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# Gender Identity, Personal Data and Social Networks: An analysis of the categorization of sensitive data from a queer critique

Identidade de Gênero, Dados Pessoais e Redes Sociais: Uma análise da categorização dos dados sensíveis a partir de uma crítica queer

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**Abstract** 

This article addresses the possibility of classifying gender identity as sensitive data, taking

into consideration the parameters of Law 13.709/2018 and the queer theory. It presents

a literature review and a documental analysis of terms from social networks. As a result,

gender identity must be understood as sensitive data due to the vulnerability of non-

cisgender people.

**Keywords:** Gender Identity; Data Protection; Queer Theory.

Resumo

Este artigo aborda a possibilidade de classificar a identidade de gênero como dado

sensível, considerando os parâmetros da Lei 13.709/2018 e a teoria queer. Para isso,

foram realizadas ampla revisão bibliográfica e análise documental de termos de redes

sociais. Como resultado, tem-se que a identidade de gênero deve ser compreendida como

dado sensível em virtude da vulnerabilidade de pessoas não cisgêneras.

Palavras-chave: Identidade de gênero; Proteção de dados pessoais; Teoria Queer.

Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The Brazilian General Data Protection Law- Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados- (LGPD - Law

13.709/2018), in force since September 2020, determines the duties and obligations of

agents that carry out operations for the processing of personal data. The law also

consolidates a series of rights and guarantees of the natural persons to which the data

refer – the so-called data subjects.

In the categorization of that data, the LGPD introduces a list of sensitive

personal data (art. 5, item II) that has a distinct regime of obligations. In this list, the law

mentions, objectively and explicitly, data on sexual life, not specifically addressing data

related to gender identity, that is, the way in which the person expresses the gender with

which he/she identifies. As this data is not simply related to biological factors, but mainly

to personal, social, and cultural issues, the questions that guide this research arise: 1) How

is data on gender identity processed and protected? 2) What are the possibilities and

justifications for categorizing gender identity as sensitive data?

In this regard, classifying gender data as sensitive may be a necessary protective

measure when we think about the Brazilian context, where systemic violence directed at

the LGBTQIA+2population occurs, especially to people outside the cisgender

conformation, susceptible to suffering more physical violence only because of their

identity. According to surveys carried out by the National Association of Transvestites and

Transsexuals (ANTRA), in 2020, 175 transvestites and transsexual women were murdered,

a number that represented an increase of 41% compared to the previous year. Among the

victims, 78% were black and 72% were sex workers (BENEVIDES; NOGUEIRA, 2021).

The inadequate processing of information about the gender of trans or non-

binary<sup>3</sup> people can seriously violate their personalities, creating contexts of discrimination

for an already extremely marginalized population. Certain cases reveal how technologies

and data processing can fuel violence based on the gender identity of vulnerable

populations. Researchers Mariah Rafaela Silva and Joana Varon developed a study on the

<sup>1</sup> This research was developed within the scope of the Compliance and Data Protection project of the Center for Education and Research on Innovation (CEPI) at FGV São Paulo Law School.

<sup>2</sup> The acronym LGBTQIA+ encompasses lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transvestite, queer, intersex, and other sexual identities and orientations that are not included in the heterosexual and cisgender pattern.

<sup>3</sup> Trans people are those who identify with a different gender from the one assigned to them when they were born. Non-binary people, on the other hand, are those who do not identify themselves by binary gender identities, that is, they fit neither as man/male nor as woman/female. There are also people of fluid gender, who move between male and female, and *ageneres*, who have a neutral gender identity.

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use of facial recognition in the Brazilian public sector and trans identities, in which they

warn about the risks and discriminatory practices embedded in technology and data

processing, which specifically affect the trans population. This scenario is aggravated by

the lack of transparency, which makes it difficult to measure the harmful effects when

assessing socioeconomic, racial, and territorial issues of trans people (SILVA; VARON,

2021).

Thus, given the normative silence, it is up to public and private agents, in the

position of personal data controllers, to determine which interpretation to give to gender

data. In this regard, interpretive alternatives are appropriate: (i) consider gender data as

sensitive personal data, understanding that it is included in data about sexual life; (ii)

consider it as sensitive personal data, understanding the list of art. 5 as an example and

this information as autonomous and not related to sex life, starting from a contextual

assessment, in accordance with art. 11, § 1st; and (iii) not considering it as sensitive

personal data, considering the list of article 5 as exhaustive, and that the data is not

covered by information about sexual life. Thus, the article explores which of the

interpretations data controllers have been adopting in the country. Furthermore, the first

and second interpretative possibilities are evaluated from the perspective of queer theory

contributions.

In this context, this article seeks to analyze (i) how sensitive data is classified in

the LGPD; (ii) how it would be possible to interpret data on gender identity as sensitive;

and (iii) how personal data related to gender identity is handled by large companies.

Therefore, the work presents an empirical investigation into the social networks

Facebook, LinkedIn, and Tinder. Subsequently, interpretive ways are proposed to

categorize gender identity as sensitive data, through the normative mechanisms offered

by the LGPD, analyzed from a queer perspective.

1 Theoretical demarcation and methodological options

This research arose from the questioning about the limits and the strictness, or not, of the

category of sensitive data brought by the LGPD, which does not consider data on gender

or gender identity as sensitive. Therefore, this article gives special focus to non-cisgender

people. Cisgenderity is based on a binary and biological pattern of man/male and

woman/female This text focuses on other gender identities that do not correspond to this

pattern, such as transsexuals, transvestites, agenres, non-binary, and fluid gender.

The research starts from a critique from the perspective of queer theory to the

way in which the LGPD, as well as the socio-juridical structures that make up its field of

implementation and applicability, are crossed and composed by heterocisnormativity<sup>4</sup>.

This criticism explains, in part, the express absence of gender identity as sensitive data in

the Brazilian law for the protection of personal data. The criticism, however, does not end

with verifying the legislative omission, but continues with the need to interpret the

normative dynamically, so that it allows tensioning the structural elements of universality

and neutrality of the law, which discriminate against people non-compliant with

normativity. Thus, the objective of this work is not to reduce queer criticism to a

theorization, but rather to propose a perspective of analysis and confrontation of

heterocisnormative structures in legal norms that directly affect the protection of

identities that deviate from normativity in contexts of personal data processing.

In this regard, queer theory can be conceived as a critical path capable of

examining how "laws, court decisions, theories of law, in their categories and

presuppositions" are elements produced and reproduced from the systematic logic of

sexist and heteronormative devices that comprise a binary view of gender, which

perpetuates violence against and the marginalization of people who do not meet the

gender standards restricted to the biological idea of cisgenderness (RAMOS, 2020, p. 3)

(our translation).

Teresa de Laurentis was the first to use the term queer academically at a

conference in 1990, in which she denounced the heterosexist character of studies on

sexual diversity at the time (DE LAURENTIS, 1991). The choice of the term queer, which

can be translated as "weird" and which was understood as "a curse that denoted

abnormality", serves to highlight a critique of the construction of normality, especially in

terms of sexual and gender identity (MISKOLCI, 2009, p. 151) (our translation). However,

the term was also redefined by social movements of LGBTQIA+ people, where the letter

"Q" designates queer people, that is, those who do not meet gender norms.

Paul B. Preciado (2008) articulates the queer theory indicating that the norms

of gender and sexuality have overcome a sense of separation between power and

<sup>4</sup> Heterocisnormativity can be understood as a social and historical construction of compulsory imposition of heterosexuality and cisgenderity, which marginalizes sexual and gender identities that do not correspond to

the normative standards of gender and sexuality.

subjectivation. For the author, gender is an effect of discursive and visual practices that

emanate from different institutional devices, such as the family, religion, school, the

media, the biomedical, legal, and even cinema. The body, however, is not limited to a pre-

discursive result, nor a purely biological fact, as it is also constituted in the relationship

with the production of materials and technoscientific flows.

In this sense, a queer critique must involve issues that go beyond the

constructions of identities that are categorized and marginalized and highlight the

dehumanization effects of dissident bodies. Thus, discussing the protection of sensitive

personal data must include a perspective on how data subjects cannot be neutralized as

if their information locates them in the same social spaces and possibilities.

The articulation of queer criticism in law follows a process of contestation of

universalist legal categories. Thus, the choice for the queer theoretical demarcation is an

option for an analysis lens for the critique of law, especially to what concerns data

protection legislation and its implementation, using data on gender identity as an analysis

variable.

Thus, the search for empirical data appeared as a research demand, to

understand whether the self-regulation of companies in the paths of data processing

complies with the applicable legislation and if it would enable, by itself, the protection of

gender identity as sensitive data.

Social networks were chosen because they are popular and because they make

it possible to observe the interpretation of gender data in experiences with a great impact

on the debate on data protection. Networks with different approaches were selected,

namely: (i) Facebook as a social network for affinity and sociability purposes, with 130

million Brazilian users; (ii) LinkedIIn as a social network for work and professional contact,

with 46 million users in Brazil; and (iii) Tinder as a network for relationships and

encounters, with Brazil being the third country in the number of users (VOLPATO, 2021;

ORAZEM, 2020; ALBACH, 2017).

The technique used to collect and evaluate research data was document

analysis. The following documents were considered: (i) Facebook: Terms of Use, Data

Policy; Ads Preferences, Help Center - LGPD Inquiries and Contacting the Data Protection

Officer (DPO); (ii) LinkedIn: LinkedIn Help: Inferred Age or Gender on LinkedIn, LinkedIn

Help: How LinkedIn uses demographic data, Preferences: Advertising Data and Contact

LinkedIn Support; (iii) Tinder: Tinder's Terms of Use, Community Guidelines, and Security Center and Policy.

The analytical steps developed by researcher André Cellard (2008) were followed, who highlights the importance of a critical preliminary assessment of documents. Thus, we started from the assumption of documental complexity, considering its limitations as an important part of the analytical process. The elements extrinsic to the documents were observed, such as the social context in which they are produced, the authenticity and reliability of the texts taken from official platforms (CELLARD, 2008, p. 300-301). Then, categories based on core elements of the LGPD were created, structured in a question format, to facilitate the search and collection of data.

Box 1: Categories/questions of document analysis.

Category	Question
Sensitive data	What types of sensitive data does the network collect?
Transparency	Does the network have a privacy policy and terms of use written in understandable/less technical language? Does it describe well the data processing performed?
Non-discrimination	Does the network indicate any specific issues related to diversity and non-discrimination?
Rights of data subjects	Does the network indicate the rights of data subjects when using it and how to exercise them? How does it describe these guarantees?
Deletion	How does the network handle the data deletion issue? Does the network keep user data in the databases even after they delete the account?
Security	Does the network indicate security mechanisms for users' personal data? Which?
Gender data	Does the network collect data on gender? What are the options and collection methods?
Purpose	Does the network explicitly indicate the purposes for processing the gender data collected?
Legal bases	Does the network indicate the legal bases to process the gender data collected?
Sharing	Does the network indicate that it shares gender data with third parties? How does it justify sharing? Does it indicate the

purpose of sharing and the third parties with whom it shares

the data?

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The categories created were gathered in order to understand how privacy

policies expose the functioning of data processing – especially personal data of gender.

For this reason, the categories were developed based on key elements for an assessment

of a company's suitability for the LGPD. The main objective of the study was to empirically

verify whether this information is considered sensitive in the process of social networks.

There are, however, limitations in document analysis, such as the insufficiency of some

information in the documents, or the lack of transparency in certain points.

The research assumes that the categories listed can extract a partial analysis of

the documental content, as other questions could be prepared. In addition, there is the

limitation of the field cut, restricted to the chosen networks, and the timeframe, as the

analysis was carried out between May and June 2021, making it possible for companies

to modify these documents over time. The investigation, therefore, does not aim to

exhaust the analytical possibilities and understands the limitations of research directed

towards an article. Thus, it is demarcated that the study can be expanded or replicated to

other fields aligned with this research.

2 How gender identity data is handled by Social Networks in Brazil

With the entry into force of the LGPD, several companies, including social networks,

began to adapt their internal policies to the legislation, to guarantee their users' rights

and avoid future sanctions by the National Data Protection Authority (ANPD). The method

adopted by these companies to carry out the adjustment reflects how the LGPD is being

applied and how personal data is being protected. It also reflects the level of discussion

about contexts not explored by the law, such as the data on gender identity. The following

topics bring the results observed in the documents relating to the privacy policy and data

processing of Facebook, LinkedIn, and Tinder.

#### 2.a Facebook

Facebook is now one of the five largest companies in the US Silicon Valley. Researcher Shoshana Zuboff (2020) points out that the network is related to the dissemination of the business model based on the processing of personal data to deepen the ability to influence the choices of its users with targeted advertisements and publicity. Currently, the company dominates a large portion of the digital market (e.g. WhatsApp and Instagram), a fact that has been stimulating several discussions in the field of data protection (MCLAUGHLIN; KERN, 2021).

According to Facebook (2021a), its mission is to empower people to build communities and bring the world together, with security and privacy protection being one of its principles. Recently, the company reached the mark of 3 billion active users around the (FACEBOOK, 2021a), with Brazil being the 4th country with the most users on the platform, with approximately 120 million active accounts (SILVA, 2020a), which is equivalent to more than half of the Brazilian population. To register on Facebook, the information required is: first name, last name, email, date of birth, and gender.

Box 2: Facebook Results 1.

Sensitive data	Gender data	Non-	Purpose	Legal bases
		discrimination		
To register, no	Holders can only	There are no	Data "with	Gender identity
sensitive data is	create a profile	non-	special	data is collected
collected. Said	by providing	discriminatory	protections" is	through the
category of data	data on gender	measures in the	used to	legal basis of
is not included	which can be	privacy policy. In	"provide,	consent - but
in the "data	one of the	the Community	customize and	not in a specific
policy,"	options	Standards	improve our	and prominent
(FACEBOOK,	"female",	(FACEBOOK,	products",	way.
2021b). The	"male", and	2021h), the	which includes	
company claims	"personalized",	company states	"personalizing	
that profile data	selecting the	that hate speech	advertisements,	
receive "special	appropriate	cannot be	offers, and	
protections".	treatment	published.	other sponsored	
	pronoun.		content".	

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In the policy, "data with special protections" is mentioned for "providing, customizing and improving our products", which includes providing personalized experiences to users and improving Facebook's products, purposes about which there is



little information. It also comprises "selecting and customizing advertisements, offers and other sponsored content (...)", relating to Facebook's business model. According to the company, advertisers carry a list of information about the target audience they want to reach, and Facebook matches the ads to users' timelines.

For this purpose, the company makes available tools (FACEBOOK, 2021c) to control personal data, allowing users, for example, to choose whether some data can be used to target ads. However, there is no way to configure the use of personal data on gender to target ads. Also on this link, Facebook draws attention to the fact that, despite the settings made available, advertisers will still be able to reach the user "by choosing categories related to age, gender, location (...)". Therefore, it is concluded that Facebook uses personal data of gender to target ads, with no choice for the user.

Box 3: Facebook Results 2.

Security	Sharing	Deletion	Rights of data	Transparency
Security  The policy does not show security measures related to the flow of personal data. Manuals are provided for users to protect themselves on the network.	Personal data - including gender - is only shared with advertisers with the consent of the data	Data storage occurs as long as it is useful to provide services and products or even account deletion, a determination that varies according to the case, with the purpose of the data, involvement of legal obligation,	subjects  Provision of channels for inquiries about the LGPD (FACEBOOK, 2021f) - how to access, download and delete personal information, how to object to data processing - and contact the company's data protection officer	Transparency  The terms are very descriptive, but some information is not detailed. The privacy policy makes no specific mention of gender identity.
		and nature of the information (FACEBOOK, 2021d and		
		2021e)		

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Despite provisions stating that Facebook only shares identified data with the consent of users, the company accumulates scandals involving improper sharing of personal data. The best-known case is that of political marketing consultancy Cambridge Analytica, sanctioned by the National Consumer Protection Secretariat (Senacon) (RESENDE, 2019). But there are also cases under investigation by the same Secretariat, of



sensitive data illegally received (such as heart rate and menstrual cycle) by a partner application and data sharing with the WhatsApp instant messaging network (BUCCO, 2021) In common, in addition to dealing with improper sharing, all cases involve the use of sensitive data to target ads.

## 2.b LinkedIn

LinkedIn defines itself as a platform for professionals, whose purpose is to promote connections, acquire work opportunities, establish and strengthen professional relationships, and even for business purposes. According to data released in 2020, the site had 46 million users in Brazil (ÉPOCA NEGÓCIOS, 2020) and 738 million users around the world (GREENHALGH, 2021), with an average of 100,000 new profiles created daily (SILVA, 2020b).

LinkedIn requires little information to create a profile, such as: name, email address and/or mobile device number, and password. Still, the platform infers gender data about its users as stated in LinkedIn's privacy policy (LINKEDIN, 2021f). According to the platform, the inference is based on the name or pronouns used when users recommend each other's competences (LINKEDIN, 2021c). Therefore, it is important to understand how gender data is processed.

Box 4: LinkedIn Results 1.

Sensitive data	Gender data	Non-	Purpose	Legal bases
		discrimination		
The platform	There is no field	There is a	Gender data is	Gender identity
can collect	for gender	prohibition on	inferred for ad	data is collected
data on union	declaration by the	content that	targeting and	through the legal
membership if	user in the	spreads hatred	can be entered	basis of consent -
the holder	Brazilian version.	and	to compose	but not
wants to make	There is, however,	discriminatory	demographic	specifically and
it available on	the inference of	actions against	information.	prominently,
the network.	gender through	individuals or		based on
	the platform.	groups due to		legitimate
		gender, among		interest.
		other aspects.		

Source: Prepared by the authors.

It is noteworthy that, as to the purpose, the way in which information about gender is reflected in targeted advertisements is not mentioned. In the account settings



area, it is only informed that the user will continue to see the same number of ads, but these will be "less relevant" (LINKEDIN, 2021d). It is possible to stop targeting ads based on gender inference if the user chooses to do so – which does not prevent gender inference itself.

Regarding the "voluntary demographic information of self-identification", it is possible to identify, in the individual's profile configurations, with the "female", "male", "other gender identity" or "prefer not to declare" gender. This data is not displayed and, depending on the platform, is used for statistics, news, announcements, and personalized content (LINKEDIN, 2021e). Although there is the user's consent to fill in these "demographic" fields, the platform's inference about the user's gender happens regardless of his/her will.

The platform has a binary perception of gender issues. This is inferred from the analysis of reports generated annually, such as the "Gender Insights Report" (LINKEDIN, 2019), which demonstrates how women and men get involved in jobs in different ways. The possibility of the user identifying himself with non-binary gender identity was only considered by LinkedIn in March 2021, when the network allowed the inclusion of pronouns in the profiles created - including neutral pronouns. That modality was only incorporated in five countries: the United States, Great Britain, Sweden, Canada, and Ireland (GREENHALGH, 2021).

The lack of perception about a population that is outside the normative cisgender scope by the platform is worrying, considering that, in Brazil, 38% of companies have restrictions to hire LGBTQIA+ (SANTO CAOS, 2015), 90% of trans and transvestite women have prostitution as the source of income and subsistence (BENEVIDES; NOGUEIRA, 2021, p. 44) and that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate of the trans population was 20.47%, higher within the LGBTQIA+ community itself, whose average unemployment was 17.5% (VOTELGBT; BOX1824, 2021). Other aspects were evaluated to characterize the level of protection and guarantees in the network, as shown in the table below.

Box 5: LinkedIn Results 2.

Security			Sharing			Deleti	ion		Rights	of data	Transparency	
									subjects	5		
There	is n	О	There	is	no	Delete	es	data	Delete,	correct,	The terms are	e very
processi	ng tha	t	sharing	of	an	after	30	days	revise	and	descriptive,	but
guarante	ees		individu	al		of	aco	count	update		some informa	tion is



greater security,	member's	closure.	information;	not detailed. The
and the	inferred gender	However, data	delete the	privacy policy
platform is not	and age data	that does not	account;	makes no specific
responsible for	with third	identify the	contact the Data	mention of gender
possible access	parties. Data	data subject is	Protection	identity.
and changes to	collected and	stored.	Officer.	
the information	shared is used as			
sent.	aggregated			
	insights.			

Source: Prepared by the authors.

While users can contact LinkedIn's Data Protection Officer (LINKEDIN, 2021b) directly to request clarification about themselves, as well as Support for clarification on the privacy policy (LINKEDIN, 2021a), the pages presented are in English, which may imply a barrier for data subjects to exercise their rights.

## 2.c Tinder

Tinder is a relationship network created in 2012 in the United States. The platform works from the geolocation of users and aims to create links and contacts between profiles, being especially used through an application (app). The network has millions of users worldwide. In Brazil alone, it already had ten million users in 2014, equivalent to 10% of the total users in the world<sup>5</sup> (JUNQUEIRA; VENTURA, 2019). Tinder users are looking for *matches* (combinations), made between profiles when there is a mutual approval between them through what is called a 'like'.

When creating a Tinder profile, the login options are a Google email, Facebook profile, or phone number. Data such as the gender and age of the user is required. The network offers the gender options man, woman, and "more", in which other identities can be freely included. The user chooses whether to display the gender in the profile. Tinder provides a text explanation of the "more" option as a way to include diverse gender identities. The matter is also clarified through the speech of people who represent these identities in a video on the platform's page<sup>6</sup>. This is an inclusion tool, as it provides explanations in text and video, in accessible language, and with representative

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP90QAnmaA4 . Accessed on: June 10, 2021.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The survey did not find up-to-date data on the specific number of Tinder users in Brazil, but, as already pointed out, the country ranks third in the ranking of countries with the most users, according to Grupo Match, the corporation to which Tinder belongs, which does not disclose specific numbers on the number of users.

communicators. However, the video was produced in English, which limits the information for Brazilian users.

The network, however, receives complaints from trans people who have their profiles banned without justification or for a generic violation of community guidelines. In this regard, the company responded that it does not ban users due to their gender identity; it is a complex context in which users report the accounts of trans people. The network recognized that trans people face challenges and said it is working to improve their practices, with the support of specialized organizations (MARÇAL, 2020). In addition, Tinder provides a contact email where people can complain if they believe their profiles have been unfairly banned.

In this context, at first, it is important to demarcate how Tinder handles sensitive data, for what purpose and how it collects gender data and whether it has content on the principle of non-discrimination in its terms.

Box 6: Tinder Results 1.

Sensitive data	Gender data	Non-	Purpose	Legal bases
		discrimination		
Sensitive data	Data subjects	Community	Gender data is	Gender identity
such as	can only create	guidelines include	basic login data,	data is collected
ethnicity,	a profile by	the non-	whose collection	through the
race, sexual	providing data	acceptance of	is intended for the	legal basis of
orientation,	on gender,	hate speech of	operation of the	consent - but
and religious	which can be	any kind, or	service.	not in a specific
beliefs are	'man', 'woman'	violence and		and prominent
collected, as	or 'other',	incitement to		way.
well as	selected at their	violence.		
content such	discretion			
as photos and				
videos.				

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Gender information can also be inferred from user interactions and content, or by connecting to other networks (e.g. Facebook and Instagram). When explaining the use of automatic decision-making performed by the network algorithm, Tinder indicates that it uses gender and other data to feed the matches algorithm, but does not use information such as race, ethnicity, income, and religion. It is noteworthy that the network also handles data from conversations between users, as well as the content that users publish, as part of the operation of services (TINDER, 2021) However, the failure to obtain specific and detailed consent on gender data indicates that the company still does not perceive

this data as sensitive, which characterizes an opening for violations. Other aspects were evaluated to characterize the level of protection and guarantees in the network, as shown in the table below.

Box 7: Tinder Results 2.

Security	Sharing	Deletion	Rights of data	Transparency
			subjects	
Protects data	It shares data	Retains data	Delete, correct,	The terms are
from	with service	only as long as	revise and update	very descriptive,
unauthorized	providers,	necessary for	information;	but some
access,	service	legitimate	whether or not to	information is
alteration,	operation	business	authorize access	not detailed.
disclosure, or	partners, other	interests. After	to the device;	Besides, the
destruction,	Match Group	deleting the	delete the	privacy policy
including strict	companies, and,	account in the	account; uninstall;	makes no
technical	in some cases,	app, there is a	responsibility of	specific mention
systems and	with legal	period of three	the company.	of gender
encryption for	authorities.	months to		identity.
users' photos		delete the data.		
and messages.				

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Although Tinder indicated security precautions, in 2020, Senacon notified the platform for selling users' data to other companies to improve the efficiency of advertisements (LARA, 2020). In this regard, the network's privacy policy indicates that it can share personal data, including gender, to develop and provide advertising (TINDER, 2021c).

Among the rights of data subjects, uninstalling interrupts data processing, but the network continues to store the mobile identifier associated with the device. Data subjects can also call the ANPD (National Data Protection Authority) for complaints. Furthermore, the three-month timeframe for deleting the data may not be met due to technical limitations (TINDER, 2021c).

# 3 Gender identity as sensitive data: interpretations for anti-discrimination protection

LGPD, in its art. 5, item II, indicates that sensitive personal data is personal data on racial or ethnic origin, religious belief, public opinion, affiliation to union or religious, philosophical or political organization, data relating to the health or "sex life", genetic or



biometric data. Since the law is risk regulation, the creation of this category implies that

agents who process sensitive personal data consider their operations as riskier in relation

to the fundamental rights and freedoms of data subjects, thus requiring greater security

and protection of the flows of said data (QUELLE, 2017; ZANATTA, 2017; BIONI; LUCIANO,

2019).

It is noteworthy that the creation of the sensitive data category is part of a

pragmatic observation process about the different effects caused by the processing of

said data in relation to others. Thus, the very selection of which data would be sensitive

demonstrates that the circulation of certain information can lead to greater harm to its

data subjects, in a given social configuration (DONEDA, 2019, p. 143). The simple

formation of profiles based on sensitive personal data can lead to discrimination due to

several factors. Among them, it is possible to mention the fact that personal data,

apparently not "sensitive", can become sensitive if it contributes to the development of a

profile, or even in contexts where the individual sphere itself can be violated when the

person belongs to a stigmatized group or is associated with negative characteristics and

interpretations (RODOTÀ, 2008), which is the case of non-cisgender populations.

However, it is not clear in the LGPD whether the data considered sensitive

consists of an exhaustive or exemplary list. Likewise, there is no official guidance from

ANPD (National Data Protection Authority) and legislation regarding the possibility or the

obligation to understand gender identity as data relating to sexual life. Thus, this research

raised data and discussions to reflect on the categorization of data on gender identity as

sensitive data. Given the absence of specific regulation, the main objective is to explore

how large social networking companies, which occupy different aspects of everyday life:

social, romantic, family and work relationships, are self-regulated. As the analysis of the

networks revealed, companies do not show in their respective policies the way they

interpret and, therefore, process personal gender data. The global analysis of the

documents allows us to infer that such data is not classified by them as sensitive

information, which indicates the need for clarification by the regulatory authority on this

matter.

This classification would place companies that process gender identity data with

more significant obligations to protect such data. Furthermore, it would make processing

based on the legal hypothesis of legitimate interest impossible, in addition to limiting the

use of the legal basis of consent, which, for sensitive data, must be provided in a specific

and prominent manner, for specific purposes, as provided for in art. 11, I of LGPD. Given

this context, it is necessary to think about the possibilities of interpretation to classify

personal gender data as sensitive.

Among the possibilities, there are two options capable of including gender

identity as sensitive information: (i) the possibility of including gender identity in an

interpretation of sensitive data regarding sexual life, as provided for in art. 5th, II; or (ii)

the exercise of a contextual interpretation, supported by art. 11, § 1, which establishes

the regulation as sensitive data to any processing of personal data that reveals sensitive

personal data and that may cause damage to the data subject.

Regarding the definition of data referring to sexual life, it is evident that the

legislator's option for a generic term is problematic, as it opens disproportionate margins

for the interpretation and application of the law. This is due to the fact that while some

data controllers may opt for inclusive perceptions about sexual diversity, others may

restrict the spectrum of application of a more guaranteeing interpretation. Gender

identity is an example of this issue. In a more restricted interpretation, gender does not

comprise information about a person's sexual life, and if we understand non-cisgender

identities from the same perspective, the result is the exclusion of data on gender identity

from the sensitive data category.

However, based on the queer contribution, Daniel Borrillo (2011, p. 30)

emphasizes that the binary sexual division between man/male and woman/female

complements heterocisnormative conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality. Thus, when

thinking about the components of social perception about sexual life, gender identity can

also be understood as a sexual characteristic. It is an identity, it is not linked to people's

sexual orientation or exercise of sexuality, but it assigns them a location in the

sociocultural constructs of gender and, therefore, a position in the sexual division, even if

it does not belong to normativity.

In this regard, the interpretative proposal of gender identity as data referring to

sexual life and, therefore, belonging to the category of sensitive data, is a way to protect

people, especially non-cisgender people, considering that said group falls into a highly

discriminatory social context. Information on non-normative identities increases the

vulnerability of these people and the potential harm in cases of inadequate data

processing. This does not exclude the possibility of understanding gender as sensitive

information, even when related to binary sexual division, as is the case with information

on race, which does not go through a division based on distinctions of privilege or social

oppression. Furthermore, the interpretation of gender identity as information on sexual

life provides immediate application of the sensitive data regime, restricting the

possibilities to process this type of data.

The idea of gender aligned with aspects of sexual life is diffused in queer theory,

which subverts and challenges the normativity of bodies. Judith Butler (1990) stresses the

binary construction of gender, demarcating that it is focused on sexual relations, the body

not being naturally sexual, but marked by a gender identity produced from culturally

produced performativity. Thus, gender identity does not determine our behaviors, but we

conceive identity by the behavioral patterns we reproduce (BUTLER, 2020, p. 242-243).

This perspective strengthens the perception that gender is an expressive path in the

construction of the sexual sphere, including non-normative identities that subvert binary

logics.

In terms of Brazil, thinking about gender and sexuality requires a careful look at

a society that includes a perspective on the distribution of violence. Jota Mombaça (2016)

explains that vulnerable populations such as people who do not obey cisnormativity

receive a greater share of violence in the Brazilian social structure. That is to say, to be a

non-cisgender person is to become a less human target in a racist, sexist, classist, and

lgbtphobic society. It is important to highlight that not recognizing one's gender, or

misgendering a person, even if in the context of a social network, reinforces the idea that

the space that this person occupies, the society that they find themselves into, do not

consider their person's gender real. This implies rejection, impacts their self-esteem and

confidence, lack of authenticity and increases one's perception of being socially

stigmatized (KEYES, 2018).

Skinner-Thompson (2021) reveals dimensions of what he calls "privacy on the

margins," referring to the historical and sociocultural constructs that underpin the

relationship between surveillance and privacy for vulnerable populations. The researcher

debates the possibilities of security in the private life and freedom of LGBTQIA+ people,

emphasizing that historically non-heteronormative people face surveillance contexts and

social restrictions. In this sense, the improper treatment of information about this

population tends to increase the discriminatory context. In other words, surveillance of

LGBTQIA+ people is a historical and structural process of discrimination and

categorization of people based on their identities and sexual practices. This process

affects the ways in which these people are treated, therefore, information about their

lives can be used in a negative way, reflecting perceptions that already marginalize them

in society.

At this juncture, thinking about the protection of data on gender identity reveals

the need to assess the social factors surrounding this information, as well as the

discriminatory and harmful potential of its processing, whether in a private sense, since it

is evident that the identity of gender is a very personal aspect, whether in terms of

collective effects, as non-cisgender people already suffer systematic and structural

violence for not meeting a normative gender expectation.

Thus, gender identity is information with significant discriminatory potential,

and it can be used to exclude people who already suffer violence and limitations in the

most diverse social sectors, such as education, health, and the labor market. In this

scenario, the inadequate processing of gender data in social networks, for example, can

translate into a significant collective impact, considering the context of sharing with other

companies and the enormous capacity of popular social networks to collect this

information from vulnerable groups.

This understanding is justified because the category of sensitive data comprises

personal data "especially susceptible to use for discriminatory purposes, such as

stigmatization, exclusion or segregation", which may cause violations of people's dignity,

personal identity, and privacy (KONDER, 2019, p. 455) (our translation). Therefore, it is

possible to understand that there is no exhaustive list of sensitive data in the LGPD, as

such data is classified according to the level of harm it presents in each processing.

Paul Quinn and Gianclaudio Malgieri (2020, p. 29-30) analyze the European

context of the discussion on sensitive data protection and argue about the need to rethink

the approach that is used for this category of data. The authors thus propose a hybrid

approach, taking into account the purpose of the processing of sensitive data. For them,

personal data should be considered sensitive if the controllers' intention is to process or

discover sensitive information or if it is reasonably foreseeable that such data could be

used to reveal or infer sensitive aspects. This formulation is defended by the authors as a

form of balance for analyzing the context of sensitive data processing, avoiding

disproportionate interpretations. In this way, the concept of sensitive data remains viable,

and a real level of protection is provided to data subjects who may be in a vulnerable

position and at risk of discrimination and mitigation of other fundamental rights.

However, just as European and Brazilian legislation does not contemplate

peaceful concepts on sensitive data, the interpretation of this category of data and the

way in which the controllers will use it cannot be relativized to the point of allowing

infringing and improper treatment. In this sense, thinking about the social context of

sensitive information is to increases the defense of the subject's fundamental rights. In

other words, some information needs to be treated more rigorously because the social

context has a strong impact on the possibilities of discrimination in its treatment.

Therefore, sensitive data must be processed only when necessary and in accordance with

specific purposes and appropriate legal bases.

Thus, assuming that certain information has greater potential to be treated in a

discriminatory manner, another possible interpretative way to classify gender identity as

sensitive data is the contextual evaluation of its processing. Art. 11, § 1, of the LGPD,

brings the possibility of applying the sensitive data regime to data that, even not originally

understood as sensitive, or not belonging to the options provided for in art. 5, II, is

characterized as such, according to the context of processing. However, there is a

discussion about the presence of damage when classifying a piece of data as sensitive.

Such a link between damage and sensitivity restricts the scope of the application of art.

11, since it is difficult for the data subject to concretely prove the damage. In addition,

the harmful effects are, to a large extent, reflected in the collective and private sphere of

the data subjects (MULHOLLAND, 2020, p. 131).

When we look at the data on gender identity on social networks, what we have

is an activity of little transparency about the way this data is inferred and used by

companies, in addition to the provisions of privacy policies. This is due to the fact that

these companies manage large personal databases, carrying out an extensive profile of

the personality of their users. This is because social networks are part of the process of

socioeconomic organization called "surveillance capitalism", in which platforms yield

profits by translating personality data into behavioral data (ZUBOFF, 2020) (our

translation). This market is stimulated by persuasion initiatives introduced in the

networks, which intend to make predictions about our future steps and, therefore,

increase the chances of creating profitable trades. About this supposed predictability,

however, many questions remain. After all, if algorithms only use patterns identified in

the past to predict the future, they miss out on a series of new gender identities that can

be recognized and normalized over time.

The very act of inferring gender data, it is important to emphasize, implies a

paradox of privacy. This is because analyzing this data without considering the user's will

implies accessing information that people might not want to share. In order to deal with

this information, or seek to correct it (in the case of misgendering), users find themselves

obliged to provide even more additional information, disclosing more data or more

detailed information about themselves (CUSTERS 2013). Thus, gender identity is

information that, when processed illegally and abusively, can generate private and

collective damage. Therefore, interpreting this data as sensitive also includes a

perspective that any sensitive data, when processed outside the legal hypotheses of art.

11, I, II, of LGPD, "will always generate damages of a very personal nature for violation of

the rights of privacy, freedom or identity, fundamentals of data protection". Thus, the

damage would be in re ipsa, without the need for proof of other legal consequences,

which does not remove the possibility of a person claiming the existence of concrete

damage to their personality (MULHOLLAND, 2020, p. 131-132) (our translation).

The proposals for interpreting gender identity as sensitive data presented in this

work especially consider the non-cisgender population, considering that sexual and

gender diversity brings together a context of various types of violence. However, the

interpretations aim, in the first place, to ensure that the legislation fulfills its objective of

a broad protection of the natural person against violations of their personal data, with the

category of sensitive data having greater protective robustness, in line with the principle

of non-discrimination established by law. Thus, having identified the great harmful

potential of the processing of gender identity data, what remains for the processes of

adjustment to the LGPD is to follow the provisions on the sensitive data regime, added to

the legal basis, which advocates the development of personality and human dignity in its

art. 2, VII.

In this regard, in LGPD implementation processes, data on gender identity must

be understood as sensitive, either by its insertion in the term "sexual life" provided for in

the list of sensitive data in the LGPD, or by a contextual assessment that gives it the

elements for configuration as sensitive data, namely: (i) very personal information; (ii)

discriminatory potential; and (iii) harmful potential. Both interpretations follow the

perception that the discriminatory effects are not in the data itself, but in its use

(DONEDA, 2019, p. 144). However, certain types of information configure a greater

context of vulnerability for its data subjects.

Thus, the proposed interpretations establish possibilities to expand the LGPD's

tutelage and include a panorama for data subjects who face social contexts of greater

vulnerability. In this scenario, injustices and demands related to gender and sexual life put

the right to anti-discrimination to the test, while challenging and developing it. That

reveals the need for a "juridical-scientific methodological stance, marked by theoretical

concern with the understanding of existing legal categories and their relationship with

gender and sexuality" (RIOS, 2020, p. 1335) (our translation). Therefore, the exercise of

interpreting the LGPD beyond the norm and normativity was based on the queer

perspective, as a way of stressing the category of sensitive data, including human and

identity factors still little seen by lawmakers and, as also observed in empirical research,

by companies in their privacy and data protection policies.

**4 Conclusion** 

As shown, the purpose of the LGPD was to provide autonomy to data subjects regarding

their personal information. One of the principles of this new law is non-discrimination in

order to safeguard data subjects from exposure to vexatious situations or greater

vulnerability, certain data is determined to be sensitive data – which should be processed

with greater caution.

Among sensitive personal data, there is the term "sexual life", which, due to its

vagueness, does not make explicit whether it also protects data on gender identity. This

normative lack is related to a culture of marginalization of debates about gender diversity.

As a consequence, express norms are not produced to protect identities that do not

behave in a binary gender perspective - which is divided by the male/female parallel and

does not correspond to the identity diversity of the population. This scenario contributes

to the consolidation of contexts of discrimination, vulnerability, and violence for non-

cisgender people.

However, it is possible to understand that data on gender can be considered

sensitive data, both from an extensive interpretation of the term "sexual life", in article 5,

II, LGPD, as from the very definition of the term sensitive data (as data that exposes data

subject to greater vulnerability) in line with the interpretation of article 11§1, LGPD, which

leads to the interpretation that the list of sensitive personal data is not, per se, exhaustive.

These interpretations are aligned with the context of vulnerability, linked to issues of

gender identity, which contribute to the marginalization of people, depending on their

identification. The understanding of gender data as sensitive data is particularly relevant

in Brazilian society, where there is systemic violence directed at the population that does

not fit the normative cisgender standard.

Despite these considerations, the digital platforms analyzed in this research do

not process gender data with due care, either because they are not transparent about the

processing performed, or because they do not guarantee sufficient security measures, or

because they carry out the activities regardless of consent users, through inferences made

in an unknown manner by the data subjects.

Among the networks used, there are good practices that deserve to be

highlighted. Tinder, for example, deals with the issue of information about gender identity

through a text and video explanation, in accessible language, and with representation.

Furthermore, this network, as well as Facebook, allows the inclusion of all gender

identities and expressions in the user's profile, which represents that they understand the

plurality of possible gender identities. LinkedIn, in turn, has an easy-access channel to the

Data Protection Officer (DPO), which makes it possible to implement the rights of the data

subjects more quickly, especially with regard to possible violations.

The networks, however, have a series of aspects that need to be revised. Tinder

is silent about matching or recognizing gender data as sensitive. Facebook and LinkedIn

categorize gender data in the same data segment considered sensitive by the LGPD, but

do not process the data differently, remaining irregular. Still, it is highlighted that all

studied networks lack a policy that is concerned with issues related to gender identity and

how these issues can affect their users.

Thus, even though the LGPD has brought a series of innovations and guarantees

to data subjects, its wording on sensitive data makes room for companies to continue

dealing with gender data of the trans or non-binary population as if it were information

that does not deserve specific care, regardless of the potential harm it may cause. Thus,

the role attributed to queer theory in this work was precisely the contestation of a non-

inclusive normative structure, which did not observe the protective and anti-

discriminatory potential that the express inclusion of gender identity in the text of the law

would have. Even so, the dynamic interpretation of the LGPD makes it possible to

articulate criticisms capable of broadening the protection provided for in the legislation

and emphasizing an inclusive data protection culture, capable of overcoming the universal  $\,$ 

and normative construction of the actual data subject.

Therefore, it is concluded that the analysis of legislation and empirical research

reveals that neither the legislator nor the social networks considered gender diversity in

the definition of legal norms. This lack of concern with gender identity empirically

confirms, for the domain of personal data protection, what queer theory indicates more

generally: the law starts from a heterocisnormative perspective and ignores gender

diversity. The proper interpretation of the LGPD, considering gender data as sensitive

data, can overcome this limitation and foster a data protection culture that pays attention

to human diversity, in accordance with constitutional principles.

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