

Dissertação de Mestrado

**TRANSGENDERS OR TRANSSEXUALS? IDENTITIES, SEXUALITIES AND  
GENDERS IN *THE WELL OF LONELINESS* AND *STONE BUTCH BLUES***

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This dissertation aims at analyzing the issues of identity, gender and sexuality in the novels *The Well of Loneliness*, by Radclyffe Hall, and *Stone Butch Blues*, by Leslie Feinberg. The focus of this analysis lies in the main characters of the two novels, Stephen Gordon and Jess Goldberg. Both characters live multiple conflicts since their gender identity and gender expression are not consonant with their biological sex. They clearly portray the inner and social struggles faced by those who do not conform to the sexual/gender binarism.

In the light of Judith Butler's ideas, in *Gender Trouble* (1999 [1990]), as well as Simone de Beauvoir's, in *The Second Sex* (1997), it discusses the socio-cultural construction of gender, being that what is expected to be the male and/or the female subjects concerning the protagonists, based on the biological determinism related to the

body. Furthermore, Butler quotes Michel Foucault, stating that “the body is not ‘sexed’” (BUTLER, 1990, p. 117), if not taken in the context of a discourse, which is a resource of control and dominance, establishes the concepts of conformity and non-conformity, regarding how similar one is to his/her “proper” gender stereotype. This matter of (non)conformity is analyzed both in terms of gender and sexuality, since Stephen and Jess do not conform to the standards of either sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.

Jess’s and Stephen’s identities are developed throughout the novels, pointing at the complexity and malleability stated in the post-modern concept of identity defended by Stuart Hall, in “The Question of Cultural Identity” (1996). Not only they are impacted by other characters in the novels but they find themselves through things those characters notice about the two of them. This *transformation* as an essential aspect of the plural, fragmented, changeable post-modern subject introduces the terms *transsexual* and *transgender*, which name those who traverse the boundaries of sex and gender, respectively.

Jamison Green, in “Introduction to Transgender Issues” (2000), spots very clearly the distinction between sexuality and gender, as well as the other concepts unfolded from or related to them, including transgenders and transsexuals. According to Green, transsexual refers to those whose biological sex does not correspond to the sex the person wishes to have or identifies with, whereas transgenders are those whose gender expression contradicts the behavioral code socially expected from the person’s biological sex.

Transgenders or transsexuals? Although, this question in the title may suggest the pursuit of an answer, it intends to collect evidence that Stephen and Jess may be

both, either one or the other, or even none; it will all depend on the moment of they are living, the situation they are facing, or even the people they are dealing with. Feinberg solves this puzzle in one of his theoretical books, *Trans Liberation* (1998), coining a name/concept which encompasses not only transgenders and transsexuals but also all those who transgress stereotypes one way or another: transpeople. This new term perfectly matches the heroines as well as their creators, who, in addition to transgressing the norms, “want to change the world, sensitize people about the difficulties they have to face in order to survive, so that WE [my emphasis] can actually achieve freedom” (FONTENLA, 2009, p. 99).

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