judicial y por órganos gubernamentales responsables de la implementación y reglamentación de estos grupos. La fundamentación teórica explora conceptos clave como la gubernamentalidad, el cuidado de sí y la producción de subjetividad. El objetivo central es analizar la emergencia de los grupos reflexivos como dispositivos de saber-poder que no solo intervienen en la vida de los individuos, sino que también producen modos específicos de subjetivación masculina. Así, este texto alienta a contribuir a una comprensión crítica de estos dispositivos, cuyos resultados apuntan a su función estratégica en la gestión contemporánea de la violencia de género, al desplazar la mera punición hacia la reeducación y la transformación de las conductas. Este enfoque permite situar a los grupos reflexivos como piezas centrales en la gubernamentalidad jurídica, evidenciando cómo el discurso, el poder y la subjetividad se entrelazan en la administración de las poblaciones y en la producción de las masculinidades frente a las respuestas sociales a la violencia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Violencia de género. Dispositivo. Subjetivación masculina.

ABSTRACT: This article undertakes, from the perspective of Foucauldian Discourse Studies, an analysis of the emergence and discursivity of reflective groups of men who commit violence against women in the Brazilian context. The investigation seeks to uncover the historical conditions that enabled the institutionalization of these groups, as well as the processes of objectification of the participating subject and the regime of truth that constitutes the legal field, with the aim of analyzing the effects of truth and subjectivity of these discourses. To this end, the research archive consists of a set of legal and regulatory documents extracted from regulations produced by the Judiciary and by government agencies responsible for the implementation and regulation of these groups. The theoretical foundation exploits key concepts such as governmentality, self-care, and the production of subjectivity. The central objective is to analyze the emergence of reflective groups as devices of knowledge-power, which not only intervene in the lives of individuals, but also produce specific modes of male subjectivation. Thus, this text aims to contribute to a critical understanding of these devices, whose results point to their strategic function in the contemporary management of gender violence, by shifting from mere punishment to re-education and behavioral transformation. This approach allows us to situate reflective groups as central pieces in legal governmentality, highlighting how discourse, power, and subjectivity are intertwined in the administration of populations and the production of masculinities in the face of social responses to violence.

KEYWORDS: Gender violence. Device. Male subjectivation.

1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the discussion of gender violence has occupied a limited space in political and social spheres, which, anchored in male domination, has ended up naturalizing violence and producing, as an effect of this naturalization, the subjectivation of women into accepting and tolerating multiple forms of violence, often treated as inherent to their condition, thus contributing to the silencing and perpetuation of these practices. According to Saffioti (2015, p.79), "it is obvious that society considers it normal and natural for men to mistreat their women, just as it is normal for fathers and mothers to mistreat their children, thus ratifying the pedagogy of violence." Despite Law 11.340/2006, better known as the Maria da Penha Law, turning 19 in 2025, the naturalization of gender violence and female guilt still remains in the social fabric.

In this context, we observe an alarming increase in violence against women in the country. Between 2022 and 2023, there was a 22.7% increase in reported cases, according to data from the 2025 Atlas of Violence . The survey indicates that physical violence is the most recurrent in reports, followed by sexual and psychological violence. According to the 2025 Brazilian Public Security Yearbook , 1,492 cases of femicide were recorded in 2024. The number of calls to the Military Police via the 190 hotline also increased, totaling 1,067,556 reports, equivalent to two calls per minute.

In light of this scenario, reflective groups (RG) have emerged as a response to this historical demand for an increase in violence against women in the country. These groups are based on legislation such as Law No. 11,340, of August 7, 2006 (Maria da Penha Law), which recommends the creation of spaces for education and rehabilitation for perpetrators of gender violence. In addition to this, Law No. 13,984, of April 3, 2020, establishes that the aggressor must attend recovery and re-education programs, in addition to providing for psychosocial follow-up through individual and/or group support services.

According to Hatje, Magalhães, and Ribeiro (2022, p. 26), “the law changed the understanding of punitive practices, transforming them from a repressive character to a pedagogical bias about the treatment of men who commit violence.” We understand, therefore, that these regulations, by being part of the legal field, outline the historical conditions that make the emergence of Reflective Groups possible, converting them into devices that articulate knowledge and regulate conduct within the social network.

Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze the emergence of Reflective Groups (RG) and the practice of legal governmentality. Specifically, we aim to: i) understand the historical conditions that make these groups possible; ii) describe the process of objectification of the perpetrator; iii) analyze the effects of governmentality produced by the legal statements that establish Reflective Groups, especially with regard to the conduct of behavior and the production of non-violent male subjectivities.

We start from the hypothesis that Reflective Groups of men who commit violence against women, when instituted by legal and normative statements, assume a strategic function within the diagram of knowledge-power relations, operating as devices of governmentality that shift the centrality of punishment to the continuous management of conduct, producing processes of objectification and subjectification of the perpetrator oriented by accountability, internalization of the norm, and the production of socially legitimized forms of masculinity.

In this sense, this article is theoretically grounded in Foucauldian Discursive Studies (2025 [1979], 2022, 2021, 2006), based on the notions of emergence, governmentality, and self-care, which allow us to understand these groups as spaces for the production of knowledge, the management of conduct, and the production of subjectivities within contemporary legal rationality. Given the description of discursive events, we pose a question of paramount importance for this study: “how did a particular statement appear, and not another in its place?” (Foucault, 2022, p. 33). Thus, we ask ourselves why Reflexive Groups rather than something else?

Finally, we organized the text as follows: in the first section, we address the historical conditions that made RG possible, articulating data and emblematic cases of gender violence that explain their emergence. Next, we discuss the theoretical foundation based on Foucauldian Discursive Studies, with an emphasis on the notion of governmentality and the strategic function of these groups. In the third part, we present analyses of materialities, organized into enunciative series, from which we examine the effects of knowledge-power and the processes of subjectivation. We conclude with final considerations that highlight the contributions of the study.

2 THE HISTORICAL CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY FOR REFLECTIVE GROUPS

Although the topic of violence against women may seem repetitive, the statistical data presented show that its incidence continues to grow. It is essential, however, to remember that this violence is not a recent phenomenon: it spans centuries, taking on different configurations according to historical and social contexts, but preserving a constant pattern of inequality and oppression. In different societies and eras, the pattern repeats itself: women continue to be the target of aggression, constraints, and practices that reinforce their subordinate social position.

By way of example, Virgili (2021 [2013], pp. 85-86) shows that:

At the beginning of the 20th century, French society was deeply unequal from a gender perspective. The essence of political, social, and family rights remained the preserve of men. It was also up to men to preserve this imbalance, to prevent "their women" (mothers, sisters, wives, daughters) from engaging in behavior that would disrupt the sexual order, and therefore the social order. It was up to men to ensure the good conduct of women, who were still considered, both legally and intellectually, irresponsible.

In line with this historian, Foucault (2021b), in his book *The History of Sexuality II*, also points out that, in ancient times, within a virile morality, women were seen as objects and "as partners who should be trained, educated, and supervised" (Foucault, 2021b, p.23). During this period, and continuing to the present day, women, being placed in a position of inferiority, remained susceptible to various forms of violence, such as psychological, physical, sexual, and patrimonial. In view of this, after long struggles by feminist movements, the legal field created laws to curb gender violence. However, as we saw earlier, the data show that cases of men assaulting women continue to grow.

In this article, the critical history of the present mobilizes a return to the past, not to reconstruct a chronological linearity, but to explain the conditions of possibility that make violence against women and the formation of reflective groups understandable. The analysis is based on the Foucauldian perspective, which conceives of "History as a methodological resource for (his) philosophy, or, in other words, the use of History as a tool for thinking about our present time and world" (Prado Filho, 2013, p. 88), mobilizing the past in the construction of "histories of the present."

To deepen this reading, it is essential to consider the different scales of events, which, although they coexist, have different scopes, chronological amplitudes, and capacities to produce effects of power. We will see below how crimes of domestic violence reported by the media operate at these different scales, requiring us to know how to "distinguish events, differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong" in order to then "reconstruct the threads that connect them" (Foucault, 2025, p. 40-41) and understand how they engender each other without forcing a fictitious continuity. From the perspective of discontinuity, these episodes cease to be mere linear records and come to be read as an "individualization of different series, which are juxtaposed, succeed one another, overlap, and intersect, without being reducible to a linear scheme" (Foucault, 2022, p.10), which, in their dispersion, allow us to describe the system that makes the emergence of GRs possible.

The first emblematic case is that of Minas Gerais socialite Ângela Maria Fernandes Diniz, who was shot four times on December 30, 1976, at her home in Praia dos Ossos, Búzios, by her boyfriend, São Paulo *playboy* Raul Fernando do Amaral Street, better known as Doca Street. According to the *Praia dos Ossos* Podcast¹, in the three years between the crime and the trial, a controversial narrative was constructed: despite being the perpetrator of the shooting, Doca was progressively portrayed as a victim, thanks to the thesis of legitimate defense of honor, mobilized by his defense at the time. This case was tried as homicide and, in the absence of specific legislation on femicide at that time, was classified as aggravated homicide (Art. 121, § 2, of the Penal Code). It was only in 2023 that the Federal Supreme Court (STF) recognized the unconstitutionality of using the defense of honor in crimes of femicide or assault against women.

Thus, for certain practices to be recognized as crimes, it is essential that there be a legal system that names, classifies, and punishes them. Violence, in this sense, only acquires the status of an offense when it is enshrined in law, which highlights the centrality of legal norms in protecting women and holding aggressors accountable. However, the emergence of these laws does not occur immediately or spontaneously, but results from historical processes marked by disputes, conventions, legislative proposals, and public debates that define which behaviors become punishable. According to Foucault (2005), the very notion of offense is conditioned by the existence of a law that recognizes and punishes violence.

The consolidation of Brazilian debates on violence against women cannot be understood in isolation, as it is part of a broader historical movement, led by feminist struggles on the international stage and driven, in particular, by the agendas formulated within the United Nations (UN). Over the years, multilateral organizations have come to play a decisive role in the production of normative frameworks that have forced states to recognize gender violence as a public issue and a violation of human rights.

¹ Available at: https://radionovelo.com.br/originais/praiadosossos/#_

Noteworthy in this regard is the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, known as the Belém do Pará Convention, adopted by the Organization of American States in 1994 and ratified by Brazil on November 27, 1995. This document was a watershed moment, establishing legal and political parameters that contributed directly to the formulation of Brazilian legislation and public policies, indicating that many of the national regulatory advances are the result of transnational processes of advocacy and protection of women's rights.

However, even before the Belém do Pará Convention, various international actions and debates were already driving the women's rights agenda. In 1945, the First UN General Assembly, held in San Francisco (USA), established a subcommittee dedicated to the status of women globally. The following year, this subcommittee gave rise to the Commission on the Status of Women, an institutional milestone that increased the visibility of gender inequalities. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reinforced, in its Article 2, the principle that all people have equal rights and freedoms. Over the following decades, new initiatives consolidated this trajectory. In 1963, the UN General Assembly called on member countries to draft a specific document on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. In 1980, Denmark hosted the Women's Decade Conference, accompanied by the Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations, both focused on advocating for women's full participation in social, economic, and political spheres. In 1981, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was enacted, consolidating international obligations in this field. Between 1990 and 1995, the UN implemented the Plan for Women and Development, the first initiative to assign each country concrete tasks for achieving common goals (Campos and Corrêa, 2012).

These events, taken in isolation, do not constitute a causal succession, but rather a historical regularity that functions as a condition of possibility for the emergence of violence against women as an object of knowledge, legal intervention, and political management. Far from being isolated facts or a linear evolution, they reveal a methodological strategy that "shows more dispersion and rupture than unity of discourse" (Prado Filho, 2013, p. 96), configuring a discursive bricolage in which the effect of unity is produced by practices and discourses of power that form a historical regularity and situate the crime analyzed as the effect of a historical network of practices, discourses, and devices.

The second case refers to Maria da Penha, a biochemist pharmacist who suffered assaults and threats during her relationship with Heredia Viveiros. According to Campos and Corrêa (2012), she was afraid to ask for a separation, fearing that the situation would worsen even further. In 1983, her abuser shot her in the back, leaving her paraplegic; two weeks later, he tried to electrocute her while she was taking a shower. Due to the slowness of the justice system, Maria da Penha petitioned the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (OAS) in 1998 against the Brazilian state for failing to comply with its international commitments regarding cases of violence against women. Consequently, the aggressor was only arrested in 2002. Discussions of this case culminated in the creation of Law No. 11,340 of 2006, better known as the Maria da Penha Law.

The Maria da Penha Law was amended by the enactment of Law No. 13,984/2020, which modified Article 22 to include two new emergency protective measures: (VI) mandatory attendance by the perpetrator in recovery and re-education programs; and (VII) psychosocial monitoring of the aggressor, carried out through individual counseling and/or support groups. Subsequently, Law No. 15,125/2025 included § 5 in the same article, establishing that, in the cases provided for, the protective measure may be combined with electronic monitoring of the aggressor, guaranteeing the victim a security device capable of alerting them to any approach.

Nevertheless, the creation of the Guidelines for the Implementation of Aggressor Accountability and Education Services² by the Presidency of the Republic and the Public Secretariat for Women is part of a broader movement inaugurated by the National Pact to Combat Violence against Women, launched in August 2007 by then-President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as part of the Federal Government's Social Agenda. Structured as a federal agreement between the Union, states, and municipalities, the Pact aimed to

² Available at: <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/navegue-por-temas/politicas-para-mulheres/arquivo/sobre/a-secretaria/subsecretaria-de-enfrentamento-a-violencia-contra-as-mulheres/pacto/servico-de-responsabilizacao-do-agressor-pos-workshop.pdf>

consolidate the National Policy to Combat Violence against Women through the coordination of integrated public policies throughout the national territory.

Four years after its implementation, during the preparation of the 2012–2015 Multi-Year Program (PPA) in the first half of Dilma Rousseff's administration, the Secretariat for Women's Policies (SPM/PR) conducted a critical review of the Pact, evaluating its implementation in the 27 states. It is in this context that the aforementioned Guidelines emerge, conceived as a response to the need to go beyond an exclusively punitive approach. Supported by the Maria da Penha Law and the discussions facilitated by the Pact, they were formulated by the SPM after the 2008 *workshop*, with the aim of guiding practices focused on reflection on masculinities, the deconstruction of gender stereotypes, and the educational accountability of perpetrators of violence.

This set of legislative changes and institutional guidelines, taken in their entirety, shows a historical regularity that shifts the confrontation of violence against women beyond strictly criminal rationality. This constitutes a field of governmentality in which the perpetrator of violence is produced as an object of knowledge and intervention, through mechanisms that articulate control, accountability, and practices of subjectivation, making the case under analysis historically possible.

Moving forward in time, we will now look at some more recent cases of violence against women. In 2023, model and TV presenter Ana Hickmann was assaulted by her then-husband, Alexandre Correa. In November 2025, Laís Angeli Gamarra was assaulted by influencer Thiago da Cruz Schultz, popularly nicknamed “Calvo do Campari” (Bald Campari). Countless other episodes of violence against women and femicide could be mentioned, spanning different social groups and showing that higher levels of male education are no guarantee against aggression. Such occurrences underscore the persistence of patriarchal structures that sustain this serious social problem. Similarly, it would be possible to retrieve various news stories about women (such as Anas, Marias, Cecílias) whose identities often remain hidden, reduced to notes that merely state that “a woman was beaten” or “murdered by her partner,” rendering their stories and unique characteristics invisible.

Thousands of women continue to suffer various forms of violence, such as the cases discussed here of Ângela Diniz and Maria da Penha, episodes that left indelible marks on their lives, their families, and the broader social fabric. As Foucault (2005, p. 81) states, “crime is not something akin to sin and fault; it is something that damages society; it is social damage, a disturbance, a nuisance to the whole of society.”

From this perspective, the critical history of the present compels us to look to the past in order to understand the emergence of reflective groups of men who perpetrate violence against women. These groups were strategically designed, with an educational orientation, to reduce the recurrence of such violence. The GRs operate in a heterogeneous network of discourses, practices, institutions, techniques, and knowledge that produce effects of truth and govern conduct. The analysis shifts the focus from the essence of the aggressor to an approach that “decenters the subject and shifts the problem of authorship, showing the production of subjectivity in the games of truth of knowledge” (Prado Filho, 2013, p. 96), understanding the perpetrator of violence as “effect, not cause — ‘subjects’ in the strong sense of the term: subjects of statements” (Prado Filho, 2013, p. 96) produced by this network.

To advance the analysis, it is necessary to explain how these groups are structured, constituted, and what their main specificities are, since prior understanding is indispensable to situate the reader in the field in which they operate. These groups are regulated by the National Council of Justice (CNJ) and implemented by Courts of Justice (TJ) in several states. According to Beira, Martins, and Hugill (2024), there was an increase in CRs throughout Brazil, from 312 in 2020 to 498 in 2023, an increase of 59.61%. According to the Guidance Booklet of the Federation of Community Councils of the State of Paraná (FECCOMAR)³ and Recommendation No. 124/2020 of the National Council of Justice, the groups must have at least eight two-hour meetings. The participants are men referred by the magistrate to serve part or all of their sentence for offenses related to domestic and family violence. The guide also

³ Available at: <https://feccompar.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Cartilha-Reflexiva-EDERACAO-DOS-CONSELHOS-DA-COMUNIDADE-DO-ESTADO-DO-PARANA-COM-AJUSTES-3-1.pdf>

states that the number of participants is at the discretion of the district. However, Beiras, Martins, and Hugill (2023)⁴ state that the maximum number should be 20 men, ensuring the possibility of individual expression with a minimum level of depth.

Thus, the man referred to the group first undergoes a screening with the team. It is worth noting that the theme of the meetings is pre-established, but there should be flexibility to address different themes according to their reality and needs. By understanding the constitution of these groups in advance, we can then shift our gaze to Foucault's theoretical framework, which will provide the analytical tools necessary for interpreting GRs as governmental practices that produce subjects and regulate behavior. In this sense, interpreting GR requires recognizing that archaeological analysis "takes knowledge in its positivity and not in its scientificity," treating "games of truth as games of power" (Prado Filho, 2013, p. 96). In this way, GRs are no longer seen only as an educational technique but are understood as a "discontinuous and unsystematic historical-political treatment of discursive practices in our societies" (Prado Filho, 2023, p. 97).

3 ON GOVERNMENTALITY

The emergence of Reflective Groups is analyzed from a Foucauldian perspective, mobilized as a theoretical-methodological lens for the observation and problematization of these devices, as practices traversed by relations of power-knowledge and processes of subjectivation. At this point, it becomes essential to shift the focus from the institutional description of RGs to the intelligibility of how they become possible, operate, and produce effects of truth within the scope of a discursive practice.

For Foucault (2022), discursive practice can be understood as the system of rules that establishes the limits of what can be said in a given historical and social context. It precedes the meaning of objects, as it organizes socially recognizable and acceptable signs, thus constituting a condition of possibility for the constitution of something as an object of discourse. Beyond its organizing function, discursive practice is also the set of anonymous and materially delimited rules that enable the production, reproduction, and repetition of statements in concrete reality. It is an articulation between discursive and non-discursive relations whose convergence delimits the contours of a discourse that is effectively in operation. Thus, discursive practice is not limited to being an event or structuring what can be said, but also regulates the ways in which statements emerge, circulate, and stabilize in specific discursive formations.

Given this, discursive practices operate as a political-discursive machinery that guides ways of perceiving, interpreting, and conducting subjects. Thus, Reflective Groups cannot be reduced to public policies, since they are part of the devices of governmentality that structure specific forms of intervention and production of behaviors. This perspective converges with Foucault's formulation that "the State is a practice. The State cannot be dissociated from the set of practices that effectively made it a way of governing, a way of acting, and also a way of relating to government" (Foucault, 2008, p.369).

Based on this understanding of the state as practice, it becomes possible to deepen the analysis by shifting the focus to the historical conditions of possibility that allowed the emergence of this modern form of governing. Foucault (2008) indicates that governmentality constitutes a calculated and reflective political practice whose matrix dates back to Christian pastoral care. From this perspective, Foucauldian Discursive Studies demonstrate that Christian pastoral care constitutes a matrix of modern governmentality, which allows us to understand how certain forms of conducting individuals precede and inform contemporary political technologies. Pastoral care introduces a specific type of power relationship: pastoral power. As Fernandes (2012) observes, pastoral power does not operate through the logic of hostility or punishment of the enemy, but through the guidance of individuals, directing them to act appropriately both towards themselves and others, that is, promoting their own well-being and that of others. We can infer that when a man commits violence against a woman, it highlights the disruption of this pastoral logic, marked by the inability to care for oneself and others, compromising the principle that underpins this form of guiding individuals.

⁴ Available at: <https://www.tjdft.jus.br/informacoes/cidadania/nucleo-judiciario-da-mulher/parceiros/mapeamento-nacional-ghav-2023.pdf>

It is essential to note that Foucault (2025 [1979]) in *Microphysics of Power* introduces the notion of governmentality by examining how security devices lead to a broader reflection on forms of government. In this journey, the author analyzes the triad of security, population, and government, showing that the exercise of modern power is not reduced to sovereignty but involves specific techniques for managing individuals and communities. In the book *Discipline and Punish* (2018), the focus is on disciplinary devices, which are essential for the production of docile and useful bodies. Although different in their functioning, both disciplinary and security devices are part of the process of standardization, even though they operate according to different logics.

It is important to note that discipline is not excluded by governmentality; on the contrary, it remains a fundamental part of the administration of conduct. However, the French philosopher identifies the emergence of a new triad—sovereignty, population, and government—in which security devices take center stage. To operate fully, these devices depend on a modern notion of freedom, understood not as the absence of regulation, but as a strategic condition that allows the government to define the boundaries between the public and the private, and between what is and is not the responsibility of the state, according to Foucault (2025 [1979]).

In this sense, in affective relationships, men and women have the freedom to organize their marital and family life (private sphere). However, this freedom finds its limits when violence manifests itself, at which point the state activates both security mechanisms to protect women and disciplinary mechanisms⁵ to hold the aggressor accountable. The implementation of the Maria da Penha Law shows how governmentality operates by demarcating the boundary between what can remain in the private sphere and what becomes subject to public regulation.

In this logic, mechanisms and governmentality are intertwined in a “power that is exercised positively over life, which undertakes its management, its increase, its multiplication, the exercise of precise controls and overall regulations over it” (Foucault, 2021a, p. 147). According to the author, this concept, unlike sovereign power, operates through “making live or letting die,” managing and investing in life, establishing “series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population” (Foucault, 2021a, p. 152). Therefore, we understand that Reflective Groups operate as biopolitical devices of governmentality.

4 REFLECTIVE GROUPS OF MEN WHO COMMIT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Previously, we examined the historical conditions that made reflective groups possible, governmentality, and the set of laws that supported their formation. Now, we turn to the analysis of the guides and manuals that guide their structure and functioning, instruments aimed at fostering new forms of conduct, producing subjectivities dissociated from patriarchy and aligned with non-violent masculinity. To this end, we selected the Guideline for the Implementation of Services for the Accountability and Education of Aggressors (2008), Recommendation No. 124/2022 of the National Council of Justice, a booklet (Booklet from the Rio de Janeiro Secretariat for Women), and a manual (Manual from the Federal District Court of Justice).

We use Foucault's theoretical-methodological tools (2022), thus, the enunciative series “composed for analysis have no linearity whatsoever, but regularity between the objects they refer to, the subjects who enunciate them, the medium in which they circulate, and the relationships established between these groupings” (Author, 2017, p. 55). Given this, the enunciative series are: Reflective Groups: pedagogy as a practice of power which analyzes GRs as practices of governing conduct through legal-pedagogical devices, and subject-aggressor, which examines the discursive processes of accountability and production of male subjectivities.

Reflective Groups: pedagogy as a practice of power :

⁵ According to Foucault (2025[1979]), the device has a strategic character, emerging in a specific historical context with the function of responding urgently to a specific demand.

- 1) the service is **mandatory and pedagogical** in nature and not welfare-based or aimed at 'treating' (whether psychologically, socially, or legally) the aggressor. (Guidelines, 2008, emphasis added)
- 2) Art. 1 Recommend to the State Courts of Justice that they establish and maintain programs aimed at **reflection** and awareness-raising among perpetrators of domestic and family violence, with the objective of implementing the emergency protective measures provided for in items VI and VII of the Maria da Penha Law (Law No. 11,340/2006). (Recommendation, emphasis added).
- 3) The fundamental point is understanding the **educational** and rehabilitative nature of the GRH. (Booklet - RJ, p. 15, emphasis added)
- 4) The practice of groups, however, has produced some important guidelines, such as the assertion that groups are not only for psychotherapeutic interventions, but also have an **educational** character, which can be transformative for those who participate. (DF Manual, p. 36, emphasis added).

The above statements represent the governmentality present in the legal discourse on GRH. Based on the regularity observed, they were divided into two blocks. The first and fourth statements reinforce the educational and pedagogical character of the judicial system, explicitly shifting the treatment of domestic violence from the strictly criminal field to the field of behavioral education. Both statements highlight the emergence of a governmental rationality that invests in the subjective transformation of the aggressor, producing him as a subject to be guided, (re)oriented, and permanently worked on. Thus, the management of the aggressor-subject operates through a meticulous investment in the production of new subjectivities and behavioral changes.

This logic is in line with Foucault's formulation that "to manage the population means to manage it in depth, meticulously, in detail" (Foucault, 2025 [1979], p. 428), indicating that the pedagogical devices mobilized by reflective groups are a fundamental part of this meticulous and capillary management of conduct. In line with Larrosa (1994, p. 58), "a pedagogical device will then be any place in which the experience of oneself is constituted or transformed. Any place in which the relationships that the subject establishes with himself are learned or modified." We can infer that reflective groups operate as spaces for the production of subjectivities, in which men who commit violence are called upon to reorganize their narratives about themselves, their affections, and their practices, according to regimes of truth legitimized by public policies to combat gender violence. In these spaces, the device acts at the level of self-experience, reconfiguring practices, affections, and discourses based on a rationality that seeks to align individual behaviors with certain social and gender norms, under the promise of transformation and accountability.

In this regard, the perpetrator is guided and objectified by the legal system, which inscribes them in a network of knowledge and practices aimed at identifying, classifying, and intervening in their behavior. According to Araújo (2001, p. 110), "the subject is objectified by epistemic practices," which, through the effect of regimes of truth, are taken as objects of knowledge and management. The author further states that "knowledge weaves relationships with a certain type of power, whose most noble product will be the normalized individual" (Araújo, 2001, p. 110), allowing us to understand that legal accountability goes beyond the punitive framework and is linked to a biopolitical rationality of government of populations. In view of this, normalization operates as a technology of power aimed at the manufacture of governable subjects, in conjunction with broader strategies of life management.

The second block, composed of the second and third statements – "recommend that the Courts of Justice establish and maintain programs aimed at reflection and awareness" and "the educational and rehabilitative nature promoted by the GRH" – shifts the focus from punishment to conduct management, placing the perpetrator in a regime of continuous intervention. By determining the creation and maintenance of programs of this nature, the State activates what Foucault (2025 [1979]) calls tactics of government, thus composing a device aimed at producing certain effects of truth on the perpetrator: they must be identified, referred, sensitized, and transformed.

This movement highlights a redefinition of the role of the judiciary, which ceases to act exclusively as a sanctioning authority and takes on the role of manager of educational and subjectivizing processes, in a manner characteristic of modern governmentality. This shift from punishment to behavior management is part of a rationality specific to modern governmentality, in which the individualization of subjects is a central condition for the exercise of power. As Prado Filho (2017, p. 316) points out, "modern society is a society made up of individuals," so that the objectification of subjects in our culture is achieved through the application

of individualization techniques that regulate the exercise of individuality itself. It is in this context that the statements that make up the second block, by recommending the establishment and maintenance of programs aimed at reflection, awareness, and rehabilitation, update a specific type of state intervention, guided less by specific sanctions and more by the continuous management of behavior. Thus, the judiciary begins to operate as an instance of government, articulating legal, pedagogical, and psychological knowledge⁶ to produce effects of truth that constitute the aggressor-subject as an individual to be permanently monitored, educated, and normalized.

In view of the above, the second series of statements deals with the perpetrator, who, through governmentality, seeks to guide behavior and produce new subjectivities not linked to violence against women. Let us look at the following:

- 5) The Accountability and Education Service should contribute to **raising awareness among aggressors** about gender violence as a violation of women's human rights and to holding them accountable for the violence committed. (Guidelines, 2008, p.2, emphasis added)
- 6) I – focus on processes of **reflection and accountability** for perpetrators of domestic and family violence against women; (Recommendation, emphasis added).
- 7) VI – promotion of **reflection** on gender issues, women's human and fundamental rights, and the social construction of masculinity; (Recommendation, emphasis added)
- 8) Reflection Groups with Men provide aggressors with the **opportunity to review their** actions, from a gender-transformative perspective, directly contributing to the analysis and management of emotions, breaking with rigid gender norms (based on deep reflections on what it means to be a man, socially), revising the way they relate to others based on **reinterpretations of** masculinities, and providing **rehabilitation** for men. (Booklet - RJ, p. 14, emphasis added)
- 9) In groups with men who are perpetrators of violence, as we will see below, the management affirms the need to stimulate **reflections that de-individualize the problem of violence**, causing participants to connect their reactions to broader social contexts that are subject to change (Manual DF, p. 24, emphasis added).

In line with the theoretical-methodological framework of Foucauldian Discourse Studies, reading the statements presented allows us to understand a set of discursive regularities that constitute the so-called GR as a strategic device for governing behavior. Thus, these are not mere technical or pedagogical guidelines, but statements inscribed in a specific discursive formation, traversed by relations of knowledge-power that produce certain modes of male subjectivation.

In statements (5), (6), (7), (8), and (9), the words "awareness," "accountability," "reflection," and "review" emerge, all referring to the perpetrator. Thus, the nouns used show that the perpetrator needs to take responsibility for the violent acts committed against women and, through this legal mechanism, transform his subjectivity away from violent masculinity. We will now delve deeper into the analysis.

In statement (5), gender-based violence is presented as a "violation of women's human rights," shifting it from the realm of private conflict to the public domain. This shift is fundamental because, by naming violence as a violation of rights, the discourse produces the aggressor as a subject responsible for ethical and legal wrongdoing, who must be led to recognize himself as such. It is a technology of power that operates less through direct punishment and more through the internalization of the norm, calling on the subject to accept the truth of himself as an aggressor and, simultaneously, as someone capable of correction.

This portrayal of the perpetrator as someone who has committed an ethical and legal offense is part of the historical functioning of judicial practices. These practices are understood by Foucault (2005, p. 11) as "social practices in which historical analysis allows us to locate the emergence of new forms of subjectivity." In this context, legal practices, or more precisely, judicial practices, stand out as the most important, given that these practices organize the ways in which man and truth relate to each other, which leads us to the production of subjectivity and forms of knowledge (Foucault, 2005). These regular practices, although historically mobile, constitute types of subjectivity and forms of knowledge that guide the way in which individuals are led to recognize themselves as

⁶ It is important to emphasize that there is a network effort to implement GR, and thus, certain areas of knowledge are part of this process, especially psychology. In this article, we will not delve into the networking efforts of different instances regarding these groups, leaving a gap that could be analyzed in future works.

responsible subjects. In this sense, accountability and education services update this functioning by shifting judgment to devices of continuous intervention, in which the aggressor is called upon to assume the truth about himself, narrate his actions, and govern his conduct.

Statement (6) reinforces this logic by establishing a “focus on processes of reflection and accountability.” Here, reflection appears as self-care (*epimeleia heautoû*). Foucault (2006, p. 7) defines this care as a constant exercise, in the philosopher's words, “you must take care of yourself, not forget yourself, take care of yourself.” In the same vein, Fernandes (2012, p. 79) states that “this care consists of rules aimed at conducting moral precepts, in principle, external to the subjects, but which must constitute them through the production of subjectivity.” Thus, accountability is not only a legal mechanism, but also has a bias toward the production of subjectivity, as it is expected that the perpetrator of violence will recognize himself as the agent of the act and incorporate a narrative about himself that aligns him with institutional gender norms and no longer practices violence.

In statements (7) and (8), the expressions “promoting reflection on gender issues” and “revising the way of relating based on reinterpretations of masculinities and providing rehabilitation for men” make explicit the epistemological status of the discourse: gender and masculinity are treated as objects of knowledge, subject to analysis, problematization, and intervention. This movement inscribes reflective groups in a biopolitical matrix, insofar as masculinity is no longer understood as a natural given and comes to be governed as a historical and social construction. At the same time, the aggressor-subject is invited to reconfigure his relationship with his own masculinity, producing a new subjectivity.

From this perspective, Foucault (2006) presents the concept of *gnôthi seautón* (“know thyself”), initially emphasizing that it is linked to *epiméleia heautoû* (care of the self). Subsequently, however, the author reformulates this position and emphasizes that it is something broader than a simple relationship of bond and subordination, thus assuming an essential role in the ethical constitution of the subject.

The philosopher points out that *epimeleia heautoû* should be understood as a prior and broader principle in relation to *gnôthi seautón*. In analyzing the figure of Socrates, he shows that self-care operates as the ethical foundation of existence, establishing a permanent restlessness that calls on the subject to monitor and question their way of life. From this perspective, self-care is not presented as merely a condition of possibility for self-knowledge, being later taken up by traditions such as Stoicism, the Cynics, and authors such as Epictetus, who reaffirm its centrality in the ethical practices of Antiquity.

From this perspective, the aggressor is called upon to know himself (*gnôthi seautón*), being led to a critical reinterpretation of what it means to be a man, in order to reconfigure his ways of relating to himself and others towards non-violent social practices. From this same perspective, Reflective Groups can be understood as contemporary devices that, in another historical and institutional register, seek to reinscribe the principle of self-care. By promoting practices of reflection on their own conduct, these groups aim to produce subjective shifts that articulate self-governance with communal life and the legal field, since self-regulation emerges as a condition for social coexistence and for confronting violence against women.

Finally, statement (9) introduces a significant shift by affirming the need for “reflections to de-individualize the problem of violence,” connecting the actions of participants to broader social contexts. This legal discursive movement removes the strictly individualizing logic of accountability and reinscribes violence in a historical and social field. However, this de-individualization does not eliminate accountability; on the contrary, it problematizes it. The subject continues to be called upon to transform themselves, but now under the justification that their actions are effects of a social structure that needs to be changed. Governmentality, therefore, has a sophisticated *modus operandi*: by recognizing the structural dimension of violence against women, it further legitimizes its intervention on perpetrators, in the interest of social transformation.

Together, these statements form a knot in the discursive network that produces the perpetrator of violence as a governable, reflective subject capable of re-education. The goal of governmentality, in this case, is not limited to containing violence, but to engendering socially legitimized forms of masculinity. According to Foucault (2025 [1979]), it is possible to affirm that we are dealing with a device that articulates knowledge (gender, human rights, psychology), practices (reflective groups, self-care, self-reflection), and institutions (state, justice, public policies), aiming to guide behaviors and manufacture subjects adjusted to a certain normativity regarding gender, violence, and citizenship.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of the legal and normative statements that establish Reflective Groups with men who commit violence against women has highlighted their inscription in a specific rationality of conduct governance, inherent to modern governmentality. Far from being a neutral or merely technical response to the phenomenon of gender violence, this device emerges as the effect of a discursive field in which legal, pedagogical, and moral knowledge are articulated, producing particular modes of subjectivation of the aggressor.

By reconstructing the historical conditions that made these groups possible, it was demonstrated that their institutionalization shifts the focus from strict punishment to continuous, meticulous, and preventive management of male behavior. In this movement, the aggressor-subject is objectified by judicial practices that constitute him as a target for accountability, reflection, and re-education, establishing processes of subjectivation guided by the internalization of the norm.

Discursive analysis has also highlighted that Reflective Groups operate as strategic devices that produce governmental effects by reinscribing violence in the domain of governing oneself and others. The functioning of these groups reveals an exercise of power that is based less on direct coercion and more on the incitement of reflexivity, through the pedagogization of experience and the production of governable subjects, in line with a biopolitical rationality focused on the management of collective life.

Thus, the initially formulated hypothesis is corroborated, since Reflective Groups are configured as devices of legal governmentality that, by shifting the centrality of punishment to the management of conduct, produce effects of objectification and subjectification of the aggressor. The emergence of these devices therefore confirms the inseparable intertwining of discourse, power, and subjectivity, reaffirming the central role of legal practices in the contemporary production of ways of being, acting, and governing.

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