

Gordinha da Silva: a discourse analysis of the female body deemed as fat in the blogging environment

Gordinha da Silva: análise discursiva acerca do corpo feminino considerado gordo no universo dos *blogs*

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Abstract

The purpose of this article, from the perspective of Human Sciences and Health Sciences, is to analyze the meaning of the female body deemed as fat, using blogs of people who self-report as fat as the object of study. The method used in the study was discourse analysis. The research corpus was designed with texts from public blogs published on the platform *Blogger*. The categories of analysis were based on posts and titles with words related to fat, weight and body image. The results suggest that the issue of a fat body in the context of the present study goes beyond the need to lose fat and weight. The discourses on the blogs show a quest for a particular, shaped body image, in order to meet the interests of the market. It is a media's perfect, stylized body which makes use of the several resources made available by the health, esthetics and technology markets, such as mobile applications for dieting and exercising purposes; stomach reduction surgery (e.g. gastroplication, gastroplasty); silicone implants for muscle hypertrophy. The discourses also express immediacy in the quest for transformation of fat bodies. A fat body that does not undergo transformation is signified in blogs as something stagnant and obsolete.

Keywords: Body. Obesity. Social Stigma. Blogs. Health.

Resumo

A partir de um olhar das ciências humanas e da saúde, o artigo tem por objetivo analisar os sentidos do corpo feminino considerado gordo, utilizando como objeto de estudo *blogs* de pessoas que

se dizem gordas. O método utilizado no estudo foi a análise do discurso. Para construir o *corpus* de pesquisa, recorremos a *blogs* públicos na plataforma Blogger. As categorias de análise foram feitas a partir de postagens e títulos com palavras relacionadas à gordura, ao peso e à imagem do corpo. Os resultados sugerem que a problemática do corpo gordo no contexto estudado vai além da necessidade de perder gordura ou diminuir o peso. Os discursos dos *blogs* revelam também a busca por um corpo específico, modelado e que atenda aos interesses do mercado. Um corpo estilizado e midiático que recorre aos variados artifícios que o mercado da saúde, da estética e da tecnologia disponibilizam, tais como aplicativos móveis (app) para dieta e exercício; cirurgias de redução de estômago (gastroplicatura, gastroplastia); silicoes para hipertrofia dos músculos. Os discursos também expressam urgência na busca pela transformação dos corpos gordos. O corpo gordo que não se transforma é significado nos *blogs* como algo estagnado e obsoleto.

Palavras-chave: Corpo. Obesidade. Estigma Social. *Blogs*. Saúde.

Introduction

In a market economy, where the consumption industry reigns supreme and disseminates images of success and health associated with beautiful, lean, standardized, manipulated and transformed bodies, fat bodies, mainly females', seem to be an easy target for a constant vigil.

Common sense, informed by a biomedical discourse that values the turning health into aesthetics, a process in which the criteria of aesthetic medicine, fashion and beauty built at gyms are used as parameters to evaluate health¹, randomly identifies fat bodies as obese, some sick body that needs to be emaciated. It is often an imposition that reinforces stigmas that weigh and hurt more than fat itself.

According to Poulain,² fat bodies are stigmatized for being different and considered deviant because they are not in accordance with medical orders. Because of this, it is naturalized in everyday life as a “wrong” body, outside the “normal” pattern. Society, however, ignores that what is considered normal is also a changeable value and what today is considered fat and ugly has already been considered “plump,” voluminous and sexy in a recent past.³

Fat women suffer from disturbances from their own image, influenced by a beauty's dictatorship that, supported by the media, celebrates female bodies restrictive and reformatory practices as healthy and enviable care, blaming and ridiculing those who do not follow it. Moreover, even without necessity, the idea of "the leaner, the better" is always reinforced.⁴ Obesity and overweight take on meanings that are mixed and confused in the vocabularies of health and aesthetics.

The socio-cultural environment and the media have a strong influence on the image that subjects build on their bodies and the body ideal that they would like to have. If the socially valued image is of slimness, slimming shall be everyone's ideal and those who do not have it usually have greater dissatisfaction and suffering. In this sense, the body image is constructed from the contact that the body has with external experiences. The body registers and assimilates experiences and also suffers the marks of time. This image-making is an active experience that changes over time from the changes of looking at the world, at others and at oneself.⁵

Exploring discourses from blogs is like talking about the subjective universe of fat and unveiling senses naturalized in dictatorships, stigma and excessive impositions on the body. In choosing the Internet environment, we search in culture what is being said today about fat people, speeches that extrapolate and reverberate from the perimeter of the disease/health language (doctors' offices and clinics).

The cybernetic environment works in contemporaneity as a complete mode of existence. A place with its own language, endowed with cultures and utopias, which allows the development of an imaginary world of senses. A world in which borders are mixed and the body is invisible. It would be like a kingdom of liberation from the body's limitations, where the body is enclosed in parentheses. The weight of the bodies becomes light as a cloud. As stated by French professor David Le Breton, the cybernetic environment frees individuals from the constraints of identity, provisionally metamorphosing them into what they want to be, without fearing what is unmeasured in the real. Without a face, one is no longer afraid of not being able to look at oneself. They are free from any responsibility, since their identity is volatile.⁶

Blog is a word arising from "*web + log*." It would be the result of a truncation of the expression "*Web*" (from the original "*World Wide Web*," a synonym with Internet) with "*log*" ("website" or "record"). That is, a *log* on the *Web*. Or a small site within the giant universe of the virtual community. Some site where it would be possible to express (to post) personal experiences, opinions, feelings and thoughts on various topics. A site of possibilities to expose secrets.⁷⁻⁹

The objective of this article was to analyze, from the human and health sciences point of view, the meanings of fat female bodies in contemporary society, using as a research object the discourse from blogs by people who identify themselves as fat.

Methodology

The method used in the study was the discourse analysis. By analyzing the discourse, according to Eni Orlandi,¹⁰ it is possible to understand how a symbolic object produces meanings. In this understanding, a discourse is the ritual of words in movement and practice of language. Moreover, a discourse is invested with significances by and for the subjects of the discourse.

A discourse here is not only about conveying information, but about a process of identifying the subject and constructing reality. Speech is not just speech. It is a system that only exists within social and historical and subjective and objective contexts.

To construct the corpus of this research, we have resorted to clippings from public blogs postings on the blog-publishing service Blogger. The categories of analysis were established from posts and titles with words related to body fat, weight and image.

We describe the repertoire of questions that were useful for identifying elements in blogs discourse that would serve as a way to construct our categories of analysis and, from them, to develop a theoretical discussion anchored in the literature on human and biomedical sciences: a) What are the derogatory lines? b) What are the metaphors used to represent the body? c) What words related to self-image/body appearance would show up? d) What standard appears as a body model? e) What are the recurrent terms in the fat/obesity universe in the study period? f) What are the words and phrases related to the condition of being fat (stigma)?

Results and Discussion

Through the analysis of the discourses, it is possible to understand that each category can represent a link in the network of meanings and significations of the contemporary fat universe. Links which are constantly produced and reproduced. Next, we describe some categories that were chosen to develop the discussion of this work:

The self-deprecating speech

“I hate myself, I’m obese!”¹¹

“No one wants to be fat. Just like nobody wants to be ugly or poor. Everybody wants to be a winner and there’s only one kind of winner, right?”¹²

“Human waste!”¹¹

The words used to talk about one’s own body in blogs may have different interpretations. One of the aspects that draws attention in blogs is the speech about some devalued body, which

is associated with a product without utility in the market, a disposable object, such as garbage. It must be understood that in a market economy, where everything can be consumed and sold, the body is also a product. As stated by Vieira & Bosi,¹³ the desired body of today is the synthetic body, calculated down to the last inch, technological and designed for efficiency, in an eternal manufacture. This is what shall guarantee to it the possibility of remaining desired.

In finding out that desire can not be satisfied, other products are launched, in an eternal fad that dialectically authenticates what was obsolete yesterday. It should be added that in this system, based on constant processes of product construction and reconstruction, after attempts to transform it into a salable product, failure is considered personal.

For Le Breton,¹⁴ the body became an imperfect object, a sketch to be corrected. The body to which he refers is a body that is increasingly being transformed into a machine, with no subjects or affections. In this sense, the body is no longer just the irreducible incarnation of the subject, the being-in-the-world, but a construction, a transitory and manipulative object. I has ceased to be an identity of itself to become a kit, a sum of parts. The subject's exteriority was reduced to its surface and any attempt to change the body would also be an attempt to change life.

Metaphors

“String bikini”¹⁵

As reported by Vigarello,¹⁶ “In the seventeenth century, the ‘lady of the palace’ would wear clothing to counterbalance excesses, corsets, bandages or nightgowns to make the waist thin, spiky and slender.” That is, in that context, fat would have modeling capabilities to its advantage.

The twentieth century shortened and remodeled dresses, unveiling a body that was hidden. The current market, however, does not suggest, rather it dictates. If previously accessories and fashion would be available to the body, today the body needs to conform to the modeling. In this process there are not many options. It is what must be repaired, sewn and reconstructed to the molds that the market imposes.

For example, *String Bikini* is the name of a blog by a person who identifies herself as fat. The feminine garment chosen as a name is not any clothing piece. It is a small bikini, or rather, very small. A product of the fashion universe manufactured for a standard body, that refers to an ideal body type. A string bikini can also be meant as an icon of thinness. The object of desire announces that everything must be worth it for the body to fit into this product. Being fat in this context is being outside of the measurements, it is not fitting in what the current market offers.

Another way of analyzing this situation is from Bauman¹⁷'s point of view, which defines the consumer society. According to him, it represents a type of society that promotes, encourages and reinforces the choice of a lifestyle and an existential consumerist strategy, rejecting all alternative cultural options. In this society, adapting to and correctly following the consumer culture precepts is a vital purpose and the only choice unconditionally approved. In addition, the consumerist vocation would be based on individual efforts. The consumer is the one who should suit the restricted market offer and thus feel adequate, efficient and within the standards. It is also important to understand that there is a statement of offers for "all tastes," but the social space shall be freely available only to those who consume certain products (models).

"Powerful in the store fitting rooms or in the Valentine's Day lingerie"¹⁸

Being "powerful in store fitting rooms or Valentine's Day lingerie (*sic*)" seems to be an attempt to be part of an environment restricted to lean bodies. In a study on the history of the body, Brazilian historian and professor Mary Del Priore highlights the fashion world influence on the female body. The early twentieth century brought together the heyday of the lean woman. Leading French fashion designer and couturier Paul Poiret broke with the majestic hips fashion by freeing women from corsets. Clothing size would then determine bodies' width and shape in relation to clothes, becoming some kind of anatomical shape. Failure to fit into a particular garment would be translated into a moral constraint and not just some bodily constraint. Size would be translated into a mental martyrdom, the demarcation line that would reprove and stigmatize every woman extrapolating it.¹⁹

Lipovetsky,²⁰ however, postulates that contemporary society would be experiencing a period of transesthetic capitalism. It would be a time of hyper consumption when style, product design and beauty are imposed as strategic imperatives of great brands that appeal to emotions and the aesthetic sense of their customers and consumers. Everything would have to be embellished, from toothbrush, toilet paper, household utensils to bodies. There is a general requirement for embellishing the world, a hyper design of products. The appeal to emotions in an attempt to seduce by visual pleasure. In addition, some strong imposition of speed for the transformations to take place.

In this swift movement, it would seem that the fat body would not be an ideal mannequin, such as a good clothes rack, nor a good showcase for clothes and accessories. Going further, the fat body, following Lipovetsky's logic, would not be able to "match" the logic of hyper stylization, since it would not be some dough easy to be transformed, molded, stylized. In this context, this body shape would then become an obsolete object.

Body shapes

“Because we are all potential *panicats*.”¹⁸

Blogs speeches reveal that the body models to be followed are the media body shapes. Models, TV program hosts, soap operas actresses, people who get public attention in media, celebrities.

One of the models chosen for this discussion was a (Brazilian TV showgirl) *panicat*. The word *panicat* refers to young, skimpily dressed women who are showgirls on a Brazilian television station show. They are some kind of *modern chacretes*. *Chacretes* were skimpily dressed professional dancers and showgirls who would cheer up the audience on a Brazilian TV show, *Cassino do Chacrinha* (Chacrinha's Casino).^a According to the blog post, potentially all (women) could have the body of a *panicat* or a *chacrete*. Every body could reach this standard and thus be part of a lifestyle, the media, the popular, the visualized. Changing to occupy the stage or scenario. Theoretically, all women considered fat could be transformed and visualized in such a “normal” world – after all, as the popular saying goes, “You're fat only if you want it.”

The mass media would have an active participation in people's daily lives^{21, 22} with a broad capacity to insert and disseminate symbolic goods in the collective imagination. This “active” participation in everyday life happens intermittently and exhaustively through images and representations of ideals of bodies and habits, instigating a consumption of these models by society.¹³

Pierre Bourdieu²¹ (French sociologist, anthropologist, philosopher, and renowned public intellectual) helps perceive this phenomenon when he speaks of a symbolic power that is able to spread a consensus about society's senses. Subtly, this symbolic power would gradually contribute to reproducing a social order. It would be an imperceptible and silent power. In this hyper discreet way, it would spread and promote the consumption of attitudes and images, besides inducing ways of thinking, ways of being and behaving.

If to participate in this game the real body, classified as fat, is not suitable, then the meaning of life is directed to transforming the fat body or “out of the measurements” body into a media model, some search for a body that can play socially. However, there is not always an actual perception of how to achieve an ideal image. Thus, the magic of aesthetic resources is presented as a very close, practical and ideal solution. Lopes e Bosi¹³ add, however, that these ideals of bodies shall always be those which are impossible to attain and which shall also require large sums of money.

a Brazilian free-to-air television network Rede Globo's live audience variety show, hosted by (Brazilian comedian, radio and TV personality) José Abelardo Barbosa de Medeiros, better known as “Chacrinha,” between 1982 and 1988.

The models conveyed by the bombardment of media images are daily compared to contemporary self-portraits, the *selfies*. *Selfies* appear to record a desire for an unknown body to be visualized and recognized. It would also be the record of this addictive quest for an ideal image of what is on the surface. If subjectivity is not recognized as a possibility of being in the world and the real body goes unnoticed in several environments, a selfie image seems to be a way out of invisibility. Even if the outcome of this battle can often be a perception of failure, dissatisfaction, fatigue, a sense of detour, a chronic image disorder. Image disorders understood²³ as a severe and persistent change in the way individuals perceive their own body.

Taking up the question about *panicats*' body, becoming a *panicat* is not becoming just thin, it is becoming someone having their body built. A *panicat* is an expression of all the artifices available for sale or consumption in the aesthetic market [breast prostheses, gluteal implant (buttock prosthesis), lower extremity silicone injection, artificial hair integrations (more commonly known as hair extensions or hair weaves), false eyelashes, Sunless tanning (also known as UV-free tanning, self tanning, spray tanning, or fake tanning), AcryGel® system powder gel for nails, etc. ...] and medications [steroid hormones and anabolic-androgenic steroids (AAS)]. It is a woman's body with some strong erotic appeal although reminding of men's looks. Muscles in excess, thick voices, stereotypes of strong men, males, gladiators. A large, heavy body. However, the weight does not come from fat, but from muscles and prostheses.

Saying that "We are all potential *panicats*," as in one of the blogs visited, is also saying that they are all potential clients for the metamorphosis industry. It is a transformation that goes beyond the simple desire to lose weight. It's "becoming tasty," becoming edible without being eaten. It is going beyond, metamorphosing and becoming something else.

For Ferreira,¹ body metamorphosis would be like a new face of the transformation of everyday life into something individualized, where bodies would be metamorphosed into disposable objects in the universe of consumption. The emptiness of existence would be replaced by a desire for transformation. This transformation would, above all, involve speed. Time, short and fast, would play a fundamental role in this process. There would no longer be time for fat. Fat has a sense of time standing still. Fat denotes what is static, which requires more time, which lasts. Being fat is to be standing still, to be asleep. Fat people, under this point of view, must be awoken!

The condition of being fat today

"Oh, ridiculous fat person. Why don't you wake up! Your time is running out!"¹¹

"Lean forever."²⁴

Analyzing a speech, according to Orlandi,¹⁰ is also based on the assumption that synonyms, metaphors and paraphrases are reflections of language historicity. An analyst must then find in the text signs of interpretation that shape its historicity.

Issues related to time and everyday speed, typical of contemporary life, are expressed in the discourses. An experience based on a fast pace, with no room for reflection, for tiredness, for pause, for other rhythms. The rhythm seems to have to be the same for everyone, in a progressive pursuit for greater performance, greater speed, especially controlled. An intense, nonstop frequency, such as a modern machine or an electronic, hyper modern computer application program.

[...] In my interpretation, (free smartphone computer application program and website) *MyFitnessPal*^c shall be a companion... Also a weight controller...¹³

[...] Using the (video game) *Wii fit*^b because nowadays it is my most accurate weighing scale...¹³

There is no way to separate the Internet and digital technologies from people's everyday life in the contemporaneity. As postulated by Le Breton,¹⁴ "The information technology vocabulary penetrates the ways of explaining people and their bodies. The boundaries between people's flesh and the power of the machine, between the mental and technical processes."

The use of digital technology in the form of computer application programs has been described as one more resource to facilitate and very quickly transform the way people live day to day. Every day, new computer application programs are launched, with different purposes. Calorie counters, calculators for assessing body mass index, calculators for diet development, exercise plans and general health advice are some of these examples described as the digital world facilitators in the fight against fat.²⁵

Technological resources that appeared in blog posts were the computer application programs *Wii fit*^b and *MyFitnessPal*^c, which count calories ingested, control the weight and measures of body circumference, evaluating daily amount of nutrient intake.

These technology resources seem to express yet another need for external self-control when self-management also seems impossible. This dynamics seems to exemplify what Le Breton⁶ shall

b It is a (Japanese multinational consumer electronics and video game company) Nintendo Co., Ltd. platform peripheral computer application program consisting of physical exercises and weight loss.

c A computer application program developed by the (digital distribution platform) App Store that works as a quick and easy-to-use calorie calculator. It has a food database with more than five million foods and very fast food and exercise records. Suitable for weight loss, good shape and health.

call Pharmacologization of the self that is perceived in contemporary societies as techniques of mood management and surveillance, used in everyday life for transformation of self-consciousness, aiming to improve the power over the world, sharpen the ability to perceive, overcome tiredness, prolong sleep or escape from it.

This process would favor the development of an imagery of omnipotence about itself, widely used by individuals, since by abandoning the “natural” mood individuals also deprive themselves of a list of resources or become less competitive in the work or everyday life aspects. The author argues that what is most interesting in this process is that they reveal a desire to produce affective states without ever questioning the difficulty of living but rather a concern to decide on their own.

Vocabulary of fat people's environment

“...an HER companion.”¹²

“Does anyone know or has already had a gastroplication surgery?... Has anyone gotten a *blog* to recommend?”²⁶

“Bar-iat-ric!!!”²⁶

Not only media technologies or the use of psychoactive drugs are used in this *techné* way of trying to manage themselves, but stomach surgeries [gastroplication, vertical banded gastroplasty (VBG)], HER (healthy eating reeducation) and PA (physical activity) are also part of what we could call “a false daily management of oneself.” In addition to expressing this need, these practices also tell about voluntary modes of self-production and of a personal identity. Body modification and bodily measures and shapes management create some sense of existence. And a false perception that control over the world is possible is also an illusory impression that the “machine” can be managed.

Comments and posts with references to surgical interventions are examples of how some expressions in the universe of aesthetics and medicine are made natural in collective speeches. They would be elements of the embellishment culture. Speeches reveal quick possibilities for body changes from these elements, very easily, as if they were magical mechanisms of bodily changes.

Ferreira²⁷ calls this part of the aesthetic-related health process, where aesthetic standards are increasingly present in processes that confuse aesthetic medicine, advertising, disinformation, spectacle and scientific information for common sense, providing a false idea of effectiveness that would not always be real. That is, Ethics, Aesthetics and Public Health would be confusing and interfering with body care and concern about beauty and health.

According to the author, the growth of the plastic surgery market in Brazil and the expansion of the beauty industry and the body's metamorphosis industry would be part of a broader process of medicalization, in which medical techno-rationality would be taken to new aspects of everyday life. In addition, the popularization and trivialization of such surgical procedures would lead to new constructions of meaning on the body, placing it as an artifact to be modeled, according to the interests of the moment. It should be added that the body placed by the author is not called fat or thin. It is every body that would be inserted in this social context, where aesthetics is hegemonic.

Final Thoughts

The search for body perfection seems to have no end. The proposal of perceiving nuances in the network of meanings and significations that permeate the universe of fat people in the context of the present society would be revealing hidden details, also allowing different interpretation paths. Considering the complexity that permeates the web of meanings and significations of fat people's universe, it is worth mentioning here some elements that we consider relevant for the finalization of the present work.

With the development of this study, it was possible to perceive in blogs discourses some body image conflict concealed in a frantic search for corporal change. Some desire to lose weight conveyed as the only life option, urgently, to become some *future ex-chubby* (the title of one of the blogs), metamorphosing and *becoming tasty* (the title of one of the blogs) and becoming lean forever. When the body is an instrument of prestige in society, the pursuit of beauty becomes a categorical imperative. Those with some more vulnerable self-image respond to these stimuli, judging themselves to be inadequate and overestimating the dimensions of their body and the need to transform them.

Despite the attempt to build another speech, then being satisfied with the XL-sized body or wanting to feel "powerful in fitting rooms or in Valentine's Day lingerie," the speech that says that to be well with yourself it is necessary to transform this current and real body into a body conveyed in the media still prevails. Even though the intention to value the current body exists, dissatisfaction with not having the body of models, actresses, and female characters on TV shows often appears in speeches.

It is important to add that the problem of the current fat body, visualized in the context of blogs, is not reduced to fat loss or weight loss. Blogs speech expresses the search for a specific type of body, an image of the ideal body. Image based on a model fitting in a string bikini, for example. A body that meets the interests of market offers. A body that is hyper-stylized and compliant to the media. A body whose main orientation and life project is sure to be a potential *panical*. A

body that knows that besides being fat and ugly, it is not possible to be poor, because all this also requires financial investments.

To achieve this specific body, the larger project exceeds the summer period when body exposure in bathing suits is required. The quest for this particular body now makes sense for a life-long project. To do this, one must make use of the various devices that the market of health, aesthetics and technology provides: computer application programs for diets and exercises, stomach reduction surgeries [gastroplication, vertical banded gastroplasty (VBG)], silicone fluid injections for muscle hypertrophy, in addition to HER (healthy eating reeducation) and PA (physical activity), now reformulated.

The speeches also refer to a certain imposition and immediacy of this movement to transform fat bodies. What could be a suggestion or prescription, is now an imperative order: Homework has been provided! Hypertrophy is for now! In addition, having a body considered obese or fat is, as posted on the blogs, being standing still, being hated, being some stray dog, having some urgency to change this “human” body and not letting go the “artificial” “body of the moment.”

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