ORIGINAL ARTICLES

Virtual LGBTI+phobia: notes on an ethnography in virtual communities on Facebook

LGBTI+fobia virtual: notas sobre uma etnografia em comunidades virtuais no Facebook

LGBTI+fobia virtual: notas sobre una etnografía en comunidades virtuales en Facebook

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses LGBTI+phobia in virtual environments, based on the virtual ethnography of two virtual communities on Facebook, "Brasil sem ideologia de gênero" ["Brazil without gender ideology"] and "Não à ditadura *gay*" ["No gay dictatorship"]. The silent observation (lurking) occurred between 2018 and 2019, in 75 posts. This was followed by a script to identify the characteristics of members, the interaction profile, the architecture of the communities, and the members' perception about expressions of sexuality and gender dissident of the heteronormativity. LGBTI+phobia starts to become more noticeable from hate speeches of an ultra-conservative and symbolic nature, using elements such as humor, politics, and scientific data misrepresentation, delegitimizing the existence of the LGBTI+ population, justifying the withdrawal of rights, and minimizing their agendas. The need for observation of companies responsible for these digital environments was highlighted, in addition to pointing out the need for digital literacy of the population, in order to enable them to critically and responsibly use these digital environments.

Keywords: Homophobia; Online social networking; Sexual and gender minorities; Violence; Social discrimination.

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la LGBTI+fobia en entornos virtuales, a partir de etnografía virtual en dos comunidades virtuales en Facebook, "Brasil sem ideologia de gênero" ["Brasil sin ideología de género"] y "Não à ditadura gay" ["No dictadura gay"]. La observación silenciosa (*lurking*) ocurrió desde 2018 hasta 2019, y resultó en 75 publicaciones. A esto le siguió un guión que identificó características de miembros, perfil de interacción, arquitectura comunitaria y la percepción sobre expresiones disidentes de sexualidad y género contrarias a la heteronormatividad. La LGBTI+fobia comienza a ser más notório desde que comenzó a produzirse discursos de odio de ultraconservadores y simbólicos, utilizando elementos como humor, política y ter- giversación de datos científicos, con los objetivos de deslegitimar la existencia de la población LGBTI+, justificar la retirada de sus derechos y minimizar sus agendas. Se destacó la necesidad de observación de empresas responsables de estos entornos digitales, además de señalar la necesidad de la alfabetización digital de la población, con el fin de permitirles un uso crítico y responsable de estos.

Palavras clave: Homofobia; Redes sociales en línea; Minorías sexuales y de género; Violencia; Discriminación social.

INTRODUCTION

Cyberculture is the concept that refers to the phenomenon originated by the convergence of the social with the technological, which led, therefore, to the emergence of digital technologies that establish and consolidate the coexistence between individuals and their community formations (LEVY, 1999, 2015; LEMOS; LEVY, 2010). One of the fruits of this scenario is the emergence and popularization of social networking sites, which emerged around the beginning of the 2000s, and which since then have engendered in the virtuality of the social nature of men and women, enabling and facilitating the expression of opinions and ideas of individuals who, organized in networks, create social bonds (AMARAL, 2012; RECUERO, 2009, 2011; 2012). Thus, the plurality of contents and greater diversity in the flow of opinions on numerous topics in the public sphere are highlighted, allowing for greater democratization of expressions of their views and access. The controversial side of this phenomenon, however, is that it became easier to disseminate expressions of violence, often present in speeches, facilitating possibilities inherent in the virtual world. In this work, we will discuss how this violence has been directed against LGBTI+ people (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, and intersex people), which characterizes a virtual LGBTI+phobia.

The term 'phobia' derives from the Greek phóbos (to be afraid). It consists of a state of anguish, 'fear,' something practically impossible to control. It is also a kind of 'aversion', 'lack of tolerance'. Fears are, therefore, not isolated from the social and cultural contexts of individuals but are combined with prejudices created based on what culture determines as right or wrong (SILVA; FRANÇA, 2019). The term 'homophobia' appeared in 1971 in a study by K.T. Smith that analyzes homophobic personality traits. Later, G. Weinberg defined 'homophobia' as the fear of proximity to homosexuals, or hatred of homosexuals, as an internalized homophobia (BORRILLO, 2010; SILVA; FRANÇA, 2019).

Currently, and in addition to attitudes of "extreme psychological apprehension (phobia)," homophobia is understood as prejudiced and discriminatory reactions against affective relationships between people of the same sex, reaching a personal dimension, which rejects the homosexual subject, and also a dimension culture, where rejection turns against homosexuality. In both dimensions violence can take the form of direct aggression, name-calling, physical and sexual abuse, and symbolic violence, sometimes imperceptible to its victims, being present in the structures of social and cultural meanings (BORRILLO, 2010).

Although the use of the term 'homophobia' is common, it refers to an understanding of violence suffered only, or more commonly, by male homosexuals, making other victims invisible, such as lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, intersex people, and other subjects who, for society would not be included in the normative standards of gender and sexuality (SILVA; FRANÇA, 2019). Thus, it becomes more appropriate to use a term that encompasses the plurality of this violence, from the perspective of sexual orientations to gender identities. Therefore, we opted for LGBTI+phobia.

On the internet, this type of violence, subtracted from materiality, is perpetrated from discourses motivated by intolerance, which create meanings and reinforce ideologies that endorse forms of aggression against this population. Thus, inside or outside computer screens, cell phones, etc., the consequences of this violence are a lot of pain and great suffering, with physical and mental health problems, which can, in some circumstances, lead to death (ISP, 2018; BENEVIDES; NOGUEIRA, 2018; GRUPO GAY DA BAHIA, 2020; ANTRA, 2021).

LGBTI+phobia, which occurs in environments such as virtual communities, has been the object of denunciation and mobilization by society and organized social movements. According to the National Center for Reporting Cyber Crimes, created and maintained by Safernet, in 2020, LGBTI+phobia accounted for 5,293 of the complaints received and processed involving 2,886 pages (SAFERNET, 2021). In the LGBT+ Dossier from the Public Security Institute (ISP) in Rio de Janeiro (2018), virtual environments accounted

for 5.6% of occurrences of LGBTI+phobic crimes, being ahead of occurrences in bars, restaurants, and in educational establishments. The Dossier on murders and violence against transvestites and transsexuals in Brazil in 2018 (BENEVIDES; NOGUEIRA, 2018) reinforces this data, placing the internet in the third position of places of occurrence.

We observed that virtual LGBTI+phobia had been understood as a possible unfolding of the magnitude of LGBTI+phobic violence. In this work, our objective is to understand how these virtual spaces, mediated by technological communication devices, have been used as catalysts for discourses of an LGBTI+phobic nature.

INVESTIGATING CLUES ON DIGITAL NETWORKS – RESEARCH PATHS

The methodological approach used was virtual ethnography, which allows observing the internet as a rich and complex "cultural setting" (HINE, 2000, 2005, 2016). Thus, the internet ceases to be an abstract environment, a network used frequently and unnoticed and becomes a space for analysis of 'where you are' and 'where you are going', thus eliminating the limits between online and online. The focus of virtual ethnography is, therefore, on the experiences and processes that occur in it as a means of communication, with the online space being the scenario in which culture is created and recreated with another dynamic.

Campanella and Barros (2016, p. 5) state that the advancement of technologies that make the internet what we see today "created opportunities and challenges in the research of articulation between media and culture." In addition, the expansion of internet use has changed the ways we use public and private spaces, especially on the borders between these spaces, making it a rich source of ethnographic research. Evidently, the observation made, on or from the internet, brings with it new dilemmas, both methodological – due to the sheer amount of data it provides – and also ethical. Thus, to carry out ethnographic research on the internet, it is necessary to use new ways of thinking and acting that also challenge the field of anthropology (MILLER; SLATER, 2004; ESCOBAR, 2016; HINE, 2016; RAMOS, 2016). To Escobar (2016, p. 22): "[…] new trends in the study of technology are dramatically transforming the classic notions in the field."

This study took place between 2018 and 2019 within the scope of the research Violence in digital communication: analysis of discourses and practices disseminated on the internet about homophobia, self-perpetration of violence, cyber dating abuse, and cyberbullying. We selected two virtual communities from Facebook, which, at the time, was the most accessed social networking site and with the highest number of active users available on the internet (approximately 2,260,833 users), according to the Internet Live Stats observatory. (2018).

Considering the vast number of pages with community characteristics on Facebook, we elaborated a strategy applied in the search field of the site itself, using the terms: 'gay,' 'lesbian,' 'LGBT,' 'homophobia,' 'homosexuality,' 'gender, ' and 'homosexuality.' From there, we analyzed the retrieved results – communities, groups, commercial pages, personal profiles, and events – with the help of the Netvizz application, a Facebook extension that allows the extraction of detailed public data, namely: the number of interactions, number of members and comments in the communities (RIEDER, 2013). Netvizz is a tool cited by researchers in more than three hundred academic articles that allowed us to analyze discussions based on posts and users' feelings regarding different subjects (SOUSA, 2019). The application, however, was discontinued in September 2019, which made it possible to use it only to choose the observed communities and for some more general interaction data.

Communities were selected in a way that, in addition to establishing consistency with the objectives of the more extensive research, met the following criteria: open/public in terms of the degree of privacy, degree of updating of the posts (the date of the last post, as well as the frequency between posts, and their interactions); content of posts with a view to the perception of expressions of LGBTI+phobia. Thus, we selected the communities "Brazil without gender ideology" and "No to gay dictatorship," the first with 10,525 likes

and 10,431 followers and the second with 874 likes and 872 followers. With the help of Netvizz, we accessed data retroactive to the observation period, which also contributed to the choice of communities. "Brazil without gender ideology" had, at the time, 332 posts, with a total of 35,778 likes, 2,638 comments, and 16,574 shares; while the community "No to gay dictatorship" had 197 posts, with 628 likes, 108 comments, and 1,311 shares. We consider the expressive numbers, in terms of engagement and sharing of content, identified by us as LGBTI+phobic.

The selection of the community "Brazil without gender ideology" was opportune for the study due to the controversies present in posts about what is understood as 'gender 'ideology' by ultraconservative groups. According to Junqueira (2018), the term 'gender ideology' is a neologism arising from a deep strategy of communication and efficient persuasion promoted by reactionary and fundamentalist groups, with an authoritarian project that aims to prevent the advances of agendas related to gender and sexuality from a morally regressive agenda, represented by the image and defense of the traditional family. These groups include religious organizations, pro-family and pro-life associations and networks, sexual conversion clinics (gay cure), groups of jurists and Christian doctors and some movements, political parties, media sectors, public agents, leaders of State, etc. Among other agendas are the reaffirmation of sexual hierarchies, the re-pathologization of sexual and gender dissidence (homosexuality, transgenderism), exclusion of sex education from school curricula, and restriction of adolescents to access this information, as well as criminalization of abortion.

In turn, the community "No to gay dictatorship," although it did not deal directly with the fight against 'gender ideology,' had published content that often converged with this agenda, creating similarities with the community "Brazil without gender ideology" but with an emphasis on building a public enemy that threatens religious liberty and freedom of expression. Such enemies are contained in the group formed by radical feminists, LGBTQIA+ activists, left-wing politicians and supporters of communism, and international organizations and their allies, etc. (JUNQUEIRA, 2018; LIONÇO et al., 2018; MATTOS, 2018). The focus of the community is also directed to the political scenario, serving as a space for asserting support for extreme right candidates with speeches in defense of family and life reaffirming an authoritarian political project of power (JUNQUEIRA, 2018).

After this selection stage, we started methodological procedures for observing the communities. Since they are open, with no access restrictions or the need for authorization from a moderator, all old and current posts could be observed, although only the contents posted during the observation period were the object of this work. The research's ethical issues were discussed and observed, and efforts were made to minimize as much as possible the possibility of identifying community members when describing the posted content and the set of interactions. This was certainly one of the most complex moments of this fieldwork: after all, how to immerse yourself in an LGBTI+phobic environment, that is, hostile, from the research point of view? Understanding the ethical challenge in the path of research, we sought to support ourselves in the recommendations made by the literature (ELM, 2009; ANGROSSINO, 2009; FRAGOSO; RECUERO; AMARAL, 2013) and by the Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR, c2020).

Fragoso, Recuero, and Amaral (2013) indicate two possibilities of observation: lurking and insider. In lurking, the observation is silent, and the community is not informed that it is being observed by the researcher, while in insider observation, observation is participatory, and the researcher introduces himself and integrates himself into the analyzed community. We chose to carry out an observation based on lurking since this level of observation proved to be more relevant, given that LGBTI+phobia can present itself as sensitive content that can weaken both the informants and the researcher himself or even weaken this relationship, putting the results at risk (FRAGOSO; RECUERO AMARAL, 2013). We understand that lurking also brings some limitations to the immersion in this field of study since the researcher does not in-

teract with community members. Participant or silent observation are still challenges in the methodological process under construction. Thus, we seek to sublimate the absence of interaction with community participants, emphasizing the interactions of posts and the architecture and aesthetics of virtual communities, as they also show a field of manifestations of violence against the LGBTI+ population, disseminated on the internet, which have circulation range and incalculable consumption.

In this sense, it is worth resuming what Peirano (2014, p. 380) brings us about "empiricism" as material that we collect, and analyze and that "are not just collected data, but questions, sources of renewal." Even as silent observers, we do not fail to be hit, to some extent, and impacted by LGBTI+phobic content, especially that perpetrated from resources characteristic of virtualized environments. And we consider that this crossing can and should be the object of a dense description, as well as the virtual environment itself, which is permeated, many times, by a unique language.

We prepared and followed a script that guided the observation, involving the following questions: (1) When/where/how do researchers access virtual communities? (browser, home or public space, time and duration of observation, etc.); (2) How is the structure of virtual communities? (links and related pages, texts and/or presentation images, etc.); (3) How is the dynamic of interactions between community members? (likes, reactions, comments, posts, and shares);

(4) What are the characteristics of community members? (interaction profile, anonymity, etc.); (5) Is there a moderator in the communities? If so, how is communication with members done?; and (6) How are sexualities perceived by community members? (cursing, threats, teasing, etc.).

We started the observation on June 11, 2018 at 10 am, and ended the process on September 24, 2019 at 1 pm. The time frame was established aiming at a cycle of just over a year of interactions - which would cover significant commemorative dates in the Brazilian context such as Christmas, New Year, Carnival, and other religious holidays that could bring several scenarios to understand the interactions. Furthermore, the period was marked by the 2018 election in which we witnessed deep moral discussions, resulting from the political polarization that was established in the country. Observations were made from a researcher profile on Facebook, created to avoid bias and personalization of results. The access to the pages was via a personal computer, from a browser in invisible mode, a function offered by Google Chrome, the browser used in the study. These precautions were taken to avoid the effects of the "filter bubble" (PARISER, 2012, p. 18), which customizes based on the user's browsing profile, results, and information retrieved. We observed a total of 75 posts, of which 9 corresponded to the community "Brazil without gender ideology," and 66 to the community "No to gay dictatorship." The discrepancy between one community and another, in terms of number of posts, was not relevant with the number of interactions and level of engagement with the posted content.

ROUTES OF VIOLENCE IN VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

The main interactions carried out on Facebook, in communities of this nature, are 'likes,' 'comments,' and 'shares.' The information that feeds the communication between community members starts from the 'like' and 'follow,' and, for understanding, it is important to understand the meanings that these actions have. Santos (2014) explains that culturally, on Facebook, likes are the most common manifestation of support and alignment with ideas and opinions that are exchanged between community members. The 'like' is a "synonym of tune, friendship, adhesion, and also the inevitable popularity of the one who sends the post many times liked" (SANTOS, 2014, p. 1).

There are also interactions classified as 'reactions', such as "Love", "Grr", "Haha", "Wow," and "Sad." Reactions are functions available on Facebook, and, from them, members can express 'love,' 'anger,' 'joy,' 'perplexity,' or 'sadness,' respectively. Each of these functions expresses strength in alignment, or personalization of reaction to the post, or even disapproval. In total, in the community "Brazil without

gender ideology" there were 393 interactions, while in the community "No to gay dictatorship" the number of interactions was 353. As likes and reactions are simpler and faster interactions, this data does not informed us a lot in qualitative terms, even because there is uncertainty as to whether all content posted in these communities is, in fact, read or watched in full.

Figure 1 – Representation of Facebook reactions[1]
Source: screen reproduction from the authors, taken from Facebook (2019).

The structure of the communities follows the standard layout of Facebook, that is, adding community values from the so-called News Feed, where each user can share photos, videos, and texts. In both communities there is an "about" field for page creation data and a statement of responsibility, among other information that is also made available. The community "No to gay dictatorship" was created on March 17, 2015 with an indication of responsibility presented by the community based on two user profiles. In addition, in the 'More information' icon, we have the following text:

> Author's statement
> NO TO THE GAY DICTATORSHIP
> [Author of the page]
> An attentive observer will notice that the "gay cause" has more and more space and greater influence in the mass media. It is often said that law is common sense. And this is entirely true. This is a simpler way of saying that law is reason, that is, it must be rational, logical, coherent. An illogical, unreasonable rule of law, contrary to the nature of things, should not oblige anyone, it should not be in the legal world or even in the world of facts. Where there is no logic, there is no right. There is a maxim according to which "those who do not live as they think, end up thinking as they live." That is to say: whoever does not guide his life according to the postulates of reason, of common sense, without realizing it, as if trapped by a numbness or annihilation of reasoning, comes to believe that it is reason to live under the yoke of instincts and passions, appetites lower sensitivity. This rule, valid for any man, is also valid for the State, since it unites the virtues and vices of its subjects. (Community "No to gay dictatorship").

The "Brazil without gender ideology" community does not have an informed creation date, although we estimate that the page was created in 2015, according to the date of the first post. Nor is there any data on page owners or moderators. In his presentation, the following text appears: "Brazil has been the only country in the world to seriously and firmly combat gender ideology. Nowhere else has there been such strong opposition. "Let's keep going!!.""

Regarding the profile of community members, we did not notice any outstanding characteristics in terms of gender, education, race/skin color, etc. Some users still have profiles without photos, or even with little personal information, which, in the post, makes identification impossible. These are not necessarily anonymous profiles, and no posts have been classified as anonymous; however, some profiles have only minimal information, using fictitious names as usernames, which are only for interactions in certain communities. Although community members are aligned with their objectives, we also observed some comments contrary to LGBTI+phobic posts, which generated controversy at times.

The pages studied have two main images: the cover photo and the profile photo. These two images seem to have the function of informing users of the main ideas and motivation of the community, serving as the first message to be disseminated.

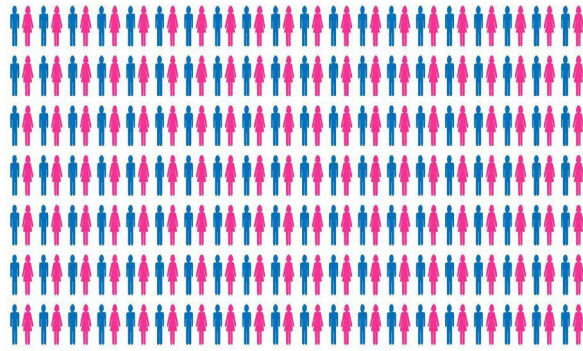1   Translation: "Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, Angry."

Figure 2 – Cover photo of the community "Brazil without gender ideology"
Source: screen reproduction from the authors, taken from Facebook (2019).

Figure 3 – Cover photo of the community "No to gay dictatorship"[2]
Source: screen reproduction from the authors, taken from Facebook (2019).

Figure 4 – Profile photo of the "Brazil without gender ideology" community[3]
Source: screen reproduction from the authors, taken from Facebook (2019).

Figure 5 – Profile photo of the community "No to gay dictatorship"
Source: screen reproduction from the authors, taken from Facebook (2019).

The "Brazil without gender ideology" community seeks to emphasize gender binarism, very present in the symbolism of the colors blue (male) and pink (female), both in the profile picture and in the cover photo, in which this objective is made explicit with the presence of male and female symbols, alluding to a single framework of possible gender and sexuality. The affirmation of masculinity and femininity, based on stereotypes, symbols, and socially constructed marks, are articulated with a rebiologizing and essentializing premise of the conceptions of bodies, and also of a 'natural' composition of the family. What is different from these conceptions tends to be pathologized, what Louro (2018) calls "pedagogy of sexualities" a subtle, discreet, continuous, but almost always efficient and lasting process of disciplining bodies, expressively carried out within the scope of the school, but also produced in other institutions, such as family, church, media and laws (JUNQUEIRA, 2018; LOURO, 2018).

The images of the community "No to gay dictatorship" associate the LGBTI+ movement with a type of authoritarian, oppressive movement analogous to a political and religious dictatorship, as stated in the

2   Translation: "ALERT! Religious freedom threatened - Gay dictatorship in Brazil - Vote against say NO!"

3   Translation: "BRAZIL - WITHOUT GENDER IDEOLOGY"

cover photo text, "Threatened religious freedom – Gay dictatorship in Brazil – Vote against say NO!," which endorses the construction of an 'enemy', as explained by Junqueira (2018). The images of this community retain a degree of symbolic violence that not only discredits the advances in human rights of LGBTI+ people, but also implies an inversion of values with the noun "freedom," a basic word for this movement that, in fact, seeks the right to express itself. freely express sexual and gender diversity. As can be seen in Figures 3 and 5, the banners used, which repress, silence, or even suffocate, have the colors of the LGBTI+ pride flag – a symbol of a struggle, which represents, based on its colors, life, healing/health, sunlight, nature, art and spirit (REIS, 2018). That is, meanings that are totally contrary to what is postulated by the virtual community, which subverts this symbol to a level that is completely opposite to what its historical meaning represents.

In addition to the presentation images, the main page of the communities has a list of other pages, reported as related or followed. During the observation period, the community "Brazil without gender ideology" followed only one page, "RJ against gender ideology." The community "No to gay dictatorship," in turn, followed pages whose content of an ideological nature endorsed the purposes of the pages observed in the research, affirming political positions and supporting the functioning of the network. In addition, it was common to observe content with posts created by related pages, although not exclusively. Another element that drew attention were the images and videos posted on the home page of the communities, serving as a kind of 'shop window.' These are images and videos that reinforce the page's ideological discourse, from political party preferences to memes.

Regarding the written posts, the elements resulting from both communities converge towards the discourse of the primacy of 'heteronormativity,' a term coined by Michael Warner in the 1990s, which refers to the normative function of heterosexuality, chosen as a norm, standard, or the 'normal,' based on the hierarchy and judgment of all other expressions of sexuality. It is a hegemonic social pattern of sexuality accepted in today's society (JUNQUEIRA, 2018; SOUZA; SILVA, 2011; PRADO, MACHADO, 2012; SOUZA et al., 2015). Rios (2007, p. 33) defines heteronormativity as "a system where heterosexuality is institutionalized as a social, political, economic and legal norm."

In the community "No to the gay dictatorship" the discourse is articulated around the argument that the LGBTI+ movement would promote, in the name of sexual and gender freedom, oppression of religious freedom, understood here as religious institutions and values that condemn sexual practices against heteronormativity. This discursive architecture thus creates a monolithic, simplistic view of both the concept of freedom and religiosity. The "Brazil without gender ideology" community, in turn, is a forum for discussion that brings together defenders of the traditional family, fighting thus the supposed 'gender ideology.' Thus, their posts do not emphasize gender as a sociocultural factor, but rather as a natural and biological characteristic. In this way, the posts were dedicated to refuting what is understood as 'gender ideology', which the LGBTI+ population would be committed to inserting into the national and world political agenda. In both communities there is a conspiratorial tone based on a narrative of combating an 'evil' (author's emphasis) that threatens the traditional structure of the family, the education of children and adolescents and society.

The dynamics of the interactions of both communities, but more frequent in the "Brazil without gender ideology" community, included video postings, journalistic texts, academic articles and summoning of specialists and institutions that pronounce on the discussed themes, as a way of supporting the proposed arguments. According to Junqueira (2018) and Lionço et al. (2018) it is a common feature of anti-gender discourses to refute gender studies with speculation, delegitimizing the scientific rigor of these studies, reversing their meanings based on discursive strategies. Some institutions, such as the Medical Association for Diversity, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Association of American Pediatric Physicians and the University of California, are mentioned in the posts.

In a post made on August 7 in the community "Brazil without gender ideology," this type of interaction was well evidenced and received a total of 133 comments by the final date of observation – the highest number of comments we noticed during the observation. The post did not bring any element that differed from the others, however, one of the comments prompted a long discussion. In the comment, one of the members questions the reason for the disagreement about the 'gender theory' since Facebook allows each comment posted to be answered individually - the comment in question received approximately 46 responses from the total number of comments contained in the publication. No other observed post received this audience, a fact that caught our attention in this interaction specifically. The discussion that followed was initially answered by the community itself, in the figure of the moderator. However, the discussion has deepened specifically between two users, in an exchange of messages that begins in a cordial way, and continues, gradually, evolving into a more combative. In the flow of messages, links were exchanged that referred to academic articles retrieved from scientific databases such as PubMed/Medline and SciELO, and also to institutions defended as 'scientific', forming a set of arguments that disputed truth value and scientific status. However, in a more accurate examination of these interactions, we observe that some of the institutions mentioned are linked to religious organizations with a strong presence in the discussion on gender and sexuality, in general with ultraconservative positions. The following are some of the comments extracted from this discussion:

User A: *Why don't you agree with GENDER THEORY?*

Brazil without gender ideology: Because it is a theory and does not require mandatory agreement. The other point, even more important, is that it is a theory that has no support in reality, therefore, it is totally ideological. Its roots and propagators are very clear about this. It is a theory that tries to dilute the person's identity; which says there is no definition of "gender" and intends to "overthrow binary sex." This is pure ideology. Now, if nobody is nothing, how dare they categorize the "nothings," the "blank pages"? Gender ideology is a theory that snubs the truth.

User B: *Basically, gender ideology says that biology doesn't matter, it doesn't matter what science says about sexuality, what matters is how a person feels. Today Joãozinho feels like a woman and society must treat him like a woman. If tomorrow, Joãozinho feels like a man again, that's fine, society has to adapt to Joãozinho's feelings.*

User A: *Brazil WITHOUT gender ideology. You are very wrong about what gender theory says, there are several scientific articles on the subject, I suggest a reading on the subject. For example, see what the American Academy of Pediatrics says:* https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Confusion-In-Children.aspx?fbclid=IwAR1JWXIvayoonRSIRVmH1nQB-DerW4oFWPJoQ0mRtn8otBua5Du7YpJSqFyA.

User A: *You are wrong about the topic, there are several scientific articles on the topic, try to get better information. Real information does not come from a priest and a pastor.*

User C: *[...] why do you agree with the GENDER IDEOLOGY?*

User A: *[...] because it is a science proven by several studies. I never found any serious studies that went against GENDER THEORY. Because the human being is much more than xx and xy. Just for that.*

User C: *By several studies? Which studies? The ones you sent prove absolutely nothing, it was just a more sophisticated way of saying that human beings are more than xx and xy, without any scientific backing and the American Association of Pediatrics has already positioned itself against gender ideology.* https://padrepauloricardo.

org/blog/associacao-americana-de-pediatras-fulmina-ideologia-de-genero?fbclid=IwAR0JdcX2JA_PUBxmtt-5OBd-jbpoT6G5_uNbqedtDQMXR6mtI5djYml245M.

Usuário A: *[…] American College of Pediatricians that this priest spoke about is not the association of American pediatricians. In fact, they are fundamentalist bigots who left science and founded this association that does not represent American doctors. Just check the association's values on the association's page.* (Community "Brazil without gender ideology").

In the same way that medical-scientific organizations are mentioned for the purpose of legitimizing LGBTI+phobic arguments, others are mentioned as complicit in the supposed implementation of 'gender ideology', or agendas are read as favorable to the LGBTI+ movement. We observed a more combative discourse in relation to Rede Globo, although other international organizations were also mentioned, such as the United Nations (UN), Unesco and the World Bank, endorsing what we identified earlier – the construction of an enemy.

Figure 6 – Community "Brazil without gender ideology" Source: screen reproduction from the authors, taken from Facebook (2019)

Figure 7 – Community "No to gay dictatorship" Source: screenshot from the authors taken from Facebook (2019)[4]

Most of the time, LGBTI+phobic discourses were presented in relatively subtle ways, much more in defense of an agenda and in proposing discussions, than in the form of explicit verbal aggression, threats, contempt, or desire for annihilation. A resource used in some posts that demonstrate this relative subtlety was the use of humor, very present in communication in virtual communities, in the form of memes, which use videos or moving images (gifs).

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4   Translation: "Do not show this brochure out of respect to children watching at home."

Figure 8 – Community "Brazil without gender ideology"[5]
Source: Facebook (2019).

Figure 9 – Community "Brazil without gender ideology"
Source: Facebook (2019).

In both communities, posts with a threatening tone, such as name-calling or more explicit offenses, were less numerous, which highlights a more subtle form of construction of the LGBTI+phobic discourse. In the posts made directly by the administrators of the communities, there were no direct offenses but moral and ultraconservative criticism, as well as the summoning of conspiracy theories. We noticed more direct offenses only in the comments of the posts that directed aggression towards figures in the political and scientific universe known for their agendas and their studies on topics such as the defense of the human rights of LGBTI+ groups and women.

> Comment 1: MY DOG'S POOP IS WORTH MORE THAN THEM! ("Brazil without gender ideology" community)
>
> Comment 2: No to abortion. (Community "Brazil without gender ideology")
>
> Comment 3: WHAT IF YOU HAD BEEN THE ABORTED?
> Response to Comment 3: [...] if it had been them, the world would be a better place.
> Response to Comment 3: [...] they weren't born, they were squeezed, they are society's boils. ("Brazil without gender ideology" community)
>
> Comment 4: Disgusting scrotums. (Community "Brazil without gender ideology")
> Comment 5: Garbage. ("Brazil without gender ideology" community)
>
> Comment 6: Cynics, cowards, and hypocrites! How can anyone vote for this guy? ("Brazil without gender ideology" community)
>
> Comment 7: Devil's dung puppets. ("Brazil without gender ideology" community)

The interaction of members of these communities does not only reveal hate speech directed against LGBTI+ people, but also the aggressive and bellicose face of ongoing conservative agendas in the country's legislative power. Although there are some singularities, the boundaries between both virtual communities are marked by few differences since the narrative resources used are basically the same, that is, political ideologies, scientific relativization, and activation of moral panics, in addition to creating conspiracy theo-

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5   Translation: "I am the grey matter and have an answer to any question.
Why, in Brazil, a man at the age of 21 can have surgery to changer sex but cannot have vasectomy.
Wait a second my dear"

ries. These discourses amplify LGBTI+phobic violence and must be observed and faced not only by LGBTI+ individuals but by society as a whole.

HATE ON THE INTERNET AND ITS DISCOURSES

The internet has served as a stage for hate movements to articulate in order to disseminate ideas and utter attacks on human rights by taking advantage of posting facilities and anonymity. The practicality of production, the sharing of content, and the speed with which this occurs make it difficult to treat 'LGBTI+-virtual phobia', as well observed in our research, even for the law (MAYNARD, 2013; MOREIRA; BASTOS; ROMÃO, 2012). Chetty and Alathur (2018) admit that the advances made on the internet have brought benefits to society, such as new forms of sociability and greater access to information. However, they point out that this advance brought a dark side, which was the growth of violent speeches amplified by the internet worldwide. Feitosa and Morato (2018) understand that the freedom offered by digital networks makes the free and equal expression of thought possible for almost everyone, as immediate as the capacity for its manifestation on screen. However, this freedom brings with it the concern with the reproduction of disinformation, violence, hatred, and intolerance, that is, a device for the promotion of discrimination and offenses directed at politically minority social groups.

While fostering disqualification, inferiority and contempt for individuals or social groups, LGBTI+-phobic discourses can be characterized as hate speech, an urgent topic of our historical time (OLIVEIRA; LIMA; GOMES, 2018; CARVALHO; LIONÇO, 2019). Language, its greatest instrument, holds the power to perpetuate hate, which spreads, reaches new emitters and creates a cycle that is difficult to break, since it reproduces itself when language is replicated and shared countless times.

According to Butler (2021), hate speech attempts to subordinate the subject, creating a place of existence dependent on the calling of the other, reinvoking a position of power and domination that is reinforced at the time of its utterance. It is agreed that the insulting terms that make up these speeches are interpellated, but the power exercised there is difficult to locate and identify, given that although it originates from a subject, this subject is unlikely to initiate or end it. The discourse is, therefore, circulating, being repeated from subject to subject, operating through accumulation and dissimulation that, in the end, give strength to the injurious term. The subject who utters it is joining a series of speakers. Hence the complexity of legal treatments in order to curb hate speech, since "the legal effort to control injurious speech tends to isolate the 'speaker' as the culpable agent, as if the speaker were at the origin of such speech" (BUTLER, 2021, p. 71).

The difference between freedom of expression and discriminatory speech is tenuous, and it is in this aspect that part of the discussion on LGBTI+phobia in virtual communities is inserted. For Cazellato and Cardin (2017), the internet is a significant channel for unlimited exposure toknowledge, which reinvents the conception of citizenship and language. However, it has also become a repository of misinformation, with false, distorted and insulting content (FRANCISCO, 2004). Gabriel Giorgi (2019) makes an interesting analysis of the internet, in which he compares it to a kind of "virtual wall." In this mural, which appears to be ephemeral and residual in character, writings are sedimented, which, although destined to oblivion, end up composing a landscape of statements that swell, forming a discursive mass, sometimes anonymous, that produces a chorus effect. This is how they are regulated and normalized as an effect of accumulation, masking violence under the guise of freedom.

For Barbosa (2019), on the internet, freedom of creation, added to the speed of dissemination, creates an environment of misinformation and false news, popularly known as fake news (BARBOSA, 2019). The consequence of this is the creation of discriminatory spaces that allow the circulation of LGBTI+phobic discourses, affirmed by their oppressive, prejudiced, discriminatory, stigmatizing characteristics, restricting the rights of LGBTI+ individuals. Carvalho and Lionço (2019) observed that discourses disseminated over

the internet associate LGBTI+ subjects with criminality, sexual abuse, murders and heinous crimes, and relate them to depravity, promiscuity, sin, anti-life and anti-nature.

The use of audiovisual resources in posts, which mostly consist of images and videos, is the most frequent form of information exchange, with textual resources being the most common in comments. On this point, Spyer (2018) observes that the use of images and videos tends to be more widespread on these platforms, as it simplifies the understanding and expression of opinions about events, even for illiterate people. The use of images and videos makes it easier for users to show their moral values, and to make derogatory jokes about sensitive subjects.

The use of humor is common in images that soften or even disguise discrimination. According to Moreira (2019), humor, which is directly related to the sociocultural context, is commonly a reflection of a message that induces laughter, based on a playful, strange, unexpected sense about a certain event or subject. However, it also has the function of establishing a distinction between these, by exacerbating stereotypes, stigmas, and creating a sense of superiority among people.

Another important point is the architecture of platforms such as Facebook, which privileges, based on the use of algorithms, which content will be made available to its users. "Facebook monetizes its gigantic database using artificial intelligence algorithms capable of mapping the personality of users, according to platform information, with 80% accuracy" (KAUFMAN, 2019, p. 55). Each action is received by the site as a mirror of the personality and emotions of those who do it, promoting an operating methodology that segments users, even offering them advertising for shared content that establishes a connection with their affections. A distribution of categorized content is then generated, based on gender, age, education, ethnicity, personality 'deviations,' sexual, political and religious orientation (SUMPTER, 2019; KAUFMAN, 2019). Finally, what we have is the apprehension of contents more capable of confirming a bias or feeding a belief system than of informing facts and events (PARISER, 2012; SANTAELLA, 2018).

The contents are subject to the coexistence guidelines established by Facebook's "Community Standards" (FACEBOOK, c2021), and, in this sense, hate speeches are generally excluded, when reported. The question that arose, however, was to think about Facebook's ability to reveal conservative discourses, conditioned to these standards, but which still transcend what is understood as discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender. In this way, what is established is a violence perpetrated from discourses composed of ideological statements, conspiracy, or persecutory theories, by the 'subtleties' of humor, by the distortions of science, by all the aspects observed in both communities. These elements are characteristic of symbolic violence, as they create meanings, articulate spaces of power and structure a sociocultural environment that delegitimizes and makes LGBTI+ subjects invisible, causing effects that go beyond the virtuality in which they originate (BOURDIEU, 2002).

While the internet facilitates the continuous sharing of these aspects, negative stigmas and stereotypes circulate, causing damage to the health of LGBTI+ people, which can range from psychological damage, depression, and low self-esteem to heart disorders and high emotional stress. (MOREIRA, 2019). The problem is further aggravated as, at the political level, the construction of meanings forged by these discourses increases social fragmentation, distancing the LGBTI+ population from access to their rights, such as security, health, education, employment, income, and housing. Thus, this phenomenon needs attention from the competent authorities, and also from scientific communities, in order to understand its characteristics and to implement measures to face it.

CONSIDERATIONS

Any consideration of the elements analyzed in this article already runs the risk of being out of date, due to the dynamic nature of the internet. It is an environment of enormous speed of transformation, in which

many of the analyzed elements had already undergone modifications during data analysis and writing of this article. Facebook, which at the beginning of the study was the main site used, began to share protagonism with other platforms, such as Instagram and WhatsApp, which, although belonging to the same company, have a different interface and different communication dynamics.

This speed of transformation of the internet is also closely related to the advancement of the LGBTI+ movement agenda, which also uses the internet as a space for articulating and providing information about the rights and demands of these subjects. As a result, we have the opportunity to learn about issues surrounding minority groups and broaden the scope of the discussion beyond the traditional boundaries of academic and political fields. A certain rupture in communication is observed, facilitated by the internet, which allows complex discussions to reach less well-off strata of society, even considering the issues of digital exclusion that still persist.

However, for better or for worse, all the capital generated by the internet still remains in the hands of large business monopolies, or Big Techs, as the literature in the area has called companies such as Google and Facebook (MOROZOV, 2018). With that, there is some uncertainty about how aware these organizations are about the influence they have on sensitive agendas in society. And, given the importance that these platforms have taken on in the various dimensions of everyday life, it is clear that this is a path of no return, leaving us to adapt to the cultural changes that are established. As shown by the results of this study, the phenomenon of virtual LGBTI+phobia gave rise to a series of questions about freedom of expression and discriminatory speech. The uttered speeches are crossed by the interference of these platforms, mainly due to their algorithms and their usage guidelines that design in the public space what is considered violent or not.

The incongruity between the cultural changes brought about by the internet and the population's ability to discern its use are worrying. The discussion that takes place, not only about LGBTI+virtual phobia, but about all the expressions of violence that are perpetrated on the networks, leads us to a (re) reading of the concept of the banality of evil, by the philosopher Hannah Arendt (ARENDT, 1999). The trivialized evil once made possible, in our historical time, the rise of authoritarianism and totalitarianism that denied the existence of human beings, delegitimizing human diversity and alterity, so important in the construction of a healthy society. The trivialization of hatred, which is said in internet spaces, attacks the characteristics and values of the other, and paves the way in which violence is perpetuated – off screen and against bodies in their materiality.

According to anthropologist Debora Diniz (2020), "we are still in a moment of defining a civilizing pact of online coexistence," and this context crosses political and social dimensions of life. Therefore, it is urgent to deal with this discussion from the perspective of digital literacy, in order to include those who remain excluded from digital networks and point out the best ways of using the internet. The risk of neglecting this need is the construction of uninformative, fallacious virtual spaces, ratifiers of prejudice and discrimination that will be reflected in the face-to-face experience.

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