

Homosexual desire after AIDS: an analysis of the criteria adopted by men in the search for same sex partners

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Abstract *This article analyzes changes and continuities in partner search criteria by homosexual men considering the impact of the HIV-AIDS epidemic in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. Thus, it compares two different historical moments: between 1979 and 1981 (pre-epidemic) and 2015 to 2017 (post-epidemic). In the first period, the source incorporated 120 classified ads collected from the *Lampião da Esquina* newspaper and in the second period, the preferences and criteria used to search for partners were analyzed using geolocalized applications, based on 120 online profiles. The data show that that between 1979-1981 the search for “discreet” partners took place, while the sexual panic created in the deadliest period of the AIDS epidemic boosted the use of the Internet in search of partners less likely to be infected with HIV, the “out of the (gay) scene”. Since then, the search for “discreet and out of the (gay) scene” has consolidated itself by shaping the body’s ideals and conduct that shape the current São Paulo online sex market in which part of the homosexuals take part.*

Key words *HIV-AIDS, Internet, Male homosexuals, Hookup apps, Masculinities*

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Introduction

I'm discreet and out of the (gay) scene and its variations, is a regular introduction to online profiles of men who are looking for same-sex partners in current geolocated applications on smartphones. What is the origin of this self-definition, which also appears as the desired ideal partner? An answer to this question involves the impact that the deadliest period of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (1981-1996) had on the sexual and love life of homosexual men¹. Thus, this article aims to comparatively analyze two distinct historical moments: the first of them between 1970/1980 and the second, nowadays.

The research is based on a historical and sociological understanding of male homosexual desire. Here desire is understood as the cultural driver of the search for sexual and/or love partners. Thus, we move away from interpretations that give desire an innate, timeless, and biological character, and associate ourselves with a sociological perspective about the desire that is embedded in an already consolidated analytic line in which it is defined as socially constructed, varying historically and according to each social context²⁻⁶. In the case of male homosexual desire, we seek historical and contemporary documentary sources to understand how the individual dynamics of partner search enables us to analyze social, and therefore collective forces that shape – almost invisibly – the sphere of affections.

Among the social forces that have changed the search for partners by homosexual men that live in São Paulo, we highlight the cultural impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, not the epidemic itself, but rather the way in which it began to shape fears and desires at a time when homosexuality become almost synonymous with AIDS. The epidemic has a history, which can be divided into periods, within which we based on Pelúcio and Miskolci⁷ characterize the worst one – roughly speaking – as the years between the first officially reported case of AIDS (1981) until the invention of the antiretroviral cocktail (1996). At that time, HIV and AIDS were hegemonically understood as synonyms because of the low efficiency of available treatment. Being diagnosed as HIV positive was seen as a “death sentence”, hence the stigma of seropositivity being even greater than nowadays, something noticeable in the then prevalence of the term “*aidético*” (a negative way of calling a seropositive person).

The stigma of seropositivity is not completely overcome, but it is undeniable that the free dis-

tribution of the antiretroviral cocktail by the National AIDS Program since 1997 and the effective improvement of seropositive people's living conditions⁸ have gradually appeased the sexual panic that characterized the 1980s and the beginning of the next decade. Nevertheless, the data collected in our research indicate that the impact of the sexual panic among men from São Paulo seeking same-sex partners still continues. This continuity, we attempt to argue, is often indirect and therefore not noticeable to the individuals, which does not mean that it is something secondary or less powerful when defining the criteria used to find love and sexual partners.

In the Results and Discussion section, we will start by presenting the historical data obtained from the research on partner search classified ads in the newspaper *Lampião da Esquina* (1979-1981), a well-known publication targeted at the homosexual public that emerged after the political opening that took place in the end of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985). Next, we will analyze the profiles we have collected in recent years through one of the most popular geolocated hookup apps among men that search for same sex partners in the city of São Paulo. Afterwards, we will contrast our sources in order to identify the changes and continuities in the criteria that shape the search for partners in this city, thus bringing historical and cultural elements to understand male homosexual desire sociologically over the last decades. Finally, to conclude, we will identify some aspects that help to understand the continuing cultural impact that the HIV/AIDS epidemic bequeathed to the affective sphere of men from São Paulo.

Methodology

The study was characterized as transversal, of mixed nature, grouping methods, as well as quantitative and qualitative techniques^{9,10}. For the first moment, a documentary analysis of the columns *Cartas na Mesa* (Cards on the Table) and *Troca-Troca* (an old male childhood game in which partners switch positions in the sexual act) were used from the *Lampião da Esquina* newspaper published between April, 1978 and June, 1981.

In this step, we analyzed the 38 issues of the newspaper, including number zero. Therefore, the ads were collected from the two columns mentioned above, following the pre-delimited criteria: man, of any age group and resident in the city of São Paulo.

In the second step, which included collecting and analyzing online profiles, we used the *Hornet*[®] application as a tool to examine data from 2015 and 2016. The application functions as a georeferenced social network aimed at gay, bisexual and curious men, as the commercial interface presents it, with free and paid versions. According to data provided online by *Hornet Networks Limited*, the application brings together more than 25 million users globally, of which just over 5 million are Brazilians. We chose to use *Hornet*[®] mainly due to the wide coverage of the application in places where flirting and sexual/love searches take place among homosexual men in São Paulo, as demonstrated by Miskolci⁶, as well as the possibility of finding detailed information about the profiles without necessarily needing to obtain a paid profile.

In this step, we created a profile as a researcher within the platform to establish the field and observe how people within the above characteristics textualized the profile and visualized varied characters, images and resources. We adopted lurking¹¹ as a technique, which involves the possibility of researching in an observational and non-interactive way, collecting data from the platform that enables us to design a sample of a given population/group established online. This technique is not new to the social sciences, and can also be described as “non-participant online observation”, since the researcher does not interact directly with the interlocutors, using public data available on the profiles, in order to collect qualitative information about the sample. A total of 120 male user profiles, who were resident in the city of São Paulo, were collected.

The research was funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation and follows the ethical prerogatives established by the National Health Council¹², approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the Federal University of São Carlos.

Results and discussion

Moreno (ambiguous term that alludes to a tanned or dark-skinned person), *25 years old, discreet, handsome, wants to get in contact with young men from 18 to 23 years old who are top and discreet*. São Paulo, March, 1981. *Lampião da Esquina*, issue 34.

This is one of the partner search ads of the then newly created column *Troca-Troca*. Throughout the documentary research, we came across more than a hundred profiles similar to

the one presented. The preference for a “discreet” person, who was “young” – comprising an age group of 18-25 years old – “handsome” and “top” was usual in the ads. In addition, a large portion of the advertisers presented themselves as “discreet”, “moreno”, “handsome”, “entendido” (open-minded) and “young” (Figure 1). The average age among advertisers was 24.69 years old, which corroborates the preference for people of a similar age group or younger.

We use the terms between quotation marks for two reasons: they are emic terms, and also because later we will use them to construct analytical categories that lead to a sociological discussion of what they tell us about male homosexuality in the city of São Paulo at the time. Afterwards, by comparing the terms currently used in partner search applications, these categories will help us to understand the relational dynamics of the present.

Figure 1 shows a summary of the personal descriptions found in the partner search classified ads. There are, evidently, three descriptors that stand out in relation to the others, which are: “discreet”, “moreno” and “open-minded”.

“Discreet”, in the midst of the Military Dictatorship, can be understood as a characteristic which shows a reaction against a conservative and heterosexist society in which individuals who were interested in the same sex and had sexual relationships in public spaces sought to perform an unsuspected masculinity, that is, who did not report them as homosexuals in public spaces, seen as synonymous of heterosexuality⁶.

At first, the term also seemed to temporarily resolve the representational paradoxes available in the weekly newspapers and leaflets that circulated before *Lampião* (*O Snob*, *Le Femme*, *Os Felinos* and *Okzinho*) or by the hierarchical opposition between *bicha/boneca* (faggot/fairy) and *bofe* (rough guy), either in relation to the sexual position assumed in relationships, often established among socially identified individuals as “bottom” or “top” – the latter characteristic associated with^{13,14}.

Guimarães¹⁵ and Perlongher¹⁶ show, in ethnographic terms, that the uses and the high demand for discretion were related to hostility in public spaces towards homosexuality, whose forms of flirting and searching for partners developed by associating fear of violence and persecution, as well as people close to them eventually discovering and refusing them including friends, co-workers and family members. The searches, from 1970 to 1980, occurred in places where

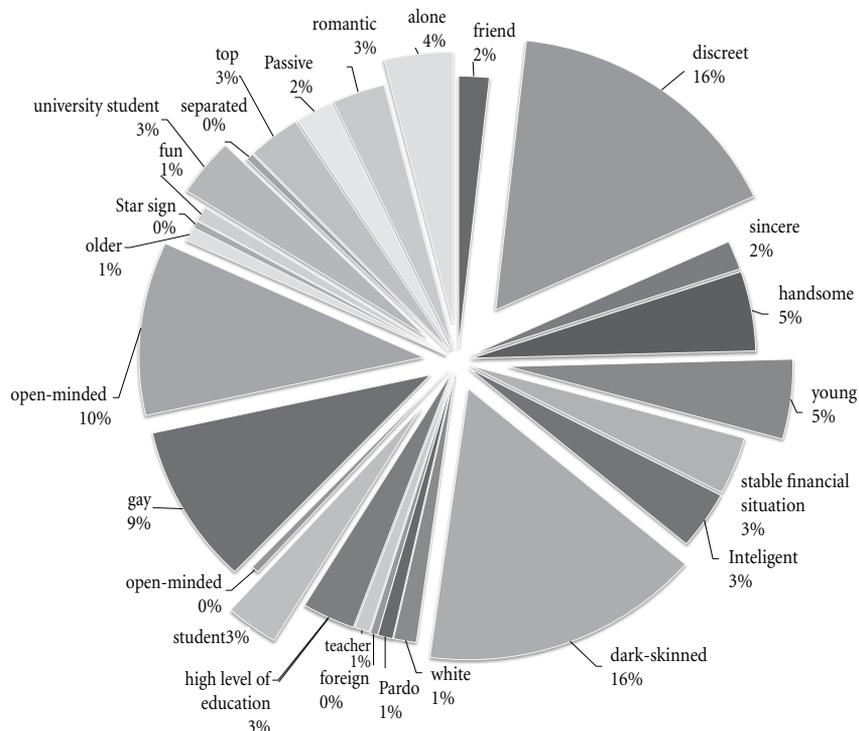


Figure 1. Personal description by categories triggered*, in absolute numbers, with repetition. São Paulo, 1979-1981.

Source: Database produced by the authors.

there was face-to-face contact, which brought together individuals from different social classes, ethnic-racial origin, among other characteristics. Public toilets, cinemas, squares, parks, parking lots and commercial streets, especially at night, became spaces where flirting took place, the so-called “cruising” places or, in other words, nice places to look for anonymous partners for casual relationships¹⁶.

There was frequent risk of violence and persecution in these spaces, as well as incisive police retaliation at the end of the military period; according to Simões and França¹⁷, since 1976 in São Paulo, nightclubs and discos catering for a diverse public, as well as bars that were found mainly in the central regions, whose proximity to the already known places used for the searches gathered a broad spectrum of homosexuals and sympathizers. These new places, segmented by social class, gender, sexuality, generation and

race/ethnicity, created new relational dynamics, attracting “onlookers”, who shared “cruising” networks, friendship and of their own codes established in the São Paulo homosexual environment^{16,17}.

It is during this period that the “entendido” (open-minded) category gained visibility. However, the “open-minded” category was not new, as it was used extensively by lesbians and homosexual men, since the 1940s, as a kind of correspondent to the “open-minded individual”¹⁵. Nevertheless, the term also evokes two other meanings, since, first of all, for many individuals who recognized themselves as desiring the same sex, the categories available seemed too coarse and derogatory, especially for men, crystallizing into vexatious nicknames such as “queen” or “faggot”. Secondly, the term “open-minded” served as a strategic category in which the aim was to break down the dichotomies between “bi-

cha/bofe” (faggot/rough guy) and “bottom/top”, apparently leveling the supposed sexual hierarchy between homosexual individuals^{13,15}.

Another prevalent category is the self-proclaimed “moreno” (dark-skinned) individuals, which could – at first sight – evoke a *concept of racialization* and, to some extent, a hybridized notion of corporality and desire. However, due to the socioeconomic characteristics of the newspaper readers in which ads were collected, that is, men with a high level of schooling and living in up market regions in the city of São Paulo, it can also be inferred that the “moreno” individuals a reference to dark hair and/or a tanned complexion, representing sensuality and a physical type popular among Brazilian professional middle classes, and not necessarily a search for a black partner.

The uses of the “Moreno” category may even be related to the then current representations of men considered attractive, often exhibited by Lampião to its segmented homosexual public, but also those that appeared in the mass media at the time, converging racialization and sexualization of bodies. Constructing the personal image is always a relational and collective undertaking, and therefore the descriptions used by the classified ads reflect a process of self-construction that goes through what is available imagetically as a reference through the mass media in Brazil, as well as the specific characteristics demanded by users of same-sex ads.

From the documentary source researched, the combination of these three descriptors – “moreno”, “discreet” and “open-minded” – enables us to understand under which intelligibilities and forms of recognition the desire between men was established. Their descriptions and preferences demanded in the ads reiterated social expectations in order to symbolically model and reproduce the valued representations about masculinity and desire. Thus, the three descriptors, in dialogue, intermediarized a language of refusal of those partners who could be publicly recognized as homosexuals – supposedly “effeminate” –, also as bottoms or as “faggots” or “fairies”, privileging “open-minded” individuals, who would possibly not be identified in the public space as homosexual, avoiding discrimination and violence.

As far as preferences are concerned, the “friendship” category also emerges, followed by the already mentioned “discreet”, which was associated with people of “all kinds” and predominantly “young”, as can be concluded in Figure 2.

The fact that preferences agglutinate a search for “friendship” reinforces our analysis of the

other descriptors triggered in the ads: that the ideal partner searched for did not only express personal tastes, but also the current social demand for discretion and maintenance of presumed heterosexuality in public spaces.

In these terms, the search for “friendship” could indicate the desire not to be publicly recognized with a partner of the same sex, which would expose their sexual orientation in daily life. There was also the incidence of the “discreet” category, almost in the same proportion as the “friendship” category, which enables us to infer that both are triggered with similar expectations regarding the ideal partner and, indirectly, the way that homosexuality was expected to live: without drawing attention in public spaces, in the family or at work.

The category “young”, on the other hand, can be understood as a representation both described and therefore embodied in the personal description of advertisers, as well as those demanded. Although the average age of men who advertised in the columns was 24.69 years old, there were many announcements from older individuals, whose ages span the generational exchanges of flirting social circles and searching for a loving relationship in the newspaper. From the point of view of relations, there were two common aspects that converged: the preference for youth and masculinity. Perlongher¹⁶ argues that the older individuals managed to circumvent the absence of a young ethos through economic capital, providing material and symbolic rewards to partners. And the partners, on the other hand, embodied by a young and masculine aesthetic, commoditized their “raw” and “authentic” masculinity – from the social imaginary to the lower classes – in exchange for economic capital.

Sexual practices and partner search among men in cultural terms entertain representations of specific sex (body) and gender (masculinities)¹⁸. Once “body” and “masculinities” acquire socially constructed meanings, there will be an ongoing process of creation and transformation of ideal types within that which is valued in the hegemonic vocabulary of available (heterosexual) masculinity¹⁹.

From the descriptors triggered by the advertisers in the newspaper classified ads, it can be observed that the representations demanded between homosexuals from São Paulo in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to construct their ideal pair, united categories such as “discreet”, “open-minded”, “moreno” and “young”, with whom they would experience unsuspected love

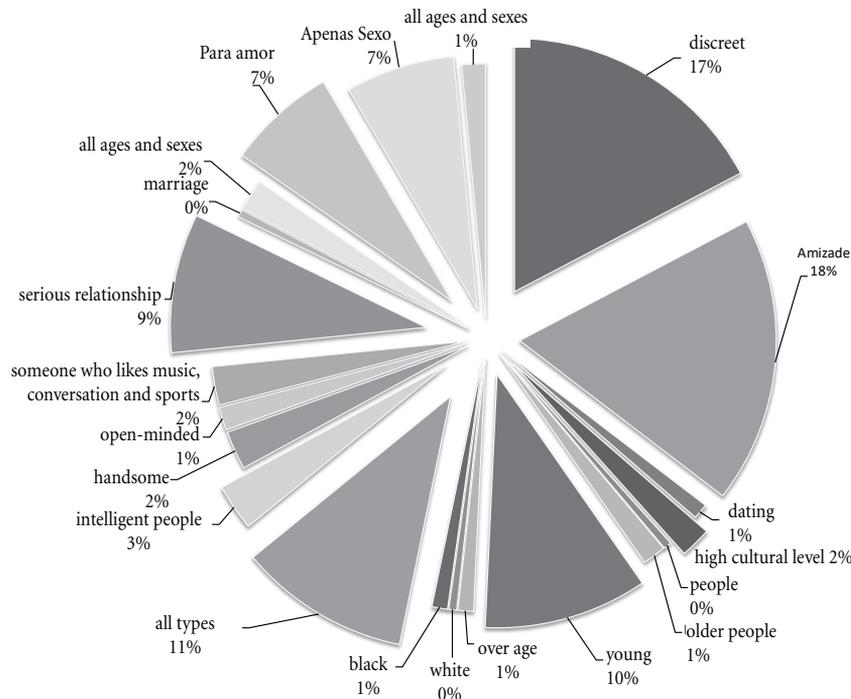


Figure 2. Preferences triggered* in classified ads, in absolute numbers, with repetition. São Paulo, 1979-1981.

Source: Database produced by the authors.

and/or sexual relationships, which could be socially seen as “friendship”.

The new digital economy of desire: “discreet”, “fit” and “out of the gay scene” [subsub-título]

I am top, 25 years old, white, 1.86 cm, 75 kg, fit and discreet. I am looking for guys who are also discreet and out of gay scene. If you're effeminate, don't waste your time! I don't reply to ghosts, send a photo! No messing around! If I don't reply, it's because I don't like you, São Paulo, December 2016, Hornet® Application.

Now, we will focus on the profiles collected during the digital media research using the Hornet® application from 2015 to 2016. Analogously to the analysis proposed for the classified ads, we are faced with demands that are continuities and ruptures regarding criteria and preferences. Starting from the personal description, the details can be observed from one of the interlocutors' profiles of the research reproduced above.

This is largely due to the format and architectural structure of the app, which allows for more characterization of the information, attempting to define imagery and subjectively its users materializing them as an online profile. From this point on, consequently, there is the convergence of objective and subjective characteristics, in which the former can be synthesized in the descriptors of “race/ethnicity”, “height”, “age” and “weight”, already pre-configured on the digital platform, leading its users to choose from the options that best match their physical and body characteristics, completing their profiles with data about themselves and assigning materiality to their digital persona. Zago¹⁸, in this regard, analyzes that the set of delimited information allows the construction of a kind of “curriculum” about the person, which involves the production of possible, habitable and negotiable bodies, masculinities and sexualities.

The subjective characterization, on the other hand, materializes through the descriptors “fit/muscular”, “discreet”, “out of the (gay) scene”,

“not effeminate” etc., whose models and parameters of representation are based on the experiences of the interlocutors with the media, experiences with other users and the adoption of body models and masculinities previously reproduced in mass and segmented media – especially in advertising and pornography targeted at homosexuals^{6,20}.

Concerning the objective descriptions made available by the applications and triggered by the users, we distinguish five groups: “race/ethnicity”, “relationship status”, “searching”, “serological status” and “profile photo” (Table 1).

First, a prevalence of self-proclaimed “white” individuals (n = 72), followed by “latinos” (n = 14) and “pardos” (n = 6) (Table 1). Differently from what happened in the classified ads – in which there was no specific criterion regarding the racial/ethnic profile with which the advertisers could be defined, prevailing the descriptor “moreno” –, there is a greater delimitation of the racial categories, encouraged by the interface of the platform that follows the North American configuration of understanding them. Regarding the differences related to the printed classified ads from the past, it can be observed that in the digital platforms pre-framing is usual, where users are placed in categories that materialize racially the body and subjectivity, racializing (or not, in the case of “whites”) corporality and desire²¹.

Secondly, many of the profiles were self-proclaimed “single” individuals (n = 94) and, to a lesser extent, those “in an open relationship” (n = 4) and “dating” (n = 4). Regarding the search, there was a prevalence of individuals who were looking for “dates” (n = 61), which included one-

night stands, followed by “friendship” (n = 16) and “dating” (n = 11). Regarding the serological status, most users preferred “do not show” (n = 67) and, among those who described their status in the profiles, a prevalence of “negative” (n = 30) was observed.

The way Brazilians show or not their serological status can be understood by contrast with the North American reality studied by Miskolci^{6,22} in which the choice of partners subsists by the serological status what sociologists such as Kane Race²³ characterize as serosorting, a practice resulting from a model of prevention focused on the individual and in absence of a universal health program such as the Brazilian one. If in the United States the description of serological status is imposed, here – where there has been decades of advertising about safe sex as general practice – it proves to be less prevalent or demanded. Nevertheless, the exposure (or not) of the serological status is not an obstacle to access the application, because this type of information is not mandatory for the personal details and, as we have seen from the data, many interlocutors chose not to state this.

This data enables us to compare the effects of the sexual panic of AIDS in contexts that do not have public and universal health treatments. Recently, the Norwegian NGO called SINTEF publicly reported the *Grindr* application for leaking information regarding its users’ serological status with the Aptimized and Localytics companies. According to a statement published by BBC Brasil in April 2018, the app “shared the user’s exact GPS location, ‘tribe’ (or gay subculture), sexual orientation, relationship status, ethnicity

Table 1. Categories expressed in the profile interface by the Hornet® application. São Paulo, 2015-2016.

Race /ethnicity	Relationship status	Looking for	Serological status (HIV)	Profile photo
Black	3 Single	92 Conversaion	8 Do not show	67 Face
Latino	14 Complicated	- Encontros	61 Não sei	1 Rosto de lado
Árab	2 In an open relationship	4 Meetings	61 Don't know	1 Profile of face
Pardo	6 Dating	4 Friends	16 Negative	30 Chest and abdomen
Asian	3	Networking	4 Positive	1 Hip (penis)
White	72	Dating	11 Negative, in PrEP*	- Hip (butt)
			Positive, undetectable	1 Back

* Pre-exposure prophylaxis.

Source: Database produced by the authors.

and telephone number". The scandal leaves no doubt that the ethic of desire in digital media is laden with personal demands, insecurity, fear of contamination – explicitly in contexts in which access to health does not come from a common public policy – market speculation and new conceptions of risk and prevention.

In addition, most of the profiles had a profile picture of the face ($n = 53$), followed by the chest and abdomen ($n = 38$) and back ($n = 6$). Thirdly, age, shows a prevalence of people in the age group from thirty to forty-five years old, the average being 39.37 years – about fifteen years more than what was found in the newspaper (24.69 years old). In these terms, a large generation difference can be observed between the two sources of research analyzed.

First and foremost, we need to consider the distinctions that cover the two media: in the late 1970s, there was a need for basic schooling in order to have access to the classified ads and also to send letters to the newspaper, which contrasts with the Brazilian reality of the period, because in 1980 the number of illiterate people amounted to 32.7 million or around a quarter of the country's population²⁴. In addition, in terms of schooling, there were severe inequalities among the five regions of the country at that time. This fact leads us to consider that, because it is the city of São Paulo, with better indicators compared to other states, data related to age may have been positive in relation to the other regions.

In the second media, there is a distinct social and historical situation, beginning with the change in the national demographic pyramid caused by the increase in life expectancy and the decrease in the number of young people in the total population. In addition, the number of illiterate people in the country was 7.2% in 2017, according to the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD/IBGE), reaching only 3.8% in the São Paulo region²⁵.

These data related to "race/ethnicity", "relationship status", "serological status" and "age", expressed in the interface of the collected profiles show a new way of describing oneself and also prove an intensification of the descriptions, from the classified ads to the applications. Eva Illouz⁴ analyzes that this process of making an online profile is the product of a meticulous evaluation of oneself and one's desire: the description requires a rigorous estimation between what is objective and what is subjective. There is no strict and explicit limit between these two fields, even though they are not, of course, separate spheres.

According to Illouz⁴, Baym²⁶ and Sibilia²⁷, on-line narratives take shape in a context from which one can be represented in many ways, whether through written language or shared visual content, as is the case with photos. The uses of these features, no longer as simple optional items available to application users, work as a kind of social imperative to successful entry into search and digital sociability, as reproduced by one of the interlocutors: *I don't reply to ghosts, send a photo!*

The symbolic value attributed to the photos allows us to create a parameter between what was described in the profile, in terms of textual language, and what can be seen and, to a certain extent, proven and made real. The image, in short, works as a "gender technology"²⁸, while intending collective perceptions and meanings of sexuality and masculinity in order to represent subjects and practices, and to assign form, content and veracity to the profiles created on-line^{4,29,30}.

Still concerning the personal description pointed out by the interlocutors, 18% were described as "top", 13% as "discreet" and "bottom", 12% as "non-effeminate" and 11% as "out of the gay scene" (Figure 3). Comparatively, the data verify continuities and ruptures concerning the once printed classified ads. From the permanences, we highlight the substantial uses of the "discreet" category which maintains the intention of avoiding association with a "feminine" performativity that would publicly show homosexuality in oneself and/or in the other.

The terms related to sexual positions gain more visibility and, in fact, become more important when selecting partners than in the past. The term "versatile", a possible contemporary form of the "open-minded", appears to a lesser extent as an apparently less hierarchical and more fluid alternative (Figure 3).

From the point of view of the grammar of desire, there are also ruptures and, considering this, the appearance of new categories, for example "out of the (gay) scene". The term, according to the literature, does not come from digital media, although it has spread from it, included in a social and historical problematic which emerged between 1986 and 1997 – a period that includes the upsurge in deaths by the HIV/AIDS epidemic^{4,30}.

Pelúcio and Miskolci⁷ argue that in the late 1980s, male homosexuality was repathologized, no longer seen as a mental illness to become an epidemiological problem. Thus, at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in mid-1981 and 1983, there was no clear knowledge of the etiol-

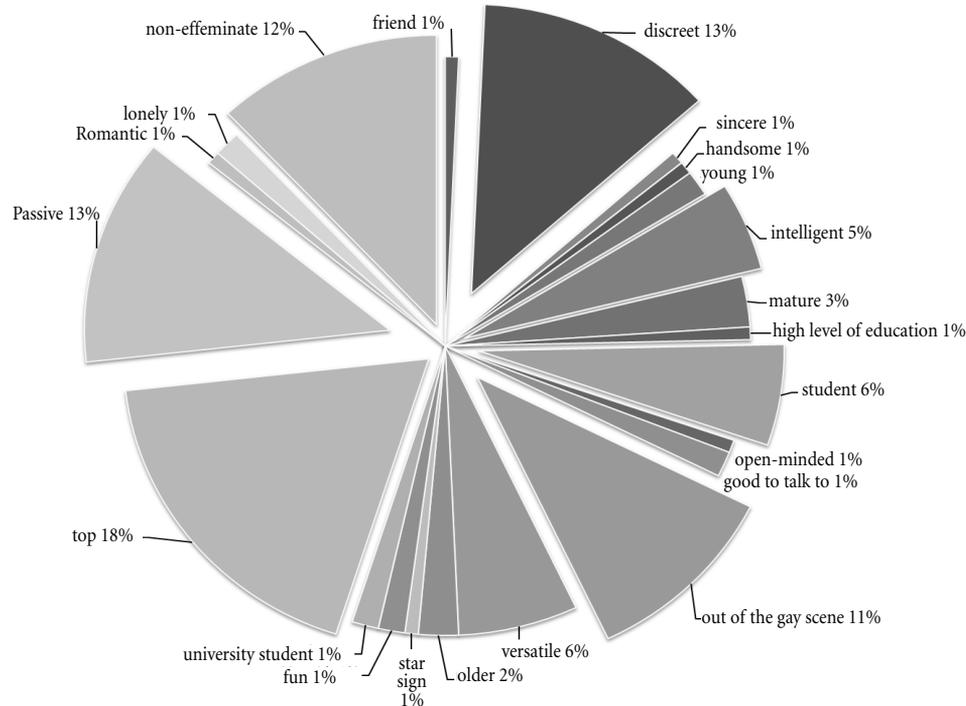


Figure 3. Personal description* expressed in the profile interface by the Hornet® application. São Paulo, 2015-2016.

Source: Database produced by the authors.

ogy of the disease, nor with regard to risk factors and probable signs and symptoms^{31,32}. Thus, much speculation about the ways of spreading HIV/AIDS was established, as well as moralizing discourses. These discourses, originating from religious backgrounds and the mainstream press, ended up creating “risk behaviours” and, at the same time, “risk groups”³¹⁻³³.

Homosexuals, prostitutes, Haitian immigrants and intravenous drug users were the first risk groups demarcated by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States. AIDS, first treated by Immune Deficiency Related to Homosexuality (or *Gay-Related Immunodeficiency* (GRID), created a generalized sexual panic, sometimes due to its own etiological ignorance and the impossibility of effective treatment, sometimes due to the exposure that the discovery of the pathology could cause, because to say you were “seropositive”, in the context at that time, would be analogous to say “homosexual”³¹.

“The emergence of a hegemonic body standard – that of the well-built, muscular man (“sara-

do”, a Brazilian Portuguese term that evokes the idea of a body strengthened through workouts, healthy and probably not HIV infected) – also dates back to this moment. Research done in different national contexts have similarly pointed out that this valuing of muscular bodies was a result of the AIDS epidemic. In fact, before drug therapies became readily available, doctors prescribed steroids and recommended work outs at the gym to avoid weight loss and motivate HIV patients to keep up a healthy lifestyle”³⁰.

The imagery of the homoerotic desire represented under the prism of the preventive model of AIDS reconstitutes the union of moral imperatives with questions about collective health, socially crystallizing the conception that corporally undisciplined homosexual individuals – read: emaciated or not within the hegemonic standards of masculinity – would be ill and possibly seropositive. On the other hand, men who engaged in sports and, in the 1980s, were part of the so-called “Health Generation” would materialize the “well built, muscular man”: “bodily discipline

involving exercises, diets and supposedly healthy habits distances these men from the ever present stereotypes of homosexuals as undisciplined, social deviants who are prone to reproachable or dangerous habits”⁶.

The new terms, collected from digital media research, reveal historical and social reasons that unconsciously induce homosexual men to seek partners with a certain profile. This new erotic regime is – on-line – a “new economy of desire”^{6,22}, whose visibility is more noticeable when one analyzes the descriptors and the categories produced over the last three decades, not only in terms of “personal description”, as we saw earlier (Figure 3), but also in relation to potential partner demands, described hereafter as “preferences” (Figure 4).

The preferences most triggered by application users are: “discreet” (17%), “top” (11%), “non-effeminate” (10%), “secrecy” (8%), “out of the (gay) scene” (7%), for “friendship” (7%) and “male” (6%) (Figure 4). Even though 30

years have passed since the analyzed printed ads, there are still criteria for selecting partners that reinforces the maintenance of presumed heterosexuality in public spaces. The search imperative continues to be the distance from probable stigma, whether by sharing socially recognized codes and forms of desire or by refusing people with whom the individuals would be read publicly as homosexuals.

Although more incipient, compared to the classified ads, there was the incidence of “dating” searches, which were associated – in the newspaper ads – with the demand for “serious relationships” and “love”, and in the application with the demand for “secrecy” “older people” and “someone who likes music, sports or conversation”. This inference, taken from the descriptors and the mean age in the two contexts, leads us to the realization that the demand for stability and lasting relationship adds up to an increase of 14.69 years in relation to age, whereas the profiles in the application are often for people over 30 years.

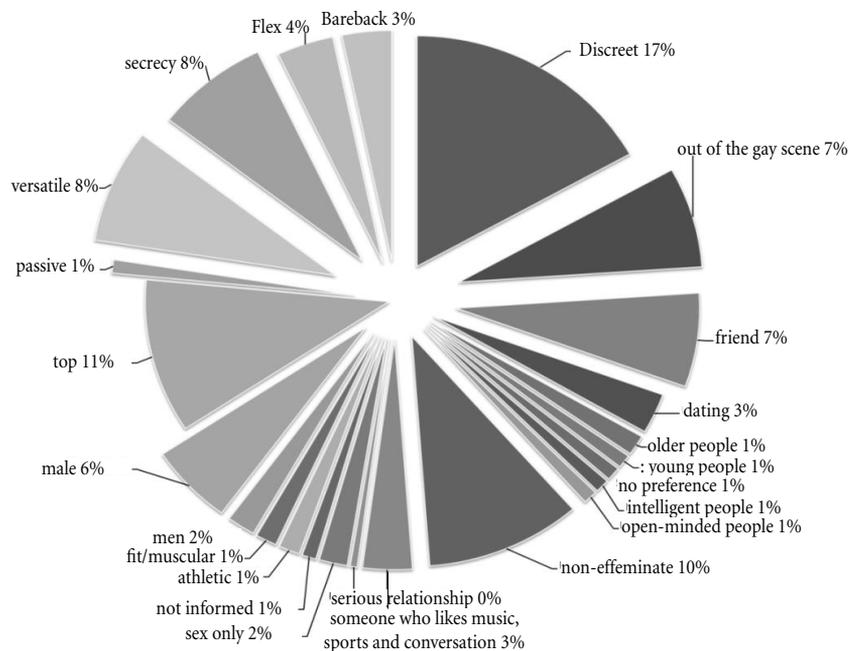


Figure 4. Preferences expressed* in the profile interface by the Hornet® application. São Paulo, 2015-2016.

Source: Database produced by the authors.

Final considerations

Historically, at least in the periods and environments analyzed, the way São Paulo men search for same-sex partners reveals an economy of desire shaped by expectations of collective acceptance. Thus, they seek both a partner and a relationship that would allow them to move away from social stigmas, which create an interactive logic in the applications marked by competition for socially recognized profiles as well as by relationships in which negative characteristics are attributed to the other(s) of which they want to distance themselves. Under a social order in which recognition, security and rights are still not fully guaranteed to homosexuals, it is not surprising that individuals try to introduce themselves, find a partner and have relationships that seem/are close to heterosexuality.

The contrast between the data collected between 1979 and 1981 and those between 2015 and 2016 enables us to recognize continuities, but also some changes. The poor visual imagery of printed publications from the turn of the 1980s contrasts with the imagery richness of applications nowadays. Although the printed ads did not have any photos, they showed less emphasis on the partners' body description and the photos published in other sections of *Lampião* prove that the models of male beauty and the homosexual segment were different from those currently seen today. In the apps, in turn, besides the users' photos, there are detailed and careful

descriptions of possible partners, revealing that the most sought after tend to embody the "discreet" and "out of the (gay) scene" now and then as a "sarado" (fit or muscular man) – a well-built young man who was raised to gay cultural icon at the height of the HIV-AIDS epidemic.

The new digital economy of desire, that is, searches in digital media interpreted from the perspective of the collected descriptors also reveal the need for survival and circulation in common spaces or by triggering the aforementioned terms so as to avoid public stigmas and discrimination, now as a strategy of denying visibility to homosexual desire. However, this latter consideration operates by materializing a kind of refusal of the "homosexual" category, whose articulation with the descriptors allows us to perceive a demand for partners who, taken to the extreme, do not see themselves as "gays" or "homosexuals".

At the beginning of the 1980s, relational forms such as dating and marriage were not available to homosexuals being understandably replaced by anonymous sexual encounters or "friendship". In current applications, in addition to the demand for friendship, there are also searches for love and stable relationships. Such a quest for love, even though it is a small percentage (3%), indicates changes in the aspirational horizon of men seeking same-sex partners that may be related to the recent legal recognition of same-sex unions by the Federal Supreme Court in 2011, and their equivalence to marriage in 2013.

Collaborations

R Miskolci worked on research design, data collection, critical review, and manuscript writing; JP Ferreira worked on research design, data collection, critical review, and manuscript writing.

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