


When Invisibility Is Impossible: Body, Subjectivity, and Labor Among *Travestis* and Transsexuals

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Abstract

The main goal of this article is to analyze the relationship involving subjectivity, embodiment, and labor activity among *travestis* and transsexuals. We recognize that bodies are invested by various discourses and power relations, which produce normal and abnormal bodies in society, establishing the intelligibility of the body through gender categories. Beyond that, the body is an active element in the production of one's subjectivity. Transgender people are considered abnormal in the binary gender matrix of intelligibility, which makes them more susceptible to be stigmatized, discriminated, and socially excluded. As for labor, it has been observed that the bodies of *travestis* and transsexuals may represent an obstacle for the obtaining of formal jobs.

Keywords

work, *travestis*, transsexuals, body, subjectivity

Introduction

The main objective of this article is to analyze the process involved in the embodiment and subjectivity of transsexual and *travesti* (Latin word to transvestite) individuals and the relations of the embodiment process with their labor activities. The intention is to analyze whether the visibility of their gender identity as transgender individuals manifested on their bodies may produce stigmas, discrimination, and exclusion from the mainstream social, organizational, and economic settings, consequently affecting their choices and possibilities of labor activities. For this purpose, a qualitative study was carried out with 30 Brazilian transsexuals and *travestis*, in an attempt to understand how such process occurs.

This research is relevant for the field of organizational studies for three main reasons: First, we consider the dimension of the study corpus that approaches *travestis* and transsexuals important within a social context that is apart from the Anglo-Saxon axis. Second, this article investigates the relationship between the bodies of *travestis* and transsexuals and the work they perform, that is, it examines how the bodies of *travestis* and transsexuals affect their labor practices, which is an issue that has been just sparsely studied (Thanem, 2011). Last, but not least, studies on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) labor remain underrepresented in organizational studies (Creed & Cooper, 2008).

Above all, it must be emphasized how difficult it was to collect the data presented in this study. The research path

brought many difficulties. Actually, working with *travestis* and transsexuals requires different perception from researchers, as well as great sensitivity. This happens because normality, or what is referred to as normal and accepted as such, causes various groups to be excluded and perceived as abnormal or abject because of their bodies (Thanem, 2003). The problem worsens when the topic of sexuality is brought up because, as Foucault (1988) tells us, much was said about sex in the 20th century, but little was allowed for exercising it. Coming from the private sphere, the topic of sexuality has invaded the public sphere. Yet, it has remained as knowledge mostly pertaining to the medical and legal fields.

For this reason, the first part of this article debates the major theories in organizational studies that concern the human body, and then we attempt to understand the relationship involving body, embodiment, and gender. Afterward, the concepts of *travesti* and transsexual and some aspects of the labor activity of such individuals are discussed. Following that, the methodology is presented, and the data analysis is performed, leading to some relevant conclusions.

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Body and Gender in Organizational Studies

The study of the human body is not a novelty in business administration. Since the beginning of the systematization of business studies, the body was a topic already present in theories that perceived organizations as entities. Frederick Taylor, with his concepts of time and motion, and Henry Ford with the assembly line, had already had human body as the main subject of analysis, in their intention to improve control as a means of increasing production. Parker (2000), for example, has described Fordism as the systematic manipulation of human muscles. Even along the premises of the Human Relations approach, the concept was no different, for if one starts from the idea there is a division between body and mind, this idea will also elaborate forms of controlling body production by controlling the minds of workers. This was carried out by means of management of the informal groups, which workers belonged to.

Thanem (2003) stresses the research on the body, and embodiment began to be intensified in the field of administration only from the 1990s on. Among such works, it is worth noting the works published by Acker (1990); Barry and Hazen (1996); Dale (2001); Hassard, Holliday, and Wilmott (2000); and Hetrick and Boje (1992) as important to this process. Thanem (2003) points out that most research articles that study the body emphasize its forms of organization, regulation, and normalization, whereas the studies that approach bodies as an element of resistance and disruption of socially established standards are still peripheral.

In fact, many organizational researches have sought to understand the objectification of the body by organizations (Acker, 1990; Hetrick & Boje, 1992; Holliday & Thompson, 2001; McDowell & Court, 1994), by approaching the body as a passive and inert object, characterized by power relations. This analysis perspective is based on the classic Cartesian division between mind and body, in which the body is seen as a passive object, modeled and tagged by social forces. This approach does not perceive the body as an agent that resists against processes of objectification and standardization, nor as an active element in the production of subjectivities. In this respect, this article intends to disrupt with this logic and to highlight the role of the body and the embodiment process as active components in the subjectivity construction (Thanem, 2011).

Dale and Burrell (2000) claim that bodies can be restructured, and the self-image projected by the body can be recreated. The body alone is no longer viewed as an organic system of interrelated parts, but instead, as an extension of the self. As Brewis and Sinclair (2000) have shown, the relationships individuals establish with their bodies are an important part of the way they perceive themselves and form their subjectivity. Works such as those by Bahnisch (2000), Ball (2005), Brewis and Sinclair, Dale (2001), and Letiche (2000) are incipient to consider the body as something active

and to break with the Cartesian view of the body. In fact, the work by Parker (2000) reaches the point of considering the joint action of the body with non-human actors during the process of subjective production.

The body is an important element in subjectification processes, especially in the construction of identities and subjectivities (Adelman & Ruggi, 2008). Of course the understanding by which a person recognizes herself or himself as masculine or feminine is generally based on the embodiment process related to gender. It means that masculinity and femininity operate as discursive labels involved in power relations that compel human beings to act and behave in specific ways, while offering ontological spaces for individuals to occupy and delimiting the gender possibilities (the body constitutes the self and is also restructured by it, conversely). Indeed gender is neither ahistorical nor transcendental (Brewis, Hampton, & Linstead, 1997), and gender is neither something that someone has nor something that someone is (Phillips & Knowles, 2012). Gender is something that someone does and undoes (Butler, 2004; Phillips & Knowles, 2012) and not a property of individuals (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). The process involving doing and undoing gender by the repetition of discursive norms is called performativity (Butler, 1993), and the logic present in these discursive norms produces intelligible genders (Butler, 1990).

Therefore, intelligible genders are “those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (Butler, 1990, p. 23). For Butler (1990), the main effect of the intelligible genders is the control and prohibition of any forms of incoherent embodiment, searching to establish a determinist connection among one’s biological sex and the cultural genders, hence constructing a sense of “natural connection between genitals and gender identity” (Schilt & Connell, 2007, p. 602). In other words, the gendered body is discursively constructed and disciplined by power relations (Thanem, 2011). Bodies that do not follow or disrupt this intelligibility are considered abject (Adelman & Ruggi, 2008; Thanem, 2003) and, therefore, outside the matrix of intelligibility.

However, despite the repeated citation of norms, performativity always escapes from its ideal identity because the “ongoing performance of identity merely involves a repeated citation of, or an ‘aiming for’ an ideal state which doesn’t actually exist . . .” (Kenny & Euchler, 2012, p. 310). In other words, performance is the fantasy of a fantasy, and for this reason, all performance demonstrates the contingency of gender identity and the potential of change and subversion contained in such. The performance is not a mimetic reenactment. All repetition is unstable and opens the possibility of subversion that creates gender trouble (Butler, 1990). In this sense, the binarism masculine *versus* feminine “cannot refract the fluidity that characterizes the embodied experience of gender” (Linstead & Pullen, 2006, p. 1288).

Gender is always multiple, heterogeneous, and a constant process of becoming (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). Beyond that, the gender fluidity “is not merely movement across a binary boundary . . . or across several horizontal boundaries between multiples identities. Identity is motion and fluidity. It dissolves boundaries and carries them off in its flood” (Linstead & Pullen, 2006, p. 1305). For instance, Connell (2010) demonstrates that transgender individuals have the capability to do (reinforcing attributes associated with femininity and masculinity), undo (disrupting the gender binary), and redo (resetting attributes associated with femininity and masculinity) gender, simultaneously. In this regard, Thanem (2011) also asserts that *travestis* perform gender without desiring to be permanently masculine or feminine, not only disrupting the binary logic of gender but also undoing the very gender (Thanem & Wallenberg, in press). Despite transgender people to be appointed relevant in the process of undoing and redoing gender (Connell, 2010), however, specifically in the context of the formal workplace, due they to search to keep their job security and to maintain friendly relationships, their possibilities to make gender trouble and undoing gender are limited (Schilt & Connell, 2007).

Therefore, as mentioned before, the aim of this article is to analyze the embodiment process as well as how the body of *travestis* and transsexuals influences their stigmatization in labor activities. To do so, it seeks to understand the relationships between embodiment and labor activity of the participants studied. Hence, the next section presents the debate on the definitions concerning *travestis* and transsexuals, as well as the relations between their bodies and their labor.

Travestis and Transsexuals: Body, Gender, and Labor

To Namaste (2006), transsexuals are individuals born with a biological sex (male or female) but who identify themselves as members of the opposite sex. To do so, they often take hormones and undergo surgery to reshape their genitalia. However, for this author, the term *transgender* means something more comprehensive, which includes all forms of sexuality that do not fit the normative relations of sex and gender, such as drag queens, drag kings, transsexuals, and *travestis*. Benedetti (2005) and Namaste consider that *travestis* and transsexuals maintain direct relationships with the opposite gender of birth, and both authors define such individuals as transgender. Nevertheless, the definitions about transsexuals and *travestis* are not that simple. As Hines (2006) asserts, there are many distinct subjectivities under the transsexual and *travesti* labels.

The author affirms that such specific identities are singularly situated and experienced by each individual, and “many transgender individuals articulate gender identities that fall beyond a traditional binary framework” (Hines, 2006, p. 63). It means that the identity of transgender people is not only restricted to circulate between a binary and opposite female

and male poles. Opposing this assumption, Thanem and Wallenberg (in press) affirm that *travestis* express in the same time feminine and masculine forms of embodiment, therefore undoing gender. However, although this is a challenge, it does not dismantle the hegemonic forms of gender. For this reason, *travestis* and transsexuals cannot be homogeneously conceptualized, and the particular experiences they go through produce differences within each category. As Perucchi, Brandão, Berto, Rodrigues, and DaSilva (2014) state, there is an intimate relation between transgender subjectivity and the construction of their bodies.

Hence, the term *transgender* is used in this article as an umbrella term to refer to people who do not follow the gender assigned at birth (Connell, 2010; Thanem, 2011). It may encompass *travestis*, transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag queens and kings, genderqueers, intersexual, and agenderist individuals, among others. In fact, the definition includes “all individuals who embody and express a gender identity which diverges from the binary distinction . . . between female and male” (Thanem, 2011, p. 192). Finally, precisely for disrupting the binary logic of gender, the embodiment of transgender individuals brings along social trouble and exclusion.

As for gender, it is important to understand that transsexuals, unlike *travestis*, do not consider themselves as transgender individuals, because they do not see their bodies, identities, or lives as a part of a larger process of change that aims to break with the sex/gender binarism (Namaste, 2006). However, the bodies of *travestis* call such binarism into question, for these individuals remain between the borders of men and women bodies, for they simultaneously present characteristics that are socially considered belonging to women (e.g., breasts) and men (e.g., the penis). In contrast, transsexuals wish to fit into only one of these binary categories.

The concept and understanding about what a transsexual individual and a *travesti* are also change according to social and cultural contexts. Specifically, in a study on Brazilian *travestis*, Kulick (1997) found that such individuals consider sexuality rather than gender as the main constitutive element of their identities. Thus, transvestisms are not only a matter of gender in the Brazilian context. Furthermore, both transsexual and *travesti* individuals in Brazil wish to undergo hormone replacement, but *travestis* tend to use most often the corporal insertion of silicone, in order to change the form of their body (Perucchi et al., 2014). The main difference between *travesti* and transsexual individuals in Brazil is that although transsexuals undergo sex reassignment surgery, *travestis* prefer to keep their penis and do not undergo a reassignment surgery. In addition to that, differently from Sweden, where a *travesti* can be “part-time *travesti*” for some hours during the day (Thanem & Wallenberg, in press), in Brazilian culture, for someone to be considered a *travesti*, it is necessary to act as a *travesti* full-time; otherwise, they are classified not as a *travesti* but as a cross-dresser or drag queen, for instance. This happens because, as mentioned before, it is very usual among Brazilian *travestis* to undergo

silicone injection as well as clandestine procedures to have artificial breasts and a huge gluteus, which consequently transform their bodies and make them visible *travestis* 24 hr a day.

In the context of Brazil, due to the visibility of their body modifications, *travestis* break with the idea of normality and correction in the correlation among sex, gender, and sexuality, facing enormous difficulties and challenges in their daily lives (Tauches, 2006). In addition, their bodies are considered by what Thanem (2003) named “contested and monstrous bodies.” On this aspect, Namaste (2006) also stresses that transsexuals are also subject to social discrimination in a variety of ways. Unlike discrimination against sexuality, in which the individual can resort to strategies of hiding, it is not possible to *travestis* to do so because of their corporal visibility (Button, 2001; Griffith & Hebl, 2002).

As to the embodiment process as a set of regulatory practices, the heterosexual matrix through which identities related to gender and sexuality become intelligible means that some identities cannot exist. That is the case of identities that break with or do not follow the determinist relation involving sex–gender–sexuality (Butler, 1990). For Butler (1990), such relation is political and instituted by cultural laws. Therefore, they operate as a regulator of the meaning of sexuality. Nevertheless, many identities fail to follow such norms of “intelligibility,” and they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities form within that domain. Their persistence and proliferation, however, provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of the “intelligibility” domain (Butler, 1990, p. 24). Heteronormativity is supported by cultural, legal, and institutional practices, which reinforce the logic that the sex of birth determines the gender and the belief that only two possible genders exist (masculine or feminine; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

These discursive norms force individuals to fit into a single genre but never into both. Therefore, gender and sexuality operate at the personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels (Tauches, 2006). At the personal level, society dictates what is considered normal for a person in terms of gender identity and sexuality. At the interpersonal level, when two people interact, appearance, behavior, gesture, body, and social norms act together to create attributions and categories founded on gender and sexuality. Finally, at the institutional level, gender and sexuality are organized in a hierarchy in which men, masculinity, and heterosexuality are valued in comparison with women, femininity, and homosexuality (Tauches, 2006).

An example of how heteronormativity acts at the personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels operates in the workplace and can be verified in Schilt and Westbrook’s (2009) research. This work shows transgender individuals trying to adjust themselves in the workplace according to heteronormativity. Female to male transgender individuals follow men’s behavior and conduct, searching to accomplish

tasks considered appropriated to masculine abilities and to become “one of the guys.” However, despite the fact that all variations of transgender individuals suffer discrimination at the workplace (Connell, 2010), there are differences among them. In the case of Female to Male (FTM) transgender, becoming a man can bring prestigious and more opportunities at work. On the contrary, in the case of Male to Female (MTF), this choice often causes the loss of power positions in the workplace hierarchy (Connell, 2010; Schilt & Connell, 2007). In other words, identities that do not follow the hegemonic gender norms can perform gender in a negative way. This means that identities that problematize gender become unlivable or less livable (Thanem & Wallenberg, in press).

Stigma can take different forms, such as race, sexual preference, and religion, among others. However, individuals with multifaceted gender identities as transgender acquire more social visibility because of their body and embodiment process and become more subject to being socially stigmatized (Creed & Cooper, 2008). When invisibility is not possible and visible gender identities are socially stigmatized, such identities are marginalized in the workplace (Creed & Scully, 2000). Transgender individuals are targets of hate crimes, physical violence, and labor market discrimination (Thanem, 2011). The few transgender people who get a successful career in formal organizations conceal their gender identity at the workplace, and due to transphobia present in many societies, it is not easy for transgender individuals to be hired, to be promoted, or to keep their positions at formal organizations. This fact compels transgender people to work in prostitution and other illegitimate forms of work to survive (Thanem, 2011). To be a prostitute usually means to be physically, socially, and morally dirty, but it also provides opportunity to perform gender differently, hence creating problems with gender (Brewis & Linstead, 2000; Tyler, 2012), and this perception of the prostitution constitutes its activity as being a form of abject labor (Tyler, 2012).

In Brazil, transgender individuals are not treated as human beings. They live and work in violent environments, and many do not live up to the old age (Antunes & Mercadante, 2013). Many transgender individuals in Brazil work in prostitution (Cortez, Boer, & Baltieri, 2011), and some common characteristics among transgender people who work in prostitution are poor education, low social-economic level, drugs and alcohol use, and unprotected sexual relations with a large number of sexual partners, which make them more susceptible to AIDS (Cortez et al., 2011; Perucchi et al., 2014). Besides, *travesti* sex workers suffer more discrimination, even when they do not work with prostitution, because of their appearance (Cortez et al., 2011).

However, despite all this, one of the most common transgender complaints in Brazil is the inability to use their social name by which they identify themselves (Perucchi et al., 2014). Although being a MTF or a FTM transgender and not being able to change their names to a female/male name make such individuals more susceptible to discrimination

due to the visibility of their transgender condition. In Brazil, it is not easy to change one's birth name as it is in countries such as the United Kingdom. Changing the birth name is not allowed by Brazilian laws, and it can be done only when a person goes through a very expensive judicial process that does not give any guarantee to be successful in the end of this process. Also, besides cost and uncertainty of success in this endeavor, the judicial process takes decades to be concluded.

Method

This research was developed with the participation of participants who worked formally or informally in the four state capitals of southeastern Brazil: Belo Horizonte, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Vitória. The participants who compose the group of interest for this research proposal are *travestis* and transsexuals. To describe the methodology of the research, the corresponding techniques used are presented below, followed by data analysis.

The proposed research was developed from a qualitative methodology, for according to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), this is a possibility for the construction of theoretical models of intelligibility, for the study of things that are not accessible directly, neither in their organization nor in their processes. On account of the uniqueness and delicacy of the theme to be studied, it was necessary to use qualitative research as methodology. The operationalization of the research field involved, at first, reaching associations that support homosexuals, especially lesbians, *travestis*, and transsexuals, in each of the four capitals of southeastern Brazil. An example was the *Centro de Luta pela Livre Orientação Sexual* (CELLOS) in Minas Gerais (Fight for Free Sexual Orientation Center, in English). The research was conducted by two research groups: *Núcleo de Estudos Organizacionais e Sociedade* (NEOS; Nucleus of Organizational and Society Studies, at Federal University of Minas Gerais) and *Grupo de Estudo sobre Poder em Organizações* (GEPO; Study Group on Power at Organizations, at Federal University of Espírito Santo), totaling six research fellows and two researchers.

To limit the selection of research participants, the snowball method (Gray, Williamson, & Karp, 2007) was used. In this method, the selection is built throughout the research process, following further indications from the very research participants. Selecting the research participants intentionally is an important aspect of any qualitative research. This technique was adopted because we consider that a technique aligned with qualitative methodology should focus on singularity. Therefore, it would contradict the generalization of human experiences. Moreover, the oral history of the individuals' lives falls into such precepts, valuing the unique and particular events experienced by participants. The oral history favors the restitution of circumstances, from the description of the very agent involved in these events, without aiming to cross the

borders of particularity. Furthermore, the life history of individuals allows researchers to reconstruct relationships concerning society, a given group, and the participants themselves (Rhodes & Pullen, 2009).

At the field, researchers had to revise the methodology that had been previously defined. Initially, all interviews were supposed to be recorded and filmed. However, the violence to which the participants who participated in this research are subjected forced a change in the methodological strategies. Thus, interviews were recorded whenever possible, reaching a total of 24 *travestis* and 6 transsexuals. Among the 24, 2 interviews with *travestis* were filmed. However, part of our data about *travestis* derives from non-recorded interviews, annotated in field diaries. This added to the total, reaching 30 MTF transgender people, mainly with the participation of *travestis*. This was the most withdrawn group to take part in the research.

Before the interview, researchers explained to the transgender individuals the main goal of the research, presented the term of ethical conduct, and asked them to record the interview. As already said, some *travestis* authorized only to be interviewed and observed at their work on the street as prostitutes, without recording their voices. All interviews were conducted following a semi-structured script, recorded and transcribed or annotated in field diaries. This procedure was developed carefully to preserve the faithful reproduction of the speeches and avoid cuts or additions. The interview questions were developed with the participation of focus groups with six *travestis* and six transsexuals, separately. In the meetings, participants narrated their own life experiences, mainly focused on the theme of labor (Rhodes & Pullen, 2009). From the focus groups, the semi-structured interview was outlined. After processing the data, the participants were named using female pseudonyms, to protect their identities and the confidentiality of any evidence that could identify them. In general, all participants worked either formally—in formal public jobs or as entrepreneurs—or informally in prostitution and moonlighting. The data were analyzed by referring back to the literature review presented in this article and comparing it with the empirical material produced.

Subjectivity and Embodiment of Travesti and Transsexual Individuals

As Benedetti (2005) has stated, both transsexuals and *travestis* experience social and subjective distress associated with their bodies. This feeling of suffering is manifested early in the life of such individuals, which can be clearly evidenced in the speech by Natasha: "At age 14, my family was already able to notice my effeminate ways, you know? At that time, homosexuality was a disease, so my family sent me to a psychiatrist." The speech by Natasha highlights the suffering of not being in accordance with the hegemonic and hierarchically valued discursive possibilities of gender and sexuality

(Butler, 1990, 1993), and it confirms the strong relationship between transvestism and transsexualism with sexuality in the Brazilian society. Kulick (1997) has demonstrated this by finding that Brazilian *travestis* consider sexuality rather than gender as the main constitutive element of their identities.

To sort out this contradiction and end psychological suffering, *travestis* and transsexuals try to adjust their bodies to their subjective condition, as much as their subjectivity to their bodies, for, "It's not easy to be a transsexual. You look in the mirror and wish to be someone else. (You wish) to have another identity. It's very difficult" (Pamela), because

when we find out we are *travestis* or transsexuals, we lose all our bonds. We lose our families, friends, we lose everything. You know, the ones who manage to keep family bonds, in case their family accepts it, are completely different persons. (Mary)

It is impossible for such individuals not to seek the performing of their bodies, due to the fact that "it is not an option, but a condition, you know what I mean? Being a *travesti* is not easy, you must fight against many things, you know?" (Kate).

The suffering regarding their bodies declared by Pamela, Mary, and Kate highlights the connection between body and subjectivity. For these individuals, their subjectivity can only be realized through their bodies. Moreover, their bodies are active in the process of subjectivity construction (Adelman & Ruggi, 2008; Perucchi et al., 2014; Thanem, 2011), because both transsexuals and *travestis* perceive as a form of violence to look in the mirror and see someone else: "One day you look at yourself in the mirror and think: 'I can't go on like this, I'm not that person who's standing in front of the mirror, that's not me'" (Patty). Also, they can go on perceiving themselves as "horrible" (Catherine). However, there is a crucial difference between *travestis* and transsexuals, as far as body-changing processes are concerned. Transsexuals aim to completely follow the social models that define the bodies of men and women according to the heterosexual matrix of gender, which include undergoing changes in their genitals, to become either a man or a woman. However, *travestis* do not want their bodies to be completely as a woman's, as explained by Margaret (a transsexual): "I've always wanted to change sex. I never wanted to be halfway through. In that case, I would be a *travesti*." Therefore, transsexuals aim to adjust their bodies according to the binary intelligibility of gender, that is, trying to transform their body into a "real" woman body but not disrupting the hegemonic intelligibility of gender. On the other side, *travestis* are seen by transsexuals as abject (Adelman & Ruggi, 2008; Thanem, 2003) exactly because they are not willing to follow such intelligibility.

With regard to transsexualism, Sally states that

You fight a lot to run away from things, until one day you look at yourself in the mirror and think: "I can't go on like this, I'm

not this person who's standing in front of the mirror, that's not me."

Therefore, the body already manifests performances early in life, leading such individuals to a possibility of subjective existence that is closer to a given body performance. This makes them wish and seek to adjust themselves to the discursive possibilities of a woman or a man. Among transsexuals, during the process of transformation (Linstead & Pullen, 2006), the body is objectified and pointed out by respondents as something to be modeled and labeled in accordance with the social constructions and power relations that define the body of a woman. Transsexuals are completely tied to the binary gender model (Butler, 1990), and they seek to transform their bodies according to one of two possible binary definitions of gender (a male or a female), as if those were the only existing possibilities. They want their bodies to entirely follow such model, not challenging or questioning the binary and excluding definition of gender. Indeed, as we have seen, the bodies of *travestis* are seen as monstrous bodies (Thanem, 2003), precisely because they stand at the borders between what is socially regarded as the body of a man or a woman. *Travestis* do not remove their original sexual organ, and thus, they jeopardize and put to test the binary matrix of gender, which is so sacred to transsexuals (Namaste, 2006).

From the interviews, it can be seen that in the process of becoming, transsexuals consider the mind (subjectivity) to be at the foreground, for they seek to find and complete their subjective existence through the modification of their bodies. However, the boundaries between mind and body are not clear, because the respondents aim to restructure their bodies in accordance with their self-image, and the very self in accordance with the body image, conversely (Dale & Burrell, 2000). Unlike transsexuals, who point out sex changing operation as the most important aspect to achieve subjectivity, *travestis* show that the maintenance of the male sexual organ denotes certain distinction. In this sense, the option of removing the genitalia would establish norms to their bodies and would hence transform them into women. So would this be the same as to fit into what society determines as to be the sexual duality underlying the concepts of a man or a woman. With regard to this aspect, Patty emphasizes,

I'm more into being different and valuing this, because if I get operated, I'll be normalizing myself, I'll be willing to be (normal). I'll be normalizing what is different about me, right? And all in all, there are millions of vaginas in the world, but just a few people like me.

An aspect that must be highlighted is that the main occupation of many *travestis* is prostitution, and the distinct feature of being a "woman with a penis" attracts more clients.

For Patty, the idea of being different is to not adapt her body into the intelligible, heterosexual matrix of gender

(Butler, 1990, 1993). According to such logic, fixing oneself is to become “normal,” through the normalization of the body according to discursive norms. However, in the view of transsexuals, when *travestis* break with the norms of gender intelligibility, they appear to be something incomplete, a failure, or maybe an ontological impossibility (Butler, 1990). For *travestis*, such rupture is an opportunity to go beyond the limits of regulatory intelligibility. The *travesti* bodies call into question the binary gender logic, undoing gender (Butler, 2004; Connell, 2010). This happens because their embodiment retains at the same time characteristics perceived as belonging to women (breasts and big gluteus) and to men (the penis; Namaste, 2006). For this reason, the binary intelligibility of gender is not capable to reflect the entire complexity and fluidity of the embodied gender experience (Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Thanem & Wallenberg, in press).

Only the demonstration of the processes of embodiment that operate on the bodies of transsexuals and *travestis* can reveal the relations between body and subjectivity, because the body constitutes the self and is also restructured by it, conversely (Dale & Burrell, 2000). What we seek to highlight in the processes of subjectification is the embodiment as an active element in the constitution of the respondents' subjectivity (Ball, 2005; Brewis & Sinclair, 2000; Dale, 2001; Letiche, 2000). This process of the body as a creator of the self also becomes evident in the speech by Natasha: “This discovery was everything but simple, because in fact we are already born like a ‘trans,’ we’re already born with a little different mind.” In that sense, Natasha’s body has manifested itself as something different from other participants’ bodies, from a very early time. Thus, although as a child Natasha still was not aware of other discursive possibilities that broke with the hegemonic models of gender and sexuality, the body reveals and expresses this difference by acting directly as a catalyst in the search of other possibilities of subjective existence. This occurs in spite of these possibilities being discursively finite and limited (Brewis et al., 1997; Butler, 1993): Individuals have either to be a *travesti* or a transsexual. According to what has been previously mentioned by Kate, this search “is not an option but a condition.”

Furthermore, as already analyzed, such individuals attempt to adjust their bodies within the subjective possibilities of a given discourse (Brewis et al., 1997; Butler, 1993). At the same time, as these also act by classifying and restraining the participant, they create in the same individuals a feeling of dissatisfaction regarding their own bodies. This happens because such bodies do not fit perfectly within any of these possibilities, making respondents seek the transformation of their bodies and subjectivities. Without such adjustments, the body would carry on causing huge subjective suffering.

Body and Labor

The *Travestis* stated that their families did not accept their body and sexual condition, and they ended up kicked out from their households when they were still young. In the case

of those coming from poor backgrounds with poor education, they were led to prostitution to survive (Cortez et al., 2011; Perucchi et al., 2014; Thanem, 2011). When asked about formal jobs, the respondents said it is virtually impossible for a *travesti* to be hired by a company as an employee. They state, “I’ve always looked for a job, I’ve always tried to find work, with a social security card and all. It’s a monumental task, you see?” (Catherine), or that “I didn’t try other options, and it’s certainly very hard for transgender individuals to get into the work market these days” (Kate). The speeches by Catherine and Kate also reaffirm the speeches by Adele, Agatha, and Alexis: “That’s when the question of work market comes up, they do not give us opportunity and we are discriminated right away. When you get there to hand in your CV, people won’t even accept it, you know?” (Adele); “Gosh, it’s a big challenge, way too big indeed” (Agatha); “There is no labor market for *travestis*, the doors are closed. And the alternative are the streets” (Alexis).

It is a fact that Brazilian *travestis* often undergo corporal insertion of silicone to accomplish the desired changes on their bodies (i.e., having big breasts and a big gluteus), but, at the same time, they also maintain certain male characteristics. This makes their condition of *travestis* completely visible to other people. Therefore, because they are a more multifaceted cultural gender identity than transsexuals, *travestis* acquire more visibility, which consequently makes them easy targets for social stigmatization (Creed & Cooper, 2008). The main consequence of stigmatization is that it is almost impossible for a *travesti* to be hired by organizations in the Brazilian labor market, due to the transphobia present in this country’s society (Thanem, 2011). The speeches of the *travestis* interviewed in this article have clearly shown the discrimination involved in the obtaining of formal employment, because of their bodies. Moreover, the fact that they have been outcast home very early for their families, combined with discrimination faced by the performing of a body that disrupts the boundaries of the binary model of gender, the only option left for them is to work as prostitutes or set up small ventures. Beyond that, the majority of *travestis* came from poor backgrounds, and the lack of financial and emotional support from their families (Adelman & Ruggi, 2008; Cortez et al., 2011) aligned to low education (Cortez et al., 2011) eventually led them into prostitution.

The entry into the formal work market is perceived by this group as evidence of social recognition, or a way to ensure a possible citizenship status for the interviewed participants. However, if the formal market closes its doors, of course, the informal market (prostitution) still remains a possibility for such individuals. The speech by Alisson exemplifies and reveals one of the few alternatives available for this group to survive—prostitution.

So, it’s like this, they don’t even give us a chance, so the option that remains is prostitution. There isn’t any other, you either work as a prostitute or you die of hunger, misery, and everything. So I had to be a prostitute to survive, you know? (Alisson)

However, this is not a new phenomenon, and work as prostitute is survivor strategy that has been used for many decades, as Amber asserts,

I started working as prostitute in the 70s. I was 11 the first time. I went through all these decades and faced the dictatorship, faced the end of the dictatorship, faced AIDS, faced all that. I still face prejudice today . . .

However, that is no easy task. *Travestis* who carry on working activities as prostitutes must face violence, STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases), and social insecurity in their daily routines (Antunes & Mercadante, 2013; Cortez et al., 2011; Perucchi et al., 2014). Natasha states, "Everybody who lives the transgender life, exposed on a corner to make a living, whatever happens to one them can happen to you as well." Anna and Catherine agree with Natasha as they reiterate,

We already suffer so much discrimination from society, at night for example, we take the risk of exposing ourselves, you get in the car of someone you don't know, you don't even know if you're coming back (Anna), because "if you don't make money you won't eat, you won't drink, you won't live and you also have to draw your goals, we have to make a living. Out there we don't know what we'll have to go through, what's going to happen." (Catherine)

From the speeches, it becomes evident that working as a prostitute is not their choice or first option, nor is it a typical or an easy job, first, because this is often the only option for survival for this group, and second, because it is not a formally recognized function by society. It exposes the participants to the risk of being shot or even being hit by a stone. The violence involved in prostitution is part of the everyday life of *travestis*. Moreover, Brazilian *travestis* who work in prostitution suffer violence more frequently than other sort of sex workers (Cortez et al., 2011) and are more susceptible to being infected by the HIV (Operario, Soma, & Underhill, 2008).

However, poverty and low educational levels are not the only causes that lead *travestis* to prostitution. As already mentioned, the corporal changes made in their bodies disrupt the heterosexual matrix logic and makes them an abject body. This affects their work and contributes to increase in aggregated transphobia. Yet, working as a prostitute also provides more opportunities to *travestis* to perform their gender differently from the norms of intelligibility (Brewis & Linstead, 2000; Tyler, 2012). This can be confirmed by Betty discourse. Betty affirms that at "15 or 16 I was hired with formal, legal and regular work contract . . . , but at that time I was only gay." Betty complements that after the use of hormones to change her body, "the only job I had as *travesti* was in the sex market. As a prostitute . . ." Then, as "only gay," Betty managed to get a regular job, and it was exactly the body changes to become a *travesti* that caused exclusion from the formal labor market. As Beverly asserts, "the

travestis are very intelligent, they are very capable, you know? They are not animals, they aren't monsters. We are labeled as illiterate as a John Doe." Beyond that, the fact that most of them work as prostitute increases the stigmatization of *travestis*, regarding them as physically, socially, and morally dirty in the Brazilian society (Tyler, 2012). This makes their labor activity abject as well (Tyler, 2012), due to their allegedly abject bodies.

The other possibility for *travestis* is to work as hairdressers. Some respondents managed to set up small beauty parlors to survive, because the formal work in companies is still inaccessible for *travestis*. Carmen affirms that "[hairdressing] is a field that accepts homosexuals and *travestis* easily . . ." The hairdresser shops work as a place of refuge for *travestis* and also work as a support community among them. Nevertheless, only the hairdresser shops owned or managed by another *travesti* or homosexuals hire *travestis*. Hairdresser shops that do not fit in this characteristic usually fire them when managers/owners discover that the hairdresser hired is not a "real" woman:

You get there and hand in your CV [with a female name]. You go through a test and are hired. . . . So people hired me thinking that I was a woman. When they asked to bring in my documentation to finish the hiring process . . . they would dismiss me, I was always dismissed.

This speech highlights the importance of a long-standing demand of transgender people in Brazil: the institutional use of their social name as a dispositive to avoid exclusion and discrimination not only at work but also in all social relations (Perucchi et al., 2014).

Anyway, the vast majority of *travestis* respondents are forced to work as prostitutes on the streets, without any social protection. The bodies of *travestis* do not allow their gender and sexuality to go unnoticed. Moreover, by putting into question the boundaries of the binary model of gender, *travestis* end up becoming the major targets of discrimination during processes of recruitment by companies. Therefore, due to the fact that *travestis* break with the idea of normality and direct correlation among sex, gender, and sexuality (Butler, 1990), they come across tremendous difficulties for being hired by companies as employees (Thanem, 2011).

As for transsexuals, the search for work seemed to yield possibilities other than prostitution. The speeches also show difficulty in getting jobs, but there are also moments that seem to reveal a change in society. Carol discussed the difficulties faced by transsexuals in finding a job in the private sector: "In the old days I used to send my CV with my birth certificate name, and then when I got there, I was a completely different person. People were shocked; it was a surprise for them." Again, the importance of the social name for transgender people is declared by the transsexual Eve (Perucchi et al., 2014). Eve makes clear that "I was afraid to transform myself during college and be expelled or become

unable to graduate.” However, after graduating from college, Eve succeeded in a public service examination and was employed as a public servant. Afterward, she underwent definitive sex change operation.

While trying to avoid or reduce discrimination at work, many transsexuals seek to change their name of birth (Perucchi et al., 2014). Changing their names to names that follow the heteronormativity involving sex–gender–sexuality (Butler, 1990) allows them to conceal their transsexuality, hence making their transsexual condition invisible to society. Some public departments in Brazil already allow transsexuals to use their “social name” expressing their gender identification rather than their name of birth. On this matter, Pamela declares that in the São Paulo City Hall, “in health and educational departments, all transsexuals and cross-dressers must be called by their social name . . .” However, there is no federal law that establishes this right to all public departments in Brazil territory, and its adoption or not depends exclusively on the desire of the local governors. Because of that, many transsexuals seek to change their birth names by filing a suit in court. However, in addition to high costs that limit the access of economically underprivileged transsexuals, there is no guarantee that they will achieve success in this endeavor. As Carol asserts, “The lawyer said judges are so conservative, and I’d be lucky if my trial doesn’t go to Supreme Court.”

Most of the transsexuals interviewed have received good tuition and do not come from such poor backgrounds. These conditions have allowed them to search for a public employment, to avoid the strong discrimination they would face in the private sector. It is worth clarifying that in Brazil, public employment is achieved through a selective process called public recruitment examination. This test involves specific knowledge related to the position that the candidate shall hold, that is, a public servant position is not obtained through a personal interview or an indication, but by means of a selective process in which a candidate competes against thousands of other applicants for a single vacancy. Once a candidate is approved in a public examination, he or she is assigned to the position and can no longer be dismissed, under the attributions of the law. Therefore, the selective process for the Brazilian public service is highly impersonal, and candidates are not physically known. This factor allows the invisibility of the body and ensures economic stability for the successful candidates. In public service examination, individuals are just a number in a list, and in case they succeed, the Constitution assures that they occupy the position. On this aspect, Felicia states, “Working in the private sector is very bad, but in the public sector we still have a chance. You know, in the public examination we’re just numbers.”

Many transsexuals who participated in the interviews work in the public educational system as teachers in primary schools. As mentioned before, this occurs because often transsexuals have a better educational level compared with *travestis*. For instance, Georgina declares to “have accomplished the complete curriculum to become a teacher. First I

took the basic courses to be a teacher, then I graduated in English and Pedagogy and today I have a career in the public education sector.” Beyond that, the process of changing their bodies usually starts later in their lives as compared with *travestis*, which allows them to conclude their professional formation not as transsexuals. They get into the process to change their gender when they already have professional stability in the public sector, as Alison affirms: “There was a whole context I . . . was 37 years old when I became Beatrice . . .” It can be concluded from the speeches that the transsexuals interviewed achieved some level of financial and professional stability when they began their corporal changes. The fact they found economic stability prior to making corporal changes has made things much easier for transsexuals. They constructed their career by not showing any disruption in the body and gender relation and by following the gender norms of intelligibility (Butler, 1990, 1993), as a way to avoid discrimination at work (Thanem, 2011; Thanem & Wallenberg, in press). Just after they have accomplished economic stability, they underwent corporal changes.

Besides working as public servants and in the field of education, similarly to some *travestis*, many transsexuals have sought to set up their own business as dressmakers, manicures, or hairdressers. For instance, Hazel started working at age 12 as “a manicure, a hairdresser, and a dressmaker. Women stuff. After all this was my identity. When I had the operation, then I built up the courage and set up my own beauty parlor.” Holly sees herself as capable of doing various tasks: “I never had a job. I mean, I was a hairdresser. I’m like a jack-of-all-trades! I’m a hairdresser, I can sew, I cook very well, I sell takeaway food, you know?”

Nonetheless, this does not free transsexuals from discrimination at the workplace (Thanem, 2011). Hope emphasizes discrimination suffered while working as a monitor for a professor in college: “Many students found it strange, especially men, you know. They thought, ‘wow, she’s a *travesti*, she’s my monitor, I don’t want to work with her” (Hope). Jane states that discrimination against transsexuals at work is frequent: “When I worked in a company, jokes were frequent, this and that, but I tried not to pay attention, ignore them, just leave it behind, because people didn’t know what they were talking about, they didn’t know anything.” Joanna states that the other employees believe “they can do harm because they are gays, *travestis* or transsexuals.” As it can be observed, Kelly states that discrimination occurs not only when people have already been hired to work for companies but often during the process of selection and recruitment:

I was called to an internship at a soda company, but they did not accept me. They explained that since I was going to work only with men and travel with them to various points of sales, this would be an uncomfortable situation for them.

Even transsexuals working in public jobs show evidence of discrimination at work. Some reported to face problems to be promoted (Thanem, 2011), which is a manifestation of

lack of professional recognition. Joanna makes clear that sexual recognition comes before the occupational, transforming non-promotions into a means for labor discrimination. Also, according to Joanna,

If you look closely you will see that the public sector is full of transsexuals. You know why? Because we're just a number and there is an entrance exam. We're anonymous. And if we pass the examination process, people must accept us. Of course, we still have to suffer later on. In my case, I was never promoted.

Conclusion

It is concluded that not only gender and sexuality operate at the personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels (Tauches, 2006) but also the body operates at those three levels. At the personal level, societies establish what is considered the "normal" body for a person, categorized into a particular gender and sexual practice, which, consequently, constructs and establishes processes of body objectification. At the interpersonal level, the bodies of *travestis* and transsexuals interfere in their relations with their families and other members of society. In fact, they can be marginalized by organizational managers as a result of their bodies, and such marginalization is manifested in the difficulty to obtain a formal job, particularly in the case of *travestis*. Finally, at the institutional level, the body is organized in a consistent hierarchy in which the bodies that best fit the binary gender model are also the most valued.

The body is always in the middle of an intense interaction with subjectivity, namely, the human mind. Subjectivity shapes bodies and is, at the same time, shaped by them. Therefore, there is no division between the mind and the body. Besides, the body is not marked and passive, but instead, it is active in the subjective constitution of *travestis* and transsexuals. The body influences the possibilities of subjective existence in the scope of labor. *Travestis* face huge difficulty to take formal positions in companies, for they are discriminated because of their bodies, which, in turn, lead them to prostitution. Transsexuals also face this difficulty, but because their bodies are more suited to the binary model of gender, they manage to take up formal jobs in companies. In other words, it means that, because gender issues cause so much trouble to them than transsexuals, the life of *travestis* becomes less livable (Thanem & Wallenberg, in press) than the life of transsexuals.

In this sense, to invert this scenario, it is necessary to improve the use of social names by transgender individuals, to protect them from discrimination at the workplace and also to provide them with a wider range of formal job opportunities, especially in the private sector. *Travestis* do not want to be sexual workers, but the policy of exclusion operated by companies leads them to prostitution. Prostitution is not a choice; it becomes in many cases the only alternative for survival. Added to that, *travestis* have skills and capabilities to accomplish many tasks at the workplace.

As for transsexuals, in spite of having more job opportunities than *travestis*, they are also discriminated at the workplace. Therefore, to avoid discrimination, affirmative action rights need to be extended to *travestis* and transsexuals, and the use of social name needs to be warranted by a federal law that regulates and establishes the use of such names in all public and private companies. Moreover, the discrimination of transsexuals and *travestis* needs to be criminalized in the Brazilian law, into a humanitarian offense.

As a suggestion for future research, it would be interesting to analyze the processes of subjectivity on and through the body from the standpoint of female employees and organizational managers in general. The understanding on how these processes constitute realities and establish power relations and forms of subjective existence has still received little research attention in the field of organizational studies.

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