

# Transvestite and Transsexual Teachers: The “High Heels Pedagogy”

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## Abstract

In the Brazilian educational scenario, transvestite and transsexual teachers are increasingly visible, and cause repercussions generally related to the prejudice and discrimination they suffer. This text investigates the pedagogical and educational consequences of the presence of transvestite and transsexual teachers in the classroom. Following the careers of a group of these teachers in several states of Brazil, we try to identify the elements that characterize their action in the classroom, and reach the proposition of the “high heels pedagogy”. In this pedagogical modality, two strong elements are combined, being a woman and being a teacher. The “high heels pedagogy” is about an educational activity that evades the traditional bodiless and sexless figure of the teacher. Contrary to what may be thought, a certain amount of eroticism and production of the woman who “has the role” in being a teacher, far from “misrepresenting” the space of the classroom, has brought out the power of affection. This results in a professional who is more skilled and involved with work, and a woman who assumes herself as adult reference in the classroom.

## Keywords

Professor, Transvestite, Transsexual, Pedagogies of Gender and Sexuality, “High Heels Pedagogy”

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## 1. Introduction

In the Brazilian educational scenario, transvestite and transsexual teachers are increasingly visible. Although a minority in numerical terms, they bring to debate issues that raise controversy on various topics, in particular on account of the curiosity they institute and the impact on ways of working the relationship: teacher/student, teacher/other coworkers, teacher/managers of education systems, and teacher/parents and families of students. In general, the media coverage captures the debate on issues related to prejudice and discrimination that these

teachers suffer in schools. In addition to these aspects, certainly relevant, this text inquires about the pedagogical and educational consequences of the presence of transvestite and transsexual teachers in the classroom. This is the least developed dimension of the debate, specially because of the moral panic that dominates the discussions, and that immediately places transvestite and transgender teachers in the position of being unreliable as role models to the new generations, and therefore, it is unsuitable to be in the classroom in front of the “innocent” children and teenagers. It is worth remembering that “moral panic expresses, in a culturally complex way, struggles over what the collectivity considers legitimate in terms of behavior and lifestyle” (Miskolci, 2007: p. 111).

Following the career of a group of transvestite and transsexual teachers in several states of Brazil, we try to identify the elements that characterize their action in the classroom, and we reach some propositions about the subject, all of them in connection with our research sample<sup>1</sup>. As we discuss in the text the pedagogical action of these teachers, regardless of the discipline they teach, there seems to be, in the classroom, processes and knowledge of teaching that displace the traditional figure of the teacher as a mother, aunt or older sister. Another type of relationship is introduced in which the body of the teacher comes to play an important role, particularly marked by the attributes of gender and sexuality, but an equation in which also comes into playing markers of generation, race, and religious belonging. The action of these teachers seems to put into question a poorly enunciated, but clearly visible truth in schools, that the ideal teacher is a bodiless being without sex appeal, and caught in the female gender in a dimension almost attaches to the maternal role. The good teacher, after all, even today remains in the educational imagination as a good mother, good wife, a modest woman, possibly the single woman who becomes mother to her students, more properly aunt or older sister. All of these assumptions fall apart when classes of students (and schools and education systems) find themselves grappling with the teachers, openly transvestites and transsexuals, largely because they are identities strongly constructed in relation to body and sexuality.

Some will say that this is a sign of chaos, moral degradation of the profession, the end of times. We affirm that, on the contrary, it establishes productive classroom discussions about the teacher as an adult reference, a public servant who uses to the best dialogues with students while not sidestep their sexual and gender condition, and even manifest some eroticism. Again, there are plenty of voices to warn eroticism is something undesirable in the classroom, especially when brought on by the teacher. It seems that pedagogy does not know how to deal with some of the most mundane elements in any classroom, and eroticism is one of them, besides laughter. Does anybody know what the function of laughter in education is? Few are the authors that question the role of laughter in educational processes (Lulkin, 2007). Laughter is always that which distracts from learning, if it is seen by common sense, and can never help in the classroom. One may think the same thing in relation to the erotic, with the aggravation that it causes furious moral reactions. Consecrated in educational media is the formula of thinking by subtraction: these elements must be removed from the classroom (leave out laughing, leave out the erotic, leave out the baseball cap, leave out the students” musical tastes, leave out the cultural ways of youth speech, leave out questions that do not concern the subject, etc.). With so many subtractions, only the student and the teacher are left leaving out youth cultures and the woman teacher. From elements listed in the professional trajectory of transvestite and transsexual teachers, this text proposes that the curiosities of gender and sexuality, as well as some eroticism, may help to think that the teacher is a woman, and this is not something to be hidden, much less immediately captured as the figure of the aunt, mother or older sister. The fact of the teacher definitely being a woman is not something necessarily detrimental to learning or that collaborates in the moral deformation of the students.

The text has three sections. In the first one, we present relevant information about the transvestite and transsexual teachers who were willing to talk about their professional and personal lives, and allowed us to dive partly into this investigation. Most of the data and scenes presented come from field diaries, but the presentation of some transvestite and transsexual teachers helps to outline some of our arguments. In the following section, we briefly discuss what is transvestility and what is transsexuality, and how these two identity constructions are present in the statements of our interviewees. In the final third section, from narrated scenes and school situations, we seek to embody the conceptual category of the high heels pedagogy, linking it with the knowledge of teachers and the notion of *curriculum*. In all sections, we work with excerpts from the interviewees’ speeches and observations recorded in the field diary.

This paper analyzes the perceptions of transvestite and transsexual teachers about the impact the changes in their bodies cause in relation to students, other teachers and the school community. It also analyzes the percep-

<sup>1</sup>Part of the data of this text comes from Marina Reidel’s Master dissertation (REIDEL, 2013).

tions that these transvestite and transsexual teachers have of the implications of this body production in their role as teachers, particularly because of the erotic component. We recognize that these analyzes are favorable to think the concept of embodiment, as developed by Braidotti (2011), Csordas (2003), but not occupied in these connections in this text, which has an exploratory and specific character about transvestite and transsexual group of teachers interviewed in Brazilian public schools, in connection with three issues: the knowledge of the teacher, the knowledge of the discipline and contingent classroom elements.

## 2. Transvestite and Transsexual Teachers: Fragments of Life Stories

The research movement started by the most basic questions: are there transvestite and transsexual teachers? Where do they work? What problems have they faced in their careers? What stories would they have to tell? How do we find these teachers? How many interviews would be sufficient to make an adequate survey sample? Do these teachers have some form of self-organization? The search for transvestite and transsexual teachers followed a mix of procedures. The most basic of them was to make contacts in education meetings and meetings of the LGBT movement<sup>2</sup>. From the first, some indicated others, and some discovered by newspaper reports and references in virtual environments. A year of research ended up mapping a set of 90 female and two male transvestite or transsexual teachers, totaling 92 people. Of all these teachers, it was possible to talk to at events or exchange emails with 40, and seven effectively had complete interviews. The 92 transvestite and transsexual teachers are distributed in practically all states of Brazil, in capital cities, medium sized cities and many small towns in the countryside. Most of them are effective teachers that work in classrooms, ranging from the early grades, elementary school, and high school. Nearly all are public servants, which mean that the vast majority approved in public tender of titles and tests. Some serve on boards of education, and others are supervisors, guidance counselors, school librarians, and principals, the last elected by the school community. In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, our research basis, the group consists of fifteen teachers, ten in the metropolitan area and five from towns in the countryside.

The teachers interviewed live in the cities of Aracaju, Cuiabá, Porto Alegre, Curitiba, Rio de Janeiro, and Uberlândia. The interviews conducted in person, and recorded with consent, taking advantage of the presence at events, and in the movement that resulted in the creation of the Network TransEduc Brasil. It occurs that while the research was going on, with contacts and interviews, an associative movement started among transvestite and transsexual teachers. It was partially aided by the research and largely assisted in the same. The Network TransEduc Brasil emerged from the visibility of various transvestite and transsexual teachers, and the need to organize and help each other on common difficulties and legislation that favors them in the wake of identity movements that have taken place in Brazil since the consolidation of the democratic regime. The specificity of being teachers raised certain issues that are new in the struggling scenario of transvestites and transsexuals. The exchange of experiences and supporting each other to face difficulties in relationships with coworkers and managers of educational systems are the main objectives of the Network. The TransEduc Network was created with broad support from the National Association of Transvestites and Transsexuals of Brazil (ANTRA—Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais do Brasil). We were there at the first meeting of the Network, which lasted two days, where it was possible to follow the conversation groups, the reports of experience and depositions with about thirty transvestite and transsexual teachers who were present<sup>3</sup>. At the end of the event, the first Minute of the Network was registered in view of the aspects highlighted and the need for continuity of meetings and seminars for transvestite and transsexual teachers.

Before presenting the interviewees, it is important to have a discussion of ethical nature. The research was done with a term of free informed consent, and the initial proposal was to keep legal names confidential by exchanging their names. However, as contacts, informal conversations, and interviews went along, the interviewees demonstrated very strongly that they did not want this. On the contrary, and supported in speech that highly valued visibility, transvestite and transsexual teachers claimed the right to have their legal names clearly associated to their statements. Reviewing ethical procedures in research, we found two other cases in which this wish was granted. The first in Neil Franco Pereira de Almeida's dissertation<sup>4</sup> (Graduate Program in Education,

<sup>2</sup>Social movement that aggregates the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

<sup>3</sup>The first meeting of the network used the presence of a large number of transvestite and transsexual teachers to the VII Transvestite and Transsexual Meeting of the Southeast Region, between May 06-09, 2012 at UFMG, Belo Horizonte. More information on <http://www.fae.ufmg.br/pagina.php?page=transex> (last accessed February 7, 2014).

<sup>4</sup>Dissertation entitled "Diversity enters the school: stories of teachers who pass the boundaries of sexuality and gender", year of production 2009. The author is a professor at the Federal University of Mato Grosso (Médio Araguaia).

Federal University of Uberlândia) and second in José Miguel Nieto Olivar's doctoral thesis<sup>5</sup> (Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at UFRGS). The most recurrent argument of the interviewees (and all others with whom we spoke informally), was that they were born with a name (a masculine name), had given themselves a feminine name, had then acquired the right to use this name as a feminine social name. Had had enormous difficulties to enforce this corporate name, and now their statements would appear with another name or perhaps without a name. Finally we gave in, which forced us to use a Term of Free Informed Consent (where the respondent agrees to participate in the research, consents to the use of his/her speech, and researchers are committed to delivering a typed copy of the entire contents of the interview). And a Term of Consent to the use of their legal names, where the respondents say they are aware that their legal names will be associated to their speeches in a written dissertation and articles.

At the end of this second term, a sentence was placed at the express request of the interviewees: "This was a request from most contributors of this research, with the aim of raising the profile of this segment within the social movement of Brazilian transvestite and transsexuals". Although the term "majority" was used, all the interviewees expressly wanted that their legal names be stated, and that they were always given the freedom of choice to remain confidential with the name change, which was not accepted by any of them. Repeating the arguments of the respondents on this topic, they emphasized that they did not want another nickname due to the invisibility of the population of transvestites and transsexuals, who do not have their names respected in the country by a proper law authorizing official exchange of names except through judicial processes, as in other Latin American countries<sup>6</sup>. The use of the legal name clearly placed next to their speech was interpreted as the vigorous strategy of visibility and respect to the way they would like to be called. This demand appeared in line with most of their struggles and was therefore respected. Essential information about the seven interviewees is as follows.

Adriana Lohanna do Santos was born in Aquidabã, Sergipe. Her first degree is a Licensure in Letters: Portuguese/English. She also graduated from college as a Social Worker. She understands herself as a transsexual and has already changed her name through court proceedings. She is 26, works as a teacher in public schools and is a social worker. She is Catholic. Adriana Sales was born in Londrina, Parana. She currently lives in Cuiabá/MT. She has graduated in Letters: Portuguese/French. She also has a postgraduate degree in Children's and Youth Literature. She taught in public schools and currently works at the State Department of Education of Mato Grosso, in the superintendence of projects. She understands herself as a transvestite, is 40 years old and worships Candomblé, an Afro-Brazilian religion. Carla da Silva is a native of Rio de Janeiro and lives in Tijuca neighborhood. She is 34 years old. In high school, she went through a Technical Course in Teaching at Instituto Superior de Educação, in Rio de Janeiro and later Pedagogy with specialization in early grades. She works at SESI/RJ as a teacher for Youth and Adult Education (EJA-Educação de Jovens e Adultos) at night and during the day is a municipal Community Health Agent. She is a readequated transsexual and already has lawful name recognition. She is Catholic. Sayonara Nogueira is from Uberlândia, Minas Gerais, where she lives. She has a Licensure Degree in Social Studies: Specialization in Geography and History, and Postgraduate Degree in Research Techniques and Methodology. She is a teacher in the public schools of Uberlândia and has a small consulting firm which gives guidance in research for scholars. She is 35 years old. Did not disclose any religious issues in the interview. She understands herself as transsexual. Brenda Ferrari da Silva lives in Curitiba, but is from the city of Lapa, countryside of Paraná state. She is 34 years old. She has a Licensure Degree in Mathematics and Postgraduate Degree in Educational Psychology. She also studied Theology because she really likes religion. She began her religiosity in Umbanda and then in Candomblé, Afro-Brazilian religions. She is currently a mathematics teacher at the Federal Institute of Paraná and works in the State Department of Education in Coordination of Diversity. Andréia Laís Cantelli is a teacher from Curitiba, Paraná. She is 31 years old. She has a Licensure Degree in Social Studies Specialization in History. In addition, Postgraduate Degree in Teaching Methodology of History and History of Art. She is a public school teacher. She understands herself as a transsexual. She has no defined religion. Adriana Souza born in Itaquí, countryside of Rio Grande do Sul. She currently lives in Porto Alegre. She has a Licensure and BA Degree in Philosophy from the Federal University of Santa Maria. She has two Postgraduate courses: Political Philosophy and Clinical Philosophy. She is a state school teacher. Currently she is the principal of a school. She is 31 years old. Her religion is Kardecist spiritual-

<sup>5</sup>Thesis entitled 'Wars, transits and appropriations: female prostitution policies, from the experiences of four women activists in Porto Alegre, Brazil, year of 2010. The author is a researcher associated with the Center for Gender Studies PAGU/UNICAMP.

<sup>6</sup>This, in part, has changed in some states, due to the issuance of identity with the legal name, as [Aguinsky, Ferreira, & Rodrigues \(2013\)](#).

ist. She understands herself as a non readequated transsexual.

Although the description is brief, some significant aspects were mentioned. The commitment to academic education is notable: all went beyond achieving undergraduate licensure degrees, obtained postgraduate, and even other college degrees. It was evident, in the interviews, that being a good professional is an important strategy to preserve oneself from prejudice and discrimination in the workplace. In a related way, the religious affiliations were also declared in line with this goal: getting strength to overcome situations of stigma<sup>7</sup>. In all the stories, the desire to be a woman began in childhood, some do not even remember exactly when, as they always understood themselves as women, and perceived they were different from others. The games of playing house, with dolls, very early gave place to playing to be a teacher, and they explain that it was from that moment on that they liked the teaching profession. School was a place of a lot of suffering and humiliation to them all, and it was noted in the interviews that they returned to this environment as teachers, and to have suffered. Because of this they are better able to understand the suffering of many students, even in those cases in which humiliation is not caused by issues of gender and sexuality, but for non-compliance with the body, prejudice because of race or social class, jokes and ridicule on account of religious belonging or family unit. The university route was also not exempt from humiliation, but generally to a lesser degree.

They also cited the difficulties encountered in schools where they were already working as teachers, and particularly those difficulties brought on by fellow teachers<sup>8</sup>. Almost unanimously, they agree that the greater acceptance of the situation of being transvestite and transsexual teachers is given by the students, with whom they say they have great interaction. They mentioned many cases of recognition, such as when they were elected class councilors, patrons, representatives of students at this or that moment, they were paid tribute to on Teacher's Day, etc. For all respondents, and for many of those with whom we had informal conversations, the religious belonging showed a strong element, either because they claimed to have intense spirituality, or by direct involvement with some religion, notably those of Afro-Brazilian tradition.

### 3. Transsexuality, Travestility: Many Questions, Many Answers, Little Consensus

Only in the second half of the twentieth century has cross-dressing become thought of as a sexual identity. The late 1960s was a period of great questioning of the issues of sexuality and gender, and the affirmation of sex as a source of pleasure, and not only as a device for human reproduction, took shape. In the wake of assuming oneself as an identity, transvestites joined the struggle for the right to political participation and recognition as citizens. Although the transvestites were, until the 1960s, associated with the homosexual group, the struggle for identity provided an opportunity to emerge their own transvestite associations, making visible a set of singularities that distinguish them from homosexuals. Transvestites define themselves, according to the most recent literature in the humanities, as subjects that transform and adorn their bodies with the purpose of approaching, through appearance, the opposite sex (Mello & Crillanovick, 1999; Patrício, 2002). The concept of transvestite, according to Pelúcio, points out that:

Transvestites are people who are born with male genitals (thus why the vast majority understands themselves as a man) and seek to use symbols, on their bodies, of what is socially sanctioned as feminine, without, however, wishing to uproot their genitals, with which, they usually coexist without major conflicts. Usually transvestites like to relate emotionally and sexually with men, but still do not identify with the homo-oriented men (Pelúcio, 2009: pp. 3-4).

Pelúcio (2009) opted for the term and concept of "tranvestilities" encompassing the various aspects that make up the plurality of this category of identity, indicating the multiplicities of many everyday experiences of transvestites, in the construction and deconstruction of their bodies, instead of transvestite or cross-dressing, terms that often simplify and reduce into abject ways of life. This same author considers that the term tranvestility affirms the multiplicity of experiences linked to the construction and deconstruction of bodies, although there is some stiffness in the genre of these subjects. This austerity exists due to the experiences made within the hete-

<sup>7</sup>This question, quite compelling, that values religious belonging as a related strategy to overcome the setbacks of stigma and prejudice in terms of gender and sexuality, was highlighted in interviews, but will not be detailed in this text. Although it is related with the teacher's performance in the classroom, we recognize that this approach deserves further investigation.

<sup>8</sup>Recent journalistic issue addressed the topic, see Preconceito... [2014]

<http://educacao.uol.com.br/noticias/2014/02/20/preconceito-esta-nos-professores-e-nao-nos-alunos-diz-docente-transsexual.htm> (last accessed March 3, 2014).

ronormativity, which does not prevent that the body of the transvestite “has an ambiguity, which causes uncertainties, doubts in the codes of intelligibility, as this is the term that has come to designate the movement formed by individuals and groups identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender” (Pelúcio, 2009: p. 39), after holding the National LGBT Conference in 2008, by order of the Conference itself.

Typically, it is in phase of puberty that transvestites go through the construction process of the “new body”, in general, a female formatting. It is a “second birth”, as the metaphor used by Silva & Florentino (1996). It is a second birth to a new body with a female figure, which has in turn different qualities and attributes of the female body. They use a variety of techniques, products, and investments to build this body and the female condition. Transvestites make big investments on their bodies, through clothing, hair removal, hair styling, perfume, cosmetics, implants, aesthetic and hormonal adaptations. According to Benedetti (2005), the process of transformation of transvestites is a struggle for them in what they understand feminine and is applicable to themselves, therefore they manufacture forms and female contours with the aid of technology and aesthetic medicine in their own bodies. These people, because of their identity, create their own gender, their own values related to female and male. This highlights a social construction of their own gender identity of transvestites.

One of the key devices in the life of a transvestite is to start using hormones. With hormone therapy, body changes are more visible and more definitive: the breasts develop, the silhouette rounds, the voice thins and the amount of hair, especially the beard, chest and legs, start reducing. Hormone treatment intake seems to be the very decision to incorporate and publicize the transvestite identity. Female hormones are usually the first (and for some the only) product to be started for this purpose. Hormone treatment seems to be the vehicle that integrates and externalizes the physical and moral dimensions in the world of transvestites, or even, as transvestites often comment, “the hormone is like nourishment for the body”. It is through hormones that new features in body shape and new particularities of moral nature, which relate to female behavior in society, are acquired (as Benedetti, 1998: p. 16). Another important aspect is that transvestites perceive the body not only as a social attribute, but as a real social identity, since this process is even part of their personal shaping. However, studies concerning transvestites show that this production of changes in their bodies, in order to make them feminine and make them look like women, does not involve reassignment surgery (Benedetti, 2000).

Nonetheless, as shown by several respondents, transvestites came into this world to “throw the gender upside down”, because gender issues have become questionable when they say they want to be neither male nor female, they claim a transvestite identity without thinking of a third sex. Transvestites, as stated by Benedetti (2005), investing time, resources, and their own emotions in the body change processes, are not seeing the body as a mere support of meanings. The body of a transvestite is primarily a language: it is in the body and through it that the meanings of female and male materialize and give the person social qualities. It is with the body that transvestites are produced as a subject. So transvestites produce and reproduce in their bodies signs of being feminine, in an action they call “assembly” and, in this operation, they use clothes, women’s lingerie and accessories. Reconfiguring the body itself and changing their name, these individuals manipulate and reconstruct genders, breaking the idea of the existence of binary, fixed and immutable categories. Still, according to the author, around the transvestite there is a double identity. The first is the identity, surrounded by the constant search for beauty, attractive dresses, perfect makeup, makes a strong, and in some cases extravagant, exposure. The second, the identity created by society, exactly when the transvestite leaves home and, in many cases, is teased, laughed at, suffers prejudice, and jokes in ironic tones. As Silva (1993: p. 41) elucidates, “the transvestite has double skin: one of glitter and one of humiliation, in which order we do not know, or maybe only one skin, woven of the two ingredients”. According to Carla da Silva, the teacher interviewed:

The issue that I was a woman and wanted to be called in a female form. In the feminine way. It required that others called me like that, because it made me feel well. When someone called me by my male name, I pretended it was not even me, trying to make them understand that I was a person and deserved respect.

This commitment to being a woman, producing a woman’s body, will bring consequences to the figure of the teacher, and will establish important differences, as already pointed out, between the aunt/teacher, mother/teacher and the woman transvestite teacher. The ghost that haunts the body of transvestites is prostitution, a recurrent theme in interviews with various opinions:

I am not against those who prostitute themselves, but it is difficult to get respect when there is display of an almost naked body in the street to attract customers. Society does not see this very well (Brenda Ferrari da

Silva).

We have transvestites and transsexuals that are graduates and postgraduates, but this must be a constant, because if we do a survey, most of us are prostitutes. That needs to change. There are other ways of working and that prostitution is guaranteed to all people who try to fit in regular and social standards (Adriana Sales).

The category called transsexualism is of recent use and is involved in discursive challenges and of belonging to other cross-dressing, touting individuals in other identity networks closer to medical knowledge. Transsexualism can be understood as the identity dimension located in the genre and is characterized by potential conflicts with gender norms to the extent in which people who experience this claim for social and legal recognition of different genre informed by gender, regardless of reassignment surgery, but generally with a strong commitment to undergo surgery. Medical knowledge considers this experience as a disease, using terms such as gender dysphoria, gender neurodiscord, gender disorder syndrome, and the most well known, as transsexualism. In all the terms, transsexuality is placed on the list of mental diseases. Once characterized as sick, the person then has the right to surgery, which will “cure”, aligning body, gender and sex. According to Bento (2006, 2008), the problem would not be the person who claims the surgery, but the gender norms and social institutions, which narrow the possibilities in experiencing gender and sexuality to only the male/female binary, and thus giving rise to the emergence of such conflicts. To the extent that we have only two possibilities of living a gender, male or female, medicine sees no other alternative than that of pathologizing the discontented individuals, and performing surgeries that fit them within another possibility, as it does not admit desires other than those ordered by the binary pairs. So, to define a transsexual person as sick is to trap this person, keeping individuals in an existential position that encounters within themselves the explanatory source for their conflicts, divergent perspectives of those who interpret it as an identity experience. For Bento (2008), the specificity of transsexuality is the explanation of the limits of these gender norms, to the extent that the claim of passing the gender imposed at birth for identification requires that the defenders of their own gender norms be positioned. Although people who live transsexual experience do not show any change in their chromosomal structures or otherwise, they are said to be mentally ill.

Foucault (1985) shows how deeply the idea that everyone has a defined and naturally given sex is rooted in our thinking, pointing out that our true sex is the cause of our behavior and the cause of our observable sexual characteristics. The “true sex” in this sense, determines the individual’s gender identity, their behavior and their desire for the opposite sex. The medical discourse on transsexuality is strongly caught by this dispositive. Although transsexualism is the privileged canonical term for doctors and lawyers to refer to the experience of transsexuality, for Bento (2006, 2008), there is the understanding of the need to break away from the pathologizing use of the suffix “ism”. Thus, similar to the term already discussed for the transvestite, this article uses the category “transsexuals”, and discovered in the research that all the teachers prefer this designation too.

Presented in very synthetic lines both categories, travestility and transsexuality, we question how our respondents understand themselves, as transvestite or transsexual teachers? In the presentation made above, most chose transsexual, followed by some specification. However, interviews and informal conversations in the events showed both situations. For some, there was attachment to one of two categories (I am a transvestite, I am transsexual), but in many cases the use of these expressions was more or less free, not just as synonymous, but to identify the quality of a few moments. Although there was great personal investment to produce themselves as women and teachers, identities appear to be rearranged depending on the moment lived or the interpolations (Hall, 2000) without a definitive attachment to any one of them. We cite two cases that exemplify this. Living for four days in an intense mode with Adriana Sales, it was possible to suddenly hear two statements. In one of the moments, the result of her involvement in intense heated debate, and listening to some jokes colleagues made of her momentum in discussions, she said, “today I am a transvestite, I already woke up as a transvestite!” Two days later, as we met for breakfast at the hostel, she was well dressed, having tea with biscuits, and said, “Today I woke up more like a woman, feeling that I am a transsexual”. This exchange of expressions was well understood and accompanied by other transvestite and transgender teachers in moments of casual conversation, especially in the narrative of everyday situations, like “once I had to separate two huge guys in the schoolyard who were fighting, I felt like a transvestite, and put each of them aside on the spot, they were afraid of me”. The binary reappears, associating something of “energy” male “to be transvestite”, and something of the “energy” feminine “to be transsexual”. Asked directly about it, for many of them it did not appear to be a problem to live

on this border between transvestite and transsexual, on the contrary, it seemed that they used the two possibilities, needed to solve different everyday situations. In one of the interviews, Adriana Lohanna, trying to summarize her life and perceptions until now, said it seemed like: “I had lived various stages of several lives”, and concluded by saying “initially I understood myself as being gay, then perceived that I was a transvestite for I wore women’s clothing-and now I understand myself as being transsexual, and tomorrow I may already be a perfect woman, who knows?” Unlike some understanding of common sense, that values the stability of identity as synonymous with maturity, she ended by saying that “this is my process of maturity, which is being built over time and upon my understanding of sexuality”.

#### 4. In an Attempt to Balance Chalk and High Heels

A certain movement in the classroom pedagogy can be introduced, when the chalk is balanced on high heels, giving rise to the adjective we apply in the noun “pedagogy”, entitling it the high heels pedagogy. Thinking about the educational performance of transvestite and transsexual teachers in the classroom, it can be done in many ways. We choose to think of the action of these teachers from three references: the knowledge of the teacher, the knowledge of the discipline and contingent classroom elements<sup>9</sup>. In this scenario, our focus is on eroticism and the presence of the body of the woman teacher in the classroom. We make use of excerpts from the interviews of the transvestite and transsexual teachers already presented, and of many annotations in the field diary about their coexistence and the coexistence with other teachers at events.

The knowledge of subjects makes up the body of information in a particular field of studies. Of course, not all teachers work teaching specific subjects, because we have elementary schoolteachers of early childhood education. But in our sample, only one teacher teaches varieties of subjects. Thus, most of them teach one subject. Knowledge is acquired in the first degree of higher education, and is enhanced in postgraduate activities or through skills of reading and individual studies. Part of the teacher’s authority comes from expertise in a subject, in recognition of that specific knowledge. Important element that increases the moral authority of the teacher is the taste for knowledge of the subject she chooses teaching. To not only teach History, but like history and stories.

The interviews and conversations show great commitment in knowledge of the subject. For those who have graduated in Portuguese, the effort is visible in expressing themselves correctly, in commenting on the reading of literary works, addressing the main shortcomings of written expression of students. With variants, so do the others, who expose their knowledge in history, geography, philosophy, in youth and adult education. In informal conversations with the interviewees and other teachers, it is possible to notice a taste for subjects taught, which impacts their lives in many ways. From the training in arts education, which one is assumed as an artist; from training in chemistry, a vocation to examine the composition of foods in supermarkets; from training in mathematics and liking calculation so much it leads the teacher to engage in economy; graduating in history a taste for political participation; and so on. Beyond the realm of having knowledge in subjects (information, methods, conceptual categories), the transvestite and transsexual teachers interviewed show a fondness for knowledge of their specific subject. In one of the events, upon returning to the place of accommodation, we get lost in the city, and immediately to the teacher with a degree in geography takes the lead to find the way, clearly linking it to graduate in geography, therefore holding the knowledge to do so.

Unfortunately, the love for a subject is not an attribute that is often among teachers. Students hardly listen, in an honest and free mode, to teachers saying that they like the subject they teach and like to read about it, beyond what is necessary to prepare lessons. Transvestite and transsexual teachers with whom we had contact enjoy their area of expertise, and are keen to express that. Certainly, there derives part of their authority in the classroom. It is visible the effort they make to aggregate in their identity attributes derived from being part of the subject they teach and even those conditions of being the teacher. Upon arriving for a day of meetings two of them immediately stood up to organize the room chairs, saying that as teachers they could not see the classroom so messy. While writing the meeting topics on the board, others made mention of the handwriting: “Round and large print, as should be the handwriting of a teacher”.

Countless were the phrases, sayings, comments observed in both at the specific meetings of transvestite and transsexual teachers as at times when they were meeting with the larger group of transvestite and transsexuals, in which the teacher identity was activated, and even the teacher identity of a specific subject. Returning to the

<sup>9</sup>An improved discussion of these three elements is in SEFFNER (2010).



definition of identity in Hall (2000), thought of as provisional subject position resulting from an interpolation, it seems clear that transvestite and transgender teachers gain experience in being recognized as teachers. For this purpose, they constantly resort to this subject position, which expresses the taste for this belonging, with obvious self esteem and gain of professional recognition, a little contrary to what occurs with the other teachers, who complain that to be a teacher is a true profession of faith, showing low esteem because of this sense of belonging. In some conversations, the value of work of being a teacher appeared in line with the enormous difficulties faced in school and academic life, and a taste of “I managed to get there, despite everything that happened”. So, the teaching profession was desired, coveted as an alternative to other problems in life, and is widely valued. It was not a casual, automatic choice nor the result of a “natural destination”, as it is for many women.

The knowledge of teaching is the second category we used to think about the performance of transvestite and transsexual teachers in the classroom, and this category has proved to be very promising. The knowledge of teaching is a wide range of cognition and experience generally of a practical nature, in that blend elements of learning to be a teacher, obtained in coping day to day classes, and knowledge of the rules, procedures, ways of being and making of the school. This set of procedures, which highlights in an original way the functioning of the school, approaches the concept of school culture. By school culture we understand the set of symbolic processes of nature featuring the school institution, as opposed to processes that characterize other institutions such as the judiciary, the police, and privacy activity. Some things are done in this or that way in a school, and are done otherwise in other institutions, because the school is a place of learning and preparing for life in the public world. School it has a laboratory function, and deals with children and young people who we believe are being trained, individuals not yet fully adult for life in society. Understanding the nature of how the school works, the cultural character, its system of power, gives the teacher authority towards students, and an experience that helps solve the problems of everyday life, to “survive” in that institution. Herein, there is no difference from any other professional who soon learns how to survive in the workplace, identifying the written and unwritten rules, the usual procedures, the expected answers, power relations, transits of influence, management of the institutional speech, knowing how to properly use words and categories indicating good conduct, etc.

Analysis of the interviewees’ speeches, as well as other statements recorded in a field diary during informal meetings and conversations, revealed that the transvestite and transgender teachers demonstrate a rather sophisticated knowledge of teaching. This is due to a certain regime of permanent tension with the institution, especially with colleagues and managers, making them aware of the regiments, regulations, rights, procedures with remarkable expertise, and with the stated purpose of defending themselves from possible attacks. This conduct proves the thesis that the construction of knowledge teachers have is closely connected with the construction of knowledge of the individual social life. Having experienced in life many situations where they had to defend themselves, transvestite and transsexual teachers realize they need to know in depth the school institution, including written regulations way beyond those, *i.e.* they need to seize many elements of the school culture, to survive in this environment. Therefore, some of them developed explicit strategies to better know their step within the schools.

Brenda reported that despite having little experience in the classroom, she always tried to approach the students and used recess time for that. While teachers were having a coffee break she walked down the school yard and talked to the youngsters. They exchanged experiences and played all the time. Forms of approaching the topics of sexuality and homophobia were established in these dialogues. As a result, she gained experience and was soon chosen school counselor, that is, she became a teacher selected by the group of students to answer some questions and take responsibility before parents when they seek the school for any reason related to their children. Brenda made it clear that being a counselor of one of the classes gave her more power in negotiating with colleagues and the students’ parents. Adryana Souza cited an important moment: when she was starting her teaching career, in the adaptation phase, she was designated to stay in school working with projects. She chose as theme of the projects gender and sexuality. To her surprise she was honored by an 8th grade group as patron speaker, despite being new at the school. When asking students about why they chose her, they said that it was because of her courage in tackling these issues and to assume her life story as a transsexual teacher with absolute transparency. The following year, when school started, she could already see many allies among the classes and students, giving her a feeling of peace to stay in school.

In both cases, we find that the diverse knowledge that life provides, generally related to problem solving, to facing difficult situations, strategies for expanding the network of relationships, experience in dealing with people, institutions and social movements, the expertise to recognize the social actors involved in the struggle of

politics, has accredited transvestite and transgender teachers insertion in schools with guaranteed acceptance. By doing so, transvestite and transsexual teachers embody the concept of solidarity:

Solidarity does not come by reflection but, yes, it is created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of pain and humiliation of other unfamiliar types of people. This increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to marginalize by thought those who are different from us (...). This process of seeing other human beings as “one of us”, and not as “them/the other”, is a matter of detailed description of how strangers are and of redescription of who we ourselves are (Rorty, 2007: p. 20).

The third and final category we chose to analyze in the teaching performance of transvestite and transgender teachers concerns contingency and the unforeseen twists and turns that mark the teacher’s performance, particularly when faced with a class of students. But what are the twists and turns?

Every class holds unexpected turns and dilemmas, to decide whether it is worth following the direction of that unexpected turn, or if it is worth insisting on what was previously planned. There are teachers who cling to their planning, and do not accept any variation, they need to “teach the subject”, having to “follow the content”. There are those who make good use of every question asked and any questioning made by students to go into discussions of other issues, not intended for that class. It is hard to know which path to take, knowing that decisions have to be made fast, when the unexpected presents itself, and that the contexts are very different. These are practical dilemmas, they make the class tread through challenging unknown terrain (Seffner, 2010: p. 217).

In the language adopted by our respondents, the risks and contingency have been named as possible “bafos”. All the issues that induce any kind of conflict in the lives of transvestite and transsexuals, and of course, in the lives of teachers, are hosted under this heading. Problems faced in relation to legal and social name, bathroom use, labor issues and other legal rights, curiosity about their lives and expressions of stigma and prejudice. The word *bafo* in the language of Bajubá, or as transvestites and transsexuals say, the language of “*bate-bate*”, means trouble, confusion, conflict or turmoil. *Bafo* means both the problem, as well as their attitude in facing it. To have a *bafo* was used in order to show that they are alive, present and aware of their role as citizens. Eroticism and sexuality issues appear as the main factor that causes *bafos*, especially unforeseen questions, contingent situations, surprise with sudden acts and words. For many of them, curiosity to know about their lives seems absurd. Adriana Sales expressed, in one of the meetings, that “the world is about to cause a third world war here and people are concerned about which bathroom we will be using.” But the conflicts were perceived by them as situations that helped them mature and added life experience. Restlessness teaches them to defend themselves.

To address the connections between transvestite and transsexual teachers and eroticism in the classroom we closely follow the considerations of Hooks (2013). As already stated at the beginning of the text, the teacher is usually a human being thought of as having no body. The body of the teacher has no function in the classroom, and it is something that can disrupt the educational function. Thus, the ideal is that the teacher “leaves behind” her body before entering the classroom, and relates to the class of students only with her brain. With this, the teacher brings up the old separation of body and mind, and introduces herself to students as someone provided with only the use of the intellect. Along with the body, she also leaves behind passion, libidinous thoughts, erotic attraction students have for her, etc. For women teachers, this issue appears to be enhance. To demonstrate that they are actually able to think and have intellectual activity, women seem to make an effort to put aside the body. In general, there is an opposition between women who take care of the body and teachers who deny this and live dedicate to an intellect life.

Transvestite and transsexual teachers enter the classroom as a “whole”, they are strongly body related, and because of this, they also care about being intellectually strong. Being an intellect helps compensate, in their point of view, the strong presence of the body, which has no way to be disguised, especially because of the polemic about the use of the bathroom, social name, silicone implants, the transsexual process. For a teacher who was called and perceived as a man in school when she comes transformed into a woman, her body attracts a lot of attention. To avoid this, she seeks to present herself as a recognized capable teacher, and this was mentioned by them at various times, in phrases like: “I know that students are all the time looking at my body”, “the boys draw an outline of my body in the notebook”, “if I’m with a short skirt, students look for signs of my penis when I sit down”, “some cannot resist and ask questions, for example the girls bring up the issues of makeup, lingerie, under the pretext to know my ways and my preferences”. The more the body and its erotic appeal present themselves in the classroom, the more transvestite and transgender teachers strive to be seen as competent teachers, and this is the central articulation of what we are calling the “high heels pedagogy”. This presence,

by the whole, in the classroom closely guards direct connection with feminist attitudes:

One of the main principles of the feminist critical pedagogy is the insistence in not activating the separation between mind and body (...). Those of us who, as students or teachers, have been closely involved with the feminist thinking have always recognized the legitimacy of a pedagogy that dares to subvert the separation between mind and body and allows us to be present in full-and hence, with all our heart-in the classroom (Hooks, 2013: p. 256).

The intense presence of the body in the classroom, combined with the efforts to make this body a “real woman”, because they were not born as a woman, but have become women, and make a daily effort to be seen as so, this intensifies this tension of mind and body. While talking at breakfast in an event, notes were taken down in the field diary as one of the teachers said:

“Every morning it’s a battle to get ready, to see if the silicone is in place, if there are no stubbles on my face, examining myself for hours in the mirror and in the bath, to get to school as a real woman. Because I do not ever want to hear what I’ve heard, that you are a man dressed as a woman, you are not woman, I’m more of woman than all of them together” (referring to the other teachers, their co-workers). I then asked if all this production caused any effect on students, and she then said she had to be a great teacher, give good lessons, be rigorous, otherwise “they do not respect me as a teacher, they look at me only as a woman, and a woman who dresses up too much, for them, is a bitch”.

Although the obvious sex appeal of the above statements, what we are calling as the “high heels pedagogy” involves converting much of this into a remarking performance in the classroom by simultaneously a strong presence of the female body, and a strong presence of the professional competence of this teacher, with a delicate balance. As stated by Hooks (2013: p. 257), “To understand the place of Eros and eroticism in the classroom, we must try to misunderstand these forces only in sexual terms, although this dimension should not be denied”. In the wake of this game, transvestite and transsexual teachers expressed preference for some students, those who respect them, that do not harm them, and clearly point out students who they do not like, because of the manifestations of discrimination they have already experienced related to sexism and homophobia. Hence, they created, in the classroom, a system of preferences in terms of affection, breaking loose from the traditional idea that the teacher likes all students equally. By doing so, they establish connections between attitudes of the students inside and outside the classroom. In the words of one, “they have to respect me in the classroom as a teacher, and out of the classroom as a woman”. In doing so, they bring up another feminist postulate: “feminist education for critical consciousness is rooted in the assumption that the knowledge and critical thought done in the classroom should inform our habits of being and ways of living outside the classroom” (Hooks, 2013: p. 256).

The “high heels pedagogy” betrays a common sense that in which education in the classroom takes place in a neutral ground by an emotional point of view, that is, the teacher likes everyone equally, and should be liked by everyone, in the same way. This idyllic situation is widely seen as desirable, thought of as something positive, *i.e.* the teacher loves all her students, and is loved by all of them. The presence of transvestite and transsexual teachers in the classroom introduces a more dynamic movement in terms of relationship, where we have the strong presence of the women, and the strong presence of the teacher. The woman balanced on high heels, and the teacher wielding the chalk in a competent manner. The presence of Eros in the classroom brings both benefits for the teacher, who has expertise in a particular subject, and for the adult in reference, an important social role of the teacher:

The realization that Eros is a force that enhances our overall effort to self-actualizing, that it can provide an epistemological grounding informing how we know what we know, enables both professors and students to use such energy in a classroom setting in ways that invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination (Hooks, 2013: p. 258).

Therefore, the “high heels pedagogy” combines two strong elements, being a woman and being a teacher, producing a result in terms of professional performance that, for all the transvestite and transsexual teachers interviewed, revealed as being of strong impact on classes of students, among colleagues and when facing managers of the educational systems. To introduce a motion in the action of the teacher in the classroom, the “high heels pedagogy” speaks of educational activity that flees the traditional bodiless asexual figure of the teacher.

Contrary to what one might think, a certain degree of eroticism and woman production that “inhabits” the teacher, far from “misrepresenting” the space of the classroom, brought about a power of emotions which resulted in a better skilled professional, involved with her work, and a woman who has assumed her role being a reference to young adults.

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