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Discursive Practices and Symbolic Violence Towards the LGBT Community in the University Context¹

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Abstract: Symbolic violence against the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community operates in a normalized way and enhances relationships of inequality in diverse social spaces. The objective of this study is to explore forms of symbolic violence against LGBT people committed through the discourse of students and teachers in the context of Mexican universities. A qualitative methodology was adopted involving the use of the discussion group technique. Subsequently, discourse analysis was conducted drawing on psychosocial thinking. The results reveal two discursive strategies that contribute to the reproduction of forms of discrimination and violence against LGBT people: one in the form of *carrilla* (Mexican slang for making fun), and the other in the form of tropes and rhetorical figures involving the notion of respect. Finally, we highlight the importance of understanding informal and everyday discursive practices to better address this problem in educational institutions.

Keywords: violence, gender, peers, discourse, sexual orientation

Práticas Discursivas e Violência Simbólica Relacionadas à Comunidade LGBT em Espaços Universitários

Resumo: A violência simbólica dirigida para a comunidade lésbica, gay, bissexual e transgênero (LGBT) opera de maneira padrão e contribui para gerar relações de desigualdade em diversos espaços sociais. O objetivo deste estudo é explorar formas de violência simbólica contra pessoas LGBT por meio do discurso de estudantes e docentes no contexto universitário mexicano. Propõe-se uma metodologia qualitativa que utiliza a técnica dos grupos de discussão para a produção de informação e, posteriormente, realiza-se uma análise do discurso sobre a mesma desde uma perspectiva psicossocial. Nos resultados identificam-se duas estratégias discursivas sobressalentes que contribuem para reproduzir formas de discriminação e violência contra pessoas LGBT neste contexto: uma ligada à zombaria e outra relacionada com a figura do respeito. Finalmente, mostra-se a relevância de compreender as práticas discursivas informais e cotidianas para a melhor abordagem desta problemática em instituições educativas.

Palavras-chave: violência, gênero, universidades, discurso, orientação sexual

Prácticas Discursivas y Violencia Simbólica Hacia la Comunidad LGBT en Espacios Universitarios

Resumen: La violencia simbólica dirigida hacia la comunidad lésbico, gay, bissexual y transgénero (LGBT) opera de manera normalizada y contribuye a generar relaciones de desigualdad en diversos espacios sociales. El objetivo de este estudio es explorar formas de violencia simbólica hacia personas LGBT a través del discurso de estudiantes y docentes en el contexto universitario mexicano. Se plantea una metodología cualitativa que utiliza la técnica de los grupos de discusión para la producción de información y posteriormente se realiza un análisis del discurso sobre la misma desde una perspectiva psicossocial. En los resultados se identifican dos estrategias discursivas sobressalentes que contribuyen a re-producir formas de discriminación y violencia hacia personas LGBT en este contexto: una vinculada con la burla o *carrilla*; otra relacionada con la figura del respeto. Finalmente, se muestra la relevancia de comprender las prácticas discursivas informales y cotidianas para el mejor abordaje de esta problemática en instituciones educativas.

Palabras clave: violencia, género, universidades, discurso, orientación sexual

Violence and discrimination against the LGBT community is one of the main challenges facing contemporary democracies (Logie, 2012; Weeks, 2014). Research in the field of psychosocial studies has addressed this pressing problem, exploring its implications for mental health and psychological

well-being (Borralla & Pascoal, 2015; Cardoso & Ferro, 2012; Meyer, 2013), the influence of cultural and structural factors on the processes underlying prejudice and discrimination (Alexandre, Lima, & Galvão, 2014; Barrientos & Nardi, 2016; Costa & Nardi, 2015; Koehler, 2013), and the different forms of violence (sexual, psychological, physical) to which the LGBT community is subjected (Albuquerque & Williams, 2015; Efrem Filho, 2016; Gomes, Reis, & Kurashige, 2013; Smyth & Jenness, 2014).

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However, certain other aspects deserve greater attention in so much as they are central to understanding and eradicating this problem, one of which is *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu, 1998, 1999, 2000). This form of violence is of particular interest in so far as does not entail a clear manifestation of harm or threat to a particular subject, but rather a complex symbolic and cultural order of domination that sustains and reproduces other more direct forms of violence.

According to Bourdieu (2000), symbolic violence occurs through a set of cognitive and perceptual schemes, symbolic cultural structures, which are rooted in people's ordinary experience and thus become part of the "natural" or "normal" state of things in a given sociohistorical context. As such, it turns into a form of domination that often goes unnoticed, even by the dominated subjects, who tend to engage in a kind of "unconscious complicity" in the very sociocultural practices they are subjected to. Furthermore, given its invisible nature, symbolic violence tends to receive less attention than other types of violence, both in terms of research and interventions designed to prevent violence (Pedersen, 2013; Samuel, 2013). Although subtle and inconspicuous, symbolic violence shapes social relations and reproduces behavioral dispositions and forms of social representation.

It is equally important to study the processes underlying violence and discrimination against LGBT people in educational settings, particularly higher education. It has been shown that educational settings play an important role in legitimizing the knowledge and cultural practices of a community (Lima Júnior, Pinheiro, & Ostermann, 2012; Watson & Widin, 2015). Moreover, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that this space acts as an apparatus that reproduces the dominant symbolic order of the society to which it belongs. On the other hand, while educational institutions play a key role in reproducing the dominant culture, they are also particularly well placed to develop critical reflexivity and promote the transformation of cultural practices.

Various studies addressing gender violence in educational and university settings have been conducted in Mexico and Latin America as a whole (Abramovay, 2006; Alcántara Santuario & Navarrete Cazales, 2014; Anzaldúa & Yurén, 2011; Castro & Vázquez García, 2008; Molina, López, Martínez-Guzmán y Covarrubias, 2016). However, the main focus of attention has been violence committed by men against women and violence against the LGBT community and symbolic violence as a mechanism of domination embedded in the social order remain neglected.

The discursive approach to psychosocial research (Parker, 2014; Potter, 2012; Íñiguez-Rueda, 2011) is useful for studying symbolic violence insofar as it proposes that discourse produces and reproduces representations and symbolic resources that determine our understanding of the objects under discussion and thus serve as frameworks that drive behavior and promote certain kinds of social relationships. Here language is understood not only as a means of communication between speakers and listeners, but also, and above all, as a set of practices that structure and organize social life. This approach therefore allows one to question what Bourdieu (1998) calls *doxa*, a deep-founded

set of values, knowledge and beliefs that are considered by the *status quo* as inherently true and necessary for social functioning; so much so that they generate a submissive and habitual acceptance, even when this involves the maintenance of objective relations of domination.

Thus, the discursive practices of students and professors as the main actors in these spaces are central to understanding these forms of power and domination. Nonnormative sexual orientations in university settings in Mexico are currently in a weak position when it comes to gaining recognition and promoting policies designed to create an inclusive environment, marked by an ambiguity between resistance and change (Gutiérrez Domínguez, 2015; Rosales Mendoza & Flores Soriano, 2009). Studies addressing LGBT issues are rare and university regulations applying to the recognition and protection of the rights of LGBT people are incipient and lack specificity.

In light of the above, this qualitative study explores forms of symbolic violence against LGBT people committed through the discourse of students and professors in university settings, focusing on a university in Mexico.

Method

Participants

This study was conducted in a public university in Mexico with approximately 12,000 students and 70 higher education educational programs. The study sample was generated using purposive sampling methods, whereby participants are selected because they occupy a defined position in a structure or social order and so have a distinct perspective to offer in relation to the study objective.

Group composition met the homogeneity/heterogeneity criterion in relation to the social characteristics of the participants relevant to the study. Homogeneity of group composition facilitates symmetrical relationships between participants and thus effective conversation and freedom of expression. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to take into account discursive positioning specific to a group constituted as a collective subject. A certain level of heterogeneity is also important, given that a totally homogenous population "would not produce discourse or would produce a totally redundant discourse" (Ibáñez, 1979, p. 276). Groups should therefore be homogenous with respect to characteristics relevant to the study topic and heterogeneous with respect to less relevant features (Sánchez-Pinilla & Legerén, 2008).

The following homogeneity criteria were taken into account: (a) institutional role (student or professor), (b) gender identity (man or woman), and (c) sexual identity (people who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender). The sample also met the following heterogeneity criteria: (a) participant's areas of knowledge or study, and (b) participant's degree and academic background. Furthermore, in all cases we ensured that the participants did not know each other previously, since the existence of previous relations between subjects is likely to predefine or interfere with group functioning (Alonso, 1998; Sánchez-Pinilla & Legerén, 2008).

The sample was composed of four groups: Group 1 - *male students* (self-identified as heterosexual); Group 2 - *female students* (self-identified as heterosexual); Group 3 - *professors* (whose sexual orientation was not explicitly manifested); and Group 4 - *male and female students* (openly self-identified as members of the LGBT community). Each group was made up of between five and seven people, based on proposed rules for determining sample size for this method (Alonso, 1998; Ibáñez, 1979). In accordance with the heterogeneity criteria, the participants came from various areas of knowledge, including the social sciences and humanities, health sciences, engineering, and basic sciences, including 14 educational programs (nursing, social work, civil engineering, telematics, dance, pedagogy, foreign languages, and architecture and design, among others).

Instruments

The discussion group (DG) technique (developed in 1997; Ibáñez, 1979, 1986; Sánchez-Pinilla & Legerén, 2008) was used to produce discourse on the LGBT community among the target population. This method is designed to create spaces within which conversation can take place, where “converse” is understood as a collective, socially-inscribed task involving symbolic elaboration (Sánchez-Pinilla & Legerén, 2008). This technique encourages the generation of discourses which, responsively and based on dialogic interaction, reveal the prevailing symbolic and subjective elements in the group in relation to the topic in question (Criado, 1997; Ibáñez, 1979).

According to Ibáñez (1979, 1986), this technique assumes that there is a strong link between the group situation and the macro-social situation to which the participants belong. Therefore, discussion groups provide a space where the types of interactions that are dominant in the context in question are reproduced on a controlled scale. The discussion groups were conducted using a moderator guide designed around three basic themes: (a) social interactions and the “social atmosphere” in the group’s educational centers; (b) student-student and student-professor interactions; and (c) perceptions of sex/gender relations in educational centers. In accordance with the adopted method, the groups were encouraged to engage in spontaneous conversation without strict adherence to the guide.

Procedure

Data collection. Participants were recruited after making observations and conducting interviews with key informants, such as the coordinators of educational centers, with a view to identifying potential participants. Candidates were contacted by telephone to explain the study objectives and invite them to participate. Group discussions were held with those who agreed to participate in a classroom in the university’s training center, which is separate from the educational centers attended by the participants. Each group discussion was moderated by a member of the research team and lasted for between 40 and 90 minutes. The sessions were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed orthographically

Data analysis. The transcriptions were analyzed to identify discursive practices revealing discrimination and symbolic violence against the LGBT community in the context in question. Discourse analysis is defined as the study of the way in which certain linguistic practices act in particular contexts to maintain and promote specific conceptions of reality and social relations (Íñiguez-Rueda & Antaki, 1994). Unlike other qualitative approaches, which conceive of texts as repositories of recurring themes and “categorizable” contents that can be extracted from the contexts in which utterances are made, discourse analysis emphasizes the manner in which subjects perform actions through discourse or execute “speech acts”, which have social functions, such as legitimation, questioning, defending or stigmatization and contribute to the composition of the social spaces they inhabit (Íñiguez-Rueda, 2011).

The present analysis centers on the way in which different gender expressions/sexual orientations and subject positions are represented and constructed in the context in question. In particular, we identify the *function* and *variation* of discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), as well as other discursive resources, such as rhetorical strategies and conversational implicatures (Íñiguez-Rueda, 2011), which contribute to the establishment of certain representations of LGBT people and reproduce hierarchical relations within the university setting. The identification of these specific resources inductively reveal wider discursive strategies that are particularly common or “effective” in acts of discrimination and symbolic violence towards LGBT community.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology of the University of Colima, where the first author is affiliated. The study was also conducted in accordance with the Code of Good Research Practice of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, to which the second author is affiliated. This code requires researchers to obtain informed consent and guarantee confidentiality and that the participants will not be exposed to risk during the investigation. The nature of the collaboration was explained to the participants and they were asked to sign an informed consent form guaranteeing the confidentiality of information and anonymity of the participants and the institution where the study was conducted and confirming the participant’s right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Results

Two discursive strategies were identified that help to explain certain symbolic power mechanisms that permeate sex/gender relations in university settings: (a) joking and mockery in the form of *carrilla* (Mexican slang for making fun), and (b) the notion of *respect*, understood as a trope and a rhetorical figure. Each discursive strategy in turn reveals particular social and discursive elements, such as stereotypes, prejudice, rhetorical strategies and ways of constructing subjects, which contribute to the maintenance of certain

patterns of everyday interaction with the university LGBT community.

Between Jokes and *carrilla*

The first discursive strategy, which is particularly common among students, is a phenomenon commonly known as *carrilla*, a popular term used in Mexico, especially in informal interactions between young people, to refer to a practice whereby one or various individuals are the constant brunt of jokes and mockery made by a group in the same social setting.

More often than not, *carrilla* is understood as “only playing” and accepted as an appropriate and “fun form of socialization”. This practice maintains forms of interaction that draw attention to, repudiate or belittle certain attitudes or behaviors adopted by those on the receiving end, without openly acknowledging that they are offensive. By disguising these actions as a joke or playing, the intimidation and harassment that this practice entails are excused and these acts are understood as a socially acceptable and supposedly harmless form of interaction.

The student discussion groups showed that *carrilla* is a typical form of interaction within the various educational centers and that it is more commonly directed at people that stray from the stereotypical notion of masculinity and femininity. Thus, the objects of this practice tend to be, for example, male students who show “effeminate” behavior and women who are considered “masculine” in appearance. The following excerpt extracted from the female student group illustrates this practice:

I reckon that ninety percent of the school are gay . . . but yes, I sometimes make fun of them. There was a guy in our class, Agustín, who said he wasn't gay and used like boots and tight shirts. We used to make fun of him: “and you say you're not (gay)”. But it's nothing more than a joke (GD 2, 23/03/2015).

It is interesting to note in the above utterance how the student characterizes the majority of her male colleagues as gay and refers to *carrilla* as a common code of interaction that she follows. In particular, this utterance denotes an implicature that suggests that one's dress “used like boots and tight shirts” is a sign of “being gay” and can even be used to denounce someone who denies being so “who said he wasn't gay”. It is also important to note the expression used to close the episode - “But it's nothing more than a joke . . .” - since this adversative statement fulfills the rhetorical purpose of attenuating or dissipating the possible intrusive or accusatory effects of the narrated episode, ultimately dismissing it as “nothing more than a joke”, that is, an innocent and trivial game.

This discursive practice contributes to the policing and reinforcement of heteronormative culture in educational settings, especially in those areas of knowledge strongly associated with stereotyped gender views. The following

utterance made by a student of engineering, a profession considered to be typically male, reveals what one could call a “popular expression” commonly used in the educational center: “if you haven't had a girlfriend by half way through the degree, you'll never have one. On the contrary: you'll end up having a boyfriend. If you haven't got anybody after halftime, you already are . . . playing for the other team” (GD 1, 16/03/2015).

The above extract illustrates a joke that is characteristic of educational settings, where male students who “haven't had a girlfriend” by halfway through their degree find themselves the brunt of the jokes. According to this proposition, the lack of a girlfriend is possible proof of being homosexual, as suggested by the expression “playing for the other team”. Thus, this practice exposes patterns of behavior and experiences that stray from established heterosexual expectations, thus acting as a strategy that compels people to conform to dominant sexual/gender stereotypes.

It is also interesting to note that *carrilla* is often perceived by those on the receiving end as a normal form of sexual orientation/gender differentiation that should be seen as natural. The following extract from the LGBT group, a student who self-identifies as gay and openly expresses his sexual orientation, illustrates how he became the target of this practice:

before, I was like . . . introvert and really quiet, and played football. You can imagine: with pure men, you know? (laughter). Well, they made so much fun of me. And I already knew that (would happen) . . . It was like . . . I don't know . . . such fun [laughter] . . . we got together recently after some time and it was funny . . . I might have changed a bit, but I still talk the same . . . and they still laugh and make fun of me (GD 4, 6/04/2015).

This utterance illustrates other interesting aspects. Firstly, it shows an openly gay male student who participates in a stereotypically masculine social space (football), to which he admits he does not belong. The expression “You can imagine” is a voice of conversational interpellation that draws his interlocutors' attention to the estrangement and amazement that his presence in this place generates. This gesture also confirms the imaginary of the way in which spaces are divided according to sex/gender. At the same time, the statement characterizes *carrilla* and mockery in such a setting as expected and natural: “I already knew that (would happen)” indicates that his expectations in relation to this practice were fulfilled. Moreover, he uses adjectives like “fun” and “funny” to describe the mockery of which he is object, thus contributing to the construction of this practice as a “game”, dismissing any implications it may have for differentiation and stigmatization.

Thus, as a discursive phenomenon, *carrilla* is shown to play an important role as a mechanism of social pressure. This practice seeks to strengthen conformity in those at the receiving end in relation to group expectations and exposes and sanctions behaviors that do not live up to these expectations. In keeping with the notion of symbolic violence, this practice also

allows the normalization of asymmetric relationships between different sexual orientations/gender identities and contributes to the maintenance of socially accepted forms of discrediting and stigmatizing nonheteronormal sexual practices.

By being disguised as interaction and playing, *carrilla* and mockery become a generalized means for policing sexual orientation/gender borders, distinguishing between legitimate expressions and those which are shameful or reprehensible. Moreover, these acts are frequently seen by those on the receiving end as expected, acceptable and even fun. In short, they act as discursive vehicles through which heteronormative symbolic order is exercised, counting on the consent of both dominant and dominated subjects.

However, possibilities of questioning these normative practices can be observed, albeit to a lesser extent, in the discourse of the students and professors. This is what Bourdieu (1998) would call “estrangement of *doxa*”, a reflective exercise that makes the emergence of a critical view of an order that is taken as legitimate possible. This is shown in the following utterance made by a male student belonging to LGBT group:

I believe that to some extent we give others a certain amount of power to offend us. I do it as well (make fun), I’m not going to say I haven’t . . . Until the penny dropped and I thought: “listen, why do you say that? You’re gay too . . . and, like, is that bad?”. And someone might say: “Well, that’s funny”. But, why’s it amusing? Is being mocked for being gay funny? So I think we give others the power to offend us (GD 4, 6/04/2015).

Variations concerning ‘respect’

We are currently witnessing the strong presence of cultural and institutional discourses linked to notions of “gender equity”, “respect” and “tolerance” towards “sexual diversity”. Without doubt, the presence of these discourses demonstrates the achievements made in a historic struggle for the recognition of the rights of groups persecuted because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Frequently, these terms have been incorporated into the official rhetoric of institutions.

In light of this, it is by no means strange that the notion of “respect” has a conspicuous presence in the lexical repertoire of the participants when discussing sexual orientation/gender differences in educational settings. The recurrent and heterogeneous use of this notion allows the subjects to define their personal position and engage in various actions to define and contrast the situations discussed. These uses may be defined in terms of *discursive variation* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), whereby language is used “with a wide variety of functions and that its use implies a wide variety of consequences” (Sisto Campos, 2012, p. 192). In the case in question, this amounts to uses that confer distinct meanings on the term “respect”, granting it different and sometimes opposing meanings.

A point in question in relation to the use of this term

is when participants say they respect the different sexual orientations and practices of their peers and colleagues, as in the case of the following utterance made by a student in the LGBT group: “before I studied advertising and public relations in Veracruz, where I was able to express my sexuality without any problem, so I found a space where there was respect and equality . . .” [GD 4, 6/04/2015]. This amounts to a conventional use in keeping with wider cultural and institutional discourses related to “respect for diversity” (Colina, 2009), which appears to be commonplace in the context under question. However, the notion of “respect” can be driven in a different direction:

I think everyone has their own tastes, right? And that is respected . . . everyone knows what they do and their preferences . . . And, like, in general [homosexual people] are usually . . . nice . . . I think it’s a normal issue. Only that there are certain types of people that sometimes want to . . . let’s say . . . overstep the mark in some way and that’s when it doesn’t go down so well. Like anything, I mean, a person might try something on that you don’t like, which you’re not going to accept anyway (GD 1, 16/03/2015).

This utterance places homosexual people as subjects that may at some point “overstep the mark” or “might try something on that you don’t like”, that is, as potentially dangerous or threatening. This redirects the discursive function of “respect”, characterizing it as something that heterosexual people should demand from homosexuals. This discursive function was clearly observed in the same discussion group when another male student, referring to gay men, stated the following: “I do not have any problem with respect, but they also have to respect me” (GD 1, 16/03/2015). The following utterance shows a similar stance: “You should be able to do what you feel like doing, everyone has their own tastes and sexual preferences are respected, and you can live with (them) as you would with any other person . . . but without making insinuations” (GD 1, 16/03/2015).

Another use of the notion of respect frequently adopted by the LGBT community was also identified. This use has the function of situating the university as a space that “deserves respect”, understanding it in terms of the disapproval and suppression of nonnormative gender expressions and sexuality therein. The following passage from a lesbian student’s narrative addresses this point:

I gave my girlfriend a kiss at school and suddenly an administrative assistant appeared and said: “look, you can’t do that here”. And I said to him: “Sorry?”. . . And I could see heterosexual people around me kissing . . . And it was an ordinary kiss, tender if you like. And it was like: “No, not here . . . get out of here”. And then nothing happened, and like, I don’t know why, but I thought something like: “well, if I want to be respected, I will try to respect” (GD 4, 6/04/2015).

Demonstrations of affection between people of the same sex are censured and can be understood as lack of respect (even by those who demonstrate the affection). The above extract illustrates an argumentative turn: what is initially seen with suspicion and as being strange (*Sorry?, And I could see heterosexual people around me kissing*), is normalized towards the end of the intervention and incorporated as a valid rule for getting along with others. Thus, homosexual acts in public are constituted as immoral or disrespectful.

Something similar occurs with gender identities that stray from the traditional norms. A case in point are transvestite and transgender students who are hindered or prevented from expressing their gender identity in university settings. The “school” is assumed to be a space where it is inappropriate to show your transgender identity and, once again, this symbolic norm is normalized and practiced by the very subjects who are affected by it. In contrast to other spaces (extra-institutional and leisure), educational institutions are conceived of as a place that should be “respected”, that is, where you must conform to the dominant gender norms and social expectations. The following narrative of a transvestite student illustrates this issue:

There are places for doing it ... it's for the best; to attract respect, because if you don't do that they aren't going to respect you. In my school my teachers respect me a lot, but I also say (to myself) that it's a school and I'm not going to do it ... my thing [laughter] ... just because of the simple fact that it's my school ... Well, because I also respect, right? There are places, how can I say ... I've been in clubs like that ... where I finish a show and I can't be bothered to get changed [undress] and I go like that [to the school] ... and they don't let me in". [GD 4, 6/04/2015]

It is important to note that, through discursive practices, “respect” plays an important role in reinforcing and maintaining different gender norms in university settings. Thus, for example, such practices permit the delineation and policing of the borders between identities and bodies that are “appropriate” to these spaces and those which have no place there. The use of bathrooms by transgender people clearly illustrates this form of segregation as the following narrative of a transgender student shows:

...here in the faculty you “are a man” and..., we accept and respect you, but you have to follow certain rules or guidelines. What's this about entering the women's bathroom?, you are not allowed. As long as you don't show that you don't have your “part” ... penis you might say, you cannot enter the women's bathroom... But yes there are, there loads of rules ... and yes, ...they are very in line with the internal guidelines. [GD 4, 6/04/2015]

It is important to note that, in this context, these “guidelines” are not formal rules incorporated into the regulations of the institution. On the contrary, they are social conventions and unofficial norms that operate with an almost institutionalized force, because they are assumed to be a constituent and defining part of the institution and, therefore, unquestionable. It is also interesting to note that this norm is grounded on an essentialist understanding of identity that assumes that, biologically speaking, everyone is either strictly male or female (Fausto-Sterling, 2008). This amounts to “urinary segregation”, where it could be said, not without a certain sarcasm, “how can society demand a declaration of sex from a subject to allow them to access the bathroom to discard what is bothering them” (Cabrera, 2004, p. 149).

This type of discursive practice plays an important role in defining spaces and regulating the bodies and identities that are allowed to frequent them. They construct educational institutions and education itself as social fields that require adherence to certain gender norms so that they can be “fittingly” inhabited. The following statement from a transvestite student illustrates this process:

One of my teachers said something like “Outside, on the other side of the fence”. For some reason they fenced off the whole perimeter of the University. Outside the white line you can do what you want. The university demands respect, eh ... the faculty, we demand respect. We respect you, but don't come to class to put on a “show”, don't come to get attention, come to pay attention and take your classes. [GD 4, 6/04/2015]

It is interesting to note that, according to the imaginary revealed in the above words, the educational function is intimately interwoven with a specific sexual orientation/gender normative. Attending university and participating in the educational process means abiding by the norms of gender identity and gender expression. The transgression of these norms is understood as a deviation from the educational function towards a “show” and is ultimately considered an affront to the educational space. The expressions “on the other side of the fence” and “outside the white line” act to delimit physical spaces based on sexual orientation/gender criteria, delineating borders that “protect” the university from gender practices that are considered offensive and threatening. In short, the notion of “respect” is revealed to be a key rhetorical figure: it clearly demonstrates a variation in the semantic and functional plane that illustrates how terms associated with the promotion of equity and the fight against discrimination on grounds of gender and sexuality orientation can be appropriated and resignified in concrete communicative contexts to maintain the dominant symbolic order. In this respect, accepted and commonly used terms associated with “politically correct” registers and styles can work just as well to contradict and distort the original idea. This finding also draws attention to the broader risks of using socially legitimized rhetorical and lexical resources to perpetuate and justify asymmetrical and exclusive sex/gender relations.

Discussion

The present study shows how specific discursive strategies can contribute to maintaining segregation and stigma related to nonnormative expressions of sexual orientation/gender in ways that are socially accepted and legitimated, whereby they are largely perceived as harmless and unproblematic for the social actors involved. The findings also show that terms associated with cultural and institutional policies designed to protect the rights LGBT people can be resignified by concrete discursive practices to maintain forms of symbolic violence and discriminatory practices. Therefore, although public institutions have formally adopted a position against discrimination towards the LGBT community (as is the case with many universities in Mexico and Latin America), it is still possible to observe the deeply-rooted practices of “subtle” violence and discrimination, which is more difficult to identify and address.

Despite the subtlety of these practices, they should not be considered “microdiscrimination” or “microaggression” (Nadal, 2008; Nadal, Issaa, Leon, Meterko, Widemana & Wong, 2011), given that they consist of symbolic acts consummated with the capacity to produce and maintain inequitable structural relationships whose effects are by no means limited or short term. On the contrary, the indirect and veiled nature of these practices (Bourdieu, 2000) contributes to strengthen and deepen their effects on power relations.

The discursive practices identified here reveal a more complex logic consisting of symbolic elements that contribute to the maintenance of hostile and exclusive policy towards nonnormative sexual identities/genders, as is the case with essentialist and biologicist understandings of gender identity that activate stereotypes of masculinity and femininity among the student community and obstruct free and equal access of transgender people to university spaces (Platero Méndez, 2014). In the same vein, this study reveals a heterocentric culture that regulates socioaffective relationships in the educational setting, excluding homoerotic expressions and stigmatizing certain homosocial affective practices (Anderson & McCormack, 2015).

Our analysis shows the importance of studying not only institutional policies and pedagogical and curricular aspects, but also the myriad of processes of interaction and daily coexistence that are largely responsible for structuring and regulating what takes place in educational spaces.

The emphasis placed on the analysis of daily discursive practices allows us to break away from an understanding of socialization in educational settings as a unidirectional process of cultural inculcation or inscription, where subjects simply internalize and practice a set of collective values and dispositions. This shows the benefits of using a theoretical and methodological approach that emphasizes the role language plays in building social relations (of discrimination), particularly in its daily use through function and variation of discourse.

The findings also show the importance of conducting further psychosocial research into how socialization in educational environments influence the constitution of the

gendered/sexed body and subject. In this respect, one of the limitations of this study is the lack of a more in-depth investigation into the modalities of agency, negotiation and resistance among the LGBT community, an important topic for future research (Contreras-Salinas & Ramirez-Pavelic, 2016). Another limitation is that data collection was limited to spaces for conversation set by the discussion groups. In this respect, a broader methodological approach, using ethnography for example, would be better capable of capturing the diversity and complexity of the discursive practices of discrimination present in particular educational settings, as well as other symbolic practices that – although not situated within conversational interactions – contribute to inequality and the exclusion of LGBT people.

As suggested above, educational settings provide an opportunity to transform these asymmetrical and exclusive relationships. This requires the promotion of reflective practices that systematically question *doxa*, i.e. that which is taken to be the normal state of things and the natural social order, and the adoption of inclusive education strategies (Andújar & Rosoli, 2014). In short, it is necessary to reconstruct and widen forms of symbolic representation and discursive fields within the social spaces inhabited by the various expressions of sexual identity and gender, particularly in university settings.

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