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Dynamics of Gay Men's Organized Social Life on Dating Apps

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Abstract

The forms technology has assumed in contemporaneity are as varied as they are ubiquitous. They have transformed the ways of living in society in a context of increasing mediation of social relations by technology, which seems to complement face-to-face interactions by establishing new social existence modalities. This article aims to discuss the dynamics of social life organized on dating apps around four basic axes: virtuality, sociability, stereotyping, and violence. The study is based on an inductively inspired survey of users of the Grindr app in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. The data suggest that virtuality implies superficiality and a disposable attitude to relationships, which lead to a form of ephemeral sociability in which stereotyping is ostensibly employed to accelerate the dynamic by attributing preconceptions to other users. Indeed, these aspects are materialized as varied and systematic violence practices, which are frequent in the context of the investigated application. The main conclusions reveal that organized social life humanizes organizational analysis and advances the concept of organization by humanizing the process and including the ways of organizing practiced by social groups. This includes situating the researcher in a process that implicates them and politicizes knowledge production.

Keywords: organized social life; dating apps; gay men; Grindr.

Introduction

The forms that technology has assumed in contemporary times are as varied as they are ubiquitous and have transformed the ways of living in society in a context of increasing

virtualization, which seems to complement face-to-face interactions by establishing new social existence modalities (Ahlm, 2017). However, what is presented must also be discussed, particularly regarding the physical distance between individuals and the advent of virtual relationships mediated by technology. This article discusses this topic by framing the dynamics of the social life organized by gay men through dating apps (a.k.a. hookup apps).

The virtualization of social interactions enters the domain of organizational studies as other organizational conceptions are adopted beyond the large industrial capitalist enterprise. In this sense, we look into this topic through the perspective of organized social life, which "refers to how the different social groups put the organization of their multiple forms of existence in society into practice" (Saraiva, 2020, p. 13). In a scenario in which virtuality poses as an inevitable appendix of contemporaneity, dating apps, in theory, may allow new relationships, providing simultaneous access to possibilities of interaction with people with whom perhaps no effective social or leisure contact could be established. Indeed, these apps' interfaces are inviting and intuitive (Padilha, 2015) and promote an element of social inclusion since people who might be excluded from specific social contexts and obviously from possibilities of sexual encounters – which may be their main raison d'être – can establish contact with one another (Licoppe, Rivière, & Morel, 2015). Such apps have a specific way of operating that "invites" users to navigate by offering a "preview" of the people they can possibly meet by consuming the app. This, in turn, produces the same type of "performative identity affirmation among users, which bonds the subjects to a specific gender (male) and sexual identity (gay/homosexual). This, in turn, triggers an ethical and aesthetical imaginary of 'how to be gay'" (Padilha, 2015, p. 98).

However, the contact established through dating apps has not changed the hegemonic forms of sociability (Miskolci, 2009) – that is, heterosexual and governed by Christian morality and a cisgender logic, among other aspects – which, according to Bauman (2008, 2021), are already quite "liquid." Several studies have confirmed the persistence and the migration of the same heteronormative, misogynistic, and emotionally detached logic prevailing in society to the virtual domain, such as Saraiva, Santos, and Pereira (2020). This implies limiting such apps to the possibility of building social contexts that are different from the ones users experience in society. Their logic is based on a perspective of approximation among "different" individuals who seek a form of "normality" applicable to a few subjects, which are generally disputed. The appreciation of a hegemonic profile – white, young, thin, masculine, without physical disabilities, middle-class, just to name a few aspects – establishes a hierarchy and creates competition among the various subjects, who examine their interlocutors according to these parameters and define their priorities, the more or less desirable profiles, and the abject bodies (Butler, 2011; Foucault, 1988). Not surprisingly, the published profiles are similar to each other and show hegemonically valued attributes, such as men with muscular chests, facial hair, who practice physical activities, etc.[1] (Moura, Nascimento, & Barros, 2017).

This article aims to examine and question the dynamics of social life organized in dating apps around four basic axes: virtuality, sociability, stereotyping, and violence. Violence is defined as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (World Health Organization [WHO], 1996, s.p.).

We defend four basic points: first, that virtuality, due to the non-existence of "concrete" others, as in face-to-face interactions, renders the interlocutors unaccountable, accelerating and intensifying a disposable attitude to social relations since virtual relations are regarded as "inferior." Second, based on the permanence of some aspects, sociability becomes a bundle of momentary and replaceable experiences hindering forms of social inclusion. Consequently, they reinforce, in a virtual context, the marginality of gay existence in society. Third, the way social life is organized in such platforms enables and reinforces stereotyping, which largely defines the relationships established in that domain. Finally, we maintain that this is a violent environment where differences are emphasized but not absorbed, thus resulting in the selection of certain aspects as superior, with various violent effects for all users who do not fit into what is established as "appropriate."

From social order to organized social life

The notion of order as something that structures collective life derives from sociology, more specifically from the work of Émile Durkheim (Souza, 2008). The principle is simple: for social life to be possible, an order that ensures limits to one's natural impulses is required, and obedience to this order is what ensures social cohesion. Chaos, understood as "a state of disturbed order" (Brüseke, 1991, p. 41), confirms itself as the established order, and the social functions it assigns to the members of a society are ignored. Thus, to avoid anomie, society needs to adopt patterns to accomplish social ordering by dividing work and assigning functions so that cooperation enables harmonious coexistence (Merton, 1999).

Yet, despite the rigidity of this perspective, it has been foundational to any discussion of social functioning. To order a society means to resort to elements enabling the creation of patterns to which everyone individually must adjust to a greater or lesser extent for collective life to exist (Thorlindsson & Bernburg, 2004). However, Pires (2012) points out that change is not "the shift from order to chaos, but the replacement of a system of order by another system of order. The very processes of change reveal transformation patterns (i.e., ordered processes), which must be analyzed and explained" (p. 31). That is, the order is not objective and disinterested, and there is order in apparent disorder, which accentuates the limits of Durkheim's ordering perspective.

The major problem with such a positivist perspective of order is the definition of norms regarding what subjects must be like to fit perfectly with their social functions. Per se, order means the systematic appreciation of specific characteristics for a given purpose – to the explicit or implicit detriment of others. In the case of society, this allows for the creation of "normality," which is a dangerous prospect that differentiates and hierarchizes individuals according to how close (or far) they are from what is expected in the social order. However, the homogeneity and uniformity advocated by Durkheim (2016) do not define what society is; there is no such thing as "normal," "normality," or anything of the sort except as elements of control and coercion of subjects within the framework of life in society. Therefore, the limits of this notion of order are already outlined from the perspective of "normalizing" things as differences are submitted to a form of systematization. This, in turn, can give rise to schemes of classification, categorization, and hierarchization of ideas, places, and people, such as racism, male chauvinism, xenophobia, LGBTphobia[2], etc.

However, we do not fail to acknowledge that a notion of order is appropriate to address organizations and hegemonic terms in organizational studies. These, however, are not synonyms

but associated ideas deserving a closer examination. Although it intends to be universal, the social order per se does not suffice to account for all the complexity of subjects in their micro-interactions, which is why it needs the support of another concept: the organization. At the micro level, the organization is what will configure the broader social order in detail. To achieve that, it resorts to organizational apparatuses, such as planning, organizing, directing, and controlling, all of which are familiar to the field of administration. Not only do these aspects reveal the functional character of administration, but they also associate it with an inescapable purpose of ordering, whatever exists, in a technical and decontextualized manner, at the micro level. Furthermore, this "social function" has evolved so that administration unfolds simultaneously into four forms of knowledge:

> Practice, science, product, and ideology, all of which feed off each other. The need to adopt more rational practices led to the systematization of information, which would soon extrapolate the status of theoretical knowledge and become products to be marketed in the form of various solutions to organizational problems. Moreover, administration is a powerful ideology, which has come forward as indispensable and unavoidable, as if capitalism pointed to it as the only possible means by which things can be carried out, silencing all non-administrative possibilities of organizing (Saraiva, 2021, p. 2).

For the purposes of this paper, the hegemony of what is referred to as an organization, as the articulation of resources for the achievement of an economic purpose, has been historically established. Thus, organizational studies are hardly a "natural" candidate to be functional because this field is the very starting point of the notion of organization. However, a growing group of researchers has come to question this concept and introduced other possibilities of organizing by adopting theoretical perspectives such as organizational practices and organized social life, the latter of which is the focus of this study. Without abandoning the idea of order but repositioning it in the field of social micro-existence, Saraiva (2020, p. 13) argues that organized social life refers to

> how the different social groups put the organization of their multiple forms of existence in society into practice. This implies considering the various concepts and practices through which these groups plan, organize, control, represent, resign, resist, narrate, and preserve their histories and memories, to name just a few dimensions, by carrying out plural dynamics pointing towards various directions.

Therefore, it is not about a purpose-driven idea: people put several ways of organizing into practice according to the distinct events with which they have to deal in a dynamic and plural flow. Different from what is taught in universities, social groups redefine what it is to plan and organize, for example, in the light of referents defined by their concrete social lives. Existence, comprising all different forms in the human infinite, confers a sense of action to ideas often regarded as stable and indisputable constructs (Deleuze, 2018). Differences in the act of existing imply adjustments in what is perceived as real and how a given reality allows people to construct and deconstruct practices – including organizational ones – in the light of the social life dynamics. Thus, these are verbs rather than nouns because the groups practice their own order in view of the elements of the concrete

world surrounding them by organizing themselves dynamically while acting and reacting to the environment. Indeed, Saraiva goes on:

> Relying on the social life perspective to understand the act of organizing in its practices significantly expands what is referred to as the field of organizational studies because it considers the various ordinances that different groups in a society adopt and with which they have to deal. It includes relations – which may be of convergence and/or divergence at various levels – with organizational practices adopted by other social groups and also with institutionalized aspects valid for all social groups. (Saraiva, 2020, p. 13)

As the references here break with the ones associated with Durkheim's social order, we no longer face a homogeneous and harmonious organized social life, quite the contrary. From the perspective of administration, this social life can even be regarded as chaotic since there is no common starting point except the collective life of individuals. Expecting defined goals, an orderly arrangement of resources, division of labor, and monitoring of processes, as in a functionally arranged organization, does not fit into the context of organized social life. Nevertheless, this does not mean that some groups cannot functionally organize the dynamics of their practices and that the eventual incorporation of knowledge from the management taught at the university is infeasible; however, this lacks a central, perennial, or universal character, and the process is subject to continuous changes, subtle and drastic, slow and fast, simple and complex, which can radically change the original purposes and defy a classical perspective of what is perceived as "organization." In part, this explains the frustration of countless scholars, armed with surreptitious economic rationality and unassuming social and intellectual arrogance, when they fail to "organize things" in the contact they establish with social groups. In these groups, there is a form of organized social life in which the references naturalized at the university are not paramount, enabling the untimely observation of conflicts from social, practical, political, and epistemic points of view.

Therefore, as we talk about organized social life, we open ourselves to what is achieved by people in their everyday existence (Carrieri, 2014). It has to do with how an action is collectively organized at the microsocial level, even though it may seem non-rational, incoherent, unproductive, etc. It is not economic rationality that predominates here but other rationalities, characterized by series or bundles of practices that acquire collective meanings mobilized as ways to deal with the configurations of a given social way of life. Since that refers to what is practiced in the scope of life in society, if the focus lies on life mediated by technology, as in the case of dating apps, it is also plausible to expect that specific forms of organization are put into practice, associated with a specific way of existing in a given social interaction context, as will be discussed below.

Dating platforms and new (?) social relationships

There is plenty of evidence that dating apps have accelerated social relationships dynamics as they have re-situated them in the technological world in terms of speed (McQuire, 2011) and the relations between humans and machines (Turkle, 2005), which is a complex process with multiple outcomes. By integrating previously existing features such as chat rooms and partner search engines and adding other functionalities to them, such as real-time geolocation, these apps become part of

a broader framework of sociability, marked by identity aspects (Jaspal, 2016). Indeed, these can be aesthetical (Anderson, Holland, Koc, & Haslam, 2018), sociological (Padilha, 2015), economic (Raj, 2011), and rooted in urban culture, and they promote changes in the city landscape, as already discussed by Renninger (2018) and Jaque (2017).

From a survey of gay and bisexual Mexican users of Grindr who had recently arrived from the United States, Lennes (2021, p. 1015) found that the context of insertion in another country, although apparently softened by the promises of dating other men, proves to be an element that, even operating in a gap of sociability, ends up influencing the migrant's integration process, allowing him to escape the "restrictive cycle of diaspora," through the rescaling of aspects such as intimacy, sociability, and sexuality. In a context of displacement associated with tourism, based on an ethnography conducted at an Australian resort, Vorobjovas-Pinta and Dalla-Fontana (2019) found that the use of dating apps links to a logic of increased interaction options, including sexual ones, reproducing forms of sociability already employed by users in their everyday lives. The authors point out that one should not lose sight of the fact that the possibilities of using the app are associated with aspects such as income level, which requires caution since not all gay men can travel as tourists and count on the same resources.

As far as LGBT people are concerned, a well-known article by Miller (2015) characterizes dating apps as the "modern gay bar" since they allow users to do almost everything they could do in a bar, which, in turn, has led to the emptying of this type of business. In the Brazilian context, Saraiva et al. (2020) partly agree with such a view by highlighting the elements of convenience for the user and protection "because since Brazil is the country with the highest number of LGBT murders in the world, staying home can be, above all, a safe alternative – even if it leads to invisibilization and secrecy and, therefore, a step backward" (p. 122). Renninger (2018) adheres to a critical view of this argument by problematizing LGBT spatial dynamics in cities. If a few decades ago gay bathhouses and bars were relatively safe places because they allowed the free expression of an oppressed group, the advance of social movements, associated with evidence of the consumption potential of this segment, has created new urban dynamics, in which the presence of gay people is associated with property valuation and urban gentrification (Gorman-Murray, 2016) – a phenomenon Christafore and Leguizamon (2018) have called "gaytrification" –, which can be observed in the districts of Castro, in San Francisco (Boyd, 2011); Brooklyn, in New York (Gieseking, 2013); and Marais, in Paris (Giraud, 2009). Indeed, when it comes to consumption, the LGBT market is highly attractive and profligate in novelties, as is the case of dating apps.

Grindr was the first and still is the most popular dating app for gay, bisexual, and transgender users, although it faces fierce competition from platforms such as Scruff, Tinder, and Badoo. It is based on a real-time location feature, and even in its simplest, free version, it enables users to interact with each other based on various forms of interaction (Grindr, 2021; Gudelunas, 2012; Miller, 2015). Despite being presented as a practical means to provide dating, one should not lose sight of the fact that this application is a product created to fill a market gap. Notwithstanding treating them as users, its audience consists, strictly speaking, of consumers who wish to use it, whether through its format, language, more complete paid versions or the products and services of partners advertised to that target audience. This commercial aspect should not be disregarded so as to avoid the depoliticization of this phenomenon since it constitutes a relationship between supply and demand in which technology plays the role of mediating social relations that are, above all, economic.

Users contribute to feeding the system's logic by situating themselves as producers of content to be consumed by other users. But how does this happen? In various ways, such as "spicy" descriptions that arouse interest for interaction; body pictures and, especially, body parts that advertise the user's "attractiveness"; and the use of emojis that summarize preferences and predispositions, such as openness to unprotected intercourse, drug use, or the possibility of receiving visitors for sexual encounters, to name a few (Blackwell, Birnholtz, & Abbott, 2015). All the possibilities presented above, which do not exhaust the dynamics of the apps, reveal a process of active engagement of users in the production of impressions that favor their appreciation and consumption by others.

This gaze helps us to perceive the capitalist gear associated with the growing importance of hookup apps among gay men. Authors such as Illouz (2011) even argue that these forms of love, including heterosexual ones, are mediated by a technology that makes virtual interactions pragmatic, presentable, and consumable. It is no coincidence that the advance of technology has reached the LGBT community, but it is a market matter. Furthermore, in the era of platform capitalism, this market relies on algorithms to define the dynamics of virtual environments. This complex process must be questioned in the scope of technology, contextual use, and politics in relation to those involved, why things are done as they are, with what implications, and for whom, as Dutton (2013) points out. Once these starting points are established, an extraordinary, complex, and polyphonic phenomenon is underway, which, while receiving a great deal of attention, still has much more to reveal. The most obvious aspects of consumption and social interaction become more complex as differences in how to use social media apps are perceived, exposing the various nuances involved in the observation of what is happening there.

Methodology

Based on an inductively-inspired method, this study was based on a larger study initiated in 2019 and still ongoing, conducted with the participation of Grindr users in Belo Horizonte (MG), Minas Gerais, Brazil. When pursuing such an endeavor, we must make and assume specific methodological choices, which, in turn, end up defining a distinctive research path. Based on data collected from users, this investigation has been carried out in two phases so far: the first, based on interactions in the app's integrated chat, employed a semi-structured interview questionnaire totaling 32 interactions. The second relied on the life histories method, whose data will not be treated in this text, and was based on several individual, in-depth meetings addressing various moments and themes of the respondents' lives without a specific questionnaire.

During the interview phase, which lasted approximately four months, the profile used for the interactions explicitly identified the user as a researcher and presented a brief description of the study so that it could not be accessed by mistake. After a brief period of actively searching for new respondents, which proved unsuccessful, we changed the profile description by making the invitation to participate more explicit. Consequently, the respondents made themselves available to participate in the survey. Making them aware of the nature of the interactions followed Braz's (2010) steps as a crucial element of the research. All respondents identified as cisgender gay men, and most of them were aged between 18 and 37. We were unable to obtain information on race, income, and other demographics, possibly due to the data collection method based on the app's chat feature.

In the interviews, all users were warned that such interaction was associated with research, and their statements were collected with their authorization explicitly stated in the app's integrated chat feature. However, due to the characteristics of the medium in which the data were produced, we were not able to work with tools such as an informed consent form, typically used in research with human subjects. However, the fact that we did not have the participants' signatures on a formal document does not invalidate the data[3], not only because they gave us their authorization in the app's chats but because we were very careful about the form of disclosure. That is, although the data may seem vague due to our choice of not presenting the interview fragments, this was an analytical option, as will be explained later, and a strategy to preserve anonymity, which is a crucial aspect of the qualified interactions we had.

Indeed, two data production strategies were vital and must be addressed. Since the app's interactions are typically based on real-time location (Blackwell et al., 2015), the exact place where one is at a given moment is a crucial factor. Hence, to avoid distortions, the app was activated in distinct geographic and demographic areas of Belo Horizonte to allow access to a wider range of profiles. The second choice acknowledges that when we rely on a technological device (smartphone) and, more specifically, a social media platform to produce data, the investigation is limited by tangible boundaries. The first refers to the profile of the study subjects – since even with the growing affordability of devices, Brazil still ranks high as one of the most unequal countries in the world in terms of income distribution – which makes the "app user" figure a limited choice,[4] to say the least. The second limit refers to the use of the application itself. Although it is equipped with countless features, the dialogs held on the platform tend to be short and objective and mostly targeted at the exchange of images and sexual encounters.

We must also add a third moment as a data source: the systematic observation of Grindr itself. By visiting tabs, exploring contents, and examining messages and images, we were able to become familiar with the application's interface and came to understand how it was conceived and how there were gaps concerning the planned objective, as will be addressed later. Despite eventually employing broad expressions, the methodological limits of this endeavor are established, and therefore we only present here the data collected from the people we talked to or through the notes taken from the observations. However, this does not prevent broader analytical transpositions, especially considering their algorithmic configurations, based on creating predictable interaction patterns following predetermined scripts.

By the end of the process, the volume of data collected during that phase proved significant, and various complex themes associated with using the app were addressed. In qualitative data analysis, the predominant method involves selecting a few fragments from a larger data set and building a properly analytical corpus from there (Padilha & Facioli, 2018). However, "the products of the disruptive incursion of new ideas [have come to include] a renewed space for critical approaches to organizational analysis" (Casey, 2002, p. 111), into which we argue this study fits. Thus, this article examines the data according to a reflexive methodology (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2017), essentially grounded in the empirical material collected – interviews and systematic observation – but not directly informed by it since fragments and images previously explored in other texts were suppressed. In the end, this allowed the analytical construction of four categories that seemed more evident to somewhat understand the dynamics of the organized social life of gay men in dating apps. The four categories refer to virtuality, sociability, stereotyping, and violence, which are present in all interactions, and will be discussed in the next section.

Unveiling the dynamics of organized social life

Systematic observation of how elements are arranged on the Grindr platform has enabled us to glimpse some of its limits, employed as social strategies by users. Beyond these aspects, this study has come across other intriguing elements requiring further analysis. Combined, virtuality, sociability, stereotyping, and violence are protruding elements of the organized social life of the users addressed, providing a rich framework for understanding how putting the organization into practice also extends to the virtual world.

Virtualizing relationships

The first way in which organization is put into practice is by virtualizing relationships, which implies three processes: speed, unaccountability, and a disposable attitude toward social relationships. The first refers to pace since everything happens rapidly in a hookup app: profiles are created, edited, and deleted instantaneously. According to McQuire (2011), "learning to inhabit mediated space differently is as much a question of speed as it is one of ownership or content" (p. 229). A user can have multiple profiles linked to various emails and passwords, each of them with a specific purpose, and even access them at the same time from different smartphones, as mentioned by the respondents.

These possibilities suggest that many of the users interviewed feel they must stay in the spotlight to interact, compete for attention, in short, to be consumed (Gudelunas, 2012). This explains why they maintain a fast updating pace so that their profiles always remain attractive and a central element in the application's interaction strategies. This is only possible because the context of the interaction is virtual. Although virtuality presupposes reality at some point, this does not seem to be an indispensable issue, except when the dates arranged through the app are about to happen. This is because many users seem to be aroused merely by looking at images or exchanging messages and are not really willing to engage in face-to-face, in-person interactions. Moreover, given the disseminated preference for a hegemonic profile, it is plausible to assume that most users fail to fit into it (Raj, 2011) and that, therefore, virtual relationships are interesting to the extent that face-to-face experiences can be degrading[5] (Turkle, 1995).

The second process constitutes a form of unaccountability. Virtuality seems to authorize a kind of interaction somehow targeted at the app's purposes, and this frees interlocutors from taking responsibility for the relationships established there (Miller, 2015). Virtual relationships imply their absence from concrete, synchronous interactions, so many users seem to disregard the fact that their words and actions may offend their recipients, for example. The absence of direct interlocution interferes with the interaction and fosters a certain level of coarsening. If the interlocutor fails to arouse immediate interest, he can be ignored or abruptly dismissed through a swipe of the fingers on the smartphone screen.

As for this aspect, we must consider that the same can also occur in face-to-face social interactions, which is why we must be cautious not to adopt a potentially moralistic perspective on the social possibilities brought by technology; however, authors such as Licoppe et al. (2016) point out that the way in which relationships take place in the context of Grindr is based on the idea that, in interactions, "protagonists are not supposed to be affected, emotionally, relationally, and

socially" (p. 2555), and this process ends up emphasizing more virtualized relationships per se than offline engagement possibilities.

This brings us to the third element: the disposable attitude towards social relations, which is also found in society. Quick relationships for which no one takes responsibility seem to be disposable. Since one is dealing with avatars rather than people, relationships are not governed by a concrete physical existence but a simulacrum of that existence. Although face-to-face interactions have unveiled increasingly disposable social relationships, among which physical interactions – especially between young people – can be highlighted, the absence of such interactions allows people to be more straightforward. This, in turn, allows interlocutors to "skip" steps perceived as essential to social life, such as greetings, preliminary conversations to "break the ice," and the use of humor, for example (Jaspal, 2016).

The result is that users switch from one conversation to another in a matter of seconds according to what they want and the kind of feedback they expect to get. Consequently, this seems to establish a sort of competition for performance, which is apparently necessary to ensure more profile views, messages, and, perhaps, dates (Gudelunas, 2012). This means interacting simultaneously with several people at various levels of intimacy but based on a more or less predictable script that allows optimizing interactions and maintaining all interactions as potentially "effective." This is reinforced by continuous updating and how certain profiles seek to stand out by valuing users' physical attributes and catchphrases, highlighting the continuous tension around the consumption of bodies in a virtualized domain. Virtuality also implies a form of sociability so that such processes do not occur separately.

Socializing in any possible way

Given that virtual relationships are fast, unaccountable, and disposable, it is not surprising sociability forms have been reconfigured. Since they imply social conviviality, and this has been changed by the virtualization of relationships, the social component operating in this context is governed by another logic, which rewards ephemerality. Sociability becomes a bundle of momentary experiences that can be replaced by new and quick experiences, thus rendering effective social exchanges somewhat difficult. Despite a certain degree of romanticization in the interviews regarding how the virtual medium makes it impossible for people to interact "for real," as in Miller (2015), the forms by which virtual sociability is presented in Grindr seem to distinguish themselves by their instantaneousness: bodies are exposed in provocative angles, phrases are forged to cause impact, stimuli are offered to encourage invitations, and when combined, all these aspects seem to reward the moment.

Produced for almost instantaneous consumption (Illouz, 2011), they are replete with ephemerality. Pictures are taken, videos are recorded, and texts are written, all for the sake of a form of absorption that seems to constitute the raison d'être of these contexts. In the eyes of the respondents, social interaction is translated into the number of views, dates, conversations, and bookmarks but is infertile in terms of effective relationships with others. Once again, we must not romanticize "what is missing" from dating apps, which are designed to meet market opportunities before anything else. Nonetheless, the respondents' accounts suggest a logic previously addressed in Bauman (2008), when the author argues that lives at the reach of fingertips turn to the economy

– from a supply/demand, production/consumption perspective – in which a form of psychological contract of sociability is not assumed.

Socializing becomes a way of producing oneself to be quickly consumed by others, which consume and produce themselves at the same pace, in a process that seems to know no limits. This simultaneous, accelerated process of production and consumption can refer to images, as discussed by Valenzuela (2016), impressions, as argued by Blackwell et al. (2015), or a form of diffuse sexual visibility that must necessarily be attractive, as argued by Miskolci (2015), continuously negotiated and swing from a desire to secrecy (Miskolci, 2014).

As reported by the respondents, interactions occur simultaneously and with multiple people, which characterizes not only a kind of "desire etiquette" (Crooks, 2013), in which agility constitutes a requirement for not missing "good opportunities" – whatever that means for those involved. Strictly speaking, as Woo (2014) argues when referring to the dualism between real life and virtual life, "life is rarely strictly one or the other: it is our simultaneous negotiation of both that matters" (p. 65). The fact that a person can be online talking to several people at the same time does not mean that this cannot be done offline. Therefore, the idea that dating apps like Grindr are destroying gay relationship possibilities is a fallacy.

The ephemeral nature of these interactions does not change many of the aspects of the users' social experiences: one can defend that it even reinforces them. And that is because the participants showed no initiative to reflect on or change their attitude regarding what was presented to them as given. In this sense, it is almost as if they agreed completely with that scenario. Despite the fact that it praises young white, masculine, athletic men, and so on, and the fact that this confers different prerogatives to the holders of such characteristics, at no moment did the respondents question this logic or try to situate themselves in more favorable positions, exploring what the virtual world can offer them as a bargaining resource. Therefore, when non-hegemonic profile users venture to interact with the hegemonic profiles, manifestations of rejection, silencing, or blocking are expected as part of the interaction. To some extent, this stereotypically reinforces the marginality of most gay existences, even in a virtual context.

Stereotyping to buy time

Can a characteristic become a stereotype? When and how does this happen? These are different things. Characteristics refer to definitions or elements that constitute something or someone. Stereotypes do not refer to personal attributes or the attributes of a thing but are instead attributed to them in the form of a preconception. They constitute a kind of "shortcut" about a certain thing based on previous experience and knowledge, not necessarily verified in each specific case. Therefore, one can tell right away how stereotyping can be inaccurate and harmful, especially if associated with algorithms. Algorithms are ways of processing information that transform data into a specific fragment. To do so, it associates what a user has previously searched with what is searched for by other users, "systemically adjusting the information with the aim of predicting, with a high degree of accuracy, what is being sought" (Padilha & Facioli 2018, p. 311).

Under the argument of filling in data from a profile, each option checked in the app's ordering allows producing specific data that can reinforce stereotyping. Not surprisingly, such a shortcut logic is based on stereotypes, which Bres (1991) defines as "prefabricated representations [...] forged in particular by their ethnicity, their sex, their social class" (p. 93). They simplify

interactions to the extent that they crudely classify subjects and anticipate their reactions based on preconceived patterns – and we must point out, both in the positive and the negative sense. The marked and reiterated differences between what is "offered" and "sought" end up defining hierarchies, from more valued profiles at the top to less valued profiles in lower positions, as discussed by Cascalheira and Smith (2020).

Once again, the differences experienced in society were identified in the interviews, as users were very aware of the stereotypes present in Grindr, many of which reinforce the secondary place of others. The others, that is, the effeminate, the ugly, the poor, the fat, and the elderly, for example – serve a vague purpose of interlocution but should not take up too much time in a conversation. As a matter of fact, this conversation should be purpose-driven, not a social interaction per se. The interaction with others must be guided by a purpose, which apparently needs to be explicit for the interlocutors; hence, the conversations go straight to the point in an interactional convergence directed to the ultimate goal of most interactions: the sexual act (Ahlm, 2017).

Although certain options can be ticked as to you and what you are looking for in the app, they are much less accessed than the "dates" and "now" alternatives in the profile descriptions. And what does this mean? That one is not on the app "for fun": everyone knows what is at stake, even if they are not explicit about it. Even if one's interests point in another direction, the interactions are driven by the sexual component. Everything that contributes to its prevalence and materialization must be part of the accelerated repertoire of social interactions so that everything else is secondary. Indeed, Crooks' (2013) desire etiquette has a definite purpose that justifies stereotyping as a resource for those who turn to a specific goal.

Indeed, if stereotypes "summarize" what interlocutors are, based on patterns attributed to them, then they play a relevant role in accelerating interactions in the app. When they come across an element they dislike, such as old age, they may promote the stereotyping of older people, attributing them undesirable characteristics that justify their exclusion from the interaction horizon. Through blocking, ghosting, or plain aggression, the interviews suggest that rarely does the stereotyped subject achieve some form of redemption for being who they are. Stereotyping condemns them, for better or worse, to occupy a previously defined place from which they can only be removed in exceptional situations, at the discretion of the interlocutor, who has in their hands the power to reproduce the stereotypes indiscriminately, oppressing others from how one should be and act (Campbell, 2004).

Raping (oneself) systematically

"Virtualizing relationships," "socializing in any possible way," and "stereotyping to buy time," all of which seem to be steps in a somewhat peculiar instruction manual, as alluded to by Padilha (2015), materialize in varied and systematic practices of violence (WHO, 1996), including among the users themselves, in the context of the dating app analyzed in this study. Authors like Dietzel (2021) even mention the existence of rape culture when "violence is perceived as sexy, and sexuality as violent" (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993, p. vii), which exists both online and offline. Based on a study conducted in Montreal, Canada, the author identified a series of violent practices that include the presence of male consent in a racist context in which bodies are objectified and fetishized, and this is regarded as acceptable among those Grindr users.

In the case of this study, various violent practices were mentioned, among which we highlight: (a) the assumption that options not linked to the consummation of the sexual act are fallacious, and that all those who claim not to be interested in sex are liars and deserve no attention; (b) the possibility of discarding those who are not "objective," either by wanting to talk longer, not sending images, or failing to provide accurate information about body measurements; (c) exclusive desire for those who are "attractive" – that is, idealized, desired and consumed bodies, to the detriment of all others (Padilha, 2015) – a factor that acts as an interaction barrier for "diversity" to occur, since only profiles similar to one's own are desired, in a rather narcissistic fashion; (d) the aggressiveness of the dialogs, which should be short, fast and direct, not allowing hesitations, long intervals of time or deeper conversations; (e) the repulsion to bodies classified as abject (Butler, 2011; Kristeva, 1982; Le Breton, 2007), which should resign themselves to the most invisible place possible, and be content with whatever is proposed to them, since "they have nothing to offer;" (f) the naturalization of binary and misogynistic patterns of heteronormativity regarding sexual practices of "males" and "females," therefore "dominant" and "submissive," "active" and "passive" (Grohmann, 2016, Knights, 2019), etc.; (g) the collusion with aspects such as "secrecy" (Miskolci, 2014), "discretion" (Miskolci, 2015), "masculine appearance" (Medeiros, 2017), which back feeds notions of rejection, marginalization, and social exclusion at various levels.

While the mention of violence may seem too strong to some, it is accurate. As the World Health Organization (WHO, 1996) concept deals with potentially virtual aspects – such as intentionality, power, threat, and psychological harm, among other elements –it is quite adherent to what has been found in research and various works in organizational studies, according to Costas and Grey (2018). In a context where no physical interaction takes place, the virtual component confers new nuances to what can be regarded as violent, something that users not only know but reproduce and experience in everyday life. Some of these violent acts are considered crimes in the real world, such as the misuse of images provided for in the Brazilian Penal Code.

According to the respondents, the reasons for this can be varied, from jokes with no major purposes other than the pleasure of fooling the people they talk to and then disappearing; to using enhanced body images, even of others, to become more attractive in the eyes of the interlocutors; and, finally, seeking revenge against people who have snubbed them, by using the profile photos of the person with whom they had a disagreement. Considering the possible harm from exposure and false attribution of behavior to a person, Grindr has a mechanism that welcomes the reporting of profiles displaying false information. Still, users often mention misuse and misappropriation of one's pictures.

Other forms of violence refer to subtleties in the digital world etiquette and are no less violent for that, as when one does not react to an unsolicited post. Since consumption incorporates a reaction that registers one's access to the platform, not registering reactions is a straightforward message. The expression "ghosting is not a reply," present in many user profiles, refers to a widespread practice of ignoring people with whom there is no interest or for whom one has lost interest in interacting. Indeed, ghosting is a form of rejection through silence, which makes sense in a context of great competition for space and attention. It can happen from the very first moment when an unsolicited message is received – which can range from a greeting to an invitation through the sending of images – or in the middle of an interaction when one simply stops talking to the interlocutor altogether. Blocking is yet another mechanism, the most radical one since it completely obstructs any form of interaction. Although the participants believe that it is an extreme resource,

several of them stated that they use it regularly to avoid harassment from "unwanted profiles,"[7] such as fat or old men, for example. This signals how a violent feature of the app can be used in a naturalized way to avoid interaction.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data produced by our investigation reiterate evidence found in other studies about how dating apps have proved to be a means by which relationships are verified and not always different from what is experienced offline. Various elements, such as speed, unaccountability, and a disposable attitude towards social relations, operate as markers of a form of interaction mediated by technology, suggesting that the migration to the virtual, online environment not only failed to change what was already true in society but also aggravated problems with the algorithm adjusting content according to user preferences. A social life organized in a fast, unaccountable fashion that discards social relationships is only possible by mirroring similarly constructed social relationships and technological configurations that do not regard such elements as problems since their focus is on the economic dimension provided by the app. Therefore, they make resources available to their users, which can be employed as aggressive practices by them. Interestingly, this does not seem to be an issue in a digital platform that aspires to profit above anything else.

The dynamics of organized social life found in the interviews reveal that virtualizing, socializing, stereotyping, and perpetrating violence are part of a broader framework already existing in the social world in which gay people are inserted. It is hardly surprising that such aspects are present in Grindr, which may have eventually been conceived for yet another type of relationship, theoretically freer since they are not bound by conventional social ties, but which cannot effectively get rid of them altogether. The result is that the ways in which organization is practiced in such a medium end up reproducing conditions of asymmetry and violence verified in society. Accordingly, gay men, who have been historical targets of prejudice and discrimination as a group, find themselves reproducing similar practices against other gay men on this digital platform. This operates through a hierarchy of desire that has at the top the profile closest to the alpha male figure and, at the bottom, those who fall short, such as Black, poor, effeminate, fat, old men, or those with some form of physical disability.

From the standpoint of organized social life, *virtualizing* social relationships makes sense in order to provide a "full breakfast", as per Woo's (2014) terms. The possibilities of dating apps add to regular social interactions, enabling the expansion of gay men's network of contacts and relationships, even if casual. Considering objective aspects such as the costs involved in preparation, travel, and entertainment, it is undoubtedly very economical to invest in virtual interactions. Despite the loss of elements such as face-to-face interaction, the respondents seem to perceive several advantages in the practicality of interacting quickly and simultaneously with several other users as they optimize their time and increase their possibilities.

Socializing as possible implies dealing with the limits of a social networking application that is, above anything else, a product that must be economically viable, aimed at a target audience previously identified as profitable. To this end, its functionalities are not primarily focused on varied forms of socialization but on how economic objectives can be more easily achieved. Indeed, this includes the subscription model, which allows access to more profiles and features, and the expansion of the fixed consumer base. Nonetheless, the respondents claimed to use the system

allows them (most of them use Grindr's free features) in whatever way seems most interesting and convenient to them. That is, they favor quick, direct conversations with people who are close to where they are located, so they can materialize sexual encounters more objectively.

To enable speed and objectivity, **stereotyping** users is a constant resource of the respondents, as they attribute aspects to others in an anticipated and generalized way to focus on profiles "worth investing in." This simultaneously implies distance and ignorance about people taken individually by associating them with pre-existing "tribes" on Grindr, such as "boy," "*cafuçu*," or "discreet," all of which are valued or devalued according to their own preferences. Many users rely on stereotyping as a way to save time by applying filters in which they prioritize the profiles they want to engage with, in some cases even preventing those who do not interest them from being displayed at all. And the more resources available, the greater the possibilities for filtering and, presumably, for "success."

Finally, this whole scenario is made possible by various forms of **violence** perpetrated in the context of this organized social life. In a milieu in which the primary purpose is to get straight to the point as fast as possible, a logic of competition for time, attention, and priority is installed, which can only be fed when those who are not interested are ostensibly swiped over, that is, those who do not send photos, take too long to reply, do not precisely define the meeting place, etc. This is a context of radical functionality, in which, for everything to operate properly, each one must take on and fit perfectly into their role, co-producing the content of the application as they adhere to a business project translated into an online dating platform.

As we can see, the main findings suggest that technology is not in itself a form of redemption for the complex social issues of minority groups, even if it involves a group using an application specifically designed for them. They reproduce the logic of differentiation even within their own domains, which suggests that this is a widespread social phenomenon in virtual relationships as well. If this is what happens in social life, one would expect users to come up with a better way of dealing with it in virtualized sociability environments. However, this is apparently not the agenda of Grindr or of its users. By emphasizing consumption more than politics, the app settings confirm what it is all about: business.

The ephemerality of what is experienced in the context of this dating app constitutes a bundle of momentary and replaceable experiences by new, increasingly volatile experiences. Virtualizing relationships, socializing in any possible way, stereotyping to buy time, and systematically raping (oneself) – the dynamics of organized social life suggest that, around relating (especially in sexual terms), the foundations of interaction are established that, strictly speaking, makes it difficult for the apps to become an environment for effective social relationships – but perhaps, on the other hand, they are simply not meant for that. Research on the subject reveals the permanence of patterns of social isolation because even when sexual interactions take place, it is instrumentalized for immediate consumption. Once it is fulfilled or consummated, sex is then analyzed, compared, qualified, and, in the end, counted as yet one more interaction within a framework of "interaction statistics" before the entire process starts all over again.

Indeed, we must make three considerations regarding the subjective, methodological-analytical, and ethical-political aspects of this study. First, the paper may have built a negative image of the dynamics of the organized social life of Grindr users, but this was not intentional. In studies about differences, researchers must be careful with how they express themselves to avoid falling

into what they criticize: the adoption of certain moralism to judge what is "different" according to a given notion of "normality" is a difficult but necessary exercise, which challenges researchers to adopt a position by assuming their own implications. The virtual interaction modality creates a dialog with a time when not interacting through technology means being "out" of most of what happens in the world, thus limiting possibilities of updating and expanding one's knowledge. However, the conditions of existence in the virtual sphere do not change the marginal condition already experienced by LGBT individuals. In this sense, although criticism of this platform can be associated with a romantic vision of the forms that virtual interactions on a gay dating app could incorporate, it is quite pragmatic. Social inclusion could be the greatest asset of these apps and a way to make those who are somehow prevented from fully belonging to society visible. However, the emphasis on one's body and on a "right" pattern all bodies should adhere to ends up reinforcing the marginality of most gay existences in the virtual context as well, which can make organized social life an interesting object for academic and social attention.

The second consideration refers to the methodological-analytical level. This manuscript does not comply with the classic structure of an organizational studies paper in several respects, and, in particular, the methodology and analysis can cause some discomfort. We have consciously opted for detaching from strict data, although all lines written here strictly adhere to the research material. However, some may feel inclined to demand details of the analysis techniques, the explicitness of the data, and the like, which are often associated with a strange fetish for positivist scientism that we were not interested in conforming to. This study has led us to reflect on the place that analysis occupies in organizational studies, which is something to be problematized and, according to Casey (2002), revitalized at the theory and application levels. Therefore, we have invested in making the analytical dimension denser, by referring to the ideas to which the categories allude while establishing a careful dialog with research as an unfinished social process and with theory as an element for questioning ideas. Thus, the focus on analysis and a more fluid form of writing brings contributions, pointing to a possible path for producing knowledge in organizational studies.

The third and last consideration lies at the ethical-political level. Going back to the question of differences, this work points out the existence of unavoidable aspects regarding what is conventionally referred to as "others" and how investigations and interactions with others can strain our human limits. To what extent did the research experience not lead to predisposition as to the participants? Although this question may seem expendable, it unveils some of the ethical dilemmas involved in conducting this research, such as dealing with situations that seemed acute, where we observed respondents describing schemas that visibly diminished them vis-à-vis other users because of their physical characteristics, or that reinforced stereotypes that the LGBT community has been fighting against for years, and that socially disqualify them. The observation of this component in the scope of an investigative social interaction requires a problematization of what is assumed as research practice when dealing with oppressed social groups. Should one remain impassive in the face of evident suffering? And in case something escapes the so-called "scientific" script, should researchers limit themselves to the words exchanged in the heat of the interaction without dealing with the effects this dialogue may provoke? Why is our field of knowledge defined as an applied social science but is more concerned with application than society?

These are no trivial questions, and they raise points about a form of knowledge production that must be politicized in response to a whole configuration within a capitalist production system that decontextualizes and dehumanizes in favor of accumulation. Relying on dating apps aimed at

the LGBT community is not simply a form of recognition: it is market segmentation, and it does not respect differences, if not to the extent that they allow increasing the precision of algorithms – and the volume of profit. Indeed, although these platforms encourage consumption, they lack spaces for political use by users because, in fact, these are mere consumers. In this sense, it is interesting to understand how organized social life advances the concept of organization by humanizing the process and including the ways of organizing practiced by social groups in their specific contexts. While it is possible to discover and explore the organized social life of users of a given social media platform, we can also identify other uses beyond the mere consumption of what is offered to them. From an organizational point of view, this suggests a scarcely explored potential, which makes sense in the scope of existences in specific social contexts.

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Notes

1. The widespread search for users of a hegemonic profile is no exaggeration. Studies conducted worldwide such as Anderson et al. (2018) and Raj (2011) in Australia, Jaspal (2016) in England, and Medeiros (2017), Grohmann (2016), Miskolci (2015), and Padilha (2015) in different parts of Brazil, have shown that although algorithms themselves do not define profiles preferable to others, they do react to the preferences of the users of the dating apps studied. This does not mean that there are no abject bodies among users, in the sense coined by Butler (2011); however, such users occupy specific "niches" within a large group of users that reiterate the preference for a "standard body," i.e., white, young, virile, fit, healthy men, etc. Therefore, it is not about homogenizing the desire of all gay men or approaching it from a cisgender perspective, but to register in this study, as the others previously mentioned, that in the scope of these applications, this desire is predominantly targeted at a specific profile to the detriment of the others. This does not mean that other bodies are not the recipients of desire or consumers of this platform, but their role is secondary. Moreover, this fact has not gone unnoticed by the market since it has explored this segment in apps aimed at older men with the "bear" profile, such as bearwww, growlr, w | bear, bigger city, and daddy hunt, for example.
2. In view of the constant controversy surrounding the initials of the letters that refer to the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite, Transsexual, or Transgender) "community," which periodically sees the acronym incorporate new initials due to demands from unrepresented segments, we opted to keep the term that has not only been established since the late 1980s but widely negotiated with the corresponding activism. The other terms, such as LGBTQ (which seeks to include queer people), LGBTQI (intersex people), LGBTQIA (asexual, aromantic, or Aces), LGBTQIAPN (pansexual, polysexual, and non-binary people), and LGBTQIAP+ (any other people who do not feel included in any of the other initials of the acronym), while undoubtedly legitimate, were not disregarded in their particularities. Nonetheless, we consider that they have been covered by the already established and negotiated meaning of the acronym.
3. The process of submitting a study to an ethics committee has inadequacies that prevent it from being registered at the university hosting the research. We assume that the forms of interaction between researchers and participants will be face-to-face and that other forms of interaction must follow the same formal steps of conventional research. Such a procedure is rather inadequate to incorporate new methodological possibilities since it ignores other methodological means and dynamics. Confronted with the possibility of not conducting the research to wait for the bureaucratic proceduralism to catch up, we decided to carry on, particularly because of the research team's experience with marginalized and vulnerable populations, which includes ethical practices of investigation and analysis that we seek to incorporate in this manuscript.

4. One of the reviewers (correctly) drew attention to the regional asymmetries existing in Brazil. Since the study was conducted in Belo Horizonte, we cannot neglect the fact that this city has higher average income levels than most cities in the country and that the elitist choice may not exactly reflect the actual "elite" in the local context. However, as stated in the remainder of the paragraph, demographic data such as "average income" can distort reality by equating dissimilar socioeconomic contexts. Therefore, we have chosen to employ the term "limited choice" rather than "elitist choice," as the first seems to express the meaning more correctly.
5. Since users can adopt pseudonyms and anonymity to freely play with their identities in the online environment (Turkle, 1995), apps such as Grindr expand this to the possibility of forging profiles by using catchphrases and informing physical attributes that may be incompatible with the user's real characteristics. In some cases, this strategy is used to attract attention and potential partners for face-to-face dates. However, when the encounter is consummated between a person who has created a profile that is at odds with their real attributes and another who expected coherence with the profile they interacted with, several possibilities for violence can occur, such as rejection, humiliation, and even verbal and physical assault (Pooley & Boxall, 2020).
6. According to Bandeira and Batista (2002), "prejudice of anything or prejudice of something means 'making a premature, inadequate judgment about the thing in question' [...] Therefore, it is assumed that a subject/individual carrying prejudice must 'inevitably' be able to cause some harm to subjects who are the victims of a given prejudice" (p. 126).
7. One of the reviewers made a very pertinent criticism to be addressed here regarding the possibility that a "preference" can be regarded as an act of violence. In theory, it cannot. However, if we are talking about systematically "preferred" and "despised" profiles, things may change, since the rejection, in this case, is motivated by one's failure to meet the requirements of the hegemonic desire. Indeed, this is highly violent and cannot be considered a mere choice. In this regard, Saraiva et al. (2020) argue that "the hierarchization and the idea of 'I'm not/I don't like it' is present in the platform, [and these are] explicitly prejudiced, hierarchizing, demeaning [positions]. These discourses can be interpreted as a form of legitimation between accepted bodies and rejected/delegitimized ones according to a hegemonic standard of beauty" (p. 124).

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Conflict of Interests

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Inclusive Language

The authors use inclusive language that acknowledges diversity, shows respect for all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.

Authors' Contributions

The lead author was solely responsible for the conception, data curation, formal analysis, funding, research, methodology, drafting, proofreading, and editing of this paper.

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