

Volume 39  
issue 2 / 2020

Contracampo e-ISSN 2238-2577  
Niterói (RJ), 39 (2)  
ago/2020-nov/2020

Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication is a quarterly publication of the Graduate Programme in Communication Studies (PPGCOM) at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). It aims to contribute to critical reflection within the field of Media Studies, being a space for dissemination of research and scientific thought.

## THE MONSTER'S FACTORY: Performances of masculinity in interviews with Léo Stronda

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TO REFERENCE THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CITATION:

Sacramento, I; Brasiliense, D.R; Sanches, J.C; THE MONSTER'S FACTORY: Performances of masculinity in interviews with Léo Stronda. *Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication*, Niterói, v. 39, n. 2, p. XXX-YYY, jun./aug. 2020.

**Submission on: 04/11/2019, Reviewer A: 03/24/2020, Reviewer B: 03/31/2020, Accepted on 10/04/2020**

DOI – <http://dx.doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v39i2.38416>

## Abstract

In the last years, we have been noticing the frequent use of words such as monster and big monster not only as qualifiers of muscular male bodies, but also as vectors of the identification of virility as value by the bodybuilding. In this work, we analyze these discourses through interviews with Léo Stronda, whose performances of masculinity consist in the ways of affirmation of an identity project centered on a revaluation of monstrosity. Our analysis will consist of two steps. In the first part, we will discuss the ways in which Léo Stronda identifies himself as a monster, re-elaborating his past and projecting a future, which allows him to assert an authority through the conquest of the monster-body. Then, we look at the comments on the videos and discuss the recognition of the youtuber as a model and guru of those who also want to be recognized as monsters. We conclude that the association between masculinity and monstrosity in a positive sense contributes to the construction of virility by brutality and concern with appearance, which configures the body shape as part of a lifestyle.

### Keywords

Body; Identity; Masculinity.

## Introduction

“Become monster,” “come, monster,” “grow,” “get very big,” “big monster.” Expressions like these mark the gym spaces among those who dedicate themselves to the bodybuilding<sup>1</sup>. These terms, in recent years, however, have become popular in everyday life, especially amidst men who care as much about the anatomical forms of their body, with regard to aesthetics, as with their male character. This way, they emphasize, in a new relationship with the body, a transformation in the sense of monstrosity. Affirmed positively, the monster is not necessarily the other of the normality, its extreme opposite, radical, the one that is marked by a transgression of the natural limits and classifications. Throughout the 20th century, there is a process of monstrosity’s objectification by science, which shifted the monstrosity from the nature’s scope to the behavior’s: “we can see a change that is, so to speak, the autonomization of a moral monstrosity, of a monstrosity of behavior that transposes the old category of the monster from the domain of somatic and natural disorder to the domain of pure and simple criminality.” (Foucault, 2010, p. 75).

When we thought of the suffering bodies, of which Judith Butler (2011) talks, relating them to the monstrosity as an abnormality, came to our mind the television series that was successful in Brazil by the 1980s, called *The Incredible Hulk*. The scientist David Banner, played by the actor Bill Bixby, is the victim of a radioactive effect after testing a bomb that would end up diseases. Under this effect, in certain moments, David turns into a big, green and muscular monster, whose body’s growth intensity tears the small clothes of a slender and ordinary man. Lou Ferrigno, the actor who plays the transformed Hulk, was 1.94m tall and weighed 135 kilos. Strong, exotic and effective, Hulk makes people afraid and admire him. However, as the effect of his transformation passes, the character suffers, sometimes cries for having to carry forever with him that monster that arises without his control. The endings of *The Incredible Hulk* episodes are always alike, with the same sad song that marks the moment of solitude of that disguised monster who will never be able to live normally in society.

What draws our attention is the displacement of the suffering in being a monster to a valuation. Contrary to what we saw in Hulk, one no longer suffers to be presented as a monster, especially with regard to the male sculptural body’s performance. One suffers from not having a large body with hypertrophied muscles, because this is ideal. One seeks to be a monster. Hulk’s monstrosity was not of a bad nature, only his large and brute body was perceived as disproportionate to others. Although this generated in the character a sense of discomfort, a feeling of misadjustment and deviation, it made him a stronger, more powerful man, who hypnotized others by his body difference. What we have contemporarily is the possibility of body-monster that is no longer a reason of sadness, but has the tone of happiness and fullness as performance of a normalized masculinity.

Created on April 14, 2014, the YouTube channel *Fábrica de Monstros (Monster’s Factory)* is dedicated to reinforce that the very muscular body ceases to being the sign of abnormality or extraordinary to that of normality or ordinariness, configuring a type of masculinity and male body that externalizes the virility, the strength, and also the care of a man for himself. The first video is part of the *Monstro na Cozinha (Monster in the Kitchen)* playlist, a segment of the channel that dialogues with the TV cooking shows with some important language changes. The young presenter of the videos, Léo Stronda, wears an apron over the bare back, to show the muscular body, only prepares recipes that encourage his viewers to become monsters and does not care about the formalities and decorum common to this TV format, usually

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1 Bodybuilding is the use of progressive resistance exercises to develop the muscles of the body.

addressed to housewives.<sup>2</sup> He swears, offends his viewers by calling them chickens or little chickens.<sup>3</sup>

Thinking about it, we will analyze in this paper Léo Stronda's performance, who assumes himself positively as a monster and does not feel guilt or sadness for doing so, quite the contrary. Our corpus focuses on a video from the YouTube channel, *Fábrica de Monstros (Monster's Factory)*, in which Léo Stronda interviews himself, published on april 30, 2015, and another interview for the SBT's<sup>4</sup> TV show *The Noite com Danilo Gentili (The Night with Danilo Gentili)*, aired on December 30, 2015, and published on the YouTube channel on the same day.

Our analysis will consider Léo Stronda's discourses and interviews, in which he values the monster-body and himself as authority in the conquest of the ideal bodily model. Thus, although he remembers himself as a "chicken", it is the production of this memory and of a performative rupture with his own past that legitimizes him in the present as a monster and makes him seek ways to continue being prestigious as such. We pursue, as a methodological strategy, the synchrony with the time of the videos' publication so that we can analyze the masculinity-monster's modes of expression, as well as the dynamics of recognition of "being monster" as an identity project of Léo Stronda and his spectators.

We have divided this text in three parts, in addition to this introduction and the final considerations. First, we present basic theoretical elements for the understanding of the valuation's process of the monster-masculinity as an identity project. Then, we take care of the analysis of the video from the channel *Fábrica de Monstros (Monster's Factory)*, followed by the interview for the TV show.

## The masculinity-monster's project

More oftenly, we observe processes of revaluation of the muscular body in contemporaneity. In the forms of expression used by Léo Stronda in the videos, by asserting himself as a monster and as fully capable of instructing his followers on how to become a monster, we see the process of identity building involving valuation and recognition. In this sense, the recognition of Léo Stronda's authority as a model and guru of the muscular monstrosity, through comments on the videos, allows to observe how much the personal work on the body is configured as a form of expertise. The body is, therefore, in a continuous state of "unfinishedness"; the body is "seen as an entity which is in the process of becoming; a project which should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual's self-identity" (Shilling, 1993, p. 5). A way of thinking about the contemporary configuration of the somatic culture of the development of "body projects". Body projects are ways of building personal and collective identities through the body, particularly the surface of the body.

As Jurandir Freire Costa notes, "body culture, or body worship, is not a definition; is an emphasis feature. The imprecise designation draws attention to the fact that the body has become a privileged reference for the construction of personal

identities" (Costa, 2004, p. 203). Still according to Costa, contemporary somatic culture also conditions two phenomena: "the physical body's cognitive remapping and the invasion of culture by the

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2 Léo Stronda stayed on the channel until he decided to create his own, which had its first publication on march 12, 2016. The creation of his own channel and the withdrawing from the previous one was due to the notoriety he was obtaining individually, with participations in TV shows and partnerships with companies in the fitness market. On his channel, the youtuber rarely has the presence of guests. The fixed segments are *Monstro na Cozinha (Monster in the Kitchen* – in the same style as the previous channel), *Monstro Reage (Monster Reacts* – in which he comments videos, especially from the music universe and the performance of "chickens" in the gym), *Monstro Joga (Monster Plays* – in which he plays games on the computer and video games) and *Pergunte ao Monstro (Ask the Monster* – in which he answers to questions).

3 Chicken and its derivatives are expressions generally associated in opposition to monster. The chicken is both the non-practitioner and the beginner in the bodybuilding practice, who does not know enough methods and techniques.

4 Translator's Note: Brazilian Television System (known by the acronym SBT) is a brazilian open commercial television network.

spectacle's moral" (Costa, 2004, p. 204). The first is responsible for providing the rational justifications for rewriting who we are. Yet, the second aspect contributes to define the moral norms of what we should be, observing the cultural system structured around the regulation of bodies.

There is a diverse set of knowledge, techniques and products available in the contemporary health market, ensuring the possibility of establishing what Nikolas Rose (2014) calls "somatic ethics." That is, it becomes imperative to the individuals the responsibility for the management of the diseases and aging's risks, for the hypertrophy, for the percentage of fat's reduction, for the continuous improvement of the body, for the longevity and for the vitality from choices and projections that seem to define the course of life. In contemporary society, in fact, "[w]e now have the means to exert an unprecedented degree of control over bodies, yet we are also living in an age which has thrown into radical doubt our knowledge of what bodies are and how we should control them" (Shilling, 1993, p. 3). The body is becoming "increasingly a phenomenon of options and choices" (Shilling, 1993, p. 3). Choosing a body project depends on the recognition of a structure of the past's failure to take action. Thus, it cannot be ignored that "the consistency of the body *project* depends, fundamentally, on the memory that provides the basic indicators of a past that produced the circumstances of the present, without the awareness of which it would be impossible to have or elaborate *projects*" (Velho, 1994, p. 101, emphasis in original).

The possibility of associating masculinity with monstrosity in a positive sense, as a widely legitimized and recognized *body project*, is established through normalization processes. Processes such as these, Foucault (1988) explains, refer to how power is both totalizing, because it controls all aspects of life, creating pressure to conform to the norms, as well as individualizing, because those who are outside the norm are marked as deviant and directed to disciplinary strategies designed to neutralize their deviation. In our reflection, from this, at the basis of masculinities' production, is the process of normalization of certain identity constructions and, at the same time, of determination of the place in which an individual is positioned in the hierarchical system of masculinities. However, such conformation is not achieved through coercion or force, but rather by desire. By constructing conceptions of normality and deviation, power makes norms to become moral, good and correct, and creates the desire to conform and adjust to these norms. Power would be fragile if its only function were to repress, if it functioned only and solely as a form of censorship, exclusion, blocking and repression. For Foucault (1988), power produces effects on the levels of desire and knowledge. For us, these effects also take place in the identity-body projects affirmed, defended and propagated by certain individuals, as in the case of the masculinity-monster.

We believe that the body, as a place for the inscription and repetition of certain masculinity practices, is governed by norms that dictate the negotiation of certain significant and psychic practices that inform most men according to the regulatory practice of compulsory heterosexuality. Sex is "a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls" (Butler, 2011, p. 1). It deals, therefore, with "a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices" (Butler, 2011, p. 1). In other words, what is called sex is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through times and spaces. This formulation "moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality" (Butler, 2010, p. 243). After all, "[i]t is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (Butler, 2011, p. 1-2).

To understand this, the author uses two notions: performativity and gender performance. According to Butler (2011, p. 34), performativity "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names

[...] and, to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition.” In order to materialize its effects, discourse must be understood as a “set of complex and convergent chains in which effects are vectors of power and whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable” (Butler, 2011, p. 267). If the power that discourse has to produce what it appoints is associated with the question of performativity, then performativity is “a domain in which power acts as discourse” (Butler, 2011, p. 316). Whereas, performance is only part of the genre. For this, Judith Butler (2011, p. 328) states that “it would be a mistake to reduce performativity to the manifestation or performance of gender.” It is what disturbs binary associations and points to the imitative character of every genre. Performance, therefore, points to a “radical contingency” (Butler, 2010, p. 196) in relation to gender and to sex, for a denaturalization and for the manufactured character of all sexual identity. The contingent dimension of gender as performance suggests the need for repetition which, at the same time it is the re-enactment of a set of meanings already established socially, it is also, each time, a new experience.

In view of this understanding, performativity refers to the complex process of constitution not only of gender, but also of sex, through the internalization of imposing norms of compulsory heterosexuality, which materialize in the body as sex and that create an effect of gender as real and stable. These norms set the limits of what will be considered an intelligible formation of the subject within a given historical context. This circumstance is due to the fact that “there is no creation of the self (*poiesis*) outside a mode of subjectivation and, therefore, there is no creation of the self out of the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that the subject must assume” (Butler, 2010, p. 29).

Gender, in this perspective, is not constituted by a preexisting I or *us*. Subject to gender and subjected by gender, “the I neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves” (Butler, 2011, p. 25). In this sense, it is necessary to think that “masculinities are not fixed entities incarnated in the bodies or in the subjects’ personality traits,” but are “normative configurations of practices that are carried out in social relations” and that “can differentiate and be reformulated according to gender relations in a particular social scenario” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2013, p. 250). The construction of masculinities involves the choice of characteristics in the set of representations and practices of gender and sexuality available in a social space at a given moment. This occurs within a normalization process that designates certain bodies and conducts as normal, desirable and correct as opposed to those considered less normal, more abnormal and less abnormal, and so on.

It is in this perspective that we observe the process of normalization and valuation of the masculinity-monster from Léo Stronda. We understand that such process acts at the level of desire, driving him and others to become muscular and male enough to be considered monsters. But this is not just about the body. The body is the insignia of a power internalized as a desire that is externalized as physical form. In the case of Léo Stronda, this happens in a way considered very successful. He softens his body to the point of adapting to the masculinity’s contemporary moral values and to the mutations of contemporary biopolitics, which holds individuals accountable for their own well-being, happiness and health. After all, the power of normalization operates through the production of desire to conform to the norms that certain knowledge establishes itself. Thus, individuals feel compelled to regulate their bodies to conform to the norms, but also to talk about what they “should” and “should not” do and confess any deviation from these norms.

## The interview of the self in monster’s factory

On April 14, 2014, the YouTube channel “Fábrica de monstros” (Monster’s factory) publishes a video inviting internet users to subscribe to what is classified as “the largest fitness channel in Brazil”, in

the channel's own advertising campaign. In the presentation, Léo Stronda narrates the challenges that are to come, for him and for those subscribed to the channel. Stronda's narration says that "there is no victory without sacrifices", a common understanding to bodybuilding practitioners, because the symbolic repertoire disseminated in the fitness culture points, mostly, to the notion that without pain there is no gain. After all, the notion of pain elaborated by bodybuilding practitioners, as is the case of the narrator Stronda, is one of the main elements of the process of body modeling's development through bodybuilding. In the context of bodybuilding, the pain positives and legitimizes itself, since it is "directly associated with dedication to the exercises, to the stoic domain of actions and desires" (Sabino & Luz, 2014, p. 472). Thus, by acquiring a muscular body, the aspiring monster begins to be recognized for the ability to overcome or resist pain, which enables him to shape in his flesh "the *status*' muscular profile directly rooted in the form and knowledge of how to build it" (Sabino & Luz, 2014, p. 473). It occurs, then, that the overcoming, as a life project, is constantly triggered. Léo Stronda goes on to state this: "My neurosis is that I'm never good enough. I'm daily after something better. They say I'm crazy, a monster. Yes, maybe they're right."

The teaser video of the *Monster's Factory* channel produced different reactions in the internet users who signed up for the channel. Léo Stronda's speech begins a process of constructing self-identity as a monster. For him, attachment to a set of characteristics seeks to give meaning and coherence to the personal identity. Here he seeks to match the promise of the maintenance of the self and the character: "I am (...) a monster." The "who" matches the "what." Thus, the construction of this self-identity, whose greater representation is in his own body, makes him responsible, as he assures himself, for the manufacturing of new monsters. By saying that "the time has come for you to change without excuses," the *Monster's Factory* channel builds a symbolic negotiation with the subscribers. As we can see in some of the comments to this video, the project of being a monster organizes the narrator's account when he talks about himself and the group to which he belongs and represents. The user Rodrigo Filho, for example, in response to the video tells us: "We can trust him that he will help us to become a MONSTER by Léo Schulz (sic.)".

In this sense, being a monster becomes a project, in the terms of Velho (1994). After all, a project gives double significance to an individual's life: direction and meaning. While establishing where the individual wants to get, the project brings meaning to existence. In this case, certainly, it is a passage from the body *status* identified as that of chicken to the one of monster. But this type of authority's configuration by the incorporation of masculinity normative entails a set of differentiations. After all, we understand that identities are processed in the relationship between individual and society, especially from classification and valuation logics that produce hierarchies. The somatic culture is producing a "somatic ethics of the differences, because instead of subjecting individuals to traditional normativities, it seeks to create small normativities appropriate to the biological equipment's versatility" (Costa, 2004, p. 239).

At the same time, there is an intense relationship between the construction of this personal identity and the moral question. That is, the valorization of the other and also of the self is a form of production and reproduction of social practices and values when there is the effort to create stigmas by discourses' framing ensured by common sense regarding this male body identity. In our case, we are analyzing both the monstrosity's revaluation and the identification processes' production from this hypertrophied model of male body-monster.

We cannot fail to observe that the YouTube's profile picture of the viewer named Rodrigo Filho is of the president Jair Bolsonaro. It is not by chance this identification. Bolsonaro, in his appearances and public positionings, has for more than three decades demonstrated traces of homophobia, misogyny, racism and authoritarianism, and has been especially considered in recent years an icon, or "myth", as his followers call him, of the so-called conservative wave in Brazil (cf., for example, Maranhão Filho et al., 2018). In this sense, the identification of a Bolsonaro's follower with Stronda is completely plausible and expected. Stronda builds himself as a figure who develops a hyper-heterosexual personality and builds an

image of himself as a monster. The image that he seeks to build for himself interconnects discourses about masculinity, heteronormativity, aggressiveness, individualism and narcissism.

In addition, it is worth highlighting in Rodrigo Filho's comment the trust in Léo Stronda to make him become a monster. As we have said, recognizing the body as a project implies the acceptance that its size, shape and appearance are subject to reconstruction according to its owner's projects. Contemporary somatic culture requires the individual's awareness of the management and aesthetics of his/her body. This requires the recognition of the body as a personal and social resource that projects a person's identity. Therefore, bodies become "malleable entities which can be shaped and honed by the vigilance and hard work of their owners" (Shilling, 1993, p. 5).

The impression that Léo Stronda will be able to turn the followers' body into monsters is common, as we can see in the internet user Felipe Santos' comment when he says: "I'm fat chicken but I like it because it will change my life!".

In this post, it is quite evident that there is a hierarchy between the body-chicken and the body-monster associated with another, between the thin and the fat. In the fitness culture, being fat chicken is much more pejorative and subalternized. However, Felipe Santos claims to believe in Léo Stronda to change his life. Once again, the monster-body is a project: it gives direction and meaning to life.

Léo Stronda's authority to be able to "change the life" is above all inscribed in his body. Stronda's denomination is not academic, but it is his own body, which acts as insignia of an intense work of dedication and body modeling through dieting and physical exercises. Thus, the body, itself, becomes symbolic capital. It is a distinctive body, a body conquered through a lot of financial investment, work and sacrifice (Goldenberg & Ramos, 2002). Becoming a monster is, therefore, a new body signifier of a normative masculinity model. This makes certain individuals be in the position of counselors and others of counselled, or even masters and apprentices.

Thus, returning to Bourdieu (1989), what is at stake in the identity disputes is not only "being perceived that exists fundamentally by the recognition of others", but being endowed with the ability of "imposition of perception and categories of perception" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 117). We believe that, among his followers, Léo Stronda acquires this male authority to "make see" and "make believe", when he advises and gains recognition. After all, if the symbolic power is the power to "make see and make believe, to confirm or transform the world vision and, thus, the action on the world, therefore, the world" (Bourdieu, 1989, p.14), it is necessary, as an analyst, to observe the "struggle for the conservation or transformation of the social world through the conservation or transformation of the social world's vision" (Bourdieu, 1989, p.174). In this sense, Léo Stronda bases his authority on the experience of having managed to have a monster-body, in a society that values muscle hypertrophy as a sign of dominant masculinity.

The video of the segment *Guest monster*, from the *Monster's Factory* channel, published on April 20, 2015, is the description's example of the project developed by the figure of Léo Stronda who, in an unusual way, conducts a self-interview. When he talks about himself, he announces the following profile:

We're going to interview here the celebrity of the fitness world, of the bodybuilding world, of the hip-hop world, of the rap world. The guy is too much thug (sic.), and I'm a big fan, okay? He who brought a new face to the national sport, he who brought a new Know-how for the brazilian hip-hop, a guy like that without words, I'm not even going to spend compliments here because he himself is enough, okay? We're here and we're interviewing today our dear Léo Stronda, the monster of monsters.

In self-presenting, Stronda refers to himself as a successful subject, as a figure who achieved the goals of becoming a national celebrity, highlighting fundamentally the achievements made in different areas of the arts and sport.<sup>5</sup> The latter, above all, is the mark that constitutes Léo Stronda's public image,

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<sup>5</sup> Léo Stronda did not start his career as a youtuber, but as a singer. Together with Diego Thug, MC Night and MC Cot, he formed, in 2006, a carioca funk and hip-hop group, O Bonde do Stronda (The Stronda's



the monster with exaggerated body shapes and knowledgeable of body improvement techniques – under the aegis of bodybuilding. Sport, in this sense, has become the symbol of Léo Stronda's moral conduct in governing himself, whose results of physical exercises are demonstrated in his own body dimension.

The thinking of the french sociologist Alain Ehrenberg on the role of sport in contemporary societies is indispensable for understanding the monster Léo Stronda's social phenomenon. Ehrenberg (2010) states that sport has begun to aggregate a social valuation never seen before, making it a catapult to the contemporary subject's autonomy discourses. In addition, Ehrenberg points out, sport has expanded itself into social daily life and become an engine of the government of the self's practices. The author considers that currently sport "is a *system of conducts of the self* that consists of involving the individual in the formation of his/her autonomy and responsibility" (Ehrenberg, 2010, p. 18). As an autonomous subject, the monster Léo Stronda explains that the presence of bodybuilding in his life occurred through dissatisfaction with the body. In his self-interview, when asked about the reasons that lead him to the bodybuilding practices, he states that "the problem is that I, personally, didn't like to feel myself small, I wanted to be big." Léo Stronda refers to the idea of fragility, smallness and failure, moral values that are in constant dispute in contemporary societies, whose life projects are associated with a search for the ideals of high performance, of advanced output, of transposition of barriers and obstacles, of victory, of success and, above all, of strength. In addition, a whole trajectory of search for improvement and self-realization stands out. This occurs, above all, in the desire for the results from sports practices, the famous training. Asked if there is a formula for achieving good results (to become a monster), Léo Stronda reiterates that "there is no magic formula to become monster, much less in three months. There's no such thing, okay? What exists is dedication, training, diet and rest."

The advisory role produced by Léo Stronda translates that which Nikolas Rose (2011) points out as the dimension of the contemporary *expertise* as technique used by different subjects in order to advise others about the mastery of the self:

[Thus], contemporary individuals are incited to live as if they were *projects*: they must *work on* their emotional world, their domestic and marital arrangements, their relationships with employment and their sexual pleasures' techniques; they must develop a "lifestyle" that will maximize the value of their existences for themselves (Rose, 2011, p. 218, emphasis in original).

Léo Stronda demonstrates his *expertise* in regard to the bodybuilding's sports practices and advises those subscribed in the *Monster's Factory* channel. He more than helps others find ways to conquer the monster-body, as well as is an expert. According to Rose (2011), the *expertise* has the character of "attribution of authority in relation to the 'conducting of the conduct'" (Rose, 2011, p. 217). In this sense, the *expertise's* competence in governing the self and others is potent. It causes, above all, an effect of subject's production, in addition to the referendum to the adviser's authority, whose job is to develop life projects. The request for help by those subscribed in the channel is recurrent, as there is a recognition of the qualities of advice present in Léo Stronda's speech. In the following commentary, Léo Stronda's life narrative from the age of chicken in adolescence – theme addressed in the video – is dismembered into personal stories. In other words, the internet users subscribed to the channel seek advice from what was experienced by the youtuber, seeking to walk the path placed as sure to become monster as well. Patrick Farias, for example, says that, like Léo Stronda, he likes to work out and has wanted to stop being a chicken since adolescence. The internet user asks a question to the youtuber: "Leo, I'm 14 years old and like working out, I've never taken any supplement. Do you know if supplements, especially whey, and intense workouts harm my height?"

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Crew). The group became popular among young people through the Internet because their songs addressed, in a politically incorrect way, the nightlife, drinking, dating, sexual relations, women, daily life. Since 2009, the band has become a duo with the quitting of MC Cot in 2007 and that of MC Night in 2008.

Patrick doesn't get a response from his idol. But the question is answered by Stronda in other videos of the channel, in which he recommends the use of Whey Protein. He says, also, that he has been using supplementation since he started working out in adolescence. There is a widespread confidence in Stronda on the part of his viewers. Based on these comments, we already have some indications that the processes of production and appropriation of biomedical resources for the purpose of improvement has perhaps as their objectives much less to help re-inscribe the differences in body terms and much more to accentuate and legitimize the characteristics associated with an expected masculinity. In this context, Léo Stronda works both as a male body and performance model, as well as a counselor on ways to achieve such a pattern.

If we continue thinking about the relationship between expertise and identity from a network of agents and social agencies, with their flows and interactions, we can perceive the establishment of a common project: to become a monster. This project has as reference some counselors, leaders or coaches, who are recognized for the ability to maximize the chances of a given individual to achieve a certain bodily objective, and thus acquire a certain recognition or, rather, the passage and belonging to a group superior to his, passing, in this case, from chicken to monster. In this sense, Felipe Macêdo, when commenting, identifies himself with Léo Stronda and starts to have hope, thinking that he is equal to the idol and that he will have the same success story that he had. Felipe Macêdo says: "I'm equal to leo man I'm 15 years old and 1.51 tall, I think I'll go through the same story as him too i've been to the doctor but the doctor said no about working out because it hinders the growth, she talked about practicing fights but I hate fights I am a dwarf and the guys are going to eat me up (sic.)".

The identification of the youtuber Léo Stronda's life narratives and those subscribed to the *Monster's Factory* channel is constantly mobilized in the comments of the videos, bringing to the debate the interactional character (and of identification) that exists in the process of formation of the image of the self (and others) built by Stronda. Léo Stronda's life story arises in replications (r)elaborated by internet users, demonstrating identification with the narrative and deepening a relationship of trust between the youtuber and his fans. That is, the role of authority's figure, associated with the memory of his past as chicken, consolidates an image of Léo Stronda as a hero, as a source of inspiration, as an exemplary subject. Therefore, we can consider that the *Monster's Factory* channel develops a process of "cult of performance", whose epicenter is in the idea that there is a "lifestyle, not just physical exercise; a state of mind more than a distraction or a virtuous pedagogy of the body" (Ehrenberg, 2010, p. 17).

## The interview in *The Night with Danilo Gentili*

The interview given by Léo Stronda to TV presenter Danilo Gentili retains the affirmation's characteristics of the masculinity-monster's project. The TV show *The Night*, from December 30, 2015, brought to its stage the fitness celebrity, whose presentation stated: "our next guest is annoyed, hates the chicken (sic.) and came here to crush. I've already gone to the point. Léo Stronda!!!!". Generally speaking, the interview revolved around Léo Stronda's life story, throughout the narrative of the process that made him adhere to bodybuilding. It is in this video that he explains what it is to be a monster, as we see in the following excerpt from the interview:

Danilo Gentili: "What is a monster? Do you consider yourself a monster?"

Léo Stronda: "Yes! Nowadays, yes."

Danilo Gentili: "Because you abuse children, hit seniors" [Audience laughing]

Danilo Gentili: "Beats up women?"

Léo Stronda: "Monster right in the carcass, in the appearance."

Danilo Gentili: "In the carcass..."

Léo Stronda: "It's because there's this slang in the bodybuilding world, you know?"

Monster is the guy who's reached a higher level, you know?"

Léo Stronda's discourse about being a monster affirms a shift from the idea of monstrosity. We believe that the concept negotiated by the youtuber is associated, above all, to the body's aesthetics enlarged in volume by physical exercises, dealing with the evidence of a symbolization located within the fitness culture. In other words, this is not a question of thinking about the teratological figures of the Middle Ages (Gil, 2006), much less about the abnormal, moral monsters, criminals and delinquents (Foucault, 2010). The meaning's transfiguration of the fitness culture's monster seeks to point to the process of going beyond bodily limits, in the search for the "construction" of the monster-body. This "banal monstrosity" is present in the proliferation of monstrous figures in contemporary culture, especially in cultural, literary, cinematographic productions etc. This is evident when Léo Stronda exemplifies, in the interview, an image symbol of the body that he would like to have:

Danilo Gentili: "When you watch *The Avengers*, you say, this Hulk right there, I can achieve it."

Léo Stronda: "Yes, I like it a lot. The Hulk is my favorite."

The monstrous body, according to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2000), is constituted by the very culture that engenders it: "the monster's body incorporates — quite literally — fear, desire, anxiety and fantasy (ataraxic or incendiary), giving them a life and a strange independence" (Cohen, 2000, p. 26-27). Therefore, it is a matter of us thinking that the fitness culture's monster-body is in motion at a time that body care gains a moralizing tonic (Shilling, 1993).

It turns out that the symbolic production around the monster involves not only this apollonian image of the fitness body, but also those contrasting bodies. In this case, the chicken figure is the body in dialogue and tension, it is the other: the body in deviation, the abnormality, in relation to the normalization of the body-monster. When asked about Léo Stronda's partnership with Mr. Thug in the band Bonde do Stronda (Stronda's Crew), the revulsion feeling at the thin body is established in the interview:

Danilo Gentili: "Now your colleague, Mr. Thug"

Léo Stronda: "Mr. Thug, Diego"...

Danilo Gentili: "He's half chicken, right?"

Léo Stronda: "He's very chicken, right? It's another level of... of..."

Danilo Gentili: "There's a picture here" [showing a picture of Mr. Thug next to Léo Stronda].

Léo Stronda: "It's another style..."

Danilo Gentili: "It's Mister Chicken, go..."

Léo Stronda: "It's Mister Chicken"

Danilo Gentili: "And you who are a monster, stand face to face with a chicken like that [referring to Mister Thug, Léo Stronda's partner on The Stronda's Crew], don't you feel like punching a chicken like that? Isn't it on the nature of a monster to take a chicken like that by the neck?"

Léo Stronda: "It's on nature, it's nature." [agrees].

Léo Stronda reiterates a position of the fitness monster linked to violence, especially when confronted with bodily existences that differ from the government of the self's paradigm articulated by the moral of fitness culture. The alpha male, as he declares himself, plays the role of domination of the self and of others. Therefore, it is up to the alpha male, being him the monster, to attack others and impose his own desires. In this sense, the perspective of the male gender as holder of the violation role is ratified by the *ethos* presented by Léo Stronda. This male maintains submissive all bodies that do not fit the ideals of power and strength articulated in gender relations. It turns out that, clearly, Léo Stronda articulates gender performances that seek to stylize the male, thus consecrating a reiterated attitude of what it is to be alpha male. In this sense, we agree with Judith Butler (2010) in invoking the notion of gender as a performance established in acts. The author emphasizes that we should think the gender as an effect of repetitions that stabilize genres' image. Therefore, we can conclude that "the effect of

gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler, 2010, p. 200).

The butlerian argument encourages us to perceive the identity forged by Léo Stronda as an effect of gender politics that form compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 2010). Therefore, the violent and dominating character presented in Léo Stronda’s gender performance reveals the need for constant reiteration of the domination’s dimension, whether symbolic or material. In this sense, the chicken is the subject who failed in the search for the virile masculinity maintenance – here linked to the image of the sports practices’ voluminous body, being it only a body considered fragile that must be subjugated to the alpha male’s desires, who, in this case, is the monster. This scenario demonstrates how problematic is the configuration of the fitness monster, precisely by (r)elaborating strategies and practices of sexual and gender binarism’s reinforcement. Fabio Cristofori’s comment, for example, demonstrates how the expectation of the contemporary alpha male’s muscled body is directly linked to an exacerbated desire towards muscles, declaring a possible failure of the presenter Danilo Gentili for being chicken: “It is pathetic and shameful the scene in which Danilo Gentili displays his ridiculous biceps of 32cm. For a man of 1.91 tall and biceps as such I can only say that he does not represent men! My condolences Danilo, sniff, sniff, sniff...”

Léo Stronda seeks to build a hypermasculine self-identity, quite present in the fact that he aspires to develop a body type known for muscular mesomorphy, which is characterized by well-developed chest and arm muscles, as well as broad shoulders that narrow to a small waist. The mesomorphic form is linked to cultural visions of masculinity that dictate that men be powerful, strong, competent and control their environment. It is as if, in other words, hypertrophy contributed to ensuring, maintaining and expanding masculinity.

In the interview, Léo Stronda perceived a slim body as his partner’s from the Stronda’s Crew as repugnant, because it denied the cultural norms of male desire, including hardness and physical power. Such undesirable characteristics could, however, be relieved or disappear with the development of a muscular and toned body. But this required the resistance to systematic methodical training, physical exhaustion and overcoming obstacles, including injuries, and that disappointing moment when muscles reach a plateau and, subsequently, stop growing. In this sense, the commitment to build and strengthen one’s own body functions as a symbol of the successful ascendant aspiration for those who are most responsible with themselves. As Stronda reinforced in this and in the other interview, with self-discipline and self-control, it is possible to conquer a monster-body, allowing the recognition of its superiority, based on the ideals of hypermasculinity, including authority and domination.

## Final considerations

Léo Stronda emphasizes, above all, an instigating process about the changes in the concept of monster. We believe that the contemporary monster’s transformation, whose existence is guided by the impetus of fitness culture, happens initially by the rejection of the modern understanding of monstrosity, driving away the moral judgment about the pathological figures of the nineteenth century. As we have seen, the modern monster is the one who crossed the barriers imposed by social and biological laws, becoming a dangerous being. Contemporaneity, in turn, has brought about new horizons for the monstrosity. The *project* of monster exalted in Léo Stronda’s speeches, for example, is an entity affirmed positively, full of agency and motivation, always living in search of high-performance results, constantly dialoguing with the risk. In saying that “monster is the guy who has reached a higher level” of bodybuilding practices, Léo Stronda positions the sense of monster within a set of practices of care for the body and appearance, differing from all moral valuation that existed in modernity. In other words, the monster exhorted by the

bodybuilder Léo Stronda shifts the ingrained sense in the history of monstrosity and situates this new understanding amid the symbolic arsenal of the fitness culture. This happens because in contemporary culture the hypertrophied male body externalizes “hypermasculinity”, giving its carrier a recognition of a virility that would differentiate him from other men, thus evidencing his said superiority in the relationship with other men, especially those considered chickens.

A new dynamic of moralization comes into play. The fitness culture as promoter of a performative health produces a set of demonization of certain foods, bodies and conducts. This way, the possibility of personal and collective acceptance seems to be increasingly linked in this context not only to the bodily transformation, but above all to the set of changes in habits and behaviors made by individuals. The monster-body is less a physical form than a lifestyle. It is the physical form of a lifestyle, but also of normalized masculinity.

We have sought to explore how Léo Stronda and his young followers give meaning to their own bodies and trajectories, at the same time that they seek through media representations of other men’s bodies the stimulus for the achievement of their own goals. In this way, they are engaged in the task of understanding how they are positioned as men by these images, and the types of masculinities available to them. This focus on the construction of meaning is important to understand the intersection of projects, practices and identities from the perspective of the social actors themselves, their speeches and comments. The fitness monster is the one that presents in “its carcass”, paraphrasing Léo Stronda, the results of the process of body mass growth. Therefore, there are no limits to the monster, because the contemporary logic of self-management institutes a search for high performance.

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