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The gender of love: therapeutic culture and feminisms*

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Abstract

This article reflects on the therapeutic culture that Brazilian anonymous support groups produce – especially in MADA (Women Who Love Too Much Anonymous) – and on contemporary feminist strategies and forms of action in digital networks, as pedagogical instances of emotional learning and social (re)organization of romantic suffering. In this way, I attempt to understand how accounts about love and romantic suffering offer modes of action, systems of communication, and exchanges between these domains.

Key Words: Therapeutic Culture, Love, Feminisms, Internet.

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Introduction

> Nonetheless, paradoxically, and alongside the desire to protect my very essence, there is an intense desire to publicly confess, and not to a priest. But who knows, L. de A., if someday I will know how to write a novel or a short story that reveals a person's innermost essence without leaving her exposed, naked, and brazen. There is no danger, granted: a human's essence reaches so far that it can become confused with the contours of that which we call God (Clarisse Lispector, 1999:79).[1]

> Concern for the future of Black female students, whose intellectual ideas, scholarship and writing are sorely needed has motivated me to do the "critical self-inventory" West advocates and to publically discuss personal experience, giving personal testimony that may encourage and uplift. In the process of critical self-evaluation I realized how I had been socialized not to speak about commitment to intellectual life, but rather to see that as a private, almost "secret" choice. By not speaking about this choice, I was also not conveying to Black female students the joys and pleasures of intellectual work. If I and other Black women, particularly those of us who work in academic settings, only talk about the difficulties, we paint a gloomy picture that may lead students to see intellectual work as diminishing and disenabling. Often in conversations with students, particularly young Black females, I am asked by students to discuss aspects of my personal journeying. This passionate inquiry and interrogation often challenges my sense of privacy (such as it is), yet it is rooted in a profound desire on their part to understand the process by which Black women choose intellectual life, where and how we find

[1] Translator's Translation. Excerpt from *A Descoberta do Mundo – Crônicas* ("Discovery of the World – Chronicles"), a collection of the author's chronicles, novellas, short-stories, reflections and annotations, originally published in the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*, between 1967 and 1973. "*L de A*" refers to a reader that Lispector is addressing in the chronicle.

> personal fulfillment. Their longing for Black women intellectuals to chart the journey often places a demand for openness, for candid, honest revelation that may not be placed on male colleagues, or non-Black women. Yet, Black women intellectuals committed to insurgent practices must recognize the call to speak openly about the intellectual life as we know it, about out work as a form of activism (bell hooks 1991:164).[2]

In different ways and with different motives, the excerpts that open this article revolve around the authors' conflicts, needs, and desires for excessive exposure, as well as centering on personal preservation and disclosure. I have chosen them as they provide what I consider to be significant suggestions for anxieties that are both intellectual and political. They motivate reflections about the various possibilities, situations and forms in which private stories are converted into public acts of communication and their ends, about the moral political grammar and emotional complexes that permeate them, and above all their power to constitute subjective positions and notions of what is public and/or common.

Some of these concerns arose from my contact with the group Women Who Love Too Much Anonymous (henceforth MADA) in São Paulo during my doctoral research, between 2008 and 2012.[3] Unlike other similar groups, only women are allowed to participate in MADA. Over the years I heard accounts and testimonies of their experiences with romantic suffering (mostly from heterosexual women) and the ways in which they sought to overcome it. Stemming from a notion of common suffering, the group is a space in which women produce paths to learning how to conduct themselves in the affective-romantic field. A significant part of the narratives of those who "seek recovery" from the "behavioral pattern of loving too much" could subscribe to a

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[2] Original excerpt from *Breaking Bread*, 1991.

[3] In my research I analyzed the emergence of the notions of sex and love addiction through anonymous support groups, medical conventions, and the popularization of these categories (Ferreira, 2012).

feminist repertoire but were not identified as such. Although, from certain perspectives,[4] MADA and feminist notions and dynamics could be associated, from an ethnographic and practical point of view, I did not find subjects forged through the convergence between these discourses. In this sense, being MADA and being feminist can be considered as competing discourses.

Another concern arose during the same period, while I monitored and participated in feminist political-communication webs that use the Internet as a locus for relevant action in Brazil (Ferreira, 2015). These webs are comprised of social network profiles and diverse blogs, such as the blog *Escreva Lola Escreva* (Write Lola Write), whose diffusion – combined with the author's actions – has had a significant impact on Brazilian feminist activism.[5] Lola also often provides a space for guest posts on her blog, in which readers' letters or even writings clarify certain themes, positions and/or disputes arising from discussions and dialogues triggered by the posts. A year after the end of my doctoral research, I found a text written by M., 27, who lives in São Paulo and identified herself as MADA.[6] In it which she explained

[4] In feminist debates and practices, narratives of life experiences, statements/testimonies, writings about oneself, and personalizing techniques (such as those employed in feminist self-awareness women-only groups in the 1960s and 70s) were very common for narrating activists' practices, producing theoretical and methodological frameworks, establishing concerns during certain periods or at certain moments, as well as for producing memory. One possible relationship could be between MADA and these resources in feminist settings, despite the different purposes through which conventions of personal accounts operate, and thus their different effects. See Procopius (2007) for research on MADA that produces these counterpoints.

[5] Lola teaches literature at the Federal University of Ceara and has has the blog *Escreva Lola Escreva* since 2008. The blog puts forward critical opinions of the media's representation of women, supports campaigns for legalized abortion and against gender-based violence. The blog receives over 260,000 visits per month (*Época Magazine*, February 2014). Lola has been the target of digital smear campaigns since 2014, when a website advocating hate speech was created under her name. She has also received death and rape threats due to the reach of her feminist activism.

[6] I am grateful to Adriana Vianna for drawing my attention to this material.

"her process": that five years after entering the group she became a feminist. On the one hand, her first person testimony did not exclude either identity (being MADA, being feminist); on the other, comments made in the blog to M's article revealed that being MADA and being feminist could be competing and, even, potentially contradictory discourses.

Given these concerns, this paper treats the therapeutic culture produced in anonymous support groups – especially in MADA – and new feminist strategies and forms of action as pedagogical instances of emotional learning and control, and for the social (re)organization of romantic suffering. To this end, I follow anthropological approaches that treat emotions and feelings as language, as forms of communication (Mauss, 1999, 2003; Sarti, 2011, 2014) that produce a "micro-politics of emotions": an idea that refers to the ability to dramatize, reinforce or change the social macro-relations that create the interpersonal relations in which individual emotional experience emerges (Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 2008; Rezende and Coelho, 2010).[7]

To this end, I begin by revisiting my doctoral thesis and show the pedagogical quality of the rhetorics of emotional control, and how it is produced through the coexistence of different gender dynamics. I then take the repertoire of romantic experience and suffering as a system of communication between MADA's therapeutic culture and digital feminist networks. The interpenetration of these discourses also produces pedagogical

[7] Lutz and Abu-Lughod (2008) called this "contextualism" in their review of the anthropology of emotions in the North American context. According to the authors, the issue of emotional control should be considered through Foucault's proposal on the production of discourses, that is, as a discourse that maintains a formative rather than referential relation with reality. They also argue that the discourse of emotional control finds parallels in discourses of sexual control. This control rhetoric requires a psycho-physical essence that is manipulated and directed to dispels a socially constructed nature from the notion of emotions (Lutz, 2008). However, according to this point of view, emotions are not just a historical and cultural construct but best defined as something that only exists in context, and that emerges through the relationship between interlocutors and their reference (Rezende and Coelho, 2010).

instances and effects that intervene in both settings, transforming both.

1. Revisiting Anonymous Support Groups

Among other topics, my doctoral research ethnographically dealt with the sociality[8] producing currents that are established within anonymous support groups that are connected to notions of sexual and/or romantic addiction/compulsion. I sought out and began to frequent MADA for my fieldwork because the notion of a group of women that gathered because "they loved too much" was directly related to previous research interests.[9]

I soon realized that many participants, as well as their boyfriends, partners or husbands, frequented other anonymous groups and that they all used the same notions at different groups,

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[8] I work with the concept of sociality in orde to indicate and underline the importance of the production and maintenance of relations, of placing them within the context of social processes in which any subject is invariably engaged in more than the rules, customs or structures that exist independently to the people being socialized. For the purposes of this argument, I thus intend to grasp people as containing relational potential, and as embedded in a matrix of relationships with others. In this sense, subjects are in constant *becoming* through relations that are constantly forged and re-forged, without assigning individuals and relations to a single domain of reified abstraction.

[9] I refer here to my Master's dissertation (Ferreira, 2006), which addresses the trajectories of HIV-positive heterosexual women working within HIV+ political activism. All the women interviewed contracted the virus from men with whom they had stable (heterosexual and monogamous) relationships, referred to as marriage or dating. At the time of the research, some women were no longer married or dated the same men. However, no marriage or dating relationship ended as a result of HIV and its discovery. In these narratives a certain "legitimacy" was attributed to the fact that the husband, boyfriend and/or partner had infected them. This "legitimacy" was expressed in the accounts when they narratively referred to the period of their lives in which they "did not know AIDS," "had no information," and felt protected because they were married. The introduction of these women into NGOs and activist networks opened a political repertoire for them through an emotional politics in which feelings of "love," "trust," and "passion" produced an exchange between knowledge and activism.

such as "rock bottom," "codependency," "anorexia."[10] Some of these notions were the object of explanatory and theoretical interest – in the sense that, in some groups more than others, they involved knowledge systematization and the production of native theories – but their significance and meanings circulated in many of these groups. I thus realized that subjects and meanings circulated between the groups, producing a particular sociality.[11]

Although my fieldwork involved diverse groups, I focused on DASA (Love and Sex Dependents Anonymous), CODA (Co-dependents Anonymous), and MADA. Anonymous groups associated with notions of love and/or sex addiction are spaces that condense the tensions of affective-sexual norms and conventions, often pathologizing sex and romantic relationships. Participants (both female and male) consider their so-called compulsions for sex, love and/or relationships as diseases, a view that operates through the emic conception that addiction is a chronic and potentially fatal diseasethat manifests through "behavioral patterns."

According to native theories of this disease, its physical-moral dimension appears in the subjects' narratives as a kind of "short-circuit" in the ways that they conduct themselves in the affective-sexual field. These theories also involve a substantialist conception of disease, for example, in relation to the role that alcohol, drugs, and money play in their biographies. In this context, it was important to perceive a type of distribution of the person, who articulates meanings in the diverse groups in which she circulates, while seeking to repair the damages caused in her

[10] For more on these categories see Neves (2004); Campos (2005); Ferreira (2012).

[11] The groups' organizational modes dispense with the presence of experts such as psychologists, physicians, etc. Moreover, such groups maintain themselves the participants' contributions of any monetary value, they have a specific way of managing participants' information – known as *anonymity* – and notions of the sacred conveyed by ideas of a *Higher Power* and collective consciousness. For more on the ritualized practices through which these groups operate and their operational modes, see Ferreira (2012).

relational networks due to certain sexual practices, relationships, and emotional states: such as Madalena (a Black woman in her 30s, a bank employee and participant in various groups) who said said to me, "Oh Carol! I leave each part in each group that I go to, I leave the financial side at Debtors Anonymous, I leave my emotional side at Neurotics Anonymous, and loving too much at MADA."

These notions are revealed through *sharing*: an emic category that means telling your experience to others. Every time a subject takes the floor, or when it is their turn to give their testimonial to the group, she/he makes public her/his distress at an alleged moment of emotional, affective or sexual suffering or turmoil. The narrated personal dramas are expressed through the body on several emotional levels, sometimes in very distressing manners, with the presence of crying, tremors, vocal and respiratory alterations, and then sometimes with the simple gesture of placing a hand on one's breast to indicate "their interior," as an expression of this dramaticity.

Sharing or testimonials can happen in the group, during online conversations, can be published in printed materials or even on the groups' websites. They are private stories converted into public acts of communication. The mechanism that allows for this translation is the imagination of a common experience of suffering, which creates a deep sense of belonging to a "community of sufferers"[12] or, as I wrote on a different occasion, "of an imagined

[12] The inspiration for this argument comes from Cavalcanti's (2007) interpretation of Turner's (1968) *Schism and Continuity*. Though heir to the theoretical and methodological influences of the Manchester School, Turner's work presents heterodox ideas, especially in terms of the relationship between process and social structure, and puts forward the idea that social unity does not happen in spite of conflict but through conflict itself. The notion of social drama established by Turner allows us to relate sociological understanding with a vision of social experience as an experience of subjectivation that is accomplished by learning, handling, and use of symbols. This concept is coined by the author to explain the sense of belonging to a social group, in his case the *Ndembu*, as based on the continuous production of a "community of suffering," in which tensions and conflicts are expressed and resolved healing and affliction rites. These rites thus

universal fellowship" (Ferreira, 2012). Through a sociologically spatialized language and aesthetics, these subjects' imaginative and identificatory processes create a broad and transnational range of similar sufferers; shaping the ways in which private stories should be shared, the motivation for narrating them in public, the forms in which the public should interpret them, and the appropriate corresponding care.[13]

The rigorous self-control producing technologies created in anonymous groups that work through the idea of sexual and/or romantic addiction effectively bring about an *emotional civil society*.[14] This takes place through the imaginative and identificatory subjective process of common suffering, as well as through the notion of public representation that this experience creates. As a result, in this context, we might identify an *affective citizenship* (Irvine, 2007), which is devised to enable social subjects through an *emotional ethos*[15] that is based on notions of self-control and the lack of it.[16]

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not only reveal points of tension within the social structure but also constitute a space for the *Ndembu* person's reflection, analysis, self-analysis, and the conceptual and internal transformation in their relationships.

[13] In my research on anonymous groups, a "community of sufferers" produces the notion of equality through the group's ritualized practices, which could be translated in the statement "here we are all equal, regardless of class, race, creed, or religion." However, the participants referred to a number of differences regarding the urban-spatial displacements between groups, as well as in the relation between social practices and the production of notions of addiction and vice.

[14] I am grateful to Adriana Vianna for drawing my attention to this term during my doctoral defense.

[15] I use the notion of ethos as employed by Gilberto Velho (1981) in his critique of Geertz. The latter states that a worldview refers to a cognitive framework, while *ethos* is associated with lifestyles. Velho problematizes this separation by arguing that a cognitive system is inseparable from a belief system, which implies emotions and feelings, producing an indissoluble link between knowledge and affect. The division between *ethos* and worldview, which is relativized in Velho's analysis, permeates his anthropological work as it was important for understanding how values and moralities are built within relationships among very diverse social groups in the urban space and, at the same time, how this

Women and love are not related *a priori* within the ethnography on anonymous groups because the social drama of addiction – in its relation to an affective-sexual field and containing romantic notions – was expressed through expectations and categories that mobilized both men and women. In this context, the rhetorics of emotional control relate to multiple, coexisting gender discourses (Rosaldo, 1978; Lutz, 2008).

One such discourse is linked to the discursive rationale formed within contemporary therapeutic culture, with its androgynous quality and lack of gender preference (Illouz, 2010).[17] This feature appeared in learnings conveyed through participation

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relates to the group lifestyles, practices and expressions in a shared urban space. I am grateful to Isadora Lins França and Maria Elvira Diaz-Benitez for raising this point.

[16] In an attempt to understand the changes in the secular regime of sexuality, Carrara (2015) indicates how they have shifted from "non-reproductive" individuals or groups, or those exercising their sexuality beyond the "walls of heterosexuality," to other concerns, such as: to those who have difficulty recognizing their own desires and are unable to derive satisfying pleasure from sex, due to either organic or psychological difficulties; those without sufficient control over their own sexual desires, placing their own integrity and the integrity of others at risk; and finally people who, according to new criteria, feel unwanted desires, mainly toward those whose consent cannot be assured.

[17] According to the author, therapeutic discourse – which she defines as a "contagious cultural structure" – is a very convincing narrative for men and women as it is based on a traditionally masculine ideal of self-confidence, currently foregrounded in people's emotional lives, and allowing for self-management in both public and private spheres. Still according to Illouz, emotional abilities created within contemporary therapeutic culture produce forms of social distinction. The author claims that such dynamics involves interactions between old and new masculinities that create emotional hierarchies. For Illouz (Ibid.), these hierarchies are socially stratified by class and thus middle and upper-middle class subjects have more resources for achieving them when compared to, what she calls, the working classes. In this context, virtuous conduct has feminine women at the highest level, followed by feminine men, who overtake masculine women. Although Ilouz presents inspiring points, my research increasingly shows how people from middle and low-medium strata sought these groups to address their emotional and sexual-affective states, as well as attending individual therapy.

in inter-group networks, and relative to the expectation of reformulating one's affective-sexual conduct:

> In reality, we're looking for love, it's not just sex (...) I believe it's about having a relationship, right? Finding a person and establishing a relationship with them. A healthy and loving relationship. Every relationship has problems, I'm not talking about a perfect relationship (Nando, São Paulo, 2010).[18]
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> ***
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> And then he called me a few times. After two days, I think, we went to the movies and started dating! Because I have this relationship pattern. I don't have the pattern of hooking-up. Hooking-up isn't enough for me. I'd need to hook-up with ten people! It's not enough for me, not enough tenderness, sex, emotions. I need more. I need a boyfriend (Cindy, São Caetano, 2010).[19]

Both Nando and Cindy considered themselves as addicted to sex and, through their participation in the groups, they sought the "knowledge" to learn new ways of conducting themselves in the affective-sexual field. The ability to learn such behavior was linked to a pedagogical method that erased gender differences in the quest for stable and monogamous relationships in which the subjects could act sentimentally. The notions of addict/addicted to sex (or sexual addiction) and codependency are relevant categories in this repertoire of the rhetorics of emotional control. Their emergence and use within a specialized framework also

[18] Nando, 46, "white", single, secondary education complete, salesman.

[19] Cindy, 40, English teacher, at the time living alone at the back of her parents' house, located in the metropolitan region of São Paulo. She defined herself as heterosexual and as a *morena clara* (a light-skinned black woman), and participated in the groups Love and Sex Dependents Anonymous (DASA), Women who Love Too Much (MADA) and Neurotics Anonymous (NA).

contribute to the gender discourses that are present among anonymous groups.[20]

On an international level, the concept of sexual addiction first emerged in 1977, among a group of men that frequented Alcoholics Anonymous in Boston (USA), and who discovered their condition by turning AA's philosophy and ideology toward their "sexual inabilities." They thus defined their frequent masturbation, casual sex habits, emotional dependence, and extra-marital relations as the expression of a new disease called *sex and love addiction*. The perception of an out of control sexuality motivated these AA members to find other people with similar problems with whom to share their suffering, and thus "stay sober" (Levine and Troiden, 2002).

The notion of codependency appears in a context of new readings of vice/addiction, leading to the emergence of the first and most classic definition of the term at the end of the 1970s to describe the dysfunctional relationship between wife and alcoholic husband.[21] Thereafter, the psychology/psychopathology literature on the subject begins to distinguish between dependency and codependency. The first notion commonly appears to refer to people addicted to chemical substances and alcohol (chemical dependency). However, the second notion refers to an addiction to another person or other people, for which the resulting

[20] Throughout the text, lay elements relate to systems of knowledge production, especially within the world of anonymous groups. This context is comprised of the subjects' emotional experiences and "truths," and the (re)appropriation of self-help books and their long and complex process of production, distribution, and consumption. Meanwhile, "specialized knowledge" refers to knowledge systems traditionally defined as scientific. Nevertheless, in other works (Ferreira, 2012, 2013, and 2014) I have shown how the separation of these fields is arbitrary in the context of the emergence of categories relative to sex and love addiction, how they present processes of co-production more than difference, and find structure within lay systems.

[21] The notion of codependency began to emerge in 1951, albeit not yet with this name, in anonymous support groups for Families of Alcoholics (Al-Anon). The group was created in New York by people who "had their lives indirectly affected by alcoholism," most of them were wives of alcoholic men.

problems are not considered as symptoms but as issues in themselves.

A focus on the family expands the definition of the term and begins to include children or any close individual involved in a relationship with an alcoholic, and other definitions begin to advocate that codependency can occur independently of alcoholism or other disorders caused by drug use. In the 1980s, a symbiosis of physicalist and psychological conceptions seems to occur through the effort to define the general notion of addict. In this context, especially with regard to sexuality, the definition of sexual addict came to articulate explanations of the purportedly physical inclination of dependence with its psychological correlative, that is, codependency. In this sense, specialist interpretative models on the etiology of diseases and on the concept of the body corroborated ongoing processes on the understanding of biologically determined sexual desire, as something objectively and empirically present in the body.[22]

[22] According to Russo (2004), the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM III), published in 1980 by the American Psychiatric Association, brought changes to terminology, particularly concerning alleged sexual and gender disorders/deviations. The author argues that analysis of the different versions of this document reveals a significant increase in the number of disorders, which are transformed into new types of deviations composing the repertoire of diagnoses. Russo characterizes this process as a "biological turn" in protocols guiding psychiatric practice, differing from previous versions of the document that had predominantly psychoanalytical interpretations of mental disorders that emphasized "the subject's moral dimension" over the physical dimension. The scenario identified by the author resounds in the debate on sexual addiction. In this context, we find theories centered on the brain, suggesting a finite number of polymorphous sexual possibilities from childhood and, consequently, behavior is synchronously determined by the mind and the brain. The notion of predispositions to certain behaviors thus gained ground and legitimacy, even though explanations articulating psychological and physical dimensions are more common and better accepted (especially in the world of anonymous groups). Thus, according to lay and expert explanations, most of the causes behind alleged sexual disorders lie in *dysfunctional homes*, *low self-esteem,* and *lack of self-worth*. Moreover, the sexual addict's behavior frequently appears as the result of previous abuse and its different ramifications: sexual, physical, and emotional.

In the production of these new diagnostic categories, the significance of the sexual act relates to the emphasis given to its frequency, who practices it and how, and is marked by gender. In the contemporary context of the medicalization of sexuality, the "classic" notion of the sexual addict converges with a male sexuality, while the definition of female sexual addiction always relates to the frequency of sexual intercourse. For example, in articles by Goodman (1998) – an American psychiatrist working to establish the diagnostic criteria for sexual addiction – most clinical examples deal with white middle-class American men. Meanwhile, in the late 1980s, in the book *Women, Sex and Addiction*, Charlotte Davis Kasl links female sexual addiction to the notion of codependency, defining it as a devastating disease befalling women who have sex at any time, even when they do not desire it, to maintain an affectionate relationship or to please their partner (Irvine, 2005)[23].

Within the anonymous groups, men and women self-identified as sex addicts and codependents, but only women could be "MADAS," or even, as in the emphatic assertions of my interlocutors, "very MADA" or "so fucking MADA," and have a "pattern of loving too much." The processual, mutable and temporary nature of gender attribution to notions of sexual addiction and codependency existed alongside the oppositional and mutually exclusive nature of the categories of "man" and "woman." In the anonymous groups, this oppositional gender discourse hierarchically organized feminine and masculine attributes to produce rhetorics of emotional control. This hierarchization appeared in multiple group dynamics.

During fieldwork, it became clear that circulation between groups created opportunities for romantic encounters, which often evolved into dating and heterosexual marriage. This context was

[23] For a broader analysis of the displacements of the notion of sexual addict that takes on board the processual dynamics of gender relations, involving notions such as nymphomania and satyriasis, see: Groneman (2001) and Ferreira (2012, 2013).

seen by the subjects as an opportunity to exercise the new sexual-affective skills that they learnt in the groups.[24] This exercise engendered an information network on the subjects' reputations: a crucial element for the native definition of whether someone was or was not committed to the values of "recovery". Although men and women operated with and were the targets of this evaluation, it was among women that this knowledge was also managed in a way that informed, in great detail, which men were better or worse partners for establishing an affective-sexual relationship.

Women were the primary interlocutors in these detailed exchanges, creating bad reputations for some men, especially in terms of evaluations of their potential for romantic involvement.[25] The information exchanged about men went beyond their

[24] Generally speaking, affective-sexual relationships within a group – or even between groups – were avoided due to the *intersection of addictions*. However, strategies and negotiations were adopted when a man and a woman started a relationship. It was practically unanimous among participants who were dating or had stared a relationship that both should stay in the groups. In their view this was a way to pedagogically exercise and practice emotional-sexual ethics and skills for the relationship to work. The couple did not always attend the same group and the decision to participate in different *fraternities* could be made immediately after starting a relationship. Nevertheless, when both met in the same place, went together to the same meeting, or stayed in the same group, one of the adopted strategies was for one of them to leave the room so that their partner could *share*. The network/opportunity established between groups for flirting, dating, and marriage can also be considered as a device for the production, exercise and regulation of heterosexualities, which ultimately organized itself through a marriage market created in this context.

[25] Behavior seen as failing to follow the practice, exercise, and pedagogy proposed by the groups were frowned upon, generating the use of accusatory notions such as *womanizer,* commonly directed toward men who supposedly attended the groups in order to *pick up* women without committing to the principles of *recovery*. Within the marital market established between groups the notion of an *easy woman* also circulated as a type of public image, pertaining to a female type engendered from clothing and the exercise of their sexuality. This figure appeared among women attending groups as an evaluative criterion of their own conduct, while the use of this idea by men occurred through the exercise of their *vices*, and never as evaluation of their *female partners* in groups, whether girlfriends/wives or otherwise.

supposedly adequate use of an ideal attainment of sexual-affective ethics and skills. It also included physical characteristics, how they kissed, "had sex," and their behavior in an intimate setting, the most frequent being diverse negotiations during consented sexual practices and condom use.

As a cultural and historical context associated with a type of femininity, the romantic repertoire was greatly valued in the composition of the rhetorics of emotional control by men and women, as previously mentioned. However, among women, reputations were also produced that could be used to deal with emotional states in general. Thus, part of the interactions within that context naturalized and valued feminine "aptitudes," such as a mother's emotional competence, care, and affection. At the same time, interactions within the groups meant that the appreciation and naturalization of feminine emotional competences became denaturalized before the "wary surprise" of seeing men in groups telling their stories:

> The DASA meeting had already begun when two women entered the room, both with their MADA "handouts" in their hands (...) when the time came for first-time participants to speak, Wilson looked in their direction and gave them the floor. Both women began by commenting on their participation in MADA and that they were surprised to hear men speak about how they suffered in relation to love and/or sex (Field Notes, São Paulo, 2008).

As mentioned earlier, if romantic expectations appeared to be androgynous for both men and women, at one level, a move toward it feminized the moral path of men who sought the care provided by the groups (Bonnet, 2014). Such a reflection allows for a more complex understanding of how individuals begin to take on gendered subjective positions through their involvement with multiple gender discourses. By recognizing that subjectivity is not unitary but multiple, and that it is the product of diverse discourses and practices relating to gender and gender difference, femininity

and masculinity cannot be taken as singular, fixed characteristics, exclusively located in women and men (Moore, 2000).

In women's eyes, this feminization was seen as a virtue, since women were the ones invested in a sentimental-romantic reputation. The prerogatives associated with women being more "skilled" and more "sensitive" to romantic and affective issues could be analyzed through Moore's (2000) reflection on fantasies and reputation. According to the author, fantasy – as ideas concerning the kind of person one wishes to be and the kind of person one wishes others to believe they are – play a certain role because fantasies of identity are connected to fantasies of power and agency in the world. According to the author, this would explain why concepts such as reputation not only connect to self-representation and self-evaluation but to the potential power and agency given by a good reputation.

According to Lutz (2008), discourses on emotions are related to discourses of gender, and the gendered rhetorics of emotional control transform discourses on emotions into statements on the exercise of power. Although both men and women use rhetorics of emotional control in the affective-sexual field described above, they can also be seen to establish different meanings and claims.[26] From women's perspective, to speak of emotional control through a repertoire of romantic suffering is to speak of power relations, their exercise, and the positions of biographically located and invested subjects. Within the anonymous groups (and we might extend this to contemporary therapeutic culture), where we find different gender discourses coexisting, the investment in a sentimental romantic reputation can be seen as a way of creating strategic repertoires and courses of action that result in unexpected commitments.

[26] Elsewhere (Ferreira, 2014), I explore the mapping of senses and tensions within narratives by male members of anonymous groups, taking into consideration how the use of the sex market is a reflexive object that produces styles of moderation and rigor relative to uses, demands, and desires in this field.

2. Rhetorics of (re)organization of the experience of romantic suffering

The anonymous support group Women Who Love Too Much Anonymous (MADA) follows guidelines from the book *Women Who Love Too Much*, by the North American family therapist Robin Norwood. According to the author, the book is based on her personal experience and on the experiences of other women involved with drug addicts. She noticed a "behavioral pattern" common to all these women and thus identified them as women who love too much. As a result, at the end of the book, the author suggests ways of establishing groups to treat the "disease of loving and suffering too much."

In Brazil, MADA was founded in 1994 in São Paulo by a woman who was married to a drug addict and began to follow the guidelines in Noorwood's book. Michele, who participated in the group for at least three years at the time of my research,[27] also confirmed that, in São Paulo, MADA emerged through the initiative of a woman who already participated in a Support Unit for Families and Friends of Alcoholics (Al-Anon) and two other women who participated in Narcotics Anonymous (NA): "they were sitting there on the church's doorstep, exchanging ideas about Robin's book after a group session, when they decided to found MADA."

The group is currently present in fourteen Brazilian States and the Federal District (Pardo and Peixoto, 2014). As previously mentioned, the main "behavioral pattern" addressed in the group is the "loving too much pattern" which, in the members' narratives, is linked to poorly managing their conduct in the romantic field. Among other ritualized group practices, at every meeting a woman is chosen to read the *characteristics of a woman*

[27] She is Japanese and was about 40 years old at the time, had three children and had been married, and said that she had "lost everything she had" in that relationship, and could not even come close to her ex-husband as it would make her "sick" again.

who loves too much or the *characteristics of a woman who has recovered from loving too much.*[28]

Within the social sciences, research interests have been aroused by the group's national proliferation and the (re)vitalization of discourses that understand emotions, particularly love, as natural and biological expressions.[29] These studies rightly indicate that MADA is a space that operates through conceptions commonly linked to notions of emotional disarray and vulnerability: elements historically regarded as intrinsic to conceptions of womanhood and the feminine. According to this argument, on the one hand, the group's ideals accept and attempt to reproduce normative gender patterns but, on the other hand, they also resignify these patterns through their encounter with other discourses: feminist demands, questions surrounding women's workload in the domestic sphere, conflicts between traditional and egalitarian conceptions of relationships, etc.

[28] These characteristics can be found in Robin Norwood's book, in group webs and in leaflets distributed by MADA. However, here are some of the characteristics related to the theme proposed in the present work – *Characteristics of a woman who loves too much*: 1) Has the fear of being abandoned, she'll do anything to prevent the end of the relationship; 2) She's willing to bear more than 50% of the responsibility, guilt, and failure of any relationship; 3) Her self-esteem is critically low and deep down she does not believe she deserves to be happy. *Characteristics of a woman who has recovered from loving too much*: 1) She legitimates herself rather than search for a relationship to provide her with a sense of self-worth; 2) She asks, "Is this relationship good for me?" 3) When a relationship is destructive, she is able to abandon it without going through a crippling depression. She has a circle of friends who support her and have healthy interests, which help her to overcome crises (Source: Leaflets distributed at MADA-SP groups).

[29] Although not a new theme on the nature of emotions, at the end of the first decade of the 2000s, European and American neuroscientists stated that love is the result of physiological stimuli and emerges from brain chemistry. Romantic suffering is related to compulsive-obsessive behaviors that, according to them, could be minimized by the use of drugs and memory manipulation, through techniques used in the treatment of post-traumatic stress. While this is a controversial topic in the scientific community, some argue that such drugs and techniques could be used with people who are in violent relationships but cannot free themselves from feelings of attachment.

(Procópio, 2007; Costa, 2008; Pardo, 2012; Pardo e Peixoto, 2014). MADA's traditional reading of gender, and the conflictual and crisis-ridden aspects of the gender discourses that produce MADA, are surefire targets for such critical reflections.

Although I agree with these analyses and consider them to be relevant, I would like to propose a different exercise. I thus argue that MADA's traditional reading of gender should be contextualized within repertoires that recognize the social experience of romantic suffering as being more complex than the simple allusion to norms as an ultimate objective.[30] By reducing these experiences to a mere "lack of awareness" we cannot include their ability to subvert norms from within.[31] Moreover, I propose that the repertoire of romantic experience and suffering offers its subjects important courses of action,[32] including

[30] Inspired by Gregori (2010).

[31] According to Illouz (2012), ever since the "second wave" of feminism, love has been considered as an element that is part of the systems of oppression of women. Feminist readings brilliantly showed how the struggle for power reside at the center of love and sexuality, opening the path for considering the personal as political, for example. According to her, readings by radical feminists (the author cites Shulamith Firestone and Ti-Grace Atkinson) consider men to be always at an advantage in these struggles, since economic power converges with sexual power. Ultimately, male power is such that gender hierarchies and inequalities happen and reproduce themselves through the demonstration and experience of romantic feelings, which in turn sustain other broader economic and political power differences. However, according to the author, the assumption of the primacy of power is a flaw within this particular feminist critique of love. During periods in which the patriarchy played a much more prominent and powerful role than now, love played a much less significant role within feminine and masculine subjectivities. In Illouz's argument (2012), the cultural prominence of love seems to be related with the decline of male power within the family and with relationship changes stemming from concepts such as gender equality and symmetry. According to her, when feminist theory reduces female love (and the desire to love) to a mere element of patriarchy, feminist theory cannot account for why love continues to be relevant for women and, she adds, for men also.

[32] The inspiration for this argument comes from research by Abu-Lughod (2008), Piscitelli (2011), and Padovanni (2015). The authors take romantic experience as repertoires that open courses of action in the context of romantic poetry and by becoming discourses of defiance and resistance to the ideals of Bedouin social

feminisms. In Brazil, this repertoire has triggered action and opened communication channels, facilitating the emergence of important controversies for generations of feminists.

In 2011, the SlutWalk took place in many Brazilian cities, subsequently creating new collectives that have acted to renew feminist issues, practices, and tactics in the country. As previously mentioned, these collectives participate in feminist political-communication webs that use the Internet as an important locus for action, including the production and circulation of visual materials for their events, such as photographs of demonstrations, as well as of campaigns in different social networks.

In 2012, the Slutwalk-Brasilia collective launched an image campaign that caught my attention as it was composed of re-appropriated, historical feminist agendas (such as the right to pleasure, aesthetic oppression, equality at work and to moral sexual standards), which were associated with different people's everyday lives (women of different ages, sexual orientations, with different bodies and skin color, as well as men and children). At times, the language used closely resembled issues and problems addressed at MADA, such as the importance of seeking and managing one's autonomy while involved in a romantic relationship, and the importance that notions such as self-esteem and self-respect acquired as conditions for being alone or becoming involved in a romantic relationship. It was as if the contents of the *twelve characteristics of a woman who has recovered from loving too much*, had "jumped the fence" to produce a communication campaign put forward by generations of contemporary feminists.

For example, one of the images shows a slim, smiling, young black woman, her hair loose, with writing down the right side stating: "My happiness does not depend on being in a romantic relationship – that is also feminism." Another image shows an

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life; within transnational sex and marriage markets in Brazilian women's South-North global movements; and in the context of affective and sexual relationships in female prisons in the cities of São Paulo and Barcelona, respectively.

older white woman graciously making a face as she holds up her brown hair, next to the words "I am a feminist because – I cannot be the woman of your life because I am the woman of my life." A third image shows a smiling young brunette wearing red lipstick, her hair high on her head in a "well-behaved" bun, standing next to a slogan that paraphrases a 1980s song by the Brazilian rock group Legião Urbana, made famous by the singer Cássia Eller: "I am a feminist because – I am mine, mine alone, and not for whoever wants me." The fourth image in the set shows a young white woman with red hair, moving her head from side to side, with the line: "My freedom does not end when I'm in a relationship with someone – that is also feminism."

Approximately a year after the campaign I came across the article by M. in the *Escreva Lola Escreva* blog. Her statement was set within a broader "conversation" that had been taking place in

the blog for at least three months.[33] In that conversation there were accounts by young women in their 20s who described their distress at defining themselves as feminists while maintaining violent heterosexual relationships. It is common for readers to exchange emails with Lola, asking for her help in the form of opinions or advice. Although the blog's author always positions herself, she also states that, "It's hard to say, because I never went through it"; and here MADA appears in some of the dialogues:

> One time, during a lecture in São Paulo last year, during the conversation with the audience, a very beautiful and sweet girl brought tears to my eyes when she said that she had "suffered for love" (it sounds like a cliché, but it happens all the time). And then she spoke of this association, MADA (Women Who Love Too Much) and how it had helped. I recently met her again at another lecture and I asked her once again for a *guest post*.

The scene described by Lola involves the convergence of two kinds of *coming out*. The first, which I have previously mentioned, is the recurrent idea "of defining oneself" as feminist in these communicational political networks and the doubts surrounding one's conduct from then on; the second form of "coming out" here involves disclosing the anonymous identity of "being a MADA." Lola then provides opinions and solutions to the problems presented by her readers, and begins to suggest that MADA might be a possibility:

> At the end of the year a reader wrote to me about the difficulty she had in ending a relationship, as bad as it was, and asked me if I knew of a support group. Hesitantly, I said that a girl had once recommended MADA, but I had no idea if they mixed religion, self-help, and other slightly esoteric

[33] All excerpts and comments are taken from the blog *Lola escreva Lola* from July to October 2013 [http://escrevalolaescreva.blogspot.com.br/2013/10/guest-post-nenhuma-de-nos-e-todas.html].

> elements. Well, the reader went to MADA and loved it. First of all, according to her, it had nothing to do with religion (although the website mentions God all the time). Second, she felt welcome and it was great for her to see so many women going through the same problem.

Everything suggests that, at Lola's request and calling herself M., a *beautiful and sweet girl* wrote the guest post, "None of us and all of us represent MADA." In the article she explains what MADA is, that it works through *12 steps and 12 traditions*, and about the importance Robin Norwood's book, among other topics:

> Many of you have might have heard of MADA: the group received a lot of publicity in the soap opera Women in Love (*Mulheres Apaixonadas*) and, as a result, we frequently come across many reservations surrounding the issue. "Loving too much" is often solely associated with extremely jealous women (such as Heloise in the soap opera) or women who are physically abused at home. In reality, romantic obsession is a real problem. Pathological-love (for which there are even studies at the *Hospital das Clínicas*) is much more common than you might think, and it's a disease that kills. Men and women suffer from it but primarily women, and thus our fraternity focuses on them.

The narrative attempts to connect with common everyday experiences something that the popularization of the categories of romantic addiction, conducted by important cultural mediators, presents as "extraordinary."[34] M. continues her narrative by

[34] During my fieldwork with anonymous groups most participants became aware of the groups through different media outlets. The most commonly cited was the Internet, followed by soap operas, magazine stories, and references to famous people (such as film and TV actors) who publicly identified themselves with the subject of addiction, particularly to sex. A communication policy was in effect among the groups in relation to the media, which was guided by the emic idea of "attraction" rather than "promotion." To this effect, manuals and commissions elaborated suggestions as to how participants should behave in case of interviews, TV shows, or during any situation in which he or she assumed the identity of

combining elements taken from therapeutic culture and the feminist field:

> My mind was completely closed when I joined MADA, I was very unhappy and thought that the only solution to my problem was to be with the man who had abandoned me. In other words, I was completely sexist toward myself. I came from an emotionally abusive home, had recurring unhappy relationships, many harmful friendships, was bullied during my teenage years, I was in despair. I had attempted suicide more than once. The group gave me almost immediate relief, for in those women I found true SISTERHOOD, sincere hugs and smiles and the promise of never again being alone (which was my greatest fear). These women literally saved my life.

The entire narrative is an attempt to produce coherence in a MADA's moral trajectory as a feminist:

> With time, I learned a lot and I suddenly realized that all these women were together, women of different races, colors, shapes, social classes and from different places were talking about the same thing. There was no way that the problem was only emotional. There was no way that we spoke about the same experiences only because of some emotional abnormality. I began to study (and I came across Lola's blog as well as many other feminist blogs, which helped me immensely) to see how it all happened. It wasn't possible for this disease, that of "loving too much", to be a virus, and that the majority of the female population suffered from it. I arrived at the conclusion that the social problem, that is, sexism, makes many women believe

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group member in a communication vehicle, to avoid the stigmatization of participants. Even so, the relationship between groups and media outlets was riddled with tensions and co-productions, since different media vehicles were cultural mediators in the way groups prepared themselves to "talk to the media" and how they received what was appropriated by the media about their "contentions." For more on this subject, see Pardo (2012).

> they're not worth anything, that the only thing that makes life worth it is to have a man by your side. Nowadays I can call myself a feminist. Today I know that I am part of a program that gives me the tools to escape a disease that is derived from a sexist culture. MADA taught me to like women, to live with them and to love them all, whether feminist or not. I sometimes use my statements in the group to talk about this, how it is a feminist program and helps us to see the world differently.

However, the inverse move, that is, the attempt to produce moral coherence in a feminist's trajectory as a MADA, was polemical. Comments made to M.'s article[35] brought controversies, for example, in relation to how one conceives of the notion of violence. Some perceived this issue from a structuring perspective of invariably asymmetrical positions, which produced incoherence in the articulation between therapeutic culture and feminisms. In an angry tone, the first comment to the article is

> men go crazy from love and they beat and kill – all normal, "it's natural, the world as it is". Women when faced with the same madness? Then they have to run off to a recovery group because she's batshit crazy.

Other comments underlined the value of the account:

> Give some thought to your words. You can't underestimate the suffering of women with destructive behavior. Jeez, the author says MADA literally saved her life, but you think she shouldn't talk about it? Being murdered by a partner is

[35] I cannot provide the characteristics of subjects who wrote the comments since most were anonymous or used a pseudonym. It is possible to tell that most comments came from women, since many of them also included personal experiences. From more than 50 comments, two came from anti-feminist *trollers*. A *troll* is an individual who acts online by disturbing ("trolling"), whether intentionally or otherwise, spaces for virtual sociability, such as forums, or by directly attacking individuals through discording comments (Zilli, 2015).

> worthy of struggle and awareness, but dying as a result of an instability that leads to suicide isn't?

Other comments drew attention to the complexity of the connection between experience and therapeutic culture:

> Initiatives such as these are very important because sexism operates in numerous ways, and oppression does not always work through the traditional format: victim-oppressor. In fact, sometimes these barriers are blurred and feminism cannot be insensitive to life's complexities.

And, lastly, there were comments in which "sexism" is thought to go beyond a system of oppression and a sociocultural construct, and is characterized as a disease that can only be treated through pedagogical instances:

> Men who rape and kill women are also in need, not of a support group but of psychological treatment, so that they can cure themselves of sexism and change their worldview, their view of life, and of right and wrong, of what one can and cannot do. Sexism is a disease that society insists on transmitting, and just as much of a pathology.

In spite of the controversies, MADA's encounter with feminisms does not occur in a setting in which they can be held as competing discourses. This is clear in the production and intense display of affection in reaction to M.'s narrative, both in the disagreements and in the first person comments that agree with or defend her views, and that aggregated further emotionality to the event.

Being a MADA or a feminist are experiences that produce subjects through processes that reveal experience as a contested field, that is, as a discursive space in which subjective positions – and different and differential subjectivities – are inscribed, reiterated, or repudiated (Brah, 2006). As such, any understanding of love and/or romantic suffering becomes a signifier for

identification, beliefs, and struggles, as well as communicating different messages; reminding us that despite feminisms normative utopian horizons or views on women's emotionality as value and/or damnation, people do not necessarily have identical experiences of events.

Interactions between MADA and feminist discourses have led to transformations in both. The feminist repertoire (re)signifies therapeutic culture within a social and political field of power relations. During my first contact with MADA in 2006 the group stated that it was intended for women who needed to recover from the "pattern of loving too much," in relation to their husbands, boyfriends, and other relationships involving men, such as parents, bosses, and siblings. This has changed and, currently, most of the groups define themselves as being for women who wish to "recover from their pattern of dependence on other people," broadening the array of relationships and, fundamentally, including those among women.

The encounter between pedagogies of emotional learning and emotional control, which are present in MADA's therapeutic culture and within feminist discourses, also means that feminisms do not appear as needing "conversion," but rather as biographically situated and invested subjective positions. In this context, online political-communicational networks exert a key role as pedagogical instances and as spaces for the recognition of what it means "to be a feminist," as M. wrote: "I began to study (and I came across Lola's blog as well as many other feminist blogs, which helped me immensely) to see how it all happened."

We can analyze the mutual influence of these pedagogies by drawing parallels between the data on Internet access and perceptions of being a woman, of sexism, and feminism in the Brazilian context in recent years. According to IBGE's data, since 2009, the number of Brazilian women using the Internet has grown more than the number of men and, the older they are, the greater the disparity in women's favor. The 2013 National Household Survey (PNAD) showed that the proportion of Internet users in the

country increased from 49.2% in 2012 to 50.1% in 2013, in a total population in which women represent 51.9% (IBGE, 2013).

According to research by the Perseus Abramo Foundation, from 2001 to 2010 the number of Brazilian women who considered themselves to be feminists increased from 21% to 31%. Whether they defined themselves as feminists or not, half of these women hold positive views of feminism, and identify it with the struggle for equal rights in general (27%), for women's freedom and independence (26%), and equal rights in the labor market (7%). The survey also showed that young women are the most likely to declare themselves feminists – 47% of young women aged 15 to 17 years, followed by young women aged 25-34, and then 23% among women over 60 years.

The material presented in this article involves a significant age delimitation in its analysis of the convergence between MADA's therapeutic culture and feminisms: "feminist madas" are no more than 20-27 years old and make considerable use of the Internet to seek out information on groups and knowledge on the therapeutic culture of "loving too much," as well as on feminisms. This contrasts with the profile of women who frequented the group during my PhD research, who were mostly over 30, and whose use of the internet was mainly limited to learning about the groups' existence and whereabouts. However, even among the latter – who did not define themselves as feminists – we find the feminist elements identified by M. and associated with *sisterhood* and *enjoying being and living among women*. Within the exchanges between anonymous groups, a common route among women was to begin at MADA and then move on to other groups. After establishing a course between these groups, several women evaluated MADA as less "structured" and, we might say, with less "potential" in terms of the *promise of recovery*. Among the reasons for staying in the group were the friendships formed there, a special fondness for the room, or even that "they liked the girls at MADA a lot."

The correlation between women's increased Internet access and increased recognition or positive views of feminism illustrates

the emergence of a more favorable field for the encounter between therapeutic culture and feminism. This encounter and the changes it entails are also situated within the transformations that generations of feminists have stamped onto the Brazilian context. All of these changes and patterns occurred since 2000, when the feminist field became marked by more horizontal discourses, by plural and heterogeneous feminist practices, particularly in articulations with diverse sectors of civil society, resulting in the multiplication of feminist fields (Alvarez, 2014).

Among the major differences between current and previous generations,[36] we find a greater diversification in the production of the feminist political subject, which is no longer exclusively defined by sexual and biological identities of womanhood (Gomes and Sorj, 2014). The claims of non-hegemonic LGBT identities (for example, transgender men and women) within feminism, the identification of "cis men" as feminists (and all other current variations: "feminist men," "pro-feminist men" and "men in the process of deconstructing their sexism"), have expanded the disputes related to the management and criteria of who feminism includes or excludes from its different normative utopian projects.

A possible approach to the moral trajectory of a MADA feminist is given in one of the opening excerpts in this article, by one of the most prominent voices in black feminism. However, in a counterfactual exercise, in relation to M.'s statement that, "in those women I found true SORORITY, with sincere hugs and smiles and the promise of never being alone," or even that, "MADA taught me to like women, to live with them and to love them all,

[36] By analyzing the SlutWalks, Gomes and Sorj (2014) explore the contrasts and continuities between different generations of feminists in Brazil. In a literature review, they identify as "prior" those feminisms that appear in historical records on the social composition of feminists: from the suffragette movement until the 1970s generation, which had a strong presence in the struggle for democratization in the country, in the organization of national feminist meetings, the formation of centers for gender studies in universities and scientific associations, and in the institutionalization of feminism within the State.

feminists or otherwise," Hooks could also have "answered" as she once did in a critique of white American feminism:

> At thirteen, the understanding that I had of patriarchy gave me very different expectations, in relation to the feminist movement, to those held by young middle-class white women. When I entered my first class on women's studies at Stanford University at the beginning of the 1970s, white women were discovering the joy of being together: for them it was an important and unique moment. I had never lived a life in which women were not together, in which women had not helped, protected and loved one another (bell hooks, 2004:44 *e* 45, translator's translation).

In the Brazilian context, contemporary generations of feminists operate in a scenario composed of claims for specific political places, in which lesbians, black women, indigenous women, peasant women, and young women present themselves as specific groups (Gomes and Sorj, 2014). Beyond reflections about how the intersection of social markers of difference socially operate amidst power relations – a paradigm consolidated from the 1990s onwards – policies that mobilize difference within this field begin to establish their own subjects. It is common to find groups or people defining themselves as "intersectional feminists," who sometimes invest in the delimitation of differences and on political assertions made through identitary oppositions, and sometimes acknowledge differences as benefitting coalitions while mobilizing them toward a more universal definition of a feminist identity, without obscuring it (Gomes and Sorj, 2014).

In this sense, differences operate and produce the contemporary feminist field in a way that enables the emergence of the mada feminist's moral trajectory.[37] The intersection between mada and feminisms' discourses – which establish bridges between the personal and the political through the reorganization of

[37] And also allows us to contemplate the (im)possibilities of relating Clarice Lispector and bell hooks.

romantic suffering and its emotional scripts – allows for the production and localization of personal biographies that result from the relationship between a need to resolve conflicts in the public sphere and a notion of common citizenship.

Changes in Brazil's contemporary feminist scenario have also been triggered by the expansion of the "our body belongs to us" repertoire, broadening the meaning of body and extrapolating prior references.[38] Insofar as it is perceived and taken as a means for experimentation – though never abstracted from transformations in politics, culture, and interpersonal relations – the body is experienced as subjective (Gomes and Sorj, 2014) and as an instance where these experimentations can explore the limits of its plasticity and performativity.[39]

This panorama shows that these changes are also related to an investment in strategies where the Internet has a key role, such as, for example, in the articulation of networks of "physical

[38] References related to the autonomy of the body and claims for the decriminalization of abortion, family planning, and women's health (Gomes and Sorj, 2014). The authors also indicate how among the bodies of contemporary feminism one finds the significant presence of young people under the age of twenty, producing a stark contrast with the bodies of feminist generations from the 1970s and 1980s, during which many feminists had returned from experiences in exile, were or had been married, had experienced maternity, and were already in the labor market; accordingly, in this period, the demands reflected the moment of that generation's life cycle (Gomes and Sorj, 2014).

[39] In broadening the "our body belongs to us" repertoire, performances are exalted in which femininities and masculinities blend (*fuck gender*), in hybrid identities (both male and female) and androgyny. There are many references to queer politics, which puts the "normality of the normal" in perspective. Plasticity and performativity refer to bodies but also to the relation between bodies and conducts. For example, some of SlutWalk collectives in Brazil proposed the *Slut experience* to question the existence of norms that qualify and hierarchize female behavior (see Tavares, 2014). Moreover, the expansion of this repertoire related to the body, the notion of ableism, a term that would encompass the dynamics of exclusion and production inequalities linked to impairments on concepts relating the body to fitness, availability for work, and a certain ideal of beauty, has often appeared as a way of questioning a supposedly normal condition of the bodies and denote the systematic exclusion of people with disabilities.

persons" as resource, language, and forms of transmission that promote good intergenerational relations (Gonçalves and Pinto, 2011). In this context, Internet use works as a way of translating terms, ideals, and struggles, a way of investing in the effectiveness of action that does not consider feminisms to be the consequence of prior consciousness, and a way of attracting more people or, even, further clarifying the use of certain concepts, themes and/or "buzzwords."

As an important aspect of these changes, the Internet has allowed for the establishment of networks that have deepened contacts with existing political organizations and feminist groups, but also created other communication networks as instruments of political action and as identitary resources. Generations of contemporary feminists make use of the Internet but are also subjects produced by their own prosumer activities, that is, they are people who produce themselves while performing these activities.[40] Since 2011, at least, contemporary Brazilian feminisms' events, marches, and demonstrations can only be understood through relations mediated between online and offline activist networks.[41]

Through the use of technology online feminist political-communication webs establish communicational processes that allow emotional states to become extended and connected (Castells, 2014). This context favored the interpenetration between MADA's therapeutic culture and feminisms. From a feminist point

[40] With the expansion of corporeal experimentations, the body-flag publicly emerges with an important and dual role on the street, since it is at the same time object of claims for subjects' corporeal autonomy and a primary tool for protest, communication, and support (Gomes and Sorj, 2014; Ferreira, 2013). Digital spaces, blogs, YouTube channels, profiles across several social networks, memes, also use body-forms as protest tools, communication supports, and for the production of subjectivities and aesthetics. Within the production and operationalization of body-forms, it seems that age and the decision to use certain technologies are relevant to the extent that they inform and locate subjects across different online social networks and the intention of which audience to reach.

[41] For more on this issue, see Name e Zanetti (2013).

of view, and through subjective, affective, social and moral cartographies, romantic experience and the (re)organization of romantic suffering began to compose the elaboration of demands for recognition and investment.

While operating in the interchange between MADA and contemporary feminisms, these networks expand spaces for the production of an *affective citizenship* (Irvine, 2007) within the conflictual process of *making citizens* out of different social subjects whose identities are established through the language of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation (Carrara, 2015). MADA's emotive grammar provides relevant repertoires for the moral, social and political engagement involved in the *struggle against sexism*, and is incorporated as a *feminist program that helps us to see the world differently*. On the other hand, feminisms' political grammar acts on diffuse anxieties and fears, turning them into indignation, directing them toward concrete policies and weaving a moral, cognitive and emotional fabric that inspires political action (Goodwin et.al, 2001; Zilli, 2014) – and is very useful as a form of social communication between different audiences.

Final Remarks

This paper has, above all, explored love and experiences of romantic suffering as categories within a morality produced between anonymous groups. By revisiting ethnographic material taken from my doctoral research, it demonstrates the pedagogical character of the rhetorics of emotional control and the different gender dynamics that produce them: first, locating subjects in gender discourses in a processual, mutable, and historically variable form; and then, emphasizing the oppositional and exclusive nature of the categories of "man" and "woman," and how they hierarchically organize attributes associated with masculinity and femininity. The discussion sought to demonstrate the complexity of the use of patterns of subjective convergence and distancing within the romantic repertoire, and avoided identifying systematic differences, marked by gender, between

different subject positions. Within these dynamics, women personalized (in the dual sense of the term) the romantic experience, to create reputations connected to the ability of dealing with romantic issues, to produce strategic repertoires and courses of action, that in turn constituted unexpected commitments in the encounter with other discourses.

The repertoire of romantic experience and amorous suffering is thus taken as a system of communication between therapeutic cultures and feminist digital networks. The interpenetration of these discourses also produces pedagogical instances and effects that act in both environments to produce changes in both, disintegrating the idea that MADA's therapeutic culture and feminisms are, in principle, competing discourses; even while never dismissing that disputes that might emerge in this field.

By situating contemporary feminisms in Brazil in a transformative context, attention can be drawn to how the Internet is an important field of action and a pedagogical instance for sensibilities related to feminist ideals. Through the language of gender, diversity, and sexual orientation, online feminist political-communication networks can thus be shown to expand spaces for an *affective citizenship* in the process of *making citizens* out of different social subjects, when traversed by discourses of therapeutic culture.

While this process enables social communication between different audiences and instances,[42] its effects take place in an

[42] Other studies and reflections have also dealt with such communications and instances and their different effects, especially in the field of social protection and struggle against violence. For example, Andrade (2014) explores the production of discourses on domestic violence and gender in the transit between MADA groups and institutional apparatuses, such as Reference Centers against this type of violence. Oliveira (2016) ethnographically addresses a group for men accused of crimes under the *Maria da Penha* Law, coordinated by men from the NGO Sexuality and Health Feminist Collective in São Paulo/SP. Souza (2015) shows how the action of professional teams in a public support service for women victims of violence in São Paulo was impregnated with ideas from MADA. According to the author, the team's technical psychologist always made references to anonymous groups, suggesting for example, that during their

open field that can reconfigure those dynamics that produce the "authenticity" of subjective experience within social demands for rights and political action.[43] In this way, it establishes new reflexive agendas related to the (im)possibilities of political action that result from the multiplication of sexual subjects and their emotional states.

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vacations, group participants "replace" vacant days with visits to MADA meetings and Neurotics Anonymous. And finally, there are Vianna's (2013) reflections about the similarity of anonymous groups' pedagogical dimension and that generated through relations between various institutional apparatuses, political mobilizations and collectivization strategies, which often have the State as mediator.

[43] Brah (2006) and Parmar (2012), reflecting on the Black British black movement/feminism, employ the terms "authenticity of the personal experience" and "authentic subjective experiences," respectively, to discuss how the idea of multiple oppressions came to be seen not as articulations but linearly, so that the more oppressions a subject was able to list, the greater their claim for occupying a higher moral position. A re-reading of political conduct in terms of shared subjective identities in contexts of oppression produced a hierarchy of oppressions, which on the one hand emphasized the accumulation of a collection of oppressed identities, drawing attention away from proposals that actually contribute toward social change. In Brah's words "pharisaical declarations of political correction began to replace political analysis" (Brah 2006:349).

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