13 Narrative and Identity Formation: An Analysis of Media Personal Accounts from Patients of Cosmetic Plastic Surgery

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INTRODUCTION

According to Woodward, of late years the concept of identity has come to matter, "both in terms of social and political concerns within the contemporary world and within academic discourses, where identity has been seen as conceptually important in offering explanations of social and cultural changes" (1997, p. 1). In late modernity, the concepts of identity and identity formation are inseparable from language and discourse. As scholars both in the area of linguistics and of social sciences affirm, identities are forged within discourse, more specifically within socially and institutionally situated discursive practices (Fairclough, 1992, 2003, 2006; Moita Lopes, 2001; Hall, 1996; Bruner, 1990, 2004; etc.).

Recent social phenomena/movements such as the liberation of women, of gays/lesbians, of blacks, etc., have helped to open up spaces for discussion and theorization about who we are in social life (Moita Lopes, 2001, p. 56). In late modernity, media discourses (of television, cinema, print media, the internet), by presenting human experience under multiple and plural forms, register and publicize the constant changes that are taking place in social life. However, as Moita Lopes (2001, p. 55) points out, there is an ever-present danger that information technologies, working for a neoliberal globalized discourse, might erase "the differences we are made of." This is precisely one of the points I want to explore in this article: the fact that, at the same time that the mass media offer us windows through which we can glance at different possibilities of being and living, they also work to impose hegemonic models of identity, be them in terms of gender, sexuality, human relations, or body design.

In this work I am interested in how female identities, especially in what concerns the intersection between self-identity and body shape, are construed and represented by certain genres endemic in glossy women's magazines, a highly popular mass media product whose pleasures are hard to resist. The attraction of women's magazines lies in the fact that they explore what it means to be a woman, and the problems typically faced by everyday women, in a light, colourful, superficial and easy-to-process way. In fact, they function as "manuals" of womanhood (especially the hegemonic model of womanhood, based on the

typical white, neo-liberal, middle-class, heterosexual female reader), teaching and advising women on how to behave, especially in what concerns the most private aspects of their lives (love, their bodies and sex). If we were to consider women's magazines as a genre, we could say that the presence of fixed sections create textual expectations and help to build and define a loyal readership.

The glossy female magazines (in Brazil, *Claudia, Elle, Marie Claire, Desfile, Boa Forma, Corpo a Corpo*, etc.) seem to have incorporated some basic feminist values, such as the fact that women now work outside home and have careers. However, these values are construed, in the pages of these magazines, against the backdrop of conservative and misogynist notions of femininity, such as female passivity, the need for female beautification and body care, and the search for a permanent male partner as a woman's main "career" (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996).

In this article, based on the theoretical frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis, Identity Studies, Narrative Studies and Genre Studies, I investigate how the identities of three women, especially in what concerns their body design, are construed in the genre "media personal account", in the present case of experiences of cosmetic plastic surgery published in two Brazilian glossy magazines, *Claudia* and *Plastic Surgery&Beauty (Plástica&Beleza)*. *Claudia* is a monthly publication addressed at adult women which covers a variety of themes ranging from love and family life, sex life, professional life, beautification and fashion. *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, on the other hand, is a monthly publication which thematizes cosmetic and plastic procedures for women, and as such its advertising contents (ads for plastic surgery clinics, private surgeons, cosmetic clinics/spas, and cosmetic products) are much larger than that of *Claudia*. From these magazines, three personal sections of media personal accounts have been selected for analysis: from the November 2006 edition of *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, the fixed sections "My diary—your story with the scalpel," in which a common reader relates her personal experience of a cosmetic plastic surgery (from now on CPS), and "Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect shape," in which a current celebrity (from television, for instance) also relates her personal experience of CPS. From the October 2006 edition of *Claudia*, the selected section was called "Silicone Diary," which presented a personal account of a reader who underwent a breast enlargement surgery.

Personal account sections are endemic in women's magazines, especially the thematic ones (i.e., those addressed at specific topics such as dieting, exercise, fashion, plastic surgery, etc.). In terms of genre, these sections consist of a fixed title, the name of a journalist (optional), a lead, which contextualizes the personal story in question, photos of before and after, and the personal account itself. Even though media personal accounts could be viewed in themselves as

personal experiences lived by "real" readers, it is important to point out that, by being introduced by the section's title, the journalist's name, and a lead, they are strongly framed and influenced by the journalist's voice, position and institutional point of view, realizing in this case a specific kind of media genre. In this sense, media personal accounts are similar to other media genres in which the voice of a "real" person from the "real" world is filtered, framed and recontextualized by the voice of a journalist, such as in reader's letters and interviews. My main contention in this work, in terms of genre, is that certain genres of the media (such as media personal accounts) perform the social action of creating idealized identities that interpellate and imbricate individuals by and into gendered narratives.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Narrative and identity formation

According to researchers from different areas of the Social Sciences, narrative, as a discursive form of acting in the world, plays a central role in the construction of social identities (Bruner, 1990, 2004; Mishler, 1999; Schiffrin, 1996; Bamberg, 1997; Moita Lopes, 1998, 1999, 2001; Fabrício, 2006, etc.). These researchers share the view that "to tell stories is a way of making sense of life (Bruner, 1990) or of who we are and how we are formed in the social world" (Moita Lopes, 2001, p. 60). From that perspective, autobiography, such as in personal narratives, is seen as a "set of procedures for 'life making'" (Bruner, 2004, p. 692), that is, the ways of telling self-stories end up by shaping the very persons we become.

According to Bruner, for human beings lived time can only be described in narrative form. Life narratives are socio-cognitively constructed by human beings through language. In this sense, life itself is a socio-cognitive human construction. As the author puts it, "narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative. . . . There is no such thing as 'life itself.' At the very least, [life] is a selective achievement of memory recall; beyond that, recounting one's life is an interpretive feat" (Bruner, 2004, pp. 692-693).

The focus of scholars such as Bruner and Moita Lopes is the role of narrative as an organizing element of discourse and, by extension, of knowledge, identities and social relations. In that sense, many of these scholars (Moita Lopes, 1999; Bruner, 1990, 2004; Linde, 1997; Norrick, 1997; Duranti, 1986; Schiffrin, 1984; Fabrício, 2006) criticize the classic model of narrative analysis proposed by Labov and Waletsky (1967) and Labov (1972) due to its structuralist and determinist character which, they claim, does not allow for an adequate understanding of the social uses of language. However, I believe that a socio-discursive

approach, such as CDA, can expand and complement the Labovian proposal, adding a social dimension to that form-oriented model.

Narratives are not just ways to build certain views of reality. As spaces of struggle for the legitimation of specific meanings and representations, they also represent forms of controlling and manipulating reality and the participants of discursive events. In identity terms, narratives legitimate and privilege certain forms of subjectivities while excluding others.

Moita Lopes sees "the thematization of the issue of identity formation by the Social Sciences as the result of macro-social factors related to recent historical changes, specifically the phenomenon of globalization and the technological developments which have been affecting everyday life and, thus, who we are becoming in the social world . . . ." (2001, p. 62). This view of discourse and identities "allows the analyses of narrative practices to be theoretically anchored in institutional life as a privileged space for identity studies, since institutions play a major role in our socialization into the types of people we are" (Moita Lopes, 2001, p. 62).

Narrative and genre

Fairclough defines genres as discursive aspects of the way people act and interact in social events (2003, p. 65). That is, genres are particular forms of social relations between social agents (individuals or organizations). From the point of view of CDA, therefore, genre analysis of texts focuses on the role played by genre in establishing social action/interactions in social events.

Fairclough's proposal for genre analysis is threefold: analysis of genre chains; analysis of genre mixtures in particular texts; and analysis of individual genres in a particular text. In this article, my focus is on the latter. The author points out two preliminary and basic features of genres: they are not stable, fixed or homogenized, and they lack an established terminology. This second point is the one I want to draw special attention to, since there is no consensus among academic authors regarding the appropriate nomenclature for personal narrative genres, or even for the status of narrative as a genre or not.

Fabrício (2006, p. 14), for instance, characterizes "the act of telling stories as a discursive genre," even though she is aware that her position is by no means pacific, since many genre analysts see narrative as a rhetorical form of discourse organization which is found in different genres (Bonini, 2001), while others see it as something broader than a mere type of discourse organization (Paltridge, 1996). Some authors refer to first-person narrative genres as "*personal narrative*" (Meurer, 2002), others as "*account*" or "*testimony*" (Sousa, 2003), and others still as "*narrative*" or "*first-person account*" (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996; Moita Lopes, 2001; Fabrício, 2006). In this work I shall use the term *personal account* to refer

to a specific genre, the press stories told in the first person, published either in a section of a newspaper/magazine by themselves (as is the case of my data), or as part of a news story.

According to Fairclough (2003), one of the difficulties of dealing with the concept of genre is that it can generate definitions at different levels of abstraction. The author claims that some genres stand at a high level of abstraction, transcending particular networks of social practices. If we could call Narrative a genre, it would be located at this high level of abstraction, and it would take the form of different specific narrative genres in particular social practices (e.g., conversational narratives, accounts in the media, stories told in institutional settings such as therapy, legal depositions, etc.). However, if we believe that a genre is linked to a particular social practice or network of practices, then Narrative should not be called a genre, but a *pre-genre* (Swales, 1990).

That way, in this article I will adopt Fairclough's terminology to avoid confusion: I shall call "pre-genres" the most abstract categories (e.g., *narratives*), and "situated genres" the ones specific to a particular network of social practices (e.g., *media personal accounts*).

Another useful concept presented by Fairclough in his analysis of genre is that of "activity," which refers to "what people are doing discoursally" (2003, p. 70). The interest here is to distinguish, among social activities, those which are primarily discoursal (e.g., a lecture) and those in which discourse plays an ancillary role (e.g., fixing a machine, mowing the lawn). This notion is useful to understand genres because genres are commonly defined in terms of the purposes of the activity. According to Fairclough, purposes can be relatively explicit or implicit, and hierarchically ordered.

The texts under analysis in this article are probably part of a category of genres which could be called *personal stories* narrated in the first person. They are primarily discoursal, and their basic purpose is to give strength, vividness and credibility to an array of hegemonic discourses, sometimes in an openly promotional form (e.g., in websites of plastic surgery clinics which present personal accounts of ex-clients, always satisfied with the results of the cosmetic procedures/surgeries underwent), sometimes in a less overtly promotional form, aiming at circulating, strengthening and legitimizing a certain ideology (e.g., oral personal accounts given by participants of groups such as Weight Watchers, Alcoholics Anonymous, churches and religious sects). If we say that the main communicative purpose of personal accounts in general is, explicitly, to illustrate a certain point in a discussion, we could also claim that there is a secondary purpose (generally implicit) which gives these texts a strong ideological character: many of them are used for promotional aims, or as a way of adding vividness, legitimacy, veracity and credibility to the discourse where

they occur (e.g., the discourse of women's magazines).

However, as Fairclough points out, there are problems in privileging purpose in the definition of a genre: "while some genres are clearly purposive, clearly tied to broadly recognized social purposes, this is not true of all genres" (2003, p. 71). Fairclough believes that this problem arises from a distinction between "communicative" and "strategic" action (Habermas, 1984). *Communicative action* takes place in interactions oriented to arriving at understanding (e.g., a personal chat with a friend), while *strategic action* takes place in interactions oriented to getting results (e.g., a sales encounter). The problem, according to Fairclough, is that:

> The modernization of social life involves the emergence of complex social systems whose rationality is "instrumental" (rather than communicative), in which interaction is predominantly strategic—which are, in short, oriented to efficiently producing results. Purpose-driven genres characterized by a determinate structure are a significant part of these instrumental social systems. (2003, p. 71)

Media personal accounts, though apparently communicative (i.e., aiming at transmitting someone's personal experience to the readers, and thus illustrating a point in an argument), are in fact strategic in the sense that they also help to "sell" specific ideas, products and services (in the present case, cosmetic procedures and surgeries advertised by the magazines). This can be seen as ideological since it legitimizes the "pathological" (Habermas, 1984) invasion of the lifeworld (the world of everyday experience) by systems and instrumental rationality (Fairclough, 2003). This blurring of communicative and strategic purposes in media personal accounts of CPS indicates that women's magazines mediate information on CPS between expert systems (doctors, clinics, pharmaceutical companies, who are their advertising clients) and the lay readers, thus shaping our knowledge of CPSs and gearing it towards market ends. Segal (2007) makes similar comments on the shaping of knowledge in narratives of breast cancer.

To sum up, the distinction between communicative and strategic purposes is not always clear-cut, and they frequently occur in combination. An evidence of the blurred purposes of certain activities is the strategic simulation of communicative interaction, a typical feature of media personal accounts. Therefore, genre studies need to take this distinction and this fuzziness into account in order to understand feminine narrative media genres (such as the media personal accounts analyzed here) and their impact on the female readers of women's magazines. In other words, to understand these genres, genre theory needs to

include perspectives from cultural and feminist studies and to incorporate tools of critical discourse analysis within a genre frame.

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

In any mass media personal account, the text is supposedly a tale told by a real person who, prior to the act of telling her story, has undergone some personal experience worth telling and worth reading about. This is what Labov and Waletsky (1967) called "reportability," that is, the success of any narrative depends on it having a "point" and a reason to be told.

Labov proposed, in his 1972 essay, a structural model for the analysis of fully-formed oral narratives, which I will apply to my data:

(1) **Abstract:** *What is the story about?*
(2) **Orientation:** *Who, when, where, what?*
(3) **Complicating action**: *Then what happened?*
(4) **Evaluation:** *So what, how is this interesting?*
(5) **Result or resolution:** *What finally happened?*
(6) **Coda:** *That's it, I've finished.*

However, it is important to point out here that while Labov's model was proposed for oral narratives produced by a single narrator, I am applying his proposal to written media personal accounts, which, even though being presented as the product of a single, "real-world" narrator, are constructed by a combination of two voices: that of the person who is relating a personal experience, and that of the journalist in charge of the section of which the personal account is a part. Therefore, some elements of the Labovian model are produced, in media personal accounts, not by the person who lived the story herself, but by the journalist in charge of the section. Another point is that, even though Labov's model was not designed within the field of genre studies, I would like to argue, by extension, that the elements he presents for a fully-formed narrative can be seen as a basis from which we could raise the textual organization of the genre "personal media account." Therefore, starting from Labov's model, I will use the term "move" (Swales, 1990) to refer to each of the elements of his model, which, from the analysis of the exemplars in my corpus, correspond to the organization of the genre "media personal account."

In addition to the Labovian model described above, I am also applying to the analysis of these narrative texts the macro-analytical model of "problem-solution" developed by Hoey (1979, 1983), who viewed "narratives as linguistic patterns organized in terms of a situation, a problem and a response (or solution), which can be evaluated positively or negatively" (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996, p. 257).

Finally, to add a socio-discursive turn to the micro-analysis of my data, I am also making use of van Leeuwen's (1996) model for the analysis of social actors (coupled with some categories from Halliday's (2004) systemic functional grammar). In his model, van Leeuwen proposes a network of sociosemantic systems to investigate how social actors are represented in discourse.

Following the fact that discourses are situational, we can state that personal narrative genres are circumscribed by the contexts of the situations in which they occur, and by the contexts of culture which encompass specific discursive events. Among the institutional and socio-cultural restrictions that shape media personal accounts are the types of life valued and recognized by a given culture. In Bruner's words,

> Given their constructed nature and their dependence upon the cultural conventions and language usage, life narratives obviously reflect the prevailing theories about 'possible lives' that are part of one's culture. Indeed, one way of characterizing a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life. (2004, p. 694)

As we will see below, the prevailing model of "possible lives" and "possible bodies" represented in the mass-media genre personal account of CPS is that of the slim, fit and young-looking body, a form of self-identity and of lifestyle sold in mass media texts as a guarantee of self-worth, personal balance, harmony and happiness (Figueiredo, forthcoming).

ANALYTICAL SECTION

Move I and II: Abstract and Orientation—who is really talking?

The genre of media personal accounts of CPS has a particular organizational pattern that gives a distinct structure to the story related, which then reinforces the cultural ideals expressed through them. That is precisely why I am stretching the notion of "element" from the Labovian model and comparing it to Swales' (1990) concept of "moves" that help organize the genre "media personal account," and also help to construe and disseminate ideological assumptions about women's identity. In terms of the first two elements (or moves) of Labov's narrative model (*abstract* and *orientation*), in *Claudia*'s narrative the lead fulfills the dual function of abstract (*What is the story about?*) and part of the orientation (*Who, when, where, what?*)

(1) **The advertiser and writer Magali Moraes** [orientation] **tells how life**

can change—in many senses—after an extra 225 milliliters in each breast [abstract] ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

In *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, on the other hand, the section's name functions as abstract (*What is the story about?*), but not as orientation:

(2) **My diary—your story with the scalpel** By **Karine César** (*Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

(3) **Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect shape By Suzana Ferreira** (*Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 44)

In these two texts, part of the orientation (*Who, when, where, what?*) is presented in the lead:

(4) **The dancer and manager Ana Carolina Mattos, 25 years old** ("My diary—your story with the scalpel," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

(5) **The actress Mariana Guives, 25, [member of the cast] of the soap opera *Cristal,* from SBT.** ("Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect shape," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 44)

As we can see in these examples, the abstract and orientation are partially produced by the journalist who was/is responsible for the magazine section, and not by the first-person narrator, supposedly a "real" reader who wrote to the magazine recounting her personal experience of a CPS. In "Silicone Diary" (*Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202), the journalist is not identified, in an example of what van Leeuwen calls "exclusion by backgrounding" (1996, p. 39). Even though we do not know the name of the journalist in charge of this reportage, we know, by the presence of a lead which introduces a quoted first-person account and which refers to the main narrator (and character) of this account (the "real" reader who is sharing her personal experience) in the third person (through nomination combined with functionalization and identification—*The advertiser and writer Magali Moraes*), that this text was at least partially produced (and certainly edited) by members of the magazine's editorial staff.

Different from *Claudia*'s article, in which the journalist is not mentioned, in *Plastic Surgery&Beauty* the journalists are semi-formally nominated (van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 39) right after the title of the section, that is, they are represented as having a unique identity through the combination of first name + surname, as we can see in examples 2 and 3 above.

In spite of this difference, in terms of authorial voices the three accounts share a common feature: all of them are textualized as quotations introduced by a journalist's voice. Caldas-Coulthard (1996) argues that quotations are a strategy used by journalists to seem detached from their texts, and at the same time to bring reader and character close together by mimicking a dialogue between them (confirming that these texts represent in fact strategic activities disguised as communicative ones). In her words, "the apparent 'factuality' is a fiction" (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996, p. 258). In this work, the media personal accounts of CPS, supposedly "factual," are introduced and recontextualized in such a way that represents the magazine's editorial voice and point of view.

In short, the media personal accounts analysed here are in fact examples of quoted accounts framed by a lead written by a journalist, which also fulfills the move of orientation, describing the first-person narrator by nomination + functionalization and identification (van Leeuwen, 1996). In *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, the media personal accounts are even opened and closed by quotation marks. This produces what Caldas-Coulthard calls a "layered narration," in which the magazine, more specifically a journalist, occupies the powerful role of giving "the women voice to recount their personal experiences" (1996, p. 259).

Fairclough (2003) also raises the issue of selectivity and purpose in news stories genres (news, reportages [see Bonini, this volume], media personal accounts, profiles, etc.). Journalists, while composing media genres, include some things and exclude others (which means the inclusion/exclusion of certain voices), selecting and editing what was said by "real" life informants. In terms of purpose, basically news stories genres aim at telling people about things that have taken place in the world, but, if we consider the relationship between the areas of news media, politics, economics, and so forth, we could argue that news media is part of the apparatus of governance, and therefore that their aims are not merely informative but also political.

Move II: Orientation—Resources used in the narrators' "self" representation

In the media personal accounts analysed in this article, the identification of the main narrator, or character (part of the *orientation* in Labov's model), is textualized in the quoted accounts that follow the leads, either through the use of the first-person pronoun (**I**), through its ellipsis (**Ø**), or through other first-person references (**me, myself, mine, my**):

(6) **I** have danced ballet since I was four years old and during adolescence I began to consider myself fat. When **I** turned 23, I was far from my ideal weight. **My** self-esteem went down, my clothes didn't look good, and I

began to get mad at any little thing. . . . Last April **I** got engaged and we decided to get married next year. **I** started to analyze **my** situation and **Ø** realized that **I** couldn't get married with this body. ("My diary—your story with the scalpel," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

(7) Before thinking about changing **my** appearance, **I** used to eat anything. ("Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect shape," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 44)

(8) **I** am a Libra like *Cláudia*. When you read this anniversary edition, **I** will be enjoying the big present I gave **myself** for **my** 39th birthday: new boobs. ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

Since the theme of each of these media personal accounts is the main character's discontentment with her body shape, her representation requires a description of physical traits. This form of representation is what van Leeuwen calls "*physical identification,*" which depicts social actors "in terms of physical characteristics which uniquely identify them in a given context. It can be realized by nouns denoting physical characteristics . . . or by adjectives . . . or prepositional phrases . . . ." (1996, p. 57). This is how the narrators supposedly described themselves physically:

(9) . . . during adolescence I began to consider myself **fat**. When I turned 23, I was **far from my ideal weight** . . . . ("My diary—your story with the scalpel," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

(10) But when I got the invitation from the [Cristal soap opera] production team, I started to worry about my **projecting tummy**. ("Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect shape," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 44)

(11) But, as my best friend said, what's the good of spending a week in Salvador with **a flat chest**? [But] after losing weight, **the little [breasts]** I had disappeared, and I started missing them, especially in summer. ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

Different from other forms of role allocation, physical identification is always overdetermined. In the excerpts above, this overdetermination is always negative, creating the image of the narrator's dissatisfaction with at least some aspect of her body shape. Van Leeuwen argues that "physical attributes tend to

have connotations, and these can be used to obliquely classify or functionalise social actors" (1996, p. 58). The physical attributes focused on in the excerpts above legitimize and reinforce the hegemonic feminine model of the slim, fit and curvaceous body. In the excerpts, the women's bodies are fragmented, and some of their parts (the belly, the hips, the breasts) are given focal status as a part that epitomizes the ideal of female beauty and physical attractiveness: a flat belly, curvaceous hips (examples 9 and 10) and large, firm (or at least clearly visible) breasts (example 11). The use of physical identification is never neutral in the representation of social actors, and it can be used, as in *Claudia* and *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*'s media personal accounts of CPS, to focus the reader's attention on selected physical traits that objectify the narrators as sexual commodities. As van Leeuwen points out, "even when used for the purposes of classification, the category of physical identification remains distinct, because of its obliqueness, its overdetermination, and its apparent 'empirical innocence'" (1996, p. 58).

In the accounts analysed, most of the elements of the orientation move (the participants and the circumstances) follow the linear pattern of narrative genres, coming after the abstract and before the complicating action (Labov, 1972). Besides being described in terms of their physical traits, as we have seen above, another resource used by the narrators to refer to themselves is the representation of people around them. The women narrators, apart from the description of their bodies, are also identified through their relations with social actors from the private and the public spheres of their lives: friends, fiancé, husband, children, work colleagues, boss:

(12) Last April **I got engaged** and **we decided** to get married next year. I started to analyse my situation and Ø realized that **I couldn't get married with this body.** ("My diary—your story with the scalpel," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

(13) But when I got the invitation from **the [Cristal soap opera] production team**, I started to worry about my projecting tummy. ("Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect shape," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 44)

(14) I remember the first time that, half kidding, I talked to **my husband** [about the breast enlargement operation]. **Ricardo** gave me a big smile and surprised me with a nice "and why not?" If I had one motive, he **had** ulterior ones. . . . After that I could swear that every time **Ricardo** looked at me he saw a small sign saying: "Soon playground here." ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

(15) Talking about that, I still had to break the news [the decision to undergo a breast enlargement operation] to **two small men**: **my 10- and 6-year-old sons**. ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

The excerpts above are examples of "relational identification," usually possessivated, which "represents social actors in terms of their personal, kinship or work relations" (van Leeuwen 1996, p. 56). Husband, children, friends, colleagues are included but are referred to generically, through the use of a pronoun or article + general word (*the production team, my sons*). Only in one case is the husband identified (*Ricardo*—example 16). The main thing seems to be these social actors' relations to the narrators, and the way the narrators relate to their own bodies. The use of relational identification indicates that, even though the first-person female narrators are nominated and functionalized (their full names and professions are given), their social relations are also a central aspect of their identities, especially in what concerns their body shape, since it is through the impact of their images on others, through the gaze of the Other (especially a male Other) over their bodies, that they construct their self-identities. As Hall puts it, identities "have to do not so much with the questions 'who we are' or 'where we came from,' but much more with the questions 'who we can become,' 'how we have been represented,' and 'how this representation affects the way we can represent ourselves'" (1996, pp. 111-112). Notice that, in all of the examples above, the reactions of the social actors who surround the narrator (both privately and publicly) seem to have been essential in their decision to undertake a CPS, either as sources of encouragement and stimulation (*Ricardo gave me a big smile and surprised me with a nice "and why not?"*) or as representatives of the outside, hegemonic gaze that helps to shape and establish, even for the narrators themselves, the ideal of feminine beauty and bodily attraction (*I couldn't get married with this body; I could swear that every time Ricardo looked at me he saw a small sign saying: "Soon playground here"*).

The narrators also represented themselves in terms of their relations to the doctors who operated on them:

(16) I went to **a specialist in Aesthetic Medicine, Dr. Eliomar Jayme (RJ)** and I did a hydro-liposuction to remove some extra fat from my sides and abdomen. ("Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect shape," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 44)

(17) I went to **a plastic surgeon** and I liked him straight away . . . . ("My diary—your story with the scalpel," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

(18) Ah, the first appointment. Through the indication of a great friend, I already liked **the doctor** even before meeting her. But I didn't count on getting nervous . . . . Besides **a plastic surgeon and mastologist**, what did I expect? That she would be a psychologist too? Even though I loved her, I wanted to hear a second opinion. [I went to] another **surgeon, highly recommended, very competent** and . . . did he have to be so attractive too? ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

Only in one of the texts is the doctor nominated and functionalized (*a specialist in Aesthetic Medicine, Dr. Eliomar Jayme (RJ)*). In the other accounts the doctors are only functionalized (*a plastic surgeon; the doctor; a plastic surgeon and mastologist; another surgeon, highly recommended, very competent*), which indicates that these narratives do not aim at advertising the work of particular doctors, but rather at legitimizing the practice of CPS as a positive way of dealing with dissatisfactions with body shape, and of emphasizing the need to make use of the services provided by the experts in this area (plastic surgeons, specialists in aesthetic medicine, mastologists, etc.).

Move III: Complicating Action

The media personal accounts analysed in this article follow the formulaic pattern of beginning with a situation seen as problematic by the narrator (Hoey, 1979, 1983), corresponding to the Labovian move of *orientation*:

(19) I have danced ballet since I was four years old and during adolescence **I began to consider myself fat**. When I turned 23, **I was far from my ideal weight**. **My self-esteem went down, my clothes didn't look good, and I began to get mad at any little thing**. . . . Last April I got engaged and we decided to get married next year. **I started to analyze my situation and Ø realized that I couldn't get married with this body**. ("My diary—your story with the scalpel," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

(20) Before thinking about changing my appearance, I used to eat anything. But when I got the invitation from the [Cristal soap opera] production team, **I started to worry about my projecting tummy**. **As I had little time until the beginning of the shootings, there was no point in going to the gym because *the problem* wouldn't disappear overnight**" ("Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect shape," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 44)

(21) I am a Libra like *Cláudia*. When you read this anniversary edition, I will be enjoying the big present I gave myself for my 39th birthday: new boobs. Yes, I could have chosen a dress, a stock market, a trip. **But, as my best friend said, what's the good of spending a week in Salvador with a flat chest?** . . . . **after losing weight, the little [breasts] I had disappeared, and I started missing them, especially in summer**. **To use a metaphor, it was like redecorating the whole house and leaving a little corner out.** ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

The "problem" is always related to the fact that the narrator's figure did not conform, before the CPS, to the hegemonic model of the slim and curvaceous body. Notice that there are several clause-internal evaluative markers (Labov, 1972) dispersed through these "problematic" body situations, such as the use of epistemic modality coupled with the deictic intensifier "this" in example 19 (*I couldn't get married with this body*), the adjectives "*fat,*" "*far from my ideal weight,*" (example 19) and "*my projecting tummy*" (example 22), as well as a rhetorical question "*But, as my best friend said, what's the good of spending a week in Salvador with a flat chest?*" (example 21), which functions as an explanation and justification of why this narrator chose new "boobs" as a birthday present instead of a holiday trip. In example 21 the narrator also presents, along with the problem situation, the solution and its "positive" evaluation: the silicone implant that solved her lack of breasts—"*When you read this anniversary edition, I will be enjoying the big present I gave myself for my 39th birthday: new boobs.*"

The presentation of the problem is followed by the move complicating action (*Then what happened?*), which is the essence of the narrative (Labov, 1972). The problematic situation described by the narrators (their unhappiness with some aspect of their body shape) is dealt with through a series of actions:

(22) **I decided** to **do a liposuction on my abdomen and sides** to get faster and more efficient results. **I went to a plastic surgeon** and liked him immediately. . . . **I cleared all my doubts** before the surgery and **waited** for the day of the operation. . . . **I had no regrets** whatsoever. ("My diary—your story with the scalpel," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

(23) **I went to a specialist** in Aesthetic Medicine, Dr. Eliomar Jayme (RJ) and **I did a hydro-liposuction** to remove some extra fat from my sides and abdomen. ("Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect

> shape," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 44)

(24) Surfing the web, **I discovered an array of possibilities**. . . . **I took that information in** and my brain gently transformed it into generous cleavages, tank tops, backless shirts. . . . **I decided to surrender myself to the scalpel** . . . . Oh, the first appointment. . . . The only thing I didn't expect was being nervous. . . . Finally the day arrived and **I was calm**. The surgery lasted less than two hours and **I went back home on the same day**. ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

In these actions the narrators represented themselves as "the active, dynamic forces in the activity," what van Leeuwen calls "*activation.*" In the excerpts above the narrator represents herself as actor in material processes (*I did a hydro-lipo-suction, I went to a plastic surgeon, I waited, I went back home*), sensor in mental processes (*I decided to do a liposuction, I cleared all my doubts, I had no regrets, I discovered an array of possibilities, I took that information in, I decided to surrender myself to the scalpel*), and carrier in a relational process (*I was calm*) (for more on the system of transitivity, see Halliday, 2004). Even though the narrators are actors of material processes, in semantic terms some of these processes are in fact carried out by other people, not by the narrator herself (such as in "*do a hydro-liposuction*" and even "*go to a plastic surgeon*"). In both these cases, the doctor is in fact the one who, once chosen by the patient, provides information on CPS and actually performs the operation. The mental processes (*I decided to do a liposuction, I decided to surrender myself to the scalpel, I discovered an array of possibilities, I took that information in*) seem to indicate that, even though the first-person narrator is the agent of these actions, they do not describe concrete actions in the "real" world, rather they represent a "master narrative" the narrator constructs for herself, a series of mental decisions that precede the surgical intervention and which have to do with how the narrator sees herself and wishes to be seen by others. These mental processes, coupled with the material processes which are in fact performed by others upon the narrators, represent the identity projected for each of these narrators: a woman who is concerned with her body shape, who concludes that her body is not "adequate" and, consequently, gives her body up into the hands of professionals (e.g., plastic surgeons) who can "correct," re-shape and align it with the hegemonic model of female beauty. In short, the first-person narrators construe themselves (or are construed) semiotically and symbolically, while others construct (or re-construct) them physically.

Move IV: Evaluation

Evaluation is a very important element in any type of narrative genre. From a critical perspective, the evaluative elements in narrative genres are extremely

important because it is mainly through them that the narrator will express her ideological stance(s) towards the story she is recounting.

In the exemplars of media personal accounts analyzed here, all three narrators positively evaluate the surgical procedure they underwent:

(25) **The operation was great and I didn't feel any discomfort. I'm extremely happy** and anxious for the bikini test since this will be my first summer with my new silhouette! ("My diary—your story with the scalpel," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

(26) **To maintain the results**, I do sessions of lymphatic draining, in addition to modeling massage, endermology and carboxitherapy at the Vitalitá Clinic (SP). Besides, I work out an hour and a half everyday: I do the treadmill or spinning, yoga or Pilates. And my diet has changed completely! My meals are rich in salads, vegetables and fruit. **After my full recovery and as soon as I find some free time, I intend to have a breast enlargement surgery** ("Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect shape," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 44)

(27) It didn't hurt a bit. Of course the first thing I did when I woke up was to take a pip [at the breasts] in the recovery room . . . . **The difference was visible**. . . . I was only introduced officially to my new breasts 24 hours later, when I returned to take out the drain. When I opened the bra, they jumped out, happy and exultant. **Nice to meet you! And the pleasure was all mine** . . . . **Weighing everything, it was worth it**. **It's like having recovered something that was mine by right**. ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

The narrators talk about happiness and increased self-esteem after their bodies were better aligned with the thin and curvaceous hegemonic model. It is worth noticing the notion that a beautiful and attractive body is construed as a "right" of the female gender, as we can see in example 27 ("*It's like having recovered something that was mine by right*"). Also worthy of notice is the way this same narrator indicates that the gaze of the Other (usually Man) is an important measure of female beauty and value ("*I found out that size does matter*"): the premise here is that, to be beautiful and attractive, women have to be seen, and to be seen they have to possess the "right" physical proportions in the "right" places—curvaceous hips, small waist, large and firm breasts. Even the physical pain and discomfort of a CPS is represented as a small price to pay for this new and beautiful body form:

(28) **On the following day it felt like I had been hit by a truck. But I had no regrets whatsoever. I kept imagining the results. The first three days were the most difficult because the body is in a process of recovery. After that, you learn to move in such a way that you don't feel pain during your daily physical activities and everything gets better** ("My diary—your story with the scalpel," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

The new body is always measured against the old, as we can see below:

(29) **How nice to compare my before and after photos**! Mimicking that classic male concern, I found out that **size does matter**. ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

In certain cases, the verbal account is coupled with and strengthened by the combination of verbal and visual resources used to compare and contrast the "before" and "after" of CPS, as example 30 illustrates.

The evaluative utterances presented by the first-person narrators represent what Labov calls "external evaluation." In external evaluations "the narrator breaks the frame of the report to address the reader directly and interrupts the actions to express her general evaluation of the distant events" (Labov, 1992, p. 366). The lexical items chosen by these narrators are part of two lexical fields: a field of discontentment with their body form previous to the CPS (expressed by words such as "*fat*," "*far from my ideal weight*," "*projecting tummy*," "*flat chest*"), and a field of satisfaction, happiness and increased self-esteem after the surgical procedure (textualized through expressions such as "*the operation was great*," "*[no] discomfort*," "*extremely happy*," "*visible difference*," "*pleasure*," "*nice*").

In these narratives evaluation is expressed not only by the women who actually underwent the CPSs, but also by the journalist in charge of the section. The title itself of one of the sections functions as a positive evaluation of CPS:

(31) *Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery—the secret for a perfect shape* (*Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 44)

This title rests on two presupposed assumptions: first, that there is a pattern for the "perfect female figure" and that, because this imaginary figure is "perfect," every woman should aspire to it. Second, that CPS is the "secret" technique used by famous women to remain beautiful and sexy. Other examples of institutional evaluation of CPS present in the texts are:

EXAMPLE (30)

(32) **Glowing with the results of a liposuction** done three months ago, the dancer and manager Ana Carolina Mattos, 25 years old, **besides going down three numbers in her mannequin, reveals how she acquired the self-confidence she needed to change old habits** ("My diary—your story with the scalpel," *Plastic Surgery&Beauty*, Nov. 2006, p. 42)

(33) With humor and candidness, the advertiser and writer Magali Moraes tells **how life can change—in many senses—after an extra 225 millilitres in each breast.** ("Silicon Diary," *Claudia*, Oct. 2006, p. 202)

As we can see in examples 26 and 32 above, apart from promoting CPS as a way of achieving a "perfect figure," these media personal accounts also promote a series of other disciplinary techniques (physical exercises, dieting, cosmetic procedures, etc.) that, together with the CPS itself, are represented as legitimate ways to achieve and maintain the "perfect" body. In a nutshell, according to this genre, discipline (of habits, of body and of mind) is an integral and essential part of being a beautiful and attractive woman.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the cases of CPS addressed by the genre media personal accounts analysed in this paper, the narrators are nominated, functionalized and identified through the use of their full names and professions, which help to place them in recognizable social spaces. The professional glossing also seems to attach these narrators to the public rather than to the private world. This media genre seems to attempt to be more "realistic" and less fictionalized than other media narratives presented as part of larger reportages—e.g., as in Caldas-Coulthard's (1996) study of narratives of sex published by *Marie Claire*.

However, even though these first-person narrators are represented as professional women who occupy spaces in the public world, their physical appearance is seen as an important measure of their social worth. Their decision to undergo a cosmetic plastic surgery is also grounded on their relations to other social actors, such as partners, friends, colleagues and employers, who seem to function, to these narrators, both as a way of identifying themselves in terms of their network of social relations, and as sources of encouragement and rewards for making every possible effort to fit into the hegemonic model of female beauty and sex appeal.

Even though the genre organization of media personal accounts could allow different approaches to a certain issue (e.g., CPS), the exemplars analysed here are evidence that this genre is used to promote hegemonic models of female identity in women's magazines. The organization of media personal accounts, leading from a negative physical description of the narrators to their decision to undergo a CPS to a final positive evaluation of the results of such procedures, indicates that we are trained, through mechanisms of manipulation and control of media information, to distinguish between what can be thought and said in terms of our bodies and our identities, what should be silenced and excluded, and how to say what is socially acceptable, how to define/explain/understand ourselves and the world.

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