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Trans-activism: Transformation of the semantic structure within this field of study*

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Abstract

The article reviews academic literature on transgender people's social movements, using a database of 345 publications (1997-2023) gathered from Scopus and Timbó Foco. It analyzes keyword co-occurrence networks to explore the semantic structure of the field. The study focuses on key questions raised by research into trans-activism, social movements, its links with state, and citizenship, while also highlighting shifts in conceptual perspectives over recent decades.

Keywords: Social Movements, Transgender, Network Analysis, Word Clusters, Citizenship, Women Writers.

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Introduction

During the 1980s, the language of “sexual citizenship” was introduced (Evans, 1993; Weeks, 2012). It placed the demands for sexual rights into a widely recognizable moral and political framework, grounded in the long history of discourses about rights in Western societies. Many different social movements have collaborated to reestablish the meaning of sex, gender, and sexuality, which are the basis for contemporary nation-states and ideas of citizenship. Simultaneously, one can observe an explosive emergence of debates around sexual morality, bringing into the public arena issues related to a myriad of contemporary social institutions, such as the state, education, medicine, and popular culture (Lind; Argüello, 2009). In this context, issues like abortion, sex education, and same-sex marriage gain relevance, attracting media attention and gaining prominence in both government agendas and political campaigns. During this process, there has been a noticeable increase in the mobilization of LGBTQIA+ activists¹, and their demands have achieved significant global visibility. In particular, an important group of organizations led by *trans** people² has raised its own demands, sparking new debates, disputes, and reflections on the role of sex and gender in contemporary conceptions of citizenship.

In recent years, these movements have captured the attention of social sciences. This is a new and emerging field of study, but the number of annual publications on the topic is sharply increasing. This article aims to map this field’s production. How have researchers approached this issue? What questions have been posed for research on social movements, its relationship with the state, and for the development of citizenship? Have conceptual perspectives aimed at understanding these problems shifted in recent decades? These are the questions addressed in this article.

In order to answer these questions, the study consisted of constructing a database that includes articles, books, dissertations, research papers, and conference papers using two search tools – Scopus³ and Timbó Foco⁴. A literature review on the *trans** population in Latin America was also carried out by Torre (2023). Scopus is one of the most comprehensive and widely used platforms in the world. Timbó Foco, in turn, enhances regional coverage of publications in Spanish and Portuguese. Additionally, the research included a review of the bibliography from the texts previously selected through these three sources. The database includes 345 pieces published from 1997 to February 2023.

Based on this review, a bibliometric analysis of the publications was conducted with two objectives. First, the analysis aimed to identify the semantic structure of the literature's content. To do this, the network of keyword occurrences used by the authors of the selected bibliography was analyzed. Subsequently, communities or clusters were defined, representing groups of terms with a relatively high degree of similarity compared to the other elements in the network. The goal was to categorize the structure based on “natural groupings” (Namey *et al.*, 2008:146), rather than propose a predefined categorization. Second, an analysis of the historic development of publications that utilize the cluster terms was conducted, with the objective of investigating how semantic structures shifted over time.

This paper is organized into five parts. First, some conceptual considerations are presented to situate the historical context in which trans-activism studies were developed. Second, a brief summary of the main methodological decisions adopted for selecting publications, constructing the

¹ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual. The plus sign (+) refers to other non-heteronormative and non-cisgender identity categories.

² Although the term “*trans**” is usually translated as “transgender”, the term was kept in its Spanish version to preserve its original contextual strength. In Portuguese and Spanish-speaking contexts, “*trans**” is used as an umbrella term, which includes identities such as *travesti*, transsexual, and transgender. The asterisk refers to the inclusion of other gender identities and expressions that do not conform to the cisgender norm, including non-binary identities. The term *travesti*, in particular, is used as an identity category with unique political and social meanings in some Latin American contexts.

³ Scopus is a citation and abstract database of academic literature. Available at: <https://www.scopus.com/>.

⁴ Timbó-Foco is a digital repository of scholarly publications developed by the National Agency for Research and Innovation (ANII) of Uruguay. Available at: <https://foco.timbo.org.uy/home>.

database, creating the word co-occurrence network, and for identifying communities is provided. Third, the article briefly describes the content of the bibliographic compilation. The fourth part presents the analysis of the co-occurrence network and the results of the cluster identification. The fifth part focuses on the temporal evolution of the semantic structure. Finally, the article concludes by reflecting on how the study of trans-activism not only demonstrates a strong potential for the construction of a new social theory, but also provides a fertile terrain for the discussion of important political and social challenges in the contemporary world.

Study of trans-activism: conceptual considerations

It is not possible to talk about a *trans** social subject across all historical times, much less of a political subject under this term. Sexual identities are not universal categories or categories with isolated meaning. Rather, they are shaped by a complex web of social relationships that involve reproduction and change. They are built on the basis of norms that delimit what is “true” and “false”, as well as what is permitted, prohibited, and where there is space for transgression.

Terms such as transsexual, *travesti*, transgender, *trans**, hermaphrodite, and intersex, emerge during specific historical moments, and have specific roots and trajectories in different geographical locations. However, they all allude to a “rupture,” be that with the sex assigned at birth, or the expression, corporality, and identity of a person (Platero, 2017). In general, such terms refer to people whose gender expression (and/or identity) does not conform to what is socially expected according to the sex assigned at birth under a hetero-cis-normative system⁵.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, a myriad of words to define the “trans phenomenon⁶,” which was gaining ground as a medical problem that arose in the burgeoning medical literature (Stryker, 2017). The “trans phenomenon” goes back to debates about the existence of a “contrary sexual feeling” that sought to distinguish between what is “natural” and what is “against nature” (Preciado, 2021, Part II para. 7). This was followed by an extensive terminological debate that attempted to distinguish between inversion, homosexuality, intersexuality, transvestism, transsexuality, and several other categories. It was Norman Fisk who first proposed the term “gender dysphoria,” which was ultimately included as a pathological characterization in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1980⁷.

Historians of sexuality such as D’Emilio (1983) consider that the development of the 20th-century psychiatric model represented a change from which behaviors that were considered deviant or immoral came to be understood as deviant identities. This shift made a different kind of repression towards some people possible, while also setting the basis for the emergence of a collective homosexual subject. Interconnected to these changes, the shift in the psychiatric model also structured the emergence of a *trans** collectivity.

The movement of *trans** people emerged side by side with collective actions by gay and lesbian people. In most Western countries, the movement of *trans** people arose in response to strong repression and police persecutions of various types, depending on the context and the

⁵ The heteronormative system is the name given to a social, political, and economic regime that imposes patriarchy and heterosexual sexual practices onto various mechanisms and institutions that present heterosexuality as necessary for the functioning of society, and as the only valid model of affective sex and kinship relation (Johnson, 2002). The term “cis-normativity” refers to a model based on an “epistemology of sexual difference” (Preciado, 2021) that creates an oppositional binary of two physiological and chromosomal anatomies. Based on this dichotomy, gender behaviors and expressions, which are also binary, are defined and considered natural, normal, and desirable.

⁶ Some examples are: “psychopathia sexualis”, coined by Krafft-Ebing in 1886; a “contrary sexual feeling”, by Albert Moll in 1891; “drive for sexual transformation”, by Max Marcuse in 1913; and “sexo-aesthetic inversion” by Havelock Ellis in 1928 (Stryker, 2017).

⁷ In the 1960s, John Money had moved away from the notion of sex as an anatomical reality and used the term “gender” to refer to the possibility of technically producing sexual difference. In 1973, Fisk coined the term “gender dysphoria”. Harry Benjamin, Robert Stoller, and Norman Fisk established the taxonomy to distinguish between transvestism (passing for another sex through dress) and “true” transsexuality, involving bodily metamorphosis (Preciado, 2019). Preciado (2021: Part II para. 10) describes these transformations as a “progressive shift from external practices of institutionalization and surveillance towards new biochemical and pharmacological techniques to produce and control subjectivity.”

political regimes. Often, after a joint mobilization, groups composed solely of *trans** people were formed (Ramos, 2003). These first groups, mainly made up of *trans**women, organized themselves to improve the conditions in which sex work was carried out, to fight for the human rights of HIV-positive people, and to oppose the pathologization of these identities.

In the 1950s, an incipient *trans** movement emerged in the United States and some well-known figures gained public visibility. *Trans** organizations proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s, but their origins can be traced back to these earlier manifestations (Stryker, 2017). In other countries, such as Spain, the emergence of *trans** organizations with a political agenda can be seen starting at the end of the 1970s, during the period of the end of the Franco regime (Ramos, 2003). In Argentina, LGBTQIA+ organizations reactivated and consolidated their mobilization at the end of the military dictatorship in 1983. Similar to what took place in other countries, the founding of organizations formed solely by *trans** people came later, in the 1990s. Similar processes can be seen in countries such as Uruguay and Brazil.

The history of discourses on *trans** identities reveals how the concepts of sex and gender have changed in contemporary Western societies. It allows us to distinguish the contexts in which *trans** identities emerge, the ways in which they are derived from medical problems or delinquency and, subsequently, how *trans** people have become subjects with rights. The possibility of defining an object of study as the “*trans** social movement” makes sense in a historical context in which *trans** people are political subjects. The study of this movement is, almost certainly, a symptom of its emergence.

Methodological notes

Analysis of the structural semantic of a field of study

Bibliometric analysis usually refers to the application of statistical and mathematical methods for the study of written communication processes, fundamentally within a scientific discipline (Lawani, 1981:294). The use of this type of analysis presupposes the definition of an academic “field of study”. Thus, focusing on written production within a discipline, an institution, or a group of journals can be an interesting approach. This article proposes to work with publications that focus on a specific object of study: the *trans** social movement. Thus, the documents were selected based on the use of specific conceptual categories⁸.

This type of analysis can be used for a variety of purposes. In recent years, an approach known as “science mapping” was developed (Cobo *et al.*, 2011). This approach uses bibliometric methods to analyze how disciplines, fields, subfields, or publications relate to each other (Zupic; Čater, 2015). In this sense, it is common to include network analysis strategies in this type of study. From this perspective, a set of methods are commonly used: co-citation, co-authorship, and word co-occurrence (Derviş, 2019). The aim of this article is to analyze keyword co-occurrence amongst the studies published within the field of study.

Word co-occurrence refers to the joint appearance of two terms within a specific text. It can include their use in an article, a fragment of an article, an abstract or, as is of interest in this study, the author's assigned “keywords” for their publication. This study understands that keyword terms summarize the most important topics, approaches, and theoretical and methodological perspectives of the authors of the analyzed texts.

It is possible to relate articles and keywords by structuring them in a two-mode network (Batagelj; Cerinsek, 2013). The terms and the publications represent two sets of disconnected nodes. These sets are related through edges that link each publication with the keywords used. For this study, the graph is projected with nodes representing words. In this way, a simple graph is constructed – not directed – in which the nodes are words and the edges that link them represent the co-occurrence observed in all the articles that use the keywords.

This way of structuring information permits a semantic analysis of the publications' content (Barnett; Danowski 1992). This involves analyzing network structure using measures such as

⁸ See the subsection titled “Construction of the database”.

density, distance between nodes, centrality, and transitivity, which are derived from the network analysis approaches. In addition, word clusters can be identified according to their co-occurrence. Two methods of detecting communities in networks are used for this exercise: the detection of flat communities and the method of Louvain⁹. Hence, rather than categorizing structures based on the researcher's *a priori* classifications, the aim is to identify “natural groupings” within the set of information (Namey *et al.*, 2007:146).

Finally, the method utilized allows one to correlate these classifications with the attributes of the articles containing the respective words, such as the year or place of publication. This information will be used to analyze how the semantic structure of the field of study evolves over time.

Construction of the database

The study was conducted on top of a database containing bibliographic information from articles, books, dissertations, research papers, and conference papers. These were identified using two search tools – Scopus and Timbó Foco – and a literature review of the *trans** population in Latin America developed by Torre (2023). In addition, the research included a review of the bibliographic references of the identified texts. The final database contains 345 pieces published between 1977 and 2023.

The aim of the review was to identify publications in the field of social sciences that address the “*trans** social movement” as an object of study. Identifying these publications was not a simple task, since it required a prior definition, not only of a social group that can be conceptualized as a “social movement”, but also an identification of its “trans” aspect.

Looking for publications in digital repositories involves defining search patterns – words or terms used to identify the pieces. Defining these terms is not an innocuous decision. The terms chosen for the search can capture thematic topics, areas of study, analytical categories, and methodological or theoretical perspectives. Words tend to have multiple meanings, and the same term can lead to publications of varying nature. Furthermore, the same topic can be referred to using different words depending on the academic or socio-cultural context. One additional challenge concerns the linguistic diversity in which publications are produced. In short, the final result of a literature search is necessarily conditioned by the criteria defined beforehand.

The definition of “social movement” is not unanimous among the research that attempts to study this phenomenon. Without aiming to be comprehensive, it is worth mentioning that the definitions developed in this field can range from a broad scope (considering various types of mobilization, protest actions, cultural expressions, among others) to more restricted understandings (such as organizational spaces with different levels of formality). At the same time, such phenomena can be referred to as social movement, collective action, social activism, as well as other categories, used to describe phenomena of a similar nature, depending on the theoretical approach of the research. Three categories were selected for this study, and they are frequently used in these studies. They were: “social movement”, “activism”, and “collective identity”. The term “trans-activism” was also added as a concept under which these studies can be referenced. The aim, therefore, was to carry out a broad search on the topic of interest.

To define “*trans** social movement” as an object of study introduces additional operational challenges to the search. The definition can be conceptual in nature – developed by the researcher – or it can allude to identity categories that the subjects themselves use to categorize themselves. The term “*trans**” – or any other associated with it – and the plausible identification with this category are meaningful in a specific historical context. Part of the interest of this literature review was to understand at what point and through what publications, “*trans** social movement” began to emerge as a feasible object of study. To this end, pieces containing at least one of the following terms – “trans,” “transgende,” “transsexual,” and “*travesti*” – were included. The search was conducted using terms in Spanish and English.

⁹ See the subsection titled “Identification of word communities or clusters”.

The database was constructed using four consecutive phases of information incorporation. First, a Scopus database with 215 publications was downloaded. Then, 33 publications identified in the literature review carried out by Torre (2023) were incorporated into the database. Subsequently, a search was carried out in Timbó-Foco. Based on a reading of the titles, another 50 publications were incorporated. Finally, the bibliography of all the papers that were available as full texts was reviewed. When a new piece of work was identified, the publication was retrieved, and a new bibliographic review of the article was conducted. The process was repeated until no new references were found. A total of 85 publications were read and 47 new papers were identified. At the end of the four stages, this study compiled a database of 345 academic papers.

Construction of the network of word co-occurrence

The study constructed an undirected and unweighted graph¹⁰ of the keyword co-occurrence in academic publications on the *trans** social movement. The graph was constructed using the R package called “bibliometrix”, which employs the method proposed by Batagelj and Cerinsek (2013). Once the network was constructed, it was analysed using the “graph” package.

For the construction of the network, the study employed the 250 most used words in academic papers. The search excluded the terms “social movement”, “activism”, and “collective identity”, both in their singular and plural forms, as well as in all the different languages in which they appear in the database (English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French). These terms were used as search patterns, so it was expected that they would frequently appear in the publications. The aim of including these terms was to capture papers that study collective forms of association among *trans** people, but the analysis of their use was not particularly relevant to this study. However, the search patterns used to capture the “*trans*” aspects of the movement were included. This decision is based on the fact that the use of these identity categories has varied over time, both by the social actors involved and the academic community. Analyzing how each form of naming correlates with other conceptual terms was particularly relevant to this study.

In this study, synonyms that suppose the fusion of nodes are not predefined, with one exception: the use of acronyms that refer to the non-hetero-cis-conforming identity categories (LGBT, LGBTI, LGBTIQ, LGBTQ+, LGBTQIA+, and so on). In this case, this set was grouped in the same node. Though the diversity of uses reflects an intention to recognize social groups cumulatively, it is understood that they generically refer to similar topics.

It is important to emphasize that this type of approach only analyzes publications that contain keywords. Many texts, due to their publication format, do not include this content. Consequently, the semantic analysis was applied to 229 of the publications, 86% of which were journal articles. The remaining 14% included dissertations, books, and some research papers.

Identification of word communities or clusters

The identification of communities or clusters in a network provides an indication of how the network is organized. This makes it possible to identify groups of nodes that have a certain degree of autonomy in relation to the graph as a whole (Fortunato; Hric, 2016). In the case of word networks, it is a useful tool for capturing close and distant topics or approaches.

There are many techniques for defining word communities. However, as Fortunato and Hric (2016) point out, there are no clear guidelines on how to evaluate and compare the results obtained by the different algorithms. In this paper, different types of detection methods were utilized: simple, hierarchical and multilevel¹¹. The method was selected according to the results obtained. Three

¹⁰ The graph can be weighted according to the number of times the words appear together. This study does not take this information into account.

¹¹ During the work process, the following methods were evaluated: flat communities, edge betweenness, path traps, method of Leiden and method of Louvain. Simple methods are characterized by their direct approach to detecting communities within a network. Flat communities are a type of approach with these characteristics: the partition of the graph is calculated from random “walks,” through which densely connected subgraphs are found (Rosvall *et al.*, 2009:14). Hierarchical methods approach detection through iterative processes, in which communities are divided or

criteria were used to evaluate their quality: (1) their modularity – the algorithms whose classification was furthest from that obtained by a random network were considered to be more optimal; (2) the degree of similarity between the partitions - the most similar partitions were considered to be more robust; and (3) their usefulness for the interpretation of results, namely, their possible theoretical meaning.

The results are presented based on two algorithms: flat communities and the method of Louvain. Both present a degree of modularity greater than 0.6, which means that they are far from a random partition (value 0). In both methods, approximately half of the nodes (46.3%) are classified in the same way. The main difference between the partitions lies in the number of groups they divide. While the flat community detection identified 21 groups, the method of Louvain did so in 10. This difference in quantification can be explained by the differences between the algorithms. Flat communities are calculated from random “walks” by which densely connected subgraphs are found (Rosvall *et al.*, 2009). The method of Louvain generates multi-level partitions. This means that, based on a decomposition of the network into separate communities, the method constructs a meta-network in which each community is iteratively contracted (Blondel *et al.*, 2008). Analytically, it is interesting to observe both partitions. While it is possible to observe large sets of topics using the method of Louvain, the particularities of smaller clusters can be better observed through flat communities.

Description of publications

Trans-activism is a relatively new field of academic production. The first identified study is from 1997. It is possible, however, that there are older publications that were not captured by the search criteria or that are not available in digital format. Even so, it is not surprising that this incipient body of literature emerged in the 1990s. The 1970s and 1980s were decades of intense mobilization around the rights of the LGBTQIA+ population, particularly in the United States. *Trans** people participated very actively in these processes. This review, however, sought to capture those studies that focused primarily on analyzing *trans** movements. Publications about LGBTQIA+ organizations were excluded, except for those that explicitly and centrally problematized the participation of *trans** people and/or their link with gay and lesbian activists. In this sense, the emergence of collectives organized exclusively by *trans** people or that fought for their own demands were consolidated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in several countries. Therefore, it is to be reasonably expected that the study of these collectives dates from a relatively later period.

The increase of the number of annual publications is consistent with the growth of social mobilizations and the significant legislative victories that these organizations achieved in recent decades. One can observe that the quantity of publications increased significantly in the 2000s, and grew rapidly in the last five years. From 2018 onwards, more than 30 publications were produced annually, and this is significantly higher than the average of 7 publications per year, calculated based on the entire period.

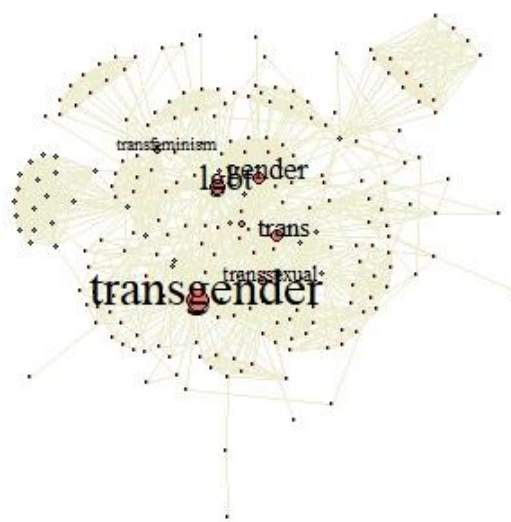
The papers were written by 473 authors born in different countries across all five continents. Notably, there is a large volume of publications in the United States, Spain, the United Kingdom and, in Latin America, in Brazil and Argentina. The journals that published the greatest number of articles are all North American: Journal of Lesbian Studies, Journal of Homosexuality, Sexualities and Critical Social Policy. During the last seven years, one can observe a significant increase in the presence of a journal specializing in the *trans** population, Transgender Studies Quarterly, and the Brazilian journal *cadernos pagu*.

merged at different levels. The edge betweenness method, which iteratively removes edges with greater intermediation in order to fragment the network. and the path trap, which orders based on the identification of highly connected subgraphs, are examples of this type of approach. Algorithms such as Leiden and Louvain are multilevel methods, based on the optimization of modularity.

Conceptual structure of the field

The study analyzed the conceptual structure of the field based on a network of co-occurrences of keywords from the articles and the division of these into different sub-graphs. Graph 1 illustrates the representation of this network. The graph has 235 nodes (words) and 1337 edges (links between words according to their simultaneous appearance in an article). The graph is also structured in a single component and is relatively sparse¹². The words “transgender”, “lgbt”, “gender”, “trans”, “transexual”, and “transfeminism” have a high degree of centrality compared to the other nodes in the network.

Graph 1. Network of word co-occurrence



Source: Author's own creation based on a literature review

Note: The network is diagrammed using the Kamada Kawai algorithm. The size of the nodes is proportional to their degree.

Graph 2 visually presents the partitioning of the network into word clusters based on flat communities and the method of Louvain. Both algorithms classify 46.3% of the nodes in the same way.

According to both methods, four sets of words are accurately clustered within the same cluster. The four communities¹³ are characterized by a significant number of words mentioned in a single article, though there are few nodes that connect the subgraph to the network as a whole. This suggests that these articles use words that are atypical compared to the body of publications as a whole.

The other six groups detected using the method of Louvain differ from the classification obtained using flat communities. The fifth group (G5) is formed by terms associated with the link between *trans** organizations and feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements. It includes terms such as “*transfeminismo* [transfeminism]”, “gender violence”, “sexual identity”, “homosexualities”, as well as “proud” or “celebration”, usually related to LGBTQIA+ group slogans. It also includes terms used in theories aimed at understanding different forms of structural oppression, such as “postcolonial studies”, “*interseccionalidad del género* [gender intersectionality]” and even, in some

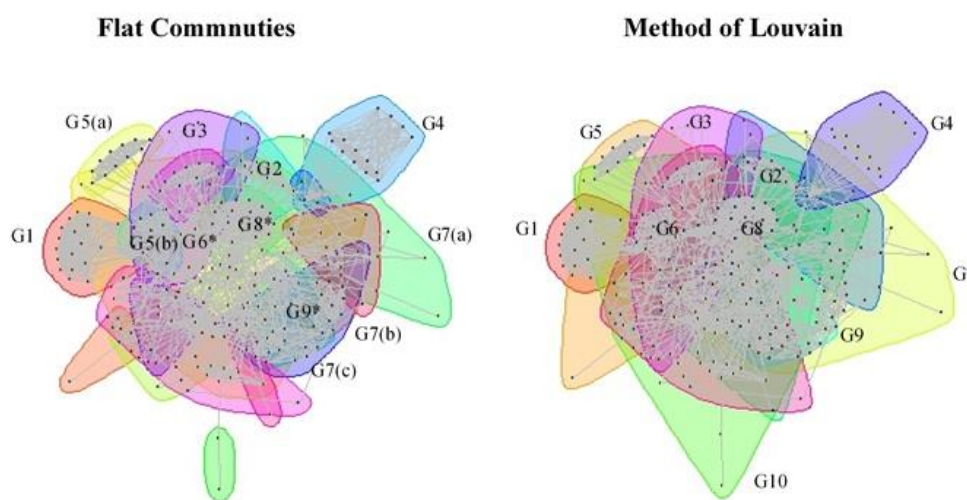
¹² The density of the network has a value of 0.05.

¹³ The first group (G1) is formed by terms used in an Argentine ethnographic study on cultural practices. The second group (G2) includes words used in a study of political psychology that examines the marginalization of sex workers in Brazil. The third (G3) and fourth (G4) group contains words taken from two studies written in Colombia. The third group (G3) refers to terms used in a paper criticizing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a mechanism of depoliticization of collective action. The fourth group (G4) concentrates words from a collectively authored article on epistemological justice towards trans people within the processes of reparation for armed conflicts in Colombia.

cases, “queer theory”. The sixth group (G6) detected by the Louvain algorithm is similar in nature. However, it includes terms found in articles that fundamentally problematize the conflicts and tensions within feminist movements.

The seventh group of words (G7) identified using the method of Louvain includes terms associated with different types of action repertoires (“*manifestações de rua* [street manifestations]”, “street demonstration”, “YouTube”) and words related to the communication processes of the collectives (“*audiencia* [audience]”, “*comunicación* [communications]”, “*contra-públicos* [counter-publics]”). It also includes a wide variety of words referring to identity categories (“*transsexualidad* [transsexuality]”, “*personas trans* [trans people]”, “*travesti*”, “*trans** [transgender]”, “*transsexual* [transsexual]”, “transsexual”, “transvestite”, “*travesti*”) and terms that allude to studies about identity, subjectivity, and social representations. According to the classification using flat communities, three groups could be formed (albeit not exactly) from these terms. The first group is associated with the analysis of the processes of subjectivation and communication. The second group is about street manifestations. The third group concerns *trans** people as objects of social representation.

Graph 2. Identification of clusters using a network of word co-occurrence



Source: Author's own creation based on a literature review

Note: Networks are diagrammed using the Kamada Kawai algorithm. The communities detected using the Method of Louvain are listed, and some similar clusters identified from flat communities are referenced.

The eighth cluster (G8) includes terms that allude to the demands for rights and legislative reforms by *trans** organizations. It includes terms such as “rights”, “legislation”, “legislative politics”, “judicial politics”, “interest groups” or “state politics”. A ninth cluster (G9) also encompasses terms associated with the demand for rights. However, unlike cluster G8, the cluster G9 is composed of words used in historiographic studies that reflect on how the concept of citizenship as it relates to these groups has changed. Therefore, terms such as “*ciudadanía* [citizenship]”, “*ciudadanía sexual* [sexual citizenship]” or “gender dysphoria” are included here¹⁴.

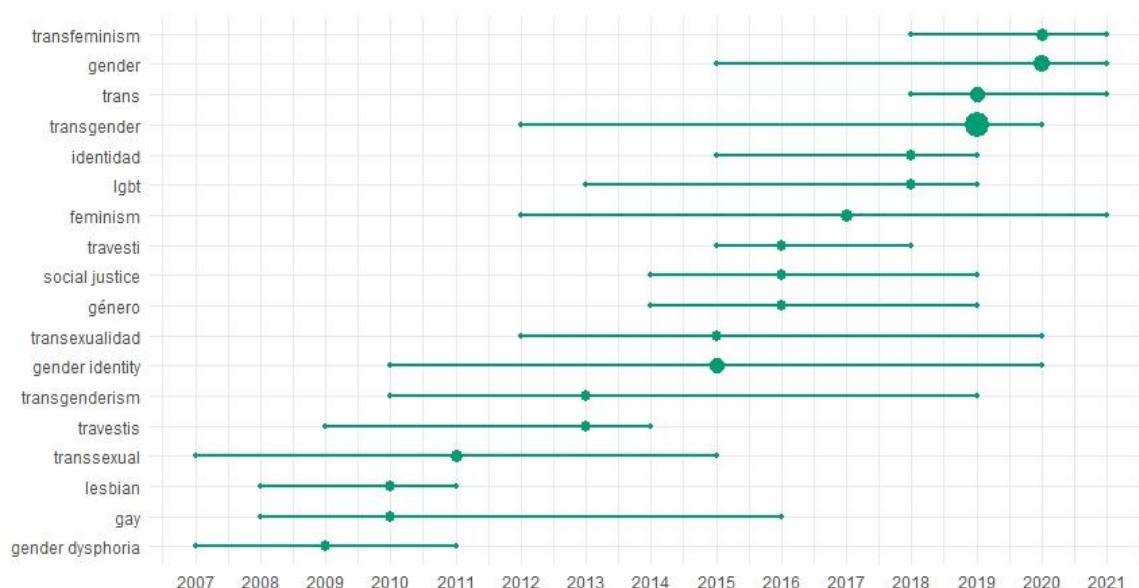
The last group (G10) is the largest of those identified using the method of Louvain; it includes 48 nodes. Furthermore, it is the one with the most inconsistent cluster compared to the others obtained using flat communities. One might consider this cluster as the least robust of all those detected. This set of terms can intersect with the previous classifications and includes a wide range of identity categories, different country names and continents, and some methodological perspectives.

¹⁴ Based on the division obtained using flat communities, a single sub-graph in each respective cluster (G8* and G9*) is included in the classification of Louvain. The remaining terms are distributed into several different sized clusters.

Historical evolution of the conceptual structure

The terms frequently used in academic papers have varied in recent years. Graph 3 shows the most frequently used keywords in the period according to the descriptive statistics of distribution of the years in which certain keywords occurred. The illustration clearly demonstrates a predominance of studies focused on “gender dysphoria” approximately ten years ago. This type of study problematizes the consequences of medical pathologization in the construction of *trans** people's subjectivity, as well as the call for the de-medicalization of these identities. Around the mid-2010s, these references were abandoned, and the issue is predominantly framed as “gender identity”. In recent years, the association between *trans** activism and feminism becomes particularly relevant, and the term “transfeminism” emerges as a prevalent concept.

Graph 3. Evolution of “trending words”



Source: Author's creation based on the literature review.

Note: The graph represents quintiles 1 and 3, and the mean of the year's distributions in which the articles using the most frequent words were published. The size of the point representing the mean is proportional to the number of articles that included the word.

The predominance of identity categories also changed over the last decade. Terms such as “*travestis*” in Spanish and “transsexual” in English fell into relative disuse. On the other hand, the words “trans” and “transgender” - as ‘umbrella terms’ for non-cis-conforming identities - take center stage both in Spanish and English respectively.

Graph 4 presents the historical evolution of articles that use keywords corresponding to the clusters defined according to the method of Louvain. For all the communities, the number of publications that make reference to the terms below (Graph 4) increases, following similar trends to those observed for the entire database. However, the same pattern is not observed when analyzing the impact of the publications containing these terms compared to the total number of annual publications. This measure is understood as a possible indicator of the academic relevance of certain topics at any given time.

Graph 4. Evolution of the proportion of publications that use terms in word communities



Source: Author's creation based on the literature review

Note: Only the graphs for data clusters 5 to 10 are included.

Understanding the emergence of a *trans** social subject as a political subject with rights was one of the most frequently discussed issues in the social sciences regarding this field. Seventy-three publications (21% of all entries) refer to the terms included in the cluster that focuses on the development of a political subjectivity and the transformations this subjectivity has produced in terms of citizenship (G8). The impact of these studies was particularly relevant at the beginning of the 2000s, but they continue to provoke academic reflection today. The literature focused its attention on disputes over medical (de)pathologization, the recognition of the conditions of social exclusion, and key legislative victories achieved in recent years.

The emergence of a *trans** movement was marked by debates seemingly over the terminology that relates to identity categories. Coll-Plannas and Missé (2015) point out that these terms have a normative aspect, and their use situates disputes between social actors. *Trans** identities were necessarily influenced by their medical origin. However, what is at stake is not strictly an issue over terminology. On the contrary, these disputes involve, for example, different ways of conceiving of the connection between gender and body. Disputes are expressed in different areas of social life: debates over a framework of reference and strategic actions among activists (Burke, 2011); conceptions of citizenship (Hines, 2007; Soley-Beltran, 2007); demands for the revision of psychiatric manuals (Davy; Sorile; Schwend, 2018); or claims for attention within health systems (Cannoot, 2019).

Reflections about subjectivity and identity constructs undoubtedly represent the topic that has most captured the attention of social scientists studying *trans** movements. All the identified clusters of articles refer to this topic. However, the articles containing the words that were grouped in the G7 cluster (111 publications) have focused primarily on some aspects of this problem. Some examples of this are articles that address identity constructs from the perspective of their inherent processes of inclusion and exclusion (Davison, 2007; Sutherland, 2023); and others that consider the reflexivity required by such constructs (Serret, 2009). There are those that emphasize the role of the body (Escobar, 2013; Buriticá, 2013), the regulations involved in bodily transformation (Barbosa, 2015), or the exercise of prostitution in this process (Buriticá, 2013). In addition, articles focus on the evolution of the use of categories (Coll-Planas; Missé, 2020), discursive practices (Solís, 2021), and narratives (Platero, 2011; Cepeda-Bolívar, 2017; Pandolfi; Torre, 2021; Cannamela, 2022).

In recent years, concerns about the construct of subjectivity increased, along with considerations about the implications of these subjectivities on the ways in which organizations develop their repertoires of action and communication strategies towards an external audience. The articles reflect on how to express subjectivities on the internet and social media (Tortajada *et al.*, 2019; Carvalho, 2015; Carvalho, 2018); in street manifestations (Carvalho, 2015); or in artistic expressions (Blanca, 2016; Pais, 2022).

The legislative transformations that many States experienced in recent decades has also caught the attention of the academic field. Some studies question the historical relevance of these events (Vitulli, 2010; Taylor *et al.*, 2018). Others have focused on the relationship between *trans** activists and the State (Argüello, 2014), or on the framing (George, 2019; Taylor; Lewis, 2014) and the narratives (Platero, 2011; 2009) developed by activists to demand rights. Other issues to highlight include the processes of resistance to psychiatrization (Missé *et al.*, 2010) and its legal impacts (Canoot, 2019; Davy *et al.*, 2018), the regulations of body transformation (Barbosa, 2015), the demands for access to the health system (Pitts *et al.*, 2009), or inclusive labor laws (Vitulli, 2010). In recent years, the debate expanded to consider positive legislation (Barrancos, 2014) and gender identity laws (Battacharya, 2019; De Mauro *et al.*, 2019; Gupta, 2022). Some limits to the demands for rights were also addressed: the possible “depoliticization” of these movements (Buchely *et al.*, 2019; Verloo *et al.*, 2020), the persistence of the binary logic (Taylor *et al.*, 2018; Verloo *et al.*, 2020), the disconnect with the material dimensions of gender justice (Verloo *et al.*, 2020), or the influence of corporations interested in funding activist campaigns (O'Brien, 2019).

Studies in this field have commonly explored the link between the *trans** movement and other collectives. The relevance of this issue remained relatively constant in the literature published over the last few decades. Some publications have focused strictly on the formation of coalitions between activists (Navarro, 2019; Santos, 2020), while others question the frameworks that movements develop to establish these dialogues and articulations. In this sense, several studies question whether a “trans-feminist” movement is possible (Green, 2006) or if queer perspectives can be included in decolonial approaches (Pasos *et al.*, 2022). The tensions, conflicts and divisions in the literature reveal how cis-normativity has pervaded the practices by social movements, academic theorization, as well as the action strategies and theoretical perspectives that enable the emergence of this normativity.

Disputes over the nature of a sex-gender system or the non-binarity of gendered identities permeated feminist movements in particular. These issues appear in a significant corpus of work and are grouped in a same word cluster. This includes, for example, debates over the possibility of activists considering people with a “male” sex-physiological anatomy as “women” (Vukovic, 2021) or the limitations of the discursive strategy of “equal rights” (Mathen, 2006). The publications demonstrated the heterogeneity of the debate’s trajectory in different geopolitical contexts. Green (2006) describes the emergence of “trans-exclusive” perspectives within the feminist movement in the United States, while Pan (2022) looks at this issue in Eastern European countries. Turnbull-Dugarte and McMillan (2022) analyze alliances built between conservative thinkers and some feminist activists to “resurrect gender binarisms” in the United Kingdom. In contrast, Platero (2011)

narrates a shift in Spanish feminism towards “transfeminism”, in which important coalitions of activists are developed.

Final reflections

The social mobilization of *trans** people has posed significant challenges for the social sciences, which aim to understand the relationship between the State, types of citizenship, and the development of political subjects and collective actions. Their approach revisits long-standing questions in this field, while simultaneously introducing new problems, reexamining how sex, gender, and sexuality shape contemporary nation-States.

Research into this topic raises long-standing issues in the field of social movements: Why does a movement emerge in a particular socio-historical context? What is the role of identity in collective actions? How and why are specific repertoires of action chosen? In particular, the *trans** movement has demanded a constructivist approach to thinking about identity. This perspective seeks to account for the complex reflective processes and disputes these collectives demand regarding the establishment of frameworks of reference.

The literature review shows that the primary interest of academic research on trans-activism lies in the study of subjectivity. What is the relationship between body and subjectivity? What is “natural” about human behavior? What is the role of technology and of body modification techniques in these processes? How is the concept of citizenship defined through these relations? How are the norms regarding what is permitted and what is prohibited defined? What are the possibilities for transgression? What happens when stigmatized groups acquire a new status of legal and social recognition? These are some of the many questions that the study of these movements poses for the academic agenda.

The increase in the number of publications on this topic is a relatively recent phenomenon, beginning in the 1990s. However, the field was consolidated and grew at the turn of the century. For this reason, identifying substantive changes regarding the content addressed in the literature is no simple task. Nevertheless, an examination of its evolution over the years permits the identification of some shifts in the researchers' main areas of interest. Thus, an approach focused on the role of medical diagnoses on the development of subjectivity (and the consequent demands for de-medicalization) has become less common in recent years. At the same time, this topic has become part and parcel of the “gender identity” issue. Along with this process, the topic has acquired relevance as an object of study with particular characteristics, different from a generic LGBTQIA+ movement.

This is a field of study strongly influenced by the social contexts in which academic research is produced. The evolution of topics of interest was marked by important social and regulatory changes related to the demands and actions of *trans** movements. The approval of anti-discrimination laws, which enable changes of one's name or registered sex, changes in legislation regarding marriage and adoption, and the promotion of access to the labor market or the education system, gave rise to various debates in several countries. Furthermore, the reflexivity of activists themselves permeates academic approaches. There is a growing tendency to seek to categorize social actors according to the categories they choose to describe themselves. The predominance of words such as “trans” and “transgender” in publications is symptomatic of this dialogue between academics and social actors.

A panoramic (but not superficial) view of the publications demonstrates how *trans** activism has permeated discussions within various areas of study on collective mobilization. This study calls attention, in particular, to reflections from decolonial studies, anti-racist movements, intersectionality theory, and the implications of these theories for the latest wave of the feminist movement.

The objective of this study was to provide an overview of the content of academic publications. In this way, it utilized a method for classifying terms inductively based on the keywords used in articles. Although this strategy allows for a global approach to the production of texts, it has some limitations that should be considered in future studies. In particular, many identified publications were excluded from the analysis because their authors did not specify keywords. In

addition, the criteria for the selection of these terms may differ between authors. Since the approach of this study was to summarize available information, it would be useful to take a closer look at the different ways in which words can be used depending on the social and geographical context of academic production.

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