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Masculinities and counselling in digital media: subjectivation and self-entrepreneurship on Instagram pages

Bruna Loureiro Denkin¹

> brunadenkin88@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-6936-8714

Fernando de Figueiredo Balieiro¹

> fernandofbalieiro@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0003-3952-4779

¹ Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM), Santa Maria, Brasil

Translation: Isabel Hargrave

Technical revision: Juliana Valente and Horacio Sívori

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Abstract: This article analyses two Instagram pages managed by digital influencers who present reflexive content for men about the construction of masculinity. It addresses the forms of subjectivation immanent in the content publicised. The analysis was focused on biographical descriptions, imagery and audiovisual content, and monitoring of posts in their user profile and *stories* during one year. The themes identified as central were the control of emotions and romantic relationships, associated with the construction of the so-called “healthy masculinity”. That construction requires the consumption of therapeutic practices offered in courses and products through the platform. The media consumption of masculinities requires, from their followers, financial investments and it is articulated to the logic of entrepreneurship of the self. Those investments work towards an ideal of autonomous and self-realised subject embodied in the individual construction of a “healthy masculinity”.

Keywords: masculinities; digital media; Instagram; entrepreneurship of the self.

Masculinidades e aconselhamento nas mídias digitais: subjetivação e empreendedorismo de si em páginas do Instagram

Resumo: Este artigo analisa duas páginas do Instagram administradas por influenciadores digitais que apresentam conteúdo reflexivo voltado a homens em torno a construção da masculinidade, buscando compreender as formas de subjetivação imanentes à publicação de conteúdo. A análise se centrou nas descrições biográficas, no conteúdo imagético e audiovisual e no acompanhamento das publicações no perfil e nos *stories* por um ano. Identificamos que seus temas centrais são o controle das emoções e os relacionamentos conjugais, associados à construção de uma masculinidade denominada “saúdável”. Seu desenvolvimento passa pelo consumo de práticas terapêuticas oferecidas em cursos e produtos vendidos através da plataforma. O consumo midiático das masculinidades exige, aos seus seguidores, investimentos financeiros e articula-se à lógica do empreendedorismo de si. Busca-se, nesses investimentos, um ideal de sujeito autônomo e autorrealizado consubstanciado na construção individual de uma “masculinidade saúdável”.

Palavras-chave: masculinidades; mídias digitais; Instagram; empreendedorismo de si.

Masculinidades y asesamiento en medios digitales: subjetivación y emprendedorismo de sí en páginas de Instagram

Resumen: Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar dos páginas de Instagram administradas por influencers digitales que presentan contenido reflexivo para hombres en torno al tema de la construcción de la masculinidad. Buscamos comprender las formas de subjetivación immanentes al contenido publicitado. El análisis se centró en descripciones biográficas, imágenes y contenido audiovisual, y seguimiento de publicaciones en su perfil y *stories* durante un año. Identificamos como sus temas centrales el control de las emociones y las relaciones amorosas, asociadas a la construcción de la denominada “masculinidad saludable”. Esa construcción requiere el consumo de prácticas terapéuticas ofrecidas en cursos y productos a través de la plataforma. El consumo mediático de las masculinidades requiere, de sus seguidores, inversiones financieras y se articula a la lógica del emprendimiento del yo. Tal inversión se realiza en función de un ideal de sujeto autónomo y autorrealizado encarnado en la construcción individual de una “masculinidad saludable.”

Palabras clave: masculinidades; medios digitales; Instagram; emprendedores de sí.

Masculinities and counselling on digital media: subjectivation and self-entrepreneurship on Instagram pages

Introduction¹

The idea is that, in these 7 days, you follow the steps on how to, permanently, leave the state of affliction, regret and abandonment towards self-knowledge, autonomy and Full Love.²

Men fall sick for not being able to show their feelings and for believing that they must abnegate their vulnerabilities because that is not manly, and they keep it all to themselves.³

My experience is focused on deconstructing patriarchal restraints. These beliefs permeate the collective unconscious and, consequently, our unconscious. The cure is internal!⁴

“Healthy masculinity” is a classification that designates a commercial therapeutic segment in which digital influencers have begun to create content and to sell emotional guidance courses for men. This article presents the results of research on two Instagram pages of this segment. As the excerpts quoted above show, they aim not only to propagate narratives about an ideal model of masculinity, but—through constant communication with their followers and through courses offered to them—to offer the means to produce them.

The analysis focuses on the biographical descriptions, the visual and audiovisual content, and on following the feed and stories⁵ posted over a one year period.

¹ This article results from Bruna Loureiro Denkin’s final paper for the Certificate Program in Gender Studies at Federal University of Santa Maria (Denkin, 2021). We would like to thank Prof. Dr. Monalisa Dias de Siqueira and Prof. Dr. Eduardo Name Risk for their discussion as faculty evaluators.

² Text taken from one of the pages analysed, identified as page 01. To preserve the authors’ identity, we have opted to conceal all their names and page titles.

³ Text taken from one of the pages analysed, identified as page 02.

⁴ Text taken from page 02.

⁵ Tool to share images, video and audio on Instagram, where the content is available for 24h.

Aware of the central role of digital platforms in contemporary culture, we aimed to understand the forms of subjectivation that are immanent to content posted on the pages analysed. Both pages express an understanding of patriarchy and homophobia as harmful only to women and homosexuals, but also to the heterosexual man, distant from himself and trapped in psychocultural shackles. The pages analysed introduce themselves as specialised in helping men overcome the emotional implication of a model of masculinity understood as harmful and toxic.

It is commonplace to say that gender is a sociocultural construction, that is, it is constructed through social norms and conventions and have varied throughout history and from society to society, structuring and organising institutions, relations and establishing a set of practices based on sexual reproductive differences (Connell; Pearson, 2015: 48). Gender is built in a relational and multidimensional way, implied in relations of power, identity, work, sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, age etc. As a rule, it favours men to the detriment of women, resulting in gender injustice and inequality, transforming “the others” into subordinates (Connell; Pearson, 2015, p. 49; Kimmel, 1998).

We understand that different masculinity models coexist in specific social contexts and can vary throughout a person’s life, from society to society, from one period to another and between social groups within the same society. This diversity is present in social media in a way that the pages dedicated to the theme of masculinities are very diverse and heterogeneous. The analysis of the selected pages does not intend to represent all of this diversity, but to understand them from a specific point of view.

We focused on analysing Instagram pages that share a set of advice in the form of posts and stories publications, message exchange and course offers for their followers with an emotional guidance for men regarding matters related to masculinity. They are characterised as an alternative, not institutionalised, approach, of practices that intend to be therapeutic and/or spiritual and which can be read as contemporary sources to construct the self. A specific pedagogy of what it means to be a “healthy man” is passed on to a male target-audience who, beyond rethinking their role in perpetuating gender inequality, seek for spiritual development and personal self-realisation based on narratives that look for practices to reconnect with oneself and with one’s own body.

A “healthy masculinity” would be built from its relative opposition to the so-called “toxic masculinity,” a category that, on its turn, has gained “[...] media space in the past years in different forms, such as news reports, advertising campaigns, movies, reality shows, documentaries, among others.” This has been acknowledged even by the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as was incorporated in the report *Masculinidades y salud en la Región de las Américas*, and

reflected in the federal and state-level health policies in Brazil (Casadei; Kudeken, 2020: 914). It is a semantic field that has expanded as a model of health marked by individual accountability. Digital platforms such as Instagram have emerged as fertile ground for counselling marketing within the context of individualising media consumption.⁶

For sociologist Miriam Adelman et al. (2015), digital platforms are set as a space to develop “narratives of the self.” Thus, they present themselves as a study field that contributes to understanding subjectivity, sociability, identity constructs that are individual, collective and discursive of contemporaneity (Adelman et al., 2015). Platforms are not neutral means through which people communicate. They are mediators and condition the way users utilise them through technical settings, interfaces and algorithmic operations (Van Dick, 2016).

As well as other main contemporary corporate platforms, at the same time that it distributes a variety of content produced to segmented audiences, by collecting extensive data from users’ profiles, Instagram also gives visibility to content creators with the largest likes and views rates, which provides them with authority, regardless of their acknowledgment in specific professional fields. This research addresses how a strategic presence in digital platforms becomes a relevant component within the dispute for space in the market of counselling practices.

The content on the pages analysed can be thought as an example of what Anthony Giddens (1991) considers central in (high) modernity society: the active process of reconstructing the self based on a renewed appropriation of specialised knowledge. This characteristic seems to acquire dramatic outlines in the digital era in face of the prominence of digital platforms that conform to what Manuel Castells (2015) calls “mass self-communication.” That is, a new media ecology marked by the abundance of self-generated content, whose production is self-directed, and whose reception is self-selected. With the automation of content production in highly delimited niches, it becomes possible to find pages of specific interests. One of those interests is the offer and consumption of emotional counselling directed towards social segments, forging possibilities to invest in themselves based on demands of the social contexts to which consumers belong.

We rely on Anthony Giddens’ hypothesis that we experience a historical context in which the self has become a reflexive project marked by an active process of construction and reconstruction. Add to that that the reconstruction of the self is forged within a culture of entrepreneurship (Rose, 1996), which could be noticed in the core of the pages’ narratives, characterised by a discursive self-help

⁶ For further discussions on how the platform works, see Denkin, 2021:8

style, centred in an idea of autonomy of the self, then characterised for its ability to choose and search for achievement. In this cultural context, a new way to construct subjectivity is imposed, which involves an alliance among specialised knowledge and the market:

Self-help, today, entails an alliance between professionals claiming to provide an objective, rational answer to the question of how one should conduct a life to ensure normality, contentment, and success, and individuals seeking to shape a 'life-style', not in order to conform to social conventions but in the hope of personal happiness and an 'improved quality of life'. [...] Contemporary individuals are incited to live as if making a project of themselves: they are to work on their emotional world, their domestic and conjugal arrangements, their relations with employment and their techniques of sexual pleasure, to develop a 'style' of living that will maximise the worth of their existence to themselves (Rose, 1996 p. 156-157).

Illouz (2008; 2016) argues that counselling culture, due to its centrality in contemporary society, was responsible for a profound transformation in our way of understanding ourselves, dealing and working with our emotions, therefore being characterised for its performative dimension. The performativity of contemporary culture is evident in the interactive consumption of digital platforms, which is representative of the shift from spectators, in analogic media, to network protagonists (Miskolci; Balieiro, 2018), encouraged to produce textual, imaged or audiovisual narratives about themselves targeted to selected audiences.

The pages analysed were developed in a moment of evident expansion of male communities in digital environments, noticeable in the North-American context, but extensible to the Brazilian context, about masculinity. This became known on the internet as "manosphere" (Nagle, 2017). In contrast to the abundance of antifeminist groups in forums, blogs, digital platforms and in academic and "grey" literature, the analysed pages are not characterised by resentment or misogyny, but by an active dialogue with feminism, associating "healthy masculinity" with respect for women and with the compromise of relationships with greater affect reciprocity. Instead of being exclusively male spaces, the pages are open to the participation of women.

The search for counselling for (re)constructing masculinity is coherent with a moment of social, technological, cultural and political transformations. Pelúcio (2019) analysed a series of anxieties and contradictions around the construction of masculinity in the current times. From ascending feminist demands over the past decades to a new economy of affect marked by flexibility in the love realm, characterised by the abundance of sexual choices and by the high competition

apparent in dating applications, the pressures around the contemporary construction of masculinity are countless and frequently contradictory. In this context, the author highlighted the presence, within her research field, of the model of the “sensitive man,” understood in the native vocabulary as “deconstructed,” valued in the sexual market for taking ownership of certain feminist values and language.

Instagram, counselling culture and the “popularity principle”

After finishing collecting data, an incident directly connected to our object, widely reported in the news media, sheds light on issues addressed in our analysis. In March 2022, a college student and digital influencer was accused of plagiarising the work of Valeska Zanello, Psychology professor at University of Brasilia (UnB), specialist in the field of masculinities.⁷ After great mobilisation, he admitted to his fault in his own web page and made a publically retraction. A man proposes to address masculinities holding an open dialogue with feminism, but reproduces the work of a professional, a woman, without giving her credit. Besides the contradictions of the case, this opens another reflection. The author had more than 257 thousand followers on Instagram and, despite being a college student, introduced himself as writer and lecturer, taking part in online live interviews on a video platform. In May of the same year, when this article was being produced, he still had over 209 thousand followers, which leads us to interpret that he is still considered an authority on the subject.

Although the Instagram pages analysed here do not present the same ethical problems as the aforementioned case, the influencers that produce them share something in common with the student: they also introduce themselves as authorities in the subject, offering courses and publications to help their followers construct a “healthy masculinity.” During our period of observation, we verified that their biographical descriptions were constantly reviewed and modified by the authors, revealing a constant reflexivity, expressed in the pages’ public definitions, which show their strategies, attentive to the platform’s logic.

The administrator of page 01 presents himself as therapist, and reports having taken professional training courses such as Reiki, ThetaHealing and Quantum Being (or Emotional Hearing).⁸ He also introduces himself as writer, facilitator of re-

⁷ See Camilla Germano’s journal article (Germano, 2022).

⁸ Reiki is a healing therapy based on the conduction of energy conduction through the hands to reestablish physical, mental, emotional and spiritual balance. ThetaHealing is the trademark

flection groups for men, and therapist, “pioneer” specialist in “healthy masculinity.” In 2020 he claimed to have acted in the therapy field for over one year. Answering a follower’s comment, the author stated that he decided to “deconstruct himself when his patterns appeared as more harmful than beneficial.” But, for him, his “deconstruction process has always existed, for I have always asked why I had to do that.”

When his page reached 105 thousand followers, the author informed, in response to one follower, that 33 thousand out of that total were men, implying that the majority consumers of his content were women. Women’s search for male counselling regarding their relationships with men proved to be more intense, up to a point where, recently, the page began directing its communication exclusively towards the female audience. This was noticed after we finished this research’s data collection stage.⁹ The increase in female audience had already been observed by Juliana do Prado (2015; 2020) in her research on blogs, communities and websites about masculinities, revealing a female interest in male counselling, especially regarding matters of sexual and sentimental relationships.

The administrator of page 02 introduces himself in the page’s biography section as a public figure and lecturer. His biography also mentions men’s mental and emotional health and a free monthly cycle for men and women. He reports, in 2020, having worked with spirituality for 11 years, a practice that he began after a breathing course. He also presents himself as a holistic therapist, lecturer, and workshop facilitator, “focusing on building a society free from patriarchal influence.” In his repertoire of therapy training, the author cites Sound Meditation, Body Psychotherapy, ThetaHealing and Quantum Therapy.¹⁰ That year he also

for a meditation technique and spiritual philosophy that involves mind, body and spiritual training, to clear limiting thoughts and adopt positive ones. Information available at: <https://brasilthetahealing.com/about-thetahealing/about-thetahealing-brazil.html> (accessed in September, 2020). Quantum Being is a technique derived from ThetaHealing for listening to emotions, feelings and the quantum nature of the individual, a connection of the self with its emotions, seeking to cure the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual body. Information available at <https://www.personare.com.br/o-que-e-o-quantum-being-m48705> (accessed in October, 2020).

⁹ In the new presentation of page 01, the author introduces his new goal as: “I help you stop settling for crumbs. Learn how to be loved, respected and desired.”

¹⁰ Sound meditation is a technique that uses music as a tool to reestablish harmony and integration. Information available at: <https://www.casajaya.com.br/meditacao-sonora/> (accessed in October, 2020). Body psychotherapy is a technique that uses body language in the therapeutic process. Information available at: <https://blog.psicologiaviva.com.br/psicoterapia-corporal/> (accessed in October, 2020). Quantum therapy is based on information about change in body cells through thought, and considers the power of the mind and of energetic fields in the search for comprehensive health. Information available at: <https://academiadeterapias.com.br/blog/o-que-e-terapia-quantica> (accessed in May, 2022).

claimed to have started to think about “healthy” masculinity four years before, after participating in a retreat. On a post in the page’s stories, he mentioned that he began to want to “deconstruct himself when he got tired of thinking about dying, of depending on anaesthetics and of being hostage to his sexual energy.” He believes that “a man admitting to sexist behaviour is a sign for deconstruction, for change.”

Deconstruction is a common term among the pages’ authors and followers. It means the rejection of certain practices learned, incorporated and reproduced throughout life, currently considered to some extent harmful, that should be avoided or abandoned. Based on the idea that they are built in through education and socialisation, “to deconstruct” refers to the process of undoing this construction and incorporating new practices and behaviours considered to be healthier or less harmful.

Juliana do Prado (2015) analysed how digital media have recently become a proper space for an emotional support segmented market, within which the topic “masculinity” has become relevant. Preceding the hegemony of digital platforms, the internet intensified the possibilities of “[...] obtaining emotional support in a field that extends between psych professional and lay knowledge, in the form of online blogs, forums and communities that can provide emotional counselling” (Do Prado, 2015: 12). Although massive counselling services by long predate the internet, originally propagated by print media and television, this new medium has enabled—according to the author—the expansion of “specialists” beyond the training recognized within professional parameters in the field of Psychology. This becomes more evident when observing digital influencers in that field, among which are found the authors of the pages analysed here.

As converging characteristics, both present themselves as heterosexual men, in marital relationships, vegan and graduated in Literature and Administration, respectively. Both claim to have begun to rethink their masculinities in a moment of psychic suffering in which they identified their behaviours as harmful and the cause of their suffering, and attributed the origin of their conducts to the gender structure in which they were socialised. In this process, which they define as marked by the search for self-knowledge and self-realisation, they have participated and consumed a series of alternative therapies, defined as reflexive, spiritual, and esoteric, such as meditation, yoga, spiritual retreats, reflection groups, tarot, therapy training and aromatherapy courses. Besides that, both claim to be friends and share their relationships and social networks on and offline.

In their narratives as consumers of these practices they gradually began to work with them and became entrepreneurs of self-help therapeutic practices on digital media. They changed professions to become therapists, mentors, instruc-

tors, initially investing in the area of masculinities and emotions, which they later expanded to marital relationships. The connection between the pages' authors, audience and platforms mediation has influenced the way the pages have developed as a commercial business.

In the analysed profiles, interactions and content produced are published as posts in the feed with texts, images and videos, and also with the use of stories, lives and IGTV.¹¹ The diversity of interactions suggests that the administrators use the resources offered by the platform to maximise their relationship with their audience. Both have professional accounts. Therefore, they have access to the metrics made available by Instagram about their posts, as well as information regarding the audience, such as location, gender, age group and the time period when people access the pages the most. Thus, they can adjust and plan their interactions and posts aiming to obtain the best results to maintain and amplify their audience as potential consumers of their courses.

Stig Hjarvard (2014) names as “mediatization” the process, specific to late modernity, through which media acquire autonomy and impose their logic onto other spheres of social life. On screen, we watch one of the chapters of the mediatization process of emotional help. Eva Illouz (2008) and Juliana do Prado (2015) address the profusion of counselling culture in mass culture in the United States and in Brazil, respectively, in the 20th century. According to the Moroccan sociologist, the traffic between the production of scientific knowledge and its popularisation in magazines, radio, cinema and television were responsible for spreading a new psychologizing language of the self in society.

In digital platforms, the authority attributed to professionals with specialised knowledge is disputed by other social actors, levelled within the media logic in which the ability to communicate and the skill and intuitive capacity to understand its mechanisms is at the origin of the visibility that they will reach among a potentially interested audience. Van Dijck (2016) names as “popularity principle” the sociotechnical mechanisms inscribed in contemporary commercial platforms that tend to promote publications, pages and social actors with greater interaction metrics in social media, regardless of other criteria that could define their quality.

Actors who guarantee a larger number of followers on Instagram, using the platform's technical resources, their communication, production and audiovisual editing skills, can appear to their audiences as more prominent in the subject, re-

¹¹ Tools to share videos on Instagram. Lives are live video streams. They allow the simultaneous participation of guests with active accounts on the platform, for up to 60 minutes. The content remains available for 24 hours. IGTV is a tool to store and share videos up to 60 minutes long, whose content remains available indefinitely.

ardless of how they are acknowledged by socially validated instances of their field of knowledge. Thus, college students or self-taught people can introduce themselves as legitimate professionals by conquering prominence in social media, presenting themselves as “lecturers” on a certain subject. Other factors may count to legitimise a position of reference in this or that subject, such as the experience of having gone through a “personal transformation,” through specific practices, which would be the prerequisite to act as a mentor to other people.

The analysed pages present discourses that hybridise a presumed specialised knowledge based on training obtained in courses of alternative therapies with practices of spiritual inspiration. In them, we can highlight the individual experience of each of the authors, which is recalled in the narratives and images that call upon their followers. The following analysis encompasses those narratives, aiming to unveil the subjectivation aspects that so-called “healthy masculinity” gives rise to. The qualitative framework developed based on the analysis of two pages may trigger insights to think about the broader tendencies of one among the many ways masculinity is currently constructed, in its intersections with the platform-based counselling market.

The selection of the corpus was defined intentionally. Its elements were chosen according to criteria that derive from the research problem, from the characteristics of the observed universe, and from the conditions and methods of observation and analysis (Fragoso *et al.*, 2011: 78). The data collection was conducted by means of non-participant observation, paying attention to content adjusted to understand the investigated phenomenon (Adelman *et al.*, 2015). We highlight that the information collected and data presented come from the public information available in the pages analysed, either from posts, comments, or interactions among users. Between October 2019 and December 2020 we observed the productions and posts of pages 01 and 02, the interactions with followers, and the uses, flows and practises with and from the media. The data, mostly collected from posts in the stories and feeds, were recorded in screenshots of the posts and annotated in a field diary. From those, we selected publications and comments considered relevant to compose the body of analysis.¹²

Subjectivation and counselling in “healthy masculinities”

The first post analysed is from page 02, made of an image and a descriptive/reflexive text. In the image, there is a white muscular male with a collage on top

¹² To access the analysed images, see Denkin, 2021.

of him of a large banana covering and representing his penis. The image conveys the message of a manly male figure in a crisis. The banana represents the symbolic function of the phallus and the male force. It connotes virility and strength. The man in the image shows his head hidden between his arms, meaning suffering and solitude. Implied in the connection between the image and the post caption is the burden of sustaining this male standard.

In the text, we verify the use of words that exemplify a hegemonic model of masculinity¹³, questioned by the author: “The heterosexual man cannot cry, be afraid, be unable to get it up, deny sex, or express sensitivity, because all of that is girly and gay stuff. Men get sick for not being able to demonstrate their emotions...” The author presents his course as a means of overcoming this behaviour that causes suffering. Image and text complement each other. The discourse consists of the idea of a masculinity crisis, the introduction of a problem, and the offer of a solution for it, in a language characteristic of self-help culture. The diagnosis of the alleged masculinity crisis involves homophobia and the repression of feelings, which the author presents as consequences of a patriarchal society. Thus, the expression of emotions and feelings is highlighted as appreciated, stimulated and valued manly behaviour, which can be attained with the author’s help. The page, then, is presented as a means of emotional management.

In her analysis of contemporary society, by highlighting the centrality of affections, sociologist Eva Illouz (2011, s/p) highlights the gender hierarchy that marks the constantly updated specialised culture of affect of our times. Modern expectations regarding affect allude to a man with courage, cold rationality and disciplined aggressiveness; while for women, femininity requires kindness, compassion and optimism. According to the author, with the spreading of therapeutic culture in high modernity, those differences in sensibility have started to melt. Men receive incentives to develop feelings and competences that previously were considered feminine. In this context, emotional expression becomes a model for a new pattern of male expression (Grossi, 2004: 23), at least for specific social segments.

In order to learn how to express emotions, the author of page 01 offers his course about “healthy masculinity” with the slogan “the cure is internal.” Based

¹³ Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that designates cultural acquiescence around a model of masculinity desired in a certain social context. The concept is the object of a broad discussion and critique, especially of ahistorical, universalizing assumptions (Cf. Connell; Messerschmidt, 2013). In a society marked by intense media segmentation, it is important to consider that conflicting masculinity models coexist. We may think that, for certain social segments, the idea of a “healthy masculinity” may be seen as exemplar, considering the changes promoted by affect capitalism (Illouz, 2011), as well as the rising demands by feminisms.

on a belief that people have the necessary resources for a future of plain well-being “within themselves”—in self-help style (Pereira; Souza, 2018)—the pages aim to develop the resources for such.

The second post analysed (post 02, page 02) is also made up of visual image and verbal text. It is a shirtless face profile picture of the author, wearing only shorts, holding what resembles a bamboo stick, which he brings to his mouth as a wind instrument, with his eyes closed. The background is made up of elements that refer to nature, adjusting to the linguistic message that suggests the need to reconnect body and spirit:

Sexism is a cancer in the world that needs to be disintegrated. It is the man who, being so superior, suffers quietly. And the woman is downgraded to an inferior level, together with men of homosexual orientation [...] The heterosexual man loses his spontaneity, gets stuck in masks to adequate to what is expected of him, a man who is always strong, insensitive, an alpha male [...] the woman becomes an object to satiate the sexual desire of the male. She loses her freedom to come and go as she will, and lives in fear of suffering abuse. Those vibrating in this frequency forget that we have a body and a sexual gender, we are not that. At some point, the body stays and We continue [...] Bros who agree with the text, come to the next Online Course [...] For further info and enrollment, the link is on my bio! If you want to come, but cannot pay it full, send me an email (Page 02, post 02).

Iconic and linguistic communication codes present sexism as a problem: a “cancer that needs to be dissolved.” The iconic code articulated with the linguistic code set up a referential framework that relates to the idea of a free man in contact with nature searching for his essence to free himself from the ties that hold him identified in the linguistic code of “sexism.” Besides the objectification of women, it would lead to the repression of male feelings: “men suffer quietly,” “the heterosexual man loses his spontaneity, he gets stuck behind masks.” Finally, the page presents an online course as an alternative to deal with these issues and develop spirituality as a means to find an outlet to the expression of feelings.

The third piece analysed assembles two posts (image and text) on page 01 that address the topic of relationships. The images are photographs of the page’s author with a serious expression, unfocused gaze, giving the idea of being reflexive, bothered by something or facing a difficult decision. The images are captioned by the following sentences: “Frequently asked questions: How to overcome trust in a worn out relationship? How can I be more confident and express what I am feeling?” The linguistic code in the images allows the reader to identify the topics addressed: relationships and the expression of feelings.

In the linguistic code of the captions one can verify that the message has a reflexive tone directed to the public. Once again, emotions appear as central issues when exercising masculinity. In the textual description, we can see the meanings attributed to love in a marital relationship: “Love is to Cure, not necessarily to Endure [...]. A moment to harvest learning.” The discussions about marital relationships in the pages analysed address topics on how to begin, maintain and improve marital relationships; or to learn how to end relationships that seem to have reached an end, as suggested in the expressions: “If it lasts, great; if it doesn’t last, great too” and “I bring my demand (desire or limit) and add how I feel when I verbalise it.”

The pages refer to what sociologist Anthony Giddens calls confluent love, proper of the transformations of intimacy in high modernity, which is assumed to be an equal gift, that is, affect reciprocity. In contrast with traditional forms of relationships, love can only develop to the point that each partner is prepared to manifest concerns and needs in relation to one another, and is vulnerable to the other (Giddens, 1993: 73). However, it is worth mentioning that the posts seem to describe an emotional *modus operandi* that is less reciprocal and more self-centred, revealing the anxieties of a context marked by a regimen of flexibility in the love realm (Pelucio, 2019). In the highly competitive era of relationship apps, it becomes necessary to act like an entrepreneur in the market of affections, as we see below.

The fourth post analysed is an advertisement of a free course offered by the page’s author. The main image of the post is a digital art piece, in which the colours black, white and red predominate. The art features a well-dressed woman with a penetrating gaze, highlighting her red lipstick on the background of a black and white image, with chess pieces spread around. The representation of the woman, for its iconic code, refers back to seduction. The display of chess pieces brings the idea of disorganisation. The course’s title, “Checkmate of love relationships,” refers to the linguistic code used in the image. It compares relationships to a game, a competition, and this idea is reinforced by the chess pieces. Hence, to be successful in a relationship, as well as in a game, in order to “win” you just need to know the rules. The image is followed by the textual description below:

Special: series of lives about relationships in December! The theme for this series of lives is: It is not about searching for the dream person, but about BEING the dream person. After all, the ideal relationship will not come to me while I’m not the one that I want to love! (...) The challenge checkmate of love relationships is for you who wants to break this cycle of frustration-attachment-abandonment-insecurity in which you see yourself. [...] The idea is that in these 7 days you follow the step-by-step of how to definitely leave the state of anguish, regret and abandonment towards self-knowl-

edge, autonomy and Full Love. If you want to participate in the entire free event, do the following: go to the link at the bio and enrol. Until the event's week, I will send exclusive bonuses by email + everyday practical self-love exercises. I don't want to just say "love yourself," I want to show you how to do it. Let's? I'm waiting for you" (Post 04, page 01).

Illouz (2011, n.p.) argues that reflexivity, common in the culture of affect found in self-help, transforms affections into observable and manipulable entities. Affection is objectified in a process of the rationalisation of affect through techniques, seminars, courses and manuals that offer tools about what to do, how to become aware of patterns and overcome limitations. The therapeutic culture expressed in this page incorporates a feminist demand for equality in relationships within a neoliberal rationality of self-government (Dardot; Laval, 2017; Rose, 1996).

Incorporating "healthy masculinity" in this example would be a type of investment in the market of sex and affect in a context where, as shown by Larissa Pelúcio (2019), romance increasingly acquires the form of a neoliberal enterprise in which one must optimise, invest and negotiate constantly. At times marked by the generalisation of relationship apps, which reconfigure the love script into a market language, the search for sex and affect demands the construction of a competitive digital self.

By the end of the seven days of lives free of charge, the author launched a new edition of his course "The Secret Code of Relationships" about "how to build the best relationship of your life" for those who want to "conquer full love," represented by images following. After that, he made a set of sponsored posts publicising said course. The word "sponsored," captioned on the post, shows that it is an advertisement, that is, a paid action to publicise his course in the digital platform. Among the iconic codes used in the course's advertisements, we highlight the central image of the author, which refers to the idea of authority in relation to his supposedly specialised knowledge about relationships.

Promising his followers that they would have a better relationship with themselves, and also that they would establish "healthy and deep" relationships, page 01 offers an online course with the same name, "The secret code of relationships," at a "discount price," from R\$ 1,297.00, for "only" 12x of R\$ 48.42 or R\$ 497.00 in one payment. The linguistic code of the last image mobilises a market language, as in the use of the expression "investment," which gives the reader the idea that their enrollment will return a future compensation that will equate the paid amount.

In this same logic, we analyse the interaction of page 02 with its followers in posts from the page's stories. One of the specificities of this type of publication is that it remains available only for 24 hours, disappearing after that period. With

that, more spontaneous interactions are common, less planned than the feed posts. In the presentation of the iconic code, we identify the use of contrasting colours to highlight the text. In its sequence in the stories, page 02 shares a question made by an alleged follower: “19 years old and with psychological erectile dysfunction, what can I do?” To which the page’s administrator answers “join my course. I cannot guarantee you’ll be healed. But I have seen similar situations progress well [...] click below [...].”

In the ensuing publication, the administrator continues: “besides working with addictions (such as drugs and pornography), it is a work that changes our relationship with our emotions and vulnerabilities. Thus, it moves all of our relationships to a place with much more truth and depth. My next course begins next Saturday [...]” The expression “come to my course, bro” suggests intimacy, the same that is promised to his followers and is recurring in the posts. The linguistic code features persuasive communication functions, with narratives of suffering and testimonials characteristic of self-help discourse (Santos; Cunha, 2015). He reveals that the therapeutic practices that he promotes have also helped him “with hardcore drugs, alcohol, prescription drugs.”

The course concentrates a repertoire of therapeutic practices for “healthy masculinity.” Its practices involve the development of emotional intelligence with tools to delve deeper into love relationships, such as breathing therapies and active meditation, the study of spiritual laws, conversation circles among participants and the-tahealing. The course costs between R\$ 440 and R\$ 620, according to the page’s author, who adds: “the prices differ to accommodate each one’s different financial situation. The idea is to literally follow your heart!”

The pages analysed, by promising their followers the construction of “healthy masculinity,” offer an *ethos* of personal autonomy, which responds to the imperatives of the labour market in the digital era, which demands flexibility and constant improvement. These obligations can be observed by analysing the development of one of the pages.

Following page 01 during the period analysed, it was possible to see its visual transformation through time. In the first publications, at the beginning of the page, we can verify that the author does not show, nor does he identify himself. He introduces himself only with the page’s pseudonym, uses stock images, reflective on their own, introducing the subject addressed in the written description. At the closing of data collection, we verified a full visual reorganisation of the page, with all of the previous posts archived and presented in a more professional way.

In his narratives, the page’s author reveals that he went from consumer of therapeutic practices to therapist and digital consultant on relationships. He resigned his job, abdicating a profession he had held for over 10 years, to launch himself as

digital entrepreneur for relationships, masculinities and affect. Although he introduces himself as specialist, pioneer in the fields of healthy masculinities and the therapy of “listening to emotions,” he claims to have begun working with those therapies just over a year ago, after having taken the aforementioned courses and launched himself as an emotional entrepreneur in digital media. Conducted by widespread principles in the therapeutic practices that he produces, within ideals of autonomy, self-knowledge, self-domain, freedom and self-government, the narrative of the page’s author path is coherent with the alleged individual freedom of the era of work flexibilization.

Final considerations

In *Consuming like a girl: subjectivation and empowerment in ads targeting women*, Hamlin and Peters (2018) address the use of a feminist lexicon in publicity, to analyse how the idea of “empowerment,” whose roots go back to collectivist commitments forged in social struggles, shifted to an individualising meaning connected to a neoliberal rationality. To empower oneself, within the scope of the publicity associated with agendas of gender equality, has become a synonym of being a successful and attractive woman, something that one can certify or conquer through the consumption of certain products. Thus, important demands for women’s rights are misappropriated for commercial ends, connecting brands to values that are enticing for their consumers. The authors analyse the contradictory aspects of this translation of feminism into advertising language. On one hand, they produce changes within their symbolic scope, replacing pejorative feminine representations with messages in favour of gender equality. On the other, they depoliticize feminist agendas, individualising them and shifting their lexicon from social struggles to the consumption sphere.

The market of the so-called “healthy masculinity” on Instagram is also representative of this discursive shift of gender issues. In this case, in the production and marketing of services targeting men, which can be identified in the call to overcome “toxic masculinity,” made by digital influencers who introduce themselves as specialists in emotional management. From heterodox professional trajectories, the influencers saw on Instagram a platform to venture in the counselling market. Their courses promise to offer their followers resources to deal with their emotions in a healthier way, allowing them to cry freely, to let emotions flow, besides adopting a non-violent stance, with orientations for more respectful relationships with their romantic partners. Above all, the posts and courses become tools to construct an entrepreneurial masculinity in a competitive market of affection.

In a context of great transformations in the spheres of affect and gender (Illouz, 2011; Pelúcio, 2019), the internet has become a space for discussion that reveals anxieties around masculinities (Nagle, 2017; Prado, 2015). In contrast with openly misogynous and anti-feminist forums, the content produced and disseminated by the influencers analysed here openly speaks to feminist agendas, incorporating them into their own purposes. Our analysis has focused on the relationship between masculinities, digital media and entrepreneurship. We suggest that further studies may incorporate into their analysis contemporary movements around masculinities, such as the discussions about so-called sacred masculine and the mythopoetic movement.

Specific of the context of contemporary affect capitalism (Illouz, 2011), the media consumption of masculinities requires financial investments by the pages' followers, and connects to a logic grounded on self-entrepreneurship, in which what is sold is an ideal of an autonomous, self-realised subject, embodied in the individual construction of a so-understood "healthy masculinity." The discourse about ways of acting, thinking and feeling to construct men that practise a so-called "healthy masculinity" is centred around the search for the self-control of desires, emotions and feelings—which can be attained through meditation, yoga, alternative therapies and male reflection groups. Such practices constitute models that do not interfere or question social structures or gender inequalities, or offer solutions or strategies that involve collective engagement, but certainly present new ways to individualise subjectivation in the construction of masculinity for certain social segments.

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