The Lab's Quarterly

2025 / a. XXVII / n. 2 (aprile-giugno)

CONTATTI
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MONOGRAFICO

Queer(ing) (e) le scienze sociali: tra sfidee prospettive

A cura di Marianna Coppola (Università di Salerno), Luca Guizzardi (Università di Bologna), Salvatore Monaco (Libera Università di Bolzano)

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INTRODUCTION
QUEER(ING) (AND) THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

*di Marianna Coppola, Luca Guizzardi, Salvatore Monaco**

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS SPECIAL QUEER ISSUE

We are very happy to introduce this special issue on Queer theory, which seeks to explore the various ways in which queer perspectives intersect with and enrich the scientific discourse within the field of social sciences. Originally emerging from textual idealism and literary criticism, the concept of "queer" has undergone a significant transformation over time, evolving into a critical and disruptive framework useful for analyzing and reinterpreting the dynamics of identity, subjectivity, and social relations. The inherently fluid nature of the queer concept, characterized by an active resistance to rigid definitions, is evident through a constant commitment to critically deconstruct conventional labels. Far from being abstract or purely conceptual, this resistance deeply influences the studying of gender, sexuality and broader sociocultural dynamics. By effectively undermining conventional taxonomies, queer theory contributes to a redefinition of societal norms and expectations. Therefore, the queer approach goes beyond outlining new thought paradigms; it also promotes an inclusive perspective that emancipates itself from entrenched stereotypes, offering a more open and pluralistic view of society. Building on these premises, this special issue brings together a collection of contributions that investigate the ramifications, applications, and tensions of queer theory within the broad field of social sciences. The selected articles are from a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and legal sciences, offering a rich and interdisciplinary overview of queer methodologies and epistemologies. Each contribution examines how queer theoretical frameworks intersect with disciplinary traditions, drawing attention to both productive synergies and critical frictions. Adopting different perspectives, all the authors have emphasized the connection between queer theory and their disciplines, exploring synergies and tensions that arise, in a specific context like Italy as well as in other international contexts.

In her article, *Looking at polyamory through queer lens. Notes from a longitudinal qualitative studies*, Nicole Braida analyses the main results of a longitudinal study on relational forms inspired by the theory and practice of polyamory in Italy. Guided from a queer epistemological perspective, Braida highlights how the polyamorous discourse can foster the denaturalization of certain binarisms (Homosexual/Heterosexual; Man/Woman) that are foundational to sexual identity in the dominant order and of normativity that govern the social recognition of meaningful relationships. While acknowledging its political limitations, the article values as well the contribution that other activisms have made to polyamorous discourse, pointing it in a more critical and (self)reflective direction.

Since the condition of homelessness in LGBTQI+ people often turn out to be invisible due to the reluctance of individuals to self-describe as such due to the fear of experiencing discrimination and violence from other guests and from the operators of dedicated shelters themselves, in *Between horizontal and oblique. For a queer approach to LGBTQI+ experiences of housing precarity*, Simone Schinocca and Raffaella Ferrero Camoletto reconstruct the experiences of a group of participants in the Tohousing project, inaugurated in Turin in December 2018 to provide precise responses to the issues of housing precarity and socioeconomic vulnerability of LGBTI+ people. Using a mixed-methods approach, integrating together a creative methodology (a theater workshop with the creation of a podcast) and a more traditional qualitative research technique (semi-structured interviews), the article shows how the horizontality of the participatory approach adopted takes the form of an oblique (and in this sense queerizing) positioning with respect to other ways of doing research and intervention, including on the social policy level, with marginalized subjectivities.

Barbara Centrone and Elisa Costantino pinpoint the fact that the existing literature on Disability Studies has only recently begun to explore the sexual identity of disabled people from an embodied perspective. So, their article *Multiple discrimination: an intersectional study on the embodied experience of LGBTQIAP+ disabled people* is part of a broader and still ongoing research project that presents the results of an exploratory survey conducted with a self-selected sample of queer disabled people. The study builds on the authors' collaborative autoethnography and continues with a survey and discursive interviews.

The next article, *Queer Aesthetics: Reflections on the Queer through the Lens of Georg Simmel,* wants to outline some theoretical reflections about queer aesthetics. Luca Guizzardi wonders: who is a queer individual? How can a queer individual be imagined? The queer subject is the strange(r) of society and in society and, as the author shall try to show, queer could therefore be observed, from that Simmelian perspective, as a social form. In fact, the essential point of the article is about to make is that queer should be seen as a cultural form. The figure of the outsider and Simmel's social aesthetic theory will then be taken up in order to develop a possible link between the two – the perception of queerness and the individual's reaction to it. Finally, in the conclusions will mention various reflections on the meaning of queer as a cultural form of our modern life.

In the article *Queer(er) Sociology: Innovations and Implications for Social Research*, Salvatore Monaco highlights the transformative potential of queer theory to unsettle some established paradigms within Sociology, and to foster innovative modes of knowledge production. He argues that queer theory should not be viewed merely as an object of academic inquiry, but rather as a critical tool for analyzing social structures, power dynamics, and the processes of normalization that often underpin social research. The author places particular emphasis on the theoretical and methodological challenges involved in integrating queer perspectives into the social sciences. His work aims to broaden the scope of sociological inquiry by promoting a practice of knowledge co-creation—one that actively engages with the diversity and complexity of social realities.

With their article *Nature's Queer Nexus, Reclaiming Spaces and Identities*, Udisha Singh and Anurag Anand explore the intersection between queer theory and ecology, arguing the need to deconstruct the heteronormative dichotomies that permeate people's relationship with nature. The authors claim that designating nature as heteronormative has led to the marginalization of queer communities and the denaturalization of homosexuality. Through the analysis of works by American queer writers such as Adrienne Rich and Minnie Bruce Pratt, the paper highlights the close association between the queer community and nature, as well as the need for conservation practices that protect both nature and queer communities.

In her article *Challenging Neoliberal Normativities: Making Space for Queer Urban Theory and Radical Practices*, Anna Liliana Arlotta engages with key strands of queer theory, urban studies, and critical geography to theorize the concept of the "marginal city" through a queer lens. To this end, the paper explores the political and theoretical potential of adopting radical queer approaches in the analysis of urban space, reflecting on both the convergences and frictions between queer theory and critical urban studies. Arlotta offers a critical examination of the notion of the "inclusive city" and the dynamics of LGBT+ assimilationism, exposing the contradictions these frameworks present not only for sexual and gender minorities but also for a broader range of subjects who occupy the symbolic and material margins of contemporary urban environments. The article culminates in the articulation of a visionary model of the "not-yet-here" city, inspired by bell hooks' conceptualization of the margin as a space of radical openness. This model challenges prevailing urban imaginaries and proposes alternative spatial configurations grounded in resistance, multiplicity, and emancipatory potential.

In their contribution, *The Impact of Queer culture in gender affirmation pathways: the case of desister people*, Marianna Coppola and Giuseppe Masullo propose a completely different interpretation of the possible outcomes of the assessment process within gender affirmation processes for binary and non-binary transgender people. The authors emphasize that the much-discussed and controversial phenomenon of "desisting" that is, people who begin a gender affirmation journey and then discontinue it after a short time - must be viewed from a holistic and "queering" perspective in order to appreciate the complexity and composite reality of life stories and processes of identity self-determination.

In his contribution*, A brief history of modern and contemporary theories of the subject: universal, binary, queer. From olympe de gouges to paul b. Preciado in the dialectic between equality and difference,* Nit Nahum offers a historical and cultural analysis of modern theories on the queer dimension, analyzing the main contributions of influential authors in the contemporary debate, crossing different historical phases and paradigms of thought on the composite reality of the queer world.

The work of Alessia Ale Santambrogio and Richard Bourelly entitled *Youth Resistance in Cavour High School, an Italian Case Study* presents a timely and complex reflection on the forms of resistance implemented by transgender and non-binary students who highlight a difficulty with the social democratization mechanism of the "alias career" both in terms of application and in terms of the dissemination of knowledge and training by the "social actors" involved in the process: from school administrators to teachers, school staff, and the parents of other students.

Micol Pizzolati, in her contribution entitled *Queerness and collective care within University: insights from memory work with student groups*, explores the theme of "queerness" in the university system through ethnography and analysis of life stories that examine the ways in which queer students co-construct the coordinates of meaning by negotiating tensions and the need for meaning in social reality.

Finally, two book reviews are presented by authors who highlight important reflections on the theme of feminism and queer theories.

Gabriele Oliva offers a comprehensive analysis of Judith Butler's book *Who's Afraid of Gender?*, outlining the historical and cultural context in which the philosopher proposes keys to interpreting the dynamics of power/oppression of gender identities that are "other" than the cis-heteronormative male domain. In addition to his analysis, Oliva offers reflections for future research and for the actualization of Butler's theory in relation to the new challenges of contemporary society in terms of identity self-determination, issues that are intersectional with other forms of social oppression.

Miriam Matteo reviews the book *Femminismo Terrone* by Claudia Fauzia and Valentina Amenta, offering an analysis of the very interesting intersectional aspect: the aspects of the feminist struggle with the struggles and demands of the southern question, which is still very much felt in Italy between the social and economic divide between the north of the country and the south and the islands.

Matteo outlines the keys to analyzing the phenomenon of female emancipation among the populations of southern Italy without, however, identifying the critical issues and practical implications of the authors' thinking.

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LOOKING AT POLYAMORY THROUGH QUEER LENSES. NOTES FROM A LONGITUDINAL QUALITATIVE STUDY

di Nicole Braida[*]

Abstract

The article analyses the main results of a longitudinal study on relational forms inspired by the theory and practice of polyamory in Italy. Adopting a queer epistemological perspective, I highlight how the polyamorous discourse aligns and can partly contribute to the denaturalization of certain binarisms (Homosexual/Heterosexual; Man/Woman) that are foundational to sexual identity in the dominant order and of normativities that regulate the social recognition of meaningful relationships. While acknowledging its political limitations, the article also highlights the contribution of other activisms to polyamorous discourse, steering it toward a more critical and (self)reflective direction.

Keywords

Polyamory, Queer Epistemologies, Binary Thought, Longitudinal Study

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1. INTRODUCTION

Polyamory is usually defined as the practice or possibility to have multiple relationships at the same time and with the consent of all the people involved. At first, the definition focused on intimate, romantic or sexual partnerships, but I will discuss how the term is increasingly used – specially in some activist contexts – as an umbrella term to encompass a wide range of relationships, without defining a priori the nature of these relationships.

In the last decades polyamory gained increasing attention as perhaps the most popular model of Consensual Non-Monogamy, arousing growing interest also in academic literature (Barker and Langdridge, 2010; En-Griffiths *et al.*, 2018; Hamilton *et al.*, 2021; Klesse *et al.*, 2024).

Although the term was coined in the early '90s, when the community developed its own values and vocabulary, its roots can be traced back to the geeky, sci-fi/fantasy, alternative spirituality and technology community of the San Francisco Bay area of the '60s (Anapol, 2010).

More recently, the polyamorous theories and practices have spread in different geographical areas. It is especially in the last decade that polyamory has become more popular in Italy as well, mainly due to encounters through social networks of people who are uncomfortable with the ideal of monogamous romantic love (Paccagnella, 2020). The origins of what we can call Italian "polyamorous community" can be traced back to the creation of the first national Facebook group[1] that achieved a certain popularity, and the creation of local groups in different cities, which began to organise moments of conviviality (the so-called "poliaperitivi") and circles for discussion and support on the management of polyamorous relationships ("polimeriggi").

This article starts from the results of a longitudinal qualitative study conducted in Italy that spanned two waves (2017-18; 2023). The reflections I try to articulate apply queer lenses to the study of polyamorous practices. The term "queer" is understood here as critical theory and as epistemological foundation for those movements that combine a non-normative approach to sexuality with a radical contestation of the *status quo* (Bernini, 2017). More specifically, its anti-normative, anti-binary, anti-essentialist and anti-assimilationist

[1] The group was created in 2009 and was archived in 2019. Meanwhile, another group was created in 2013 with a large overlap of members from the first one. This second group is still active, with more than 6300 members. In recent years, polyamorous outreach has also expanded to Instagram, where some micro-influencer pages have reached around 15000/20000 followers.

dimensions are considered. Nevertheless, we can not ignore that the term is nowadays used in a variety of contexts and meanings that go beyond its political meaning (e.g., its use as an umbrella term for all non-hetero and/or non-cisgender subjectivities). We can say that queer is "a contested and locationally contingent term" (Browne, Nash, 2010: p. 2).

Within the sociological tradition, my approach is indebted to symbolic interactionism. Continuities from an epistemological perspective between symbolic interactionism and more recent developments in queer theory have already been identified. Romania (2013) summarises them as follows:

> [T]he shared definition of identities as non-categorizable; a shared emphasis on individual subjectivity; the rejection of scientific paradigms as truth structures in favour of a performative understanding of them; the impossibility of clearly distinguishing the relationship between nature and culture, in a world already socially and symbolically constructed and transformed, to the point of preventing a pre-conceptual – in Kantian terms – perception of reality (Ivi: p. 22, my translation).

Various studies have highlighted how people who experience consensual multiple-partners relationships show greater tendency to identify their sexuality in non-dichotomous and non-heteronormative ways (Manley *et al.*, 2015), greater flexibility and greater adaptability to changes within the relationship (for example, from sexual relationship to non-sexual relationship) (Sheff, 2013) or greater acceptance of the end of romantic relationships (Sheff, 2015). These trends were also confirmed by the first wave of the study, conducted during my PhD. Sheff interprets these trends through the lens of the psychological theory of resilience (Hooper, 2008; Becvar, 2013; Walsh, 2016), underlining how polyamorous families display some of the skills that resilience scholars highlighted as important to manage crisis, such as "positive communication skills and the cohesion of family network connections" (Sheff, 2016: p. 262). These results inspired the idea of a longitudinal study with a specific focus on sexual identity and relationship transformations. This focus allows me to track changes in the interviewees' affective network and determine whether the trends identified in the first wave are confirmed after five years, despite the (potential) transformations that may have occurred in their relationships or relational orientation/style. Through the interviews, I also sought to consider how the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic (which lasted almost two months in Italy in its most restrictive form) impacted the interviewees' intimate network.

In other contributions (Braida, 2023; Braida, forthcoming), I have already highlighted how a wide range of political positions exists within the polyamorous community: from complete depoliticization – which, as feminist reflections on positionality have shown, effectively amounts to tacit support of the *status quo* – to what might be called "liberal assimilationist" stances – which endorse feminist, anti-racist, and anti-fascist values, but whose political demands aim at inclusion within the hegemonic model rather than its radical transformation – to positions that advocate for a radical overturning and rethinking of how intimacy, care, and family are practiced. This heterogeneity of political stances, combined with certain individualistic tendencies and a focus on the "search for the true self" that have characterized the polyamorous approach since its early days, hinders its transformative potential. Moreover, various studies – including my own research – have shown that polyamorous communities are predominantly composed of white, middle-class individuals with medium to high levels of cultural capital (Sheff, Hammers, 2011; Klesse, 2013).

Despite these critical aspects – which must be taken into account if we are to adopt a queer anti-assimilationist approach – my research has brought to light elements that seem to point toward an undoing and broadening of the concepts of love and relationship, moving beyond the mere reproduction of the heterosexual couple. At the same time, it appears that more recent forms of polyamorous activism have increased reflexivity around the dimension of power in relationships (and how it interacts with gender and class dimensions), as well as taken a more radical stance on the need for a fundamental transformation of society, beginning with its material aspects. In this article, I will therefore focus on elements of my research that align with this direction, aiming to highlight how polyamorous discourse can be employed as a tool for radical social transformation.

2. QUEER(ING) EPISTEMOLOGIES AND METHODS

The study moves from an insider perspective. Indeed, I was active in the Italian polyamorous community from 2012 to 2017 (at different levels, both online and in the local group). As I have argued elsewhere (Braida, 2023), the insider position presents both arguments for and against, which I will go briefly to recall here. On the positive side, the possibility to overcome the community's gatekeeping (Hermann, 1989); the fact that I was already socialised to the languages of the community, which allowed me to have more direct access to the meanings that people attach to their practices and to look at those practices from an at least partially shared point of view (Geertz, 1983); and the fact that I was already socialised to group dynamics, which made it easier for me to understand the different positioning and conflicts within the community, and to know who was best to turn to for information of different kind (Smyth, Holian, 2008). On the negative side, I can mention the community's expectations towards the insider researcher and the perception of the researcher's expectations from part of the people interviewed, who can consequently adapt their narrative to offer an exclusively celebratory narrative.

Moreover, I reflected on how some personal traits might have shaped my research. First, I considered how my social perception as a woman may have positively influenced the interviewees' comfort in opening up to me, which was generally true for people of all genders. However, this may also result from a greater predisposition to self-reflexivity among polyamorous people, as well as a habit of discussing their intimate relationships. Additionally, being perceived as an "expert" (and as someone with a high level of cultural capital on the topic), combined with the power imbalance during the interview, may have prevented some people from speaking freely about their concerns, especially when they did not feel fluent enough in polyamorous vocabulary. On the other hand, my (trans)feminist stance may have discouraged some participants from expressing sexist views or, especially among heterosexual men, from acknowledging power imbalances in their relationships with women. Although I did not explicitly discuss my activist identity with all interviewees, it was easily inferred from my Facebook profile, which I used frequently for recruitment.

These reflections fit within feminist and queer epistemological approaches who have amplified the concept of "situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988). These analyses brought forth a critique of the idea of objectivity in research, highlighting how what has long been presented as a "neutral gaze" concealed the situated point of view of those speaking from a position of power (Jagose, 1996; Law, 2004; Browne, Nash, 2010). Concerning the "subject" of research, they moved away from the conceptualisation of a stable, coherent, and unified subject, reframing it as multiple, unstable, blurred (Browne and Nash, 2010). With these epistemological premises the insider perspective is reframed as a specific position with respect to the subject of study, which gives rise to a specific knowledge. It is from my incorporated relational experiences and from my path within the polyamorous community that I started the research journey. At the same time, my relations with queer activism and theory contributed to look at polyamory from a specific point of view. This situated gaze has inevitably contributed to privileging some interpretations over others and to framing narratives within conceptualisations that leave room for nuance, plurality, and continuous redefinitions.

Concerning the methods, the study combines different qualitative tools. In the first wave, I articulated the work in three work packages, not rigidly ordered in chronological order: 1) study of public discourses on Consensual Non-Monogamies (self-help manuals; sites, blogs and articles of international and national activism); 2) study of online discourses and participant observation (both online – in the two main Italian Facebook groups dedicated to polyamory – and offline – participating in local polyamorous events in different cities); 3) semi-structured interviews: 60 people of different ages, geographical areas, gender identity and sexual/affective orientation having experience of Consensual Non-Monogamy. The research started officially in October 2016, while the actual fieldwork lasted from October 2017 to July 2018. I chose to spend a period (which varied from a week to a month) in almost every Italian city where there was a local group dedicated to organising poly events; in total I visited 10 different cities, through north, centre and south of Italy. This choice was important to expand the possibility of recruiting people for interviews, but also to establish informal relationships with people in the local group and/or people who had experienced poly relationships. The informal relationships and exchanges built before and during the ethnographic work greatly contributed to its interpretation and can thus be considered an integral part of it, although it is difficult to account for formally.

In the second wave (February-June 2023) I interviewed again (five years later) ten of the people previously interviewed, trying to maintain some heterogeneity in age, geographic area, gender identity, education, and sexual/affective orientation. Their characteristics are summarised in Table 1, except for the geographical area (in the attempt to not to make them too easily identifiable). I had initially contacted two other people, one of whom declined the interview, while the other did not respond. All the other people contacted eagerly agreed. While the interviews in the first wave were all conducted live, in this case seven interviews were conducted online. The interviews in the second wave focused mainly on the transformations that the interviewees experienced in their relationships, the way they conceptualise love and relationships, their sexual/affective orientation, and their gender identity. To jog the memory of my respondents, I sent the transcript of the previous interview to the participants a few days prior to the interview. This allowed them to rely on the actual snapshot of their responses from five years earlier, rather than on their own memory reconstruction, which would inevitably be fragmented and inaccurate. Moreover, consistent with my advancement of perspective that I will articulate better in the concluding paragraph, in this second wave I tried to broaden the focus on the affective network. In this regard, I also proposed to the interviewees to draw an affective map by including the people they believe are part of their affective network. Six people responded positively to this stimulus, drawing the map that we commented during the interview.

The study of the relationships and of the affective networks follows a performative approach, looking at intimate/affective relationships as something that people do, and in doing they construct the meaning of these relationships, beyond essentialist and reified interpretations of intimate or family relationships (West, Zimmermann, 1987; Butler, 1990; Morgan, 2011). Concretely, I never started from my own definition of "relationship" but asked them to define it and to describe the characteristics of the relationship with the different people included in their affective map.

Table 1. Socio-demographics characteristics of interviewees

Pseudonym	**Gender**	**Age**	**Education**	**Orientation**
Ettore	NB	34	BA	asexual, bisexual
Adele	NB	33	high school	bisexual
Serena	Woman	33	MA	bisexual
Paolo	NB	46	MA	pansexual
Michele	Man	33	PhD	gay
Carlo	Man	53	MA	heterosexual
Giada	NB	34	MA	pansexual
Fiore	Woman	28	high school	bisexual
Fede	NB	32	BA	bisexual
Sergio	Man	39	MA	heteroflexible

In this article I will focus mainly on the second wave of interviews, highlighting the longitudinal changes in the respondents' conceptualisations and practices.

3. BEYOND BINARISMS

Many respondents emphasised already in the first wave how the encounter with polyamory marked a passage from definitions that were rigid and with solid boundaries to definitions that are more nuanced, pluralised, multifaceted. This distinction recalls the passage from modern stories to what Plummer (1995) calls "postmodern stories". In the following subsections I will analyse how these changes applied in three areas: the first two regards their sexual identities (sexual/affective orientation and gender identity), the third their conceptualisations regarding relationships.

3.1 Homosexuality/Heterosexuality and Woman/Man

The interconnection between nonmonogamous relational practices and/or preferences and plurisexual orientations have been highlighted by different researchers (Rust, 1996; Page, 2004; Klesse, 2007; Robinson, 2013). In the first wave of my study more than half of the people in my sample (32/60) defined their sexual/affective orientation differently than homosexual or heterosexual (Braida, 2020). For many, the "exploration" of their plurisexual orientation moved in parallel with the "exploration" of polyamory, or in some cases the "discovery" of polyamory sparked further inquiry into other aspects of their sexual identity or behaviours, including their patterns of attraction.

Nevertheless, the definition of their orientation remained fairly stable between the two waves. Thus, the possibility of being attracted to people of different genders does not seem to be "a phase" for my respondents (although five years is not a long time, this relative stability occurs in the totality of respondents).

It is also worth noting that Carlo, the only person in the sub-sample who identifies as heterosexual, in terms of sexual behaviours he reports having had sex with men, although he remains attracted solely to women.

Regarding gender identity as well, the number of polyamorous people who do not fit into gender binary is significantly higher than that (although probably underestimated) in the general population (see Braida *et al.*, 2023). With the term "nonbinary" I (and in many cases, my respondents) encompass a range of gender experiences, ranging from not feeling that they belong to any gender, to feeling somewhere between woman and man, or feeling something entirely different.

Among the people selected for the sub-sample of the second wave, two people register changes in the experience of their gender identity. Giada highlighted already in the first interview how the polyamorous spaces represented a safer space were to experiment also with gender expression: "[M]y first dress I put it here, my first time I said [to be genderqueer] openly to a person who was not in the group was here[2]" (April 2018). By the time of the second interview, Giada[3] has better define her identity: "I now call myself a nonbinary trans person, which is also oxymoronic, but I like It that way. With all the difficulties of the case, which are now getting bigger and bigger and giant, difficulties of the case of a person who is not out in all circumstances" (April 2023). In the case of Fede at the time of the first interview they defined as a cis woman, but during the second interview they express a more complicated relationship with their gender identity:

> [A]t some point I started thinking differently, feeling differently, and... I felt and still feel a major impostor syndrome with respect to not defining myself as cisgender, I have a very hard time finding a definition that I can actually feel is... right, for me. I think that... I mean, I feel that being a cisgender woman doesn't even begin to describe who I am. I have a… lately the words that are in my head are "plural" and "expanding". I think my gender identity is plural and expanding. I need… I want, and I need to imagine to expand the possibilities of my gender, and this is something that gives me a lot to think about, that makes me reflect every day, that makes me look in the mirror every day and ask what it sees, and what I see, and what others see, and how what others see impacts how I feel (May 2023).

The adjectives by which Fede describes their gender identity – "plural" and "expanding" – are clearly in the direction of deconstructing a definition that remains within the stakes of rigid binarism.

As in the case of sexual orientation, in this case as well people who already defined themselves as nonbinary during the first interview have not changed the definition but, in some cases, they add some nuances. Paolo, for example, comments in this way their changes in the way to conceive their gender (and that of other people):

> [T]he thing that I noticed most in rereading the old interview, is how much I

[2] The interviewee says "here" because we were in the place where the events of the poly group were held.

[3] I chose a female name as a pseudonym on the recommendation of the interviewee, following the second interview.

> was using the masculine. And how much I was also using gendered terms to refer to other people who have a gender as well. I mean, now I wouldn't say "a girl", or "a woman", or "a man" of a person I interact with, I would say "a person" because I don't feel the need to gender people. […] The idea of not having a gender I already had [...] it's more of a masking thing, that is, over time I have both gained more explicit awareness of this and gained awareness that it's something I can express.

In Paolo's case, therefore, the tendency to eschew gender categorisation has strengthened over the past five years, and this has been reflected first and foremost in the use of language.

3.2 Love/Not-Love

Approaching polyamory also seems to blur the definitions of love and relationship. In particular, three tendencies have been identified: the difficulty in drawing a clear line between love and friendship; the acceptance of non-linear transformations in their relationships; and the acceptance of the end of romantic phases/relationships. From respondents' narratives, it seems that the "nonmonogamous turn" helped them to develop a conceptualisation of relationships as paths that can undergo different phases and forms, not necessarily on a regular basis.

Among the respondents of the second wave, first of all there are some differences between people who define relationship anarchists and the others. Indeed, Ettore, Adele and Paolo – who use the label of relationship anarchy[4] – are less inclined to use label to define people included in their affective network. Ettore, reflecting on the fact that compared to the previous interview, only the relationships that had been less "formalised" with a label survived, comments the following:

> [I]f there's one conclusion I can draw over the years is that, perhaps, I'm more inclined to... relationships of this kind, much less formalised and also based on a... let's say, a long-term approach where you're not looking for something specific in the other person but... there's mutual interest, you keep in touch and this thing. Then, if it works, in the long run this sustains the relationship.

[4] Relationship anarchy can be defined as the philosophy or practice in which people are seen to be free to engage in relationships that are not bound by rules, aside from those mutually agreed by the people involved; essentially, it can be distinguished from polyamory in that it is more radically non-hierarchical and refuses to define relationships with labels such as "just friends", "in a relationship", and so on (Anapol, 2010). The term – coined by Nordgren (2006) – and the concept originate from and align with anarchist thought but have also spread in the polyamorous communities with a depoliticised meaning.

Ettore, in short, prefers to cultivate relationships that do not carry with them specific romantic or sexual expectations but, at the same time, are based on the continuity of the relationship, mutual interest and support, even if in some cases at a distance. Paolo's approach presents some differences. Indeed, it includes in their network a variety of relationships:

> [F]rom people with whom there is a very strong emotional but not necessarily sexual connection [...], to people with whom there is more of a body connection, [...] people who are like family of choice […], [with] Agata we are seeing each other regularly, it can be called a relationship from the most classical point of view, as far as she is married and living with her husband [...]. So [there are] relationships sometimes called friendly, sometimes sexual, sometimes not. There are various levels of connection, they're recurrent people in my life, they're people I have direct, personal relationships with, instead of people I only see in group settings.

So, Paolo includes relationships with different levels of continuity, different levels of emotional connection and different level of sexual connection.

People who do not define relationship anarchists draw a sharper line between relationships with a romantic component and relationships where there is no such component. However, when we go deeper into delving the nature of different relationships, the boundaries often waver. For example, Fede at first expresses difficulty in avoiding distinguishing between people with whom they have a romantic relationship and others. By the end of the interview, however, they reflect that probably the biggest change in these five years has been precisely that they have learned to conceptualise relationships in a more "hybrid" way:

> [P]recisely comes to mind the fact that the relationship that I have with Zoe I'm not able to define it at all, okay? Because there are some components of one type and other components of another […]. [W]ithout any kind of handbook, totally randomly, we are exploring, and we are trying to find a dimension that is somehow right for us. And so… it's okay, I gladly keep the uncertainty as well. I don't know how to say… it's a phase where you explore. And that's okay, but here it is. I mean, it's confusing. However, I would say that if I had to think about what is the thing that has changed the most, it is this, that is, the possibility of imagining other relational forms as well.

Michele's narrative is somewhat similar. Although the respondent identifies one partner as primary, he currently cohabits with another person with whom he has entered into a civil union to enable him to obtain Italian citizenship more easily. Speaking of plans to end the civil union – now that Francesco has been granted citizenship – and move in with his primary partner, Michele comments:

> This thing of shutting down [the civil union] will be like shutting down a part of my identity that has been with me for the last six years so much, and also the idea then of going to live with Marco and then not having Francesco in the house anymore and losing that part there puts me very... very much afraid, because Francesco is a reference point for me, we don't have a relationship neither sexual nor sentimental, however... he is my sister Francesco, practically. He is someone I love very much and [it is hard] to imagine not having him in my everyday life.

Although Michele's future plans seem to follow a more "traditional" model, Michele experiences the change in the configuration of the relationship with Francesco as significant and he does not approach it lightly.

Another element that has been confirmed in the second wave is the decentralisation of the sexual component. This is not so much because sexuality is not important for the respondents – for many of them it is – but because I have often registered a misalignment between sharing sexuality and hierarchy of relationships. Adele and Ettore – who also describes himself as asexual – do not currently have relationships with a sexual component. In other cases, sharing sexuality In some relationships is not determinative in deeming those relationships more important, as in Paolo's case. Carlo, then, explicitly states that polyamory has helped him to accept the fact that the sexual component in his primary relationship has become less important. These tendencies go in the direction of challenging allonormativity, understood in the sense of the definition provided by Brandley and Spencer (2022), as a term that describes "the constitutive practices whereby social structures expect and privilege sexual and romantic attraction and relationships" (p. 1).

Other elements emerging from the field challenge other relational normativities, such as the relationship escalator, defined by Gahran (2017) as "the standard by which most people gauge whether an intimate relationship is significant, serious, good, healthy, committed or worthy of effort" (p. 19) and that it is manifested in the recognition of a set of steps that the relationship must go through, more or less chronologically ordered and that may have slight variations depending on the society of reference (in our society Gahran recognised eight steps: making contact, initiation, claiming and defining, establishment, commitment, merging, conclusion, legacy). For example, Fiore and Giada cohabited for a time with one of their partners and then decided – for different reasons – to interrupt the cohabitation, without affecting the importance of the relationship. In Giada's case, not only with Dorian did they decide not to cohabitate anymore, but they also decided to exclude the sexual component from their relationship. Giada comments that "the sentiment has remained the same. Actually, it is probably more because we realised that nothing can beat us". Similarly, Sergio – despite the birth of a son – imagines that in the future, when his son is older, his ideal living configuration would be not to continue cohabiting with the mother of his child.

These relational paths are also a challenge for chrononormativity, defined by Freeman as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (p. 3). In this sense, the relational temporality described are similar to queer temporalities, because they do not follow the timing imposed on relationships (and productivity) by social norms: they stall, skip steps, or go backwards, sabotaging the escalator.

Even when the end of the romantic relationship coincides with the end of the relationship altogether (as opposed to transformation) – and although the respondents admit that this can sometimes be very painful – often the "exes" remain within the affective network. This is the case, for example, of Serena, who cites her three most important ex-partners as people she continues to refer to in the case of emotional emergencies; or of Fiore, who has included several of her ex-partners in the drawing of her affective map, even in the case where they are no longer in contact, because "were very important people who I still think are very important".

4. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

From March 22 to May 3, 2020, the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic was adopted in its most stringent form in Italy: it was forbidden for all individuals to relocate or move by public or private means of transportation to municipalities other than the one in which they were located, except for proven business needs, absolute urgency, or health reasons. These emergency measures, then followed by other phases in which measures were alternately tightened and relaxed until the following April, clearly had an impact for people who had a non-normative relational configuration.

During the second round of interviews, I investigated the impact that pandemic containment measures had on the relational lives of respondents. Some people took the time to redefine their own priorities and redefine their relational boundaries. This was especially true for Ettore, who was the only person who spent the lockdown alone: for him it was a time to recharge their social battery and to rethink the way to connect with other people.

For many other people it represented a forced monogamisation because they had to choose a person to live with. While Carlo read it as an opportunity to strengthen his relationship that was already defined as primary, for others this situation severely compromised relationships and, for some, even mental health. For Adele, the pandemic time was a time of severe suffering. Due to logistical issues, she spent the lockdown with her partner Andrea and his mother, with whom she previously – and afterward – cohabited only part-time. She commented:

> [T]he period of Covid I was going through quite a negative period at the level of... health... mental health as well, because I had this fever that lasted me for six months, […] which was then also related a bit to a... a depressive phase. […] [C]ertainly, there was a very strong connection between the physical part and the mental part, and the fact that I only had to choose one place to live really led me to... to shut down, in the sense that I live by the fact of... not having a fixed place to return to. […] For me, it is crucial to have a space and time for all relationships [...], including the relationship with myself.

For Serena as well, living in a small, dimly-lit space with her (former) partner was also an element of relationship fatigue, which contributed to the breakdown. In Paolo's case, living together during the lockdown in another country led to the end of cohabitation and of the relationship. This experience also led Paolo to make the decision not to share living space anymore, except for short-term hospitality.

Instead, Michele shared living space during the lockdown with his roommate and "husband"[5] Francesco; then, later joined – circumventing restrictions – his primary partner Marco and two other friends. Michele reports that this experience was also a bit of a trial run for his relationship with Marco, because of which they realised they could move in together. The lockdown was also a test case (with a negative outcome, in this case) for Michele's other relationship. Even though during the lockdown he would go "the long way around" after the grocery shopping to see him, not feeling the same commitment to pursue the relationship on the other side led the relationship to dissipate.

[5] They have a civil union, as marriage is not allowed in Italy between same-gender people.

The lockdown has been a turning point for many people, who mentioned it before I asked them the explicit question of how it had affected their relationships: for some, it was a time to reaffirm their – relational, spatial, temporal – boundaries, for others a testing ground for relationships, with both positive and negative outcomes.

5. STRUCTURAL LIMITS

In the second wave of interviews structural limits emerge more clearly than five years before, also due to the greater experience accumulated by the people interviewed. With the expression "structural limits" I am referring to that set of cultural, institutional, and legislative norms that prioritise the monogamous couple and the nuclear family over all other forms of relationship. In particular, regarding the Italian context, it is crucial to emphasise the significant Catholic influence and the family-oriented welfare state, which views the family as the primary source of support and care for its members. These factors help to reinforce a conservative stance on family values and structure, marked by both heteronormativity and mononormativity.

What seems to emerge with more clarity in the second wave is also a differentiation between the limits identified between those who have more "traditional" life plans and those who instead identify as relationship anarchists. For example, Serena – who desires one or more relationships with whom to share a long-term relationship project – asks herself many questions about how she can reconcile this desire with the nonmonogamous approach in this society:

> How will I get out of this? Will I get out of it? Will I find a person, or several people, with whom to share projects while sharing a vision of this type, or is it a vision of this type and therefore must be content with extemporaneousness, with the temporariness of relationships? It bothers me, this... this thing. So, I will seek a mediation...

On the other hand, Ettore became more aware of the difference in desires and positionings even within the nonmonogamous approach. He concludes that his relational preferences are probably not compatible with those who need to draw strict relational boundaries:

> What I see – after these five years – is that there has been – always referring back to my feeling of communicative failure in explaining how I live relationships, in a way that I can approximate by saying that [I am]

> relationship anarchist – by many people who identify themselves more as polyamorous, this thing in my opinion has not really... been understood, or at least if it has been understood it was not... it could not... get along with their way of living... relationships.

Thus, a more pronounced differentiation seems to be emerging within the nonmonogamous positionings. While there are those who question whether it is possible to cultivate long-term relationship projects within nonmonogamous relationships, there are also those who feel that they are a minority within the minority for wanting to more radically undo the way relationships are done. Structural limits affect both positionings: as long as the monogamous model is the only one with social and institutional legitimacy and recognition, imaginaries about other types of intimacy and care remain constrained.

6. FINAL REMARKS

In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), one of the books considered foundational for queer theory, Sedgwick writes:

> It is a rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another (dimensions that include preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, etc. etc. etc.), precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained, as *the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of "sexual orientation". […] At the same time that this process of sexual specification or species formation was going on, the book will argue, less stable and identity-bound understandings of sexual choice also persisted and developed, often among the same people or interwoven in the same systems of thought. Again, the book will not suggest (nor do I believe there currently exists) any standpoint of thought from which the rival claims of these minoritizing and universalizing understandings of sexual definition could be decisively arbitrated as to their "truth". Instead, the performative effects of the self-contradictory discursive field of force created by their overlap will be my subject. […] [O]ne main strand of argument in this book is deconstructive, in a fairly specific sense. The analytic move it makes is to demonstrate that categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions – heterosexual/ homosexual, in this case – actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation (Ivi: 8-10).

It is in this sense of deconstruction that the polyamorous discourse seems to be able to align with and to be understood. Although for some people the approach to polyamorous theory and practice has been the springboard to question their sexual identity in a broader sense, I do not want to establish a unidirectional causal relationship between the polyamorous discourse and the deconstruction of different binarisms. I simply want to underline how the polyamorous discourse seems to fit into a broader complex process of questioning naturalised norms and binarisms, starting with the heterosexual/homosexual one.

The longitudinal analysis of polyamorous narratives and practices seem to confirm that the polyamorous discourse can be a tool to open relational imaginaries alternative to the dominant scenario. Polyamorous experiences seem to go beyond a simple reproduction of the couple device. Indeed, for some people the polyamorous discourse seems to configure as a tool to challenge the binary thought – especially in terms of gender and sexuality – and to reframe post-romantic, a-romantic and a-sexual relationships.

Several authors advanced critiques of the polyamorous model from a radical perspective, noting the risk of creating a new normative model (Haritaworn *et al*., 2006; Willey, 2010), of failing to question and instead reinforcing the hierarchy of romantic relationships over other relationships (Wilkinson, 2012), and of adhering to a neoliberal model of relational accumulation that overlooks care (Vasallo, 2018). These critiques have opened spaces for new reflections and formulations within polyamorous activism, which often arise from contamination with bisexual, aspec[6], trans and queer activisms. With these processes in mind, what Car G. Lepori and I have tried to do in the short essay *Poliamore. Riflessioni transfemministe queer per una critica al sistema monogamo [Polyamory. Queer Transfeminist Reflections for a Critique of the Monogamous System]* (2023) is to broaden the meaning of polyamory, using it as an umbrella term to define one's relational network, which is not defined a priori based on the sharing of specific practices, but can be defined by each person based on their own (ongoing) definition of relationship. Although the original polyamorous theory may reinforce individualistic aspects (for example highlighting the search for the "true self"), also because of its roots in a mainly middle-class community with high cultural resources, we find also ideals/experiences that are moving toward more collectivist and mutualistic perspectives.

[6] Aspec is an umbrella term for anyone who identifies on the asexual and/or aromantic spectrum.

What I am arguing is not that these practices are particularly innovative – it can happen that monogamous people are friends with exes or have important relationships that are neither sexual nor romantic – but that the polyamorous discourse works for my respondents as a tool for identifying and valuing these practices. Besides, these frameworks seem to have increase the tendencies to define orientations, relationships and gender identities in non-dichotomous, multifaceted and plural ways that challenge static and monolithic identity definitions. Although acknowledging political limitations of polyamory as a movement that lacks a solid, shared base of claims (Braida, 2023), in the Italian context contamination with other counternormative activisms appears to provide interesting insights into recoding intimacies and care outside normative boundaries.

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PER UN ABITARE OBLIQUO
Esplorare esperienze LGBTQI+ di precarietà abitativa con metodi creativi

di Simone Schinocca, Raffaella Ferrero Camoletto[*]

Abstract

Between horizontal and oblique. For a queer approach to LGBTQI+ experiences of housing precarity.

La condizione di homelessness in persone LGBTQI+ risulta spesso invisibile per la riluttanza degli individui ad autodefinirsi tali per il timore su subire discriminazioni e violenze da altri ospiti e dagli stessi operatori dei rifugi dedicati (Quilty, Norris 2022).

L'articolo ricostruisce le esperienze di un gruppo di partecipanti al progetto Tohousing, inaugurato a Torino nel dicembre 2018 per fornire risposte precise alle problematiche di precarietà abitativa e vulnerabilità socio-economica delle persone LGBTI+. La ricerca utilizza un approccio mixed-methods, integrando tra loro una metodologia creativa (un laboratorio teatrale con la creazione di un podcast) e una tecnica di ricerca qualitativa più tradizionale (interviste semi strutturate). La peculiarità di questa integrazione di tecniche e la loro organizzazione sequenziale con l'avvio della discesa sul campo attraverso il laboratorio ha favorito l'orizzontalità nella relazione tra ricercatore e partecipanti, un "fare ricerca per e con" più che un "fare ricerca su" (Rinaldi, 2023).

Keywords

Precarietà abitativa; LBGTQI+; Metodi creativi; Metodi partecipativi

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Il fenomeno della homelessness tra le persone LGBTQI+ rappresenta una delle espressioni più complesse e meno visibili delle disuguaglianze sociali. In Italia, come in altri contesti internazionali, la mancanza di studi specifici e di dati affidabili contribuisce a nascondere l'entità del problema. Tuttavia, alcune esperienze pionieristiche, come il progetto ToHousing di Torino, stanno cercando di rispondere in maniera innovativa a questa emergenza, adottando modelli di intervento partecipativi e creativi.

La marginalizzazione delle persone LGBTQI+ senza dimora si manifesta attraverso l'intersezione di fattori discriminatori che rendono più difficile per loro l'accesso ai servizi di accoglienza tradizionali (Rosati et al., 2021). L'esposizione a forme di discriminazione multipla è peraltro aggravata dall'attuale clima politico nel contesto italiano (Rosati et al., 2025), che mette in luce la necessità di interventi che vadano oltre la semplice fornitura di un tetto, promuovendo la costruzione di spazi di accoglienza che siano realmente inclusivi e rispettosi delle differenze.

Il presente saggio, a partire da un lavoro di ricerca sul campo (Schinocca, 2021), esplora le dinamiche della homelessness tra le persone LGBTQI+, evidenziando il legame tra orientamento sessuale, identità di genere e precarietà abitativa, attraverso le storie di partecipanti al progetto ToHousing.

Il saggio si concentra poi sull'utilità dell'approccio metodologico adottato che, partendo da un'esperienza partecipativa di un laboratorio teatrale, ha attivato un percorso di ricerca qualitativa in cui le persone sono state coinvolte non come mere discenti, ma come partecipanti attiv* mess* nelle condizioni di potersi raccontare attraverso un linguaggio sia verbale sia delle emozioni e del corpo. Tale approccio viene qui inteso come possibilità di queerizzare i canoni metodologici delle scienze sociali perché ne destabilizza ruoli, gerarchie e confini (Rinaldi, 2015).

1. HOMELESSNESS E PERSONE LGBTQI+: UN INQUADRAMENTO

La homelessness è una delle forme più estreme di povertà e marginalità sociale, spesso associata a esperienze di esclusione relazionale, isolamento e discriminazione (Consoli, Meo, 2020) e prodotto dell'intersezione tra fattori strutturali, economici e culturali. All'interno di questo quadro, le persone LGBTQIA+ emergono come soggettività particolarmente vulnerabili a forme specifiche di precarietà abitativa, spesso legate a dinamiche di discriminazione, violenza familiare, esclusione sociale e marginalizzazione istituzionale. Questa prospettiva riflette le teorie di Paugam (1999) e Castel (1993) sulla disaffiliazione sociale, che vedono nella homelessness una condizione di esclusione multidimensionale che va oltre la mera assenza di un tetto per includere forme di instabilità abitativa, temporaneità forzata e abitazioni inadeguate (Tosi, 2017). La classificazione ETHOS, adottata da FEANTSA (2007), ha contribuito a una comprensione più articolata del fenomeno, includendo nella definizione di homelessness non solo coloro che vivono in strada, ma anche chi risiede in alloggi inadeguati o insicuri. Tuttavia, questa tipologia fatica a catturare la specificità dell'esperienza LGBTQI+. Per esempio, la pratica del couch surfing, particolarmente diffusa tra i giovani LGBTQI+, raramente viene riconosciuta come una forma di precarietà abitativa (Curry, 2017).

Può essere utile, dal punto di vista analitico, riprendere il concetto di sextilio, coniato da Guzman negli anni ’90 per descrivere l’esperienza di esilio vissuta da persone omosessuali — in particolare portoricani — costrette a lasciare il proprio paese d’origine a causa dell’orientamento sessuale. Il termine ha assunto nel tempo una portata concettuale più ampia, utile a indagare le forme di dislocamento soggettivo e di non-appartenenza che colpiscono le persone LGBTQI+ in molteplici contesti. Wasser e França (2021) estendono ulteriormente il concetto considerandolo come una forma più generale di esilio dalla casa, più che dalla nazione, che non si limita ad uno spostamento geografico, ma si radica in un vissuto di rottura affettiva e simbolica con la famiglia, il luogo di origine e la cultura nazionale, percepiti come inospitali o apertamente ostili all’identità sessuale e/o di genere del soggetto. Il sexilio si configura spesso come una fuga dal rifiuto, dalla violenza familiare, dall’assenza di riconoscimento e dalla paura: è quindi prima di tutto un concetto relazionale ed esperienziale, legato al desiderio e alla necessità di “essere altrove per poter essere sé stessi”. In questa prospettiva, il sexilio si configura come una condizione liminale, in cui il soggetto queer si trova sospeso tra il desiderio di essere riconosciuto e la necessità di separarsi da luoghi e relazioni che non offrono quello spazio. Lontano dall’essere una mera categoria identitaria o migratoria, il sexilio esprime una esperienza queer del mondo che mette in crisi l’idea normativa di “casa”, “origine”, “famiglia” e anche di “nazione”.

Tale criticità si riflette in una sorta di "homelessness invisibile" che rende difficile intercettare i bisogni reali di questa popolazione, spesso costretta a strategie abitative informali, instabili o a rapporti di coabitazione coercitivi.

Dal punto di vista delle dimensioni del fenomeno, studi condotti in Canada e negli Stati Uniti rivelano che tra il 20% e il 40% dei giovani senza dimora si identifica come LGBTQI+, una percentuale significativamente più alta rispetto alla popolazione generale (Ecker et al., 2019). Nel Regno Unito si stima che il 25% dei giovani senza dimora sia LGBTQI+ (Albert Kennedy Trust, 2015). In Australia, circa il 18% dei giovani senza fissa dimora si identifica come LGBTQ+, (Hail-Jares et al., 2023). In Spagna dove, come in Italia, mancano studi specifici, la Federaciòn Estatal de Lesbians, Gays, Transexuales y Bisexuales & the RAIS fundaciòn (2017) stima una percentuale del 35% di LGBTQI+ fra i giovani homeless.

In Italia, sebbene gli studi sul tema siano ancora relativamente limitati rispetto al panorama internazionale, esistono contributi che mettono in luce la dimensione intersezionale della vulnerabilità abitativa. Il volume "DisOrientamenti" (D'Ippoliti e Schuster, 2011) rappresenta il primo tentativo sistematico di offrire un'analisi multidisciplinare e multidimensionale delle discriminazioni subite dalle persone LGBT (lesbiche, gay, bisessuali, transgender e transessuali) in Italia, attraverso un approccio integrato, che coniuga ricerca quantitativa, analisi normativa, studio di casi e buone prassi. La ricerca conferma come il disagio abitativo rappresenti una delle manifestazioni più evidenti della marginalizzazione socio-economica vissuta da molte persone LGBTQI+, configurandosi come esito materiale di processi di esclusione sistemica e di rottura delle reti primarie di supporto. Una delle principali vie di accesso all'homelessness per le persone LGBT+ è la rottura precoce con il contesto familiare, in particolare in occasione del coming out. Numerose testimonianze raccolte nel volume segnalano dinamiche di espulsione, isolamento o violenza domestica motivate dal rifiuto dell'identità di genere o dell'orientamento sessuale del soggetto.

Più recente il report di Demurtas e Peroni (2023) che mira a mappare le strutture di ospitalità LGBT+ attive al 2021, analizzandone caratteristiche, funzionamento, target, pratiche di accoglienza e sostenibilità, attraverso un approccio qualitativo e intersezionale. Il quadro che emerge è quello di una rete di realtà frammentate e recenti (la maggior parte fondata dopo il 2016), con una differenziazione nella selezione del proprio target, per cui alcune strutture si rivolgono solo a giovani adulti LGBTQ+ espuls dalle famiglie*, con finalità preventiva (evitare la cronicizzazione), mentre altre adottano un approccio intergenerazionale e intersezionale, rivolgendosi a donne trans, persone migranti, vittime di tratta, ecc.

Secondo ricerche condotte da Arcigay (2020), fino al 30% dei giovani LGBTQIA+ ha sperimentato forme di precarietà abitativa o vera e propria esclusione dall'ambiente familiare. Si può parlare di una "homelessness queer" (England, 2022), segnata da rifiuto familiare, assenza di supporto sociale e difficoltà di accesso a servizi di accoglienza inclusivi e culturalmente competenti. L'esperienza della homelessness in questi casi si intreccia a dinamiche di stigma, isolamento e limitata accessibilità al mercato del lavoro, rafforzando circuiti di povertà e esclusione.

A livello internazionale, McLoughlin (2013) evidenzia come le persone trans siano particolarmente esposte a violenze e abusi nei centri di accoglienza tradizionali, a causa della segregazione binaria degli spazi. La mancanza di alloggi gender-neutral rappresenta una delle principali barriere all'accesso ai servizi (Abramovich, 2012).

Una recente rassegna della letteratura (Gutman et al., 2022) riguardante interventi rivolti a giovani LGBTQIA+ senza fissa dimora mostra come vi sia una grave carenza di dati empirici sull'efficacia e l'impatto percepito dei servizi. Alcune indagini qualitative confermano l'esistenza di barriere strutturali e culturali che limitano l'accesso delle persone LGBTQI+ ai servizi di accoglienza (Norris, Quilty, 2020, 2021; Quilty, Norris, 2022). L'invisibilità di questa popolazione è determinata da una combinazione di fattori: la paura di subire discriminazioni nei rifugi tradizionali, la riluttanza a dichiarare il proprio orientamento sessuale o identità di genere e la mancanza di servizi specificamente dedicati (Costa e Magino, 2021). Anche Burwick et al. (2014) sottolineano come molte persone siano riluttanti a dichiarare la propria identità di genere o orientamento sessuale, temendo ripercussioni negative. Questo fenomeno, definito come invisibilità non registrata, contribuisce a sottostimare la portata reale del problema. Le ricerche di Norris e Quilty (2021) in Irlanda hanno evidenziato come l'invisibilità della homelessness LGBTQI+ si manifesti in quattro dimensioni:

- Irreale (unreal): a causa della riluttanza tra i giovani LGBTQI+ a vedersi e definirsi realmente come senza dimora;

- Senza riparo (unsheltered): perché i giovani senzatetto LGBTQI+ spesso non sono disposti a utilizzare i servizi per senza dimora a causa della preoccupazione di essere soggetti ad azioni o comportamenti omofobici e/o transfobici da parte di altri utenti dei servizi o per l'organizzazione degli stessi con la segregazione per sesso anagrafico;
- Nascosta (unseen): a causa delle preoccupazioni circa il rischio di essere vittime di atteggiamenti omofobici e/o transfobici, quando i giovani LGBTQI+ utilizzano i servizi per i senza dimora spesso non sono disposti a rivelare il proprio orientamento sessuale e/o identità di genere;
- Non registrata (unrecorded): spesso il personale di servizio per senza dimora è riluttante a registrare l'orientamento sessuale o l'identità di genere degli ospiti a causa di preoccupazioni sull'etica, la privacy e la protezione dei dati o perché viene messa in dubbio la necessità di farlo.

Le persone transgender risultano essere tra le più vulnerabili, non solo per il rischio di discriminazioni ma anche per le difficoltà pratiche legate alla documentazione di genere non conforme. La mancata corrispondenza tra identità percepita e documenti ufficiali spesso rende ancora più complesso l'accesso ai servizi di base (Begun, Kattari, 2016).

In sintesi, il quadro teorico che emerge evidenzia la necessità di un approccio intersezionale nella progettazione dei servizi per le persone senza dimora, che tenga conto delle specificità legate all'identità di genere e all'orientamento sessuale. In quest'ottica, la costruzione di spazi sicuri e la formazione adeguata degli operatori sociali risultano variabili chiave per rispondere in modo efficace alle esigenze delle persone LGBTQI+ senza dimora. Ad esempio, la recente ricerca di Tubertini et al. (2023) evidenzia come gli operatori dei servizi abitativi per persone LGBTQIA+ senza fissa dimora o in fuga da ambienti familiari ostili in Italia spesso agiscano su base volontaria, con competenze maturate sul campo o tramite autoformazione. La doppia identità di attivisti e professionisti genera talvolta ambiguità nei ruoli, mancanza di preparazione strutturata e difficoltà nella gestione dei casi più complessi.

2. METODOLOGIA E CASO-STUDIO: IL PROGETTO TOHOUSING

La ricerca ha assunto come oggetto uno studio di caso, il progetto To-Housing, ideato e gestito dall'associazione Quore come realtà costruita per fornire risposte ai bisogni di giovani LGBT+ senza dimora o con situazioni abitative ad alto rischio. Nel report "*17 Practices to help end Youth Homelessness in Europe*" di FEANTSA (2021), il progetto ToHousing risulta una delle best practices descritte.

Tre i principi che orientano ToHousing: la multidisciplinarietà, per rispondere alla multi-problematicità portata dalle persone ospitate; la territorialità, costruita attraverso una fitta rete di collaborazioni che il progetto definisce "costellazione di partner" per dar vita a politiche di *welfare community*; e la temporaneità, per garantire in linea generale interventi e percorsi di accompagnamento che abbiano una durata di 8/10 mesi.

L'obiettivo principale è ~~di~~ fornire una residenza temporanea e rispondere ad un bisogno primario e fondamentale che, proprio a partire dalla casa, possa allo stesso tempo attivare percorsi virtuosi di solidarietà e soprattutto reinserimento sociale (Costa, Magino, 2021).

ToHousing oggi rappresenta un modello ibrido di coabitazione per adulti che, oltre alla disponibilità di spazi abitativi, fornisce un supporto diretto finalizzato all'autonomia[1].

Da gennaio 2019 a dicembre 2024 sono state accolte 130 persone di cui il 42% di età compresa tra i 18 e i 25 anni, e il 77% under 35. Il 58% delle persone ospitate si autodefinisce gay, il 30% Trans e il 12% Lesbica. Il 42% proveniente dall'Italia, il 23% dall'Africa, il 17% dall'Asia.

La ricerca su ToHousing si è sviluppata attraverso un approccio mixed-methods, che ha integrato strumenti qualitativi tradizionali con metodologie creative. In particolare, sono state condotte interviste semi-strutturate rivolte ai responsabili del progetto (n=2), ad alcuni operatori (n=3) e a ospiti ed ex ospiti della struttura (n =13 in totale). Parallelamente, si è svolto un laboratorio teatrale che ha portato alla creazione di un podcast, realizzato con la collaborazione attiva dei partecipanti.

La metodologia adottata nel progetto si distingue per il suo approccio "obliquo" (in questo senso "queer", nel significato letterale e simbolico che il termine stesso veicola), che mira a sovvertire le tradizionali gerarchie di potere nella ricerca sociale. Infatti, come afferma Rinaldi (2015, 86-87), "queer theory questions scientific knowledge and its methods, which aim to identify and reproduce normal and normative

[1] Più nello specifico, il progetto offre diversi servizi: una soluzione temporanea all'emergenza abitativa; un supporto alle necessità di base; la possibilità di un counseling individuale psicologico e di orientamento al lavoro e alla formazione; l'eventuale accompagnamento all'audizione della Commissione Territoriale (per i richiedenti asilo); azioni di inclusione sociale sul territorio attraverso attività di animazione sociale e di reciprocità (in un'ottica di welfare generativo).

bodies, genders and sexualities. extent that the emancipation of the non-normative subjectivities is based on the use of a new vocabulary through which they can express themselves”.

Come abbiamo visto, la combinazione di discriminazioni basate sull’orientamento sessuale e/o sull’identità di genere e l’esclusione abitativa rappresenta un punto d’intersezione critico, che richiede approcci metodologici sensibili, inclusivi e capaci di restituire agency ai soggetti coinvolti. In tale contesto, i metodi partecipativi e creativi si sono affermati come strumenti fondamentali per superare le limitazioni delle metodologie tradizionali e per valorizzare la voce e la soggettività delle persone coinvolte. Nel caso delle persone LGBTQIA+ senza fissa dimora, l’approccio partecipativo permette di contrastare dinamiche di epistemicidio (Escobar et al., 2007), ovvero la cancellazione dei saperi situati e delle esperienze vissute da soggetti sociali oppressi.

L’impiego di metodi partecipativi e creativi genera conoscenza situata, riflessiva e non estrattiva. Rispetto alla ricerca convenzionale, questi approcci promuovono un’etica della co-produzione del sapere, del consenso informato continuativo e della cura relazionale. Questo è particolarmente rilevante in contesti di vulnerabilità come quello dell’homelessness LGBTQIA+, dove il rischio di “oggettivare” i partecipanti o di reiterare forme di violenza simbolica è elevato.

Seguendo Haraway (1988), la produzione di saperi deve essere posizionata e responsabile: i metodi partecipativi permettono dunque di decentrare la figura del ricercatore e riconoscere l'autorità epistemica dei soggetti coinvolti. Inoltre, studi recenti (Austin et al., 2023) hanno evidenziato che i metodi creativi aumentano la capacità dei partecipanti di influenzare le politiche pubbliche e di costruire reti di supporto comunitarie.

La scelta di utilizzare un approccio partecipativo e creativo (Giorgi at al., 2021) è stata dunque motivata dal tentativo di coinvolgere attivamente soggettività marginalizzate e invisibilizzate/silenziate come persone LGBTQIA+ in condizione di precarietà abitativa, restituendo loro un’agency all’interno della ricerca e una possibilità di rielaborazione dei propri vissuti, spesso traumatici, in una prospettiva costruttiva e di orizzonte futuro.

Studi come quelli di Ecker (2016) e Abramovich (2012) hanno messo in luce come l’impiego di laboratori artistici, tecniche performative e approcci creativi partecipativi con persone LGBTQIA+ senza fissa dimora non sia soltanto uno strumento per la raccolta di dati o per la rappresentazione simbolica delle esperienze vissute, ma configuri veri e propri dispositivi trasformativi. In particolare, tali metodologie contribuiscono a costruire spazi protetti e generativi, dove i partecipanti possono esprimersi liberamente, rielaborare collettivamente vissuti traumatici e accedere a forme di riconoscimento simbolico spesso negate nei contesti istituzionali, come i servizi sociali tradizionali, i centri d'accoglienza o gli spazi sanitari.

Il teatro partecipativo, ad esempio, offre la possibilità di incarnare, mettere in scena e decostruire ruoli sociali imposti, identità stigmatizzate e narrazioni dominanti. Attraverso il gioco, la performatività e la finzione, i partecipanti riescono a elaborare strategie di resistenza, esplorare alternative narrative e consolidare un senso di agency, fondamentale per chi vive condizioni di esclusione materiale e simbolica. Questo tipo di attività favorisce inoltre la costruzione di relazioni orizzontali e comunitarie, in grado di contrastare l'isolamento sociale e l'internalizzazione dello stigma, fenomeni molto comuni tra le persone LGBTQIA+ che vivono in condizione di homelessness.

Abramovich (2013) sottolinea come il coinvolgimento attivo in pratiche artistiche possa avere effetti terapeutici e riparativi, in quanto consente di restituire una certa padronanza della propria narrazione biografica, in un contesto in cui la quotidianità è spesso segnata dalla perdita di controllo, invisibilità e violenza. La possibilità di raccontarsi attraverso forme non convenzionali – come il corpo, il disegno, la fotografia o la performance – permette di rompere con i linguaggi istituzionali, spesso rigidi e patologizzanti, e di accedere a codici espressivi più vicini all'esperienza vissuta dei soggetti.

Inoltre, Ecker (2016) evidenzia che queste pratiche non hanno solo un impatto individuale, ma possono anche generare effetti collettivi e politici: i prodotti artistici realizzati (fotografie, performance, installazioni) diventano strumenti per sensibilizzare il pubblico, dialogare con le istituzioni e reclamare diritti e visibilità. In tal senso, la creatività si configura come una forma di resistenza epistemica, capace di produrre conoscenza, memoria e consapevolezza politica a partire dalle esperienze subalterne.

Nella nostra ricerca, il laboratorio teatrale, in particolare, ha favorito un'interazione orizzontale, riducendo la distanza tra ricercatori e partecipanti. Questa prospettiva si rifà alle teorie di Erel, Reynolds e Kaptani (2017), che vedono nei metodi creativi uno strumento per articolare esperienze di marginalità e per affermare identità oppresse. Ad esempio, la promozione di riflessività a partire dal significato attributo alla parola "casa" e al "sentirsi a casa" (esperienza incorporata) ha costituito una modalità di permettere a* partecipanti di parlare con la propria voce e le proprie categorie.

La co-creazione di un podcast, infine, ha permesso ai partecipanti di esprimere le proprie storie in uno spazio sicuro, contribuendo alla costruzione di un senso collettivo di appartenenza e all'apertura alla possibilità di condivisione all'esterno dei propri vissuti.

3. DISCUSSIONE DEI RISULTATI

L'analisi del materiale empirico ha rivelato una serie di tendenze chiave, evidenziando la complessità delle esperienze delle persone LGBTQI+ senza dimora. Il punto di partenza della ricerca era interrogarsi se la condizione LGBTQI+ rappresenti un elemento determinante nel percorso che conduce alla precarietà abitativa, o se essa si aggiunga e amplifichi altre fragilità preesistenti nelle storie individuali. Le storie raccolte, come già osservato da Hartal (2018), testimoniano una stretta associazione tra la cronicizzazione della condizione di homelessness e la presenza di vissuti multiproblematici.

Nelle interviste emerge come l'identità LGBTQI+ non sia necessariamente il "motore primo" del disagio abitativo, ma piuttosto un fattore trasversale che, nel tempo, si intreccia a dinamiche di esclusione sociale, povertà, isolamento, disagio psichico e dipendenze. In tal senso, l'essere LGBTQI+ in una condizione cronica di homelessness può tradursi in una fragilità aggiuntiva, soprattutto a causa della difficoltà di accesso ai servizi tradizionali per senza dimora. Le parole di Alex, uno degli intervistati, sono emblematiche:

«Non mi sono mai definito senzatetto… Non mi sono mai detto così, anche quando lo ero. Ero uno che non aveva un posto, ma non ero quella cosa lì. Perché poi ti senti come se non fossi più una persona, ma solo un problema.»

Questa riflessione si collega al concetto di Parsell (2011) «Homeless is what I am, not who I am», suggerendo che, per le persone LGBTQI+, la de-soggettivazione identitaria può assumere forme particolarmente dolorose, perché interseca lo stigma già legato all'identità di genere o all'orientamento sessuale.

La temporalità della condizione homeless assume un ruolo importante nella lettura delle traiettorie biografiche: più è breve il periodo senza dimora, più è evidente che la componente LGBTQI+ può aver innescato un crollo del sistema familiare e di supporto sociale, come nel caso di giovani espuls* da casa dopo il coming out. In situazioni più consolidate e croniche, invece, l'identità LGBTQI+ tende a diventare un aspetto secondario, benché continui a incidere sulla difficoltà di accesso a spazi sicuri.

Molte persone intervistate hanno adottato strategie di sopravvivenza "invisibili", come il coach surfing, una pratica già nota nella letteratura (Curry, 2017; McLoughlin, 2013), descritta anche da Chiara, ex ospite di ToHousing:

«Per un po' sono passata da casa a casa, amici, poi conoscenti, poi amici di amici… finché non ce l'ho più fatta, e ho dormito un mese in un ostello, poi in strada.»

Per le persone migranti richiedenti asilo, la condizione LGBTQI+ costituisce un ulteriore vettore di vulnerabilità, anche all'interno del sistema di accoglienza, come evidenzia A., ragazzo gay proveniente da un paese africano in cui appare evidente un contesto socioculturale fortemente omofobo:

«Nel centro non potevo dire chi ero. Ero sempre in ansia. Ho sentito storie di altri ragazzi picchiati o cacciati. Lì era meglio sparire.»

Queste testimonianze confermano quanto descritto da Caramelli, Parente e Tagliavia (2021): anche in Italia, i centri di accoglienza possono riprodurre dinamiche di discriminazione e controllo che costringono le persone LGBTQI+ a ritrarsi e occultarsi, aggravando la loro solitudine e sfiducia nei servizi.

Un altro elemento ricorrente riguarda l'esperienza di ipervisibilità, simile all'essere esposti perennemente ad uno sguardo normativo e giudicante, vissuto soprattutto da persone transgender, in linea con quanto evidenziato nella letteratura internazionale. Giulia, ospite transgender di ToHousing, racconta:

«Anche in spazi considerati sicuri, come i festival o gli eventi culturali, sento gli sguardi e le battute. È come se il mio corpo fosse costantemente sotto esame. Quando ho perso la casa, la paura di entrare in un rifugio è stata paralizzante.»

Questa narrazione mette in evidenza come anche ambienti "inclusivi" possano risultare ambivalenti, confermando la necessità di progettare spazi realmente de-patologizzanti e de-normativizzanti.

Nel progetto ToHousing, l'approccio relazionale e basato sul riconoscimento si è rivelato centrale per riattivare percorsi di cura e dignità, come osservato da Alessandro Battaglia, uno dei responsabili del progetto: «Non basta dare un tetto. Bisogna costruire luoghi in cui le persone possano ritrovare fiducia e dignità.»

Anche il laboratorio teatrale e il podcast hanno permesso di esplorare nuove forme di narrazione e rappresentazione di sé, facilitando l'emergere di identità collettive e simboliche. Come già evidenziato nel paragrafo metodologico, nel progetto ToHousing, le pratiche narrative e performative — in particolare il laboratorio teatrale e il podcast collettivo — hanno rappresentato non soltanto momenti creativi o ricreativi, ma dispositivi relazionali e trasformativi profondamente connessi al percorso di ricostruzione identitaria delle persone coinvolte.

Tali spazi hanno permesso ai partecipanti di rielaborare il proprio vissuto non più soltanto come biografie fratturate dalla marginalità, ma come narrazioni condivise, capaci di generare senso, appartenenza e, in alcuni casi, risignificazione del trauma. Il laboratorio ha fornito canali espressivi alternativi, non basati sulla performance individuale in senso competitivo, ma su pratiche di ascolto, reciprocità e creazione collettiva.

In questo contesto si inserisce il gesto simbolico di uno dei partecipanti, che, al termine di una delle attività, ha deciso di donare una piantina grassa al facilitatore, dicendo: «Per me era come dire: adesso qui metto radici. Anche se piccole».

Questo gesto, apparentemente semplice, assume un forte valore simbolico: la piantina grassa — pianta capace di resistere a condizioni ostili e di trattenere acqua anche nei deserti — diventa metafora della resilienza silenziosa e della volontà di rimettere in moto un processo di radicamento esistenziale, seppur in forma fragile e provvisoria. "Mettere radici", nel discorso della persona intervistata, non indica tanto un'inscrizione permanente nello spazio fisico, quanto la possibilità di sentirsi riconosciut* e di esistere dentro una relazione significativa, in un luogo che non è più solo funzionale (un tetto), ma anche simbolicamente abitabile.

In questa prospettiva, il laboratorio ha avuto anche una funzione riparativa, permettendo di esercitare una narrazione auto-determinata, non mediata dal linguaggio istituzionale o medico; di condividere emozioni e memorie con un gruppo di pari; e di costruire una memoria collettiva queer, che rompesse con l'isolamento individuale e con l'invisibilità strutturale.

La realizzazione del podcast ha ulteriormente potenziato questo processo, offrendo uno spazio in cui le voci delle persone LGBTQI+ senza dimora potessero farsi ascoltare pubblicamente, uscendo dalla sfera del bisogno e accedendo a quella della testimonianza politica e culturale. Il laboratorio ha così generato "atti di presenza" (Butler, 2015), che ridefiniscono il soggetto non più come "utente fragile", ma come narratore di senso e produttore di sapere.

In conclusione, questi spazi creativi non sono stati marginali rispetto al percorso di accoglienza, ma elementi centrali per la costruzione di un'identità riconosciuta e condivisa, in un contesto in cui la precarietà abitativa si accompagna troppo spesso a una precarietà simbolica, esistenziale e relazionale.

Al di là dei resoconti qualitativi, emerge infine come l'80% degli intervistati abbia riportato un miglioramento significativo del benessere psicologico e una riduzione dello stress, attribuito all'ambiente accogliente e al supporto continuo degli operatori. Tuttavia, sono emerse anche criticità legate alla necessità di maggiori risorse economiche per ampliare il progetto e accogliere un numero più elevato di persone.

Pare, purtroppo, ancora lontano il desiderio espresso da Mario, un* de* ospiti intervistat*: «Che possano sparire le ToHousing. Che nel mondo non ci sia più bisogno di case per accogliere persone con molti problemi e difficoltà che, in generale, sono dovute all'uomo».

4. CONCLUSIONI: PER UN ABITARE OBLIQUO

La presente ricerca si è proposta di esplorare le esperienze delle persone LGBTQI+ senza dimora, con particolare attenzione ai significati attribuiti alla casa, all'identità e alle relazioni, attraverso una prospettiva qualitativa, partecipativa e creativa. In un panorama ancora largamente segnato dalla carenza di dati, rappresentazioni e servizi mirati, questo studio ha voluto restituire visibilità e voce a soggettività spesso silenziate o patologizzate, documentando non solo i fattori di esclusione che le attraversano, ma anche le risorse relazionali, narrative e simboliche che ne sostengono la resistenza.

Uno degli elementi centrali emersi è la pluralità delle traiettorie biografiche che conducono alla condizione di homelessness, e la difficoltà di ridurre tali percorsi a un unico fattore causale. L'identità LGBTQI+ si rivela un elemento trasversale, che in alcune situazioni rappresenta il fattore scatenante della rottura familiare e dell'accesso alla marginalità abitativa (soprattutto nei giovani espuls* da casa), mentre in altri casi si intreccia a un quadro più ampio di vulnerabilità sociale, economica, psicologica e migratoria. In quest'ottica, la categoria di "multi-problematicità" non va intesa come etichetta diagnostica, ma come lente attraverso cui leggere le intersezioni tra disuguaglianze strutturali e biografie singolari.

La condizione di cronicità dell'homelessness tende, nel tempo, a spostare l'identità LGBTQI+ sullo sfondo, ma non la rende irrilevante: essa continua a incidere sulle forme di esclusione, sulla qualità dell'accesso ai servizi e sulle dinamiche di stigma. Particolarmente significativa è risultata l'esperienza delle persone transgender, spesso soggette a ipervisibilizzazione normativa e a discriminazioni multiple, anche in contesti progettati come inclusivi. Questo dato rafforza la necessità di ripensare l'inclusività non come semplice apertura nominale, ma come pratica quotidiana di ascolto, adattamento e decostruzione dei presupposti eteronormativi e binari.

Dal punto di vista metodologico, l'approccio adottato ha rappresentato un elemento distintivo e innovativo del lavoro: la scelta di integrare metodologie partecipative, narrative e creative non ha avuto solo una funzione strumentale rispetto alla raccolta di dati, ma si è configurata come parte integrante di un processo di ricerca con e non su i soggetti coinvolti. Tale approccio ha offerto l'opportunità

> to challenge representations of the "rational man" and the "macho ethics" of male researchers who "discover," "conquer," and who are "systematic" or "rigorous" in playing the role of inexpressive and emotionless» (ivi: 52).

La messa in discussione del dato per scontato in una società eteronormata ha permesso quindi di allargare le categorie di ciò che è "pensabile", "dicibile" e "conoscibile", rendendo pienamente legittimata e condivisibile la possibilità di raccontarsi per soggettività LGBTQI+ (Rinaldi 2023). Il laboratorio teatrale, il podcast e le attività relazionali all'interno della comunità di ToHousing hanno attivato processi di autorappresentazione, conarrazione e simbolizzazione dell'esperienza, generando forme di riconoscimento e agency che sarebbero state difficilmente accessibili con strumenti più tradizionali.

Il gesto emblematico della donazione della piantina grassa al facilitatore del laboratorio non è solo un aneddoto, ma un indicatore potente della trasformazione del significato del luogo: da spazio di emergenza a luogo di radicamento simbolico, di cura reciproca e di costruzione di legami. In questo gesto si condensa il passaggio da una condizione di esclusione a una possibilità di appartenenza, seppur fragile e provvisoria. Allo stesso modo, il coinvolgimento degli ospiti nella costruzione del podcast ha permesso di creare memorie collettive queer, capaci di contrastare l'invisibilità e di rivendicare spazio pubblico e ascolto politico.

I risultati mostrano che un'accoglienza realmente efficace non può limitarsi a offrire un letto e un pasto, ma deve essere in grado di riconoscere le soggettività nella loro interezza, valorizzando le esperienze, le vulnerabilità e le risorse delle persone. La relazionalità come dispositivo politico si afferma così come uno degli elementi fondamentali nei percorsi di fuoriuscita dalla marginalità, nella misura in cui consente di ricostruire fiducia, agency e legami di senso.

In ultima istanza, questa ricerca invita a ripensare radicalmente i modelli di accoglienza, superando approcci emergenziali, neutri e normalizzanti, e promuovendo invece dispositivi queer e intersezionali di cura, capaci di accogliere e trasformare la complessità. Ciò implica anche un rinnovato impegno politico e istituzionale: affinché il bisogno di spazi come ToHousing possa progressivamente venire meno, è necessario costruire una società in cui nessuno debba più giustificare il proprio diritto ad avere una casa, una voce e un posto nel mondo.

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MULTIPLE DISCRIMINATION: AN INTERSECTIONAL STUDY ON THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCE OF LGBTQIAP+ DISABLED PEOPLE

di Barbara Centrone and Elisa Costantino[*]

Abstract

The existing literature on Disability Studies has only recently begun to explore the sexual identity of disabled people from an embodied perspective. This study is part of a broader and still ongoing research project that presents the results of an exploratory survey conducted with a self-selected sample of queer disabled people. The study builds on the authors' collaborative autoethnography and continues with a survey and discursive interviews.

Keywords

autoethnography, intersectional, ableism, queerphobia

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INTRODUCTION

> Azzurra: You are not wrong, you are not alone and above all always remember that whatever others may throw up at you is not reality, it is a thought [...]

Individuals experiencing a state of non-conformity are more likely to question other aspects of their identity (Centrone, 2024b; Pieri, 2023; Walker, 2021). Consequently, there is a significant population of disabled individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+. This demographic faces numerous forms of discrimination on a daily basis, the intricacies of which can only be comprehensively analyzed and addressed through an intersectional lens.

Nevertheless, it is only recently that the field of Disability Studies has begun to address the topic of sexuality. In Queer Studies, disability is frequently rendered invisible. To address this lacuna in the academic literature, McRuer formalized the Crip Theory in 2006. This intersectional interpretative paradigm posits the interconnectedness of ableism and queerphobia.

It is precisely on the basis of the Crip Theory, and with the objective of establishing a genuine field of study – Crip Studies – that the authors, who are themselves disabled and queer, have decided to undertake participatory research with LGBTQ+ disabled people (fig.1).

Fig.1: The genesis of the collaborative decision to undertake this research project

Barbara and I met a couple of years ago, because of an enabling attack on social media by a university lecturer that involved us in the same space-time. As a result of this affair, we began to exchange experiences, perhaps initially more out of acquaintance, but which over time became more and more dense and profound. When I met Barbara, I was going through a period of questioning about my sexual orientation and gender identity, and having a safe space to rely on at that time was crucial for me. With Barbara, I never felt wrong or out of place because of my multiple nonconforming identities, which reinforced my queer essence, which was always present in my specific biographical trajectory, even if perhaps only latent. That is how a dense exchange of experiences and narratives of lived discrimination began, discovering that we had so much in common. To this day, Barbara and I are sisters in struggle. From our shared experiences and interest in thematic studies, this research was born, which aims to give voice to all those LGBTQIAP+ and disabled people who experience intersectional discrimination just like the two authors of this paper. -Elisa Costantino	I first learned about Elisa through Instagram. A professor I worked with recommended her page to me. One day, we commented on the same post, and a colleague of that professor commented something ableist about us. I expressed solidarity to her privately and from that moment we started talking more and more frequently. Over time, we learned a lot about each other, even sharing personal experiences, even though we had only met in person once. Elisa helped me overcome internalized ableism. that over time had led me to feel "not disabled enough" in those periods of life when I did not need mobility aids, to unhinge the thought that I was not a "good deconstructed disabled activist" if I wanted to complain about the debilitating pain of my chronic illnesses. Elisa taught me, with her experience, her being my friend, her words, how to hold together the complexity of individual experience. We've worked together many times, both in institutional and academic policy contexts, and our research was born out of realizing how well we supported each other, how great it is to engage with other disabled people, and how urgent it was to do participatory research on these issues in Italy. -Barbara Centrone

The aim is to investigate, among other things, the intersectional discrimination they experience.

This chapter is set within the theoretical framework of Crip Studies (Centrone, 2025), with the aim of presenting an analysis of the first data collected by means of written and oral interviews. As will be described in the third section, this research was conducted entirely online. Firstly, a preliminary questionnaire was distributed on Google Form. Secondly, some in-depth interviews were conducted on Google Meet. The empirical material collected was then placed in a drive folder so as to be analyzed by both authors. This analysis is strongly linked to the two authors' collaborative autoethnography (Gariglio, Luvera, 2023). One of the chapter's goals is to make a contribution to debates on the accessibility of research methods by offering methodological reflections which emphasize the importance of rethinking and, indeed, cripping the way in which research is done so as to amplify those voices which usually remain unheard and unreachable.

1. CRIP THEORY

In recent decades, Disability Studies[1] have highlighted that disability is not a medical or biological condition intrinsic to human beings, but rather a sociocultural and political construction in which there is a mutual influence between an individual's characteristics[2] and the contextual factors specific to the environment in which they are situated (WHO, 2001).

Disability studies have historically overlooked the intersection with gender and sexual identity (Costantino and Valtellina, 2024; Centrone, 2025). This oversight was not addressed until 2006 thanks to the Crip Theory (Bèrubè, McRuer and Samuels, 2018).

Formalized by Robert McRuer, Crip Theory sits at the intersection of Disability Studies and Queer Studies, proposing a radical critique of the normative structures that regulate bodies and identities. It represents one

[1] Disability Studies emerged at the close of the 20th century, driven by the activism of disabled individuals in countries where English is the primary language and shares cultural elements. From there, the movement disseminated to Northern and Western Europe. While it adopts various forms depending on the specific socio-cultural context, it is characterized by several overarching principles. These include a) a critical examination of the biomedical model as a prevailing interpretative paradigm of bodies; b) an analysis of social dynamics, institutional practices and language that result in exclusion; and c) the pursuit of rights, including self-determination. For a more in-depth examination of these concepts, readers are directed to Barnes, C.; Oliver, M.; Barton, L. (2002), Disability Studies Today, PolityPress, Cambridge

[2] To be more specific, Barbara is ADHDer with chronic illnesses and Elisa is a person with a motor impairment and some psychiatric diagnoses who is not self-sufficient.

of the most significant theoretical innovations in the landscape of disability studies and contemporary critical theory (Centrone, 2025).

Consequently, it has exerted a profound influence on both academic and political reflections on subjects of identity, oppression, resistance, and methodological approaches that should be employed to analyze these phenomena.

Crip Theory proposes a theoretical reversal of the prevailing gaze, which has historically viewed various forms of discrimination as the result of a sum. This theory unveils the structural interdependence between *compulsory heterosexuality* (Rich, 1980) and *compulsory able-bodiedness* as instruments of social control (Foucault, 1976) that function as a "natural order of things" (McRuer, 2006: p.79): they promote cis-heterosexuality and able-bodiedness as an ideal, universal, and desirable standard, while conceptualizing deviance from the standard as an individual and social problem by virtue of which one is in a lower position in the hierarchical pyramid of dignity and power of bodies[3].

Ableism is deeply embedded in every aspect of social structures, overcoming other forms of pervasive oppression through its ability to naturalize to the point of becoming invisible (Campbell, 2008): "just as heterosexuality is defined by homosexuality, disability cannot exist without ability" (Costantino, Valtellina, 2024). As suggested by Taylor (2018) in the concept of "grievable lives," the lives of disabled and LGBTQIAP+ people are often perceived as less complete and less worthy than those of able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender[4], monogamous, and allosexual[5] people. This devaluation is not accidental, but the result of a power system that privileges some bodies over others, perpetuating social inequalities and hierarchies.

Disabled and LGBTQIAP+ people share, at the identity, political, and social levels, many common experiences (Centrone, 2025). First of all, the two groups have a history of political claiming that began with grassroots claiming movements, often repressed violently by the police

[3] Crip Theory, as established by McRuer, exclusively addresses compulsory heterosexuality. Centrone (cfr. Centrone, 2025) proposes a need to expand the scope of Crip Theory and establish a new academic discipline, Crip Studies, that can encompass all forms of oppression and all aspects of normativity, broadening DisCrit's view even further to make it intersectional and multidimensional. This approach aims to facilitate an intersectional analysis that recognizes the interconnected nature of compulsory able bodiedness, compulsory neurotypical-mindedness, hetero-cis-mono-allo normativity, racism, fatphobia, ageism, classism and other forms of oppression.

[4] The term "cisgender" is used to denote individuals who conform to the gender that is socially expected based on the gender that was assigned to them at birth.

[5] Allosexuals are people who experience sexual attraction. Asexuals are people who experience sexual attraction to no gender or only rarely and/or under certain conditions (Chasin, 2015).

and underrepresented or misrepresented in TV news. These movements then led to institutional and legislative changes and to the emergence of new fields of study such as disability studies and queer studies. Moreover, both groups are characterized by a complex and layered history of linguistic experimentation and critical discussions of language, and by the political act of re-appropriating a term that was originally a slur. The third common point concerns the lack of social and legal recognition that results in a lack of access to rights. Furthermore, the presence of queer and disabled bodies within media representations has been noted as being largely invisible. Alternatively, they are frequently depicted through a stereotypical or monstrous lens. This is evidenced by the utilization of clichéic depictions, such as crip suits. Queer and disabled bodies are rarely designated as protagonists within narratives. Their presence is predominantly limited to tragic and compassionate narratives, or those intended to elicit inspiration. (Centrone, 2024). All these commonalities emanate from the fact that both bodies that identify as queer and bodies living with disabilities are viewed and interpreted through the biomedical paradigm. This paradigm stigmatizes and pathologizes and displays bodies that do not fully fit the socio-culturally established standards of what constitutes *normality* (Butler, 2001).

Comprehending the complexity of intersections among these experiences necessitates a queercrip paradigm that is genuinely intersectional, commencing from embodied experiences and progressing through research tools and methodologies that are inherently queercrip.

In this study, we adopt a queercrip paradigm to analyze the experiences of individuals who self-identify as both disabled and queer, with the objective of contributing to the establishment of a distinct field of study: Crip Studies (Centrone, 2025). This methodological framework facilitates the identification of not only the intersections of oppressions, but also the strategies of resistance, solidarity and identity construction employed by these individuals. A particular focus will be placed on the experiences of discrimination, gaslighting and invisibilization that emerged from the interviews conducted, which offer a direct insight into the challenges and potential of individuals living at the intersection of disability and queerness. In doing so, the intention is to contribute not only to the theoretical understanding of these dynamics, but also to their social and political transformation.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The research that is the focus of this chapter was initiated by the collaborative autoethnography (Gariglio and Luvera 2023) conducted by and on the two authors – disabled queer people. The results and reflections of this research are presented in this chapter.

This study aims to shed light on instances of multiple discrimination, with the objective of delving into the lived experiences of individuals who identify as both disabled and as part of the LGBTQIAP+ community.

To this end, an *ad hoc* questionnaire was created on the Google Forms platform, entitled 'Ableism & Queerphobia' (A&Q), through which closed and open-ended questions were administered, and contact details were collected from participants willing to be contacted again to schedule a discursive interview (Cardano, Gariglio 2022).

The questionnaire was disseminated via social media, initially on the authors' Instagram accounts (@barbiequeeer; @elicosta_99). As the authors are disabled and queer individuals who engage in online outreach and activism on these issues, the process of snowball sampling enabled the collection of the participation of 134 people who self-identify as disabled and as part of the LGBTQIAP+ community within a few days.

2.1 'Ableism & Queerphobia' Questionnaire

The 'Ableism & Queerphobia' (A&Q) questionnaire is divided into several sections. Section A is designed to collect socio-demographic data regarding age, sex assigned at birth, gender identity, sexual/romantic orientation, relational style, type of impairment for which one defines oneself as disabled, and the having of one or more caregivers. Section B explores various aspects of life, including family, sports, employment, university/education, health and mental health facilities, and participation in associations. Section C explores the disclosure of disability and LGBTQIAP+ identity, while Section D investigates experiences of ableist and queerphobic discrimination.

The survey concludes with an optional section where participants are invited to provide a written account of one or more instances of discrimination they have encountered. It was evident that the testimonies collated in this specific section were profoundly detailed and concrete in nature. In addition to this, they were also, at times, emotionally evocative. Undoubtedly, these testimonies assisted the researchers in comprehending the subjects to be explored during the oral interviews. Additionally, there is a space where individuals can provide their contact details in case they would like to be interviewed orally.

2.2 Semi-structured interviews

The primary focus of the interview was to elicit experiences of discrimination suffered by virtue of their own positioning.

The interviews were conducted via video calls using the Google Meets platform. Participants were asked to consent to the recording in advance, after which a pre-prepared text was read to them in which we disclosed our own shared positionality and, by so doing, transformed the research into an autoethnographic research:

> We're two queer and disabled people conducting research to highlight multiple forms of discrimination and explore the embodied experience of people who are both disabled and part of the LGBTQIAP+ community. We're using semi-structured interviews, so I'll ask you questions, and you can answer them in any order and as much or as little time as you need. There are no right or wrong answers, and everything you say will be kept anonymous, so there's no way for us to trace your identity

We guided the interview process through the provision of a brief overview of the overarching theme, followed by the presentation of a probing question. As articulated by Cardano and Gariglio (2022), this phase was of paramount importance, requiring us to adopt an active listening stance, thereby empowering the interviewee to construct their own narrative. In instances where the interviewee's discourse appeared to reach an impasse, we promptly proffered a subsequent macro-theme for exploration, ensuring the continuity and progression of the interview.

2.3 Collaborative autoethnography

By autoethnography is meant:

> a set of research approaches and ways of writing grounded in embedded personal experiences (self) through which the writer intends to contribute to the understanding of cultural and social experiences (ethno), in which personal experiences are located, through analysis and writing (handwriting) (Gariglio e Luvera, 2023:2; our translation).

The decision to employ collaborative autoethnography is predicated on the objective of situating our respective (inter)subjective experiences at the core of the research process, through the utilisation of co-writing methodologies (Gariglio, 2017; 2018).

In order to facilitate interaction and the exchange of ideas, online platforms were utilised in both synchronous and asynchronous modes. Specifically, video calls were conducted on Google Meets for synchronous interactions, whereas instant messaging and Instagram chat were employed as means for asynchronous communication. The asynchronous approach was complemented by a co-writing exercise, wherein intensive writing sessions were interspersed with regular revisions, fostering a dynamic and collaborative learning environment. This modality enabled the recounting and sharing of experiences deemed particularly pertinent, both in terms of our embodied experience and the exchange of strategies to combat multiple discriminations. It also facilitated the enrichment of the analysis of the discursive interviews with our perspective as experts by experience and scholars who employ an intersectional approach from Disability Studies and Crip Studies (Costantino, Valtellina, 2024; Centrone, 2025).

2.4 Strengths and limitations

One potential limitation of the study is the self-selection of the sample. Participants from the disabled and LGBTQIAP+ communities who chose to take part in the research are likely to be individuals who follow our social networks pages. Consequently, the study participants are likely to have access to and use of social networks, which provides them with greater opportunity to interact with other disabled individuals and profiles dedicated to activism and outreach. It is acknowledged that the process of recounting experiences of discrimination can be challenging, and it is possible that some individuals may have desired to participate but were unable to recall or document distressing experiences. This leads to the hypothesis that those who completed the questionnaire may have a comprehensive understanding either the political and the scientific significance of sharing their experiences and may possess the psychological resilience and coping mechanisms necessary to engage in the emotional recollection process. Moreover, being a discriminated vulnerable group, we thought this would be the most appropriate ethical approach.

A secondary consideration of paramount importance that is frequently overlooked in research is that of autonomy, accessibility and safety. It should be noted that not all disabled individuals possess the ability to complete the questionnaire independently, often requiring assistance from caregivers or assistants. The findings of the present study, as outlined below, underscore the challenges associated with being safe disclosing personal information and experiences. This is a particularly salient concern when considering the experiences of disabled individuals, the LGBTQIA+ community, and those who require assistance in order to attend to their daily needs, as these groups frequently encounter difficulties in accessing settings conducive to the articulation of their authentic selves. Consequently, the present sample is inherently influenced by self-selection, a factor which has already been alluded to in the preceding discussion. This results in a significant limitation, and we are exploring strategies to overcome it, particularly in reaching individuals who are subjected to a higher level of segregation and, consequently, unable to be out due to their dependence on enabling and queerphobic caregivers (i.e. it might be difficult to be honest if your father is writing for you).

Another salient issue that demands attention pertains to our positioning as researchers. It is well-established that positioning is never neutral; in this instance, our embodied experiences as queer and disabled individuals were crucial in determining the methodological techniques, interview instruments, and the manner in which the interviews were conducted, as well as the analysis of the constructed data. Our positioning was promptly communicated to the interviewees and was written in the initial descriptions of the survey.

The utilisation of autoethnography in research does not stem from any sense of shame or apprehension concerning the aforementioned issues. On the contrary, it is employed with the objective of engendering superior forms of research, characterised by enhanced humanity and ethical democracy. This approach endeavours to mitigate the occurrence of epistemic violence and hypocrisy, thus promoting an environment that values truth and justice.

The participants' feedback indicated that the decision to disclose our positioning had a significant positive effect on the individuals interviewed, who felt comfortable sharing deeply personal experiences, including life stories and biographical interviews, with people who, despite their unique characteristics, shared a similar identity, political orientation, and personal history, as it is well known in autoethnographic literature. The explicit positioning created a sense of understanding among the interviewees, encouraging them to share even the most challenging moments of their biographical journey (Cardano *et al.*, 2020).

This decision, which is also politically motivated, seeks to crip, to transform the manner in which research is conducted, resulting in oral interviews becoming spaces for sharing and listening, with the aim of deconstructing hierarchies. By the way those who were not confident with it did not reply. It is our conviction that the level of depth and the amount of detail provided in the autobiographical narratives would not have been achievable if we had not explicitly shared our positioning (cfr. "Autoethnographies conversation" in Gariglio, 2025); if people were required to answer questions posed by researchers who were not queer or disabled, it would be difficult for them to share deep life stories.

The choice to conduct the interviews online was made for reasons of convenience - the people in the sample come from different provinces in Italy - but above all for reasons of accessibility: the online mode allows us to conduct the research and the interviewees to participate from home. However, if on the one hand many problems related to the disablement of the environments and methods are avoided a priori, we are aware that for some people it is not always possible and safe to talk about themselves and their identities and experiences in front of their family members and/or caregivers (Gariglio, 2025)

We believe it is important to highlight that this is a limitation and a risk that the world of researchers must face with ever new and effective strategies that can guarantee the largest possible participation; in the meantime, we believe it is important to cripple the way of doing research (Mills and Sanchez, 2023), also through the choice of instruments with which to conduct it, the premises, the acts of care and the sharing of one's positioning.

The main strength of this essay, in our view, is the design of research based on situated knowledge (Cardano and Gariglio, 2022).

3. COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

We subscribe to the notion that "the personal is political", a concept that has evolved into a slogan frequently employed in feminist publications, manifestos and demonstrations. This assertion is substantiated by the analysis of autobiographical interviews and first-hand experiences, which have led to the discernment of clear similarities and differences in the experiences of intersectional discrimination across various domains. The present study employs a methodology known as collaborative autoethnography, which is predicated on the premise outlined above. The methodology enables the dissemination of experiences that have been encountered in different spheres, thereby facilitating the identification of commonalities. It is precisely from the points of difference and convergence that future critical analyses of the systemic phenomena of queerphobic and ableist violence will be initiated.

The following account is that of author Barbara Centrone, who writes in the first person.

I am a queer, lesbian, neurodivergent, relational anarchist and disabled person. All of these identity labels are relatively recent for me, and it is still a revolutionary political act to claim them. I have lived my entire life wondering who I was and why I was a certain way. I have always asked myself, 'What is wrong with me?' The first reason is that there is a lack of representation in the media of people from minority groups, and these groups are often shown in a negative light. The second reason is that society has a very narrow idea of what it means to be 'normal'.

Not having representations that I could identify with meant that I became aware of myself very late, and in the meantime, I was gaslighted in every context for my desire to question myself and my difficulty in finding suitable words to describe myself.

Finding out I was ADHD changed my life, but 'how' I found out also played a key role. In Italy, embarking on a diagnostic pathway is still a privilege - of race, class, gender, geographical origin...- (Marocchini, 2024) and I had the privilege of being followed by a competent psychiatrist who explained to me how my neurobiological functioning. Because he was not biased, he listened to me carefully, and this allowed me to understand what had happened in my life and to see myself differently. I could understand how I learn, socialize and deal with difficulties. For years, people had said that these were because I was 'lazy', 'selfish' or 'uncaring'. It hasn't been easy to come out as ADHD in other situations, like at the emergency room or at work. Even at university -I was enrolled in a degree course to become a teacher- I was often gaslighted by those same professors who teach disciplines, such as psychology and neuropsychology, that also study neurodevelopmental disorders.

I have come out thousands of times, for a thousand reasons. Sometimes as a political and pedagogical act, such as when I reveal my identities to my pupils at school or university; other times to defend myself in advance against any unsolicited judgements; other times to try to justify my opinions or my knowledge of certain facts established in literature.

Even in activist circles, which I have frequented for years, I have been constantly having to come out as if I had to convince other people that I had a right to occupy that space and talk about certain issues. This is because for every part of my identity I do not fit into the stereotypes present in the common imagination: I am a lesbian and non-binary but I have a distinctly female gender expression, I am non-monogamous but I have had a main partner to live with for years, I have a dynamic disability and therefore do not always use mobility aids. Living at the intersection of many identity axes of oppression has allowed me to understand what it means to suffer intersectional discrimination and has enabled me to practice the tool of intersectionality to analyze oppressions, create networks of alliances, make resistance, create representations. It is as if I had to choose which part of me to bring into a space and which to hide: am I in a transfeminist collective? if I talk about lesbian issues I am accepted, if I talk about ableism I am frowned upon. And if I don't have mobility aids, I'm not even taken seriously.

I have also often come out in health care, to demand more comprehensive answers to my questions about my health from negligent doctors who treated me carelessly because I was socialized as a woman, because I was a lesbian. In fact, I have suffered from chronic pain since I was 13 years old, and only after 13 years of visits, examinations, and specialized check-ups around Italy did I get the official diagnosis of endometriosis and adenomyosis.

When I asked the family doctor for a prescription for blood tests to check for sexually transmitted diseases, she did not understand why because she knows me as a disabled person with chronic pain, she has seen me use a walker and cane to walk and this for her automatically meant that I did not have a sex life. When I told her that I was a non-monogamous person and that I had multiple sexual partners, she was in shock.

In many contexts my being "weird", "eccentric" became a distinguishing feature, a tool in the hands of the outside gaze: "you're weird because you're ADHD, but you're not really queer" in LGBTQIAP+ environments, "you're weird because you're queer, but you're not really ADHD" in contexts occupied by other neurodivergent people. My biological mother, after my umpteenth coming out told me "You've always been weird! Now you tell the world that you are all these things just because you want to be the center of attention". This sentence is half true, but only if turned inside out: I have always been weird in the eyes of others because I am a neurodivergent queer person with chronic pain. And since self-determination is a right, I only had access to as an adult, after much effort, the act of claiming these identity labels for myself and re-appropriating terms like 'street' is an act of freedom.

In my process of reappropriating my body and my identities, endometriosis surgery played a key role: it was proof that 13 years of pain was real, it was not in my head, it was not hysteria, it was not lack of a man, it was not because I am a lesbian, it was not confusion, it was not all a figment of my imagination, as the doctors had told me for years.

All these experiences of discrimination have influenced my way of doing activism, which also aims to create representation by sharing photos that show the daily reality I live in the chronically ill queer fourth body, to deconstruct the stereotypes present in the collective imagination (*fig. 2*).

Figure 2. One of the photos through which I create non-stereotypical representation of a non-binary, lesbian, disabled body on my Instagram profile barbiequeeer.

The following are the experiences of author Elisa Costantino, who writes in the first person.

I have motor impairments, I am neurodivergent, demisexual, genderfluid and relational anarchist. I was 23 when I came out as queer after my first relationship with a girl. Before that, I felt wrong because of my sexual preferences, the way I understand sexuality and relationships. I liked women, I couldn't understand the difference between love and friendship, and I refused to compete with my friends on who had sex first. For me, sex has always been something that primarily involves the mind, and only afterwards the body. Growing up, I then had the privilege of getting to know other queer people, starting a long journey of questioning that continues even now. The problem is that there is a lack of LGBTQIAP+ disabled people being shown in the media (Centrone, 2024a; Cuollo, 2024), sex education is not taught in schools (Bruno, 2024) and issues related to gender identity, sexual orientation, relationship status and disability are medicalized by the society (Eckhert, 2016). If you don't see yourself represented anywhere, how can you not feel out of place? Another thing is that I was ashamed of my disability which stopped me from accepting my queerness, since I didn't accept my disability.

In my personal experience, the most denied identity is undoubtedly the demisexual identity, which falls within the asexual spectrum. Invisibilization and microaggressions against people on the asexual spectrum are also very common among the people we interviewed, which is consistent with what the relevant sociological literature points out (Winer, 2024; Milligan & Neufeldt, 2001; Gupta, 2017). As has already emerged from the interviews, my life experience is also influenced by this kind of 'mutual denial' involving the two communities: the disabled community and the asexual community (Kim, 2014). In fact, it is common for people from the disabled community to deny the existence of asexuality as a real and prior sexual orientation: see for example viral slogans on the web such as 'I am not asexual', which is a response to the common infantilization of disabled people who are thought to be sexless (Bonnie, 2014; McRuer and Mollow, 2012). On the other hand, many people in the asexual community claim their own asexual identity and, in emphasizing that asexuality is not a disease, often fall into the trap of conflating disease and disability, contributing to an empowering and inaccurate view (Appia, 2024).

In my daily life, I don't have to say that I'm asexual because otherwise people might think disabled people can't or don't want to have sex, which isn't true. All people, including disabled people, can choose to have sex if they want to. When people don't talk about their sexuality, it has consequences for society. It can make it difficult for us to understand all parts of a person's identity. For example, it has caused me to hide my demisexual identity, which is when someone is attracted to only one or two of the three main types of sexuality. This double invisibility doesn't only affect places of activism and association, but also the medical field.

As the studies on gender medicine confirm (Schopp et al., 2022), this is expressed most strongly during gynecological examinations: disabled people with a uterus are not provided for, only penetrative sex is given importance, and the disabled body is not thought of as a sexual body that can have a sexual life. This view influences the way the examination is conducted, the examinations that are or are not prescribed, the focus on the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, etc.

Obtaining a contraceptive device was very difficult: the doctors did not want to prescribe it for me - just as they would not give me internal examinations - because they assumed that my disabled body could not be sexually active.

Another aspect I would like to focus on is personal assistance or, more generally, Independent Living (Costantino, 2024; Bocci et al., 2024) since I have been experiencing this model of living for six years now as a non-self-sufficient person. In this regard, I would like to emphasize how crucial personal assistance is to enable disabled people to freely question themselves without the judgement of enabling and queerphobic caregivers. In fact, it is only thanks to personal assistance - people whose job it is to do my arms and legs - that today I have the privilege of being able to assert my sexual, gender and relational identity. In practice, in fact, my assistants: accompany me to queer events (when accessible), allow me to hang out with whomever I wish and make decisions regarding my gender identity. I remember very well the first time when, thanks to my assistant's presence, I dressed in a suit and tie. Finally, at that moment, I saw myself and could be authentically myself. The same thing could not have happened if I had been cared for by my parents -a situation that is still all too common among disabled people who are often forced to depend on queerphobic and enabling caregivers. To this day, it is only possible for me to express my gender identity through personal assistance and, wearing a jacket and tie, I could only do so at the age of 24, with the right caregiver (*fig.3*).

Fig.3 A photo of Elisa representing freedom of self-determination with the right assistance.

My life experience gives me hope that soon all disabled people will be able to find and express themselves through personal assistance, without judgement, without abuse and in full self-determination.

4. BEING DISABLED AND QUEER: NARRATIVES OF INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION

4.1 The survey

A total of 134 individuals participated in the ad hoc questionnaire, which was designed to assess the prevalence of ableism and queerphobia. The participants were characterised by the following demographics (fig.4; fig.5):

Figure 4. Gender distribution

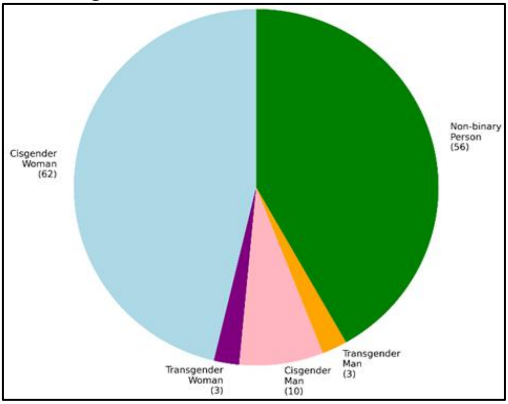
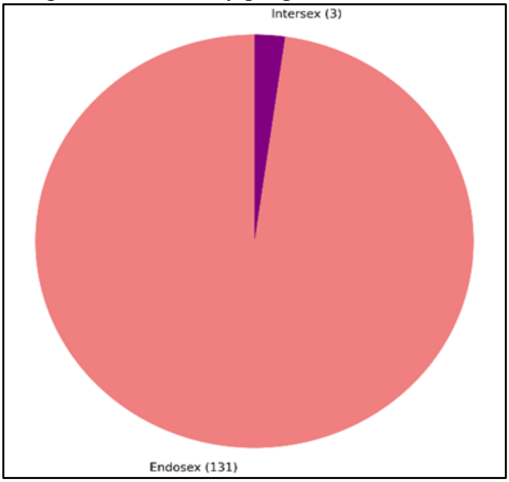


Figure 5. How many people are intersex



In relation to the subjects of gender identity and sexual and romantic orientation and relationship orientation/style, individuals self-identified in the following manner (*fig. 6; fig.7*):

Figure 6. Sexual and romantic orientation

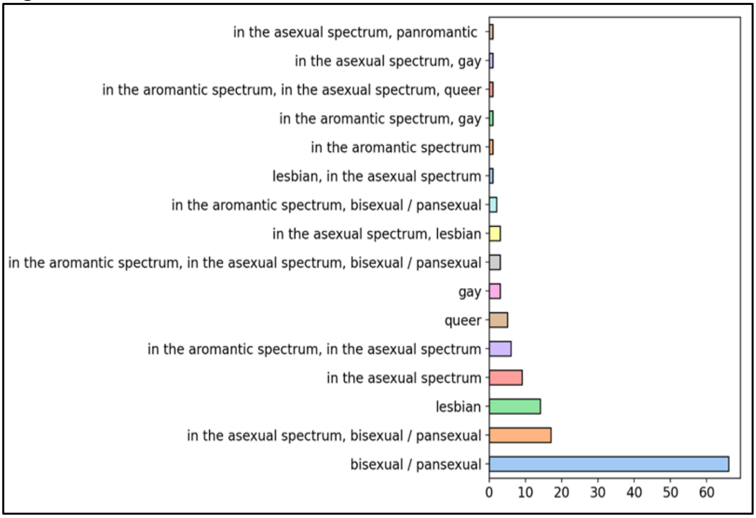
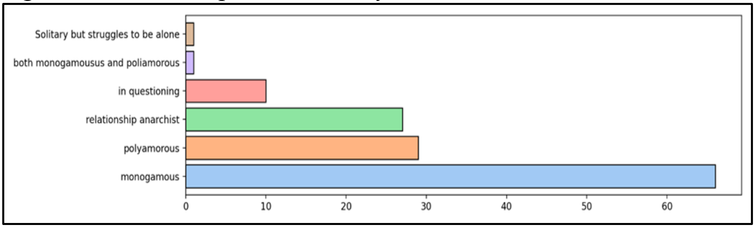
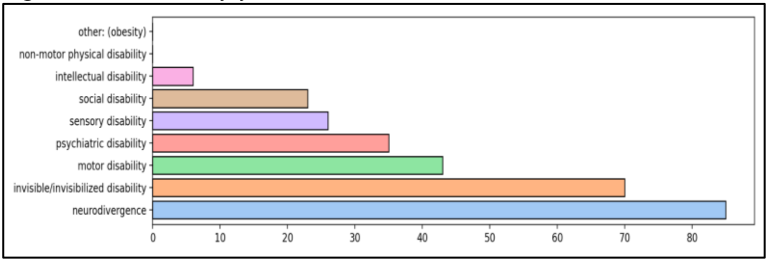


Figure 7. Relationship orientation/style



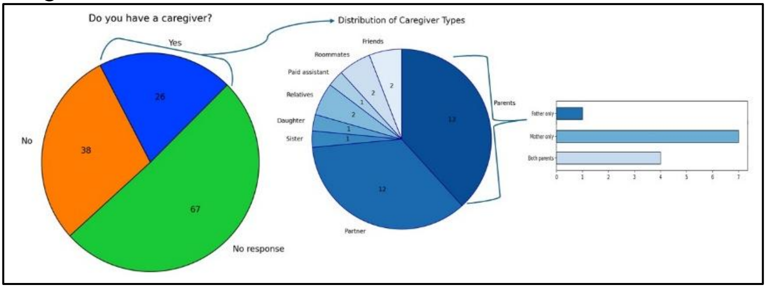
In relation to the identification of the target group, participants were invited to provide answers to the question of why they identified themselves as disabled. The following alternative answers were provided: 'intellectual disability', 'invisible/invisible disability', 'motor disability', 'psychiatric disability', 'sensory disability', 'social disability', 'neurodivergence' and 'other'. While acknowledging the preferred usage of the term 'impairment', we have opted for alternative lexical choices due to its limited prevalence and utilisation in Italy. Consequently, we have chosen to utilise expressions frequently encountered in social networks and offline activist circles, thereby ensuring the familiarity of the terminology to the self-selected sample.
The following graphs show the distribution of the answers given (fig.8):

Figure 8. You identify yourself as disabled for...



The questionnaire was originally designed to allow participants to opt out of answering certain questions. However, it was subsequently deemed necessary to make these questions compulsory in order to ensure the collection of valuable data. A total of 68 individuals chose not to respond to these optional questions, resulting in a final sample size of 66 for the section on carers. In relation to caregiving, 27 out of 66 respondents reported having one or more caregivers, primarily family members, while 39 respondents reported having no caregivers (*fig.9*):

Figure 9. Do you have a caregiver? What is your relationship with your caregiver?



In order to investigate the experiences of ableism and queerphobia, a series of questions was posed, with multiple options available for selection:

1) From whom/which contexts have you experienced ableism?
2) From whom/which contexts have you experienced queerphobia?
3) From whom/which contexts have you experienced intersectional discrimination as a disabled LGBTQIAP+ person?

The following table provides a summary of the distribution of answers given to these three questions, as well as to the answers related to the people and contexts with whom/which one is out about one's gender identity (showing the distribution over the sample of non-binary people, trans women and trans men), one's sexual orientation and one's relational orientation/style. This is taking into account that of the sample of 134 people interviewed, cisgender people numbered 72, heterosexual people 0, and monogamous people 66 (fig.10*)*.

The data presented thus far is drawn from the empirical data collection derived from written interviews; the remaining data will be addressed in future contributions. The following discussion will provide a synopsis prior to the analysis of the oral interviews that is the subject of this report.

Figure 10. Contexts in which episodes of discrimination were experienced.

People and contexts	**From whom/which contexts have you experienced ableism?**	**From whom/which contexts have you experienced queerphobia?**	With whom/in what contexts are you out about your gender identity? (no-cis= 62)			With whom/in what contexts are you out about your sexual orientation? (hetero=0)	With whom/in what contexts are you out about your relationship style? (mono=66)	**From whom/which contexts have you experienced intersectional discrimination as a disabled lgbtqiap+ person?**
			Nb	Tw	Tm			
Other family members	71	49	18	2	2	48	7	72
Cohabiting relatives	60	42	18	1	2	50	9	57
Friends	58	38	48	3	2	113	46	47
Mental health professionals	42 (Over 54 who meet, even occasionally, with mental health professionals)	33	31	3	3	78	20	51
Universities (professors)	41	15	3	0	1	3	1	
Activism contexts / cultural association events	40 (Over 53 who attend, even occasionally, activist contexts and/or participate in association events)	19	28	1	2	66	19	
Job (employer)	39	23	4	0	1	15	5	29
Job (colleagues)	38	27	8	0	1	29	12	42
Social media	37	30	30	1	2	51	11	51
Partner	29 (for 12 of them the partner is also their caregiver)	17 (for 12 of them the partner is also their caregiver)	31	2	2	77	35	25
Sports contexts	28	7	1	0	1	10	2	18
Universities (colleagues)	27	14	5	1	2	24	1	20
Universities (non-teaching staff)	21	7	1	0	1	4	1	13
Caregiver/s	20	8	6	1	0	28	6	19
Roommates	16	10	6	0	1	18	6	13
Social assistants	10	4	4	1	0	8	0	9
Autonomy assistants	7	2	1			4	0	4
No one	7	22	0	0	0	3	2	8
Other/s:	7 (Cinemas, concerts, beaches, car parks (1); teachers and schoolmates (2); volunteer contexts for the disabled (1); strangers on the street (1); post offices (1); lgbt association counters (1)	6 (unknown persons (4); teachers and schoolmates (1); lgbt association counters (1)						3 (teachers and schoolmates (2); strangers (1); self-help groups (1)

4.2 Medical spaces[6]

As McRuer (2006) argue, the LGBTQIAP+ community and the disabled community share experiences of medicalisation and normalisation. This can be summarised by «*the restorative principles that are used for both disabled and queer people*» (our translation), as Sara, our interviewee, explains.

This phenomenon is particularly evident within medical spaces, where ableist and queerphobic discrimination are intertwined.

The present study draws upon in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of asexual disabled individuals to explore the prevalence of intersectional discrimination in their lives, with a particular focus on its manifestations in medical and care settings. Caterina Appia's seminal work (2024) addresses the issue of mutual negation involving disabled and asexual people and takes its starting point from the processes of medicalisation and psychiatry to which both populations of our interest are subjected. Indeed, if disabled people have been socially perceived as sick and defective in accordance with the medical model, asexual people have not fared any better, being even psychiatrized in light of Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder being included in the DSM-IV. Conversely, individuals with disabilities have historically been stigmatised as asexual, a term that, in this particular context, does not denote a sexual orientation but rather signifies a profound incompatibility between disabled individuals and the sexual domain as objects of desire. The existence of such stereotypes may give rise to the erroneous assumption that individuals with a disability are incapable of sexual desire. However, closer inspection reveals that each individual, irrespective of disability status, exhibits a distinct relationship with their sexuality, one that is influenced by personal, cultural, and social factors. Asexuality, by contrast, is defined as a sexual orientation characterised by a deficiency or diminution in sexual attraction to others. It is imperative to acknowledge that identifying as asexual does not imply an absence of yearning for intimacy or relationships; rather, individuals may experience a spectrum of romantic, affectionate, and physical attractions. Consequently, asexuality is recognised as a legitimate and valid identity within the comprehensive spectrum of sexual diversity. In practice, as will be demonstrated in the following excerpts of interviews reported, this manifests in the denial of disability by asexual people and, reciprocally, in the perception of disability as a pathological condition and of

[6] It is imperative to acknowledge that the results presented here are preliminary. Each paragraph will be the subject of further exploration in subsequent contributions.

asexuality as a deficiency and incompatibility with the sexual dimension, due to the prevailing ableist and aphobic stereotypes.

In this context, mutual negation is manifested in the experience of Eva[7], a disabled and asexual person, who recounts:

> Eva: it's like saying "I'm declining you to an even lower level-not only you're not-you can't be what you are or you're not but I'm declining you to an even lower level which is disability" [...] even asexual people for example keep saying "we don't have a disease, we don't have a libido problem", probably, but in reality I mean you can have it and anyway you're not less asexual [...] 'are-you-have-you-listed in your biography all your diseases? [...] like it's my fault that I'm like that, I have a lot of intersections, of discrimination it's not my fault [...] (our translation).

Consequently, asexual individuals, perceiving disability as a disease, seek to distance themselves from it at all costs, thereby exhibiting ableist tendencies.

A discussion of disability and asexuality reveals several intriguing and intricate facets. For instance, disabled individuals who identify as asexual are frequently perceived through a skewed lens, as asexuality is often invalidated, occasionally regarded as a consequence of impairment, and never acknowledged as an act of self-determination. This phenomenon is exemplified by the experience of Azzurra, an asexual individual living with chronic illnesses, who asserts that:

> Azzurra: there is then this kind of double discrimination, isn't there? That is, "you are like this because you are ill, you are like this because you are disabled". No, I would have been even if I didn't have my disability, if I didn't have illness, I could have been exactly the same, full stop. 'Ah you're like this because you took this drug and maybe on a hormonal level it destroyed you' in fact I say on a hormonal level it destroys me and I can have libido problems but not sexual attraction problems that's another matter [...] many times I repeat it bothers me a lot that then it takes a very ableist nuance that is 'you're like this because you're sick because you're disabled', there it bothers me a little bit as if my disability goes to break something, no? [...] when I tried to talk about it with some doctor, things like that, I often felt invalidated especially because of the discourse of not feeling sexual attraction. [...] Now I can't really tell you the amount of times I've been told "no, it must be the drugs, no, it must be the illness that's drained you so much energy that you don't think about it" and I was like "no, it's not that, it's not that" [...] (our translation).

[7] In order to comply with ethical standards and privacy regulations, the data has undergone a process of anonymisation.

As demonstrated by Azzurra's experience, asexual disabled individuals are not perceived as having the capacity for autonomous self-determination of their sexual orientation, but rather as doubly ill. Disability is thus used as a pretext to delegitimise asexuality.

A similar dynamic can be observed in the experience of Mario, a trans, autistic boy with fibromyalgia. Like Azzurra, Mario's chronic pain is not recognised as legitimate due to his trans identity and neurodivergence:

> Mario: [...] after two years of hormone therapy they started to tell me that surely the fact that I had lived that is, my trans life and the fact that I was diagnosed late as autistic had probably been the two causes that had triggered the fibromyalgia because there was a very strong stress on my nervous system... so my identity essentially was used as an explanation for why I have chronic pain... it's an incredible combo [...] (our translation).

In this case, Mario's non-binary gender identity and autism are used as a pretext for the invalidation of the chronic pain he experiences. Due to the medicalisation of disabled identity and queerness, LGBTQIAP+ disabled people appear to be unable to have a sexual orientation and gender identity that does not conform to normative standards. The interviews conducted clearly demonstrate that collective opinion perceives the disabled and queer experience as inexorably incompatible.

This stereotype is particularly pronounced among disabled individuals within the LGBTQIAP+ community, especially in medical and care settings.

The situation is critical in these spaces, which by definition should provide support and care regardless of any individual's identity characteristics. An analysis of the interviews conducted reveals a concerning pattern of treatment by healthcare professionals towards LGBTQIAP+ disabled people, characterised by invalidation, gaslighting and invisibilization

This phenomenon is exemplified by the case of Eva, whose psychologist, exhibiting prejudicial attitudes, contributed to the delay in the affirmation of her sexual identity:

> Eva: people like my psychologist who told me that when I told him I was asexual he told me to stimulate my libido [...] it created a situation of confusion in me i.e. it delayed the discovery of my identity [...] (our translation).

Mario's testimony is also of great significance. During the interview, he describes experiencing discrimination on the basis of both his trans status and disability. He illustrates how this took place in the field of gynaecology, an area in which intersectional discrimination is manifestly evident:

> Mario: [...] the situation was not only ableist, but it was also crossed with the fact of being trans and of being in hormone substitution therapy ... so there were several times where with medical staff and with specialist people ... I had to be accompanied in order to be listened not only to the physical pain I was feeling but also for a question linked to the hormone substitution therapy [...] then let's say that the whole experience linked to gynaecology was quite devastating, that is to say the last time I saw a gynaecologist she kept repeating my first name and then she repeated my first name and then she said that I was in hormone substitution therapy [...]. ..] then let's say that the whole experience related to gynaecology has been quite devastating exactly that is to say that the last time I saw a gynaecologist she kept repeating my name and then she did it in a way almost to make me feel better, didn't she? [...] and she didn't really know how to handle the fact that I didn't have relations with people with penises [...] she didn't really know how to handle this and she even went so far as to suggest to me, I was 24 at the time [...] when I had this visit and it was suggested that I still get the papilloma virus vaccine if I'm not mistaken [...] because she didn't really know which way to turn with this [...] (our translation).

4.3 Activism settings

It is evident that intersectional discrimination manifests itself in various spaces, including those dedicated to activism. This phenomenon can be attributed, at least in part, to the pervasive societal perception of disability as a health issue rather than a minority social identity. This misperception leads to the exclusion of disabled individuals from intersectional activist spaces, effectively rendering them inaccessible and exclusionary. The absence of disability in these spaces is particularly keenly felt and suffered by the crip community, who do not have the opportunity to see themselves represented, expected and welcomed in those very environments that should offer support. In this sense, all other identities of disabled people are invisibilized in order to maintain the status quo (Centrone et al., 2023; Bocci and Straniero, 2020).

The experience of disabled people is in stark contrast to the theoretical underpinnings of intersectional activism, which posits the inclusion of multiple identities. In practice, disabled people are often marginalised and absent from intersectional movements, including, for instance,

intersectional transfeminism[8]. This disparity underscores a systemic failure to incorporate disabled people's experiences and needs in both collective reflections and actual practice.
A similar situation pertains to LGBTQIAP+ activist spaces that tend to be exclusionary towards disabled people. The majority of the interviews conducted reveal that such spaces are inaccessible in their structure, thereby exacerbating the social exclusion of disabled people, as exemplified by the presence of steps, loud noises, lights, and a lack of remote connection. However, as will be demonstrated in the subsequent section, drawing upon the embodied experience of one of the two authors of the present essay, in addition to the inaccessible nature of these spaces, there is a conspicuous absence of collective consciousness regarding the issue of disability.

The following section will provide concrete examples to support this argument:

> Eva: [...] the spaces where you went to do activism were not completely accessible and so... there were some problems, for example once there was a place where I went to do-participate in this event against gender violence, it was also a kind of event of self-awareness but it was not... apart from that you could hear a lot of noises and so... I'm ADHD and then there was the noise of an air conditioner, that is trivial things that then, no? I mean... for people who have disabilities, however, they count, and there was the noise of the air conditioner all the time that... caused me a lot of anxiety, in fact I had to run away from the room [...] Not to mention the Pride, the Pride is really a nightmare for any type of disability, any type of disability (our translation).

As Eva's experience illustrates, activist environments are characterised by inaccessibility. This phenomenon occurs even in spaces such as Pride events, which, by definition, are intended to provide a safe haven for individuals of all body/mind. However, these spaces frequently impose their own set of barriers, including architectural, sensory and information access issues, which can effectively exclude disabled individuals. This is a glaring oversight in the design of these spaces, which fail to cater to the needs of disabled individuals. Disabled people encounter numerous barriers in all aspects of life, leading to the phenomenon of psycho-emotional ableism (Thomas, 2004; Reeve, 2004; Crippi, 2024), a phenomenon to which we are all subject. In this regard, by analogy, we

[8] Please direct your attention to the letter signed by Marta Migliosi and Asya Bellia, which was addressed to *Non Una Di Meno* and concerned the exclusion of disabled people from the feminist struggle. This letter can be found at the following URL: https://informareunh.it/per-tutte-le-donne-per-non-una-di-meno-oggi-e-in-futuro-siamo-meno/ (last visited 30/12/2024).

often hear of minority stress (Meyer, 2003) for people from the LGBTQIAP+ community. We posit that the concept of minority stress is analogous to that of psycho-emotional ableism. To summarise further, one could conclude that psycho-emotional ableism is to disabled people as minority stress is to queer people. Once more, it is evident how disability is itself a queer experience.

At this juncture, the words of Sara, a bisexual girl with motor impairment, assume central importance:

> Sara: [...] so many queer centres and spaces [...] yes because disabled people are not allowed [...] so this queer feminist bookshop is the only one I have in [city name] and I had this huge fight with them, I'm so angry with them because they don't let disabled people in, not even queer disabled people, so... and this is not a safe space for queer disabled people if they don't even let you in, if they tell you that it's not true that there are laws against architectural barriers, it's not a safe space if they tell you that they want to organise an event with you and then they do it in a space that is inaccessible for you and for disabled people, you can't even go to the bathroom, it's not a safe space I mean if they call you to a transfeminist collective or a transfeminist podcast they call you and force you to drive 8 hours alone on the motorway and without giving you the possibility to connect remotely [. ..] and without thinking that yes exactly as we were saying before, right? That there's all the hidden labour, there's the chronic illnesses, the fatigue and the disability, the architectural barriers and the sensory barriers... that's discrimination, that's discrimination, I absolutely see it as queer and ableist discrimination because people [...] because disabled people who are queer how do they feel safe in a space like that where their presence is not for their existence-is not expected? (our translation).

Whilst transfeminist associations frequently advocate for face-to-face meetings as a means to cultivate human connection and establish safe spaces, online meetings can prove more inclusive and accessible for a multitude of individuals. Indeed, those residing in remote areas and experiencing disablement may find virtual spaces to be a more accessible opportunity to actively participate in movement discussions and initiatives.

Like Eva, Sara faces significant challenges in accessing queer activist spaces due to structural inaccessibility and a lack of collective understanding of disability and ableism issues. These crucial concerns perpetuate a pervasive feeling among disabled individuals of not feeling safe, unwanted and unwelcome. Despite the endeavours of disabled activists to reclaim their existence in the world, the prevailing reality indicates that events organised as part of the queer, feminist, and related movements continue to be hosted in non-accessible venues. This preclusion effectively limits access to an elite comprising those who possess the physical, sensory, and neurological characteristics deemed to be normal within the ableist system's normotype.

4.4 Resistance strategies

In view of the aforementioned points, individuals from the LGBTQIAP+ and disabled community adopt various strategies of resistance to ableist and queerphobic discrimination. The following section will examine some of these strategies expressed in idealtypes (*fig.11*).

Figure 11. Main strategies adopted

Segregation LGBTQIAP+ disabled individuals who have limited personal and social resources often experience segregation and marginalization within collective spaces. Rather than adopting a strategy of (ir)resistance, these individuals often opt for segregation as a strategy to avoid psycho-emotional enablement, leading to social withdrawal	***Creating alliances*** This survey revealed a further resistance strategy, the creation of alliances. Indeed, a significant proportion of the LGBTQIAP+ and disabled people interviewed reported that they had established alliances with medical, academic, sporting, and other professionals. These alliances were formed with the aim of establishing safe spaces and facilitating mutual exchange and influence
Studying and deconstruction In the course of the present research, a significant number of subjects interviewed – including the two authors of this essay – have undertaken rigorous deconstruction and analysis of the issues in question, with the objective of liberating themselves from internalised ableism and queerphobia. Occasionally, deconstruction and analysis give rise to academic activism, with the resultant products being educational resources and publications on the subject.	***Activism*** Disabled and LGBTQIAP+ individuals who possess greater personal and social resources, and who are more predisposed to encounter challenges, have been observed to adopt the role of activist, both online and offline. This phenomenon is motivated by an aspiration to effect change within societal frameworks characterised by exclusions experienced by individuals whose body-mind diverge from societal norms.

It is finally important to emphasise that both visible queerness, performed as such, and visible forms of impairment can be understood as forms of *intersectional master status.* These can easily become a vector for further oppression. This aspect is important to take into account for an intersectional analysis of the phenomena in question.

5. CONCLUSIONS

McRuer's Crip Theory offers a sophisticated and critical analysis of the role of compulsory able-bodiedness within globalized neoliberal capitalism. In this context, political consciousness tends to be constructed around a politics of identity that implies identification as a specifically marginalized subject (McRuer, 2014).

The concept of "queer-crip consciousness" was derived from the life experiences of self-determination and resistance that were shared during the interviews conducted by the researchers and among the researchers themselves within the framework of collaborative autoethnography. This concept was coined by McRuer (2006): the process of identification does not end in an individual claim; rather, it takes the form of a form of collective resistance. This emergent form of queer and disabled consciousness interrogates ableist and heteronormative norms, while also claiming political space for collective action to secure rights and social equity. Furthermore, it problematizes the structures of the neoliberal state that facilitate the perpetuation of systemic forms of oppression.

However, in order for Crip Studies to evolve into a comprehensive theoretical and political frame of reference that genuinely embodies intersectionality (Centrone, 2025), it is imperative to build upon and extend its foundations. It is through this process of expansion and innovation that the social sciences can evolve to embrace new perspectives and enhance their analytical capabilities.

The concept of *cripping* the way in which research is conducted entails the acknowledgement and deconstruction of the privileges that inform the decisions made by researchers. It involves active engagement with the needs of various stigmatized social groups and a process of reflection on the aspects that require modification. Crip research can be defined as a truly participatory form of enquiry that is founded on the premise that each life experience is inherently valuable and must be evaluated within a comprehensive framework. The inherent complexity and intersectionality of this framework necessitates the employment of sophisticated and multifaceted analytical methodologies.

Cripping the way one does research also means using one's identity positioning to engage often marginalized identities, amplify their voices and collaborate to conceptualize lines of intervention.

Our research, which is currently ongoing, has demonstrated significant promise in actively involving disabled and queer individuals in the process of sharing their experiences of discrimination and discussing strategies for active resistance. The selection of methods and research approaches reflects a personal and political commitment to adhere to the principles of Universal Design (Centrone et al, in press; CAST, 2018; Demo, 2022), as well as the intersectional interpretative crip paradigm.

In this theoretical framework, the methodology of collaborative autoethnography manifests through three distinct components: a guiding framework, an insightful examination, and an analytical lens.

In general, the data collected to date provides an alarming portrait of abuses perpetrated by caregivers, by mental health professionals, by partners, and in contexts of activism and associationism that self-identify as safe and inclusive environments.

Our objective is that this undertaking will make a meaningful contribution to an as yet undefined field in Italy's academic context, that of Crip Studies.

In terms of the future direction of this research, the objective is to facilitate group activities centered on the sharing and creation of audiovisual and artistic products. These products will be informed by the creative methods employed within the social sciences (Giorgi et al., 2021) with the aim of enhancing biographical narratives and serving as a conduit for the dissemination of effective practices concerning early intervention in contexts involving discrimination.

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ESTHÉTIQUE QUEER : RÉFLEXIONS SUR LE QUEER À PARTIR DE GEORG SIMMEL

*di Luca Guizzardi**

Abstract

Queer Aesthetics: Reflections on the Queer through the Lens of Georg Simmel

The article wants to outline some theoretical reflections about queer aesthetics. Who is a queer individual? How can a queer individual be imagined? The queer subject or, better still, queer identities, shatter the dominant perspective of society in the same way as Simmel's stranger. The queer subject is the strange(r) of society and in society and, as the author shall try to show, queer could therefore be observed, from that Simmelian perspective, as a social form. In fact, the essential point the article is about to make is that queer should be seen as a cultural form. The contribution will sketch out a possible definition of queer. The figure of the outsider and Simmel's social aesthetic theory will then be taken up in order to develop a possible link between the two – the perception of queerness and the individual's reaction to it. Finally, in the conclusions will mention various reflections on the meaning of queer as a cultural form of our modern life.

Keywords

Queer, Aesthetics/Esthétique, Intimacy/Intimité, Georg Simmel

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1. QUI ES-TU ? IMAGES DE L'AUTRE ET COMMENT LA SOCIETE (QUEER) EST-ELLE POSSIBLE? UI ES-TU ?

« Je me suis rendu dans une caserne avec la lettre d'une psychiatre qui était la sœur de Mario Mieli, le fondateur de l'activisme gay. Elle y avait écrit que j'étais incompatible avec le service militaire et que celui-ci aurait été très dangereux pour moi. J'avais les ongles verts, les cheveux rouge-fuchsia et un grand manteau de fourrure. Un colonel me regarda et me dit: – Vous seriez très dangereux pour vos camarades, et non l'inverse» raconte Ivan Cattaneo, dans une interview au journal *La Repubblica*[1], à propos de son expérience comme l'un des premiers exemptés du service militaire en raison de son homosexualité.

Seahorse Parents est un projet photographique et cinématographique réalisé par l'artiste Miriam Guttmann sur les hommes transgenres enceints. Les images[2] représentent des hommes enceints qui nagent et flottent dans l'eau tels des hippocampes. «Visibility – dit Jérôme, l'un de ces hommes transgenres enceints – plays a crucial role in empowering transgender youth who may be questioning their identities. As a seahorse dad myself, I can demonstrate that it is possible to embrace one's gender identity and still fulfil the dream of becoming a parent»[3]. De même, Alex, un autre père, explique que:

> visibility and representation create a sense of community and belonging. When you don't see yourself in the world, it's hard to feel like you belong. I think *Seahorse Parent* is about showcasing the differences that exist among birthing people. It's about acknowledging that those differences aren't inherently bad, but, rather, beautiful. *Seahorse Parent* shows that all parents deserve to create families in whatever ways feel right to them.

Bingo Allison, 36 ans, raconte au journal *Liverpool Echo* son expérience de premier prêtre non binaire à l'église d'Angleterre. Bingo Allison (qui emploie les pronoms *they/them* pour se référer à lui/elle-même) se définit *queer* parce qu'il/elle ne s'identifie ni comme un homme, ni comme une femme et, en outre, il/elle est transgenre. Bingo Allison est marié et père de trois enfants. Grâce à l'aide et au soutien d'un groupe LGBT* dont Allison fait partie, il s'est libéré des préjugés qu'il avait intériorisés en

[1] *La Repubblica*, 25 Avril 2023.

[2] https://www.foam.org/events/miriam-guttmann

[3] *'Difference is beautiful': pregnant trans men go for a swim – in picture*, dans *The Guardian*, 8 Août 2023.

raison du milieu très fanatique et intolérant dans lequel il avait grandi. Aujourd'hui, Allison peut vivre et exprimer en pleine liberté sa véritable identité et sa mission est la suivante: «when I'm wearing my collar it lets children know that is okay and that there is a place in the church and in the outside world for people like me»[4].

Un homosexuel dans les forces armées dans les années soixante-dix, des hommes enceints, un prêtre non-binaire et transgenre: voici des exemples d'identité *queer*. Ces identités *ébranlent* les images que la société attribue, par habitude, au militaire (masculin et viril), à la personne enceinte (une femme) et au prêtre (un homme cisgenre). Face à ces formes alternatives, quiconque peut se sentir en difficulté en présence d'un autre qu'il ne peut plus reconnaître, car différent.

Mais pourquoi Ivan Catteneo aurait pu être très dangereux pour ses camarades et non l'inverse? Les raisons pour lesquelles ses camarades auraient pu être dangereux pour le chanteur sont, selon moi, plutôt évidentes: Cattaneo aurait été victime de harcèlement et de moqueries. Toutefois, Cattaneo aurait pu, quant à lui, mettre à mal l'hétérosexualité de ses camarades en les provoquant… Il s'agit bel et bien du danger envisagé par le colonel.

Selon Davide Ruggieri (2019), la contribution la plus importante apportée par Georg Simmel à la sociologie n'est pas tant d'avoir découvert un nouvel objet d'étude, mais plutôt d'avoir tracé les contours d'une nouvelle façon d'observer la réalité historico-sociale à travers un «regard sociologique». Ce regard a une connotation *esthétique* très forte. Pour le moment, je préfèrerais définir le *queer* comme un théorie positive de la sexualité (Fineman, 2009), comme une théorie de l'affirmation de pratiques, de la performativité et de la fluidité de la sexualité et, au contraire, de la non-affirmation des identités fixées, de l'essence et de l'immutabilité de la sexualité (Halley, 2009). Ainsi, le lecteur pourrait se demander pourquoi interpréter le *queer* à travers l'épistémologie de Simmel si ce dernier n'a en réalité jamais traité ce sujet (qui n'existait pas à son époque). Simmel (2001, 2004a) a, en effet, analysé la liaison entre les sexes, la philosophie de l'amour, la psychologie de la femme et le rôle de la femme dans la société, la famille, la coquetterie… mais le *queer* est une invention très récente. Il ne fait toutefois aucun doute que si le *queer* avait existé à son époque, Simmel l'aurait étudié comme une forme sociale.

Je voudrais à présent me concentrer sur différents points. Je pense que si l'on veut analyser à la Simmel un fait social en tant que sociologue, il faut l'appréhender comme une forme sociale, comme l'orientation réciproque entre les individus et leur valeur. Et pour analyser le *queer* dans

[4] *Liverpool Echo*, 3 Janvier 2023.

cette optique, deux approches analytiques tracées par Simmel sont très utiles : ses observations sur la figure de l'étranger et sa sociologie esthétique. Le sujet *queer* ou, mieux encore, les identités *queer*, brisent la perspective dominante de la société de la même manière que l'étranger de Simmel. Le sujet *queer* est l'étrange(r)[5] de la société et dans la société et, comme j'essaierai de le montrer, le *queer* pourrait donc être observé, dans cette perspective, comme une forme sociale. La deuxième approche s'interroge sur comment le sujet *queer* est observé par les autres. Quelle est la réaction face à un prêtre *queer* (transgenre) ou à un père enceint? Dans ces deux cas, la perception de la *bizarrerie* ou *de l'être étrange(r)* est immédiate. Mais qu'en est-il de l'individu non-binaire qui se déclare tout simplement aux autres comme étant non-binaire (Hord, 2022)? Ou de la famille *queer* (Gilley, Masullo, 2022)? Comment reconnaître par l'immédiateté du regard la *queerness* d'un couple? Par conséquent, comment reconnaître la *queerness* non manifeste ou explicite des individus? Pour reprendre Simmel, le point essentiel que je vais aborder est que le *queer devrait être considéré comme une forme culturelle.*

Mon article sera structuré de la manière suivante: le prochain paragraphe esquissera une définition possible du *queer*. Puis seront reprises la figure de l'étranger et la théorie esthétique sociale de Simmel afin de développer un lien possible entre les deux – la perception de la *queerness* et la réaction de l'individu face à celle-ci. Enfin, le dernier paragraphe mentionnera différentes réflexions sur le sens du *queer* comme forme culturelle de notre vie moderne.

2. (ESTH)ETIQUE DE L'IDENTITE QUEER: UNE ESQUISSE DE (IN)DEFINITION

Qu'est-ce que le *queer*? Une question qui est loin d'être simple et à laquelle il est difficile de donner une réponse univoque et précise: la réponse elle-même ne peut être que *queer*, à savoir une non-réponse. Je m'explique. Mon objectif n'est pas de faire ici une analyse philologique du mot *queer* ou historiographique de la théorie *queer* que Teresa de Lauretis a formulée en 1991 (Prearo, 2012). Je suis tout à fait d'accord avec le jugement de Federica Valentini (2018) sur l'échec de toute tentative de recomposition de l'ensemble des événements qui ont conduit à la

[5] Je jouerai avec les deux mots *étrange* et *étranger* dans la mesure où l'origine étymologique est la même: du latin classique *extraneus*, du dehors, extérieur (qui n'est pas de la famille, du pays comme dans le cas de l'étranger). Dans tous les cas, il y a donc une référence à une réalité sociale, à une société à laquelle l'individu étrange(r) n'appartient pas.

naissance du *queer*. C'est la raison pour laquelle il vaut mieux, selon elle, parler de *généalogies queer*. Si l'on cherche un mot qui résumerait, à lui seul, ce que le *queer* engendre, il s'agirait du mot: *déconstruction*. Le *queer* déconstruit les homosexualités masculines et féminines (de Lauretis, 1991), la sexualité (Sedgwick, 1990, 2013), le sex/gender system (Rubin, 1997) et le genre (Butler, 1999). Si l'on parle d'essence du *queer*, cette essence doit donc être un *signifié flottant* (Bernini, 2017) qui renvoie à l'instabilité comme trait distinctif du *queer*, rendant ontologiquement instables – c'est-à-dire déstabilisant – non seulement les substantifs, mais aussi les identités et les distinctions, et restant dans l'idéalisme textuel dans lequel le *queer* est né. Le *queer* «is and should be remain unclear, fluid and multiple» (Browne, Nash, 2010: 7). Il faut maintenir le «queer permanently unclear, unstable and 'unfit' to represent any particular sexual identity […] the key to maintaining a non-normative queer position» (*ibidem*). En général, la théorie *queer* est «resistance to definition […] resisting categorization, for itself and for its subjects» (Leckey, Brooks, 2010: 13) et la *queerness* «is a political ethos that works to question and deconstruct identitarian logics» et le *queer* «is a political position or stance in relation to the 'normal' or 'dominant', but queer thought is skeptical about all identity categorizations, even LGBT ones, and sees identity-based rights claims as limited» (Lamble, 2021: 7). Ainsi, on comprend bien pourquoi le *queer* est déconstruction: «deconstruction *is* queer theory» (Miller, 2017: 45) [6] – et non le contraire, c'est-à-dire «queer theory is deconstruction». Le lien entre *queer* et déconstruction n'est pas seulement très fort, mais il est également constitutif du *queer*. Toutefois, il faut en même temps tenir compte que, pour Derrida, la déconstruction n'est pas synonyme de *destruction*. Déconstruction est dé-construction: «a discovery of what materials were selected, and of how they were combined, to create the structure» (Mathews, 2000: 113). La dé-construction permet de recombiner les éléments selon une façon différente, plus juste, mais qui ne veut absolument pas dire plus véritable pour découvrir la vérité (Derrida, 1994). Par exemple, selon de Lauretis, le *queer* permet de comprendre non seulement les formes de l'homosexualité qui n'ont pas encore été observées, mais aussi comment la sexualité concerne les autres caractéristiques de l'individu (l'ethnie, la classe sociale, l'origine géographique, la religion, etc.) (de Lauretis, 1991). Le *queer* représente l'épistémologie pour comprendre toutes les différences (Ivi: iix).

Je voudrais à présent me focaliser davantage sur ces années et notamment

[6] Je souligne que «the poststructuralism is queer» (Turner, 2000: 22), et pas le contraire. Ou encore: «Derrida's writing […] have determined the form 'queer theory' has taken» (Miller, 2017: 27).

sur le débat entre ceux qui considèrent le *queer* comme une déconstruction (strictement) textuelle et ceux qui soulignent le besoin d'aller au-delà du texte (et en direction de la société) (Seidman, 1993). En effet, quelques années après l'invention de l'expression «théorie *queer*» par Teresa de Lauretis, Ken Plummer a souligné, sans attendre, la faiblesse de cette théorie due au fait qu'elle ne dépasse jamais «the text» (Stein, Plummer, 1994: 184; Namaste, 1996). Plummer est, en effet, de l'avis opposé et préconise d'accomplir ce pas, de lier le *queer* (comme texte) à la «'real' queer life, as it si materially experienced across the world» (*ibidem*). Il faut tenir compte de la critique de Plummer vis-à-vis de la théorie *queer*: trop textuelle, trop occidentale et trop américaine (Plummer, 2013: 760). En général, la théorie *queer* est trop limitée (*ibidem*): dès son apparition, elle n'a en effet tenu compte que de la contraposition entre homosexualité et hétérosexualité, en considérant le 'normal' comme étant «its enemies» (*ibidem*). Je n'ai pas l'intention de faire, dans cet article, l'analyse de l'approche développée par Plummer, très connue et très importante, mais je me limiterai à mentionner la réaction de Plummer lors de l'invention du *queer*, qui a consisté en la fondation de *Sexualities* – le pluriel étant, à mon avis, la réinterprétation sociologique de la force dé-constructive du *queer*. *Sexualities* est décrite par Plummer comme une revue (pas seulement une revue, mais plutôt une approche) des *Critical Sexualities Studies* (Plummer, 2013: 760) proposant des analyses sociales et culturelles ainsi que des contributions aussi bien théoriques qu'empiriques (Plummer, 1998: 7). Et tous les articles publiés dans cette revue se focalisent sur «the lived life or real world events» (*ibidem*) – c'est-à-dire sur les sexualités qui s'enracinent dans les corps des individus, dans leurs pratiques, leurs liaisons, leurs désirs, leurs choix, etc., et pas seulement dans *les textes, les mots et les discours.* Il faut – selon Adam I. Green (2002) – dépasser le *queer* pour achever le *post-queer* par la 'socialisation/sociologisation' des présupposés du *queer*, notamment en replaçant le rôle des institutions (des formations sociales) et de la socialisation dans les processus de la formation du 'sexuel'. Si la promesse de la théorie *queer* est de faire du *queer* une déconstruction constante et immuable qui «operates *in tension* with […] sociological approaches to the subject» (Green, 2007: 27) et que, par conséquent, la théorie *queer* n'est engagée que dans la «dissolution of the subject» (*ibidem*), alors, comment peut-on être *queer* ? Qui est l'individu *queer* ? Il ne fait pas de doute que la force du *queer* – la *queerness* – est de marquer «a suspension of identity as something fixed, coherent and natural» (Jagose, 1996: 98). Toutefois, l'acronyme LGBTQIAPK2SPIRIT* constitue – même si on l'oublie souvent – une distinction qui ne montre pas seulement tout ce qui n'est pas *hétérosexuel/hétéronormatif,* mais qui indique en même temps des identités bien claires et précises (par exemple, Robinson, 2020). Le *queer*, en mettant en lumière la fluidité de toutes les distinctions binaires du sexe, du genre et de l'orientation sexuelle (Guizzardi, 2022; Rinaldi, 2023), est la «theory of sexual borders» (Fuss, 1991: 3) dont on a besoin pour définir, distinguer et indiquer toutes les nouvelles formes culturelles et identitaires des sexualités (Grassi, 2013). Il s'agit-là de l'esprit de la revue *Sexualities* et de son fondateur Ken Plummer. Cela veut dire que si la recherche, et la recherche quantitative en particulier, comprennent à peine toutes les identités fluides (Magliozzi et al., 2016; Nowakowski et al., 2016), alors il faut *queering* la recherche-même (Sumerau et al., 2017). Par exemple, aujourd'hui, l'asexualité est une catégorie qui définit une forme de sexualité (Scott, Dawson, 2015). Il faut lier la manière avec laquelle on 'mesure' sa propre sexualité aux autres caractères que le partenaire devrait ou ne devrait pas avoir tels que l'ethnie, l'orientation religieuse, le genre, l'âge, certaines caractéristiques physiques, certaines habitudes de pratiques sexuelles, etc. (Sumerau et al. 2017; Westbrook et al., 2022). Même si, comme on vient de le voir, «queer theory is not the theory *of* anything in particular» (Berlant, Warner, 1995: 344), à mon avis, on peut/doit la définir. Toutefois, si le *queer* ne correspond à rien en particulier ou si le *queer* est indéfinissable et que, par conséquent, tout est *queer*, alors, paradoxalement, rien n'est *queer*. Ainsi, pour reprendre les mots de Diana Fuss, l'individu *queer* est l'individu qui définit sa propre sexualité en se situant lui-même par rapport à *la distinction (le 'border', le seuil, le périmètre de la distinction)* et non par rapport à *l'un des deux côtés de la distinction même.* La sexualité *queerness* est donc la sexualité déconnectée de la binarité du genre, de l'orientation sexuelle (hétérosexualité/homosexualité), de l'hétéronormativité et du féminisme. La *queerness* ne signifie pas la négation de toutes les identités ou de toutes les définitions – il faut rappeler que le *queer* est une dé-finition qui fait une distinction entre *queer/non-queer*. Il faut comprendre que la *queerness* ne signifie pas mener sa propre vie en niant ce que l'on n'est pas – une vie qui deviendrait ainsi une constante négation. *Queerness* ne peut pas correspondre simplement à l'affirmation «of what heterosexuality *is not*» (Weiner, Young, 2011: 228). Il s'agit aussi bien d'une négation que d'une affirmation: «the antisocial force of (queer) sex is fundamental to the world-making inventiveness that queer bonds also name. Nevertheless, if sexuality – as what sticks in the gears of sociality *and* occasions its proliferation in ever-new forms – is constitutive of what we think of as queer bonds, this does not mean that we will always know where to find it […] the location of 'sexuality' is precisely what is at stake. If queer bonds are social bonds that nevertheless call into question the meaning of the 'social', we can add now that, like the social, the sexual remains a question for queer bonds – it *is* the question of queer bonds» (Ivi: 226). Le *queer* est toujours anti-social (critique et négation de l'ordre hétérosexuel social-normatif) (Casiero et al., 2006) parce que le *queer*, en se normativisant, produit un surplus anti-social. On a déjà reconnu la famille homosexuelle, mais qu'en est-il de la famille polyamoureuse? (Pallotta-Chiarolli et al., 2013) et de la *transpregnancy* (Masullo, Coppola, 2022)? Et qu'en sera-t-il de ce qui n'est pas encore apparu, mais qui se manifestera tôt ou tard (Marvel, 2013; Marella, 2017)?

3. LA SOCIOLOGIE ESTHÉTIQUE DE SIMMEL

Les trois exemples que j'ai illustrés dans le premier paragraphe désignent trois catégories de sujets bizarres, *étrange(r)s* par rapport à *une société*. Pour Simmel, l'étranger, l'ennemi, le criminel et le pauvre représentent des individus «excluded from the society for which their existence is important» (Simmel, 2009: 46). Il se réfère d'ailleurs à ces différents *sujets étrange(r)s* pour introduire le deuxième a priori dans son interrogation «Comment la société est-elle possible ?». De même, Simmel s'est également consacré à l'*étranger* dans son livre intitulé *La Sociologie*, largement analysé, critiqué et étudié au fil des années (notamment: Harman 1998; McLemore, 1970; Levine, 1977; 1985; Stichweh, 1997). Il faut avant tout tenir compte de la définition de l'étranger par Simmel:

> the stranger is not understood here as a wanderer […], one who arrives today and leaves tomorrow, but as one who comes today and stays tomorrow […]. The distance within the relationship means that the near is far away, but being a stranger means that the distant is near (Simmel, 2009: 601).

Le sujet étranger est, par conséquent, le sujet qui demeure dans un espace partagé avec la collectivité, tout en n'ayant rien ou très peu seulement en commun avec celle-ci. Comme l'écrit Simmel, «the stranger is a member of the group itself » (*ibidem*) et, à cause de cette appartenance au groupe (à une forme sociale), dont l'étranger reste, en même temps, à l'écart – «a particular form of the far and near, indifference and engagement (Ivi: 602). Et «being a stranger is an entirely positive relationship, a special form of interaction» (Ivi: 601). Cette définition est très importante parce qu'elle établit que l'être étranger est une relation et non un individu. En effet, Simmel donne à cette configuration (*Konstellation*), à cette forme sociale de l'(être) étranger une fonction très spécifique et très importante pour la société: une fonction de critique ou de réflexivité dérivant de «the objectivity of the stranger» (Ivi: 602). Ainsi, l'étranger n'est pas «radically committed to individual components or one-sided tendencies of the group», l'étranger peut *observer objectivement* «which does not mean, perhaps, a mere aloofness or disengagement but a particular form of the far and near, indifference and engagement» (*ibidem*). L'étranger n'est donc pas un individu blasé (Simmel, 2004b: 650 et suivantes; 1995), indifférent à tout et totalement désengagé, mais plutôt un individu qui est, tout simplement, un autre et rien de plus. Au contraire, l'individu étranger montre comment le groupe – par rapport auquel il se trouve en dehors – peut être *différent* parce que l'objectivité est une forme positive de participation (Simmel, 2009: 602). Le regard de l'étrange(r) est la rupture «créatrice de formes neuves et, par là-même, d'une culture autre» (Raphaël, 2008: 90). Je veux souligner cette fonction d'objectivité qui caractérise la *Konstellation* particulière de l'être étranger, qui signifie que l'étranger appartient au groupe, mais sans y être enraciné (De Simone, 2016).

Pour Jeffrey C. Alexander, la figure simmelienne de l'étranger est très proche de la figure postmoderne car «is the critical factor in creating the stranger in society» (Alexander, 2004: 89). L'étranger ne désigne pas une proximité ou une distance physique ou sociale, mais bel et bien «an interpretative position vis-à-vis the 'social ideal'» (*ibidem*). Comme Rammstedt l'observe (1994 : 149), cette proximité ou distance se vérifient dans un espace *symbolique*. L'étrange(r) n'est pas seulement le pauvre ou l'exclu; l'étrange(r) est le *différent,* même s'il reste un membre de la société – dit Alexander – parce que, comme Simmel le remarque,

> the stranger is near us insofar as we feel similarities of a national or social, occupational or generally human kind between the stranger and us; the stranger is far from us insofar as these similarities reach over both of us and bind us together only because they bind very many people generally (Simmel, 2009: 603).

L'étrange(r) est, par conséquent, «simplement l'Autre» (Rammstedt, 1994: 149) avec lequel l'on interagit, mais qui reste en dehors des formes sociales ou des groupes et des sociétés auxquels nous appartenons, en brisant l'ordre. Ainsi, en observant l'étranger comme une *forme sociale* (Goodstein, 2012) ou un *type social* (Rammstedt, 1994) et non pas comme un rôle ou une identité fixée, l'*être (de l') étrange(r)* est la modalité interactionnelle avec et par rapport «to the dominant perspective» (Goodstein, 2012: 251): l'étrange(r) détruit l'image que la société a de lui-même et critique comment la *société ou la majorité des individus font des choses (être militaire, être prêtre, être enceint*, etc.)*. Simultanément, *l'étrange(r) représente d'autres identités*. Je me pose alors la question suivante: face à un prête *queer* ou à un homme enceint, quelle est la réaction de l'autre, de celui qui vient de les voir ? Ce sont des images qui bouleversent les images habituelles.

Dans le récit de sa vie à l'Université de Berlin où il a eu l'occasion d'assister à des leçons de Georg Simmel, Arthur Salz (1965 : 236) explique que, selon ce dernier, la sociologie est

> the study of the forms of sociation. But whoever speaks of form moves in the field of aesthetics. Ultimately, society is a work of art. And where there is form (*forma, eidos, morphé*), there is distance, reluctance to sell out or surrender. 'Form' suggests seeing things in perspective, being prepared for the unexpected so that it can be taken in stride.

Reprenons à présent les trois exemples de l'introduction. Si l'on voit le visage et le corps masculin d'un individu enceint, il n'y a aucun doute que l'image de la maternité et de la mère se brise et que l'on doit réélaborer culturellement les images de la femme, de l'homme, de la maternité et de la paternité… Pareillement, si l'on voit le visage masculin et féminin d'un prêtre *queer*, l'on doit s'interroger sur les représentations collectives de la foi, de l'église, de qui peut être prêtre (et, pourquoi pas, sœur) et de la Vérité et se demander si ces représentations sont encore réelles et véritables (Wilcox, 2021). «We want to know: what sort of being is this person? What is the enduring substance of this person's nature? And: what is this person like in this moment? desiring? thinking? saying?» (Simmel, 2009: 574): cette question est celle que se pose Simmel dans *Sociologie de sens*. Les deux essais – *Sociologie de sens* (1907, inséré ensuite dans *Sociologie* comme l'un des treize excursus qui caractérisent cette œuvre) et *Esthétique sociologique* (1896) – constituent la base théorique de l'esthétique sociale/sociologique de Simmel (Cacciari, 1970; Davis, 1972). La problématique est très simple:

> acting on the subject, the impression of a person brings about feelings in us of desire and aversion, of one's own enhancement and diminishment, of excitement or calm by the other's appearance or the tone of that person's voice, by the mere physical presence in the same space. All this is not of use for getting to know or defining the other; it is simply fine for me or just the opposite if someone is there whom I would see and hear. That person's self is left, so to speak, outside by this reaction of feeling to one's physical appearance (Simmel, 2009: 570).

En d'autres termes: l'homme enceint me dégoûte-t-il? Rappelons, pour mieux comprendre, que l'eurodéputée Christine Anderson a déclaré au

Parlement Européen que «les femmes trans ne sont pas des femmes» et que, par conséquent, celles-ci doivent être condamnées par le mépris et le dégoût sociaux. Il s'agit bel et bien là du cœur de la discussion: «the face and its aesthetic significance and uniqueness» (Simmel, 2020: 234). Au niveau général, la sociologie de Simmel est construite sur l'esthétique; le social (le fait social ou le phénomène social) est étudié *visually* par Simmel (Davis, 1972: 328). L'esthésiologie sociale simmelienne (Simmel, 2009: 570-1) se développe à partir de deux dimensions complémentaires: la perception sensorielle de l'autre par les organes des sens (comment les individus, par les sens, perçoivent les autres et comment cette perception, cette sensibilité conditionnent le lien) et la perception formelle par l'analogie entre la forme esthétique et la forme sociale (De La Fuente, 2008). Si je vois une femme enceinte, c'est la forme de la maternité qui est explicite, mais si je vois un homme enceint? Pourtant, l'esthésiologie sociale implique que les sens jouent un rôle déterminant dans toutes les interactions sociales et, notamment, dans la première rencontre avec l'étrange(r). Les perceptions sensorielles ont une valeur esthétique (il est agréable de regarder l'autre ou pas) et une valeur informative (son corps, son visage, etc. sont des informations). C'est l'esthétique qui est la «precondition through which all the cognitive and practical dimensions of social interaction must pass» (Carnevali, Pinotti, 2020: 174). Simmel écrit:

> the essence of aesthetic contemplation and interpretation for us consists in the following: what is unique emphasizes what is typical, what is accidental appears as normal, and the superficial and fleeting stands for what is essential and basic. *It seems to be impossible for any phenomenon to avoid being reduced to what is important and of eternal value* (Simmel, 2020: 96, souligné par moi-même).

Par conséquent, tous les phénomènes sociaux, à savoir toutes les manifestations individuelles, toutes les manières par lesquelles les individus se manifestent (Simmel, 2009: 91) et se (re)présentent aux autres dans la société, ne peuvent échapper à cette perception esthétique par les autres dont la fonction est de trouver une sorte d'ordre symétrique – «the origin of all aesthetic themes is found in symmetry» (Simmel, 2020: 98). La dimension esthétique dans les interactions engendre «a *totality* out of the *fragmentary*» et, en même temps, «what is *individual is* transformed into the *universal*» (Frisby, 1991: 75). Pourtant, la connaissance et la reconnaissance de l'autre sont strictement conditionnées par l'impression sensorielle de l'autre: le goût ou le dégoût pour l'autre représente notre sens social. Notamment, il n'y a pas seulement le corps, la forme anatomique de l'individu comme objet du sens social. L'image sensible et esthétique de l'autre est le produit d'une incessante *Wechselwirkung* entre la forme charnelle et anatomique et de comment on l'embellit, on l'arrange pour «the desire of the person to please associates» (Simmel, 2009: 332). Pour l'instant, je voudrais attirer l'attention sur l'importance de l'œil par Simmel – ou plutôt, du regard. Par l'œil, par le premier regard, nous pouvons saisir «the immediate grasp of someone's individuality, just as that person's appearance, above all the face, betrays it to our look; wherefore it is basically insignificant that with this there also occur sufficient errors and corrections» (Ivi: 573). En fait, par le regard, en observant le visage de l'autre, le visage est

> the most complete symbol of the persistent inwardness and all of what our experiences have allowed to sink into our enduring basic nature, there are nevertheless at the same time the interactively rich situations of the moment (*ibidem*).

En même temps, et par la *Wechselwirkung*, «one cannot take with the eye without at same time giving» parce que «in the look that takes in the other one reveals oneself» (Ivi: 571). Le contact visuel immédiat est, pour Simmel, «the most complete mutuality in the whole realm of human relations» (*ibidem*). Pourquoi? Parce que c'est bel et bien par cette forme de contact que l'on a toutes les formes possibles, les plus simples et les plus naturelles, de reconnaissance de l'autre. Si je ne réponds pas au regard de l'autre, cela signifie que je veux suspendre l'interaction, que je ne veux pas interagir avec l'autre – je ne *vois* pas l'autre, je ne considère pas l'autre. Ainsi, l'intimité produite par l'échange visuel est l'intimité de l'observation réciproque:

> the look into the eye of the other serves not only for me to know the other but also for the other to know me ; one's personality, one's mood, one's impulse towards the other is carried forth in the line that binds both our eyes (Ivi: 572).

Le nez aussi – ou le sens olfactif – permet de construire l'intimité entre les sujets. En bref, pour Simmel, «instinctive antipathies and sympathies that are attached to the olfactory sphere surrounding people and those, for example, that often become important for the social relationship of two races living in the same territory, find all the less resistance of thought and volition» (Ivi: 577). Bien évidemment, Simmel ne pense pas que la guerre ou la paix soient dues à la perception olfactive de l'autre! Ce que Simmel affirme à propos du sens olfactif, c'est que

> when we smell something, we draw this impression or this radiating object

> so deeply into ourselves, into our center […]. That we smell the atmosphere (*Atmosphäre*) of somebody is a most intimate perception of that person; that person penetrates, so to speak, in the form of air, into our most inner senses (Ivi: 578).

À un niveau plus général, il faut souligner que la reconnaissance intersubjective, pour Simmel, est dissimulée dans les mécanismes de l'*aisthesis* (Carnevali, 2017), de la perception esthétique de l'autre la plus immédiate, sensible et *intime*. Et c'est bien là l'origine de toutes les configurations sociales, bien qu'elle soit souvent oubliée, parce que l'on croit, au contraire, qu'elles sont établies par la société elle-même (Simmel, 2009: 574; Lechner, 2022). Il faut tenir compte du fait que lorsque l'on rencontre l'autre, un sujet étrange(r), on essaie de re-composer toutes les sensations recueillies par les sens dans une unité que Simmel appelle *Stimmung* (*mood*). L'autre est comme un paysage (Simmel 2020: 224): le paysage n'existe pas dans la nature, le paysage «arises when a range of natural phenomena spread […] is comprehended by a particular kind of unity» (*ibidem*). De la même façon,

> when we refer to the mood of a person, we mean that coherent ensemble that either permanently or temporarily colors the entirety of his or her psychic constituents. It is not itself something discrete, and often also not an attribute of any one individual trait. All the same, it is that commonality where all these individual traits interconnect (*ibidem*).

Ainsi, ce que je perçois de l'autre individu, c'est son *Stimmung* du paysage, son *Atmosphäre*, une unité formée de tous les éléments qui la compose.

C'est la raison pour laquelle le concept de *Atmosphäre*, comme Carnevali (2017) le remarque, mais j'ajoute aussi le concept de *Stimmung*, constituent le principal apport de la théorie esthétique de Simmel: c'est mon expérience sensorielle de l'autre (ce que l'autre me transmet/me communique de lui-même dans sa totalité) qui détermine mon ouverture (ou, au contraire, ma fermeture) à l'autre. Je partage totalement la conclusion de Carnevali:

> because of its aesthetic nature, is what makes each encounter with others determined by uniqueness of the circumstances of sensory perception as well as by the affective singularity of the individualities concerned (Ivi: 26).

Je suis d'accord, certes, mais je voudrais souligner deux points que Carnevali, à mon avis, ne traite pas.

Premier point. Lorsque je vois des éléments du paysage, je suis capable de les reconnaître, de les distinguer, de les nommer parce que j'ai

été *socialisé/éduqué*: la société me l'a enseigné et si je n'étais pas en mesure de le faire, je ne pourrais pas faire l'expérience du paysage – connaître le paysage en tant que paysage. Je peux distinguer «the metaphysical-aesthetic charm of the ruin» (Simmel, 1958: 384) de la décrépitude parce que la société m'a appris à reconnaître «the aesthetic value of the ruin» (*ibidem*). Un autre exemple: la société m'a également appris à reconnaître la caricature, l'hyperbole artistique et lorsque «the personality as a whole remains something 'exaggerated' – then the outcome is tragedy rather than caricature» (Simmel, 2020: 188).
Mais que se passe-t-il si je ne peux pas saisir ou comprendre le *Stimmung* de l'autre parce que la société ne possède pas encore les catégories, les images ou les valeurs pour le faire? Si je vois un homme enceint, etc.? Si je vois un individu qui n'est ni masculin, ni féminin? Si je vois une famille se composant de deux pères ou de deux mères et de leurs enfants?

Deuxième point. Dans sa quinzième leçon sur Kant, Simmel établit la différence entre l'intérêt sensuel (*sinnliche Interesse*) et l'intérêt moral (*sittliche Interesse*): si l'intérêt sensuel se réfère à tout ce qui est sensible ou réel ou que nous souhaitons être réel, l'intérêt moral se réfère à tout ce qui *doit* être réel, même s'il peut être achevé de manière très imparfaite (Simmel, 1986: 257). Le jugement esthétique est lié aux images des choses et «la limite à tout jugement de connaissance réside dans le caractère sensible de tout ce qui est esthétique» (Ivi: 258). Le jugement esthétique ne se fonde pas sur la connaissance objective et véritable, (le jugement selon la loi qui dicte qu'il faut être comme il faut), mais il n'est en aucun cas arbitraire ou illégitime puisqu'il est ancré dans le *Stimmung* (*innerlich harmonischen Stimmung*) de l'individu ou de qui est l'individu, objet de mon jugement. Donc, dans le cas du jugement de goût (*geschmacksurteils*), comme Kant l'a bien démontré selon Simmel, personne ne peut contester le goût de l'autre pour quelque chose: si j'aime beaucoup les huîtres (l'exemple de Simmel) ou les personnes du même sexe (Zaylía, 2009), qui donc pourrait le contester et pour quelle raison ? Toutefois, si personne ne peut distinguer les jugements esthétiques justes des faux jugements parce que le goût esthétique est incontestable – dit Simmel – comment peut-on lier la subjectivité individuelle à la supra-individualité (*überindividuellen Gemeinsamkeit*)? La solution de Kant, comme le fait remarquer Simmel, est la suivante: les différences entre les jugements esthétiques, *avec un même niveau d'éducation culturelle* (c'est bien la condition requise) (Ivi: 260), sont dues à l'élément universel humain déjà présent dans chaque individu et par lequel chacun peut aimer différemment la même chose. Il ne faut pas oublier que l'objet de la discussion n'est pas le goût personnel *mais plutôt la réciprocité entre les* *goûts et entre les jugements de goût de l'autre individu*. Que se passe-t-il si la condition posée par Kant et acceptée par Simmel n'est plus possible? En fait, il n'y a qu'un seul problème pour l'esprit et l'individu modernes: comment associer liberté et multiplicité des individus «sans tomber dans l'anarchie et l'isolement» (*ibidem*)? À mon avis, il faut souligner un point très important dans les analyses de Simmel: ce dernier ne considère pas le goût comme un processus individuel et strictement solipsiste, mais comme le résultat de la réciprocité entre le *Stimmung de l'individu que je vois et moi-même.* Simmel tient en réalité pour acquise la capacité de l'individu à comprendre le *Stimmung* par la culture que l'individu a apprise et sans laquelle il ne pourrait pas assimiler d'un seul coup le *Stimmung* de l'autre, l'unité de son image. Ce n'est pas un problème individuel, mais un problème social parce que «the typical conflict between the individual and supra-individual existence can be interpreted as the irreconcilable striving of both elements to attain an aesthetically satisfying expression» (Simmel, 2004b: 500). Ainsi, le conflit de la culture moderne est le conflit entre *l'individu*, qui veut être une totalité dans lui-même, et la société, ou la totalité supra-individuelle qui, pour être totalité elle-même (Amendola, Tirino, 2020; Ruggieri, 2019), «cannot possibly tolerate any independence on the part of its members» (Simmel, 2004b: 500) : «the totality of the whole […] stands in eternal conflict with the totality of the individual» (*ibidem*). Et l'expression esthétique de ce conflit est très impressionnante, écrit Simmel, parce que «the charm of beauty is always embedded in a whole» (*ibidem*). Comment résoudre le conflit entre (l'image de la société de) la maternité et (l'image de) l'homme enceint? Comment résoudre le conflit entre (l'image de la société du) couple amoureux et fidèle et (l'image du) couple polyamoureux? La beauté, l'harmonie et la symétrie de la société demande que chaque élément «derives its position, its justification and its significance only in relation to other elements and to a common center» (*ibidem*). Au contraire, si chaque élément poursuit son impulsion et sa volonté de manière autonome, «the whole becomes necessarily asymmetrical and fortuitous» (*ibidem*). Toutefois, la totalité devient également asymétrique car je ne suis plus capable de reconnaître (l'image de) l'autre. La fragmentation des formes sociales – telles que la famille, les identités liées au sexe et aux genres – peut produire une disharmonie et une dis-symétrie de la société que la culture ne nous donne pas. Il faut rejeter

> the tragic vision of the separation of subjective and objective culture as a permanent 'fate' […]. Then we could investigate the transformations of aesthetic experience that are taking place without falling back upon the resignatory stance of cultural pessimism (Frisby, 1991: 89).

Ainsi, on ne dira plus que *le monde s'écroule* en voyant un homme enceint.

4. EN CONCLUSION: LA VALEUR (DU) *QUEER*.

Je ne sais pas si, dans les années 1980, Ivan Cattaneo s'est réellement senti *queer*. Homosexuel, sans l'ombre d'un doute, mais *queer*, peut-être pas encore. *Queer* n'était pas encore un mot courant. Au contraire, Bingo Allison se définit comme étant un prêtre *queer* parce qu'il s'agit désormais d'un mot que tout le monde connaît… Qui n'est pas *queer* aujourd'hui?! Plus sérieusement, le *queer*, comme j'ai essayé de le démontrer, indique, d'une part, la déconstruction de la sexualité (le sexe, le genre, l'orientation sexuelle) mais, d'autre part, la recombinaison selon des modalités différentes. Par conséquent, pourquoi approfondir le *queer visibility* à travers la sociologie esthétique de Simmel? Ici, en réalité, je n'ai pas voulu analyser le *queer* en tant que produit (discursif et matérialiste) de la *commodity culture* (Hennessy, 1995) ou de la mode (Reddy-Best et al., 2022).
En conclusion, je voudrais souligner deux aspects. Tout d'abord, observer le *queer* à travers la sociologie esthétique de Simmel nous montre comment la reconnaissance des identités *queer* est, avant tout, un problème esthétique/sensoriel, de perception de l'autre et de son *Stimmung*. Le *queer* comme valeur de la société – ou «respectable queerness» (Joshi, 2021) – permet de reconnaître l'unité des personnes. Malheureusement, même si je ne peux pas aborder cette question importante ici, l'absence de cette reconnaissance, c'est-à-dire la méconnaissance ou le déni, entraîne de graves formes de discrimination et d'exclusion sociale à l'égard des personnes queer, par exemple les personnes non binaires ou transgenres (McQueen, 2014; Schettini, 2023).

Deuxième aspect. Selon moi, Simmel nous offre donc, sans le vouloir, les plus belles images pour définir la *queerness*: celles de la *porte* et du *pont* (Simmel, 1994), mais aussi de la sexualité. Le *queer* est, simultanément, *porte* et *pont*. Fuss a défini le *queer* comme la *theory of sexual borders*. Simmel a défini l'individu comme «the relating being who must go on separating, but cannot relate without separating […]. Similarly, the human being is the being with limits who has no limits» (Simmel, 1994: 412). Et encore Simmel:

> the seclusion of his being-at-home achieved by the door means that man severs a piece from the uninterrupted unity-of-being in nature. But just as

> amorphous limitations finds a shape, so man's being limited finds its meaning and its dignity in what is signified by the door – the possibility of at any moment stepping into freedom and out-of being limited (*ibidem*).

Il s'agit-là bel et bien du *queer*. Pour mieux comprendre cette question très importante, je vais à présent réfléchir sur l'intimité *queer*. Philipp L. Hammack et al. (2019) construisent un paradigme *queer* pour l'étude des liaisons intimes en opposant l'intimité normative à l'intimité *queer*. Dans le tableau suivant sont indiqués les éléments caractéristiques de ces deux types d'intimité.

Table 1. Intimité straight et Intimité queer

Intimité straight (ou *non-queer*)	**Intimité *queer***
Binarité cisgenre.	Homosexualité cisgenre, non-binarité, transgenre.
Symétrie des rôles et égalité.	Asymétrie consensuelle et occasionnelle régie par la hiérarchie de pouvoir (*kinky*, *fetish*, BDSM).
Couple mono-amour et dyadique.	Polyamour et non-monogamie consensuelle.
Intimité fondée sur le romanticisme et sexualité définie comme activité.	Intimité sans amour, intimité sans activité sexuelle (asexualité et aromanticisme).
Famille biologique et filiation.	'Famille de choix' et par rapport à l'identité et à la communauté d'appartenance.
Identités fixes et inchangées pendant le cours de la vie.	Pluralité et fluidité des identités pendant le cours de la vie.
Essentialisme et intelligibilité de la forme d'intimité qui doit être définie, régulée et 'cataloguée'.	Formes culturelles et sociales d'intimité toujours en évolution par la créativité de l'individu.

Avant tout, je dois préciser que je préfère la distinction 'intimité non *queer* (ou straight)/intimité *queer'* à la distinction faite par Hammack ('intimité normative/intimité *queer*') puisque le *queer* est lui aussi normatif (Weigman, Wilson, 2005).

Voici quelques observations. La première: si l'intimité *non-queer* ou straight, configurée comme une liaison fondée sur l'égalité sexuelle, sentimentale et émotionnelle entre les deux partenaires, s'articule autour de la binarité des sexes et des individus cisgenres, l'intimité *queer* comprend toutefois toutes les *autres possibilités* qui remettent en question cette forme d'intimité. L'intimité *queer* concerne donc les relations aussi bien entre des individus homosexuels cisgenres (c'est-à-dire des individus qui se reconnaissent eux-mêmes dans la binarité) qu'entre des individus qui se reconnaissent eux-mêmes comme non-binaires. De plus, l'intimité *queer* s'ouvre à des situations d'inégalité et d'asymétrie de pouvoir, mais qui se manifestent de manière consensuelle.

Deuxième observation: si l'intimité *non-queer* idéalise l'exclusivité du couple d'amoureux et qu'une tierce personne correspond à l'amant et à la trahison, le couple *queer* peut poursuivre le polyamour (pas uniquement à deux) ou se présenter aussi comme un couple ouvert. La sémantique de la trahison change: tandis que dans le couple *non-queer*, la trahison est un élément négatif et la cause de la rupture probable du couple, dans le couple *queer*, la monogamie non-consensuelle représente la nouvelle règle suivie par les partenaires. De même, la sexualité, selon le paradigme de l'intimité straight, ne peut être déconnectée de l'intimité, de l'attraction physique, de l'amour. Au contraire, le couple *queer* peut être formé par des individus qui se définissent asexuels, aromantiques, demisexuels, *graysexual* (ou asexualité grise). En analysant la famille *queer* et la famille straight, il faut tout de suite souligner que si cette dernière est fondée sur la conception biologique de la famille naturelle, car ce sont les liens enracinés dans la filiation naturelle et dans la consanguinité qui constituent la forme culturelle normative, la famille *queer* est tout sauf cela! Lorsque ce n'est plus le couple hétérosexuel qui forme le noyau, de nombreuses formes de famille, de filiation et de parenté apparaissent, qui sont bel et bien des familles. De la même manière, la famille peut également représenter une union entre des personnes sans aucun lien naturel, mais qui ont fait le choix de 'vivre ensemble' durant un certain temps (Broad et al., 2004). Ainsi, à un niveau plus général, le *queer* déconstruit l'hypothèse normative *non-queer* de l'essence intelligible de l'intimité selon laquelle «timeless forms of intimacy can be known or catalogued» (Hammack et al., 2019: 559). En revanche, le *queer* soutient «an axiom of open possibility» (*ibidem*), c'est-à-dire que toutes les formes d'intimité sont «always historically and culturally situated and in a state of constant contestation and creativity» (*ibidem*). Toutefois, il faut selon moi ajouter une observation très importante: chaque forme d'intimité est choisie et achevée par rapport à la contingence d'une identité propre – la pluralité et la fluidité des identités. Notamment, je pense aux individus plurisexuels, ceux qui se sentent attirés par n'importe quel genre ou orientation sexuelle. Il est évident que l'on peut continuer à tisser des liens intimes *non-queer* sans pour autant violer la loi. *Être queer n'est pas une obligation, tout comme il n'y a pas/il ne devrait pas y avoir d'interdiction d'être* *queer*. Voici une question pour aider à mieux comprendre ce point. Qui est donc une femme cisgenre, qui a comme partenaire un homme transgenre? Si l'on voit, dans la rue, un couple s'embrasser tout simplement, on pourrait penser qu'il s'agit d'un homme et d'une femme qui s'aiment, et donc d'un couple hétéro! Mais cela n'est pas vrai. Peut-être que la femme se définit hétéro – et cela serait-il faux? Ou lesbienne – et cela serait-il faux? Si des mots ne parviennent pas à définir 'qui je suis', le *queer* peut, quant à lui, très bien définir ce qui est indéfinissable (Pfeffer, 2017). Toutefois, comme Pfeffer l'a déjà démontré, le choix des femmes cisgenres qui ont une liaison intime avec des hommes transgenres de se définir comme '*queer*' est dû à leur refus «to be held accountable for other's people's (mis)recognition of their partner's sex, gender, and sexual identities» (Ivi: 37). Sans l'ombre d'un doute, beaucoup de formes intimes *queer* existaient bien avant l'invention du *queer*. Il faut tenir compte que «new vocabularies and taxonomies have emerged that now give these relational forms as a contemporary meaning» (Hammack et al., 2019: 559) même si «new, unknown queer relational forms» sont toujours possibles – et il s'agit-là bel et bien du *queer*, la reconnaissance (épistémologique, pratique et sociale) de cette possibilité.

Pour terminer, le sujet *queer* – comme le sujet étrange(r) de Simmel, complexe dans ses multiples façons d'être, (in)définissable par la contingence constante d'être de nouvelles formes qui pourraient se manifester – montre comment, au-delà des formes bien établies plus ou moins récemment (la famille homoparentale est plus récente par rapport à la famille hétéroparentale), les individus peuvent être/faire différemment, être/faire selon d'autres modes d'être étrange(r)s.

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PER SOCIOLOGIA "PIÙ QUEER"
Innovazioni e implicazioni per la ricerca sociale

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Abstract

Queer(er) Sociology: Innovations and Implications for Social Research
This paper re-evaluates some conventional research practices in Sociology, advocating for their reformulation through a queer lens to better capture the complexity and diversity of human experiences. The primary aim is to advance strategies for a more inclusive and reflexive approach to fieldwork, balancing theoretical innovation with methodological rigor. It explores how key stages of the research process—formulating research questions, developing data collection tools, sampling and recruitment, data collection and analysis, and disseminating findings—can be restructured to challenge normative assumptions and binary frameworks. Emphasis is placed on fostering participatory approaches and embracing fluidity in identity representation, ensuring that marginalized voices and experiences are adequately acknowledged and represented. By proposing methodological adjustments rooted in queer perspectives, the article seeks to expand the scope of sociological inquiry, promoting a practice of knowledge co-creation that actively engages with the plurality of social realities.

Keywords

Methodology, social research, fieldwork, sociological inquiry, identity.

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1. INTRODUZIONE

A partire dagli anni Novanta del secolo scorso, all'interno delle scienze sociali ha iniziato a farsi strada in maniera sempre più visibile la cosiddetta prospettiva *queer*, proponendosi nel dibattito scientifico come una lente volta ad analizzare e reinterpretare le dinamiche del sé e delle relazioni sociali (Epstein, 1994). Il termine, di derivazione tedesca (*quer* significa "obliquo", "trasversale"), è stato utilizzato per la prima volta da Teresa de Lauretis che, durante una conferenza presso l'Università di Santa Cruz, ha provocatoriamente sottratto questa parola all'omofobia, associandola semanticamente all'insieme delle teorie decostruzioniste dell'identità sessuale. Infatti, nel linguaggio comune l'espressione queer veniva utilizzata in maniera dispregiativa in riferimento alle identità sessuali che si discostavano, del tutto o in parte, dalle aspettative sociali, per insinuare il loro carattere considerato "deviante", "perverso" o "anormale" (de Lauretis, 2011). La "ridefinizione" del termine ha reso evidente la volontà di dare voce a un programma volto a resistere attivamente a categorizzazioni rigide e a mettere in discussione le etichette convenzionali (Weeks, 1981). Attualizzando parte delle teorizzazioni di Foucault, sin da subito la produzione scientifica queer ha fatto propria la strategia della sessuologia positivista di contestare le identità proposte come naturali, concettualizzandole come formazioni socio-culturali complesse, risultato di percorsi e processi diversi e diversificati.

Benché la valorizzazione della fluidità di genere rappresenti una strategia volta a destabilizzare i dispositivi normativi e le categorie identitarie essenzializzate, l'enfasi queer è stata talvolta percepita come difficilmente conciliabile con rivendicazioni emancipative fondate proprio sul riconoscimento stabile e giuridicamente tutelato di determinate soggettività — si pensi, ad esempio, alle lotte femministe contro il patriarcato o alle battaglie per i diritti delle persone transgender (Namaste, 2000; Rudy, 2000). Diversi contributi (Jagose, 2009; Stryker e Whittle, 2006; Wiegman, 2004; 2012) hanno tuttavia sollecitato a non leggere tale tensione come una contraddizione insanabile, bensì come un punto di frizione generativo, che sollecita una riflessione sul doppio statuto dell'identità: da un lato, costruzione socio-culturale da sottoporre a critica quando rischia di irrigidirsi in nuove forme di normatività; dall'altro, risorsa strategica per l'azione politica e per la visibilità pubblica nelle lotte contro le disuguaglianze. L'invito che ne deriva è quello di bilanciare l'urgenza decostruttiva con il riconoscimento del potenziale mobilitante dell'identità, favorendo una logica di concatenazione tra differenti istanze e soggettività. In questa prospettiva, teorici e teoriche queer suggeriscono di ripensare le categorie di genere in chiave dinamica, con la consapevolezza dei contesti politici nei quali assumono un valore strategico (Kaplan, 1992; Marcus, 2005; McBean, 2016). Sotto questa angolazione critica, la nozione di queer può essere intesa come una (non)categoria aperta e flessibile, capace di operare anche in assenza di un soggetto politico che la rivendichi esplicitamente, che r(esiste) proprio nella sua instabilità.

Gli studiosi e le studiose queer hanno iniziato a promuovere anche una ridefinizione del modo in cui la conoscenza viene prodotta nell'ambito delle scienze sociali, per smantellare convenzioni disciplinari e tradizioni epistemologiche considerate escludenti (Watney, 1994). In particolare, è stato messo in evidenza come, a causa di un riduzionismo storicamente radicato nella Sociologia, venga inconsapevolmente riprodotta una visione egemonica della realtà sociale. Questo fenomeno nasce dalla tendenza a categorizzare i gruppi e i fenomeni in un incessante tentativo di definire ciò che è "normale" e ciò che invece è "deviante" (Brim e Ghaziani, 2016). Tale approccio è evidente in alcune pratiche della ricerca empirica che, anziché generare nuova conoscenza, rischiano di riprodurre e legittimare alcune gerarchie di potere dominanti (D'Lane et al., 2018).

L'esistenza di categorie sociali in divenire, di soggetti le cui identità e pratiche si collocano al di fuori dei sistemi categoriali tradizionali, così come quelle di comunità disperse o invisibili, rappresentano in questo scenario la prova tangibile della fallacia degli approcci metodologici convenzionali e della necessità di intercettare strategie più inclusive per considerare nella ricerca sociologica in maniera compiuta fenomeni che si collocano ai limiti dell'esperienza conoscibile (Warner, 1993).

In particolare, nella società contemporanea, gli attori sociali si mostrano più liberi di agire e di costruire la propria identità, anche sessuale, dal momento che le biografie individuali si sono slegate sempre più dai principi universali e unitari tipici della modernità (Touraine, 2002). La sessualità ha, infatti, rivelato il proprio essere "duttile" (Giddens, 1992), in quanto gli attori sociali hanno iniziato a viverla indipendentemente da vincoli prescrittivi, come per esempio quelli riproduttivi. Allo stesso modo, l'acquisizione dell'identità di genere ha iniziato a essere un processo sempre più slegato da condizionamenti ambientali, sociali e culturali, anche in conseguenza all'avanzamento scientifico (Harvey, 1990; Sinfield, 1994). Il corpo, veicolo del proprio essere nel mondo, attraverso la chirurgia estetica e le tecniche di riproduzione medicalmente assistita, è oggi posto potenzialmente nelle condizioni di poter rispondere in maniera puntuale alle esigenze identitarie individuali, in linea con un progetto riflessivo del sé, distante dal riflesso della natura (Giddens, 1991). Tali conquiste riguardano indistintamente tutte le soggettività, dal momento che si è assistito a una ridefinizione della relazione tra sesso e genere e della rigida polarizzazione tra ruoli e pratiche legate alla sessualità (Jagose, 1996). Di conseguenza, le asimmetrie di genere e il postulato dominio del maschile sul femminile, così come la norma eterosessuale, sono ormai messe in discussione.

In Italia, la prospettiva queer ha iniziato a farsi strada a partire dai primi anni Duemila, per merito dell'azione di collettivi, gruppi lesbo-femministi e coordinamenti LGBTQ+, spesso in dialogo con le esperienze statunitensi. La ricezione della queer theory in ambito scientifico è avvenuta inizialmente in forma frammentata, mediante la traduzione di testi anglofoni e di alcune iniziative convegnistiche (Trappolin, 2013). Con il tempo, sono nati alcuni centri di ricerca impegnati a connettere teoria, attivismo e produzione culturale (Pustianaz, 2011), che hanno operato, non senza difficoltà, nella tensione tra resistenza all'assimilazione e creazione di nuovi spazi discorsivi, capaci di sfidare le norme epistemiche dominanti.

Nel contesto più specifico della Sociologia italiana, la ricezione della prospettiva queer è stata per lungo tempo rallentata da un impianto teorico e metodologico tradizionale (Romania, 2012), tendenzialmente refrattario all'inclusione di saperi sessuati e alle questioni di genere (Inghilleri e Ruspini, 2011). Tale situazione sembra essere cambiata negli ultimi anni, anche per il lavoro sempre più visibile di una nuova generazione di studiose e studiosi, che sta progressivamente integrando la prospettiva queer nel dibattito contemporaneo (Corbisiero e Monaco, 2023). Un segnale concreto di questa apertura è rappresentato, per esempio, dall'attivazione nel 2024 dell'insegnamento di "Queer studies" presso l'Università di Torino, accessibile a studenti e studentesse di tutti i corsi di laurea.

Il presente contributo si inserisce entro questo solco, con l'intento di valorizzare il potenziale della teoria queer nell'ambito della ricerca empirica. L'obiettivo principale è avanzare alcune proposte per condurre studi sul campo più "queer", cercando un equilibrio tra l'innovazione teorica e l'adesione rigorosa alla metodologia della ricerca sociale (Browne e Nash, 2010; Halperin, 2002). Più nello specifico, il paper intende suggerire in che modo le pratiche consolidate della ricerca possano essere ripensate alla luce degli approcci queer, rendendo il lavoro su campo più inclusivo, al di là delle lenti convenzionali. Nei paragrafi che seguono, il paper mostrerà come alcune delle principali fasi di un disegno di ricerca possano essere riconfigurate secondo i principi queer: dalla formulazione della domanda di ricerca alla costruzione degli strumenti per la rilevazione, fino all'analisi e alla disseminazione dei risultati. In particolare, sarà evidenziato come ciascun passaggio possa essere influenzato da una prospettiva decostruttiva, dialogica e situata. L'intento finale è quello di contribuire all'ampliamento dei confini della conoscenza sociologica, promuovendo una ricerca che non solo analizzi la realtà sociale, ma che sia anche più consapevole della complessità e della pluralità dell'esperienza umana.

2. DA DOVE INIZIARE

La domanda di ricerca è il punto di partenza di ogni indagine sociologica e rappresenta un passaggio cruciale per definire le direzioni di uno studio. Nell'ambito della prospettiva queer, tale formulazione non è mai un atto neutrale. Infatti, le domande di ricerca sono spesso costruite sulla base di categorie rigide che rispecchiano visioni della realtà, riprodotte nel corso del tempo attraverso processi di socializzazione, che gli studi sociologici possono finire per rendere ancora più prescrittive.

Sebbene le categorie siano funzionali per molti degli scopi della Sociologia, esse rischiano di cristallizzare l'esperienza umana, limitando la conoscenza scientifica. Inoltre, l'utilizzo di schemi precostituiti nella formulazione delle domande di ricerca può limitare o condizionare lo studio della realtà sociale, in quanto le identità che si collocano al di fuori o ai margini delle definizioni convenzionali sono escluse o invisibilizzate (Connell, 2002).

Pertanto, la prospettiva queer incoraggia a strutturare le domande di ricerca in modo da poter considerare anche identità fluide o in evoluzione. Per esempio, in uno studio qualitativo condotto all'inizio degli anni 2000 volto a studiare la costruzione di genitorialità delle donne nere residenti a New York, Moore (2011) ha impostato il proprio disegno di ricerca, formulando la domanda che avrebbe guidato lo studio solo dopo aver trascorso un lungo periodo all'interno della comunità di interesse, frequentando molti dei loro spazi di aggregazione. Ciò le ha consentito di chiarire e sviluppare un programma di studio solido e informato.

Un altro ambito su cui è opportuno che i ricercatori e le ricercatrici sociali concentrino la propria attenzione è l'individuazione di dinamiche di potere che influenzano il processo di costruzione delle domande. Come sottolinea Haritaworn (2008), è essenziale, infatti, che i sociologi e le sociologhe si interroghino sulle implicazioni epistemologiche e culturali delle proprie ricerche. Gli studi possono involontariamente perpetuare i *bias* di ricercatori e ricercatrici, riproducendo narrazioni normative o coloniali. Alla luce di queste considerazioni, appare necessario che i ricercatori e le ricercatrici sociali adottino già in fase di definizione della domanda di ricerca un approccio riflessivo che tenga conto dell'appropriatezza culturale e delle relazioni di potere insiste nel contesto sociale entro il quale intendono lavorare. La prospettiva queer insiste, infatti, sull'importanza della riflessività, spingendola oltre la dimensione dell'autoconsapevolezza individuale e del posizionamento soggettivo. In linea con tradizioni già consolidate nelle scienze sociali, viene riconosciuto che ogni atto conoscitivo è situato e attraversato da relazioni di potere. Tuttavia, ciò che distingue l'approccio queer è l'attenzione radicale ai processi di normalizzazione sottesi alla produzione di sapere, nonché la messa in discussione delle categorie epistemologiche che strutturano il campo stesso della ricerca (McDonald, 2016). Più che limitarsi a una presa di coscienza, la riflessività deve quindi tradursi in una pratica politica e metodologica capace di destabilizzare le cornici stesse del sapere legittimo (Halberstam, 2008). Si tratta, in altri termini, di un'estensione —e al tempo stesso una problematizzazione— delle forme di riflessività già presenti nella Sociologia critica, che propone una vigilanza continua sulle relazioni tra chi fa ricerca e campo, ma anche sulle strutture epistemiche. Formulare domande di ricerca queer richiede una sensibilità contestuale che consideri le specificità storiche, culturali e sociali (Plummer, 1995).

Studi condotti in contesti non occidentali hanno evidenziato, inoltre, la necessità di un approccio decentrato, che si riflette anche nelle scelte linguistiche. Per esempio, Boellstorff (2005) e Manalansan (2003) hanno criticato l'impiego di termini occidentali in culture dove le identità sessuali e di genere sono articolate in modi differenti. Pertanto, è fondamentale che sociologi e sociologhe formulino domande di ricerca che partano dalle specificità locali, senza rifarsi a schemi predefiniti, anche quando questi sono consolidati.

L'approccio queer alla formulazione delle domande sfida anche le gerarchie disciplinari che privilegiano alcune forme di conoscenza rispetto ad altre. Come ha evidenziato Sedgwick (1990), la conoscenza queer si distingue per la propria apertura all'ambiguità e alla fluidità, opponendosi all'ossessione per la certezza e la linearità tipica di molte discipline, tra cui la Sociologia di matrice positivista. Questo consente di analizzare fenomeni complessi con maggiore profondità, arricchendo così il panorama metodologico della ricerca. La studiosa, dunque, ha sottolineato che la formulazione di una domanda di ricerca queer richiede di problematizzare le categorie normative, riconoscere e decostruire le dinamiche di potere, essere sensibili al contesto e sfidare le gerarchie disciplinari. Questo processo, pur complesso, rappresenta un passo essenziale per rendere la ricerca sociologica più inclusiva.

3. POPOLAZIONE E CAMPIONAMENTO

L'individuazione della popolazione di riferimento e l'implementazione delle strategie di reclutamento rappresentano passaggi fondamentali nella ricerca sociologica. Abbracciando gli assunti della prospettiva queer, è possibile sostenere che queste fasi richiedono uno sforzo da parte di ricercatori e ricercatrici di andare oltre i protocolli standard, abbracciando la fluidità, la diversità e la mutevolezza delle identità e delle esperienze.

Nell'ambito della ricerca quantitativa, un primo elemento cruciale è la necessità di riconoscere e affrontare i limiti dei metodi di campionamento tradizionali. Le liste ufficiali utilizzate per il campionamento probabilistico spesso omettono informazioni sull'orientamento sessuale o l'identità di genere delle persone (De Rosa, Inglese, 2018). Tale lacuna comporta una distorsione sistematica nella rappresentazione delle minoranze sessuali o di genere nella popolazione generale, con il rischio di perpetuare la loro invisibilità (Gates, 2012).

In aggiunta a ciò, un aspetto critico evidenziato nella letteratura è la confusione terminologica tra sesso e genere, che porta molti sociologi e sociologhe a trattare i due concetti in modo intercambiabile già in fase di individuazione della popolazione di riferimento (Bosse e Chiodo, 2016; Ruelos e Ruberg, 2020). Il sesso biologico viene assegnato alla nascita sulla base della combinazione di caratteristiche biologiche e fisiche, come i cromosomi, gli ormoni, gli organi riproduttivi interni e i genitali. L'identità di genere può essere invece definita come l'esperienza interna e individuale profondamente sentita di ciascuna persona riguardo al genere, che può o meno corrispondere al sesso assegnato alla nascita (Butler, 1990). Di conseguenza, da un punto di vista sociale, l'autodeterminazione di genere e le esperienze vissute dovrebbero avere un peso specifico maggiore. Tuttavia, ciò non sempre avviene. Al contrario, il sesso biologico è spesso utilizzo come criterio principale per la stratificazione dei campioni, quasi a sottolineare che le categorie di sessualità sono variabili fisse e normative (Browne, 2008). Inoltre, l'uso di categorie dicotomiche negli studi ignora la complessità delle identità. Ridurre l'esperienza a due sole opzioni binarie trascura di fatto l'esperienza di altre soggettività, come per esempio le persone intersessuali o non binarie. Ciò non solo può inficiare la buona riuscita delle ricerche sociali, ma contribuisce a perpetuare stereotipi eterosessisti (Sumerau et al., 2017). In questo scenario, la prospettiva queer invita a un aumento della consapevolezza pubblica e del dibattito sulla fluidità sessuale e di genere, sollecitando anche la Sociologia, soprattutto quantitativa, a impegnarsi per catturare meglio la complessità empirica di genere e sessualità nel mondo contemporaneo, espandendo le opzioni di risposta sugli strumenti di indagine (Bauer et al., 2017; Nadal, 2019). Su questo tema, Kassis et al. (2021) hanno proposto l'introduzione di schemi di identità di genere e attrazione emotiva e sessuale più ampi e articolati, al fine di riflettere meglio la realtà della popolazione. La raccolta di dati più accurati non solo consente di pervenire a fotografie della realtà maggiormente eterogenee, ma fornisce anche una base empirica più solida per sviluppare politiche pubbliche inclusive (Suen et al., 2020).

In aggiunta a ciò, è importante sottolineare che le persone che appartengono a minoranze sessuali o di genere possono essere riluttanti a prendere parte a ricerche scientifiche. Ciò avviene soprattutto nei contesti in cui vige una forte adesione agli stereotipi, per cui diversi soggetti occultano la propria identità. In casi come questo, le persone queer si rendono invisibili, e per questo diventano una popolazione *hard-to-survey* (Tourangeau, 2014). In tale contesto può essere utile ricorrere a campionamenti non probabilistici, come lo *snowball sampling*. Questo si basa sulla selezione iniziale di un piccolo gruppo di individui con le caratteristiche oggetto di studio che, a loro volta, reclutano altri partecipanti all'interno della propria rete sociale. Tale campionamento consente di accedere a reti altrimenti inaccessibili, ma presenta anche il rischio di *bias* di omogeneità del campione, poiché le persone reclutate possono avere caratteristiche simili ai reclutatori iniziali. Un'evoluzione più sofisticata dello *snowball sampling* è rappresentata dal *respondent-driven sampling* (RDS) (Heckathorn, 1997; 2002), che combina il reclutamento a valanga con un modello matematico che consente di stimare la probabilità di inclusione degli individui, riducendo il *bias* di autoreferenzialità. Nell'RDS, i e le partecipanti ricevono un numero limitato di inviti da distribuire, così che il processo di reclutamento sia controllabile e si possano stimare statisticamente alcune proprietà della popolazione di interesse (Volz & Heckathorn, 2008). Tale approccio è stato utilizzato con successo in alcuni studi che hanno coinvolto persone LGBTQ+ per raccogliere dati su discriminazioni e accesso ai servizi socio-sanitari (Bengtsson et al., 2012).

Un'altra tipologia di campionamento non probabilistico è nota come *time-location sampling* (TLS), particolarmente utile per indagini che coinvolgono soggetti che frequentano spazi di aggregazione specifici. Tale tecnica si basa sull'identificazione preliminare dei luoghi frequentati regolarmente dal target della ricerca —come centri, locali, eventi o spazi pubblici— all'interno dei quali è possibile programmare la raccolta dati in momenti prestabiliti (Sommen et al., 2018). Il TLS è stato impiegato con successo in diversi studi su popolazioni marginalizzate. Un importante esempio è rappresentato dalla prima indagine nazionale condotta in Belgio sullo stato di salute, i comportamenti protettivi e la percezione del rischio HIV+ tra persone transgender e non binarie (De Brier et al., 2022). Dopo aver realizzato una mappatura delle strutture sanitarie e degli spazi che ospitano eventi di sensibilizzazione queer presenti sul territorio belga, il gruppo di ricerca ha selezionato un insieme di cluster tramite campionamento sistematico, seguito da un campionamento casuale semplice per la selezione dei partecipanti. I soggetti individuati sono stati invitati ad auto-compilare un questionario in forma anonima, così da ridurre i *bias* legati alla desiderabilità sociale. L'efficacia del TLS risiede nella sua capacità di intercettare una porzione ampia e diversificata della popolazione target, anche se il reclutamento è limitato ai soggetti che frequentano gli spazi selezionati, escludendo chi non partecipa ad attività pubbliche per ragioni di sicurezza, riservatezza o disinteresse (De Rosa, Inglese, 2020). Inoltre, poiché si tratta spesso di ambienti chiusi o riservati, può risultare strategico il supporto di un *gatekeeper*, ovvero un facilitatore che, godendo della fiducia del gruppo, possa introdurre chi fa ricerca nel contesto, contribuendo a ridurre la diffidenza nei confronti di un *outsider* (Moore, 2017).

Infine, il *convenience sampling* si basa sulla selezione di partecipanti facilmente raggiungibili, come utenti di servizi o membri di associazioni. Pur essendo il campionamento meno impegnativo da realizzare, questo tende a sovrarappresentare segmenti di popolazione che sono già visibili o connessi a reti di supporto formali (Sedgwick, 2013).

Una delle criticità comuni a tutti i campionamenti non probabilistici è la questione della rappresentatività. La mancanza di una lista esaustiva e l'auto-selezione dei partecipanti comportano, infatti, il rischio di distorsioni significative nei risultati, rendendo difficile generalizzare le conclusioni alla popolazione complessiva. Tuttavia, la prospettiva queer insiste sull'importanza per la ricerca sociologica non tanto di ambire a una stima di parametri generali, quanto dare voce e visibilità alle esperienze vissute e alla pluralità di voci esistenti.

Per mitigare alcune delle limitazioni descritte può essere utile l'impiego di approcci misti, che combinano tecniche qualitative e quantitative (Creswell e Plano Clark, 2007), sfruttando anche le nuove possibilità offerte dal web. Le piattaforme digitali costituiscono, infatti, uno spazio percepito da molti come anonimo e sicuro, particolarmente utile per raggiungere soggettività marginalizzate o reticenti a esporsi in contesti offline (Gray, 2009; UyBico et al., 2007). In questi ambienti, l'uso combinato di strumenti quantitativi —come survey e analisi di reti sociali— e qualitativi —come netnografie o analisi di materiale testuale e altre tracce digitali— consente di raccogliere dati eterogenei, offrendo una lettura articolata delle dinamiche sociali, sia sul piano comportamentale sia su quello linguistico. Un ulteriore vantaggio dell'e-research risiede nella possibilità di adattare gli strumenti di indagine in modo più flessibile rispetto alle caratteristiche e ai bisogni del target. È possibile, per esempio, garantire l'anonimato e offrire modalità di partecipazione asincrone, che permettono ai soggetti coinvolti di scegliere tempi e forme dell'interazione (Punziano, Delli Paoli, 2021).

4. QUALI STRUMENTI?

Gli strumenti di ricerca rappresentano il mezzo attraverso cui vengono raccolti dati e informazioni, e il modo in cui sono costruiti può influenzare l'andamento della ricerca sociale. In ottica queer, la predisposizione degli strumenti richiede un'attenzione particolare al linguaggio utilizzato, alla formulazione delle domande e alla scelta delle categorie analitiche. Pertanto, è necessario interrogarsi su come i dispositivi possano (ri)produrre inconsapevolmente stereotipi o assunzioni normative ed escludenti. In questa direzione si muove la critica di Ferguson (2004), che ha mostrato come in molti studi sociologici statunitensi, attraverso il linguaggio e la struttura stessa degli strumenti di rilevazione, siano state utilizzate le categorie dominanti di classe ed etnia, contribuendo così alla loro naturalizzazione. Il suo invito è stato di adottare un approccio critico e intersezionale, capace di smascherare e smantellare le gerarchie implicite che strutturano le pratiche di raccolta dati, mettendo in discussione la nozione stessa di "neutralità" nella produzione del sapere.

In modo analogo, anche le domande che riguardano il genere, l'orientamento sessuale o le pratiche affettive e relazionali tendono spesso a riflettere le categorie e le concezioni normative interiorizzate da chi costruisce lo strumento, senza considerare che tali visioni possono essere diverse da quelle della popolazione target. In questo senso, la prospettiva queer sottolinea l'urgenza di costruire strumenti più inclusivi, dialogici e flessibili, in grado di accogliere soggettività plurali, identità fluide e vissuti che si collocano al di là dei codici binari.

All'interno dei questionari, ciò può tradursi, per esempio, nell'utilizzo di domande aperte o con opzioni di risposta multiple, catturando una maggiore complessità e diversità delle esperienze.
Anche nelle ricerche di natura qualitativa, è importante che ricercatori e ricercatrici prestino importanza al linguaggio utilizzato e al modo in cui vengono formulate le domande. Ciò significa riconoscere la molteplicità delle soggettività e non dare mai per scontato che vi sia corrispondenza tra sesso, identità di genere, orientamento sessuale ed espressione di genere. Dunque, prima di procedere con un'intervista o di avviare un focus group, è opportuno che chi conduce la ricerca si informi su quali pronomi siano preferiti dalla persona partecipante e, se necessario, offra la possibilità di utilizzare un nickname o un nome di fantasia, evitando il riferimento diretto ai dati anagrafici (Saguy e Williams, 2022).

Come riportato da Meezan e Martin (2012), nel caso in cui i e le partecipanti siano persone transgender o non binarie, è fondamentale evitare episodi di *deadnaming* o *misgendering*. Il *deadnaming* consiste nel riferirsi a una persona utilizzando il nome assegnato alla nascita che è stato successivamente rifiutato o abbandonato dalla persona stessa (Turton, 2021). Questa pratica non solo è irrispettosa, ma può avere un impatto traumatico, poiché richiama un'identità imposta e negata, generando disagio psico-sociale (Bauer et al., 2017). Il *misgendering*, invece, si verifica quando si utilizza un pronome o un termine che non rispecchia l'identità di genere dell'individuo. Questo atto, intenzionale o meno, contribuisce alla delegittimazione delle identità di genere non conformi e può causare conseguenze negative sul benessere e sull'autostima (McLemore, 2018; Monaco, 2024). Tali comportamenti non solo si configurano come forme di violenza simbolica, ma contribuiscono a un clima di discriminazione strutturale, riducendo la fiducia nelle istituzioni e nella ricerca accademica (Grant et al., 2011). La letteratura ha già sottolineato come tali episodi siano manifestazioni di un sistema che presuppone l'esistenza di due soli generi, assegnati alla nascita, e che penalizza le identità non conformi (Scandurra et al., 2021).

In aggiunta a ciò, quando non si hanno informazioni sulla vita privata delle persone e si rende necessario raccogliere tali dati ai fini della ricerca, i sociologi e le sociologhe devono evitare domande invasive o formulazioni escludenti. Per esempio, chiedere a una persona che si identifica o viene percepita come donna per la propria espressione di genere se ha un "compagno" o un "fidanzato" presuppone un'attribuzione di genere e l'esistenza di una possibile relazione di coppia eterosessuale, che esclude e marginalizza altre forme di relazione o orientamenti. In casi come questo, appare più appropriato utilizzare un linguaggio neutro e inclusivo, parlando di uno o più "partner" o "persone importanti" per evitare di imporre categorie normative (Lips, 2018). Le domande che riflettono un *bias* culturale rafforzano un fenomeno definito come eteronormatività (Warner, 1991). Si tratta di un concetto chiave negli studi di genere, che descrive un sistema sociale che considera l'eterosessualità come l'unica e naturale possibilità di relazione, marginalizzando tutte le altre forme relazionali o identitarie. Questo paradigma si riflette nelle pratiche di ricerca quando, per esempio, le relazioni *same-sex* vengono presentate come "alternative" o devianti rispetto alla norma eterosessuale (Davis, 2008; Rich, 2006).

Infine, la costruzione degli strumenti di rilevazione dovrebbe essere accompagnata da un processo di validazione che tenga conto della pluralità delle esperienze. Ciò può includere il coinvolgimento diretto della popolazione di riferimento in fase di progettazione e revisione, al fine di garantire che le dimensioni indagate e il processo di operativizzazione siano rappresentativi e rispettosi. L'approccio partecipativo può migliorare la qualità dei dati raccolti, contribuendo anche a costruire una ricerca sociale più equa, in cui i e le partecipanti siano membri attivi (Stryker et al., 2008).

5. COME RACCOGLIERE DATI E INFORMAZIONI

Oltre al linguaggio e alla struttura delle domande, è fondamentale considerare anche le modalità attraverso cui avviene la raccolta di dati e informazioni. La fase di rilevazione, infatti, è un momento centrale in ogni ricerca sociologica e rappresenta l'occasione per stabilire un contatto diretto tra ricercatori/ricercatrici e partecipanti.

La prospettiva queer richiede di smantellare le asimmetrie tradizionali che caratterizzano la relazione tra chi raccoglie dati e chi partecipa allo studio. Teorici e teoriche queer sottolineano l'importanza di considerare tutti i soggetti coinvolti nella ricerca come co-produttori di conoscenza, promuovendo un approccio collaborativo in cui ci si trova tutti e tutte su un piano di parità, indipendentemente dal ruolo. Questo assetto decostruisce l'idea tradizionale del ricercatore come figura neutrale e distaccata, riconoscendo invece che la produzione di sapere è un processo sociale e situato, influenzato dalle identità, dalle esperienze e dalle prospettive di tutti i soggetti coinvolti (Haraway, 1988). Radicata negli studi femministi e queer, questa visione promuove una modalità dialogica di rilevazione, in cui il significato viene costruito congiuntamente (Alcoff, Potter, 1993). Operativamente, ciò implica strutturare la ricerca in modo flessibile, lasciando spazio all'autonarrazione, alla rinegoziazione dei ruoli e alla costruzione condivisa del senso. Tale approccio è particolarmente cruciale quando si lavora con soggetti che sfidano le categorie analitiche tradizionali della Sociologia, e che richiedono quindi un elevato grado di flessibilità. Significa, in concreto, assumersi la responsabilità di non forzare le esperienze in griglie predeterminate (Maynard, Purvis, 2013), accogliendo invece le narrazioni nella loro parzialità, fluidità e possibile contraddittorietà. Da un lato, i e le partecipanti, coinvolti come agenti attivi nel processo di ricerca, possono offrire visioni e narrazioni alternative e contestuali che arricchiscono il quadro analitico complessivo (de Lauretis, 1991). Dall'altro, ricercatori e ricercatrici devono rinunciare al ruolo di osservatori esterni, assumendo una posizione di facilitazione, adattando la propria analisi a ciò che emerge durante la rilevazione (Plummer, 2011). Questa posizione si traduce in pratiche di ricerca capaci di accogliere quella è stata chiamata *queer vulnerability* (Tweedy, 2016), ossia una forma di apertura epistemologica che sfida i confini della professionalità accademica, rifiutando la distanza come unica garanzia di rigore, valorizzando invece la relazione dialogica come fonte di conoscenza. L'autoconsapevolezza critica è parte integrante di questo processo. Infatti, riconoscere il peso del proprio *background*, dei propri privilegi e delle proprie convinzioni è fondamentale, soprattutto nelle ricerche qualitative, dove la soggettività di chi conduce la ricerca influisce inevitabilmente sulla raccolta e sull'interpretazione dei dati (Finlay, 2002).

Come ha osservato Warner (1999), l'analisi dei fenomeni sociali non si nutre solo di dati e informazioni che emergono in maniera esplicita, ma anche attraverso le dinamiche relazionali, emotive e culturali che condizionano il modo in cui le persone raccontano di sé. Le ambiguità, i silenzi, le contraddizioni quindi non sono elementi marginali, ma parte integrante del materiale da raccogliere. Nella ricerca etnografica, per esempio, anche ciò che è non detto, incompiuto o effimero —che Muñoz (2009) ha definito *ephemera*— può assumere valore. Sguardi fugaci, gesti ambigui, esitazioni nelle risposte, posture corporee sono tutti segnali che, pur sfuggendo alle categorie stabili della Sociologia, sono meritevoli di attenzione. Lungi dal rappresentare una minaccia all'affidabilità, l'intreccio tra dimensione soggettiva ed empirica è considerato, nella prospettiva queer, una chiave per accedere a fenomeni che sfuggono alla ricerca tradizionalmente intesa. In questa visione, non è l'oggettività a garantire la validità della ricerca, ma la capacità di costruire teorie empiricamente fondate a partire dalla *messiness* del campo, ossia dai fallimenti, dalle tensioni e dalle emozioni che emergono nel processo di co-costruzione del sapere (Morgensen, 2015). Accettare la complessità, l'instabilità e persino il disagio significa aprirsi alla possibilità di una conoscenza trasformativa, capace di restituire la pluralità e l'ambiguità che caratterizzano i fenomeni sociali.

È necessario altresì considerare con particolare attenzione le implicazioni etiche della raccolta dati, soprattutto quando la ricerca coinvolge soggettività vulnerabili o marginalizzate. Un aspetto spesso sottovalutato nella progettazione delle indagini è la sensibilità ai contesti socio-culturali e politici specifici. In diversi territori, infatti, le identità e le pratiche queer non solo non sono riconosciute, ma possono essere oggetto di criminalizzazione, stigmatizzazione o repressione istituzionale. In tali contesti, la visibilità pubblica —anche se circoscritta all'ambito della ricerca— può comportare rischi concreti per l'incolumità fisica, psicologica o sociale delle persone coinvolte (Clark, 2012). Alla luce di ciò, l'approccio da parte di chi fa ricerca deve essere flessibile, situato e adattabile alle condizioni di rischio e vulnerabilità presenti nel contesto di ricerca. È fondamentale evitare di imporre standard di sicurezza universalistici, spesso modellati su contesti stabili, che rischiano di risultare inadeguati o addirittura dannosi in ambienti segnati da forti disuguaglianze, regimi autoritari o controllo sociale. L'etica queer della ricerca, in questo senso, implica una postura relazionale e contestuale, capace di problematizzare le nozioni stesse di consenso, esposizione e protezione, e di adattare continuamente le strategie di indagine in funzione delle condizioni effettive delle persone coinvolte. La protezione dei e delle partecipanti non deve essere concepita come una prescrizione tecnica, ma va intesa come un processo dinamico, fondato su ascolto, rispetto e responsabilità condivisa.

La ricerca online richiede una riflessione ulteriore sulle responsabilità e sull'impatto del lavoro sociologico. Diversi studi hanno evidenziato, per esempio, il potenziale della netnografia come strumento di osservazione non invasiva, dato che consente a chi fa ricerca di immergersi nei contesti digitali e nelle pratiche delle comunità (Demant e Moretti, 2024; Kozinets, 2015). In alcuni casi, la non-interferenza è considerata strategica, soprattutto quando il coinvolgimento attivo potrebbe alterare i comportamenti degli utenti o compromettere la spontaneità delle interazioni (McKenna e Chughtai, 2020; Svensson, 2014). Tuttavia, questa modalità solleva importanti interrogativi etici. La letteratura in materia (Masullo et al., 2020; Tuikka et al., 2015) sottolinea, infatti, la necessità di adottare approcci consapevoli, rispettosi e situati. È fondamentale quindi garantire la riservatezza, la sicurezza e l'autonomia delle persone coinvolte, evitando qualsiasi forma di esposizione involontaria, e prestando particolare attenzione alla de-contestualizzazione di contenuti sensibili. In questo senso, è essenziale attenersi alle linee guida previste dai comitati etici di riferimento e, ove possibile, coinvolgere i e le partecipanti nei processi di valutazione dei rischi (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Allo stesso modo, è cruciale che i e le partecipanti abbiano il controllo sui propri dati, con la possibilità di ritirarsi dalla ricerca o di modificare le informazioni fornite in qualsiasi momento senza ripercussioni. La trasparenza sui fini degli studi e sulle modalità di raccolta e utilizzo dei dati, attraverso un consenso informato dettagliato, rappresentano un pilastro essenziale per un approccio etico robusto (Denzin e Lincoln, 2011).

Per garantire una maggiore sicurezza e promuovere la partecipazione, è fondamentale anche creare spazi sicuri, sia fisici sia virtuali. I *safe space* non sono solo ambienti privi di minacce dirette, ma devono essere progettati per ridurre i rischi percepiti e facilitare l'espressione autentica delle identità. Nel contesto delle interviste qualitative, per esempio, ciò può includere l'individuazione di luoghi privati e riservati, la possibilità di scegliere la modalità di partecipazione (attraverso interviste telefoniche o piattaforme digitali, anche senza webcam). Nell'ambito della ricerca online, invece, costituiscono strumenti importanti per tutelare la privacy applicazioni criptate e la possibilità di rispondere tramite questionari anonimi (Bender et al., 2017).

6. Analisi e Disseminazione

La prospettiva queer enfatizza l'importanza di riconoscere e valorizzare le esperienze dei e delle partecipanti non solo durante la raccolta dei dati, ma anche nelle fasi successive di analisi e disseminazione.

In questo quadro, pratiche di feedback e condivisione dei risultati assumono un ruolo cruciale nella promozione di una maggiore equità epistemica. Coinvolgere i e le partecipanti in fase di analisi contribuisce a ridurre le disuguaglianze tra chi produce sapere e chi ne è oggetto, favorendo una più equa redistribuzione dell'autorità conoscitiva (Richman e Zucker, 2019). Questo approccio riflette l'impegno etico e politico, proprio della tradizione queer, per il riconoscimento delle voci marginalizzate e per la contestazione delle gerarchie di sapere che escludono le soggettività non conformi.

Inoltre, l'approccio queer invita a rendere evidente in fase di analisi anche il modo in cui le categorie di genere e sessualità sono state socialmente costruite e riprodotte all'interno della ricerca. Questo implica un superamento delle tecniche analitiche rigide e la promozione di approcci interpretativi più flessibili, in grado di cogliere la complessità, la fluidità e le contraddizioni delle esperienze (Ahmed, 2012; Ellingson, 2017).

Un ulteriore ambito di riflessione riguarda le modalità di presentazione e comunicazione dei risultati. L'approccio queer invita a interrogarsi non solo sui contenuti, ma anche sui formati e linguaggi utilizzati per restituire i risultati della ricerca. Si sollecita, in questo senso, una comunicazione riflessiva e situata, che espliciti i presupposti epistemologici, politici ed etici di chi ha condotto la ricerca e che riconosca il proprio posizionamento all'interno del campo (Meadow, 2013). Ciò può tradursi anche nella sperimentazione di forme di disseminazione meno convenzionali, maggiormente dialogiche e accessibili, capaci di coinvolgere pubblici differenti e di valorizzare l'esperienza soggettiva come dimensione legittima della conoscenza.

I risultati degli studi queer possono avere un impatto significativo su diversi livelli della società. In prima battuta, possono contribuire a promuovere un cambiamento culturale, mettendo in discussione le norme e gli stereotipi che regolano le dinamiche di genere e sessualità. In secondo luogo, la ricerca empirica può influenzare le pratiche professionali in ambiti come l'educazione, la sanità e il lavoro sociale. Per esempio, l'inclusione di prospettive queer nella formazione può aiutare i lavoratori a riconoscere *bias* che in maniera inconsapevole condizionano la loro pratica professionale, sensibilizzandoli alle specifiche esigenze delle persone LGBTQ+. Ciò può ridurre le discriminazioni e promuovere una maggiore equità nei servizi. Infine, i risultati delle ricerche in ottica queer possono avere un impatto diretto sulle politiche pubbliche, contribuendo a informare e orientare i decisori politici in materia di diritti civili, parità di genere e lotta alle discriminazioni. Per esempio, studi che documentano le esperienze di discriminazione e marginalizzazione possono fornire una base empirica per la formulazione di politiche antidiscriminatorie più efficaci e mirate. Questi contributi sono fondamentali per creare una società più equa e inclusiva, in cui le differenze siano valorizzate anziché marginalizzate. Sotto questa angolazione critica, è possibile sostenere che la conoscenza queer non è solo un fine in sé, ma si configura come uno strumento utile per trasformare le pratiche e le politiche istituzionali (Haritaworn, 2008).

7. CONCLUSIONI

Adottare una prospettiva queer nella ricerca sociologica rappresenta un'opportunità per rinnovare e ampliare il campo disciplinare, rendendolo non solo più inclusivo, ma anche politicamente impegnato (Rhodes, Alexander, 2022).

L'approccio queer offre infatti un contributo nella critica delle strutture normative che regolano genere e sessualità. La Sociologia tradizionale ha spesso cristallizzato alcune soggettività in schemi rigidi, fornendone una rappresentazione parziale e limitata. Per esempio, nel corso del ventesimo secolo, una parte significativa della disciplina ha contribuito a "costruire" l'identità delle persone lesbiche, gay e bisessuali, che sono stati spesso ritratte come giovani "a rischio" o come adulti omonormativi perfettamente integrati (Duggan, 2004). Tale approccio ha trascurato la complessità e la variabilità interna dell'universo LGB, riducendo a un'unica narrazione una realtà caratterizzata da molteplici profili identitari, storie ed esperienze, con esigenze, bisogni e aspettative diversificate (Corbisiero e Monaco, 2021; McNeil, 2010). Allo stesso modo, le esperienze delle persone transgender e non binarie sono state frequentemente marginalizzate o ridotte a fenomeni patologici o devianti, escludendo dal discorso accademico le complessità legate all'autodeterminazione di genere e alle espressioni non conformi (Muñoz, 2009).

Superare questo approccio permette di riconoscere i vissuti delle persone come prospettive centrali nella produzione della conoscenza, ampliando l'analisi dei fenomeni sociali e delle esperienze umane attraverso pratiche di ricerca su campo più partecipative, sia che si tratti di studi quantitativi, qualitativi o *mixed-methods*. La dimensione militante del queer si manifesta nell'orientare la ricerca verso una trasformazione sociale che sia attenta all'intersezione tra genere, sessualità, etnia, classe, abilità e altre forme di oppressione, assumendo la produzione di conoscenza come pratica situata, critica e trasformativa. Sotto questa angolazione, l'approccio queer incoraggia una maggiore riflessività da parte di ricercatori e ricercatrici, sottolineando come il processo di ricerca sia intrinsecamente situato e condizionato dal posizionamento stesso di chi intende produrre conoscenza, oltre che dalle strutture di potere e dai meccanismi di riconoscimento esistenti (Harding, 1993).

Nonostante le opportunità offerte, l'adozione di una prospettiva queer nella ricerca sociologica non è priva di sfide e limiti.

Una delle principali difficoltà risiede nella sua messa in opera. La natura anti-categoriale e anti-normativa del queer può infatti essere percepita come poco applicabile o eccessivamente idiosincratica. La sua adozione può risultare di difficile applicazione o meno immediata soprattutto in contesti normati da vincoli istituzionali e regolativi, oppure scontrarsi con le esigenze di classificazione, misurazione e comparabilità proprie di molte ricerche empiriche.

In aggiunta a ciò, è riscontrabile una certa resistenza della disciplina sociologica a rivedere alcune delle proprie categorie in chiave critica e decostruzionista (DeVault, 1999).

La Sociologia positivista, con il suo forte ancoraggio alla misurazione empirica e alle strutture binarie di analisi, spesso fatica ad accogliere modelli analitici più fluidi, come quelli proposti dal pensiero queer (Stacey e Torn, 1985).

Inoltre, i ricercatori e le ricercatrici sono invitati a confrontarsi con il proprio posizionamento, i propri privilegi e le proprie implicazioni affettive e politiche nel campo. Questa esposizione epistemica può risultare destabilizzante, soprattutto per chi ha ricevuto una formazione in contesti che privilegiano l'impersonalità e la distanza analitica. L'apertura verso la vulnerabilità, l'ambiguità e il disordine metodologico, se non adeguatamente accompagnata da un'elaborazione teorica solida, può generare incertezza e difficoltà nella conduzione della ricerca empirica.

Un altro limite è rappresentato dalla difficoltà di tradurre le intuizioni teoriche in strumenti formalizzati e condivisi che ne definiscano i protocolli operativi. Sebbene l'approccio queer inviti a decostruire le categorie rigide, questo può entrare in conflitto con la necessità di standardizzazione tipica delle metodologie quantitative. Le ricerche sociali, in particolare quelle su larga scala, si affidano spesso a schemi predefiniti che non consentono di cogliere la complessità e la fluidità delle esperienze. Ciò comporta il rischio di una "queerizzazione parziale" della ricerca, in cui la critica teorica non riesce a tradursi pienamente nella pratica empirica (Kitzinger, 2005).

Una criticità ulteriore riguarda la tensione tra la specificità locale delle esperienze queer e l'ambizione di produrre generalizzazioni scientifiche. Le teorie queer enfatizzano l'importanza di studi e ricerche situate e il contesto delle esperienze individuali, rendendo complessa la comparazione tra diversi contesti. Ciò diventa particolarmente evidente quando si studiano fenomeni come le forme multiple di esclusione sociale o marginalizzazione per effetto dell'intersezionalità tra genere, etnia, classe sociale e altri fattori socio-demografici (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989).

Un ultimo aspetto critico è rappresentato dal rischio di appropriazione teorica senza un reale coinvolgimento dei gruppi o delle soggettività studiate (Namaste, 1994). Abbracciare la prospettiva queer dovrebbe implicare non solo la decostruzione delle categorie analitiche, ma anche un impegno politico verso la giustizia sociale e l'autodeterminazione dei gruppi marginalizzati. Ciò richiede una pratica di ricerca eticamente consapevole, in cui i e le partecipanti siano coinvolti attivamente non solo nella fase di raccolta dati, ma anche nella co-produzione del sapere e nella diffusione dei risultati.

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DECONSTRUCTING DICHOTOMIES
Nature's queer nexus, reclaiming spaces and identities

di *Udisha Singh and Anurag Anand**

Abstract

The discourse on the relationship between humans and nature has been under alteration since its inception. This relationship is usually seen in the form of binaries. The existence of queer flora and fauna has never managed to come to the centre and has always been subjected to the periphery. Hence, a need to "queer" this relationship is required to challenge the dominant discourse of sexuality and nature, to reject the anthropocentric ideas of nature and to acknowledge its complexities. This paper uses the concept of "queer ecology" to question the idea of nature or wilderness as culturally constructed by situating queer desires within natural spaces. It refers to the works of the queer American writers to highlight how certain spaces that are designated as "nature" are violently defended against queers in a society in which that very nature is exploited. It finally highlights the close association of the queer community with nature and works on the conservatory practices to not just protect nature but also the queer community by critiquing the heteronormative tendencies that observe homosexuality as a "crime against nature".

Keywords

Nature, Heteronormativity, Queer, Homoeroticism, Ecology

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1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between humans and nature has long been characterized by a complex interplay of dominance, exploitation, and segregation. Rooted in anthropocentric ideologies, this relationship is often conceptualized through rigid binaries - such as human versus non-human, culture versus nature, and domestic versus wild - that reinforce the divide between the natural world and human society. This dichotomous thinking has contributed significantly to the marginalization of both non-human species and human communities that deviate from normative structures, particularly those identifying as queer.

Historically, cultural evolution - from the Paleolithic era to the modern industrial age - has reinforced human supremacy over the natural world. As societies became increasingly structured and hierarchical, norms surrounding gender, sexuality, and identity solidified. The earliest traces of culture can be spotted from the Paleolithic age i.e. the Old Stone Age wherein hunting through stones was the dominant culture. The animal species were exploited because it was the means of survival. Then came the Neolithic age where the focus shifted from hunting to agriculture. The violence was now perpetrated on the plant species. Then came the Iron Age that introduced specialized agriculture. This age was a relatively progressive age and had a progressive society. The stratification of communities on the basis of culture was first observed in this age. It had defined norms and anyone who deviated from those norms was ostracized from society. Like, for instance, in India, this age was called Vedic age and distributed the Indian society into four varnas i.e. four communities. Each community had strict norms and the person who didn't comply with those norms was marginalized. These norms decided and facilitated the distribution of work according to the communities and assigned tasks according to the gender roles. However, in other societies, the gender wasn't strictly bifurcated into "male" and "female". There were a lot of indigenous tribes like Maori, Tupi-Guarani, Apache, Navajo, Winnebago etc, that were fluid in terms of sexuality (Lugones, 2007:200). Gender was not an organizing principle before colonization as is evident from the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria (Lugones, 2007:196). There was no stringent binary or hierarchy in many tribes of the pre-colonial era. The whole idea of gender binary was introduced during colonialism for socio-political and economic dominance. This western ideology was ingrained so deeply that the scars were visible even in the post-colonial era. One can notice how heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system are intertwined. By imposing heterosexual norms, colonizers not only reshaped local social structures but also redefined family structures, kinship systems, and property laws, often in ways that facilitated their economic and political dominance. The family unit, structured around heterosexual marriage, became a cornerstone of colonial governance. In many indigenous societies, kinship systems were more fluid, with roles and relationships that did not necessarily conform to the rigid nuclear family model promoted by colonial powers. By enforcing heterosexual marriage and sexual relations, colonial regimes sought to produce predictable, controlled labor forces, often tied to capitalist economies through institutions like marriage, inheritance, and land ownership. These systems suppressed the diversity of sexual and familial relationships, further entrenching colonial control over indigenous bodies and land.

The colonial powers not only imposed heterosexual norms and binary gender systems on colonized populations, but these systems continue to affect gender and sexuality norms in post-colonial societies. This becomes even more problematic when these binaries of 'male- female' and "natural" and "unnatural" begin to be visible in context of nature, designating it a heteronormative status. This limits one's perspective to mere binaries and denaturalizes everything that doesn't fall into the binaries including homosexuality and negates its existence from the equation. These heteronormative norms lead to the marginalization of the queer community because it fails to fit into these gender binaries. It dehumanizes them. These oppressive norms are legitimized by their association with nature and any kind of non-compliance lead to marginalization and therefore, the urges of the queer are suppressed because their urges don't align with the defined and "legitimate" genders and so to continue living in the society, they have to obey the norms.

The heteronormative framework works on the binary of "natural" and "unnatural". The homosexuals are portrayed as a perversion of nature because nature has always been designated a heteronormative status .The stringent binaries that are formed without having a comprehensive knowledge about the ecosystem limits one's perspective and therefore, the need to "queer" this concept is required to challenge the dominant discourse of sexuality and nature, to reject the anthropocentric ideas of nature and to acknowledge its complexities. The field of queer ecology emerges as a response to these dominant discourses. It challenges the heteronormative frameworks that define nature, repositions queer identities within ecological contexts, and critiques the cultural narratives that determine what is considered "natural" or "unnatural.". It forces one to question all the truths and pre-existing norms that have been naturalized and have been passed on for decades, without any questioning. It questions the evolutionary evidence that is being used to back heteronormativity. Queer ecology transgresses the boundaries established by evolutionary theory. This paper adopts queer ecology as its central theoretical framework to interrogate the ideological separation between queerness and the natural world.

This study hypothesizes that the heteronormative framing of nature is a socially constructed discourse, not a biological truth, and that queerness exists inherently within the natural world. By queering nature, we can dismantle anthropocentric and binary models and create inclusive narratives that recognize ecological and sexual diversity. In doing so, this research advocates for a paradigm shift - from viewing queerness as "unnatural" to recognizing it as a vital and integral part of the ecosystem, ultimately working toward both environmental justice and queer inclusion.

2. QUEER ECOLOGY

Queer ecology emerged in the early 21st century as an intersectional approach that brings together queer theory and ecological thought. Scholars like Catriona Sandilands, Heather R. White, and Donovan Schaefer have expanded the field by arguing that traditional environmental discourses often ignore the complexities of identity, sexuality, and gender in their discussions of nature. Rich and Pratt, with their critiques of gender, sexuality, and power structures, provide a foundational lens for these ideas. Rich's intersection of sexual identity and ecological activism, for example, reflects the early seeds of what would later be formalized as queer ecology. Rich came out as a lesbian in the 1970s, which marked a significant shift in her work. Prior to this, her poetry reflected more conventional themes of marriage and motherhood. However, her coming-out process and her political engagement with feminist and LGBTQ+ causes led to a more radical critique of patriarchal structures, heteronormativity, and the limitations imposed on women and queer people by mainstream society. Rich's poetry often links gender, sexuality, and ecology, illustrating how patriarchal and heteronormative systems of oppression are entwined with ecological destruction. In works like *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978) and *The Burning of Paper Instead of Children* (1973), Rich critiques the ways that societal structures - particularly those relating to gender and sexuality - also impact the environment. For Rich, queerness was not only a sexual or gendered identity but also a critique of the social and natural world, advocating for a radical reimagining of ecological and social systems. Her critique of the binary, heteronormative, and capitalist structures of power in her work resonates with the central tenets of queer ecology, which calls for a recognition of the fluidity of nature, identity, and social systems. Rich's focus on the ways in which women, especially lesbians, have historically been excluded from ecological discourse contributes to queer ecological thought by highlighting how gendered and sexual identities shape our relationship to the environment.

Rich's essays and poetry about feminist ethics, environmentalism, and human rights lay the groundwork for understanding the intersections of human social structures and the natural world. Her critique of male-dominated environmental thought, especially in the context of women's roles in nature, aligns with key queer ecological concepts that reject the anthropocentric view of the environment.

Pratt's feminist and queer consciousness grew out of her own experiences with oppression. Her coming-out story was pivotal in the development of her political activism, especially concerning the struggles faced by queer women, particularly lesbians of color. Pratt's poetry connects queer identity with the historical struggles for liberation, and this perspective is vital in understanding her approach to ecology. Much like Rich, Pratt's work offers a critique of heteronormativity and patriarchal structures, but she also provides a critique of environmental injustice. Her work is informed by the intersectional politics of race, class, gender, and sexual identity, which informs her approach to queer ecology. Pratt's experiences as a Southern lesbian, alongside her activism, led her to develop a deeply ecological understanding of social systems, where oppression - whether based on gender, sexuality, or race - is intimately tied to environmental degradation.

Crime Against Nature (1990) is one of Pratt's most influential works. The collection combines autobiographical narratives with themes of environmental justice, especially focusing on the struggles of women and queer people in the South. Pratt critiques the ways in which patriarchal and heteronormative structures have led to ecological harm, drawing connections between personal experiences of oppression and larger social and environmental issues. Pratt's poetry often invokes the South as a site of both ecological richness and exploitation, where environmental degradation and societal oppression are intricately connected. Her works highlight the resilience of marginalized groups, including queer and women-of-color communities, who are often at the forefront of environmental and social justice efforts. Pratt's focus on the lived experience of queer women in the South offers a poignant commentary on how environmental degradation disproportionately impacts marginalized communities. Her emphasis on the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, race, and ecology provides a critical lens for understanding queer ecology as not just a theoretical framework but a lived reality for many LGBTQ+ individuals.

Both Adrienne Rich and Minnie Bruce Pratt made significant contributions to queer ecology through their reflections on gender, sexuality, and environmentalism. Rich's feminist and lesbian identity, coupled with her critiques of patriarchy and heteronormativity, provided an intellectual foundation for understanding how sexual politics are deeply intertwined with ecological degradation. Pratt, with her focus on the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and environmental justice, demonstrated the importance of recognizing the agency of marginalized communities in both understanding and solving environmental issues. Their works reflect the importance of an intersectional, inclusive, and fluid approach to ecology - one that acknowledges the complex relationships between identity, power, and nature.

3. DISCUSSION

The non-essentialist theory of queer ecology proves the natural existence of the queer community because evolution was the result of natural selection, as proposed by Darwin. This means that only those species survived that were the fittest and were able to adapt to the environment. This implies that the survival of the species depends on their health as well as the health of the environment. This reflects a clear relationship between species and their environment. Since the homosexual species have existed and survived as well, it is rational to conclude that they are as much a part of nature as the heterosexual species because if they were "unnatural", they would have become extinct. Queer ecology bridges this gap between homoeroticism and nature. It not just voices the concerns of a specific community, but it aims at forming a safe space for other marginalized groups as well.

Queering deconstructs the idea of nature and propagates deromanticizing of nature i.e. deconstructing the warm, protective imagery of "Mother Nature" and accepting it as wild, unsettling and dangerous as represented in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Queering further delves deep into the structuring of culture and makes one question the ways in which humans are located in nature. It challenges the narratives that establish what's "natural" and what's "unnatural" and does the "othering" of the unnatural. It points out how the concretization of this binary of "natural" and "unnatural" lacks credibility because it is highly subjective, and this can be proven through the concept of cultural relativity. What's "natural" for one culture isn't necessarily "natural" for another culture and therefore it's required to question the legitimacy of the authorities that form the binaries and try to seek control. "To queer nature is to question its normative use, to interrogate relations of knowledge and power by which certain "truths" about us have been allowed to pass, unnoticed, without questioning" (Sandilands, 1994: 22). We must acknowledge the indispensability of "queering" our perception for finding effective methods to deal with the environmental problems because the term "queering" is not one-dimensional but rather two-dimensional. It is not just limited to the representation of the queer community and environment, but it also propagates the idea of moving against the grain i.e. resistance against the hegemonic ideology. Queer ecology resists forced heterosexuality and resists heteronormativity in nature. It combines the two realms – sexuality and environment and uses each realm to question the construction of "natural" in both culture and nature. It intertwines the idea of sexuality and nature in a manner that the discourses of nature shape the discourses of sexuality and vice versa. This idea is backed up by evolutionary evidence that proves that the relationship between sexuality and biodiversity can't be simply categorized in heteronormative terms, especially when evolution proves that we all evolved from single-called asexual ancestors that reproduced by themselves. The plants and animals were hermaphroditic before they were bisexual and later, heterosexual and yet the queer community has always been sidelined by the dominant heteronormative cultures and is delegitimized in the name of it being opposed to nature or "unnatural" while completely neglecting the existence of queer flora and fauna like the clownfish, lichens, willow trees and mole rats (Lieffe, 2021). This not just projects ignorance but also the divide between the human and the non-human world. The stringent divide between 'humans' and 'animals', wherein, one is regarded as acceptable and civilized while the other category is termed as unacceptable and uncivilized while deliberately neglecting the inhuman acts that often blur this divide speaks a lot about how the dominant cultures are formed, prioritizing one community over another. Both the animals and the queer community are treated as the "other", as the subalterns. This is evident from the way the rules and laws are made and molded by the authoritative forces for the environment and the community without consulting with the subjects. The emphasis is always on the "needs" of the power figures instead of the subjects. The fact that the LGBTQ+ had recently achieved its basic human rights in some countries but are still not considered legitimate citizens in different parts of the world which unfurls the dehumanizing aspect of these hegemonic cultures. Another instance is Minnie Bruce Pratt's collection Crime Against Nature, wherein, the writer shares her experience as a lesbian in the USA and condemns the social and judicial system of the country that has declared her a "misfit" for her two sons. The title of her collection is a satirical take on the system that sees queerness as the "crime against nature". She questions the authority for putting her in a luminal space and delegitimizing her motherhood solely on the basis of her deviation from the traditional hierarchical structure of heterosexuality. In her poem, "Poem for my Sons", Minnie Bruce advises her sons to resist against the hegemonic power and challenge the norms of the society. She teaches them to never take anything for face value and to question the pre-existing ideas, subtly hinting towards the structuring of gender. She alludes to the idea of fluidity in gender when she asks her sons to be "true" men and not "real" men. The term 'true men' probably hints towards the idea of humanity whereas 'real men' seems to be hinting towards the social concept of masculinity that requires a man to strictly adhere to its norms in order to be called a "man". She's probably warning her sons against this rigid social construct of gender that can hinder one's sense of morality as a being because of the gender battles. Here, she is using a queer perspective to differentiate between "human" (real men) and "humanity" (true men), while inculcating a sense of moral responsibility for other living creatures as well. She further states, "I can only pray: That you'll never ask for the weather, earth, Angels, women, or other lives to obey you." (1990: 14). These lines are the essence of queer ecology because it projects resistance against the anthropocentric outlook towards the environment. In the above stated lines, Pratt talks about dismantling the idea of domination of humans over the environment. She denounces the idea of hegemonic domination of mankind over other beings and calls this the "crime against nature". The sense of discrimination and hatred is so deeply rooted that it not just limits itself to humans but extends to non-humans too. This framework of hierarchy is used for flora and fauna as well. That's why some species are valued over others and the violence done to the species that lie lower in the hierarchy is somehow justified. Queer ecology challenges this anthropocentric approach towards ecosystems. "Crossing lines between bodies, species, and environments [that] call on viewers to intervene in the violence being done to other species, for the survival of all the species who depend on these ecosystems, our own and others" (Cárdenas, 2022: 212).

Anthropocentrism is rooted in the obsession of humans with themselves and to ensure that they always remain at the center, domination over other species is required. A simple example to explain the unnecessary obsession of human beings with dominance and control in gardens. Gardens can be considered artificial or man-made ecosystems. Garden as a space is a tamed version of wilderness. It's an example of man's attempt at exercising his heterosexual masculinity. This is the reason why the activities of hunting or cutting the trees are associated with "masculine" activities according to the norms. The ideology of conquering or taming nature is associated with "manhood". The true crime against nature is this problematic masculinity that seeks validation by exercising dominance over other species and environment through forced normative heterosexuality. Pratt in her poem "Crime Against Nature" points out how the violence perpetrated by men in the name of nationalism is never questioned but is applauded «No one says crime against nature when man shots one or two or three or four or five or more of his children or wife» (1990: 118). This queer perspective helps one to question the unchallenged, rigid ideas and facilitate the expansion of knowledge through discourses. The marginalized groups are banished from these male dominated spaces, and history proves how these become spaces of violence for the marginalized people like the lynching of blacks on the southern trees and queer people being murdered in the wilderness. The plants in the garden are forced to grow according to the gardener, are cut, shaped and planted according to his/her will but the plants who fail to comply are uprooted and thrown out, like the weeds that are considered to be the misfit in the garden. The gardener decides what kind of plants stay and he/she has complete autonomy on the lives of the plants. The queer community is treated like the weeds, the "misfits" because they don't fit in the hierarchical structure of the society, hence, are treated as the outcasts. The gardener is the metaphor for all the hegemonic tyrants who rule the world according to their norms and anyone who fails to comply is banished. So basically, these "misfits" have no place of belonging. They are either "too wild" or "too unnatural" to belong. The division of space is also gendered but is restricted to only two genders. The public sphere is for the male members while the domestic sphere is reserved for the female members. The queer community is conveniently sidelined from this division of space and that's why they experience a lack of belongingness. They acquire a liminal space in society. Queer ecology changes the dominant narrative and resituates the community in the natural spaces they were once banished from. This idea is projected in Marie Bruce Pratt's poems "Shame" and "No Place". «There was no place to be/simultaneously or between» (1990:18). In these poems, she shares her experience as a lesbian mother and narrates her ostracization from society. She says how she experiences loss of belonging in the heteronormative world and tries to create a safe space for people like her through her imagination, in the lap of nature. The queer community has managed to survive by creating a safe space for themselves, primarily in nature. «Queer and trans practices of kinship have always encompassed ecological relationships everywhere between rural and urban, whether we as environmental communication scholars acknowledge them or not... these cultures of kinship offer antidotes to abandonment in the struggle to build places of survival». (Cram, 2024: 21)

This is evident from a short story "Brokeback Mountain" by Annie Proulx wherein two gays seek the refuge in nature to explore their sexual relationship. The untamed wilderness becomes a safe space for them that is free from the heteronormative surveillance of the town. This imaginative "natural" place is in contrast with her "unnatural" state and by situating herself within a "natural" setting, she reverses that "unnaturalness" and in doing so, simultaneously debunks the myth of calling homosexuality a crime against nature. Nancy Dunkan talks about the struggle of queer community with reclaiming spaces. She states «Hegemonic heterosexuality of most environments has made the queer invisible or if they choose to signal their sexuality, they must be constantly under the exhausting pressure and responsibility of political struggle over the definition of space. As long as the queer... remain invisible, radical geographical explanations of oppression will remain unnecessarily homogenous and insensitive to differences among those who are marginalized and oppressed» (1996: 4-5). This concept of space appears again in Pratt's poem «The Place Lost and Gone; the Place Found» (1990: 38) where Pratt finds a space for herself in nature. She calls this space "in-between places". The idea of space doesn't restrict itself to humans and extends to the natural world as well. In this anthropocentric world, nature has been sidelined, and it procures a liminal space. With the booming technology and rising civilization, large acres of forests are being converted into habitable lands for humans, leading to the disruption of the ecosystem. It's no more about finding civilization within nature but more about finding nature within civilization. There was a time when humans were scared of nature and worshipped it. They associated the human consequences with the reward or punishment of nature, but it soon shifted to humanization of nature, wherein nature began to be exploited for human greed. Carolyn Merchant in her book The Death of Nature talks about the evolution of the world from the natural to the mechanical one. She critiques this celebrated progress by highlighting the harm it has caused to the more-than-human world in the name of modernity and evolution (1996: 192). This exploitation happened because of the uneven power relations between humans and more-than-human. Val Plumwood's famous narrative of being attacked by the saltwater crocodile changed her perception of this human-animal power dynamics and forced her to re-conceptualize what it means to be a prey. It made her reconsider the helplessness of more-than-humans in the modern world. This shifts the focus from human to non-human world and makes people more cognizant of the other species. This is the core essence of queer ecology as it decenters the anthropocentric tendencies and adds a new perspective to the nature – human relationship. The conventional relationship has been, as mentioned above, heteronormative and therefore, the space for queer desires has been absent. Desire within nature is situated only as a means of procreation. Queering decenters the retrosexual approach and allows queer desires to nurture that have been suppressed for a long time. This is because sexuality and sexual orientation have been grounded in the heterosexual biological discourses whose primary aim is procreation. Like, for instance, the dominant religions like Christianity recognizes a sexual act sinful if it's not for reproduction. The Catholic Church considers homosexual tendencies a "temptation" towards sin. Several religions teach abstinence because the idea of sexual activity for pleasure is considered a "sin". So, this conventional idea of repression of sexuality has been concretized by institutions of religion by grounding it in nature and categorizing the sexual acts as "natural" and "unnatural". The morality of sexual activity depends on its purposeless which is reproduction but if this is true, we must not forget that not all heterosexual couples are fertile and the queer people can have children by other means but still they aren't recognized as legitimate citizens like heterosexuals, but no one talks about this hypocrisy. These institutions condemn sexual activity solely for pleasure and consider it "immoral". Adrienne Rich protests against this ideology through her Poem 3 and condemns the conventional association of sexuality with procreation. She dissociates sexuality with reproduction by situating the homoerotic desire within the natural setting of winter. Winter is associated with infertility but is still a part of nature. It is enjoyed regardless of its barrenness, «the pleasures of winter» (1986:294) which alludes to the idea that pleasure is not limited to heterosexual relationships. The dominant discourses deemed homosexual relationships "barren" and therefore "unnatural" so by using the natural setting, Rich emphasizes the naturalness of the homosexual desire. This poem queers the nature of desire by replacing the heteronormative ideology of sex solely for reproduction with sex for pleasure. The poetry of Adrienne Rich (Your Native Land) and Minnie

Bruce Pratt (Crime Against Nature) reaffirm queer desires by situating them within the space of nature. Their poetry revisits the violence perpetrated by the heteronormative norms on nature and homosexuals and highlight centuries of trauma, ostracization and cultural silencing. They combine the environmental struggles with the sexual struggles and offer a new approach to queer ecology. In the collection Your Native Land, Your Life, Adrienne Rich explores how one's sexual orientation determines one's position within the public and natural (native) spaces. Both Pratt and Rich depict the historical marginalization of the "outcasts" and try to reclaim the "native" spaces.

In her poem "Yom Kippur 1984", Rich problematizes the concept of solitude in nature and highlights how it is a privilege only for those who fit into the social norms while those who are considered deviants are more vulnerable to being attacked in a such places because they are viewed as "unnatural" and them entering a natural terrain is almost like a taboo and hence, a punishable offense. This dislocates homosexuals from the natural environment. Rich, through her poetry, fights for their justice. «Solitude, O taboo, endangered species on the mist-struck spur of the mountain, I want a gun to defend you in the desert, on the deserted street, I want what I can't have: your elder sister, Justice […]» (Rich, 1986: 77).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the complex relationship between human beings and nature has been shaped by deeply ingrained cultural narratives, power structures, and rigid binaries that have long marginalized certain groups, particularly the queer community. The dominance of anthropocentrism has perpetuated an unjust hierarchy, positioning humanity at the center and relegating the natural world and non-conforming sexualities to the margins. By queering the traditional understanding of nature and sexuality, queer ecology challenges these binaries, advocating for a more inclusive, fluid, and complex relationship with both the environment and human identity. This paradigm shift seeks to break down the harmful structures that have historically silenced diverse voices, whether in the realm of sexuality or in the treatment of the environment. Through the works of poets like Minnie Bruce Pratt and Adrienne Rich, queer ecology not only defends the rights of the marginalized but also invites a reevaluation of how nature, culture, and identity intersect. Ultimately, queering our understanding of nature pushes us to question the legitimacy of dominant ideologies, urging us to create a more equitable world where all forms of life, human and non-human alike, can coexist without the violence of domination and exclusion.

Stringent measures have to be taken to amend the condition of the ecosystem. The first step would be to revisit and question the existing environmental policies and approach them from an unbiased perspective, especially from an ecocentric perspective rather than from an anthropocentric one. This will ensure to look beyond the binaries and open scope for discourses. Ensure that environmental boards, committees, and decision-making bodies are diverse and inclusive, incorporating LGBTQ+ voices, perspectives, and leadership. This can help in creating policies that reflect the intersection of environmental and social justice issues. By increasing the LGBTQ+ representation in environmental NGOs, government bodies, and local conservation groups, and collaborating with queer Indigenous groups or queer environmental, more culturally relevant conservation strategies can be developed. For instance, designing public green spaces (parks, nature reserves, etc.) with queer symbols for inclusivity and for creating environments where LGBTQ+ individuals can engage with nature without feeling unsafe or unwelcome. Integration of LGBTQ+ environmental activism into school curricula, emphasizing historical figures, movements, and contemporary queer activists working on climate change and conservation will help to create awareness. Promotion of LGBTQ+ role models in the environmental sector to inspire the next generation of activists and leaders will make the natural space more inclusive. Adaptation of indigenous queer conservation practices such as that in the Tupi-Guarani culture, where there is a concept of "gender fluidity" that informs their spiritual relationship to the land. The understanding of the natural world in this context is not based on a binary view but rather a more nuanced, relational understanding that sees all entities - human and non-human - as part of a living system. Another example is that of the Māori culture of New Zealand that recognizes the importance of both male and female elements in the world, and historically, the Māori had a more fluid understanding of gender. In their traditions, there are roles for whakawāhine (gender non-conforming individuals) and takatāpui (people of the same sex who may share emotional or physical intimacy), who have historically been involved in important environmental and cultural practices. Māori cosmology sees humans as part of a larger ecological framework that includes spiritual connections to the land, sea, and other natural forces. The concept of mana (spiritual power) is central to Māori environmental practices, and certain individuals - regardless of their gender - may be called upon to help steward sacred lands and ecosystems. The Māori practice of kaitiakitanga, which refers to guardianship and protection of the environment, is an integral aspect of their conservation. Gender-fluid individuals might be particularly charged with upholding these responsibilities due to their perceived connection to both male and female energies, which are thought to enable a balanced approach to environmental stewardship.

The other step can be the idea of formulating these policies in accordance with the geography of different countries because each country has a different demographic and ecosystems. The myriad range of ecosystems differ from each other as each one has a distinct structure and requirements. So, a unanimous policy for such diversity may not be a sensible step and perhaps a more subjective approach can be used to achieve the desired results. The policies can be molded according to the geography of the countries to work effectively on the areas that need our attention. This is because each part has a distinct geography which equates to distinct ecosystems. These ecosystems comprise communities and with communities comes the idea of culture. So, the policies that might be suitable for one community might not be suitable for the other community. For instance, let's assume that in a certain country, the government bans animal slaughter. Now, the community that is vegan and believes in animal worship is at peace but the community that isn't vegan and performs the ritual of animal sacrifice will feel discriminated against. So, is it possible to achieve a universal solution for environmental problems while being cognizant of the sentiments of the communities? Can queer ecology lead to the formulation of more inclusive policies by being mindful of the diversity? Will the subversion of heteronormative relations lead to practical solutions or will remain restricted to mere discourses? These are some questions that need to be discussed for one to have a comprehensive understanding of queer ecology.

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CHALLENGING NEOLIBERAL NORMATIVITIES: MAKING THE SPACE FOR QUEER URBAN THEORY AND RADICAL PRACTICES

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Abstract

Challenging neoliberal normativities: making the space for queer urban theory and radical practices

The essay explores the political and theoretical possibility offered by a conscious use of queer radical approaches in the analysis of urban space, reflecting on convergences and distrust between queer theory and critical urban studies. Reflections on the idea of the «inclusive» city and LGBT assimilationism highlight the contradictions that arise not only for sexual and gender minorities, but for a whole range of subjects who inhabit the symbolic and material margins of our cities. Finally, a model of the not-yet-here city is proposed, based on bell hooks' conceptualisation of the margin as a space of radical openness.

Keywords

Queer urban theory, urban neoliberalism, inclusion, bell hooks

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1. INTRODUCTION

This theoretical work explores the points of contact and friction between two critical theoretical positionings, namely critical urban theory and queer theories, reasoning about the causes of the formal absence of a queer urban theory and the potential of this union of gazes. These reflections arise from the curiosity inherent in any queer posture about the way the world is constructed, and from the desire to constantly question, disarticulate and fluidify established positions. The invitation is to consider the arbitrariness of power inherent in any relationship of production: of gender and sexuality, of theoretical knowledge, of academic positioning. Among the practices common to feminist and queer writing but not to urban theorists is that of situating oneself, and from this practice, to begin the contamination at the center of this paper, I also begin.

I am precariously part of the academic world as a PhD candidate in Italy, in a national context in which today there is open warfare on universities and explicitly on those who deal with gender, LGBT and queer studies[1]. I am pursuing a PhD in Urban Studies in Milan, in a city where it is impossible to live on a monthly stipend due to very high rents, and so I live elsewhere. Inside the academy I experience the fatigue, shared by many others, of being a queer person and of bringing this personal and political experience into my research: talking about queer among urban sociologists is not easy, especially in the resistant terms that this word embodies for me and which I will clarify while writing.

What I have found to unite queer theory and critical urban theory is a radical and politicised stance in the production of knowledge and a very practical, transformative desire to change things. The theory/practice question is essential to our discourse because understanding the ways in which knowledge is conceptualised, legitimised and used requires reflection on the epistemological assumptions that underpin it and its implications, which often need to be problematised. These certainly include the implicit hierarchy whereby theoretical production is seen as superior, more universal and abstract, while action is relegated to a secondary or instrumental role. This binary understanding reproduces power logics that devalue experiential and contextual knowledge (which is often the

[1] The current right-wing government has announced a manoeuvre of cuts that will reinforce university jobs' insecurity and endanger the very existence of some universities. In the same months, professors who deal explicitly with queer theories have received attacks from extreme conservative parties including formal investigations, as in the case of the gender and queer theories course held at the University of Sassari.

valuable knowledge of the margins) and the arbitrariness with which «theory» and «practice» are defined in opposition to each other.

Contemporary cities, containers of the complexities and contradictions of our world system, are and have been a privileged observation space for the existences and resistances of the LGBT+ population, which, looking at the West, has been able to proliferate and create communities in cities since the birth of the first homosexual movements (Hubbard, 2012). Nevertheless, adopting a queer gaze on the city today means, first of all, reflecting deeply on the fluctuating meaning (Bernini, 2015) that this term carries. It then means to understand it as a mode of "critique without subject" (Eng e Puar, 2020) capable of grasping those contradictions that today elude a binary understanding of space based on oppositions such as homo/heterosexual, oppression/resistance, urban/rural and theory/practice.

To date, despite consistent efforts by scholars to connect the respective fields of study (queer and urban), it would be improper to speak of queer urban theory as a coherent or systematised whole (Oswin, 2022). Indeed, queer and LGBT+ perspectives and research have remained marginal to the interests of the so-called new urban sociology. This discipline, in contrast to the dominant paradigms of mainstream urban knowledge - heavily dependent on the passive acceptance of state power and control, technocracy and market-driven urban development and planning - has, since the 1960s, enabled a vision of urban space as a product of power relations.

The possibility of space truly shaped on inhabitants' needs and desires, as in Lefebvrian descriptions of the right to the city, remains in this view something to struggle for, especially starting from the vindication of the less powerful actors that inhabit these neoliberal spaces. Dissident bodies such as non-heterosexual, trans, poor, migrant, racialized, disabled ones face everyday city conformations that do not meet their needs and desires and nevertheless have the possibility to form alliances and create creative forms of resistance. Even though the conflicted and layered nature of the urban has remained a staple of urban theorists, the question of sexualities, from which our reflection will start, continues to be overlooked. According to Seitz (2015) the main reason lays in the understanding of gender as sexuality as attribute of individual personality rather than the materialisation of a power structures.

Critical urban theory moves from the observation of social and economic inequalities and oppressions/exclusions in the context of neoliberal cities. What I am interested in emphasising is that critical urban theory is rooted in an analytical economic perspective of Marxist derivation;

although it evolves over time to include other dimensions (cultural, political, social) that reflect the complexities of the contemporary city, these fail to seriously take into account the discourse on power-systems governing gender and sexuality (Halberstam, 2005). Acknowledging the close interdependence of these oppressions, none of which are merely cultural or personal attributes, allows for the development of more precise analysis and the possibility of contestation from empowered critical positions.

In writing I will therefore attempt to inform these two different critical schools of their misunderstandings and the potentialities inherent in their mutual intersection. After exploring the meanings of queer and attributing a specific positioning to it, the link between dissident sexualities and the city will be explored and then a review of the observations made by queer positions on urban theory will be presented. In the concluding section, an original contribution towards a queer urban theory is proposed, discussing on the one hand the models for better cities developed by urban studies, and on the other hand the controversies related to the possible emergence of the «inclusive» city. Through the voice of bell hooks and the numerous spatial and geographical references of her critical/biographical and practical/theoretical works, the potential of the undesiderable and unprofitable model of the Marginal City will be explored.

2. EXPLORATIONS ON THE MEANING OF QUEER

Every time I come across a source that uses the term queer, the first exercise I must carry out is to understand which sense is attributed to the specific context I am facing. When it is not explicitly explained, it may take some time to grasp it, and thus grasp the positioning, or the aim, of the person writing. Publication time, or the geographical context from which one writes, also become precious elements of analysis that help test the water. *Queer* continues to exist in its rich but elusive nature, even for those who deal with it every day, in academic, political, personal ways.

In its present form, it remains a fluid term that requires redefinition with each use, though it is not entirely devoid of meaning or open to any interpretation; both as a theoretical concept and a political practice, queer is indeed firmly connected to a set of political stances. It not only opposes the discrimination of non-heterocisexual individuals (such as homolesbobitransphobia) but also critiques heteronormativity and other power structures like homonormativity[2] and homonationalism[3], highlighting contradictions and power structures that can emerge even inside LGBT+ communities and politics (Bernini, 2015).

Although often used as a term equivalent to the acronym LGBT+, queer refers then to a set of different concepts and practices that are not targeted when generally speaking of non-heterocisexual people; this difference is found both in the academic field, for example, with respect to the so-called LGBT+ studies or to certain approaches to gender studies, as well as in the activists' environment, where queer movements have pretty different claims compared to mainstream LGBT+ perspective.

To use a queer approach means today to complexifying the gaze, the analysis, the narratives beyond the binary of hetero/homosexuality. It means, for example, denouncing how dynamics of exclusion and hierarchy and normative models are produced even within the communities of sexual minorities, and reflecting on contradictions of the integration of minorized sexualities (and of their desire for assimilation) within unjust societies, with a specific reference to the neoliberal political-economic paradigm.

Looking to Western contexts, European countries are experiencing right-wing forces gaining ground and LGBT+ communities facing heightened repression[4]. In the United States, similar trends are emerging, with state legislatures enacting laws that limit LGBT+ rights, including bans on gender-affirming care for minors, restriction on legal recognition of gender identity, and block on trans people's updated ID documents. These worrying trends go hand in hand with what several scholars describe as a broader depoliticization of LGBT+ subjectivities—a shift that frames these identities and experiences as private matters rather than political ones, severing them from the social struggles and power dynamics in which they are embedded, resulting in conservative forces able to ostracize or manipulate them to their favor. Depoliticization of sexual difference also allowed to frame LGBT+ issues in terms of «inclusion» within existing social structures, which makes them appear less disruptive or threatening to the status quo. A clear example of this shift is seen in

[2] Homonormativity, as defined by Duggan (2002), refers to a neoliberal sexual politics that supports dominant heteronormative norms, promoting a depoliticized, consumerist gay culture centered on domesticity rather than challenging existing power structures.
[3] Homonationalism, as described by Puar (2007), involves using LGBT+ rights to reinforce national identity and project a progressive image, often through a Western lens, while masking underlying racism, xenophobia, or anti-immigrant sentiment.
[4] According to ILGA-Europe's annual review, LGBT+ organizations are increasingly being vilified as agents of foreign influence, and their rights to healthcare, visibility, and freedoms are being severely restricted to advance the political aims of conservative governments.

contemporary Pride events, which several scholars argue have moved away from their origins as radical acts of protest against oppression. Instead, commercialized celebrations take place in progressist urban spaces, reflecting and reinforcing this broader trend of depoliticization within LGBT+ population. Corporate sponsorships dominate many parades, often reducing LGBT+ politics to marketable aesthetics (Ahmed, 2004; Halberstam, 2011), while radical voices—particularly from trans, BIPOC, and working-class communities—are frequently sidelined in favor of more «respectable» representations both in European and non-Western cities (Butler, 1990; Spade, 2015).

When discussing queer, especially in theoretical and academic contexts, it is crucial not to detach it from the lived experiences, bodies, and communities that gave it meaning. Queer thought blurs the line between theory and practice more than other frameworks, due to its revolutionary origins. This connection is rooted in a collective historical memory that cannot be overlooked while engaging with definitions, uses, or intersections with other theories. Before «queer» became a post-identity theoretical category, it was embodied in the 1969 Stonewall riots by trans sex workers, butch lesbians, and racialized subjects with an explicitly anti-police stance. From these events emerged radical movements like STAR and the Gay Liberation Front—though they did not use the word «queer». It was only in 1990 that the activist group Queer Nation reclaimed the term to politicize their refusal of respectability, assimilation, and capitalist norms, echoing the radical spirit of Stonewall.

Today, identifying as queer can still express resistance to the depoliticization that characterizes much of mainstream LGBT+ politics, which often focuses on civil rights within existing institutions (such as marriage, the military, or the market). This tension raises ongoing questions: should «queer» be synonymous with non-normative, socially unacceptable ways of living and thinking? And if so, does this risk reinforcing a binary between «queer» and «mainstream»?

According to Puar (2007), to put queer into work means analyzing how LGBT+ rights intersect with nationalism, migration, and state power. In Western contexts like the U.S., certain non-heterosexual subjects—mainly white, cisgender, middle-class gay men and lesbians—are incorporated into national ideologies, while others, particularly LGBT+ Muslims, migrants, and people of color, are excluded and marked as threats. A key example is Israel's use of its progressive stance on LGBT+ rights to promote a liberal image—a strategy known as *pinkwashing*—which serves to distract from its occupation of Palestine and ongoing human rights violations.

The term queer can be therefore applied to explore far more than just the experiences of LGBT+ individuals. In this work the word is not used as an all-encompassing word for LGBT+ but as a distinction, a claim to a difference. This perspective mirrors the refusal to adhere to any already given normality (or normativity) both in considering sexuality and its political intersections, and in adopting research positioning and formulating research questions.

2.1 The political in queer: notes on the ambiguity of neutrality

Queer theory has alternately been accused of being too vague and therefore not applicable on analysis of «real» social problems or too explicitly linked to a desire for subversion of existing reality, and therefore ideological. As treated in this paper, queer theory is encompassed into that strand of transformative and positional sociology (De Nardis e Simone, 2023), understood as a social science capable of analyzing the present to determine a critical agenda necessary to imagine an alternative society. The aim is to bring out «contradictions where everyone sees normality and elements of regularity where everyone sees contradictions. In this sense it is, by its very nature, intimately subversive, hence positional»[5] (Ivi: 162). Rejection of this neutral perspective is something communal between queer and critical urban theory; however, the latter, although it moves from similar transformative desires, is not continually asked to legitimize itself within the categories of true knowledge.

More broadly, the positivist paradigm and its aftermath as the norm of scientific production is not only still very much present, but when it is the dominant approach, it produces forms of violence and exclusion of other approaches that refer to critical schools and paradigms. This violence prevents, among other things, «the development of epistemological creativity, aimed at social transformation rather than objectification of social phenomena» (Borghi, Bourcieur, Prieur, 2016: 165). Othered forms of knowledge are continually charged as ideological because they lack neutrality, objectivity, and distance, which are essential conditions for knowledge to be said to be scientific[6].

[5] My translation.

[6] Foucault himself teaches us that the production of knowledge is always a way of reproducing power; therefore, even the reduced space that in an academic context is reserved for theorizing coming from the margins becomes significant. Their possibility of becoming epistemologies, thus different ways of looking at reality, is constantly hindered and on the contrary one is accused of ideology.

In this sense, queer theory arises as a revindication of marginalization and is, as seen in the previous paragraph, inevitably linked to political struggle: it is precisely from the materiality of bodies that have suffered exclusion/violence that arises the urgency of theorizing one's condition and imagining new liberations. Thus, the distance between researcher and object of research becomes shorter than in other fields; nevertheless, as I will deepen in the following sections, the directions taken by contemporary queer theories range far beyond the sexual referent, making it an interesting tool for the investigation of reality capable of power-critique (and of the normativity it generates) in its infinite multiplications.

3. CITIES AND SEXUALITIES

In addressing the relationship between the city and sexuality, it is essential to problematize homogenizing approaches that treat the "city" as a monolithic and universal entity (Massey, 2005; Halberstam, 2005). LGBT+ urban experiences are deeply situated and variable, shaped by geographic, political, economic, and cultural factors that significantly differentiate cities in the Global North from those in the Global South (Oswin, 2014). Moreover, dynamics of marginality, LGBT+ visibility, and access to safe spaces can take on very different forms in peripheral or extra-metropolitan contexts, challenging the notion of the city as the sole site of LGBT+ possibility (Herring, 2010; Halberstam, 2005). It is therefore necessary to continuously question the concept of the city and anchor it in the specific research context, in order to avoid a flattening narrative that risks excluding experiences that do not conform to dominant urban models.

Generally speaking, urban theory has recognized cities as privileged spaces for observing the infinite manifestations of power, as they concentrate the economic, political and social processes that shape both everyday life and global flows. The connection between space and sexuality, and thus between space and power, has been abundantly explored inside the field of geography of sexualities[7]. The focus was especially on gay and lesbian subjects and spatial practices, with attention to urban contexts. The need to briefly retrace its path serves us to explore some of the key concepts and publications that should be kept in mind also in those understanding of space such as bound to economic structures highlighted by urban critical thinkers. Geographers of sexuality have in fact pointed

[7] When generally speaking of sexuality, the referent is both gender and sexual orientation.

out how another structure, heteronormativity, is at stake not only in the production of space itself, but also in that understanding of space that is foundational in much geographical theorizing.

In short, heteronormativity is the idea of mandatory heterosexuality; its strength comes by its naturalization that allows not to needed further explanation in front of something that is just the way it must be. As stated by Valentine,

> heterosexuality is clearly the dominant sexuality in most everyday environments, not just private spaces, with all interactions taking place between sexed actors. However, such is the strength of the assumption of the 'naturalness' of heterosexual hegemony, that most people are oblivious to the way it operates as a process of power relations in all spaces (1993:96).

While it is common opinion that public space is a priori a non-sexual space as sexuality is considered an aspect of life to be confined to the private sphere of existence, this idea can be dismantled with careful observation of our reality and life daily. Here the space seems not to be sexual because the manifestations of heterosexuality that occur there are taken for granted to the point of not being perceived as linked to sex. Heteronormativity is a ubiquitous element (Hubbard, 2008), capable of being simultaneously in every place, regardless of its public or private dimension: in urban areas, despite the development of gay areas or LGBT+ neighborhoods in some of them, and the peculiar role that the city has for non-heterocis people and communities[8], feelings of fear, shame, invisibilization, out-of-place syndrome (Borghi, 2020) continue to be shared experiences between LGBT+ urban population, with significant differences based on geographical positioning.

The exploration of spatialized dimension of sexual subjects was at first conducted around non-heterosexuals lives and desires, namely gay and lesbian ones. The first edited collection explicitly addressing the relationship between sexuality and space, *Mapping Desire*, was published in 1995 edited by Bell and Valentine, bringing geographers into dialogue with those in other disciplines working on LGBT+ identities, queer theory and the cultural politics of sexuality. First analytical attention was given here to physical spaces that inside city-space were characterized by presence of gay and lesbian population, giving birth to a research trend around gay villages[9]. With later growing sophistication of how

[8] See i.g. Ghaziani, (2015).

[9] The fame enjoyed by this research topic has then experienced its relative decline as both an empirical and theoretical concern, due to a queer understanding of sexuality and an increasing sophistication in the way geographers handle place and scale.

geographers handle place and scale and the emergences of prior invisibilized sexualities[10], the focus of research shifted soon to wider aspects regarding LGBT+ population.

Geographers recognized city space as having a peculiar role in the emergence, existence and resistance of sexual minorities, since it offered both the possibility of freedom and anonymity and the one to create communities and organize in large numbers. Cities have therefore represented the privileged place of investigation in research on the geography of sexualities, to the point that it would be possible to speak of *urban geography of sexualities*[11], although research has expanded beyond this binary view of LGBT+ life and contraposition urban/rural, criticizing *metronormativity* and producing some interesting inquiries into life beyond the metropolitan center (e.g. Bain, Podmore, 2020). Urban space is then not only intended as the backdrop against which LGBT+ life and more generally sexual relations develop, but also has an active agent in shaping sexualities, encouraging some expressions and repressing other ones (Hubbard, 2012). This perspective allowed the multiplication of the directions of research on broader discourses on sexuality beyond LGBT+ spaces.
According to Oswin and Seitz,

> cities are central sites for the regulation of and resistance to notions of sexual propriety and impropriety, as sexuality is intertwined with numerous aspects of urban life, from reproduction and population growth to security and the separation of zones of ''vice'' from respectable neighborhoods to the emergence of spaces for LGBTQ communities and social movement (2017:21)

For sure geographers of sexualities have attested the mutual influence that space and sexualities have on each other, together with the importance of geographical contextualization, since considering the specificity of different cities (or non-urban environments) allows practices and identities not to be subjected to violent abstraction. In speaking of non-conforming gender and sexualities, geographers have quite often used the word queer as a synonym for LGBT+ referring to groups of population inhabiting spaces in opposition/transgression of the heterosexual one. In the discipline the equation of queer space with gay and lesbian space remained

[10] Dissident sexualities were firstly recognized as gay and lesbian, with the tendency to keep in the closet bisexual and transgender experiences, as well as the non-heterosexual nor cisgender experiences of racialized people, or of LGBT+ people with less acceptable lifestyles.
[11] Rural and small-town LGBT+ life is generally mythologized as sad and lonely, or else rural LGBT+ people might be thought of as "stuck" in a place that they would leave if they only could.

evident: nevertheless, to adopt a queer approach to space can refer to something different (Oswin, 2008).

To explicitly rely on queer theories offers the opportunity to go beyond binary understandings of reality; speaking in terms of heterosexual vs. homosexual or oppression vs. resistance oppositions creates the «sort of mapping that poststructuralist queer theory emerged to write against» (pp.89) and it clarifies how the term queer was often genuinely misused as a generic synonym for non-heterocisexual subjects.

3.1 It is possible to speak about queer urban theory?

Geography of sexualities do not necessary imply a queer approach. The latter is in fact a critical vision, challenging normativities and binary conclusions, focusing on instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations. Analyses carried out by critical urban theory also explicitly position themselves in opposition to systems of domination, in particular the capitalist system and its spatialization: in the following, we will outline some of the missing points of contact between these two critical perspectives, tracing the observations of some queer scholars with regard to urban sociology.

To reflect on the (non-)existence of queer urban theory as a formalized field of study, Oswin and Seitz explored within the beginnings of the discipline and then in its contemporary characterizations, firstly by analyzing the visions on homosexuality in the context of the Chicago school, and subsequently investigating the reluctance of the so-called critical urban theory in seriously consider sexuality among its research topics. While, as we examined previously, a queer approach to space do not imply necessarily the centrality of the LGBT+ subject, the oversight of non-normative sexualities in the urban discipline also influenced the possibilities of reception and integration of the queer approach, which had almost no explicit influence within urban studies.

Despite the engagement of different scholars to connect the two fields, is not possible to speak about queer urban theory as a systematized body of theorization (Oswin, 2022). «Queer urban theory is simply not a sanctioned scholarly subfield» (Ivi:1) and not because of its lacking usefulness; instead, the field of sexuality, when considered as an order that give shape to individual and societal ways of living, a dense point where power relations can be observed – understanding on which Foucault has sufficiently elaborated - became a crucial angle from where conducting sociological analysis, with different perspectives from specific geographical contexts and different scales. Different scholars have in fact applicate a queer, disrupting gaze on urban phenomena, facing the struggle to be recognized in a corpus of theorization that comes from a straight, male cisgender, Western/white perspective that inevitably excluded marginal visions and persistently confined queer one such as an out of place. «A residue, an elision, a shadowy presence» (Ivi:2); nonetheless, queer has remained a resistant presence.

Oswin (2022) critiques early urban sociology from the Chicago School, arguing that the city was not just studied as a «social laboratory» but actively produced as one. In this framework, addressing social issues meant identifying and correcting perceived anomalies, excluding deviant subjectivities—such as women, homosexuals, and other marginalized groups—who were dismissed as «social junk» and denied intellectual or theoretical legitimacy within the liberal urban order. A similar analysis was applied to racialized population. Later, with a not so gentle reappropriation of space, it was from the consciousness of these specific oppressions and exclusion that queer desires and practices arrived to produce knowledge, despite the persistency of asymmetric power distribution. The point became then to enhance the repressed difference and from this specific positionality produce generative ideas and perspectives.

Some decades later, with the birth of the so called new urban sociology, the possibility to think about gender and sexuality expanded inside the field; nevertheless, the preexisting power-relationships, that we can generically refer to as heteronormativity and sexism, were left almost untouched. When speaking of critical urban theory, the reference goes mainly to the writing of Lefebvre, Harvey, Castells, Marcuse and their fellows, that from the late 60s, began to produce a new critical, or radical, way of looking at the city. In the context of political ferment inside the space of knowledge that characterized that period - made of social mass mobilization igniting in schools and universities - the political positioning of the academic body ceased to be a taboo, and indeed took shape as an essential attribute: this new and explicitly politicized perspective also contaminated the way of looking at the urban environment (Rossi, 2018).

Critical urban theory, emerging in contrast to traditional models like the Chicago School and technocratic or neoliberal approaches, challenges dominant urban paradigms that prioritize state control, market efficiency, and bureaucratic rationality (Brenner, 2009). Rejecting fixed disciplinary boundaries and the idea of cities as neutral outcomes of social or economic laws, it instead emphasizes the political, contested, and socially constructed nature of urban spaces, highlighting cities as both products and arenas of power relations and resistance.

A conflictual stance is taken not only toward established urban knowledge but also towards current urban structures; the strong imaginative and generative position held in radical concept such as the right to the city support the possibility of a different, more democratic, socially equitable, and sustainable approach to urban development is realizable and to some extent already existing inside the urban contemporaneity. Despite the prevailing endeavor of institutional systems, practices, and ideologies, critical urban theory is a call for subverting reality: recalling another famous Lefebvre's position, his emphasis on the *possible* and the importance he attached to extending and realizing it through collective struggle. In its essence critical urban theory encompasses the examination of ideology, including socio-scientific ideologies, as well as the analysis of power dynamics, inequality, injustice, and exploitation both within individual cities and across urban areas.

Between the power dynamics considered by past and contemporary critics of urban processes, sexuality discourses were and are not considered as something very significant. The main reason for this neglect can be traced in the lack of recognition of sexuality as a system of power, as the materialization of a structure strongly intertwined with the economic one, very dear to those urban theorists that highlighted the centrality of capital to the politics of the city.

Beyond the economic dimension, seen by urban theorists as the number one driver of oppression and inequality in the urban environment[12], queer approaches invite to look at the mutually constitutive oppressive character of gender, sexuality, class and race structures and at the unexpected results that these intersections can lead to[13].

Seitz (2015) offered an example in analyzing Marcuse (2012) understanding of sexuality in his recent exploration of the right to the city, where he reflects on the question of who we are speaking about when we use this concept. His neat distinction between those that are excluded in a «cultural sense», referring to race, ethnicity, gender and lifestyle but included in an «economic sense» perfectly reflects the lack of an integrated vision, in this case relying on the distinction of the cultural and the material as separate and parallel rather than interdependent and complicit.

[12] The reference eluded the city environment, expanding to all those places that, although not cities, are strongly related and subordinated to these agglomerations of political-economic power with greater evidence since the advent of globalization.
[13] The intersectional approach has been theorized and put into work with specific focuses by different feminist traditions such as materialist feminism (i.g. Silvia Federici, Nancy Fraser), French 1970s lesbian feminism (i.g. Monique Wittig), black and Afro-American feminism (i.g. Angela Davis, Kimberle Crenshaw, bell hooks) and decolonial feminism (i.g. Maria Lugones, Gloria Anzaldùa, Chandra Mohanty).

Trans theorist Jack Halberstam (2005) similarly argued on the deficiency of canonical work on «postmodern geography» (referring to the renowed names of Soja, Jameson, Harvey) in including sexuality as a category of analysis. The motivation lied, according to him, in considering the role of desire and the way in which neo-Marxists have considered it as part of a ludic bodily politics that should be separated from the proper work of activism. This fundamental exclusion, which relegated sexuality to the body/local/personal and framed class/global/political as the central perspective, has made it difficult to integrate questions of sexuality and space into wider debates on globalization and transnational capitalism (pp.16). Apparently, it is «normativity», as it has been theorised within feminist, LGBT+, queer studies, the big concept missing in postmodern geography within the Marxist tradition, although that of capitalist realism is also a suffocating normativity.

Although it is not possible to speak of *queer urban theory*, the reflections collected here highlight that the relationship between hetero-cis-normativity and economic oppression is better understood when analyzed in its complicit and complexity, insisting on how these forms of violence interrelate and mutually shape each (Seitz, 2015).

4. CHALLENGING THE «INCLUSIVE» CITY NARRATIVE

To put into work our theoretical reflection we will now consider some issues linked to contemporary urban environments. Inclusion and diversity, initially understood as tools to promote equity and social justice, are now often co-opted by the neo-liberal model, turning into depoliticised practices functional to market interests. This process, analysed by various scholars and theorists, highlights how neoliberalism has integrated progressive discourses to strengthen its legitimacy, without necessarily challenging the power structures that produce inequalities. Similar processes also take place in the contest of neoliberal cities. Between urban elites, models for better cities emerged, based on generic ideals of progress, development, and well-being; they have often been presented as universal ones and a goal towards which every world city should strive, crystallising in the literature and known to both scholars and the wider public, since they have seen attempts at practical application.

I refer to those models that have appeared since the beginning of the 21st century, such as the sustainable city, the creative city, the slow city, the resilient city and, more recently, the smart city, which promises to optimise urban life through advanced technologies, big data and automation. The models, although seemingly progressist, are built on assumptions that end up disregarding or even reinforcing inequalities; critiques arises around technocentrism and inacessibility to advanced technologies for the majority of the population, structural differences between rich neighbourhoods and peripheries that are not taken into account, the issue of green capitalism, i.e. an idea of environmental sustainability in which people's needs are always subordinated to economic profits and market dynamics, and so on. The dominant urban models are also anchored in a vision of urban development that insists on an ideal of linear and universal progress. These approaches implicitly assume that the ideal city is a predefined goal, a technical and normative outcome to be pursued through design and management solutions. However, such models often mask structural inequalities, legitimising the city-system as a site of reproduction of injustice, exploitation and control (Vanolo, 2014).

Although it has not emerged as an urban development paradigm with definite contours, the idea of the «inclusive» city does not come as a surprise to those concerned with cities today. Talking about inclusivity immediately recall to mind issues that minorized communities have to face in the context of a given normality: as a lower number of people, characterized by a communal element that is source of discrimination, or exclusion, the need to be treated as a «normal» member of the wider community became the objective. As we saw, queer approach strongly challenges not only the usefulness of being integrated in a disputable normality, but the proper idea of normality and its desirability: it's the revindication of difference, of a specific marginal positionality that base and fuel the desire for socio-political change. In this sense, the idea of inclusion, and in application to urban oppression the one of «inclusive» cities can be strongly questioned, since alignments of liberal LGBT+ political strategies with urban modes of governance are often inseparable from neoliberal, racist, nationalist, and militarist logics (Oswin, 2015).

One of the most famous mainstream ideas around non normative sexualities and their role in the city, namely the *gay index* elaborated by Florida, perfectly highlights this kind of neoliberal contradictions. In *The rise of the creative class* (2002) attributes to LGBT+ people the ability to contribute to developing the cultural economy of the city. The essay revolves around the role that a specific group of people, the creative class, would have in the production of value in cities: this group would have emerged since the 1970s, and would tend to have similar characteristics, attitudes and tastes. The creative class, explicitly identified as a means to increase urban economic growth, would be attracted to cities where the level of talent, tolerance and technology is higher; by tolerance is meant openness and respect for the resulting sexual diversity in a diverse and progressive environment, measured by the gay index.

This highly influential - but also widely criticized - urban marketing strategy continues to tell us something about the exploitation that urban elites can make of sexual diversity (and diversity in general): more than twenty years after the publication of Florida, the possibility of selling difference has become a reality far beyond urban politics and consists of all those practices that today are encapsulated under the name of rainbow-washing.

Other analysis, such as the theory of «rainbow cities» (Corbisiero, Monaco, 2017) developed within the Italian context are rooted in the model of urban inclusiveness, emphasizing the best practices in city governance. However, while the inclusion indicators predominantly focus on individual aspects of LGBT lives, the challenge remains in capturing complexities of multi-layered identities' urban experiences and not to create city rankings that risk reinforcing the neoliberal drive for urban competitiveness. In this regard, the case of Milan is particularly emblematic. While highly visible in the media and prominent within «rainbow narratives», the city's approach to diversity mainstreaming reflects a strong tendency toward neoliberal inclusion, which prioritizes spaces for consumption, corporate sponsorships, and diversity branding. However, behind this facade of openness, genuinely accessible and politicized spaces for more precarious subjectivities, such as trans people, migrants, or sex workers, are scarce and frequently ostracized from local institutions.

Today, cities have become a crucial battleground for advancing sexual equity with a new strength, since their success and their competitiveness are firmly linked to their ability to be gay-friendly (Oswin, 2002). The cooptation and commodification of historical memories for the LGBT+ communities – now transformed in big events in big cities – like Pride parades, are not only sponsored by big companies that contribute to a depolitization of the celebration but also used by urban government to increase the city attractiveness for tourists and investors (Rottenberg, 2018). From here it became important to investigate the local ways of being «inclusive» cities for sexual minorities and to notice which subjectivities or social groups can instead being erased or damaged from those sexual politics is a queer question, able to go beyond homo/hetero, cultural/material, inclusion/exclusion binaries and to focus our attention beyond the LGBT+ subject, which identity can be often crossed by other experiences of marginalization. Referring again to the Italian context, Bologna stands out as an interesting case of convergence between institutional and grassroots activism. The city is often cited as one of the most advanced Italian cities in terms of LGBT+ policies, thanks to its strong associative fabric[14] and the interaction between institutions and autonomous spaces, which has allowed for a coexistence of recognition and radical critique, resulting, for example, in the organization of both institutional and radical pride united under the name of Rivolta Pride.

4.1 The marginal city: a decentered perspective for urban future

In this conclusive paragraph I would like to propose a city model that move in the not-yet here queer urban theory direction; the idea of queer as not-yet-here is built upon Muñoz (2009) response to the delusional here and now opposed to the potentiality or concrete possibility for another world (the *queer*). To draw the perimeters of this potential city I will use some of bell hooks' ideas around the margins.

First of all, existing urban and geographical scholarship on the «marginal city» deals with cities (or urban spaces within cities) that are structurally excluded, peripheral, or stigmatized, using the concept to indicate an undesirable condition that needs to be resolved or brought to normality (e.g. Waquant, 2008). Marginality can be spatial, social, economic, and most of the time, these layers intertwine with each other.

While marginality often denotes exclusion, marginal spaces are also spaces of resilience and resistance, and from this perspective, I will continue my discussion. The aim is not to romanticize a difficult condition, as will be seen, but to reclaim dignity, power, and creativity outside of normative frameworks.

Moreover, the choice to contaminate critical urban theorisations with a Black vision of space is meant to be a challenge to a field whose main theorists are heterosexual white men and whose positioning, although critical of oppressive political-economic structures, are unable to integrate perspectives from embodied experiences and «other» epistemologies. Oswin, while referring to the geographical discipline, emphasises the harmful consequences of the erasure of «othered» subjectivities and visions due to «centuries of white supremacist heteropatriarchal grounding and a failure of the collective critical geographical imagination» (2020: 1). She invites us to create solidarities between «othered» subjectivities and continue to build scholarship that inhabits an epistemological elsewhere: so I'm doing.

[14] Between others the MIT (trans identities movement) activist group, the Cassero LGBT+ community and cultural center, the MalaConsilia, a self-organized alternative healthcare center for LGBT+ people.

bell hooks radical Black feminist theorising, while not strictly geographical, or urban, continually seeks to develop its sense of place, and can teach us much - as geographers, as sociologists, as urban theorists, and as queer people embedded in spaces of heteronormativity. For the author, the sense of place is closely linked to identity, belonging and collective memory and is explored in her work not only as a geographical space, but as a terrain of emotional and relational connections. In this interpretation of place, which is anything but romanticising or abstract, hooks makes the capitalist and colonial system responsible of alienating, individualizing and interrupting relationships of care and connection with the land and community[15].

What I want to put into work in my contribution is hooks' image of the margin, which is central to her work, her worldview and her lifelong political struggle. In the essay *CHOOSING THE MARGIN AS A SPACE OF RADICAL OPENNESS*, she describes margin and marginality as

> a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and way one lives (…) not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose- to give up or surrender as part of moving into the centre – but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds (1989:20).

The margin is thus oppressive when it represents social, economic and cultural exclusion, but becomes radically powerful when it is chosen as a place from which to observe, criticise and imagine alternatives to the dominant centre. In this sense, the margin is not just a condition to be endured but can be transformed into a strategic position of resistance and power. hooks argues that the margin is a place of radical openness, where new perspectives are created, solidarities among the oppressed are developed and narratives are constructed that challenge hegemonic power.

The margin is not an easy space: it is a profoundly complex dimension, and finding a home there is difficult but essential. To navigate it with less struggle, building a community is crucial – a potentially vast community, as power has relegated countless people to the margins. According to bell hooks, understanding marginality as both a position and a site of resistance is vital for the oppressed, exploited, and colonized. This

[15] In the city, in bell hooks' experience as a racialized child and woman, «people (...) often ridiculed the desire to live in a community, because what they loved about the city was precisely the anonymity, not knowing anything about anyone and therefore not feeling responsible for anything» (2023:30)

understanding prevents them from believing there are no alternatives and falling into the trap of absolute skepticism (Ivi: 21).

Within contemporary cities, the margins/centre dichotomy can relate to the materiality of city structure, but especially for subjectivities that cannot take part in the construction of a space tailored to their needs and desires. For them, I imagined a queer and paradoxical alternative: the Marginal City. Here, the point is not to integrate marginality, queerness, divergence, and undesirability into the dominant system, but of reversing the paradigm, making the margin the perspective of urban life, one that is no longer built around profit opportunities nor based on reassuring desires of assimilation.

I have imagined five points that would underpin the Marginal City:

- Urban planning and design start from the needs, desires and knowledges of excluded communities. This means actively involving LGBT+ people, women, migrants, disabled and racialised bodies, precarious workers and other categories traditionally not involved in decision-making processes. The space of the margins is a crowded space and can become a space of intersectional alliances and community based on a plurality of experiences.
- The Marginal City is configured as a decentralised ecosystem that values autonomy and cooperation; space production is based on collective and participatory practices that can go into the directions of management of empty spaces, self-management of resources, alternative economies and the creation of solidarity networks: the city is nourished by narratives, visions and practices that emerge from below.
- Public spaces are designed to encourage encounters, community building and mutual support that privilege human relationships, solidarity and move towards collective autonomy. The Marginal City is not pre-defined by an aesthetic of progress or technological efficiency, but by responding to the concrete needs of marginalized subjectivities and their political creativity. The Marginal City is also a city of desire, which does not reduce marginal subjectivities to mere survival, but enhances their aspirations and potentials: desire is neither individualistic nor consumerist, but collective and transformative. The needs of the inhabitants of the Marginal City - home, affection, creativity - are met through relationships of reciprocity and solidarity.
- Marginal City celebrates marginal cultures, recognising them as sources of innovation, resistance and creativity: here public spaces

become sites of artistic and democratic political expression.
- In contrast to the hustle and bustle of the neoliberal city, Marginal City adopts a temporality that prioritises well-being and long-term sustainability. This implies spaces for slowness, reflection and mutual care.

The Marginal City is a difficult model to define in universalistic terms, as such models are created by theorists, policy makers and urban elites who tend to create homogeneous and thus partial narratives of cities. Those living on the margins are not interested in constructing universal models, but rather in developing local practices of resistance already taking the form of small alternative experience and daily experimentation. These practices, while often invisibilized in academic and political discourses, offer unique visions that challenge dominant structures and propose concrete alternatives to the centralist vision of the city. It is crucial that these experiences, however fragmented, gain more space in the debate, contaminating the collective consciousness and pushing towards a more democratic and complex understanding of urban spaces. In this way, the Marginal City can be not just a theoretical concept, but a practice made up of the many marginalized experiences that already inhabit our cities.

In the Marginal City, there is no room for controversial events like the World Pride, which takes place annually in global cities, with heavy corporate sponsorship and increased policing. These events tend to replicate Western-centric, commodified LGBT+ politics, often sidelining or ignoring local struggles – and in some cases, even penalizing local inhabitants. The aim is not to impose a universal LGBT+ experience, especially one that fails to resonate with cities in the Global South or obscures other forms of state control and violence. For instance, Tel Aviv Pride has increasingly been criticized for pinkwashing and for exploiting LGBT+ rights to project a progressive image that is complicit in the ongoing Israeli genocide against Palestinians. Instead of advancing liberation for every oppressed subject, including the LGBT+ Palestinian population, such events further promote a sanitized, neoliberal LGBT+ image tied to tourism and consumerism, while also attempting to normalize colonization.

Differently, concrete practices of queer resistance in contemporary urban territories move closer to the utopia of the Marginal City, rejecting the idea of inclusion that comes at the expense of other subjectivities.[16] A clear example of this is the Berlin Internationalist Queer Pride, a march deliberately organized as an alternative to the official CSD parade. Unlike

[16] These same queer movements often rejected the use of the term inclusion, conscious of its political ambiguity and its tendency towards neoliberal assimilation.

the mainstream event, it consistently aligns itself with anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles, expressing explicit solidarity with Palestinian, Kurdish, and Iranian liberation movements between others. This urban practice reaffirms – through the occupation of public space – a vision of queerness rooted not in assimilation or visibility alone, but in a global justice consciousness.

Also in the Italian context different queer radical movements such as PRiot Pride in Rome, Free(k) Pride in Torino, Marciona in Milano have been able to show solidarity with local urban struggles, creating small islands of uncompromising intersectionality. Among these struggles is e.g. the opposition to migration detention centers (CPRs), which have violently impacted on the lives of migrant and poor urban subjects, while also producing necropolitical zones within our seemingly pacified cities. Far from being exceptions, CPRs are embedded within the urban fabric of our «pacified» cities, exposing the racialized and classed infrastructures of control that underlie securitized urbanism. In this context, queer and intersectional political practices that align with local struggles - against deportation, racial profiling, and housing precarity -reclaim the city as a space of dissidence rather than assimilation.

It is precisely here that the image of the «rainbow city» or the «inclusive city», often celebrated as a space of diversity and peaceful coexistence, begins to fall apart. In its place emerges the possibility of the Marginal City as a site of genuine solidarity, built not on sanitized symbols of tolerance but on the material needs, struggles, and collective power of the oppressed. Rather than striving for inclusion into existing structures, this city reimagines belonging through resistance, care, and radical reconfiguration of urban life from below.

CONCLUSION

This contribution aimed to reflect on the possibilities offered by the intersection of two critical modes of knowledge production and their way of engaging in transformative practices, moving towards a queer urban theory that is not-yet-here. What is definitely here is capitalism ability to absorb the idea of difference and make it profitable, to call it diversity and make it a variable of attractiveness and competitiveness for our cities, in manifestations that demand our attention and that can be grasped only with the consciousness of the interdependence of systems of power. In this sense, «inclusion» strategies that do not truly challenge injustices and inequalities and that often, when they refer to the LGBT+

population, result in the oppression of other minority subjectivities, have a local urban materialisations.

The lack of attention of these intersected modes of oppression characterized almost all urban theorization, resulting in static modes of analyzing urban life and urban phenomena inside the academic environment. To queer the perspective on urban neoliberalism means then not just to map and consider LGBT+ lives inside the urban space but to exceed the non-heterocis subject experience and target the needs of marginal inhabitants. In this direction the impossible, counter-intuitive «model» developed around bell hooks marginality and imagined as the Marginal City, with a series of foundational principles that revolve around inhabitants' needs, emphasize potentiality for a different world and give spaces to the already-existent alternatives. The Marginal City redefines urban space, not integrating marginality into the mainstream, but making the margin the perspective of urban life, envisioning a place that resists both profit-driven and assimilationist logics.

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THE IMPACT OF QUEER CULTURE IN GENDER AFFIRMATION PATHWAYS: THE CASE OF "DESISTERS"

di Marianna Coppola and Giuseppe Masullo [*]

Abstract

The gender transition path is often considered a process of self-determination that mainly involves the psychological and intrapsychic aspects of an individual, leaving social and contextual issues, often considered of lesser importance, in the background.
This paper aims to reflect on this 'controversial' issue through the analysis of a case of a transgender desister and, in particular, to highlight the reasons behind the decision to 'interrupt' the transition process once it has begun, with the aim of offering a perspective that does not refer only to psychological variables but, on the contrary, considers the social and cultural aspects involved.

Keywords

LGBTQIA+ community, Queer Theory, Transgender people, non-binary, desister.

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1. INTRODUCTION[1]

Of the diverse LGBTQ+ world, transgender and nonbinary people are the ones who express a greater need for social recognition, through which they obtain positive or negative feedback with respect to the successful process of gender transition and affirmation. Recent research (Coppola and Masullo, 2024) has pointed out how the "other than self" (both internal and external to the LGBTQ+ community) constitutes a fundamental "mirror" through which transgender people gather useful information regarding their degree of passing for normal, that is, their ability to be recognized with their chosen gender, rather than the one assigned at birth. Much of the stigmatization processes are in fact related to the ability of transgender people to "perform" their chosen gender, (Butler, 2004) although not infrequently deferring to an "essentialist" and "heteronormative" meaning of this (Coppola and Masullo, 2023).

The path of gender transition is often regarded as a process of self-determination that primarily invests the psychological and intrapsychic aspects of an individual, leaving social and contextual issues, often considered of lesser importance, as secondary. Recent studies, on the other hand, have pointed out, how this process of identity redefinition begins as a personal desire and aspiration that, as it is made explicit in the individual's micro-systems of life, evolves into a process in which the transgender person is necessarily called upon to redefine his or her social identity and repositioning within social and relational dynamics (Scandurra et al., 2018; Selkie et al., 2020; Vandenbussche et al. 2021). Ultimately, the gender transition path does not occur within a "social vacuum," but on the contrary, life contexts and social support play an important role in defining one's self, both in the stages of identity exploration and in the later stages of affirmation and social repositioning of the individual with the new identity set-up (Punziano, Coppola, Avellino, 2022)

In the current scientific debate, the phenomenon of desisters, i.e., people who, despite having obtained a diagnosis of gender incongruence and authorization to take health and medical actions (such as, for example, hormone replacement therapy), do not continue or end the gender transition path, has been of particular interest. It emerges, that about 15 percent of people who

[1] While this paper results from a conjoined effort, in the final draft, Coppola Marianna wrote sections: 2 The path of gender affirmation in Italy: legal, cultural and medical aspects; 4. Sexual normativity, trans-normativity, and the Checkpoint Charlie effect; 5.1. The reconstruction of Sara's story; 5.2. Analysis of the interview: inside the choice to interrupt the process of gender affirmation. Giuseppe Masullo wrote sections: 1. Introduction; 3. The phenomenon of desisting: disrupting the path of gender affirmation; 5. Methodological aspects; 6. Concluding reflections: the impact of queer culture in gender affirmation protocols.

begin psychological support or obtain authorization for hormone therapy, do not transition into the later stages of the path.

The phenomenon of desisters is experienced by professionals who deal with gender transition pathways as a bug in the evaluative, diagnostic system that prescribes as a consequence of the finding of gender incongruence a presumed need to affirm the chosen gender, most often conceived in a binary perspective. In particular, the phenomenon of desisters is now often called into question in the debate inherent in the age at which it is possible (as well as necessary) to begin a gender transition process, given that more and more of those requesting it are adolescent boys and girls.

The present work aims to reflect on this "controversial" issue through the analysis of a case of a transgender person desister and in particular wants to highlight the reasons behind the choice to "interrupt" the transition process once it has begun, with the aim of offering a perspective that refers not only to psychological variables, but on the contrary considering those social and cultural aspects that are implicated in it. As will be seen from the results of this pilot study, desisting, while it may be conceived by practitioners as an underlying "inconsistency" of transgender people (and thus regarded as an error in assessing a person's needs), on the other hand, offers the possibility of questioning an evaluative, diagnostic, clinical, and legal system that has regarded "completion" of the gender transition path as a "given for granted," and not as a process that can lead to different outcomes. On the contrary, the analysis from the history of desisting examined here leads to offer a much more complex view of the process of transition, which, as will be seen, is not infrequently characterized by doubts and uncertainties, attributable not only to psychological aspects, but also cultural, social and political dimensions and positioning. Experiencing one's chosen gender in different life contexts means relating to a set of social expectations concerning gender roles themselves, the difficulties of which are only rarely considered by those involved in assessing the transition process in psychological, clinical and legal terms.

The concerns that health professionals express today in taking care of desisted people, and even more so those who are nonbinary and/or queer, could therefore highlight the weaknesses of an assessment system that sees gender incongruence as a stable and definitive process, and not, on the contrary, a system that must adapt to the psychological and social and cultural needs of individuals. One does not fail to observe that recently the demands posed particularly by younger people, ill-fit with a "rigid" vision underlying the pathways provided by the current health care system, which not infrequently affirm gender binarism as the final outcome. In particular, the emergence of and adherence to queer culture, which is so prevalent among young people and those who are militant today, prompts consideration of how the demand for transition in some cases is wedded to the need (political and identity-based) to experience oneself, including by challenging current gender cages, and those present in the current system of taking care of transgender people. The needs posed by non-binary people, also lead to a review of the terminological correctness of concepts such as that of transition, which, unless otherwise indicated, should be replaced by that of "gender affirmation," since not only does this allow for the plurality of identity arrangements that are included under the umbrella term "non-binary," but of a process that by implying among other things forms of experimentation cannot but include among the possible outcomes also a break or rethinking.

The first part of the contribution will present the legal and psychodiagnostic aspects of the gender affirmation path in Italy that have contributed to the consolidation of the single outcome evaluative conception of the gender affirmation path, which has favored the installation in the scientific community of the idea that the phenomenon of desisting is to be interpreted as an "error of the evaluative system." The latter will be distinguished from the condition of half-transitioners, that is, those who like desisters interrupt the transition process, but with the only difference being that what affects them here are purely social obstacles interposed between a strong desire to affirm the chosen gender and the need not to sever with some affectively significant ties that oppose this intent (ex-partner cis, children, etc.).

In the second part, through the exposition of a case study of desisting, an attempt will be made to propose a multi-exit interpretative model of the gender affirmation path, which attempts to go beyond a "normative" view of the process itself in order to include different bio-psycho-social trajectories, of which desisting might be only one possible expression.

2. THE PATH OF GENDER AFFIRMATION IN ITALY: LEGAL, CULTURAL AND MEDICAL ASPECTS

The legal device that regulates in Italy the path of gender affirmation is governed by Law No. 164 of April 14, 1982, titled "Norms for Surgical Sex Reassignment," which for more than 40 years has been the only passage in the Civil Code that prescribes according to legal terms "gender transition" in the country. Until April 1982, therefore, intervening on one's body or gender identity (such as changing one's name and rectifying the sex assigned at birth) was considered illegal in Italy.

The social, cultural and legal path that led in the spring of 1982 to the passage of a law was the outcome of a season of movements that insisted on the need to heal situations that had already been put in place but were not legally recognized and dealt with from a social and cultural and legal standpoint.

Among these events was the 1979 occupation of Milan's Idroscalo by a group of transgender women activists. Also, during this period, the first Italian activist movement for the rights of transgender people, known by the acronym MIT (Movimento Italiano Transessuali), was born in Bologna, Italy, which fought for the possibility of allowing a process for gender reassignment in Italy as well. The bill, promoted by MIT, met the interest of the Radical Party, particularly in the figure of Senator Nilde Jotti, who at the time of the events was President of the Chamber of Deputies. The debate among the different political forces of the time arrived at a proposal that established the possibility of being able to undertake a path of gender affirmation, that is, of an adjustment of the physical, and social as well as legal components to the chosen gender, but conceived in a binary meaning. The path, the one established as described above, by Law 164/1982 was and still is articulated (with the exception of phase 4) according to four stages:

The first phase-or "gender identity questioning phase"-represents the starting point of the gender reaffirmation process and has two specific objectives: to ascertain-through a psychodiagnostic assessment-the criteria for the diagnosis of gender incongruence; and to exclude the presence of psychiatric issues and make a possible differential diagnosis. Generally, a psychotherapeutic intervention project is established at this stage to support the individual and his or her proximity networks at all stages of the process.

Phase 2, or "triadic phase," is organized through an integrated path in which three aspects are acted upon contextually: the "social transition"-in which the individual assumes the desired gender and identity in all life contexts; the phenotypic gender modification through taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT); and the initiation of legal procedures for authorization of interventions.

Phase 3 represents the phase in which "irreversible" actions of the path are implemented, in that the primary sexual characters are surgically acted upon subject to the authorization of the court of jurisdiction; this represents the phase that from a psychological, social and symbolic point of view arouses the most concern, fear and need for greater attention from the evaluative system involved.

The last phase - or Phase 4 - again gives a central role to the court of jurisdiction in authorizing the registry change and all documents, having ascertained that the surgical change of sex assigned at birth has taken place; it represents the phase after which the transgender person considers the personal journey of gender affirmation to be concluded.

Over the past decade, Law 164/1982 has been re-discussed on a number of points considered fundamental, partly as a result of profound social and cultural changes that have affected the LGBTQ+ community, as well as a more inclusive society with respect to the issues posed by transgenderism, reasons that all together have gradually resulted in a process of "depathologization" of the transgender condition. Both LGBTQ+ movements and associations of transgender individuals and families have fought for the recognition of two inalienable rights of individuals with gender incongruence: The possibility of adjusting documents and registry data concurrently with the modification of the individual's phenotypic gender characteristics; and the possibility of not resorting to demolitive and reconstructive surgery to affirm the new gender identity where the transgender person does not express the need to adjust the primary sexual characteristics of his or her body in the direction of the chosen gender, so as to promote greater democratization of subjective desires and In light of this process, a first decree is issued that intervenes on Law 164/82 and DL 150 2001 on the simplification of civil proceedings intentions.

In light of this process, a first decree is issued that intervenes on Law 164/82 and DL 150 2001 on the simplification of civil proceedings.

This decree attempted, for the first time, to implement time- and cost-improving changes to the final rectification procedure but, in reality, it focused primarily on proceedings where there were prior marriages and/or children of transgender individuals at the time of the start of the gender reaffirmation process.

However, major legal and social changes for transgender people in gender reassertion pathways occurred between 2015 and 2017.

Unlike in the past where the modification of personal data was subsequent to the surgical intervention phase, in 2015, the Court of Rome allows a transgender person to obtain the rectification of identity documents without necessarily providing for the surgical modification of primary sexual characteristics.

Subsequently, on January 12, 2017, the Court of Avezzano issued a remittal order on Article 1, Paragraph 1, of Law 164 of 1982 in which the judge sanctioned that in order to avoid "gender disorientation" that could in some way disrupt interpersonal relationships, resulting in acts of discrimination or stigmatization, it is necessary that the phenotypically expressed gender of the person requesting the rectification of documents be recognized.

As of 2017 to date, almost all courts in Italy have authorized the change of documents and registry data at the same time as phenotypic gender modification, putting off to the legislature the task of intervening and amending Law 164/82, which, in its 40th year of expression, is still laconic and anachronistic.

3. THE PHENOMENON OF DESISTING: DISRUPTING THE PATH OF GENDER AFFIRMATION

The possibility of modifying documents at the same time as the phenotypic modification, the progressive decrease in requests for surgical interventions on secondary sexual characteristics, the emergence of queer culture have called into question the dichotomous conception on which the Phase 1 evaluation process is based, which necessarily envisaged a favourable outcome of the gender affirmation process without second thoughts or the need for re-transition. In fact, the process, until the sentences of 2015 and 2017, was structured in such a way as not to contemplate the possibility of reaching the phases considered "irreversible" if not moved by a motivation of authentic suffering in living a gender identity that does not conform to one's feelings and desire for self-determination.

Desistings are not infrequently considered as evaluative errors for which the professionals involved in the gender affirmation process are responsible, who in taking in a person underestimate the possibility that the person with gender incongruence may decide to discontinue in path at any time, to the extent that the latter believes that the assignment of the neo-identity may not correspond to what he or she had previously imagined, thus requiring to be re-framed, with the gender and sexual identity assigned at birth.

More specifically, desister refers to the condition in which a transgender person, who, despite expressing a desire to undertake the gender transition path, having obtained permission for hormone replacement therapy, does not begin the pharmacological and social transition phase or, having undertaken HRT, discontinues it within a year of it, and returns to personally and socially assume sexual identity consistent with biological identity.

This condition should be distinguished from those who, on the other hand, are defined in the literature as half transitions, those individuals who despite having undertaken the process of gender affirmation do not carry it out for disparate reasons, which pertain not so much to a non-authenticity of gender incongruity, but to aspects relegated mainly to the social and relational spheres that prevent them in some way from completing it (e.g. disagreements with their family members, fear of losing a relationship with their children, anxiety related to the processes of stigmatization suffered or potentially perceived) (Masullo and Coppola, 2022)

Looking at some of the data provided by the Gender Transition Centers, it is possible to point out that about 15 percent of the people who start the gender affirmation path, receiving psychological support or getting permission for hormone therapy, do not transition to the later stages from the path.

According to a study by Vandenbussche and colleagues (2021) conducted in the United States, the phenomenon of desisting would affect about 1 to 2 percent of those who seek services to undertake gender affirmation. Several reasons emerged behind this discontinuation on the part of those who had requested it. The process of identity credibility, i.e., identity stabilization of the new gender, which occurs at both psychological and social levels, play an important role. Indeed, in the process of identity credibility construction, self-esteem, self-confidence, as well as internalized transphobia play a central role. Also among the psychological variables to be considered are fear and anxiety related to medical treatment, and confrontation with the possible sexual practices associated with the newly elected gender

From the social point of view, identity credibility is played out in one's own life contexts, in the networks of support and proximity, which here play an important role in terms of recognition, constituting for the transgender person "the stage" above which the person experiences his or her ability to perform the chosen gender adequately (passing), and therefore receiving positive and encouraging signals, rather than on the contrary disconfirming and rejecting signals. This level would also become decisive because of its connection with the psychological level; the more genuine the intent to transition, and therefore the gender incongruence is felt to be strong, the more the second level also loses value in the case of episodes of delegitimization and lack of social recognition; conversely, the more the belief about one's incongruence is felt to be weak, the more the social level becomes decisive in affecting the success of the path, and the possibility of it being interrupted at any time.

In conclusion, the centrality of the social contexts and support networks in which the transgender person is embedded turns out to be crucial: on the one hand, they constitute the relational fields in which to trace processes of credibility of the new identity construction of male, female or non-binary (and of the acquisition of gender expectations determined by the new identity structure assumed as a result of the transition); on the other hand, they would become the real "certifiers" of the suitability of the path of gender reassertion being undertaken.

Determinant in this process are the gender reference models that people yearn for as an outcome of the gender affirmation process, which when oriented in a heteronormative sense, constitute what has been referred to elsewhere as transnormativity, (Johnson, 2016; Coppola and Masullo, 2023) a concept that will be attempted to explain further in the following section.

4. SEXUAL NORMATIVITY, TRANS-NORMATIVITY, AND THE CHECKPOINT CHARLIE EFFECT

While the attempt to generalize the term transgender by society, dominant groups and institutions has created opportunities for recognition and social citizenship, it has not had the ability to fully capture the dynamics of oppression that transgender people often face as people who are in a different position in terms of power, both compared to cis people and to other categories that are part of the diverse "rainbow world" (Datta, 2012).

In order to best understand the processes of social inclusion and exclusion of different sexual identities, the concept of sexual normativity or "sexual normality" understood as an identity construction considered normative and accepted by members of a specific society, in terms of sexual identity, turns out to be central (Butler, 2004; Coppola, 2023).

Identity constructions considered normative include the set of individual (physical and psychological) and social (related to status, culture, personal experience) aspects that constitute the parameters of normality of a specific sexual identity (Motschenbacher, 2018).

Sexual normativity is constructed and made explicit in all sexual identities and regulates the relationships between them.

Butler (2004) and Connell (2007) argued that the adherence to the cis-heteronormative model represents the dominant sexual normativity in society; this hegemony was supported by the assumptions of the veterosexual model, which determines the unambiguous correspondence between biological sex and gender identity, the existence of only two possible genders (gender binarism), and the existence of only one sexual orientation considered normative such as (assumption of generativity) the heterosexual orientation. In addition, the supremacy of cis-heteronormativity is explained by the fact that the model is supported by the essentialist conception shared and endorsed by different disciplinary fields and scientific communities considered exact such as, for example, medicine and biology.

Non-normative sexual identities, such as homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism, have also, over time, identified and consolidated their own identity construction that is considered standard and the bearer of authenticity and conformity, shared and recognized by members of the identity instance.

There is a fair amount of scholarly production in the relevant scientific literature on the evolution of identity emancipation of the homosexual community (Corbisiero, 2012; Chauvin, Lerch 2013); there is, however, an important scholarly gap on trans-normativity, i.e., identity construction considered normative for transgender people.

Austin H. Johnson in 2016, in an article published in the journal "Sociological

Inquiry" titled "Transnormativity: a new concept and its validation through documentary films about transgender man," proposed a study for the identification of transgender normativity in the United States. The author, through an analysis of the dominant patterns of gender and gender expressiveness within the transgender community, particularly among transgender men, showed that almost all of the people proposed in the media products analysed were "medicalized" transgender people, that is, they had, at different levels, undertaken a path of gender reaffirmation according to official medical and proposed legal medical protocols.

For Johnson (2016), trans-normativity represents a condition of the transgender person that fulfills the path of gender affirmation in medicalized terms and identity homogenization to the chosen gender. Johnson, moreover, points out how nonbinary and genderfluid identities are actually demonized, considered deviant from a normative model of the binary transgender person and aiming for "social camouflage" with other cisgender identities.

In line with Johnson (2016), Coppola and Masullo (2023) studied and analysed transgender normativity in the Italian landscape.

The author asserts that trans-normativity would permanently reside in gender binarism, which is supported and legitimized by both legal devices (such as Law 184/1982) and the medical-health protocols most widely used in major Western democracies.

Transgender normativity, set and reinforced by identity normativity criteria that provide protocols and pathways that homogenize, in the final outcome of the gender affirmation path, transgender people to cisgender people, would, therefore, provide for a series of steps that would represent real checkpoints put in place by society to legitimize (or not) the gender affirmation path in terms of "compliance with parameters considered normative."

In this path of gender affirmation of transgender people, therefore, the same mainstream cis-heteronormative society would exercise a controlling function, through the legal and social systems that regulate and govern the pathways; this controlling effect, here, is referred to as the Charlie Checkpoint Effect.

To best understand the rationale behind naming the phenomenon involving the verification of the parameters of normativity and identity legitimacy during the path of gender affirmation, Checkpoint Chiarlie, it is necessary to briefly explain the history of the "famous" East German checkpoint during the Cold War.

At the end of World War II, the victorious allies of the conflict, namely the United States, France, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, divided Germany into two different nations: West Germany under NATO control and East Germany under the influence of the USSR. To further weaken the defeated Germany from the conflict, the victors also divided the capital Berlin into two different sectors: West Berlin for the Western forces and East Berlin for the

Soviet Union.

This partition created a difficult and singular condition in the world landscape. West Berlin was a Western democratic enclave in a Soviet bloc country, so for the first 15 years after the end of World War II there was a gradual depopulation of communist Germany and East Berlin to West Berlin.

For this reason, the East German regime erected a wall on the night of August 12-13, 1961, separating the West Berlin enclave from the rest of the nation.

Checkpoint Charlie was one of three Berlin Wall checkpoints that separated the German capital between 1961 and 1989, when the wall was torn down and the city (and Germany) was subsequently reunified. The checkpoint was used by U.S. troops to check documents, motives, history, and access criteria from East to West Berlin and viceversa.

Checkpoint Charlie has represented in the collective imagination the metaphor of the entry point from an oppressive world to a democratic world, from malaise to prosperity, from a condition experienced as alien to one perceived as desirable, innovative, and life-enhancing.

Precisely by using the symbolic and imaginary value that Checkpoint Charlie has had in contemporary history, it is possible to elucidate, through this analogy and metaphor, the evaluative control effect of the path of identity affirmation, and specifically gender identity.

Along the path of gender affirmation there are several "checkpoints" whose function is to evaluate and view the parameters considered "normative" for the identity of the chosen gender; this evaluation process can be exogenous, i.e., put in place by the institutions that certify and legitimize the validity (or not) of the gender affirmation path - examples are the psychodiagnostic team, the medical team, the Court, the School, the family; or endogenous, i.e., an internal, intrapsychic assessment of the real motivation to undertake the path and finalize it in all its parts, the real long-term personal resilience or the possibility of finding forms of "identity mediation" between biological sex, gender expressivity and chosen gender.

The successful (or unsuccessful) validation of the normative parameters deemed appropriate for the transgender condition allows the person who has embarked on the gender affirmation path to pass the checkpoint and assume the chosen gender identity and experience a new condition in life, or at the same time actions may be put in place that may delay, disfavor, or desist the transition from the identity ascribed at birth to the chosen gender identity.

5. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

As pointed out earlier, a different point of view is proposed here in the reading of the desister condition than the traditional view that sees the phenomenon of interruption of gender affirmation as an "evaluative error."

Desisting, on the contrary, is conceptualized as an outcome, among possible ones, of an evolutionary process of self-determination of a person embarking on a path of gender affirmation, a way of finding one's own identity form, an accommodation between biological sex and experienced gender identity.

With the spread of today's knowledge about transition, as well as the services and centers proposed to the recognition of gender incongruence, it is not unusual that it is through these very realities that The phenomenon of desisters may take on more and more consistency. In fact, this aspect is already evident with what is happening with queer and non-binary people who currently, with reference to their specific instances, interrogate the current psychological and medical/health protocols that guide the operators of Transition Centers (Coppola, Masullo, Gnazzo, 2024)

To argue this point of view will be presented, the case study of Sara, a girl who embarked on a path of gender affirmation, obtaining-after an evaluative period of about a year-a certification of Gender Incongruence as stipulated by ICD-10 and subsequently Hormone Replacement Therapy, as well as completing her social transition in all life contexts.

The research follows a qualitative approach and uses the life story approach. The latter are considered crucial for their ability to shed light on the micro sociological and identity processes examined here rather than for the generalizability of the knowledge they provide on a given phenomenon (Bichi, 2004).

For case selection, it follows Morse's directions when he writes that "to rely on 'excellent data' it is necessary to acquire 'excellent participants' that is, to have the 'best example' of the phenomenon studied" (2007, p 231). Sara's story is an "information-rich" desisting story, and it was identified on the basis of certain theoretical assumptions that show its relevance, in accordance with what Cardano (2020, pp 31-32) points out in this passage "the extent of the results acquired from the observation of a handful of cases (sometimes even just one) rests on the legitimacy of the theoretical assumptions that guided their selection".

With Sara's story, we wanted to better understand what psychological and social motivations guide people in choosing to embark on a path of gender affirmation and what at some point causes them to "give up" and return to an original identity construction.

This life story was collected through an in-depth interview, while its analysis was compared between the two co-authors, who together identified those key passages, as well as the most significant dimensions to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are Sara's main motivations for embarking on a path of gender affirmation?
- RQ2: What effects on one's life did taking on a transgender boy identity generate and what were the effects, specifically, on relational aspects in different life contexts?
- RQ3: What, on the other hand, were the main motivations that led Sara to discontinue the path, and what explanations does she provide in finding forms of mediation between her history of desister and that of affirming a gender identity that now conforms to her biological identity?

The interview with Sara, 18, took place via Skype in May 2023, 10 months after she decided to end her gender affirmation path.

5.1. THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SARA'S STORY

From Sara's account, it emerges that it was her mother who contacted the center's secretariat dealing with gender affirmation pathways, reporting that her daughter was very sick. All this happens in 2020 during a COVID-19 health emergency. The long social isolation precipitates her already precarious psychological situation. During this time, her doubts about her gender identity escalate, and with the support of both parents Sara decides to deal with this "boulder."

The girl begins her gender affirmation path in a center in the capital, declaring to the operators that she feels like a boy and choosing "Kevin[2]" as her elective name, expressing the desire to live as a man, change her documents and undergo breast surgery in the future.

At the time of the start of the path Sara is 17 years old so, as stipulated by law, the consent of both parents is required to proceed with the assessment path.

The parents are separated but in decent relationship. The girl is primarily in the care of her mother but sees her father regularly on weekends. The mother and sister are very supportive and cooperative, the father, on the other hand, manifests several misgivings.

As Sara tells it, her mood and relational life begin to improve markedly

[2] To understand the interview, we need to distinguish two temporal moments. At the time of the interview, Sara has already interrupted the process of gender affirmation and therefore speaks of herself in the feminine. When Sara refers to her identity in transition (Kevin) she uses the masculine.

since she has been living as Kevin: she hangs out with other people from the "rainbow" world and participates as an activist in the relational and social life of a Transgender Association in the city[3].

Sara at the end of several interviews with the Center's psychologists and physicians finally obtains certification to undertake Hormone Replacement Therapy, which they issue to him in December 2021 at the same time as authorizing him to continue in "phase 2" of the gender affirmation path. On January 10, 2022, the first interview with the endocrinologist is scheduled for the administration of HRT of the masculinizing type, that is, the daily administration of male hormones that will significantly, functionally and phenotypically change Sara's body and appearance toward a male-like conformation.

Sara begins HRT on January 11, 2022, and recounts how with the new identity she is better able to relate to both girls and boys in every life context, which she was unable to do with the previous identity configuration.

The condition of bio-psycho-social well-being achieved by Sara also positively affects her school performance, an aspect that benefits the girl in her social and relational life.

However, as time passes, the first physical changes in the direction of masculinization begin to generate increasing anxiety in Sara, and without telling anyone, she halves the daily dose of testosterone prescribed at the time of her first visit with the endocrinologist.

At the first checkup, the medical provider notices a testosterone level that is too low compared to the expected values and, therefore, questions Sara about how she took the hormone, hypothesizing incorrect administration. The state of malaise in Sara returns, and therefore she decides to discuss it with the team of physicians and psychologists who follow her at the Center and who have issued her certification of gender incongruence.

The interviews reveal that in recent months she has had a number of doubts about her real motivation for the gender affirmation path and that irreversible changes particularly frighten her.

The family is also supportive in the eventual decision to discontinue the affirmation path and reassume gender identity consistent with biological identity.

In July 2022, Sara discontinued her gender affirmation journey, stopped taking TOS daily, reestablished the name Sara in all contexts in place of Kevin, and decided to live in a conforming way with her feminine life.

5.2. ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW: INSIDE THE CHOICE TO INTERRUPT THE PROCESS OF GENDER AFFIRMATION

Regarding Sara's motivations for embarking on the path of gender affirmation, two aspects can be identified, which are considered fundamental in the scientific literature related to gender socialization: on the one hand, the relationship with one's own body and, specifically, with the sexed and performed body in relation to biological or perceived gender (Butler, 2004; Rinaldi, 2016); a second aspect is the relational and social one, i.e., acceptance and integration in life contexts as an individual who follows a social (as well as sexual) role in relation to “hetero-perceived” gender (Simon and Gagnon, 2003).

These aspects, according to Sara's account, were highly compromised at the time of the events narrated in the interview. The girl believed that she had an unfeminine and unattractive appearance, suffering since the age of 12 from obesity and hirsutism. On a relational level, Sara had been bullied in all the school classes she had attended, phenomena that had deeply undermined her self-esteem, her ability to relate positively to both boys and girls. Complicating Sara's already precarious psychological and social balance came the restrictive social norms for the containment of the health emergency from COVID-19.

During this period, in which the main social activity was taking place online, Sara joined Transgender online community, a group in which she was able to hear and read stories similar to her own, that is, of people telling of the difficulties of living according to the social expectations performed around the female gender, and who had therefore embarked on the path of gender affirmation. Sara, therefore, matures in herself the idea that probably living in masculinity, as it happened to other girls, may be her own form of authenticity.

> I have always had a very conflicted relationship with my body and my sexuality. Weight, for example, has always been an issue. When I was little, in elementary school, I was called a walrus. I had no friends or girlfriends. The girls would push me away like the plague, while the boys would beat me up, put me in a corner and throw crumbs from snacks at me, saying I was a vacuum cleaner anyway. (...) When I went to high school it got even worse. I had gotten to 130 KG. I was completely alone (...) When the pandemic broke out it was a drama, because I was forced to do DAD and the first time I turned on the cam to do the lesson a boy in the class yelled that I was even fatter on video, I refused to turn it on until the end of the year (...) joining social trans groups was my luck, I met so many people who had the same problems with people as me, I found human warmth, strange isn't it? Human warmth through the web (...) One FtoM guy told me about the XXX centre, I had my mother call, I wanted to do it myself, but I was too ashamed.

The beginning of the journey of gender affirmation, the possibility of assuming a masculine identity, and the purging of the "feminine" from her life and from every relational aspect benefit - initially - decisively on Sara's psycho-social well-being.

Living as with Kevin's chosen gender identity causes her to experience, for the first time, a sense of not necessarily having to be attentive to aspects that are instead central to the life of a girl her age: the obsessive focus on body aesthetics, the need to dress a certain way, to hang out with certain people and in certain circles. Sara, experiences through Kevin, a greater sense of freedom from the social expectations associated with her assigned gender at birth.

As Kevin begins to cultivate interests, to share with other people his doubts, the same needs for self-determination.

> When I started the journey, I made the social transition almost immediately, I erased Sara everywhere and replaced Kevin with every previous space I had experienced as a female. Like Kevin I lived just fine, I had a sense of lightness and light heartedness that I had never experienced (...) the big social achievement was becoming an activist of the XXX association, I felt for the first time part of something that believed in me, and having LGBTQ+ friends gave me the strength to understand that it was not only me who was living that unhealthy situation. Kevin lived better in 18 months than Sara did in 17 years.

The motivation to also undertake hormone replacement therapy appears, in this project, to be an obligatory step in confirming to the world, before herself, the choice to embark on a path of gender affirmation, a fundamental step in the "Checkpoint" of legitimation of the new identity construction: changing one's appearance phenotypically in the direction of the chosen gender represents that fundamental step in legitimating oneself to society with the new identity construction in a more authentic way and not as a "usurper" (Masullo and Coppola, 2023).

In a recent article, Coppola (2023) highlights how the "checkpoint" can be experienced as a necessary, expected act for binary transgender people who have an authentic desire to assume the chosen gender; this authenticity does not make people experience the transition to the next stages of gender questioning with anxiety and fear but, on the contrary, it is experienced as a crucial step, sustained by high motivation, often experienced by people almost impatiently.

At the point when the gender questioning is not authentic, but a masking of other motivations, instances, and discomforts, the transition to the next stages, on the contrary is experienced as something problematic, inauthentic almost forking. This process, however, can be triggered only when one moves to a stage perceived as more "agitated" of the path, when one has to intervene on the medical-surgical or legal aspects, that is, when one experiences the feeling of irreversibility (ibid.).

Sara, now Kevin, again plunges back into crisis and, with the help of the family and the Center's team, manages to explicate the real motivations of the whole path. Together with the operators, she understands that the problem was situated more in the relational sphere than related to a gender incongruity. Having to adapt to the female models proposed by society, also in view of her physical problems, had led her to believe that the idea of living as a man was the most functional, since it provided her with the possibility of living without the sense of inadequacy she had experienced as a woman. Living as a man had allowed for the explication of certain characteristics of herself that were unlikely to emerge living as Sara. Sara, now Kevin, feels that she does not necessarily have to abandon the feminine in order to live well in society and therefore decides to discontinue the path, to restore the old identity in each of its contexts, aware that she has matured, that she feels she is a new Sara who integrates and retains the skills and virtues acquired from Kevin and from the experience she lived as a “gender migrant.”

> I have to say that there is a big difference between living as a woman or as a man. As a woman you have a lot of problems, you can't really say what you think and you have to be careful about a lot of things, and first you have to be beautiful, and you have to be liked. (...) since I was Kevin my life had really improved but to really be a boy and not let the effect of the change I was living as a boy fade away I had a feeling that going all the way at that point was necessary, I couldn't let down the people in the association and the team that had certified Gender Incongruence, if they said so then it was true (...) when I realized that I was scared of HRT and interventions I had a lot of anxiety, how could I take a step back? How could I say I wasn't convinced? I was very sick and so I went on the path (...) I could tell everyone that I didn't feel like continuing HRT, that by losing weight and gaining confidence in myself in the end I didn't want to let Sara go. My mother was bewildered; my father breathed a sigh of relief.

Called upon to conduct a meta-evaluative analysis of her own gender affirmation journey, Sara reports with conviction that her journey is not an “error of the evaluative system,” that she did not pass the checkpoint as an impostor. On the contrary, having experienced the path over a period of time allowed her to understand that the reasons for her malaise were not hedosyntonic, but that the causes of her own discomfort and relational difficulty came mainly from outside, from social expectations related to gender performativity.

During the interview, it is Sara herself who provides the meaning attributed to her “desiting” and urges not to condemn and stigmatize a person who retraces her steps as happened to her when confronted with newly acquired friendships within the transgender world she was accused of being indecisive, inconsistent, and fickle.

> How do I consider my path? A success! I owe so much to the team that followed me and I also owe so much to Kevin. I think of him as a part of me, the more outgoing part and the part that I was able to experience by spending a period of time in the "masculine" (laughs) yes, come on, we can say that I was a guest of the masculine world for a period of time (...) being a boy, however, is another thing. I don't think I would have understood it if I hadn't had the opportunity to experience the condition and be one step away from never being able to go back. You are wrong to say that those who stop the path are just confused or that the protocols didn't work, I think the problem maybe lies in society, in the bullies, in the giggles, and in the burden of what the world asks of you. I have had to face a new racism, that of the T community branding me as a fraud, I think even among cis-etero people I will have the patch of someone who started the path and then discontinued, we should have oblivion like for cancer patients

6. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: THE IMPACT OF QUEER CULTURE IN GENDER AFFIRMATION PROTOCOLS

The analysis of Sara's story, brought to light how the condition of those who decide to discontinue a path of gender affirmation should not be considered as an error of the evaluative system of the psychological and medical operators of the Centers assigned to certify a gender incongruence, as much as on the contrary to the rigidity of these protocols that are designed for a path that leads in a rather linear way, with conviction and consistency of those who undergo it, to the "elective" gender without the possibility of any "hiccups" or second thoughts. Moving from one gender condition to the other, as Sara's story brings out, means, on the other hand, confronting relational fields within which different patterns, expressions, ways of "being" and "doing" gender prevail normatively, with which the individual is forced to deal. Ultimately, Sara's journey brought out how fundamental social recognition is to a stabilization of gender identity, and that in the absence of real gender incongruence or dysphoria, this constitutes an aspect to be attended to in the same way as others.

At the end of what can be considered metaphorically as a "gender migration," Sara is able to identify more precisely the nature of her problem, which would lie not so much in her, and in her supposed gender incongruity, but in the world around her and the rigidity with which this forces her to comply with patterns, expressiveness ways of saying and doing gender that conform to the gender order (Risman, 2024). Sara, comparing herself with other people who have embarked on a path of transition, thinks that she finds a solution to her problems with femininity, in another "relational field" the masculine one, which she also accesses thanks to the "check point" that the center deputed to assess her history provides her with, when she begins the process envisaged by transition. However, even within this realm Sara suffers the pressures of the sex/gender system (Rubin), which based on an affirmative single-issue model (and a binary view of gender), generates in her new reasons for apprehension especially when she has to undergo the prescribed hormone therapy.

In the light of this experience, it is almost inevitable to conclude that only a system based on challenging any attempt to stabilize and categorize gender identities in binary and/or hetero-normative terms would allow the system to accommodate with less difficulty the demands of those who do not necessarily intend to transition to one gender, rather than another (as with gender fluid or non-binary people) and those who like Sara decide to "reconsider" and go back, maturing a clearer reflection on herself and her propositions. This system can only be inspired by a queer epistemology, which as it is known sets out to challenge, to counter any attempt to categorize gender and sexual identities in stable, fixed or simply normative terms (De Laurentis, 1991), leaving it up to subjects to "deconstruct" (Derrida, 1994) and give rise to an original identity configuration, as unique as it is, and above all more corresponding to their own authenticity. If queer is based on the permanence of a "skeptical" attitude toward any attempt at definition (Lamble, 2021), assuming queer as the foundation of the protocols that guide the deputed services and centers means learning to evaluate a person's history without the need to attribute to it a truth value, or a stable certainty, but something that can and should be constantly questioned throughout the planned transition process.

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BREVE STORIA DELLE TEORIE MODERNE E CONTEMPORANEE DEL SOGGETTO: UNIVERSALE, BINARIO, QUEER. DA OLYMPE DE GOUGES A PAUL B. PRECIADO NELLA DIALETTICA TRA UGUAGLIANZA E DIFFERENZA

di *Nit Nahum**

Abstract

In the modern era, philosophers introduced the principle of the natural equality of men. Since its formulation, the universality of this principle was contradicted by some exceptions. Olympe de Gouges denounced the socially and legally exclusive framework that was taking hold in the 18th century and she paid with her life for her ideas and speeches. In fact, the regime of sexual difference had imposed itself in society and women had been relegated to a role of subordination to male power. Through Silvia Federici's analysis, it is possible to trace the affirmation of female inferiorization, placing this phenomenon in a two-century-long process of transition from the medieval to the capitalist culture. Faced with the iniquity of this political framework, De Gouges was the first to name a "plural feminine" from which a philosophical, social and political movement originated that is still alive today. Through feminism, the supposedly neutral but in reality male subject was flanked by the Woman subject; however even this latter, in its abstractness, resulted normative and therefore excluding. Queer philosophies and practices go beyond the rhetoric of both equality and difference, and open the way to the possibility of a politics after the subject. Through the thoughts of Foucault, Butler and Preciado it is possible to read the complex dynamics between power and subject and imagine resistant actions.

Keywords

Subject, power, equality, difference

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INTRODUZIONE

Il soggetto è un concetto presente fin dagli albori di ciò che oggi è considerata "la filosofia". Il presente contributo ripercorre l'evoluzione di questa categoria centrale, sia dal punto di vista epistemico che dal punto di vista politico, a partire dalla modernità fino alle teorie contemporanee. L'intento è quello di attraversare la storia del pensiero politico con una prospettiva femminista e queer, valorizzando i posizionamenti filosofici e i sentieri teorici orientati alla ricerca di una maggiore giustizia sociale, coerentemente con le forme di pensiero e azione a cui ci si richiama. La tematica del genere è privilegiata rispetto ad altre possibili e la soggettività trans rappresenta un approfondimento specifico. Nell'ambito di un testo di analisi storico-filosofica, il focus proposto relativo agli aspetti giuridici dell'affermazione di genere in Italia, risponde a due obiettivi tra loro collegati. In primo luogo si intende proporre una prospettiva interdisciplinare, utile alla ricerca come pratica in sé, per aprire a possibilità di connessioni originali ed inedite che solo l'assunzione di punti molteplici di osservazione può offrire. Nello specifico del tema in esame inoltre, cioè la costruzione delle identità e delle configurazioni di potere generate sull'articolazione del binomio uguaglianza/differenza, pensiero e diritto si sono evoluti in un intreccio impossibile da districare. La combinazione di riflessioni maturate in ambiti e momenti storici differenti, è utilizzata per mettere in evidenza ingiustizie ed inuguaglianza del presente. *Testo Tossico* di Paul B. Preciado è analizzato come operazione corporea, filosofica ed editoriale di resistenza e di creazione, in una società democratica che, nonostante le dichiarazioni universali e locali di uguaglianza, continua ad escludere dalla piena soggettività sia ontologica che politica.

1. UGUAGLIANZA, DIFFERENZA E NATURA NEL PENSIERO POLITICO MODERNO

> Che cosa c'era nel mio corpo infantile che permetteva di predire la mia vita intera? Per quanto ci si gratti a sangue, non si troverà una spiegazione. Per quanto si prenda a testate le sbarre della griglia del genere fino a spaccarsi in due, non se ne vedrà la ragione.
>
> Paul B. Preciado, Sono un mostro che vi parla.

Olympe de Gouges fu una *philosophe*, una scrittrice teatrale e politica e un'attivista rivoluzionaria nata nel 1748 a Montauban, in Occitania, e morta nel 1793 a Parigi, sul patibolo. Il suo pensiero è influenzato dall'illuminismo e affine al giusnaturalismo e il suo destino è comune a tante donne e altre soggettività che hanno osato sfidare l'ingiustizia, la sua naturalizzazione e il suo silenziamento. La vita di de Gouges è stata attraversata da un confronto costante con la denigrazione e la violenza e il suo contributo politico e letterario è stato oggetto, per molto tempo, di *damnatio memorie* (Cavaliere, 2021: 60). Oggi, in Europa, de Gouges è rivalutata negli ambienti accademici così come dai movimenti femministi, con l'intento di mettere in discussione un canone ontologico, discorsivo e politico incentrato su un soggetto postulato come neutro e assunto come tale dalla tradizione filosofica, così come dalla pratica istituzionale. Dietro la neutralità dell'individuo, figlio del pensiero politico moderno e unità di misura della contemporaneità, c'è in realtà un essere: umano, maschio, bianco, abile, proprietario, adulto, cisgender, etero, neurotipico, sano, cristiano, cittadino, di peso medio, professionista ed onnivoro. In controluce, nella contrapposizione tra il neutro e lo specifico, si staglia una coppia analitica caratteristica del pensiero contrattualista e dunque centrale nella genesi e nell'evoluzione di idee come lo Stato, la cittadinanza, la democrazia e il diritto: il binomio uguaglianza/differenza. Il principio comune, da cui si delinearono sistemi di pensiero diversi e prospettive difformi come quelle di Hobbes, Locke e Rousseau, si affermò simbolicamente e storicamente in Europa con la *Dichiarazione dei diritti dell'uomo e del cittadino*[1] del 1789 in cui la Rivoluzione francese, al primo articolo, sentenziò che: «Gli uomini nascono e rimangono liberi ed eguali nei diritti». La specificità del pensiero politico di de Gouges si esprime già nell'interpretazione originale di questo primo assunto che l'autrice riscrisse, così come tutta la *Dichiarazione*, «con l'intento di chiarire, aggiungere, puntualizzare tutto quanto i rivoluzionari hanno occultato, mistificato, dimenticato, tutto quanto riguarda, in breve, metà del genere umano: le donne» (Loche, 2021: 24). Il 14 settembre 1791 *la Dichiarazione dei diritti della donna e della cittadina*[2] fu data alla stampa. La riscrittura, praticamente coeva, di un documento storicamente tanto significativo, come quello redatto dall'Assemblea Nazionale nel 1789, non fu un'operazione solo linguistica o performativa. Secondo Annamaria Loche le modifiche terminologiche introdotte da de Gouges risposero a due obiettivi: denunciare il carattere escludente dell'universalismo proposto dai filosofi e affermatosi nella rivoluzione e richiedere una specificità «con lo scopo di dar senso compiuto all'universalismo» (ivi: 22- 33). La pensatrice concepisce infatti l'universalismo come un "tutto",

[1] Consultabile on line: http://www.dircost.unito.it/cs/docs/francia1789.htm
[2] Consultabile on line: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9629179b/f14.item

«composto di parti differenziate» (Vantin, 2021: 164). In questo senso, la *philosphe*: «ha colto la possibilità di stare nell'eguaglianza riconoscendo una specificità» (Giolo, 2021: 192-199). La contestazione di de Gouges alla soggettività maschile come parametro unico non è quindi attuata in contrasto, ma «in ragione del principio di uguaglianza» (*ibidem*). Nelle formulazioni di un soggetto astratto, tipico dei filosofi giusnaturalisti "essenzialisti", l'uguaglianza è infatti un presupposto mentre nell'interpretazione di de Gouges, al contrario, non è una premessa ma un fine. Questo perché la radice delle riflessioni dell'autrice sono le «esperienze concrete di ingiustizia ed assoggettamento» (Orrù, 2021: 97-99). La teoria di de Gouges appare molto più saldamente ancorata alla vita di quella dei suoi contemporanei, ma la differenza nell'interpretazione dell'uguaglianza della pensatrice rispetto a quella del pensiero maschile maggioritario, cioè quello che ha avuto il privilegio di diventare canone e influire sull'evoluzione epistemologica mondiale, è di carattere ontologico, oltre che politico. La natura, insieme all'uguaglianza è l'altra categoria filosofica, fondamentale per il giusnaturalismo quanto per il contrattualismo, che la pensatrice interpreta in modo radicalmente diverso rispetto a molti pensatori moderni tra cui ad esempio Locke e Rousseau. Per tuttx, inclusa de Gouges, la natura è fonte di verità autoevidenti e dunque è il modello a cui guardare per riconoscere i diritti naturali, che nella società civile devono essere assunti come valore collettivo e pubblico e quindi resi esigibili e generalizzabili attraverso le istituzioni e le leggi. De Gouges fa un uso coerentemente emancipatorio (ivi: 95) del diritto naturale utilizzandolo per contestare l'invisibilizzazione femminile così come la schiavitù e la povertà e per reclamare uguaglianza, consapevole di come le disuguaglianze non siano «un dato naturale, ma una costruzione socialmente determinata» (Cavaliere, 2021: 71). Al contrario, sia Locke che Rousseau nella natura rintracciano l'origine delle differenze, la legittimazione per le deroghe all'uguaglianza e, di conseguenza, per le esclusioni dalla cittadinanza. In *The Racial Contract*, Charles W. Mills sottolinea come le teorie del filosofo inglese abbiano giocato un ruolo importante nelle dinamiche di espropriazione coloniale e di giustificazione della schiavitù (Mills, 1997: 67). Mills avanza la supposizione che «Locke saw blacks as not fully human and thus as a subject to a different set of normative rules» (ivi: 68). Stacy Clifford Simplican mette invece in evidenza il ruolo giocato dal *Secondo Trattato*[3] nel rafforzamento delle gerarchie sociali e politiche costituitesi attraverso il dispositivo dell'abilità. Secondo Simplican infatti «Locke's focus on capacity allows us to see how his social contract is a capacity contract: only individuals who pass the threshold of

[3] LOCKE, J. (1998). *Secondo trattato sul governo*. Milano: Rizzoli.

cognitive capacity can consent and therefore merit political membership» (Simplican, 2015: 40). Dal canto suo Rousseau dedica l'intero capitolo finale di *Emilio*, che l'autore stesso definisce un "tutto completo" con *Il contratto sociale* (Derathé, 1994: XV), a Sofia: la sposa designata del suo educando. Rousseau giunge alla conclusione che per Sofia sia necessaria un'educazione differenziata, finalizzata a rafforzare la predisposizione alla sottomissione, all'obbedienza, alla laboriosità, alla dedizione ed alla procreazione, dopo aver argomentato come queste attitudini siano prerogative naturali della femminilità, così come la dipendenza, la tendenza all'eccesso sessuale ed altre caratteristiche che il filosofo ginevrino adduce come ragioni dell'inferiorizzazione delle donne, sottesa all'opera politico-pedagogica (Rousseau, 2024: 447-617). La società civile si espresse fin dal principio rispetto a quale interpretazione dell'uguaglianza avrebbe assunto nel proprio sistema di conoscenze, valori e istituzioni. Nel 1793 Olympe de Gouges fu ghigliottinata. Pochi mesi dopo le ceneri di Jean Jaques Rousseau furono trasferite nel Panteon di Parigi, in segno di massima onorificenza. Non è solo il violento epilogo della vita della pensatrice ad essere simbolicamente e politicamente significativo, ma tutta la sua vicenda umana e storico-bibliografica. Le teorie di de Gouges e le sue prese di posizione politiche non furono contestate dai suoi oppositori, ma screditate e definite "abominio". La sua persona fu oggetto di "furore misogino" (Casadei, 2021: 43). Dopo la sua morte e fino agli anni Settanta del secolo scorso, nella storiografia a lei relativa «prevale la rappresentazione di una donna eccentrica, folle, affetta da manie di protagonismo» (Altopiedi, 2018: 73). Tra le poche opere redatte, vi è uno studio medico-psicologico postumo sull'autrice[4] da cui de Gouges esce rappresentata come «posseduta dal demonio e malata di auto- idolatria» (*ibidem*). Nella storiografia contemporanea prevale invece «la sovrapposizione di anacronistiche categorie del presente o l'esaltazione di una singolare audacia femminile» (*ibidem*). Rappresentare de Gouges come una figura eccezionale e politicamente isolata è un'ennesima mistificazione dei suoi scritti e dei suoi intenti, nonché della storia delle lotte delle donne e delle resistenze. Contemporaneamente a quella di de Gouges altre voci si levavano per contrastare il paradigma giuridicamente e socialmente escludente che andava affermandosi nelle nascenti repubbliche moderne. I dispositivi della differenza sessuale e razziale furono contestati fin dal loro affermarsi. Riguardo a quest'ultimo asse Walter D. Mignolo afferma che: «il pensiero decoloniale è emerso durante la stessa fondazione della modernità/colonialità, come suo contrappunto» (Mignolo, 2021: 185).

[4] GUILLOIS, A. (1904). *Étude medico-psychologique sur Olympe de Gouges*, tesi presentata alla Facoltà di Medicina e Farmacia di Lione.

L'autore riporta una breve analisi del pensiero di Ottobah Cugoano, «il meno noto dei quattro schiavi (insieme a Egnatius Sanecho, John Marrant e Loudah Equiano) che arrivarono alla pagina scritta in Inghilterra durante la seconda metà del diciottesimo secolo» (ivi: 203). Il trattato politico decoloniale di Cugoano[5] «è una brutale critica etica degli imperiali predatori e ladri di uomini» (ivi: 209). Rispetto a una retorica che assume il genere come uno degli assi principali invece, insieme a de Gouges, Mary Wollstonecraft può essere posta alle origini del movimento femminista (Restaino, 2022: 3-5). Visse e scrisse negli stessi anni della pensatrice francese, esprimendo posizioni differenti da de Gouges. Ma anche Wollstoncraft fu giudicata per le libertà agite in una vita indipendente (lavorare e viaggiare da sola) e segnata da un «marchio infamante che accompagnerà la sua notorietà di scrittrice, considerata alla stregua di una donna perduta» (ivi: 5). Sono documentate, in epoca moderna, anche testimonianze di esistenze non binarie, tra prese di parola e tentativi di contenimento. Susan Striker sottolinea in *Storia trans gender* come «sin dai tempi dell'insediamento coloniale di quelli che oggi chiamiamo Stati Uniti, sono sempre esistite persone che contraddicevano le aspettative di genere ritenute tipiche delle donne e degli uomini» (Striker, 2022: 65). Lo dimostrano una legge contro il cross-dressing proclamata dalla colonia del Massachusetts nel 1690 e la pubblicazione, su una rivista letteraria popolare del 1857, di una breve storia «che offriva una rappresentazione empatica di una persona transgender» (ivi: 65-66). La necessità della riscoperta contemporanea di autori, autrici e autorx a lungo dimenticatx dimostra come nell'Ade della *damnatio memoriae* de Gouges non sia stata sola. La dialettica instaurata con i poteri permette di inserire de Gouges non solo in un reticolato di continuità orizzontale, rispetto a figure a lei contemporanee, ma anche in una linea continuità verticale, rispetto al passato e al futuro. Se infatti una presa di parola delle donne e di altre soggettività oppresse è documentabile in modo crescente e sistematico solo dall'epoca moderna, le lotte e le resistenze alle gerarchie ed alle subordinazioni hanno origini molto più antiche. Certo, sono state ciclicamente spezzate, ma non si sono mai arrestate.

[5] CUGOANO, O. (1787). *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Human Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great Britain, by Ottobah Cugoano a Native of Africa*.

2. STREGHE: IL PARADIGMA DELLA DIFFERENZA SESSUALE

Ne *Calibano e la strega* Silvia Federici analizza, da un punto di vista femminista, il periodo immediatamente precedente alla modernità in cui visse de Gouges e gli inizi di questa epoca storica, dando centralità alla transizione della società verso il capitalismo, visto come «la controrivoluzione che ha distrutto le possibilità che erano emerse nel corso della lotta antifeudale» (Federici, 2004: 30). Nella dinamica tra i processi di accumulazione originaria e di resistenza ad essi, secondo Federici hanno avuto un ruolo importante sia le lotte contadine, che portarono all'abolizione della servitù della gleba, che le eresie diffusesi in Europa nello stesso periodo. Nelle prime il ruolo delle donne povere fu fondamentale, le seconde diedero vita a esperienze in cui i richiami a una nuova etica religiosa erano combinati a sperimentazioni sociali e politiche. In molte esperienze eretiche, come quella Catara, le donne ricoprivano ruoli importanti e l'etica sessuale non era associata in alcun modo a una concezione degradata della femminilità. Anche la peste contribuì al livellamento delle gerarchie sociali, rendendo più preziosa la forza lavoro, perché più rara, e contemporaneamente stimolando al diffusione di un fatalismo, dovuto al continuo contatto con la morte, che assunse la forma del rifiuto del lavoro (ivi: 29-76). Federici afferma quindi che: «Fu in risposta a questa crisi che la classe dominante europea lanciò quell'offensiva globale che nel corso di almeno tre secoli doveva cambiare la storia del pianeta, gettando le basi di un sistema capitalista mondiale, nell'inarrestabile tentativo di appropriarsi di nuove fonti di ricchezza, espandere le proprie basi economiche e portare nuovi lavoratori sotto il suo comando» (ivi: 82).

Secondo l'autrice questo processo fu agevolato dall'uso della violenza che prese la forma della conquista, del soggiogamento, della rapina e dell'assassinio. (*ibidem*). La condizione per l'assoggettamento delle donne fu la separazione della sfera produttiva da quella riproduttiva, caratteristica della società capitalista fin dalla sua origine. È in un contesto che assunse tale divisione come naturale e utile che fu possibile escludere le donne dalla proprietà, dal salario e dalle professioni, nonché svalutare il loro lavoro, soprattutto quello di curatrici e levatrici. L'emarginazione di queste figure, storicamente integrate nelle comunità, avvenne contemporaneamente alla criminalizzazione della contraccezione, dell'aborto e del lavoro sessuale[6], accelerando per le donne la perdita del controllo sul proprio corpo e sulla procreazione, affidata da allora alla scienza, incarnata da medici uomini. La famiglia borghese si affermò come centro di

[6] Nel testo di Federici l'espressione usata è "prostituzione", ma si è preferito l'uso di "lavoro sessuale" in uso attualmente perché non stigmatizzante.

produzione della forza lavoro, attraverso la divisione sessuale degli spazi, l'occultamento dello sfruttamento delle donne e dell'appropriazione dei loro corpi. Le differenze tra maschile e femminile furono enfatizzate dalla differenziazione dei ruoli, dalla segregazione dei luoghi e dalla polarizzazione delle rappresentazioni. Le donne europee subirono un processo di svalutazione economica e sociale e di infantilizzazione giuridica, in un'inferiorizzazione identitaria generale che la poneva "necessariamente" sotto il controllo maschile (Federici, 2004: 104-150). Per distruggere un intero mondo di pratiche femminili e per annientare la resistenza delle donne al patriarcato moderno, fu perpetrato ciò che Federici definisce "genocidio" (ivi: 208), una forma di "terrorismo di stato" di cui sono state oggetto le donne per più di due secoli: la caccia alle streghe (ivi: 149). Questo episodio storico è stato spesso trattato come secondario, o relativo al folclore (ivi: 208), ma in realtà centinaia di migliaia di donne torturate e uccise con estrema crudeltà in rituali pubblici hanno contribuito a creare un nuovo ordine politico in cui la differenza tra donne e uomini era più profonda, in cui alcune forme di comportamento femminile furono sradicate e sostituite con altre che convergevano a formare l'ideale della moglie casalinga, contrapposto a quello della sabbatica strega. In questa polarizzazione si ridefinì il rapporto di tuttx, ma soprattutto delle donne, con la sessualità nella direzione di divieti e inibizioni: della nudità, delle danze, dell'erotismo pubblico, collettivo e non riproduttivo (ivi: 207-271). L'analisi di Federici si conclude con la riflessione su come l'assoggettamento delle popolazioni europee, in particolare delle donne e di altre soggettività marginalizzate, sia stato contemporaneo e culturalmente e politicamente integrato con quello delle popolazioni che subirono la colonizzazione e le sue pratiche, tra cui lo sterminio e la schiavitù, che anche in questo contesto colpirono più drammaticamente le donne, numerose anche nella resistenza anticoloniale. Dagli albori della modernità le popolazioni colonizzate, come le donne europee furono oggetto di «un processo di disumanizzazione» e di «una forma paradigmatica di repressione» (ivi: 273-301).

Le rivendicazioni che differenziano la *Dichiarazione della donna e della cittadina*, dal suo corrispettivo ufficiale e suppostamente neutro, denunciano l'iniquità del quadro scaturito dalle trasformazioni descritte da Federici. De Gouges reclamò infatti il diritto per le donne di accedere ai lavori ed alle cariche politiche, il diritto di parola nella sfera pubblica, il riconoscimento di una specificità di bisogni nella sfera privata e l'uguaglianza della soggettività giuridica. Olympe de Gouges pronunciò «un importantissimo "noi" femminile plurale» (Vantin, 2021: 161), attorno al quale si formò un movimento filosofico, sociale e politico che è tutt'ora in vita.

3. DAL FEMMINISMO AL QUEER: IL SOGGETTO DONNA E IL SUO SUPERAMENTO

Il femminismo viene storiograficamente temporalizzato in ondate (Restaino, 2022: 3-77). Questo proprio come metafora del fatto che le varie correnti e i differenti posizionamenti si propaghino, si sovrappongano, avanzino, si ritirino e poi ritornino, ma mai uguali, in un moto incessante di pensiero e azione, di convergenza, collusione, rinnovamento e mescolanza. Nel primo femminismo continuò a prevalere la retorica dell'uguaglianza che aveva caratterizzato il dibattito in epoca moderna. Il femminismo liberale, di cui la già citata Wollstonecraft può essere considerata esponente, aveva il focus sulla rivendicazione di uguali diritti, di parità sociale e politica. In questa prima fase nacque e si sviluppò anche una corrente di femminismo socialista che metteva al centro, oltre all'uguaglianza formale e giuridica le tematiche della subordinazione e dello sfruttamento di classe, e quindi dell'uguaglianza materiale. Fu un fattore di grande emancipazione femminile insieme alla guerra che, così come la peste, portò una rimodulazione nelle gerarchie sociali, al punto che: «il movimento delle donne della prima ondata, nelle sue correnti liberale e socialista, ottiene il massimo delle sue conquiste all'indomani della prima guerra mondiale» (Restaino, 2022: 19). Franco Restaino individua a partire da questo momento, cioè tra il 1918 e il 1968, un periodo di messa in discussione della «validità dell'obiettivo stesso dell'uguaglianza», in una "rifondazione torica" che mise al centro l'indagine e la valorizzazione della differenza. «Che cosa è una donna?», si chiedeva Simone de Beauvoir nel 1949 (De Beauvoir, 2022: 135). In molte cercarono una risposta a questa domanda. Nella discussione sulla differenza furono chiamate in causa le questioni dell'educazione, della sessualità, della violenza, del matrimonio, della maternità e della cura. Da un punto di vista epistemico, accanto al soggetto Uomo si costituì il soggetto Donna, «un'essenza femminile altrettanto capace di soggettivarsi» (Cavarero, 2022: 95). Adriana Cavarero evidenzia luci ed ombre dei femminismi "della differenza", affermando che: «contrapporre all'Uomo la Donna è comunque una mossa teorica imprevista dal modello. Essa però non fa che dualizzare la logica senza intaccarne il meccanismo fondamentale» (*ibidem*). Anche il soggetto Donna infatti per Cavarero è un soggetto astratto, che riproduce l'indifferenziazione degli individui. Per questo l'autrice conclude che: «oltre a mimare il gesto patriarcale attraverso la costruzione del significante generale Donna, questo tipo di operazione sortisce anche l'effetto di cancellare le differenze singolari fra le donne, costringendole a un'identificazione univoca nella donna» (ivi: 96). Cavarero è molto esplicita nell'affermare che contrapporre l'identità femminile a quella maschile significa «colpire il solo lato misogino del soggetto e tuttavia collaborare al successo degli altri suoi lati oppressivi» (ivi: 106). La valutazione di Cavarero rispetto alla strategia di una parte del femminismo che ebbe una grande visibilità, spesso a scapito delle altre, era una consapevolezza per molte femministe della seconda ondata a partire dagli anni Sessanta e con maggior enfasi da gli anni Settanta. Presenze "differenti" in sé, che insieme al soggetto maschile dominante nella società contestavano anche il soggetto sì femminile, ma anche bianco ed eterosessuale, egemone nel femminismo stesso. Erano soprattutto le donne Nere o razializzate e le lesbiche. Le prime, tra cui Angela Davis, bell hooks, Patricia J. Williams o Gayatri Spivac, misero in evidenza la connotazione razzista del modello, le seconde ne contestarono la naturalità. Monique Wittig affermava infatti nel 1981 che la donna «è soltanto un mito» (Wittig, 2022: 200). Il percorso storico di soggettivazione delle donne e poi delle femministe e delle lesbiche contribuì a mettere in discussione il paradigma della differenza in generale e della differenza sessuale in particolare. Quest'ultima, secondo Paul B. Preciado entrò in crisi dagli anni Quaranta. L'autore afferma infatti che, dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale:

> la politicizzazione delle soggettività e dei corpi in quest'epistemologia considerati abietti o mostruosi, l'organizzazione di movimenti di lotta per la sovranità riproduttiva e politica dei corpi delle donne, per la depatologizzazione dell'omosessualità nonché l'invenzione di nuove tecniche di rappresentazione e di manipolazione delle strutture biochimiche del vivente (lettura cromosomica, diagnosi prenatale, somministrazione di ormoni eccetera) condurranno […] a una situazione senza precedenti (Preciado, 2021: 75).

Nel 1955 lo psicologo clinico infantile John Money fu il primo a utilizzare la nozione di "genere", «per accedere alla possibilità di modificare il sesso dei bambini nati con organi genitali e/o cromosomi che la medicina, con i suoi criteri visivi e discorsivi, non può classificare solo come femminili o maschili» (Preciado, 2015: 90-91). Secondo Preciado la definizione di un "sesso psicologico" o di un "ruolo sociale" mirava «alla possibilità di utilizzare la tecnologia (dagli ormoni alle tecnologie sociali, per esempio quelle impiegate nelle istituzioni pedagogiche e amministrative) per modificare il corpo o produrre soggettività intenzionalmente secondo un ideale regolatore preesistente che prescrive come deve essere un corpo umano femminile o maschile» (ivi: 91). Gli apparati medici, biologici e politici preferirono, secondo Preciado, «intervenire direttamente all'interno delle strutture degli esseri viventi e costruire artificialmente il dimorfismo sessuale usando tecniche chirurgiche, prostetiche e ormonali» invece che produrre un'epistemologia alternativa «per comprendere corpi e desideri non conformi» (ivi: 95). All'interno del femminismo invece, ci fu chi aveva la disponibilità a mettere in discussione i propri fondamenti e ad accogliere una nuova teoria del soggetto, eccentrico, nomade e cyborg[7]. In una parola: queer. In realtà, più che un soggetto nuovo, con caratteristiche differenti rispetto ai modelli precedenti, il queer potrebbe essere considerato come: «un modo per pensare la politica dopo il soggetto» (Lo Iacono, 2011: 107).

4. ASSOGGETTAMENTO: UNA FORMA "PARADOSSALE" DI POTERE E I SUOI PUNTI DI ROTTURA

Secondo Lorenzo Bernini: «*La volontè de savoir* può essere considerato il testo fondativo delle teorie queer» (Bernini, 2013: 29). Nel saggio del 1976 Michel Foucault descrive la sessualità non come un dato naturale, ma come un "dispositivo storico", cioè «come una grande trama di superficie dove la stimolazione dei corpi, l'intensificazione dei piaceri, l'incitazione al discorso, la formazione delle conoscenze, il rafforzamento dei controlli e delle resistenze si legano gli uni con gli altri sulla base di alcune grandi strategie di sapere-potere» (Foucault, 2022: 94). Attraverso quest'esperienza, gli individui devono riconoscersi come soggetti di una "sessualità" (ivi:10). Foucault rintraccia la nascita del "dispositivo sessualità" nelle pratiche di direzione spirituale medievale, come la confessione, attraverso cui si «attribuisce al sesso, inteso come desiderio sessuale, lo statuto di una "verità" fondamentale del soggetto che emerge, richiede l'intervento di un altro che ha il ruolo non soltanto di ermeneutica o maieutica, ma anche di guida pastorale» (Bernini: 2013: 30). Nel XIX secolo, lo Stato si sostituisce al prete nel portare avanti questo compito. A questo punto: «sono educatori, pedagogisti, medici, psichiatri a produrre sapere sul sesso e al tempo stesso a imporgli una disciplina» (*ibidem*). Attraverso questo processo: «la sessualità si cristallizza in identità sessuali», di cui i nuovi saperi indagano non solo gli atti, ma anche le

[7] Le espressioni "soggetto eccentrico", "soggetto nomade" e "cyborg" sono state utilizzate rispettivamente da Teresa De Lauretis, Rosi Braidotti e Donna Haraway. Si veda CAVARERO, A. (2022). Il pensiero femminista. Un approccio teoretico. In A. Cavarero, F. Restaino, *Le filosofie femministe* (pp. 65-67). Milano-Torino: Pearson.

personalità (ivi: 30-31). Le categorie che classificano l'identità sessuale, come quella di eterosessualità, omosessualità e transessualità «non descrivono cioè semplicemente la natura dei corpi e dei desideri, ma plasmano tale natura». Si tratta quindi di costrutti prodotti storicamente e modificabili (ivi: 29-30). Non si può comprendere il tema del soggetto in Faucault, senza collegarlo a quello del potere poiché l'analisi di Foucault sui processi di soggettivazione è una teoria dell'«onnipresenza del potere». Il filosofo sostiene infatti che non vada ricercata l'esistenza originaria di un punto centrale, di in un centro unico di sovranità. Al contrario, il potere «si produce in ogni istante, in ogni punto o piuttosto in ogni relazione fra un punto e un altro». In conclusione, «Il potere è dappertutto» (Foucault, 2022: 82). Secondo Judith Butler, seguendo il pensiero del filosofo francese, «è possibile comprendere che il potere costituisce il soggetto, determinando le condizioni stesse della sua esistenza e le traiettorie del suo desiderio: ne consegue dunque che il potere non è più, o non è solo, ciò a cui ci contrapponiamo, ma anche, in senso forte, ciò da cui dipende il nostro esistere e ciò che accogliamo nel nostro essere» (Butler, 2013: 41). Detto in altri termini siamo di fronte ad una «riconcettualizzazione dell'identità come *effetto*, cioè come qualcosa di *prodotto* o *generato*», dove «per un'identità essere un effetto significa non essere né fatalmente determinata né totalmente artificiale e arbitraria» (Butler, 2018: 200). Secondo Butler, infatti, «la costruzione non è in contrapposizione alla capacità di agire; è la scena necessaria della capacità di agire» (*ibidem*). Quest'analisi disvela una forma di «dipendenza originaria da un discorso che non abbiamo la possibilità di scegliere ma che, paradossalmente, fonda – e incoraggia – la nostra *agency*. La parola "soggetto" indica infatti sia quel processo di sottomissione al potere, sia il processo di divenire soggetto» (Butler, 2013: 41). Ne *La vita psichica del potere* (ivi: 41-66) Butler dialoga con i testi di Foucault su questa forma "paradossale" di potere che è l'assoggettamento, per cui la sottomissione non è solo la condizione di costituzione del soggetto ma anche il processo attraverso cui l'individuo acquisisce intellegibilità, cioè il presupposto per poter essere ed agire. Per essere intellegibile, un soggetto deve essere prima fondato nel linguaggio (ivi: 41-50), deve cioè avere un'identità. In quest'ottica il potere è esterno al soggetto, precondizione della sua possibilità, ma allo stesso tempo è mantenuto in vita e riprodotto dall'azione "propria" del soggetto, in quanto «soggetto *di* potere» (ivi: 52-53). Da questi presupposti Butler conclude che:

> Questo non significa che il soggetto possa essere *ridotto* al potere che lo ha determinato, oppure che il potere che lo ha determinato sia *riducibile* al soggetto. Il potere non è mai soltanto una condizione esterna o

> antecedente al soggetto, né esso può essere identificato solo con il soggetto. Le condizioni di potere devono essere ripetute affinché possano persistere e il soggetto è proprio il luogo fisico di questa reiterazione (ivi: 54).

Secondo Butler, tra le condizioni esterne e antecedenti al soggetto, che ne consentono l'intellegibilità sociale e il riconoscimento politico, un ruolo fondamentale spetta al genere, che l'autrice interpreta come «un sistema di regole, convenzioni, norme sociali e pratiche istituzionali che producono *performativamente* il soggetto che pretendono di descrivere» (Preciado, 2015 :99). Non si tratta quindi di un'essenza o di una verità psicologica ma di una «pratica discorsiva e corporea performativa» (ivi:100). Secondo la teoria della performatività del genere di Judith Butler infatti: «nessun genere è "espresso" da azioni, da gesti o dal linguaggio, ma è la stessa performance del genere a generare in modo retroattivo l'illusione che vi sia un nucleo interno a ciascuno dei generi». Secondo Butler è quindi la performance e la sua reiterazione che generano e producono (retroattivamente) l'essenza. Il genere è dunque «una ripetizione ritualizzata di convenzioni» socialmente imposta (Butler, 2013: 163).

Il soggetto e il potere per Foucault, così come il genere per Butler, non sono dunque determinati una volta per tutte. Sono invece fondati in maniera reiterata, in un processo generativo costante, dato dalla ripetizione della norma attuata da corpi incarnati, attraverso le loro azioni e convinzioni. La coerenza del soggetto e della norma dipendono dalla ripetizione. Non si tratta di un modello di sovranità codificata univocamente, ma di «rapporti di forza in cui si producono effetti di dominio ma mai completamente stabili» (Foucault, 2022: 91). Uno dei fattori dell'instabilità della situazione strategica complessa rappresentata dal potere è la resistenza ad esso. Per Foucault la resistenza è presente ovunque ci sia il potere, rispetto a cui non è mai in una posizione di esteriorità (ivi: 84-85). Non c'è dunque, per il filosofo francese, un luogo del "grande Rifiuto" rispetto al potere. Sono possibili però resistenze che sono esemplari nonché: «necessarie, improbabili, spontanee, selvagge, solitarie, concertate, striscianti, violente, irriducibili, pronte al compromesso, interessate o sacrificali». Queste azioni resistenti esistono solo nel campo strategico delle relazioni di potere, ma questo non vuol dire che ne rappresentino solo "la conseguenza" o "il segno negativo", né che siano destinate per forza alla sconfitta (ivi: 85). Anche secondo Butler i dispositivi, per quanto potenti, possono subire una dis-fatta (Butler, 2007:14). Il genere, ad esempio, costituisce una scena costrittiva in cui sono però possibili delle improvvisazioni (ivi: 25). Sia per Butler che per Foucault è possibile una ricerca che individui le condizioni contingenti e mutevoli del campo di forze del potere ed è anche possibile intervenire in nome della trasformazione, infrangendo ciò che è considerato sapere certo e realtà conoscibile (ivi: 53-54). Esistono dei punti di rottura: il potere dei dispositivi è resistibile. Butler sostiene infatti che l'irreale può avanzare pretese sulla realtà, entrando nel suo dominio, mostrando l'instabilità delle norme e aprendo così la strada per nuove significazioni (ivi: 54-55). Gli esempi di sovversione descritti da Butler, come il *drag* e come molte delle pratiche queer, hanno spesso a che fare con la ri-significazione. Sono tese cioè ad aprire la strada, nel campo dell'esistenza, a possibilità nuove che amplino la sfera dell'universale, rendendo pensabile ciò che prima non era tale. Si tratta di gettare semi per la fioritura di una nuova epistemologia. In questo tipo di movimento c'è una tensione verso la giustizia sociale poiché «per coloro che stanno ancora cercando di divenire possibili, la possibilità rappresenta una necessità» (ivi: 251-255). È in gioco, in alcuni casi, la sopravvivenza. Ci sono corpi per cui non si tratta di scegliere la libertà, ma di costruirla.

> Ho fatto del mio corpo, della mia mente, della mia mostruosità, del mio desiderio e della mia transizione uno spettacolo pubblico: ancora una volta avevo trovato una via di scampo.
>
> Paul B. Preciado, Sono un mostro che vi parla.

5. LA SOGGETTIVITÀ TRANS: CENNI GIURIDICI E CONTRADDIZIONI POLITICHE

Il presente paragrafo si prefigge l'obiettivo di analizzare come la vicenda normativa italiana relativa all'affermazione di genere sia una conferma storico-giuridico-politica sia della teoria dell'assoggettamento, che di quella della performatività di genere. Nella prima pagina di *Corpi che Contano* Butler si domanda: «Esiste un modo per mettere in relazione la materialità del corpo con la performatività del genere?» (Butler, 1996: 1). Si tenterà uno sforzo in questa direzione.

In Italia, sebbene secondo la Costituzione il diritto all'identità sessuale rientri nell'alveo dei diritti fondamentali della persona (Parigiani, 2024: 42), l'unico strumento normativo per dare riconoscimento giuridico alle persone trans è la legge 164 del 1982. Dall'anno di promulgazione ad oggi la normativa è stata oggetto di riforme procedurali che, pur introducendo alcune innovazioni, ne hanno confermato l'impostazione sostanziale (Dalla Balla, 2024: 59), edificata sul presupposto della necessaria congruenza tra sesso bio-anatomico, genere anagrafico e nome (ivi: 72 e 78) e basata sul binarismo di genere come "premessa ineludibile" e "fatto naturale" (Parigiani, 2024: 36). Le uniche due opzioni di genere riconosciute sono quella maschile o quella femminile e non è possibile apporre una terza possibilità neutra o provvisoria «neanche in quei casi in cui l'osservazione dei genitali esterni – effettuata nell'ottica classificatoria binarista – dia esiti non in linea con la prospettiva cisnormativa». È il caso delle persone intersex, per cui viene meno «la rigida bipartizione genitale su cui viene fatta poggiare la divisione dei corpi» (ivi: 37-38). Secondo la giurisprudenza e l'Ordinamento infatti «l'eventuale apertura al riconoscimento di identità esterne al "binomio" di genere, porterebbe inevitabilmente ad una "ambiguità" giuridica del soggetto, tale da far cadere la certezza dei rapporti giuridici» (ivi: 41). Fino al 2011 l'identità di genere delle persone trans era riconosciuta dal Tribunale in una procedura civile in due fasi: «competeva al giudice istruttore autorizzare la modifica chirurgica dei caratteri sessuali primari e – solo una volta effettuato l'intervento – il Collegio avrebbe potuto accertare l'avvenuta transizione di genere e ordinare la rettifica anagrafica» (Dalla Balla, 2024: 60). In un sistema organizzato in questa forma «la rettificazione chirurgica era considerata l'unica opzione terapeutica possibile ed efficace» e il «"controllo" dell'autorità giudiziaria si poneva "a monte" del percorso di transizione». Dagli anni Ottanta ad oggi la giurisprudenza ha dovuto confrontarsi con alcune trasformazioni: da un lato la pratica degli interventi chirurgici di adeguamento dei caratteri sessuali avvenuti all'estero e senza ricorrere al giudice (pratica che la legge n. 164/1982 ha decriminalizzato), dall'altro l'evoluzione delle possibilità offerte dalla scienza medica, in particolare l'efficacia dei farmaci ormonali nell'adeguamento dei caratteri sessuali secondari (ivi: 67-71). Il d.lgs. n. 150/2011 ha ridotto la procedura ad una sola fase in cui il Tribunale interviene "a valle", in un unico processo quando la trasformazione corporea è già in corso, poiché iniziata attraverso un percorso di affermazione di genere con terapia ormonale presso le strutture sanitarie, senza alcun vaglio autorizzativo da parte del Tribunale. Il procedimento serve quindi oggi per autorizzare l'intervento chirurgico, la copertura dello stesso a carico del Sistema Sanitario Nazionale e per rettificare l'identità anagrafica. Il percorso per l'affermazione di genere prevede ora, per prassi diffusa, la modificazione dei "caratteri sessuali", senza che si tratti necessariamente di quelli c.d. "primari" (cioè quelli riguardanti la conformazione degli organi genitali e l'apparato riproduttivo, ndr), a condizione però che «gli effetti delle terapie di transizione appaiano definitivi e irreversibili». Deve trattarsi cioè di una «scelta personale tendenzialmente immutabile, sia sotto il profilo della percezione soggettiva, sia sotto il profilo delle oggettive mutazioni dei caratteri sessuali estetico – somatici ed ormonali». Su queste "oggettive mutazioni", l'autorità giudiziaria ha il potere di "indagare", contestualmente alla valutazione in cui accerta l'«effettivo mutamento di sesso» che deve riguardare gli aspetti psicologici, comportamentali e fisici (ivi: 62-76). La legge 164 del 1982 è costruita quindi sull'assunto che siano «la natura e l'entità delle intervenute modificazioni dei caratteri sessuali […] a determinare l'identità personale e di genere»[8].

Dopo un'analisi dettagliata della normativa, Francesco Dalla Balla individua alcune questioni critiche dal punto di vista giuridico. Innanzitutto, secondo l'autore, il paradigma ideologico sotteso alla legge è «fondato sull'indisponibilità anagrafica da parte del suo titolare», poiché l'identità di genere risulta legata a «risultanze bio-anatomiche» (Dalla Balla, 2024: 77) e per questo quindi «non costituisce elemento suscettibile di una compiuta autodeterminazione» (ivi: 79). Inoltre secondo Dalla Balla la legge 164/1982 «non accorda il benché minimo rilievo anagrafico alla condizione della persona *in corso* di transizione», con impatti importanti su diritti del tutto estranei all'autodeterminazione di genere come la circolazione, l'espatrio e i diritti in stato di detenzione, determinando così per la persona in transizione un «vuoto di tutela» (ivi: 79-84). Anche Roberta Parigiani mette in evidenza alcune implicazioni della normativa, prendendone in considerazione l'impianto binario e le conseguenze che ne derivano per le persone *intersex* e per le persone non binarie che vengono inserite «forzatamente in un incasellamento binario», anche se non appartengono o non sentono di appartenere né al genere femminile né al genere maschile (Parigiani, 2024:46).

Anche se analizzate entrambe per cenni, è possibile scorgere la teoria della performatività di Butler, nella normativa relativa all'affermazione di genere vigente in Italia. Come sottolinea Parigiani infatti il binarismo di genere è considerato "premessa ineludibile" e "fatto naturale" nell'impianto normativo (Parigiani, 2024: 36), ma analizzando la l .164/82, è evidente come per le persone trans sia in realtà la legge stessa che prescrive e realizza il dimorfismo sessuale: lo costruisce. La necessaria congruenza tra sesso bio-anatomico, genere anagrafico e nome implica una coerenza di genere che le persone trans devono raggiungere adeguando la propria psiche, il proprio comportamento ed il proprio corpo. Il soggetto trans è letteralmente "una costruzione" e una costruzione fortemente (ma mai completamente) determinata dal potere sotto forma di imposizione di: ideali regolativi, procedure obbligate, standard cis-etero-normativi, *gatekeeping* ed egemonia dell'industria e dei professionisti della salute.

In *Teoria della cura trans*, con la forza di un posizionamento personale e politico, Hil Malatino afferma che: «ci manca il privilegio di un

[8] Corte cost., sent. N. 180/2017

"Io" semplice […]. Il riconoscimento ci viene in forma di dono» (Malatino, 2021: 117). Malatino approfondisce il concetto in un passaggio successivo: «Possiamo tentare di esercitare una minima *agency* come richiedenti – lanciando immediatamente segnali di tipo visivo, uditivo o linguistico – ma non abbiamo alcun controllo sullo scambio, non possiamo in alcun modo determinare il risultato» (ivi: 118). Ne consegue che per le persone in transizione il genere sia «un processo moralmente laborioso», un «lavoro alienato», poiché non si possiede ciò che si produce, per cui si dipende da altrx nell'«assemblaggio della propria carne», nella realizzazione di «progetti di alterazione biotecnologica» (ivi: 120-121). Nella progettualità corporea ed esistenziale trans un ruolo decisionale determinante è attribuito a giudici e, come si è visto, in maniera sempre crescente agli apparati medico-sanitari. La diagnosi, da sempre parte integrante del percorso, oggi è il *gate* fondamentale da attraversare per poter accedere al trattamento ormonale dai cui esiti, di fatto, dipendono gli step successivi e il riconoscimento giuridico. Butler avanza alcune osservazioni rispetto alle conseguenze dell'assoggettamento rispetto a questo «meccanismo regolatore» del genere che è la patologizzazione delle persone non conformi (Butler, 2007: 120). Secondo Butler «la diagnosi di disforia di genere esige che la vita assuma nel tempo una forma più o meno definita» (ivi: 109). Butler si domanda se il «sottomettersi ad una diagnosi non implichi, più o meno consciamente, un certo assoggettamento a essa in maniera che si finisca per interiorizzare alcuni aspetti, arrivando a considerarsi mentalmente malati o "carenti" in normalità, o entrambe le cose» (ivi: 111). Anche quando questo non avvenga, anche approcciandosi con un atteggiamento "strumentale" alla diagnosi per accedere alla liberta, seppur condizionata, che essa accorda (quanto meno sulle possibilità di modificare il proprio corpo e status), secondo Butler ci si pone nella condizione di «ratificare il potere della diagnosi su molte altre persone in futuro» (ivi: 120-121). Proprio come nella dinamica di potere «paradossale» descritta in precedenza «per poter superare il test ci si deve sottomettere al suo linguaggio» (ivi:122) così come ai suoi presupposti, quali il vincolo della corrispondenza tra comportamento ed identificazione di genere e la narrazione della supposta sofferenza sottesa alla condizione di persona trans. Tale sofferenza è attribuita dalla giurisprudenza e dalla medicina ad una «menomazione» della persona stessa, senza che sia considerato l'effetto sul benessere della fissità delle norme di genere e della loro inflessibilità e senza domandarsi se esse «generino angoscia, disagio o se ostacolino la capacità di agire o siano per alcuni, per molti, una fonte di sofferenza» (ivi: 124-125). La normativa italiana e la *ratio* sottesa al trattamento delle persone trans (condivisa anche in situazioni geografiche e temporali differenti, come dimostra la convergenza degli interventi richiamati che provengono da contesti eterogenei, seppur tutti relativi all'Europa o al Nord America e agli ultimi vent'anni) rispondono al meccanismo descritto da Paul B. Preciado secondo cui «una malattia diventa reale come conseguenza di un modello medico e farmaceutico, come risultato di un supporto tecnico e istituzionale capace di spiegarla discorsivamente, di materializzarla e trattarla in maniera più o meno operativa» (Preciado, 2015: 47). Secondo Preciado, che abbraccia le teorie di Foucault, in questa dinamica si esprime il «bio-potere», cioè una «grande tecnologia» la cui funzione più importante è di «investire interamente la vita», attraverso il disciplinamento dei corpi e le regolazioni della popolazione, attuato con dispositivi «anatomici e biologici» che agiscono sull'individuo e sulla specie. Le tecniche di potere sono presenti a tutti i livelli del corpo sociale (famiglia, esercito, scuola, polizia, medicina individuale, amministrazione collettiva) e sono alla base dell'investimento da parte del potere del corpo vivente, della sua valorizzazione e gestione distributiva, fattori indispensabili, secondo il filosofo francese, per lo sviluppo del capitalismo (Foucault, 2022: 123-125). Il bio-potere si esprime in pratiche «micro» fatte di «sorveglianze infinitesimali» e «controlli istante per istante», quali sono ad esempio gli esami medici o psicologici, ma «dà luogo anche a misure massicce, a stime statistiche, ad interventi che prendono di mira l'intero corpo sociale o gruppi presi nel loro insieme» (ivi: 129).

6. TESTO TOSSICO: IL REGIME FARMACOPORNOGRAFICO E LE POSSIBILI VIE DI SCAMPO

In *Testo Tossico* Paul B. Preciado, riprende il concetto di bio-potere di Foucault e, mantenendo la centralità del dispositivo di sessualità, ne descrive un ulteriore sviluppo, determinato da alcuni cambiamenti avvenuti a partire dalla Seconda guerra mondiale. L'autore si riferisce alla trasformazione profonda delle tecnologie di produzione del corpo e della soggettività. Nello specifico all'introduzione della nozione di «genere, come dispositivo tecnico, visivo performativo di sessuazione del corpo» e «la riorganizzazione del sistema medico-giuridico, educativo e mediatico» nella direzione della «possibilità di modificare tecnicamente un individuo per "fabbricare un'anima" maschile o femminile» (Preciado, 2015: 185). Preciado definisce il nuovo regime «farmacopornografico», per riferirsi ai «processi di governo della soggettività sessuale, nelle loro modalità biomolecolari (farmaco-) e semiotico-tecniche (porno-)» (ivi: 31). Le radici del regime farmacopornografico affondano nella società scientifica e coloniale del diciannovesimo secolo, ma sono evidenti solo dagli anni Settanta (*ibidem*). In questo intervallo: «la tecnoscienza ha stabilito la sua autorità materiale trasformando i concetti di psichismo, libido, coscienza, femminilità e mascolinità, eterosessualità e omosessualità in realtà tangibili, sostanze chimiche, molecole commercializzabili, corpi, biotipi umani, valori mercantili gestibili da multinazionali farmacopornografiche» (ivi: 32). Secondo Preciado nella società contemporanea le soggettività «si definiscono per la sostanza o le sostanze che assumono o che dominano il loro metabolismo, per le protesi cibernetiche che permettono loro di agire, per il tipo di desideri farmacopornografici che orientano le loro azioni» (*ibidem*). Nel regime farmacopornografico il corpo è «un'entità tecno-vivente mutliconnessa che incorpora la tecnologia» (ivi: 39), un artefatto che acquisisce statuto naturale (ivi: 32-33): è una «nuova incarnazione di natura» (ivi: 188). Questa dinamica tra corpi e potere determina uno sconfinamento tra spazio interno ed esterno nonché «un'implosione irreversibile delle nozioni di soggetto e oggetto, di naturale e artificiale» (ivi: 40). Preciado individua infatti la specificità delle tecnologie farmacopornografiche, che definisce «morbide», nella capacità di «prendere la forma del corpo che controllano, di trasformarsi in corpo, fino a diventare indistinguibili da esso, fino a diventare soggettività». Nel saggio sono descritti alcuni esempi, come quello della pillola che l'autore utilizza per mettere in luce come «attraverso l'intervento ormonale l'azione anticoncezionale diventi inseparabile dall'induzione di un "tecno-ciclo", una iniezione biomimetica attraverso cui il corpo delle donne del ventesimo secolo può continuare ad apparire come effetto di leggi "naturali" e immutabili» (Ellena, 2016). Se la pillola anticoncezionale ha avuto un ruolo determinante nella definizione contemporanea della forma e della funzionalità della femminilità, è il testosterone che produce il soggetto maschile. Quando è sintetico, può essere incorporato in corpi molteplici e, secondo Preciado «aprire la strada a una deriva postidentitaria». *Testo tossico* non è solo lo strumento con cui Preciado esprime la sua teoria e ne descrive le applicazioni pratiche. Il saggio è un'operazione corporea ed editoriale che sfida direttamente il potere che teorizza e che esemplifica carnalmente la modalità di resistenza che incoraggia. Il suo autore lo definisce «un protocollo d'intossicazione volontaria», «un saggio corporeo», «una teoria del sé o un'autoteoria» (ivi: 11). Chi legge trova esposte, senza soluzione di continuità, «riflessioni filosofiche, narrazioni di sessioni di somministrazione di ormoni e resoconti dettagliati di pratiche sessuali» perché, secondo Preciado, «questo è il modo in cui si costruisce la soggettività» (*ibidem*). I capitoli di analisi politica sono alternati ai racconti di una «riprogrammazione endocrinologica» completamente autogestita, un esperimento di cui Preciado è sia il ricercatore che la cavia. L' «incarnazione della finzione politica Paul» (Preciado, 2022: 301), non è resa possibile dall'azione congiunta di medicina e legge, e non è da intendersi come una «transizione di genere, ma più come una pratica di disolcazione e resistenza» (Preciado 2015: 9). Preciado si somministra il testosterone passatogli da un amico e amante e ne decide autonomamente il dosaggio, registrando le modificazioni delle sue sensazioni, del suo desiderio e documentando la propria evoluzione sentimentale e la propria pratica erotica. Il risultato è una sorta di diario o forse più precisamente una confessione, non indotta, ma volontaria. Le autorità a cui Preciado si rivolge sono il suo pubblico e un morto. L'autore non nega che, anche nella sua pratica totalmente autodeterminata, sia necessario il riconoscimento per essere intellegibili, ma decide autonomamente a chi attribuire la facoltà del giudizio su di sé, quando afferma: «tocca a voi ora, concedermi il diritto di indossare questa maschera» (*ibidem*) e in tutti i passaggi in cui si racconta a Guillaume Dustan, poeta e amico appena deceduto. *Testo tossico* è un'operazione politica di citazione, riappropriazione e sconfinamento. Citazione dei meccanismi e dei dispositivi del potere, riappropriazione delle tecniche di costruzione del genere e sconfinamento di ogni possibile barriera: non solo quella tra maschile e femminile, ma anche quella tra scienza e lotta, tra linguaggio della filosofia e linguaggio della strada, tra morte e rinascita. Il lavoro di Preciado nel suo complesso, oltre il testo in esame, è un'invenzione di soggettività, proprio sulla base di quell'ambiguità che la legge non ammette poiché capace di «far cadere la certezza dei rapporti giuridici», di mettere quindi in crisi il diritto, disconoscendone la naturalità. Si potrebbero avanzare obiezioni molteplici rispetto alla capacità trasformativa di un gesto sicuramente spettacolare ma, ad esempio, non generalizzabile. Preciado era un autore già affermato quando scrisse e pubblicò *Testo Tossico*, e l'impresa che vi è narrata non avrebbe senso senza il pubblico a cui è rivolto tutto il progetto. Inoltre il testosterone che Paul B. si somministra, seppur senza autorizzazione medica, proviene comunque dalle multinazionali farmaceutiche attraverso il Sistema Sanitario. Per poter parlare di reale autodeterminazione bisognerebbe mettere in discussione anche le modalità di produzione della sostanza, aprendo possibilità di autoproduzione ad oggi impensabili o, per lo meno, modificare radicalmente il sistema di accesso al farmaco. Quella proposta da Preciado è sicuramente una forma di resistenza performativa ed esemplare, ma non per questo solipsistica o autoreferenziale. L'autore afferma infatti che: «il mio gesto non avrebbe forza se non fosse per l'esercito di transessuali silenziosi per i quali la molecola, il protocollo, il cambiamento di identità giuridica non sono un lusso» (ivi:55). Per dis-fare un dispositivo tanto potente e storicamente radicato come il genere, i transessuali e le transessuali non celebri, non possono rimanere silenziosx. In realtà moltx di loro si esprimono già in molti modi. È necessario che siano ascoltatx. Abbiamo bisogno di elaborazioni collettive e di soluzioni comunitarie, che in *Testo Tossico* possono trovare ispirazione. L'idea di usare la propria esperienza ed esporla in un saggio filosofico è un atto di decostruzione delle narrative dominanti, nonché una scelta di profonda coerenza al principio femminista del partire da sé, con tutte le contraddizioni che questo comporta. Per costruire un sapere nuovo ed un agire collettivo votato alla giustizia sociale, dobbiamo mettere a servizio del cambiamento tanto la consapevolezza e la rabbia che maturiamo nelle oppressioni che subiamo, quanto la forza che accumuliamo grazie ai privilegi che incarniamo. Il potere è dappertutto, anche dentro di noi. Riconoscerlo nel proprio corpo è una strategia mostruosamente efficace per affrontarlo.

> Chi vuol diventare soggetto politico cominci con l'essere cavia del suo stesso laboratorio.
>
> Paul B. Preciado, Testo Tossico.

CONCLUSIONI

Con il presente contributo non si intende in alcun modo offrire una panoramica esaustiva dell'evoluzione del soggetto nel periodo in esame. Si è privilegiato un sentiero possibile tra i tanti, quello tracciato dal pensiero politico delle donne e poi dalle teorie femministe e queer nel contesto euro-nordamericano. Un percorso di decostruzione di un canone e di costruzione di alternative, che è stato possibile grazie alla sinergia tra movimenti di pensiero e azione qui solo citati, come quelli costruiti in resistenza ai dispositivi della razza e dell'abilità, o nemmeno nominati come la critica e la pratica antispecista. Si è scelto di cominciare con Olympe de Gouges per arrivare a Paul B. Preciado per mettere in luce come la ricerca sul binomio uguaglianza/differenza abbia una lunga tradizione storica, ma al contempo una grande attualità politica. Le filosofie e le pratiche queer e trans offrono oggi una chiave di lettura sui processi di soggettivazione che consente di individuare dispositivi di potere e processi di esclusione, che elaborazioni precedenti e/o binarie (seppur conflittuali e innovative) non individuavano o addirittura silenziavano e rafforzavano. Ma le sperimentazioni mutogene attuate da Preciado non sarebbero state probabilmente possibili senza le intuizioni di Butler, né senza le rivendicazioni delle femministe della differenza. L'obiettivo è stato quello di individuare le connessioni e le complicità tra i movimenti di pensiero piuttosto che sottolineare le distanze più profonde o le frizioni più dolorose. Ondate come si è già detto, che solo nella loro complessità e coralità si trasformano e trasformano.

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WHEN THE ALIAS CAREER IS NOT ENOUGH

Youth Resistance in Cavour High School, an Italian Case Study

di Richard Bourelly Ale Santambrogio *

Abstract

This exploratory study examines the power dynamics and resistance strategies surrounding adopting the alias career (*carriera alias*) in Italian schools and the lack of teacher training, focusing on Cavour High School in Rome. Through semi-structured interviews with two trans* students, Andrea and Marco, and two student representatives, the research highlights how students resist cisnormative practices. The results shed light on the interplay between youth agency and vulnerability within cisnormative educational settings. The paper also provides recommendations to schools, arguing for prioritising trans* students' well-being and promoting structural change to make schools safer and supportive environments.

Keywords

cisnormativity, high schools, alias career, trans students, resistance

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1. INTRODUCTION

National and international scientific literature has consistently demonstrated that schools often create hostile and unwelcoming environments for trans*[1] students (Bartholomaeus et al., 2017; Bourelly, 2023; Lorusso et al., 2024; McBride et al., 2020).

These educational contexts replicate broader societal cisnormative[2] hierarchies that privilege cisgender identities over trans* ones and reinforce essentialist, binary, and biologically deterministic understandings of gender and sexuality. As a consequence, school settings have a normalising effect that reinforces cisgender identities and privilege while simultaneously denying, marginalising, and rendering invisible trans* students (Enke, 2012; Martino, Cumming-Potvin, 2018; Martino, Omercajic, 2021).

In response to the discriminatory experiences they face, many trans* pupils engage in various forms of resistance to challenge the cisnormative school culture and advocate for a more respectful and supportive learning environment (Francis, 2023, 2024; Iskander, Shabtay, 2018; McBride, Neary, 2021).

In the Italian school system, a cisnormative culture is also fostered by the absence of ministerial and regulatory provisions aimed at recognising and supporting trans* students (Bourelly, 2024; Ohchr, 2019). As a consequence, from the 2019/2020 school year, trans* students, parents, gender clinics, and activist groups started pressuring schools to adopt the alias career (*carriera alias*) (Bourelly et al., 2022). As for the latest mapping, 419 schools of all levels have implemented the alias career (Agedo, 2025).

The alias career was first implemented by the University of Turin in 2012 as part of the digitalisation of academic transcripts. This initiative replaced the "doppio libretto", first implemented in 2002, which provided trans* university students with a second physical academic transcript featuring their chosen names (Russo, Valerio, 2019). With regard to secondary schools, the alias career was informally adopted from the

[1] In this paper, we use the term "trans*" as an umbrella term referring to individuals whose gender identity and/or expression differs from the gender they were assigned at birth (Halberstam, 2018), while "cisgender" refers to those who are at ease with their gender assigned at birth.

[2] Cisnormativity refers to the social hierarchy between cisgender and trans* people (Simmons & White, 2014). It is based on an essentialist, biologist, and binary understanding of gender, considered fixed, immutable, and coincident with the sex assigned at birth. This idea, called cisgenderism, produces the systematic erasure of trans* people (Kennedy, 2013).

2018/2019 school year, and formally from the following year, after the mobilisations of families, trans* students and Lgbtqia+ associations (Bourelly, 2023). In both universities and schools, the alias career is a confidentiality agreement between schools, trans* student and their family (if minor). Within its regulations, the institution allows students to use their chosen name on all internal documentation, have a new email address, and, when present, a new school badge.

Furthermore, within the text, some schools also address other critical needs, such as gender-affirming access to gendered facilities (e.g., bathrooms, locker rooms) and provide comprehensive training on trans* issues for all school staff (Bourelly, 2024). One example of such regulations is the one proposed by GenderLens and Agedo associations (GenderLens, 2022). Most schools also have measures to prevent access to support, such as the necessity to provide a diagnosis of gender dysphoria or gender incongruence. Some of these institutes have more stringent requirements, such as having started gender-affirming hormone therapy (Istituto Via delle Sette Chiese, 2022) or the legal procedure to change one's gender marker and legal name (Liceo Benedetti–Tommaseo, 2023).

In the Italian context, therefore, activating the alias career and, more generally, recognising one's rights as a trans* person may become an issue of intergenerational conflict between students and scholastic institutions. An emblematic case of such conflict is that of Cavour High School in Rome, which made the headlines for its refusal to activate the alias career to a requesting trans* student and for the discrimination suffered by another trans* pupil at the hands of a teacher (Berterame, 2021; Lupia, 2021, 2022; Marchese, 2021).

In this paper, we look at Cavour High School as an exploratory case study to provide a reflexive analysis (Iskander, Shabtay, 2018) of resistance strategies employed by its trans* students to tackle cisnormative school culture, to gain access to the alias career, and to obtain respect and effective protection from discrimination. We aim to explore the links and dynamics between scholastic institutional power and situated forms of trans* youth resistance (Hillier et al., 2020). The results shed light on the interplay between youth agency and discrimination within cisnormative educational settings (McBride, Neary, 2021) and provide important insights and recommendations to schools. We argue that it is crucial to listen to trans* students, prioritise their needs and well-being, and promote structural change to make schools safer and supportive environments.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Formal education institutions operate according to a binary framework based on dimorphic logics of gender regulation (Malatino, 2015; Miller, 2020), which is evident in various aspects of school life. These include the prevalence of cisgender assumptions that shape teaching practices (e.g., the use of gendered language), the binary division of school facilities such as toilets and locker rooms, and the significant underrepresentation of trans* experiences and identities within the curriculum (Ingrey, 2023; McBride, Schubotz, 2017; O'Flynn, 2016; Phipps and Blackall, 2023).

Furthermore, scientific literature highlights that schools frequently fail to address the systemic nature of cisnormative power by adopting tokenistic and individualised intervention approaches rather than addressing the root causes of trans* exclusion (Martino and Omercajic, 2021; Neary, 2018). This often results in reactive measures, with schools primarily intervening when students have come out and/or are being bullied (Paechter et al., 2021).

> The ad-hoc and individualised nature of this approach thus fails to disrupt structural inequalities, which contribute to the erasure of trans identities in the first instance. Discourses of individualisation result in inclusive practices being applied only in response to trans pupils being visible, i.e., being 'out' and comfortable declaring their gender identity to others. This is problematic, as schools arguably need to be set up with trans pupils in mind, with inclusive practices already embedded in the system (Phipps and Blackall, 2023: 1106).

The failure to act on the systematicity of cisnormativity is also found in school policies, which may emphasise gender binarism (e.g., regulations on school uniforms) and reiterate victimising and pathologising discursive devices (Ingrey, 2018; McBride and Neary, 2021; McGlashan and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Moreover, while anti-bullying and anti-aggression policies are intended to protect trans* students, their effectiveness is often limited. In fact, as noted by Greytak et al. (2013), anti-bullying and anti-aggression policies do not consistently achieve their purpose, and this limitation is further exacerbated by a top-down approach that fails to meaningfully engage with the experiences and perspectives of trans* students themselves (Sinclair-Palm and Gilbert, 2018).

In addition to ineffective policies, a critical factor contributing to the exclusion of trans* students is the lack of adequate training for school staff, particularly teachers, on gender identity and expression, including trans* identities. This lack of training often fails to critically examine and address gender biases within educational practices. For instance, teachers may perpetuate gender segregation through classroom activities (e.g., dividing students into 'males' and 'females' during group work or physical education). Moreover, they may invalidate or deny the identities and needs of trans* students, such as access to gendered facilities and recognition of their gender identity. Furthermore, untrained school staff may perpetuate cisgenderist and trans-negative prejudices, thereby contributing to a climate of fear and marginalisation within the educational environment (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; McBride et al., 2020; Phipps and Blackall, 2023).

Consequently, schools function as sites of power where normalising dynamics, particularly concerning students' sexuality and gender, are actively enforced (Mayo and Rodriguez, 2019). Thus, educational institutions operate as gender dimorphic devices (Santambrogio, 2022) that organise and regulate identities, ratifying the existence of only two genders with which students must identify (McBride and Neary, 2021).

> The cisnormative school culture affords Tgd [Transgender and Gender Diverse] youth differential social value and inclusion. The analysis of schooling reveals how cisnormative bodies are more protected while Tgd youth are more exposed to precarity [...] The intersections of precariousness and the cumulative impact of social inequality characterise Tgd youth as illegitimate and outside the realm of belonging (Francis, 2024: 26).

Within these exclusionary environments, trans* youth face social invisibility, aggression, bullying (Bartholomaeus et al., 2017), misgendering, and deadnaming[3] enacted by both school staff and peers (Evans and Rawlings, 2021; McBride et al., 2020; Paechter et al., 2021). This climate has significant and detrimental impacts on the mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being of trans* students, potentially affecting their educational attainment (Hatchel et al., 2019; Kosciw et al., 2022).

However, trans* students are not passive victims of educational gender-normative devices; in fact, they can enact strategies of resistance. Trans* pupils often engage in processes of self-education that can be viewed as acts of resistance against the prevailing cisnormative system within both the educational and broader societal contexts. These processes of self-discovery and self-affirmation enable them to recognise, name and ultimately disclose their gender identities (Miller et al., 2018;

[3] Deadnaming is addressing a trans* person by using their birth name (deadname), while misgendering means referring to a trans* individual by using their gender assigned at birth.

Paechter et al., 2021). Communicating one's trans* identity within the school environment can be viewed as a powerful act of self-determination that challenges cisnormative assumptions, affirms the existence of trans* individuals, and expands the understanding of gender within the educational context (Francis, 2023). Indeed, as noted by Francis, «[i]n school contexts where cisnormativity goes unquestioned, the participant's identification as transgender or non-binary is itself a significant act of resistance against cisnormative power structures» (Ivi: 694).

The scientific literature has identified various resistance strategies employed by trans* students to assert their identities and advocate for their needs within the educational context. These resistance tactics encompass teaching adults and peers about trans* identities; intervening during class time through which to break the curricular invisibilisation of trans* subjectivities; participating in activism and protest actions; advocating for themselves; challenging cisnormative school practices (e.g., binary bathroom segregation); explicitly reporting discrimination experiences, including involving the media; and creating of supportive Lgbtqia+ spaces (Bower-Brown et al., 2021; Francis, 2023; 2024; Hillier et al., 2020; Iskander and Shabtay, 2018; McBride and Neary, 2021; McGlashan and Fitzpatrick, 2018).

The analysis of the scholarly literature shows how resisting school cisnormativity is a deeply contextualised, multifaceted phenomenon. The resistance tactics implemented by trans* students, therefore, are intricately intertwined with the unique challenges faced by trans* students within their school environment. According to Hillier et al. (2020), the resistances enacted by trans* pupils can be interpreted as expressions of situated agency, resulting from the negotiation between individual actions and social factors. The situated agency is a useful conceptual tool for understanding the interplay between individual choices and contextual mediation. It also helps to critically address the dichotomous understanding of the relationship between oppression and resistance, overcoming a polarised and rigid interpretation of victim and agent roles (Hillier et al., 2020).

By engaging in specific forms of situated agency, these students actively defy cisnormative power dynamics, seek and create support networks, and open up new possibilities for themselves and others (Gooding et al., 2023). «In doing so, they resisted internalised as well as externalised oppression. [...] the choices that trans students faced in school were constrained and socially mediated [...] and their experiences defied the victim/agent dichotomy» (Hillier et al., 2020: 398).

While resistance strategies are crucial for challenging cisnormativity, they can also increase the visibility and may make trans* students vulnerable within schools (McBride & Neary, 2021). Thus, resistance, vulnerability, and visibility can be understood as intertwined and ambivalent realities that manifest within the context of the unequal power dynamics inherent in the school environment (Singh et al., 2014; Santambrogio, 2024).

3. THE ITALIAN SCHOOL CONTEXT AND THE ALIAS CAREER

It is crucial to examine the characteristics of the Italian school system to effectively address the unique challenges faced by trans* students within the educational context. This discussion will help to understand the contextual factors that have led to the recent emergence of the alias career as a necessary regulatory measure for safeguarding the well-being and educational rights of trans* students. Consistent with the topic of this paper, the following commentary will focus exclusively on the secondary school level.

Studies conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Fra, 2020; 2024) and Ilga Europe (2024) indicate that Italy exhibits a high level of discrimination against the trans* population compared to other European countries. Tgeu (Trans Europe and Central Asia) has analysed the 2019 Fra survey data (2020), focusing specifically on the experiences of 20,933 trans* respondents. The results reveal that trans* individuals, particularly adolescents, face significant levels of discrimination, aggression, and denial of rights, particularly within educational and healthcare settings (Calderon-Cifuentes, 2021). Italy is also characterised by a lack of specific policies and guidelines aimed at promoting the well-being of trans* students within the Italian school system (Bourelly, 2023; Ohchr, 2019), which contributes to increased vulnerability for trans* students, who are more likely to experience scholastic malaise and discrimination compared to their cisgender peers (Hatchel et al., 2019).

Law 105 of 2015 is the only normative reference that thematises the valorisation of differences and the fight against discrimination within schools. It mandates that schools implement the principles of equal opportunities through their Three-Year Formative Offer Plans (*Piano Triennale dell'Offerta Formativa* - Ptof). However, neither Law 105/2015 nor the subsequent 2018 implementation guidelines, *Educating for respect: for gender equality, the prevention of gender-based violence and* *all forms of discrimination* (Ministry Of Education, University and Research, 2018), explicitly address gender identity and sexual orientation as specific forms of discrimination requiring targeted educational interventions. Gusmano and Selmi point out that this absence «is not accidental and can be read as the result of the delegitimisation campaigns of educational interventions against discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation» (2023: 72) promoted by anti-gender groups and movements, which in recent years have particularly targeted schools and educational initiatives committed to promoting trans* students' rights (Ponsiglione, 2023).

The absence of policies and guidelines aimed at promoting the educational well-being of trans* students is also joined by the lack of adequate training for teaching staff, stemming from the absence of comprehensive ministerial planning for pre-service and in-service teacher education. The dearth of compulsory courses on gender, sexuality, and Lgbtqia+ issues for the educational professions is absent in university courses and in-service training (Bourelly et al., 2022). The lack of comprehensive ministerial guidance on teacher training has led to significant disparities in teacher preparedness. Teachers with a personal interest in Lgbtqia+ issues are more likely to seek out independent training, while others may lack the motivation or resources to do so, potentially contributing to a divide within the teaching profession (Bochicchio et al., 2019; Bourelly, 2023). Consequently, implementing the alias career within schools is likewise largely dependent on the advocacy of students and parents, as well as the individual sensitivity and initiative of teachers and school principals. Moreover, due to the lack of guidance and policies, the alias career is currently governed by School Autonomy laws, granting autonomy to individual institutes (Benadusi et al., 2020). As a result, to be adopted, the alias career must be voted on by the School Council, which is formed by teachers, janitors, parents and students' representatives (Dradi, 2024).

The case of Cavour High School in Rome is a prominent example of the challenges and complexities surrounding implementing the alias career in Italian schools, primarily due to significant media attention. In December 2021, during a student occupation at Cavour High School, Andrea, a trans* student, supported by the *Rete degli studenti medi del Lazio*, publicly denounced the school principal's discrimination and refusal to implement his alias career through a video statement. The video quickly gained widespread media attention and was reported in numerous local and national newspapers (Berterame, 2021; Lupia, 2021; Marchese, 2021). Following significant media attention and pressure from Andrea and the student organisation, Cavour High School began implementing the alias career in the 2022/2023 school year (Liceo Cavour, 2022). In November 2022, the school faced media scrutiny again after another trans* student, Marco, experienced transphobic discrimination at the hands of a teacher. Marco, like Andrea, publicly denounced the incident, and the student organisation organised a flash mob in front of the school in solidarity (Lupia, 2022; Tominic, 2022).

Although the media debate was not treated as a primary data source, we cannot deny its relevance to the case study, particularly as part of the broader discursive context. Consequently, we provide a concise reconstruction of the media coverage, which can be grouped into three main discursive spheres: Firstly, an emotive sphere, centred on Andrea and Marco's personal stories, used to evoke sympathy and solidarity (Berterame, 2021; Lupia, 2021, 2022; Marchese, 2021); Secondly, a conflict-centred sphere, highlighting trans*-antagonistic episodes within the school, such as a teacher's refusal to recognise Marco's chosen name or the tearing of a trans*-inclusive poster (Figure 1) (Lupia, 2023; Tominic, 2022); Lastly, an institutional sphere involving political actors, advocacy groups, and school principals, which frames the debate in terms of trans* rights, school policies, and the need for structural change (e.g., the implementation of the alias career) (Lupia, 2022; La Repubblica, 2022; Raimo, 2021).

These discursive spheres highlight how institutions function as spaces where gender recognition may intersect with institutional and ideological resistance. They also reflect themes that emerged in the interviews, such as the difficulty of asserting one's identity in trans*-antagonistic environments and the strategies implemented by students to face such hostility, the perceived (il)legitimacy of student demands, and the ambivalent role of educators and school principals.

However, the media were not included in the analytical corpus, as the research aims to explore the lived experiences of the students directly involved. For this reason, we look at Cavour's case as an opportunity to make visible trans* students' perspectives and voices in the fight for recognition of their rights and needs within the school context and to reflect on trans* youth «subjectivity, agency, and power in schools and in the public sphere» (Iskander and Shabtay, 2018: 340).

4. METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study aims to describe and analyse youth resistance concerning the alias career, focusing on their ability to advocate for change within their institution. Cavour High School in Rome was identified as a case study to explore these themes through the lived experiences of two trans* students who were able to challenge school authorities through peer and media support in the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 school years. Additionally, Cavour High School is a cautionary tale concerning the implications of implementing school policies without adequate teacher training.

As a result, in January 2023, we interviewed the two trans* students, Andrea and Marco, along with two students, Giada and Emma, who were student representatives of Cavour High School in the 2021/2022 school year (Table 1). After the interviews, Marco and Giada were contacted again in December 2024 for supplementary information regarding possible legal developments.

Table 1. Students interviewed

Name[4]	**Gender**	**Interview age**	**School grade**
Andrea	Boy	20	Graduated
Marco	Boy	18	Fifth
Giada	Girl	18	Fifth
Emma	Girl	19	Fifth

The interviews were conducted using the semi-structured interview method (Bichi, 2002), starting with the prompt: "Could you tell me about your experience with the alias career?"

The interviews further explored the following themes:

- Requesting the alias career
- Resistance to school administration and educators
- Support from peers, school organisations and Lgbtqia+ organisations
- Media coverage (news articles, interviews) and its impact

All interviews were translated from Italian with careful attention to preserving the integrity of the students' words and faithfully representing their meanings. Then, they were analysed through narrative analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013), focusing on Andrea and Marco's experiences.

As trans* researchers, we recognise the importance of our positionality in the research process. Indeed, participants were aware of

[4] Andrea consented to use his real name, while we adopted the pseudonym used by the media for Marco. Pseudonyms were also assigned to the student representatives.

the interviewer's background, which may have influenced their responses.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Andrea's Case: fighting for the alias career

During the second half of the 2020/2021 school year, Andrea contacted his school principal to request the adoption of the alias career. After being consistently not recognised as a boy by most peers and educators, he thought that acquiring institutional support would improve his school life.

However, he was told they would sign the documentation to implement the alias career in September, the beginning of the 2021/2022 school year, his fifth and final year of secondary school. Despite this promise, his principal delayed contacting him until November and subsequently decided not to adopt the alias career. The main reasons she provided were that some parents complained and did not want the school to adopt the policy, and she was shielding him from bullying. The principal also repeated the latter during a meeting with Andrea's father.

> In the meantime, my father met with the principal, and he came back home telling me, «Look, the principal is a great woman. She told me she's doing this for you». For me?! She's doing it actively for me?! So, it's not even like I had problems or things like that, right?! I mean, you're imposing yourself on my need to be called by my name for my own good?! So I won't get mocked by who, exactly?! By those same jerks who perform Roman salutes in class and call me by a name that isn't mine, and then laugh when the teacher makes me cry in class and things like that?! I mean, I already feel bullied, and I don't need a name that isn't mine on the register and my class assignments, too (Andrea, 20 years old).

In December, the school body decided to occupy the institute. Moments before the occupation, Andrea asked for support from one of the organisers, a former Cavour student and member of the students' organisation *Rete degli studenti medi del Lazio*. As a result, the alias career was put on the protest agenda, and Andrea was given a journalist's contact information. During the school's occupation, he filmed a video reposted by many newspapers (Lupia, 2021) and was interviewed by Fanpage (Berterame, 2021), among others. These two videos went viral and were the stepping stones for the school body to fight and support Andrea. During the interviews for the media and with us, he was adamant that he would not continue to be disrespected at school.

> I can't allow myself to be trampled on in this way, especially when it comes to who I am [...] you can't tell me how I should live my gender identity, how I should experience the social acceptance of my gender identity. That just doesn't make sense in heaven or on earth (Andrea, 20 years old).

The school's student union also organised many events, such as Institute assemblies concerning the alias career and trans* students. Andrea was not actively involved during these events due to the passing of his best friend, but recounted that the school's student union was the main force against the school principal.

After gaining attention from the media and pressure from students, parents, teachers and Lgbtqia+ organisations, the principal rectified her decision concerning the alias career, announcing that it would be adopted indeed. However, it would be officially adopted and regulated only after Andrea's graduation.

> I didn't obtain the alias career. My name on the register stayed the same, but in return, with the whole newspaper issue, those teachers who used to be hostile towards me no longer dared to use a pronoun or a name that wasn't mine. Sure, for instance, the physics teacher would just call me "you". At the final exam, their eyes showed pure hatred instead of resentment. I mean, they looked at me with utter disgust when I went in for the oral exam. But I didn't care. I just had to leave that school (Andrea, 20 years old).

Despite the continuing issues within his classroom and not obtaining the alias career, he supported the school representatives who had started working on the alias career regulations with some teachers, parents, and lawyers, as the principal had left the task up to them.

In the Lazio Region, most schools adopted the alias career regulations of Via di Ripetta High School (Liceo Via di Ripetta, 2020), one of the first schools in the capital with this policy. However, the regulations have many issues. They require trans* students to provide a diagnosis of gender dysphoria and do not mention bathrooms, locker rooms, or teacher training. The individuals who worked on the regulations at Cavour High School did not include the diagnosis as a requirement and added other forms of support missing from Via di Ripetta High School's regulations, such as helping trans* students whose parents are against signing the confidentiality agreement.

> The great thing about our alias regulation is that many schools with an alias career policy have a bit less than we do. For example, we don't require a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, which often excludes non-binary people. Additionally, you don't need to go through a diagnosis, which can also feel

> pathologising. [...] Plus, there are other elements, like the fact that the school can provide support, and teachers can help communicate with parents because... if you're a minor, parents have to know anyway; it's unavoidable that parents are informed about this. [...] So, there are these additional elements (Giada, 18 years old).

However, when we asked both Giada and Emma if the teacher who helps students without parental support is trained on trans* issues, they were unable to respond.

Despite Andrea's challenges and the delays in adopting the alias career, he and the students' union advocated for change, allowing future trans* students to be recognised and respected. The efforts of students, parents and teachers resulted in regulations based on self-determination, eliminating the need for a gender dysphoria diagnosis and adding further supportive measures for minor students (Liceo Cavour, 2022). Nevertheless, like in most schools, significant issues remain, particularly concerning teacher training and awareness (Bourelly, 2023; 2024), as we will explore in the next section.

5.2 Marco's Case: Denouncing transphobia despite the alias career

Starting from the 2022/2023 school year, trans* students attending Cavour High School could request the alias career after Andrea and the school representatives' efforts. As a result, Marco, a fifth-year trans* student, was able to apply for the alias career.

In November, he signed a school test with his chosen name as allowed by the school's regulations (Liceo Cavour, 2022). However, his teacher deleted "Marco" from the test and wrote his birth name.

> So... there was a class test, an exam. I signed it as Marco because I have the alias career and can do so. I mean, it's in the regulations. I didn't make it up. And... when the teacher returned it, I saw that he had changed the name like he literally corrected it [laughs]. So, I asked for an explanation, and he told me that since the test was an official document, I couldn't use a made-up or fake name. I had to use the name on my ID card, which isn't true at all because the alias career was created precisely for this reason. So, I pulled out the alias career regulations, Article 4, and kindly invited him to read it, but he refused [laughs]. At that point, I wondered, «What am I supposed to do? » Anyway, he refused to read it and started yelling at me. I turned around and went to the vice principal's office because having a conversation was impossible. Every time I tried to speak, he yelled at me again. I was also on the verge of a panic attack, so I just gave up (Marco, 18 years old).

The possibility of signing school tests with one's chosen name has been debated for many years, as some schools state that they are official documentation. However, according to Gianluca Dradi (2024), a high school principal and lawyer, there are no legal concerns. In fact, tests can be easily attributed to the correct student since they must sign a confidentiality agreement and have all their personal information stored by the school.

Nevertheless, as the alias career regulations were written and voted on by the School Council, the teacher should have discussed the validity, or lack thereof, of article 4 with the principal and not used it as an excuse to bully a student. Indeed, the teachers' behaviour was indicative of a lack of training and transphobia and not solely related to the possible illegality of the regulations; «He said, 'I can't call you anything else because you're a woman, and that's the name written on your documents'» (Marco, 18 years old).

As with Andrea, Marco and the student union went to the media (Lupia, 2022). In support of Marco, the student union also organised a flash mob and a school assembly. During his interview in January 2023, Marco also stated that he and his family were considering suing his teacher. When we followed up with him in December 2024, he confirmed that he had filed the complaint but had received no further updates and feared that the investigation had not been pursued. However, given the slow pace of Italian bureaucracy, the investigation may still be ongoing.

Additionally, after the school gained attention from the media, three measures were taken due to the events. Firstly, Cavour High School's principal decided to take disciplinary action against the teacher, as recounted by the students. However, the interviewees could not tell us which specific actions were taken, and when following up in 2024, Marco and Giada reported that the teacher was still working at the school. Secondly, the Lgbtqia+ association Gaycenter reported the event to the Ministry of Education, which resulted in Minister Giuseppe Valditara making a statement on the matter.

> Then, after we caused such an uproar over this matter, the minister also made a statement saying, «no more discrimination» and other similar statements. But what does «no more discrimination» even mean? If he really believed in something like that, Minister Valditara should approve the alias career in all schools. Because saying «no more discrimination» means nothing if the alias career isn't actually implemented in schools (Giada, 18 years old).

Lastly, the event was reported by *Partito Democratico* (Senato della Repubblica, 2022) in an oral question to the Senate on November 16, 2022.

In their statement, they questioned which initiatives the Minister of Education would adopt to ensure trans* students' inclusion. They also asked if the Ministry would provide guidelines to ensure schools would adopt the alias career. However, this oral question is reported as still in progress; therefore, the authorities have yet to respond as of January 2025.

While disciplinary measures were taken against Marco's teacher, it is unclear whether these actions addressed the teacher's transphobia. On an institutional level, the statement by the Minister of Education against discrimination was not followed by prophylactic measures to protect the well-being of trans* students or to address systemic issues within the school environment. As mentioned by Giada, awareness regarding the alias career is necessary to address systemic issues and create awareness within schools.

> We have tried to raise as much awareness as possible on this issue. We can adopt the alias career, but if the teachers are unaware and don't understand what it means or how it works... they will continue to do things like what happened to Marco (Giada, 18 years old).

As Giada predicted, the issues at Cavour High School did not end with Andrea and Marco. After the interview, for the 2023 Transgender Day of Visibility, *Rete degli studenti medi del Lazio* (2023) organised numerous events to give visibility to the alias career. During Cavour High School's event on March 31, 2023, a teacher tore a student's banner, saying, "alias careers in every school" (Figure 1). Instead of admonishing the religious studies teacher, Cavour High School's principal decided to reprimand the students because the school did not authorise the event.

Figure 1. Torn banner "alias careers in every school"

Source: Rete degli studenti medi del Lazio (2023)

6. DISCUSSION

The interviews with Cavour High School's students revealed numerous issues with the lack of ministerial regulations and guidance for adopting the alias career and the consequences of implementing the policy without staff training and awareness on trans* subjects. While the events at Cavour High School indicate systemic issues within this particular institution, it is essential to highlight that not all students have the support systems needed to denounce the school administration's wrongdoings. Consequently, students from other schools may have faced similar issues, but they are not visible due to a lack of support. Indeed, Andrea and Marco brought about change and awareness within their institution thanks to the support of the school body, student unions, Lgbtqia+ associations and media outlets (Iskander, Shabtay, 2018).

The most notable issue that emerged from the interviews was related to the difficulties faced during interactions between students and adults. In particular, the school principal took action in both events only after facing backlash from the media. Her changed behaviour highlights how her priorities do not lie with supporting students but initially with acquiescing with the demands of transphobic parents (Iskander and Shabtay, 2019: 343-344) and afterwards with maintaining a positive public image. In recent decades, schools have been managed as businesses rather than educational environments for young people (Benadusi et al., 2020). Additionally, students requesting the alias career without their parents' direct involvement face additional issues due to adultism and the invisibilisation of trans* identities, further highlighting the inherent power imbalance in the relationship between students and school authorities. The restriction of students' agency during these interactions can act as the catalyst for student resistance, as demonstrated by Andrea (Hall, 2021; Iskander and Shabtay, 2018).

While the principal's decisions were ultimately influenced by public pressure, Cavour High School's reactive approach underlines the challenges faced by students without external support or visibility. Most schools adopt the alias career only when requested, leaving many students needing to advocate for themselves and come out when seeking support.

The media's involvement not only changed the principal's actions. In Andrea's case, it also shaped the behaviour of the teachers and classmates who did not respect his gender identity and bullied him. However, this shift was not indicative of understanding and changed values, but most likely of the fear of being shamed for their actions, knowing that Andrea was no longer alone in his battle. Indeed, receiving support from activists and adults within and outside school can be essential to fighting the power imbalance between students and educators (Francis, 2023; 2024).

Additionally, Marco's experience shows how teachers can easily undermine and challenge the alias career and how, without external support, administrators can ignore their actions. Indeed, implementing the alias career without mandatory training on trans* issues and addressing systemic transphobia within the institution leaves students vulnerable and possibly the victims of bullying by staff and peers (Bourelly, 2023).

Cavour High School is a perfect example of how trans students can resist school authorities through situated agency. Andrea and Marco's actions, in fact, reflect the interplay between their need for recognition and support and the constraints imposed by their principal and educators (Hillier et al., 2020).

The collaboration between trans* youths and student unions, Lgbtqia+ associations, and media outlets shows the strategic use of support networks to shape their school environment by showing a united front to resist school authorities after their inaction.

Andrea's advocacy for the alias career for himself and other trans* students, such as Marco (Gooding et al., 2023) and Marco's determination to confront his teacher's transphobia underline the active role trans* students can take in redefining power dynamics within their institutions (Hillier et al., 2020). Indeed, by actively asserting their rights as students and trans* individuals, Andrea and Marco directly challenge the dominant cisnormative gender system within the school environment.

Establishing solidarity networks among students has proven crucial in advocating for implementing the alias career and denouncing discrimination, leading to concrete and situated improvements within the school environment (Francis, 2023; 2024; Iskander and Shabtay, 2019). These collective actions not only address immediate concerns but also have the potential to create lasting change, opening up new possibilities for current and future trans* students within the educational context (Gooding et al., 2023).

However, policies supporting trans* students and teacher training must already be present in all schools, but they have not been implemented because of students' resistance and advocacy (Omercajic and Martino, 2020). Consequently, the Ministry of Education must provide regulation and guidance on the alias career and mandate training for principals, teaching and non-teaching staff, and pre-service educators.

7. CONCLUSION

By examining the resistance tactics adopted by Cavour High School's students, this research sheds light on the complex relationship between youth agency and vulnerability within cisnormative educational settings (McBride & Neary, 2021), providing crucial recommendations for school administrators and policymakers.

The Cavour High School case study urges us to rethink the power relations within school contexts. The analysis of the resistance strategies employed by trans* students at Cavour High School and the supportive networks they have built underlines the urgent need for systemic change within the educational institution. While these student-led initiatives are crucial for challenging discrimination and marginalisation, the responsibility for transforming the school environment cannot solely rest on the shoulders of trans* students. While resistance strategies are essential for challenging cisnormativity, they can also increase the visibility and vulnerability of trans* students within the school environment (Hillier et al., 2020; McBride and Neary, 2021). This issue highlights the complex and often ambivalent nature of resistance within unequal power structures, where increased visibility can also heighten vulnerability (Singh et al., 2014; Santambrogio, 2024). In that respect, we argue that teachers and school staff play a pivotal role in fostering a more welcoming and respectful school environment. This change necessitates a commitment to personal and institutional transformation, requiring critical self-reflection on cisnormative biases within the school culture and the active promotion of gender equity (Paechter et al., 2021) that extends beyond the formal adoption of the alias career.

The analyses presented here also have implications for policymakers, highlighting the importance of prioritising trans* students' well-being and promoting structural change to make schools safer and supportive environments (Phipps and Blackall, 2023).

Indeed, Andrea and Marco's experiences highlight the need for schools to equip themselves with the means, such as the alias career, necessary to promote trans* students' rights and positive educational pathways. However, simply adopting these policies without engaging the entire school community in a participatory process of systemic change cannot guarantee their effectiveness.

We believe the alias career can only be effective if it is accompanied by the implementation of training courses for school and teaching staff, and structural changes based on the principle of gender self-determination (Bourelly et al., 2022; Evans and Rawlings, 2021; McBride and Schubotz, 2017). These transformative actions include: the creation of gender-neutral bathrooms and changing rooms accessible to everyone, updating dress codes to allow students to wear uniforms consistent with their gender identity and/or expression, commitment to ensure respect for the alias career also in relation to external realities (such as Pathways for transversal skills and orientation[5], or sports competitions), the inclusion of trans* themes in educational and curricular materials, and the creation of structured and continuous training courses for the student population, implemented by competent local organisations (such as Lgbtqia+ associations) (Ingrey, 2023; Francis and Monakali, 2021; McBride and Schubotz, 2017; Phipps and Blackall, 2023).

It is, therefore, crucial for policymakers to be able to listen to, welcome, and support the voice and needs of trans* students, to build bottom-up and situated policies that are genuinely committed to making schools places founded on a gender culture that values every gender identity and expression (Francis, 2024; Vicars and Wolfe, 2023).

As Kumashiro states:

> The situated nature of oppression (whereby oppression plays out differently for different people in different contexts) and the multiple and intersecting identities of students make difficult any antioppressive effort that revolves

[5] *Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento* (Pcto) is a mandatory program required for graduation, designed to help high school students acquire practical skills through work-based learning experiences and career orientation activities.

> around only one identity and only one form of oppression. […] what is produced or practised as a safe space, a supportive program, a feminist pedagogy, or a culturally relevant pedagogy cannot be a strategy that claims to be the solution for all people at all times, but is rather a product or practice that is constantly being contested and redefined. Rather than search for a strategy that works, I urge educators to address the articulated and known needs and individuality of the students, while constantly looking to the margins to find students who are being missed and needs that have yet to be articulated (2002: 38).

If structured in this way, the alias career can act as a picklock, able to unhinge the codes of cisnormative school organisation, supporting programmatic and multilevel actions effectively committed to promoting the rights, well-being and positive schooling of trans* students.

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QUEERNESS AND COLLECTIVE CARE WITHIN UNIVERSITY: INSIGHTS FROM MEMORY WORK WITH STUDENT GROUPS

by Micol Pizzolati[*]

Abstract

Drawing on Memory Work workshops facilitated at three Italian universities, this article explores how queer students create and inhabit spaces of collective care and belonging within academic contexts. By linking scholarship on queer student experiences with those on the politics of care, this work examines participants' desires and motivations for fostering mutual and circular support. The approach involved engaging participants in writing autobiographical memories, which were then discussed collectively, allowing complex meanings and tensions to surface. By reweaving these narratives, the article highlights how queerness, care, and commitment intersect in university life, offering insights into transformative forms of belonging.

Keywords

Collaborative care practices; Memory Work; Queer student experiences in higher education; Transformative belonging

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1. INTRODUCTION

Queerness is more visible in society than perhaps ever before, which offers a need for social research across a wide range of issues. Despite the long history of queer people being excluded from and pushed out of social and educational institutions, queer studies and some queer lives are now incorporated into universities (Taylor et al., 2023). This calls for exploring what inclusivity means, looks like, and feels like within these institutions (Black, 2024). University can be a pivotal time for queer-identifying youth, who attempt to navigate new relationships in a predominantly heteronormative and sometimes hostile environment (Woodford et al., 2024). This period presents a tension of choosing between remaining hidden and invisible or striving to transform the context (Ferfolja et al., 2020).

Experiencing difference, as in exploring non-normative gender and sexuality, can make individuals vulnerable to isolation and loneliness, preventing them from feeling a sense of belonging, particularly among young people (Batsleer and Duggan, 2021). Involvement in queer student groups is one strategy to develop protective mechanisms (Joy and Numer, 2017). Youth-led activist groups, working towards their vision of safe and inclusive societies, create a culture of care (Furman et al., 2019; Sligo et al., 2022; Sotevik, 2024), including within universities, and sustain the ability to enact change (Black, 2024). As Waling and Roffee (2019) highlight, while there is a wealth of research on the individual experiences of LGBTQIA+ students in universities, such as mental well-being and academic progress, there is a lack of research on their interactions and forms of togetherness, including activism activities.

The dialogue between academics, activists, and university bodies regarding practices related to creating queer-welcoming institutional spaces is growing in Italy, involving visible and recognized student advocacy. This dynamic both creates and demands a sense of community that is important to explore through biographical and emotional perspectives. This framework challenged me first as a person whose daily life unfolds in these contexts and then as a scholar.

My research aims to provide insights into how students feel welcome and collectively care for relational spaces within queer activist groups organised at Italian universities. It builds on the trajectory of queer research in higher education in recent years (Lange et al., 2019), while also drawing on an epistemology that centres queer languages and practices, validating the inherent worth and value of queerness, and acknowledging the tension of using *queerness* as a categorising concept without limiting its power as a site of contestation and deconstruction (Winters and Ningard, 2023).

This work integrates care both as a crucial theme for academic contexts (Legassic, 2024) and as a research approach (Brannelly and Barnes, 2022).

Inspired by Black (2024), for the purposes of this research, I consider queer university activism to encompass a broad range of actions and relationships, not limited to vocal protests by individuals or groups expressing their desire for systemic change, but also including forms of community that offer support, information, friendship, and a sense of belonging— vital for well-being. Given the challenges in accurately representing the everyday experience of queerness within the university milieu, I recognised the need to adopt an approach that allowed for embodied, flexible, non-intrusive, and careful research encounters. I chose Memory Work as it aligns with this purpose and the context of the research. This method engages the participants through the interweaving of personal writing and shared discussion (Widerberg, 2020), thus grounding the research process in participatory work by and within the group.

In the following sections, I begin by outlining how the research question that guided the development of this project emerged. I then describe the method, my encounter and relationship with the participants, and the way I connected the narratives they shared, also weighing their experiences of writing memories and listening to those of others. Through an interweaving of written memories and the discussions they provoked, I explore layers of participants' needs, desires and motivations to engage in collective care practices, highlighting their varied and complex meanings.

While participants identified as non-binary, lesbian, gay, or trans during the research workshops, they all self-selected to join the study and used *queer* to describe themselves, their experiences, and their activist practices. For clarity and in respect of their self-identification, I use *queer* throughout this article to refer to all participants, as it encompasses diverse expressions of sex, gender, and sexuality, allowing for an expansive self-definition while leaving room for interpretation (Black, 2024). Although I use the term *activist*—commonly employed in literature on student engagement in higher education—the participants did not explicitly identify with it or label their practices as such. I use *activism* to describe their collective efforts to pursue and generate transformation.

2. MATURING A RESEARCH DEMAND: A MAPPING OF QUEER STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND THE POLITICS OF COLLECTIVE CARE

A growing body of literature explores the complex interplay between identifying as an LGBTQIA+ person and navigating the everyday experience of university life. These studies, emerging across diverse global contexts, continue to evolve, expanding the range of research questions and theoretical approaches. They underscore the necessity of investigating the transformative actions within the environments where lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer students engage and commit themselves (Sharp et al., 2022).

Building on these foundational themes, several studies have examined the nuanced ways in which queer students experience safety, inclusion, and solidarity within university settings. In this regard, Allen et al. (2020) discovered that while participants reported a general sense of safety on campus, their narratives simultaneously revealed multiple instances of unsafety—suggesting an ongoing, intertwined relationship between these two perceptions. Noreiga and Burkholder (2022) further this discussion by highlighting the challenges queer students face when their sense of safety is confined to specific areas of the campus, rather than being felt universally across the university. These challenges include difficulties in locating supportive educators, feeling tolerated rather than genuinely included, and encountering explicit discrimination from peers. Waling and Roffee (2019) examined how university environments can shape students’ reluctance to engage with others who share their LGBTQIA+ identity. Their participants expressed feelings of being not queer enough in relation to homonormative expectations, or conversely, too queer when measured against transnormative frameworks.

In contrast, Garcia et al. (2023) document the various strategies queer students employ to cope with their unique challenges and make sense of their university experience. These strategies include finding supportive communities, building social connections, advocating for themselves and others, and fostering a sense of agency. Similarly, Joy and Numer (2017) explore the experience of a student-led queer advocacy group, showing how participation in such a group generates a sense of accomplishment, pride, emotional bonding and social connectedness.

In their exploration of resistance practices against the marginalization of queer identity and scholarship, Winters and Ningard (2023) propose a redefinition of care that transcends narrow gendered and neoliberal frameworks. They conceptualize care as a form of mutual aid, suggesting that the creation of reimagined university spaces requires a shift away from a transactional approach—I care for you, and you care for me in return—towards a more radical, collaborative practice of social solidarity. This form of care, rooted in mutual aid, materializes through collective and participatory actions.

This redefinition of care resonates with Gusmano’s (2022) concept of a politics of complicity, in which networks of care and friendship among queer individuals are not only emotionally sustaining but also politically significant. Rather than being grounded in obligation or reciprocity, these relationships create spaces of belonging and resistance, both within and beyond institutional settings. Research on university activism has also shown that students with minoritised identities who are actively engaged in activism often experience feelings of missing out on creative or life-giving opportunities, and may face emotional and mental exhaustion or alienation (Linder et al., 2019; Conner et al., 2023). Simultaneously, these students often feel responsible for caring for their activist peers (Vaccaro and Mena, 2011).

The intersection of the literature on queer student experiences and collective care has prompted me to ask, within the specific context of Italian universities, how collective care practices emerge among queer students, and how these practices are shaped by their needs, desires, and motivations, ultimately contributing to the creation of spaces of belonging, solidarity, and mutual support.

3. CO-CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE: APPROACH, PARTICIPANTS, AND SENSE OF THINGS

Doing research with young queer students as a cisgender adult and privileged outsider made me reflect on the possible ethical challenges (Levy, 2013) and the need for conducting research through a social justice lens (Parson, 2019). Alongside the research question itself, it was equally important to me to create an inclusive (Fang et al., 2024) and safe space (Pizzolati, 2025). I also drew on Batsleer and Duggan's (2021) emphasis on the need to question the individual gaze when exploring the entanglement of loneliness and belonging in young people's everyday contexts.

Jourian and Nicolazzo (2016) called for further queering of LGBTQIA+ research in higher education by adopting collaborative methodologies to enhance both the practices and knowledge of queer communities, and to collectively imagine new realities. The design of my project was thus shaped by the intersection of challenges and opportunities: to involve groups of queer university activists through a participatory method capable of eliciting, in their own words, narratives of everyday university life—both its difficulties and moments of joy—how they wish or need their lives to be, and their constrained capacities for change. I also felt it important to engage participants in a creative and intellectual activity that could serve as enriching educational experience.

I followed these directions, offering the groups involved the opportunity to engage with an approach developed for self-study within activist groups, such as Memory Work (Haug, 1992). This method favours reciprocal and collective exchange and contribution (Widerberg, 2020), in alignment with the way university activist groups work and engage. I felt it was important to challenge the convention of academic research as an individual endeavour, and I am comfortable with methods that involve the interaction of groups of people in the creation of narratives and the construction of knowledge. At the same time, I embraced Brown and Leigh's (2018) emphasis on the use of new methodological approaches in social research around university pathways.

Memory Work is distinctive in that it creates a context for exploring the folds of everyday life by problematising what is often taken for granted. Through recalling and writing stories of experiences, both participants and researchers are invited to search for varied layers of meaning and interpretation—within their own stories and in those of others (Widerberg, 2020). The approach has been applied across different contexts and themes, including with university students (Mogensen and Stigemo, 2021) and with queer adults and youth (Coes et al., 2018). It has also been adapted to suit the aims of specific projects, as well as the relationships among those involved (Simovska et al., 2019). By passing personal experience through multiple filters—writing it down in the third person, reading each other's memories, discussing, comparing, questioning, and looking at the story from different angles—this method can create the conditions for participants to become aware of their active contribution to the social world (Vlachou, 2020).

Building on these premises, and drawing on previous experience with the method, I designed a Memory Work workshop in which autobiographical stories prompted by the theme of 'a time when I felt welcome at university' would be discussed in relation to the themes of loneliness, change, and care. I contacted six university LGBTQIA+ collectives from different Italian regions by sending a message through social media platforms—WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram and Facebook—introducing myself and inviting the group to participate in a workshop. In the message, I explained why I was developing the research and how I wanted to involve them, as follows:

> I've been at university for a long time: first as a student, then a PhD candidate, a temporary researcher, and for the past few years a lecturer in sociology and (visual and creative) methods for social research—always in different, often distant cities. Moving through so many university spaces and contexts has made me reflect on how relationships shape the student experience, and vice versa—a topic I've been researching for some time. I would therefore like to invite a small group from your collective to take part in a closed-door workshop to explore how being part of it makes the university feel emotionally welcoming to you.

Within a short period, three groups from three areas of Italy—the north-west, north-east and centre—based in two medium-sized universities and one large university—responded. To ensure anonymity in this article, I have assigned each group a fictional name, as shown in Table 1 and will refer to them as Collective(s) throughout. I then sent a more detailed flyer about the workshop, including the title/theme «Collective care for the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people in the university environment» and an overview of the method we would use, namely writing autobiographical stories and discussing them together. With one or a few members of each group, I arranged short video calls and chats to explore whether the proposed topic resonated with their activism.

After receiving confirmation, I scheduled appointments with each group. The three workshop sessions were held in autumn 2024 and lasted approximately two and a half hours each. Each group chose the most suitable and accessible venue. Eleven young people participated in the research, including on-site, commuter, and off-site students. Participants included both undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as one person who had temporarily suspended their enrolment. One participant was of African descent. Transgender people were present in each of the three groups.

I provided the participants with a handout containing all the necessary information about the research, including a request for consent to photograph the story sheets and record the discussion. The handout also included instructions for writing the memory to be shared:

> Write a memory of a situation in which you felt welcomed at university.
> - It must be an autobiographical story, but written in the third person, as if recounting the experience of someone else, using a name other than your own.
> - Try to complete it in about twenty minutes.
> - Write in capital letters to help me read it more easily. :)

The handout also offered prompts for the group discussion:

> What does this story say:
> - About loneliness?
> - About change?
> - About caring?
> What else is this story about?

In the first part of the workshop, each participant received an erasable pen and a bamboo sheet—slightly thicker and warmer in tone than standard printer paper—taken from a drawing pad. This choice aimed to subtly mark the writing activity as distinct from routine academic work. I set a timer for twenty minutes, although the groups organically extended the writing time by ten to twenty additional minutes. At the end of the memory-writing activity, participants were asked to sign their story with a pseudonym, which I use throughout this article to refer to them (see Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of research project participants.

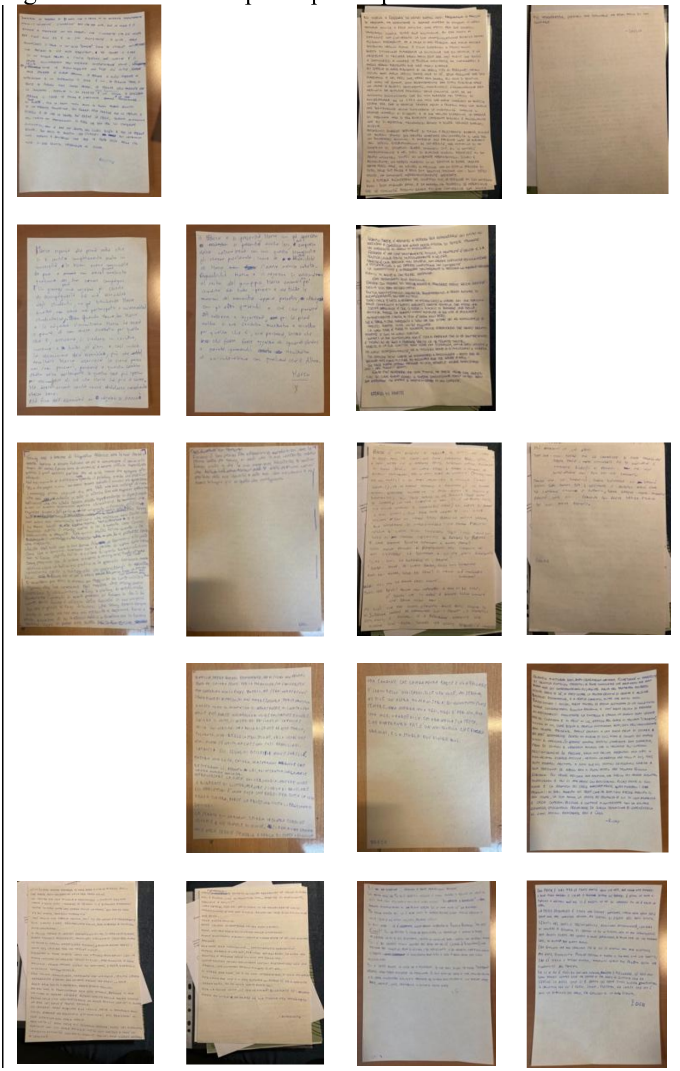
Participant pseudonym	Fictional name of respective Collective
Andrew	*Iris*
Antonietta	*Sound*
Balda	*Sound*
Eden	*Iris*
Giulia	*Sound*
Marco	*Iris*
Marte	*Sound*
Nab	*Crystal*
Orfeo	*Crystal*
Ricky	*Iris*
~S	*Iris*

In the second part of the workshop, which was audio-recorded and later transcribed by me, I read each story aloud and initiated a discussion around it. The short autobiographical texts were addressed one by one, primarily through the lens of three aspects of everyday university life that I had proposed as a starting point for exploration—while leaving space for any other themes and reflections that the stories might evoke. The outputs of the process are, therefore, both the individual stories and the collective discussions they generated and became entangled with. In the following paragraphs, excerpts from the written memoirs are presented in italics, to distinguish them from those drawn from the discussions.

The first part of the workshop naturally fostered an atmosphere of silence and concentration. The subsequent discussion evolved in continuity with the sodality that characterises the ways of belonging and being an activist in the Collective, particularly the explicit expression of mutual understanding and sharing of experiences. At times, the discussion tended to take the form of an explanation directed towards me, which gradually positioned me as a more active participant in the discussion. This process offered participants time and space to reflect on how they wanted to express their own experiences and to highlight one another's stories, conveying emotions in a manner that felt appropriate and comprehensible to them.

The approach facilitated the creation of a setting in which the hierarchies inherent in social research were softened, despite the differences in age and role. This was something the participants themselves noticed and expressed to me at the end of the discussion. For example, Balda stated: «You didn't break anything, there was no weight of 'there's a researcher', there was no interview thing, from above, from an outsider, it was just a very informal chat, but no less profound».

Figure 1. Collection of participants' penned memories



In the three workshops, the groups spontaneously developed their own ways of analysing the stories. I noticed, for example, that in the Iris Collective, participants always used the pseudonym to refer to the author of the story, or indirect forms such as «in this story ... »—thus regulating expression of their emotions. On the other hand, members of Sound and Crystal more often used their companion's real name, expressing emotion both verbally and bodily.

Memory Work resonates with creative methods (Giorgi et al., 2021) in that participants produced artefacts—their stories (see Figure 1)—which were treated as such during the workshops. After I read each story aloud, we discussed its visual features, such as handwriting and erasures. Once I photographed the sheets, everyone kept their own. This suggested to me that each story was experienced as a form of self-representation (Holtby et al., 2015).

The analysis of materials from workshop-based collective work varies according to the subject explored, the context in which the inquiry is developed, and the uses and purposes of the resulting data. I was, therefore, prompted to develop an approach for this article that captured and made sense of written memories, collective discussions, and their entanglement. I sought to give space to the participants' ways of talking about themselves and their practices, so the analysis emerged both following their reasoning and using their words as much as possible. I have also chosen to interweave expressions and excerpts from activists who were not members of the same group and therefore not participants in the same workshop.

4. AN EMBODIED EFFORT AND ENJOYMENT: PARTICIPANTS GOING THROUGH THE MEMORY WORK PROCESS

The approach I proposed for the workshops required participants to engage in relatively everyday activities, such as remembering, writing, listening and speaking, but in decidedly unusual ways. At the end of each of the three sessions, the students, with varying degrees of prompting from me, shared their reflections on their experience of doing Memory Work. I outline them here in order to inform researchers and activists who may be interested in using the method in turn.

Orfeo is categorical about his relationship with remembering and confides: «I have a terrible short-term memory, but I remember everything that has happened to me in life; that is, I have memories that I shouldn't have, in the sense that there is no explanation of how I have them». For his companion Nab, however, remembering required a more intense—or at least different—effort. When asked about the memory she wrote, she said:

> Then I have a memory problem, which is that I don't remember much. It's generally difficult for me to recall specific moments, especially when I'm asked like this, in reality. [On that day] my memories overlap a bit, that's certainly the idea; the general thing is actually this, but I didn't put in too many details because I wasn't sure what

> day it was, so I included the things that I was actually sure of then, gradually, as I wrote, I deleted things and added others later, also because, while writing, I remembered things that had happened and everything.

Yet, when approached collectively, writing can acquire new meanings and unexpected forms of pleasure. Writing down a memory is neither natural nor spontaneous, and doing so in company—whether about memories or not—is even less common. During a Memory Work session, «the act of writing with others triggers your own writing» (Widerberg, 2020: 55). For some participants, the setting brought the pleasure of having a moment «of our own, in private, to jot down what we feel and lay it out in a beautiful form, in the sense that when a person writes, they are more careful they package it, exactly, and so there was this more personal moment, you in front of the paper», as Marco described his sense of comfort.

In certain cases, participants reflected on their infrequent engagement with writing. For example, Balda remarked, «I actually realise that after at least four years of not writing argumentative texts, I have many gaps in fully expressing what I wanted to express», while Nab reflected, «I'm not very used to writing down what happens to me, my thoughts, and things».

Writing also offered a chance for enjoyment. Ricky, for instance, shared his feelings:

> Writing is something that comes easily to me; I haven't practised it that much lately, but when I do, it feels natural, I feel comfortable with it. The memory that we were asked to recount was a pleasant experience, a welcoming event, and this contributed to creating a sense of tranquillity within me, not [exactly] nostalgia, but the feeling of something good that has happened, that has passed.

Beyond comfort and enjoyment, writing also opened up deeper processes of transformation. In this regard, Orfeo observes that «paradoxically, [writing] has taken attention away from the situation [and by writing] I have effectively given this perspective, which isn't the perspective, that is, of my actual memory; basically, my actual memory is more specific».

I felt it was important to create a writing experience that contrasted with the usual practice of typing on technological devices. Marco was pleased to write by hand, not because it is something he usually does but because it reminded him of composing essays, which he used to enjoy at school. For Ricky, writing by hand is something he is «no longer accustomed to», and he found «nice» that his hand «hurt». «I think it's useful to write by hand because you are actually more attuned to your body», Nab remarked.

Writing in the third person involves transforming a memory into something new—and, in doing so, transforming one's own sense of self. On the matter of how one views themselves, Giulia put it this way:

> You always think about your life in the first person, but it's a good exercise to write it in the third person, to depersonalise your own experiences a little bit, so you get a really different perspective, to rethink and rework them. It's something I think about a lot, but I think in some ways we tend to be a little bit nicer to others than we are to ourselves. So, I think writing in the third person, as if it were someone else's story, also helps us to write it, maybe with a bit more gentleness, and to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt a bit more than maybe we usually do.

Writing in the third person, Marco suggests with a different nuance, «creates a certain distance, but somehow it brings you closer, because when you tell something, you become the narrator of a story that you've lived and therefore you're able to analyse it in a different way». For Antonietta, this perspective not only helped her «to write the story much more without a filter», but also «made it easier for us to interpret it».

Just as writing from a shifted perspective offered new insights, listening to others' stories also evoked strong emotional responses. Balda was moved as he stepped into the shoes of the protagonist in Giulia's story, which took place at a turning point in her life: *«Several weeks of tentative and frustrating research passed, until one day a link to an anonymous survey appeared on the university's WhatsApp group: at the initiative of a queer student collective called [Sound], LGBT people were asked if they had ever experienced discrimination at university».* Nab was also touched by Orfeo's story, set during an event organised by the Collective that she also attended:

> *Chiara dresses up, puts glitter on her face and goes to the university. A crowd was waiting for her, colourful, lively. She held up the banner and shouted the songs she had never heard, but which were so familiar. She meets the gaze of her new sisters, she does not know it yet, Chiara, but they will be the ones standing there, next to her, then next to him (although Chiara does not know it yet).*

«We're talking about an environment that we all know well, so knowing how others perceived it the first time is very, very sweet» says Marco. Reflecting on hearing his friends' reactions to his own story, he adds: «you see different points of view, details that you hadn't noticed before, so your perception changes too, and something is added».

This multiplicity of engagements—cognitive, affective, embodied—reveals how the Memory Work process, as developed in these workshops, fostered both personal insight and a renewed sense of connection among participants. These dynamics were reflected in the welcoming and supportive atmosphere that permeated our interactions throughout the sessions a theme that becomes even more apparent as I explore the stories of how participants experienced being welcomed.

5. Welcoming Encounters: From My Fieldwork to Their Writing

Welcoming weaves through this project in multiple ways. It not only serves as the underlying theme of the participants' memories but also, in hindsight, became a defining feature of my brief yet intimate relationship with them. Each group chose spaces where I felt welcomed, despite their diversity: the kitchen of an apartment, a room in a self-managed collective space, and a classroom shared by various university associations. In addition to the physical setting, the exchange of small gestures and casual conversation further facilitated our mutual welcoming: leaving work early to greet me, offering me coffee, talking to me about their academic challenges, sharing the coconut-milk chocolate bar I had brought, and hugging each other as we said our goodbyes at the end of the session.

When designing the project and approaching a university collective, I never assumed that my differences would not be seen as problematic. From the moment I sent my request to generate interest, the distance in status was immediately clear: I was a university lecturer wanting to ask students questions. While my cisgender identity was perceived at times during our interactions, I did not sense that it provoked perplexity, curiosity, or created distance. Rather, the difference most often acknowledged was my institutional role. In the final moments of each session, this dynamic was made explicit. Giulia, for example, commented on this aspect:

> As a Collective, we always try to create a more horizontal dialogue, where we're all on the same level. It's strange and very curious, but also very interesting to see this being done by a person who objectively has more knowledge than us, who is more experienced than us, and who is also a professor. I mean, you're also a professor too, so in that sense, meeting you in this environment makes it hard for me to imagine, for example, taking a class with you.

As part of my role during the sessions, I choose to read the stories aloud. Not asking participants to read their own stories made them feel more at ease: «I liked the fact that I didn't have to read it myself because it was something that was very intimidating for me», said Andrew. Reading aloud also allowed me to connect with the group in a different way - through my voice, as an outsider - and to do more than simply facilitate the activity. For instance, I used tone and emphasis to highlight certain words. While I occasionally commented on their calligraphies, I deliberately avoided offering remarks on the stories themselves, so as not to come across as condescending. I did, however, intervene at times during the discussion, speaking sincerely when I was struck by a particular episode or by the way it was told.

In line, in some respects, with findings from other studies (Silver and Krietzberg, 2023), the stories written by participants reflect a context in which feeling welcomed emerges as the result of effort - an intentional and, at times, strenuous search for community and connection (Garcia et al., 2023). These narratives describe both moments directly linked to their belonging to the Collective and more casual interactions in university life, such as exchanges with peers or lecturers during classes. Eden, for example, recalled their first assembly:

> *The first meeting was very confusing, they didn't understand half the things, they didn't know anyone, but they felt they were in the right place. Sitting in the university courtyard, listening carefully, trying to understand the discourse, they felt a little at fault, as if they didn't belong, at least not yet. But they knew they wanted to belong, to do what they were doing, to help as much as they could.*

Before that episode, the protagonist of Orfeo's story *«was perhaps afraid to come out of her torpor and live»*. In these stories, vivid terms are used to describe the contexts created through the supportive relationships among queer university students—similarly to what emerges, for example, in Noreiga and Burkholder's (2022) research, in which participants speak of emotional spaces as havens. In Giulia's memory, the welcome she received on this occasion is described as something very tangible and soft:

> *Eli immediately contacted them and within a few days attended his first meeting, discovering a wonderful environment: safe and welcoming, a soft carpet to fall on without hurting yourself, a group of people with whom you could talk about everything - about fears and identity - people who shared the same values as Eli, but who were still wonderfully multicoloured.*

The stories also convey moments when participants felt truly seen, often *«for the first time»*, as in Nab's story. This feeling can be surprising: Marco experiences *«relief and lightness»*, Balda gains *«the confidence he needed»*, and Andrew *«watches fear and anxiety fade away»*. Ricky compares this feeling to *«someone wrapping his heart, his soul, the deepest part of him, in a soft, warm blanket»*.

Such moments also describe the sensation of being taken into account: Andrew, for instance, shares that his peers *«do not ignore him, they ask his opinion in discussions and he feels the fear and anguish disappear»*. Anna, the protagonist of Antonietta's story, no longer hears *«the voices in her head telling* *her that she was not enough, that others were better than her»*. In Marte's story, the act of doing things for others becomes a way of feeling welcomed:

> *A few months ago, Marte started collecting clothes that people no longer use and giving them to friends. He enjoys hosting people at his house and watching them leave happy with their 'new' clothes. While it may seem like a small thing, Marte finds this exchange and sharing a meaningful way to explore himself and feel part of a community.*

«Every time she feels like she's doing politics and building something important within the university, with people who are unique, strong, creative, loud, angry and joyful about being queer» is an occasion where the protagonist of ~S's story feels welcomed and connected. These memories of feeling welcomed and recognised highlight how participants craft belonging through small, meaningful encounters. So far, I have focused on the stories they wrote - stories that convey connection, care, and the desire to find one's place. Yet these narratives also opened space for group conversations that brought to the surface more complex and ambivalent experiences. In what follows, I turn to the folds of feeling lonely as a queer student.

6. IN THE FOLDS OF FEELING LONELY AS A QUEER STUDENT

Participants confronted each other with their written memories, finding words to express how loneliness is embedded at different levels in the folds of their everyday university experiences. This exploration allows various nuances to emerge, which resonate with findings from other research, such as the feeling of being both invisible and targeted (Sotevik, 2024) and of entering a void (Noreiga and Burkholder, 2022).

As doubts about one's sexual identity arise and mature, one experiences what Orfeo describes as «detachment, not belonging, and torpor a feeling of vagueness, where you feel something inside, but you don't know how to throw it out». In these moments, one often finds themselves in «solitude or isolation, in one's own head», explains Marco while commenting on Eden's and Ricky's memories.

Reflecting on the similarities between Giulia's memory and his own experience, Marte shares that he recognised himself «a lot, both in the loneliness of discovering gender and looking online for support and tools to better understand yourself, and also in the sense of isolation when you're looking around at university and see a reality that you don't like». One aspect of loneliness experienced as a queer person at university, as discussed in the three workshops, is its persistence. In this regard, Balda notes that one way to cope is «to look for and find peace in the little things».

The loneliness of being «the only queer in a sea of completely different people» is described by Marte, who explains that you feel this part of yourself is the only one noticed by others: «Even with people I might get along with, who share common interests, there's always this thing where they might make an inappropriate comment or joke, that makes you realise that, in reality, you're not seen as normal, you're seen as different».

Further reflecting on the intertwining of diversity and loneliness, Marco points out that this feeling arises from the «gaze that objectifies you, identifies you as other, different». He adds, commenting on Ricky's story: «If you don't feel accepted, you feel lonely even when you're among many people». Nab also reflects on the sense that no one can understand how you and what kind of person you are: «Maybe you're always around others, but in reality, if no one sees things the way you do, you're always a bit lonely». Feeling isolated, Marco observes in his discussion of Andrew's story, leads to discomfort, even a sense of «danger» in expressing oneself:

> Our thinking is very much shaped by who we are, by our identity. On certain issues, we have a specific perspective because we live them differently than others. So, when someone talks about something and you, a queer person, have a thought shaped by your identity, you may find it hard to express it because you don't know how it would be received, or because there's no one like you who can understand. Even in a context of interaction, in a setting of conviviality and sharing, you can still feel isolated.

Building on this, Ricky draws a distinction between two types of loneliness he has experienced. Reflecting on Andrew's story, he describes one type as «almost atavistic, initial, where you feel lonely because you're in a new context and don't know anyone». However, commenting on Eden's memory and then ~S's story, he highlights a different experience. In the early moments of joining the university Collective, loneliness doesn't easily dissipate because you are «in a new context and with people for whom it's no longer new. Some things are taken for granted and it's easy to feel that you don't belong, like you're arriving in the middle of something that has already taken shape».

Through reflection on these memories, it is also possible to identify moments that push back against loneliness. For example, Ricky notes how the protagonist of Marco's story feels «seen in the most general sense» and «valued for one's opinions» when a girl invites him to his first student assembly. Being and acting within the Collective means, for the participants, «being able to see yourself reflected in those around you, through shared ideals and identities» (Black, 2024: 52). Breaking through the oppressive cloak of loneliness can offer comfort (Coes et al., 2018), helping one to move through and provoke change - something I will explore in more detail in the next section.

7. CHANGING AND MAKING THINGS CHANGE

In the reflections shared by participants while listening to their comrades' stories, I observed various connections between the desire to seek each other out as queer people at university and the mutual recognition of shared needs to transform this context. Being open about one's queer identity emerged as neither easy nor something that could be assumed as given. The words Ricky used to describe his discovery of self (*«he had in the meantime discovered new parts of himself, in particular his gender identity and some psychiatric diagnoses, and he felt changed, as well as very lonely»*) provoked ~S to observe that «he brings to the university […] his authenticity», underscoring the value of his choice to be visible.

The opportunity to attend a queer-only group at university for the first time in one's life is described by Antonietta as «a hope for all queer people who haven't been able to experience their queerness [before], [to] put themselves in a queer perspective in all relationships, whether sentimental, friendly or sexual». In this respect, engagement intertwines the feelings of excitement, relief and joy (Noreiga and Burkholder, 2022) and is a way of trying to be in the best possible place to express one's needs as a person with a minorised identity (Linder et al., 2019). This trait is disclosed in other parts of the discussions as well. While coming into contact during university life with people with whom one connects well, «let's say I like them and all», Nab points out, being part of a Collective—which in her case uses intersectionality to highlight the intertwining of identities and marginalisations—responded to her «need to [get together with] certain kinds of people to actually start getting to know a bit of the real me, the real me».

To describe the feeling of the protagonist in Eden's story as he begins to reconnect and share moments with his comrades in the Collective, Marco uses the expressions «feeling lighter» and «finding a peace, at least momentary», while what strikes Andrew is the effort it took:

> He finds himself in front of an assembly, something he had never done before and knew absolutely nothing about, how it worked, the rules, and he finds himself trying to understand the mechanism; the fact that he tries to understand the mechanism in my opinion, as [Ricky] said, shows how he actually cares about this kind of thing, how he sees this thing as something important, that can actually help you in this, which is for him, in my opinion, the change.

~S adds further nuance to the sensations she felt in her initial encounters with the Collective. Reflecting on the similarities between her personal experience and that of the protagonist of Andrew's story, she describes «the attraction to this world, still a bit foreign» in which there are «people who talk about so many interesting things who know things I don't know, who use words I don't know».

Stimulated by Orfeo's memory, Nab reflects on how joining the Collective reshapes one's outlook and future vision of the university, revealing that «the university could be a different place, because there are people with a hopeful perspective on how the world—and we—could change it». The incongruity between how one is and how one would like to be represented within the university environment leads to attempts to change its institutional practices (Linder et al., 2019).

A change consists in starting to share one's ideas, which you could not do before because, as Orfeo points out, «you always had things in your head, but you didn't have the tools to voice them, to express them in some way». This transformation «comes naturally when you meet people» who, for Marco, have «the need to fight, to be political» and, for Orfeo, the means «to express that same discontent that you also feel», and who know how to use them. Change then becomes stronger, according to Orfeo, when you are able, guided and supported by your comrades, to express «your anger».

Ricky and Nab also dwell on the expression of anger as a spark for change. They both explain, in different words, how the need to engage in practices of struggle can only be felt «up to a certain point if you're alone», whereas within the Collective it is «your way of feeling, of saying OK, I can change something, let's change it, let's fight and unite together with our anger, our experience». Commitment to change is an expression of engagement in practices of resistance (Robinson and Schmitz, 2021), which are not detached from, but rather sustained by, collective care, as I highlight in the next section.

8. RECEIVING AND PROVIDING: CREATING CARE TOGETHER

The participants' reflections illuminate the multiple meanings and practices of care embedded in their experience of belonging to the Collective, which take on different contours across various spaces—within the university (such as group-assigned classrooms and outdoor areas) and in the city (homes, squares).

One recurring theme is the feeling of being cared for. Reflecting on this need with a touch of melancholy, Antonietta remarks: «it's a bit sad to think that we always have, that is, that we need someone to take care of us because we always have something missing or wrong». Nab also refers to a sense of care experienced beyond formal activities, describing the Collective as «a group of people you can share everything with and who will help you on every single occasion, [who] maybe know you much more than your real family knows you».

One feels «safer», as Andrew notes, when participating in group meetings brings you «into something bigger». In this regard, the terms *relief* and *tranquillity* also came up during the discussions. For example, Eden, to describe the emotion of the protagonist of ~S's story, says she takes a «breath of relief by joining the Collective». Orfeo explains the same feeling in these words:

> the relief of saying 'I've actually found my people, that is, I'm starting, I'm starting to find my people and I don't have to think these things alone anymore, wondering if I'm the only one thinking them, if I'm crazy or if maybe I've read a book and it's just me and the author thinking that way'; [it's] the tranquillity and relief of having found a situation in which you actually feel good.

Nab adds a nuance to the meaning of feeling calm in the Collective, saying that to participate is «to have a moment of quietness where one thinks nothing, of lightness, yes, total lightness». Feeling cared for is intertwined with the theme of identity in the participants' thoughts. For example, ~S expresses it by saying: «I don't have to explain my identity, I just exist», and Ricky says, paraphrasing the experience of the protagonist of one of the stories: «the guy who introduced himself to me, introduced himself to me without seeing my real identity, just seeing me as a person». Marco defines himself as an agentic person in relation to this aspect: «you're not an object, you claim your own identity». Being «free to be who you want to be, who you are» (Nab), «feeling involved» (Marco) and «feeling valued, not just validated» (Ricky) are other nuances of feeling care that participants expressed.

A second theme very much emerging with different meanings and nuances in the reflections of the young activists is that of caring. «Committing oneself to come to one another» is, for example, what strikes Marte in Giulia's story, and «not [having] a judgmental behaviour» is what stands out according to Eden in Marco's story. Two stories of his companions remind Ricky of two other practices of caring, namely «going to the person and explaining» and «actively including pulling in». About the importance of being asked to express one's opinion, Marco is keen to explain, especially to me:

> Maybe for a queer person, that is a person who is generally perceived as different, it's very easy that your opinion, your thought, either you keep it to yourself or if you make it explicit it can cause a strong reaction and therefore you don't always feel totally legitimate to speak in a context where there are people who aren't, let's say, in your bubble. And instead, there's the fact that in this new place this person's opinion counted, that is, his opinion, his presence counted, he wasn't only, let's say, treated well or not disturbed, he was also, let's say, seen.

A third theme that emerged from the discussions is the circularity of care, of receiving and giving back. For example, for ~S, care is «being part of this Collective, doing something within it and then giving that thing back». Again, referring to the episode when someone asked the protagonist of a story about his name and pronouns, Ricky noted that in the group «nobody questioned it». He added that it was also this way of approaching things that made him «want to contribute» to the life of the Collective: as «a need for recognition» was satisfied, the need to «then take care of it in return» arose.

The reflections shared by participants reveal a rich, relational understanding of care as both a deeply personal and a collective practice. Within the spaces of the Collective care is experienced as emotional relief, identity affirmation, and the grounding sense of not being alone. Yet care is not only received; it is also actively given, through gestures of inclusion, listening, and mutual responsibility. What emerges is a circular dynamic in which feeling safe and seen becomes the ground for wanting to contribute, reinforcing a shared ethic of solidarity and belonging. These practices of care challenge normative ideas of support, highlighting how queer communities build transformative relationships through everyday attentiveness.

9. CONCLUSION

As Denton and Cain (2023) highlighted, many methodological roads can lead to socially just outcomes in research with, about, and for queer students. With the project recounted in this article, I aimed to create and facilitate a process based on a queer epistemology—eliciting from the young participants a shared narrative of how they see and do academic life as queer activists. The Memory Work workshops provided the participants with a new context in which to develop a nuanced perspective on their experiences and articulate their unique ways of emotionally supporting one another, sharing—enacting collective care (Winters and Ningard, 2023) through discussion rooted in memory and emotion.

The feeling of being cared for is what they most associate with activism in their university Collective. And feeling this way is the starting point and nourishment for practices that are intertwined with changing relational and social contexts. These insights resonate with the point Black (2024) made about the fact that a queer ethic of self-care is not just about individual well-being but also about social justice, from which self-care is framed as relational. Although based on the analysis of past experiences, the workshops allowed the participants' reflections on care practices to be projected into the future as well, when, for example, they expressed their intention – arguing its importance – to continue to offer their time and commitment to the activities curated and promoted by their group.

By generating collective reflections from the unveiling of individual stories, the project created spaces of authentic care (Owis, 2024) as well as generating knowledge about the everyday lives of queer university students in Italy. Within these spaces, and drawing on their lived experiences, the activists reasoned and spoke as a means of opening up possibilities and conceptualising desired relational environments within the university.

I am deeply grateful to the participants who animated and shaped this project, and whose stories and reflections are expressions of their strength and commitment. Because this work is rooted in writing as a relational practice, I also want to warmly acknowledge the collective energy and encouragement of the writing group I am part of and help to run, where much of this article took shape: www.szwg.co.uk.

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LIBRI IN DISCUSSIONE

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BOOKS UNDER DISCUSSION

Judith Butler

CHI HA PAURA DEL GENDER?

Roma-Bari, Laterza Publishers, 2024, 335 pp.

by Gabriele Oliva[*]

We live in a time when the concept of gender has become a political and media target. Butler, with her essay, intervenes in this debate with her trademark rigorous lucidity, showing how the "gender panic" is nothing more than a rhetorical construction used to reinforce patriarchal and conservative models of power. The author's goal is clear: to deconstruct these narratives, bringing the debate back to critical and scientific ground.

He adopts complex and theoretical language, but each concept is presented with intellectual rigor. Although the book may be difficult to follow for those unfamiliar with contemporary philosophy and queer theory, it nevertheless offers a stimulating and provocative introduction to his broader ideas about gender.

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GENDER AS CONSTRUCTION AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE

One of the book's strongest insights is the demonstration of how the concept of gender is, first and foremost, a social and normative construct (Stoller R. J., 1964). He takes up and expands on his earlier work, explaining how gender is not simply a biological issue, but a political discourse that redefines bodies and identities. The obsession with the so-called "Gender Ideology" is evidence of how conservative institutions perceive any attempt to deconstruct traditional roles as threatening.

In the first chapter, the author focuses primarily on how the issue of *gender* has become a topic of international political debate, analysing the global forces that contribute to making it an issue. She discusses the political context in which gender debates are developing, particularly in relation to globalization and the resulting social changes. Butler explores how the issue of gender is addressed in different societies, starting in the Western context, but then broadens the discussion to a global level, with a focus on human rights, religion, and politics (Butler, 2024).

One of the key issues that emerges from the first chapter is the tension between advances in civil rights and anti-modernist forces that seek to limit or -repress the rights of LGBTQ+ people. The author examines how international policies, as well as the domestic policies of various states, have addressed -or ignored- issues of gender identity and sexual orientation, often treating these issues as threats to cultural -tradition or -normality.

Within this global framework, the author highlights the diverse political and social reactions to gender issues, highlighting how anti-gender positions and related theories have often been fuelled by fears and prejudices rooted within specific cultural backgrounds. Indeed, the fear referred to in the title of the volume fits into this scenario, where the perception that the recognition of gender rights, may undermine the traditional social order.

The book also makes no shortage of references to how global politics and geopolitical dynamics influence the visibility and representation of gender identities, showing how these identities have been the subject of ideological and social conflicts. It also shows how gender theories have been received in different contexts, highlighting the difficulties in translating concepts that originate in the Western world, to other countries with different traditions and social structures (Amadiume, 1987). She thus offers a critical reflection on the global scope of the gender issue and its challenges, both theoretically and practically. Butler raises crucial questions about identity politics, the recognition of diversity, and the role of international institutions in supporting, or at the same time, hindering gender rights.

Reflecting on the growing politicization of gender and the tensions between progress and conservatism around the world, the fear of gender, according to Butler, stems from the perceived threat to the traditional social order, which is defended through reactionary policies and cultural control devices.

A case in point is the enactment of the *Child Protection Law* in 2013 in Russia, which bans “homosexual propaganda” among minors, a measure Butler cites as an example of repressive legislation designed to limit LGBTQ+ visibility and rights.

Judith Butler examines and critiques the positions and even the reactions of the Vatican and the Catholic Church to gender theories and the growing visibility of LGBTQ+ rights. The author explores how religious positions, particularly those promoted by the Catholic Church, have affected the public debate regarding gender by presenting gender as a threat to religious “nature” and “tradition.” The Church, which has traditionally opposed any form of change in gender and sexuality norms, has reacted strongly against the emergence of theories and policies that recognize the fluidity of gender and the existence of non-binary identities, especially since the 1990s, with the LGBTQ+ rights movements gaining global space. According to Butler, the Vatican sees gender theory as a threat to the traditional view of family, marriage, and sexuality, which are for the Catholic Church anchored in a heterosexual and biologically determined model.

A central element of the Vatican's critique, as explored in chapter two, is the perception of gender as an “artificial” concept that denies the “truth” of nature (Ratzinger, 2004). In the author's disquisition: for the Church, the concept of gender is a social construct intended to subvert natural and moral distinctions, promoting a relativist view that threatens the absolute moral values upheld by the Catholic religion. In this sense, The Holy See's approach reveals a certain concern about losing dominion over those moral categories that have guided religious understanding of sexuality and human identity for centuries.

Butler reports official Church documents: such as encyclical letters and statements issued during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, condemning the adoption of a “relativist” view of gender and the spread of queer theories. These texts, according to Butler, not only oppose LGBTQ+ rights, but also theoretical thinking that questions the link between biological sex and gender identity, reinforcing the rigidity of male-female distinctions.

Another important aspect that is emphasized is how the Vatican's narrative regarding gender fits into a broader geopolitical vision. The Catholic Church is not only a religious institution but also a political power that has considerable influence around the world, and it is on a global scale that it seeks to defend its traditional vision, often intervening in national laws related to women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and sex education. Butler dwells on the contradiction between the Church's advocacy of "religious freedom" and its attempt to impose an unambiguous view of gender and sexuality globally. Indeed, while claiming to respect individual freedom, it seems to deny that freedom when it comes to issues related to the body, gender, and sexual orientation.

Following in the reading is an analysis of how conservative policies in the United States have intensified attacks against gender through legislative and media strategies. Here, then, is how the institutionalization of censorship against gender studies manifests itself through bans on teaching in schools and universities: as in the case of the "*Don't Say Gay*" law passed in Florida in 2022. Butler examines the role of religious and political lobbies, such as the *Alliance Defending Freedom*, in spreading kl idea that gender is a threat to the social order and traditional values. This analysis highlights how such policies have concrete consequences on the lives of transgender and gender nonconforming people by limiting their access to health services, education, and social participation.

MORAL PANIC AND CONSERVATIVE STRATEGIES

Butler identified the idea of "moral panic" as a way to gain political support and justify discrimination. One of the main examples that is cited is the French movement "*La Manif Pour Tous*," which emerged in 2012 to oppose the egalitarian marriage bill. This movement organized nationwide demonstrations, participating in the spread of a new narrative redundancy that described gender as an ideology imposed to destroy the foundations of traditional society.

Moral panic, as in the idea elaborated by the author, results from the construction of an imaginary threat that justifies intransigent and reactionary policies. The author associates this phenomenon with other historical moments in which certain marginalized groups were instrumentalized to point to them as a dangerous threat to society. For example, she refers to the narrative used in the United States during the "Lavender

Scare" of the 1950s, when gay government employees were systematically removed based on the idea that they posed a danger to national security.

Butler studies the tactics deployed in more recent years by various government and right-wing groups to incite moral panic. A notable case is the anti-gender campaign in Poland initiated by the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in 2019.

Andrzej Duda, the president of Poland, claimed that the LGBTQ+ movement was an assault on Poland's Christian heritage and argued that there was no gender other than male or female, characterizing gender ideology as 'more dangerous than communism.' This redundant oratory led to the emergence of so-called "LGBTQ+ free zones," areas where local authorities explicitly state that they will not support or promote the rights of LGBTQ+ people. The Midwestern example is cited by the author as confirmation of a steady increase in anti-trans legislation passed in the United States in recent years, such as the vicious *North Carolina Bathroom Bill of* 2016, which banned transgender people from using public facilities aligned with the gender with which they identified. Although the bill was rescinded due to a huge backlash from civil society and big business, it still paved the way for similar policies in other states. Conservative strategy often exploits the emotional aspects of certain events to stir up feelings of fear in the population. Butler points out that the idea of the "child in danger" is one of the most recurrent justifications for authoritarian measures. A more recent example would be the disinformation campaign regarding 'gender ideologies' in Brazil, which was central to the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 (Correa S., 2020).

The Brazilian leader repeatedly claimed that public schools were "teaching children to be gay," stoking unfounded fears to gain electoral support.

Finally, as expressed earlier, emphasis is placed on the role of the Catholic Church in spreading gender-related moral panic: the Vatican, through official documents such as *Male and Female Created Them* (Congregation fir Catholic Education, 2019), has expressed strong opposition to gender studies, portraying them as an attack on the natural order. This document has influenced educational policies in several countries, contributing to the censorship of inclusive school curricula.

Overall, the volume shows how moral panic is a deliberate strategy to reinforce gender and sexual hierarchies, preventing the advancement of civil rights. Its analysis gives readers the tools to recognize these mechanisms and develop critical arguments to counter anti-gender rhetoric through education and activism.

GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Butler, moreover, addresses intersectionality as central to understanding oppressions related to gender, race, social class, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1989). The author points out how anti-gender policies are often intertwined with other forms of discrimination, such as racism and xenophobia. A significant example is the use of anti-gender rhetoric in Hungary under Viktor Orbán's government, where restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights are accompanied by anti-immigration policies and the construction of a nationalist narrative. Butler again cites the case of Poland, where the "Family Charter" promoted by the Law and Justice party in 2020 links the defense of the "traditional family" to the repression of sexual minorities and the exclusion of migrants. Through these examples, the author shows how the fight against gender ideology is part of a larger political project aimed at strengthening existing power hierarchies.

In response to repressive policies, the importance of resistance movements opposing anti-gender rhetoric and institutionalized discrimination is suggested. It reports on feminist and LGBTQ+ mobilizations globally, such as the protests in Argentina that led to the legalization of abortion in 2020, demonstrating how the concept of gender can become a powerful tool for empowerment. Another case in point is the protests against "LGBT-free zones" in Poland, which sparked a wave of international outrage, even leading the European Parliament to condemn them in 2021. Butler highlights how progressive movements have learned to leverage social media and transnational networks to build more effective and global forms of resistance that can be both networks of support and political pressure.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The author concludes the book by reflecting on possible future developments in the gender debate and the challenges ahead. She warns that although progressive movements have won important battles, conservative forces are gaining strength through new strategies of disinformation and repression. One example is the spread of the so-called "gender conspiracy theory" in Italy, propagated by groups such as *CitizenGO* and *Pro Vita & Famiglia*, which have influenced public discourse and educational policy.

Butler closes with a call to action: emphasizing the need for solidarity and alliance building among social movements to actively resist anti-gender ideology and work toward an inclusive future.

In her provocative and passionate analysis, as the title already suggests, *Who's Afraid of Gender?*, a better understanding of contemporary gender politics and repression in the modern world emerges, contextual reasons and ways to resist are presented. I personally consider Butler's book a valuable academic reference and manifesto for social change, offering important insights into the power relations that shape the construction of gender identity from the perspective of sociological theories.

The volume is a seminal contribution to the field of critical gender theory, emphasizing the need for discursive resistance and academic activism.

Butler's work shows that anti-gender mobilization is a transnational phenomenon, based on a network of alliances among religious, political and institutional actors.

Finally, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* stands as a highly relevant work in the field of contemporary sociology, providing an in-depth and critical analysis of anti-gender rhetoric and its social implications. More important, this book contributes significantly to research on power and gender relations, but it also offers theoretical tools that help us participate in any public debate with depth and critical challenge, we can consider Judith Butler's work a book that not only deconstructs fear, but invites us to transmute it into action and resistance.

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BOOKS UNDER DISCUSSION

Claudia Fauzia, Valentina Amenta
FEMMINISMO TERRONE. PER UN'ALLEANZA DEI MARGINI
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di *Miriam Matteo*[*]

"*Femminismo Terrone. Per un'alleanza dei margini"* is a "political project in the making" (p. 159), rooted in feminist and decolonial positioning. It offers a critical reexamination of classical Southern Italianism through an intersectional lens, aiming to develop an embodied and situated understanding of a specific Southern subalternity, that interacts in complex ways with other forms of inequality that generate sexism, homolesbobitransphobia, classism, racism, and ableism. The work seeks to "initiate a profound cultural revolution capable of challenging deeply rooted beliefs about the identity of Southern people and the South in all its complexity" (p. 15), restoring multiple "ways of seeing" the South perspectives that emerge from those who have always been considered "the Other," objects of knowledge rather than subjects who create valid knowledge of their own. The theoretical framework presented in the volume rejects any claim to being universal, acknowledging its own partiality. Instead, it aspires to a responsible *pluriversality* of knowledge, conscious of its emergence within a "liminal"

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space traversed by both privilege and oppression. It addresses both broader society and the feminist movement itself, as the authors point out that the latter "seemed to ignore the discrimination suffered *as Southerners*" (p. 7), identifying *anti-Southernism* as "the name of the oppression that has (cost us) so much to recognize" (p. 8), referring to the oppression of people and cultures from Southern regions a problem that "must be interpreted within a complex and layered system of power" (ibid). Fauzia and Amenta explore the systemic dynamics that have contributed to the construction of a narrative depicting the South as patriarchal, unchangeable, and marginal. They ask whether the South could instead represent "a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (hooks, 1990), and they develop their reflections across four chapters, which express a strong condemnation of the neoliberal dynamics that weigh on the shoulders of all the subaltern people and "Souths" of the world.

In the first chapter, the authors offer a decolonial critique of the "Southern Italian Question," that emerged after the unification of Italy, arguing that this issue was shaped by a hierarchical distinction that constructed the South as backward, "the bearer of a singular Southern difference to be redeemed through adherence to Northern modernity" (p. 18). This framing reflects a "nationalist and developmentalist perspective that fails to recognize the South's particularities, nuances, and plurality" (ibid.), overlooking the broader world-system in which Italy is embedded. Within a logic of epistemic violence, the South is rendered as the colonized Other, a mere object under the "*North Gaze*" which assumes the position of privileged knowing subject. This dynamic leads Southern individuals to "internalize the role of the Other, perpetuating the sense of never (being able to) fully become the Self" (p. 21). As a consequence, it "shapes how people perceive themselves, their land, their history, and what they ought to aspire to" (p. 43). Thus, rather than a neutral "Question", a form of southern discrimination occurred: differences were translated into inferiority and an attempt was made to flatten them in favour of a desirable norm. This process, which continued in the following decades, affected both the unequal distribution of services and resources and the intimate personal way in which individuals perceived themselves, shaping the subaltern position of the South.

Drawing on Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and subalternity and postcolonial feminist theories, the second chapter reconstructs the invention of the South, which can be traced back at least to the 18th century, when youths from northern European elites, eager to explore the places linked to their Greek and Latin classical education, undertook the "Grand Tour" through Southern Europe, bringing with them a colonial gaze that translated difference into inferiority. This gaze would later be adopted by the elites of the Italian Risorgimento who, in order to redeem Southern Italy in the eyes of northern Europe, framed the South as a "foreign body to be tamed, civilised and assimilated into the hegemonic self of the nation" (p. 52). Even the positivists drew on the Italian colonial archive regarding colonized populations in order to construct, and thus invent, the South as the "Other," using the categories of race and skin colour. As the authors note, "Italianness is formed in contrast […], first opposing the South as the internal Other, and then the radically Other of the colonies" (p. 54). In this context, the power of representation in producing knowledge is underlined: "The broader the range of representations we can identify with, the more possibilities for existence will open up to us. […] Having limited representations of one's subjectivity traps individuals in a cage where not only are they perceived in a single way, but they also come to believe they cannot be anything else" (p. 55). This is why postcolonial scholars of the South speak of the "invention of the South", revealing its artificial nature and describing it as a postcolonial space, imbued with a form of "internal Orientalism" that makes it exotic and domesticable for the purposes of exploitation that impacts differently on different subalternities. Following an intersectional approach, Fauzia and Amenta observe how various forms of inequality reinforce one another, identifying the direction of the gaze as yet another axis of discrimination shaped by stereotypes, such as the "*terronizzazione* of trash culture", "a proliferation of content that reduces the richness and complexity of regional identities to trivializing clichés" (p. 67). According to the authors, literature and film have also contributed to trapping the South in a dichotomy: either poverty/social unrest or bucolic/wild paradise, thus reinforcing its stereotyped representation. For instance, the historical novel "*Il Gattopardo*" has been mistakenly interpreted as evidence of Sicily's immutability, rather than as a caustic and ironic critique of Risorgimento rhetoric and "a chronicle of inexorable decline and the end of an era" (p. 72). Similarly, the romanticization of the South in films such as "*Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*" and "*Il Postino*" has contributed to its domestication in favour of mass tourism. Threading their way through the folds of anti-Southern bias through an intersectional compass, the authors continue their feminist and decolonial analysis, describing what happens when Male and North *Gaze* intersect. Like Pygmalion with his sculpted woman, but with an added racist tint, this intersection gives rise to the archetype of the "fiery Southern woman:" domesticated as an expression of Mediterranean identity that blends passion with family values, while "very few intellectuals, politicians, or journalists are represented as

Southern women" (pp. 86–87). Such stereotyped representation does not even spare the feminist movement itself, within which the South is also framed as either "an embodiment of anachronistic patriarchy or a perfect matriarchy" (p. 88). Drawing on Panico's (2022) critiques of Italian feminism, the authors call for avoiding reductive narratives and for "multiplying the directions of the gaze, expanding the narratives on the South through diverse perspectives and unheard voices" (p. 89).

The third chapter is titled "*Terrone Resistances*", as it emphasizes the importance of memory in shaping both individual and collective identities. Fauzia and Amenta propose a "decolonial and feminist rereading of the memories we have inherited" (p. 91) as a means of fostering Southern self-determination. Indeed, "if hegemonic memory decides what is included in and excluded from official history, at the margins of official knowledge lie counter-memories. Plural, multiple, partial, and subjective [...], collateral remnants of the grand narrative, which is presumed to be univocal, universal, and progressive[...], they hold the potential to forge an imaginary distinct from the hegemonic one" (p. 93), such as the memory of Maria Occhipinti, part of the anti-fascist and anti-monarchist "*Non si parte*" movement, often misread as Southern conservatism; the memory of Rosa Balistreri, "an activist who gave political speeches with her guitar" (p. 95) and the memory of Franca Viola, whose body bore the double violence of the *mafia* and patriarchy. Fauzia and Amenta reinforce the recovery of *terrone* counter-memories by referring to the concept of "Southern thought" of Cassano (2005), which holds the potential to emancipate Southern identity discourse from the confines of the nation, as it does not stem from identitarian fervor but rather from the category of the "Other".

The fourth and final chapter opens with a feminist and Southern Italian critique of linguistic and cultural discrimination. According to the authors, "our accent marks us. Not all accents are equal, and some carry more information than others" (p. 127). This form of discrimination, experienced by people from Southern Italy, resonates with the denunciation of Southern Spanish accent discrimination by Andalusian feminists, as well as with the linguistic and cultural inferiority internalized by *chicanas* in the borderlands of California, Texas, and Arizona. The common thread among these experiences is "shame as a signal of the structural violence suffered by Southern people" (p. 131). "If imagining new possibilities also involves assigning new meaning to what already exists [...] reclaiming a term from its usual context" (p. 128), then *La poderío* in Andalusian-accented Spanish is reclaimed from patriarchal power, just as *terrone* is "withdrawn from its stigmatizing context to be reinterpreted through a decolonial lens, thereby acquiring political significance" (p. 155). In this way, a vocabulary steeped in colonial modernity is overturned and *terrone*, once a derogatory label used to stigmatize an internal migrant, poor and land-tied, is re-signified with a positive, appropriative value and with the power to bring visibility to family memories of migration, evoking the so-called "diasporic condition" of the South. This concept, rooted in decolonial discourse, refers to a prismatic, complex and liminal sense of belonging, animated by conflicting emotions, "cultural contamination, discovery, and identity renegotiation, that challenges both the nation as a fixed place and identity as a uniform and self-enclosed entity (p. 146). This entails a renegotiation of one's relationship with the land, much like what happens through the notion of *restanza* (Teti, 2022), which "subverts the idea of 'staying' and pulls it out of the realm of immobility: staying in the same place can become an act of mobilization" (p. 152). Drawing on diasporic thinking and *restanza*, the authors assert the right to reinvent one's relationship with their land. *Femminismo terrone*, as a collective and South-South political project, aims to unite oppressed bodies and territories in the struggle against neocolonial forms of exploitation, recovering memories, languages and practices, in order to build a present and future free from systemic oppression.

The intersectional, decolonial, and situated transfeminist positioning of Amenta and Fauzia emerges not only from the social and political issues addressed throughout the volume, but also through their use of gender-neutralization strategies, namely, non-standard morphological variations involving the substitution of final vowels in conventionally gender-marked words with numbers or symbols. The lexicon and syntax exhibit a deliberately accessible yet sufficiently technical style that establishes the essential terms of the themes the authors' tackle.

Chapters, paragraphs, and sections are not densely packed with intratextual academic references to scientific articles on the topics discussed, as one might expect in a scholarly work. However, the text is reinforced in several places by references to feminist epistemologies and the most recent decolonial theories, which are indicated through footnotes, rather than by intratextual citations that refer to bibliographic entries at the end of the volume or of individual chapters. This choice confirms the authors' desire for immediate communicative clarity and a divulgative intent.

While these decisions contribute to making the text more readable, with feminist and decolonial bibliographic entries readily accessible as the reader progresses, they may also raise methodological objections. Specifically, the absence of direct scientific references for many of the volume's assertions – for example, "the South and Southern people are recognizable only when they move within the narrow confines of stereotypes" (p. 74) – which would be necessary to provide scientifically verifiable corroboration from other researchers and scholars on these points, risks attracting criticism labelling such claims as "self-evident" due to insufficient empirical support. Nevertheless, if the aim of the volume is to disseminate the topics for the purposes of political activism, socio-cultural regeneration, and the construction of an alliance network among Southern identities, while drawing on decolonial and feminist scientific epistemologies to thoroughly explore the lines of reasoning presented, without claiming universality, then I consider the stylistic choice to discuss these themes without dense empirical validation acceptable.

Another observation concerns the claim about the "Southern question," which the authors deem "misframed" because it portrays the South as a single monolithic and underdeveloped block caught within a dichotomy of development/backwardness, limited to a purely national discourse. Actually, rather than being "misframed," it was inevitably a product of its own time: the period of the national state formation. Therefore, it would have been better to describe it as anachronistic, especially since the authors recontextualize it within a broader world-systems dynamic, while also unmasking its colonial and racial elements rooted in Lombrosian and classist frameworks.

The work, written in a pragmatic language that is both situated and "embodied", simple, yet far from simplistic, is accessible to both activists and policy makers striving for a more inclusive future for Southern Italian societies, as well as to researchers and scholars working on gender, transfeminist, intersectional, territorial, and decolonial issues. However, without at least a basic understanding of feminist epistemologies, readers may struggle to fully grasp the theoretical and political scope of the book. For example, the volume frequently refers to bodies and to the embodied, situated experiences of those who inhabit the South of Italy, from which "new knowledges" emerge. It would have been helpful to provide readers, many of whom may not be familiar with feminist theories, with at least a brief overview of feminist epistemologies drawing on post-structuralism and deconstruction, that reject universal truths and essentialisms in favor of reclaiming the centrality of bodies, not as "natural objects" of knowledge, but as the product of specific practices, oppressions, languages, and embodied forms of resistance.

Ultimately, the volume offers new and original analytical tools regarding feminisms of difference and coloniality, Southern Italy, and the Global South. It moves across multiple levels of analysis: theoretical, political, and activist, rooted in feminist collectives from the margins and in feminist thought on subalternity (Spivak, 2004). From these emerge forms of situated research, useful both for those wishing to delve into the folds of contemporary feminisms and explore their internal constellations, and for those working in the fields of social research applied to territory and socio-cultural planning, in order to study and develop new practices, processes, and narratives concerning the South, from an anti-neoliberal perspective.

This book is fully part of the international intersectional transfeminist and decolonial debate. Due to the originality of the topics it addresses and its alignment with feminist and decolonial scholarship, it should be translated into other languages, in order to extend its educational and political reach to a broader international audience.

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