

Identities, oppressions and the unconscious

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Abstract

Analytical Psychology emerged between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century alongside Psychoanalysis and other psychologies, in the historical, social and political context of Europe at that time. The hypothesis of the unconscious, shared with Psychoanalysis and other psychologies, has its idea of the unconscious redefined and expanded by C. G. Jung in an epistemological turn that expands the analytical thinking of the time. Some issues of contemporary human suffering, well exemplified by issues of gender and oppression based on gender identities, call for a new reflection on this conception of the unconscious to advance discussions on how to listen to what suffering people in our time have to tell us. This article aims to contribute to this discussion by examining the gender identities of LGBT people and masculinities. ■



Keywords
identity;
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Psychology was established as a discipline, an area of knowledge and a field of research organized by European scientific methodology, back in the 19th century. Its primary objectives were to intervene in institutions such as schools, prisons and hospitals, promoting an understanding of the individual that made it possible to control bodies by mapping how they behaved. In this sense, psychology emerges as a field marked by liberal European thought that supported the primacy of the individual while trying to discipline them for the supposed progress of society (Figueiredo & Santi, 2003).

The European intellectual effervescence from the end of the 19th century to the first decades of the 20th century gave birth to Psychoanalysis and other fertile fields of individual listening such as, for example, Binswanger's phenomenological orientation and C. G. Jung's Analytical Psychology. The latter had his interaction with Psychoanalysis between 1906 and 1912, as we know, following his own path in the elaboration of his ideas from that year onwards. With Psychoanalysis, Analytical Psychology shares the hypothesis of the unconscious. Among its many divergences with psychoanalytic proposals, however, is the very definition of the unconscious.

C. G. Jung's proposal for the unconscious would not consist merely on the contents repressed by the subject that need to constitute another psychic space in itself. For Jung (2015, vol. VII/2), the unconscious would be formed by three vectors, namely: the repressed contents of Freud and Psychoanalysis; the contents forgotten due to memory failure; everything that is virtually unknown. This notion of the unconscious is formulated from an opposition to consciousness, bringing us to a final idea that the unknown, the forgotten and the repressed are somehow united, constituting this great unconscious.

Jung's interest in expanding the idea of the unconscious that was present in Psychoanalysis at the beginning of the 20th century is justified by his work with psychotic patients and his observation of images in dreams, reports and manual productions of these patients that referred to motifs present in religions and mythologies. When recognizing such images in different cultures apparently without any connection with each other, Jung (2014, vol. IX/1, par. 711) postulates the concept of collective unconscious, which he proposes to be "a disposition capable of producing in all times and places the same symbols or, at least, very similar to each other". We must also note Jung's word association experiments (2012, vol. II), which gave a more prominent place to the idea of forgetfulness, which could be either a derivation of the repressed, in the case of forgetting what one does not want to remember, or a trivial forgetfulness relegated to the unconscious of everyday memory.

It is important to make a pause in our reflection at this point to recognize the Jungian epistemological turn in his hypothesis of the collective unconscious. Until he published his thesis on the archetypes and the collective unconscious, first seen in public in his work *Symbols of Transformation*, the debates in Psychoanalysis dealt with an unconscious as an effect of certain experiences of the individual in our society. When Jung elaborates the unconscious as a disposition capable of producing something (in this case, symbols), there is a drastic logical turn in the conception of what the psyche is. For Jung, unlike Psychoanalysis, the unconscious becomes a cause that produces effects: the complexes. In this sense, it becomes understandable that Jung (2015, vol. VII/2) treats the ego as a complex because it is also an effect of unconscious production, like any other complex.

Jung then proposes that the ego is responsible for their journey of individuation, which will constitute a process that will lead the subject to their singularity or, in the words of Jung (2015, vol. VII/2), individuation will make the subject a unique individual, one that is not divided. The idea of division is seen in both Psychoanalysis and Analytical Psychology, but the suggestion of a process of individuation leads to the imagination that this division can somehow be overcome by another psychic organization. As if it were utopian to imagine an undivided being, Jung proposes instead that psychic elements can be reorganized in a way other than a tension between opposites. In this idea, the notion that the division that shakes the self would be between two terms that are in tension with each other is implicit. Jung (2013, vol. VIII/2) then says that, once the individual is able to withstand the tension, a third conflict-solving element can emerge and thus reconfigure the way the psyche relates to those aspects, achieving this re-elaboration that would eventually dissolve the conflict. Again, we see in the proposal this role given to the ego as a kind of participant observer, without it being the cause or driving force of its own process of individuation. Even if we imagine an active egoic attitude that needs to be exercised in order to elaborate unconscious contents, once again the unconscious appears as the cause of a transformation in consciousness, leaving to the ego a role of observing, facilitating and interacting with the unconscious action that occurs in the process. In Analytical Psychology, two important acts are assigned to the conscious ego: the recognition of one's own unconscious and the ability to withstand the conflicts that unconscious contents provoke when stressed.

With his epistemological turn in which the unconscious ceases to be an effect and can be reimagined as a producer of psychic processes, Jung subverts a point in the liberal ideology that founded Psychology itself: in the Jungian conception, there is no willpower or affirmation of individual desire that is enough to transform a

situation. The action of the unconscious is necessary for a transformation to take place or, in the author's own words, the *deo concedente* factor is a necessity (Jung, 2014, vol. IX/1).

When formulating the hypothesis of the collective unconscious, expanding the boundaries of the understanding of the unconscious itself and proposing the ego as an effect of the unconscious, the liberal idea of the ego's determination and perseverance loses strength and it becomes necessary to reposition the will of the ego in the face of countless elements that affect them. However, this new proposition of the unconscious also brings with it a problem: where would this collective unconscious, broad and magnanimous, which produces and is not produced be located? What would be its mode of action, from what point it can be conceived? Could the unconscious be a subject, some kind of force with the capacity to act on the world? Jung (2013, Vol. VIII) suggests at one point that the archetype is psychoid, that is, it is beyond the psyche. At another point, the author (Jung, 2014, vol. IX/1) treats the collective unconscious as a kind of repository of the memory of the human species, referring to a somewhat genetic aspect of archetypes. By not properly elaborating on these ideas, the author leaves room for a transcendental interpretation of his hypothesis, which could lead us to a religious conception of the psyche. As Butler (2003) points out, the universalizing attempt to expand a concept has the advantage of producing consistency and unity to that proposition, however at the expense of the logical challenge of continuing the discussion: if the unconscious does it, who or what is it about? Who created it as a subject capable of acting on the world? Avoiding further discussion paralyzes us at the transcendental level that leads us to the most obvious response of appealing to a higher entity or other universalizing categories that describe little and have little clarity, such as "life", "the universe" or "god".

If we take this discussion further away from a biological, hereditary or genetic hypothesis for

the unconscious, we would call into question that the memory of the species is constituted from material events that were lived out by our species throughout its millennia of existence. Such events, which were supposedly recorded in this great collective repository of images and symbols, make up a historical process of the human species that has been organized throughout its past through various social and political forms, cultivating means of subsistence and survival of the species itself. In other words, the psychoid formation of archetypes and the collective unconscious could not be other than the social, political and cultural events that were experienced by humanity throughout its history. If we admit this proposition, we move far enough away from a transcendental premise as the basis for the hypothesis of the collective unconscious.

We would still have to think about what leads images and symbols to survive in memory to the point of constituting something collective, so powerful that they would be capable of persisting over time and crossing generations through our historical process. Here, it makes sense to align ourselves with Dantas (2019), who reminds us that the archetype is determined by the presence of numinosity, that is, the impact of intense fascination or unparalleled terror that an archetypal experience can provoke. The numinous, in turn, would be determined by being charged with affection, which produces an overwhelming effect on the individual sufficient for a powerful record of that experience in memory. When we articulate a theory of affects together with the attempt to make the collective unconscious something historical, we can imagine it as something other than governed by the metaphysics of substance. Furthermore, the idea of a present or residual affective charge helps us understand the idea of unconscious action, which would be moved by shared affections that provide typically human experiences, such as the experience of care promoted by others that leads us to the conception of motherhood or the social impulse to organize

relationships, groups and communities that establishes most readings of the paternal function from a symbolic point of view.

Butler (2003), when discussing the conception of genre, formulates the idea of metaphysics of substance to designate the processes by which something is repeated ad infinitum in certain cultures to generate an appearance of naturalization regarding something that is, in fact, historical and socially constructed, stating that “certain gender configurations take the place of the real and consolidate and increase their hegemony through an apt and successful self-naturalization” (Butler, 2003, p. 69).

The collective unconscious, if seen without the reifying lens of the metaphysics of substance, can be imagined as the set of unconscious aspects, that is, repressed, forgotten and unknown, according to Jung’s conception, throughout the historical process of the cultures of our species. The affective charge present in certain experiences carries them along the thread of our history through generations. The idea of a psychoid archetype in this context would connect to all events and experiences that, in fact, are not exactly ours nor precisely make up our psyche, but were present in this endless thread of ancestry to which our historical process belongs.

The advantage of imagining a historical collective unconscious lies precisely in the possibility of filtering through the idea of metaphysics of substance everything that was considered archetypal without a more detailed and in-depth examination of what this would imply. A good example of this situation are the concepts of anima and animus in Jung (2014, vol. IX), which elevated gender to the archetypal dimension. As we can see in Pessoa (2021), gender is best examined if understood as a cultural complex, so that we can explain and locate the historical, social and political crossings that lead to some conceptions of gender being expected or considered ideal, while other gender performances are designated as inappropriate or pathological.

If we recall that Psychology was born in a context in which its objectives focused on cataloging and standardizing, it is understandable that a Gender Psychology formulated in the first decades of the 20th century is also thought of based on the same parameters. In order to advance on the topic and understand why gender is a category that causes enormous suffering among people, therefore constituting a relevant topic for Psychology, it is necessary that we develop other ways of thinking about gender.

Of course, gender here is also an example of many other phenomena that may have been unduly regarded as archetypal. Discussions in the field of gender studies are especially interesting for Psychology because, alongside the categories of race and class, they are fertile grounds for discussing the issue of identities. As Dantas (2019) tells us, in Jung the initial division of the human seems to be metaphorized as that between male and female. The male-female pair would, in some way, bring an outline of an original tension between opposites. This vision, if historically positioned, can be understood as an effect of the historical and cultural context of European thought, as elaborated in Pessoa (2022). As Oyeumi (2021) shows us, the use of gender as the main marker of difference between humans is something typically European, which is not reproduced in other cultures. When recounting the history of the Yoruba people in southern Nigeria, Oyeumi (2021) teaches us that the fundamental marker of difference in that society is age rather than gender.

Regarding what we understand as the Western people, that is, the European peoples and the peoples brutally colonized and reconstituted by Europeans, Oyeumi's speech (2021) makes clear to us that understanding gender becomes inexorable, as regarding the peoples deeply marked by the history of violent colonization imposed by European people understanding the categories of race and class and how they affect us becomes inexorable also. To try to advance

the understanding of gender identities in this context, I will address two distinct experiences: the identities of LGBT people and masculinities.

The experience of LGBT people and images of closets

LGBT people began to organize themselves socially and politically more clearly from the second half of the 19th century (Quinalha, 2022). The understanding that dissident sexuality, that is, distinct from the heterosexual norm, is configured as an identity is a phenomenon that has been emerging throughout the 20th century and gained strength after the 2000s. At the end of the 1980s, intellectuals who identify as LGBT people begin remarkable academic productions, constituting for the first time a theory and assuming the place of subject in the production of knowledge instead of objects of research for heterosexual people. According to Preciado (2020), three works are considered seminal to the emergence of what is known today as queer theory: *Queer Theory*, an article by Teresa de Lauretis, *Problems of Gender*, a book by Judith Butler and, finally, and *Epistemology do Closet*, a book published by Eve Sedgwick.

Sedgwick (2008) explores the specificities of the constitution of the identity of LGBT people. According to the author, homosexuality is permeated by "a torturous system of double binds, systematically oppressing gay people, identities and acts" (Sedgwick, 2008, p. 26). In the same way, they continue, homosexuality is treated as a simultaneously public and private issue, on which heterosexual people are authorized to give their opinion and about which they do not desire to have detailed knowledge.

Sedgwick's main argument is that LGBT identities rest under the cloak of secrecy, functioning as an eternal half-open closet in which something is denied but its existence is well known. Double-meaning messages are sent and received all the time, inviting LGBT people to expose them-

selves while denying the legitimacy of the way they subjectively identify. The author states:

Each of these complicating possibilities derives, at least in part, from the plurality and cumulative incoherence of modern ways of conceptualizing same-sex desire and, therefore, gay identity. [...] They come to see it as a function of stable definitions of identity such that the structure of someone's personality can mark them as homosexual even in the absence of any genital activity. (Sedgwick, 2008, p. 42)

Queer theory, more broadly, will advocate for the instability of identities based on the understanding of LGBT identities. This is one of Butler's (2003) promising arguments, when the author proposes that women's identity and, by extension, all other identities based on the field of gender and sexuality, are unstable. Identity, as an identification in relation to a certain category, is something performative, which will be established by the repetition of certain acts in the body. Therefore, Butler (2003) coined the term gender performativity to describe how gender and its identities occur in the body and exist as they are performed in bodies. In this way, identities are expressions of oneself that can dissolve, transform and will, by definition, have contradictions and constitutive inconsistencies that will shape the identity itself. Identity is not limited to the group or culture to which a person identifies. Due to its ineffable political existence, identity also talks about how a person is identified by culture and others.

Butler (2003) criticizes the idea of naturalized gender, as we have already seen in their concept of metaphysics of substance. The author says that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid structure, which crystallizes over time to produce the appearance of a substance, a natural class of being" (Butler, 2003, p. 69).

The highly rigid structure that the author refers to is patriarchy, or heteropatriarchy in the conception of Preciado (2017). It is in this historical, social, political and cultural regime that people try to express themselves in the body, in the form of behaviors, desires and imaginations deeply influenced by their experiences within the rigidity of our society. There is little room for individual maneuvering, although Butler (2003) recognizes and names as agency the ability of the ego to effectively make choices and act outside the structure that conditions it.

Eribon (2008) formulates the identities of LGBT people as emerging from insult and offense. According to the author, before properly recognizing themselves as such, often still as children, LGBT people are insulted and offended by other children and adults and thus begin their process of self-recognition. The notion of self is initiated through a negative value, with LGBT people first being named as that which is not good, not desired or not appropriate. In addition to the ideas of double meaning and contradiction, inferiority as an attribute of identity comes into play here.

The discussion of the identities of LGBT people brings to the fore the instability of identities in general, naming oppression as a factor in registering a permanent insecurity about who one is. The authors of queer theory clarify that identity, before being a safe place for identifications and social bonds, is itself a problem due to its inconsistency and its permeability alternating with its experiences of rigidity and inflexibility. Here, there is another epistemological turn similar to what we saw previously: by advocating against the metaphysics of substance, queer theory shows us that identity is not an inner force producing authenticity in the subject; rather, it is an effect of the oppressions experienced by each of us in our life stories. In its web of identifications, it can occasionally provide a feeling of belonging and shelter in times of difficulty. In its rigidity and inflexibility, it becomes a blanket too short to describe who we are in our singularities. In the

thread of the history of people's struggles and the LGBT movement, something creative can be rescued from the intricacies of identity: shared stories and an ancestry that is formed from a community that keeps on resisting.

On masculinities

Discussions about masculine identities also prove to be productive in understanding how identity formation and its challenges occur. In this field of study, the research by Connell (2005) and Kimmel (2016) stands out.

Connell (2005) formulates the category of hegemonic masculinity, which the author describes as a set of certain traits attributed to masculinity desired by the majority of men, but effectively performed by very few. According to Zanella (2018), we can understand these masculine ideals through two devices: sexual virility and labor virility. Hegemonic masculinity relates to men with a fit body, a good sexual performance, who are conqueror of women, desired by them and admired by them. In terms of virility at work, we have men who are successful in their careers and in their finances, playing the role of provider and also the figure of the North American winner, that is, the one who has been successful in life.

Kimmel (2016) contributes to the debate by adding the axis of competitiveness, agreeing on this point with the concept of identity instability brought by Butler (2003). For the author, it is necessary for man to prove himself a man all the time, in infinite competition with himself. Furthermore, Kimmel (2016) states that masculinities are constituted by two negatives: the man is the one who is not a woman and the one who is not homosexual. It is up to him, also all the time, to talk about what he is not. The author says about his research carried out with men identified as heterosexual:

Now changing the question and wondering what a heterosexual man does to ensure that no one possibly gets the "wrong idea" about him. Responses typically

referred to the original stereotypes, this time a set of negative rules about behavior. Never dress this way. Never talk or walk like that. Never show your feelings, or, be emotional. Always be prepared to show sexual interest in women you meet, so it is impossible for any woman to get the wrong idea about you. In this sense, homophobia, the fear of being perceived as gay, as not being a real man, keeps men exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity, including predatory sex with women. Homophobia and sexism go hand in hand. (Kimmel, 2016, p. 114)

Studies on masculinities indicate that these identities are also fragile, unstable and contradictory. The man alternates between the logical-rational trait of the successful person in a heteropatriarchal society and the animalistic and predatory version, apparently not sufficiently satisfied in any of his performances. Tyminski (2018), when discussing his clinical studies regarding the identities of boys and adolescents, reports the difficulty of these young people in following social changes and their attempt to return to a more generic identity, provided by gender stereotypes that perpetuate the aggressive bias of many masculine identities or, alternatively, produce an acute feeling of inadequacy that leads to these young people's isolation.

Unlike LGBT identities, masculine identities apparently have a way out of society's most acute oppressions through the privilege of being a man in a frighteningly sexist society. The problem, as Connell (2005) states, is that the exercise of this privilege is generally reserved for the few who accumulate categories of power in our society: it is not enough to be a man, you must be white, cisgender, heterosexual, rich, athletic, without disabilities, and the requirements continue... so that hegemonic masculinity becomes more of an ideal than something actually experienced by the vast majority of men. The risk here is men's willingness to act at any cost to try to obtain and

consolidate this privilege, which typically starts another cycle of violence.

In this sense, again we see identities becoming the effect of oppression: most men are constituted by what they are not, if we return to the categories mentioned in the previous paragraph. The possibility of working through this suffering is an alternative, although more often than not we see men still pursuing these unattainable ideals of a privileged masculinity reserved for only a few.

Final considerations

This article sought to follow a path that explains how the historical context that enabled the emergence of Analytical Psychology leads to a notion of the unconscious that, without due caution, can incur what Butler (2003) pointed out as the metaphysics of substance. Such a reading of Analytical Psychology is undesirable because it leads to naturalizing conceptions that are the basis of the suffering of many people, which becomes particularly evident when we enter into the discussion regarding identities.

By briefly mentioning the identities of LGBT people and male identities, I sought to demonstrate that taking traits and characteristics as constitutive of a genuine and spontaneous interi-

ority, without due consideration of the socio-political, historical and cultural contexts, can lead us to a transcendental interpretation of how people's suffering is produced and of which ways can be effective in its elaboration. Identity is created through the repetition of acts within social interactions instead of being characterized by a collection of intrapsychic traits that are descriptive of a personality.

Finally, I emphasized two epistemological turns: first, when Jung states that the unconscious produces consciousness instead of being the effect of it. Secondly, Butler claims that identities are not naturalized inner creative forces, but unstable performances that take place within a rigid social system. Such statements were used to consider that identities are also effects of oppression rather than its causes. In this sense, I intend to deny statements such as "I was oppressed because I am like that"; instead, I propose that we are the result of a multiplicity of experiences that meet the polymorphism of our libido, producing our identities based on, although not only, our oppressions and how we elaborate them. ■

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Resumen

Identities, oppressions and the unconscious

La Psicología Analítica surgió entre finales del siglo XIX y principios del XX junto al Psicoanálisis y otras psicologías, en el contexto histórico, social y político de la Europa de aquel momento. La hipótesis del inconsciente, compartida con el Psicoanálisis y otras psicologías, tiene su idea de inconsciente redefinida y ampliada por C. G. Jung en un giro epistemológico que amplía el pensamiento analítico de la época. Algunas cuestiones del sufrimiento humano contempo-

ráneo, bien ejemplificadas por las cuestiones de género y la opresión basada en las identidades de género, exigen una nueva reflexión sobre esta concepción del inconsciente para avanzar en los debates sobre cómo escuchar lo que las personas que sufren en nuestro tiempo tienen que decirnos. Este artículo pretende contribuir a esta discusión examinando las identidades de género de las personas LGBT y de las masculinidades. ■

Palabras-clave: identidad; opresión; inconsciente; género; psicología analítica

Resumo

Identities, oppressões e o inconsciente

A Psicologia Analítica emerge entre o fim do século XIX e o início do século XX junto à Psicanálise e a outras psicologias, no contexto histórico, social e político da Europa daqueles anos. A hipótese do inconsciente, compartilhada com a Psicanálise e com outras psicologias, é redefinida e expandida por C. G. Jung em um giro epistemológico que amplia o pensamento analítico da época. Algumas questões do sofrimento humano contem-

porâneo, bem exemplificadas pelas questões de gênero e da opressão baseada em identidades de gênero, pedem uma nova reflexão acerca dessa concepção de inconsciente para avançarmos nas discussões sobre como escutar o que pessoas em sofrimento na nossa época têm a nos dizer. Este artigo pretende contribuir com essa discussão a partir do exame das identidades de gênero de pessoas LGBT e das masculinidades. ■

Palavras-chave: identidade; opressão; inconsciente; gênero; psicología analítica

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