

The personal trainer and self-care: a perspective of professional mediation.

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Abstract: The present article proposed to discuss the “self-care” as a possibility of the professional mediation between the Physical Education teacher who works as a personal trainer and his client. Therefore, a bibliographic revision about the theme “self-care” was carried out, using Michel Foucault’s works as a theoretical support, followed by the attempt of the articulation with the thought of authors like Deleuze, Baudrillard, Bauman, Melucci and Sant’Anna, among others.

Key-words: Self-care. *Personal Trainer*. Body.

1 Introduction

Nowadays, when the means of mass communication promote the guided and personalized physical activity, we soon think about an “expert” in physical fitness, that means, the personal trainer.

With aspects of a “seasonal trend”, this perspective of activity was introduced in Brazil, according to Rodrigues (1996), in the early 90’s of the XX century. I understand that

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this perspective seems to have added new roles to the everyday activities exercised by the Physical Education teacher within the Fitness segment. Thus, Rodrigues (1996) seems to outline one of these new roles when defining the Personal Training professional as a “super micro-company” that sells fitness services and aims at winning the client, meeting his needs and keeping him loyal.

Thus, the *personal trainer* segment seems to incorporate and reproduce the business discourse and it's in the bibliographic references found about the theme that this language becomes visible. The books of Brooks (2000; 2004); Deliberador (1998); Domingues Filho (2001); Monteiro (1998); Monteiro (2000); Novaes (1998); Novaes; Vianna (2003); O'Brien (1998); Oliveira (1999); Rodrigues (1996); Rodrigues; Contursi (1998), for the most part of them, feature as manuals for Physical Education teachers who want to work in the personal training area. Words like client, competition, negotiation, marketing, credibility, service, advertisement, consumer, product, market, partnerships are presented in a recurring manner in such books/manuals. They also bring instructions of how to become a successful professional, personal marketing strategies, contractual aspects, training program planning and the concern about the growing competition in the physical activity market.

Sibillia (2002, p. 36) defends that “[...] while the citizens of the globalized world are incorporating the consumers' role, the company's logic starts permeating the entirety of the social body, imposing its model to all the institutions”. Then, we could

consider the client as the consumer for the fitness service sold by the personal trainer.

Thus, Bauman (1999, p. 91) emphasizes that consumers are “[...] first and above all, feeling accumulators; collectors of things only in the secondary and derivative sense”. Therefore, taking the personal trainer as a company and his client as a consumer of his service rendering, which feelings would this client like to have in the relation with his/her personal trainer?

Proposing the discussion on this question, I sought in the “self-care” bibliography a possibility to start this investigation.

2 Self-care and the Personal Trainer

From the ideas presented by Foucault (2006) in “The Hermeneutics of the Subject”, we can infer that the philosophers from the Ancient Greece were the first thinkers of *epiméleia heautoû*, which can be understood as the self-care, the self-concern, the fact of engaging with oneself. Thus, Socrates presents himself as “the master of self-care”, whose main and basic function is to stimulate the other individuals to self-care, the task entrusted to him by the deities. The texts from the early centuries, according to Foucault (1985), point out the accuracy of the attention and watchfulness to oneself, the apprehension with the body and soul’s uneasiness and the necessary respect for oneself.

The philosopher Epictetus defines self-care as “[. . .] a privilege-duty, a gift-obligation that assures freedom to us and forces us to make ourselves an object of all our application”

(FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 53). This thinker seemed to believe that the human being, differently from the animals, would be the one to whom self-care has been entrusted and should, thus, learn how to perform it with all the attention and devotion.

Foucault (2006) situates in the I and II centuries of our age the golden period of self-care. One of the main self-care forms in these first centuries, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, seemed to be the dietetics, body and soul diet. Foucault (1984, p. 93) refers that “[...] the diet is all about an art of living”. Thus, the diet seemed to have a normative character, making the individual’s behavior a problem and comprehending the exact measures of the exercises, foods, beverages, sleeps and particularly the sexual relations.

Foucault (1985, p. 107) comments that the diet literature had the purpose to ensure autonomy, recognizing in it “[...] one of the essential principles of the self-care practice: equip oneself, in order to have it always at hand, with a useful discourse early learned, frequently repeated, and regularly thought upon”. Not only did the diet establish a measure of body order, but also of moral order, giving evidence of a great commitment with the soul’s obligations. The soul should keep a full domain over itself and the body could not prevail over it. The soul seemed to be, however, the main focus of attentions. At that historical moment, the obligation with self-care assumed a law aspect, comprising everyone, unconditionally, during the whole life, regardless of each one’s social status.

Thus, for comprising the whole life, the old age would also be included in this self-care practice and should be considered as a “positive existence target” (FOUCAULT, 2006,

p. 135). But the self-care law seems to be fictitious in relation to social status, presented itself as an elite privilege, because it was necessary to spend time and exchequer for the maintenance of this care. Thus, as an auxiliary in those self-practices, Rome's aristocracy quite often used the private consultant, a counselor that had several functions and performed them alternatively as a teacher, guide, personal confidant, intermediate and political inspiration in negotiations (FOUCAULT, 1985). But the self-care assistance was not made only by professionals, it comprised all the social relations. The seek for another person's help, some who was wise and competent to help in the self application was seen as a right, just like it was this other person's obligation to help the former one. "Self-care occurs, therefore, intrinsically linked to a soul service that involves the possibility of a game of exchanges with the other and a system of mutual obligations" (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 59).

Foucault (1985) also relates the correlation between self-care and the medical practice in the Greek culture, where the attention to body was enhanced with the medical care increment. Philosophy and medicine was closely connected, regulating the individuals' life.

From the III and IV centuries, Christianity arose defending the self-renouncement as the fundamental principle to self-salvation (FOUCAULT, 2006). The self-occupation arises in the purifying knowledge form, dispersing the temptations, illusions and seductions and seeking the soul salvation. The Christian model was transmitted to the whole history of the western culture and, therefore, the soul continues representing the main focus of all cares.

Nowadays, however, we live in a “[...] techno-scientific-business order [...]” (SANT’ANNA, 2005, p. 99) where the body is the new temple of subjectivity and the soul seems to have lost its relevance. Baudrillard (2005, p. 136) states “[...] today, everything witnesses that the body became the object of salvation. It literally substitutes soul, in this moral and ideological function”. The body salvation seems to have supplanted the soul salvation. Sant’Anna (2005, p. 103) also calls the attention to this change, defending that “[...] when the body acquires the value and the statute similar to the soul’s, it’s necessary to win it and control it rapidly, because contrarily to soul, it’s known that the body does not have eternal life”.

On this body’s finitude, Bauman (2005) comments that the body seems to be the only with expectation of growing duration, when compared to life style, the institutions and the objects that meet the human existence’s needs. However, even giving evidences of the “long-term” possibility (BAUMAN, 2001), the body continues to be mortal, there is no pre-established date, but its finitude is a concrete fact. Thus, Sant’Anna (2005, p. 103) mentions the concept of validity:

[...] caring for the body is increasing the validity of its several parts, broadening it towards several directions, so that afterwards, it can be reconfigured; even if, for that, it is necessary to change drastically each live element’s nature, creating new ways to evolution.

Thus, validity does not seem to be exclusively connected to the age duration time of this body, but to the longevity of its young appearance. From this perspective, Baudrillard (2005, p. 151) adds that “[...] the body turns into a threatening object, which it’s necessary to watch upon, reduce and mortify for aesthetic purposes”. A torrent of information desolates us everyday through the means of communication that present to us the latest statistics about the risks from which we have the obligation to protect our body in order to increase its longevity.

The contemporary biostatistics, for example, provides us with figures that, “[...] beside categorizing a means to lead our own bodies as a risk factor, they treat each individual that is found captured in this network of incidences as a protagonist of this *narrative of the degenerative death*” (FRAGA, 2006, p. 20). Deleuze (1999, p. 6) defends that “[...] informing is circulating a word of order [...]” and explains that those that inform us say what exactly we must believe in. And they seem to inform, also, what we must be afraid of.

The belief in the need of aesthetic longevity seems to have made it an objective desired in an untiring manner, incremented by the fear when reaching the old age. For Melucci (2004, p. 129) “[...] ageing and being old are themes that project a shade of unquietness on the solar society, which celebrates the cult of the young and efficient body”. The old age seems to have passed from a positive life target (I and II centuries) to incorporate the uselessness negativity. Thus, in order to run away from ageing, discard, social refuse, the body seems to consist in an object of constant and untiring reinvention. “A

body under reconstruction is infinite” (SANT’ANNA, 2001, p. 65).

Thus, this reconstruction seems to mean correction, reform, reorganization and adjustment to the aspirations of belonging to this historical moment’s rules. The experts’ intervention seems to be necessary in such body reconstruction, offering an endless service and counseling network. Thus, Melucci (2004, p. 105) defends that everyday life: “[...] is no longer the field of experience and relations, but a space of attention and intervention for an amount of experts that identify problems and propose us solutions”. For each problem that arises, an expert’s counseling seems to be necessary. He prescribes, recommends, indicates and limits the individual’s means of acting, making him dependent on his services.

In relation to this dependence, Bauman (2001, p.85) comments that “[...] looking for examples, advices and counseling is a vice: the more one seeks, the more one needs and the more one suffers when deprived from new doses of the drug sought”. The personal trainer seems to be one of those experts, an expert in fitness, a counselor of body veneration” (MALYSSE, 2002, p. 99). According to Oliveira (1999), the personal trainer would be the professional licensed in Physical Education with majoring in sports training, exercise physiology, autonomy and biomechanics, fit to prescribe a personalized physical training.

However, the trainer’s professional action does not seem to comprise only the client’s physical training and its exact moment of execution, but his entire everyday life. It also seems to include the control of his daily activities, his nutrition habits,

his sleep hours, his clothes, his family and social relations; quite often interfering in his personal decisions. In a superficial way, the personal trainer seems to be the up-to-date version of the private consultant of the first centuries.

However, there seems to be crucial differences between these two figures: the private consultant aims at the counseling in order to ensure the individual's autonomy, while the personal trainer seems to aim at his client's lifelong dependence on his work. The counselor helped the individual self-care and, differently from him, the personal trainer seems to be liable to his client's care. Thus, the client seems to transfer the self-care concern to his personal trainer, exempting himself from this function. In opposition to the counselors of the first centuries who focused on soul, the personal trainer seems to focus his cares exclusively on his client's body. We could say, though, that today the body consists in the self-care target and that the personal trainer seems to be an agent of this care. But why would the client transfer the self-care to this expert?

The individualization – an increasing characteristics of this historical moment – could be thought as a possibility of discussion. Bauman (2001) defends that the individualization concurrently brings the individual the freedom to try and the confrontation of the consequences. Facing the consequences of choices or simply making the right choices seems to generate a great anxiety in the consumer's life. "Not being able to support oneself, in societies in which the "self" became a total responsibility of each one, becomes a new ghost, as terrible as the old ghost of the culpabilities put under lock and key" (SANT'ANNA, 2001, p. 25).

The responsibility for the choices seems to be exclusive of each individual with himself and, to run away from the error, reproval, blame, it seems to be safe to delegate the self-responsibility to another person. Thus, regarding the body and its care, the personal trainer would become the target of this responsibility transfer.

The service performed by the provider personal trainer that aims at the client's body care could be understood as an object of purchase, which adds a symbol of power and social status its purchaser. Body and consumption seem to be closely related: "[...] if the body rediscovery is always the body/object rediscovery within the general context of the other objects, it can be noted how easy, logic and necessary the transition of goods and purchase objects appropriation is" (BAUDRILLARD, 2005, p. 143).

Thus, we can think that the self-care status seems to have remained unchanged since the Ancient times, continuing to be an elite's privilege. The self-care performed by the personal trainer could be understood as an exclusive service rendering of an economic elite, which seeks the constant metamorphosis of a body that consumes and is consumed. In such case, Andrade and Janata (2003, p. 1) refer to body as "[...] the synonym of plastic merchandise to be lapidated, filled, exposed and sold [...]", which corroborates the thought of some authors presented in this work.

3 Transitory Considerations

This revision article's proposal is by no means to close the discussion that, for the time being, seems to demand a certain complexity.

The "self-care" theme was approached in this article with the purpose to put the work performed by the Physical Education professional, who acts as a personal trainer, in the center of the discussion. Thus, this care was focused as a possible aspect of mediation between the personal trainer and his respective client, because it does not seem to be a unilateral relation, but an inter-relation.

The self-care seems to be indirectly linked to the personal trainer's work, passing by the client-personal trainer relation. Therefore, it seems to change this professional's role, focused on his client's training and physical fitness to think of him as a "care taker" of this client. Thus, we can think the "feel oneself cared" as a possibility of sensation desired by the client in the relation with his *personal trainer*. This relation strain is crossed by issues that, here in this article, may converge with the self-care concept. This strain seems to lack broader discussions by the Physical Education and Sports Sciences area, because the bibliography on the theme has not investigated it.

So, the perspective of looking at the straining of the personal trainer relation with his client could compare a practice and a theory that allowed this complexity problematization, like the possibility of reading from self-care.

The personal trainer and the care itself: a perspective of professional mediation.

Abstract: The present article proposed to discuss the “care itself” as a possibility of the professional mediation between the teacher of the Physical Education who work as personal trainer and his client. That why, was realized a bibliographic revision about the subject “care itself”, used as theoretical support the works of the Michel Foucault, next the attempt of the articulation with the thought of the authors as Deleuze, Baudrillard, Bauman, Melucci and Sant’Anna, among others.

Keywords: Care Itself. Personal Trainer. Body.

El personal *trainer* y el cuidado de sí: una perspectiva de mediación profesional.

Resumen: El actual artículo propone discutir el “cuidado de sí” como una posibilidad de mediación profesional en medio del profesor de Educación Física que trabaja como entrenador personalizado – personal trainer – y su cliente. Para eso, fue realizada una revisión bibliográfica sobre el tema “cuidado de sí”, utilizando como soporte teórico el trabajo de Michel Foucault, sucedida del intento de articulación con el pensamiento de autores como Deleuze, Baudrillard, Bauman, Melucci y Sant’Anna, entre otros.

Palabras-Clave: Cuidado de Sí. Personal Trainer. Cuerpo.

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