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Experiences of discrimination of transgender people: The intersectional matrix of oppressions

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to understand how Brazilian and Portuguese trans people perceive their positions of privilege and oppression, making it possible to build a narrative around the intersectional matrix of oppression and its influences on the processes of identity de/construction. Thirty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who self-identified as trans, transsexual and *travestis*, in Brazil and Portugal. Their discourses were analyzed according to Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. This study focused on the intersectional matrix of oppression. Based on the conclusions of this study, it is possible to affirm that the way people de/construct their identities is related to how they think about transsexualities and live them in an intersection with their historical, sociocultural, economic, and political contexts, creating reading matrices on gender that cross the (always diverse) expressions of their identities, reinforcing that several oppressions are intersectioned.

1. Introduction

Transphobia is a worldwide issue that has not yet been properly addressed. One of the main difficulties in this domain is the resistance to recognizing the social relevance of transsexualities (Platero, 2014), especially from an intersectional perspective, since many of the studies on the topic are circumscribed to the biomedical model (e.g., Gómez Gil & Antonio, 2006; Lawrence, 2010; Money, 1969). These studies have contributed to the social stigmatization of trans people. Moreover, by placing the problem on transsexualities, they do not question or problematize transphobias, resulting in negative references that – instead of following trans people in their decisions on their identities – work as ‘guardian’ of the sex/gender system (Coimbra, 1995; Platero, 2014). In this sense, this paper takes a feminist intersectional position, once grounded in the feminist commitment to fight any type of discrimination (Solá, 2013), recognizing that the systems of oppression and privileges are interrelated (Bowleg, 2008; Taylor, 2009). Therefore, the contributions of the theory of intersectionality to studies on transsexuality were explored.

In the 1980s, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1994) was the first author to use

the term ‘intersectionality’ ([MASKED FOR REVIEW]; Platero, 2012; Taylor, 2009). Crenshaw claims that the experiences of marginalized people are ‘multidimensional’. For example, we do not focus solely on the fact that a person is trans, but on the way being trans relates to social class, age, and sexuality, making it possible for a person to be protected or at risk depending on their identity belongings (Platero, 2012, 2014). If we isolate the experience of being trans from other identity traces, we would limit its complexity (Jesus, 2012; [MASKED FOR REVIEW]; Serano, 2012).

Patricia Hill Collins (1991) uses the concept of ‘matrix of domination and intersecting systems of oppression’ in arguing that different axis of oppression intersect one another in a matrix in which different individuals constitute themselves in different positions of power. This image makes it possible to comprehend the interaction and interdependency of the axis of oppression by presenting a complex view, wherein people are in different oppressing and oppressed positions simultaneously.

The theory of intersectionality presupposes that oppressions are interrelated, and that their impact is grounded in multiplying reasoning rather than an additional one. This is based on the idea that the

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intersection of different axes of oppression creates concrete and complex experiences of discrimination (and does not simply add isolated discrimination to one another) (Coll-Planas, 2012; Nash, 2008; [MASKED FOR REVIEW]).

The historical context influences the adoption of identity politics, which has made it possible to build groups and movements. The construction of one identity may also be seen as a way to resist many oppressed groups (Crenshaw, 1991/2012; Platero, 2012).

The concept of intersectional politics signals how much identity politics, by erasing a person's intersectional belonging and trying to combat each oppression separately, might produce an intersectional disempowerment of each movement (Crenshaw, 1991/2012). From a critical feminist perspective, it is therefore fundamental to move beyond separatist and essentialist perspectives by adopting feminist politics of alliance with other movements that fight discrimination (De Lauretis, 2000; Solá, 2013).

This paper adopts such an approach, arguing that gender and feminist studies can interact with studies about sexuality in constructionist perspectives, avoiding the reduction of gender discourses to essentialist perspectives on what it is 'to be a man' and/or 'a woman' – and rather focusing on what it is to construct oneself as a person. Adopting a feminist and intersectional lens is crucial, as studying non-normative sexualities without it would probably lead to a reduction of non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities to something essentialist, not encompassing the de/construction of plural sexualities and identities (Carvalho, 2014).

Given the discrimination of trans people in the heart of the feminist movement and their invisibility in the LGBT movement, trans feminism – which emerges for the first time in the USA as a 'new' trend of feminism in the 1960s (Kaas, 2013) – claims the visibility, autonomy, and emancipation of trans people, opposing itself to the ideological structure that marginalizes this social group: cissexism. This term has been used mainly in trans feminism to refer to a system that privileges cis (non-trans) people at the expense of trans people (Alves, 2012; Cabezas et al., 2013; Platero, 2014). Cissexism may also be defined as a form of sexism that considers trans people's gender identity as less legitimate than that of cis people (Serano, 2012). Therefore, trans feminism is a political movement that produces critical theory and discusses both self-determination and the legitimacy of trans bodies and identities (Missé, 2014; Moreira, 2014; Ramos, 2009), building alliances and visibility for trans experiences and committing itself to the fight against any type of discrimination (Jesus, 2014). Trans-feminism aims to transform feminist thinking and movement by undertaking a fundamental contribution to the interpretation of oppression based on gender, not sex, and by presenting an agenda that gathers a collection of claims and struggles grounded in the principles of gender equality and social justice. In this sense, it has contributed to the deconstruction of gender binaries and essentialist perspectives, reinforced the intersectional nature of oppressions, recognized the political struggles and personal experiences of trans people, and made it possible for both trans and cis

people to actively participate in the movement (Jesus & Alves, 2010).

In Brazil, the emergence of transfeminism has had special importance because it is a country where most hate crimes are motivated by transphobia (Jesus, 2012; TGEU, 2021). Furthermore, the activism of some *travestis*¹ has enabled the growth of the recognition of trans people's rights. In Portugal, it is possible to affirm that the trans feminist political and scientific movement has been scarce; it exists only in some scientific studies and political actions on the theme ([MASKED FOR REVIEW]; [MASKED FOR REVIEW]; [MASKED FOR REVIEW]; [MASKED FOR REVIEW]; [MASKED FOR REVIEW]; [MASKED FOR REVIEW]).

From a progressionist perspective, trans feminists' claims go beyond the fight against the heteronorm; they signal the fact that radically emancipatory practices need to assume the conception that identity is fiction (Butler, 1995, 2008; Carvalho, 2014). Taking identity as fiction is not an easy process, but it makes it possible for people who directly break with heteronorms – and people in general – to live a freer reality. Societies that respect plurality make it possible for people living in them to be freer. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to explore how trans and travesti individuals in Brazil and Portugal perceive and narrate their experiences of privilege and oppression through an intersectional matrix. Specifically, this paper aims to analyze to what extent does trans people's identity de/construction in Portugal and Brazil intersect with gender, class, and sexual orientation?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

In this study, 35 people who self-identified as transsexual, *travestis* and trans, designated by themselves, were interviewed. Table 1 summarizes demographic and biographical characteristics of the participants.

Central to all participants was the discourse of non-conformity between the sex assigned at birth and the gender to which they feel they belong, with a spectrum of possibilities of experiencing this gender identity. Twenty-one people self-identified as women and 14 as men, with ages ranging from 16 to 55 years. Twenty-four people were Brazilian and 11 were Portuguese. Thirty participants were single, three were married, and two were divorced. Twenty-one people self-identified as heterosexuals, five as bisexuals, one as gay, and two as lesbians; one said they did not feel physical, psychological, or emotional attraction to anyone, while four people claimed they were attracted to people. One participant said that they did not know. In terms of education, twenty-one people concluded high-school, two finished elementary school, and 12 graduated from university. In terms of professional status, 11 people were employed, four people were unemployed, and twenty people were in other professional situations (e.g., precarious working conditions, no working ties, funding by scholarships, and sexual work).

¹ In this study, the terms 'transsexual' and 'travesti' are used according to the participants' self-definition. While 'transsexual' relates to historical and clinical frameworks (e.g., Harry Benjamin), it is adopted here as a chosen identity label. The term 'travesti' is deeply rooted in the Brazilian and Latin American socio-political context as an identity of political affirmation and resistance; therefore, we have opted for the non-translation of the term in this paper. This designation differs significantly from terms such as 'transvestite', 'transvestism', or 'cross-dresser' as typically used in the European context, particularly in Portugal. In Portugal, the designation 'transvestite' (travesti) usually refers to individuals who occasionally express a gender identity contrary to the one assigned at birth, but who tend to identify with their assigned sex (Missé, 2014; Platero, 2014). Given the specific political dimension that 'travesti' encompasses in the Brazilian reality, it remains distinct from standard English-language definitions and reflects the specific identity explicitly chosen by the participants to describe themselves.

Table 1
Demographic and biographical characteristics of the participants.

Characteristic	Category	N
Gender Identity	Women	21
	Men	14
Country	Brazil	24
	Portugal	11
Age Range	16–55 years	
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	21
	Bisexual	5
	Lesbian	2
	Gay	1
	Attracted to people	4
	Asexual/No attraction	1
Education	Did not know	1
	University Graduate	12
	High School	21
	Elementary School	2
Professional Status	Employed	11
	Unemployed	4
	Other situations (precarious, etc.)	20

2.2. Instrument

To conduct this study, a two-version semi-structured interview script was used as an instrument (one for Portuguese participants and another for Brazilians), which was built on previous research on the theme, in terms of a literature review about trans issues. The two versions of the script were culturally adapted to ensure relevance and clarity. Adaptations included using country-specific terminology (e.g., acknowledging the distinct political connotation of 'travesti' in Brazil), adjusting language to local dialects, and framing questions about social and health-care systems to reflect the specific contexts of Portugal and Brazil.

This script was divided into three parts: the first referred to informed consent, wherein the participant read the conditions for taking part in the study; the second was related to the interview itself, that is, the semi-structured questions that allowed for answering the research questions; and, finally, the third aimed at collecting biographical data from the participant.

Throughout the whole process, the described themes served only as general guidance for conducting the interviews, attributing some pattern amongst them; however, they were made flexible considering the interviewee and adapted in accordance with the country.

2.3. Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in full accordance with the ethical principles for research involving human participants. At the time the field-work was carried out, formal ethical review and approval were not required for non-clinical studies of this nature under the applicable local legislation and institutional guidelines.

Despite this, stringent ethical procedures were followed. All participants were adults (over 18 years old) and provided written informed consent before participating. The consent process ensured that participants understood the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time. To protect participant anonymity, all personal identifiers have been removed from the data and coded names are used in this manuscript.

2.4. Procedure

The data collection process was intentional for privileged contact with some participants prior to collection. The invitation to the interviews and data collection had two phases: first in Brazil (from October 2013 to January 2014) and later in Portugal (from March 2014 to October 2014). Participants were recruited using a purposive and snowball sampling strategy. Initial contact was made through LGBTQIA + community organizations and online forums in both Brazil and

Portugal. Following initial interviews, participants were invited to refer other potential interviewees from their networks. Inclusion criteria were: (1) self-identifying as trans, transsexual, or travesti; (2) being over 18 years of age; and (3) residing in Brazil or Portugal. There were no specific exclusion criteria beyond these points. Potential participants were contacted via email or private message, where the study's objectives and procedures were explained before scheduling an interview.

The interviews were usually conducted in public spaces (defined by the interviewees) that were relatively empty to allow for suitable audio recording; they were, in general, approximately 60 min. After an integral transcription of the interviews, data analysis was conducted. NVivo software (version 8.0) was used to organize the material from the interviews, especially in terms of volume.

2.5. Data analysis framework

Thematic analysis is a method of qualitative data analysis that is used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) in data, making it possible to comprehend meanings associated with textual data possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this study, a constructionist, feminist, and intersectional approach was adopted for thematic data analysis. One advantage of this approach is that the researcher is not only responsible for but also implicated in the entire investigation process.

This analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) recommendations: i) familiarization with the data, ii) generation of initial codes, iii) search for themes, iv) review of themes, v) definition and naming of themes, and vi) production of the report.

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013), was specifically chosen for its flexibility and methodological rigor in handling rich, nuanced narrative data. This method is particularly well-suited to the study's constructionist and feminist paradigm, as it allows for a deep, interpretive engagement with participants' lived experiences, moving beyond mere description to uncover underlying meanings and patterns.

In this context, the sample size of $N = 35$ was considered robust and appropriate for the study's aims. The goal was not to achieve statistical representativeness, but rather to gather in-depth data sufficient for achieving thematic saturation—the point at which new interviews cease to generate new significant themes. This sample size allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the complexities within the 'intersectional matrix of oppressions,' ensuring the findings are well-grounded in a diverse range of participant accounts.

3. Data analysis and discussion

In what follows, data analysis framed by a constructionist, feminist, and intersectional paradigm is presented. This analysis aims to not only describe the data but also problematize it in relation to the research question or goal. The interpretation and discussion are done in a dialogic process with the literature on the topic, exposing the theme, codes, and most representative excerpts.

3.1. Intersectional matrix of oppressions

It was possible to identify the theme 'intersectional matrix of oppressions' based on seven codes that emerged from the data: 'the non-white and poor position'; 'social class as privilege'; 'the place of gender'; 'the privilege of heteronormativity'; 'the privilege of cisnormativity'; 'activism as privilege'; and 'geographical location as privilege'. Table 2 presents a brief summary of codes and illustrative quotes.

All the codes are related to one another, generating a concrete matrix of oppressions (and privileges). The 'non-white and poor position' code emerged from a few participants, as only three people self-identified as black or afro-descendants. Among these three, one person, despite identifying as an afro-descendant, claims that they are mostly perceived

Table 2
Summary of codes under the theme 'intersectional matrix of oppressions'.

Code	Brief Description	Illustrative Quote
The non-white and poor position	The compounded vulnerability experienced by participants who are simultaneously trans, non-white, and from a low socioeconomic background.	"(...) Being black. That seems a dynamite. (...) I have to leave home every day with this kind of skin. And that's it, being trans stays behind everything." (9-J.M.PT.PL)
Social class as privilege	The perception that higher social class provides access to resources (e.g., healthcare, education) that can mitigate some forms of transphobia.	"It is clear that I have some privilege for coming from a middle-class family that supports me ..." (3-F.F.BR.SE)
The place of gender	The different discrimination experiences faced by trans men and trans women, related to visibility and sexism.	"(...) they have more difficulty in, let us say, changes, like physical, facial, and visible changes than us, but one of the most complicated things is the SRS, which is the sex reassignment [surgery]; for them it's a lot easier, let us say, because the medicine has been working on this for more time than for trans men (...)" (17-B.M.BR.CO)
The privilege of heteronormativity	The relative advantage experienced by heterosexual trans people compared to those with non-normative sexualities.	"(...) This is why there are so many transphobic transmen, which is ridiculous. That does not understand the idea of a trans gay ..." (17-B.M.BR.CO)
The privilege of cisnormativity	The pressure to 'pass' as cisgender to avoid discrimination, and the feelings of safety this can provide.	"You cannot be the target of discrimination if people do not know if you have that factor against which they have something." (6-R.F.PT.GL)
Activism as privilege	The role of activism in creating protective communities, providing knowledge, and fostering a sense of empowerment.	"(...) coming here as a girl, it made me feel good (...) it was the fact of interacting with, meeting new people and you learn new things ..." (16-S.F.BR.S)
Geographical location as privilege	The advantage of living in urban centers with more access to services and diverse communities compared to rural areas.	"A person living in the capital or near the capital ends up being privileged by the proximity of services and information arrives faster." (23-L.F.BR.S)

as white, so they do not feel the impact of not being white so starkly. The other two people who were identified as non-white, on the other hand, refer to an additional vulnerability due to being trans and black because not only do they identify as black or non-white but are also perceived as such. Therefore, the impact of stigma does not depend solely on self-identification, but also on the perception and judgement of the 'other' (Foucault, 2008; Goffman, 1963, 1988; Plumwood, 1993, 2002).

Moreover, social class, in such cases, is seen as a dimension that intersects, creating a concrete matrix of oppression – being trans, black, and poor – and multiplying the situation of oppression (e.g., Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1994; Jesus, 2012; [MASKED FOR REVIEW]; Platero, 2012; [MASKED FOR REVIEW]; Serano, 2012). The following is an example:

(...) I still suffer racism; I still have to work harder and fight harder than a Caucasian person ... I will always be seen in a different perspective and also in a different socioeconomic level; it's all a great intersection of discriminations (...). I have suffered discrimination from others. It was all interconnected. And that was a thing I was aware of, that made me more sensitive and be more on the alert. This

is because there is an intersection between discriminations. It is not a linear thing (...). Being a man is a privilege I have. Racism. Race. Being black. That seems a dynamite. Being black is the worst. (...) I have to leave home every day with this kind of skin. And that's it, being trans stays behind everything. People assume things about me because I am black. Because automatically I step back a little bit from discrimination for being trans (9-J.M.PT.PL).

This powerful testimony from the participant exemplifies the concept of 'intersectional invisibility' discussed by theorists like Crenshaw (1991/2012) and empirically explored in studies such as Bowleg's (2008) research on Black lesbians. The participant articulates that their racial identity ('Being black') is the primary lens through which they are judged, overshadowing and compounding the discrimination they face for being trans. This is not an additive model of oppression ('racism + transphobia') but a multiplicative one, creating a unique and intensified form of vulnerability that prioritizes immediate survival over other aspects of identity.

The code 'social class as a privilege also emerged from the data. Eighteen participants affirmed that trans-people who belong to higher social classes have more privileges, such as access to specific health treatments for trans-people (when they want to). According to them, privileges also exist for access to education and rights recognition. For some trans people who belong to lower social classes, there is no guarantee of rights recognition, making them more vulnerable to transphobia in particular contexts such as health and educational contexts (Platero, 2012). Nevertheless, this privilege should not be viewed in an additional fashion. Belonging to a specific social class does not place a person in a situation of privilege or oppression, for it intersects with other identity belongings.

Some rights are not recognized, even if a person belongs to a higher social class. The recognition of legal identity, for instance, is not granted in some countries (e.g., Holland, Germany, Austria, and Moldavia), regardless of social class belonging. However, being a member of a higher social class might make it easier to alter and recognize one's name in an official document. The following excerpt illustrates this code:

It is clear that I have some privilege for coming from a middle-class family that supports me, and also an understanding that my family guarantees that I am not living on the streets and such. But, for example, the alteration of my name, something I have not yet got. A job is something that is super hard to get. I work as a freelancer, but it is complicated when a person asks for a receipt because it has to have my name, and then I have to explain it (3-F.F.BR.SE).

This participant's account highlights the material benefits of class privilege, such as housing and family support, which act as a crucial buffer against the harshest outcomes of transphobia, like homelessness. However, it also shows the limits of this privilege. Economic capital does not automatically translate into social or legal recognition, as seen in the struggle to change official documents. This nuanced reality – where privilege in one domain coexists with oppression in another – is a core tenet of intersectionality and is reflected in empirical studies that find economic resources can mitigate some, but not all, forms of discrimination for marginalized groups (e.g., Taylor, 2009).

'The place of gender' was another code that emerged from the data. This code signaled that either belonging to the female or male gender or refusing the gender binary has a particular impact on people's experiences of discrimination. Some participants claimed that some trans women suffer more transphobia than some trans men because they are more visible and also suffer sexism for being perceived as women (independently from being trans or non-trans – cis). On the other hand, some participants argued that trans men's invisibility contributed to their vulnerable condition for not being named, resulting in their non-recognition as subjects with rights (Butler, 2015). For some participants, in terms of access to health, trans-women are more privileged than trans-men, especially in the Brazilian context. Here is an example:

(...) they have more difficulty in, let us say, changes, like physical, facial, and visible changes than us, but one of the most complicated things is the SRS, which is the sex reassignment [surgery]; for them it's a lot easier, let us say, because the medicine has been working on this for more time than for trans men (...), the trans, the girls, being more known or I do not know, having more visibility for a while, it seems that people understand what it is faster (...), the trans male visibility is so small that there must exist many dudes lost in the GLS [Gay, Lesbians and Sympathizers/Supporters] feminine world without knowing, thinking that is enough (...). (17-B.M.BR.CO).

The participant's discourse highlights a critical tension within trans experiences, where visibility can be a double-edged sword. While some literature points to the hypervisibility of trans women leading to increased violence (Bailey et al., 2022), this participant points to the 'invisibility' of trans men in healthcare and social discourse as a distinct form of marginalization, echoing Butler's (2015) concerns about which lives are considered recognizable. The perception that medical science has 'been working on this for more time' for trans women speaks to a historical bias in research and care protocols, creating different barriers for trans men, a finding also noted in qualitative health studies (e.g., Pinto & Moleiro, 2012).

Another code that emerged from the data was 'the privilege of heteronormativity', that is, the privilege that some trans people have in relation to others for being heterosexual. From this code, it is possible to perceive the privilege of heterosexual transgender people in relation to non-heterosexuals. For some, being trans and living non-normative sexualities adds vulnerability to their experiences.

Beyond all the issues implicated in the process of pathologizing trans-identities, these bodies have been symbolically designated as abject bodies. To be accepted these bodies have gone through 'normalization devices', a heteronormative process (Butler, 2009). The following is an example:

(...) it's the thing that I had to understand that the condition of oppressed and oppressor there's a huge difference when, in fact, they go together (...). This is why there are so many transphobic trans-men, which is ridiculous. That does not understand the idea of a trans gay, for example, because they were really oppressed dudes that moved to the position of oppressor, they saw themselves in the condition of oppressor and sank their teeth onto it because they could no longer be oppressed (17-B.M.BR.CO).

This quote is particularly insightful as it reveals intra-community tensions and the internalization of normative hierarchies. The participant describes how some heterosexual trans men adopt an 'oppressor' position against non-heterosexual trans individuals, seeking the relative safety of normativity. This aligns with empirical findings that demonstrate how proximity to dominant norms (like heterosexuality) can be used as a strategy to mitigate stigma in other areas (Taylor, 2009). The participant's reflection shows how intersecting axes of oppression are not only imposed from the outside but can also be reproduced within marginalized communities.

'Privilege of cisnormativity' was one of the codes that appeared the most in the data. Most participants refer to the privilege some trans people have as they develop strategies for 'passing', this is, being perceived as cis, not trans. Once again, the issue of stigma can be more or less effective, depending on how much trans people can reproduce social norms despite being trans. Cisnormativity, that is, the idea that cis bodies are more valued, legitimate, and accepted than trans bodies, reproduces the idea that these bodies are only desirable and may only desire when going through a cisnormative (and heteronormative) 'normalization device', resulting in a process of hierarchization and legitimization of people's bodies and lives in accordance with these determined systems (Butler, 2009; Oliveira, 2014). The 'normalization devices' of bodies have direct impacts on people's lives; when they are not followed, they imprint the delegitimation of a self-identified body

and gender. Moreover, some trans people seemed happy when perceived as cis. This feeling may be related to internalized transphobia (Platero, 2014). It is vital to problematize, however, that many of these people go through daily situations of oppression and survival marked on their bodies. Therefore, the happiness grounded on 'passing' is legitimate. More than legitimately, it is a concrete way of surviving the cissexist oppression marked on trans bodies. Here are some examples:

(...) I fear being pointed at, shouted at. It also has never happened to me to be pointed at in the restroom, but I am afraid people find out I am trans, that they point at me, that they speak to a cop, things like this. It scares me (...) I said, I am going to the men's restroom and then there was a guard in front of it, and he said, what do you want? I want a restroom. And he said, here's the men's restroom, and there's the women's. That was really cool because I expected the opposite. It was really cool. However, I think we will get better with time (19-R.F.BR.NE).

I felt this discrimination in a social context, but it was for a very brief period, in which I had already started hormonal therapy but still had, let us say, an aspect in the middle and people could perceive something. After being through that and being seen as a woman by people, I was never questioned, I no longer felt discriminated against. You cannot be the target of discrimination if people do not know if you have that factor against which they have something (6-R.F.PT.GL).

These examples powerfully illustrate how 'passing' is framed not merely as a desire for authenticity but as a crucial survival strategy. This pragmatic approach has been documented in other qualitative studies with trans individuals (e.g., Pinto & Moleiro, 2012), where the ability to blend in is directly linked to safety from harassment and violence in public spaces like restrooms. The participant's narrative underscores that the relief or 'cool' feeling derived from passing is less about rejecting a trans identity and more about escaping the relentless social and physical threats associated with being visibly trans. It highlights the profound impact of cissexism on daily life, turning mundane activities into sites of potential conflict.

The code entitled 'activism as privilege' is related to the idea that activism creates a context of protection and privilege for those who take part in it. Resources (and knowledge) are added to personal and collective life experiences through peer sharing and recognition. Activism allows for the construction of meanings in light of perspectives far from medical models and close to the recognition of people's rights, such as the right to self-determination of bodies and trans identities.

The interviewees referred to gender differences in terms of privileges as activists, especially in Brazil. In the country, trans women have had more recognition and visibility due to the history of the trans movement itself for it was initiated two decades ago by *travesti* women; hence, the political particularity associated with the term *travesti*. On the other hand, transgender men in Brazil have had less visibility, and their history of activism is more recent. The following is an example:

(...) I only accepted to work here again because I am one of the oldest members of the association, (...) coming here as a girl, it made me feel good not because of the money, money also helps, but it was the fact of interacting with, meeting new people and you learn new things, you will learn things that you can take outside to help your friends (...) (16-S.F.BR.S).

This participant's experience illustrates how activism functions as a source of cultural and social capital. It is not just a political act but a space for building community and knowledge, which serves as a protective factor against the isolation and misinformation often faced by trans individuals. The gendered difference noted in the text – the historical prominence of *travesti* activism in Brazil – is a crucial finding that highlights how the matrix of oppression is context-specific and shapes the very forms of resistance available to different subgroups within the trans community.

Finally, the code called ‘geographical location as privilege’ allows for the demonstration of trans people’s different contexts of experiences, depending on their geographical locality.

Most participants claimed that people who live in urban centers, with specific health care for trans people, and access to information will be less discriminated against. These results are aligned with those of other studies in the area, especially when the focus relies on populations that break gender and sexuality norms. Some of these studies show that more diverse environments, marked by the presence of people with different sex/gender, national, and cultural belonging, are also more protective contexts for diversity in terms of gender and sexuality (Kosciw et al., 2009; Preston et al., 2007). Nevertheless, from an intersectional perspective, it is possible to argue that older transgender people, despite being discriminated against and having little access to health services in the countryside, might create solidarity networks in these spaces. Here are some examples:

A person living in the capital or near the capital ends up being privileged by the proximity of services and information arrives faster (23-L.F.BR.S).

I have no doubt that it is more difficult in rural areas that more distant from the services. Our services are too centralized; they’re in Lisbon, they’re in Porto, and they’re in Coimbra, but nowhere else. These are the major urban centers in the country. For those far from them, it will be harder (...) (3-T.F.PT.PL).

These narratives confirm findings from a large body of empirical research on LGBTQ + populations (Kosciw et al., 2009; Preston et al.,

2007), which consistently shows that urban centers offer greater access to resources, community, and relative anonymity. However, the participant’s comment on the hyper-centralization of services in Portugal points to a structural issue where geography itself becomes a primary axis of inequality.

To illustrate the relationship between the central theme and its constituent codes, a map of the theme is presented in Fig. 1.

4. Final considerations

Our findings show how oppressions are intersectional, a reality expressed by participants in both Brazil and Portugal. However, certain axes of this matrix were more salient in specific contexts. For instance, the role of travesti activism in creating visibility was a uniquely Brazilian phenomenon in our data, while challenges related to centralized healthcare services were a prominent concern for Portuguese participants from rural areas. Our qualitative data provides rich, narrative evidence that complements and deepens quantitative findings on discrimination, illustrating the lived realities behind statistical disparities. By centering the voices of Brazilian and Portuguese trans people, this study contributes a specific sociocultural perspective to the international body of empirical work on trans lives.

With this study, it is possible to reinforce that transgender people constitute a diverse group and, as such, have differences in economic, ideological, geographical, and social levels. These differences shape the way transgender people conceptualize their own identities and transsexualities. Such heterogeneity also influences how people position themselves in medical models.

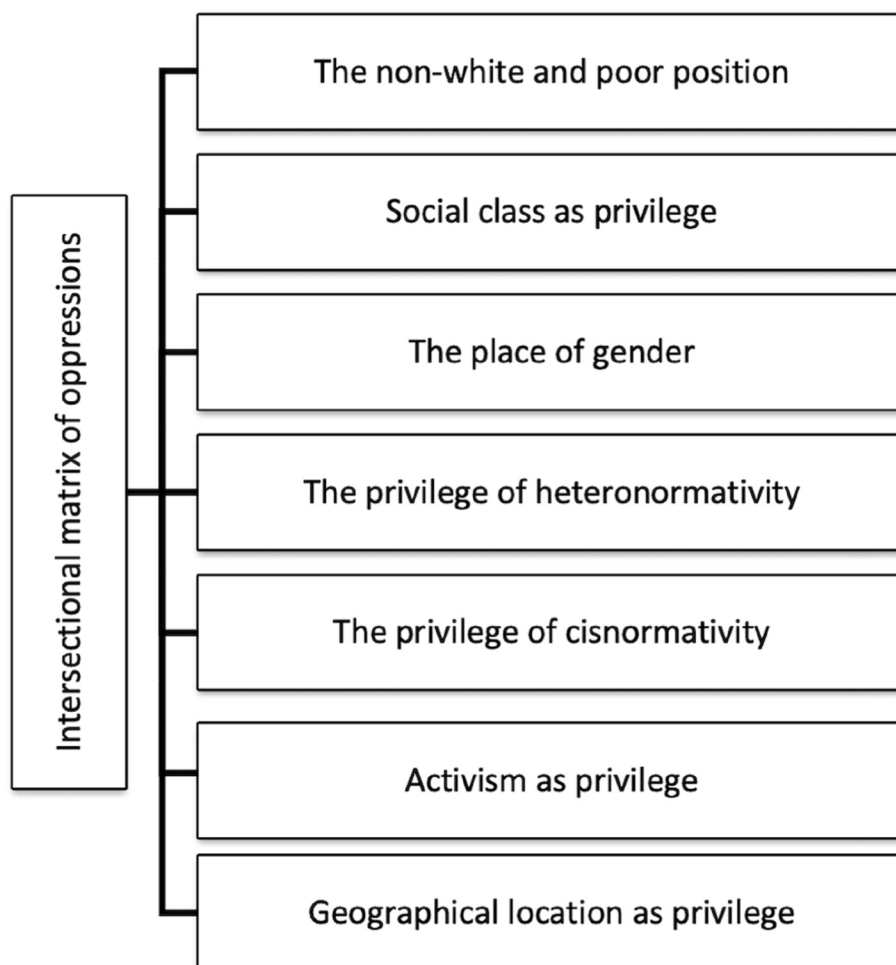


Fig. 1. Map of the theme “Intersectional matrix of oppressions”.

The epistemologies adopted here and the discourses that provide their shape and content aim to justify the claim for the recognition of plurality in processes of identity subjectification. Therefore, we must highlight that oppressions are intersectional; stress the importance of recognition in the self-determination of identities and in the adoption of proposals for the depathologization of transsexualities; and reinforce that contexts of support/alliance are crucial for the well-being of people outside the gender norms, as they are for all people.

Critical perspectives on human rights include the rights of all people and recognizing their identity as belonging to a specific axis of oppression. The inclusion of people considering their belongings is characteristic of a project of real pluralization in democratic societies (Rodrigues, Barbosa et al., 2021; Schramm et al., 2011).

Based on this paper, we can affirm that an emancipatory project of human rights demands professionals that either establish connections with the trans population or develop studies on the diversity of trans people's life paths (Bailey et al., 2022; Moita, 2001, 2006), raising awareness of the complete respect to trans identities. These professionals play a fundamental role in contributing to transgender people living their identities and bodies to their fullest if they wish (Miguel et al., 2008; Pinto & Moleiro, 2012).

Historically, it has been important to identify and recognize different identities to create groups, offer references, combat prejudicial ideas, question the ideological systems wherein sexualities are inscribed, and achieve the symbolic recognition of various identities. It is equally important to stand against the usual homogeneity attributed to existing categories and assure the difference, especially in the interpretation of identities and sexualities, to promote and celebrate transsexualities and plural sexual orientations (Garaizabal, 2010; Lima, 2012).

Based on this study and from a critical perspective, it becomes fundamental that combat to transphobias and other forms of discrimination occurs in a dynamic and systematic relation to three levels: the macropolitical level, through the approval of laws by the state and international organs; the mesopolitical level, through the politics of institutions that recognize and value diversity; and the micropolitical level, in concrete actions of people's lives.

4.1. Strengths and contributions

This study offers several unique contributions to the literature. First, by focusing on two Lusophone countries, it provides a novel cross-national comparison that is scarce in transfeminist research. Second, it gives prominence to the specific experiences of travestis in Brazil, a group whose political and social history is crucial but often underrepresented in international scholarship. Methodologically, the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews provided rich, nuanced data, while the rigorous application of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis ensured a systematic interpretation of participants' lived experiences. Finally, this work directly challenges biomedical models by centering the voices and intersectional realities of trans people themselves.

4.2. Limitations and future directions

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. The number of participants, although appropriate for qualitative methodology, presents limited racial diversity, with only three participants identifying as Black or Afro-descendant, restricting a deeper analysis of racial intersectionality. Furthermore, the data were collected between 2013 and 2014; while the core experiences of discrimination remain relevant, the socio-political context for trans people in Brazil and Portugal, has changed significantly, which may limit the temporal relevance of some findings.

Future research should follow transgender people in different stages of life through longitudinal studies. They allow for an understanding of trans people's life paths, including the development of their childhood, youth, and old age. Other relevant studies to continue investigations in

this area, as well as in terms of institutional processes, should deepen knowledge about transgender people in prisons.

Overall, we aimed to make models other than the pathological ones visible. Such models recognize the importance of people and oppressed groups being able to tell and live their stories freely to occupy the public space by claiming their rights (Missé, 2014) and combatting multiple and intersecting discrimination.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Liliana Rodrigues: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ana R. Pinho:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology. **Leonardo Dias Cruz:** Writing – review & editing. **Nuno Santos Carneiro:** Supervision. **Conceição Nogueira:** Supervision.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not available for ethical reasons of anonymity and confidentiality of the people interviewed.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval were not formally required for this study at the time of data collection, according to the institutional regulations of the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto (FPCEUP). However, the research protocol was rigorously reviewed and validated by the Doctoral Program in Psychology and the project supervisors (Nuno Santos Carneiro and Conceição Nogueira). The study was funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). All procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki, ensuring informed consent, anonymity, and data privacy for all participants.

Declaration of the use of AI assisted technologies

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Gemini to improve the English language and ensure clear sentence structure, as they are non-native English speakers. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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