

“School of precariousness”: the production of consent to precarious work in administration internships

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to understand the production of consent to precarious working conditions in administration students’ internship experiences.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 13 students of an undergraduate program in Business Administration in a private university were interviewed. The students’ perceptions about the dynamics of the internship and their engagement in this experience were explored through thematic analysis.

Findings – Internships became more than spaces to learn about the world of work. They are also the locus of professional socialization toward precarious work. The detachment of internships from their educational scope is mediated by neonormative control mechanisms that subjectively mobilize the interns, producing the institutionalization and appreciation of the precarious experience, resignified as something that leads to autonomy, learning and a job position.

Practical implications – The article can help students, universities and companies to assess the role of internships in training future professionals.

Social implications – The research problematizes the internship as a form of professional socialization toward precarious work and its detachment from the original educational purpose. The article critically contributes to the debate about the current professional socialization process of young students.

Originality/value – The article highlights the subjective dimension that supports students’ consent to dysfunctional internships, discussing both the experience of work precariousness and exploitation, and the terms of the students’ engagement in such dynamics, bridging consent to neonormative controls.

Keywords Labor process theory, Neonormative control, Internship, Work precariousness

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The internship experience was conceived as a stage in the professionalization of higher education students (Rocha-de-Oliveira & Piccinini, 2012b). However, it has gained dysfunctional contours by assimilating characteristics of the current work process prevalent in companies, which is increasingly guided by contract heterogeneity and precarious labor relations (Antunes, 2018; Castel, 1998; Druck, 2013). Examples of such



dysfunctions are the increase of the workload, assignment of tasks outside the internship scope and the numerous requirements for students to enter organizations. Thus, the internship becomes an experience similar to that of a precarious work contract, leaving behind its original educational purpose (Piccinini, Rocha-de-Oliveira, & Rübenich, 2005).

Authors such as Castel (1998), Boltanski and Chiapello (2009), Eckelt and Schmidt (2015) and Leonard, Halford, and Bruce (2016) pointed out the ongoing process of transforming the internship into a modality of precarious work. Studying the phenomenon in Brazil, Piccinini *et al.* (2005), Bianchi and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2011), Rocha-de-Oliveira & Piccinini (2012a), Ribeiro & Tolfo (2011) also identified such trend, particularly in the field of business administration. However, these studies did not discuss the subjective dimension supporting the students' consent to this form of work. This aspect deserves attention because meeting work requirements and the scope of what is formally established as an internship does not occur without the students' agreement. This gap in the literature motivated this research, which aims to understand how consent to precarious working conditions and practices has been produced in internship experiences in the case of business administration students.

The conceptual perspective to discuss control in this research is supported by the labor process theory (LPT), which seeks to understand how workforce control is operationalized to expand production (Braverman, 1974/1987). The more recent versions of the LPT addressing the so-called normative and neonormative control arrangements (Kunda, 1995; Fleming & Sturdy, 2009; Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018) contribute to assessing why students consent to engage in precarious work conditions, with practices and requirements that do not match the original purpose of the internship.

The research contributes to deepening the discussion on work precariousness by problematizing the deviations of an activity designed to be a stage in the preparation of future professionals (de Almeida, Lagemann, & Souza, 2006; Melo & Murari, 2009) but became a form of workforce flexibility and precariousness (Rocha-de-Oliveira & Piccinini, 2012b). Furthermore, the study aims to expand the understanding of subtle mechanisms of control and consent in the daily lives of students engaged in the companies' work processes. Finally, the debate within the scope of the LPT is expanded (Knights, 1990; O'Doherty & Willmott, 2001) by suggesting that consent to precarious work regimes may start during internships where students become familiar with such practices.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 *From labor process theory to neonormative control: metamorphoses of control*

Debates about the dynamics of workforce control, consent and resistance within organizations take shape based on Braverman's (1974/1987) work "Labor and Monopoly Capital," which presented the first thoughts of what became the so-called LPT. The LPT is a Marxist-based theory that analyzes the process of extracting surplus value and converting the workforce to increase the companies' capital accumulation. Later, Burawoy (1979) published "Manufacturing consent," a study that deepened the discussion on the role of worker subjectivity in hiding the exploratory nature of the capitalist work process and in consenting to the production of surplus value.

For Burawoy, subjectivity is an inseparable ingredient of labor organization, mediating the capital-labor relationship (Burawoy, 1979). When considering subjectivity as an active part of the dynamics of control over the work process, Burawoy points to a new perspective (O'Doherty & Willmott, 2001) that introduces the idea of "consent". The idea derives from the Gramscian perspective of hegemony (Knights & Willmott, 1990) and indicates the workers' engagement in cooperating with the work process, highlighting the role of subjectivity in the control and reproduction of their exploitation beyond the exploitation the capitalist already exercises (Burawoy, 1979, p. 27).

The analysis based on subjectivity brings new poststructuralist perspectives focused on power relations and subjectivation related to the work process (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Knights, 1990). Management control arrangements and structures gain subtle contours, following new forms of labor organization characterized by increased flexibility, decreased hierarchies and influence on workers' subjectivity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Hallmarks of these developments include high-performance work systems, lean production, technological innovations and human resource management techniques (Thompson & von den Broek, 2010).

Kunda (1995) points out the "normative" nature of the new subtle forms of control focused on the modulation of the individual's behavior and subjectivity, like in organizational cultures in which behaviors are shaped according to symbols, company dynamics and narratives (Barley & Kunda, 1992; Kunda, 1995). Normative controls are ways of prescribing and normalizing experiences, thoughts and feelings that guide the actions of individuals, shaping them according to the organization's goals. These controls can also be resources to promote certain types of behaviors and mental structures that allow workers to incorporate the values appropriate to labor activity as part of their sense of identity (Kunda, 1995).

In the same direction, Fleming and Sturdy (2009) point to a variation of the "normative" format of control toward what is identified as "neo-normative," which implies the idea that the individual's subjectivity is no longer the target of modulation, but it is incorporated into the labor process. Maravelias (2016) relates these forms of control to the evolution of neoliberalism that has caused changes in how individuals mobilize. Under neoliberalism, personalities, identities and social relationships are perceived as potential resources that should be managed as a business, guided by an instrumental logic, understanding life as an economic function.

Thus, all management techniques are control mechanisms, regardless of whether they are flexible, democratic or even "fun" (Bilsland & Cumbers, 2018). These forms are composed of more subtle arrangements that seek the workers' consent and engagement with the current work dynamics, building a space where particular characteristics and personal attributes could be expressed more freely and instrumentalized by the organization (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009). The invitation to "be yourself" and the discourses of autonomy and empowerment reflect, above all, a subtle way of incorporating subjectivity as part of the production process to meet the organization's demands (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2017). Additionally, as highlighted by Lemos, Da, de Carvalho Silva, and Serra (2020) and Perez-Zapata, Collado, and Alvarez-Hernández (2017), discourses that praise "love" and "passion" for work expand the subjective workforce control to the extent that excessive dedication to work emerges as self-expression, attributing to the individual the responsibility for the developments of such dedication, no matter if positive or negative.

Volunteerism, autonomy and flexibility are central elements of worker engagement. The professional then resignifies experiences of exploitation, intensification and precarious work by consenting to such practices that also reduce resistance possibilities. In this direction, McCabe (2011) portrays how British bank employees, based on their self-perceptions of autonomy and identification with corporate discourse and culture, begin to tolerate, consent to and justify adverse working conditions. Peticca-Haris, Weststar, and McKenna (2015) point out how game developers' extreme work practices are legitimized by blurring the boundaries of fun and work and adopting project work techniques that encourage racing to complete stages, giving a playful guise to the dynamics of work exploitation.

Thus, workers form their subjectivities based on discourses and control mechanisms that praise flexibility, autonomy, self-management and self-responsibility consent to the conditions of the ongoing work process, believing they are dedicating efforts to the extent of their will (Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018). According to the poststructuralist perspective, the modalities of control based predominantly on the promotion of the individual's apparent freedom and autonomy and stimulating the worker's self-responsibility can also be understood as subjectivation technologies that seek the constitution of a subject prepared to

reproduce the organizational dynamics and work regimes consistent with the current logic of capitalist accumulation (Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018).

However, although control modalities present categorical distinctions, the exercise of control is complex. Sometimes it combines coercive, bureaucratic, normative and neonormative approaches, resulting in the production of the individual's consent to the reproduction and maintenance of the work process (Thompson & von den Broek, 2010). In general terms, the new control modalities greatly mobilize the worker's subjectivity in favor of enthusiastic consent to contemporary work processes.

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2.2 The internship

Recent structural changes in capitalism have given rise to flexible forms of work such as outsourcing, fixed term and part-time work contracts. In this sense, Boltanski and Chiapello (2009) and Castel (1998) highlighted that internships and employment-training contracts are configured as forms of work precariousness. Furthermore, the extension of the period between training and professional activity in the labor market stands out, which is a period often marked by precariousness and professional uncertainties (Eckelt & Schmidt, 2015). Leonard *et al.* (2016) point to the emergence of unpaid internships as a way of entering the labor market. This modality is often legitimized and resignified as experiences guided by personal motivation, career choices and life goals, but masks a context of precarious work.

The insertion of higher education students into the Brazilian labor market occurs initially through internships (Andrade & Resende, 2015; Bianchi & Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2011). The internship is designed to complement the student's training, based on experiences in organizations, following the educational and economic paradigms of the historical context (Andrade & Resende, 2015). In this sense, education is influenced by changes in modes of production, adjusting according to production demands through new educational and pedagogical models (Previtali & Fagiani, 2014).

The internship practice in Brazil is regulated by Law 11788/08. It is defined as an educational act mediated by companies and educational institutions (BRASIL, 2008) and can be a mandatory or nonmandatory activity "as determined by the curriculum guidelines, modality and area of teaching, and the pedagogical project of the program" (BRASIL, 2008). The mandatory internship – the focus of this study – is defined by the educational program's pedagogical project and is a requirement to obtain a degree/diploma. Although the internship is not an employment relationship, this experience is shaped according to the business' interest, and the expansion of its concept presents an opportunity for exploitation through work precariousness. Moreover, despite the updating of the legal apparatus, the proper implementation of the internship is a challenge for educational managers due to the historical particularities of Brazilian work culture (Colombo & Ballão, 2014).

The internship is considered an important factor in business administration for students to gain competencies (Melo & Murari, 2009; Gomes & Teixeira, 2016). It is also considered a space for learning and experimentation (Bianchi & Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2011), dynamic construction between theory and practice, and a path to gaining employability (Kuzaqui & Volpato, 2013). However, despite the diversity of research, the literature on internships in business administration deals, above all, with the development of competencies, professional qualifications and learning (de Almeida *et al.*, 2006; Santana & Cardoso, 2018). Although these studies identify and recognize several deviations in the internship experience and its conflicts with universities and integration agents, they consider these deviations as mere operational failures in the implementation of the internship program in companies, rarely exploring their (often dysfunctional) relationship with the labor market (Rocha-de-Oliveira & Piccinini, 2012a, b).

In this context, a set of challenges of different origins can hamper or prevent the fulfillment of the internship's educational purpose (Andrade & Resende, 2015), making it close to a

configuration of formal work (Rocha-de-Oliveira & Piccinini, 2012a) or even as a way of forming a more flexible staff, revealing a form of work precariousness (Piccinini *et al.*, 2005).

Piccinini *et al.* (2005) point out the use of internships to provide a cheaper qualified workforce, free from costs related to formal employment contracts. It is a type of work relationship without the labor protection established by law, presenting dysfunctions such as the extension of the maximum legally allowed workload and a more demanding selection process in terms of skills, knowledge and experiences required, which is questionable since these elements should be developed during the internship.

Furthermore, interns are submitted to attributions and responsibilities that jeopardize their academic performance, creating conflicts between the internship and university activities (Bianchi & Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2011; Ribeiro & Tolfo, 2011). In some cases, internship assignments are also carried out at home and on weekends (Beckhauser, de Souza & Patrisotto, 2017). However, even in these circumstances, the student often values the internship's practical experience more than the academic training (Bianchi & Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2011). The permanence in the company, although marked by deviations, is also associated with instrumental expectations such as being hired, increasing remuneration and access to benefits (Ribeiro & Tolfo, 2011).

Finally, higher education has prepared social subjects that supply the market demands. They are workers who combine versatility, multifunctionality and resilience to deal with the inconstancy of the world of work (Previtali & Fagiani, 2014). In this context, the internship works mainly in line with the demands of the labor market for greater workforce flexibility, even considering that this activity has a primarily educational purpose.

3. Methodological aspects

This research was conducted through in-depth interviews with students from a private higher education institution (HEI) in Rio de Janeiro. The students were selected based on two main criteria. First, they were studying Business Administration or had completed the undergraduate program in the year this research was prepared (2019). Second, the students had a recent experience (in 2019, the year of the research) of at least five months of mandatory internship in a (private) company (i.e. the students interviewed fulfilled part of the minimum time of mandatory internship required to obtain a degree in Business Administration).

The first criterion is justified by the theoretical approach used, specifically addressing the undergraduate program in Business Administration and the role of the internship in preparing students for professional life. The second criterion indicates the need for a minimum time for the interns' socialization in the company's work dynamics. No criteria have been established regarding the student's year in the undergraduate program because, even if the student is in the final year, it does not necessarily mean that they have completed an internship. All interviewees did their internships in private companies, as it is understood that these organizations would better align with capitalism's current productive and ideological dynamics.

Thus, 13 students (four women and nine men) were selected and formally accepted to participate. They were between 20 and 25 years old and had completed at least one and a half years of the undergraduate program and eight months of internship. The snowball sampling technique was used to contact the students, and thematic saturation was reached around the eleventh interview. The interviews were based on a semi-structured script, organized through the theoretical categories of the LPT, aiming to explore how the students were guided and organized to carry out the internship tasks, the supervision and control of activities, and their impressions, feelings and justifications toward the process of work. Thus, the discussion points and questions were organized into four axes: (1) internship dynamics, routine, activities performed and perceptions about these activities; (2) implementation process,

aspects and behaviors of the company values; (3) conciliation of the internship with studying and private life, and (4) learning from the experience, observing what students found constructive and deficient in these experiences. The identity of the students was preserved by not showing their names.

The corpus of analysis was constituted from the interview transcriptions and analyzed using thematic analysis (Boeije, 2010) with coding, segmentation and reorganization of data according to the research problem, to interpret the information and obtain results. The interviewees' speeches were initially coded based on emerging themes in the field and supported by categories present in the literature. In the coding phase, the data were broken down, examined, compared, and categorized (Boeije, 2010). Thus, repeated readings of the corpus were carried out and excerpts from the interviewees' speeches were coded according to the recurrence of certain themes, similarities and differences, and alignment (or discrepancies) from the literature, taking into account codes emerging from the particularities of the field. After this preliminary coding, the speeches were organized or grouped into broader categories (which brought together groups of codes) that synthesized and built the narrative thread of the findings and aspects of interest. Such categories sought to synthesize the primary mechanisms for producing consent to the dynamics of a precarious internship.

4. Results analysis and discussion

The results analysis and discussion were structured into three categories to facilitate the understanding of how consent to precarious work has been produced in the dynamics of internships in administration: (1) the appeal of gaining autonomy and professional development, (2) the promise of being hired and (3) the learning opportunity. These categories – created after the interviews and based on the interpretation of the participants' responses – summarize the main arguments to justify the students' consent to dysfunctional work practices in internship experiences, considering the student's purpose of being prepared for the labor market.

4.1 *The appeal of gaining autonomy and professional maturity*

The results point that the expansion of autonomy in internships appears as a control tool, as it induces self-management and engagement beyond the internship scope (Bilsland & Cumbers, 2018). The speeches reveal that dysfunctional experiences are resignified based on the perception of autonomy, contributing to overshadowing the level of the students' voluntarism (McCabe, 2011) in their internships. The appreciation for having decision-making power, having responsibilities similar to those of employees and having more activity diversity and accumulation of functions was recurring in the interviews despite being considered dysfunctions and were perceived by most students as experiences of autonomy:

I really like it, as I said, my area is strategic and I like working with projects because I don't like having a routine, and it's good that I gain a lot of autonomy; I know many people, I replace my boss at meetings, etc. So, I really like it (I13)

I started to manage the closure of the [project] of a platform that we have here in Brazil. So, I have direct contact with the customer, I'm the customer's point of contact within the company, buying material, requesting engineers, opening cases for the engineering department, I do all that. (I09)

In the context observed, autonomy becomes a key element in the configuration of the internship, operating both as a source of student satisfaction and a mechanism to connect neo-normative controls (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2017; Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018). Autonomy stimulates the interns' intense subjective engagement in the work process. The discourse of autonomy, added to the interns' condition as apprentices and their desire for recognition, is

instrumentalized to increase production, putting the work of interns and formal employees at the same level (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009).

Autonomy is even more appreciated when contrasted with operational activities that, in the students' perception, are associated with the exploitation and alienation of the individual. In other words, activities perhaps more adhering to the internship format are portrayed as unwanted, vis-à-vis the appeal of more creative and autonomous activities, even those that are outside the internship scope:

[...] Before starting the internship, I had this impression that it was going to be very boring, and the "E" for "*estagiário*" [intern, in Portuguese] was going to be an "E" for "*escravo*" [slave, in Portuguese]. But after I started, I saw that, at least in that company, it's quite the opposite. I have 100% freedom, I have certain decision-making power that suits my boss, I like it a lot. (I13)

It was full of challenges; it was cool, I was always doing something different. It wasn't that "little job" that you do in the office. It was wonderful. (I06)

Most students reported a pleasurable feeling of having autonomy, which seems to obscure and justify practices of intensified workload (Peticca-Harris *et al.*, 2015). It is essential to stress that asking interns to take on tasks and responsibilities of a contracted professional is a distortion and a form of work precariousness (Ribeiro & Tolfo, 2011), even though there is a perception of voluntariness in this dynamic. The inconsistency with the educational premise underlying the internship and the precarious nature of the experience stand out when, for example, interns replace employees on vacation:

I was not treated as an intern [...] I covered employees when they went on vacation, I worked in their position (I08)

[...] when the [employee] goes on vacation, my bosses ask me as if they were asking the [employee]. But it was a situation where the [employee] went on vacation for a whole month and I took care of the entire publication. (I01)

Although the student's adherence to these dynamics is associated with instrumental aspects such as remuneration and benefits (Ribeiro & Tolfo, 2011), subjective elements that also make up its justification are perceived. The notion of "doing something you like" frequently appeared in the speeches:

I left the internship where I made good money, and I left to make half of that but to have a chance to do what I want, to grow, so this really defined myself, I saw what I really liked and what I didn't like (I03)

In line with Lemos *et al.* (2020), when discussing the current features of neonormative control, "doing something you like" seems to justify, at least discursively, the subjection to precarious work dynamics for most of the interviewees. The intern values the increase in responsibility as a sign of supposed professional maturity. However, it is worth considering that challenges that are inconsistent with the internship scope and with the development of the intern are dysfunctional, even if appreciated by the students:

They put million-dollar processes in your lap, and you're like, "man, I'm a 21-year-old intern; are you really going to put a million-dollar process in my lap?" "That's right; it's time to grow up; you are now responsible. Suck it up" (I12)

This experience promotes a questionable perception of empowerment (McCabe, 2011), overshadowing the face of precarious work underlying such practice, which leads interns to take on employees' tasks, contributing to the institutionalization of this dynamic and to subjectivities aligned to parameters of productivity, flexibility and market performance (Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018):

Honestly, I think it's natural. It is natural in the sense that you learn more, you gain more responsibility, you get closer to what is to be in the function of an employee (I10)

The contract that I delivered two months ago says that these are things beyond my area of knowledge, they are not necessarily within the scope of the internship; but I don't think it is something wrong [...] (I09)

The analysis suggests that the speeches that value autonomy and professional development operate as a form of control insofar they lead students to engage in deviations voluntarily, detaching the internship from its educational purpose and consolidating a distorted view of autonomy (Bilsland & Cumbers, 2018; Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018).

4.2 *The promise of being hired*

During the interviews, the students were asked about the process and requirements to get hired by the company, revealing that they are encouraged to demonstrate constant availability, a predisposition to assume responsibilities and strong motivation to increase their chances of being hired. As one student reports: "You need to show that you are there all the time, always be there for the company. You live for that, you work overtime, stay late" (I13). The possibility of being hired – implicit or explicit – operates as an important normative control mechanism for interns (Kunda, 1995; Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018). It leads students to adjust their behaviors to engage in practices that can configure deviation:

You must show interest and not just do what is asked of you. It means being attentive, showing that you can help with other projects, showing that you're willing to grow there. I am always trying to show I'm interested, when someone needs help, I offer my help, when they need me to stay longer, I stay because I'm not there just to meet the schedule and leave, I'm there with the objective of being hired and develop a career (I07)

The positivity of the student's speech indicates subjective consent not only to attitudes consistent with the intern's role but also to the dysfunctional behaviors such as working overtime and extrapolating the scope of the task (Peticca-Harris *et al.*, 2015). The progressive increase in the time dedicated to the internship, and the use of overtime, which is incoherent and illegal, seem to be commonplace:

[...] And then by April, I had accumulated almost 35 hours of overtime. So, I used to arrive at 9:00 AM and leave at 6:00 PM [...] 7:00 PM (I02)

But I am on my laptop all the time. I take it home and work from home. I work from home, and I work from the university once in a while when I need to. I have cell phone meetings; I also work on weekends when they need me to. (I09)

This same logic is reinforced in internal programs, whose normative character (Kunda, 1995) seeks to legitimize and praise certain attitudes and commitment to this type of dysfunctional dedication:

One of the reasons they gave me the "A+ intern" [an award] was because when the [employee] went on vacation, I took over everything, and I allowed myself to make mistakes, you know. They said I was very proactive, very hardworking. (I01)

When asked what constitutes an "A+ intern," the interviewee replied:

I think it's a person who's really there, who shows to be there and does their best for the company. I think a person who leaves the comfort zone would be awarded the A+ intern award. It is like going from "I'll do what I have to do because that's what I'm being paid for" to something like, "I'll work myself into the ground." (I01)

The interviewee expressed bold statements such as “do your best for the company” and “I’ll work myself into the ground.” The student speaks of dedication, not only thinking of material factors but also suggesting an ideological dimension that reinforces consent to deviations, anchored in discourses such as “I love this job,” to legitimize their engagement in questionable practices as a way of demonstrating a passion for what they do (Lemos *et al.*, 2020). The promise of hiring seems to work as a normative form of control, as it prescribes and shapes their attitudes and experiences according to the organization’s objectives (Kunda, 1995), in this case, through a continuous evaluation of performance and engagement.

Some interviewees mentioned postponing graduation as a common practice among students, which is also observed in research by Rocha-de-Oliveira and Piccinini (2012a, b):

[...] if you see a possibility of being hired[...] or you have a chance of being hired, they start giving you more work. Because it’s literally that phase that your contract is ending, they want to see what you can develop, the results you can bring, so they can assess if you’re going to be hired or not. (I02)

As a mediator of employability, the internship performance is conceived as fundamental for the professional’s future by most of the interviewees, who start to prolong their stay in this experience, even at the expense of their training:

A person who takes an internship from the fourth semester onward only has two years to do an internship, and it will take the seventh, eighth semester already[...] they will be either hired or sent away. [...] (I02)

We are going to the job market and thinking about keeping work for these companies. So much so that lately many students have been delaying graduation precisely to be able to stay in the internship. (I13)

Deliberately taking longer to complete the undergraduate program courses and postponing graduation to stay in the internships are practices also related to the perception of job scarcity and the difficulty of students and young professionals to get a job (Druck, 2013; Eckelt & Schmidt, 2015; Leonard *et al.*, 2016). These elements increase the anxiety of interns regarding the possibility of being hired by the same company where the internship takes place, foster the consent to certain dynamics (Ribeiro & Tolfo, 2011) and the introjection and reproduction of behaviors that may lead to getting a job (Kunda, 1995; Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018):

[...] the intern’s first professional experience, they really want to get that job, because they have never worked before, and they know that the job market is difficult [...] there is the factor that the hiring company knows there is a queue of people out there that can be hired. (I09)

In addition to the “autonomy” granted to the students, the uncertainty regarding being hired brings up maximum dedication, and they consent to deviations from the internship’s scope although there are no guarantees about job positions in the company. Both aspects work as mechanisms for forming and screening subjectivities that are more adherent to organizational demands and, consequently, to the market (Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018). Thus, the wide availability of qualified workforce increases the pressure for being hired, and, therefore, the promise of hiring the intern, in many cases illusory, is a form of subtle control, which produces consent and institutionalization of inappropriate use of the student workforce (Ribeiro & Tolfo, 2011; Eckelt & Schmidt, 2015).

4.3 Learning opportunity

Although aspects related to learning and professional qualification are relevant and widely discussed in the literature (de Almeida *et al.*, 2006; Melo & Murari, 2009; Kuazaqui & Volpato, 2013; Gomes & Teixeira, 2016; Rocha-de-Oliveira & Piccinini, 2012a; Santana & Cardoso, 2018), this issue needs to be mediated from the context of labor market in capitalism current moment. In this sense, contradictory learning conditions, disproportionate requirements for

students to enter the internship, absence or indefinite supervision or formal internal training process were observed in the interviews, leading the student to learn without guidance.

First, the absence or lack of definition of supervisors in the process of monitoring the student's activities in the company allows questioning the internship's educational purpose:

[...] so technically my work had to be supervised by someone in the area, but it wasn't. Then it started to get harder. (I02)

In theory, [the intern's supervisor] is the head of the department, but in practice, he does not fulfill this role. We don't experience much follow-up[...] from any person who has been with the company longer to help us. (I07)

One interviewee who did not have adequate supervision reported the impact of this lack on the internship: *"On the one hand it was a little strange and bad, but nowadays I think it was worth it and I liked that it happened. I learned a lot and gained autonomy"* (I07).

Given the lack of supervision to facilitate the intern's technical development, the responsibility for learning falls almost exclusively on the student, characterizing the instrumentalization of elements of the worker's subjectivity and the characteristic of neonormative modalities of control (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2017). Similarly, the internship seems to work, under the premise of learning and complementarity of the students' training, as a way of engaging them in their own exploitation, functioning as a resignifying lens of deviant experiences, giving a purpose and a meaning to experienced dysfunctions:

So, I had no experience in the financial market, I had to learn by myself, asking people on the internet, working alone to find out how it worked. (I04)

In addition to the lack of supervision, the internship's educational purpose is also distorted as there are excessive requirements around the student selection, contradicting its educational nature. This reinforces the perception that companies have used the internship to make it cheaper to obtain qualified workforce (Piccinini *et al.*, 2005; Rocha-de-Oliveira & Piccinini, 2012b):

Man, they're asking the intern to know how to use Photoshop [software][...] they're asking you to know how to use Corel [software], they're asking 500,000 things [...] you'll see internships asking [knowledge on how to use] Photoshop[...] Corel[...] asking for all possible creative [software] packages[...] then ask English and Spanish proficiency. The market is asking many things that I didn't necessarily learn in college, and I see a lot of people trying to learn somewhere else to acquire this knowledge. (I02)

The requirement for certain attitudes and technical knowledge outside the disciplinary grid of educational institutions can be interpreted as a neonormative form of control. It conditions the hiring of students to personal interests and aspirations suitable for the job as a premise for hiring (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2017). The internship requirements go beyond the limits of the undergraduate education, intensifying the need to complement the student's skills outside the university to become competitive to enter (and remain) in the internship.

In addition, the internship starts to assume a privileged position in the students' routine, who report not being able to *"[...] dedicate the same mental capacity that I do [to the internship] when I have 6 hours of classes in the middle"* (I10). In this sense, the learning premise is also contradicted when *"the internship overlaps with study"* (I02), especially when considering that enrollment in an educational institution is a requirement for the internship. The discursive relationship between learning and employability is highlighted: in theory, one would make the other viable, but in fact it ends up promoting student engagement in dysfunctions by transferring to them the responsibility for permanence and success in the job market, reinforcing a vision that privileges the individual's agency and self-responsibility (Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018).

Despite the verification of dysfunctions in the activities performed, it was observed that the university assumes a prominent place in routine imbalance:

For me, if I just worked, it would be great. But there is the studying part that I still see is something that makes me very uneasy. (I01)

Studying for me is already something that I can't do, I see, the time I'm studying I could be doing something else. [...] The issue for me is not even the work, but the university. (I03)

Thus, the internship helps students legitimize excuses to avoid studying, as the internship appears to offer greater learning potential (Bianchi & Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2011), assuming a privileged space in the routine of students who come to value excesses arising from dysfunctions in the stage, instead of contesting them. On the other hand, university learning is perceived as insufficient to meet market demands centralized in the neoliberal ideological context (Maravelias, 2016).

In short, it is possible to say that the internship inserts the student into the dynamics of contemporary work, permeated by control mechanisms that are embodied in the promises of hiring, in the discourses of autonomy, professional development and learning. These mechanisms seem to overshadow and justify dynamics that deviate the internship from its educational scope, leading students to consent to practices that constrain their "freedom of choice" to the limits of consent to work precariousness and exploitation.

5. Final considerations

This research sought to understand how the consent to work precariousness has been built in internship dynamics in Administration area. It was observed that internships have been moving away from their educational purpose, configuring a resource that allows flexibility and precarious work through the use of interns to carry out activities that hired employees should do (Piccinini *et al.*, 2005; Rocha-de-Oliveira & Piccinini, 2012a). In addition to manifesting within the deviation of functions, precariousness also appears in the extension of working hours and the absence of adequate guidance for carrying out the tasks. The dysfunctions of the internship seem to be institutionalized as its primary configuration, with the justifications that there is a need for "training," "preparation," and "inclusion" of young people in the demanding job market, in which work precariousness is established as a regular practice (Castel, 1998).

The study showed that the distance from the internship educational scope is mediated by normative and neonormative control mechanisms (Kunda, 1995; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2017; Weiskopf & Loacker, 2018), leading students to positively resignify and even desire the deviations they experience. The connection of subtle controls, like promises of hiring and appreciation of autonomy, leads students to consent to precarious work dynamics and mold positive perceptions about the dysfunctional and precarious experience.

By problematizing the internship as a space for the normalization of precarious working conditions, this research contributes to the debate within the scope of LPT, expanding the discussion about the production of consent by placing it in the moment before entering the formal labor market. We revealed that the consent to precarious forms of work begins with the student's training for work during internships. We also sought to contribute to the literature on LPT by analyzing the internship as a differentiated work regime (which does not constitute a formal employment relationship), exploring the imbrications of the dynamics of exploitation, control and consent specific to this activity designed for educational purposes.

The article also expands the debate about the internship beyond the discussions of learning, professional qualification and competence development, questioning this activity in the context of work under neoliberalism, whose dynamics produce and incorporate

deviations in the production process. Thus, as deviations from the scope of the internship become natural, the constitution of a workforce that subjectively engages in its own exploitation is observed in the internship. Thus, the internship has been configured not only as a space for work learning but also as a locus for the socialization of precarious work practices.

It is noteworthy that this research did not exclusively attribute the entire process of student work socialization to the internship, as this would be inserted in a broader ideological and social context, which includes a university education that reflects said context. However, this research analyzed the dynamics of this specific experience, considering the potential controls that permeate it, as it represents, in many cases, a (per)formative space of this ideological context.

The research did not consider or problematize the position of the internship integration agency of the HEI and was limited to the students' perceptions about the work dynamics in organizations. In this sense, future studies can deepen the investigation of the integration agents positioning in this process and question the extent to which educational institutions are consistent with organizations' dysfunctional practices of becoming agents in this process. In this sense, we must reflect on the possibilities of emancipatory education in a neoliberal society context.

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