



SEXUALity Debate

CONTENTS

1. Theoretical framework
 - 1.1 Sexual-genre system: Sexual and genre social construction
 - 1.2 The social construction of sexuality: The order of sexual reproduction
2. Analyzing reality
3. Overcoming the hegemonic heterosexual model
4. Bibliography



“ Sexuality is beyond the body and the individual: it is a complex of bio-socio-cultural phenomena that includes the individuals, the groups and the social relationships, the institutions and the conceptions of the world – representation systems, symbolism, subjectivity, different ethics, languages,- and of course power.

Sexuality is so defining that it organizes in a different way, not only the lives of the social subjects, but also societies.

In that sense, sexuality is a historical attribute of the subjects; of society and cultures: its relationships, its institutions and its life spheres.”

MARCELA LAGARDE



Introduction

This text you have got in your hands (or on the screen) is a tool for reflection. We haven't invented anything new; we have only grouped, ordered, given a framework... Even though it is nothing new at all, it has cost us a great effort to complete. The longer we left it aside, the more contributions and ideas we had. Many of them appeared after discussing in groups, others because we read them somewhere and because of everything mentioned before, it has been group work. Thanks to everybody.

It is a document that is alive. It is difficult to give it an ending. It is impossible to include everything. So it is an open text. It has to be completed. It must be reflected on. It must be continued combining personal and political reflection.

For that reason, take some time to read this report. Later discuss it, ask about it, deny it.....
SHARE IT!

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Sexual-genre system: Sexual and genre social construction

In 1949 Simone de Beauvoir claimed in her book "Le deuxième sexe" (Second sex) – A woman is made a woman. With this idea she was making reference to the social construction. Later on in the 70s, the feminist theory started to use the concept of genre, femininity and masculinity which society understood as a set of features.

Thereby, sex was understood as the biological features that distinguish males and females, and genre, as all the cultural belief based on sex. All of these helped to understand that the relationship of power and oppression among men and women were built relationships; that is, they were framed by a system and not by natural features.

The new feminist point of view that started in the 80s and got stronger since the 90s, criticized this idea and sex also, (not only genre) started to be seen as a sociocultural construction. This point of view understands sex biology (chromosomes, cells, gonads, hormones, hypothalamus pituitary, genitals...) as a category defined by learning, training and culture. This gives us new resources to understand reality, the continuum idea appears where the two extreme sexes are discarded and intersexual reality turns up. This reality with genital, chromosomic, gonadic...features, instead of limiting within these opposite categories, locates it in a continuum. Instead of limiting to the male and female categories, it understands the multiple sex constructions arising from this continuum.

Therefore, it can be said that, both genre and sex are sociocultural constructions. Nowadays society is based on this dichotomous model and the different social institutions (science, the media, education...) reproduce this dichotomous model through their different discourse.

If reality is analyzed from this point of view, in the area of sexuality, it shows that it is based on a binary and hierarchical model, a sexual model that follows the patriarchal system, whose aim is to keep control over women's body and dependence.



1.2 The social construction of sexuality.

Like any other dimension in the person, sexuality is a social construction, nowadays on its roots, being a fertility oriented construction. In order to perpetuate the patriarchal system, sex, sexuality and fertility practice is needed by FERTILITY, that is, the body, desire and pleasure are going to be controlled by it; constructed under the limits of fertility.

The Order of Sexual reproduction

(Sexuality model based on reproduction)

Nowadays in society a sexuality model based on reproduction is normal, it is within the limits of order. The different sexuality models that arise from out of this hegemonic model, are considered abnormal, pathologic, chaotic...Consequently, all the practice and identity that is away from this sexuality model based on reproduction is looked down on, stigmatized.

What is order?

Things are in order when they are in their right place: hierarchy principle

SUPERIOR LEVEL	WHITHIN THE ORDER normal
LOWER, CONTROLLED	AWAY FROM THE ORDER Disordered, abnormal, pathologic

Sexuality based on reproduction will bring order and control; placing reproduction over non reproduction and consequently fertile body, fertile desire and fertile pleasure being above other statements, all the other different statements and ways will be abnormal and looked down on.

Fertile desire. Desire based on fertility needs a heterosexual society, that is, it needs a man and a woman, a heterosexual couple, and at the same time, this couple will bring up heterosexual children. Socializing will be heterosexualizing, a well socialized person will be heterosexual according to this model. The people who integrate society are heterosexualizers; we are both part of it and agents.

Fertile desire builds these criteria:






- Heterosexualizing
- Partnership: Desire guided by reproduction is fair and permissible.
E.g. an elderly woman cannot desire a young man.
- Genre-specific: Constructing strict heterosexual people, men and women. Men are male and women answer to feminine values. As it was said in the previous point, genre is a historical construction, regarding desire, desired women and men who desire, were constructed by generalization. Both women and men would have to be object and subject. Historically, in the construction of desire the object (the one who is desired) and the subject (the one who desires) were constructed. E.g.; if a man is “ninfomano”, he is a “normal” man.

Fertile pleasure, practice based on reproduction is strengthened, so the hegemonic practice is coitus. The coital process is COITAL CENTERED and coital centered societies build it up.

Fertile body; that is to say that the body is controlled by reproduction; it is a genitalization of the body. All the other parts of the body are considered to be at a second level, a genitalized body is hegemonic: everything is ordered around genitals.

Men’s body and genitals will be the reference body and genitals. Women’s body is not considered in this sexual reproductive model, as the clitoris function is not reproductive at all, it has been left aside and looked down on throughout centuries (many sexologists claimed for vaginal orgasm, this answers to the reproductive model)

HEGEMONIC		
The order of this sexual model based on reproduction		
DESIRE based on reproduction	PLEASURE based on reproduction	BODY based on reproduction
		
HETEROSEXUALIZATION GENERALIZATION FAMILY UNIT	COITUS COITUS CENTRISM	GENERALIZATION FALICENTRISM

2. ANALYSING REALITY

As we have said, we live in a system that only accepts two sexes and two genres, a society based on control and hierarchy of one over the other. We cannot forget that this is also seen in all the other aspects of life, two sexes' scheme and power relationships, articulated by the neoliberal economic system; they are what is defined as basic by our society.

Therefore, regarding sexuality, it is a model derived from the neoliberal and patriarchal model: coital heterosexual relationship. This relationship needs capitalism to continue, that is, the reproduction of workers (products) will be the necessary sexual model. This model creates a conflict between the reproductive sexual model and the non-reproductive one; and at the same time, between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Both reproductive sexuality and heterosexuality will be located at the top of this hierarchy.

This sexual model will bring control over the reproduction of the "product" by the capital and patriarchy. Therefore the ability of reproduction in women will be an element to control, so they must control women's sexuality and body: through monogamy, a family with patriarchal model, stigma, romantic love,... This sexuality model above mentioned (reproduction based on the control of the order in sexuality) will be ideologically legitimated, sacred considering and naturalizing the coital relationship. In order to build this, the patriarchal family and the idea of romantic love will be settled in our bodies, and these rules will be written as natural.

Therefore, the characteristics of the model that arises from this system are these: sex constructed over the bipolar, heterosexual, genital and towards male's pleasure.

As this model appears tied to reproduction, heterosexuality is tied to "natural", and homosexuality is understood as a deviation.

These ideas bring the naturalization and biological interpretation of sexuality, as if it was tied to primary instincts and sense. So the cultural learnt and constructed dimension of sex, sexuality and erotic is denied.

A consequence of the dichotomist sex construction is the difference between the feminine and masculine sexuality. Masculine sexuality is the biological necessity, boosted and phallic, while the feminine one appears connected to emotions, affection and a global concept of the body (not genitalized). This model reproduces the differences between men and women.



This hegemonic sexuality model, answers to the necessities of the masculine patriarchal model, directed towards masculine pleasure, a specific type of pleasure: quick, genital and instantaneous... this heterosexist (phallic) model limits sexuality to one thing: between two people, two specific sexes, some specific practice, a specific place and time, with a specific excitation level, a specific age and feelings and senses...

Therefore, the hegemonic sexuality model only accepts one way to live sexuality, defining it as “good” and “bad” sexuality. Within good sexuality, it must be heterosexual, with a stable partner, coital, at home and in the bed. All the rest is defined as “bad” sexuality and is located on the pathologic side: homosexuality, among people of different ages, with objects, animals, more than two people, promiscuous, pornographic, with money exchange, in the street... This also brings the legitimacy of practice, some are legitimate, the ones that answer to the model and the others not. What is not good is what is outside the model, the stigmatized.

Here is the graphic with the division of good and bad sexuality proposed by Gayle Rubin in the article “notas para una teoría radical del sexo” : he calls this organization “sexual hierarchy” .

Different practices construct different identities: women identities also arise from sexual practice: the ones that follow good or the ones that follow bad practice. The former will be identified with pure roles and good women; while the latter, the ones who follow the stigmatized practice, will be defined as lost women, bitches, dirty, shameless... These ones will compromise the role of good women and femininity.

Also this model is seen as sacred: vital to live, an element of relevant importance... If this sexuality model is not practiced, a stigma is caused. This sexual practice has become a rule. “When was the last time you had sex? “ Hey, sex is all you need!” we can listen to these messages everywhere. The person who is out of this model is out of what is seen as “normal” and also if they are not coital heterosexual relations they are not considered sexuality.

Nowadays we can say that homosexuality is being assimilated. In the heterosexualizing system, homosexuality is trying to be treated as “normal”: as a couple, a romantic model, a family model, weddings, functions and role divisions, consumerism. (In Gayle Rubin’s hierarchic sexual concept this is within the parameters of “good” sexuality, as this is valuable to give the system continuity).

The idea of freely living sexuality is there, but we will have to ask ourselves what is considered freedom in this sense and to what extent our practice is not conditioned by the normative sexuality model.

3. Overcoming the heterosexual hegemonic model.

(Towards other sexualities)

Feminists cannot deny the political importance of this topic. What is more, we have to reflect and define how we understand it, and what it would have to be like. There must be a nonstop revision so as not to lose the aim and to specify where we are going to.

Quite often sexuality is mixed with the essentialist discourse. Apart from all the other elements that have been mentioned, the body, the flows, pleasure, desire and so on; it has easily been tied to nature, to a natural happening. To what cannot be discussed. To what cannot be thought. Impulses. Common sense.

There are feminist militants and authors who have worked to change this. Nevertheless, from “Bilgune Feminista” on many occasions we have strongly asked for a “free sexuality” (and we will continue on its defense), in our speeches, communications and manifestations. We have to fill it with contents. What is free sexuality for the Basque feminists? (if we want to call it this way).

There is a lot to be discussed. It is a work that has no ending. It will not be fair to vindicate “free sexuality” and then do nothing. We cannot deny that concept of freedom is full of ideology but it also diffuse, thus it can be the same as saying nothing. As it is such a wide concept it has to be filled with meanings.

We cannot forget that sexuality always answers to a social, economic, politic and historical environment. It arises from it as a specific shape with sharp or mild limits, but one that will always be naturally and legitimately seen in the practice. There it gives continuity to the social, economic and historical model.

While we practice what is considered natural, we make the system continue. The difficulty to share and discuss what we have as private and natural, places us away from the possibilities of changing the heterosexual hegemonic model. Therefore, it is vital for feminism to recover the slogan that says “private is political”.

We would have to be able to give sexuality political importance. Now and here. Nonstop. So one of our aims will be to give sexuality, economy and other structures their political value.

In fact, how is it impossible to see the straight bonds it has with economy and capitalism? Sexuality is tied to other social structures and it conditions person’s different aspects in life:

relationships, family definitions, housing, the model of beauty, reproductive politics, jobs divides according to sex, criminalizing certain practice,...

What is sexuality?

We haven't found a definition that could explain the whole meaning of it. In fact, it is really difficult for it to be defined. Nevertheless, there is a repeated and vital element: pleasure. For us, pleasure is the engine of it. It is an element that could be found in different points of view talking about sexuality.

It is necessary to discuss a definition for sexuality. This is the one we think could be a beginning: Sexuality could be the management of pleasure. What is this management like, what rules it has, how are they constructed and what added values are connected to it.... would have to be defined. We from Bilgune Feminista believe that **this management must be feminist**.

Here there some vital elements to complete this definition. They are not complete, they are ready to be discussed, and they are ready to be thought over.

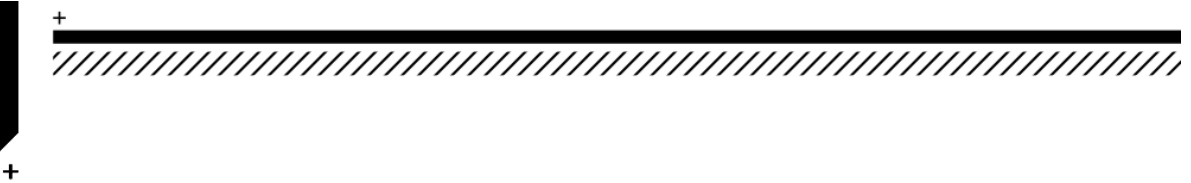
1. Sexual or erotic practice: Different practice is part of our erotic. There are many different ways to practice sex; that is the reason why it is necessary to have examples that overcome the hegemonic model. Far from discourse. Giving status to the different types of practice and also a sexual category. What we call sexual practice is limited so why not widen those limits? Everything that gives us pleasure could be sexual or not.

Genitals not being the origin or aim, and taking into account a perspective that goes beyond them; there is a need to overcome the hetero patriarchal coital centered model. Coitus is nothing but another type of practice. **Pleasure and Desire** would be the origin.

2. The need to analyze the legitimacy of tendency and the lack of legitimacy. There is a need to overcome the idea of considering sacred the hegemonic model of sexuality and the criminalization of the different. For example, instead of putting aside pornography as a whole (as it is done in some feminist movements), we would like to make up some sequences and redefine it. In fact, it is a great tool to influence the collective imaginary.

In this section some practice such as BDSM could also be located, or the lack of legitimacy in the sexual practice between different ages. Not only analyze tendency but also these different types of practice (they could be specific) to be then transformed.

- Sexuality is something present in all the people; it is an element that is present during the whole vital cycle. **It is different according to the person and the moment. Different forms, different practice** (desire, kisses, looks, getting closer,...)



Life changes during all the process. The management of pleasure also changes according to the environment: a person gets pleasure in different ways during his/her life cycle. The desire of the partnership of sex also changes. Saying all this we do not mean that each age has certain attached elements. Not at all. We do not believe this scheme even exists. On the contrary, the same way life changes, the way of living sexuality and the ways to get pleasure also change.

- From only one sexuality (if there was an only model) this concept has to turn into sexualitiES (plural). Not even one woman is the same as another. Sexuality cannot be the same as well.
- One of the elements that helps strengthen naturalization is the way the **body and desire is understood**. The dichotomy between the body and the mind, understands the mind as rational and the body as physiological, thus denying the relation between them. If sexuality is limited to the physiological aspect, the ability to think and decide is made to disappear. We understand the person as a whole. Our desire, likes, impulses and willingness are not only a consequence of that physiological process; consciousness and ideology also build it up. Thus we have the ability to choose and decide.
- Women that live pleased with their body: it strengthens self-esteem, a basic health care condition. Women have to develop ways to accept our body, value it and personally care for it. If we are pleased with ourselves, it will help to have positive sexuality experiences, for that reason the care of our body is the basis of it.

Personal care will be vital. The concept of care is a social construction but the following ones could be considered some clues: personal knowledge and acceptance of the body, self-knowledge being the basis of health, keeping a critical point of view of the hegemonic conception of beauty, each person being the creator of our own erotic, protecting ourselves from certain sexual practice (illnesses and pregnancies, being able to know the personal likes, necessities and respect, leaving time for ourselves, cuddling, offering ourselves what makes us feel well without feeling guilt,...

All in all, together with all other points we find on our way, we will have to move on from our experience if we are waiting for a real social change. Thinking that personal is political, tell and do. It ought not to be just a beautiful speech. Our life and practice are questioned. We can't look aside, the change is in us.

Let's try to build bridges among the cliff we find between this report and our own practice.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

FAUSTO-STERLING, Anne: *Sexing the body: Gender Politics and the Construction of sexuality.*

FOUCAULT, Michel: *The History os Sexuality I: The Will to Knowledge*

McROBBIE, Angela: *Top Girls?*

PRECIADO, Beatriz: *The Contra-sexual Manifesto*

RUBIN, Gayle: *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex*

WITTIG, Monique: *The Straight Mind*