

Social influence on personal identity: a reflection

Abstract

The anthropology of the body is an aspect that nurses must keep in mind in the individualized care of patients. For this reason, it is necessary to understand what are the main factors that influence this phenomenon. This article is a reflective opinion on the construction of our ideals in relation to gender from an individual and social point of view. A brief historical overview is presented on the influence of Western society and religion on everyday customs which have affected and continue to affect personal identity (psychosocial effect). The opinion is related to published international studies whose common element is the social influence on gender identity and the production of current social capitalism.

Keywords: gender stereotyping, cultural anthropology, nursing, cultural characteristics, social identification, gender identity

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Introduction

The construction of ideals about the body and gender are shaped by the society in which we live. Each culture has its particularities and peculiarities in relation to two main aspects that affect personal identity. On the one hand, it affects how the figure of man and woman should be represented in society, and, on the other hand the dichotomy of male and female gender. These factors of psychosocial interest for health are elements that nurses address as frontline health personnel.¹ The body is often used as another mode of expression. We communicate through expressions, gestures, clothing, physical appearance, certain emotions and the way we speak, among others. Each person who makes up society (referring to Western or Western Christian society^{2,3} has a cultural and social field where the bases lie on what mind and body should be, that is, an image that is accepted by all people. The question is what about myself in the construction of the body and gender with which I identify, and what is there of sociocultural influence that dictates what “should be”? I agree with anthropologist authors⁴ who have analysed the control exercised by society in terms of food, physical appearance, physical exercise or sexuality.

Main body

Historically speaking, gender was linked to sex and there were normalized patterns to identify women, such as a physical appearance of a lady caregiver and “prototype caregiver mother”.⁴ Regarding the man, he had to dedicate himself to being the economic breadwinner of the family and performing household chores was interpreted as a loss of power. Care for physical appearance had to meet the church’s requirements of interpretation of what a “good Christian looks like.” These requirements were equal to or more legitimate than the law itself, and of course, more determinative than your own choice of personal identity. The vision of these issues has evolved, adapting to the social circumstances of each period, transcending the everyday to influencing an international sphere.^{5,6} Today, in the twenty-first century, things have not changed that much. In a globalized world, society continues to determine what, how, when and why of our appearance and sexuality. Most countries have had incredibly significant changes that have managed to give visibility to gender and sex differences with laws that aim to be inclusive for women. The professions of the hegemony of the sexes (both historically female and historically male professions), the integration of women in working life and their capacity for economic independence have been liberalized.⁷ Thus, the symbols that identify social and cultural status

have also evolved. People can express themselves freely, dress as they like, look whatever they want, and do whatever they want. But, from the point of view of society.

There will always be buts. At present, what most determines our body construction in this globalized culture and society are social networks, big brands⁸ and famous celebrities? They are the mirrors of the masses where they can see themselves reflected and show off in front of the entire world. It is being observed that narcissism, hedonism and the culture of radical *carpe diem* is what really matters. In a figurative sense: as a man “I am in the social obligation” to meet a series of parameters, otherwise it would provoke the non-acceptance of the masses. In this line, for society I must be physically muscular, have a designer haircut and a hyper-protein diet (but the one of a celebrity, because my own diet has no followers). In addition, I must make a minimum of three trips a year to publish my “selfies” (a trip to a big city, it is not worth going to a town, it must be a state capital; another trip to the coast, the beach cannot be a local one, it must be an international sun and beach destination and, not to mention, a trip to the mountain, which should be a world biosphere reserve). Should you be a woman, from the point of view of society, you have even more downsides since you must add the use of high-end cosmetics, hire a personal trainer (it is not worth being a trainer), have lips made à la carte, use anti-cellulite creams, update your wardrobe every time you get your wage ... But the most important thing of all is to show your feminine attributes so that your daily “casting” on the social networks allow you to keep your liking figures high.

As in the past, today we continue to balance what identifies us and we like as an individual, and what society has established. We continue to see “weird and weird” people because they do not follow the canons. In the same way that the food we eat is controlled, the ways in which sexuality is expressed are also subject to social control, even showing an expression other than a smile is not well regarded socially speaking. Social capitalism is called.⁹ It consists of creating similar profiles of individuals who are governed by the same rules, who think in the same way, maintain the same culinary tastes, fashions, express their sexuality as established and when having sex use even the same trademark of condoms. But at the same time, they feel like unique, exceptional people, with their own thinking, genuine and “an appealing personality”.

Conclusion

In the light of nursing, it is important to know how the environment affects people’s perception of their appearance and

personal identity. It is known that the closeness offered by the nurse in the helping relationship is unique. Hence, nurses must be aware of the social reality. A key element in providing adequate support will be understanding “how patients see themselves as individuals” and how they can adapt in a rapidly changing context.¹⁰ Overall, despite social changes and new gender perspectives, the construction of the body has not changed much. It is a psychosocial factor that is a matter of oneself and how we visualize ourselves within a whole that encompasses the social and cultural aspects, although what dictates the influence of our choices will be the value we give to each element of the balance ... the sociocultural versus the individual-singular one.

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Conflicts of interest

I declare that there is no conflict of interest with any company or entity.

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