

Me Inc.: The desired identity in initial training in Physical Education¹

Mário Luiz Ferrari Nunes²
Marcos Garcia Neira³

Abstract

The hegemony of neoliberal rationality has produced new forms of population control and regulation. As an institution within this context, the university has been yielding to the laws of the market and called on to construct a certain type of subject accustomed to a new life ethos. Starting from the notion of curriculum as a signifying practice that designs and governs identities, and understood as a form of investment, like any other commodity or consumer good, higher education not only determines to a great extent what people should do, but above all, who they are or can be. As a consequence, it also specifies what they should not be and the problems that this may entail for those who do not conform to its dictates. Based on these assumptions, this article examines some of the activities in an initial training course in Physical Education at a private Higher Education Institution, which aim to subjectify its subjects in order to meet those demands. To this end, a cultural analysis was performed on the written and oral texts collected by means of observations followed by records in field diaries and compilation of electronic messages sent to the university community, as well as advertising campaigns and information available on the institution's website. The results indicate that the form of subjectification put into circulation by the curriculum designs the identity of the Me Inc. subject.

Keywords

Curriculum – Teacher training – Physical education – Identity.

Introduction

Material that emphasizes care with professional career, health, financial gain, personal relationships, food, appearance, etc., has been increasingly publicized in the mass media, with ample use of keywords such as “entrepreneurship”, “investment”, “leadership”, and “flexibility”—in short, a vocabulary that announces the steps that each person must

1- This text was translated by Gláucia Roberta Rocha Fernandes and Martin Clowes.

2- Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, SP, Brasil. Contato: mario.nunes@fef.unicamp.br.

3- Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brasil. Contato: mgneira@usp.br



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take to be successful. In other words, they promise a future in which one can envisage and enjoy the enrichment and happiness obtained exclusively through personal efforts.

The more individuals are called upon to take responsibility for themselves, the more information they access to understand and overcome personal problems. The solutions for facing conjunctural crises and lack of enthusiasm are presented by an avalanche of seminars, lectures, and courses offered by specialist companies. As if this were not enough, there are also media productions that celebrate those who have overcome difficulties and have triumphed in the face of life's unforeseen events. For many, these conditions are natural and derive from the evolution of society. In these terms, overcoming is a virtue of each person.

This article denaturalizes this discursive order when analyzing the practices in the curriculum of an initial training course in Physical Education (PE) at a private Higher Education Institution (HEI). It is not just about words, but a set of perspectives and *truths*, organized and made available, constituting practices with prescriptive, molding, and fixing properties (COSTA, 2000).

The written and oral texts analyzed, when combined, disseminate, reinforce, nurture and produce representations, constituting a battlefield in a politics of identity inclined to the naming of a (possible) identity. Therefore, what is presented here are the technologies of subjectification that seek to produce the identity of the Me Inc. subject.

The Me Inc. subject is produced in the midst of the narratives that make up the social world and form the contemporary culture regulated mainly by market principles, creating a belief in the celebration of a lifestyle that is taking hold in curricula, especially those of higher education. The entrepreneurial culture that has become established in Higher Education (HE) exerts a type of explicit regulation on the ethos of the HEIs, producing diverse meanings and effects that govern the practices and social conduct within them and, therefore, favor the hegemony of neoliberal rationality.

Neoliberalism is an art of government that extends market rationality from economic domains to the whole fabric of society, including non-economic fields. According to Foucault (2008), it works as a principle of intelligibility to define social relations and behavior of individuals.

The French philosopher explains that in neoliberalism, *homo economicus* is an entrepreneur of him-/herself because he/she is his/her own producer and source of his income. In neoliberalism, salary is seen to be an income for the worker. In this way, the worker perceives him-/herself as a machine for producing income streams, generating personal gains for working. To that end, the income earned through work cannot be dissociated from the skills available to him/her. Income is the capital that the worker receives and that enables him/her to make a personal investment, becoming a company of him/herself. It is this logic that makes consumption possible and that turns everything into merchandise.

The product obtained by the income acquired—the salary-income— is what brings well-being and happiness. Foucault (2008, p. 311) asserts that, in neoliberalism, “consumption must be considered as a business activity by which the individual, starting with a certain capital at his/her disposal, goes on to produce something that

will be his/her own satisfaction”⁴. Ultimately, the person of consumption is also the owner of production.

In the neoliberal order, education is one of the best investments a subject can make for him/herself and his/her children. It is said that investing in education brings several benefits, ranging from personal satisfaction to higher pay and a better position in the job market. The same reasoning applies to the investments that a country has to make in the education of its population. Without it, it will be excluded from the economic game between nations. In all cases, it is also said that risks have to be well calculated. Since resources cannot be wasted in vain, the expectation is always a rate of return that compensates the effort.

The discourse surrounding higher education is that it not only largely determines what people have to do, but affirms who they are and can be, based on that mode of investment. As a consequence, it specifies what they should not be and the problems that this may entail.

As an investment, education ceases to be a process of critical reconstruction of public culture and starts to be treated as merchandise, just like any consumer good. In this condition, education is also impermanent, because the knowledge obtained soon becomes obsolete due to the constant changes generated by the dynamics of competition, and of the culture of generalized and unlimited effectiveness (LIPOVETSKY, 2012). But so is the transmission of knowledge, since according to Silva (1995), depending on curricular organization, subjects will blend the skills and behaviors accessed with their own ways of being.

By favoring one topic to the detriment of another and promoting certain social practices, the curriculum affirms certain knowledge and values for participation in society. Consequently, it affects the construction of the representation of who we are, how we should be, and how we cannot be. The curriculum is a discursive practice that transmits particular regimes of truth, that is embodied in certain narratives of the individual and society, and that acts to position the subjects of education in culture (SILVA, 2005). Permeated by power relationships and organized to guarantee control, efficiency and social regulation, the curriculum acts in the production of new generations, constructs realities, and designse idealized identities (SILVA, 2001; LOPES; MACEDO, 2011).

These interrelationships between curriculum and culture have fostered the investigation of the technologies that the curriculum for PE education focuses on in order to produce the desired subject in these times when the art of neoliberal government is spreading throughout the social *fabric*.

The production of the Me Inc. subject

The research in question was conducted at a private HEI located in a large Brazilian metropolis. The institution mainly serves the section of the population benefited by the social policies of the last decade. In general, they are the first representatives of the family to access universities in pursuit of higher certification. Oral and written texts

4- Our translation.

collected during an academic year through systematic observations and the compilation of documents (electronic messages sent to the community, the Internet portal, and advertising campaigns) were submitted to a cultural analysis along the lines proposed by Costa (2000, p.24), for whom “the task of cultural analysis is the examination of implicit and explicit meanings and values in a certain way of life and in a certain culture.”

Several actions and instances are identified in the curriculum of this HEI that affect students, teachers, and employees with a view to bringing them closer to the mercantile ethos of these times. For example, the Department of International Relations (DIR) was created with the main objective of promoting academic, teaching, and technical-administrative exchange, as well as any cooperative activities with partner institutions. The website announces more than 10 countries with which the HEI maintains contact so that the students can join exchange programs.

The DIR helps the institution to take steps towards internationalization through a partnership with an international franchise for language courses and a scientific cooperation agreement in Psychomotricity with the University of Paris. The first case concerns the purchase of software for learning foreign languages, while the second advertises vacancies for the masters course, as the HEI aims to form a group of excellence in that area, along with 22 other countries .

The establishment of the department and the partnerships established are in line with the recommendations of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which perceives education to be a tradable service. In 1996, for example, the agency regulated the option for buying educational products produced by developed countries. Subsequently, an agreement was signed on the internationalization of education via university branches. This logic reinforces the mercantile nuances of exchange trips (MANCIBO, 2007).

Another relevant fact in relation to these exchanges and the complex connection between the conditions of globalization, education, and the state is the constitution of a notion of cosmopolitan citizenship (POPKEWITZ, 2004). Travel, studies of foreign languages, and multicultural tolerance are encouraged. This may facilitate the process of homogenizing identities, since students from the so-called third world come into contact with other conceptions of education that focus on reinforcing the critique of the local models.

Consider the following example: During an academic exchange held at the Department of Sports Sciences of the University of Konstanz, Germany, some students of the PE course were impressed by the structure available for the practice of gymnastics. Back in Brazil, they constantly reinforced that the country is light-years away from providing something similar. The assertion disregards the conditions that allowed the country they visited to constitute what it presents. When questioned, they were also unable to say what knowledge they had made available to effect the academic exchange that was presupposed for the trip. The narrative—more common than one can imagine—is that the process is a one-way street. There is no exchange; what happens is a seductive exposure to resources, ways of life and, above all, certain academic knowledge to be acquired, i.e., the commercial spirit is in force and scientific colonization is consolidated. In the same line of *colonial propaganda*, some professors at the HEI are simultaneously technical managers of sports teams. As a rule, when they return from their trips abroad,

they exalt the superiority of the structure available for practicing a certain type of sport and they enunciate the dream of a permanent transfer. These comments are powerful in the curriculum, since they reverberate with colonialist superiority. Not infrequently, students retell the experiences described and, even without leaving the country, reproduce the professors' litany.

As if the lack of exchange in this traffic of subjects, cultures, and conceptions were not enough, there is no political intervention in the path of the students' training. The students do not report any educational action that could challenge the international economic superiority in order to obliterate the binary forms of narrating the subject and the nations in terms of a center and a periphery. They only learn to admire them, becoming potential buyers of their production in a unhinged attempt at identification. This is supplemented by the lack of any appreciation for the local point of view in the reports forwarded by the DIR.

Situations such as this—so common in some Brazilian universities—disseminate the concepts of developed countries, expanding the sectors of influence of the epistemic communities⁵, which find themselves enhanced by the use of a variety of devices (publications, lectures, fairs, and consultancies). In the midst of these transnational exchanges, there is a risk of establishing what is best for all from a single reference.

The processes of international exchange extend the idea and possibility of global consumerism, falling upon the possibility of identification processes between consumer clients, even though they originate from distant places. The episodes narrated reveal how national cultures are most exposed to external influences, which in a way weakens local identities and enhances the cultural homogenization phenomenon. In Hall's words (1992, p. 622):

The more social life becomes mediated by the global marketing of styles, places, and images, by international travel, and by globally networked media images and communications systems, the more identities become detached - disembedded - from specific times, places, histories, and traditions, and appear "free-floating".

Based on Hall's critiques (2003), it is possible to understand that this movement involves maintaining the problems arising from colonialism in another way and in another historical conjuncture. For the author, what is currently seen in relations between and within countries is that the asymmetry of power has shifted from the imperial protectorate to a globalized transnational system, keeping the post-colonized in a situation of extreme political, economic, and military fragility. The shift in the control of power between colonized societies and their colonizers indicates that the characteristic feature of this transition has been the persistence of the structural inequality inherited from the ex-colonizers. The difference is that this now occurs in a global, deregulated, free-market system that serves the interests of transnational corporations and Western models of regulation. Colonization comes to be seen as part of an essentially transnational and

5- An epistemic community consists of network of recognized and competent experts in a particular field and with legitimized authority in terms of politically relevant knowledge associated with that field or area of knowledge (BALL, 2001).

transcultural global process, producing great imperial narratives of the past and how the Other can be in the West without being seen or having a feeling of belonging. It is no coincidence that the exchange of students causes some of them to desire to become one of them. Wrapped up in this tangle, the Me Inc. subject seeks to invest in knowledge produced according to scientific parameters imposed by the hegemonic groups. When it comes to teacher training in Physical Education, a field historically dominated by psychobiological discourse, a possible effect is the uncritical appropriation of theories of physical development and performance based on positivist principles. This is something that is at least dangerous when working in a real school environment evidently populated by subjects very different from those analyzed and described in the studies accessed.

Again with respect to the colonizing perspective, everything gives the impression that the DIR initiatives reinforce the neoliberal policies of the commodification of education in two ways: On the one hand, there is emphasis on other forms of school financing/investment together with personal efforts to obtain credit and funds for the travel and the stay; on the other hand, because it implies that the exchange processes ensure that the business world has an interest in education simply because it wants a qualified workforce, capable of competition in national and international markets. In this sense, it is interesting to note that the exchange is seen as essential for building a *curriculum vitae*, and thus as a form of personal investment.

The electronic messages sent to the community by the DIR support the foregoing analyses. Banco Santander, a company that maintains commercial ties with the HEI, sponsors a period of residence in Spanish universities. Apart from the added discourse of superiority, the communiqué emphasizes that the scholarship program is one of the most important in the world, entangling hegemonic aspects and financial interests. To corroborate this, the HEI sent an email to lecturers and students with one of several world rankings of universities, in which the classification drawn up by a British institution is presented in an aseptic manner.

It is notable that *performativity* uses a variety of mechanisms. In these cases, it contributes the internationalization of production, finance and other economic and cultural resources that wipe out the capacity of any individual state to control or define its economic future (BURBULES; TORRES, 2004). More clearly, the processes of exchange promoted by the institution reinforce the most perverse side of globalization. The meanings produced by the native country are of little importance for contemporary business strategy, which can be potent for the fragmentation of national policies submitted to the logic of economic competitiveness (BALL, 2001). These forces contribute to the transformation or abandonment of educational policy as a component of the social development of a nation that wants to be sovereign, that is to say, the possibilities of breaking with the historical condition of subordinacy and of resisting a complete foreign scientific, technological, and cultural dependence are diminished (FRIGOTTO, CIAVATA, 2003).

Another department of the HEI involved with the contemporary mercantile issues is the Junior Company. This is a non-profit civil society whose purpose is to provide cultural and professional development for students and professors. The priority focus is

organizational advisory and consulting services, which provides guidance for business projects and services in general. It is active in the following areas:

- Entrepreneurship: The development, implementation, and monitoring of business plans; training of entrepreneurs and future business owners; as well as fundraising for initiating or developing new projects for the interested public.
- Business consulting: The development of models for planning, controlling and executing organizational processes and promotion of the training of leaders in highly competitive scenarios.
- Franchises: Being a center of excellence in the franchise market, acting as a facilitator of processes between franchising companies, franchisees, institutions, industry associations, students, and representatives of the communities that contextualize the [...].⁶

The Junior Company provides evidence of the current intention to align the subjects of education and the contents addressed in the course to the market demands, since it is from this that the necessary knowledge for the professional activity is extracted. By linking education with preparation for work, and academic research with the imperative of free initiative, the Me Inc. subject consolidates a training that is distant or absent from the social problems in which it is engendered. The trend is to promote and reinforce a more global perspective on local social policies. Ultimately, even in projects formulated for social areas, the issue is the acquisition of resources and gains with the unfavorable social condition. It is notable that many PE students work in NGOs that promote sports in areas that are deemed socially vulnerable.

Another constituent practice of the curriculum investigated is the Friend Campaign, a strategy for attracting students that is contributing to a significant increase in enrollments in the institution. According to internally released campaign reports, 90% of the current student body was won through this campaign. This model for recruiting customers exists in several social segments and has already become commonplace from elementary to higher education, and from religious institutions to for-profit institutions—each with its particular ways of reaching the public or rewarding its *partners*.⁷

The campaign regulations prescribe that the referral of new students for any course and period will generate bonuses. The bonus will be doubled for referrals for transfers from other institutions. The transferred student will receive a bonus in the amount of one monthly payment, which will be received after paying the first three installments. Only paid-up and former students may participate. For those joining the institution, the right to participate is granted from the moment they enroll.

The campaign is constantly promoted in an intensive marketing campaign. The campaign involves everyone and is constantly commented on by students in all classes. At other times, this initiative also rewarded teachers. During the execution of this research, according to an internal communication, one student received R\$ 2,000.00 for her referrals, and the benefits awarded to students has exceeded R\$ 1,000,000.00. On one

6- Source: Institutional website of the HEI in question.

7- In a *Google* search, we found approximately 493,000 results regarding this way of recruiting subjects, including students for educational institutions.

occasion, a recent recruit to the PE course was caught phoning a friend and explaining that if he came to the institution, both would profit from the transfer. He also proposed setting up a *pyramid*—a popular capital-gains system—with other colleagues to increase the dividends.

The financial incentive is introducing a migration of students from other HEIs, which is contributing to the establishment of intramural borders between “us” (the old students) and “them” (the transferees). It is common to see groups of students on campus wearing clothing with the logos of other HEIs. The campaign inserts the Me Inc. subject into one of the conditions of current society: the experience of being inside and outside, the *familiar stranger* (HALL, 2003). These subjects experience temporary forms of belonging: There are those who only attend licensure courses, because they have a bachelor’s degree from another HEI; there are others who left the original course a long time ago and return to complete it; and also those who need to take various subjects in different classes, because their university transcript has a poor fit with the curriculum of the institution. In all cases, it is difficult for them to establish bonds of belonging. As a consequence, they live in a state of readiness to launch themselves into other quests. In the PE course, for example, there are many students who are attending their fourth or fifth HEI, which reinforces ephemerality as a characteristic of the present times. (HARVEY, 1993).

Faced with the competition, the institution sets enrollment targets and announces that if the goal is achieved, there will be discounts on monthly fees. Otherwise, an increase is inevitable. In addition to the commitment to earning the bonus, the campaign makes students jointly responsible for preserving the institution and the conditions that establish the cost of their training. It is implied that *everyone has to play his/her part*. The Friend Campaign addresses many current interests and specifically seeks to meet the needs of economic sustainability. In neoliberal rationality, as Foucault (2008) explains, there is more governance with less cost. These practices call upon the Me Inc. subject to act.

Turning oneself into an entrepreneur requires the establishment of a partnership with the HEI. The campaign makes this a form of personal investment. Ultimately, the growth of the institution leads to its recognition. Therefore, the Me Inc. subject invests in his/her own image, because it is not enough to have a small gain for momentary personal expenses or to consolidate his/her course. It is necessary to have a diploma of recognized provenance for the subject to be valued in the public space. The diploma has a symbolic value that grants him/her an identity. What will become of their investments if the institution they chose is not recognized in the market? What will their identity be if it goes bankrupt or closes the course they are attending because it has lost in the competitive game? In addition to the loss of dividends, the Me Inc. subject will have shaken his/her conviction about his/her competence to choose. It is no wonder that the effort that students make to recruit new partners is increasing.

The Friend Campaign teaches its subjects the characteristic modes of action of the post-Fordist model. Labor innovations include the concept of teamwork, the need to count on the collaboration of all to guarantee personal commitment to the interests of the company, the stimulation of competitiveness by means of awards, profit sharing and other forms of economic incentives without this implying autonomy in decision-

making. (TORRES SANTOMÉ, 1998). Consequently, the campaign simply naturalizes the restructuring of organizational culture along these lines.

It is perceived that an initiative with this content also reinforces the concept of managerialism. In Ball's view (2005), this is a competitive business culture, a form of government that introduces conflicting changes in labor relations in which individuals are vested with responsibility for the well-being of the organization. The role of the company is to facilitate the process. The structures of the new managerialism allow a greater range of the behavior and the emotional life of the workers to become public, and therefore visible and open to analysis to be governed (BALL, 2005).

By dedicating him-/herself to this endeavor, the Me Inc. subject ends up benefiting economically from the growth of the company. If the goal is not met, either the company can transfer the responsibility to the subject, or the subject can assume the burden of failure for him-/herself. In the post-Fordist model, this generates a need for self-exploration in search of personal success and criticism of those who do not collaborate. The impression that remains is that it becomes impossible to achieve goals without the cooperation and commitment of all involved. The aim is to instill a culture of *performativity* in the worker's spirit. (BALL, 2005).

In addition to its tangible effects, the Friend Campaign functions as a link between the Me Inc. subject and consumption. The invasion of higher education by corporate culture is building a network of intelligibility that transforms the Other—the friend, the new student—into a commodity. The commodity-other is also the Me Inc. subject-other, because on entering the institution, in addition to consuming the products and services of the organization and seeing their personal interests met, he/she becomes another source of student recruitment, a new partner. This relationship between the three parties intensifies exchanges of merchandise and services, shaping modes of consumption, in which all parties involved are objects of desire. As with any cultural artifact, the campaign produces forms for regulating identities and simultaneously produces such identities.

Two situations observed materialize the process. One student reports that she was approached by an acquaintance, with whom she was not personally close, with the suggestion that she refer him so that she could obtain the dividends announced. She says that there was no interest beyond that, since he did not even enroll or keep in touch. He may have been abducted by a more compelling competitor's campaign. Another student narrates that when she was in the enrollment line, she was approached by a regular student that she knew but without any bond of friendship. She proposed referring her name and registration number so that she could win the bonus. As the applicant would have been transferred from another HEI, the amount received would be doubled. The deal involved a negotiation regarding the division of the bonus. After six months, and now newly enrolled, she has met the proposer several times, but the latter avoids conversation and runs away.

Bauman (2008a) states that we are trained to seek new needs that arouse a pleasant yearning for satisfaction. Disabling the past, both of material and affective experiences, is part of this learning. From an early age, marketing strategies discourage us from maintaining affective relationships with consumer objects and the desire for others. For

the sociologist, life in consumer society has little relation to the acquisition of possession. The rhetoric is another—what matters is to be always in movement. In the present case, transferring from a HEI can be seen as an upgrade⁸ in the *curriculum vitae*. Many are of the view that it can be profitable to study at an institution that is better-known in the market. For Bauman (1999), consumption is the norm of contemporary society and it seems that the private higher-education curriculum presents practices that normalize it. The current discourse among students is that *there is no harm in earning a little money*, even if the merchandise is a friend. There is nothing wrong in changing institutions, as long as there is a good reward in the transaction. In this way, new friends and new opportunities are presented to the Me Inc. subject. It is not by chance that several students express that their transfer was due to dissatisfaction with the service provided by the previous HEI—support, structure, internship/employment opportunities, outdated professors, etc.

At the turn of the semesters, professors and students are invited to offer courses, lectures, and workshops in the areas of academic and professional competence of each interested party. The goal is to encourage entrepreneurship. The calls sent by electronic mail highlight the great acceptance and demand on the part of students and the external community throughout the school year and, mainly, in vacations, for extension courses, workshops, and leisure and physical exercise activities—the last aligned to the PE course. Financial return is the counterpart of the partnership. In language and extension courses, 70% of the application fee goes to the proposer. In the case of mini courses, lectures, and workshops, the percentage offered is 80%.

This form of participation encourages the Me Inc. subject to commit to the quality and productivity goals of the institution. It is based on the informational paradigm of the world of work and the concept of continuing education, which characterizes the “learning to learn” of the post-capitalist society. (DRUCKER, 1999). By offering the knowledge of the interested parties, the institution ensures that the community is updated in accordance with market innovations, without having to pay the price. What is seen is a proliferation of courses with emphasis on multifunctional Me Inc. subjects.

By being called upon to act at different moments, the identity of this subject makes it clear that we are the result of constant negotiation and the decisions we make in order to guarantee forms of belonging. An evident identity entails personal promotion and sale of the product. As a student, the Me Inc. subject learns to promote the marketing of his/her own self, objectified and transformed into merchandise.

Another practice implemented within the curriculum under investigation is the annual promotion of the awarding of a prize to prominent members of society. Over ten years, more than 200 awards have been given out based on nominations of the members of the HEI’s managing council. The so-called Night of Stars, as it appears in the emails promoting the event, has awarded local and international politicians, singers, actors, athletes, writers, and other personalities, as well as professors and students of the

8- Information based on a student’s comment regarding the process of changing institution (Source: Field diary).

institution, honored for academic merit and active participation in the activities promoted by the institution.

It is worth mentioning that the ceremony, held in the local theater, involves refinements such as cocktails for the guests, the presence of a master of ceremonies for presenting the award, companions to accompany those awarded, and professional musicians—all transmitted live to the campus by big screen. The winners receive a diploma of honor and a patinated-bronze trophy with two crystal stones, weighing around 3 kg, with certificate authenticated by an artist.

Another project that stands out is the *Ousadias Interdisciplinares* [“Interdisciplinary Boldnesses”], better known as OI. On Fridays, students are invited to present their artistic attributes in a specially designed space located in the campus courtyard. Singers and bands of varied musical styles, magicians, dancers, *capoeira* groups, and circus artists are among those who present themselves to the community before lessons and/or in breaks extended for the purpose. In the official notes, it is disclosed that there have been 500 presentations, each with an estimated audience of 2,500 people. As a meritorious cultural practice—because only virtuosos present themselves—OI is another action that involves issues of self-production and consumption⁹.

In addition to their aspect of praise, the actions employed give rise to others. At the end of the day, why are these practices established? An analysis of the society of spectacle is not appropriate here, but it is important to say that it is linked to the society of consumption and knowledge. What is implemented is the constant display of new identities, ready to be consumed and then discarded. In this show game, there is no terminal identity, because anyone can, at any moment, be honored or have their presentation space safeguarded so that they can be seen and almost immediately forgotten. In the case of OI, students and employees usually praise the modality of the events. The actors are not even named. During the production of the data, no prior disclosure of the shows was observed. The audience headed to the place as usual, knowing that something would happen. The reverse occurs in the case of the winners of the other event, when the honor goes to those who are still in evidence.

Athletics is another area that favors the production of the subject Me plc. It deals centrally with the training and administrative management of sports teams for university competitions. Its main goal is to strengthen the name of the institution, showing that an athletics association recognized for excellence in sports is the fruit and mirror of a respected teaching institution. Teams are usually made up of athletes and coaches belonging to clubs and sports centers that benefit from scholarships. Having won several titles in university championships for volleyball, basketball, and *futsal* [Brazilian five-a-side indoor soccer], and sponsored student athletes in modalities including boxing, jiu-jitsu, fencing, and weightlifting, the athletics association is a self-proclaimed force and reference in the university sports scene. Given that most of its athletes are linked to the PE course, the performance discourse is greatly exalted.

⁹- As everything comes and, everything goes in the society of consumption, the project was canceled during the research project.

The identity of the scholarship subject aligns with that of the Me Inc. subject, which involves analyzing the possible effects of this privilege on the exchange relationships that are established in higher education. This is more evident in the Physical Education course. When victorious in sporting events, their achievements are given prominence by halting classes without prior notice, so that everyone can attend the tributes to student athletes. It is also not uncommon to be absent from classes to participate in events. In this case, professors are requested to release the student from classes and replace the content with the execution of activities outside the time and space of school.

These identities represent competitiveness, efficiency, achievement, and individuality—characteristic features of neoliberal rationality. Athletes and top models are subjects who live in a performance-oriented culture in their areas of expertise. They are identities linked with the consumption culture of spectacles and personalities. In local terms, both are positioned in power relations that involve asymmetries in discursive practices because they represent an elite—the winners.

The condition of these subjects' presence within the curriculum reinforces aspects considered as the norm of modern society to interested parties. Something like: "Those who stand out have to be valued, privileged". To reinforce this, PE professors linked to the sport are introduced to new students (first-year or not) by means of their sporting history, a common procedure in the curricula of Physical Education professors (NEIRA, 2017). Participation in Olympics, revelation of famous athletes, titles won, and involvement in teams are aspects that make up the identity of these professors. Such issues gain impetus when the professor's involvement in the field of sports forces him/her to be absent from classes. In this situation, the absence is justified as gallantry. In other words, the formation of the student is deferred and the identity as a sports coach gains more prominence in the curriculum than the identity as a teacher. Likewise, the absence of student athletes in the classroom is considered natural. After all, for many of them, this has been a recurring theme since the times of basic education (NUNES, 2006).

The granting of scholarships is the result of negotiations involving the exposure of the institutional brand at events. They are established by means of agreements between parties that involve the subsidy of studies and sponsorships. As can be seen, these subjects are immersed in games of seduction and achievement, regardless of their uses by the institution. Not infrequently, some scholarship students change HEIs as they receive other offers/proposals. There are also those who suspend their studies due to incompatibility between studies and competitions. In other words, the scholarship student's commitment to the institution is a hindrance when an opportunity arises in the future.

The Athletics association also promotes the Me Inc. subject in other ways. In addition to holding internal sporting events, it maintains a fitness facility with the same appeals of large companies in the field. Its presence in the institutional Internet portal consists of the image of a young, white, female student with a silhouette acceptable to the established standards of physical aesthetics of the major fitness centers—shapely and lightly tanned. The promises include fat reduction, muscle building, physical conditioning, and quality of life—aspects that favor body satisfaction and the aesthetics of self, helping the subject perform fetishistic practices and become a desirable commodity within a society of image

and celebrities. It should be mentioned that the fitness center receptionists are PE students. Moreover, the same concepts and conceptions of an efficient and manipulable body cross most of the course disciplines and end up forming part of the PE professor's discourses.

The subjects summoned are not just pure investment and return. They need to be valued for their efforts and rewarded socially. To that end, the HEI promotes various forms of appreciation, in which the game of meritocracy and celebrity are highlighted. There are countless messages extolling the achievements of subjects linked to the institution. Professors, students, alumni, and the institution itself are publicly commended for their efforts, in addition to sporting events: book launches; publication of scientific articles; works accepted in national and international congresses; entry or career promotion of alumni and professors; approval in competitions; social- and environmental-responsibility campaigns; hiring of students who excel in class by renowned companies; and even appearances in television programs or in news articles are effusively broadcast. The communiqués give the public the imperious notions of competence and meritocracy as essential goals for those who want to be *someone in life*. It's up to them.

Self-exhibitions are increasing as new feats are presented to the educational community. This is a practice of great relevance, constantly repeated and transformed into a norm. In contemporary society, in which identity seems to be a fitting together of loose parts, merit and consumption are becoming necessary for this cobbling together (BAUMAN, 2008b; LIPOVETSKY, 2012). In such a context, it is interesting to note that the Me Inc. subject is a governable subject that internalizes social norms and self-governs in this endeavor.

Considerations

Neoliberal rationality, in regulating the curriculum of higher education, collaborates to university education being given the value of a commodity. Both in the form of awards/recognition and in the form of self-promotion, the practices described complete the subject because, apparently, they involve the desire for recognition of the effort. At the frontiers of corporate and visual culture, the curriculum makes the institution reinforce aspects of *performativity*.

The link between the production of oneself and consumption deserves to be highlighted. The production of self is, in the first instance, the opportunity to be in focus. Investing in oneself and promoting one's own image are central conditions for the subject to be invited by a professor to take up a job, gain a scholarship to study abroad, be accepted to offer a course, be honored for his/her achievements or merely divulge them, acquire a desirable body, expose his/her artistic gifts, or to make a contact/contract, etc. Being in the spotlight is the norm. It is the chance for the Me Inc. subject to show who he/she is.

By exposing the valued virtues, the subject presents his/her image to be appreciated by others and then consumed. The practices in the curriculum investigated favor the inclusion of subjects in contemporary logic, in which we are valued for the production of ourselves. Self-production is not for acquisition; it is for recognition (BAUMAN, 2008b).

For Hall (1997, 2003), the idea of consumption and its relation to the identity of the subject configured by the map of the market, uproot him/her from conventional forms of belonging, which also ends up displacing the traditional structures that supported modernity. The Me Inc. subject is a product and producer of these times.

The traditional discourses of scholarly culture present in any curriculum hybridize with those from the financial and marketing sectors. The result is the re-signification of educational discourses, which then highlight other nuances, such as the internationalization of education, the ranking of the institution, partnerships and various financial gains, academic correspondence to expose oneself, and so on. The producer, product, and consumer are integrated into a new way of managing life, a culture of consumption constructed and simulated by marketing, merit, and image.

However, one does not consume anything anywhere. What is produced to be consumed must be indexed to the logic of the desirable, and this, within the higher education curriculum, means efficiency and performance. On the personal level, being efficient is something that can only be achieved with individual merit, which spreads the concept that anyone can achieve that which he/she proposes, provided he/she works hard and with a lot of will. The result is the consecration of the individual as a victorious, entrepreneurial subject that gives visibility to the strategies of overcoming the difficulties of life, to his/her formulas for success. His/her achievements having been disclosed, the subject presents him-/herself as a norm to the social order, seducing those around him/her, exalting some, disqualifying others, but classifying all. It is not by chance that effort, efficiency, and productivity are recurrent terms in the marketplace. If the higher-education curriculum meets the market requirements, it is not surprising that there are practices within it that value this dimension of the subject. After all, the production of a winning student-subject means that the curriculum that trained him/her is efficient.

As a consequence of this, meritocracy is reinforced by the simple assumption that any subject of any social group has the same possibilities of access/success, provided that he/she conforms to this social condition. Such a perspective relegates to the background the asymmetrical relations of power that prevent some from overcoming their starting conditions, constituted in the broad field of social relations. On the subject of the meritocracy myth, McLaren (2000) affirms that merit is one of the forms used by the chains of power to manage desire for hegemonic purposes, and one of the most widespread means of configuring thought and conduct.

In the society of consumption and in the education for the market, merit is accompanied by the *making a difference* discourse. This expression—commonplace in the chat circles and verbalized in all the lectures presented to the students and professors—alludes to the idea that, in the middle of the mass, there will be opportunities and distinction only for those who present a differential worthy of merit, worthy of exposure to be consumed. *Making a difference* is a discourse of the current culture that results in spending time and effort to be aware of the constant changes in the labor market and to invest in self-production. Self-production requires a permanent clash between oneself and the models presented in the public space, which are continually modified and rapidly produce new representations and identities associated with them (HALL, 1997). After all,

in the society of consumption, at every moment, there is always someone who wants to make a difference. Professors and managers seem to be fully aligned when they never tire of repeating that the market will select the best ones, perhaps to exempt themselves from their own responsibilities. It is for the higher-education subject to self-invest and publicize his/her virtues.

Making a difference then becomes the commonplace way of marking the difference. If higher education enables the presence of the Me Inc. subject, this indicates the desired identity in the current society. Whoever does not invest in him-/herself will be excluded from the labor market, consumption, and society. Positioning oneself in another way, by not being a Me Inc. subject, is one of the emergency conditions of difference in contemporaneity.

In this territory, everything indicates that the future alumnus, by becoming a Me Inc. subject, is potentialized as a commodity and engages in the neoliberal rationality, without distrust, contributing to its hegemony.

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Mário Luiz Ferrari Nunes is a Ph.D. professor at the Faculty of Physical Education of the State University of Campinas (Unicamp) and coordinator of the Research Group for Physical Education in Schools of the Faculty of Education of the University of São Paulo (www.gpef.fe.usp.br).

Marcos Garcia Neira is a full professor at the Faculty of Education of the University of São Paulo (FEUSP) and coordinator of the Research Group for Physical Education in Schools at the same institution (www.gpef.fe.usp.br).