

**The Disputes Regarding Meanings of the Homosexual Male Body  
Characterized as Bear: An Example of Dialogic Analysis / *As disputas de  
sentido envolvendo o corpo homossexual masculino caracterizado como  
urso: um exemplo de análise dialógica***

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**ABSTRACT**

This article analyzes the dispute around meanings involving the homosexual male body characterized as bear. Based on the theoretical-methodological framework of Dialogic Discourse Analysis, an analysis was carried out of a Facebook group post with three sequences of commentaries on the bear body type. The analysis revealed that the heart of the meaning making dispute in the utterances holds two distinct evaluations: (i) the bear identified as a fat and hairy body, and (ii) the bear identified as a standard body and with (some) body hair. Through the fat/not-fat and hairy/hairless oppositions, the standard gay body contests the bear body characteristics, notably the hair, for demonstrating more masculine traits. However, this position generates protests, almost always in an ironic and critical tone, from those who defend that bears represent the resistance of a category that fits, above all, the fat body.

**KEYWORDS:** Body; Gender; Sexuality; Dialogic Discourse Analysis

**RESUMO**

*Este artigo analisa as disputas de sentido envolvendo o corpo homossexual masculino caracterizado como urso. Considerando o aporte teórico-metodológico da Análise Dialógica do Discurso, foi analisada uma postagem com três sequências de comentários que tematizavam o corpo urso em um grupo da rede social Facebook. A análise revelou que o centro da disputa de sentidos nos enunciados se detém em duas valorações distintas: (i) o urso identificado como um corpo gordo e peludo e (ii) o urso identificado como um corpo padrão e com (alguns) pelos. Por meio das oposições gordo/não gordo e pelos/não pelos, o gay de corpo padrão disputa características do corpo urso, notadamente os pelos, para demonstrar mais traços de masculinidade. Contudo, essa posição gera, em tom quase sempre irônico e crítico, protesto daqueles que defendem que os ursos representam a resistência de uma categoria que se enquadra, acima de tudo, ao corpo gordo.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Corpo; Gênero; Sexualidade; Análise Dialógica do Discurso*

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## Introduction

The construction of homosexuality in Brazil has been, throughout history, discussed around different categories. One of the most prominent is the dichotomy *man/viado*.<sup>1</sup> The *man* category encompasses male individuals who maintain an active position in sexual relations with men or women, indifferently. In addition, the *man* category also largely pertains to those who have not come out of the closet socially or who identify as discreet and outside of gay contexts, in other words, those who do not go to gay bars, clubs and/or parties. The *viado* category and its equivalents (*bicha*, *baitola*, *boiolo*<sup>2</sup> etc.) has to do with sexually passive, effeminate men, frequently called *mulherzinha*,<sup>3</sup> a hybrid type person who, despite having anatomically male characteristics, has marked feminine traits (for a history of the development of different categories, see Carrara and Simões, 2007).

This historical fact serves to illustrate that the dispute involving male homosexual bodies is a constant item in Brazilian society's agenda. The gay community itself, represented by the letter G in the acronym LGBTQIA+,<sup>4</sup> over time and with the advent of digital technology, especially in the case of the internet, social media and geolocated meeting apps, has created some subgroups or categories that legitimize desirable bodies. We have examples of gay men who are categorized as *barbie* or *standard*<sup>5</sup> (expressions that signify white, lean/buff/healthy bodies); gay men who are categorized as *dad*<sup>6</sup> (an expression that characterizes older gay men); and those known as *poc* (an expression that identifies

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<sup>1</sup> TN: Considering that this text refers to and discusses specific Brazilian Portuguese (BP) linguistic nomenclatures of the LGBTQIA+ speech community, we consider it essential to leave the terms that originally circulate in BP and supply cultural substitutions from LGBTQIA+ American English (AE), British English (BE) and/or other English variants, or paraphrases in footnotes, with the exception of *urso*, which is literally 'bear', because this term circulates within the given speech community in AE. In the case of *viado*, literally, it means 'deer', corresponding to the derogatory term *fag* in AE or *poof* in BE, among other variants. In addition, all translations of citations are ours from the BP unless previously published in which case the previously published version is used and the full reference is cited in a footnote.

<sup>2</sup> TN: these are also derogatory terms when used by those outside of the speech community, comparable to *pansy*, *pofter*, *fairy*.

<sup>3</sup> TN: literally 'little woman', something akin to 'girly' and related to the 'pretty boy' category.

<sup>4</sup> LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Travestite, Transexual, Transgendered, Queer, Intersexual, Asexual and more).

<sup>5</sup> TN: the former referring to the Barbie doll and the later literally 'standard'.

<sup>6</sup> TN: literally Dad.

effeminate and poor, generally from the outskirts). In this scenario, the community has also established the *bear* category, an expression that characterizes, principally, gay men with fat and hairy bodies.<sup>7</sup>

That said, it is important to highlight that it is through the body, as Butler (2004) points out, that gender and sexuality are (not always) visible to others, and that implies a process of socially attributed meanings, as those represented in the many previously cited categories. As it could not be otherwise, all these categories involving the control of homosexual bodies and dictating aesthetic patterns of social acceptance/exclusion, express evaluations in/through language practices. As Bakhtin (1986a)<sup>8</sup> argues, as social practices change, so change the meanings that are attributed to the uses that we make of language, which, in my view, are no different from the evaluations attributed to the *bear* body. I have perceived, as a member of social networking groups that focus on questions of gender and sexuality, that there is no consensus regarding the definition of a *bear* previously cited. In fact, it seems that the meaning *bear* body has been changing and has become an area of dispute in discursive interactions in digital environments.

Given this context, my aim is to analyze the dispute around the meanings involving the male homosexual body characterized as *bear* from the theoretical-methodological contributions of Dialogic Discourse Analysis (heretofore, DDA). If, on the one hand, the articulation of Bakhtinian thought on studies about gender and sexuality may seem, initially, improbable, since the issues about the theme were not on the specific agenda of any of the scholars of the so-called Bakhtin Circle, on the other hand, thanks to the heuristic power of their ideas and reception in Brazil, it is possible, in the recent context of academic production, to encounter the emergence of studies that consider viable, for example, the defense of dialogical feminism, both in theory and practice (Fanti; Boenavides; Martins, 2021).

Based, thus, on this path that despite the feeble pavement seems promising, and to achieve the objective, I have selected to analyze a Facebook post of three sequences of

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<sup>7</sup> For further information about the different categories of gay bodies, see also França (2006).

<sup>8</sup> BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee and Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986a. pp.60-102.

commentaries that address the *bear* body. This group gathers, for the most part, members of the LGBTQIA+ community in the city of Fortaleza, in the State of Ceará, and frequently discusses issues related to gender and sexuality. In the analysis, the post and the commentaries were considered concrete utterances and interpreted in relation to other utterances and the present values present in each one of them. Given the analysis, it is possible to argue for the contributions of DDA to interpret issues related to the body in the broader context of studies on gender and sexuality and unveil how the disputes of meaning materialize in the discursive interactions.

The text is organized in the following manner: initially, I present Bakhtinian considerations about the body, establishing, when possible, an interface with studies on gender and sexuality. Parallel to this, I methodologically discuss how the dialogical lens can interpret the utterances selected for the analysis. Then, an example of analysis is presented, ending with final remarks.

## **1 Delineating the Theoretical-Methodological Research Trajectory**

Bakhtin, when makes considerations about the body, proceeds from the context of a literary analysis and the link between the world of art and the world of life, the world of ethics and the world of aesthetics. The challenge that is put forth here is to utilize and at the same time expand on the author's considerations about the body by discussing issues related to gender and sexuality studies. This is done following the tradition of those who came before and created intelligible work about Bakhtinian and the Circle's thought, allowing the emergence of DDA in the Brazilian context, (Brait, 2012; Sobral; Giacomelli, 2016; Villarta-Neder, 2020). Going beyond the context of dialogical studies, whenever possible, I bring to the debate texts that deal with gender and sexuality and specifically about the *bear* body (Butler, 2004; Rios, 2018). In this dialogue, the lines that follow seek to delineate the theoretical-methodological trajectory of this research.

In one of his first texts, *Author and Hero in the Aesthetic Activity*,<sup>9</sup> from the 1920s, Bakhtin (1990) specifically discusses issues related to the body. The author emphasizes that the human being has a limited vision of him or herself, or rather, of some parts of our body, such as the head, that are directly inaccessible to our gaze; for this reason, there will always be something of me unknown by me and known by the other who sees me and is in front of me. Bakhtin calls this process exotopia. In the words of Bakhtin (1990, pp.22-23),

When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide. For at each given moment, regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him.

This exotopic position that we occupy in relation to the other is not applicable, as it may at first seem, only when we are facing each other. Even while looking at myself in the mirror, faced with a two-dimensional view of myself, the reflection that I see does not speak to an *I* that is the same self that is being contemplated. There, reflected, already exists another me who is perceived from a social evaluation that I receive through the eyes of others. For this reason, Bakhtin (1993),<sup>10</sup> in his first philosophy, understands that human beings, despite being unique and singular, act and interact in the material world in a mutual interdependence, but do not confuse one with another at any moment. The center of value of his philosophy is, therefore, as Sobral (2019) suggested, the relation *I-other*. This means that there is no value judgment about human practices that is not subject to the appraising gaze of the other, since I will always know something about one that they cannot see in themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability*. Edited by Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist; translated by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp.4-256.

<sup>10</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov. Edited by Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.

From this preamble, we can put forth the idea that, even if we occupy a single place in the world and that we are flesh and blood subjects, with our history and subjectivity, we participate in a world that is construed by shared meanings, in the aegis of the relation with others, denominated by Bakhtin as dialogical relations – I will return to this. It is such that in the development of the second edition of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*,<sup>11</sup> Bakhtin (1984) summarizes the ontology of his thought affirming that: “To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.287).

It is in this tense and inevitable relationship with the other that Bakhtin upholds his conception of the body. The author sees the problem of the body through the angle of values, distancing himself thus, from biological and/or psychophysical concepts on the theme. It is a theme used here in the style of Bakhtin (1986b, pp.114-115; emphasis added)<sup>12</sup> when he affirms that: “Two juxtaposed utterances belonging to different people who know nothing about one another if they only slightly converge on one and the same *subject* (idea), inevitably enter into dialogic relations with one another.” Regarding the body, Bakhtin adds: “It should be clear, of course, that, insofar as the problem relates specifically to value, it is definitely demarcated from the viewpoint of natural science – from the biological problem of the organism, from the psycho-physiological (...)” (Bakhtin, 1990, p.47).<sup>13</sup> By implication, the body, on being taken up in this article as the object of investigation in the context of gender and sexuality studies, is treated as a problem linked to the values that it receives from discursive interactions of the subjects who participate in social practices, linked to a field of human activity, in this case, the LGBTQIA+ community. Thus, the meanings attributed to the different types of bodies are understood through social and evaluative biases, in other words, dialogically.

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<sup>11</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. Caryl Emerson. 8 Ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

<sup>12</sup> BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee and Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986b. pp.60-102.

<sup>13</sup> For reference, see footnote 9.

Thus, “the body is not something self-sufficient: it needs the *other*, needs his recognition and his form-giving activity.” (Bakhtin, 1990, p.51; emphasis in original)<sup>14</sup> This way, however, it is not given in advance, but constituted by the social evaluations, by values. Bakhtin affirms, “it is as if rays of light radiate from my uniqueness and, passing through time, they confirm historical mankind, they permeate with the light of value all possible time and temporality itself as such, for I myself actually partake in temporality” (Bakhtin, 1993, p.60).<sup>15</sup> Butler (2004, p.21), who investigates gender and sexuality from another perspective, recognizes, similar to Bakhtin, that “The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine.” Expressed differently, the body is constituted in relation to the body of another; although mine, it does not pertain entirely to me, the other is fundamental to completing its form (appraised), that is to say, it exists socially.

To advance our understanding of the body in the tension between the self and the other (body), it is important to highlight that the approach to the body, the point of view I am taking up here, can be carried out within two perspectives. In the first, the body is a semiosis, or rather, an object of meaning that, for its position in the world, can provoke a response by the one who contemplates it. The body, thus, is understood as language, in relation to other bodies and with other values, a point of view defended by Villarta-Neder (2020). In this dimension, we assume that the body communicates, expresses a value and can compose an extraverbal element of the utterance, as I have demonstrated elsewhere with respect to the use of the teacher’s body to complement the meanings of the utterances directed at students in an online English class (Bastos, 2021).

In the second perspective, the one selected for the analysis in this study, the body is an object of discourse of a concrete utterance that participates in a discursive interaction. In this perspective, the analysis does not concentrate exactly on the body as sign/language, which communicates, but on the utterance of the subject that communicates with respect to

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<sup>14</sup> For reference, see footnote 9.

<sup>15</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

the body, expressing its valorization about the topic. In this way, Bakhtin (1993, pp.32-33)<sup>16</sup> puts forth that which is central to our analysis:

And that is why the word does not merely designate an object as a present-on-hand entity, but also expresses by its intonation (An actually pronounced word cannot avoid being intonated, for intonation follows from the very, fact of its being pronounced) my valuative attitude toward the object, toward what is desirable or undesirable in it, and, in doing so, sets it in motion toward that which is yet-to-be-determined about it, turns it into a constituent moment of the living, ongoing event.

As we can perceive from Bakhtin's assertion, the word (or language, synonym of word in the context of studies by the Circle) does not serve only to designate an object in the world. What has already been said about the object in other contexts is re-signified in the single event of the utterance that expects, consequently, a response, in agreement or disagreement, becoming, then, an instance of a live event. "The relation I/other and the axiological dimension – will be, therefore, the constant and nuclear axes of Bakhtinian thought and of his peers" (Faraco, 2017, p.22).<sup>17</sup> It would be impossible, in this way, to understand the disputes regarding the homosexual male body characterized as *bear* without considering the evaluative attitude of the subject in relation to the object of discourse that conceptualizes it.

From this same perspective, as Vološinov (1973)<sup>18</sup> himself teaches us, language is never just a reflection of reality, but also refraction, that is, it recreates reality in another form, from one's own appraisal of the object of discourse. In this way, meanings, in the dialogic perspective, as Faraco (2017) highlights, are not limited to the here and the now, but are updated in the here and now, dialoguing with what was said and what will still be said, in an infinite chain of dialogic communication. In this chain, there cannot exist a general human being or a universal truth given once and for all, but axiological evaluations that come from

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<sup>16</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

<sup>17</sup> In Portuguese: "A relação eu/outro e a dimensão axiológica – serão, portanto, os eixos constantes e nucleares do pensamento bakhtiniano e de seus pares."

<sup>18</sup> VOLOŠINOV, V.N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik. New York: Seminar Press, 1973.



flesh and blood subjects, who inhabit a world of permanently open values, and who, from their unique position, are responsible for the acts they practice.

From my point of view, the tense relationship of the axiological positioning attributed to the body creates, consequently, a dispute around the meanings attributed to the topic in the LGBTQIA+ community. Categories of identity/alterity are created for the classification and the consequent valorization/depreciation of bodies. This dynamic can be, at times, perverse. Some body shapes are shoved in the shadows of homo-affective interactions. In the interactions in geolocated gay apps, for example *Grindr*, it was verified that real encounters, most of the time, only occurred between *equals*, or rather, between white, young, athletic, and not effeminate men (Saraiva; Santos; Pereira, 2020). This type of profile can, easily, be identified as an ideal of beauty underlying the idea of a body culturally taken as beautiful and desirable – a white and lean/buff/healthy body. Those who differ from this profile, according to Saraiva, Santos and Pereira (2020), are repelled and indiscriminately oppressed, occupying a secondary place in the virtual community (and, dare say, outside of it).

The body of those who self-characterize as *bears*, in their turn, receive the most diverse social valorizations. To be a *bear* in the Brazilian homosexual context, according to Rios (2018), has been an act of resistance facing bodies that are legitimized as attractive and within the standard. The metaphor with the animal, for the author, validates what the category expects of those who fit it: burly, hairy and masculine. For the same author, those who are part of the *bear* category are gay men who have bodies with more hair and a certain laxness with clothing, less effeminate traits and a prominent belly. This form of identification would be a counterpoint in the gay scene, which features those bodies seen as more highly appreciated which are more buff (*standard*), but can be, on the other hand, effeminate, unlike the *bear*. Moreover, however, from the analysis carried out here, we can observe a change in the behavior by *standard* gay men in relation to their bodies. In my hypothesis, in an attempt to distance themselves from effeminate traits, they seek to mimic more closely some of the body characteristics previously inherent to *bears*, such as the presence of hair. This fact has provoked, as I will be discussed in the example of the analysis, many tensions around this topic.

In addition to this, the fact that, from Bakhtin's point of view (1986a)<sup>19</sup> we have no way to draw on an object of discourse – one being the body itself – that has not already been valued, controverted, questioned at different moments through concrete utterances. The utterance, for the author is “a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.69).<sup>20</sup> As a link, it is always permeated with other voices, other points of view, and other evaluative positions in a dialogical relationship in the chain of discursive interaction that dialogues, in greater or lesser degree, with previous utterances, anticipating future utterances/responses. This dynamics, denominated by Bakhtin as dialogical relations – relations between subjects through discourse – is a unit of analysis in the DDA that we practice.

Finally, switching the page regarding the theoretical presuppositions, suffice it to say that the meanings attributed to the male body that fit the category *bear* are products of interaction between subjects, who, through language, reveal their appraisal tones, that is, the different valorizations around the object of discourse (Bakhtin, 1986a).<sup>21</sup> Given this fact, when I discuss the body, in the context of gender and sexuality studies, I do it from an angle of values, having as an object of analysis the utterances of subjects dealing with the body.

Methodologically, I assume that the posts and the commentaries of the *Facebook* social network group are concrete utterances. Both the posts with the commentaries participate in the discursive interactions, responding more immediately to the other posts and the other commentaries, but are also inserted in the chain of previous and subsequent utterances about the same topic, within and outside of the digital environment. As the *corpus* is taken from a social network, it is worthy to note that the posts, frequently, as is the case in this analysis, tend to use verbal and visual elements in the composition of the utterance. Given this fact, it is important to clarify that, in the interpretation of a verbal-visual utterance (Brait,

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<sup>19</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

<sup>20</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

<sup>21</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

2013) the articulation of the two material elements in the construction of the author's intended meanings is taken into account.<sup>22</sup>

On interpreting an utterance (verbal-visual), what will be considered, as Bakhtin (1986a)<sup>23</sup> teaches, are three interdependent elements of its composition: (i) the object of discourse itself, *per se* – in this case the *bear* body; (ii) the expressiveness of the speaker, or rather, the evaluation of the object, if it is good or bad, desirable or undesirable, etc.; (iii) the relations of alterity, both within the previous and subsequent discourse. It is the task of the analyst, however, to find the retrospective and prospective links in the analysis, adding elements to the speech of the other who can be seen just from their *exotopic* position in relation to the object of analysis (Sobral; Giacomelli, 2016). Finally, as previously discussed, there is something in me that is only accessible to the gaze of the other.

To make the analysis of the example I present viable, it is important to clarify the situation in which the corpus was produced, that it is composed of a post and the selection of a sequence of three commentaries. The *Facebook* group in which I participate is private, hosting a total of 19.1 thousand members to the date of the constitution of this corpus and discusses diverse aspects that involve the LBGTQIA+ community of Fortaleza, in the State of Ceará. In the interactions with the group, at the beginning of 2020, I came across a post that discussed the *bear* body type. The post called my attention and demanded a closer reading due to the divergence of opinions of the members on this topic. From this, I felt provoked to understand, from a researcher's point of view, how the disputes of meanings involving the homosexual male body in the context of studies on gender and sexuality could be interpreted through a dialogic lens.

If there is, as we see, the possibility of analyzing the body as an extraverbal part of the utterance of a subject who, on speaking, also moves in space, gesticulating, and even, silencing (Villarta-Neder, 2020), it is also possible to analyze the body as an object of discourse topicalized in the utterance. The second alternative was my choice to make this analysis possible not because the two dimensions cannot be together, but because, as the

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<sup>22</sup> Due to the capacity of synthesis that the genre and aim of the article require, it will not be possible to discuss the entire complexity involved in verbal-visual studies. For further information, see Brait (2013).

<sup>23</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

*corpus* was taken from an online interaction, the access to the bodies of the subjects is taken from the visual perspective, interpretations about the body of the speaker only being able to be made when present in the verbal material of the utterance, in other words, in the commentary made by the speaker himself, or in the photo chosen to fill the profile of the commentator in the social network that, for ethical reasons, will be eliminated from this research.

Given that my joining this group was not in function of this research, but occurred before it began – I have been a member since the 24th of September 2017 –, this marks the research as participative in nature, in the Bakhtinian (1993) sense. This means that, as a gay man, I live daily interactions that deal with diverse behavioral aspects of the LGBTQIA+ community, but that, by also being committed to the role of language scholar, I join, in this research, the world of life and the world of theory in the search for the production of knowledge. I consider myself, therefore, an *insider* researcher (Amaral, 2009), who, in my case, has been inserted into the group in a digital environment well before the delimitation of the research.

From this configuration, the ethical issue guided my choices. I sought to understand how, in the virtual environment, the research must be responsible for using data originating in interactions in *cyberspace*. Elm (2008) was helpful in outlining some important points, especially those in which the notions of public and private intersect and the ethical issues. According to the author, “the internet has not only changed our ways of looking at social life but has also made us reconsider questions of how social life is to be studied when it takes place online” (Elm, 2008, p.71). Supported by this premise, I consider that by relying on the type of interaction as online, it is almost impossible to contact all the participants due to its very dynamics, making it inviable, then, to obtain terms of consent. Members enter and leave the group I participate in all the time. The profiles that comment on a post may no longer be available a minute later. Real people, but who may use false profiles, may comment on the posts, and their identification becomes a very difficult task. Therefore, as the group is private, the posts being available only to members, I decided to present the post and commentaries

anonymously, hiding the name and the profile photo of each participant, as well as eliminating the address of the digital group.

The post that I present for the analysis example was published on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 2020, the date the corpus was constituted, it had generated responses in the order of 177 commentaries. This strong engagement with the post was a decisive factor in choosing it. The photo that illustrated the post was saved in the gallery of my smartphone and inserted in the article. To complement the analysis, I selected three sequences of commentaries: the first sequence containing four commentaries; the second with three commentaries; the third with one commentary. The sequences of commentaries were captured on the screen of my smartphone and saved in my gallery, afterward they were transferred to this document. I selected the commentaries that I deem more representative for discussing how the meanings around the *bear* type body are disputed in the discursive interactions of the members of the group, as follows.

## 2 An Example of Dialogical Analysis

The post selected to illustrate the analysis presents the following caption “I love a bear \*--\* IT’S IRONY.”<sup>24</sup> The text of the caption was complemented by the photo below, which deals with another post taken from the social network *Twitter*. The utterance becomes, thus, one entire meaning, which unites verbal elements (the caption) and verbal-visual elements (the photo/post, which also is accompanied originally by a caption – “is there anything better than a chubby man??? –”<sup>25</sup> followed by three *emojis* that represent an amorous look by someone who likes what they are seeing):

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<sup>24</sup> “Amo um urso \*--\* É IRONIA.”

<sup>25</sup> In Portuguese: “tem coisa melhor que homem gordinho???”



Figure 1: Photo used to illustrate the caption of the post on the group.  
Source: personal archive<sup>26</sup>

The caption “I love a bear \*--\* IT’S IRONIC,” refers to the figure of the male body represented in the photo/post above: a *standard*, white, muscular, body, with a beard and (some) hair. The evaluation “IT’S IRONIC,” in uppercase serves to put in dispute the concepts of *bear* intended by the author of the post, whatever they may be: (i) the valorization underlying the *bear* with a body predominately fat and hairy, as Rios (2018) indicates, and (ii) the identification of the muscular body and with (some) hair as *bear*. This post, in my interpretation, had the aim of generating controversy about the two evaluations pointed out above. The author, however, has already taken a position in relation to the topic, sustaining that it would be ironic to consider the body in the image as a *bear*. Nothing keeps us also from suggesting that the original photo/post on Twitter which the caption presents “is there anything better than a chubby man”? whether ironic to the idea that buff bodies and with (some) hair can be identified as *bear*. If that is the case, the post on the *Facebook* group is a response that agrees with the *Twitter* post.

In any case, the previous and subsequent links of utterances to this utterance/post, that is, their dialogic relations, can be incalculable, as it shows the example of hundreds of

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<sup>26</sup> Translation of the photo comments: “Is there anything better than a chubby guy?”

commentaries generated in the group. For this reason, and the title of illustrations, I present the following: the analysis of three sequences of commentaries that respond in an immediate way to the post. Supported by Bakhtin's (1990)<sup>27</sup> idea that the problem of the body must be studied from the point of view of values, I analyze the evaluations in the commentaries that, on relating dialogically, constitute the meanings of the *bear* body in the discursive interactions of the members of the group on responding to the post on screen.

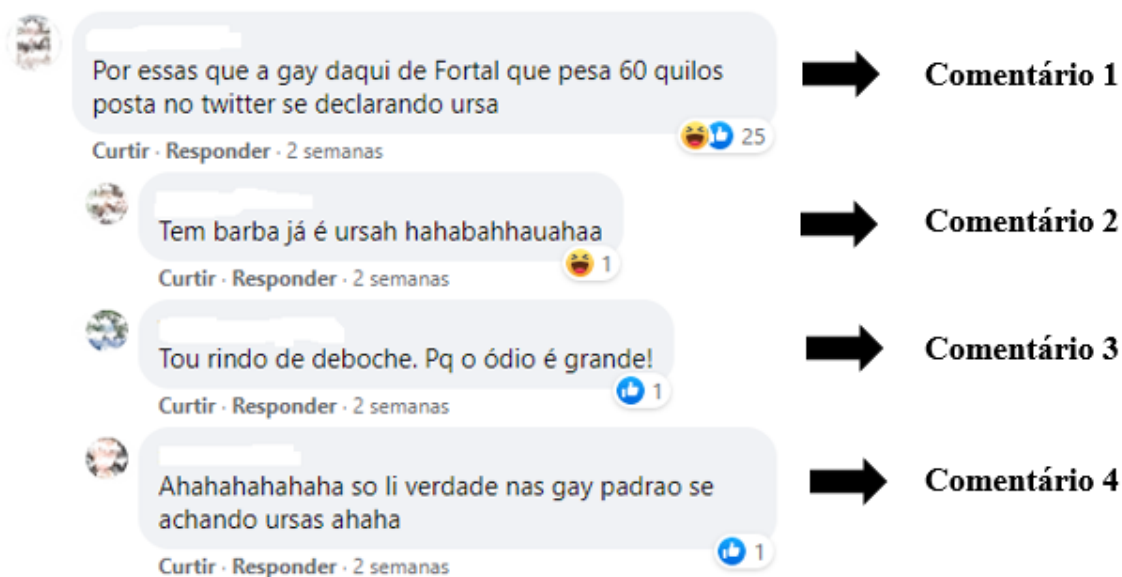


Figure 2: Sequence of commentaries 1. Source: personal archive<sup>28</sup>

Commentary 1, which inaugurates the sequence of commentaries in figure 2 responds immediately to the post. Commentaries 2, 3 and 4 respond in an immediate way to commentary 1, but also to the post and, as Bakhtin (1986b)<sup>29</sup> presupposes, respond to the other utterances produced on the same topic, even though distant in time and space. Finally, the valorization is always singular, but never individualized; it is constituted in the tense

<sup>27</sup> For reference, see footnote 9.

<sup>28</sup> Commentary 1 – For those gay from here in Fortaleza who weigh 60 kilos post on twitter calling themselves bears. Commentary 2 - Has a beard, so a bear (gendered inflection for female) ahahahahahahaha. Commentary 3- I'm laughing in mockery. Cuz the hate is huge! Commentary 4 - Hahahahaha I read the truth, standard gays thinking they're bears, hahahaha.

<sup>29</sup> For reference, see footnote 12.

relation between the subjects. In the dynamics of the interactions in the digital environment, reactions-responses are not always verbalized. One can see that in the commentaries some reaction-responses of the interlocutors are in the form of likes and laughs. Despite this specificity, I will rely on the verbal materiality of the commentaries.

The entire sequence of commentaries agrees with the valorization that the image presented by the author of the post does not correspond to what the members of the LGBTQIA+ community consider as a *bear* body. The speaker in commentary 1 states that it is by posts such as these that some gays from “Fortal” (short form used to refer to the city of Fortaleza) post photos with similar bodies (lean/buff/healthy) on the social network *Twitter* self-denominating *bear*. This commentary makes reference to the case of a young gay who, with a healthy body and with (some) hair, posted some time back a photo on the said social network affirming that he was becoming a *bear*. That fact had huge repercussions on the social networks and generated immense debate about who could be or not be considered a *bear* in the gay community. In bringing this reference to light, the author of commentary 1 disapproves of the idea that a *standard* body with (some) hair can be identified as *bear*, assuming, thus, the same ironic tone of the author of the post.

On making this evaluation, commentary 1 expresses a reaction-response of agreement that is materialized verbally in commentary 2: “has a beard so he’s bear.” It is also worthy noting how the gay community has been using terms in the feminine genre to identify themselves, subverting the order of masculinity, so valued by some segments of the community, as pointed out by Saraiva, Santos and Pereira (2020). The terms “the (gendered inflection female) gay” (commentary 1), “ursah (gendered inflection female)” (commentary 2), “the gays” and “bears” (commentary 4 both gendered inflection female) demonstrate the use of this form of language as a positive valorization of femininity. As language is related to social reality (Bakhtin, 1986a),<sup>30</sup> it is possible to understand that there is a demand for the legitimization of the feminine in the communicative practices among Outing gays as a resistance movement against the exclusively masculine that, as Carrara and Simões (2007) point out, envision the category of *viado* as inferior in the Brazilian homosexual scene.

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<sup>30</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.



Commentary 2 also evidences the fact that, in the attempt to demonstrate another masculine trait, many gay men have been using beards as a marked bodily feature. However, the presence of facial hair, for the author of commentary 2, would not be sufficient for gay men to be able to be considered *bears*. It evidences, however, the opposition hairy/hairless as a central point in the dispute for the meanings in this interaction. To what it seems, *standard* gay men are not confused in any way with the *bear*, when they are hairless and consequently able to be evaluated as less masculine. The scenario gets complicated, however, when the *standard* body grows hair in an attempt to produce semiosis with a masculine trait that before was inherent to the *bear* body. This is such the case that commentary 4, through the expression “standard gay thinking they’re bears” (gendered inflection female), mocking the idea that *standard* gay (as represented in the photo of the post), for having a beard or some body hair, can be considered *bear*.

In counterpoint to the valorizations evidenced in the post and in the sequence of commentaries 1, the sequence of commentaries 2, through commentaries 1 and 2, another point of view on the topic is brought to light. However, this point of view produces a dispute with commentary 3, as seen in the following.

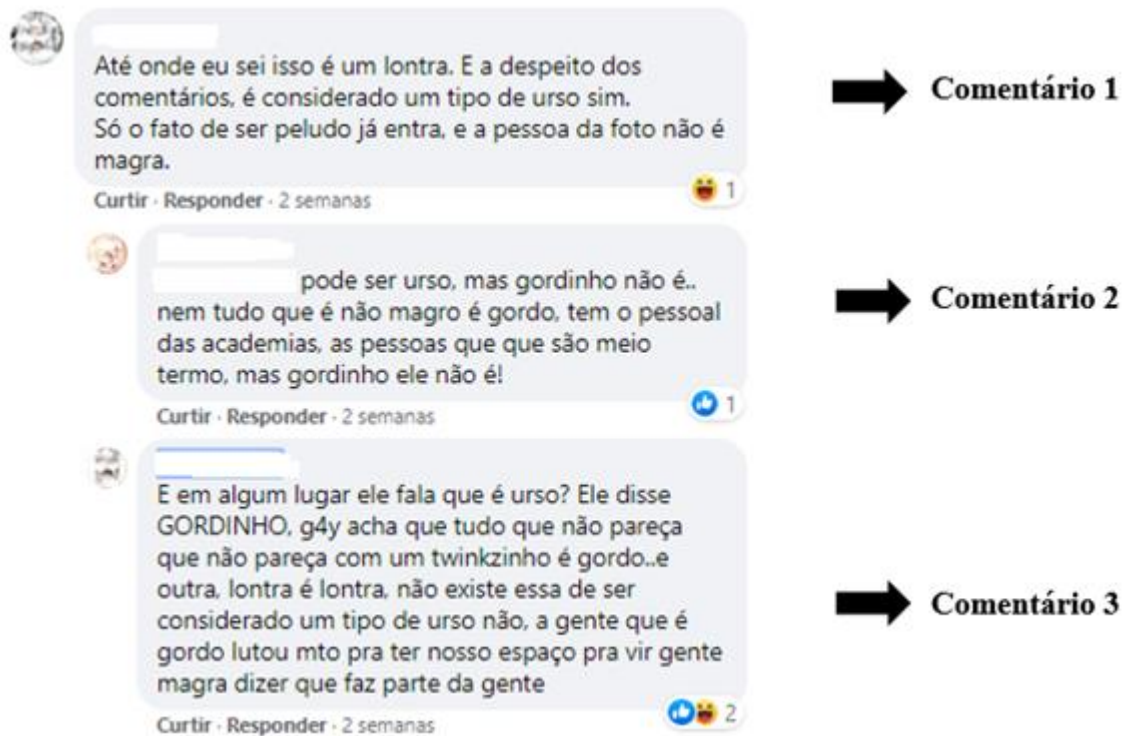


Figure 3: Sequence of commentaries 2. Source: personal archive<sup>31</sup>

The author of commentary 1 states that the man represented in the photo of the post (Figure 1) is “an otter.” Notably, in the context of the LGBTQIA+ community, the otter body, for presenting some body hair and/or beard, enters into dispute wanting to be considered a bear type, in spite of the fact that he is not fat (Rios, 2018). Next, the author adds, in dialogical relation of disagreement with the sequence of earlier commentaries, the otter “is considered a type of bear, yes.” Furthermore, he states that “Just for being hairy he belongs. And the person in the photo is not lean.” The statement that the mere fact of being hairy can already identify someone as a *bear* is the necessary counterpoint for us to understand that this category is being contested by the *standard* body such that the previously

<sup>31</sup> Commentary 1 – As far as I know this is an otter. And despite the commentaries, it is considered a type of bear, yes. Just for being hairy he belongs. And the person in the photo is not lean. Commentary 2 – he might be a bear, but chubby he’s not, there are those gym rats, the people who are midway, but chubby he is not! Commentary 3 – In some place does he say he’s a bear. He said CHUBBY. Guy thinks anything that doesn’t seem like a little twinkie is fat. And another thing, an otter is an otter, that doesn’t exist being considered a type of bear, we who are fat struggled a lot to carve out our space to have some skinny one to say they are one of us.

attributed meanings for *bear* are going through a revision, and the presence of hair, once again, is a determining factor for this change. The fact of being predominantly fat and having body hair, as Rios (2018) describes, seems no longer to be the predominate binomial for the author of commentary 1.

Commentary 2, in its turn, reinforces the evaluative position of commentary 1 through the expression “he might be bear, but chubby he’s not.” The speaker accepts that the man represented in the photo (Figure 1) is a *bear*, perhaps for having (some) body hair, but refuses the idea that he is fat. This interaction, once again, points out that the presence of hair can really define a *bear* body, independently from being fat or lean/buff/healthy, that is “a gym rat” in a general way, in the words of commentary 2 author.

The comment 3 author, in his turn, is from all evidence, a gay fat man who identifies as a *bear*. In this sense, he responds to the previous commentaries from a place from which, although not being able to say with certainty, the other interlocutors do not participate. Obviously, each human being, in their individuality, occupies a unique and unrepeatable place in the world of life (Bakhtin, 1993).<sup>32</sup> However, this does not impede the LGBTQIA+ community to create groups by identification and due to the necessity of resistance. Permeated, thus, by the morphological characteristics of the body of his group, the author of commentary 3 states that “an otter is an otter, that doesn’t exist being considered a type of bear, we who are fat struggled a lot to carve out our space to have some skinny one say they are one of us.”

The author of the commentary 3 explicitly belonging to the category of *bear* body is evidenced by the use of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our.’ This commentary, unlike the two previous ones, evaluates that the main morphological characteristic of the *bear* body is fatness and not the presence of hair. In fact, the author of the commentary emphasizes that the category struggled a lot to carve out space in the LGBTQIA+ community, to have their bodies be seen as desirable, combatting the hegemony of the attraction to *standard* bodies. Given this evaluative positioning, we perceive that the center of the dispute of meanings about the male homosexual body characterized as *bear* is dislocated from the opposition

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<sup>32</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

hairy/hairless to the opposition fat/not fat as the marked characteristic. We can suggest that, on appropriating hair as the element that can produce semiosis with masculine traits, the *standard* body demands a response/protest from the heftier homosexual, to use the words of Rios (2018), in understanding that the *bear* body is identified, above all, by being fat.

As one more example of the dispute for meanings in relation to the *bear* body, I analyze the next and last sequence of commentaries.

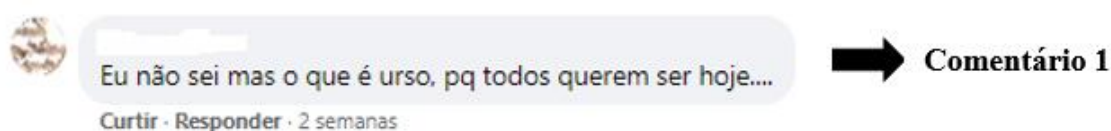


Figure 4: Sequence of commentaries 3. Source: personal archive<sup>33</sup>

The sequence of commentaries 3, which also responds to the post, is composed of only one commentary, since up to the date of the constitution of the *corpus* there was no other response to it. In it, the speaker affirms that “I don’t know what a bear is anymore, cuz everybody wants to be one nowadays.” The expression of the author of the commentary can be interpreted as a criticism of *standard* body type gays who want to be *bears*, reinforcing, once again, the possible positive aspect of the masculine traits represented by the category. There is the desire, however, in the evaluation by the author of the commentary, of all gay men to be *bears*, especially the *standard* body type gays, as represented in the photo of the post (Figure 1). In a certain way, this desire to want to be *bear*, in a critical tone in the commentary above, is, in my hypothesis, an example of the attempt of the members of the LGBTQIA+ community to distance themselves from the stigmatized category *viado*, identified as effeminate. “Everyone wants to be [bear] nowadays” may be a response to the prejudice and the discrimination that the LGBTQIA+ community confronts in their day-to-day lives in Brazilian society, and which is experienced, as Butler (2004) points out, in their own bodies.

<sup>33</sup> Commentary 1 – I don’t know what a bear is anymore cuz everybody wants to be one nowadays...

From the reading of these sequences of commentaries, the following type of question can emerge: ultimately, can a hairy and lean/buff/healthy gay be considered a *bear*? The different responses analyzed up to this point suggest the understanding of what the body, in the context of gender and sexuality studies from a dialogical perspective, despite its undeniable materiality, is constituted by social processes that, in the words of Bakhtin (1990),<sup>34</sup> give it shape and, therefore, determine and construct it in relation to the meanings socially shared with others. By implication, we can affirm that the bodies are constituted by the imprinted social valorizations in the semiotic material of the word, as Bakhtin (1993)<sup>35</sup> highlights. In this way, to be or not to be a *bear* has nothing of essentialism, attributed once and for all, but a production of meanings that are always in dispute.

Therefore, presenting how the disputes of meaning involving the homosexual male body is made concrete in language practices in *cyberspace*, it is possible to reaffirm that the *bear* body is an object of discourse and is at the center of a dispute that seeks to re-signify it, broaden it, to also identify gays as *standard* body types. This struggle happens through the presence of other voices who dispute the meanings regarding this topic. The other –*bear/not bear* – is crucial so that there are the necessary tensions in the development of (new) meanings. In the relation to different points of view about the object of discourse, it is possible to reverberate how we are or are not in relation to the semiosis that our body represents in the world of meanings in which we live. Despite seeming an obvious finding, the relation to the other gives the necessary finishing to what we can interpret, through the dialogical lens, the behavior of the language that, in the final analysis, is an interpretation of how human beings act and interact from their actions in the world, as Bakhtin reminds us: “for to *be* in life, to be *actually*, is to *act*” (Bakhtin, 1993, p.12; emphasis in original).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For reference, see footnote 9.

<sup>35</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

<sup>36</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

## Final Remarks

In this article, I analyzed the disputes of meaning involving the homosexual male body characterized as *bear*. To sum up, we can observe that the dispute for the meanings are consisted in the opposition hairy/hairless and fat/not fat. There is a pervasive view that the gay man with a *standard* body type and hairy can be considered as *bear*, regardless of his weight, which demonstrates that the *standard* is appropriating body traits from the *bear* body to produce semiosis informing that the *bear* type can be considered positive – the traits of masculinity conferred through hair. Parallel to this, it disputes the idea that the *bear* can only be those who are fat, diametrically opposed to the body of “gym rats.” However, this position generates protests, almost always in an ironic and critical tone, from those who defend that *bears* represent the resistance movement for a category that would include only fat bodies.

In the face of this discussion about the disputes of meaning involving the homosexual male body characterized as *bear*, I argue for the theoretical-methodological contribution of DDA to interpret issues related to the body in the context of gender and sexuality studies and unveil how the disputes of meaning are materialized in the discursive interactions. Therefore, this work is presented as an example of a dialogic analysis regarding a very specific point in the broader context of gender and sexuality studies – the disputes of meaning of the homosexual male body categorized as *bear*. Its fundamental importance is in provoking other reflections on the topic and advancing the very concept of the body in the light of Bakhtin within the context of gender and sexuality studies and consequently interpretation of the discursive interactions within and outside of *cyberspace*.

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## Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.



## Review I

FAVORABLE for publication, given that

- 1) the title properly reflects the subject of the article;
- 2) the objectives of the work are clearly defined, compatible with the theoretical-epistemological-axiological field, and are effectively addressed in the development of the article;
- 3) author demonstrates knowledge of a current and relevant bibliography, compatible with the proposal and appropriate to the theoretical field in which the work is situated;
- 4) the work is very well-written, both from a textual point of view, and its theoretical-methodological treatment;
- 5) the work satisfies the issue of originality of the discussion. The sphere of activity in which the production of utterances analyzed are situated presents the dispute of meanings in cyberspace, in a specific community, and alluding to the valorizations that are within and outside of the community itself.

The suggestions in the reviewed/attached text refer to requests for conceptual explanation, correction of one bibliographic reference and clarification about the translation of Russian terms. Given the relevance of the journal and the strong impact of its publications, it would be very important to take these into consideration.

APPROVED WITH SUGGESTIONS

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## Review II

The article “The dispute around meanings regarding the homosexual male body characterized as bear: an example of dialogic analysis” discusses, from the perspective of Dialogic Discourse Analysis, how the homosexual body is valorized in a Facebook community, which is very relevant to dialogic studies, given that works proposing similar endeavors in this field of studies are rare here in Brazil. Although the author does not use the notion of open controversy, which would be great for the object studied, the work has notable theoretical-methodological and analytic quality.

The author constructs the issue, presents the objective in the Introduction, situating well, so to speak, the discussion about the homosexual body and points out the theoretical basis on which the work will be developed. For this reason, the article articulates well all the elements necessary to achieve the objective proposed, constructs a well-paved methodological path and points out the reasons for the choices by the Facebook community, whose posts and commentaries become the object of analysis. Moreover, the self-ethnographic method is indicated and justified.

This methodological path is carried out from a consistent and current theoretical basis, both in reference to the authors of dialogical studies and those that study gender and the homosexual body. Although the theoretical discussion is very well placed, I suggest, for future works in which the dispute of meaning of the same object is addressed, working with

Bakhtin's controversial dialogism, staged in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, in which he addresses hidden and open polemic. I believe that the notion better aids in understanding the discursive phenomenon similar to this.

The text is structurally and linguistically appropriate to what is proposed, but could use a final revision to revisit a problem, which I highlighted in yellow. In addition, there is a reference cited missing: (FARRACO, 2017, p.22), p.7.

Therefore, my decision is FAVORABLE to accepting with restriction the article in question.  
APPROVED WITH SUGGESTIONS.

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### **Research Data and Other Materials Availability**

Data cannot be made publicly available as detailed in this paper's methodology section.