

Epidemic of fitness

Epidemia de *fitness*

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Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo refletir sobre uma condição naturalizada e disseminada principalmente pelo campo da nova promoção à saúde e reforçada nos espaços de atuação da educação física, a que se denominou epidemia de *fitness*. O termo refere-se a hábitos e comportamentos obsessivos com a saúde, beleza e vitalidade, tornando-se alvo de exercício de controle por parte de especialistas. Para discuti-la realizou-se um estudo de caso em que foram submetidos à análise semiótica, por meio do método de leitura isotópica, 59 materiais de divulgação, impressos, coletados na Expo Wellness Rio 2009, uma feira de negócios inserida no Congresso Wellness Rio 2009. As categorias isotópicas que emergiram a partir da análise são as seguintes: saúde/beleza e tecnologia, saúde/beleza e especialidade e saúde/beleza e longevidade. Elas apontam para a potencialização da vitalidade humana como mola propulsora das estratégias discursivas, assim como valor recorrente que embasa ações voltadas para a melhoria das condições de saúde, imbricadas à ideia de longevidade e beleza.

Palavras-chave: Controle; Biopoder; Biopolítica; Vitalidade; Práticas ascéticas; Educação física.

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to analyze a condition we call a fitness epidemic, which is naturalized and disseminated mainly in the field of new health promotion and reinforced in the spaces of physical education activities. The condition refers to obsessive habits and behaviors in relation to health, beauty and vitality, and has become subjected to expert control. The discussion is based on a case study of 59 pieces of promotional material collected at an event titled *Expo Wellness Rio 2009*; these materials were subjected to semiotic analysis using methodological procedures based on isotopic analysis. The isotopic categories that emerged from the analysis are health/beauty and technology, health/beauty and somatic expertise, and health/beauty and longevity. They point to the enhancement of human vitality as the motivating force in discursive strategies as well as a recurrent value underlying interventions concerned with improved health conditions, intertwined with ideas of longevity and beauty.

Keywords: Control; Biopower; Biopolitics; Vitality; Ascetic Practices; Physical Education.

Introduction

In the last decades of the twentieth century, there was a growing body of discourse about life based on the biological body's ability to perform its metabolic functions and to look good in the mirror, and even better, in the eyes of others. Not only has this fact been the object of many academic studies, but it has also been the focus of weekly magazines sold on newsstands. The importance of technological advances able to structure, model and interfere in vital human processes is undeniable; these include metabolism, organs, development... in total, even human vitality, making our existence longer and more productive (Rose, 2001). However, this article travels a broad path in pursuit of the hegemonic promotion of health. Its objective is to focus on and discuss a sub-product which crosses various technical fields and practices in our everyday lives: what we call the fitness epidemic.

In this study, the term epidemic is used metaphorically (Barata, 1987), connotating an event which targets a certain population to propagate behaviors considered obsessive due to their compulsive nature, all in the name of health and beauty; these are naturalized, and are sustained by scientific discourses touted by the mass media. The concept of fitness evokes the adaptation of an esthetic/moral model, which is manifested in dedication to physical exercise, diets, body modifications, the consumption of products which promise to optimize human metabolism, and to the biologism of existence. In this way, we seek to look with "estranged" eyes at what can be called the "ascetic ideal" (Nietzsche, 1998, *passim*); in other words, the idea of citizens who, identified with their vital aspects, live their fears and insecurities, and worry about controlling their lives in order to be long-lived, beautiful and vigorous.

In advanced, liberal twenty-first century societies, compulsive behaviors related to caring for the body to attain health and beauty are routinely carried out and translate into people more frequently thinking about themselves and acting as somatic individuals, whose judgments around their individuality are closely connected to medical discourse (Rose, 2007). In this scenario, the terms "beauty"

and “health” are make up an inseparable symbiosis and are present in contemporary biopolitics, with attention to the hygienism which is still present in the media, in the bioeconomy, and in innumerable other discourses.

Activities concerning life, acting in the amplification and control of the individual’s productive forces as a discipline of the body and of the body-species, by regulating the populations (Foucault, 1977), are not a new phenomenon. The founders of physical education were always concerned about regulating the behaviors of citizens in the rising bourgeois state, as noted by Soares (2002): “In Europe, throughout the entire nineteenth century, scientific gymnastics was affirmed as a significant part of the new codes of civility. A millimetrically reconstructed body was seen, the size of which had never been seen before” (p. 17). Another example of this type of activity was given in 1926: Boarini and Yamamoto (2004) quote verses by the doctor Carlos Sá presented at the Third Hygiene Conference in 1926, which were intended to be used to form habits in the school-aged population. The doctor recommended students to memorize them: “Today I brushed my teeth, Today I took a bath, (...) Yesterday and today I was always clean, Yesterday and today I was not afraid, Yesterday and today I did not lie” (Carlos Sá, 1926, apud Boarini and Yamamoto, 2004, p. 7).

Today, new concepts of these somatic individuals link the beauty/health hybrid to an “economy of vitality” (Rose, 2007, p. 5) and an “economy of hope” (idem, p. 27), both of which are connected to the notion of capital, which in turn is linked to the vital processes permeating contemporary biopolitics. The first is due to the quest to update vitality with an eye to the harmonization of the forms required from/for a citizen who is conscious and responsible for his or her own health, but at the same time insecure in the face of probabilities and uncertainties. Order, beauty and purity, according to Bauman (1997), are attributes which supposedly provide security and, in general, are desirable for the modern individual. But to achieve this triad, it is necessary to stop seeking one’s own happiness, as many pleasures should be substituted in large part with obligations and worries about preserving life in an uninterrupted and expanding. However, it is now necessary that

the free market’s values of well-being, appearances and vigor be invested in one’s own body.

The economy of hope refers, on one hand, to the desire for recognition, translated into wealth or reputation on the part of scientists and companies involved in potential discoveries of procedures or medications which aim to improve human vitality. On the other hand, it speaks of the infinite hope held by individuals that some change can alleviate their suffering, increasing their chances of a long life (Rose, 2007; Castiel and Vasconcellos-Silva, 2006). This circle is completed *ad infinitum*, as the competitive and expansionist character of modernity (Giddens, 1991) stimulates scientists and entrepreneurs in the bioeconomy and new biotechnical enterprises, awakening in somatic individuals the hope to acquire health, beauty and vigor by exercising the well-publicized autonomy which defines biological citizenship.

It is within the frame of this biological landscape which we will discuss the fitness epidemic.

Sources and methods

The form chosen to approach the theme of this study was the case study, with the objective of decoding the publicized narratives in the advertisements offered to a specific consuming public, that which is concerned with health, beauty, and well-being, in order to expose and analyze their central ideas.

Our sources were obtained at a business fair which was part of the Wellness Rio 2009 convention, Expo Wellness Rio. This choice was made due to the reach and influence it has on physical education and other specialties related to health. At this fair, 54 companies hosted exhibits featuring printed materials about their products. During the three days of the event, pamphlets from all the companies were collected, creating a sample with a total of 59 pieces. For reasons of brevity, some examples were chosen which represented common elements present in the rest of the materials.

The published messages were examined and decoded, taking into consideration words, colors and images in both explicit and implicit elements. All the visual programming was seen as a set of signs impregnated with meaning, with the role of embody-

ing the messages in the advertising. Analysis of the narratives was done based on semiotic principles, more specifically isotopic reading, as detailed by Greimas (1987).

Isotopic reading of the data is conducted in three steps: a) identify the semantic categories, recognizing the meanings of the units (semes) which are represented in the texts, in words as well as images; b) isolate the categories which are repeated, which will form the isotopic categories; and c) distribute the isotopic categories among three semantic levels: figurative, thematic, and axiological. The figurative level refers to the meanings absorbed directly by the senses, connecting them to perception of the real world; the thematic refers to the abstract elements which are expressed through figurative elements (for example, gym equipment is figurative, while "health" is thematic); and, finally, the axiological is connected to the system of conceptual values, such as "vitality" and "decline", following socio-culturally determined standards which judge in a positive or negative manner. In this study, three isotopic categories were found in which the health/beauty elements are present and form a unit: that is, a single seme.

The study was exempt from evaluation by the Ethics Committee since human studies were not directly involved. The publicity materials were meant to be freely distributed to the participating public, and there were no ethical issues involved with using them as a source.

Beauty/health and technology

This category was present in 33 samples, encompassing all the advertisements which blatantly used images or text which emphasized technology aimed at the biological citizen seeking physical conditioning or fitness. Here, technology is considered according to the proposition made by Rose (2007), which refers to "any assemblage structured by a practical rationality governed by a more or less consensual objective (...) hybrid assemblages of knowledge, instruments, persons, systems of judgment, buildings and spaces, sustained at the programmatic level by certain presuppositions and assumptions about human beings" (p. 16). In this way, the use of technology in the advertisements covers both machines and modern equipment as well

as ideas and systematic products which are meant to optimize the search for a healthy life connected to the current standard of beauty.

An advertisement for a hot tub, for example, shows the endorsement of medical experts who lend their names to the product's propaganda. At the communication level, the narratives exhibit information like the following: "How would you like a dose of Active Oxygen? Ozonomatic: daily renovation of your health; as well as helping to activate the body's natural defenses, supplying the means of self-healing (...) This bath consists of bubbling pressured ozonized air through warm water (...) creating oxygen in its nascent state, or as we call it, active oxygen".

From another perspective, that of signification, the party sending the message intends to awaken confidence in the product's consumer potential, through the specialists' endorsement and emphasis on precision, as the advertisements include statistics and sophisticated and modern images of the apparatus. This set of information chases away the specter of uncertainty, favoring the image of an effective product and thereby assuring the truth/reality of the narrative (Bauman, 1999; Castiel and Povoá, 2001).

The media (transmitter), in bringing its ideas to the public (receiver), needs to share the conduct and feelings of these people in order to make the communication between parties more efficient, and mainly, increase its powers of persuasion. Baudrillard (1991, p. 9) affirms that "dissimulating is pretending to not have what one has [while] simulating is pretending to have what one doesn't have". The former refers to a presence; the latter, an absence. In dissimulation, reality remains whole and a distance between the real and the represented can be perceived. But to have any approximation of confidence between the consumer and the product, in some situations the media tries to eliminate the idea of representation that it creates, and pursues the convincing nature of its product. So, by means of a simulation conducted in the advertisement, the media omits signs of the absence of reality contained in the promise made and invents something "as if it was" real.

Chandler (2007) affirms that our actions are constantly based on representations of reality and,

further, that certain representations create more confidence than others. These are partly due to what semiologists call “modality markers” and are really signs that can turn “plausibility, reliability, credibility, truth, accuracy or facticity of text within a given genre as representations of some recognizable reality” (Chandler, 2007, p. 64). A narrative, depending on how it is used, can be perceived as more or less real. Therefore, some markers of modality present in the messages linked to technology, mainly when presented in the context of health and beauty, involve subjective traces of modern globalized society, such as its desire to distance oneself from death, to have a more secure life, to acknowledge the frenetic search for youth, among others, which all elevate the degree of confidence in products offered on the market. Morais (2003), compares the action of the media, which creates “a territory between plausible reality and guided imagination” (p. 8), with Janus, the character from Roman mythology with two faces, calling attention to one of physical education teachers’ essential concerns, according to him: [they] “need to have the necessary critical ability to discern one face of the other” (p. 9).

In the *Asics* publicity pamphlet (13x9 cm and 41 pages), information about the level of technology used in producing the shoes and clothes is essential; each characteristic of the product is presented as a differentiated technology; the exclusive trademarks (®) not only suggest a sense of security regarding the quality of the materials being purchased by consumers, but also the advantage in relation to similar products. Icons are inserted next to all the images of shoes, clothes, or *Asics* brand accessories, and the captions referring to the signs are decoded in the technical section of the flyer. We can mention the word *DuraSponge* alongside one of the icons associated with images of various shoes and its decodification: “Expanded rubber sole, resistant to abrasion, located in the front section. Provides greater flexibility, durability, cushioning and excellent push-off and traction”. The notion that these items are more than just objects to be worn is reinforced, and the implicit message is that the elevated technical standard allows bodily movement to be improved, whether walking or running.

MATRIX Fitness Systems’s advertisement for

its treadmill focuses on beauty in the images of its products and innovations resulting from new technological investments in the fitness industry (Figure 1). *MATRIX* proclaims its high level of technology, based on its meticulous 83-page insert, which is written in English, printed on couche paper, and packed with photos of fitness equipment. It all centers on a high-tech aesthetic and the only words on the cover are: “*MATRIX: Strong . Smart . Beautiful*”. By investing in the construction of an image which gives priority to beauty, the quality of the materials, details of its products and, principally, a slogan of this type, the company seeks to do more than just establish a brand: it aims to gather up consumers who identify with this message and can see themselves in the adjectives “strong, smart, beautiful”. The image of the equipment, emphasizing the central panel where the word “go” appears in black on a round white background with a green halo, suggests a capacity for self-determination, making decisions and moving forward.

Publicity materials from *Terrazul* (A4 sheet folded into 4 pages), a company which produces software for physical evaluations, sports and health, affirms that its products are high technology. Its programs generate different types of evaluations and analyses, as well as gym management modules which provide access control, management of payment and fines, and activity timetables. The flyer shows a note in red calling attention to a legal rul-

Figure 1 - Matrix equipment panel



ing against a competitor who copied and illegally sold one of its products (Figure 2), highlighting the presence of economic competitions which typify the globalized world, significantly indicating the role of technology in spaces of vitality and beauty symbolized in the gym or health club. It is the *locus* for bodies and the equipment that molds them, conditions and even produces them; the gym is a type of temple in which modern technology, disseminated at the *Expo Wellness Rio*, is applied to meet the demands of a free-market society and creates in its adepts an entire culture of beautification, vigor, infinite amplification of potential and bodily functionality, which translate individual conceptions of space and time into what it means to have a good appearance.

Figure 2 - Information about “pirated” Terrazul products, in red

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Health/beauty and specialization

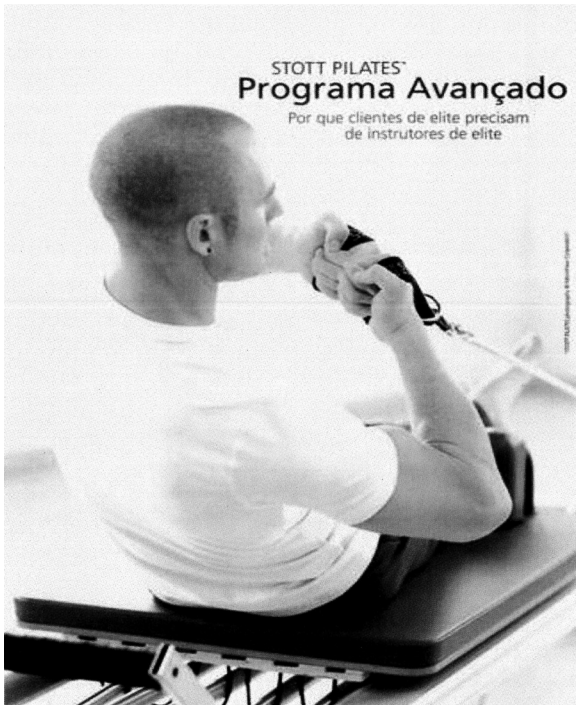
This isotopic category includes discourse identified in 33 of the samples surrounding “somatic specialization” (Rose, 2007); in other words, actions by experts committed to orienting and governing individual behavior in the area of healthy lifestyles. Professional specialization is translated into new forms of power over aspects of somatic individuals’ lives, exercised by the “somatic guides”, that is, therapists, counseling experts and professional advisers, with recurrent discourse in the fields of well-being and physical conditioning.

Rose (2007), in approaching the issue of counselors in human behavior, takes as a reference the notion of pastoral power described by Foucault (2006). This power, despite its presence in ancient eastern societies, was most developed by the Hebrew culture, and was greatly important to Christian thought as a mechanism for separating the individual from knowing his own desires. According to Foucault, it is characterized as the power exercised by a shepherd over the flock, who is charged with providing its sustenance and its salvation. In relation to discourse on sexuality, Foucault identifies a “morale and imposition of values”, aspects created by Christianity and recognized in individuals who “can act, in relation to others, as shepherds, guiding them throughout life, from birth to death” (2006, p. 65).

Publicity materials from the Canadian *Merithew Corporation*, which markets equipment and training courses for Pilates (Melo, 2010) both under the brand *Stott Pilates*, show the image of a young white man, with a muscular body and a “healthy appearance” exercising on one of the brand’s machines. In the picture, the man is surrounded by extremely bright surroundings, denoting tranquility, the certainty that the client is being well-guided on how to perform the exercises prescribed by the trainer or physical therapist and, in a certain way, transparency, cleanliness and scientific order, elements which are common to all the products sold by *Stott Pilates Programa Avançado & ISP*. The programs referring to all levels of courses offered by *Stott Pilates* appear only on the back side of the folder, an area reserved for information about the programs available. The only written text, which is found on the front of the pamphlet, states: “Because

elite clients need elite instructors” (Figure 3), which ends up attributing important value to the main image. The expression at the beginning of the phrase, which begins (in the original Portuguese) as an interrogative, ends as an affirmation, leaving a dubious aspect in the air regarding its intentions.

Figure 3 - Publicity material for courses intended for professionals already familiar with the *STOTT Pilates* technique



Professional specialization as a “value” in itself, which places the professional on a different level, has made particular gains in the wellness and fitness segment, concentrating itself in the economic aspect. In the message spread in this campaign, individuals from more economically affluent classes (who, by extension, can pay more) require the best specialists for their lives. Accordingly, the professional is compelled to enter into a competition for more and better quality information, so that his or her services can continue to have a financial yield comparable with the status of elite instructors.

Castiel and Vasconcellos-Silva (2006) make a connection between the excess of information and

the lack of significance that this excess brings. In this case, the connection between greater specialization and greater economic gains appears as the significance given to this “abundance”. Furthermore, the advertisements for the *STOTT Pilates* courses aim to form a network of strategic relationships between the professionals they train and their future elite clients. In this way, this professional/consumer will occupy a new position, that of the specialist, in acquiring the status and power to maintain himself or herself in the center of the counseling relationships of the soma, a position reached thanks to the information transmitted in the course.

The discourse of this advertisement creates twin benefits for the company. If on one hand the professional fights to stay within the ideal model of the practice of “expertise” (Ortega, 2008, p. 32) by consuming information, on the other hand the photo of the young man exercising on the Canadian company’s machines shows the consumer the possibility of reaching the market’s standards for appearances.

Aimed at professionals, *FITNESS BUSINESS* magazine presents itself as an instrument used by specialists in bio-economy to provide counsel to entrepreneurs in the wellness and fitness sector, guidance for discussions about business management, with an emphasis on leadership, marketing, strategy and competitive advantages. Thus, the specialist in bioeconomy, just like the shepherd, orients entrepreneurs so they can capture value in vital processes.

Beauty/health and longevity

This category was identified in 23 samples of published materials collected at the *Expo Wellness Rio* and speaks to one of the facts of the western liberal way of thinking: the fight against decline and death. Connected to aspects involving vital qualities of the human being, this type of thinking flows into the concept of the “ascetic ideal found in Nietzschean philosophy (Nietzsche, 1998, passim), which signifies the uninterrupted fight between life and death, in terms of preserving modern man.

The pamphlet for *Technogym*, which is all in English, advertises a series of equipment for training in those high-return areas, fitness and wellness. In one of the sections of the pamphlet, titled *Strength*

and metabolic training - *Easy Line*, images of individuals with a non-athletic appearance are shown. In the photo in question, only one of the ten people who are shown exercising presents an appearance associated with “youth”: this is the woman who is leading the group, and is located in the center of the center of the photo. She is thin, the only person wearing a form-fitting shirt and showing her arms, which makes it possible to show a physical profile which is in line with the current standards of beauty. Her appearance corresponds with the profile desired by consumers who buy *Technogym* equipment, and perhaps this is the reason why her body is authorized for public exhibition. This is very different from the other individuals in the image, whose bodies deviate from this model, and seem to not have authorization: they are dressed in the same type of clothing - pants and larger shirts - and are less illuminated than the central figure (Figure 4).

From another angle, in recognizing that biomedicine is an imperative for a long life, we are driven to think that biomedical discourse, backed by epidemiology rapidly appropriating biotechnical resources, “encourages individuals to think of death as a disease, to understand mortality as a morbidity, and approach the idea of an instrumentalized life as a means to longevity” (Banerjee, 2007, p. 30). This type of logic transforms the somatic specialties, especially medicine, into powerful mediators between life and death, and the product of this triangulation is the transmutation into the image of an implacable enemy. It ceases to be a natural phenomenon, and becomes worthy of any and all defensive actions to eliminate it, in the same way that it is fair and responsible to always defend oneself against an enemy that lurks near us. If we consider Foucault’s thinking about discipline, we really must agree that “a central technique in the literature of health education is the production of fear” (Banerjee, 2007, p. 30).

In this way, in the name of reducing suffering, dangers are exaggerated by agencies committed to educating the populace. Relative risk, an epidemiological measure of the force of association between the risk factors and outcomes which is measured from the ratio between the incidence in exposed individuals and the incidence in non-exposed individuals, is presented to the public instead of

Figure 4 - Page from the *Easy Line* pamphlet



absolute risk, which is the number of new cases of the disease/certain population in a certain time (Banerjee, 2007). Nevertheless, offering hope is an integral part of the strategy, which lies exactly in the relationship between patients and some specialists. Consequently, death can be staved off, but it depends the “at-risk” individual’s commitment to freeing himself or herself from habits considered

to be harmful. Castiel (1999, p. 37) comments that: “Collectively, an aura or threat seems to hang over all of us, which can be activated, in a particular manner, at any moment. In particular, if we do not arm ourselves according to what the precepts of health protection and the norms of occupational safety state, ideas of caution in daily activities not only in urban but also rural settings”.

Promotional material for *Vida Natural & Equilíbrio*, under the title *Delícias Natalinas [Christmas Delicacies]*, feature 11 photos of Christmas desserts and their respective calorie counts per serving, as well as the names of stores selling these products, preceded by a brief warning: “*But be careful with the calories* (note that the serving size is approximately 80 grams), *especially with panettone and chocolate panettone*. A slice can weigh heavy later” (Delícias natalinas, 2008, p. 10-11). It falls to the consumer to deliberate about the satisfaction and/or the weight that his or her decision may lead to afterwards.

In public health literature, the use of “disciplinary technologies” by powerful specialized teams and commercial groups is common in order to create incentives for individuals to relate to death in terms which are antagonistic, impersonal and technical. The point to be discussed, then, is that the corollary of the benefits presented could be the suffering caused by these messages, which create feelings of guilt and responsibility.

We note that in all the source materials collected at the *Expo Wellness Rio*, images and texts related to depictions of/about older individuals move away from the fragile and sweet figures adopted elsewhere. Now, the image of the senior citizen, who physically represents longevity, disappears. Only ten images of/with older individuals were identified, and of these, three were the presidents and vice-president of institutions participating in the convention. In the series of images which appeared in the program of events for *Wellness Rio 2009* (a 52-page booklet) only two depicted older individuals: one was the president of the company hosting for the event, and the second, which appeared in the publicity materials for a company which trains gym professionals, was an almost imperceptible image of an older person together with a child (Figure 5).

Despite having identified numerous phrases and

Figure 5 - Page from the *Wellness Rio 2009* catalog showing one of the few images of senior citizens

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images highlighting the benefits of products sold on the market of appearances and well-being for a “long and happy life”, paradoxically the image of the older person does not appear to support the textual message. This scorn for the image of old age can be exemplified in literature by Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which the central figure admires his own beauty expressed in his portrait painted by his friend Basil Hallward, and expresses the desire to remain young forever while the portrait ages in his place, even if it costs his very soul. Despite having gotten his wish, the protagonist feels disturbed by the inconsistency between his continued youth and beauty while watching his beautiful portrait grow old. In front of his own aged image, he decides to remove such a horrible vision from his view, stating “The picture had to be concealed. There was no help for it.” (Wilde, 1972, p. 150).

In this way, the relation between the narratives in the well-being pamphlets and the maintenance of health cannot be separated from the desire for beauty and preservation of the vigor of youth. But the undesired marks left by the passage of time should be erased, and the old “diseases of old age”

need to be fought as enemies of life. Soares (2009), in concluding his article about the totalitarianism of pedagogical practices regarding the body, comments that: “It seems we are definitively condemned, from here forward, to remain in fullness and shape, because if we do not, we run the risk of falling into the abyss and into disgrace, into the hell of illness and of dysfunction” (p. 79).

Findings/conclusions

The last considerations of this article speak to the values which are present in the messages transmitted in the materials which were analyzed. Principal among these is the possibility of increasing the body’s functionality and maximizing human vitality.

Based on the narratives which were analyzed, we can see that the amalgam formed by the concepts of beauty and health is animated by the vigor of youth. Therefore, we observe how technological advances, the increase in the number of new professionals specialized in well-being counseling, quality of life, as well as the search for youth and eternal beauty, try to meet the desire for vitality in the group to which *Expo Wellness Rio* is targeted to reach. This vitality is also found in the intricacies of a new facet of economic exchanges.

Contemporary biopolitics is tightly connected to new biotechnologies and the reformatting of the limits of liberal states, involving the exercise of new forms of biopower, urging individuals to take responsibility for managing and structuring their own vital aspects, or what can be called “life itself” (Rose, 2007). However, for the discourse which was analyzed, “life itself” refers to longevity, beauty and vigor. When we consider vitality from a physical education perspective (especially, from the last decades of the twentieth century to the present day), we understand that this area of knowledge created a profile with the convincing image of caring for the individual’s vitality (Ferreira, 2008).

We stress that there is a catalyzing effect in physical education activities, when bioscience and the mass media exert influence on the way that individuals think about themselves (professionals and clients). People involved in the economy of hope who believe in and share these ideas frequently commit

themselves to meeting their obligations as responsible individuals/consumers, and in doing so take the onus of what will provide them with biosecurity. Self-vigilance and efforts to maintain the willpower to do what is “right” or, in other words, the ascetic ideals which lead to vitality, end up creating the desire for physical activities, certain (correct) habits, consumption, and daily restrictions, in the scenario of what is considered to be individual liberty (Bauman, 1995, 1997; Castiel, 1999; Dumit, 2000; Ortega, 2008; Rose, 2007).

The desire for rational certainties which are capable of reducing or eliminating biological suffering, which underlie the fitness epidemic and manifest in the analyzed narratives, is the fountain of youth for many people in advanced modern western societies (or developing societies such as Brazil). It is a process in which the generation of biovalue propels the market and vital processes are included in an economy of vitality as well as in an economy of hope. In this way, considering the inherent complexity of research in the area of public health, especially in physical education, it is necessary that the social sciences emphasize their participation in (critical) discussions and interventions in this sector, perhaps weakening deterministic ideas which generate uncertainties, ideas which can haunt the twenty-first centuries’ forms of subjectivity (Bagrichevsky et al., 2006; Rose, 2007).

Due to the multiplicity of points involved in the health/beauty and vitality amalgam, we suggest further research on the topic, in a way which deepens investigations in public health and physical education, about the powers which focus on life itself. Recalling the characteristics of the method used and the diversity of concepts discussed in this study, we find it opportune to quote Wilde (1972, p. 100), when Dorian Gray’s friend Lord Henry affirms: “nothing is entirely certain”.

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