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## Instagram: The Search for Happiness from the Self-Promotion of the Image

GABRIELA BARD WIGDOR

ORCID

Universidad Nacional  
de Córdoba

[gabrielabardw@gmail.com](mailto:gabrielabardw@gmail.com)

MARIANA LORETA  
MAGALLANES UDOVICICH

ORCID

Universidad Nacional  
de Córdoba

[loretmagas@gmail.com](mailto:loretmagas@gmail.com)

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Maximiliano König

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**ABSTRACT:** From a feminist and sociological approach to socioeconomic structures and emotions, as well as to new technologies, this work investigates the images published in Instagram as a strategy to capture the gaze, which can be capitalized on by followers and likes in young people between 20 and 35 years old. This qualitative research, carried out during the years 2019/2020 based on observations and semi-structured online and offline interviews, contributes to technological, cultural and affective reflections on the shaping of the gaze as a regulation mechanism in social networks. It reflects on the way in which what has been published responds to hegemonic aesthetics of beauty, class, consumption, and capacity, in a neoliberal context where individualism and liberal politicization of bodies prevails, as well as the uncertainty of the flexibility and lability of social rights that encourage self-demanding and individual responsibility for the trajectories that are built.

**KEYWORDS:** Emotions; Stereotype; Social structure; Cultural hegemony; social networks (online).

## Instagram: La búsqueda de la felicidad desde la autopromoción de la imagen

**RESUMEN:** Desde un enfoque feminista y sociológico de las estructuras socioeconómicas y de las emociones tanto como de las nuevas tecnologías, este trabajo indaga en las imágenes que se publican en Instagram como estrategia para captar la mirada, capitalizable en seguidores y *likes*, en jóvenes de entre 20 y 35 años. Esta investigación, de carácter cualitativa, realizada durante los años 2019/2020 con base en observaciones y entrevistas semiestructuradas online y offline, contribuye a reflexiones tecnológicas, culturales y afectivas sobre la conformación de la mirada como mecanismo de regulación en redes sociales. Reflexiona sobre la manera en que lo publicado responde a estéticas hegemónicas de belleza, clase, consumos y capacitismos, en un contexto neoliberal donde prima el individualismo y la politización liberal de los cuerpos, la incertidumbre de la flexibilización y labilidad de los derechos sociales que fomentan la autoexigencia y la responsabilidad individual por las trayectorias que se logran construir.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Emociones; estereotipo; estructura social; hegemonía cultural; redes sociales (en línea).

### HOW TO QUOTE

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## Introduction

Instagram was launched in 2010 as a mobile application (App), initially exclusively for iOS devices, aimed to capture, produce, edit, and share photos and short videos in real-time. It quickly achieved fame among social networks, reaching 12 million users in its first year of operation. From its social and technical history, we consider two moments relevant: in 2012, the community grew thanks to its Android version and its incorporation into Facebook's commercial group, improving its security system, comment management, and geolocation of posts, as well as incorporating a web version, thus reaching 80 million users (Mejía, 2017).

At the beginning of 2018, it modified its algorithm and had a major impact on the circulation of content and, consequently, on the participation of Instagrammers, since it involves new factors when prioritizing the visibility of posts. According to Agung and Darma (2019), the algorithm now works based on a logical and systematic arrangement of big data. According to their analysis, content is monitored within the first sixty minutes of its posting to a minimum percentage of users and, depending on the interactions it gets from other profiles or audiences, it will get a greater or lesser chance of circulation. For this purpose, not only the interest or number of followers, "likes", and comments are considered, but also the frequency, relation, or novelty of the content. As a result, Instagram stories and hashtags for tagging content have gained interest, both for their interactivity and usefulness for users who want to manage potential audiences for content.

Today, Instagram has more than one billion active profiles and disputes the top positions among social networks by the number of users worldwide. It ranks only behind Facebook and some other mobile messaging or streaming apps, such as YouTube or WhatsApp, with the group of young people under 35 years of age being the most involved in the world, including 80% of Latin Americans who access social networks in that age group (We are social, 2010; Comscore, 2019).

Indeed, multiplatform digital consumption is increasing in the region, especially in Argentina, as shown by Comscore and Shareablee (2019), where they observed that digital users in the country made 2.7 million posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in 2018 and consumed 400 million YouTube videos per day. Our country maintains a level of participation on social media well above the world average, which is 49%, ranking seventh internationally and first in the region, with a penetration level of 76% (We are social, 2020). According to the latest national survey of cultural consumption, 64.4% of the Argentine population that uses the Internet has a Facebook account, and 27.3% has an Instagram account, also maintaining the tendency of mainly youthful use (Comscore, 2019).

After a decade since its launch and worldwide expansion, a significant amount of research has identified an important set of studies that have delved into the uses and appropriations that its members make of this platform (Morocho, 2019), whose predominance for the image distinguishes it from its competitors. In addition, it is important to clarify that Instagram is not an endogamic medium since it allows working and sharing multi-platform content on other social networks such as Facebook or Twitter.

With the emergence and growth of collaborative social software, the potential of these technologies became apparent. For Castells (2009), they enable mass self-communication, that is, communication that we select ourselves, but which has the potential to reach “the people or groups of people we select on our social networks” (p. 88). More recently, studies have shown how important this was for the popularity growth, not only of celebrities and politicians, but also of ordinary users and viewers, thanks to the gathering of connections. As Van Dijck (2016) argues, the effects are to favor immediate adhesions, positive, imitable, and quantifiable emotions, “like the Facebook ‘like’ button; another is that users seek to promote themselves to increase their reach (...) they are not so much platforms for creative expression and personal participation as tools for self-promotion” (p. 8).

Specifically, we are interested in delving into the relationship between self-promotion and self-exploitation based on the intensive use of images on social networks, which consists of the permanent recording of photos and videos of personal moments and environments considered “publishable”.

The predominance that the image has in this network resignifies the discussion on the construction of visibility in contemporaneity, enhancing the social and cultural analysis of the photos produced and circulated there (Manovich, 2017). These are not minor aspects if we understand that this process of sharing photos and videos turns Instagram accounts into ‘online catalogs’ (Alkhowaiter, 2016), and that images have become ‘social currencies’ (Rainie, Brenner, & Purcell, 2012, in Hu *et al.*, 2014).

Consequently, Instagram is positioned not only as a social network among others but also as a fundamental tool for global marketing through the strategic use of the image according to gender criteria, class, age group and, mainly, by affective searches and strategies to affect others.

### **Epistemic and Methodological Approach**

We analyze the uses of the image on Instagram from the feminist and sociological approach of socioeconomic structures and emotions, as well as from new technologies. We propose, along with Lordon (2018), to avoid the false dichotomy between the objective and the subjective in social analysis by conceptualizing emotions and the field of what is called passions.

From this approach, passions, desires, and affections become necessary to be analyzed because, otherwise, social science would not fulfill its own pretensions of analyzing the world of relationships. Indeed, psychic episodes are singular expressions of the social order, “the social determinations of individual behaviors take the form of psychic states and, again, the global and the local are here articulated in a relation of expression” (Lordon, 2018, p. 111).

In that sense, people will conduct their lives according to how structures determine them, but only if they wish to behave that way, if they are driven by the affections. In other words, if they are affected in and by the structures, people want to behave as they actually do. Thus, there are no bodily and mental events outside the affections, and people do not have any sovereign command over their bodies; it is the power, the production of effects, which activates them in the world to different levels.

Consequently, for Ahmed (2019), what I think affects me happily is what empowers me to move. As we will see throughout the paper, what drives us are the desires and affections to go after what I think will make me happy, guided by shared images, built from institutional conditioning and devices of psychic/physical operation, such as the app we analyze in this article.

In this context, the struggle for the gaze that Instagram entails leads us to recognize at least two moments that emerge clearly in the fieldwork that supports this paper: capturing attention and capitalizing on it with strategies typical of the game logic that governs the app and social behavior in general; the desire for happiness. Likewise, we analyze how the body becomes an important tool for self-promotion on social networks, guided by the search for happy affectivities and joyful affectations. So, we think of Instagram as a device organized around “ways of seeing” (Berger, 2016), insofar as it arranges images for the gaze as a culturally generated activity, which obstructs or allows spaces of visibility.

To analyze it, we proceeded with a qualitative methodology. We conducted an exploratory process based on observations and semi-structured online and offline interviews during 2019 and early 2020. The contacts were retrieved from the Instagram platform using the personal profiles of the researchers who authored this study. This is because, like any social networking site, Instagram is a web-based service that allows one to build a public or private profile, articulate with other users, and track contact lists (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Therefore, starting by constructing an individual profile, it was possible to establish contact with the links created by affinity and through the “snowball” methodology, followed by contacts and recommended content.

In detail, the work process was divided into two moments, according to a combination of data collection techniques. During the first half of the year, online participant observations were conducted, which included the creation and analysis of personal profiles, the creation of a portfolio of followers by groups of occupational and personal affiliations and preferences, as well as the content analysis of posts made on Instagram. The observations were elaborated on profiles varied in age and gender of Córdoba (Argentina) citizens, whom we subsequently contacted offline. This made it possible to demonstrate the initial interest in searching for and obtaining followers, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using the filter and tagging tools provided by the app for editing and posting images. Both elements led us to dig deeper into capturing, editing, and circulating images to attract attention and capitalize the gaze.

The second half of 2019 and early 2020 was dedicated to conducting semi-structured interviews with key informants. A total of 15 exploratory interviews were conducted with young adults between 25 and 34 years of age in the city of Córdoba. This selection is due to a greater predominance of millennials and centennials among the total number of registered users worldwide on this social network. As can be seen from global statistics, young millennials, aged 25-34, occupy the first place with 35% of the total number of registered user profiles on Instagram, followed by 18-24 year-olds, corresponding to 30% of the audience<sup>1</sup> (Wearesocial, 2020).

It should also be clarified that the selected interviewees are middle-working and upper-middle class people, so they share similar levels of technological accessibility and class tastes. Thus, the first contacts were retrieved from our virtual environment, and then they recommended others.

The meeting and dialogue space of interviews was used to inquire about three axes: the process of insertion to Instagram and the expectations of its use; the personal

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<sup>1</sup> However, national reports indicate that only 5.3% of those with social networks in Argentina create, post and edit content, and do not simply watch, comment or share other people's creations (Sinca, 2017). Therefore, contact was established particularly with those who evidenced, during the observations, an intense and daily activity on this social network, with permanent and sustained posts of photos, videos in stories, and personal feed.

experience in capturing, selecting, and editing posted images, as well as the responses of their interlocutors; and finally, the relationship with other users, profiles, and content posted on this social network, mainly, where widespread use of the body image as a resource to capture attention and affection is shown.

### **Image as a Product and Capital on Social Networks**

We could think of our contemporary existence as an industrial time, where work is no longer a means to earn a living, but a major part of our lifetime (Byung-Chul Han, 2012). Even free time and the use of social networks are exercised as a time of work or consumption, oriented to the production of one's own image and the consumption of other images. Indeed, both Facebook and Instagram are places of self-production, of technobiography in the age of technologized hyper-capitalism.

In these contexts, people act as small businesses, watching each other to accumulate profits that translate into likes or followers, guided by the values that circulate outside and inside social networks. Even those who said in interviews that they are not interested in collecting followers on Instagram showed knowledge of the operation logic around when it is convenient to upload a photo or thought, how to show themselves, etc. In order to be looked at, it is necessary to understand the forms of time regulation and the valorizable image produced by the capitalist social order: "(...) there are times when you will have more likes or people following you, generally it's after 9 pm" (E1, personal communication, January 11, 2020).

In this sense, the times indicated by the interviewees as the times of greatest image exposure and consumption on Instagram are those times that would generally be presumed to be outside the working hours of the average wage earner. That is, moments when people should be idle or resting, but which, on the contrary, spend them investing time in their own image and in selling themselves through apps: "I ask questions, generate polls, upload funny comments, some cool pictures...so that people are entertained and laugh" (E2, personal communication, February 11, 2020).

Indeed, Boltanski and Chiapello (2002) understand that today's reality requires us to be permanently self-monitoring, since subjection is not so much produced by repression as by the autonomous experience of the rules people make and how they affect them. Thus, people are psychically constituted by social and economic institutions that promote self-exploitation through self-promotion, while hiding the fact that the opportunity to become an object of consumption by others on social networks and related devices is selective according to physical characteristics, aesthetic management, and economic, cultural and social capitals.

In this way, as a device that is in the tension between practices of self-production and/or self-exploitation, Instagram exposes the intimate life, the cares and affections that belong to the emotional sphere of people, so that they can be consumed and commercialized as a brand in the market of personal image. The emotional sphere has been colonized through the direct commodification of bonds and care relationships, as well as through the use of emotions as a commodity. Thus, in the interviews, people talk about managing their emotions through the images and videos they share, where the goal is to show themselves to be happy, successful, traveling, etc.; Or to share a sad emotional state, but from humor or self-improvement: "you are not going to be disgusting by uploading pictures or depressing things, in any case you give it a twist to make it look funny or bizarre so that it generates laughter" (E3, personal communication, December 23, 2019).

Sad affects cannot circulate in the structure of passions that organize us because they generate rejection, alienation, or indifference from others (Lordon, 2018). In order to be liked and obtain social capital, affection, support networks, recognition, among other aspects, it is necessary to manage the virtual space with a calculation that, although not necessarily rational, is reasonable in the field of social networks. The important thing is to draw the attention of other users so that they consume your profile, and in this way, the logic of self-promotion is satisfied without the subjects considering it a task, a job, or an extra effort, happily giving their consent to the mercantile logic that drives the application.

Likewise, attention must not only be gained but, above all, retained. The effort is to maintain contact and interaction with followers as long as possible, even in daily work.



However, gaining followers and accumulating influence is not enough to retain attention. Attention decreases with the passing of images and connection time. This is where the body becomes a tool for self-promotion in networks, since users have identified that is an element that generates the greatest increase in gaze activity.

(Instagram) makes a list of those who have seen it, you can upload several stories and usually they decay.... So, what the girls do is one half-naked photo, another one not, then everyone looks at all the stories trying to see if at some point another one appears, right? That's the game of a sophisticated language that I refer to Instagram, There are tricks (E4, personal communication, December 11, 2019).

Once again, the strategy of the users to keep disputing the rules of the game proposed by the app emerges. Indeed, although on Instagram the look is free, paradoxically, it has become more consolidated as a social currency, standing out among the forms of social exchange and economic productivity. That is why users, as we showed in the timetable for uploading images, struggle to get and retain the gaze of the other, and the mechanism linked to this is associated with the growth of influence on the social network through the image.

In this sense, just as we expect to be watched, we must also dispute it. The Instagram platform works more like a showcase where you can present yourself to others in the world through the image and from which to build yourself to capture attention from there. However, the exchange is not entirely balanced or horizontal. The gaze is neither mutual nor bidirectional, but hierarchical. Just as one can follow a profile without being followed, retribution is not always guaranteed, so the dispute lies in becoming popular by "being followed" by an ever-increasing number of followers, which becomes part of the daily work of belonging to the network.

Unlike other social networks, where the search is to weave a network of links and the type of relationship established on the platform allows one to distinguish contacts (friends, acquaintances, and more), as well as content access (public, semi-public, and private), on Instagram this is redefined. Alternately, because pursuing the gaze of others and growing in contacts does not imply establishing close ties with them or building a

community, but merely attracting their curiosity. For this, popularity requires at least two elements.

According to the fieldwork, the presence growth on Instagram requires both the opening of accounts, under the condition that they are public and, thus, that the largest number of followers have access to the content, regardless of the relationship they can establish with the profile owner. On the other hand, we observed that those who remain protected by private profiles and limit their content to close contacts remain inactive and soon find less interest in the platform: "Honestly now it's boring me a lot because I don't have followers, I don't have much to see...there are people who have private accounts, as I do so that not anyone can see your photos" (E3, personal communication, December 23, 2019).

### Showing Yourself Happy and Successful

Instagram works as a collective regime of affections that are mainly joyful or produce happiness in others in different ways, such as humor, anecdotes, memes as forms of humorous criticism of the order, etc. These are the passions that register and accept the codes circulating in that community as fair or unfair.

Therefore, for Lordon (2018), taking Spinoza's (2007) ethics, people are activated in the world in different degrees and directions according to the affectivity they perceive in the environment.

Indeed, affectation responds to the question: 'What happens to me?'; and affects to the question: 'What does this provoke in me? Sadness, joy, or desire?' For Spinoza (2007), what I believe affects me happily is what mostly powers me to move. That is, what drives us to move are affections and to go after what I think will make me happy, which is a structural image of what may or may not be enjoyable. This question helps us to understand the use of Instagram, where people are touched in the pursuit of happiness and, in addition, try to affect others from the desire expressed in likes or hearts. Marina commented on the photos that she chose to upload to the app:

[...] This is when I traveled to Italy, Madrid...I have included a little bit of each trip I made, the museums...this is of friends, I'm adding...cars, here's this photo because my friends

asked me for a collage...I don't know, another collage of trips to Istanbul...cool moments [...] photos of things that are interesting, fun (E3, personal communication, December 23, 2019).

The interviewee considers that the image of happiness is synonymous with consumption, cultural leisure, forms of organization of life that are explained as class tastes, which, according to Bourdieu (1988), are the search for maximum "cultural profitability" (p. 267). This profitability is related to the establishment of a possible resemblance with the culture or legitimate image of the "good life", which is that of the dominant class. In the same sense, Mariano argued that daily life was not interesting to the followers; "boring photos" where it was showed everyday activities or places. By common, we mean the usual, the routine, as well as what is accessible to everyone by social sector or class and, therefore, not exceptional to the peer group, singular, or source of distinction:

[...] I wouldn't take pictures at my company, because it's extremely boring, people don't like to see what they already know...I wouldn't upload pictures of being in class like everyone else, in college, very boring...I don't know, very daily things I wouldn't post them.... (E5, personal communication, October 3, 2019).

Likewise, what is common in all these testimonies is also associated with boredom, sadness, and related emotions that should not be shared. As Ahmed (2019) argues, people not only aspire to seek happiness but to be themselves happy objects, affecting the environment in that sense. However, being considered objects/subjects of happiness is not a possibility that is equally distributed because in capitalist, colonial, and heteronormative societies, being and having are tied to gender, race, class, and bodily parameters.

Being and having what should make us happy, such as a perfect body, a successful work life, sumptuous goods like cars, etc. Consequently, uploading photos in exotic landscapes or funny situations, selfies with smiles is almost a requirement to enter the Instagram world of the interviewees. As one of the interviewees says: "you cannot upload photos that are not well thought out, nice places, cool moments like having a coffee with

a friend...you're not going to take a picture in the kitchen of your house in your bathrobe" (E6, personal communication, December 2, 2019).

In these virtual contexts, people are expected to appear successful and happy, with the images they construct being a key element to garner virtual adhesions or followers. Consequently, as Ahmed (2019) argues, happiness can become a technology of self-production, especially when we are asked to smile to occupy spaces as a form of "emotional labor."

Good feelings do not only produce the same effect, especially when the context where we must appear forces us to repress feelings in order to show ourselves only happy, causing the sensations of repressed discomfort to intensify: "I see all these people happy or uploading pictures in their successful jobs and I feel very bad...but you can't upload a photo of yourself depressed" (E2, personal communication, February 11, 2020). The representation that the subjects make of their human condition, and others, assumes that there is freedom of choice, responsibility, and own merit in what they do or say: "it makes me feel bad to see so many people who make such an effort in what they do...they earn that by being surrounded by friends, having a drink in a bar and I'm here...in the apartment or with that boring job" (E7, personal communication, March 5, 2020).

Moreover, these representations of success and, therefore, happiness, lead people to pursue, as much as refuse, to show what is held, which neither favors happiness nor avoids sadness. Therefore, Instagram images have no autonomy from social life; the ideas that make conscious our objects of desire are in the orbit of our conditioned affective life (Lordon, 2018).

However, there are variations in the use forms of the app, in the affectivities, because each person is affected to varying degrees. That is to say, psychic life is an internal confrontation between forces that seek to prevail in the person and where the most dominant will win. Indeed, the psyche is a place where affections determined by institutions or, in this case, the Instagram device is found. This type of app conditions the uses of its users, affects them, and sets them in motion under different affectivities. Thus, Instagram is constituted in a geography of affectivities and searches to affect others.

Among the affectivities, the hope of happiness by liking, seducing, linking with others and the fear of indifference or rejection arise. From the testimonies of Instagram users, the ways in which institutionalized affections discipline them and make them renounce other movements or attempts to affect them in other ways emerge. Likewise, users reject contact with certain people for fear that they will transmit their unhappiness or, on the contrary, they seek proximity to people who promise happiness. This explains why certain bodies are rejected and isolated on apps of different kinds, such as Tinder, which is closely connected to Instagram, according to interviewees:

I go from Tinder straight to Instagram, everyone is already talking only over there...Tinder is like a filter to know if it's good for you know [it refers to sexual relationships] and on the way you see if she is fat, let's say ugly, I'm not going to lie to you...I don't follow her on Instagram I don't look for her (E8, personal communication, February 16, 2019).

As expressed in this testimony, the object/subject of sad affect, according to social parameters, is expelled or invisible at the margins of social network interactions. "Certain bodies are expelled to the margins, for the purpose that the unhappiness that supposedly resides in them does not threaten the happiness that has been given" (Ahmed, 2019:207). This knowledge of social norms and aesthetic representations, which are even harsher with feminized bodies, regulate the possibilities of encounters and affectations between people solely through an image: "women have to pose more, to show that they are hot...what do I know...we post a picture driving a nice car and we're done" (E2, personal communication, February 11, 2020).

On Instagram, images of bodies and stories selected by users intentionally and strategically are shown as a priority based on aesthetics that are constructed from hegemonic discourses on beauty, class, consumption, and eroticism.

### About the Capitalization of the Gaze

In a second instance, the strategies are not only focused on attracting attention but also on obtaining a personal benefit, in other words, capitalizing on what has been generated and accumulated in terms of personal image. This may have social or, more directly, economic

purposes. In this regard, we observed among the interviewees different types of applications, where two main ones appear: seduction and product trade.

One of the widespread applications of the attention gained is exploited in the field of seduction. The interesting thing about this element is the reorientation of the use of Instagram to contact and meet people, either with or without the intention of getting a temporary or stable partner. We are talking, first of all, about the growth of the circle of contacts as a consequence of interest in one's own person and, secondly, about the attraction of a partner. In any case, although the software is not designed to arrange dates, as in other cases, it allows another type of contact, disputing the space of seduction to other platforms:

You open Tinder and put preferences and you see the photos quickly and there are people who write 'add me on Instagram' and if you like them you add them [...]. They don't go on Tinder anymore. They say: 'Instagram is the new Tinder', although Instagram is a social network for everyone to see you, not so much for dating..... [...] I've just met people through Tinder who went to Instagram.... [...] that way I've been added by many people, it allows me to broaden my relationships.... (Eg, personal communication, March 9, 2020).

On the other hand, we find the use of Instagram as a business platform supported by the extraction of value from the image and body of its users for the trade of products. Thus, we find among the interviewees a user profile that not only builds its identity and image on the platform but also uses it as a springboard to do business, obtaining monetary income from the personal marketing management performed, both inside and outside the social network. In contrast to other times, in this case, the users are who manage to position themselves and become a brand with their own identity, making a profit from their own body, characteristics, and skills without depending on representatives and intermediaries:

There are many cases of girls that I see who show their asses for several months and then, one day 'photo shoot in Cancun, photo shoot in Europe'. They set up a whole business from making themselves known, from gathering followers [...] They have no representatives, no

mediators, no bosses, they have nothing. A comeback to the craftsmanship of the body (Eg, personal communication, February 21, 2020).

There is a commercial use of the image that starts by uploading photos with free access, and, over time, they capitalize on them commercially as an employment strategy. This is the case with influencers in the cultural industry, music, or cinema field, and it is even possible to recognize it in politics. We can also observe in common users a search for modeling or the sale of outsourcing products, where profit is made from the mediation of the body itself. Once again, it is the image of the body that, in terms of business, acquires the greatest value.

Likewise, people know how to behave on the Instagram world with structurally shared values of what is “good or bad to show”. They intuit how an image of the body that deserves to be shown on the network should look, either as an object of desire or as the bearer of some valuable talent for the environment that consumes a certain profile. As Adriana Andolini (2016) argues, neoliberal technology consists of the subject’s permanent self-surveillance over its image in an environment of extreme normativity: “when I post a photo I seek to generate some kind of particular interest, for different reasons such as cultural, social or well...of arousal” (E10, personal communication, March 2, 2020).

A different aspect of body image exposed in its nudity on Instagram is the use made by artists and feminist groups that expose nudity without filters as a social awareness strategy through publicly declared acts of militancy. Regarding these images, Romero (2019) argues that “the promotion of a real corporeality that does not respond to prefixed models is an atypical fact that, unfortunately, fails to impose itself as an imposing feature of our time” (p. 15). Although some sexual diversity movements have tried to promote new canons of beauty, such as the so-called body positivity, advertising does nothing but reinforce the canon, and Instagram is a large-scale tool for this. Unfortunately, this tendency in fact stigmatizes the presence of those bodies that do not respond to the canon and increases body shaming (Brito, 2019).

In this way, natural bodies that have not been worked to enter the canon are kept out of Instagram posts, either because users avoid criticism and aggression that can generate their posts, so they decide not to post, or because they use technological resources of retouching to “improve” the appearance of their bodies to be presented in public. However, as they gain notoriety, the distance between the body image and the real one also starts to become visible, so they are two elements that begin to give feedback to each other. Consequently, the showable tensions between the virtual and real practices of Instagrammers:

I don't look at bodies so much (on Instagram) but I do look at them in real life. On Instagram I only look at famous people; I don't see normal people.... In real life, yes. The other day I noticed a girl who looked normal and is obese in real life. what a horror! On Instagram, in my environment, there are no fatties, 3-4 fatties and they don't do Instagram. The rest are normal bodies (E7, personal communication, March 5, 2020).

In this game between the horrific, the ugly, and the beautiful, Instagram also functions as a device of the ideology of normality, where the binary logic of opposing pairs produces that some images are interpreted as desirable, relative to “the other”, undesirable. As we see in the previous interview fragment, the aesthetic search of images is to generate attraction, desire, or interest, always from an image that is veiled, filtered, or modified, because images must always go through a normalizing correction of the desirable. In this logic of normality, people with non-slim bodies, with functional disabilities, non-stereotyped bodies, non-heteronormative sexualities, etc. must be assumed as diverse or contested by the mere fact of existing, of being, and thus, seek “their public” or assume that they cannot “belong”:

[...] let me be clear, in order to be like me [referring to her body size] you have to be like Miss Bimbo or some influencer who makes her weight a reason to sell or to gather people who identify themselves... so you are a fat person with fat people who follow you to feel better (E7, personal communication, March 5, 2020).



The place “of the other” are areas densely populated by those who do not enjoy the hierarchy of (normal) subjects, but whose condition of living under the sphere of the sign of exclusion is necessary to circumscribe the sphere of the included (Butler, 2002, p. 20). Consequently, to sustain oneself on Instagram implies adapting to the image of normality, of the “community of equals”, that is, parameters of beauty, thinness, capacity, Caucasian features, emotional fullness, and youth, or seeking a selective public according to the group of belonging: “being skinny is good, if you are fat you have to put a lot of filters or nobody will look at your profile, it is cruel, but that’s how it is” (E7, personal communication, March 5, 2020).

In addition, Instagram is an app that seems to reject adults, who are considered alien to the logic of use and interaction circulating on this social network. Several interviewees stated that they migrated from the Facebook platform because “it was full of old people”:

I started in 2016, my friends were doing it and I found the platform for posting photos fun, it was more innovative, all the old people went on Facebook and Instagram was the new wave (Eg, personal communication, November 22, 2020).

[...] Instagram is for centennials and millennials, it’s not a logic related to older people who are not used to this form of image, they won’t upload photos in skimpy clothes...imagine...they go to the word territory for a boost up for telling you (E8, personal communication, February 16, 2019).

From the ideology of normality, the bodies that can participate in the world of images, expose themselves, share stories and images, must be scrutinized as sensual or potentially attractive. In other words, highly selective segmentations respond to class, gender, ability, and generation stereotypes. For those who do not meet these parameters, there is isolation or filters.

Finally, there is also a use linked to the field of pornography. In this case, there are some displacements and tensions between what is posted and what can be posted to

attract the gaze, since the most exposed images are moved from public to private profiles, and on the other hand, public profiles and stories remain as lures for potential customers of these images. In both cases, we observe the use of greater nudity of the body, with more sophisticated strategies on the image to avoid the technical censorship of the platform itself. At the same time, in the case of pornography, a splitting of the body's production makes private profiles a place reserved for profiting from one's own body in articulation of erotic websites.

### Image for Seduction and Marketing Demands Filters

Erotic capital exposes that inequality between people is not only linked to strictly economic accumulation but also to cultural, social, and symbolic resources. In the particular case of erotic capital, the body modeled according to dominant aesthetic parameters functions as capital in the game that organizes the different fields of the social order (Bourdieu, 1988). Thus, erotic capital is a personal capital that is valued as economic, cultural, or social capital. In the words of the interviewees, it is about beauty, being attractive and sexual, or taking good care of one's body and image, especially to seduce others:

[...] for me China Suarez is a bomb...because she's not like a model, she's more natural, it's like she wears clothes that anyone can wear, but obviously they don't fit you like they fit her...besides, she has attitude, she uploads stories where she's sexy with dogs (E10, personal communication, March 2, 2020).

In this sense, according to socially imposed parameters of beauty, health, raciality, class, and gender, certain bodies are worth more than others and, therefore, gather a differential capital: to be desired. Moreover, in the case of Instagram, it is not only the body, it is the worked body, produced with different filters and technical interventions, that allows creating an image according to the canon that is established as a beautiful or seductive body: "I have days when I post 10 photos in a day and I hardly post content on the feed, directly stories of life, of everything...on the feed goes more worked things because it will always stay there, you have to select the photo carefully" (E2, personal communication, February 11, 2020).

There is a close relationship between the bodies that the market shows as desirable and the photos that are posted on social networks, both for the adherence of social network users and for their explicit rejection in the case of those who want to confront these mandates: "I like what's out of place, what's not normal, what's spontaneous, what's not of a dominant aesthetic [...] in the end we're all weird" (E11, personal communication, March 15, 2020).

In fact, images adapt or marginally reject and, with that effect, reinforce the aesthetics of the body as a model, which is an unfinished result of a historical cultural, social, political, and economic struggle to impose what is desirable. It is also a consequence of an affective-familial context that marks and delimits our bodily-affective possibilities of affecting and being affected by others. Thus, the body shapes and the images we want to create from them are conditioned by our relationships with others, with objects and the type of work, with class and gender in the uses of the body according to what is expected for each one of us.

Consequently, an inseparable relationship exists between the bodies the market shows as desirable and the photos posted on social networks. It is the bodies stereotyped as beautiful that gain greater visibility and, therefore, those images that circulate and acquire greater recognition feedback and educate what should and should not be considered beautiful, interesting, or visible, both by the adherence of the network users and by their explicit rejection in the case of those who bet on confronting these mandates. This is consistent with what Noriega Londoño (2019) argues, for whom the body is a stage for a ritual, a space where ideas are generated about how to behave, take care of ourselves, and show ourselves according to an ideal.

In this regard, social networks contribute to perpetuating the prevailing beauty stereotypes, and although they can influence the behavior of teenage girls by "following a diet, exercise routines or learning makeup tips; but that does not mean that the beauty conception in them is modified" (Carvajal & Terreros, 2019, p. 127). Its dominance is linked to the number of people who arrive, if we consider the number of monthly profiles active

on Instagram, as well as the influence that visuality has on the construction of ideals of beauty and perfection. This suits the market.

Therefore, the brands that sell the most in terms of marketing on Instagram are companies whose industries are directly linked to the image, and where others' look becomes the fundamental component of the industry. As some statistics indicate, "Beauty and fashion are the two most dynamic industries on Instagram. The beauty sector represents 32% of interactions and 27% of total posts among all sectors" (L2 Gartner 2018 Study, in Zuckerman, 2019).

In this framework, bodies do not appear alone, but surrounded by elements of consumption and social practices, so that visible bodies also display other elements, such as desirable and desired places, clothes, moments, and actions, which make up a universe of meaning in the production and creation of images on the platform. To the same extent, this contributes to presenting and extending different stereotypes linked to social class, religion, ethnicity, or gender, and "Self-presentations on social networks use the representational strategies of these media contexts, contributing to extend, popularize and normalize them" (Tortajada, Araña, & Martínez, 2013, p. 180).

We can see this situation reflected in the hashtags, a resource used to tag content so that it can later be traced transversally to the rest of the profiles. What happens is that, once the photo has been selected, the categories that users use to circulate it through the social network again show the focus on which the work of advertising the content is based. To do this, the Instagram platform makes available the use of hashtags, which in its translation from the English language refers to a hash, which in this case is represented by the number sign (#), followed by a tag formed by one or more concatenated words and that allow to classify data and messages issued. This is then used to open thematic communication channels between users and facilitate subsequent searches by topic.

According to the We Are Social Report (2020), among the 30 most used hashtags on the platform, we can find some that contribute to support this analysis. According to the number of posts tagged by concept, #love leads the global ranking, followed by #fashion in third place, #beautiful in fifth place, #happy in seventh place, #cute in eighth

place, #selfie in twenty-third place, #fun in twenty-sixth place, and #beauty in thirtieth place, among others (We are social, 2020). We argue that this element is not only a content organizer, but also brings us closer to the field of interests to be highlighted by platform users, since it functions as keywords for other users' searches. Therefore, it is not minor that the concepts that lead globally are linked to ideas of beauty and happiness. Far from being new concepts, they are updated today with this social network platform, where they are enhanced, once again, through the image.

Another aspect that emerges strongly from the analysis carried out is the form that the visible or showable content acquires through the image, since Instagrammers do not make a selection about what content to show and how to show this content. Thus, after a social selection process, the images go through a retouching process that involves the use of technological filters. In this regard, an interviewee commented:

[...] there are many people who work well on that: how to show what they want to show. And Instagram helps you because it has a lot of tools: filters, which work on how to show what you want to show and it doesn't matter what you want to show (E4 personal communication, December 11, 2019).

Indeed, users have the certainty that they can control their image according to their own interests, but, on the contrary, they become companies whose method of surveillance is the community of values that circulate among the social networks, expressed in followers and likes, as a neoliberal technology (Andolini, 2016).

In this regard, we are interested in highlighting the technological potential that Instagram offers to manage the image through the multiplicity of filters available for image editing. Filters are...

[...] changes in the tonal curves and chromatic saturation of the photograph that seek to change the appearance of the original shot. Ultimately, it is used to add a certain element to the photo, in order to provide it with a different light, color, or texture (Madrigal, 2015, p. 22).

These are software routines that offer the ability to change the appearance of an image or part of an image (Terreros, 2019) and are available in a range of options from which Instagrammers can choose before uploading and posting a photo.

Some previous studies have already shown that users react with more likes and comments when photos have been retouched with filters (Bakhshi, Shamma, Kennedy, & Gilbert, 2015, in Madrigal, 2015). Madrigal (2015), after having analyzed 7.6 million Instagram and Flickr photos, also tells us that "using the 'right' filter can increase by 21% the chances of the photo being seen and by 45% the number of comments" (p. 22), having better results those that offer warm tonalities, higher contrast, and exposure. In line with this, our interviewees highlight the effect of chromatic and texture filters in their posts as options for improving their personal image. This is observed especially when posting and showing images of the face and body, which cannot show traces of pimples, cellulite, or pale colors:

This photo is horrible because I look like I just woke up, but I apply a filter to it because I look like I'm dead, but the cat is beautiful...the filter helps you not to be pale, you get color, you see? You have filters that you choose to improve yourself.... (E10, personal communication, March 2, 2020).

Look at this picture, it smoothes your skin, everything. That's what it does. Do you see my face without pimples, without anything? Everybody does it, celebrities, everybody. They use filters for cellulite, filters for everything. There is a filter that you smile and it removes expression wrinkles, but I never post a photo if I have wrinkles. I rarely I post a photo without a filter because without it I'm ugly. It's like a before and after: first, you have wrinkles, then you don't. There's a big difference between reality and this. (E12, personal communication, December 12, 2109).

As such, Instagram users download some of the available apps on their smartphones to reshape their faces and bodies to create the image they want. There are software, such as AirBrush, that modifies skin tone, whitens teeth, gives a facelift that removes scars and wrinkles, slims you down, stretches you, etc. Another software, called

FaceTune, alters the smile and makes the eyes bigger, changes facial tones, and erases what you consider imperfections.

Consequently, the photos go through a very exhaustive process of social selection and technical editing, where the technological filter is the foundation of the construction of the personal image, which encloses behind it parameters and values that we drag culturally. The interesting thing about these practices is that they reveal that people do not necessarily take care of their bodies, but they show that they do. That is to say, it is a “doing as if”, to self-promote themselves on the networks without requiring direct correspondence with their own bodies. Indeed, it is the photos that are filtered, improved, modified, beyond the material body outside the network. Clearly, it seems to matter little to the interviewees that their bodily materiality does not coincide with the image exposed on Instagram. In this regard:

[...] They know I don't have that face. I upload a face that can be more or less flirtatious. I have photos with makeup that I could easily do myself, but I don't feel like it...I don't want photos with wrinkles...I know that when I wear makeup and I get dressed up I am quite similar to that, this prevents me from having to get dressed up, cover dark circles under my eyes, cover up wrinkles...so they don't see me ugly...and when I've met people on Instagram, I don't pay much attention to others, I look at myself...I also don't care so much about meeting people, just post nice photos (E13, personal communication, November 16, 2019).

## Thoughts

Throughout the article, the strategic use made by the subjects of body images for self-promotion on social networks is evidenced, as well as the nature of the desirable/showable and the technological filters to edit posts with hours of dedication, bordering on self-exploitation. On the other hand, it is shown how emotions condition the images that are posted and examined on this social network as a strategy to capture the gaze, which can be capitalized in followers and likes. It also shows how what is posted responds to

aesthetics that are constructed from hegemonic discourses on beauty, class, consumption, and capacity.

In this sense, the importance of the work on the image for the use of the body as a sales strategy, from intensive use of the network has two phases: a first moment of participation on this social network, with the growth of popularity and followers through processes to attract attention through the vital use of images linked to the body from structural criteria of beauty, success, etc., associated with the structure of class, gender, and affections.

A second moment, of capitalization of this personal positioning, achieving individual profit or benefit from such growth on the social network, according to the capitalistic logic of exposure and image consumption. Here, we distinguish between those who use the accumulated influence to turn their own name into a brand and those who capitalize on it to sell other products. In both cases, we observe a capitalizable view of the image (Bourdieu, 1988) and a techno-economic strategy of self-promotion on social networks. On the other hand, we inquired more deeply into the form that the visible or showable content acquires through the image. We deploy the analysis around the social filters in the selection of what to show, regarding the type of desirable and desired bodies, places, clothes, and actions, as well as how to show, putting in tension the technological filters and hashtags linked in the posts, whose main sense is what Ahmed (2019) and Lordon (2018) call the pursuit of personal happiness and the affectation of others from there.

Likewise, the neoliberal context, where individualism and the liberal politicization of bodies prevail, makes visible the imposed loneliness in which we live, where the uncertainty of the flexibility and lability of social rights encourage self-demand and responsibility for the trajectories that one builds. That is why the interviewees are obsessed with the content they upload, or not, to the Instagram platform, determining what has potential and interest to be shown. In this regard, we identified two key lines, first, beauty and success, and second, the sensation and pursuit of happiness. In this sense, sensations



and feelings take place and impact on what people do. What the body feels or experiences has political and social consequences.

Instagram is based on the fact that it is the look that is used as a mechanism of exchange, relegating hearing, smelling, or tasting. It is not so much the "face to face" that matters, but the effects in the virtual world that reaffirm that the selected photo, filtered, enhanced, responds to the Instagram community's expectations and to the beauty stereotypes that are promulgated. Consequently, the number of viewers, number of followers, or number of likes position us in a ranking of popularity and success on social networks, which serve as a measure and social evaluation of this look, as well as of our participation in the social environment.

Therefore, the app acts as a pedagogy of what happiness is, and this, for "objective" factors that are considered independent from social, historical, and political conditioning and that would respond to one's own merit and effort. Indeed, it reinforces the liberal sense that one can be the architect of one's own life, paradoxical from the moment in which one needs the book written by another. And that, if anything has to do with happiness, it would be able to step out of the desperate line to be taken as an object of consumption, to evaporate in the "oven" of the assembly line, even in its digital versions. Today, Instagram is one of the social networks where the image of the body is a way to do business as a techno-economic strategy of self-promotion and sale on social networks.

Finally, it remains to inquire into strategies of resistance that we suppose exist in this virtual universe and which we have not been able to deal with on this occasion.

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#### **GABRIELA BARD WIGDOR**

Argentine. PhD in Gender Studies, Master and Bachelor in Social Work. Currently, Research Assistant at CONICET, Center for Research and Study on Culture and Society (CIECS-CONICET). Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, National University of Córdoba. Research areas: Latin American feminisms, masculinities, and Decolonial Studies. Her recent publications include: Feminist Controversies and Reflections at the Core of Late Capitalism. *Revista de Ciencias Sociales*; Mar del Plata; 2020 p. 213 – 237; Telework and care: Impact on the lives of professional women in Argentina. *Revista Latinoamericana de Antropología del Trabajo*; 2021.

#### **MARIANA LORETA MAGALLANES UDOVICICH**

Argentine. PhD in Communication and Bachelor in Social Communication. Research Assistant at the Center for Research and Study on Culture and Society (CIECS-CONICET), and professor at the National University of Córdoba. She has specialized in the approach, from socio-technical perspectives, of the production, circulation, and use of knowledge of

virtual communities in collaborative platforms 2.0. Her research areas are focused on information and communication technologies. Health 2.0: web-based ICT applications for citizen cyber-participation in the field of public health. Her publications include: Intentionality revisited. Disputes over action in the Artificial world. *Pensando Revista de Filosofía*; 2020 vol. 11 p. 15-27; Wikipedia and social sciences: free access to knowledge in specialized fields. *PAAKAT Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad*; 2019 vol. 16 p. 1-16.