

Subjectivities and affects of street vendors in the urban context of Manaus: a study through documentary-research

Subjetividades e afetos de trabalhadores ambulantes no contexto urbano de manaus: um estudo através da pesquisa-documentário

Subjetividades y afectos de los vendedores ambulantes en el contexto urbano de Manaus: un estudio a través de la investigación documental

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Abstract

The **objective** of this experience report is to document the psychosocial and subjective dynamics of street vendors selling iconic regional Amazonian food products through documentary-research, fostering an interaction between science and society. The **methodology** employed was documentary-research: a qualitative, creative, and innovative approach in psychology for producing and disseminating science, integrating the university triad of teaching, research, and extension (outreach), as well as the dialogue between science and society. This approach involves the appropriation of audiovisual language through video footage and capture, mediated by Digital Information and Communication Technologies (TDIC). The study included 22 participants. The **results** indicated that, although marked by risks and vulnerabilities, street vending also constitutes a space for autonomy, solidarity, and subjective resignification, where workers construct meanings that transcend social stigma—a process that gained new dimensions through the applied method. It is **concluded** that documentary-research, combined with TDIC, represents an innovative and ethical-political resource to enhance the visibility and amplify the voices of Amazonian street vendors, strengthening both the teaching-research-extension triad and the popularization of science.

Keywords: Documentary-Research; Amazonian Street Vendors; Subjectivity; Audiovisual; Digital Information and Communication Technologies (TDIC).

Resumo

O **objetivo** deste relato de experiência é documentar/registrar as dinâmicas psicossociais e subjetivas de trabalhadores ambulantes que realizam vendas de produtos alimentícios regionais icônicos amazônicos, por meio da pesquisa-documentário, como uma interação entre a ciência e a sociedade. O **método** utilizado foi a pesquisa-documentário: uma abordagem qualitativa, criativa e inovadora, em psicologia, de se fazer e divulgar ciência, articulando tanto as práticas do tripé ensino, pesquisa e extensão, quanto na interação entre ciência e sociedade. Trata-se da apropriação da linguagem audiovisual, na produção de filmagens e capturas de materiais videogravados, mediados pelas Tecnologias Digitais da Informação e Comunicação (TDIC). Tivemos 22 participantes. Os **resultados** indicaram que, embora marcado por riscos e vulnerabilidades, o trabalho ambulante também se configura como espaço de autonomia, solidariedade e resignificação subjetiva, no qual os trabalhadores elaboram sentidos que ultrapassam o estigma social e que todo esse processo ganhou novas dimensões a partir do método utilizado. **Conclui-se** que a pesquisa-documentário, associada ao uso das TDIC, constitui recurso inovador e ético-político para ampliar a visibilidade e as vozes dos trabalhadores ambulantes amazônidas, fortalecendo tanto o tripé ensino, pesquisa e extensão, quanto a popularização da ciência.

Palavras-chave: Pesquisa-Documentário; Trabalhadores Ambulantes Amazônidas; Subjetividade; Audiovisual; Tecnologias Digitais da Informação e Comunicação (TDIC).

Resumen

El **objetivo** de este relato de experiencia es documentar las dinámicas psicosociales y subjetivas de vendedores ambulantes de alimentos regionales icónicos de la Amazonia mediante la investigación-documental, como una forma de interacción entre ciencia y sociedad. El **método** utilizado fue la investigación-documental: un enfoque cualitativo, creativo e innovador en psicología para la producción y divulgación científica, que articula las prácticas del tripode enseñanza, investigación y extensión, así como la interacción entre universidad y comunidad. Esto implica la apropiación del lenguaje audiovisual en la producción y captura de material en video, mediado por las Tecnologías Digitales de la Información y la Comunicación (TDIC). Participaron 22 personas. Los **resultados** indicaron que, aunque marcado por riesgos y vulnerabilidades, el trabajo ambulante también constituye un espacio de autonomía, solidaridad y resignificación subjetiva, en el que los trabajadores elaboran sentidos que trascienden el estigma social; todo este proceso adquirió nuevas dimensiones a partir del método utilizado. Se **concluye** que la investigación-documental, combinada con el uso de las TDIC, constituye un recurso innovador y ético-político para ampliar la visibilidad y las voces de los vendedores ambulantes amazónicos, fortaleciendo el tripode de enseñanza, investigación y extensión, así como la popularización de la ciencia.

Palabras clave: Investigación-documental; Vendedores ambulantes amazónicos; Subjetividad; Audiovisual; Tecnologías Digitales de la Información y la Comunicación (TDIC).

Initial Considerations

This experience report stems from a graduate course in Psychology in northern Brazil, which addresses topics on the subjectification process of workers and the production of documentary-research (P-D): an innovative and creative method for conducting, disseminating, and popularizing science, according to Gomes-Souza^{1,2}. The focus centers on the subjectivity of street vendors in Manaus, within an urban setting that combines intense pedestrian flow, traffic, commerce, and dynamics that cross street-level labor. Our emphasis was placed on the psychosocial and affective experiences that constitute the daily routine of selling regional products at the city's traffic lights, composing an iconic urban landscape of Manaus, whose interaction with the population does not go unnoticed: whether as pedestrians or vehicle passengers, viewing or consuming their products.

Street vending, frequently marked by precariousness and social stigma, calls upon the researcher to listen to ways of experiencing labor constructed at the intersection of economy, city, and mental health^{3,4,5}. In this context, Psychodynamics of Work (PdT) offers a conceptual framework to analyze how suffering, pleasure, recognition, and coping strategies are articulated in actual work activities beyond the literature, and how these issues impact workers' subjective constitution and psychosocial dynamics^{6,7}.

To understand the dynamics of solidarity, social bonds, and the meaning built within street vending, Dejours⁶ emphasizes that work is only fully sustained when supported by cooperation and trust among peers. It is within this collective space that recognition is established—an essential condition for transforming suffering into an experience endowed with dignity and meaning⁸. These aspects help clarify how street vendors³ develop collective strategies to face adversity, strengthen feelings of belonging, and find within the work itself elements that reaffirm their identity. Thus, it becomes a fertile ground for applying the P-D method, which highlights the agency and autonomy of those involved from a collective, democratic, and transdisciplinary perspective^{9,10}.

P-D consists of appropriating audiovisual language by producing footage, video interviews, and other visual and auditory materials mediated

by digital information and communication technologies (TDIC).

It arises from the importance of an approach that integrates knowledge production with a broader, accessible language capable of reaching various platforms, audiences, and spheres within the same process, upholding the commitment to science communication and popularization^{1,2,9,10}.

Audiovisual language favors the co-production of narratives and the social return of what is investigated, bringing an innovative aspect to knowledge construction and dissemination both inside and outside academia. From a documentary perspective, the "voice" of the film is constructed through aesthetic, technical, and technological choices of framing, editing, assembly, and relationship with participants, implying the recognition of the authorial and dialogic dimension of the method without dissociating ethics, form, and content^{11,12}.

From a practical standpoint, conducting video interviews, observing the space attentively, and co-constructing narratives with subject-characters serve as means to bring research closer to lived experience while maintaining analytical rigor and attention to audiovisual language^{13,14}. Recent literature indicates that when audiovisual tools serve as a locus of mediation, they broaden access to the voices of historically silenced groups, challenge knowledge hierarchies, and strengthen processes of visibility and recognition^{13,14,15}. In this sense, Silva, Gomes-Souza, and Oliveira⁹ demonstrate how P-D can broaden the dialogue between the university and society.

Within this theoretical and methodological context, the objective of this article is to share an experience report that focused on documenting the psychosocial and subjective dynamics of street vendors selling iconic regional Amazonian food products (cascalho, pupunha, broa, and fried plantain chips—locally known as "bananinha") through P-D as an interaction between science and society.

Descriptive Method of the Experience

This experience report is structured following the guidelines of Mussi, Flores, and Almeida¹⁶. The investigation followed a qualitative approach grounded in P-D^{1,14}, supported by PdT^{5,6,8,17} for analyzing participants' narratives regarding dynamics of pleasure, suffering, and other challenges of street vendors selling regional

Amazonian food items at traffic lights in Manaus. Thus, PdT was applied as an interpretive lens for the video-recorded narratives, articulating with P-D as a research method.

P-D is understood as an approach that utilizes audiovisuals not merely as a recording tool, but as a method for documenting, producing, and democratizing knowledge, where researcher-documentarians and subject-characters share and are affected by the narrative construction process. This generates a new subjective dimension mediated by the camera and the entire process of storing, sharing, constructing, and disseminating audiovisual material resulting from knowledge interactions mediated by TDIC. This perspective values the horizontal nature of the process and the recognition of workers' experience as legitimate knowledge^{1,2,13,14,15}.

In P-D, two central figures participate in the study: (1) the subject-character, who is the active research participant interacting intentionally, becoming a character because, in the audiovisual world, appearing on screen transforms the subject into a character through edited representations of reality that construct new subjective fields; and (2) the researcher-documentarian, who applies academic-scientific rigor to foster intersubjectivity and mutual affect while committing to producing audiovisual material guided by documentary cinema practices to record psychosocial realities².

This experience originates from a 60-hour graduate course in Psychology (Master's and Doctorate) in northern Brazil, integrating teaching, research, and extension practices. Technical, technological, and ethical-political training was developed during the course through constant interaction between subject-characters and researcher-documentarians (undergraduate and graduate students, community members, professors, and researchers), supervised by the course professor who also acted as a researcher-documentarian. The course is tied to a macro-research project on audiovisual production and Amazonian workers' subjectivities, as well as a macro-project on P-D and worker mental health.

Smartphones were used to record video interviews and support materials, alongside a semi-professional camera, lapel microphones, and free video editing and dissemination software. The city, with its sounds, rhythms, and noises, was understood as an active element shaping street vending subjectivity and participating in the audiovisual narrative.

This understanding aligns with the idea that documentaries are aesthetic constructions involving editing choices, framing, and speech selection, as discussed by Gomes-Souza, Sampaio, and Tramontano¹³.

Subject-characters who lacked smartphones, internet access, or both for interaction during the planning, execution, or feedback stages of the materials received support from researcher-documentarians. The latter provided their own devices or utilized the smartphones of close contacts who maintained direct, daily connections with those participants without access. All recorded content was stored on Google Drive, updated, and shared among all participants, enabling democratic and ethical interactions, additions, creative input, and modifications to the generated materials. Course texts and other technical resources were made available via Google Classroom. Remote communication and potential exchanges of materials were conducted through WhatsApp and Instagram. Video editing and assembly were performed using the CapCut application, resulting in a final 15-minute short documentary.

A complementary study group was formed to handle research demands, adding 60 training hours. Combined with the course (60h), study group (60h), and fieldwork, analysis, editing, and discussion procedures (at least 60h), total workload exceeded 180 hours.

Fieldwork was delimited mainly along major avenues in the southern zone of Manaus, marked by high vehicle and pedestrian traffic, as well as transit hubs like bus terminals. Participant recruitment used snowball sampling through workers' networks. The study included 7 subject-characters and 15 researcher-documentarians, totaling 22 participants. The screenshots from the P-D show images of selected subject-characters and the products they sell on the streets of Manaus, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Screen captures of the Documentary-Research showing subject-characters and Amazonian food products.



(Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025)

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee. Inclusion criteria required being of legal age, working as a street vendor of regional Amazonian food products in the urban context of Manaus, and consenting to be filmed as a political act to advocate for social improvements for their peers. Informed Consent Forms (TCLE) and Image Rights Assignment Forms (TCUI) were administered via Google Forms in compliance with current legislation¹⁸, though ethics was treated as an ongoing process revisited at every stage through continuous feedback and the possibility of reevaluation by the subject-characters. As highlighted by Gomes-Souza and Lima¹⁷, this ethical-political dimension guarantees participant autonomy and agency regarding how their stories are presented, thereby expanding the research's potential for social mobilization. In this sense, P-D reaffirms itself as an ethical and innovative practice capable of integrating knowledge production with political commitment, weaving together subjectivity, the city, and labor from a critical and transformative perspective.

Experience Presentation and Discussion

The results of the P-D conducted with seven street vendors in Manaus revealed multiple dimensions of the labor experience, articulating subjectivity, affects, collective organization, and meaning-making. The audiovisual method enabled not only the recording of statements, but also the creation of a dialogic space in which the subject-characters revisited their trajectories and recognized themselves as protagonists of their own narratives. The city, with its materiality and noises, also emerged as a constitutive element of

the research, interfering with the workers' experience and composing the symbolic fabric of street labor.

Regarding work organization, it was observed that, even without formal regulation, street vendors structure their activities through collective arrangements and implicit informal norms. For PdT, organization encompasses norms, task division, and management practices that guide the activity^{5,6,8}. In the studied case, this dynamic manifests in practices of solidarity and informal strategies of cooperation. Subject-Character 3 (hereinafter "S-P3") highlighted the collective character of his routine when organizing the group of street vendors in his area of operation, assuming a leadership role and assisting in the creation of an internal organization, which can be observed in his statement: "when I came here, I set up my team, [...] I already have others who work with me at home—there is the fryer, the packer." Thus, at his home, he coordinates the production of fried plantain chips with the support of the group, establishing a division of tasks that structures the activity and sustains collective work. The intensification of the workday reported by him confirms what Alves¹⁹ points out regarding the prolongation of informal labor in the absence of institutional boundaries. Even so, solidarity emerges as an organizational principle, drawing close to the practices of reciprocity discussed by Antunes²⁰. In turn, S-P4 made evident the reconciliation between work and family life, reinforcing the analysis by Hirata and Kergoat²¹ regarding the double burden faced by women in precarious contexts: "I can only come out to work here in the afternoon because I've got a baby, you know? So I come in the afternoon, [...] it's my oldest daughter, who is 12 years old, who stays with my baby." On screens, as a result of intense collective construction following P-D principles, these psychosocial knowledges and lived experiences gain new dimensions, opening potent fields of reflection and awareness capable of mobilizing and strengthening public policies toward gender equity.

The narratives also revealed experiences of suffering and pleasure. It is understood that suffering is inherent to work, but it can be transformed into pleasure through recognition^{5,6,7}. S-P1 reported the contrast between the industrial environment—marked by alienation—and street vending, experienced as an achievement of autonomy, stating that "[working in industry] is a

waste of time; [here] there is more time to do things, you can study, take a course, [...] stay with your wife, go out on weekends." Mendes⁵ defines pleasure as self-recognition within the product of one's activity, an idea that directly applies to this trajectory. Thus, P-D incites the sharing of intersubjective and affective networks of reflection on alternative ways of existing in the city and working, capable of reconciling leisure, labor, and family in opposition to the individualistic, competitive, and productivist logic imposed by the neoliberal political-economic system⁷, which captures subjects' subjectivity to perpetuate social inequalities, further enriching those who already possess purchasing power starkly disconnected from the majority of the population. The audiovisual analysis was fundamental to identifying layers of vulnerability, such as the memory of the pandemic period, during which S-P1 stood before the police affirming that he was merely "working with dignity."

S-P2 brought the dimension of physical suffering when recounting accidents and health limitations, as expressed in his statement: "this bone was exposed, I couldn't even walk." Subsequently, he reframed this experience into dignity for having secured a home for his family, as discussed by Dejours⁶. S-P4, in turn, reported the effects of climate and dust on health, stating that "sometimes it rains and sometimes it's hot, you have to have appropriate clothing, and also the dust, the exhaust smoke from cars—our body has to get used to it because the body gets sick at first." Nevertheless, she also highlighted the pleasure of coexisting with peers, in addition to encouraging other women to seek improvements in their lives through work, whether formal or informal. Within the scope of health sciences as well as applied human and social sciences, these narratives carry the potential to be amplified through the audiovisual output fostered by P-D. This articulates different social communities, science, and the State to fill social gaps, raising awareness across diverse audiences regarding the multiple layers of complexity that constitute these workers' daily lives, while offering varied interpretations and perspectives on the psychosocial phenomena embedded in their lives. Consequently, passing by them while moving through the city becomes a different experience, generating new and more political meanings, as well as opportunities to exercise citizenship.

In this regard, she added that "just because my dream is big doesn't mean it will stop me from

working in a simple job," illustrating the transformation of a source of suffering into resistance. Mediated by TDIC and materialized in P-D, S-P2 felt like the protagonist of his own story, recognizing himself on screen^{14,15}, reinforcing his labor activities as he realized his importance in the daily rhythm of Manaus' urban landscape. It is a simple job, yet one that colors the city, marking territories of memory and iconic affective fields in the region, allowing individuals to dream big as a political act not only of survival, but of existence and resistance, a narrative that can be shared with others through audiovisual means to advance public improvements for the collective and address local, regional, and national psychosocial challenges.

Finally, the dimension of recognition emerged as central to worker identity, given that this process is decisive for mental health. In the analyzed narratives, recognition appeared in customer feedback, in solidarity among peers, and above all, in the construction process of P-D itself, due to the opportunity for speaking space, autonomy, protagonism, and the recognition of their work being widely disseminated so that others may know it. And this is consistent with studies by Mendes⁵, Dejours⁶, and Gomes-Souza and Tramontano⁷ on the process of subjectivation and worker mental health, as they state that it is necessary to know in order to recognize, confident that recognition relates to the subject's feeling of utility and importance, and how this impacts different spheres of their life. When possibilities and fulfillments of this recognition occur—through opening fields and spaces to speak and feel heard—stronger connections emerge for building collaboration, cooperation, quality of life, dignity, and mental health. Recognition, as an ethical and political act, confirms the importance of reframing street vending as a dignified and socially relevant activity.

Final Considerations

The experiences lived throughout this P-D allowed an exercise of integration among teaching, research, and extension, fostering contact with the reality of street vendors and critical reflection regarding their living and working conditions. The process was not limited to producing audiovisual material; rather, it constituted a collective, intense, and formative experience marked by the encounter between researcher-documentarians and subject-characters.

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