

Practices of anorexia and bulimia as an aesthetics of existence

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Abstract

This article aims to present the analysis of practices of weight loss, maintenance of weight and body shapes, using the account of anorexic and bulimic young women who call themselves *Annas and Mias* in virtual space. Its educational goal is to bring situations of the life of young people in contemporary times to examine them in school contexts, considering that the topic of weight loss is often present in the period of adolescence, a phase marked by relationships with several teachers in specific areas. The sources used for the analysis are descriptive texts presented on the blogs of these young women through which they manifest the rules of conduct to become *Annas and Mias*. The analysis of such practices and discourses has given rise to the possibility of including them in three sets of experiences that intertwine: *experiences of body modification*, *virtual identity experiences* and *experiences of the self*. With these reflections, we have intended to show that, although these and other events may seem distant from the classroom, they actually go through school walls, are visible, manifest themselves and can help us reinvent teaching.

Keywords

Anorexia – Bulimia – Experiences of the self – Body-identity.

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Uma discussão sobre as práticas de anorexia e bulimia como estéticas de existência

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Resumo

Este artigo tem por finalidade apresentar a análise realizada a respeito das práticas de emagrecimento, manutenção do peso e das formas corporais, a partir do relato de jovens anoréxicas e bulímicas autodenominadas Annas e Mias, no espaço virtual. Tem como objetivo educacional trazer situações de vida jovem na contemporaneidade para pensá-las nos contextos escolares, considerando que a temática do emagrecimento frequentemente atravessa o período da adolescência, fase marcada pelo relacionamento com diferentes professores das áreas específicas. As fontes utilizadas para a análise aqui feita são textos descritivos que se apresentam nos blogs dessas jovens, por meio dos quais manifestam as regras de conduta para tornarem-se Annas e Mias. A análise realizada em torno dessas práticas e discursos ensejou a possibilidade de inseri-las em três conjuntos de experiências, que se imbricam: as experiências das modificações corporais, as experiências identitárias virtuais e as experiências de si. Com essas reflexões, quisemos mostrar que esses e outros acontecimentos, embora possam parecer distantes da sala de aula, atravessam os muros da escola, são visíveis, manifestam-se e podem nos ajudar a reinventar a docência.

Palavras-chave

Anorexia – Bulimia – Experiências de si – Corpo-identidade.

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Introduction

Body and identity¹ are issues that can be addressed in quite diverse epistemological landscapes. However, they are two sides of the same coin. That is, when addressing the issues surrounding the body, whether in its biological, psychosexual, political, economic, socio-cultural or historical dimensions, we are invariably faced with elements that address individual, collective, cultural, family, school identities, among others.

The body-identity pair is discussed here in relation, that is, as an imbricated bundle of knots which points out the difficulty in defining its borders, given the fact that we are subject-body and that there is no possibility of any process of subjectification without such unit of existence. The underlying and conditioning thought behind this is the perspective of permanence, albeit provisional, of a set of psychological elements experienced by the subject as desire to construct a self that sometimes seeks to differentiate itself from the other and sometimes is reflected in the other, and in addition presents a set of physical and biological elements which characterize human beings. Both (the self and the other) appear thus included in a field of forces which are simultaneously formed not only by the affective but also by the cultural, social and political fields.

In this sense, we propose a discussion about anorexia and bulimia, based on the account of weight loss practices – weight and body shape maintenance – in the sense of the relationship between the body and the identity in the constitution of subjects. We observe that these practices are found most obviously in the first years of adolescence and continue without a defined end age. On the other hand,

1- This article is the result of a doctoral thesis entitled “Corpo-identidade: leituras, práticas e vivências na formação de professores em diferentes licenciaturas” (Body-identity: readings, practices and experiences in teacher education in different undergraduate programmes,” by Marisa Helena Silva Farah, in 2011, Faculdade de Educação (Education School), Universidade de São Paulo (USP) under the supervision of Professor Cecilia Hanna Mate.

such practices may also occur since the end of childhood as a result of the widespread call for thinness in our society, especially to women.

However, it seems fruitful to consider that since adolescence is a period of great physical, physiological, psychological and social change, it is also a time to recast the self parting from childhood to reach adulthood. This period coincides with the adolescent’s entry into middle or junior high school and with being taught by several teachers who work on specific subjects, when school curriculum is divided into different disciplines. It is, therefore, around that time that we seek to think the subject-bodies that inhabit the classroom.

Analytical procedures

The following reflections were conducted in 2012, using the accounts of practices of young women, transmitted in virtual space – 40 national blogs – as well as posts from previous years. The selection criteria of the blogs is related to the adherence of these young women to anorexia and bulimia as a lifestyle.

First, the analysis considers the incidence of appearance of virtual elements in two texts that are repeated in the blogs analyzed, considered here as essential, since they indicate: advice on, incitement to and prescription for maintaining thinness; formation of a collective identity; and set of techniques that aim at the management of the self. The texts are “Dicionário Ana & Mia” (*Ana & Mia Dictionary*) and “Como se tornar uma Ana” (How to become an Ana), but there may be changes in the titles, albeit without structural changes in content. Following, the analysis seeks to demonstrate how the discourses and practices of these young women can be included in the set of experiences of body modification and virtual identity experiences presented by Farah (2011). In this sense, the concept of experience of the self, developed by philosopher Michel Foucault (2009), helps us think about the theme.

As part of the discussion of the problem, we present the medical framework that classifies anorexia and bulimia as eating disorders.

Eating disorders: anorexia and bulimia

Anorexia nervosa (AN) and bulimia nervosa (BN) are considered eating disorders (ED) by health experts and have been studied not only by areas of medicine (psychiatry, endocrinology, nutrition, pharmacology) and biology (genetics and neurology), but also by areas of sociology and psychology.

Assistance to individuals diagnosed with ED often seeks an interdisciplinary agreement to guide treatment, given the multifactorial characteristic of the disorder – individual, family and sociocultural predisposing factors; precipitating factors (diet and stressful events); and maintaining factors (physiological, psychological and cultural)² – in addition to comorbidity, namely the presence of two or more disorders in the same clinically diagnosed individual.

Cordás (2004) points out that diseases in the group of eating disorders usually affect especially “female adolescents and young adults, leading to marked social and psychological damage and increased morbidity and mortality” (p. 155).

In 2002, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) indicates that 90% of cases of anorexia nervosa occur in women. On the other hand, Melin and Araújo (2002) indicate the difficulty in diagnosing AN and BN in men, given gender differences regarding the motives that lead men to go on diets and the conflicts in relation to body shapes and endocrine changes.

According to the criteria of classification³ and diagnosis of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM)⁴, 1994, the

2- See: Morgan, Vecchiatti e Negrão (2002).

3- It is important not to lose sight of the critical perspective of these classifications. One example is the article by Renata Guarido (2007), which problematizes such classifications as a means of medicalizing mental suffering.

4- Manual for mental health professionals which provides a classification of mental disorders and diagnostic criteria, according to the American

term anorexia, derived from the Greek *orexis* (appetite, desire) and prefix *an* (deprivation, absence), is not appropriate because, in the case of anorexic individuals, there is not a lack of appetite, but a decision not to eat. On the other hand, being considered an eating disorder, its characteristic is the individuals' refusal to maintain their body weight at or above what is considered a minimally normal weight by health experts.

These subjects, who fear gaining weight or becoming fat, use food reduction methods, ranging from a very restricted diet to purging – self-induced vomiting and misuse of laxatives and diuretics. One of the physiological consequences to women is the changes in menstrual cycle length, among other problems. For both sexes, when the disorder is analyzed from a psychological perspective, we observe a distorted body image (which also occurs in bulimia cases), given the importance attached to weight and body shape. In this sense, the disorder can also be classified as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD).

Anorexia nervosa can be divided into two types: restrictive and binge eating/purging. In the first case, individuals use diets, fasting and excessive exercise. And, in the second case, binge eating and purging, or both.

Among several studies on the issue, there is a historical study (ARAÚJO et al., 2012) which discusses the dominant discourses on anorexia nervosa:

the [discourse] of the psychosomatic family on the basis of the etiology of the disease; the “diseased” family, who is reorganized around the disease; the resilient family, who supports recovery and defeats the illness. Each of these assumptions has created different characters, assigning the roles of villains, victims and heroes differently to parents, siblings, anorexics and therapists. (p. 479).

Psychiatric Association - APA. In May 2013, the DSM-V edition was officially presented by APA.

Bulimia nervosa, whose name is a union of the Greek terms *boul* (ox) or *bou* (loads) and *lemos* (hunger), is related to binge eating (food intake, in a period of approximately two hours, of an amount of food greater than what most individuals consume under the same circumstances) and compensation practices, as weight gain prevention methods. The disorder is classified as such when binge eating and compensations occur, on average, for three months and at least twice a week (DSM-IV, 1994).

Just like for individuals with anorexia, shape and body weight are key criteria for the self-assessment of bulimic subjects. However, in most cases, their weigh what is considered normal for their age and height, although some may weigh slightly above or below normal.

There are two bulimic types: the one who purges by self-induced vomiting by means of laxatives, diuretics or enemas⁵, and the non-purging type, who uses compensation practices (fasting, excessive exercise) for binge eating, without other behaviors.

As noted above, these two eating disorders, although configured differently, are fully related to various contemporary experiments on one's own body. These experiments imply an expectation of radical change in body shape, as well as in the way of being in the world.

Annas and Mias

Anorexia: comes from Latin. It means no hunger. It is an eating disorder (from the medical point of view) and a psychological disorder. From the anorexic's point of view, anorexia is a lifestyle in which someone eats very little, just enough to survive, "sometimes" spends days without food and likes a style of thinness as the ideal of beauty. We anorexics "nickname" our friend *Anna* or *Mia*⁶. (*Dicionário Ana & Mia*).

5- Enema: injection of liquid or semi-liquid substances through the anal sphincter in order to induce defecation or deliver medication.

6- All texts of the blogs are presented here without spelling corrections.

Annas and Mias are terms used to allude to anorexia and bulimia, as well as a collective identity composed of young people, especially females, who may also call themselves princesses, angels, butterflies, dolls and children. The purpose of these young women is to lose weight or maintain low body weight through diet, absence of feeding, forced vomiting, exercise and medication. They invest excessively in such task, disregarding health. The boundaries between the practices related to anorexia and bulimia are indicated by some participants, as we shall see.

The young women are present in the virtual space through blogs or closed groups on Facebook with fake profiles – as they themselves report – so as not be identified, especially by their families. By creating blogs or registering comments in this space, presenting their practices, advising or asking for advice, these young women have established their identity space called "Pro-Annas, Annas e Mias" (Pro-Annas, Annas and Mias) and variations involving the word Ana, in order to remain thin.

The use of the terms *Anna* and *Mia* seems to indicate a worship of some entity, or else an essence to be sought daily in one's practice: "Becoming Anna, becoming Mia!", a state of ecstasy in communion with a goddess of beauty.

Thus, some group participants refer to Anna and Mia as holy anorexia, a reference to the Italian saints who lived between 1200 and 1600 and had anorexic behavior in response to the patriarchal social structure which they were subjected to (CORDÁS; WEINBERG, 2002; CORDÁS; CLAUDINO, 2002).

In the text below, we can see a pursuit of thin perfection, of a minimum body:

"Becoming Anna" is to reach a natural state of the body. A natural defense mechanism for times of scarcity.

Being Anna is *living* with the minimum and not with nothing. For with nothing, the only

place to reach is death, not perfection. Being *Anna* is finding a balance between *life, thinness and beauty*. (*Dicionário Ana & Mia*)

Some young women report that they adhere to thinness and to *Annas* and *Mias* group as a result of the suffering experienced in their social environment, especially at school, when thinness became a determinant of beauty. Therefore, for them, being or feeling fat has led them to unhappiness and immorality, preventing them from belonging to collective identities. Obviously, this feeling of immorality is the effect of a discourse of truth as it will be pointed out below.

Considering the risk of death to which they are exposed due to weight loss practices taken to the limit (when they become an eating disorder), and to the concern of the families of these young women, we have noticed an important factor on their blogs. The frequency of posts ranges from daily or weekly to a period of absence of posts. The reasons for this absence range from frail health – including hospitalizations – to suspicion on the part of family, friends and psychotherapists, which in many cases leads to closing the blog. Later, they may reappear with another profile on some other blog and signal their presence, or may choose to open a new blog.

Having their own blog is a rite of passage for these young women as they reaffirm their belonging to a collective identity and strengthen their individual identities. This is evidenced by the creation of new designs and forms of accounts to express ideas and experiences which favor the development of a new matrix to be followed – the blog created – and an expression of identity network.

Therefore, *Annas* and *Mias* establish a system of mutual support in seeking and maintaining thinness, which can be identified in the following elements of the content of blogs: an account of the activities, diet information, advice, weight goals, statements and images of thin celebrities as an incentive

to keep the diet (Thinspiration⁷), self-discipline measures, challenges, height and weight tables, exercise tips etc.

In addition to using this system, they present themselves under false names to keep secretly active on blogs. Another practice in virtual discourse that also indicates a support system is the creation of a dictionary with specific vocabulary to report their daily, weekly or monthly practices –, diets, vomiting, compulsions, the concealment of thinness etc. – without being identified.

Thus, to report practices of self-mutilation or self-flagellation, they use the SM and SF abbreviations, respectively. Or, when they want to report the deliberate vomiting practice (by ingesting an amount of food or calories above the rules set out in the diets), they employ the word *Miar*, short for vomit. But certain groups condemn the use of these three practices to maintain thinness, because they consider them unhealthy. However, such practices can be identified in their accounts.

Weight loss practices are presented with the names No Food (identified in writing as NF), Low Food (identified in writing as LF) and Semi-NF. They are characterized, respectively, by radical diets based on going without food, eating little (70 to 800kcal), and ingesting less than 100 calories. In this classification, a semi-NF is someone who eats very few calories, up to the minimum amount of 1Kcal:

When you get to become Ana, be careful not to get anorexia-disease, not to become addicted to NF, or have a distorted self-image and want to reach a level of thinness that you can only achieve through death. (...) (*Dicionário Ana & Mia*, 2012).

Such classification of calorie intake allows the young women who have more experience in such practices, and who present themselves on the blog with the

7- Something like "thin inspiration" from the stimulus of photos of extremely thin people.

lowest weight, to become a reference (leaders) for beginners. From there, such leaders recommend diets, give concealment tips, and other advice.

They encourage the use of red and purple bracelets not only to enable Annas and Mias to identify themselves but also as diet controllers:

Ana and Mia bracelets are a way to remind us of our commitment before we eat and interrupt the diet.

The red bracelet means anorexia. And the purple one means bulimia. And, in a way, it is also a way for us to recognize ourselves. If you see a thin and vain person who eats little, speaks more than eats and avoids eating, who wears a red bracelet, she might be Anna. (...) If you see someone normal, but who always eats alone (in the bedroom, avoids eating in public) or who, when in places like pizza bars, goes to the bathroom once she finishes eating and eats excessively, and also wears a purple bracelet occasionally, keeps nails short, she might be a Mia. Buy or make one for you! (Dicionário Anna & Mia, 2012)

Other advice, procedures and rules of conduct (20 to 53 items, which vary in the different blogs surveyed) appear under the headings “How to become an Ana”, “53 tips to stop eating”, among others. The following are examples of some items of the text:

1. Always eat breakfast;
2. Eat as slowly as you can;
3. Eat in front of the mirror;
4. When you have cravings (compulsion) for food count to 100;
5. Put down the fork between each mouthful;
7. Disguise skin discoloration under the nails caused by lack of nutrients with colored nail polish;
11. Clean something dirty, so that you lose your appetite;
12. Brush your teeth;
20. Always walk with contracted buttocks
22. Imagine what food will look like in the stomach and how the fat will be formed;
28. Always see a photo of that beautiful

- thinspiration;
29. Always weigh yourself;
33. Eat chewing gum; During the 41 days of NF or very low LF, drip from 3 to 10 drops of lemon with a drop to sweetener in 500ml of iced water;
45. Establish consequences. (53 DICAS..., 2011⁸).

This advice and other content (prescription of diets, challenges, height and weight tables, goals etc.), comments, confidences and confessions were analyzed taking into account the studies of Michel Foucault, whose domain of analysis is related to certain discursive and non-discursive practices of groups or individuals. These studies encourage us to think about a particular field of action, where one can see: the homogeneity of practices and the techniques of doing; the identification of practices with a field of knowledge (discursive practices), with a field of power (relationships with the other) and with a field of ethics (relationships with the self); and the generality in which the relationships between the extremes (normal and abnormal) are observed. On this basis, we can think of the content under discussion as a set of techniques aimed at constantly managing the self, which consists of the following elements:

a) *Monitoring techniques (food, diet and weight control)*: details of the types of food that can be ingested, with specifications as to their quantities of calories; optimal times of food ingestion; chewing time; ingestion mode; feeding place; size of the plate; specific days when one can consume a greater amount of food; and daily weight control.

b) *Hunger and compulsion control techniques*: intake of heartburn tablets; disposal of “excess” food; replacing food for constant intake of water; more frequent tooth brushing; cleaning “disgusting stuff”; chewing gum; visiting friends where one cannot eat; body positions to decrease stomach pain; going out with little money.

c) *Purging techniques*: Particulars of the various types of laxatives and medication in

8- In English: 53 tips for going without food.

general, which can be ingested separately or together, such as well-known ECA – ephedrine, caffeine and aspirin –, as well as details of the “most appropriate” ways to induce vomiting, in order to purge the food ingested.

d) *Self-punishment techniques*: though not highly indicated by them, there is a strengthening of the practice of punishment in the face of hunger or compulsion which can range from self-flagellation (SF) to self-mutilation (SM).

e) *Identification techniques*: use of purple and red bracelets, signaling that one is Ana or Mia.

f) *Body discipline techniques*: from specific exercises to ways to sit, walk and lie down in order to burn calories and avoid hunger.

g) *Visualization techniques*: incitement to the use of mental images of the negative effects of food or of becoming fat. Introjection techniques are also presented, aiming at the continuous viewing of images of thin, beautiful and successful people (thinspiration), through photos posted on their blogs, and on the blogs recommended, as a stimulus to self-esteem in the beauty-thinness relation.

h) *Disguise techniques*: clothes that disguise thinness, nail polish for discolored nails, garbage bags for food disposal in public places, makeup to disguise dark circles.

By this analysis, we shall evidence below how such practices and techniques can be included in the field of experiences of body modification (EBM) and of virtual identity experiences (VIE), as experiences which constitute the process of body modification and search for a new identity, which we call body-identity (FARAH, 2011).

Experience and the experience of the self

On the body side, two essential fantasies also manifest themselves: dematerialization and hybridization.
(FELINTO, 2005, p. 48)

Experiences of body modification

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, we have identified a

strong characteristic in various fields of knowledge: diagnostic medicine, orthopedics, neurophysiology, art, genetics, and even cyberspace, among others. Such characteristic is the need for exploring the body which, when taken the limit, is also found in the aesthetic perspective (beauty) and may manifest itself in a hybrid or non-hybrid way.

We call experiences of body modification (EBM) a large group of experiences of certain modifications that are made in the body, and consider that the criterion to keep them under this bundle of actions is that they are carried out in the time and space desired by the subjects and according to the prior determination of a final design.

Such experiences may be further divided into two large blocks. In the first block are the modifications which approach the human form and are known as cult of the body, including exercise and aesthetic incursions fed by the cosmetic, massage, nutrition, surgical medicine (functional prostheses, implants, elimination or reduction of fat etc.). Together, these experiences, which bring a series of body control and monitoring practices, are used to modify hair, skin, body and face shapes, to smooth, to bleach, enhance contours, remove excess etc., according to the current standards of beauty. It is an economy of the body which expands in products, surgical instruments, the production of prostheses, medical treatments and in health clubs.

The second block consists of the experiences which distance themselves from the human form, known as body modification (BM), which alter and record on the body the marks of the protests against the homogenization of these bodies – placed on the skin, under the skin, piercing the skin. They are characterized by piercing, scarification, implants, tattoos, and, in the same direction, suspensions (by hooks), and by using ritualistic performances of pleasure and pain.

Vergara (2007) suggests two possibilities for pain in the experience of body modification: the first is that it is an escape valve for conflict;

and the second is that it is a way of dealing with pleasure and eroticism. And Pires (2005) indicates that many of the body modification followers have started such practice in the passage to adulthood, to mark a change in their lives.

Therefore, the practice of anorexia and bulimia, as a lifestyle adopted by certain subjects brought here, can be seen as an attempt to establish a relationship with others and with oneself through the body, as pointed out by Pires (2005) when she addressed the practices of body modification:

By fixing on the body the concerns and desires of one's mind and spirit, by own initiative, in a concrete though coded way, he makes the body intervention act as a link that unifies the duality between the physical body and the spiritual-mental body (p. 159).

It can be said that the concerns and desires presented in groups of Annas and Mia result from the lack of the look of the other and that, in a reverse process of body intervention, they seek to dematerialize the body by extreme thinness: "Because you do not see my soul, you shall see my bones"⁹. There is an appeal to visibility, which occurs by the decrease in body dimensions, so that the soul can be found in the visible bones.

The paradox of this behavior is that the condition of participation in the group of Pro-Annas as a lifestyle is guided by the same criteria for belonging to the previous social group, from which they felt excluded – being thin – with the terrible increase of the risk of death. This indicates the two poles of power relations between them, within a perverse support system, as we can see below in the comments on a blog:

2010 06 25

Julia (18:27:55):

hi I took your advice I'm skinny as a stick. I'm in hospital and dying and horrible I

weigh 15kg my husband left me cuz I'm thin he says I'm ugly and I need a doctor cuz I'm crazy

Answer

17 08 2010

Mileycha Valverde (20:45:10):

You need to focus! Set limits and use the information around you. The decision is yours! You need not be influenced by anyone. Know what you want, and fight for it. Good luck!

The pursuit of belonging to the group shows us the game of power played by the one who is the leader: she simultaneously insists on compliance with the rules of conduct – body disciplining to be thin – and exempts herself from responsibility for the coercion.

From these considerations, we can try to understand the practices of these young women within the field of EBM in the two blocks aforementioned, considering the following points: (i) In weight loss practices performed by these young women, there is the desire for a final design of their bodies, in a simultaneous process of constructing their individual identities and of belonging to a collective identity – Annas and Mias, princesses etc; (ii) The desired final design is constantly renewed by a new technique of: monitoring, disciplining, purging etc, which identifies their constant efforts and reverence to celebrities. In this sense, the explicit aesthetic factor lies in the search for balance between life, thinness and beauty; (iii) As in a game of pleasure and pain, these young women seek to overcome the bearable limits of hunger and body weakness – just like the body modification participants seek pleasure in overcoming extreme pain – and take satisfaction in their weight decrease, as in a rite of passage.

Virtual identity experiences

The experiences of anorexia and bulimia reported in the virtual space examined, as a

⁹- Source: <http://natyanamiah.blogspot.com.br>

lifestyle, can also be included in the set that we call virtual identity experiences (VIE), which correspond to the different forms of immersion and expression in cyberspace and which allow new possibilities of entertainment, existence, communication and socialization.

For Lemos (2007), cyberspace can be understood as the confluence of two concepts: “as a place where we are when we enter a simulated environment (virtual reality), and as the set of computer networks which are interconnected or not in the entire planet, the Internet” (p. 128). The author proposes conceiving cyberspace as a non-place or imaginary space – without dimensions – which becomes a magical space for its ubiquity, for the real time in which information is transmitted and for the non-physical space that it represents. From such perspective, cyberspace is the possibility of manipulation of the world or of “creating a parallel world, a collective memory, of imaginary, of myths and symbols which have chased men since ancient times” (p. 128-129), but which goes hand in hand with contemporary technological rationality.

Immersion forms can be observed in various types of virtual entertainment, as in video games – in the action of the player from an internal or external point of view – and especially in virtual reality environments, with the use of sensory receptors such as: data gloves – sensory gloves; vision helmets; data suits – clothes which allow feeling the whole body in virtual reality; shoes which inform on the impact of footsteps on the ground; Wearable Webcams / HMD – wireless camera system coupled to the eyes. In this type of immersion, the experience of body-identity relationship in the *interator*¹⁰ subject takes other formats:

Various interactive systems construct a temporary body, which can be a graphic picture in which the characters or “identities” built – avatars – can act

10- Machado (2007) proposes the term *interator* because he no longer identifies this active and immersed subject as a user, viewer or receiver.

and react according to the rules of the situation. The relationship that occurs between the body and identity lies in the construction of not only a body design chosen to represent oneself within the virtual, but also of the modified senses of the corporeity of the one who experiences the game. (FARAH, 2011, p. 50)

Now, the forms of expression, communication and socialization can be seen in several virtual communities such as Facebook, Twitter, chats and also blogs. Among the possibilities of social interactions in the web, blogs (weblogs), created in 1999, have become a fruitful communication space, because they can be used both as personal and as institutional space. They are a great means of expression characterized by daily postings, which can generate different image and sound content.

In another study, Lemos (2005) points out that cyberculture is characterized by three founding laws which can be observed in the blog tool: the release of the issuing pole – which means access to building one’s own blog; the network principle – blogs refer to other blogs; and the possibility of reconfiguration with new media formats and social practices – each one creates or recreates in one’s own way the forms by which one wants to express oneself (photos, texts, videos, pictures, etc.).

In this sense, we can say that the presentation of the self in virtual space and the modes of subjectification are intertwined with technological agency, and that the relationship between the infrastructure provided and the needs of participants are built gradually and mutually.

The virtual identity experience of Annas and Mias occurs in that, by building their blogs, they actively participate in a creative process that takes place in the face of the discovery of new forms of production, storage and circulation of information (internal and external links). And because they are criticized for their weight loss practices, they find in

virtual space the possibility of expression, increased sharing of aesthetic experience and the strengthening of group identification that gives them a sense of belonging.

On the other hand, this does not mean that these girls are linked to one tribe only, since moving from one group to another, while belonging to all of them, is characteristic of contemporary times. In this sense, the web enhances this movement and offers a wide range of possibilities of collective identity, which group subjects by a process of both marking the difference, as a lifestyle, and excluding (the other) or segregating (the marginalized).

Otherwise, presenting oneself in virtual space is to be under two regimes simultaneously: that of the image and that of visibility. In the regime of the image in virtual space, we are at two poles: the image (and sound) productions created and with which we communicate and interact (photos, movies, videos, graphs, drawings, pictures, words, etc.); and the imaginary, that is, the parallel world which virtual space itself can represent and which allows us to be what we want, also through our productions of mental images.

The regime of visibility comprises not only what is seen, but also what is offered to be seen or what can be seen. In cyberspace, this can be more easily identified in virtual environments, specifically in shared virtual reality, whose audiovisual events can also be sensory, taking into account the use of sensory receptors. But how can the presentations of oneself, as attempts of subject constructions conveyed in blogs, be considered in this regime of visibility?

First, we should consider that the display of photos of one's own body and of the other photos published there, added to the discourses of the self, allow constructing a subjective image whose function is to produce a certain impression on the reader-user. Therefore, visibility in this case occurs no longer through the simultaneous sharing of reality between two subjects in concrete physical space, but through imagery.

A technological configuration that, in cyberspace, can appear especially fragmented, as in the user profile in which the images of body parts – a torso, belly profile or face etc. – imply the whole. The configuration can also be distorted, with the use of photo editing programs such as Photoshop to achieve the image of a body without skin and form “imperfections”. An attempt to enhance one's part which may be interesting or appealing to both the community which one identifies with and to that which one wants to belong to. And, finally, the configuration can be hidden in its essence, that is, a subjective image, reinvented in a discourse of the self.

There, the virtual identity experiences (VIE) show themselves in the intertwining of technological resources produced, shared and re-created and the current images of oneself as a new model, simulation (pretending to be what one is not or to have what one does not have), and dissimulation (pretending not to have what one has or not to be what one is), a simulacrum.

In this model built especially by the edition and manipulation of images, the discursive practices of Annas and Mias, who take thinness as a lifestyle, can be understood both in the hybridity of two types of experiences: the experiences of body modification (EMC) and the virtual identity experiences (VIE). These two experiences show themselves thus combined in the same body-identity experience as a swinging door. Here, the body that changes and cuts itself does not hurt, does not bleed, and the subject experiences the pleasure of a “perfect” image!

Finally, it is also the configuration of a hiperbody in this deterritorialized non-space, because it extends in its ability to reach or affect people with its visual, vocal, textual presence.

The experiences of thinness observed in the discursive practices of Annas and Mias, presented above and included in the field of EBM and VIE can also be understood, as we shall see, through the notion of experience of the self, that is, as historical form of subjectification according to the thought left by Foucault.

The experience of the self

Consider the areas of the set of health sciences and aesthetics today. These areas have in common the fact that they prioritize the constructed idea of a healthy body which is preferably thin and, therefore, beautiful. Health and aesthetics construct thus a knowledge concerning the healthy and beautiful body in which the key concept of their discourses is thinness. Albeit such discourses are not homogeneous, they appear simultaneously in the discourses of the media and in the incitement to weight loss practices and techniques.

In the discourse of the entire network of healthcare and aesthetic professionals, and even of soap opera directors, there is a search for a body that also and above all reveals beauty and youth, which can only be evidenced by a certain thinness, and by a certain body development technique. Hence the constant practices of body reconstruction and modification. These discourses generate a feeling of immorality for being fat, ugly and old, which affects the entire social fabric.

Seeking a healthy body can be considered in the light of what Foucault (2009) called the three necessary elements for the constitution of experience: the games of truth, which consist of discourses of certain areas of knowledge (in our case, especially health sciences and aesthetics), which say what is true or false on a particular theme (in this case, health and beauty); power relations that establish the norms to be followed to maintain a healthy and beautiful body; and the forms of subjectivity in the relationship with the self and with others, developed from self-awareness and knowledge of oneself (techniques of the self).

In the experience of thinness, dietetics imposes itself as a wellness condition for the constitution of subjects, recasting the personal, family and social times, through prescriptions and practices of asceticism¹¹: details of food,

11- Foucault distinguishes the asceticism practiced by Greco-Roman antiquity from the asceticism practiced by Christians. In the former,

physical activity and aesthetics. It is the operation of a power that is no longer translated into relations of domination or coercion. It is a power that lures into a body economy, which, in turn, is reflected in the production and use of knowledge about thinness.

On the discourse of a healthy life, the experience of thinness as constitutive of subjectivity gradually establishes itself as the only way to salvation and happiness: only by being thin can one be saved and happy. Thinness becomes the guiding principle of everything that can govern the art of living well.

The pursuit of a thin body is experienced by a set of practices and techniques aimed at the transformation of oneself and that only occurs by the refinement of the care of oneself. When studying the constitution of the subjectivity of subjects, Foucault (1988) presents four groups of specific techniques or technologies^{12,13} which men use to understand what they are. Such technologies are: technologies of production, technologies of systems of signs, technologies of power and technologies of the self, which

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a number of operations on their bodies and souls, thought, conduct, and way of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p. 18).

The technologies of the self comprise a number of regular and rational procedures/practices which define subjects through modes and fields of action in order to live “as well

asceticism was about the individual's relationship with himself, while for Christians, asceticism was self-renunciation and practicing sacrifice.

12- It should be considered that Foucault analyzed these technologies in pagan and Christian antiquity (5th century BC to the fourth and fifth centuries AC) in the field of sexuality. With these two examples, the author shows that the practices that constituted these technologies differed in their moral principles and modes of action in the periods studied.

13- Translator's note: In Foucault's works published in English, the French word *technique* was translated both as techniques and as technologies. I have decided to use techniques throughout the text, but in relation to this specific excerpt, I have opted for technologies because that was the choice of the translator of the work cited: Foucault (1988).

as they should”, within a moral code, moral behavior and a moral conduct. This means an ethical and political choice for their own existence – an aesthetics of existence – through which it is possible to determine what the “dangerous thing” from which one wants or should move away is.

The ethical substance with which one works in the experience of thinness is the self in control of hunger, weight and body shape. As a moral subject, the self acts on itself, knowing itself, perfecting itself. However, the modes of subjection, through which the relationship is established with the imposed rules and the preparation of the ethical work, may vary.

First, the rules imposed to be thin are not homogeneous in all instances. Although medicine presents the boundaries between health and disease (in height-weight-age ratio and conditions of the body), they are not included in aesthetics, as there an anything goes for a thinner body. Therefore, the ethical game that takes place in communities of Annas and Mias reflects such inconsistency by allowing certain things and not others, and falls into the same abyss in the face of the rule of losing weight at no risk of physical damage. So the dilemma faced by Annas and Mias is how to maintain thinness as a lifestyle, fleeing illness and death.

The rules of conduct for the maintenance of a thin body, which Annas and Mias are exposed to, arise from two instances, that of the broad social interplay – doctors, family and friends – and that of one’s own virtual group. However, there is no contradiction between the rules of one and the other, but an enhancement of what is presented in the first instance to the second. That is, what should be done in the body, especially what is dictated by doctors and nutritionists to maintain a healthy slim body, is potentially used by Annas and Mias for maintaining extreme thinness, to take them to the limit. That is how diets, forms of food intake, details about food calories, information on

laxatives, among others, are fully exploited or, in other words, altered and taken to the extreme.

In the integration with virtual groups, how Annas and Mias subject themselves to the rules or do not can also be seen in two variables. The first is a revelation of the self by writing, in which one presents the sacrifices and ascetic practices aimed at remaining in the group. The second is a self-confession, which aims to present one’s relapses, faults, temptations, and the suffering caused by hunger and pain, signaling one’s guilt for “stepping out of line”.

In the preparation of the ethical work, that is, of what is done on oneself to remain morally acceptable, attempts of regulation and systematization of weight loss practices can be identified in Annas and Mias. Such practices are often interrupted, because of some unexpected event, such as a disease, a hospital stay, a compulsion, the family finding out about their practices etc.

The moral purpose of such conducts among Annas and Mias cannot be unified, because, in an attempt to maintain extreme thinness, various desires can be present: the desire for moral firmness, self-control, and visibility, to be touched or accepted, to have peace, to suffice oneself, to disappear, to experience the limit, to live on the edge, to dice with death.

Final thoughts

The experience of extreme thinness identified in Annas and Mias from the desire can lead to the idea of a body without organs (BwO), a term created by Antonin Artaud and later used by Deleuze and Guatari (1996), which challenges the utilitarian organicity of the body versus desire: as a program of intensities which cross the body or as a body open to experiments. In this case, there is a decision to conduct experiments how, when and where one wants, as in a rite of passage which can give meaning and mark the entry into adulthood.

Taking the above into account, one can ask whether these movements of self-construction of/in the body-identity are rituals which, invented and established by young people themselves, mark their right to, the exercise of and the aesthetics of their existence. Or whether these inventions are also social constitutions resulting from a system of belonging to group identities.

Anorexia and bulimia as a lifestyle sought by Annas and Mias can mean thus a limit-experience of an aesthetics of existence in the face of the regime of truth produced by health sciences and aesthetics.

These developments may seem rather unrelated to the educational reality, just like other experiences that come to the classroom and mark the presence of teenage life in school. However, in their different manifestations such developments penetrate the school walls and do

not remain hidden in classroom reality. Rather, their presence presses the boundaries of what is considered pedagogically correct and makes teaching be reinvented.¹⁴

The result of this analysis leads us to think that being a teacher is to be immersed in the life of the youth and its different narratives. And this may be the opportunity to make a difference in the school adolescent world, if we think that what happens in this phase of life of our students concerns us, affects us, gives us a reference for what we can or want to do. Therefore, it is not about proposing more functions and roles to teachers, but about thinking that teaching is permeated by events which surprise and thus give way to a state of not knowing, an estrangement so that then other ways of being a teacher can be (re)created.

14- For further clarification of the subject, see MATE, 2010, p. 159-160.

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Received on July 30th, 2013

Approved on February 19th, 2014

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