

Gender Equality: when fears invade everyday life

Santiago Pedraglio analyzes the arguments, emotions and identities confronted in the debate on the ideology of gender, among some who believe that sexual identity is determined by biology and others who recognize that there are other factors, psychological and cultural, that determine sexual identity.

Igualdad de género: cuando los miedos invaden la vida cotidiana

Santiago Pedraglio analiza los argumentos, emociones e identidades que se confrontan en el debate sobre la ideología de género, entre unos que creen que la identidad sexual está determinada por la biología y otros que reconocen que existen otros factores, psicológicos y culturales, que determinan la identidad sexual.

KEYWORDS:

Discrimination,
Sexual diversity,
Homosexuality,
Gender equality,
Machismo.

PALABRAS CLAVES

Discriminación,
Diversidad sexual,
Homosexualidad,
Igualdad de género,
Machismo.

SANTIAGO PEDRAGLIO MENDOZA

Journalist. Graduate of the Master's Degree in Sociology at San Marcos National University, with a minor in politics. Teacher at the School of Communications and of the Program of Governance and Public Management of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru.

The debate on the so-called “gender ideology” hides a background of very powerful and opposite convictions that the arguments cannot easily dilute or overcome: the desires for change opposed to preservation of lifestyles; recognition versus denial or concealment of identities; expectations of equality versus atavistic fears.

Therefore, it is not a simple political, academic, or scientific debate among proposals that could be called “progressive” on the one hand, and “conservative” or “traditionalists” on the other. This is not a debate only - nor principally - of “the elites”, or of “the informed” versus “the uninformed”, or “possessed inquisitors” against “well-written democrats”. It is not before a black versus white debate either, because within each of the two positions

There are nuances and differences (see boxes). However, it seems that the most active parties in this dispute are reluctant to recognize this simple, consistent and profound circumstance.

It is not the purpose of this brief note to discuss the correction or the absurdity of the arguments, but to present an approach to the “mass” debate that the parties mobilize and represent -contenders that sometimes become fighters instead-. Finally, I will refer to the emotional, identitarian and social depth of the ongoing discussion.

THE KEYS OF THE DEBATE

The certainty that there is a “natural order” is perhaps the key and more powerful argument of those opposed to recognize gender equality as something positive, as an achievement to conquer, because they consider that the identities and behaviors are determined by the reproductive organs.

This physical - biological, visible circumstance would be final, decisive and immovable for sexual identity and orientation of the people. Trying to modify this “natural order” would be to pervert it, to modify nature and, even worse, to oppose to the plans of God, to contradict its immanent divine origin. This is the key of the conservative argumentation that, undoubtedly, embodies the point of view of a very large number of people. It is based on traditions, customs and common senses installed

for centuries in the so-called western world as much as in other cultures.

What is complicated is that this point of view does not only points out homosexuality as a “deviation” - which is already an intransigent and outdated approach-, but that implies the idea that having born with a given sex is equivalent to having to perform certain functions in society, obeying hierarchical and long-established roles, regardless of the call and will of the people and, even more, denying them the possibility of entering worlds “reserved” for one or the other sex.

“Tolerance”, “rights”, “freedom to choose”, “equality” are, from the other side of the street, key words or concepts of the proposal for change, of an alternative way of thinking and acting. The argument is in this case, however, is much more complex, because it questions an order established on the basis of the visible, the appearances: the possession of certain genitalia.

For this way of seeing life, there are also other factors, such as the psychological or cultural ones, that determine identity; and that, today, limit options considerably. This, because socially gender marks - not sexual ones- are imposed quite early: girls in the house, boys to the street, to say it in a few and simple words. The argument in favor of gender equality goes against the common sense installed for centuries in sectors that are clearly a majority in the society.

The arguments are reflected differently in concrete life. The first one installs, in the mind and in everyday attitudes, the alleged risk of homosexualization that involves breaking the man/woman “natural order”, the danger that entails ignoring the roles established by this order. For this vision of reality, homosexuality does not exist, but it is inoculated.

The second argument -in view of the obvious homosexual orientation of millions of people, regardless of the roles imposed by the family, the school and the society to “avoid” it- seeks to enrich the personal lives and expand opportunities by breaking fictitious, but powerful borders, among what is supposedly male (notional, scientific, economic and political interests) and what would belong the female world (humanistic, literary, artistic, religious interests).

THE NATIONAL EVANGELICAL COUNCIL OF PERU (CONEP)

DECLARATION

[...]

"5. (We) regard with interest the concept of equality between men and women as a cross-cutting component of public policy and public education, while its main objective is that men and women have equal rights and the right to equal opportunities. It is necessary to transform unequal and discriminatory relations that characterize Peruvian society. Therefore, the Peruvian education cannot ignore this problem because definitely inequalities between men and women are an obstacle to the sustainable democratic development that we aspire as a country. The State, the family and the society have an ethical duty to generate the same conditions and possibilities for all citizens to exercise their rights and duties fully.

[...]"

Lima, March 2, 2017

In their declaration (2.3 2007) addressed to the churches, parents and the public opinion in general, regarding the debate on the approach to gender equality in the National Basic Education Curriculum of the Ministry of Education, the CONEP express their objection to the "discriminatory and unequal relations" that live on in Peru, and draw attention to the "inequalities between men and women" as an obstacle for the country. They are evidently setting out the religious stance that appeal to the maintenance of the status quo by appealing to the symbol of the pink as feminine and blue for the masculine.

You may think that those in the second option "have it easy". just by looking at the advances of women in the social, political, labor, and other areas, as well as the growth of the female population in technical and university careers considered male only a few decades ago. However, the truth is that there is still a long way to go, and that inequalities still appear in all these same areas.

Therefore the importance of the gender equality approach, because it is possible to uninstall from this space, not only with discourses but from the actual practice of each teacher with their students, false truths that affect both women and men.

THE DIFFICULTY OF THE DEBATE: THE SHADOW OF THE FEAR OF HOMOSEXUALITY

The powerful idea that the "natural order" is immovable adds to the fear of many parents that their children may become homosexual. The reasons are many: from the social embarrassment and having to face what "people think", (on the power of the opinion of the "others", the English philosopher John Locke laid

foundations still in full force, to God's punishment, articulated by religious speech and beliefs. But this fear it also feeds on the intuition - or better the full knowledge, that if their children are homosexual they will have a harder life, because they will have to face multiple ways of marginalization, demonization and discrimination.

One reason that explains the fierce and very massive opposition to recognizing that the members of the LGBTI community have the same rights as other people is the fear that this involves an openness that reaches even "inside the house" that the "evil" may knock the door of the house... or knock it down. There is resistance to accepting a situation like this.

Fear, also, has diverse roots: the eternal punishment, the plan of God, the opinion of those around us and wider circles. It becomes a powerful trigger of behaviors and in the long run, of social and political convictions and accusations that involve condemnation and accusations. This is why, when those in favor of change proposals debate as if only radical and ideological conservative leaders existed, they are making a mistake.

IV. Competencia cívica y participación democrática
 aprendiendo las dimensiones de la diversidad humana.

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COMPETENCIA

Convierte y participa democráticamente

El estudiante tiene en cuenta las diferencias individuales en los modos de pensar, sentir y actuar, así como los valores, las creencias, las actitudes y las normas. Muestra disposición para escuchar, comprender y discutir sobre las actitudes de la diversidad cultural, reconociendo sus diferencias. Es capaz de reconocer y respetar la diversidad cultural en un espacio como el aula, el aula virtual o en la comunidad. Trabaja para generar un clima de respeto y coexistencia democrática en el aula y en la comunidad.

Este componente implica contribuir lo siguiente:

- Interactuar con todas las personas desde el respeto a todos como personas con sus propias ideas, valores, creencias, actitudes, estilos de vida y gustos.
- Comprender y respetar las diferencias individuales en los modos de pensar, sentir y actuar, así como los valores, las creencias, las actitudes y las normas.
- Reconocer y respetar las diferencias culturales en un espacio como el aula, el aula virtual o en la comunidad.
- Trabajar para generar un clima de respeto y coexistencia democrática en el aula y en la comunidad.

Ministerial Resolution No. 281-2016-MINEDU dated June 2, 2016 approves the National Curriculum of Basic Education and orders its implementation with effect from January 1, 2017.

The National Curriculum makes it clear that a goal to be achieved is that differences - cultural, sexual, ethnic, etc.- are seen as a source of enrichment.

Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, specialist in public opinion, refers to the fears that appear in certain situations in this way:

“Intellectuals [...] have only now realized the existence of the isolated individual afraid of the opinion of their peers. [...] have investigated the contents of public opinion on the assumption that it deals with important issues, of “public relevance”. [However,] the current order is maintained, on the one hand, by the individual fear to isolation and the need for acceptance; on the other hand, by public demand, which has the weight of a court sentence, that we adapt to established views and behaviors”. (1995, pp. 47-48)

Therefore, the difficulty of the process of acceptance and public acknowledgment of homosexuality that people from all walks of life and in any geography go through is not arbitrary. Certainly, the power of social pressure, together with different kinds of fears, still condemns many to concealment. The reasons for doing so are not only rational but also emotional and social.

THE DEBATE BEHIND THE FIRST ARGUMENTS: THE DISCUSSION ON VALUES

Why should we consider that sexual diversity is not part of the “natural order” and of “God’s plan”? Why can’t love overcome dogmatic arguments? Why would we continue to encourage the fear that the sons or daughters are homosexual? Why not dispel the social difficulties that homosexuals face and which turn their problems into a self-fulfilling prophecy?

The characteristic of this debate is to confront deeply held values. Arguments such as the “natural order”, “God’s plan”, “tolerance”, “equality” refer to life approaches. Maybe for the same reason, the public opinion movements relating to this are of long duration: it will only be possible to change points of view very gradually, and always under the banner of respect for the convictions of the other. In this debate, you cannot ask the other “think like me”, but “let me be as I am”, “let them be as they are”.

George Lakoff (2007), the US cognitive linguist, said, referring to political thinking, but also valid for discussions such as this one, that people are not prioritized their preferences as if they were a laundry list, but on the base of thought frames.



The screenshot shows the El Comercio newspaper website. The main headline is "Iglesia da nuevo paso hacia la integración de los divorciados". Below the headline is a sub-headline: "En una votación muy ajustada, los participantes del Sínodo de la Familia aprobaron el documento". There is a video player icon on the right side of the sub-headline. The article text on the right side of the screenshot reads: "http://elcomercio.pe/mundo/actualidad/iglesia-da-nuevopaso-integracion-divorciados-201860" and "Bishops spoke in favor of a more welcoming church with couples who live together and with homosexuals and with Catholics in irregular situation, supporting the request of the Argentine pope in favor of an institution that stops judging and criticizing and turn into accompaniment. [...]". Below this is a quote: "The thorny issue of homosexuality was addressed only in a paragraph which reiterates that the church 'respects' homosexuals, condemns all 'un-fair discrimination' and opposes marriage with people of the same sex".

The article in El Comercio newspaper reflects the position of the Catholic Church in the declaration of the Synod of the Family (October 2015). The '270 Synod Fathers' among bishops and cardinals voted at that meeting, representing the bishops of the whole world"

Reference frames cannot be seen or heard. They are part of what cognitive scientists call "the cognitive unconscious".

All the words are defined in relation to conceptual frames. When you hear a word, its frame (or its collection of frames) is activated in the brain.

Changing frames is changing the way people see the world. It is changing what is meant by common sense.

Thinking differently needs talking differently.

THE REASON FOR THE CURRICULUM

It is not true that the center of the concern for gender equality as a cross-cutting theme of the National Curriculum approved the 2016 is the respect for homosexuality. It is rather questioning of the roles of women and men in society, a crucial aspect during school years, a tremendously sensitive period of development.

Teachers, men or women, with a macho mind frame will leave indelible marks not only or even mainly (if talking about amounts) among homosexual as well as on hete-

rosexual students. Relations between friends, colleagues or partners, fatherhood and motherhood, among other important aspects of life, will be marked by the early learning of what is classified as positive or negative by an environment that, in the case of the school, involves even the responsibility of the State.

As in the case of discrimination on grounds of skin color or geographical origin, the predominance of respect, above radical speeches and behaviors based on prejudice -acquired in the family or in the neighborhood, or absorbed by influence of the mass media-, is a synonym of protection against possible abuses. But not only that: the respect for - and, furthermore, the celebration of - divergent interests, away from prejudice and stereotypes, requires to expand your views to achieve a better personal fulfillment.

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