

Conceptual considerations about male subjectivity to the realm of feeding and nutrition

Considerações conceituais acerca da subjetividade masculina para o campo da Alimentação e Nutrição

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Abstract

This essay presents some reflections produced in the course of writing the master thesis entitled “Health in the human body: the construction of subjectivity about the male body in *Men’s Health* magazine.” We present some concepts and theoretical references used in the thesis and we consider this essay as the first articulation between the discussions about gender, health, feeding and consumption. We intend to present a mosaic of issues based on Howard Becker’s perspective (1994), to whom the mosaic image is useful because each piece added contributes to some extent to the knowledge of the whole picture. Thus, the different theoretical fragments joined here arrange the mosaic and contribute differently to our knowledge about how food, different masculinities, health care and the discourses of science, the media and the market articulate themselves in the meaning of “human health,” thus bringing forth new subjectivities attached to the consumption of ideal models of body and health.

Keywords: Masculinity. Health. Social Sciences. Nutrition. Food. Men’s health.

Resumo

O presente ensaio apresenta algumas reflexões iniciais construídas no decorrer da produção da dissertação de mestrado intitulada *A Saúde no corpo do homem: a construção da subjetividade acerca do corpo masculino na revista Men’s Health*. Apresentamos alguns conceitos e referências teóricas utilizadas na dissertação e consideramos este ensaio como uma primeira articulação entre as discussões sobre

gênero, saúde, alimentação e consumo. Pretendemos apresentar um mosaico de questões a partir da perspectiva de Howard Becker, para quem a imagem do mosaico é útil, pois nele cada peça acrescentada contribui um pouco para a compreensão do todo. Deste modo, os diferentes fragmentos teóricos aqui reunidos compõem o mosaico e contribuem de modo diferente para nossa compreensão de como a comida, as diferentes masculinidades, os cuidados com a saúde e os discursos da ciência, da mídia e do mercado se articulam no que se intitula “saúde do homem”, produzindo novas subjetividades afeitas ao consumo de modelos ideais de corpo e saúde.

Palavras-chave: Masculinidade. Saúde. Ciências Sociais. Nutrição. Alimentação. Saúde do Homem.

Introduction

When speaking about man’s health, one immediately remembers stereotypes that attempt to standardize masculinity as a single form of manhood from an ideal body model and a specific way of thinking and behaving. Such stereotypes produce a simplistic and superficial discourse that distances us from the possibility of seriously thinking about men’s relation with their own bodies, health care and eating habits, as well as different masculinities present in social life. At present, men’s health has become an object of interest to society. Common sense, science, the media and advertising heavily invest in masculinity, trying to build processes of subjectivization that meet the interests of the market and its logic of consumption. Strategies are thus created to co-opt men by fashion, by the cult of the perfect body and by the aesthetic care, which, in turn, lead to new patterns of behavior that use food as one of the main sets of means of subjectivization for obtaining the dreamed perfect health.

Constructing masculinity in its relationship with food incorporates innumerable issues. Topics such as the social distinction for consumption through the “gourmetization” of food, the profusion of programs and television series with men as protagonists in kitchens, the medicalization of food to obtain immediate results, the functionality of foods for specific actions in the organism, the construction of body image as an infallible machine in the service of performance, and the growing concern with aesthetics are some of the new senses and meanings attributed to food. The new social relations present in the act of eating and the manners themselves as men deal with these issues are subjects of general interest and quite relevant to the scientific field of Food and Nutrition.

We present here some initial reflections built during the production of the master’s thesis entitled *Health in men’s bodies: constructing subjectivity about male bodies in* (the world’s largest men’s

magazine brand and best-selling men's magazine on U.S. newsstands) *Men's Health*¹ magazine. In general, the research aimed to analyze the codes of body building and male identity in the field of Food and Nutrition from the *Men's Health*¹ magazine, critically presenting the way men are presented in this publication. The aim was to perceive the construction of body image and the transformation of food in an object of consumption, social distinction and functionality in the organism that are presented in a pragmatic and immediate way, demonstrating the mechanistic, reductionist and technically oriented look of masculine bodies present in the magazine, as well as the reinforcement of common-sense stereotypes that prevent critical reflection. Concern for performance in the social world, the sex life, and the competitive work environment turns food into an ideal “fuel” for the machine and the body is reduced to a mechanism that can be altered, programmed and controlled, disregarding in this process any vestige of subjectivity or interiority. The body is seen as the instrument that controls itself for attaining what is supposed to be desired.

We present some concepts and theoretical references used in the dissertation and consider this essay as a first articulation among discussions on gender, health, food and consumption. We do not intend, therefore, to discuss exhaustively and deepen specific questions of one field or another. On the contrary, our interest is to present a theoretical mosaic, consisting of preliminary notes and conceptual approaches that allow us to make some reflections on a little studied subject in the field of Food and Nutrition.

The field of Nutrition traditionally reproduces a way of thinking more attached to the biomedical field, which is hegemonic in the field of health, and few studies discuss the construction of manly identity and subjectivity, using the conceptual references of the Social Sciences. It is, therefore, a field of studies under construction, and this work may perhaps constitute a first articulation about the construction of male subjectivity in its relationship with food.

We use the term “mosaic” from the perspective of (American sociologist) Howard S. Becker,² for whom “the mosaic image is useful to think about this type of scientific enterprise. Each piece added in a mosaic somewhat contributes to our understanding of the picture as a whole.” Thus, the different fragments that make up the mosaic contribute differently to our understanding and none of the pieces is loose, meaningless. All are in relation to each other.

We note that the conceptual framework that underlies the discourses present in *Men's Health*¹ is referenced in the scientific discourse. In these publications, there is a mixture of advertising speech, scientific discourse, business marketing, product sales, goods and services, specialized medical discourse and common sense – in short, a myriad of concepts and discourses that are articulated with the aim of selling something to an audience. Thinking about food, different masculinities, health care and speeches in science, the media and the market means putting together different pieces of this mosaic called “men's health” with the originality of thinking of this from the field of Food and Nutrition.

Gender norms and the new man's body

The masculine universe is an area of relevant interest to the scientific field that includes discussions about gender. Several concepts from other fields contribute to a discussion that is relatively recent but also undergo criticism and reformulations. The concept of hegemonic masculinity, for example, was initially proposed by Kessler et al.³ in a conceptual discussion about the construction of masculinities and men's bodies, systematized in the article "Towards a new sociology of masculinity,"⁴ where a critique of the masculine sexual role was developed, proposing a model of masculinities in multiple power relations.

Connell & Messerschmidt⁵ take up the course of this concept that incorporates both studies about men as well as aspects of common sense about men and boys, feminist positions on patriarchy and social models of gender, indicating the need for its reformulation in contemporary terms. For the authors, hegemonic masculinity would be understood as a pattern of practices allowing the domination of men over women to continue and, despite not being adopted by all men, constituting a normativeness related to gender. Hegemonic masculinity "embodies the most honorable form of being a man; it demands that all other men position themselves in relation to it and ideologically legitimize the global subordination of women to men."⁵

According to Jansen & Sabo,⁶ the concept was also used in research on the representations of man in the media, helping to give meaning to the diversity and selectivity of images in mass media, causing a mapping of the relations among different representations of masculinities. It is within this theoretical-conceptual framework that the emergence in the Brazilian media of the idea of a "new man" as a model to be followed is observed. Unlike the "old man" who would be aligned with a hegemonic model of masculinity based on the modern traditional family, this "new man" constitutes an "advance" in assuming changes in certain values and beliefs typical of traditional masculinity, requiring from men more care with the body and the appearance and at the same time moving away from homosexuality.⁷

Following this trend of the mass media, in May 2006, (major Brazilian publisher and printing company) Editora Abril launched in Brazil *Men's Health*¹ magazine, in an attempt to modify the publishing market by creating a "new" niche for the male audience and keeping the traditional topics of other men's magazines, although with another form of presentation. In a clear attempt to broaden the concept of men, the magazine also innovated in bringing subjects previously recognized as more appropriate to the universe of women and homosexuals, such as sexuality, health care and aesthetics, style, fashion, social behavior, etc.⁷ Food has also gained considerable importance as it contributes to building beautiful and healthy bodies. This project is an index of an attempt to open a new market for the consumption of goods, ideas, services and products with the masculine universe, which until then was quite conservative in its daily habits, allowing few variations and nuances in the products offered.

The investment of this market now points to a new universe of consumers who previously would not consume such products, since there is now growth above the average economic standard of the market for products and services related to aesthetics (such as creams, shampoos, treatments, perfumes, lotions, more sophisticated beauty salons, aesthetic clinics, and hair removal services). Food also participates in this market segment by offering shakes for weight loss, supplements, diets, recipes, and foods meant to improve appearance and performance. They are products and services increasingly specialized to understand this new man and offer products that shall transform him into the metrosexual model that^{aa} stands as the aesthetic standard of contemporary masculinity. Being a hairy male is a thing of the past. The new man is shaved, gets a manicure, applies cream on the face, uses gel in hair, and consumes healthy and functional foods. All provided by specialized professionals.

The magazine becomes a privileged vehicle in the emergence and maintenance of the new masculinity because it intends to institute a new way of being a man. An attempt is made to make the “new man” closer to the universe of cosmetic industry, aesthetic medicine and fashion, without compromising the future consumer’s manliness coefficient. On the contrary, this new man supposedly comes out ahead at the moment of sexual and/or professional conquests. The new male takes care of the skin, diet and image and his identity is built from the products available in the market.

The body as a concept

In order to open new thinking in the field of Food and Nutrition, we highlight the terms “body,” “food,” “masculinity” and “health,” which, in this context, are relevant since, when developed, they significantly contribute to the endeavor towards a new masculinity. Such terms are not just words but concepts that translate the different values and ideological positions present in studies about masculinities.

For Deleuze,⁸ there is no simple concept, since it always consists of multiple interests, perceptions. There is no isolated, neutral, pure or innocent concept. The concept is always in relation to other concepts and discourses. In this sense, every concept is double, triple, multiple, consisting of distinct parts and, when exposed, it reveals its articulations, components, overlaps. Every concept then refers to a problem that gives it meaning, a discourse that guides it, establishing relations of convergence or divergence with other similar or antagonistic discourses, seeking to establish and impose modes of understanding reality, transforming perceptions and theoretical formulations into language which shall be accepted and assimilated by common sense.

a The term “metrosexual” (portmanteau neologism of metropolitan and sexual) was used by English journalist, writer, and broadcaster Mark Simpson in 1994 in a column in (British online newspaper) *The Independent*.

From this consideration, the body is not only matter, flesh and bones, a mere biological organism with its organs and systems. On the contrary, the body is built by the culture and discourses present in society, in an uninterrupted and transient socio-historical articulation. The body, therefore, can be thought of as a concept, as a construct of scientific thought in the biomedical field,⁹ which places its interests in it and updates its discourses, points of view and epistemology. In this way, thinking about the body is thinking about its concepts, its modes of presentation in the scientific scene and the discourses that constitute it in the health sciences. At the same time, the body is nature, a biological organism, and it is also culture, a set of meanings created according to the specific interests of the different social actors who produce discourses about the body.

The discourse on the body that appears in men's magazines translates concepts rooted in common sense but also clearly shows the interest of an instrumental and technical medical rationality as well as the opportunistic and biased discourse of advertising and the market. Such discourses present conceptions, representations and concepts that help construct a certain foundation about the body but reduce it to the biological dimension and its insertion in society through consumption and the cult of the "perfect body."

The concept of the body used in this strategy is reductionist, technically oriented and mechanistic. It reduces the body to biomedical or biomechanical elements, devalues or ignores subjective aspects in constructing a masculine identity, places the feminine as secondary, a kind of trophy to be earned after transformation, does not consider the different masculinities and builds an ideal body based on market strategies, aesthetic medicine and the cosmetics industry. The new man is just shape without content.

The discourse on health in *Men's Health* magazine

Thinking the body, then, means thinking about the different concepts and discourses that constitute it. The concept is the basis of discourse, it is its "hard core," for it formulates a possible world, the very reality constructed, a scientifically correct "legitimate discourse." Concepts on the body present in *Men's Health*¹ develop, relate and connect to other concepts in the biomedical field, the media, advertising, the universe of the cultural industry, reproducing the values of narcissism and consumerism characteristic of our times. In this sense, we reconcile the relationship between the construction of a masculine identity via the idealized body, considering how food is captured in a consumption logic and reiterated in the discourses of the magazine studied. The discussion about gender lends itself and reveals how dominant discourses operate in the form of a hegemonic subjectivity, using resources that were once outside the masculine universe.

The dominant scientific paradigm in the modern world has its origin in the heliocentric theory of the movement of the planets by (Renaissance mathematician and astronomer) Nicolaus Copernicus, (German mathematician, astronomer, and astrologer) Johannes Kepler's laws on the orbits of the planets, (Italian polymath) Galileo Galilei's laws on the fall of bodies, in the great synthesis operated by (English mathematician, astronomer, and physicist) Sir Isaac Newton. In the seventeenth century, the development of mechanics influenced the thinking by French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist René Descartes, who affirms the human body as a machine and it is enough to know the defect to repair it. He thus creates a scientific rationality that places the body as an object, a mere instrument of knowledge, at the mercy of a scientific rationality that produces knowledge, concepts and truths about the body that, in turn, will be diluted and penetrate into the whole society, diluting in common sense. But this thought, although hegemonic, does not constitute unanimity.

According to Boaventura Souza Santos,¹⁰ it is a totalitarian model that denies a character that be rational to all forms of knowledge that do not operate according to its logic, that are not based on its epistemological principles and its methodological rules. For the author, this scientific model has remarkable characteristics, such as: knowledge happens through rigor in quantification and qualitative aspects are discarded; complexity is reduced and must be divided to be known; and the creation of regular laws are aimed at predicting the future of the phenomenon. The world, and consequently the body, what is human, food and everything that is part of life, acquire this logic of the machine-world in such a powerful way that it shall become the great universal hypothesis of modern times, what is mechanistic.¹⁰

Thus, these guidelines constitute what we now call "science" and institute biomedical rationality in health. According to Camargo Jr.,⁹ this rationality is delimited by the generalizing character with universal validity to the detriment of singularity; by the mechanistic character, homogeneous causalities that describe the whole world; and by the analytical character, which produces an isolation of the parts, which together demonstrate the functioning of the whole. The modern rationalist logic pointed out by Boaventura and Camargo Jr. presents itself clearly in the ideology of the historical moment in which we live and appears categorically in the intention of the editorial of the *Men's Health*¹ magazine, especially in the way of understanding and practicing health.

In this sense, after World War II, with the creation of the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO), the concept of health came to be defined as the complete state of physical, mental and social well-being. Alongside it, a biopsychosocial health model emerged as a counterpoint to the biomedical model. While the former considers the person as a whole, the latter values parts of the organism, characterized by a reductionist and mechanistic rationality, as alluded to earlier.

We believe that *Men's Health*¹ magazine reproduces this totalitarian model of science, which values the body to the extreme, to the extent of erasing its plurality. It reinforces the mechanistic ideology of a defective and fragile body that needs to be repaired, subordinating it to the machine, making it a fetishized commodity.¹¹ By giving the specialists' scientific discourse the endorsement of truth, it reiterates a discourse of authority that trivializes the discussion of gender and reinforces stereotypes of strength, vigor, success and competitiveness of heteronormativity.

Body: the market fetish

With Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman's thought¹² we learn that contemporary society has been losing the rigid physical and ideological contributions of long ago. We live in a fluid society of fears and liquid loves, where people are transformed into disposable goods in the context of a consumer society, where the image (industrial brand/body brand) gives subjects their identities.

For Bauman,¹³ people are convinced, encouraged or forced to promote an attractive and desirable commodity. To do so, they do their best and use the best resources available to increase the market value of the product they are selling. And the products they are encouraged to market, promote, and sell are themselves. They are at the same time the promoters of the goods and the goods they promote. They are both the product and its marketing agents, the goods and their sellers. The new man is reduced to a new product, a new release in the market. He is the poster child of himself.

Also according to Bauman,¹³ the final destination of all the merchandise put up for sale is to be consumed by buyers and in the consumers' society nobody can become a subject without first turning into merchandise. No one can hold their subjectivity safe without reviving, resuscitating, and recharging in perpetuity the expected and required capacities of a salable commodity. There is a "blur," an elimination of boundaries between beings and things.¹³ In this perspective, the construction of a masculine identity in the magazine is a simulacrum – a representation – and what the materialization of the inner truth is supposed to be is an idealization of the material characteristics – objectified and turned into things – of consumers' choices. Satisfaction, the promise of happiness, the valorization of the performance and the "investment" results are immediate, everything "here and now," quick and easy. The ideal body of the "new" man is obtained instantaneously, the promise of happiness is perpetual, and it becomes itself a commodity of consumption. And being a consumption commodity is what makes it an authentic member of our society.

In view of the notion of a simulacrum, it is possible to consider that few concepts have as much relevance in modernity as the one of fetish, being used by several scientists and writers. It was first thought by Charles de Brosses, a French writer in 1756, which allowed us to establish the boundaries between our enlightened societies and primitive societies with beliefs and superstitions, allegedly subject to an enchanted system of superstitious beliefs. The author devoted a book to determining the historical-geographical coordinates of primitive thought by identifying a form of enchantment whose perfect illustration would be the worship of said fetish gods. This characterization of pretense primitive thinking through fetishism went through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁴ Now, wouldn't be traces of these "fetish gods" what we see today being built in the media? Thus, the articulation between the concept of Freudian fetishism and fetishism of the commodity in (German-born scientist, philosopher, economist, sociologist, journalist, and revolutionary socialist) Karl Marx is important to make up the theoretical mosaic covered to think about the power relations that are at stake in the constructions of body, health, eating and masculinity reviewed and in question.

Marx thinks commodities as a human product for exchange, with the economic objective of valorizing the capital, transforming the concrete value into an abstract value. Objects gain values ideologically produced in a movement of idealization (fetish), creating desires to be consumed. Therefore, in this articulation, we propose that the body also become an object of fetish.

In capitalist society, material objects have certain characteristics which are given by dominant social relations but which appear as if they belong to them naturally. The analogy is made with religion, in which people give some entity an imaginary power. Only they are not natural properties, they are social ones – they are real forces, not controlled by human beings and in fact they exercise control over them. They are the forms of objective appearances of the economic relations that define capitalism. If these forms are taken as natural, this is due to the immediate non-visibility of their content or social essence, which can only be revealed by theoretical analysis.

"Reification," in the same way, is a Marxist concept that defines the act (or result of the act) of transforming human properties, relationships, and actions into properties, relations and actions of things produced by man, which become independent (and which are imagined as originally independent) of man and govern his life. It also means the transformation of human beings into beings similar to things, which do not behave in a human way but according to the laws of the world of things.

As for (Austrian neurologist) Sigmund Freud,¹⁵ the fetish consists of a substitute for the penis/phallus that does not exist in women, which the child believes to have and does not want to give up believing. Fetishism linked to sexuality is intended to preserve the phallus in the woman and, because it is a symbol of the lack, at the same time it confirms the complex of castration. Thus,

Freudian fetishism denotes subjects' difficulty in dealing with limits and frustrations, defending themselves through relationships with people and things in a fleeting and ephemeral way, a mark of the perverse ideology that they would thus reach happiness and solve all their problems.

In "The Ego and the Id (German: *Das Ich und das Es*)," Freud¹⁶ states that the self is first of all corporeal, establishing through this instance a close relationship between the psyche and the external world. Its constitution comes from narcissism,¹⁷ another fundamental Freudian concept that points to the relation of the self with the body and the world of objects with which it relates. The Freudian construction of psychic experience points to the overcoming of the body-mind duality, insofar as it undoes the separation between psyche and body. For Freud, the self is an extension of the bodily surface, its constitution being directly linked to corporeality. In the constitution of the self, the subject takes the body itself as an object of love, a consideration that allows Freud to take the (Greek mythology) myth of Narcissus as a reference to think of this delicate psychic action that allows the construction of an instance that will enable the libidinal investment in the object world. It is as subjects experience their body as the first object of love that the experience of bodily unity and wholeness necessary to differentiate themselves from the external world shall be possible.

Once this internal world-external world differentiation is constructed, it is possible for subjects to launch their object investments in the world, establishing relations with others and with culture. In this sense, the ego's ideal as a psychic instance resulting from narcissism has the function of measuring the self in relation to the ideals, allowing one to situate oneself and the world. The fetish, in turn, is one of the possible objects of investment, be it the body, an ideal image, shoes or even the glow on the nose produced by love, and always meets the parameters that are established through the ideal of the self.

The ideal man published in the *Men's Health*¹ magazine often serves as this parameter, because it exerts the fascination necessary for the self to take it as an object of love. The ideal of the self, articulated to the superego, demands at every moment a chimerical search for fulfilling its often fanciful orders.

American historian, moralist, and social critic Christopher Lasch¹⁸ appears as an author who collaborates with our argument when he uses narcissism to think society. Creating the concept of "Culture of Narcissism," he argues that we shall have a cultural profile close to the psychopathology of narcissistic neuroses, psychoses and schizophrenia. He considers that people present symptoms such as lack of meaning in life, difficulties in relating and feelings of inner emptiness. The result culminates in grandiose yet weak egos and extreme concern with personal interests.¹⁸

Men, lacking the certainties of decades ago, with rampant anxiety due to the contemporary world speed and living in fear, end up activating primitive psychic defenses to survive, shaping the culture of narcissism. Contrasting with the authors mentioned above, we perceive the media

strategy in directly working to build a “new masculinity,” valuing, through discourses, the (Greek mythology) Narcissus of each and every one. The media broadens and reinforces human dissatisfaction, putting in their interests an actual ideal to be achieved.

This ideal is presented in a discourse that carries a sense of ease, speed and accessibility, directly linking to the body as the main attribute for a successful life. However, like the Freudian fetish, this ideal represents a fault that, if it maintained its malleability, would promote a permanent search for desire. This entrapment of desire with an often unattainable ideal serves the Marxist logic of fetish.

We realize that the media invests paradoxically. On the one hand, it strikes narcissistically when it affirms human fragility and, on the other, it inflames narcissistically, denoting that individuals only depend on themselves to reach perfection. Individualism is exacerbated and becomes the main reference of the world, making society a conglomeration of individuals autonomous and emptied of their collective political force.

The society of the spectacle¹⁹ places images as privileged mediators of objects (commodities) and people with their truths and solutions, transforming individuals into uncritical reproducers of their seductive ideologies. According to the Marxist fetish logic, this continuous process is characterized by the occupation of all dimensions of life by the commodity. Everything and everyone enters into a fetishized dynamic. Body, manliness and food, which are the terms privileged in this essay, are the magazine’s greatest subjectivizing vehicles.

Eating, science and gender

Eating is a key component of this biotechnology-building process of the body¹¹ and increasingly the male audience is besieged by the mass media, the discourse of specialists and service providers, products, medicines and food that provide “better performance for the machine.”

The market has already noticed this gap and magazines target aimed at the male audience insistently works to produce “a new man” – adapted to the logic of the disposable consumption of goods, products, equipment and services aimed at constructing the body, a “metrosexual” aesthetic and what is called health care, which is really nothing more than caring for body shape. What is seen as health, in fact is only a perspective linked to aesthetic medicine, the primacy of shape over content, which is called here “health aesthetics” – that is, the valuation of aesthetic parameters as defining health status.²⁰

This aesthetic-related health process points to the body’s role in the social environment and to the process of constructing an identity in today’s society, which acts in structuring a new body perception. The variety of bodily alterations (corrective or aesthetic) to which the body is subject

today, the expansion of the market linked to the cult of the body and its transformation, and the valorization of aesthetic parameters as defining health statuses and the conception of what being “healthy” means, put us before different health issues that raise new forms of understanding.

It is possible to observe in the *Men's Health*¹ magazine a profusion of discourses and meanings created that mix with the dominant ideology, confuse themselves with hegemonic social and moral values, and place the body at the same time as a fetish object, a means of social mobility, a vital organism, means of elevation, ecstasy, well-being, pleasure or fountain of eternal youth and a machine to be fed. It is a network of discourses, knowledge, meanings, tips, information, values, strategies and magic solutions that act on the surface of bodies but refuse to inhabit them. They are used without reflection, without criticism. They cause discourses from some specific sectors to become naturalized, to produce meanings and truths, to normalize life, reproducing a rationality that distances subjects from their own bodies.²¹

According to Ferreira,²¹ male bodies have also become a capital. It is a currency that participates in the market economy of affective, sexual, marital, professional and even existential exchanges. It is a necessary condition for social climbing, happiness and social recognition. The body occupies then a prominent place in the process of a progressive and hierarchical differentiation of social life. It is a form of capital that defines and is defined by the social environment. Through it, new codes are produced and old valorization and status codes are reproduced. Its aesthetic possibilities allow to move through different positions in the social hierarchy, changing and defining affective, personal, professional or social trajectories, creating new spaces in the social order, producing new forms of social distinction. The body built has its own status, as if it would not depend on hierarchy, although in fact it only reinforces the new forms of hierarchy.²¹

This form of production of subjectivity not only acts individually, emitting stimuli directly to the unconscious, producing normalized individuals, submitted to a hierarchical system of values and exposed to submission but it also acts in the production of a social subjectivity, which manifests itself in production and consumption, producing even our dreams, passions, desires, world references and life projects.

The construction of meanings on masculine bodies in *Men's Health* magazine¹ incorporates the senses worked through this essay. The body is reified, transformed into a thing, dealt with as an object of worship and fetish, a commodity to be exposed and consumed in the market, devoid of a singular value, but at the same time serialized, transformed into a machine of repetition of instrumental rationality that capitalism operates over bodies, rendering them docile and useful to the system.

The complexity of the relationship between the consumption of food and the construction of the body is a fundamental way of thinking about subjective production today. For us, capitalism

is a machine producing meanings that engenders roles, desires, points of view, corporealities and varied aesthetic patterns, using behaviors that both lend themselves to submission and liberation. Under this logic, food emerges as a scientific and medicalized product that allows access to an ideal and healthy body, since, by eating the right food, individuals shall be able to solve all their problems. Therefore, in order to believe in this ideology, the sets of power²² means exert their strategic seductions, forming insatiable consumers.

In the magazine, food appears as the fuel needed for the machine to produce and consume. We find food for males to increase muscles, to improve some organs of the body or to heal the body and soul although not always producing health. Food in this logic is reduced to a mere container of nutrients that, well administered, lead the machine to the expected results. With this rationality, one tries to erase the entire social place of food. According to Kraemer, Prado, Ferreira & Carvalho:²³

Health professionals and the media use these recommendations to establish a healthy eating pattern idealized for an idealized individual, embodied in a socially legitimized pattern. While science and technology develop healthy diets based on laboratory precepts and nutritional recommendations, in the symbolic imaginary we build a desire for some food capable of making the ideal of health come true in people's lives, some food with medicine power. Under this perspective, food appears separate from people's context and daily practices, translating into nutrients that meet a physiological demand on the one hand and idealized by on the other.²³

Dietetics increasingly gain relevance in current biopolitical strategies due to the intensification of the medicalization and pharmacologization of life.⁹ That men need to better health care is clear but how to do it was the problematization that this mosaic allows to situate. It should be emphasized that the intensification of body care is not totally negative because care with the body makes people more attentive to their health and disease processes when taken care of in their biopsychosocial totality. Especially with men, who for a long time have neglected and somehow still neglect health care. However, the health concept found in *Men's Health*¹ is not, according to research, the best way to think about men's health due to the subjectivization in this hegemonic model that limits the health-disease process.

In the magazine we effortlessly find the subordination of women to men, which has been worked on in gender studies in terms of hegemonic masculinity. Women appear on the covers in reduced images, in headlines and articles as passive objects under masculine desires, bordering misogyny. Women's positions as subjects are removed due to the corporeal and ideological form in which men are portrayed. Food gains extreme relevance in the production of this male being. Articles that advocate food as promoting mainly sexual performance that would place women as this man's passive hostages.

It is therefore exemplary how the media participates in an intense way in conforming contemporary men's body and subjectivity, producing and reproducing body and health concepts where food is more and more a protagonist. Due to the impossibility of reaching ideals conveyed as possible, it produces a subjective fragmentation that, because it is part of the self's own constitution, becomes the biopolitical strategy for capturing desires so that they serve market interests and its logic of consumption. The "new man" would thus be a makeup to reissuing a hegemonic gender norm. In short, the appearance changes but the essence of what is considered legitimately masculine as virility, strength and rigidity is not altered.

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