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Opening up to trans persons in Physical Education–Sport Tertiary Education: two case studies of recognition in queer pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Background: In western societies, commitment to social justice claims for politics of recognition when referring to gender diversity. Gender non-conforming people, such as trans persons, represent social groups traditionally oppressed within heteronormative hegemonic thinking on gender. We present two qualitative case studies based on pedagogical activities that aim to convey our ruminations on this queer question: how can we contribute to the subversion of gender normalcy in Physical Education and Sport Tertiary Education (PESTE) through the imagination of trans persons' Physical Education and Sport experiences?

Theoretical framework: With the support of queer concepts, we theorize on trans persons and queer pedagogy. Trans persons do not fit into gender binarism which molds hegemonic ideology of heteronormativity, bringing about serious consequences that would include discrimination and harassment. Queer pedagogy efforts to enhance social justice should put the eye not only in trans persons' experiences and feelings but also in cisgender's (non-trans persons) beliefs and attitudes toward trans persons.

Participants and methodology: Both activities were developed in the same degree with different groups of PESTE students. The first activity unfolds the use of a fictional tale, previously created for pedagogic purposes. The second activity entails queer tango as embodied performance to challenge heteronormativity. Qualitative data was obtained during the activities and was thematically analyzed to illustrate the activity and students' interpretations.

Results and discussion: A range of responses to the fictional tale resulted from the first activity. Some students legitimized sex/gender binarism and biological norms, unquestionably reflecting heteronormativity and, therefore, abjection toward trans persons. Others showed difficulties in achieving a true acceptance that would involve, for instance, an appropriately naming of gender identities. Finally, some exhibited their willingness to respect, encounter and accept trans persons.

In the second activity, students found interesting the opportunity that queer tango had offered to exchange gender roles, while others expressed their difficulties in performing other gender roles than their own. Embodied experience was of significant importance in the process of gaining empathetic imagination on gender diversity. Some students questioned the rigid structuration of the beginning of the activity, while other's slapstick performances were identified as strategies of resistance. Participants also reflected on how PESTE students imagined themselves

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teaching, commenting their lack of formation and ability to construct a non-heteronormative PES.

Conclusions and final comments: Initiatives to sensitize about gender diversity and disrupt normalcy are necessary in PESTE. The two activities presented evidence coexisting imaginaries on trans persons. The double approach based on a fictional tale and a queer dance show different possibilities to enhance the empathetic imagining of distant others, trans persons in this case. With its limitations, politics of recognition need to enhance empathetic imagination to foster the possibilities for recognition and dialog between gender privileged and oppressed individuals and groups.

Introduction

Identities are shaped, among other social resources, by the recognition or its absence from others. According to Taylor (1997, 25), ‘nonrecognition or misrecognition [from others] can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression’. Therefore, the politics of recognition designate the driving forces behind demands of persons on their defining characteristics as human beings. Claims toward this type of politics have recently argued to reframe the social justice agenda in order to attend inequalities derived from diversity of identities and, consequently, pedagogies which entail recognition of ‘other’ persons and groups (Azzarito et al. 2017). Although strictly speaking, all persons are ‘others’ to oneself, and otherness reflects the diversity and particularity of people, it is also worth admitting that some persons and social groups are more likely to be excluded just because they are considered *different* others.

Against this backdrop, at the forefront of the social justice agenda in Physical Education and Sport (PES) and Physical Education and Sport Tertiary Education (PESTE), it is necessary to explore the marginal, invisible, vulnerable and non-normative people and identities (Azzarito and Hill 2013). However, there is a dearth of scholarly work based on transformative purposes around queer people and, particularly, trans persons in these domains. Some studies have focused on queer and trans teachers or students’ experiences in PES to make visible and destabilize heteronormativity and normality discourses. For instance, Sykes (2011) describes several circumstances of discrimination, marginalization and exclusion experienced by six participants, identified as trans, queer or intersex, during lessons and in locker rooms losing interest in PES. Similarly, Caudwell (2014) shows how the two trans youngsters under study suffer marginalization and avoid participation in PES due to a fail in recognizing gender multiplicity. Devís-Devís et al. (2018) present trans persons’ negative experiences and also a few positive ones that may stimulate pedagogical practices to destabilize heteronormative ideological system in PES. The study of Landi (2018) emphasizes the subjectivity dimension of a queer physical education (PE) teacher based on his experiences for mapping their affective implications. Finally, Larsson, Fagrell, and Redelius (2009) focus on different ways PE teachers favor hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity.

Despite these contributions, a scarcity of works addressed to transformative pedagogies in PESTE is observed (e.g. Pérez-Samaniego et al. 2016). This situation may be related to the pervasive acceptance of the heteronormative system of beliefs, norms and discourses which lays at the most invisible part of the hidden curriculum. Henceforth, commitments for social justice should attend the recognition of queer groups in such a way that all PESTE students recognize gender diversity and, particularly, trans persons’ identities. Queer activist pedagogical approaches are of special interest in order to question and subvert heteronormativity and normality discourses of gender and sexuality (De Lauretis 1991; Kumashiro 2009; lisahunter 2017). These purposes are in line with many ideas of an activist approach, recently indicated by Oliver and Kirk (2016) in relation to girls’ experiences in PES to value a physical active life. Activist and queer pedagogies share two core beliefs. First, knowledge is produced in collaboration with participants in order to find future possibilities in

practice and, second, social transformation begins specially at the local contexts in which scholars live, work and do research.

In this paper, we explore and reflect upon the possibilities and limitations of the politics of recognition of gender diversity and, particularly, trans people in PESTE. With this purpose, we present two qualitative case studies based on pedagogical activities that aim to convey our ruminations on this queer question: how can we contribute to the subversion of gender normalcy in PESTE through the imagination of trans persons' PES experiences? In order to set the socio-professional and pedagogical context of reference, we previously examine trans persons' experiences in PES, as well as queer theory and pedagogy.

Trans persons' experiences in PES

According to Grossman and D'Augelli (2007), trans people represent a vulnerable group in western societies, experiencing different forms of oppression and discrimination. In PES, the use of language is one of the most pervasive forms of discrimination exerted toward trans people (Devís-Devís et al. 2018). Language is, as Butler (1990) indicates, the imaginable domain of gender and it has the ability to set limits to gender experiences and possibilities. When unappropriated language to identify trans persons is relentlessly repetitive, it ends up producing what it names. For instance, through the use of the terms such as 'wrong body', 'gender dysphoria', 'sexual reassignment surgery' or 'gender identity disorder', the biomedical discourse has yielded mismatching identifications between trans persons and their bodies, causing negative feelings against them and lots of unnecessary suffering (García-Dauder and Gregori 2009). Similarly, within PES, the use of language is often injurious for trans people when improper pronouns or insulting names such as 'fagot' or 'le joto' are used (Semerjian and Cohen 2006).

The restraining role of language is part of a wider heteronormative discourse which expands the dogma that gender is an extension of people's sex assigned at birth and divides gender roles in one for each sex. People interiorize the heteronormative system along the socialization process and learn to categorize some bodies as normal and others as queer or abject (Alonso and Zurbruggen 2014). Consequently, trans persons become marginalized since they disrupt cultural expectations about the idea that gender identity is an immutable derivation of a binary biology.

Abjection becomes a crucial concept to understand how trans bodies become rejected. For Butler (1990), abjected body selves 'fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted' (111). For people who have deeply interiorized heteronormative order, trans bodies become an example of abjection *per se* because of their broad distance with the biological basis of heteronormative dualism (see Stryker 1994). In the contexts of PES, abjection can be paramount because competitions, games and physical practices often require choosing between one sexual category or another, and non-mannish men and non-womanish women tend to be abjectified and rejected (Semerjian and Cohen 2006; Devís-Devís et al. 2018).

Schools are institutions in which gender construction processes are developed, and they play an essential role either to soften or enhance trans students' risk of getting trapped into a web of binary hierarchical dualisms: male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, masculinity/femininity (Martino and Pallota-Chiarolli 2006). Studies conducted in different countries have yielded relevant results on the hostility trans students experience in schools, inducing different types of discrimination and harassment, as well as suicide (Grossman and D'Augelli 2007; Grant et al. 2011; Devís-Devís et al. 2017). Results of these works are rather striking because they show that the prevalence of harassment in schools, which should be safer environments in comparison to other social contexts, is higher than in penitentiary, religious, sport and labor contexts.

PES constitutes a particular sensitive environment for trans persons insofar as their bodies, appearances, performances, abilities and embodied dispositions become literally exposed to heteronormative beliefs and practices. For instance, due to body exposure, most trans persons describe

changing rooms as embarrassing and unsafe places that hinder participation and generate fear of social rejection (Semerjian and Cohen 2006; Devís-Devís et al. 2018). In PE, trans students often feel in ‘the middle’ of activities and gender groups that are persistently segregated by teachers, experiencing aloofness, isolation and loneliness. Moreover, coeducational classes ‘often carried negative and demotivating experiences especially for trans girls, insofar as a mixed-sex environment did not facilitate trans girls’ participation within a male orientated PE curriculum’ (Devís-Devís et al. 2018, 18).

Queer theory and pedagogy

In the context of academic inquiry, ‘queer’ is a term referred not only to an identity or group of identities, such as gays, lesbians, transgenders and intersexuals. As Jacose (1996) indicates, ‘queer is less an identity than a critique of identity’ (131), emphasizing the oppositional meaning of the term and supporting the following statement of Halperin (1995): ‘Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant’ (62). This oppositional meaning is also present in *queer theory*, a term first used by De Lauretis (1991) to make sense of a group of questionings about normality and naturalized accounts of gender and sexuality. For instance, queer theory problematizes direct and simplistic relations between gender and sex, particularly when they neglect or minimize their intersection with sexuality, race, social class or other identity issues. As part of this questioning, the relational and performative conception of gender introduced by Butler (1990) decisively contributed to understanding how gender is socially constructed and how heteronormativity prevails as the hegemonic normative system in western societies. Moreover, since this questioning is a never-ending process or a nonconformist attitude, queer theorists resist in offering a stable and homogeneous definition of this theory (Kumashiro 2009).

Despite this heterogeneous theoretical corpus, lisahunter (2017) indicates that ‘queer theory seeks to dismantle categorical notions, challenge the heteronormative perspective, and move beyond sex, gender and sexuality categories’ (1). Among characteristics of queer theory, Plummer (2005) highlights the questioning of heterosexual/homosexual and sex/gender dichotomous oppositions, the claim for fluid and not fixed sexual categories, the rejection of any normalizing strategy and the swap of the paradigm of deviation by a logic of transgression. These characteristics bestow queer theory a strong social transformation commitment charged with social justice promise that may inform pedagogical approaches.

To transform this commitment into action, queer pedagogy stands as an activist approach, as suggested by Oliver and Kirk (2016), to propose, study and discuss teaching and learning practices informed by queer theory. Queer activists ‘often works to expose problems in the *status quo* and help us imagine and create more socially just alternatives’ (Kumashiro 2009, 53). However, change is difficult and requires more than becoming aware of oppression, especially for those benefited by the heteronormative *status quo*, since it requires interrupting their own privileged positions. Hence, the interest of queer pedagogy goes beyond issues of methods and knowledge transmission, to catch up with concerns with normalcy’s immanent exclusion in order to subvert processes of gender normalization (Britzman 1995; Luhmann 1998). As Alexander (2005) indicates, queer pedagogy ‘is obviously not confined to teaching as, for, or about queer subject(s)’ but ‘to think of the “constructedness” of their lives in a heteronormative society’ (375).

Accordingly, queer pedagogy entails conversation between privileged and oppressed discursive positions in order to understand the other. Among the many ways in which it could be fostered, this empathetic encounter could be imaginative (Andrews 2007; Smith 2008). Empathetic imagination helps entering into the experiential world of the oppressed other, reduce harm and, consequently, promote social justice. Therefore, queer pedagogy concerns encompass how and why social privileged groups within heteronormativity system construct their own imaginary of queer persons.

Methodology

Inquiry approach

The case studies we develop describe, analyze and reflect upon two pedagogical activities aiming to foster recognition of trans persons in PESTE. As a methodological strategy, case studies entail ‘a commitment to study holistically the complexity that is involved in naturalistic situations’ (Hodge and Sharp 2016, 62). They are particular examinations of contextualized situations, programs, events, persons, activities or specific phenomena with rich descriptions and implications for professional action (Merriam 2007). According to Yin (2009), case studies are appropriate methodological strategies to delve into research questions of *how* and *why* on contemporary events in which researchers have few or no control.

This paper also responds to a *how* research question in our contemporary teaching and the rationale of our case studies is based on two main considerations. First, we focus on cisgender (non-trans persons or gender identities aligned with their birth sex) PESTE students’ imaginary of the trans people’s PES experiences. Second, following Andrews (2007), we believe this may be enabled through narrative imagination since it allows us to explore ‘our ability to imagine other “possible lives” – our own and others – that creates our bond with “diverse social and historical worlds”’ (510).

The focus on narrative imagination assumes narratives as fundamental forms of human meaning-making as well as significant sites for learning (Goodson and Gill 2011). In this sense, the sharing of narratives of different kinds (textual, visual or performative) allows the potential for grasping the diversity of the living world by approaching and encountering, at least imaginatively, *other* meanings of being. In addition, it allows reproducing a lived experience in another person, as a vicarious experience, to empathize with that experience or to stimulate new possibilities in the reader or receiver. In the domain of queer pedagogy, narratives aspire to transgress the reality of the classroom in order to rethink the idea of the ‘other’ as a threatening subject for the other identities (Britzman 1995).

Participants, procedure and analysis

Case studies typically call upon diverse, eclectic and *ad hoc* sources for data collection (Hodge and Sharp 2016). In our cases, these entailed different procedures embedded in the pedagogical activities developed at the Sport Sciences degree of the Universitat de València with two different groups and moments.

Case study 1 took place during 2011–2012 academic course, with 61 undergraduate students, aged 20–26 years. The activities developed were part of a subject which included gender education among its content. Data were collected through (a) students’ written thoughts about a fictional tale; (b) an unstructured 40 minutes following discussion, properly recorded; and (c) students’ anonymous or nominal comments in a blog (12 posting in total). One hundred and eleven students aged 19–22 years participated in case study 2, which was developed in a subject which included hidden curriculum and gender ideologies in PES during 2016–2017 academic course. Procedures for data collection were (a) four video recordings (approximately 1 hour and a half each) of tango-queer lessons; (b) a follow-up survey addressed to all students on their thinking about the activity; and (c) individual and group semi-structured interviews, which lasted between 35 and 90 minutes, with 16 students to get in-depth impressions.

In both cases, inductive thematic analysis helped to identify interpretative patterns of meaning within the eclectic data obtained (Braun, Clarke, and Weate 2016). This kind of analysis is particularly suited to access and interpret data reflecting heterogeneous perspectives and experiences in relation to an issue, such as imagining trans persons’ experiences in PES. Researchers repeatedly read data toward immersion, followed by a systematic reading that aimed for searching similarities

and differences within the diversity of positions and responses among students. The analysis then focused on identifying thematic categories through patterns emerging from the data.

Ethical issues

Activities were carried out by several lectures, as the ones teaching at the regular modules, and students were invited to participate. The latter were advised that no outcome would be taken into account for module assessment and that they were free to withdraw from classes if they wished without any further explanation. Individual informed consent and/or recorded permission from participants was obtained in order to use data collected for research purposes. However, beyond these ethical prerequisites, our studies require especial ethical and effective teaching–learning strategies to adequately foster the imaginative encounter with trans persons’ experiences in PES. In any pedagogical initiative for social justice, it is not enough to hold good intentions or being supportive with students but to act with care and responsibility in order to wrestle with teaching dilemmas. In these cases, it became paramount that our proposals took into account how gender identities and biographical experiences, both students’ and lecturers’, may conflict with our commitments to enhance recognition and social justice (Pérez-Samaniego et al. 2016). It also meant to be disrupting with normalcy and maintaining a respectful ethic of interpretations that did not indicate a determined directionality of thought (Britzman 1995; Kumashiro 2009). These ethical considerations connect with the humility necessary to afford social transformation initiatives in education. This humility is called *modest pedagogy* by Tinning (2002) for referring to the awareness of the difficulties, possibilities and/or impossibilities to engage in critical work with postmodern students. According to this author, rational discourses are insufficient for social transformation without a corresponding level of students’ emotional commitment for change and ethics of care, as we experienced in previous critical PESTE initiatives (see Devís-Devís and Sparkes 1999; Pérez-Samaniego et al. 2016).

Queer case studies of recognition in PESTE

Case study 1. Imagining through a fictional tale

The first PESTE activity was extensively developed somewhere else (Pérez-Samaniego et al. 2016) and unfolded the creation and pedagogical use of a fictional tale. This proposal was greatly influenced by an early work by Sparkes (1997) in which he created an ethnographic fiction on Alexander, a fictional gay PE teacher, and proposed a shared reading of it with his students of Sport Sciences in order to deepen in issues of sexual identity, homophobia and heterosexism. This would be an example of what later Clough (2002) calls *educational fictions*, imaginary stories derived from amalgams of raw data, real events and feelings, which could be ‘true’ and could reveal some ‘true’. Educational fictions rely on the idea that imaginary visions make possible to discern what is said and lived in the world – the *real* world (Freeman 2004). For Ricoeur (1983), fictions imply the deletion of the first-order reference to the world – the reference to the factual reality – as a condition for the possibility of uncovering a second-order reference – the reference to lived reality.

In this case, the first step was writing a story, ‘Escapar de mi cuerpo’ (*Escaping from My Body*), that would work as a means to access and give access to what a trans person in PE *may* experience, in order to gain understanding of her living world. It tells the story of *Mar*, an adult trans person formerly named *Mario*, who started her transition during her late days in secondary school (Fuentes-Miguel, Devís-Devís, and Sparkes 2005). The following fragments would provide a hint of Mar’s bad and good experiences:

Also, I did not want to go with the guys because ... I don’t know. I felt invisible when I played the games, and they never passed me the ball. They told me I had to go with the girls which, in fact, I rather preferred! But I detested their comments on my back like, “you sissy” or “you ain’t normal.” Sometimes they pushed me hard with their shoulders. They hurt me. They hated me for my body, a body I also hated! I felt horrible, miserable. I wanted to die.

[After choreography in a PE lesson in which Mario was performing a girl role] Everybody applauded enthusiastically! Luz [PE teacher] also congratulated us. I noticed that she did not overlook an offensive comment made against me by a boy. In front of the whole group she demanded him to rethink his words. I remember she had a chat with him at the end of the class. I've always been curious about what they talked. That morning was an unforgettable turning point in my life. So much that I decided, after a talk at home with my family (and that was not easy!), that it was about time to become Mar. Little by little, day by day, step by step ... I wanted to live as a woman, because I was a woman.

It must be outlined that Mar and the other characters of the tale are invented and, therefore, events, times and spaces were created by Jorge, one of the members of the group. However, many of the events were inspired by his experiences as a PE teacher, his personal knowledge of some trans persons, conversations with them, literature review and also by interviews with transsexuals carried out as a part of a wider research project. The tale was crafted in a confessional way, with Mar as first-person narrator. The blanks in Mar's writing invite the reader to fill them with personal meaning gathered from outside the text. In this way, it is less predictable and calls upon readers to engage with it and to bring their own experiences to its reading.

For us, the fictional tale represents a privileged way to know and feel the personal and social reality of trans persons in relation to PE. Its process of crafting helped us to feel with and for trans persons experiencing PES and, of no less importance, we believe that it can also help others to do so. However, as Frank (2010) remarks, it is important to note that a story, in itself, is not always able to stimulate a critical reflection. Some further pedagogical actions would enhance the emergence of reflection and dialog on possible understandings and feelings to the story.

Mar's tale was handed to the students in a sheet of paper. After finishing its reading, students were invited to individually write down their reflections on the story. Once collected, all sheets were returned to students in a random order, so that each one received a text ignoring its authorship. A group discussion began alternating thereafter readings of the anonymous written reflections and expressing their personal opinions on those readings. The discussion ended when students felt their opinions had been sufficiently reflected in the public debate. Then, a 20-minute lecture about the binary sex–gender system and its implications for trans persons was given in order to provide students with some knowledge that may bring about further reflection on opinions posed at the discussion. In order to capture these reflections, students were introduced to a blog (<http://escapardemicuerpo.blogspot.com/>) in which they could participate in it with their comments.

The main rationale of this multi-layered procedure was to promote a dialog between possible diverse reactions to the story, whilst resisting any finalizing interpretation from ourselves. According to queer theory, it means to disrupt student's knowledge and beliefs about gender binarism and normalcy without determining directionality of their thought (Britzman 1995; Kumashiro 2009). The last word of students was thus privileged, providing them with certain power and space to construct, share and negotiate their own thinking and feelings about trans persons from their own embodied identities. Consequently, we sought to make all the students who read the fictional piece and participated in the discussion feel respected and invited to contribute from their own vantage point, including those who might have identified with trans identities, if it was the case.

The result was a great number and diversity of responses; of which we briefly show three illustrative examples of different responses during varying moments of the activity. The first one is this anonymous written reflection:

If you are born a man it is normal to act and feel as such (since men and women are different, as shown by multiple studies), and the same in the case of women. But there are some exceptions that require treatment.

This quote reflects an imaginary of gender supported by heteronormativity, in which sex/gender binarism and biological norm (supported by 'multiple studies') legitimate the acceptable body-self. Abjection becomes justified when trans persons are implicitly considered unnatural exceptions.

The second example emerged in the discussion parallel to the reading of the written reflections on the tale. This was the reaction of some students to a classmate who systematically referred to the main character of the story, Mar, with her former masculine name of Mario.

Student A: IT'S MAR, NOT MARIO. IT'S MAR!!

Student B: That depends.

Student C: Are there two?

Student D: No, no, no; it's Mario

Student A: If you agree with her, then call her as she is. She's a she. She is Mar.

Student B: What Peter [fake name of student A] is saying is that the person who wrote the comment did not take into account his identity, the main character, I mean she, of Mar.[laughs]

This dialog provides a hint on how the discussion on the fictional tale provided students the opportunity to reveal, share and reflect on their beliefs about trans persons. And it also showed the difficulties many students have in achieving a true acceptance of trans persons that would involve, for instance, an appropriately naming of their gender identities.

The last example comes from the comments written at the blog:

Mar is a person with the body of a man who feels like a woman. Therefore, she is a woman. Whatever her physique may be, what she feels inside makes her own identity as a person.

This unambiguous claim for the right of Mar to decide who she is on her own basis shows students' willingness to respect and accept trans persons. Thus, moral imagining becomes essential as a way to ethically encounter distant and vulnerable others who may challenge our own understanding of ourselves and the world(s) we inhabit (Smith 2008). The key issue here is not whether trans persons are against the backdrop of heteronormativity, but to transcend this referential framework to ethically encounter with and for trans persons.

Case study 2. *Imagining through queer dance*

The second activity relies on the potentiality of body performances as part of a strategy for imagining and (de)constructing gender. It takes up on dance, particularly tango, as a space in which students might be involved in an exercise of imagining other gender identities. Queer pedagogy has called upon dance to explore the range of gender identities that emerged through participation as in drag queen/king performances (Rosenfeld 2002; Shapiro 2007). In these approaches, dance performance fosters the imaginative possibility to enact as different and diverse gendered individuals and groups and, consequently, think and feel in a more complex way about gender binarism. In addition, Gard (2001) suggests that some dance forms offer a unique setting for explicitly addressing heteronormative assumptions about what qualities male and female bodies can exhibit, and who and under what circumstances they can perform their gender identities.

Inspired by Larsson, Quennerstedt, and Öhman's (2014), who explored queer potentials in an event that took place during a dancing lesson in an upper secondary PE class, the activity we present calls upon tango as a pretext to queer the imagining and performance of gendered identities. We chose tango because, as Davis (2015) states, its predefined and stereotyped choreographic roles (macho-male leading and hiper-feminine follower) makes of tango a 'performance *par excellence* of gender inequality' (5). That is precisely why tango can be easily turned into queer, distorting its stereotyped gender features and performances (Pellarolo 2008). Thus, we believe, queer tango performances could enable PESTE students to imaginatively embody PES experiences as lived by trans persons.

As part of three introductory sessions bestowed to basic concepts on gender ideologies, students participated in the reading of 'Escaping from My Body' as a contextualization for the activity. During

warm up, students developed several exercises of walking, imagining being a woman, a trans woman, a man and trans man in a social world. After that, the session began randomly distributing typical feminine and masculine clothes such as dresses, skirts and hats to enable students' immersion in diverse gender roles. The dance actually started with all leaders at one end the room treading toward the opposite side, where followers waited for them. Then, with a gaze and a nod, they led the followers to the dance floor, starting with a traditional coupled tango dance. Since then, the role of leaders and followers in tango activities were swapping several times along the session, keeping the traditional dancing techniques. Later, the activity was transformed by the incorporation of queer elements in such a way that leaders enjoyed fewer rights and followers gained more initiative (e.g. they could choose dance partner). Finally, tango steps were danced in trios and groups, where they could choose the role to perform without any pre-established group distribution or choreographic indications.

Two main themes of interest for this paper emerged from an inductive thematic analysis of these data. The first theme refers to the possibilities and limitations that the activity offered for the imagining of gender diversity. Many students found the activity interesting and appreciated the opportunity they had to exchange gender roles, swapping from followers to leaders and vice versa. For Mario, for instance, role exchange helped him to put himself in somebody's shoes. Alex was surprised by some of his male classmates' endeavor: 'they really got into it [the follower role], they said ... I'm wanna cease being man and I'm going to be a little like woman'. Jaime felt particularly strange during the performance at the warm-up, in which he was indicated to play the follower role: 'you walk like a woman, although they [the rest of students] see you as a man. Actually, I kept walking normal but in fact I thought 'fuck, this is weird [...]. I felt a little ... some strange feelings ... discomfort'. However, in the end, he assured that behaving as follower was for him a true exercise of empathy:

I do believe there was a moment when I did act like woman, in a normal way, I mean, feeling woman. I do think so [...]. It's fine to fully feel like a woman for a few moments!

Embodied experience was of significant importance in the process of gaining empathetic imagination of the other. For Blanca, 'physical contact with people enables to feel them with all senses, not just the look. I think this is another and deeper way of knowing and feeling the other', while Arturo uttered: 'Close your eyes, letting yourself going with the flow, that really hit me [...] it was really interesting, everything was so smooth [...] all tension released, it was surprising!'. The physicality of dance enhanced a sensitive connection with the imagined other, as well as an intimate communication with the others as imagined by the dancing mates. For instance, Ignacio remarked that he could connect 'with other people in a deeper way, especially when we were trying to connect with the other person's breathing regardless of their appearance. The connection was internally when we sought to synchronize with your couple'.

Despite predominant general positive statements on the experience, some participants, particularly male students, expressed their difficulties in performing other gender roles than their own. For instance, some students were reluctant or unable to perform any form of gender expression. Roberto stated: 'I don't know what "feeling like a woman" means [...] I simply don't know how to do it'. Others indicated they did not know how to move like a woman, as they considered there are individual and *natural* ways of moving regardless of gender. This was the case of Raúl who referred to 'a natural way of walking', and Belén who performed gender roles 'as a person, not as a woman or man'.

Several students questioned the rigid structuration of pairs in dancing, particularly when they understood the implications to be a woman or a man at the beginning of the activity. Then negative feelings arose, particularly in certain girls, like Marisa, who felt forced to perform models of femininity she did not like or agree with:

In the end you believed what she [the teacher] said, and once you believed it you became aware when she told 'now you are going to play the role of woman, you have to letting yourself be carried, be weak, be protected ...' then unintentionally you did what she told you to do ... I do not feel like a weak person but at that moment I believed I was!

Marisa also outlined unfair situations; this activity may have produced on the people who did not strictly fit into the model of sex/gender/dance position in tango:

Then I thought, why do I have to let someone lead when I could better do it than the one who is leading me? [...] But I had to keep on following when I might have performed better that role (leader) ... but I had to follow in spite of what I thought and felt.

It is also worth noting that along the activity a small, although bellowing, group of male students stood out for their theatrical and histrionic performances in the follower role. Within this group was Valerio, who stated: 'I did the male role [leader] guiding [his partner] while I joked more in the female [follower] role, pretending a super genteel girl'. Other male followers, jokingly, blew kisses or pulled up their skirt showing their legs to attract leaders to the dance floor. These slapstick performances could be interpreted as defense mechanisms of heteronormativity: putting distance between their (real) male and (imagined) female identities, humor obstructed the imagination of other non-normative genders, reinforcing heteronormative roles and privileges (Schneider 2013).

The second theme, which emerged at the discussion after the queer tango experience, was related to how PESTE students imagined themselves teaching trans persons in PES. Students commented about their lack of formation and ability, as future teachers, to construct a non-heteronormative PES. Through their own experiences practicing queer tango, they got to know and to feel, some of the problems that a traditional design of PES classes can produce over certain people when the sex of participants is privileged despite individual gender identities. Many students, like Jaime, felt confused and recognized the complexities of deconstructing PES:

I imagine myself being a teacher and having a transsexual or trans person and, in fact ... I wouldn't really know ... I could design exercises like this (queer tango) ... it's not that I could, but I should because ... well, I don't know, it's very difficult!

Some students maintained that despite its potentialities, activities such as queer tango could be counterproductive in PES if participants would transmit simplistic and stereotyped images of femininity and masculinity in them. As Jorge's reflection indicates:

Well you can disguise ... If I were a trans boy I could disguise myself as a woman regardless of the context, and theoretically it would be beneficial for me to release tensions, to feel comfortable without the opinion of others, and so on. But maybe another boy, that is another body of man dressing as a woman would be doing things that ... that maybe I wouldn't agree with being a woman!

This quotation goes even further since the act of parody of certain gendered roles not only may hamper ethical empathetic imagination, but harming possible trans students that could be in class. This issue shows how a transformational initiative has its difficulties and potentially undesirable consequences of a contextualized practice of queer modest pedagogy.

Final comments

These two activities are presented as examples of the politic of recognition of trans persons in PESTE. For most students, they probably meant the first deliberate pedagogical contact with a phenomenon that they were alien to – trans people – within a context that they were very familiar – PES. Their reactions show a diversity of coexisting imaginaries and embodied experiences. However, we believe that the understanding and sensitizing of undergraduate students about trans persons' experiences in PES could influence and, eventually, transform their future professional activities. It is an ambitious purpose and we are aware of our limitations. In fact, it would be unrealistic and naïve, if not arrogant and dangerous, to consider that two single-pedagogic activities could remove taken for granted

heteronormative values. We recognize that a deeper change would require a more comprehensive curricular involvement, including other lecturers teaching in the same degree, something rather difficult due to the rigid structures of university life in Spain. It would also necessitate continuity in such initiatives and constant questioning of the normalcy, a queer key characteristic, to disrupt the comforting zone students and lecturers tend to assume (Kumashiro 2009). Moreover, we acknowledge that trans people are not a homogeneous group. The variety of gender identities under this umbrella term indicates that different potential social discriminations can emerge within this group and pedagogical considerations may be necessary in future initiatives. Similar considerations should be taken into account when gender identities are intertwined with other social identities such as race, age and disability, among others.

Despite the aforementioned limitations and considerations for future pedagogical projects, this paper exhibits several strengths. First, initiatives to sensitize about gender diversity are necessary in tertiary education, especially in Spain where gender issues are underrepresented in PESTE, as indicated by recent research (Serra et al. 2016a, 2016b), and issues of gender diversity and trans persons' experiences are simply non-existent. Second, the two activities translate to PESTE the dialog between queer and narrative pedagogies for the subversion of gender normalcy recently undertaken in other areas (e.g. Travis and Hood 2016). In this sense, the double approach based on a fictional tale and a queer dance show how cognitive and embodied ways of imagining can intersect to enhance empathy toward distant others, trans persons in this case. Third, the ways in which knowledge is problematized and students' subjectivities are recognized in this work are in line with queer and modest pedagogies (Britzman 1995; Tinning 2002). We assume the limits of rationality for social change, exploring the role of senses for disrupting students' knowledge and beliefs, starting from our own context of work as an activist approach acclaims (Oliver and Kirk 2016). Finally, as Kumashiro (2009) points out, these activities position our work in a paradoxical teaching role since they aim to facilitate imagination and disruption, although we can never be fully aware whether we are actually imaginative and disruptive in our own practice. Despite our efforts to dismantle heteronormativity, we acknowledge that several taken for granted issues, such as the use of binary language, our own cisgender embodied communication as well as other hidden forms of oppression we are unaware of, may inadvertently permeate our practice. For the sake of anonymity, we did not inquire about gender identities of students in any of the pedagogical actions. Therefore, we ignore whether any student self-identified as trans could have participated in them, neither how could they have been affected by the activities and classmates' reactions and comments to this topic.

These considerations show that promoting empathetic imagining of the other is intrinsically problematic. Any attempt to answer the questions *who imagines?*, *who is imagined?* or *why is the imagined imagined?* entails a set of power-related issues difficult to deal with, especially from a transformative pedagogy standpoint. In our case, we have *provisionally* assumed that PESTE is a predominantly heteronormative context in which students conforming to a binary system are privileged over those who do not. Arguably, it is questionable whether in these activities the perspective of the other (trans persons in this case), as individuals or social groups, can be experienced as a unified whole. Smith (2008) warns about the risks of an imaginative transposal of oneself to the place of the other. In that case, the presumable positive goal of empathetic imagination may *finalize* the other. This happens when 'someone claims the last, the definitive, finalising word, about who the other is and what he or she can become' (152).

In spite of all risks, weaknesses and uncomfortable choices, we believe that commitment with the politics of recognition entails the promotion of empathetic imagination. In particular, within hegemonic heteronormative contexts, the encounter of gender privileged with gender oppressed needs of the imagining of other possible lives. Any approach to this aim is necessarily modest, situated and provisional. However, as researchers and pedagogues, we have the responsibility of recognizing the other in our PESTE programs by incorporating the complex turns of social change, their contradictions and possibilities.

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