

The study of the experience of trans adolescence through biographical narratives

El estudio de la experiencia de adolescencia trans a través del relato biográfico

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Background

The interpretative framework of trans as a pathology is being challenged due to it being considered as an expression of human diversity. This challenge has intensified in the past decade, with the emergence of trans childhood and adolescence as a political subject, a situation that is no longer addressed as subsidiary to trans adulthood and which causes tensions around gender and the interpretation of trans. In this new scenario, family involvement plays a key role, giving rise to the first generation of children and adolescents whose families support gender variability and take action in order for their experiences to be recognised within the framework of human rights. The impact in Spain and the Canary Islands of this action has been seen at legislative and institutional levels in the recognition of gender identity without diagnostic conditioning. We understand trans as an experience closely related to the way in which gender norms operate in a cultural and social context, which means that its meaning and signifier are in flux. The hypothesis of the research in which this article is framed is that the experience of current trans adolescence demonstrates the tensions of the context and configures an experience of trans adolescence that is "different" to the traditional notion of transsexuality, but in tension with it. For this, we explore the notion of "gender experience" in a constitutive sense of the subject that allows us to capture the agency of the subject in a process of subjective configuration inscribed in the gender order, asking ourselves about its dimensions.

Aims

To identify the dimensions of the biographical experience of a trans adolescent whose gender transition took place in the context of a contested framework of the meaning of trans.

Method & procedures

This article presents the analysis of the biographical account of a trans adolescent using the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM). We chose this method from the interpretive school because of its ability to explore the subjective formations of experience in a given context. The BNIM guides the interview technique and the data analysis, which are broken down into two units of meaning, the data sequences, the Chronology of Biographical Data (CBD) or "lived life" and the Thematic-Textual Sequence (TTS) or "narrated life", through which the structure of the case is accessed. The analysis is based on the principles of sequentiality, reconstruction and abduction and starts with a panel made up of different profiles that bring us closer to the social view of the phenomenon.

Results & discussion

The biographical account specifies a particular experience while also recognising the contextual aspect: it highlights the complex way in which social rules are assembled in institutions, relationships and subjectivity, and it enables us to track the agency of subjects in their everyday negotiations. Andrés' biography shifts between "disorder and diversity", in other words, the biographical account reveals a journey situated in the dispute of meanings from which trans adolescence confronts its challenges. Andrés' experience is made of a gender subjectivity "in becoming a trans adolescent". His trans story is reconstructed from gender practices and events of change in adolescence which facilitate exploration in the peer space. This experience is also made of dependence on the adult world and of

recognition in the terms in which gender is intelligible to them. Lastly, to be recognised, the experience of trans adolescence must follow an itinerary through institutional transition devices, which we have called “moving forward”. The community facilitates a lateral transition, Andrés’ agency.

Conclusion

In this work, we maintain that social, therapeutic and educational policy and practice for the accompaniment of trans adolescence should be underpinned by a comprehension of the experience. In relation to this, the findings of Andrés’ biographical account point in different directions. The political-cultural dispute of the concept of trans and the emergence of the subject of trans childhood and adolescence are related to a shift from the interpretative framework of disorder to affirmative approaches to diversity, but this shift does not go beyond the normative order of gender and age. In this regard, the transition devices seem to confirm the “moving forward” gender transition which includes matters such as: medical hegemony, the innate interpretation of gender identity and dependence. In this context, adult recognition of Andrés’ “trans” experience is determined in the family and leads to the possibility of accessing this gender transition itinerary. However, “becoming a trans adolescent” is a complex and profoundly relational process in which, while the itinerary of transition devices demarcate the margins of Andrés’ adult intelligibility, there is also room for the exploration of gender in peer spaces, where different narratives of trans, identity and corporeality are configured that enable a “lateral transition” and that function as a space for negotiating agency from the adult world. These findings invite us to ask ourselves about our professional practices in health, educational and social institutions. Do they enable lateral transitions? Therefore, the agency of adolescents, social and community care in primary care, family support and adolescent support groups take central stage.

Keywords: adolescence, biographic method, identity, qualitative analysis, transgender

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