

## Self-objectification in university women not heterocentrated



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### ABSTRACT

Self-objectification refers to the internalization of the other's gaze on one's own body. From studies by Frederickson and Roberts (1997) it is perceived

that, in the macho culture, people are objectified, the body becomes sexually objectified, controlled, "the target of looks and criticism". The greater the objectification, the greater the impact on mental health resulting in the occurrence of numerous conditions, such as eating disorders, anxiety, depression, stress and others. There is little research on self-objectification in college women and even less on self-objectification in non-hetero-transgender, transvestite, and non-binary college women. This paper aims to measure self-objectification in non-normative hetero university women. It was observed (1) there is high objectification in transgender, transvestite and non-binary university women. (2) The highest average of self-objectification was with transvestite university women, (3) There is a need to establish policies aimed at non-heterocentric gender relations

**Keywords:** Self-objectification, University, Gender, Femininities.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The Self-objectification refers to the internalization of the other's gaze on one's own body (Frederickson and Roberts, 1997; Loureiro, 2014; Bercht, 2018). This concept allows to identify the strength and relevance of the socio-cultural environment in the behavior of different actors in the social context. When they are objectified, the external subject looks, analyzes, evaluates and judges someone for their external characteristics, often occurring acts of physical, mental and psychological violence in the face of situations of discrimination, humiliation, occupational segregation entailing the need for a process of struggle and empowerment for the place of speech of the objectified people (Colagero, Tantleff-Dunn & Thompson, 2011).

The present work is inserted in the reading of the self-objectification of university women and contributes to deepening discussions about gender and sexuality. It is pointed out that, when objectified, they are consumed within a macho and conservative society, many are the acts of violence and misogyny. Within this view has been perceived impact on body image, experiences of shame on one's own body, psychopathological conditions such as Eating Disorders, Mood Disorders, Anxiety Disorders, Depression, Stress (Davidson & Gervais, 2015, Holmes & Johnson, 2017; Poon, Chen, Teng



& Wong, 2020; Santos, Trindade, Pereira and Santos, 2020; Moradi & Tebbe, 2022; Peci, Guizzo, Bonache, Borges-Castells, Morera & Vaes, 2023) with femicide being an outcome in many cases (Mariano and Souza, 2023).

This issue translates into suffering for the *modus vivendi* of women in a culture that objectifies them (Frederickson and Roberts, 1997; Colagero, Tantleff-Dunn & Thopson; Bercht, 2018) and makes them more vulnerable to feelings of shame, negatively impacting on mental health with anxiety, depression, eating disorders and other psychopathological conditions (Morai and Huang, 2006; Tiggemann and Williams, 2012; Loureiro, 2014; Bercht, 2018).

Much has been said about recent advances in relation to gender policies, such as greater female participation with greater access to political positions and spaces of power. This fight is not recent. It is worth remembering that only in 1879, women won the right to attend college, in 1932 they could vote, in 1960 with the contraceptive pill they reflected on the reproductive right, in 1962, they could work without needing the approval of their husband, in 1977 they could divorce from an unhappy marriage, in 2006 with the Maria da Penha law they obtained the strength to combat domestic violence and only in 2015 did the femicide law emerge (Teles, 1993; Pinto, 2003).

These advances are recent and very important, however, it is still necessary to discuss about what it is to be a woman, the role of women and the struggle for equity, for participation in different decision-making, for social spaces and for their place of speech.

However, there is still a difficulty of a large portion of the population in differentiating between sex and gender. Sex refers to an anatomical reading, while gender is a social construction where one relates social roles (with expectations of behavior according to what is expected by society), gender identity (subjective experience one has about oneself and relations with other genders) (Maracci, 2013; Cruz et al., 2020).

The postmodern view and Feminist Psychology bring gender as a process and a construct, not as a fixed response (Nogueira, Conceição, 2001). People who identify with the gender that was determined to them at the time of their birth are called cisgender, and, as trans, those who present gender identity and sexuality in non-conformity with the assigned sex, being this group is often unknown and, also excluded, canceled, assaulted, murdered (Ferreira, 2021).

The theory of objectification offers criticisms regarding biological determinism for gender attribution (Frederickson and Roberts, 1997; Berch et al., 2019). One cannot reduce "being a woman" only to the anatomical and phallogocentric aspect of the patriarchal logic that mobilizes the misogynistic reading of the scenario we currently face. It is worth remembering that, due to this phallogocentric reading, gender violence occurs, different psychopathological conditions, the submission of women to processes to jobs with wage inequality and invisibility of the different femininities.



Certainly, talking about female self-objectification in the face of Different femininities makes it possible to discuss the historical construction and narratives of corporeities and the issue increases before the theoretical-conceptual density when one realizes that there are femininities with different expressions, roles and gender identities.

This construction of the feminine denaturalizes the solely anatomical and biological aspect attributed to the body and notes the insertion of a broader reading by focusing on the different expressions, roles and ways of expressing gender (Ferreira, 2021).

## 1.1 UNIVERSITY WOMEN

Statistical data recently published by INEP on the Higher Education Census indicate higher participation of women in Higher Education, higher rate of completion of courses and lower dropout rate compared to men (Brasil, 2022) and this reflects the result of a hard achievement that was only achieved after an arduous struggle waged for a long time by women.

Despite these advances, there is still a need to better understand the space of women in universities, considering that there is still an exclusionary social space with differences in social treatment and less space for speech in decision-making positions (Cerezetti Almeida, Barbosa, Guimarães, Ramos, Lessa, Túlio, Silva, Junqueira, Alves, Campos & Ferraro 2019) and invisibility of different femininities.

It's reThe reading of the different corporeities with desires, sexualities and needs also in the University environment and the body can also be understood as a relationship with rights, power, instruments of control of actions (Foucault, 1988). In our Latino culture, sexist and patriarchal, any expression that escapes normativity is considered deviant and impacts on dominance/dominated relations.

Every day women are occupying more spaces of power. They are already a majority in higher education, however there is still wage inequality and access to decision-making positions that are predominantly male and these have been objectified. Most of the literature focuses on cis women, but we still know little about the spaces of other femininities, and there is a need to understand the bodily objectification of cis, trans, transvestite, asexual, non-binary women, who attend different areas of knowledge in higher education.

Progressively, women have been occupying space for their competence, education and work, but there is still a long way to go. It is perceived that cis women gradually have been occupying an important public and social space initially occupied by men, but there is an invisibility about this role for non-cis women. A common point among all femininities is the body's self-objectification and makes us think about the different forms of violence and their insertion in the academic space (Scavone, 2015;



D' Oliveira, 2019; Silva and Vaz, 2019; Labiak, De Novis, Silva, 2020; Maito, Panuncio-Pinto and Vieira, 2022).

Women, black, and non-heteronormative students are six times more likely to experience violence than men, whites, and hetero-normative (Montrone et als, 2020). Understand-if the theme "non-cis female self-objectification" is extremely relevant to give social visibility so that actions are planned to minimize the psychic suffering of this population and, thus, enabling the Universities to be protagonists in the space of listening and welcoming this group.

## 1.2 HISTORY

We live in a society cisnormative, where cis people decide for non-cis people, who are usually invisible, however there is a growing movement for visibility and struggle for rights.

It is worth mentioning the speech of Sojourner Truth on asking "And I'm not a woman?" It asks a profound and beyond obvious question about the exclusionary treatment that black women received (Truth, 2020) in a society that privileged white, cis and American women. She discourses the look of the black woman, enslaved and the need to look that there is also for other women and, thus, resizes femininity or womanhood.

Readings on the Womanhood (or femininity) wasn't always easy (it still isn't). The dissident women of the cis hegemonic profile for many years were perceived with the pathologizing, medicalizing, biologizing look where the other is the one who names the identity and this fact generates psychic suffering. The DSM-V still pathologizes as gender dysphoria. Preu and Brito (2019) criticize this pathologization of transsexuality of the DSM-V, which cites gender identity beyond binarism but describes it from the perspective of cisgenderism.

Being a woman is not centered on genitality and for existence there is a need to focus on the socio-historical context and offer spaces for different femininities.

In the history of feminism in Brazil it is perceived that in the last century when talking about women referred to as the "fragile sex", dependent on men and without autonomy. The black woman was the object of pleasure of the Lord of the white Mill and the white woman was destined only to procreate, to take care of the children and the house. Until women founded the first school for women, they began to publish and discuss the female condition, the right to vote, freedom, sexual identity and reproductive rights and gradually took a stand in their struggle for rights and conditions of existence (Teles, 1999).

From the 80's it breaks with the predominant view of the Eurocentric woman (white, blonde with blue eyes) whose issue made many black women wish to straighten their hair or change their nose, non-cis women mobilize for bodily changes.



The reading of other femininities arose later as a result of the dissent of the feminist movements since there were different agendas between cis and trans women, and these began to organize themselves as transvestite transsexual groups and others.

Many discussions have arisen since the process of slavery, subservience, and objectification of the feminine in its patriarchal and phallogocentric society to the present day. From the pathologizing view of decades ago, in which the woman had no right to pleasure, to her body and defined the imposition of sexual identity to the power of current self-determination. The guidelines were gradually modified. It is worth mentioning that only in 2018 it was possible to change the name without needing a psychiatric report to recognize the right of transgender people to rectify the name and gender in the documents without the need to prove sexual redefinition surgery or hormones.

Faced with these issues that permeate the struggle for existence, it is added that Brazil is the country that most kills transsexual and transvestite people (ANTRA, 2021), and by virtue of this is sanctioned the law 13.104/2015 that adds another qualifying condition for homicide that embraces transgender women, transvestites and other femininities. Transphobia, violation of rights, exclusion of trans people Gender and transvestite is a problem to be faced.

Given this, this work aims to

- a) to measure self-objectification in non-cis university women;
- b) to analyze the impact of high objectification of non-cis normative college women in the university environment.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This is quantitative and exploratory research that addresses female self-objectification in women self-perceived as transgender, transvestite, and non-binary. The Body Objectification Scale (female EOC) was used for data collection, which was applied online after free and informed consent and the description of the following variables: gender, age and socioeconomic status.

Through the instrument, university women were freely invited to participate in the research, including people who identify with the female gender and who are Brazilian university students, excluding cis women, trans mengender and cis men as well as people not belonging to the student of higher education.

### 2.1 ENVIRONMENT

In order to obtain the necessary data, an online survey was conducted through a self-administered and structured questionnaire through the platform *Google Forms*.



## 2.2 PARTICIPANT

The people participating in this work were invited through the "snowball" technique. The inclusion criteria were legal majority and self-declaration as a transvestite, transsexual and/or non-binary. Participants were 12 people who declared themselves non-cis university women.

## 2.3 PROCEDURE

The online questionnaire that begins with the Term of Free and Informed Consent was applied, in accordance with the ethical precepts established by the Resolution of the National Health Council CNS No. 466, of 2012. To guarantee the anonymity of the people who participated in the research, a system of alphanumeric identification and if they felt any discomfort they could contact the researchers and would be directed to care at the school-clinic of the IESB University Center.

After the free confirmation of the respondent, the questionnaire follows with filter questions about gender, color and education, prioritizing those who identify with the Brazilian female identity and are regularly enrolled in a higher education course. Respondents who do not meet these requirements already have the questionnaire closed.

Next, there is a section on socioeconomic aspects of the respondents, containing 6 objective questions in order to collect data on the reality of the economic class, thus outlining a more dynamic profile on self-objectification in Brazil.

Next, the EOC ladder (Body Objectification Scale) was applied, validated and translated by Loureiro (2014) for a simplified version of the OBC scale (*Objectified Body Consciousness*) and the validity and internal reliability of university women was identified (Loureiro, Guerra, Cardoso, Rodrigues, Almeida and Pedruzzi, 2022)

## 2.4 DATA ANALYSIS

After collection, the data were analyzed through EXCEL from the basic statistics (mean and standard deviation of each variable) and analyzed the EOC (Body Objectification Scale)

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the description of the sample as a function of its description as a self-declared gender identity. Of the total, 162 people who identified as university women participated, and 12 people declared themselves Transvestite, Transgender or non-binary, being, therefore, approximately 7.5% of the sample.

The sample consisted of 7 non-binary, 4 transgender women and 1 transvestite. As might be expected, the percentage of transgender female undergraduates, transvestites and other females is small. In a recent survey published by ANDIFES in 2018 it found 0.2% among all university students



throughout the country (Andifes- 2018). Our sample recorded 7.5%, which may suggest that, through an instrument applied online, have felt more comfortable for self-declaration in relation to gender and/or there is an increasing number of access to higher education for non-heteronormative women

Brazão and Dias (2021) point out the little knowledge of university students about non-binary gender and the different situations of embarrassment that many experience. The scarcity of publications has been pointed out, and it is necessary to give voice to people who have historically been silenced and assaulted (Pereira and Andrade, 2020) and establishment of affirmative policies by HEIs. Borges and Bueno (2023) emphasize that Brazil is the country that most kills transvestites and transsexuals, this shows an abominable socio-economic inequality, and it is relevant that actions are taken to facilitate access, permanence and equity

Table 1- SELF-DECLARED IDENTITY DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

| Subject | Self-declared description |
|---------|---------------------------|
| 1       | Non-binary                |
| 2       | Transvestite              |
| 3       | Non-binary                |
| 4       | Non-binary                |
| 5       | Transgender Woman         |
| 6       | Non-binary                |
| 7       | Non-binary                |
| 8       | Transgender Woman         |
| 9       | Non-binary                |
| 10      | Non-binary                |
| 11      | Transgender woman         |
| 12      | Transgender Woman         |

It is worth remembering that gender is a category that refers to a social and historical dimension, which differs from sex (attribution depending on the biological aspect of the internal, external or genetic genitalia).

The diversity of gender in the university, revealed in the data above, is a potential condition for the questioning of exclusivity cis-normativity in university spaces and these people experience situations of violence and harassment the further away from heteronormativity (ANDIFES, 2018), in addition to the invisibility of transgender women, transvestites and other femininities in Higher Education.



TABLE 2- PERCENTAGE OF THE SAMPLE AS A FUNCTION OF SELF-DECLARED GENDER

| Self-declared gender | Total | Percentage |
|----------------------|-------|------------|
| Non-binary           | 7     | 58,33 %    |
| Transvestite         | 1     | 08,33%     |
| Transgender woman    | 4     | 33,33%     |
| Total                | 12    | 100%       |

Table 2 describes the sample (absolute values and percentages) consisting of 1 (8.33%) by transvestites, 4 (33.33%) by transgender women and 6 (58.33%) by non-binary women. It is noteworthy that "Transgender" are people who have a different gender identity than the one assigned to them at birth; "Non-Binaries" are people who do not define their identity within the binary system of gender (male and female) and cis normativity. According to the LGBT foundation, the binarism embraces other femininities such as queer gender, gender fluid, agender, neutral, bigender, pangender, multigender, intergender; Transvestite, on the other hand, is the person who does not identify as the biological gender, but understands himself as a female figure, dressing and behaving as expected by the other sex (Moreira, 2022).

It is noteworthy that 58.33% of the participants declare themselves non-binary. Given this fact, it is necessary to broaden the reading and bring LGBTQIAPN+ issues to the scene of debates. Moreira (2022) also applying an online questionnaire found that even teachers of an HEI in the area of education were unaware of much information about gender.

Goes (2019) emphasizes that binary (heteronormative) discourse promotes situations where non-binaries feel embarrassed, seen as different or deviant, suffering violence due to heteronormative disagreements, with the need for interventions by university managers and planning of effective institutional policies (Goes, 2019; Costa, 2020; Brazao & Days, 2021)

Table 3 describes the sample as a function of self-reported color/race and family income.





TABLE 3- DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE BY RACE AND FAMILY INCOME

| Subject | Self-declared description | Color/Race | Household income            |
|---------|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| 1       | Non-binary                | Brown      | From 6 to 9 minimum wages   |
| 2       | Transvestite              | White      | From 9 to 12 minimum wages  |
| 3       | Non-binary                | Brown      | From 3 to 6 minimum wages   |
| 4       | Non-binary                | Brown      | Up to 1 salary              |
| 5       | Transgender Woman         | Brown      | From 1 to 3 minimum wages   |
| 6       | Non-binary                | Black      | From 3 to 6 minimum wages   |
| 7       | Non-binary                | Brown      | No                          |
| 8       | Transgender Woman         | Brown      | No                          |
| 9       | Non-binary                | Brown      | From 3 to 6 minimum wages   |
| 10      | Non-binary                | Brown      | From 9 to 12 minimum wages  |
| 11      | Transgender woman         | White      | From 12 to 15 minimum wages |
| 12      | Transgender Woman         | White      | From 6 to 9 minimum wages   |

3 women (25%) declared themselves white, 8 as brown (66.66%) and 1 as black (8.34%).

Analyzing the data in table 3 presented above, it is clear that:

- a) One non-cis normative woman had a family income of less than 1 minimum wage.
- b) non-normative cis white women have higher family income than normative non-cis black and brown women
- c) 1 transvestite had a higher family income (from 12 to 15 minimum wages)
- d) Despite the ease of access to higher education, black women with non-normative cis sexuality are the minority.
- e) Family income below 1 minimum wage was presented by a single person (brown and non-binary)



f) There is a need to broaden this discussion and address it so that we can address discriminatory violations

Table 4 presents the mean values of the body objectification scale. It is noticed that the sample presented high mean values in all categories. All (non-binary, transvestite, and transgender women) have high self-objectification. It is pointed out that, due to this objectification, they are exposed to situations of violence and murder, marginalization and difficulties in entering the labor market (ANTRA, 2021; Baptista, 2021)

TABLE 4- MEAN VALUES OF THE EOC - BODY OBJECTIFICATION SCALE

|                   | EOC Average | Result    |
|-------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Non-binary        | 50,58       | Discharge |
| Transvestite      | 65          | Discharge |
| Transgender women | 58,25       | Discharge |
| Total             | 54,34       | Discharge |

The data in table 4 point to a high objectification of non-cis women in the university environment. noting greater objectification of transvestites (M=65), followed by women transgender (M=58.25) and non-binary (M=50.58).

The values considered high of body objectification signal that non-cis women are highly objectified and this dehumanizes them as a woman, being Often objectified and seen as an object of pleasure or repulsion, such a situation leads to assuming roles of submission to the gaze of man.

Analyzing these data, it is noted

a- High objectification –

To perceive this high objectification is to realize that non-binary, transgender and transvestite women are reduced to sexual objects, as bodies to be enjoyed

It is known that Brazil is the largest consumer of trans pornography in the world. (Borges & Tilio, 2018). There is a cruel paradox between desire, fetish, and hatred. Therefore, there is a need to deal with transphobia, exclusion and prejudice (social and gender) by women who are objectified by a cis centered external gaze.

Many transgender university students have feelings of insecurity and non-belonging, prejudice and discrimination (Viana et als, 2022), high dropout rates and there should be university management policies to promote respect for diversity and combat transphobia.



It is worth remembering that heated discussions have been offered on this issue, such as access, quota policies, affirmative action programs, however there is a need for further deepening, there is still much to discuss on this agenda.

It is known that a small percentage reaches higher education with a significant dropout rate. Many are abandoned by the family, violated by the cis normative society and end up living through underemployment or prostitution, due to transphobia there is a low life expectancy

- a) UNIVERSITY – institutional affirmative policies should be instituted for access to and permanence in higher education for non-binary, transgender and transvestite women.
- b) PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN THE FACE OF HIGH OBJECTIFICATION AND PSYCHIC SUFFERING- one should have processes of listening and welcoming to deal with body shame, with feelings of non-social belonging. Give voice not just to cis women and men. It is also necessary to give a voice to transgender, transvestite and non-binary women who are invisible and victims of a patriarchal and phallogocentric society
- c) DISCUSS PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE LABOR MARKET- It is estimated that many transgender women and transvestites in Brazil have prostitution as a source of income and only possibility of subsistence (Silva, Bezerra and Queiroz, 2015), possibly promoted by several factors such as the difficulty of insertion in the formal labor market and deficiency in professional qualification caused by social exclusion, family and school

Family breakdown and social exclusion give rise to school exclusion, which hinders the educational, training and technical qualification process. Heteronormative logic assaults these women daily, either by the hand of the family that excludes, the police, the population with different forms of violence, this justifies the small percentage of access and permanence to higher education

Given the high rate of body objectification, there is a need to recognize the existence of non-cis women also in higher education and that "being a woman" is not reduced to the anatomical aspect. Foucault (1988) and Butler (1988) highlight the history of sexuality, the different mechanisms of body control and analyze the different resistances, the place of speech, the power relations in a condition of suffering, the conflicts and tensions in people dissonant with the heteronormative gender

From an early age, we learn that our bodies must be framed in pre-established control systems, which insert us into thought-out, limited and limiting behavioral models of the various subjective potentialities and the various objective contradictions, but all this, when it diverges from the cis normativity, there is self-objectification and suffering



## 4 CONCLUSION

There is a high objectification by non-cis normative (non-binary, transvestite, and transgender) college students. There is resistance in the university environment in the face of a normative cis context, it also reflects a phallogentric logic of society;

In the face of this self-objectification In non-heteronormative university women it is revealing to reflect on mental suffering, sexualization of their bodies and it is imperative to have changes in society, culture and affirmative policies.

If cisgender women already suffer from body self-image because they are all the time being bombarded with messages about "the perfect body," imagine a transgender, transvestite, non-binary woman.

It is concluded that there is suffering of non-heteronormative university women due to the high rate of self-objectification, affecting their body perceptions, body images, self-esteem, sense of security, well-being and satisfaction with themselves, as a result directly afflicting mental health, their relationships, quality of life, and the experiences of these women in a total way.

- a) There is high female body objectification by both non-binary, transgender and transvestite women.
- b) The female self-objectification by transvestites is far superior to that of transgender women and non-binary women
- c) There is a need for affirmative policies in universities
- d) Identify the discursive and normalizing devices that are used by university society to, when dealing with sex and gender, produce a stereotyped view of non-cis women
- e) Establish processes that deal with exclusionary discourse

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future studies will focus through qualitative methodology to investigate different perspectives on the issue, such contemporary issues as self-objectification and facial harmonization, rights of body modification in the face of different discursive coercions and narratives of violence in the academic environment, because the other is different, self-objectification of the LBGTQIAN+ population among others



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