EDUCATING ABOUT SEXUAL DIVERSITY: DIVERSE UNDERSTANDINGS FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM UNIVERSITIES IN PALMIRA AND BOGOTA

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ABSTRACT

This work of systematization of the family counseling experience *"Educating about sexual diversity: Diverse understandings from the experience of young people from universities in Palmira and Bogota,"* documents the results of the practical experience of intervention research, based on the experiences of five young university students with diverse sexual orientation, taking into account aspects of their context, the difficulties and opportunities of LGBTIQ+ people and their perception of the availability of resources that contribute to their well-being. The research was aimed at understanding and recognizing their sexual and gender diversity, as well as their support networks, by approaching their realities in reflective dialogue encounters. The method applied is based on the hermeneutic and socio-critical paradigms with emphasis on the qualitative approach; oriented to generate changes in the meanings and meanings of human sexuality from a systemic perspective of holons, addressing the gender approach, from the diverse sexualities, and the recognition of human rights. It should be noted that the recovery of the experience was based on two axes: sexual and gender diversities and support networks.

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As a result, transformations are observed in the narratives and social practices of the participants in each of their contexts, finding a clear rupture with the marks of the people in their close environment in relation to religious beliefs about sexuality; the reaffirmation of their identity, and the strengthening of capacities for the incidence in spaces of participation.

Keywords: Rights and liberties, sexual and gender diversity, education, heteronormativity, support network, sexuality.

INTRODUCTION

This research takes into account the context, difficulties and opportunities of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) people in the recognition of their sexual and gender diversity, globally and nationally, but also evidences how support networks, from the understanding of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, (1987) play an important role in the interactions and access to services of the university students who participated in the project.

According to data presented by the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, (2020), it is evident that in the world there are 7. 795 billion inhabitants, but the number of people who self-identify as LGBTIQ+ is unknown, currently the data reported on people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are comprised from the affectations associated with risk factors, such as the violation of human rights, violence due to situations of homophobia and transphobia, murders, poor access to different services, such as education, health, work, recreation, among others, this attributed to stigma, violence and discrimination. According to the World Bank (2018), LGBTI people probably represent the poorest 40% of people in the population. The figures evidence serious human rights violations and also pose a challenge on the part of governments in the implementation of public policies for the guarantee of the rights of LGBTIQ+ people.

In Colombia, between 1993 and 2020, a total of 1,937 violent acts against LGBTIQ+ people have been reported, affecting 2,065 victims throughout the national territory (Colombia Diversa, 2020), and among the facts are homicides, femicides, threats, harassment and police violence, the lack of support and monitoring of the problems faced by people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities is recognized. On the other hand, through the National Survey on Consumption of Psychoactive Substances (2019), DANE presented results of sexual orientation and gender identity of people between 18 and 65 years old residing in urban areas of the country. The survey reflected that 1.2% of people identify themselves as Gay, lesbian, or bisexual; and 0.05% as transgender. This

reveals the need to recognize sexuality as a natural aspect of human beings that includes diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, and thus allow the integration of people in different social spheres, as well as the strengthening of support networks that guarantee the fulfillment of human rights and the free expression of orientation and identity in people.

These data facilitate the review of the individual and collective conditions of LGBTIQ+ people and the central situations to be addressed in this research in the face of the lack of knowledge and/or lack of information both of the people of the LGTBIQ+ community itself, and of society in general about the range of possibilities of sexuality, since it not only covers sexual orientations, practices (homosexualities, bisexualities, heterosexualities, transsexuals), but also the transit of identity processes (femininities and masculinities); Since talking about sexual diversity questions the androcentric models that do not recognize differences.

This lack of knowledge highlights the invisibility of the reality of sexual diversity, leading to violence in school (bullying), social (discrimination, injuries to personal integrity), family (rejection, non-acceptance, lack of protection), institutional (limited access to services, abuse of power) and personal (feeling of low well-being and low self-esteem) environments due to social imaginaries and values transmitted that gain relevance from hegemonic masculinities and that are part of the construction of the collective identity of a country or region.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical references taken into account in the research process are guided by the systemic approach, which *"emerged with the purpose of explaining the principles of organization of many natural phenomena and is currently applied to the knowledge of many other realities"* (Espinal, Gimeno and Gonzalez, 2004, p.1), contributing to the understanding and recognition of the topic to be addressed.

From the point of view of the theory of systems, in social structures *"it is identified in the framework of modern sociology, that this is the pretension of the social discipline to become a systematic reflection"* (Luhman, 1996, p.13), that is to say, the contributions of the studies and the influence of the research methods of the social and exact sciences, allow a better understanding of the realities. In biology, organisms are understood as living and organized, among these are the atom, the crystal, the molecule, and are assumed as principles in society and the family. On the other hand, among the notions offered by mathematics are those of totality, differentiation, growth,

control, hierarchical order, dominance, competition, among others, which also cover the social and family spheres. In addition, other mechanistic principles and organisms are evidenced, which allow an interrelation between contexts, taking into account that in this interrelation the changes produced in one element facilitate the change in each of the elements, and in the system as such, that is to say that the system is seen as a totality, consisting of open and closed systems (Bertalanffy, 1986).

In this sense, the theory of social systems proposed by Luhmann (1996) emphasized the aspects linked to the environment, through which self-organization is replaced by autopoiesis, showing systems that are closed in their difference with the environment and open in the communication of their nature (Aragon, 2011).

Another important aspect is to approach the participants of the Family Counseling Project (PAF) from the interaction of the counselors, in which *"the development of second order cybernetics placed self-reference in the privileged place of the operations of the cognitive system, making the conception of the informational flow in terms of transmission of objects unfeasible"* (Aguado, 2005, p. 204). This systemic view with which we collaboratively approached the young university participants of the PAF, is articulated to the implementation of educational strategies for the recognition and identification of family and social practices around the construction of sexual and gender diversity, making visible the family as a primary socialization agent, that is to say that it allows the interaction of people with the experiences of their lives and the recognition of their sexuality, being these practices those that give meaning to human activities, social definitions and self-definitions (Weeks, 1998). This social interaction mediated by education, according to Lumhman (as cited in Ontiveros, 1997) is a social system of communication and fulfills a differentiated function through which the problems of this system are for the system to solve.

That is why, for reflection and analysis in this research, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is taken as a process that is based on teaching and learning about cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects (UN, 2018), evidencing the need to integrate the aspects of human sexuality to the systemic look, especially from the holons of sexuality (Rubio, 1994) allowing to understand through a historical approach the concept of gender (Butler, 2004, 2006), and concepts such as diversity, orientation, sexual and gender identity, from the analysis of support networks (primary-secondary socialization), which favor the process of identity construction in people through social interaction within multiple socializing spaces (Ovejero, 2015).

Among the changes that favored feminist positions, the position and status of being a man is questioned, for this reason, Nunez (2016) states that, *"Gender studies of men and masculinities sink their deep root in feminism"* (p.14). The author asserts that to the extent that feminism created the conditions for thinking about women and their position in social organization as social and historical identities, it also allowed the possibility of thinking about men and their masculinity as sociocultural and historical constructions. In this regard, Rubino (2018) refers to dissident sexualities as *"those manifestations of sexuality that question the heteronormative regime and the heterosexual matrix, as well as those normative manifestations of non-heterosexual sexuality, i.e., homonormativity"* (p.83), suggesting that *"dissidence"*, unlike *"diversity"*, is relational, since it does not refer to a sum of sexual identities (normative and non-normative) but always refers to a sexual norm within the framework of a power system.

Each of these factors shows that the relational universe of people is formed by cultural, historical, political, economic, religious and other contexts of the place to which they belong, and the sum of these relationships that are perceived as significant constitutes the personal social network, which influences their recognition as individuals, their self-image and allows the construction of habits of care and ability to adapt to crises, when the individual experience of identity produces well-being and feelings of competence (Sluzki, 1996). (Sluzki, 1996). Similarly, House (1981), points out that social support can be classified, taking into account four acts or types of support: emotional, which involves the provision of empathy, love, trust and care; instrumental, which facilitates the provision of aid and access to services; informative, related to the provision of information to the person to address their problems; and evaluation, which includes constructive feedback and affirmation, for the purpose of self-evaluation, which is why, when generating support for people, it is important to analyze the relevance of these from an intersectional perspective, through the analysis of their needs, and the confluence of the different structural systems.

METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out through three phases, having a total of 20 meetings and using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, in which five (5) young university students from the cities of Bogota and Palmira participated. Interactive techniques were used in the meetings, whose emphasis is the understanding of the depth of human realities (Quiroz et al. (2013).

For the systematization of the experience, the hermeneutic-interpretative and sociocritical

paradigms are taken into account, with emphasis on the qualitative approach to research, each of which favored the organization of the results of the research proposed by the project, based on the cross-cutting themes of gender and human rights. From the hermeneutic paradigm, systematization is a participatory exercise of those linked to the research giving account of the cultural aspects of the experience, that is, from this perspective, hermeneutics establishes an epistemological support in the systematization of experiences, turning it into an academic research practice (Cogollo, 2016), on the other hand the socio-critical paradigm, facilitated the integration of researchers with the population and from there transform and reconstruct the social realities being studied from a critical perspective. Another aspect taken into account was the qualitative approach through which the researcher is actively involved with the group under investigation in the search for meaning, likewise, the interaction between theory and empirical data is highlighted, giving value to subjectivities.

RESULTS

Throughout the implementation of the project, different perceptions of young university students surfaced in relation to how they visualize in the contexts in which they develop the conceptions towards heteronormativity, which have influenced the relationship patterns based on the imaginaries and socio-cultural dynamics associated with gender and the acceptance of these in scenarios such as the family, educational institutions, where the transmission of traditions and customs around the figures of power is propitiated, such as the family, educational institutions, where the transmission of traditions and customs around the figures of power is encouraged, in which the undervaluation of women and the dominance and authority of men are evident, *"(. ...) my aunts run to my dad, and when they are there they serve the food to him first (...) the men take out the garbage in the house and the women serve the food to the men first"* (Peter, Psychology student, 2021, DC4).

Contrary to the worldview of the cultural hegemony on the expression of sexuality, which tends to dominate and exercise control based on heteronormative constructs, some of the young university students referred that since their early adolescence they were aware of their sexual orientation, having to silence for fear of being rejected or facing the reactions of their family members, in relation to the above, there is coincidence with the article by Galvis, et. al, (2020), regarding the affectation in family ties due to social beliefs and stereotypes, which influence the processes of disclosure and acceptance. This fear also made transit to secondary socialization scenarios, where negative prejudices and exclusive practices towards people with non-hegemonic

sexuality were perceived, this coupled with the cases known in national media, referring to abuses of power by police authorities, who far from protecting people, subjected them to situations of violence.

In recent years there has been a lot of talk about the issue and it has become too normalized to the point that there is really no reason to repress who one really is, because one of the problems that the community suffered the most, the issue of repression (...) (Esteban, law student, Bogota, 2021, V4).

Although there is evidence of ruptures between the participants and these structures, it is emphasized that religious identity is the identification of the human being with a certain religion or spirituality (Carretero, 2004), *"(...) and in relation to God also what? that He loves them that He loves them as we are and that it is okay to be as we are, that there is no problem because love that love has to come first from within and accept us as we are, if God accepts us then we are no longer a mistake, because God is perfect and does not make mistakes"* (Ana Maria, psychology student, Palmira, 2021, V2). *"Today I realize that really no, and that God loves us as we are"* (Peter, psychology student, Palmira, 2020, A1).

In the young people's accounts, it is noted that their families are the most significant and available support in the face of risk factors and situations, evidencing a high value to the relationships with each of the members of their family network. *"Sundays are family spaces, and we all go to grandma's house to have lunch and tell things, (...) in fact those spaces have made my family accept me (...)"* (King, government student, Bogota, 2021, V2).

Despite the fact that the family constitutes an unconditional support for the young people, in their stories there were also reflections of moments of family tension, facing the process of acceptance of sexual identity. *"My family may accept me as I am, but they maintain a very old-fashioned, macho thinking towards some issues; it will cost them a lot of time"* (Esteban, law student, Bogota, 2020, A1); these conflicts, the result of social and cultural construction, make it difficult to understand what it means to be a man and a woman other than heteronormative; however, there were also cases where the result of this process was inclusive *"(...) after so long my mother understood that it was what I wanted, (...) it was hard for her to understand, but little by little"* (Peter, Psychology student, Palmira, 2021, V4).

As mentioned above, the most significant support scenarios are the primary ones, where the family plays a fundamental role; with this, we would not want to ignore the secondary socialization scenarios, made up in the case of young people by their friends, peers, fellow students, and people belonging to academic interest groups, with whom they interact on a regular basis.

DISCUSSION

Among the main findings is the influence of the family on the personal development of each of the young people, since, as stated by systemic theory, *"In all cultures, the family imprints on its members a feeling of independent identity."* (Minuchin, 1974, p. 80). It is also observed that in the processes of family integration, fears and stigmas generated within the family arise, and, even so, it is of vital importance that these spaces take into account that the family as a microsystem contributes to the personal and social development of young people. On the other hand, there is a lack of structured curricula in educational institutions that promote the transformation of imaginaries regarding diversity, and that encourage inclusive practices, through which comprehensive sexuality education programs are developed. In society in general, situations of discrimination and violence continue to occur, among other situations, as a result of the lack of acceptance and understanding of sexuality not as a given fact, but as a product of negotiation, struggle and human actions (Weeks, 1998).

Throughout the development of the project, the need to improve the linkage of young people with entities whose competencies are framed in the provision or management of services aimed at achieving their welfare became evident; this is in line with the perception of inappropriate management, in addition to the invisibility and disinterest in helping them, which leads them to remain on the sidelines of interactions with the entities.

CONCLUSIONS

According to Butler (2006), gender is related to the meanings that each society attributes to the feminine and masculine. The analysis of gender in the study of communities can be nourished with different conceptual frameworks, which are useful tools for understanding the relationships between men and women in their environment. Taking into account Edgar Morin's (1994) paradigm of complexity, this research was developed with a vision that embraced multiple dialogues and contexts, using this diversity to jointly build knowledge about the realities of young university students with diverse sexual orientations. The health emergency caused by COVID-19 posed a challenge for the development of the activities and interactions with the participants, since it was

necessary to carry them out virtually, due to the restrictions of being in person, however, they were successfully completed.

The main limitations that were noticed refer to the acceptance of sexual diversities and are related to rigid patterns and worldviews mainly in the family environment, where diverse sexual orientation is considered a problem and is a reason for family conflicts ranging from apathy to exclusion and discrimination in some cases, and it is from there, where these will interact with each of the social macrosystems, since according to Foucault (as cited in Mogrovejo, 2008), sexuality is a construction that points out the ways we think and understand the body throughout history, and this is what is evident both in the historical and educational context regarding sexuality, as well as in the reflections of the participants.

Taking into account that the vision of the national policy on sexuality and sexual and reproductive rights is that, by 2021, the Colombian population will have advanced in the recognition and implementation of these as human rights; a recommendation resulting from this work is to include training actions on sexual diversity in the training plans for human talent linked to public entities whose institutional mission is directed to the attention of citizens.

As lessons learned, we found that, in the case of the young people, they recognized a strengthening of their identity and gender expressions, achieved from this experience and from the affective bonding with an other (Rubio, 1994), having tools to contribute to the visibility of the sexual orientation of other people, facilitating the integration in spaces of dissidence and support.

On the other hand, throughout the development of the project, in the narratives of the young people it was possible to glimpse the need to improve the link with the entities whose competencies are framed in the provision or management of services oriented towards the achievement of their welfare; this in line with the perception of inappropriate management, in addition to the invisibility and disinterest in helping them, which leads them to remain on the sidelines of interactions with the entities. It is pointed out as a limitation that the young university students participating in the project demand spaces for linkage, which they consider necessary, not only for them, but also for other people who really need it. It is considered that some institutions design certain programs or projects to comply with regulations, without the interaction of the participants. Similarly, they consider that, in institutional spaces, the involvement of citizens should be promoted, which would help to broaden knowledge and better understand the realities that affect them. During the

development of the project, the promotion of comprehensive sexual education, emphasizing the differential approach for the expansion of knowledge about sexual diversities, rights and freedoms of people from the human rights approach, was observed as an opportunity for improvement with respect to the formative spaces. The result contained in the present work reiterates the need to direct formative actions in the different scenarios: academic, family, religious and institutional to respond to the persistent lack of knowledge on issues of sexual diversities, which influences the conceptions of human sexuality, therefore, in the recognition of rights of people of the LGTBIQ+ collective.

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