

# THE AMBIGUITY OF SCHOOL EDUCATION: REFUSES AND POSSIBILITIES TOWARDS TRAVESTILITY

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## **Abstract**

*Based on the assumption that the relationships between education and sexual identity always present themselves in prohibitions, ardors and prejudices, the present work aims to analyze how school education, as a process of transmission of human culture, reproduces sexual typologies that (re)affirm the bases of capitalist society, maintaining a process of reproduction of heterosexuality and male chauvinist that, by these principles, denies the possibilities of development of diverse sexual identities. However, we still discuss how this same institutionalized education, because it contains in its presuppositions the paradigms of contradiction and ambiguity, allows the development of Higher Psychological Functions, which allow the development of human consciousness and, consequently, the development of possibilities towards identity sexual. Thus, even if formal education denies the possibility of being a transvestite, it is (only) for it that we have the possibility of developing and affirming a transvestite sexual identity!*

**Keywords:** School Education, Sexuality, Social-Historical Psychology, Travestility.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The questions about sexuality and particularly the issues involving sexual identity and education have always been surrounded by prohibitions, prejudices and ardor of all kinds, especially under morality and religion. Add to this the imperative of what is now called politically correct, and we realize that we will have a very narrow way to talk. So, In order to analyze the relationship between sexual transvestite identity and the process of formal education, we consider it necessary to take García (2001, p. 57) as an indicator, when he writes that "the sexual identity of each human being is constructed in the history of their relations, not being a mere biological determination subject, in some cases, to failures that produce aberrations".

This consideration is necessary because we understand that the construction of any sexual identity, and specifically the transvestite, is permeated also by the ethical and moral values of a certain society, which are apprehended by the subject and permeate their development. And in the meantime, education is one of the social factors that intervene for the individual to develop his sexual identity. That is, this is a process of constructing essentially human, non-natural characteristics that allow the subject to exist and act in reality. Among such characteristics is transvestility, which emerges as a possibility of identification in the sexual sphere.

Therefore, education is a process that aims at the transmission of culture, and consequently, it is as a result of this that we visualize the construction of sexuality. However, if we consider that education transmits cultural constructions according to the demands of the context in which it is developed, we also need to safeguard that sexuality is always constrained by the possibilities that the historical moment and the social group itself will enable for the development of a specific sexual identity, a delineation mainly represented by the school universe.

## 2. EDUCATION AND SEXUALITY: POSSIBILITIES AND IMPEDIMENTS TOWARDS TRAVESTILITY

Taking historicity as an analytical category, we can observe that the biological organism has been qualitatively overcome by the appropriation of social constructions, an aspect made possible by education. This is because it is an instrument created by society to provide the development of particular individuals. Therefore, it is in education that we find the references not only to the structuring of a sexuality based on biological sex, but also to a construction that advances in an eminently social and historical understanding of the sexual base.

We observe that sex, which has as one of its basic functions the reproduction of the species, in the process of humanization loses the exclusivity of this biological determination and becomes part of a complex mechanism of expression of the social and symbolic relations of man, called sexuality. Thus, when we study sexuality, and particularly the transvestite sexual identity in a social-historical perspective, we understand the sexual development within a certain society and social group that regulate biological reproduction, making sexual experiences or behaviors possible generalizations. That is, they are based, as a rule, on the mechanism responsible for the control and maintenance of the current system, which aims, *a priori*, to maintain the heterosexual relations between the members of the species aiming at procreation.

Because of their historical character, these cultural systems carry ideologies, which leads to specific behaviors associated with each sex (or gender). Therefore, any impasse in these constructions leads to prejudices and labeling, ending in the expression of a social characteristic called sexism, that is, a set of stereotypes about the appearance, acts, abilities, emotions and appropriate role in society according to sex. And the responsibility for the maintenance of this characteristic is given precisely by a sealed vision of sexuality, considered only in relation to human reproduction.

In Western society, sexism turns into heterosexism, in the belief that all heterosexual persons are by nature superior to homosexual and bisexual people, and consequently, by imposing all sexual relations to be heterosexual. Thus, heterosexism qualifies as being ingrained and characteristic of the most important social, cultural and economic institutions (Herek, 2004). And education being one of the social institutions, it reproduces such characteristics, specifically in the configuration of schooling, which is a form of institutionalized education.

Thus, the relationship between education and sexuality is seen as a double bias: it is through education that we have the possibility of developing a sexual identity because it represents simultaneously an advance in the participation of the sociocultural achievements that our civilization has achieved, that is, in the possibility of understanding of sexuality as a social-historical construction; However, it is in the very institutionalization of education that we observe the maintenance of the principles, ideology and cultural constructions that hinder the development of transvestite as a sexual identity. The process of schooling thus aims at maintaining heterosexuality.

In order to guarantee this reproduction, school education organizes its activities and the relations of individuals with determinations aimed at maintaining and defending the hegemonic interests of society, thus evidencing the possible causes by which subjects with transvestite sexual identity interrupt their schooling, as this process subjugates them to the dictates of heterosexism. However, when they leave school, these subjects lose the specificities that education offers in the construction of psyche, radically altering the way in which the processes of learning and development of cultural contents, and among them, the modes of manifestation of one's own sexuality take place.

Faced with this denial of transvestite represented in education, we still consider a situation: why a subject with a transvestite sexual identity, who even permeated by the whole process of social violence in school education due to the characteristics and social functions of education mentioned above, can develop the continuity of your studies?

For this analysis, we consider it important to visualize the construction of sexual identity as a process based on biological bases, but eminently historical and social. Sexual identity and sexual practices also derive from the conditions of the historical moment in which they are situated, being more pure or sinful, more normal or more unhealthy, more accepted or rejected according to the ideological aspects present in the culture of the society in which it develops .

In this prism, we understand travestility as a sexual identity: it is based on the biological basis, specifically on the body, and from this the subject develops a process of identification, which, also, in the sexual aspect, is initiated by socialization in its social group. In this, the subject identifies, or not, with certain characteristics referenced socially for their anatomical sex. This process protects some caveats: (A) continuity, that is, the continuous development of a sexual identity, not the fixity of this structure; (B) the non-appropriation of male or female attitudes and behaviors, but rather the consideration of a transvestite gender; (C) the development of an identity based on this transvestite genre, a sexual identity that encompasses both the social and historical aspects, as well as the constituent elements of the subject's consciousness; (D) the revalidation of the sphere of pleasure, as a possibility for directing the emotional aspects; And (e) the very negation by capitalist society of the development of this sexual identity.

It should be considered that the conception of society present in the Historic-Dialectical Materialist epistemology, which we have used as a guiding element for our studies, does not refer to a mere abstraction from the individual. For this epistemology, when we understand the human being as a social being, we also consider that it is society itself, and this is the basal presupposition that indicates that the whole is not only the sum of the parts that compose it, but rather that each constituent contains the whole.

In this light, the social character is natural to man. As much as we consider certain needs as biological, they are also mediated by society and, therefore, guided by social rules and conventions. Human existence itself becomes a social activity, determined by the context in which it occurs: "What I do for myself, I do for society and with the awareness of myself as a social being" (Marx, 1993, p. 176).

However, much these social constructions are embodied, assimilated, and regarded as natural, eternal, immutable, they are not. All necessity, and the consequent satisfaction of it, are based on historical and social determinations. Thus, man is not born ready, he learns to be a man, and has in education one of the mechanisms for this construction.

We find here the support for the justification that the material basis is the genesis of phenomena and subjective processes. Thus, it is necessary to return to the historicity of reality in order to understand them, and in this movement, to consider also the existence of contradictions that permeate human relations. The understanding of the sexual transvestite identity will only be provided when we glimpse the possibilities of identification, since each of the poles presupposes and demands the existence of the other. Therefore, education that develops sexual identity also has an influence on the denial of transvestite.

Based on this principle, we can deduce that the formation of sexual identity contains within itself the possibility of denying the biological character of sexuality. The subject is born with a defined biological apparatus, and this apparatus will lead the development of their sexuality before the social group. The process of sexual socialization provides the first parameters for the formation of their sexual identity, which will be reinforced later by schooling.

However, travestility appears as a synthesis, a possibility of material representation of the denial of socio-sexual constructions, and the subject only finds this possibility and the way of realizing it because society allows it. Such permission occurs because we then have the subject with a certain biological apparatus, but that develops an identity process that socially does not match with it. And this identity process is made possible because the cultural productions related to sexuality are ideal constructions, that is, we should fit into the conceptions of what it is to be a woman and what it is to be a man for society. However, the idealistic constructions from which we are appropriated are not what society regards as the correct ones, and consequently the synthesis does not equate to either pole. The fact that one has characteristics that are not socially valued as feminine or masculine makes explicit the contradiction between the material base and the ideal constructions that the transvestite subject carries. The synthesis formulated is not fundamentally different from the synthesis obtained by gays/lesbians, since the material base functions as a thesis, and the social sphere as antithesis, which leads us to understand the negation of an androgynous process, since the subject she is not a woman, not a man, but a transvestite.

In this way, we understand that any subject is born with a body, which is its material base, and by its activity it will appropriate the cultural constructions that will make it a human being. In this dialectical process, it surpasses its biological materiality, although it does not cease to exist. Because we carry certain biological aspects, we are educated to possess the attributions considered socially desirable for each sex. However, although education has a social character, it also depends on the process of appropriation, which can vary between complete acceptance and complete negation of these aspects. Thus, even if we learn (through sexual socialization) to be male or female, we can deny the social representation of one sex and accept that of another.

### **3. THE AMBIGUITY OF SCHOOL EDUCATION: NOTES FOR CONCLUSIONS**

In the field of Psychology, Social-Historical Theory retakes the notion of historicity to ratify that the Superior Psychological Functions are exclusively human functions, developed on the Primary Psychological Functions, given in the phylogenetic evolution. However, unlike these, the Superior Psychological Functions

have in the social-historical context their origin. It is in the mediation of society through education, that is, in socialization, that we have the relation with material reality, in which man is constituted as subject, as human being. And this can only be given by its action in the world to produce its material life, that is, by the work (Gadotti, 1998).

Social-Historical Psychology conceives man in his materiality in relation to the other members of a certain society, and in a specific historical moment. For the construction of this new understanding of the relation between man and society, and the consequent development of the Superior Psychological Functions, Vigotski (2004) used knowledge derived not only from psychological science itself, but also from other sciences. This was possible because the transformations that permeated society at that time were aimed at a profound transformation and social restructuring, and that found in several sciences the sources for this goal.

It was based on these principles that the author developed a psychological science that has in the concept of consciousness, and consequently unconscious, the central focus of analysis. However, unlike traditionalist views, Social-Historical Psychology understands consciousness from the relation to materiality. The material world is the basis on which man, an active being, acts and constitutes his subjectivity, thus maintaining the influence of the external environment in the way in which he will develop the structural means that compose and promote the human psychological functioning, that is, the Superior Psychological Functions.

Thus the dualistic understanding between man-society, biological-psychological, was broken. Any consideration of the subject must contain its biological character and its specificities, constructed from social relations, in a dialectical process that culminates in the construction of this man, unique, although similar to the other members of the collectivity.

This active and singular process of internalization of the social sphere by the subject is made possible only by mediation. Therefore, Vygotsky has in this concept the fundamental piece for his theorizing, since the mediating elements are always interposed in the relation between disparate elements, and allows one to be incorporated by the other without any of them losing their essential characteristics.

In this perspective, Leão (1999) considers that consciousness can only be studied from its mediations, that is, starting from the affective-volitional processes by which man has made all his behavior intellectually organized. This is because the objective reality is internalized by the subject not only through the mediation of the instruments, but also through the semiotic mediation.

The constitution and functioning of the individual consciousness are explained by the Superior Psychological Functions, that is, it is by some functions like thought, language, emotion that we organize our activity, and we have the possibility to plan it, correct it and to realize it on the mental plane without the need of practical action. The relation to the world is then made by activity, which requires mediating elements that allow the process of interiorization, in which man makes his aspects of reality external to him, and these aspects manifest themselves as characteristics of the subject itself. These elements are always external, social, such as education, work and interpersonal relationships.

Thus, we have the social environment as the constituent element of consciousness. The construction of concepts, explanations, contents and values is made by social structure, its mode of production and social organization, and diffused by education, as an exclusively human activity of communication and transmission of such cultural contents. With regard to sexuality, we have in the historical process of humanity various configurations and understandings of this sphere, both biologically and socially. Some of the buildings remain at certain times, while others lose their meaning.

We need to consider that even if the subject does not have access to a methodical and elaborate explanation of the concepts or social constructions that permeate sexuality and the process of sexual identity within the school, he will find, in the very context in which schooling occurs, which direct their

development, and in particular, their sexuality. The school thus tends to make it difficult to construct a meaning that is different from the social meaning given to each sexual identity.

We must also consider that education is a historical process of promoting development based on a given period and social space, defined by each concrete situation. It is a process of development of both personal identity and social identity. Because we are historically referenced in a society, we have defined in advance the notions of masculine and feminine, as well as the norms and values that sustain them. We have, then, as a fundamental presupposition the immediate evidence of our lives referred to the sexual identity, that is, being a man or being a woman is an unquestionable presupposition of our existence.

And as far as education is concerned, we understand that it leads to the development of human sexual identity. However, because of the institutional character attributed to education, it rejects the development and experience of a transvestite sexual identity, reproducing an a-historical view of sexuality, which has heterosexism as its central axis. A repression that, by the paradigms and values of social ideology, is considered necessary.

We seek here to understand how formalized education, in principle, tries to educate the transvestite so that he/she does not do so. However, this same education enables the development of the contents and processes of the subject's consciousness. It is through the schooling that we realize the internalization of the cultural elements from the contents presented according to the structuring of the levels of education, which gradually allow the mastery of certain aspects, quantities and qualities of the same culture. And this is guaranteed by the greater amount of significations made available to the individual who, on these, builds his individual sense of reality, even based on a cultural distribution regulated by the differentiated conditions given by the destination of social class, and also by the sexual identity itself.

Education then represents the mediation between the individual and society. It allows the subject to grasp the conditions necessary for their survival in the social group and, in its institutionalized form - given in school education, conveys the contents and processes that will allow the progressive use of these contents taken as true for having satisfied the social need at a particular point in history. In this way, it is the school as a social space historically instituted that provides the physical and psychic instruments for the structuring of individual's consciousness, guaranteeing their insertion in the way of acting, thinking and feeling of a certain group. And by its mediating function between individuals and their environment, it intrinsically carries the determinations of the society that establishes it.

However, school education, precisely because it is institutionalized, also carries the precepts and prejudices of society and, as we said, has a vision of sexuality limited by the social characteristics attributed to biological sex. Travestility, as we have seen, is seen as a disorder and therefore it is this pathological significance that will be transmitted to the subjects during the schooling process. Thus, even if schooling is defined as the transmission of culture that allows the expansion of consciousness, it is also limited by the dominant conceptions, which often make it impossible for the subject to develop certain contents and processes. Among these, the very recognition of sexuality as qualitatively superior to exclusively biological determinations.

This means considering the dialectical presuppositions of contradiction and dynamicity, and we work with the existence of a multiple, multi-determined, contradictory reality that is evidenced in the relation between the subject and the object in the process of knowledge construction. Here we see that the fact that education is the condition for the construction of consciousness is the main form of verification of the way sexuality relates to education. Only through education do we have the possibility of greater appropriation of the cultural elements related to a sexual construction, which act in the interpsychological functions, concretizing them as development of the intrapsychological functions, and thus developing a consciousness that contains the social in individual. As much as formal education denies the possibility of being a

transvestite, it is (only) for her that we also have the possibility of developing and affirming a transvestite sexual identity!

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