

Image, body, and language in the usage of Grindr

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Abstract: In our study we discuss the gay dating app Grindr, considering its linguistic and semiotic aspects, emphasizing its users' imagery and linguistic productions, conceived as performativities. Eleven users of this social network were interviewed, focusing on their photographic compositions and textual interactions with other members, subsequently analyzed under Butlerian and Barthesian perspectives on language and its relation to image. A "grammar" with particular meanings of words and images with commercial and mediatic target was found out to be used within the application. Furthermore, techniques of photography, body improvement, and associations between practices and political issues were addressed by the interviewees. Therefore, we could understand Grindr as a "meaning system", where such dynamics are produced, negotiated and disputed in its uses.

Keywords: photography, male homosexuality, sexuality, technology, dating apps.

Introduction

This article is related to studies developed in the Center for Psychosocial Studies and Intervention concerning Diversity (*Núcleo de Estudos e Intervenção Psicossocial à Diversidade – NEPSID*), between 2016 and 2018, on the possibilities of self-narratives and the expression of sexuality between men mediated by mobile technologies (Pizzinato, Hamman & Maracci-Cardoso, 2018). It is believed that these platforms establish links for productions of the self through photographs, texts, and relationships developed between their users. Through such platforms, the study on such technologies and their appropriations features a fruitful path to the understanding of performativities of gender and relationships between subjects and contemporary technologies.

Thus, we aim to analyze how subjects produce themselves within the field of language, especially by photographs, from the usage of the Grindr dating application. To this end, we discuss the uses of such application considering historical aspects and their effects on culture. Then, we discuss the theoretical reference of "production of oneself" and its developments through photography. Finally, we present the interviews conducted in this research process, as well as our analysis of such interviews, and the understanding of the application as a practical and semiotic arranger of relationships between men.

Grindr

The history of platforms for the virtual mediation of sex concerns, initially, the search for relationships between men, and Grindr, released in 2009, is the first application to combine the search for partners with the mechanism of satellite geolocation (Miskolci, 2014). Nowadays, such technological possibility is broadened to specific platforms for various target audiences: heterosexual, gay, or lesbian.

With Grindr, users can view 99 people closer to them, exchange private messages, photos, and maps. This mechanism has changed the dynamics of sex between men and the relationship established between this sexuality and public space (Miskolci, 2014). Grindr and successors of applications with such purpose has changed the logic of search for partners, superimposing on-line and off-line realities and thus breaking the distinctions previously used to understand the "virtual world" as opposed to the "real world," in addition to allowing a socialization dynamic through individual/private contacts which are distant from the possibilities provided by mediations of sex between men when there was no applications (Oliveira, 2017).

Smartphones and other mobile devices allow a continuous connection to the internet, in such a way the access to networks intersects experiences in the public sphere. Such a combination provides a new experience of the city, which starts to be experienced along with the on-line reality. According to Oliveira (2017), these spaces are produced through relationships that are established there; thus, new forms of producing

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experiences are made available considering the markers that each subject represent.

Within the Grindr dynamics, the profile is the way provided by the app to enunciate such markers and identifications – from identity characteristics to requirements when searching for partners delimited by users –, with the available gaps for volunteer filling. You can choose a picture, a name, and an “about me” (using characters and emojis), enter data, such as age, height, weight, ethnicity, body type, what you are looking for, relationship status (single, married, open relationship, ...), tribes (in the free version, you can choose only one tribe), favorite sexual position, and serology, in addition to linking to the profile your Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter accounts. All these options are voluntary filled.

Grindr differs from chat rooms (such as those in Uol and Terra portals, very used in the mediation of gay sex in the early years of the 21st century) by the exclusive criterion of proximity. Whereas in that other time of gay socialization via the internet you could choose a room by a common theme (specific fetishes, ages, cities etc.), with the application users are exposed only to people closer to them. There is a selection mechanism that allows visualizing people who correspond to the “tribes” or other categories chosen by the subject; however, since this option is restricted to users who do not pay the service, it is not a device routinely used, at least in Brazil.

Hence, information displayed on the profile are formed by the function to display or not the way users relate to the application, indicated from textual and imagery codes in a semantic network shared in varying degrees by the others. This network involves emojis, types of pictures, numbers, words, and sentences that articulate in specific directions, used to expresser who you are and what you seek through this application.

In this sense, Miskolci (2012) points out that the creation of a profile on an on-line social network articulates a “private I” with a “public performance,” i.e., part of the externalization of certain elements that constitute a public “persona.” This on-line “I,” according to the author, works as an “idealized version of yourself” (p. 7), through which people produce improved images about who they are.

Creating a profile usually involves three elements: name, photograph, and description, working as a “visiting card” of the user in a specific social network (Illouz, 2011; Miskolci, 2012). To the authors, this action resumes a consuming logic by which the “on-line I” works as a merchandise displayed in a showcase. In this sense, Miskolci (2012) mentions the centrality of the body in the visualization process of themselves, making the physical appearance one of the main elements of the photographic productions present in these applications. In addition, it points to certain homogenization when creating profiles, in such a way that these tools take a “pedagogical” character for their users, establishing based

on what information should you formulate a presentation about yourself.

Furthermore, Miskolci (2017) opposes the possible association between creating a profile and an understanding of a prior and stable subject, “behind” the tool. On the contrary, the use of the application involves a connection between media and technological elements, in which subjects, as they create an idealized version of themselves, also produce themselves in this process. Such understanding is supported by analyses, such as those of Mowlabocus (2007), who points to a link between the creation of profiles in a dating website for men and pornography aimed at the gay audience, in such a way that it is common for categories that describe pornographic videos to also become categories of understanding and identification among users, such as in the terms “daddy,” “twink,” and “bear” – part of the “tribes” available on Grindr.

From this point of view, we aim to analyze this application from the “production of oneself” perspective, considered mostly concerning the theories of performativity. To this end, we seek to connect this theoretical reference to links in which the use of Grindr is performed: between images, texts, the erotic, and also the political dimension, considering the discursive field that serves as a condition of possibility for the emergence of these issues, systematized in institutions such as gender, sexuality, and masculinity.

Production of oneself

The idea of production of oneself is based on the work of Butler (1990) on performativity, which proposes a conception of subject based on practice. Opposing to dualisms favoring the society rather than the individual or vice versa, the author proposes a notion of subject based on the very doing. Hence, the subjection takes place through practice, circumscribed in current discourses, in performative actions within normativity, but which can be reorganized in manifestations of the self (Butler, 2015).

The concept of performativity assumes the absence of an “I” before the action, i.e., the action itself constitutes an idea of the “I.” In this sense, the subject is understood as performed in practices concerning the self and related to a discursive regime, being related to such through reiteration, tensions, or subversions, always within the self (Butler, 1990). The subject is supported, therefore, by the response to discourses that question them, rearranging them according to their performative action, their performance. To Butler, the “I” exceeds the subject’s very narrative, since their origin will ever be fully explained. The “I” is not originated in an individual per se, but rather in the relationships of question and answer that is established with the other (Butler, 2015).

Thus, performativity comprises different productions of gender and sexuality as well as other

social markers in dialogues and tensions with culture. It refers to a response to previous and questioning discourses, also affected and possibly modified to the extent such are tensioned before the multiplicity of ways to produce itself.

Thus, think about the use of digital media from the perspective of performativity presupposes understanding them as a space for productions of the self, according to which subjects will express themselves in several ways the way they perceive and understand their desire, creating their own condition of themselves. In more or less explicit ways, these performativities resume social values prevailing in the context in which such applications are used and in communicative processes natural to the use of these tools.

Accordingly, Couto, Morelli, Galindo, and Souza (2016) state that mobile devices to search for partners among men “inaugurate other forms of sex, give rise to other affectations to the bodies, and resignify standardized practices” (p. 170). Discourses that delimit and regulate gender and sexuality are still present in the application, but they emerge in disputes and controversies between users. Hence, we can understand Grindr as a possible space for re-producing standards and for expressing resistance regarding the contemporary experiences of men who have sex with other men, in such a way that users produce themselves from the dynamics of power and resistance that establish conditions of possibility for their experiences (Foucault, 2012).

Thus, creating a profile on Grindr is not reduced to a mere exhibition of an idealized version of the subject who uses the tool, as previously pointed out. On the contrary, we perceive the creation of the profile as a performative choice among the available codes, from which users tell who they are and what they seek in their relationship with the tools, producing themselves in this action. The choice, therefore, is configured in the reorganization of those characteristics available for the manifestation of an “I” in the application. This “I,” however, cannot be understood as restricted to the use of the social network in question, since, considering the current level of connectivity promoted by technology, this “I” is extended to the everyday life, in private or public spheres.

In this sense, the composition of images seems to be an important element for the production of oneself of mobile application users, considering the centrality of photography on these social networks. Thus, photographing yourself seems a way to, also, produce who you are in these applications – and moreover, within the context of intense connectivity in which they are used.

Photography

Sontag (2011), in her analysis of photography in contemporary times, mentions that postindustrial societies have become dependent on this imagery production, in

such a way that it has been composed as a specific form to see, understand, and value the world. For the author, “pictures change and broaden our ideas about what is worth looking at and what we have the right to observe” (Sontag, 2011, p. 13).

Her reflections are inspired by the proposals of Barthes (2012a), who mentions the tautological character of photography, always emerging based on its own repertoire, both in relation to technique and the culture in which it is inserted. For the author, the *photographic reference* – i.e., what establishes photography as a specific mode of image production, different from representational forms, such as painting or drawing – concerns what it captures, the moment, something that undoubtedly occurred in front of the camera lens.

For Barthes (1980), the photographic message is divided between its denotative character – the referent, what has effectively occurred in front of the camera lens – and connotative character, with an open and contingent code. According to the author, the connotative message is continuous, since it does not only concern the image contained in the photographs, but also the relationship that such establishes with linguistic utterances. Hence, connotation, paradoxically, is developed from a *message without a code*, which take on meaning to the extent it is signified by textual elements. The text, thus, parasitizes the image, and may extend or even change the meaning of a photograph.

By analyzing the discourses published on photography, Barthes (2012a) points out that these are usually divided in two: the first, related to the technique, considers photograph as a “way too close” view (p. 16), whereas the second, which concerns its sociological aspect, perceives it as a “way too far” view (p. 16). The author, for his turn, supports a distinct venture, which seeks to analyze photographs based on the effects they produce on the spectator: feelings, preferences, meanings.

Accordingly, he address two different affectation fields caused by photographs: *studium* and *punctum*. The first concerns the social, cultural, and material conditions that photography evokes, its context, what such informs. Aesthetic codes, social roles, cultural references, and numerous other forms of organization can be noticed through a photography – hence its sociological character, its technical dimension, its *studium*. The *punctum*, on the other hand, is highly regarded by the author as a cut, something that the photograph does not mean, but which is produced as an effect in the spectator. This cut has a particular dimension, related to the experience of one who looks; however, it also refers to a *punctum* intersecting the photograph, present in every image obtained by this technology, to the extent the photographic act “mechanically repeats what can never be existentially repeated” (2012a, p. 14).

In relation to the contemporary context of photographic production, as for the sophisticated coupling between digital cameras and cell phones, it is considered

that the photograph acquires the status of instant communication media. Thus, sharing images in digital platforms is already deemed as part of the photographic process itself, in such a way that applications for posting images are considered to enhance the rhetorical meanings that photograph can exercise (Lemos & Rodrigues, 2014). Hence, as Barthes (1980) proposes, specific meanings are established in the relationship between images, texts, and social networks.

The connotation of a photography on Grindr is considered to involve negotiation between the context of the application and the following textual information, promoting a specific meaning of the image on this platform. Such a meaning is part of the establishment of the production of oneself, also inserted in the way an “I” is created contingently to the tool – which, as observed, it is not restricted to the borders of the application.

Therefore, we will present our methodological approach to address such issues with Grindr users, as well as, in sequence, the interviews of this procedure.

Method

To conduct the interviews with Grindr users, we created an institutional profile of the research group in the application, whose name was “Research,” and the display picture was the logo of the group – with the initials NEPSID – and, in the description, we inserted the following text:

We are a group of the Institute of Psychology of UFRGS and our research focuses on homosocialization via applications, creation of profiles, and management of sexual risk. If you accept to participate, we can give you more information about us and our research.



Figure 1. Photo and description of the created institutional profile
Source: Grindr, 2019.

This profile was thus created after many attempts to approach and experience Grindr within the context of the research. Initially, we approached through personal accounts in the application – making explicit the character of the research and sending the “Informed Consent Form” at the beginning of the conversation. Such configuration proved to be inefficient, since the personal account did not confidence in respondents, in addition to limiting the interviews to their search criteria for partners, with extensive absence of answers.

Then, we created an account with no picture and no information on who was conducting the interview, only supported by references to the research. This proposal was inefficient for the research either, considering that the lack of image is understood as negative within the context

of the application, incurring, again, in constant absence of responses or difficulty in continuing the conversation.

Due to the limited access to respondents, we used a methodological approach inspired by the work of Blackwell, Birnholtz, and Abbot (2015) to create an institutional profile, with the research group logo, and an explanatory text about the research. Such composition proved to be more fruitful in our movement to approach the users, since they began to engage in conversations with us and the absence of responses diminished.

We know, however, that the institutional delimitation of the account also limited the public willing to participate in the survey, with bias of more educated people, of middle and upper classes, and with familiarity concerning academic production. We found no way of

creating a neutral profile, which would be pleasant to all users, since the relationships in the application are also mediated by desire and sexuality. Hence, every choice for creating the profile delineates the public with which it is possible to get in touch – and, because of this, we chose the configuration that provided us with more answers.

From this profile, we interviewed seven people in the chat available in Grindr, in addition to conducting four face-to-face interviews, according to the participants' availability and interest. We followed the semi-structured model of interview (Duarte, 2004), with some trigger questions to address themes we sought to approach in the research. Such questions were related to the creating of the profile, in relation to texts and photographs; use of other social networks in search for partners; motivations for using Grindr; production of photographs to the application; relationship types in relation to the tool; locations and times for use; choice of people in the application; dynamics of seductive flirts; exchange of messages, photographs, and maps; specific ways of communication in the application; risk management; past experiences etc.

This range of topics has enabled the development of an overview of Grindr uses, from which we focused, in our study, on the images and linguistic codes that are produced and circulating in the social network, concerning themes such as the body, sex, and relationships established in the tool and beyond. Such interviews were analyzed according to the Critical Discourse Studies, which comprise linguistic utterances through their relationship with socially shared discourses (Flick, 2009).

To analyze photographs, we used the Barthesian perspective, based on the “Anchoring” and “Relaying” concepts (Barthes, 1979; Kasra, 2017), which refer, respectively, to the linguistic function by which textual information leads to a particular interpretation when reading an image, and to an extended content, a reading that broadens the senses present in the image alone. Accordingly, the context of sharing and immediacy of photograph promotes specific directions and contingents for the images, referring to the articulations between the platform on which it is posted such as captions, hashtags, and algorithms (Lemos & Rodrigues, 2014).

Therefore, in our study we analyzed the images based on the linguistic elements that relate to them such as textual contents available in the names and descriptions of the users, utterances accessed by interviews, and their relation with other images and texts within the application. Thus, this analysis allows accessing the photographs in their *studium* level (Barthes, 2012a), i.e., their sociological and technical dimension, which provides an understanding of the image as a context.

However, we also sought to access pictures on another level of affectation, the *punctum* (Barthes, 2012a). Described as a “cut,” this level concerns the affectation the picture produces in the viewer, within the field of feelings. Here, we follow this direction by

understanding that, in the application, permeate issues that exceed the “rationality” of the users, since sexuality is also produced within a scope not fully controllable, related to feelings, emotions, and desires. To this end, we developed a questioning about the photographs that, for the participants, stood out in some way, called attention, and differed from the others in a level of desire. From these pictures, which participants showed in the interview, we talked about the feelings evoked by them.

In addition, as a methodological resource for understanding the way respondents comprehend the use of the application, we developed a question for them to explain to us which operating modes we should be aware of for using the tool. We question, specifically: “What should I know if I open an account on Grindr now?”

Thus, from the images, we tried to access the users' dynamics for the production of oneself, which involve the way they relate in the application, how they produce their bodies, how they choose utterances for their profiles, and other elements that we will discuss next.

Interviews

In this fieldwork, firstly, we highlighted the set of images accessed when visualizing the available profiles on Grindr and also in the respondents' narratives, focusing, in particular, on the prevalence of body photographs in this social network. Bodies which usually correspond to an ideal of health, composed of defined muscles in contrast to fat or to excessive thinness. The images of bodies contemplated by this standard are part of the flirting dynamics as a criterion of highest desirability, both in the search for dates and in the users' production of oneself. That is, such aesthetic standard focuses on the ideal referred to partners and also on the strategies and development of a desirable body for such dynamics.

This process can be accessed in the discourse of the user Gustavo¹, a 26-year-old young and white man, who explains, first, the attributes that arouse interest and desire when using the application. To this end, he shows us two images of men who he has spoked with recently on Grindr, both white, thin, and “hot,” whose profile picture showed their abdomens and a snip of their faces. The respondent tells us, then, his methodology to create good images, as well as those recently presented. Regarding the “selfie” in front of the mirror, which illustrates his account, Gustavo says:

It's a light coming from the side and it creates a certain shade. It comes, like, from the top and from the side. Especially when you take a picture of your whole body, because it creates a certain shade on the chest that makes you look hotter than you really

¹ We used fictitious names in the text to preserve the participants' confidentiality and privacy.

are. [...] Really, that's it. A picture taken from one side, a shady light, that's the light.

Effects of lighting and the angle of the body, however, end up producing, too, a questioning about the veracity of the image, considering that, under other positions and light conditions, the body of Gustavo is no longer the one pictured by the photography.

I look at this picture and this is not my body. It's mine because I'm there and because I did not edit the picture. I mean, I edited it, of course, by using the light or the filter, but, you know, I'm not like that. Oh, this [he shows another picture of his body], it's a light coming from the side, and here there's a shadow that, like, I kinda look forward and I don't see this dimple that I have here. But it's a light thing, you know? Then I post this photo on Grindr, because, you know, then the person will see me there and it's not like that, you know?

The play of light, shadows, and angles perform a Gustavo's image that resembles those he regarded as ideal and desirable in the virtual means for searching for sex. However, the reality of this body is marked by contingency among such elements, which, when broken, reveals another body, one less consistent with the expectations of the body standard. The respondent, thus, points out other ways to produce your body in the search for images that favorite you within the dynamics of flirting and seduction in the applications, related to an organic materiality performed in diets and training in gyms:

I've changed my routine a lot a year and a half ago, I started eating better, working out a bit. My body has changed, I feel more beautiful, healthier, all of these issues, too, and along with that, there was a reason for me to expose myself more, on the apps. [...] All this lifestyle of a person influences in some behaviors in terms of pictures in the application.

In this sense, the body and the image that portray him are produced in relation to the normativity in which they are inserted, negotiating the available contingent visibility modes: from angles and lighting options to gym devices that perform an ideal body, or at least one closer to the ideal. However, the effect of the standard on the subject is not decisive or totalizing; on the contrary, as Foucault (2012) mentions, power relations are established according to the possibilities of resistance, in such a way that the dynamics of the standard also behold its own contradiction.

The possibility of resistance, therefore, does not arise outside the rule, but actually in its very dynamic, delimiting the boundaries within which it is produced. Accordingly, the speech of the participant Jorge – a

28-year-old black man – illustrates the contradictions of aesthetic, imagery, and body ideals circulating in this social network. For him, defined muscles are deemed desirable within the context of Grindr; however, he claims to avoid relationships with men who exhibit them in their photos, because he understand such are inserted into a heterosexual dynamic: *“Oh, yes, the bodybuilder, definitely, the guys from the gym. [...] They are more heteronormative.”*

According to him, the so-called heteronormativity is also related to greater “sexual voracity,” mainly referred to the “active” position, that is, the one that penetrates during anal sex. In this sense, it points to a common and negative perception among respondents that homophobic utterances circulate in the application, in sentences such as “I'm not into effeminate guys” or “I want a deal between males.” Moreover, for Jorge these statements are related to pictures with an emphasis on the muscles and the used emojis. When we questioned about the specific meanings of these emojis, he reported:

Some [have specific meanings], yes. It means whether you're active, passive [...] or if there is a “top” emoji, which is one that I avoid using, that “top” emoji, because for me it already represents a more heteronormative thing, because some guys write “oh, it's top, I'm not into effeminate guys.” Guys like these often use emojis there too, so I keep some distance.

We perceive, in this excerpt, the malleability of the meaning in relation to the signifiant, a process extensively addressed in the field of Linguistics (Barthes, 2012b). The “Top” emoji is used in the Brazilian context of social networks, such as Whatsapp and Facebook, to express something positive or commemorative – and it has been recently linked to a “heterosexual” language on “memes” circulating on Instagram and Facebook. However, the word “top,” in English, is used as slang for the “active” sexual position, penetrator, as opposed to the “bottom,” passive. In this sense, Jorge's understanding of the emoji merges both meanings, from that attached to the sexual position of the English language to that of “heterosexual language” in Brazil. We cannot state that Grindr users who use such mark in their profiles take from either directions, but that the meaning, always relational, is contingently performed in relation to the signifiant, and this process also involves failures and interruptions.

Thereby, emojis are deemed to be used according to specific meanings, which commonly differ from those related to other contexts – as we can perceive in the controversy of the “Top” emoji. Such meanings, then, do not belong to the signifiant itself, being developed by the ways they are used in relation to other words, emojis and images, featuring degrees of greater or lesser stabilization according to the users' recognition.

In this perspective, Gustavo points out:

I think that a kind of grammar of emojis is established, it was kinda universalized. There are the up arrow, meaning the guy is active, the down arrow, the guy is passive, left- and right-side arrow, the guy is versatile. There's the eggplant, which is the penis, the pear, which is the buttocks. But I don't use them. I don't use it a lot. I use the smiles, at most.

Although the interviewee does not use such feature, he acknowledges its meanings, and thus he is inserted into the “universalized grammar” of emojis. We do not deem the grammar metaphor as a language standardization, determining the right or wrong for writing and speech, but rather as a group of linguistic practices recognizable to speakers of a particular language, in such a way that the use of language in exceeds the normative delineation, restricted to specific temporality and spatiality. Therefore, we agree with Gustavo: there is a grammar, but an open grammar, which negotiates meanings with different contexts – such as other applications –, modifies according to usages, and is subject to failures and linguistic grooves (Butler, 2015), causing disagreements such as the aforementioned.

In order for there to be a grammar, however, a recognition of common sense should superimpose the failures of understanding and interpretation. Accordingly, we highlight three respondents, when questioned about what we should know to use Grindr at that point, who mentioned the specific meanings of words and emojis circulating in the dynamics of the application, as we can observe next:

There are lots of possibilities. But you have to know these codes, you have to know what is active and passive, this sort of thing. [...] This thing with emojis. There are some expressions like “raw top,” if a guy wants to have sex without a condom. It's an important information for you to know.

“Tekar,” I discovered after a long time the meaning of “TK.” It's the practice of those who use cocaine. The act of using it, they call it “TK,” “teko,” “tekar.” These are profiles that I avoid, I don't think it's healthy.

The little leaf means marijuana, the lighting, cocaine. Expressions such as “raw top,” meaning to have sex without a condom.

Thus, recognizing certain terms from their contingent meanings regarding the application is deemed paramount for a good use of the tool. We must, therefore, learn this grammar. Such a process, however, does not only concern the recognition and understanding of codes already established and stabilized in a language. Speakers

of a language are those who cannot only read it, but who also produce codes from the language in which they are established. Hence, the use of Grindr is inseparable from the production of meanings for its use – images, texts, or emojis, considering that practicing a language is producing yourself through it.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that utterances are not necessarily apprehended from a rationalized dynamic. Encoding of photographs as reference for a social or political context – procedure that Jorge follows by associating muscles with heteronormativity – is inserted into the reading of the image as a context, the affectation mode that Barthes (2012a) names *studium*. This, surely more accessible when conducting our research, takes the pictures as informants of specific time, space, and situation. However, when questioned about photographs that attract the attention of respondents, we obtained answers indicating another field of affection exerted by the image.

For example, we could mention the speech of the user Pedro, a 36-year-old white man, regarding a photograph that aroused an intense interest in him in the application, without him even knowing why. It was a picture of a man lying on his back, covered by a sheet that displayed only part of his back. The respondent referred to believe that such photograph could be little “functional” in the dynamics of Grindr, since it was distinguished from others commonly understood as desirable – featuring muscle, the abdomen, and an exacerbated masculinity. However – and maybe because of that indeed –, it caused him an effect that other pictures did not, as in the case of the “cut” Barthes (2012a) associates with the *punctum*. According to the author, “what I can name cannot, actually, hurt me.” (p. 53).

In this sense, *punctum* is indeed the unspeakable, what affects the subject in a field not contemplated by words. Standing on the edge of language and representation, *punctum* exceeds the grammar, associating itself with feelings and emotions. We emphasize this movement so we do not revert to rationalizing claims of the human experience, especially related to erotic dynamics locked in hookup applications. We consider that subjects, although able to produce reports about themselves, do not give meaning to their reality in a totalizing manner, in such a way there is always something inaccessible or *mysterious*.

Reflections

The overview of Grindr usages mapped by the interviews points to some areas of analysis, which will be developed in this section. Initially, the aforementioned photographs of the defined body, part of an aesthetic standard delimiting desirability criteria, resume the formulations of Miskolci (2016) concerning the primacy of bodily criteria as for desires permeating in these tools. According to the author, being or not being recognized by attributes closer to the “ideal” existing in these

applications means, effectively, establishing more or less contact within the dynamics of flirting and seduction. Hence, social markers, such as race and class, in addition to the criteria of youth and manliness, produce a hierarchy between the profiles, which resumes prevailing social values concerning homosexuality.

Such values are associated with the image of the muscular, defined body as an aesthetic standard, related to what Santos and Zago (2013) called “health imperative.” For the authors, such imperative concerns images strongly disclosed, in the 1980s and 1990s, of diseased bodies of gay people due to the HIV virus, marked by excessive thinness. The muscular body, then, would be a response to such imagery utterances, being inserted in the production of another discourse towards homosexuality in contemporary culture: no longer the disease, but rather health. Delimiting aesthetic and body ideals for the application also resumes a pornographic language, performed by the sexualization of photographs and texts that accompany them (Mowlabocus, 2007). In this sense, the health imperative is also translated into an erotic capital, fundamental in the marketing context of sexuality, in which desires are unevenly distributed, according to criteria valuing bodies, images, and profiles (Miskolci, 2017).

Thus, the health imperative is constantly pursued, in a process of continuous improvement of the body in relation to the aesthetic ideal. We can notice such purpose in Gustavo’s experience, who started accessing a greater level of desirability in the tools to the extent he was shaping his body in gyms and eating healthier foods. Nevertheless, this body is negotiated by handling other actors such as lighting and the angle of your pose in front of the camera.

The effect of these actors is initially deemed as a distortion of the image, which, in his speech, is opposed due to the certainty that, indeed, it was his body on the photograph, which differs from what actually happened in front of the camera lens (Barthes, 2012a). However, by disclosing a body closer to the ideal preconized in the social network, the boy triggers other elements of negotiation. If the photograph features an “improved” version of himself, to Gustavo, it is not stabilized, but actually deemed as an ideal to be pursued and produced when interconnecting elements such as the gym and food. Therefore, we do not consider the profile as an improved version of a subject “behind” the application, since these elements are not stable, but rather in a continuous process of improvement and production of oneself.

Jorge, on his turn, seems to produce his self in a relationship of tension concerning the ideals permeating the application, performing a resistance against the standard that do not contemplate him. He claims to have already posted in his profile the sentence “no heteronormative guys!”, in a production of oneself that is opposed to the existing ideal of the tool, performatively reversing the hierarchy and its uneven distribution of desire. In such

utterance, Jorge positions himself as the subject of choice, not merely passive to an ideal which he is not part of, but intentional for modifying it through his action.

That does not mean this man always performs himself in contrast to the perceived standard, in an exercise of courage or radicalism. We seek, as Pereira (2015) mentions, to understand how resistance is also performed in addition to heroic or extraordinary speeches. Subjects, as we conceived them, are not continuous or closed; on the contrary, they are produced in momentary and contingent stabilizations, in such way their changing capacity is also recognized. Thus, Jorge’s report points to a positioning in relation to the contingent standard concerning that narrative, and may change to extent it is associated with other agents. If the standard is never fully performed (Butler, 2015), neither is resistance.

Jorge’s narrative is predominantly complainant when it comes to Grindr, in a positioning that turned out to be common in interviews, with constant critiques as for the operation of the application – whether by the presence of heteronormative guys, by searching for “fast hookups,” or by the lack of headshots. These users, although producing reports of discontentment, use the application, keeping their accounts active within a context of dissatisfaction. Therefore, we believe that reports and reflections concerning Grindr neither lie in a context of complete rationality, in narratives that could make a lived experience whole. Although there are ways to produce the self and relate with others permeated by logical reasoning, with expectations of cause and effect – as seen in the aforementioned interviews –, reason is also fragile when using the application, being easily understood in a bias of contradiction.

However, through a performative concept of the subject, we state that the report itself do not totalize a truth about what is lived, considering the impossibility of “handling” yourself based on a narrative (Butler, 2015). Reports of subjects concerning their lives, hence, are always permeated by a degree of openness, in which contradiction emerges not only as inconsistency of a logical reasoning, but also as the very condition of the narrative – which we can also perceive in Gustavo’s distress when questioning whether the body depicted by a photograph in the application is really his. It is within this openness that lies a possible space of performance and, therefore, resistance – not a logic and deliberative one, but rather that mobilized by the ability to produce new reports and narratives about who you are.

Regarding the “grammar” developed in the application, combining images, words, and emojis, Grindr is considered as a system of meaning (Barthes, 2012b), i.e., a particular language developed within a media, but which is related to the overall language as a parasite, in an exchange of meanings. According to Barthes (2012b):

Connotation, it is worth noting, the development of a secondary meaning system, parasite, if we may say

so, of language itself; this secondary system is also a language in relation to which speech facts, idiolects, and double structures are developed. (p. 39)

Thus, the “application grammar” and the “overall language” are contiguously related, without precise boundaries. The sentence “I’m not into effeminate guys,” which circulates in the networks of virtual mediation of sex, for example, already features appropriations in other media, such as on pages of LGBT activism that use it for politicizing the dynamics of search for partners – as we can observe in a content posted on the website *BuzzFeed*: “Why is it a problem being an effeminate gay?” (Giusti, 2015). This example exposes the porosity between both languages, corroborating our understanding that the dynamics of Grindr overflow it, exceeding the limit of the application in manifestations of other social networks or in off-line scenarios.

Moreover, this grammar permeating the application – here deemed by the recognition of common sense and not by totalizing and normative claims – points to the inherent possibility of failures and interruptions in the communication network. The language, thus, is not understood as a completeness, which acts on the subject in an absolute form. On the contrary, as Butler (2009, 2015) mentions, language fails, and such failure is what ensures the possibility of its performance, for developing new meanings and ways of positioning. Then, the literacy process on Grindr, although it may aim at a complete apprehension of its imagery and linguistic codes, is also composed by the possibility of failure – and, for that reason, using inevitably entails producing yourself together with the tool.

Final considerations

This research process enabled us to understand the dynamics for the production of oneself for Grindr users, especially concerning imagery and linguistic production practices. Accordingly, we deemed photograph and textual elements that accompany it – enabling meanings for the image, as Barthes (1980) mentions – as performativities,

actions by which subjects say who they are insert themselves in the linguistic and semiotic field. We also comprehended that subjects are not prior to their own actions (Butler, 2015), supporting themselves in the world by the way they rearrange utterances based on other practices of the self – movement that also involves the limits of language, its failures, places, in which reason does not necessarily works.

In addition, the fieldwork supported our analysis of difficulties and potential for conducting research in digital media. Interviewing people from the application allowed us to follow, in practice, its use on the part of our respondents, the way they write, used expressions, and response time – in interviews that lasted for days. However, the profile’s lack of individuality, which did not feature a photograph of who was conducting the interview, on the one hand, generated distrust and distancing of some users; and, on the other, it fostered seductive approaches of users who often tried to “unravel” the mystery of the institutional profile and lead the conversation towards a sexual approach.

Therefore, the more fruitful interviews, in terms of content, were those what started the chat and extended to a personal conversation, according to the availability of the participant. In this sense, we consider that the methodological abandonment of dichotomies between “real” and “virtual” is beneficial to the development of research in the area, considering that, in its use, the application itself contradicts such dichotomy (Miskolci, 2011).

In addition, we had some difficulty when, during the interviews, the application deleted our institutional profile based on a complaint we receive for “violation of the terms of service.” We tried to recover it by getting in touch with Grindr, but, considering the difficulty in these procedures, we created a new profile, which, for now, remains active. Such challenges are inherent in research in the area, which must continuously manage such difficulties. Therefore, we encourage the development of more research in mobile applications, which can, from such difficulties, produce contents about these topics, paramount to a complex understanding of contemporary life.

Imagem, corpo e linguagem em usos do aplicativo Grindr

Resumo: O presente artigo aborda o aplicativo de busca por parceiros entre homens Grindr, em seus aspectos linguísticos e semióticos, enfatizando as produções imagéticas e discursivas de seus usuários, concebidas enquanto performatividades. Foram entrevistados onze homens que utilizam a rede social, com foco em suas composições fotográficas e interações textuais com outros membros do aplicativo, analisadas posteriormente a partir das perspectivas butlerianas e barthesianas sobre a linguagem e sua interface com a imagem. Constatou-se a composição de uma “gramática” produzida no interior do aplicativo, com significação particular de palavras e imagens e direcionamento comercial e midiático. Além disso, técnicas de composição e manipulação de fotografias, modulações do corpo e associação de práticas travadas no aplicativo a uma dimensão política foram abordadas pelos entrevistados. Desta forma, foi possível entender o Grindr como um “sistema de significação”, no qual tais dinâmicas são produzidas, negociadas e disputadas no seu próprio uso.

Palavras-chave: fotografia; homossexualidade masculina; sexualidade; tecnologia, aplicativos de busca por parceiros.

Image, corps et langage dans utilisations de l'application Grindr

Résumé: Le présent travail discute l'application de rencontres pour hommes Grindr, dans ses aspects linguistique et sémiotique, en mettant l'accent sur les productions imaginaires et linguistiques de ses utilisateurs, conçues comme des performativités. Onze hommes qui utilisent ce réseau social ont été interviewés, en se concentrant sur leurs compositions photographiques et leurs interactions textuelles avec les autres membres, analysées par la suite dans les cadres des perspectives butlerienne et barthesiennes sur la langue et sa relation avec l'image. On a identifié la composition d'une "grammaire" produite à l'intérieur de l'application, avec une signification particulière des mots et des images, avec ciblage commercial et médiatique. En outre, les interviewés ont abordé les techniques de composition et de manipulation des photographies, les modulations corporelles et l'association de pratiques enfermées dans l'application à une dimension politique. Ainsi, il a été possible de comprendre le Grindr comme un "système de signification" où ces dynamiques sont produites, négociées et contestées dans leur propre usage.

Mots-clés: photographie, homosexualité masculine, sexualité, technologie, applications de rencontres.

Image, cuerpo y lenguaje en usos de la aplicación Grindr

Resumen: El presente artículo discute la aplicación de citas entre hombres Grindr, en sus aspectos lingüísticos y semióticos, enfatizando las producciones de imágenes y lenguaje de sus usuarios, comprendidas como performatividades. Once hombres usuarios de Grindr fueron entrevistados, con foco en sus composiciones fotográficas y interacciones textuales con otros miembros de la red social, posteriormente analizadas a partir de las perspectivas butlerianas y barthesianas sobre el lenguaje y sus relaciones con la imagen. Se constató la producción de una "gramática" en el interior de la aplicación, con la significación particular de palabras y imágenes con dirección comercial y mediática. Además, técnicas de composición y manipulación de fotografías, modulaciones del cuerpo y la asociación entre prácticas en la aplicación a cuestiones políticas fueron abordadas por los entrevistados. De esta manera, fue posible comprender Grindr como un "sistema de significación", donde estas dinámicas son producidas, negociadas y disputadas en sus usos.

Palabras clave: fotografía, homosexualidad masculina, sexualidad, tecnología, aplicaciones de citas.

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