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Performativity and representativeness of trans Brazilian people on YouTube: gender affirmation as a spectacle

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ABSTRACT

From the analysis of videos, we sought to understand the specificities of the gender affirmation of trans people born and/or residing in Brazil who create and produce content on YouTube with the objective of sharing snapshots of their lives, mainly related to their gender identity(ies). This is qualitative research in which twenty-nine videos by eight different people were collected and analyzed through the method of netnography and later discussed in light of post-structuralist studies such as Queer Theory, feminist, and trans-feminist studies. The existence of specific content patterns was perceived in the videos that contained trans themes, creating a transnormative on YouTube, with its own segments, in addition to the idealization and performativity of the bodies of cis and trans people. Also, the research gave a unique view of the impressions that those YouTubers had about Brazilian health services on gender affirmation technologies and the medical and psychological processes they have experienced or understand to be necessary. YouTube is also an environment where subjective expressions and knowledge are shared, creating a new space of visibility and trans representation, in addition to enabling the construction of a community between those who create the content and the viewers.

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Among the various niches of entertainment available on YouTube, here we analyze and discuss channels that share personal experiences both in the format of vlogs—videos that feature snippets from the YouTuber’s daily life—and videos in the “talking head” format (Laura Horak 2014), in which the person speaks freely about a subject of their choice, usually referring to certain expertise. More specifically, we analyzed YouTube channels produced and starred by Brazilian trans people, who share parts of their journeys—mainly regarding gender affirmation technologies and the specificities of being a trans person in Brazil, which involve access to health, social relationships (in a society governed by cisgender, binary and heterosexual norms) and basic rights as a Brazilian citizen.

It should be noted that, in writing this work, we adopted the term *trans* because, as Butler (2006) and Berenice Bento (2008) put it,—mainly in Brazil—it is inclusive and speaks of all people who somehow transit between genders or do not fit the socially imposed

binary normative, who identify themselves as such and share accounts of moments in their lives generally linked to issues of gender identity and processes involved in gender affirmation.

As pointed out by Horak (2014) and Tobias Raun (2015), the segment of videos dealing with trans issues has grown in recent years and established a format, generally documenting what YouTubers call transition or gender transition—therefore, in writing this paper, we chose to use the term transition, validating the term used by content creators. These are videos sometimes detailing hormonal therapies, conversations with family and friends about trans identity and their acceptance, “reactions” to photos from before gender affirmation, and, particularly in Brazil, content detailing the path taken in health services to obtain treatments such as hormone therapy and surgeries, as well as “guides” and personal experiences in name change processes in the civil registry and use of their social name in public spaces such as schools and universities.

The present study began even before the research project was designed, since curiosity about the number of videos related to gender produced and starred by trans people stirred our curiosity about the topic, and especially about YouTube as a space for sharing these people’s unique experiences. As pointed out by J. Burgess and J. Green (2009), conducting research on YouTube is a methodological challenge, as it is an unstable object of study, marked by dynamic changes both in the videos and in the organization of the website itself and its content. The platform’s daily growth is challenging when we think of the traditional approaches to data collection and analysis of research in Psychology. It was necessary to understand how YouTube works to later establish which would be the most appropriate method for research, which in this case was netnography.

Netnography, as Robert V. Kozinets (2014) puts it, directs the ethnographic gaze to the virtual environment and establishes steps to ensure scientific rigor. In this study, a Google account was first created for the research, as YouTube, as well as all other Google platforms, records the user’s interests according to their previously visited websites, keywords, videos, and images (James Davidson, et al. 2010). And, as discussed by Leesa Costello, Marie-Louise McDermott and Ruth Wallace (2017), it is extremely relevant that netnography be carried out in an active manner, where the researcher understands that their presence in the field already influences and places them as a participant. We briefly introduced ourselves and the research objectives in the comments section of the channels of each YouTuber whose material we analyzed. As we actively enter the channels of each participating YouTuber, we must recognize that our social markers, as Brazilian researchers, from the South of the country, who are white, middle class, with higher education, who identify themselves as cis women and cis men, heterosexuals, and homosexuals, will permeate both the data collection and the analysis and discussion of the issues raised. Therefore, as Donna Haraway (1995) says, knowledge is situated.

There were about eight people and twenty-nine videos in total, watched several times and described in Field Notes, which were elaborated upon entering the virtual environment, as well as impressions we had during the collection of materials. Both in the Field Notes and in the following discussion, the names of the YouTubers were maintained, both when mentioning the channel and the name they use in videos. We chose to maintain the names since the content is public and creators only share what they want on YouTube. Regarding ethical issues, guidelines for research conducted online change from country to country (Tobias Raun 2012). In the case of studies in which the data is already made

publicly available by the research participants, it is understood that these people have already consented and previously opted, without the participation of researchers, to share their data with society. Thus, it is understood that the writing and signing of an Informed Consent Form (ICF) are unnecessary.

During the lurking process (the first stage of netnography), that is, setting in the virtual field and the functioning of the website, we noticed a pattern in the channels that offer personalized content sharing aspects of the YouTuber's life and routine. The presence of tags (pre-established subjects tagged with the same title, such as "50 facts about me," for example, which are popular worldwide in personal channels) is frequent, both in channels run by cis people (those who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth) (Jaqueline Gomes Jesus 2012) and by trans people. In the videos of Brazilian trans people we analyzed, we noticed what Horak (2014) calls "gender conventions", referring to the trans segments on YouTube channels. These conventions help whoever is starting on the platform as a YouTuber to reach new viewers and organize the content they post (which was noticed in channel playlists and in the titles of the videos). In addition to serving as information for trans people who are starting or going through gender affirmation processes, surgical procedures, and/or hormonal therapies, the videos mainly offer emotional support and identification through the stories shared by YouTubers and the comments made on the videos.

What Horak (2014) and Raun (2012, 2015) argue, which will be discussed in this article, is that as much as the popular video formats help to increase visibility, deconstruction, and discussion of trans issues, they do end up creating norms of how experiences and trans bodies are or should be. The man/woman binary is present in some analyzed videos, as well as the performativity of cisnormativity. Another important contribution of the present research is the use of YouTube as a space for information and the creation of bonds and community. Issues related to the rights of trans Brazilian people in spaces such as schools, universities, and health institutions are addressed in the analyzed videos and also in the comments. Processes such as changing the name in the civil registry are detailed and shared on the platform, transforming the videos into spaces of public utility.

Online identities: gender affirmation as spectacle

Like other public and media spaces, YouTube channels are predominantly run by cis people. Just as other YouTube entertainment segments have specific formats that ensure success and visibility, videos by Brazilian transgender people also create their brands, their successful formats through what historically sometimes makes them abject: their identities, their bodies.

Mandy Candy's channel was one of the first to be reviewed. When the term *trans* is typed in the website's search engine, her channel is at the top of the results and is one of the most viewed content in Brazil. The video "Como era minha voz de 'homem' (como mudei minha voz)" ("What my voice was like as a 'man' (how I changed my voice)") is the most popular (by the number of views) on her channel. Both on Mandy's channel and the channels of other YouTubers analyzed, the most popular videos were those that contained detailed information about the gender affirmation processes that these people experienced. In addition to the views, we noticed that videos with photos pre "transition" (the word all analyzed YouTubers use when talking about gender affirmation), narratives

about hormonal treatments, surgeries, and “coming out” or “discovering oneself” as trans, were the videos that generated great interaction in the comments section, in addition to high visualization counts when compared to other videos in the channels.

Guy Debord [1967] 1997, 14) states that “the spectacle is not a set of images, but social relationships between people, mediated by images.” What instigates and popularizes the niche of trans videos on YouTube is mainly the interaction between viewers and YouTubers who, in turn, has also been or is a consumer of content on the platform. In addition to Debord’s ([1967] 1997) about the concept of the spectacle, Danielle M. Seid (2014) presents the notion of revelation, the moment when the trans person is subjected to social, binary pressures, which determine that the subject must reveal their “truth,” that they “find” themselves in their true body and gender, which is perceived not only in the content of the videos analyzed in the present study but in their popularity.

The author adds that the concept of revelation is also present in the media (movies, documentaries, news stories, and literature) through narrative techniques. In addition to these spaces, revelation is present daily in the lives of trans people, be it during a visit to the doctor or during a job interview. We can extend this concept of media disclosure to the niche of YouTuber vlogs analyzed in this research. This is present not only in the authorial production of videos that detail their journeys with gender affirmation technologies but also in the published materials containing their trajectories, where they highlight the moment when they perceived themselves as trans, the difficulties arising from the imposed cisgender passability, which poses “revelation” as a practically imminent movement, which can even mean the safety of these subjects. An example is a video that Ariel and Adam made together, which details experiences like these. Another important point raised by Seid is that unlike the “coming out of the closet” process of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, which has the effect of asserting their identities, by “revealing” themselves, trans people have their bodies challenged, constantly needing to reaffirm themselves.

Unlike the spectacularization of cis bodies, the revelation of a trans person, especially in the movies, as Seid points out, is the climax of the narrative. The audience “discovers” this trans body, and this process is highly dramatized and/or eroticized, or even portrayed comically. The spectacle of trans bodies in the movies and the media often implies showing the person’s genitals, aiming at a cis- heteronormative audience that will be taken aback by the image of that body, of the abject person. Finally, Seid problematizes that the exhibition of trans bodies in mainstream media also serves as a regulatory act, which ensures the binary normative, which only recognizes the male-female binomial and, therefore, only recognizes those trans bodies that fit into these categories.

The spectacularization of bodies can also be seen on cis people’s channels, which have a wide reach not only on YouTube but on other social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. The materials shared by Brazilian cis people present gender affirmation technologies through “guides” to obtain fit, thin bodies, suggestions of aesthetic and surgical procedures they underwent, or by creating content such as “step by step” guides to get the best outfit for “your body type” (de Jesus, D.S.V., 2017; Amanda Santos and Nicole Sanhonete 2017; Letícia Sarturi and Carla Cerqueira 2016).

On YouTube, the gender affirmation of YouTubers is what instigates, what provides the spectacle, but unlike trans bodies, revelation does not take place. Cis bodies are not abject, and they do not need to fit into binary norms in order to be recognized, so they are not revealed. Phillips (2014), in his arguments on the concept of abjection, states that

everything and everyone who challenges the cisheteronormative standard is seen as a threat and, therefore, marginalized. Abjection, then, serves as a rule, a limit of what is healthy, “normal,” and what must be pathologized and undergo treatment to fit the cisheteronormativity.

In a platform where anyone is allowed to create and share content, without necessarily being connected to the film industry or television networks, the image of the trans person, historically portrayed comically or pitifully (Raun 2012), now finds other possibilities, such as being an expert in their gender affirmation, a guide for those seeking information about treatments, costs, access to the health system, etc. In the video “*Sou trans mesmo?—Passabilidade*” (“Am I really trans?—Passability”), by Thiessa,¹ the spectators attribute the title of specialist, of an expert to her in the comments section. Thiessa uses her background in Biology (she has a degree in Biology) to explain the specifics of her hormone therapy and medical history. In the comments people are thanking her for the explanations, saying things like: “*what an amazing video!!!! I loved your didactics:P I hope now there will be no more questions from those people*” and “*damn I was so happy to understand about hormones*”,² reinforcing Thiessa’s place as someone who holds knowledge.

Currently, with the dissemination of authorial content, different possibilities of representation have been arising. These possibilities encourage each other, since more people have access to these media, and sometimes they are inspired to create their own YouTube channels, generating more content. As much as there is standardization among Brazilian trans videos, YouTubers guarantee that the experience is theirs, it is subjective, and that there are different ways to express and affirm gender. This can be perceived in their discourse, like Ariel in his video³ “*Como consegui minha testosterona*” (“How I got my testosterone”), in which he begins by saying: “I’m going to talk about my experience [...] this changes a lot depending on the city where you live and also the professionals, doctors ... so it won’t be the same, it’s very different.”

The creation of online content that encompasses gender affirmation of bodies is apparently a phenomenon that also includes cis people, although they were not the object of this study. Therefore, we can infer that the construction of bodies is an expressive spectacle in Brazil, including cis and trans people.

(Re)Constructing supposedly “real” bodies

The discussions about the construction and deconstruction of bodies are important for the analysis of the collected videos since the body is explicitly or implicitly present in the materials and in our impressions during our processes of insertion and approximation to the virtual field. [1987], 1994 argues that the body—which is “engendered,” that is, marked, imbricated by gender—is the result of social, political, racial, and class inscriptions, and, therefore, multiple and contradictory. Bodies are sexed since they also carry ruling social inscriptions; therefore, it is impossible to talk about the body without mentioning sex/gender and its regulations.

Haraway, ([1987], 1994) points out that social relationships, which build our social reality, our bodies, and our political frameworks, can create, or, better yet, elaborate bodily fiction. “The cyborg is a kind of fiction and lived experience that changes what was established as the ‘female experience’ in the last decades of the twentieth

century” (Haraway, [1987] 1994: 244). Haraway’s notion of cyborg bodies is that our bodies are permeated by technologies, norms, and gender traits which, therefore, are not natural, but rather “a fictional mapping of our social and bodily reality” (Haraway, [1987] 1994: 244). Bodies are built by culture, by supposed human nature, the result of a negotiation of boundaries between human and animal, body and machine (Haraway, [1987] 1994).

The understandings of gender and body mentioned above dialogue with the content observed in several of the videos. When sharing her experience with sex reassignment surgery (SRS), as Amanda, or Mandy Candy, calls it, she describes the importance of finding the “perfect surgeon” so that the vagina will look “just like any other.”⁴ Several times throughout the video “*TUDO Sobre Minha Cirurgia de Redesignação Sexual (Mudança de Sexo)*” (“ALL About My Sex Reassignment Surgery (Sex Change)”), she shares that she looked for the best doctor “with a top rate” to have the perfect vagina, like “the doctor who operated on Ariadna, Lea T . . .,” citing people known in the media and highlighting the importance and expertise of the physician.

The “perfect vagina” was validated by her family and friends, who, according to Mandy, demonstrated to be curious, and she, therefore, showed the result to people with whom she is close. Julia Serano (2007) points to the objectification of trans bodies in the media, more specifically in documentaries and made-for-TV shows, such as reality shows.

She states that the sensationalization of gender affirmation surgeries, detailing procedures, and exhibiting “man-made vaginas,” objectifies trans bodies, who are not guaranteed the same discretion that is usually given to cis people’s genitals (Serano 2007, 16). It is interesting to note that medical recommendations and surgical procedures to change physical traits are also present in videos of cis people, but these gender affirmation technologies are not perceived as such by viewers and cis youtuber and, therefore, are not one of the main topics of their channels.

Going back to the arguments about the construction of bodies, it is important to highlight that, as Judith Butler ([1990] 2016, 2004) puts it, the gendering of bodies, or engendering of bodies, as Lauretis conceptualizes it [1987], 1994), does not occur “naturally” as an absolute sex/gender reality. Actually, engendered bodies are constituted through the culture that is attributed and inscribed to these bodies (S. J. Kessler 1990, S. J. Kessler 1998; S. J. Kessler and W. McKenna 1978 cited by Angelo B. Costa, Henrique C. Nardi and Silvia H. Koller 2017). Therefore, in saying that a body with a penis is male, the cultural conception that bodies with a penis are male is employed; however, as Rosa Luz puts it in her video,⁵ being a woman with breasts and a dick does not make her less of a woman; that is, gender is not pre-established, but rather attributed to bodies. What emerges in the other videos analyzed here—reflecting prevailing social perceptions—is that both YouTubers and viewers, through content on technologies such as surgeries and hormonal therapies, are searching for their “real,” “legitimate” body that would correspond to their authentic, original sex/gender.

The perfect appearance of the *pepeca*, as Mandy calls vaginas, infers that all vaginas are equal as if there was an ideal standard to be reached, genital *passability*. The idea of a “natural” vagina is what is the goal, in this case, however, as stated by Paul Preciado ([2004] 2014), nature is a product of culture, which is, as Haraway [1987] 1994) argues, permeated by technologies, by human-machine interactions. All vaginas can be understood as cyborgs insofar as the supposed “natural” vagina is constructed from social

norms that determine what is “natural,” norms that are heteronormative and cisnormative (imposing the binary patterns of cisgender bodies on everyone), and which determine what genitals should look like and to which bodies they belong.

As exemplified in the data collected from the videos, this self-engendering of trans bodies, explained by [1987], 1994) as the gender that is inscribed to the bodies, considering the social markers that produce it, is permeated by the use of technologies to achieve expectations of what is seen as characteristic of a given gender, or when they do not correspond to what is culturally understood to be male or female. These expectations are expressed in some comments on the videos, such as: *“Stop taking female hormones and you’ll see. You’ll return to masculinity, and all this will be just mutilation. Because you can’t fool nature. Nature is perfect and if you let it, it’ll go back to the beginning of creation.”* This example suggests that nature is

what would legitimize bodies, as if this supposed human nature, in this case, gender, were not an effect of social technologies that are reproduced on bodies (Preciado [2004] 2014). These comments reinforce cisnormativity and determine how trans bodies should be (Raun 2015).

As Preciado ([2004] 2014) argues, taking us back to Judith Butler ([1993] 2011) statement that bodies are constituted when they are described when they are announced by health professionals—“it’s a boy!” or “it’s a girl!”—, bodies are put in a place that is intelligible, *acceptable*, from the fragmentation of organs, visual, discursive, and surgical techniques—as exemplified above—which “hide behind the name ‘sex assignment’” (Preciado [2004] 2014, 128). There are no bodies without technology and, as stated by Preciado ([2004] 2014),

Inverted. Transvestite. Intersexual. Transsexual . . . All these names speak of the limits and arrogance of the heterocentric discourse, on which medical, legal and educational institutions have been based for the last two centuries [. . .] sex-change operations may seem to solve the “problem” [. . .]. But, in fact, they become the visible scenarios of

the work of heterosexual technology; they evidence the technological and theatrical construction of the natural truth of the sexes” (128).

Butler (2004) also discusses the need for psychiatric diagnosis to ensure medical and psychotherapeutic interventions for trans people who wish to undergo them. The author states that even though the person “chooses” to undergo these procedures, the need for a diagnosis means that this choice has to have medical approval and the consent of professionals. Butler (2004) emphasizes that the label of Gender Dysphoria as a medical condition has more than one meaning, as it can allow trans people to finally undergo the procedures they consider necessary for their life and well-being, but it also serves as fuel for the expressive portion of the population that disseminates transphobic discourses, using pathologization as a justification for abjection.

The YouTubers express those procedures such as Sex Reassignment Surgery are not prerequisites for valid gender identity; however, they speak of their personal experiences, discomfort with their own bodies, and the need for surgical intervention. Thiessa, when sharing her experience with surgery in one of the most popular videos on her channel, *“Minha cirurgia de redesignação sexual—Mudança de sexo”* (“My sex reassignment surgery—Sex change”),⁶ talks about her feelings, how she perceived her body and the urgency of her surgery. Like other YouTubers, she starts her video with didactic explanations, and, just like Mandy, by justifying the reason for including the term sex change in the title of

her video. She also points out that what she is saying comes from her experience. Thiessa Woibackk (2017) emphasizes that *“not all trans people have the need or want to undergo surgery for different reasons, and this girl, this woman, is not less of a woman because of that, because it is not your sex organ that makes you a man or woman, ok? I’ve talked about this before on this channel.”* This comment, on the one hand, validates trans identities regardless of surgical procedures, however, as pointed out by Raun (2015), Horak (2014), Austin Johnson (2016), and Evan Vipond (2015), the systematic production of trans videos about surgeries and hormonal therapies, in the end, offers an image of how trans bodies must be, assuming, for example, that people will undergo surgical procedures because they are trans.

The videos from Adam and Ariel channels have significant content related to hormonal therapy. In one of Ariel’s videos (Ariel Modara 2016a),⁷ he says: “guys, do you know that you are watching someone who will no longer physically exist as I do today?” Soon after, he starts talking about his expectations regarding the body and psychological changes with the hormonal treatment he is about to start (2014) argues that vlogs by trans women—in the case of his study, European and North American—tend to address issues related to surgical interventions, in minute detail, while the trans men in his study highlight testosterone as the primary technology for transformation. Our analysis corroborates Raun’s findings (2012, 2014, 2015), since the channels of people who present themselves as trans men (Ariel and Adam) highlight the evolution of their respective hormonal treatments, from the acquisition of the medications to the physical changes they show in front of the cameras. The same was observed for videos with similar titles—but produced by other people—which were suggested in the recommended videos and auto-play sections.

Like Mandy’s and Thiessa’s channels, Adam’s and Ariel’s channels follow a pattern about body interventions. The more videos produced, the more questions and requests for materials with related topics arose. We noticed that there were several comments, mainly in videos by Adam and Ariel, about their journeys involving hormonal therapies, and how it would be possible to have similar experiences. Ariel was the only YouTuber to use the Unified Health System—SUS (Brazil’s public health system) for all his appointments and to start his hormonal treatment. In the video *“Como consegui minha testosterona”* (“How I got my testosterone”),⁸ like Mandy and Thiessa, he starts the video by pointing out that he will be talking about his own experiences and that things may vary from region to region, depending on access and services offered by SUS. Ariel also validates trans identities independent of hormonal therapies. In his case, he learned about the clinic that cares for trans people in his city through another trans man who lives in the same place. He talks about the positive experience he had, the fact that he was called by his last name in the waiting room, and the humanization of care from reception to medical appointments.

The Unified Health System (SUS) was implemented in Brazil in 1988 (September 22 1988), when the new constitution determined that “health is everyone’s right and the State’s duty,” making all access to health free, from outpatient procedures and care to highly complex interventions, such as organ transplants. Since the implementation of SUS in the early 1990s, access to health is guaranteed to every Brazilian, regardless of age, gender, race, social class, or employment status. SUS foresees the following principles to be followed: universalization, which is the right to free health for the entire population;

equity, which aims to reduce inequality in access and medical treatments, regardless of the person's social markers or the disease they have, recognizing that more investments should be made where the need is greatest; integrality, which considers the person as a whole and that all their needs need to be met—that is, in addition to treatment, prevention and actions that promote health are implemented.

SUS was designed and planned to become a reference in access to public health, and its project is seen as positive. However, what Brazilian authors Lenir Santos and Gastão de Souza Campos point out in their article (Santos & Campos, 2015) is that among so many issues and difficulties, Brazilian laws cannot guarantee the functioning of health public services according to their guidelines, in addition to not dealing with problematic situations such as *clientelism*, where one person protects another in exchange for benefits so that the service in the system is not universal and equal for all. The authors add that the fact that SUS is the responsibility of states and cities (and the federal government) makes each location invest in public services, clinics, and hospitals in a different way, which hinders access.

There are difficulties in scheduling appointments and exams, in addition to procedures, long lines that sometimes result in months and years of waiting, and difficult access to certain medications, which does not coincide with the structuring premises of SUS and the Brazilian Constitution itself, which ensures access to health care for the entire population (Santos & Campos, 2015). These limitations, barriers, and other experiences faced by the Brazilian population when using SUS are mentioned by the YouTubers analyzed in this research.

In Ariel's video, several comments were about the clinic he went to and what documents were needed, and whether he will get more procedures: "*I thought it was much harder to get the hormones! I'll find out how it works around here*"; "*What is your city again?? I was very interested in going to this clinic and taking my first steps*"; "*Are you thinking of getting top surgery?*" Unlike Mandy and Thiessa, Adam and Ariel have fewer subscribers on their channels, and probably because of the lower number of comments, they respond to almost everyone, interacting with people, answering questions, and even offering advice.

In addition to technologies like surgeries and hormonal treatments, in Adam's and Ariel's channels, as well as in other channels that appear in the recommended videos and the auto-play section, there is content about their packers, which are "items used underpants or underwear to create volume and the sensation of having a penis" (Raun, 2010). Adam shows his packer in the video and explains all its functions, how he has adapted to it and when he uses it. As with the other videos that feature details about trans bodies, the materials produced about packers have high view counts and are common among trans videos. The spectacularization of trans bodies takes place mainly through the detailing of the technologies that produce them.

In the case of packers, more specifically the content presented in Adam's video,⁹ the object is not only presented as a holder of sexual pleasure but rather of emotional pleasure, by making social situations experienced by Adam positive and pleasant. Unlike reports of hormonal therapies and surgeries, the videos about packers are presented as product reviews, in a descriptive, assertive way. Adam interacts with the people who comment, especially when they leave questions. As a counterpoint to the comments in Mandy and Thiessa's videos, there are questions from people who propose the use of packers by cis people, not just trans people.

The flexibility and the possibility of meanings given to packers go back to the arguments posed by Preciado ([2004] 2014) about dildos. Preciado, in his work *Countersexual Manifesto*, published in 2004, deconstructs sexuality and the social contracts that underlie it, proposing the use of the whole body as a dildo—an object with a shape that resembles the penis and whose function is the sexual pleasure from contact, penetration: the arm, head, leg dildo, and the plastic, silicone ones, or other objects with similar shapes. One can see certain manifestations of counter sexual proposals in the comments on Adam's video, since a comment and a response, approved by the YouTuber, suggest the use of packers by cis women, who would not use the object for the same purposes as trans men (except for penetration and sexual pleasure). The comment says *"Cis women who like inversion, for example, would it be interesting for them to use a packer instead of a strap-on? since the pleasure appears to be more than with a normal dildo on the strap-on."* And Adam responds: *"You can use it with a strap-on too! One of the problems is that the packer is more expensive than a sex shop strap-on [. . .], but the good thing is that the packer also gives you pleasure! I think it can be a different and interesting way to use it, yes!"*

It is important to highlight the role of Brazilian health services in the (de)construction of trans bodies. In analyzing the videos, it was common to find "step by step" content to initiate gender transition. Adam, Mandy, and Thiessa say that they used private health services for appointments with endocrinologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists. Adam detailed his trajectory and said that the wait would be too long in the Unified Health System (SUS), therefore, he covered medical, hospital, and psychotherapy expenses. Thiessa also gets her hormonal therapy follow-up from private health services and paid for her sex reassignment surgery. Mandy comments on the existence of public health services and the possibility of surgery through SUS. However, she says she was afraid because she had heard of negative results, so she opted for surgery with who she considered to be the best doctor, and got the procedure in Thailand. It should be noted that, at the time, Mandy lived in Asia, in South Korea. However, when talking about treatments and procedures, she mentioned Brazil and its path related to gender affirmation, when she was still in the country. Ariel, in turn, is the only YouTuber who used SUS for his appointments and follow-ups and had positive experiences.

Daniela, in an interview with Canal das Bee, criticizes the access to health of Brazilian trans people through the public health service. She reports that the queue for surgical procedures such as Sex Reassignment Surgery is long and that there is no prediction for procedures. She also problematizes the lack of professionals (based on her experiences in the city of São Paulo-SP) that work with the follow-up areas required by the SUS Transsexualization Process.

Throughout the video, Daniela discusses the control that medicine and the State exert over trans bodies, requiring reports that confirm dysfunctions and illnesses to guarantee access to health regarding gender affirmation procedures in public and private services. Jaqueline Gomes Jesus (2016) discusses the perception of SUS concerning psychiatric diagnoses and its guidelines that place universality, integrality, and equity in the treatment and welcoming of all users of the system. On the one hand, SUS opened space and fought to reinforce the right to a social name; however, on the other hand, it adopts manuals such as the DSM to diagnose people, perpetuating and disseminating the diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association (2014, 216), this is a mental

disorder whose criteria of diagnosis is a “sharp incongruity between the experienced/expressed gender and the designated gender of a person, with a duration of at least six months” and impairment in social or professional functioning.

All the YouTubers analyzed, at some point in their videos, used terms such as dysphoria and dysphoric to talk about the degree of discomfort concerning the characteristics of their bodies or to point out that some trans people may experience Gender Dysphoria.

Another common topic in trans videos produced in Brazil and/or by Brazilian people is the discussion of ensuring the rights of the trans population. Several videos are suggested with topics such as social name, civil registration rectification processes, and other topics, in a format that denotes expertise, as argued by Horak (2014) and Raun (2015), where the YouTuber dictates the steps to carry out such

procedures. One of these cases is Ariel’s video^{10,11} “*Como pedir o nome social na escola, universidade e na justiça*” (“How to request your social name at school, university, and in court”), with the participation of his father, who has a Business and Law degree, and explains the steps to request the social name, which is that by which trans people identify themselves (Jesus 2016), and/or to start the process of rectification of civil registration in Brazil. It is interesting that, in addition to sharing personal experiences, Ariel makes available for download, in the information area of the video, three files with document templates for the social name and civil rectification processes that he and his father designed and used. Both Ariel and his father emphasized the importance of making these document templates available and thus helping other transgender people. We noticed that in addition to comments about the documents, most people positively regarded the participation of Ariel’s father, as well as in the video of Ariel with his mother.

As Raun (2010) argues, for trans YouTubers the use of social media is extremely important and creates a space for an online community, for belonging. YouTube becomes the place for exchanging experiences of transphobia, family problems, and, in the case of Brazilian videos, issues about gender affirmation technologies. Mandy, Thiessa, Ariel, Adam, and Canal das Bee (a channel starring Jessica, Daniela, and Victor) state the importance and commitment they have to their subscribers. In all analyzed channels, there are videos with the aim of giving advice and helping those who send questions and life experiences to YouTubers.

Final considerations

Researching virtual environments such as YouTube is challenging since the object of study is unstable and presents dynamic changes both in the videos and in the organization of the website and its content, which grows daily through the sharing of audiovisual materials (Burgess and Green 2009). However, even with these challenges, we were able to understand how YouTube, as a media platform, has become a space of visibility, representation of trans identities, and at the same time, reproduction of what trans identities should be (Horak 2014; Raun 2015). The consistency of comments legitimizing the appearance of YouTubers in binary norms, female or male, maybe demonstrates the desire to achieve such aesthetics and cis passability. This shows that the offline bodies, which are not the YouTubers behind the camera, are also virtual, as they seek their affirmations through what is inscribed and performed online.

The performativity that validates gender expressions in society on a daily basis is also manifested in the production and reproduction of the analyzed videos, as they have virtually identical formats, performed at every moment when a new person watches the videos and creates their own material on YouTube. Like gender, the videos of trans people on YouTube present themselves as copies of themselves, which will be repeated and stylized based on the contents of the videos tagged with the same topics. Titles and thumbnails (small images created by YouTubers to attract the attention of viewers) are repeated among Brazilian trans people and, sometimes, we noticed in the comments discussions between subscribers about “which YouTuber created the content first.” Like gender performances, YouTube trans videos do not have an original, they are performed daily.

With YouTube’s daily growth and its global reach, different niches are formed on the website. In Brazil, trans materials are marked by body experiences, the spectacularization of surgeries, hormonal therapies, and social experiences of trans identities. YouTube’s difference, in comparison to trans themes in the media, is who created the materials, who decides what will be reproduced and shown to the public and how their messages will be transmitted. On the other hand, content consumers have an active role in the choice and dissemination of materials, being themselves spectators and creators, YouTubers.

The analysis of the collect data, with the discussion in light of post-structuralist studies, pointed out a unique form of gender identity(ies) construction, considering that the Brazilian YouTubers are creating a *trans normative* on YouTube, with its own segments, in addition to the idealization and performativity of the bodies of cis and trans people, similar to the concept that Johnson (2016) and Vipond (2015) explore in their respective work, arguing that the norm socially accepted for being trans is dependent upon medical standards, that embraces and legitimize those who identify in the binary gender spectrum and undergo medical conforming procedures.

The Brazilian trans norm observed in this research is also based on trans experiences within a medical—and legal model, situated within contemporary standers of health care and gender-affirming interventions, resulting in an invalid way of existence if you are a gender non-conforming person (Johnson 2016; Vipond 2015). While it is important to consider the effects of transnormativity on the trans youth and population in general, the sense of community was noticeable with materials created by the Brazilian YouTubers on important topics such as access and guarantee of their rights (getting your social name in places like schools and universities), and offering free download files of documents templates for the social name and civil rectification processes.

Notes

1. Thiessa’s video: “Sou Trans mesmo?—Passabilidade”, published on January 6 2017. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUaxQhSZ9Uc>
2. All comments were edited for length, translated, and presented in this article by the authors.
3. Ariel Modara’s video: “Como consegui minha testosterona”, published on April 22 2016. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXiOT7mKkqI&t=35s>
4. Excerpt extracted from Mandy Candy’s video: “TUDO Sobre Minha Cirurgia de Redesignação Sexual (Mudança de Sexo)”, published on November 21 2015. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGHbs-XpDTg>
5. YouTube channel “Barraco da Rosa TV”, by Rosa Luz. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCX7dUMgO8_ORxWQ4PU4ISA/featured

6. Thiessa's video "*Minha cirurgia de redesignação sexual—Mudança de sexo*", posted on April 22 2017. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfallzqbqV8>
7. Ariel Modara's video posted on February 22 2016. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XS5DWi_LZO
8. Ariel Modara's video "*Como consegui minha testosterona*", posted on April 22 2016. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXiOT7mKkql&t=35s>
9. Adam Franco's video, published on June 29 2017. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xU8Ewsk9EsQ>
10. Available at: <http://portalsaude.saude.gov.br/index.php/o-ministerio/principal/secretarias/898-sas-raiz/daet-raiz/media-e-alta-complexidade/l3-media-e-alta-complexidade/12,669-cgmac-teste-botao-8>
11. Ariel Modara's video, published on May 27 2017. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0GPxRcD8Zs>

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