

Scientific
Journal of
**Applied
Social and
Clinical
Science**

**TYRANNY OF
MERIT: THE SELF-
ENTREPRENEUR AND
“SUCCESSFUL” OLD
AGE¹**

Vanessa Santos de Freitas

Postgraduate Program in Communication
at the University of Brasília. Master in
Communication (UnB)

Fabiola Calazans

Professor of the Graduate and Graduate
Program in Social Communication at the
University of Brasília. Female doctor

All content in this magazine is
licensed under a Creative Com-
mons Attribution License. Attri-
bution-Non-Commercial-Non-
Derivatives 4.0 International (CC
BY-NC-ND 4.0).



1. Paper presented to the Communication and Sociability
Working Group of the 31st Annual Meeting of Compós,
Federal University of Maranhão, Imperatriz - MA. June 06
to 10, 2022.

Abstract: In this article, we investigate the conditions of possibility of discursive production about old age in contemporary times. The working hypothesis is that there is a model of “successful” old age that has become hegemonic in the media. We verified that this “successful” aging mode is intertwined with neoliberal rationality and aims to encourage individuals to be self-entrepreneurs in their old age projects. Thus, biopolitical shifts around old age in modernity and contemporaneity are analyzed. To investigate how the discourse of “successful” old age is configured, Foucault’s genealogical perspective was used in order to suspend the crystallized truths about aging. Finally, one of the highlighted points is the emergence of a moralizing discourse on old age that classifies and divides elderly individuals into “deserving” or “failure”, according to their commitment to the prescriptions of the “successful” old age model.

Keywords: Old age. Morality. Neoliberalism.

INTRODUCTION

The discursive proliferation on old age directs our gaze to a theme that was once silenced, old age. Some data on the visibility given to aging in contemporary times deserve to be highlighted. According to data from Google (2019) on the use of its search tool, a survey on aging was carried out every two minutes in 2018 in Brazil. One of the reasons for the visibility of the theme is also attributed to the numbers of population aging, since, by 2050, it is estimated that the number of people over 60 years of age will double worldwide. Studies show that Latin America is the second region with the fastest population aging, only behind Africa (UNBR, 2020). In Brazil, life expectancy is 76 years, 30 years longer compared to 1940 (G1, 2018).

2. In this article, the terms “elderly” and “old” were used to refer to subjects aged 65 or over. It is noteworthy that such terms were used without any judgment of value, in order to suspend the truths arranged in things and words and, thus, advance to another possible meaning, capable of generating more life.

Although they are highlighted, such numbers must not be analyzed as the only factor or predominant agent for the visibility of a model of old age in contemporary times. At the same time that there is a commitment of several companies and biotechnologists to the development of studies capable of delaying or even putting an “end” to aging, there is also a discursive dissemination about aging with a greater visibility of old people in movies, series, advertisements, among other media products. Currently, several terms have emerged to designate aging, such as “healthy ageing”, “active ageing”, “better age”, “old age”, “empowered ageing” and “successful ageing”. Such denominations are euphemisms created in order to remove the pejorative meanings historically constructed and amalgamated with words such as elderly and old ².

In this article, we start from a hypothesis that outlines the central path of our investigation and that assumes the existence of a specific type of ideal old age currently mediatized, according to which meanings associated with the imperative of constant productivity are corroborated and processes of subjectivation anchored in the logic of the success of neoliberal rationality. The central hypothesis is that today there is an old age understood as “successful”, whose hegemonic model promotes “success” in aspects of the individual’s health, in his happiness, in his capacity for autonomy and in his attitude as an active subject.

The “successful” old age model is linked to the notion of neoliberal rationality and how subjects constitute their subjectivity in contemporary times. This rationality impels individuals to be managers of themselves, in a kind of undertaking on their journey towards “success”. Each one must constitute itself according to neoliberal characteristics

of productivity, proactivity and the constant search for the optimization of its performance. Thus, there is an intrinsic morality to this rationality that encourages the vision of “winners” and “failures” according to these characteristics listed. This morality has affected the construction of subjectivity of old people, who are urged to remain productive and generate wealth for big capital until the last moment of their lives.

Based on this context, the present article seeks, from a historical retreat in modernity about the meaning of old age, to understand how the processes of subjectivation of contemporary old age are engendered from the neoliberal imperatives of constant productivity and self-employment. For this investigation, the genealogical perspective proposed by Foucault proves to be fruitful, which was inspired by Nietzsche and the meticulous, patient process that implies a lingering over the objects of analysis. The genealogical perspective presupposes a look at accidents, at the series of events that produce what is understood as society. Thus, it proposes a denaturalization and suspension of meanings that are considered “given”, “true”, “crystallized” in the production of discourses, in order to investigate the conditions of possibility that allowed the emergence of certain “truths”.

Foucault points out that the genealogical gesture moves away from the analysis focused on the origin of events, as the gaze is directed to the search for emergency conditions, deviations and events that help the understanding of what makes up the human being, since there is no universal truth, but a ground for the construction of “truths”. This analysis is called provenance and seeks to challenge knowledge, stir up what is seen as “crystallized”, show heterogeneity in what seemed to be conformity (FOUCAULT, 2017). Our bet is that the genealogical perspective

opens paths for us to perceive the layers of values and the ground for the construction of “truths” to, then, investigate a specific model of old age in contemporary times, which is anchored to “success”, to incessant productivity and self-employment.

Another relevant concept for the genealogical gesture is that of emergence, which concerns the sets of forces that constitute events, discourses and subjectivities. Through the research of the emergence of a certain meaning, it is possible to investigate both the discursive game from which knowledge and power exerted force and the disputes fought in the struggles of resistance. According to Foucault, discourse is a series of events that is disputed, being an object for which society fights. It is through discourse that power operates its capillarity (FOUCAULT, 2006).

This way, the genealogical view distances itself from the ontological notions of beings, from the search for the origin and essence of facts. For genealogy, there is no essence, nothing is innate; the events are constituted in the relations of forces, in the accidents and in the deviations. It seeks to analyze the production of events in the theater of procedures (FOUCAULT, 2017). Therefore, the genealogical gesture provides an understanding of the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the discourse highlighted in the hypothesis as a prestigious type of old age, the “successful” old age. Indeed, the genealogical perspective opens paths for the investigation of a discourse on contemporary old age with a weight of truth whose tensions and whose games of truth are intertwined with it.

For this, it was necessary to look at the notion of a “conquered evolution” of the ways of aging today compared to other historical moments, as a disembodied leap in history aimed at “progress”. It was intended, then, to

investigate what these forms of contemporary old age leave aside and also their displacements of continuities or ruptures with other historical times.

Genealogy aims its analysis at what is close in order to be able to separate from it. Thus, it treats other historical times with some suspicion, but with curiosity to observe the emergences and the displacements of meanings about the objects of analysis. When analyzing what is nearby, the genealogical gesture presupposes the researcher's involvement in his analysis, without fearing perspective knowledge. Based on this, the analysis outlined is composed of our vision as researchers on the subject, based on an apparatus of thought of interdisciplinary researchers and the subjective experience of how we observe, experience and live the world.

BIOPOLITICS AND OLD AGE IN THE COURSE OF LIFE

In order to investigate the conditions of possibility and emergence of the notion of "successful" old age as a model proposed by the triad of media, market and technoscience, it is relevant to research how old age was conceived in other historical temporalities, in an attempt to understand the game of truths that conceived old age as a social problem.

Modernity is characterized by different epistemological changes that made possible the emergence of new knowledge, such as biology, which began to investigate the living. According to Foucault (1999), based on the studies of biology, the human being appears as a being that receives stimuli and responds to them, being able to adapt, evolve, submit to the demands of the environment. This way of thinking about it made possible changes in the conception of aging and also in the social value of these subjects in the modern context.

From the 18th century onwards, with the increase in population, new ways of managing the social body emerged. From this, the regulation of populations is discursively presented as a need for biological traits to become relevant to economic management, with the implementation of an apparatus of power that not only subjects the population, but is capable of constantly increasing its usefulness (FOUCAULT, 2017). Foucault calls "biopower" this power that aims to manage the life of the population. The population emerges as this set of living beings that constitute the modern nation, in which each one has divergent biological characteristics, but which can be modified and controlled through the use of specific techniques and knowledge (SIBILIA, 2015).

Thus, biopower played the role of reconfiguration of this biological and social body through two mechanisms capable of regulating the population: discipline and biopolitics. The disciplines were composed of a set of techniques and practices aimed at training the body individually, such as surveillance of panoptic devices, individual exams and repetitive exercises. Biopolitics consisted of a range of devices aimed at studying the biological processes of the population, such as birth and mortality, health status and longevity (FOUCAULT, 2019). On this basis, power was exercised over mass and long-lasting phenomena. In summary, it can be said that biopower was exercised based on an anatomo-politics of the human body through disciplines and on a biopolitics of the population with the dimension of the body-species, through the intervention and control of random biological processes. of populations, as well as through a systematization of the analysis, prediction and reconfiguration of these biological processes.

Biopower emerges from a modern western need to invest in the living conditions of a

population, in order to impose certain norms, in addition to adapting it to national projects that carried the desire for “progress” as one of its main objectives. The path to this “progress” and the purpose of biopower were to make useful and extract human strength from this population, thus increasing its economic strength.

Through this form of power, devices and practices were applied in an attempt to control and regulate the random events that affected populations, turning their gaze to the phenomena that acted on individuals with a certain recurrence and also whose action would be in a long period of time. Random factors that affected the populations and that made their management difficult, reducing their productive capacity and burdening the states, became the object of biopolitics action. Therefore, the randomness of phenomena became calculable and capable of being prevented through this technology of power.

This way, modern biopower stimulated the emergence of new forms of knowledge, such as demography and statistics, which were able to predict, measure, regulate and analyze the phenomena that could affect populations. For this, the organization of the course of life with its stages and the social role of each age became something strategic for the purposes of biopolitics. Grin twine Debert (1998) analyzes the concept of “chronologization of life” in modernity, used by sociologists John W. Meyer and Martin Kohli in 1986, in order to express the temporal passage of life in a society in which age has become a fundamental dimension for social organization, as pointed out by the authors. It is important to emphasize that these age categories are socially constructed, in which rights and duties are established, in addition to the distribution of power and privileges. Thus, from these notions of age categories it

is possible to think about the production and reproduction of social life (DEBERT, 1998).

Based on this, old age has become an object of scientific investigation, and the dimension of the life course has become increasingly relevant for population management. These stages of life began to be socially instituted, as can be seen in the image “Ages of a Man” (image 1) which can be understood as a symptom of the conjuncture of reconfiguration of social life and the meanings of old age in modernity. This image symbolizes a shift in the form of organization of the characteristic ages of the process of modernization of society between the 18th and 19th centuries. Other images that had a similar function presented the phases of life in a circular fashion. Sociologist Anthony Giddens (2002) explains that the notion of the life cycle in pre-modern societies highlighted the connotation of renewal, due to the fact that each generation relived the ways of life of previous generations. In modernity, with the “openness” of the future and the impetus for progress, there is a rupture with the idea of repetition between one generation and another, with each individual constituting their trajectory according to modern yearnings.

Indeed, it has become common to change the circular images by representing the stages of life in the format of a ladder, which points to the ascending movement from childhood to adulthood and the movement of decay when presenting old age. This shape of the ladder gives meanings of rise and fall to the ages, with the peak of life occurring at fifty, while old age is associated with a decay of life. This indicates the influence of the temporal narrative of progress in modernity, including the way in which man saw himself in the world. Supported by the application of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution (2018) in different fields of society, the stages of life were



Image 1: Ages of Man, author unknown.

Source: Public Domain Review. Available at: <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-steps-of-life>. Accessed on September 5, 2020.

circumscribed in an evolutionary perspective, in which the life course had an “ascending” and “descending” dimension, something that remains explicit in image 1. The set of modern knowledge conceived old age as marked by “involution” (BIRMAN, 2015).

In addition to the shape of the stairs, there are more elements of the image that represent old age, associating it with a period of decadence. Each step demonstrates an age of the subject’s life being complemented with the figure of an animal: in youth and adulthood, marked by the ages of 20, 30, 40 and 50 years, man is associated with animals: foal, bull, lion and deer, respectively. These animals provide senses that describe these stages of life and are anchored in the notions of courage, strength, reason, prudence, wisdom and maturity.

However, from the age of sixty, when the descent of the stairs begins, the animals and the associated senses are those of an ambitious wolf, a grumpy dog and a cat that observes and stalks.

The association of life stages with different meanings can be analyzed from the understanding that the dimension of “evolution” by modern knowledge also unfolded in an evolutionary reading of the moral register (BIRMAN, 1997). With this, we can understand how the “ascending” phases of life – childhood and maturity – were correlated with meanings valued in the social context, such as reason and courage. In contrast, the “descending” phase of life – old age – was associated with a feeling of dissatisfaction and unhappiness, as the meaning presented in the

following passage, which refers to the 70-year-old step: “always like a grumpy dog, because in the my current age there is nothing that makes me happy” (our translation).

The overlap between power and knowledge constituted a scientific and moral vision of old age based on the productivist aspirations of the modern era. This way, the relationship with productivity became a “moral ruler” for modern subjects. In this relationship, old age came to be engendered by a social loss of prestige. Scientific discourse also helped to corroborate this moral vision by pointing to it as a stage of biological “involution”. This relationship between old age and the notion of “involution” also reinforced the association of this stage of life with death. Joel Birman (1997) points out that old age was delineated as the end of life from the dimension of degeneration. Thus, modern power-knowledge devices helped to constitute old age as a stage of life with specific needs and also a negative moral dimension, as this stage was engendered as a period of degeneration and social discredit.

“SUCCESSFUL” OLD AGE AND NEOLIBERAL RATIONALITY

The shift in the role of the State in the management of individuals alters the notions of modern biopolitics. Paula Sibilia (2015, p. 191) points to a process of privatization of biopolitics in the face of contemporary reality, in which the company expanded its potential to reach the processes of subjectivation, because, according to the author, “today it is up to companies to organize and articulate territories, populations, bodies and subjectivities, unfolding their actions across the entire surface of the planet”. Thus, there is an extension of biopower in contemporary times that spreads beyond institutions to reach “all spaces and all times, all lives throughout life” (SIBILIA, 2015, p. 191).

In these contemporary arrangements of biopower, the devices have become more sophisticated than in industrial societies and power relations are produced and reinforced by techno- scientific innovations that use the dynamics of networks, the digital horizon to exercise their control (SIBILIA, 2015). Thus, the triad media, market and technoscience assume relevance in the logics of contemporary biopolitics by playing a relevant role in composing contemporary subjective processes on aging, in order to reinforce the model of “successful” old age as a valued model of How to get old in the contemporary world.

In order to investigate how contemporary biopolitics act on the processes of subjectivation, it is necessary to resort to the dimension of governmentality used by Foucault to designate a “set constituted by institutions, procedures, analyzes and reflections, calculations and tactics that allow this exercise to be carried out”. a very specific, although very complex, form of power that has the population as its main target” (FOUCAULT, 2008, p. 143). Another dimension of governmentality used by the author is the government of conduct, that is, “techniques of domination exercised over others and techniques of the self” (FOUCAULT, 1988, p. 19). So, from the study of institutions, discourses and analyses, the concept of governmentality moves us to investigate the ways of governing the conduct of others and of oneself.

Foucault uses governmentality to investigate liberalism and neoliberalism, fundamental phenomena for the investigation of the production of discourses about contemporary old age. In order to investigate a specific phenomenon such as aging, it is necessary to analyze the conjuncture of power relations in contemporary society, the game of forces in the ways of governing individuals. In his course entitled “Birth of Biopolitics”,

Foucault (2010) deviates from his biopolitics theme in order to address the governmentality of the neoliberal system. Such a deviation occupies much of the course and provides essential clues to understanding this system.

The author emphasizes a displacement of neoliberalism by transforming the economic model into something that involves social relationships and the relationship of the individual with himself, with time, with work, with the future, with the family (FOUCAULT, 2010). Thus, Foucault understands neoliberalism as something that goes beyond being an economic project, as it encompasses a form of rationality that engenders individuals as a population and also as a way of managing themselves. What are the principles of this neoliberal rationality? There is a reformulation of society from the model of the company that integrates the social fabric to the individual scope, since the subjects are also impelled to be entrepreneurs of themselves, being “himself his own capital, being himself his own capital”. product, being for himself the source of his income” (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 286). In effect, the subject starts to manage himself from a business model that extends to the most diverse areas of his life such as work, personal relationships, image care, leisure, sexuality, etc.

This way, society is composed of numerous companies, each with its own interests, managed by a competitive regulation of society. Therefore, competition is one of the pillars of support for neoliberal rationality. In this society, subjects are managed as human capital, which can be valued as the individual works and also produces himself, according to the following excerpt from researchers Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2016, p. 331): “All your activities they must resemble a production, an investment, a cost estimate. Economics becomes a personal discipline.” Based on this notion, it is not uncommon to

see words from the financial market such as “investment”, “calculation”, “costs” and “losses” being used in advertising phrases, news or in a conversation such as, for example, how important is “invest in you” or that watching a movie is a “waste of time”.

The format of business logic expanded to the details of individuals’ daily lives, so that not only experiences and experiences became “capitalizable” powers. From this paradigm, the subjects came to be understood as self-employed capable of constant “optimization” of themselves, as can be seen in the following excerpt and Laval:

It is about the competent and competitive individual, who seeks to maximize his human capital in all fields, who not only seeks to project himself into the future and calculate gains and costs like the old economic man, but who seeks above all to work himself with the with the aim of continually transforming, improving, and becoming more and more effective (LAVAL, 2016, p. 333).

The functioning of neoliberal governmentality is based on these principles present in the quote above. It is noted that the contemporary subject is expected and encouraged to relate to others from a logic of competitiveness, since he must be “competent and competitive”. The subject needs, then, to maximize his human capital, which must constantly be transformed, improved, become more effective in order to always remain in the “match” of competition. By constituting his subjectivity from a business model, the contemporary subject starts to project himself into the future through calculations of gains, costs and risks of his behaviors and actions.

The State reduces its burden of responsibility by treating the population as companies, in which each one generates its own capital and also its own risks, in order to maximize its results in an existence based on competition. Another author who analyzes

neoliberal rationality is the French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg (2010), when he observes the appropriation of elements of sport by business practices. This movement began in the 1980s in French society and quickly expanded to other countries.

Subsequently, the sport discourse extrapolated the business scope and, in addition to composing this logic, began to be used as a way of managing oneself. Thus, the author calls “entrepreneurial spirit” the valorization of the competitiveness and autonomy of the subjects. These subjects are encouraged to take action so that they maximize their performance in this entrepreneurial journey, which resembles a “heroic” way of life with a “lifestyle that puts risk-taking in charge in a society that makes inter-individual competition fair. competition” (EHRENBERG, 2010, p. 13). To do so, the entrepreneurial subject must be able to govern himself, be ready to take risks and autonomously trace his heroic journey, while establishing a competitive relationship with other individuals who can become “villains” of his journey. for pleasure, personal satisfaction and happiness.

One of the characteristics of this form of neoliberal governmentality is that, starting from the principle of optimization or the “cult of performance”, as stated in the title of the work by Ehrenberg, there is a principle of limitlessness (LAVAL, 2020), that is, not there are limits or “an arrival point” in this heroic business journey that aims at personal satisfaction and “success”, since subjects are encouraged to undergo a constant and incessant process of optimization, always in search of the next goal or achievement. This self-entrepreneur is also an assiduous consumer of products, brands and lifestyles listed as desirable in this individual’s journey.

This “paraphernalia” of consumer items, using Debert’s term (1997), are “tools” presented as auxiliaries in this constant and incessant heroic journey of the individual towards “success”.

Philosopher Michael J. Sandel, in his book “The tyranny of merit: what happened to the common good?”, points out how the meritocratic discourse was naturalized and instrumentalized to reinforce competitiveness and “justify” the inequalities of the neoliberal system. This discourse makes individuals believe that their success makes them “winners”, something they have achieved through their own talent and commitment. Thus, meritocracy constitutes neoliberal ethics by classifying individuals as “winners” and “losers”, which allows the emergence of some affections, as the author presents: “among the winners, it generates arrogance; among the losers, humiliation and resentment” (SANDEL, 2020, p. 33). Not infrequently, it is possible to observe in contemporary times that these affections are constantly instrumentalized in political campaigns, reinforcing a polarization between “us vs. them”³.

According to Sandel (2020), the Protestant work ethic is the basis of the discourse of meritocracy. Elements of this ethics constituted the spirit of capitalism, as described by Weber (1999). In addition, displacements of this ethics reverberate in the imperative of autonomy and in the ethics of self-help. This autonomy focuses on an individual’s accountability that “is gratifying when things are going well, but demoralizing, and even punitive, when things are going wrong” (SANDEL, 2020, p. 59). Faced with these notions, contemporary old age is imbricated by this discourse of merit, classifying and judging individuals according to “deserving” and “failure”, terms often used

3. Political polarization is a movement in which the opposition is seen as an enemy that must be banished, eliminated. This is a strategy reinforced, mainly, by the extreme right, a movement that gained strength in Brazil in 2013, was strengthened with the impeachment of former president Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and has as one of its exponents President Jair Bolsonaro.

in sports language and which have expanded to the daily lives of subjects. Such notions are supported by a fallacious discourse that “success” depends exclusively on each one, leaving aside a series of factors that are beyond the control of individuals.

From the understanding of the layers of values and the logic of subjectivation of neoliberal governmentality, it is possible to draw a parallel with the object of study of “successful” old age and observe how this rationality has impacted the constitution of a specific way of aging. Increasingly visible in contemporary times, these forms of aging associated with the matrix of success bring at their core an old age “dignified” to the neoliberal values of the self-entrepreneur, who must undertake their aging project in a “successful” way.” from the imperative of autonomy and “activity”. The latter assumes the business senses of productivity, effectiveness and performance, with the term “active aging” being widely used in the media and in medical booklets on the subject. Just as business reason entered the heart of contemporary subjectivation processes, the same occurs with the logic of capital in which life itself becomes the “human value”, as cited by Rose (2013), to be invested and “optimized.” according to economic relations.

An element that cannot fail to be analyzed when it comes to a successful old age project is its relationship with work, which complements this cunning imbrication between old age and neoliberalism. Work until advanced stages of life is encouraged and valued in this governmentality. In 2007, to address the “new retirement”, Exame magazine included singer Mick Jagger in the cover photo with the following headline: “What you and he have in common: maybe it’s not fortune, or the roll, or the eight children. But, like Mick Jagger, you will have to work into old age. The good news: getting ready for it, it’s going to be great”

(EXAME, 2017). Based on the statement on the cover of Exame magazine, there is a fallacious discourse when using Mick Jagger as a comparison for the Brazilian elderly population, in terms of old age experience. The magazine also does not shy away from positive this type of behavior by bringing as an inevitable fate that individuals will need to submit to extending their working years and that this will be “great”.

The magazine’s current brand positioning is “The best investment of your time”, which already presents a co-option of time in business reason as capital to be invested. Throughout the report, retirement is presented as a risk, “a bomb capable of destroying the public finances of any country”, but which can (and must) be mitigated with the incentive to continue work after 60 years of age, as pointed out by the excerpt: “instead of playing cards, they keep working, paying taxes, in short, contributing to the economy” (EXAME, 2017b). The report continues with an endorsement of the Pension Reform proposal, which was still under debate and was approved in 2019. According to the magazine, “if it goes through Congress, it will be very difficult to see 50-year-olds retired, as is the case today, which is vital to balance public finances”.

Based on this report, Exame magazine incorporates and disseminates neoliberal notions of unfair and distorted comparisons of the Brazilian population with celebrities and millionaire businessmen. These, in fact, were able to choose to continue working, something that in the majority of the population is not a choice but, unfortunately, a necessity, since only the value of the pension provided by the State is not enough to have a dignified life.. The proposal defended by the magazine and approved by Congress, by increasing the contribution time and making it more complex to receive the ceiling from the National Social Security Institute (INSS),

makes it even more difficult for the elderly population to access retirement, which in the year of approval of the reform was BRL 5,839.45, among other changes (UOL, 2019b).

This dimension of engendering old age as an “economic burden” for the rest of the population reinforces ageism⁴, in addition to leaving aside the reality of many families who depend on the value of retirement to support themselves, according to a survey by the National Confederation of Shopkeepers (National Confederation of Shopkeepers) (CNDL) and Credit Protection Service (SPC Brasil) which pointed to 52% of the elderly as the main responsible for family income (FCDL GO, 2021). Researcher Mirella Pessoa (2020) presents the process of individualization of the subject in contemporary times as a characteristic of the weakening of the dimension of the collectivity, an essential principle for the functioning of public pension systems.

Another fact published in the media related to the themes of work and aging was a report from a 101-year-old woman who distributed CVs to “be able to buy wines without depending on anyone”, according to the report (G1, 2021). Her story “went viral” from a post by the selection analyst of a meatpacking company who received her resume, in which she narrates the fact as an act of “empowerment” and “a lesson in courage, strength and independence for all of us”, according to the image 7.

4. A form of prejudice in relation to age that can categorize and divide people in a way that causes harm, disadvantages and injustices.

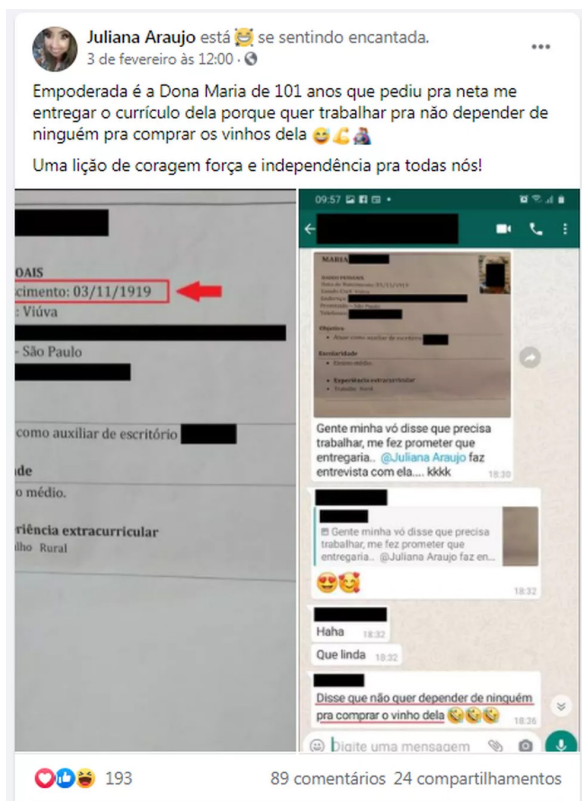


Image 7: Post on social network about the curriculum.

Source: G1 (2021)

When judging as an admirable act a person over one hundred years old asking for a job to be able to buy things he wants, it is observed how the discourse of the reprivatization process of aging pointed out by Debert (2004), which indicates the process of making the individual responsible for manage their own old age, gains strength in the population’s production of meanings. In this discourse, there is present, even if implicitly, the game of truths of “successful” old age based on the ideals of productivity and autonomy. It is noted that this discourse also reproduces the morality of this model of old age as something “worthy” of values such as courage and strength.

Thus, the figure of the “retiree”, which was praised in the emergence of the term

“third age”, popularized in the 2000s, shifts to these meanings of cost and economic risk that must be mitigated with the imperative of work, ignoring that this worker contributed for many years to receive the pension. This is the logic of the reprivatization of old age: it is increasingly up to the elderly person himself to take care of himself and maintain himself, having to work, invest in a private pension, take care of his food and health, in order to generate less “expenditure.” to the public coffers. This way, two discourses focus on contemporary old bodies: the accountability of their old age project, in order to “exempt” public entities with policies and guarantees of rights to this population, and the discourse of “successful” old age that stimulates an “investment” in a so-called healthy and active body, whose function is also to “burden” the public coffers less.

This is the cruel and perverse discourse that neoliberal reason brings to the aging process, in a “softened” guise of “successful” aging as a happy, healthy and active life project, in which work in old age is worthy of recognition. “merit”. In this neoliberal logic, it is noted the existence of a specific type of old age and aging that are placed in the media visibility as models to be achieved. The “silver market”, as this business sector is called, focused on products, solutions and services with a focus on the elderly public, reveals the silly hand of the market that does not shy away from promoting this type of old age as a profitable route to the public coffers, to media companies and to companies and industries that produce goods and services.

FINAL NOTES ON “SUCCESSFUL” OLD AGE

In this article, we start from the hypothesis of the existence of a type of old age understood as “successful”, which anchors neoliberal meanings and values associated with constant

productivity and self -employment. This model of old age involves notions associated with “performance” of physical and cognitive “high function”. And, to achieve this aging model, subjects are encouraged to take care of food and health, a routine of regular physical exercise and the maintenance of their productive capacity, whether working or in some leisure activity.

The discourse of the “successful” old age model is both an effect of neoliberal governmentality and an instrument for the constitution of subjectivation processes that reinforce these imperatives that are often associated with youth. This is because at the same time that it brokers neoliberal values, the discourse of the “successful” old age model is also brokered by them. Thus, in addition to a discourse, this production of meanings about old age also takes on the contours of a moral truth that defines, in the face of neoliberal values present in ways more or less implicit in different discourses, which is the appropriate form of aging or not.

The discourse of “successful” old age conceived presents a moral charge since its conception, having as a desire the notion of an “optimized” model and of “high function” of old age. It is, at the limit, a moralizing discourse that divides subjects into “successful” and “failed” elderly people according to characteristics such as autonomy, activity, body state, health and productivity. These values are intrinsic to the neoliberal rationality that engenders contemporary Western subjectivities and that encourages this cruel moral reason of “deserving” and “unsuccessful”.

Media vehicles constantly propagate this logic through “success stories” of old people socially valued as “deserving”. In their speeches, they engender an understanding that this path depends only on the “commitment” of each one, a fallacy that gains contours of

truth when supported and stimulated by the triad of the market, media and technoscience. This way, a pedagogization of a type of morally privileged way of life is perceived in which the subject is encouraged to manage his own aging process following a series of recommendations, in order to achieve an old age considered “successful”. If you do not reach this ideal of “success” in your old age, the individual is held responsible for not having managed risks and moderated their behaviors in a “successful” way. Based on this, the sense of “failure” is anchored to these subjects, as if they were “losers” in the journey presented as heroic of the old self-entrepreneur subject.

From these notions, it is possible to verify that the phenomenon of old age in contemporary times requires an attentive look, which captures the complexity that is at stake in a movement of constant disputes over discourses and meanings about old age. In this article, we study “successful” old age, our working hypothesis, and observe the conditions of possibility of its emergence, as well as its intrinsic relationship with neoliberal rationality. In addition to the analyzed aspects, we understand that the Covid-19 pandemic potentiated some aspects of neoliberal rationality and the logic of the merit of which lives are “deserving” of protection and care through a health catastrophe that mainly killed the elderly in Brazil. Data indicate that 76% of deaths related to Covid-19 during 2020 occurred among people over 60 years old (UNBR, 2020). This way, there are still several aspects of the discourses about old age in contemporary times that are propagated and that open the way for different studies on this theme.

To think about old age in contemporary times and in other historical times is to think about the future of each one – a reality that is little reflected, constantly captured by

the joys of marketing and masked by the seductive images of advertising. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on old age in its discourses and forms of governmentality, tracing cuts from different social classes, races and genders to visualize forms of old age that are far removed from the idealized model considered to be “successful”.

It is only by reflecting on these games of truths and the morality of discourses engendered by old age in contemporary times that one can think of becomings and other ways of aging. Not infrequently, such experiences are “overshadowed” by the media proliferation of the “successful” old age model and end up being made invisible by the logic of the tyranny of merit. The becomings are openings for other ways of living old age and that can be created as alternatives or escape routes to the rapid “tentacles” of neoliberal rationality in expansion in contemporary times.

REFERENCES

- BIRMAN, J. **Estilo e modernidade em psicanálise**. São Paulo: Editora 34, 1997.
- BIRMAN, J. Terceira idade, subjetivação e biopolítica. **História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos**, v. 22, n. 4, p. 1267–1282, dez. 2015.
- DARDOT, Pierre; LAVAL, Christian. **A nova razão do mundo: ensaio sobre a sociedade neoliberal**. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2016.
- DARWIN, C. **A origem das espécies**. São Paulo: Ubu Editora, 2018.
- DEBERT, G. G.. A Invenção da Terceira Idade e a Rearticulação de Formas de Consumo e Demandas Políticas. **Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais**, SÃO PAULO, v. 12, n.34, p. 39-56, 1997.
- DEBERT, G. G. **A reinvenção da velhice: socialização e processos de reprivatização do envelhecimento**. São Paulo: Editora Da Universidade De São Paulo, 2004.
- DEBERT, Guita Grin. Antropologia e o estudo dos grupos e das categorias de idade. In: BARROS, Myriam Moraes Lins de (org.). **Velhice ou terceira idade?: estudos antropológicos sobre identidade, memória e política**. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1998. p. 49-68.
- EHRENBERG, Alain. **O culto da performance: Da aventura empreendedora à depressão nervosa**. Aparecida, SP: Ed. Ideias e Letras, 2010.
- EXAME. **A nova aposentadoria: O que você e ele têm em comum**. Disponível em: <<https://exame.com/edicoes/1129/>>. Acesso em: 26 out. 2021.
- EXAME. **Mais aposentados trabalham após os 65 anos (e são felizes também)**. Disponível em: <<https://exame.com/revista-exame/mais-aposentados-trabalham-apos-os-65-anos-e-sao-felizes-tambem/>>. Acesso em: 26 out. 2021.
- FCDL GO. **52% dos idosos são os principais responsáveis pelo sustento da casa**. Disponível em: <<https://www.fcdlgo.com.br/52-dos-idosos-sao-os-principais-responsaveis-pelo-sustento-da-casa/>>. Acesso em: 14 jan. 2022.
- FOUCAULT, M. **História da sexualidade I: a vontade de saber**. 8ª. ed. Rio De Janeiro/São Paulo: Paz & Terra, 2019.
- FOUCAULT, M. **Microfísica do poder**. Rio De Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2017.
- FOUCAULT, M. **Nascimento da biopolítica**. Lisboa: Edições 70, 2010.
- FOUCAULT, M. **Segurança, território, população: curso dado no Collège de France (1977-1978)**. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2008.
- FOUCAULT, M. **Em defesa da Sociedade** – curso no Collège de France (1975-1976). São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1999.
- FOUCAULT, M. **Estratégia, poder-saber**. 2 ed. Manoel B. da Motta (Org.) e Tradução Vera L. A.Ribeiro. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2006. (Ditos e Escritos IV).
- FOUCAULT, M. Technologies of the Self. In: MARTIN, Luther; GUTMAN, Huck; HUTTON, Patrick (orgs.) **Technologies of the Self: a seminar with Michel Foucault**. Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988. p.16-49.
- G1. **Expectativa de vida do brasileiro ao nascer foi de 76 anos em 2017, diz IBGE**. Disponível em: <<https://g1.globo.com/bemestar/noticia/2018/11/29/expectativa-de-vida-do-brasileiro-ao-nascer-foi-de-76-anos-em-2017-diz-ibge.ghtml>>. Acesso em: 28 mar. 2020.
- G1. **Idosa de 101 anos entrega currículo em empresa do interior de SP e caso viraliza na web: “Para ajudar um pouco.”** Disponível em: <<https://g1.globo.com/sp/bauri-marilia/noticia/2021/02/13/idosa-de-101-anos-entrega-curriculo-em-empresa-do-interior-de-sp-e-caso-viraliza-na-web-para-ajudar-um-pouco.ghtml>>. Acesso em: 28 out. 2021.
- GIDDENS, A. **Modernidade e identidade**. Rio De Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2002.

GOOGLE. É hora de aposentar seu conceito de “velho”: dados e insights sobre os sêniores do Brasil. Disponível em: <<https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/pt-br/tendencias-de-consumo/e-hora-de-aposentar-seu-conceito-de-velho-dados-e-insights-sobre-os-seniores-do-brasil/>>. Acesso em: 28 mar. 2020.

LAVAL, C. **Foucault, Bourdieu e a questão neoliberal**. São Paulo: Elefante, 2020.

ONU BR. **Pessoas com mais de 60 anos são mais atingidas pela COVID-19 nas Américas | As Nações Unidas no Brasil**. Disponível em: <<https://brasil.un.org/pt-br/93559-pessoas-com-mais-de-60-anos-sao-mais-atingidas-pela-covid-19-nas-americas>>. Acesso em: 28 dez. 2021.

PESSOA, Mirella Ramos Costa. **Faces do futuro: imagens da velhice no regime de visibilidade contemporâneo**. Orientadora: Cláudia Linhares Sanz. Brasília, 2020, 121 p.

ROSE, N. **A política da própria vida: biomedicina, poder e subjetividade no século XXI**. São Paulo: Paulus, 2013.

SANDEL, M. J. **A tirania do mérito: o que aconteceu com o bem comum?** Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2020.

SIBILIA, P. **O homem pós-orgânico : a alquimia dos corpos e das almas à luz das tecnologias digitais**. 2. ed. Rio De Janeiro: Contraponto, 2015.

UOL. **Mudanças na aposentadoria: Entram em vigor novas regras para quem vai se aposentar; veja o que muda para você**. 2019b. Disponível em: <[140https://economia.uol.com.br/reportagens-especiais/reforma-da-previdencia-o-que-muda-na-aposentadoria/#page3](https://economia.uol.com.br/reportagens-especiais/reforma-da-previdencia-o-que-muda-na-aposentadoria/#page3)>. Acesso em: 26 out. 2021.

WEBER, M. **A ética protestante e o espírito do capitalismo**. São Paulo: Editora Pioneira, 1999.