

Bodies, genders and sexualities: from marginalization to the eroticization of transgender women

Cuerpos, géneros y sexualidades: de la marginación a la erotización de las mujeres transgénero

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doi: 10.20318/femeris.2023.7467

Abstract. This work presents a discussion about the corporeality of transvestites and transsexuals, seeking to understand the course of the historical transformation of gender in different cultures, as well as showing how in some beliefs transgender people are considered divine. The research method used was the bibliographic review, and interviews with transvestites and transsexuals from the city of Palmas - TO. The work was carried out from May to December 2019, with testimonies about the life and confrontations of the participants. The research aims to highlight the studies of culture, gender and sexuality, describing the participants' personal experiences and their relationship with their trans bodies, presenting their daily experiences and difficulties, relating to their identification processes, contrasts of non-identification with the opposite gender and the divine.

Keywords: Transvestites. Transsexuals. Body. Sacred. Marginalization.

Resumen. Este trabajo presenta una discusión sobre la corporeidad de travestis y transexuales, buscando comprender el curso de la transformación histórica del género en diferentes culturas, además de mostrar cómo en algunas creencias las personas transgénero son consideradas divinas. El método de investigación utilizado fue la revisión bibliográfica y entrevistas con travestis y transexuales de la ciudad de Palmas - TO. El trabajo se realizó de mayo a diciembre de 2019, con testimonios sobre la vida y enfrentamientos de las participantes. La investigación tiene como objetivo resaltar los estudios de cultura, género y sexualidad, describiendo las experiencias personales de las participantes y su relación con sus cuerpos trans, presentando sus experiencias y dificultades cotidianas, relacionadas con sus procesos de identificación, contrastes de no identificación con el género opuesto y lo divino.

Palabras clave: Travestis. Transexuales. Cuerpo. Sagrado. Marginación.

1. Introduction

Brazil was pointed out in a report as the country that most consumes trans pornography in the world, but has remained at the top of the world ranking of murders against transgender people for more than ten years. It is an ambiguity to be desired and in some cases even "adored" by cisgender men, but suffer so many prejudices daily.

Most transvestites and transsexuals are forced to have prostitution as their only means of work. Throughout their lives, any transvestite or transsexual will suffer some form of prejudice, including in religious temples. Few religions allow transgender people to participate in their activities.

This article makes a brief conceptualization of gender, presenting the difficulties experienced by transvestites and transsexuals, making an analogy between sex and the sacred, the problem of this research being the duality of transgender bodies, and how this directly affects transgender people in their experiences daily.

2. Methodology

The methodology used for this article was a bibliographic review of articles, dissertations, as well as interviews with transvestites and transsexuals from the city of Palmas - TO. A semi-structured questionnaire was applied, in which the participants signed an informed consent form.

3. Theoretical reference

Today's society still classifies sexuality as a big taboo. But what many do not realize is that the more people do not have knowledge on the subject, they end up making many people suffer, through prejudice. It is necessary to talk about this topic, because sexuality has several manifestations, and for us to talk about it, it is necessary to know the differences between gender, gender identity and sexual orientation.

For biology, sex is divided into: male and female. There are people who are called intersex, because they have both genitals (penis and vagina), but it is very rare. Biological sex is defined by hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and also chromosomes. (Simões and Facchini, 2009).

Gender is defined as feminine and masculine, as categories constructed by society. The genres cover the practices that are attributed to human beings, by virtue of the reproductive apparatus they have. Sexism is the practice that is practiced in all societies, being the one that defines behaviors, clothes, professions, according to the gender assigned to the person as soon as he is born.

Gender identity is the gender to which a person identifies. An example is when an individual who was assigned male at birth, but identifies with the opposite gender, female. There are cases where individuals identify with both genders, or with neither. Transgender people are those whose gender identity differs from their biological sex. There are MTF transgenders (male to female) and FTM (female to male). When an individual identifies with their biological gender, we call them cisgender.

Finally, sexual orientation is related to affective-sexual attraction. Sexual orientation is divided into heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and has other variables, and is not necessarily fixed.

When we talk about heteronormativity, we are relating to the context that society expects all people to be heterosexual, and discriminates against any other form of sexual orientation, also repressing them, based on their cultural norms. (Louro, 2013).

Jaqueline Jesus (2012), a researcher from Brasilia on gender and sexuality, in her guide called "GUIDES ON GENDER IDENTITY: CONCEPTS AND TERMS", brings a glossary of inclusive terms:

Gender: Personal and social classification of people as male or female. It guides gender roles and expressions. Regardless of sex. **Gender Identity:** The gender that a person identifies with, which may or may not agree with the gender they were assigned at birth. Different from the person's sexuality. Gender identity and sexual orientation are different dimensions that cannot be confused. Transgender people can be straight, lesbian, gay, or bisexual, just as much as cisgender people. **Cisgender:** An "umbrella" concept that encompasses people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. **Transgender:** An "umbrella" concept that encompasses the diverse group of people who do not identify, to different degrees, with the expected behaviors and/or roles of the gender they were assigned at birth. **Transsexual:** Generic term that characterizes a person who does not identify with the gender assigned to him or her at birth. Avoid using the term in isolation, as it sounds offensive to transgender people, as this is one of their characteristics, among others, and not the only one. Always refer to the person as a transgender woman or a transgender man, according to the gender they identify with. **Transphobia:** Prejudice and/or discrimination based on the gender identity of transsexuals or transvestites.

3.1 Travestility and Transsexuality: Exclusions and Inequalities

Transgender people, which in this study we will deal particularly with transvestites and transsexuals, are people who have a body with a reproductive system different from their psychological one, and who are a minority in society, given that they are not accepted in almost any social environment.

Transsexuality is a gender identity, and cannot be linked to a mental illness, or contagious, much less as a perversion. Many people also believe that because a person is a transgender woman, she necessarily "likes men". We cannot forget that gender identity and sexuality are completely different things. It is necessary to carry out a clarification regarding gender and sexual orientation. The two terms cannot be understood as linked to each other. According to Jesus (2012):

Gender refers to ways of identifying and being identified as male or female. Sexual orientation refers to the affective -sexual attraction to someone of some gender. One dimension does not depend on the other; there is no norm of sexual orientation depending on people's gender, so not all men and women are "naturally" heterosexual. The same can be said of gender identity: it is not reality to think that everyone is naturally cisgender. Like other people, a trans person can be bisexual, heterosexual or homosexual, depending on the gender they adopt and the gender they are affectively attracted to: transsexual women who are attracted to men are heterosexual, just like their partners; transgender men who are attracted to women are also.

Today's society is very sexist and very heteronormative, treating transgender people as sick. Any and all people who have experiences outside of heterosexuality are labeled wrong. There are rulers who belong to a political group that fight directly against the rights of LGBT people, trying to prevent any effort to create public policies that improve living conditions for this part of society.

Reading Foucault (2010) we realize that this exclusion refers to ancient times, when women were treated as slaves, excluded from the spheres of society and politics. Transgender people have also been deprived of their rights when we relate them to their constructions of identity within their sexualities.

For Silva (2006) throughout the history of humanity there have always been oppressive minorities. Women, in turn, have always been educated for housework and raising children, and a woman was always expected to leave her home to marry and raise a family. Sexual minorities have always been ghettoized and silenced. (SILVA, 2007). Groups that did not fit into the heteronormative culture were always despised by the church and justice.

It is only in the last fifty years that there have been significant changes for minorities such as gays and lesbians (Silva, 2006). Regarding the population of transvestites and transsexuals, Jesus (2012) tells us that:

A part of transsexual people recognize this condition from a young age, others belatedly, for the most different reasons, especially social ones, such as repression. The truth is that no one currently knows why someone is transgender, despite the various theories. Some say that the cause is biological, others that it is social, others that it mixes biological and social issues. A transgender woman is any person who claims social and legal recognition as a woman.

Transvestites and transsexuals are still executed, they are forced to undergo several humiliations during their lives, there are no specific laws that protect them, especially having to go through many embarrassments and harassment wherever they go. An alarming fact is that Brazil is the country that kills the most transvestites and transsexuals on the entire planet (Cunha, 2016). Machismo, in turn, continues to grow and is perpetuated in Brazil, a recent example being the speech of many politicians in their campaigns, preaching hatred for LGBT people and minorities. The State has the duty to end social inequalities. Without his direct participation, it is not possible for such rights to be established. According to Rui Barbosa:

The rule of equality consists only in apportioning unequals unequally, insofar as they are unequal. It is in this social inequality, proportionate to natural inequality, that the true law of equality is found. The rest are ravings of envy, pride, madness. To treat equals unequally, or unequals with equality, would be flagrant inequality, not real equality. (Barbosa, 1999, p. 26)

Thus, Santos (2009) tells us that social inequalities and values must value equality in the face of differences:

An emancipatory human rights policy must be able to distinguish between the struggle for equality and the struggle for the equal recognition of differences, in order to be able to fight both struggles effectively [...] We have the right to be equal when difference makes us inferior; we have the right to be different when equality mischaracterizes us. (Santos, 2009, p. 15, 18)

Transgender people are not in the same social position as cisgender men and women, not having the same strength, let alone the same opportunities. For most people, of any social class, each and every transvestite is a sex worker, and is always marginalized. There are no spaces for transgender people in the formal job markets, and when many try to look for jobs, they are always denied a job, no matter how well qualified they are.

Many transvestites suffer from having a physical appearance that is not fully feminized, as well as the prejudices imposed by religions, especially those of Christian origins. This relationship of domination exercised by the churches helps in discrimination, as it is "(...) impossible to isolate the responsibility of each of the systems of domination (...) for the discrimination practiced daily". (Saffioti, 1987, p. 62).

Thus, all these elements presented form the social construction of gender schemes, and from these multiple identities are produced (Buttler, 2002). Transgender people all over the world struggle with labels of abnormal or non-standard behavior imposed by society, which is the heteronormative standard. We cannot accept that normality is based on a single social standard, given the sexual diversity that exists everywhere. (Guasch, 2000; Silva; Barboza, 2005).

3.2. Sex as a way to the sacred

Human beings have the incessant quest to understand sex, we are made through sex. Throughout history and in art, there are depictions that reveal how human beings have a true obsession with sex. Religions have always polemicized sex, as well as the "sex of angels" and deities, being the result of investigations by theologians, on the essences, male and female.

It is interesting to note the Christian vision in which there is the dogma of the Trinity in which the Father generates the Son, and from this love a third person emerges, the Holy Spirit. The feminine side of Christian divinity is the presence of Mary as the Blessed Mother. (Valadolid, 2002)

In other so-called pagan cultures, we can also notice the sexual presence in the gods, and gods of sex and eroticism such as Aphrodite, in which their priestesses performed their worship rituals having sex with the worshipers of this goddess, who in Roman culture is known as Venus.

Kundalini is an ancient Indian belief in the energy of creation, installed in the body of every human being, known as the sustaining energy of life. About Kundalini:

Kundalini awakening affects the entire domain of the human mind and human behavior. Kundalini is not a myth or an illusion. This is not a hypothesis or hypnotic suggestion. Kundalini is a biological substance that exists within the structure of the body. Its awake-

ning generates electrical impulses throughout the body and these impulses can be detected by modern scientific instruments and machines. Kundalini is the name of a potential force dormant in the human organism and located at the root of the spinal column. In the male body it is in the perineum, between the urinary and excretory organs. In the female body it is located at the root of the uterus, at the cervix. (Satyananda, 1996)

In all ages, human contact with the divine has been segmented. Sex was and still is a gateway to connecting with the sacred, and there are techniques to make sex a sacred exercise, such as tantric sex, for example. Sex, as this gateway, was closed so that humans would not have this direct contact with the sacred. Before Christianity, sex was seen as access to the sacred, but later it became a sin if performed outside the scope of marriage.

Currently, there are *hijras*, who are people, mostly born male, but who recognize themselves as women, and who give up a sexual life, in exchange for the powers of Hindu deities. Hijras have the powers of both blessing and cursing, and are often invited to perform at wedding parties. They are a great example of the fine line between the sacred and marginalization, as it is very common to see them prostituting themselves in India, as they are considered a sub-caste. (Da Silva Correa, 2020)

Sex is still a social taboo, and many people avoid talking about sex, often thinking of its pejorative side. However, when this word is used we already associate it with something dirty, or unpronounceable, not representing what sex really is originally in all human cultures.

As sex is a possible path to the divine, it is extremely linked to spirituality, being the simplest path, however, sex is something sacred. Sex without commitment cannot be called promiscuity, when we take into account that sex is sacred. It connects two people, makes them unique even for small fractions of time. Deist or atheist cultures and religions present sex in its sacredness, within relationships of true love, in communion with the god they adore.

Sexuality has always been something very stigmatized in human history. The theorist Foucault considered that the history of sexuality within the mechanisms of repression suffered two breaks:

One occurred during the 18th century: the birth of the great prohibitions, exclusive valorization of adult and marital sexuality, imperatives of decency, mandatory avoidance of the body, restraint and imperatives of language modesty. The other took place in the 20th century, when the mechanisms of repression began to loosen; it would move from imperious sexual interdictions to a relative tolerance with regard to preuptial or extramarital relations; the disqualification of the wicked would have been attenuated and their condemnation by the law eliminated in part; the taboos that weighed heavily on children's sexuality would have been largely eliminated (Foucault, 1988, p. 109).

Thus, Foucault demonstrates that sexuality is not seen as something natural, and is shaped according to the customs of societies and also cultures. Mainly, the culture of a people is what will define whether a sexual practice is adequate or not, within each context, as a reference standard. An example is bisexuality for the Greeks, who defined the aesthetic (beauty) point for sexual desire, regardless of whether the person was male or

female. It is impossible to standardize the sexuality of individuals no matter how much society creates a standard. According to the Brazilian Ministry of Health (2006):

Sexuality constitutes a fundamental dimension in the entire life cycle of men and women, which involves practices and desires linked to satisfaction, affection, pleasure, feelings, the exercise of freedom and health. In this way, it is a historical, cultural and social construction, and it transforms as social relations change. But, unfortunately, in our western society, it was historically and culturally limited in its possibilities of living, due to taboos, myths, prejudices, interdictions and power relations.

Based on this statement, there is a need to demystify taboos, and to know sexuality in a more natural way. Nevertheless, sex is one of the most discussed topics in the world, as well as female empowerment. With so many cultural transformations Cano and Ferriani (2000) report that:

In her new role as an independent woman, she has competed on many grounds with the man and has increasingly taken her place, whether in the arts, literature, industry or sports. These cultural and moral transformations have caused numerous new social problems or have aggravated existing ones such as: prostitution, abortion, homosexuality, marital maladjustments, divorce and others. With this, the "cell" of society that is the family suffered serious shocks, which made researchers and scientists study the problem of sexuality in depth, reformulating concepts and responding to problems of sexual relationship through numerous scientific texts.

Because sex is something very stigmatized, it is necessary for people to understand that sex is perfectly linked to the vital functions of the body, and should be seen in a more natural way. The sexual act needs to be further explored because the world goes through constant changes, and there are many dysfunctions and problems in sexual relationships, because of the taboos established in the social environment.

4. Results and discussion

In the interviews with the participants, they reported their daily experiences, in which some excerpts will be transcribed below:

Interviewee 1 - It's not a question of us being victims, but society already imposes that every trans person is obliged to do a program. Because they don't have public policies aimed at them, they tend to do just that, to make a program, understand? We suffer a lot of bullying at school, there is prejudice in the matter of work between a straight person and a trans woman, if there is only one vacancy they will give it to a straight person, because they think that the trans person has no education, which of course most of them are not to blame huh.

Interviewee 2 - This is very relative, some people call you by your social name, treat you normally, others say that this is a phase, others preach religion, that it is not written in

the Bible, and that this is wrong, but a very small part, accepts you and respects you as you see yourself. We “kill a lion every day”, we take it.

Interviewee 3 - People are not prepared... for them it's always that thing: it's a man or a woman. You are judged by your sexuality or by the stigmas you carry for being a transvestite.

5. Final considerations

This work sought to understand the relationship between the trans body, a body that is different from the others, as it undergoes several transformations, sexually desired by many men. They are bodies that attract a lot of attention, as they approach perfection. This approach to the perfect brings them closer to the sacred and the divine.

Society cannot go beyond the line of stability, and rejects what is different, stereotyping, and often condemning transgender people, often using religion as a form of oppression. Thus, transvestites and transsexuals build in their own bodies, their sanctuaries and their “sacred”.

Gender transformation, which often begins in adolescence, makes the transgender body a symbolic place, with marks of struggle and resistance, physical and psychological changes. The trans body makes the transgender person have the burdens and bonuses of this transformation, that is, adoration and desire, in contrast to prejudice and violence.

There are still many public policies for trans people in the areas of education, health and public safety. But trans body transformation incurs many positive meanings, increasing transgender people's self-esteem and happiness, in contrast to all difficulties.

To be a transgender woman is to transit between the sacred and marginalization on a daily basis. Being practically adored, praised every day, attracting looks of desire wherever you go. But there is also marginalization, where most people are afraid of transvestites and transsexuals, being considered stallholders, or walking into a store and being mistreated because their appearance is not passable. But being transgender is being human and transiting on another plane, a sacred duality, in a sexist, misogynistic and transphobic world.