

# **Collective action for labor rights and the struggle for LGBTQ recognition in Brazil: tipping points and reflection**

Roseli Bregantin Barbosa<sup>1</sup>

Maria Tarcisa Silva Bega<sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction**

The potential effects of sexual identity guidelines on work-related demands for distribution lead us to believe that there is a tipping point between sexuality and work: perhaps the flexibility of the theory of heteronormativity. In order to consider this normative principle, we engaged in the debate between Butler (2016) and Fraser (2017) concerning the struggle for distribution and recognition in the United States of America and Europe, and we analyzed the Brazilian scenario based on the categories suggested in this discussion, albeit under the perspective of productive restructuring. In this article, the relationship between sexuality and work is established on the assumption that sexual identities are influenced by kinship relationships in Brazil that are closely related to work. In field observations and interviews with sex workers who work with the help or endorsement of family members, we have perceived a certain fluidity in sexual identities. They shift in order to gain better compensation (shared interest with the family), but the compensation never appears as an agenda in their collective actions. Rather, it is the recognition of work based on a sexual identity, which takes place in light of the state of autonomous work of most of the interviewees and the difficulty of framing their demands within the traditional unions.

The flexibilization of heteronormativity in Brazil can be better understood as a movement to adapt the family to satisfy the interests of capital. It should not be regarded

---

<sup>1</sup> Degree in Law (2007) from FURB (Regional University and Foundation of Blumenau). She holds a Postgraduate Degree in Corporate and Business Law from CESUSC (School of Social Sciences of Florianópolis), and a Master's Degree in Sociology from UFPR (Federal University of Paraná). Email: roseli.bregantin@hotmail.com.

<sup>2</sup> Degree in Social Sciences from UFPR (Federal University of Paraná), Masters and a PhD in Sociology from USP (University of São Paulo). She conducts research on the following themes: Paraná, Curitiba, Youth, Citizenship, Social Policies and intellectual paths. E-mail: tarcisa@ufpr.br.

merely as ‘false-recognition’, as maintained by Fraser (2017), and is far from being a ‘*weapon* against the capitalist system’ in the manner proposed by Butler (2016).

Our methodology included field observations and semi-structured interviews with sex professionals<sup>3</sup>, women between the ages of 18 and 29, with whom we investigated the sexual orientation and identity they affiliated with and depicted in their internet ads over a two-year period, and we selected (10 prostitutes) those who represented a range of sexual identities. Subsequently, we conducted interviews in an effort to discover the reasons for the changes and the influence of families in these changes and on the work of the interviewees. We also examined the identity used by these workers in their collective actions related to labor, their agendas, and demands.

Elsewhere, once required authorizations were secured, we collected data on the compensation of men and women (28 employees) who worked as pharmacy clerks and were hired through the company’s identity quota program – heterosexual and non-heterosexual, white and non-white – to determine if compensation varies according to sex or sexual identity. Also, we included the ‘color’ variable to weigh differences that could be linked to racial issues and not just sexuality. All employees interviewed had a test-period agreement with a pharmacy chain in Santa Catarina and are affiliated with a union that the author has provided services to as a lawyer. This pharmacy chain was chosen due to its identity quota policy.

In the analysis of kinship/sexuality/work relationships, we have focused on the following: sex, sexual orientation, sexual identity, and compensation. We worked with the definition of sex as biological sex; sexual orientation as the direction given to libido due to a loving and intimate object; sexual identity as the way in which the individual assumes roles and/or functions centered on sexuality and claims rights before society because of it; and compensation as the calculation of monetary benefits received for working. We adopted the concept of work proposed by the International Labour

---

<sup>3</sup> We refer to a sex worker or prostitute according to the preference of each interviewee. The only activity related to sex work that we examined in this article is prostitution.

Organization (ILO 2013)<sup>4</sup> and restricted ourselves to the limits of the Brazilian Classification of Occupations (CBO)<sup>5</sup>.

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in its statistical recommendations, published a framework in 2013 proposed by the ILO that “defines the activities that make up the concept of work. The characteristic that distinguishes each type of work is its core objective, which should not be confused with personal reasons or motivations for conducting that work” (IBGE 2013).

1 IBGE conceptual framework.

Work	Main objective
Work on production consumption	Producing goods and services for your own consumption or that of your family unit.
Occupation*	Generate income
Work as an apprentice or trainee	Acquire skills or work experience
Volunteer work	Benefit others, outside your family unit
Compulsory work stipulated by the State	Rehabilitation, reintegration, or civil compensation

IBGE, 2013. \* Includes work performed by auxiliary family workers, as they contribute to the generation of household income.

The explanation of this *a priori* analysis is significant, considering we work from data that has not only been produced in the commercial sector, but also in the sexual services sector, which also leads to controversies regarding the recognition of its professionals as male and female workers. We intend to substantiate our decision to join those who recognize prostitution as a job: the State did so by including it alongside other occupations and the activity falls within the concept of work suggested by the ILO.

Our analysis model at no time defends the ethics or aesthetics of this or that work activity, orientation, or identity. It does not fit moral positions, which *per se* does not exempt us from political positions regarding the rights of workers and the LGBTQ community – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer. It works on the premise that the identity causes have an impact on the collective action of workers in the defense of distributive agendas (Fraser 2017) and that heteronormativity was embraced by the capital for the benefit of the reproduction of the workforce (Butler 2016). For a better understanding of the variables and the research results, we prefer to use more explicit terms such as ‘straight, homo, lesbian, bi, gay, queer, cisgender, transgender, and

<sup>4</sup> International Labour Organization. 19th. ICLS, 2013. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/meetings-and-events/international-conference-oflabour-statisticians/19/lang--es/index.htm>. Accessed: Jan 20, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Brazilian Classification of Occupations. Available at: <http://www.mtecbo.gov.br/cbsite/pages/home.jsf>. Accessed: Jan 20, 2019.

transsexual’<sup>6</sup>. Our initial hypothesis investigated the fluidity of sexual identities of sex workers and started from indicators provided in studies by Butler (2003) suggesting that identities are not fixed.

The purpose of this investigation is to demonstrate the relationship between work and sexuality (tipping points) and to analyze how work can influence sexuality and organize sexuality that, to some extent, can hinder the collective action of workers for labor rights (reflections). We also intend to demonstrate that biological sex and pregnancy do not determine differences in wages. These are determined by the social role imposed on female sexual identity. Additionally, we are trying to find a generalization starting from the process of organizing collective action from the category of sex workers to other categories of workers. We propose the hypothesis that this phenomenon, the overlap of family/sexuality/work, is not something new in Brazil and it intensifies as informality at work and the confusion between the workspace and the family, the public, and the private space increases.

To this end, we propose a reflection on the interstices between Philosophy, Sociology of Work, and authors related to Social Psychology to discuss changes identified by the confusion between public space and intimacy<sup>7</sup> due to the new informality<sup>8</sup> that is imposed through digital work and advances on the family home space of male and female workers.

---

<sup>6</sup> Male/female sex: biological sex given at birth. Gender: “It is the way in which each individual expresses himself in the world. Clothes, language, voice, style, behavior – characteristics socially associated with the female or male universe”(Martins, 2018); Heterosexual: individual who has sexual relations with people of the opposite sex; Homosexual: individual who has sex with people of the same sex; Lesbian: woman who has sex with women; Bisexual: man or woman who has sex with people of both sexes; Gay: man who has sex with men; Queer: individual who mixes genders and sexual orientations, of both sexes (in the research he entered as those who did not fit the other orientations or identities); Cis or ‘cisgender’: someone whose expression of gender is in line with the expected social pattern of the biological sex he presents at birth; Trans: when referring to sex is ‘transsexual’, an individual who was born from one sex and transitioned to another through medical intervention, when referring to gender is ‘transgender’ an individual whose gender expression does not match the socially expected pattern of biological sex introduced at birth (Martins 2018).

<sup>7</sup> A situation that occurs in circumstances such as those of inmates (Varella 2017).

<sup>8</sup> We will not delve into the debate on informality and its new technological tools here as it is a side issue to the main debate.

## RESULTS

The data produced over the two years of research on sex workers demonstrates that their sexual identity is quite fluid, and this fluidity may occur due to adaptations of family relationships to this job market.

2 TABLE OF REASON FOR CHANGE IN SEXUAL IDENTITY OF PROSTITUTES

Name of the Professional	Marital status Sexual orientation	Sexual identity	Reason for change in sexual identity	Did the change have a family influence? Who?
1. Carmem	Married/straight	Bisexual	Improve income	Husband
2. July	Married/straight	Bisexual	Improve income	Husband
3. Martinha	Married/straight	Bisexual	More security	Husband
4. Andressa	Single/lesbian	Bisexual	Improve income	Mother
5. Gaby	Married/lesbian	Bisexual	More security	Partner
6. Maria	Single/straight	Bisexual	Improve income	Mother
7. Deborah	Single/straight	Bisexual	More security	Sisters
8. Vanessa	Married/straight	Bisexual	Improve income	Mother
9. Victoria	Married/Straight	Bisexual	Improve Income	Husband
10. Amanda	Married/Straight	Bisexual	More Security	Husband

Author, 2019.

Most of the interviewees reported themselves married and in heterosexual marital relationships. 30% are single, and all of them identify themselves as bisexual in their advertisements about their services. They point out that they assume a bisexual identity at work to boost income and security and to respond to a great demand for bisexual prostitutes, particularly in swinger clubs with ‘private parties’.

I started working with two friends, and we worked at the apartment of the oldest in the scheme, advertised on the internet and scheduled a place. But I realized that there were a lot of clients who wanted us at nightclubs and parties, and at their house with their wives. Those people who were into threesomes and swinging were the ones who pay the most for the gig and who treat us with the most respect (Vanessa, 22 years old).

The interviewees report that about 35% of their clients book services for a couple. Most of married women report that the husband prefers that she serves couples instead of unaccompanied men, which may also help explain the migration of the identity of these women from heterosexual to bisexual over the past 2 years. They claim that, in addition to stirring the imagination of customers and attracting couples<sup>9</sup>, the new identity does not

<sup>9</sup> In the observations and interviews, there is a shifting of behavior in the intimacy of couples, especially among couples who have been in a relationship for more than 5 years, as well as within families that no

lessen the interest of traditional customers. It is noteworthy that even the interviewee who identifies herself as a lesbian and maintains a homosexual affective relationship represents herself as a bisexual and caters to a couple, which is a strong indication that their work has more to do with sexual identity than with sexual orientation and that one thing is not necessarily linked to the other as is usually assumed. At any given moment, an individual who identifies himself as gay may be maintaining a heterosexual relationship without this alienating him from his identity group.

Activist prostitutes have published a significant amount of literature in Brazil – notably Monique Prada and Gabriela Leite – and this collection provides us with material to understand how work-oriented sexual identity culminates in a process of belonging to an identity group and stimulates an awakening in these workers for collective action concerning sexual identity, but that is not limited to guidelines for recognition. This process is further enhanced by the scarcity of space for their demands with unions, who are not receptive to ‘certain types’ of professionals. A similar process may be taking place within the working class, making unionization more difficult and promoting recognition guidelines.

3 TABLE OF COMPENSATION BY SEX, GENDER, IDENTITY, COLOR, AND POSITION

Name	Biological sex	Gender	Sexual identity	Color	Position	Gross monthly income
A	Male	Cis	Straight	White	Pharmacy clerk	R\$ 2,200.00
B	Male	Cis	Straight	White	Pharmacy clerk	R\$ 2,165.00
C	Male	Cis	Straight	Mixed race	Pharmacy clerk	R\$ 2,152.00
D	Male	Cis	Straight	Mixed race	Pharmacy clerk	R\$ 2,080.00
E	Male	Cis	Straight	Mixed race	Pharmacy clerk	R\$ 2,046.00
F	Female	Cis	Straight	White	Pharmacy clerk	R\$ 1,700.00
G	Female	Cis	Straight	Mixed race	Pharmacy clerk	R\$ 1,700.00
H	Female	Cis	Straight	Mixed race	Pharmacy clerk	R\$ 1,700.00
I	Female	Cis	Straight	Mixed race	Pharmacy clerk	R\$ 1,700.00
J	Female	Cis	Straight	White	Pharmacy clerk	R\$ 1,700.00

Author, 2019. The above amounts of compensation earned in 2014 were updated to May 2019 using the IPCA-E index.

It should be pointed out that the gender inequality or social role related to sexuality in each of the sexual identities (LGBTQ) remains. Among cis-non-straight men and women, transsexuals and/or transgenders, the wage gap linked to the female role remains in percentages that are very close to those of cis-hetero men and women, although they

---

longer expel young women from the household when they engage in prostitution, as had been the case in the past. The interviewees and/or those being observed live with a husband and children or with parents and siblings, and the financial income from their work is the main source of the family’s livelihood. Apparently, prostitution is increasingly becoming entrenched as a family business.

earn less than the latter. As with hetero couples, it happens with non-hetero couples. The partner who assumes a feminine role linked to domestic obligations has lower wages than those of their peers, even if the couple does not have a child.

4 TABLE OF COMPENSATION BY SEX, GENDER, IDENTITY, COLOR, AND POSITION

Name	Biological sex	Gender	Sexual identity	Color	Function	Gross monthly income
A	Male	Cis	Bisexual	Black	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,800.00
B	Male	Cis	Bisexual	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 2,038.00
C	Male	Cis	Gay/male	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 2,010.00
D	Male	Cis	Gay/male	Mixed race	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 2,022.00
E	Male	Cis	Gay/male	Mixed race	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 2,027.00
F	Male	Cis	Gay/female	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,700.00
G	Male	Cis	Gay/female	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,675.00
H	Male	Queer	Pansexual	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,667.00
I	Trans sex	Trans gender	Straight/female	Mixed race	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,670.00
J	Trans sex	Trans gender	Straight/male	Mixed race	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 2,014.00
L	Female	Queer	Pansexual	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,023.00
M	Female	Cis	Lesbian/female	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,700.00
N	Female	Cis	Lesbian/female	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,700.00
O	Female	Cis	Lesbian/female	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,700.00
P	Female	Cis	Lesbian/male	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 2,129.00
Q	Female	Cis	Lesbian/male	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 2,066.00
R	Female	Queer	Pansexual	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,654.00
S	Trans sex	Trans gender	Lesbian/female	White	Pharmacy Clerk	R\$ 1,825.00

Author, 2019. The above amounts of compensation earned in 2014 were updated to May 2018 using the IPCA-E index.

We noticed in this table that it is not biological sex and the possibility of becoming pregnant that causes women to earn less than men, as common sense implies, but the ‘female role’<sup>10</sup> that is linked to the family structure and directly interferes with productivity at work (taking on less overtime, being absent for family care, leaving work to do household chores, etc.). This analysis leads us to deduce that it is not necessarily the presence of children that reduces the woman’s salary, but the role that she assumes or is expected to assume in the conjugal home. Surveys conducted at Brazilian National Household Sampling Survey (PNAD)/IBGE<sup>11</sup> in 2018 indicate that the birth of the first child reduces the salary of a married worker by up to 24%, and that women with 3 children or more earn up to 40% less than women without children. These surveys, however, do not analyze how gender roles are divided in those homes. In our field observations, we noticed that childless couples tend to have a more equal division of roles and responsibilities<sup>12</sup>.

Color does not figure as a relevant variable for compensation due to the area where the research was conducted, a predominately-white region with a relatively low number of blacks participating in the labor market. However, it highlights the exclusion of blacks in jobs at pharmacies in Santa Catarina during that period, even for an income that proposes to support identity causes. Despite having blacks in their advertising inserts, their job quotas do not include color or race.

If the market incentive helps to organize collective actions around sexual identities, the fact that the increase in informality, work in the family sphere, access to social networks, and the low rate of union membership are also facilitators for organizing collective action through identity in Brazil should not be overlooked.

---

<sup>10</sup> In findings from research on sex workers in the United Kingdom (Sanders 2017) the difference in pay between men and women is striking, with women’s earnings significantly higher than those of men because the role that female sex workers perform does not correspond to the standard female role, while men who manage to establish themselves in this sector are, almost exclusively, those who place themselves in the female role. The work of the sex worker is prioritized by the family because it earns more.

<sup>11</sup> The study in question was conducted with married women workers, whether they had children or not. However, in addition to not offering a comparison with data on married men workers with and without children, it also does not provide comparisons involving data on single working women with and without children, nor of non-straight couples that may or may not have children. The research is only conducted with married women to eliminate the marriage variable from wage reductions; however, we believe that it would be more appropriate to compare data from single women who may or may not have children for this purpose.

<sup>12</sup> This is the time in a traditional couple’s relationship when the man still does not make a direct connection between the figure of the wife and the image of the mother, applying the Freudian theory of sexuality in this case (Freud 1910).



In 2017, of the 91.4 million employed persons, 14.4% (13.1 million people) were members of a union, a 3.2% decrease compared to 2016 and the lowest rate since records began in 2012. The highest rate in 2017 occurred among employees within the public sector (27.3%), followed by employees in the private sector with a formal contract (19.2%). Self-employed workers faced one of the most significant drops in the unionization rate in the historical records, from 11.3% in 2012 to 8.6% in 2017 (IBGE 2018: 1).

Take, for example, the case of sex workers who – despite being organized in many associations around the country and indicating there could be the formation of a union underway – are excluded from the CUT (Central Workers' Union) from the outset. This union publicly assumed a discourse against regulating the activity of sex workers, taking an abolitionist stance<sup>13</sup> towards prostitution, even considering that the State had recognized the activity as a job.

For the secretary of the Working Woman of the Union, Rosane Silva, the PL endorses a model of society based on the capitalist system, patriarchy and machismo. She also criticized parliamentary actions behind the scenes and demanded public policies so that women would not perceive prostitution as a way to survive. “Jean is forcing Kokay (deputy Érika Kokay of Workers' Party of the Federal District – PT-DF) to present a draft of the project and frame PT. And the comrade is waiting for the CUT to give their opinion. My opinion is that she will not accept the draft and will organize women representatives to vote against this text. What we need is to fight for public policies that lift women out of prostitution” she stated (CUT citing Silva 2013:1).

Regarding this clash between CUT and sex workers, Monique Prada, a prostitute and activist for the rights of prostitutes in Brazil and who identifies herself as a feminist, writes in her book: “In response to this position, CUTS<sup>14</sup> was conceived in December of 2015, a networking organization that unites various associations of prostitutes from all over Brazil” (Prada 2018:98).

---

<sup>13</sup> Abolitionism is a trend-led by the ‘radical’ feminist movements that initially intended to regulate prostitution in order to abolish sexual exploitation in prostitution and free prostitutes from servitude, but by advocating tighter rules and increasingly intensive control over the activity, they began over time to defend the abolition of prostitution.

<sup>14</sup> CUTS stands for *Central Única de Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras do Sexo* (Central Union for General & Sex Workers), and brings together associations such as Asprorn (Association of Prostitutes of Rio Grande do Norte), Aprospi (Association of Prostitutes of Piauí), Aprosmig (Association of Prostitutes of Minas Gerais), Aproce (Association of Prostitutes of Ceará), Aprosba (Association of Prostitutes of Bahia), Association of Prostitutes of the State of Pará and the Association of Prostitutes and Former Prostitutes of Amazonas.

## Debate

Nowadays, sexuality has taken over the public scene, leading workers to neglect collective labor actions in favor of identity causes. These agendas gain strength when adopted by neoliberalism in the United States of America and Europe, which used them there to improve their image (Fraser 2017), while in Brazil they are introduced by center-left governments for whom they served as facilitators of alliances with the ruling classes<sup>15</sup>. This impact of the sexual identity guidelines on work-related distribution guidelines leads us to reflect on the existence of a tipping point between sexuality and work, and one of them seems to be heteronormativity<sup>16</sup>. From the perspective of sexuality, heteronormativity would be the baseline for constructing and deconstructing sexual identities and would address the need for the domination and reproduction of the workforce at work (Butler 2016). However, with the advancement of productive restructuring and the growing need for labor, heteronormativity is becoming weaker and its flexibility seems to be more appealing to capital – insofar as multiple identities serve to divide the working class and weaken their collective action, we presume they are more efficient for this purpose than the simple division by sex. Heteronormativity is clearly a tipping point between sexual identity guidelines and distributive guidelines – and it is the backdrop for the debate between Butler (2016) and Fraser (2017) – because, in so far as their flexibility eases one sphere of rights, it weakens the other, even though they appear to pertain to distinct life, personal, and professional plans.

It is always challenging to establish a relationship between sexuality and work, because at some point sexuality was forcibly married with a gender perspective, largely because of the feminist movement's support for LGBTQ agendas – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer – making it seem like gender and sexuality are the same thing, but they are not. However, we do not subscribe to the viewpoint of queer authors who believe that sexuality and gender are totally dissociated issues and have thus received criticism from Butler (2005), who deems this total separation as a misguided stance. We

---

<sup>15</sup> No party governs with the support of a single class. The center-left parties in Brazil knew this and sought the support of the ruling classes in addition to the working class of their base. The ruling classes have no interest in guidelines for redistribution, so it was easier to win support with guidelines for identity recognition.

<sup>16</sup> Heteronormativity – normative social principle that dictates rules on how people should relate sexually and the social roles that each compete with each other according to sex and gender.

recognize that both issues of sexuality and gender can be analyzed from multiple perspectives, associated or not, particularly from the perspective of work.

For more conservative scholars to discuss sexuality and work would be to mix public and private, personal and professional life, which is methodologically inappropriate. With a conceived notion such as this, there is the assumption that work is only that which takes place in the public realm, leaving out domestic, sexual, and reproductive work. Moreover, determining identities based on sexuality would be relegated to the family plan and kinship relationships (Butler 2016). However, the influence of work on sexuality and vice versa is stronger than can be imagined, especially in Brazil, where the influence of family relationships on work is well-known, since its colonization has led to a confusion between the public and the private and a stamp of informality with predominance of family work – backyard companies.

A touchy subject that often causes discomfort is the fluidity of sexual orientations and identities. Some authors and identity movements want to believe that they are fixed and biologically determined. However, studies that demonstrate the fluidity in sexual orientation and identity are not new. Although they are not widely publicized, there are dozens of them that have been conducted with sailors at sea, inmates, and offshore oil rigs. The fact is that the flexibility of heteronormativity was already a well-known phenomenon in the scientific community. Among these investigations, the biggest and most relevant in Brazil over the last 5 years was a study published by Dráuzio Varella.

In a study conducted over 11 years as a doctor at a women's prison, Varella (2017) confirms the phenomenon of an adaptation and fluidity of sexual orientation, which may lead to the construction of new identities that are determined, and are determinants of the social role of its actors. In the women's prison, the author noted that heterosexual women changed their sexual orientation as a way of gaining privileged positions within the local hierarchy. The 'butch', 'dyke', '*mariazinha*', 'lipstick lesbian', according to the author, inside the female prison are more than forms of sexual relationships between prisoners, they are defining roles of hierarchy in the prison.<sup>17</sup> It also suggests that the hierarchy of

---

<sup>17</sup> Women who are members of *Comando Vermelho* criminal organization are forbidden from engaging in homosexual relationships, due to the risk of the gang's loss of authority over them. This is also a condition that exempts them from paying a monthly fee to *Comando* – everyone in *Comando Vermelho* pays a monthly fee to them. Varella (2017) reports that the majority of inmates enter the prison due to crimes committed in the presence of heterosexual relationships, like trafficking drugs for their partner, and that once they are arrested, they are totally abandoned by them and the other family members. Their new family becomes the prison, and its love relationships are shaped by homo-affection. The author does not believe that the reason for the shift in sexual orientation is male disappointment and abandonment, but rather the discovery of freedom in a world only of women who have never had it outside the walls of a prison.

power within the female prison defined by sexuality implies work assignments: those who work in the kitchen, cleaning, bathrooms, organizing cells etc. A division of labor that occurs not from biological sex, since they are all women, but because of sexuality and sexual roles. It also points out that some of those who end up leaving the prison, especially those identified as ‘lipstick lesbians’, identify themselves again as heterosexuals and to have straight marital relationships. A rather significant finding drawn from the study by Varella (2017) concerns the hierarchical structure of the female prison, which reveals that, even in a microcosm made up only of women, the difference imposed by sexual roles remains. In this sense, the flexibility of heteronormativity can benefit women, but only those who are willing to abandon the female role, as Butler (2003) pointed out. Another aspect that we consider relevant in this author’s research is the confusion of the intimate space with the working space inside the female prison, as what occurs on ships at sea, work on oil platforms, and male prisons – places where older research shows the same fluidity in sexual orientation and identity.

According to Butler (2016) heteronormativity plays the role of guaranteeing the reproduction of labor for capital, but how to sustain it in a world of work that is entering industry 4.0 (Schwab 2016) with increasingly less need for labor reproduction and a greater scarcity of job vacancies. As stated by Braga (2018) “with the advances in robotics, microelectronics, logistics, we will have situations in which the presence of workers on the production lines in industries will trend towards a decline”, so capital can choose to encourage the flexibility of heteronormativity and support new identities based on sexuality. Said *modus operandi* can provide more control over the working class, because it divides it even more than the classic gender division (man x woman)<sup>18</sup> and diversifies its agendas and demands. Such fragmentation makes it possible for capital to superficially meet recognition guidelines by creating identity quotas (with a salary lower than that paid overall, as in the case of the pharmacy chain) at the expense of labor guidelines. This contradicts Butler’s (2016) thesis, which states that the flexibilization of

---

<sup>18</sup> We may assume that this division would only take place between straight and non-straight men and women, but the idea that LGBTQ forms a unified and cohesive movement is illusory. Within this identity, there are many more rivalries than partnerships. For example, the rivalry between lesbians and transsexual women within the lesbian movements, as well as in the feminist movement, is historical. Bisexuals, despite circulating between heterosexuals and homosexuals, complain about the mistrust of both groups towards them. The ‘discreet’ gay person avoids approaching the ‘affected’ gay person, while the lesbian ‘truck driver’ or ‘butch’ is rejected by the ‘lipstick lesbians’ who prefer to only interact with each other and do not want to approach anyone with any remnants of present or past masculinity. This information clearly does not constitute an absolute truth, and there are exceptions based on the observations made in these groups, which, as the research itself reveals, is very fluid and fragmented.

heteronormativity would constitute a type of struggle against the capitalist system. Fraser (2017) asserts that recognition issues imply both immaterial and material results and, when both do not occur, it is a false recognition.

Butler's premise is indeed true, but her conclusion does not hold. She assumes that injustices based on false recognition must be immaterial and not economic. Leaving aside, for the moment, her combination of the material with the economic, her assumption is wrong in both respects. In my view, injustices based on false recognition are as material as injustices of unequal distribution. The former is rooted in social standards of interpretation, evaluation, and communication, therefore, if desired, in the symbolic order. But this does not mean that they are 'merely' symbolic (Fraser 2017:283).

We can understand the flexibilization of heteronormativity in Brazil, to a greater extent, as a movement responding to the need for capital domination over workers. However, it is not a 'lack of recognition', as Fraser (2017) points out, because it leads to some civil rights advances that benefit the LGBTQ community, such as the right to civil marriage, inheritance, death pension and more recently the criminalization of LGBT phobia. Although they do not translate into better working conditions and income, the right to civil marriage, inheritance, and pension are immaterial and material results, and even with the interpretation given by Fraser (2017), they cannot be considered a false recognition.

In addition to technological advancement, less demand for labor and flexible heteronormativity, this new world of work leads to precarious labor relations that create, according to Antunes (2018), a 'digital easement' that strips workers out of formal labor and tosses them into informality, much of it working in the family's own home or vehicle. This condition increases the influence of the family sphere on work, consequently increasing the influence of work on sexuality and vice versa, which leads us to re-evaluate sentences that separate the domestic family world from the productive world (sexuality x work) in our sociological analyses. We must also consider that a neoliberal rationality (Dardot & Laval 2016) organizes this precarious/digital society and converts workers into 'companies', not entrepreneurs, and this makes all the difference. A company needs to be open to serving everyone. It cannot discriminate between men and women or straight and non-straight, and when the company needs to assimilate this disposition, this will have an impact on their sexual identity (but not necessarily sexual orientation).

The impact of these changes<sup>19</sup> on society can be seen in the intimacy of couples who feel discouraged towards romantic and productive love and opt for confluent love (Giddens 1993) for sexuality. In intimacy, many couples (especially those with better access to information) assimilate the flexibility of heteronormativity as another form of ‘depreciation of the love issue’<sup>20</sup>(Freud 1912). This shift in intimacy<sup>21</sup>demands a more diversified sex market and implies changes in the sexual identity of professionals in the sector – which may lead to the option for bisexual identity<sup>22</sup>.

Veronesi (2008) believes that, from the biological point of view, the human species is moving towards a single sex, including within the reproductive hormonal pattern, as the diversity in reproduction provided by science rendering the sex of people who relate to each other irrelevant, and this also leads to an increased diversity in sexual relations, which he believes will be mostly bisexual within 50 years and only for displays of affection.

---

<sup>19</sup>Initially, sexuality is shaken by the sexual revolution, followed by health guidelines arising from the emergence of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), then by LGBTQ demands on the right to sexuality, and more recently, and no less important, by the lack of incentives for reproduction through environmental and technological discourses.

<sup>20</sup> Freud (1912) in his article ‘On the universal tendency to debase in the sphere of love’ talks about the use of debasement of the loving partner in constant comparison with the maternal figure to escape castration. It would be especially necessary for men to maintain sexual desire for their partner to avoid intimacy and detach it from the mother’s image. Physical and psychological violence would derive from this mechanism, extramarital relationships (with lovers or prostitutes), ‘child perversions’ can also play this role. It is worth noting that Freud classified practices, currently accepted as being normal by psychoanalysis, as child perversions, such as homosexuality and polyamory. This author classifies ‘perversion’ as ‘the reverse of neurosis’.

<sup>21</sup> With these changes in intimacy, sex for reproduction is no longer central. Confluent love and eroticism are more valued (Giddens 1993), creating the understanding that the marital relationship needs to be permanently revived and sexual relationship revitalized, as well as female pleasure reclaimed. In view of this situation, a whole market appears for this purpose, from sex therapies, sex shop companies to sexual services for couples. Here the idea sold is to combat the traditional way of maintaining marriage with the castration of women and the practice of male extramarital sexuality, adopting permanent ‘depreciation’ as a way to escape castration, without violence, and ensuring the right to feminine pleasure (including people and/or erotic artifacts into the marital home, under the banner of saving the marriage). This opening leads to a relaxation of female heterosexuality that, according to Freud (1912), in principle, is secondary to the woman’s inability to couple herself with the mother (primordial object of the libido). These changes in intimacy would be telling this woman ‘see, you can’, and leading to changes in the sexual orientation of married women.

<sup>22</sup> “The man is losing his characteristics and tends to become a sexually ambiguous figure, while the woman is becoming more masculine. In this way, society evolves towards a unique model. (...) Bisexuality will be the price to pay for the natural evolution of the human species. And I think the price is positive”(Veronesi 2008). Some authors argue that sexual orientation is genetic and fixed, we will not stick to them in this debate since our research question is less in the relationship between sexual orientation/identity sexual and more in the relationship between sexual identity/work – as shown in the studies by Varella (2017) sexual orientation is not necessarily linked to sexual identity.

## **Conclusions**

Our analysis did not intend to give answers or make value judgments as to what is right (or wrong) in terms of labor activities, sexual orientation, identity, or collective action, nor to affirm that the sexual identity of all workers is ever fluid. We do want to point out that: there are tipping points between sexuality and work and heteronormativity is one of them; that the return of work to the family sphere with precariousness and digital informality leads to new connections between sexuality and work; that sexuality builds identities that can really have an impact on work, particularly in the results of workers' collective actions, and that the capitalist system can use them to increase their profits and dismantle the collective action of the working class.

We want to reflect on the consequences of overlapping the family and work spheres (brought on by shifts in the world of work) on the sexual identity and collective action of workers to reflect on the effects of heteronormativity and its flexibility in the world of work. We emphasize the importance of denaturalizing the connection between orientation and sexual identity, and of understanding that sexual identity is a symbolic construction shared socially and does not always correspond to the practices of intimacy.

From everything we have debated thus far, we have gathered that knowing that there is room to maneuver in sexual identities, sexual diversity can be pushed by capital to the center of the debate to shift the focus of the struggle from the working class to identity agendas (whose services do not lead to financial burdens on the capital) and weaken their struggle for labor rights, as well as use it for union disarticulation by promoting identity movements. The unions can, like the capitalist system itself, learn about and use this information for the benefit of the worker and the union movement.

## **References**

Antunes, R. (2018). *O Privilégio da Servidão. O Novo Proletariado de Serviços na Era Digital*. São Paulo: Boitempo.

Braga, R. (2019). *Seremos líderes ou escravos da Indústria 4.0?* São Paulo: 2018. EPSJV/Fiocruz. Interview granted to Ana Paula Evangelista. Available at: <http://www.epsjv.fiocruz.br/noticias/reportagem/seremos-lideres-ou-escravos-daindustria-40>. Accessed on Jan 20, 2019.

Butler, J. (2016). Merely Cultural. *Social Text*, vol. 15, issue 3-4, p. 265-277, 1997. Translation. In: Parte I, dossiê Diálogos na Teoria Crítica. *Revista Idéias*, vol. 7, issue 2, p. 229-248.

Butler, J. (1994). 'Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler.' *Radical Philosophy*, 67, Summer 1994. Available at: <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/interview/judith-butler>. Accessed on: June 6, 2019.

CBO. Brazilian Classification of Occupations. Available at: <http://www.mtecbo.gov.br/cbosite/pages/home.jsf>. Accessed on: Jan 20, 2019.

CUT. Mulheres da CUT são contra regulamentação da prostituição. Available at: <https://www.cut.org.br/noticias/mulheres-da-cut-sao-contraregulamentacao-daprostituicao-473a>. Accessed on: Jan 20, 2019.

Dardot, P. & Laval, C. (2016). *A nova razão do mundo: ensaio sobre a sociedade neoliberal*. São Paulo: Boitempo.

Fraser, N. (1997). Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler. *Social Text*, vol. 15, n. 3-4, p. 279-289, 1997. Translation: *Idéias*, Campinas, SP, vol. 8, issue 1, p. 277-294, Jan./June 2017.

Fraser, N. (2016). Como certo feminismo mordeu a isca neoliberal. *The Guardian*. Tradução Felipe Kantor, *LavraPalavra*, 2016. Available at: <https://outraspalavras.net/outrasmidias/como-certo-feminismo-mordeu-a-iscaneoliberal/>. Accessed on: Jan 20, 2019.

Freud, S. (1969). Sobre a tendência universal à depreciação na esfera do amor (1912). In: Edição Standard Brasileira das Obras Completas de Sigmund Freud. Vol. 11. Rio de Janeiro: Imago Editora.

Giddens, A. (1993). *A transformação da intimidade: sexualidade, amor & erotismo nas sociedades modernas*. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade Estadual Paulista.

IBGE (2013). Taxa de sindicalização dos trabalhadores brasileiros cai para 14,4%, a menor desde 2012. Available at: <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-sala-deimprensa/2013-agencia-de-noticias/releases/22952-taxa-de-sindicalizacao-dostrabalhadores-brasileiros-cai-para-14-4-a-menor-desde-2012>. Accessed on: Jan 20, 2019.

IBGE (2018). Estatísticas de gênero: indicadores sociais das mulheres no Brasil. Disponível em: <https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/index.php/bibliotecacatalogo?view=detalhes&id=210155>. Accessed on: Jan 20, 2019.



Martins, G. (2018). Glossário de gênero: entenda o que é cis, trans, não-binário e mais. Available at: <https://www.uol.com.br/universa/noticias/redacao/2018/03/19/glossario-de-genero-entenda-o-que-significam-os-termos-cis-trans-binario.htm?fbclid=IwAR1ilwTgSQUwavgElrsn0lyAmZHC9ualoqvKmuD2FoY9gI1waJBB-brLx0>. Accessed on: May 23, 2019.

ILO (2013). International Labour Organization. 19th. ICLS. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/meetings-and-events/international-conference-of-labour-statisticians/19/lang--es/index.htm>. Accessed on: Jan 20, 2019.

Prada, M. (2018). *Baderna Puta Feminista*. São Paulo: Veneta.

Sanders, T. (2018). *Internet Sex Work: Beyond the Gaze*. Leicester: University of Leicester, UK.

Schwab, K. (2016). *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

Varella, D. (2017). *Prisioneiras*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

Veronesi, U. (2007). O Cientista italiano diz que humanidade será bissexual. Entrevista concedida à Assimina Vlahou, BBC, Roma Available at: [https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/reporterbbc/story/2007/08/070820\\_bissexualism\\_italia.shtml](https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/reporterbbc/story/2007/08/070820_bissexualism_italia.shtml). Accessed on: Jan 20, 2019.