

SEXUAL FLUIDITY: HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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ABSTRACT. In this study, we sought to deepen the concept of sexual fluidity through a critical analysis of the literature and an integrative synthesis on the topic. In it, we analyzed studies that focus on sexual fluidity, explored the concept, under the guidance of how Lisa Diamond introduces it into the scientific literature, defines it, and operationalizes it. Finally, we focused on studies on sexual fluidity, trying to understand the meanings attributed to the concept, questioning the potential gender bias that accompanies a concept located in a heteronormative time and context. As a contribution to the deepening of the concept and reinforcement of its potential, reflections are presented on the relationship between sexual fluidity and hegemonic masculinity, a relationship that is little valued in the scientific literature. Overall, this work promotes, critically and in an intersectional way, the questioning about the fixation in sex/gender of people involved in a sexual situation and discussed the boundaries of the concept of sexual fluidity and its (im)permeability.

Keywords: Sexual fluidity; sexuality; gender.

FLUIDEZ SEXUAL: CONTEXTUALIZAÇÃO HISTÓRICA E CONTRIBUTOS TEÓRICOS

RESUMO. Neste estudo, tivemos como objetivo aprofundar o conceito de fluidez sexual pela análise crítica da literatura e de uma síntese integrativa sobre o tema. Nele, analisamos estudos que se debruçam sobre a fluidez sexual, exploramos o conceito, sob orientação do modo como Lisa Diamond o introduz na literatura científica, o define e operacionaliza. Por fim, debruçamo-nos sobre estudos no âmbito da fluidez sexual, a fim de perceber os significados atribuídos, e questionando o potencial viés de gênero que acompanha um conceito situado num tempo e num contexto heteronormativos. Como contributo para o aprofundamento do conceito e reforço das suas potencialidades, são apresentadas reflexões sobre a relação entre a fluidez sexual e a masculinidade hegemônica, uma relação pouco valorizada na literatura científica. Globalmente, este trabalho promove, criticamente e de modo interseccional, o questionamento sobre a fixação no sexo/gênero

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das pessoas envolvidas numa situação sexual e são discutidas as fronteiras do conceito de fluidez sexual e a sua (im)permeabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Fluidez sexual; sexualidade; gênero.

FLUIDEZ SEXUAL: CONTEXTUALIZACIÓN HISTÓRICO Y APORTACIONES TEÓRICAS

RESUMEN. En este estudio, buscamos profundizar el concepto de fluidez sexual a través de un análisis crítico de la literatura y de una síntesis integradora sobre el tema. Para tal, se analizaron estudios enfocados en la fluidez sexual y se exploró este mismo concepto según la guía de cómo Lisa Diamond lo introduce en la literatura científica, lo define y lo concretiza. El análisis de los estudios en torno de la fluidez sexual se realizó teniendo como objetivos comprender los significados atribuidos al concepto y cuestionar el posible sesgo de género que acompaña un concepto ubicado en un tiempo y en un contexto heteronormativos. De cara a profundizar el concepto y reforzar su potencial, se presentan reflexiones sobre la relación entre la fluidez sexual y la masculinidad hegemónica, una relación que no se tiene en cuenta habitualmente en la literatura científica. En general, este trabajo contribuye, de manera crítica e interseccional, al cuestionamiento sobre la fijación en el sexo/género de las personas involucradas en una situación sexual y discute los límites del concepto de fluidez sexual y su (im)permeabilidad.

Palabras clave: Fluidez sexual; sexualidad; género.

Introduction

Sexuality is a complex facet of the human experience, influenced by many factors and expressed in multiple ways. It is an intricate concept and phenomenon, imbued with social construction (Tiefer, 2004). Sexual fluidity presents the variability of sexual categories, perceived as the possibility of changing sexual attractions, depending on situational, environmental, or relational conditions, and, therefore, illustrates the complexity of human sexuality. Lisa Diamond defined sexual fluidity as a “[...] situation-dependent flexibility in women’s sexual responsiveness... that makes it possible for some women to experience desires for either men or women under certain circumstances, regardless of their overall sexual orientation” (Diamond, 2008, p. 3). She produced this concept in a study exclusively involving women, which, along with other contemporary investigations, contributed to inaugurate the concept, although with an apparent greater probability of application to femininities.

In this study, we deepen the concept, in particular, how Lisa Diamond presents, defines, and operationalizes it, after highlighting some investigations that contributed to its history and before listing several studies that continue to do so. These studies are mostly North American. Giving voice to Lisa Diamond and focusing on her work, we sought to clarify the concept of sexual fluidity, where it comes from and where it is going, passing through

the bias and fixation of sex/gender that accompanies the concept and through the intricacies of definitions and differences in conceptual (im)permeabilities, not forgetting the time and social context that make sexual fluidity likely to emerge. In summary, we fundamentally try to understand here what we are talking about when we talk about sexual fluidity.

Precursor works on sexual fluidity

In 2008, Lisa Diamond released her book entitled *Sexual fluidity: understanding women's love and desire*, the result of a longitudinal study that introduces the concept of sexual fluidity into the scientific literature. However, even if not explicitly theorized as concretized by the author, the explorations around this concept have a history before her work. Several investigations approached the concept, which remained widespread in discussions about malleable or flexible patterns of sexuality, carried out by researchers who were faced with cases of sexuality between people of the same sex in circumstances considered unforeseen or in contexts declared unexpected. Thus, before discussing sexual fluidity, some investigations approached the concept, such as the work by Kinsey and colleagues that marked the history of human sexuality (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Their contributions showed that sexuality can be conceptualized as a continuum rather than a binary construct of discrete categories, notably refuting the widespread notion that same-sex sexual practice is uncommon (Kinsey et al., 1948). Kinsey's work presents a possibility of continuity and volatility of sexuality, highlighting the potential to reach the experience of sexuality, not only in predominantly homosexual or heterosexual poles but also in a plural range of these two possibilities. These approaches to the variability of human sexuality are also evident in the work of Goode and Haber (1977), who carried out a study on women who had sex with women in the university context, concluding that, although some of them seemed to be in their early stages of development of lesbian identity, others characterized themselves as heterosexual with an open and flexible approach to sexuality. In the same year, the work of Blumstein and Schwartz (1977) was published, a study with more than 150 women and men with experiences of attraction by people of both sexes. One group of participants characterized this pattern of attraction as constant throughout their sexual history and another group reported that it was only from a certain point in adult life that the experience of variation in attractions emerged, and the authors concluded that all people would have some degree of flexibility in sexual attractions (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977).

Then, in a study with interviews with 14 women who experienced unexpected changes in self-identifications in terms of sexuality, Sophie (1986) concluded that the traditional models of classification of sexuality characterized by the rigidity of categories should be revisited and, therefore, include the possibilities of variations and changes. Rust's work (1993) on sexual identity also revealed that 76% women self-identified as bisexual had previously identified themselves as lesbians and 41% women self-identified as lesbians had previously identified themselves as bisexual, alerting to the need to reconceptualize the process of formation of sexual identity as a form of circumscription to a social context and not as a linear and tight process. Weinberg, Williams and Pryor (1994) conducted a study of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual residents of San Francisco in the 80s of the 20th

century, and showed that a high number of participants reported small and large changes over time in sexual attractions and behaviors, especially individuals who identified as bisexual, and the authors concluded that the existence of a certain degree of fluidity would be a general property of human sexuality. The study by Kitzinger & Wilkison (1995) highlights the way in which approaches to sexual fluidity question the uniform determination of sexuality in the early stages of life. Their results show that many of the participants reported an abrupt and unexpected emergence of same-sex sexual attraction when they were between 20 and 30 years old, although many women reported years of cultural repression, which is why they kept their sexual interest hidden or repressed, others rejected this notion and, instead, reported sexual attractions that were authentically new and that arose at a specific moment in life, in a certain time and context. Baumeister (2000), who used the term erotic plasticity, focused on sex/gender differences, and reported psychological, historical, and social factors that encompassed the idea that female sexuality would be more flexible than male sexuality. Also, Kinnish, Strassberg and Turner (2005), alluding to the flexibility of sexual orientations, that is, the change in sexual orientation throughout an individual's life course, although also focusing on differences according to sex/gender, already announced approaches to sexual fluidity, attributing, likewise, greater flexibility to female sexuality.

In this way, we find a set of investigations that announce the emergence of the theory of sexual fluidity in the scientific literature. Several studies introduce the debate about the existence of a certain degree of flexibility as a general property of human sexuality. They also highlight the volatility and variability of sexuality, while refuting the rigidity of sexual classification categories, questioning the determinism of sexuality and respective self-identifications in the early stages of life, and evoking the abrupt emergence of changes in sexual attractions at certain times of life and in particular contexts. These studies are accompanied by a gender bias that seems to attribute to women a greater capacity to experience fluidity (e.g. Baumeister, 2000; Kinnish et al., 2005). With this background, Lisa Diamond (2008) embarked on her work to study female sexuality, and in which the author came across, by chance, sexual fluidity.

Sexual fluidity: how it all (re)began with Lisa Diamond

Lisa Diamond (2008) introduced the concept of sexual fluidity into the scientific literature through a longitudinal study on female sexuality, the first to follow the sexual transitions of young women over a significant period. From 1995 to 2005, the author interviewed five times, with an interval of two years, 89 women, with an average age of 20 years at the beginning of the study, with 43% identifying as lesbian, 30% as bisexual, and 27% as non-heterosexual (Diamond, 2008).

When Diamond (2008) began her work, her objective was to study the degree of continuity and stability in sexuality among women over time. However, the results of her study showed that something more was going on besides the variability in her participants' sexual pathways. The author explains that while in traditional works on sexual identity, the process of sexual identification was considered to be refined and tight, her results did not confirm this perspective, on the contrary, she noticed that 67% women who participated in

her study had made a change in sexual self-identifications at least once, and 36% had changed these names more than once. Furthermore, the author adds that, according to traditional models of sexual identity formation, the years after coming out⁶ would bring stability and certainty to sexual identity, which is not corroborated by her results, since many participants recognized the possibility of changing sexual attractions and many gave up their sexual categories due to the feeling of the absence of one that contemplates the complexity of their feelings and sexual experiences (Diamond, 2008). In her words, “[...] the results of this study suggest that nonexclusive attractions are the norm rather than the exception” (Diamond, 2008, p. 83). Over time, most women participating in the study, including those self-identified as lesbians, recognized the possibility that, in the future, they might experience attractions directed at people of both sexes, which is why many of them changed their sexual identities, precisely to take into account these possibilities of change. Finally, with Diamond’s work, it became clear that “[...] early experiences do not predict later ones” (2008, p. 83). As exposed by the author, contrary to the traditional literature on the topic, the pattern of attractions and behaviors manifested early in a person’s life does not predict sexual behaviors at later times or more advanced ages (Diamond, 2008).

Taking these results into account, Diamond developed a model of female sexuality that explains “[...] the fascinating twists and turns the respondents experienced” (2008, p. 84). The author sought to achieve an alternative to traditional models of sexuality and sexual orientation through a model that responds to the variability of women’s feelings, attractions, and sexual experiences over time and in certain situations (Diamond, 2008). Lisa Diamond developed the model of sexual fluidity.

What is Lisa Diamond talking about when she talks about sexual fluidity?

“Sexual fluidity is defined as a capacity for situation-dependent flexibility in sexual responsiveness, which allows individuals to experience changes in same-sex or other-sex desire, over both short-term and long-term time periods” (Diamond, 2016, p. 249). In other words, it is about the possibility of changing sexual attractions, depending on changes in situational, environmental, or relational conditions. For her, the concept of sexual fluidity highlights the volatility of preferences, attitudes, behaviors, and sexual identities, which explains how sexual preferences differ over time and depending on the context in which the subject is inserted (Diamond, 2008), suggesting that human sexuality is neither fixed nor tight, it is volatile and changeable over time.

Lisa Diamond presents sexual fluidity as a flexibility of the sexual response, dependent on the context, in such a way that a person can periodically experience a sexual attraction that is not compatible with their sexual orientation, for example, individuals self-identified as heterosexual can experience sexual attractions for people of the same sex, and people self-identified as homosexuals may experience sexual attractions to people of different sex (2008). The author mentions that the concept encompasses relatively stable predispositions at certain times of life, flexible at others, and not deterministically rigid, so that the propensity for changes in sexual attractions may never manifest or, if the person

⁶ Process by which a person assumes a non-heterosexual identity.

encounters contextual and situational situations that contribute to these alterations, it can manifest itself several times in their life course (Diamond, 2016).

Diamond (2008) describes sexual fluidity through four main elements. The author considers that, firstly, there is a 'general sexual orientation', and the predominant attraction can be directed towards people of the same sex, of different sex, or both sexes simultaneously (Diamond, 2008). Thus, there is a primary sexual attraction that drives an individual's sexual orientation. Second, the author mentions the predisposition for fluidity, that is, sensitivity to situations or relationships that can facilitate variations in sexual attraction (Diamond, 2008). In this way, for example, and according to Lisa Diamond, a lesbian predominantly maintains sexual attractions directed toward other women, however, she may feel attracted to men at certain times in her life, depending on certain contexts or experiences, although their predominant sexual orientation remains (2008, 2016). Then, Diamond (2008) argues that sexual attractions driven by fluidity can vary over time, some more lasting, others more temporary, and, finally, sexual fluidity is not the same for all people, so the frequency and intensity may vary depending on individual susceptibility.

Systematizing, it is important to understand sexual fluidity without neglecting some notes that the author adds, clarifying the concept. According to Diamond, it is important to emphasize that sexual fluidity does not suggest that individuals do not have sexual orientations or that they have to change them invariably. What the concept indicates is that sexual orientation does not rigidly predict every thought, desire, or sexual behavior that an individual may experience throughout their life (Diamond, 2016). In this way, sexual fluidity can be thought of as an additional component of sexuality that influences the attractions, fantasies, and affections experienced and expressed throughout life (Diamond, 2008). Also, not all individuals are equally fluid. Some people may never experience attractions that do not coincide with their general sexual orientation, while others may experience these attractions more frequently, so sexual fluidity varies depending on the person, time, and context, making it important to retain the change in sexual attractions and behaviors as a human potential (Diamond, 2008).

Diamond's proposal illustrates the human potential for sexual change and explains that the presence of a constant pattern of sexual attraction is not synonymous with permanent immutability. Diamond found great variability in the sexual patterns of the women she interviewed, which led her to consider sexual fluidity, along with the detachment from more classic theories about sexual orientations, realizing that these are not, after all, so categorical or rigid, the contrary, are permeable and variable. Sexual fluidity can be understood as the potential for variation in sexual attraction by situational, contextual, or interpersonal influences, such that a person may (or may not) encounter specific situations, determined contexts, or particular people that activate sexual attractions that do not coincide with the attractions of their base pattern (Diamond, 2008, 2016).

However, if sexual fluidity concerns the change of sexual attractions and behaviors and includes sexual interest that is not exclusive to one sex/gender, the concept becomes blurred when compared to bisexuality. Both sexual fluidity and bisexuality produce the same result: sexual attraction and behaviors towards people of both sexes. So, what is the difference, if any, between bisexuality and sexual fluidity? This is a recurring question, as

Diamond also informs: “One of the most common questions about sexual fluidity is ‘How does it differ from bisexuality?’” (2016, p. 250).

Sexual fluidity and bisexuality: approximations, intersections, and distinctions, according to Lisa Diamond

As previously exposed, Lisa Diamond (2008) presents sexual fluidity as the possibility of a person being attracted to someone of a different sex than the one that defines their general sexual orientation. In addition, the author adds that it is not a sexual orientation, but a component of sexuality that operates about sexual orientation, which influences how sexual attractions, affections, fantasies, and behaviors are experienced and expressed throughout an individual’s life (Diamond, 2008). Bisexuality, in turn, according to Lisa Diamond, can be understood as a sexual orientation that consists of sexual attraction and/or affective and emotional involvement by people of both sexes (2016). According to Diamond (2008), although sexual fluidity and bisexuality share similarities, they can also be distinguished. Diamond (2008) informs that in the reports of participants who self-identified as bisexual, the pattern of sexual attraction for people of both sexes is more constant and more consistent throughout their lives, while in the reports of women with experiences of sexual fluidity, the variations in sexual attractions tend to be more sporadic and contextual. In addition, the author explains that the concepts are distinguished by the process through which individuals perceive the change in attractions (Diamond, 2008, 2016). People who experience sexual fluidity tend not to be permanently aware of the possibility of being attracted to people of a different sex than the one that defines their general sexual orientation until a certain moment and/or social context acts as a trigger to activate the change in attraction (Diamond, 2008). In bisexuality, however, Diamond explains, individuals seem to be constantly aware of their attraction to people of both sexes throughout their lives (Diamond, 2008).

Thus, according to Lisa Diamond, bisexuality and sexual fluidity can produce sexual attractions that are not exclusive to one sex/gender, but these are expected to be a regular feature in individuals with bisexual orientation and sporadic and/or context-dependent in sexually fluid individuals (2016). In short, according to Lisa Diamond, while bisexuality is considered a sexual orientation describing the predisposition of individuals to sexually desire men and women, sexual fluidity describes the possibility that individuals have to change aspects of their sexuality, regardless of the general predisposition to certain sexual attraction (Diamond, 2016), leading the author to state that all people have the potential to experience sexual fluidity (Diamond, 2008).

Successor works on sexual fluidity

Sexual fluidity is accompanied by a contemporary debate, as studies around the concept have continued and these have been widely disseminated in the scientific community. Given the significant dissemination of literature on sexual fluidity and the absence of collective agreement on what the concept means, the most recent study by Diamond and colleagues seeks to introduce consensus on the specific meaning and

concrete operationalization of this construct, such as exposed by the authors (Diamond, Alley, Dickenson, & Blair, 2020).

This recent study by Diamond and collaborators (2020) was also developed with women, 76 participants, who completed a questionnaire about sexuality and performed a task of inducing sexual arousal. It is the first study to distinguish different types of sexual fluidity and revealed that this is a multifaceted phenomenon, which takes different forms and has different implications for the sexual experience (Diamond et al., 2020). The authors theorized about four types of sexual fluidity. Firstly, fluidity as a greater possibility of general erotic response compared to LPG (least preferred sex/gender). Then, fluidity as a situational variability in the possibility of an erotic response to the LPG. Third, fluidity as the discrepancy between sexual attraction and sexual involvement with LPG, and, finally, fluidity as instability over time in everyday sexual attraction (Diamond et al., 2020). With this, the understanding of sexual fluidity is significantly expanded, revealing that it is not a unitary and isolated trait (Diamond et al., 2020).

The author and other researchers have focused on theoretical elaborations around sexual fluidity. The analytical review by Hoy and London (2018), for example, reveals that sexual attractions and behaviors with people of the same sex are part of a large number of people self-identified as heterosexual, with multiple meanings attributed and with different interferences in their sexual identities. Subhi et al. (2011), on the other hand, in a study on coming out with gays and lesbians, revealed that half of the participants stated that fluidity is a viable possibility in their sexual journey.

Other studies have explored sexual fluidity, as is the case of Ross, Daneback and Månsson (2012) who investigated the characteristics of 1,913 women and men with fluid or fixed sexual orientations and showed that women more often report a fluid sexual orientation whether in fantasies or sexual behavior. Also Mock and Eibach (2012), in a longitudinal study on stability and change in sexual identity, also focusing on sex/gender differences, revealed that women showed greater potential for changing sexual identity

Lisa Diamond (2016) also conducted a study on sex/gender differences in sexual fluidity and examined data from 16 studies published between 2010 and 2016 on the prevalence of attractions unique to one sex/gender versus the prevalence of non-unique attractions, with analysis on the differences in these prevalences in men and women. This work reinforces the notion that sexual orientation is neither a static nor categorical trait, and informs that the prevalence of non-exclusive attractions is higher in women (Diamond, 2016).

Katz-Wise (2014), in turn, in her work on sexual fluidity, associated with the development of sexual orientation and identity, which involved 199 young adults (men and women) who did not identify as heterosexual, corroborates Lisa Diamond's theory of sexual fluidity and extends its applicability to men, demonstrating that 64% women and 52% men reported sexual fluidity in their sexual attractions, with 23% women and 22% men reporting changes in attractions more than once in their lives. Other studies extended the theoretical development on sexual fluidity in men, with important elaborations, since initial investigations in the field of sexual fluidity tended to reinforce that the variability in sexual attractions would be higher among women (Diamond, 2016). Jane Ward (2015), through case studies in fraternities and military contexts in the USA, presents how the initiation rituals

of masculinity include homoerotic behaviors as a form of integration into the 'brotherhood', as well as revealing that some men, self-identified as heterosexual, seek other men with whom they share behaviors, such as collective masturbation and oral or penetrative sex, in an attempt to bond and collectively construct masculinity with other similar 'bros'⁷ (Ward, 2015). This author uses the term *dude*⁸-sex to describe sex between men identified as heterosexual, in urban or military contexts, along with the constructions and validations of their masculinities. Tony Silva (2017) also interviewed men who identify as heterosexual, in rural contexts, who have sex with men, and who reinforce their heterosexuality through the reinterpretation of their sexual relationships. The author introduces the term *Bud*-sex⁹ that captures the reinterpretations of these men's sexual practices, which can, in this case, be used to reinforce rural masculinity, revealing how flexible heterosexuality can be and how sexual practices are socially constructed with different meanings in different cultures and populations (Silva, 2017). Finally, Savin-Williams (2017) presents the narratives of men who self-identify as mostly straight and who admit to nurturing sexual attractions or fantasies directed at men, even though their primary sexual and romantic attraction is directed towards women. Thus, they present themselves as practically or predominantly, but not heterosexual, a category that moves away from rigidity and inflexibility, reinforcing sexual orientation as a variable rather than fixed, which reveals the importance of reassessing the possibility of sexual fluidity in men.

Several studies dissect sexual fluidity, inherently accompanied by a gender bias and a fixation on the sex/gender of the people participating in a sexual moment. The conceptual limits of sexual fluidity are debated and strategies are outlined to (im)permeabilize its borders with other close concepts. Fluid sexuality is discussed because it starts from a fixed sexual understanding. So, what are we talking about when we talk about sexual fluidity? We will then seek to respond critically to this question.

Discussion

For a long time, human sexuality was considered a fixed characteristic and an internal truth of the individual (Paiva, 2008), a human component that, once determined, could never be subjected to alterations or variations. In this way, sexuality included two or three possibilities of sexual identification, which, once assumed, would serve the purpose of predicting the sexual pattern of any individual. Over time, human sexuality was thought of in terms of two distinct and opposite poles of sexual preferences, along with the binary understanding with which our social web reads and produces a world of men or women, male or female. Tendentially, sexual diversity has been neglected, as well as its human potential to experience it, something that, as we have seen, has been questioned, with

⁷ In the original 'Bro' is an abbreviation of 'brother', a term commonly used in the English language and in the subculture of young men that means friend, companion, someone who shares the same ideas, someone with whom a relationship of complicity is maintained, similar to that of a brother.

⁸ Dude is a slang term for a man.

⁹ 'Bud' is an abbreviation of buddy that can be translated as friend, colleague or companion. Thus, bud-sex refers to sex between friends, or that is how the participants interpret this relationship. This term reinforces the idea that it is not a relationship with commitment, especially with the absence of emotional and/or romantic involvement, exclusively characterized by sexual attraction (Silva, 2017).

theoretical and empirical contributions. The most recent works on sexuality introduce the debate on the human potential for sexual fluidity and, in this debate, the protagonist is Lisa Diamond. With her work, we understand sexuality as changeable, subjected to fluctuations, volatile and fluid, using a controversial concept that has gone through a troubled path. After all, what are we talking about when we talk about sexual fluidity?

Let us return to the original definition that Diamond presented in 2008: "Sexual fluidity, quite simply, means situation-dependent flexibility in women's sexual responsiveness" (Diamond, 2008, p. 3). It is about women, with women, and of women that Diamond speaks, it is for women that the author designs and bases her entire theory, in such a way that, the proposal of the concept of sexual fluidity, inevitably, induces one to think that this is a trait that suits women better. Indeed, sexual fluidity emerged from a set of investigations into female sexuality, along with the belief that gender dictates the way people experience sexuality, in a period in which female sexuality was being (re)investigated and studied its possibility for fluidity, while the stability of male sexuality, over time, was not questioned. For some years, several investigations documented approximations to sexual fluidity in women, either in works that we would call 'pre-Diamond' (e.g. Goode & Haber, 1977; Sophie, 1986; Weinberg et al., 1994; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Baumeister, 2000), passing through the moment when sexual fluidity emerges in the scientific literature (Diamond, 2008), and also in the developments that we would call 'post/with-Diamond' (e.g. Diamond, 2008; Mock & Eibach, 2012; Ross et al., 2012; Diamond et al., 2020). In this way, investigations in the field of sexual fluidity have tended to reinforce the greater variability of sexual attractions among women (Diamond, 2016), introducing, from our perspective, the gender bias in the conceptualization and study of sexual fluidity.

Therefore, the questioning about the possibility of men experiencing similar experiences of sexual fluidity is justified. We can anticipate, speculatively, that such experiences may lead to different consequences and constraints, namely of a social nature. It is inevitable to consider the social dimension of human sexuality, that gender norms produce femininity and masculinity and that inscribe sexual differences in men and women (Butler, 1999). Gender norms, as internalized and shared social expectations about the most appropriate manifestations for 'gendered' subjects by institutions and social practices in all domains, including sexuality (Butler, 1999; Medrado & Lyra, 2008), highlight the category expected for the universe of masculinities as hegemonic, 'dominant' (Connell, 1987) and limiting male sexual diversity.

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the result of social construction, a gender configuration, established as a function of the current cultural responses of the patriarchal system, which sustains the dominant position of the male group and privileges the traits traditionally considered 'natural' in men (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is, thus, an idealized figure that facilitates, by comparison, and imposition, the surveillance and control of male behaviors, systematic verification and validation of masculinities due to their distancing from or approximation to heteronormativity (Warner, 1991), competition, aggressiveness, restricted emotionality and avoidance of what is considered feminine (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Masculinities that do not respond to the dominant male ideal are therefore at risk of submission to non-hegemonic masculinities, such as subordinate masculinities, considered inferior or deviant (Connell,

1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This marginalization of masculinities takes place in a social context that is guided by the binary organization of gender and sexuality norms, in an authoritarian system that makes invisible all people who do not strictly comply with the performativity of gender and sexual behavior (Butler, 1999; Medrado & Lyra, 2008). The construction and maintenance of masculinities cross educational, family, professional, and intimate contexts, so masculinities that are not explicitly heterosexual tend to be subordinated and marginalized by heterosexual masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Knowing that gender norms directly inform sexuality (Butler, 1999; Bordini & Sperb, 2013) and that dominant gender expectation are associated with heterosexuality, a rigidly heterosexual performance in human sexual conduct is expected because it is heteronormative (Butler, 1999). Men, by the control exercised by hegemonic masculinity, will be persuaded to exhibit manifestly clear and rigidly explicit heterosexual performances, to avoid consequent marginalization (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This pressure to respond to the norms of gender and sexuality is more significant when directed at compositions of masculinity, since it is absent, to the same extent, in femininity.

Assuming that sexual experience is not restricted to the heterosexual norm and that sexual attractions can flow between people of different sexes, as the concept of sexual fluidity proposes, this may result in higher levels of risk of social sanction for masculinity than for femininity. Men are expected to maintain the privilege of male domination, responding to ideals of heteronormativity and moving away from the female performance, while sexual practices between women can be eroticized and, therefore, more socially tolerated (Diamond, 2003). Thus, as a sexual identity, heterosexuality appears as a performance, just like gender (Butler, 1999), and as a set of interpretations and forms of actively participating in the social conventions of masculinity. In this way, and in our analysis, the sociocultural context in which the concept of sexual fluidity emerged may have facilitated its greater acceptance if applied to women and hindered its applicability to men.

The conception of sexual fluidity, proposed by Lisa Diamond (2008), derived, as we have seen, from a study with women and deliberately did not include men, although the author never suggests the male inability to experience variations in sexual attractions and even highlights the lack of research on sexual fluidity in men (see Diamond, 2008, p. 11, 12). This is a scenario that has recently been changing, with studies being carried out on the mutability of sexual attractions in men. Terms such as *Dude-sex* (Ward, 2015), *bud-sex* (Silva, 2017), or *mostly straight* (Savin-Williams, 2017) are the important result of a set of investigations that contradict the trend that has accompanied the theory of sexual fluidity since its creation. These terms correspond to sexual involvements between men self-identified as heterosexual, illustrating the variety and categorical specificities that are organized and reorganized according to history and culture. Nevertheless, it should be noted that most emerging studies on approaches to sexual fluidity do not fail to reinforce heterosexuality as a norm, with investigations or terminologies considered around heterosexuality. Moreover, these investigations, mostly reproducing the North American culture, are developed with a group of men in particular, privileged by their socioeconomic level and ethnicity, like most studies in this field, with men and/or women, starting with the research of Lisa Diamond and, out of the 89 women interviewed, “[...] 60 percent considered

themselves middle or upper middle class” (Diamond, 2008, p. 57). Therefore, it is important to highlight the absence of a consolidated intersectional debate in the studies considered here.

In the intricacies of sexual fluidity, we highlight not only a gender bias but also an incessant search for gender differences in sexuality, in particular in sexual fluidity. Many studies focus on seeking and achieving a winning answer on whom to award the highest potential for fluidity (e.g. Baumeister, 2000; Kinnish et al., 2005; Diamond, 2016). When differences are detected, they fall into a void of possibilities and explanations: “[...] it is difficult to draw reliable conclusions about the extent of gender differences in sexual fluidity, and the cause of such gender differences” (Diamond, 2016, p. 254). We anticipate that this cycle will continue, as differences between women’s and men’s sexuality will exist as long as there are differences in the social organization of men’s and women’s lives.

In this study, we find the fixation on sex/gender as a norm for sexual conduct. Traditionally, sexual orientations are conceptualized as a function of the sex/gender of a person’s partner, who is also ‘gendered’. This sex/gender fixation in the analysis of the choice of sexual partner can make other characteristics invisible, which could have a very significant influence on sexual attraction, such as age, class, ethnicity, and considerations about power and control, among others, because the way people understand and experience sexuality is deeply social and intersectional. For many people, the journey from attraction through orientation and identity to sexual experience and relationship is not linear. The experiences are diverse in a concept that is as complex as it is multiple (Tiefer, 2004). As a result, we more securely define our sexual category than do our sexual actions or identities or the sex/gender of the sexual partners we engage with. Recent investigations in the field of sexual fluidity contribute to an emerging understanding of sexuality as fluid, rather than rigid and categorical (Diamond, 2016), but which is not disconnected from the fixation of sex/gender with which we traditionally tend to define our sexual practices, never devoid of a concise and obligatory clarification on how the sexes and genders of sexual partners intersect. Furthermore, investigations on sexual fluidity do not seem to comprise the diversity of human sexes/genders, reinforcing gender binarism by also reinforcing the heterosexual and homosexual binary.

Regularly, the boundaries of sexual fluidity are debated, and where this concept ends and begins when compared to bisexuality. Diamond also admits that the question is recurrent and there is a widespread concern to separate these conceptions into two distinct entities (Diamond, 2016). According to the author, sexual fluidity is characterized by its sporadic character and bisexuality presents notes of regularity, but it is also the author who affirms the difficulty in separating the waters: “[...] of course, the exact boundary between ‘regular’ and ‘sporadic’ patterns of sexual attraction is unknown, and hence, this distinction is more useful conceptually than empirically” (Diamond, 2016, p. 250). In an understanding of bisexuality and sexual fluidity that translates experiences restricted to gender binarism, generating the restlessness of definitions, this will be just as or more important if it is, at the same time, relevant, since the great investment in the search for conceptual clarity and the delimitation of definitions could reduce the investment in the central organizer of this debate: the acceptance of the human potential for sexual fluidity and the human right to sexual diversity.

Final considerations

In this study, we set out to deepen the concept of sexual fluidity, explore the moments we call 'pre-Diamond' and 'post/with-Diamond' and try to understand what we are talking about when we talk about sexual fluidity. Therefore, we realize that we are talking about a biased concept marked by gender norms, situated in a heteronormative time and context. We are talking about a phenomenon accompanied by hypersexualization (heteronormative) of men for the preservation of masculinity (Bordini & Sperb, 2013), instigating the absence of Raewyn Connell's work in this debate. We are talking about a construct whose borders are permeable to include other definitions. And about a derivative of mostly North American studies, with participants who fall into a different place in the matrix of oppressions and privileges. Diamond's work and the set of international investigations that assess attractions, behaviors, and sexual identities reinforce the move away from the categorical rigidity of human sexuality, which assumes substantial fluidity in multiple forms. So, what are we talking about when we talk about sexual fluidity? We are talking about a sexual present that does not dictate its future.

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