32 - CULT OF THE BODY, AESTHETICS AND CONTROL

YARA LACERDA
UNIVERSIDADE GAMA FILHO-UNIVERSIDADE ESTÁCIO DE SÁ
RIO DE JANEIRO-RJ-BRASIL
yaralacerda@mls.com.br
yaralacerda@superig.com.br
LIRES-LEL

INTRODUCTION

The discussion about the cult of the body, the aesthetics issues, and the perverse aspects of the exaggerations regarding shape in the universe of Physical Education is not a simple or easy undertaking. There are several variations imbedded in these issues, which transform each one of these themes in distinct fields of discussion that are also under many influences, even though they are initially associated. This study aims at sketching some reflections about the way in which the Physical Education professionals identify the body and aesthetics thematic segments and how they relate them. The identification will be made with the aid of the lenses of other fields such as anthropology. It is interesting to identify how teachers stand before the inevitable, positive and even noxious effects of the exaggerated demand of a perfect shape. Considering that this is an influential agent in the formation of other young professionals, it might be useful to reflect about the practices that characterize this professional field, since society addresses its demands regarding the cult of the body and its implications to them. This analysis is developed based on eight researches written between 2003 and 2005 about the discussed theme in the form of oriented papers of the undergraduate courses of Physical Education at the Gama Filho and Estácio de Sá universities, located in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

Nowadays the body can be considered and analyzed under several and different views: biological, social, virtual, and ecological, among others (VILLAÇA, 1998). The medical and biologized view is not the single aspect of the discussion on the physical activity field any longer. The aspects related to the human sciences became essential and indispensable in the analyses in order to establish a counterpoint, especially as the means of communication use the modern resources of technology available to them to popularize the views on the body, valorizing the angle of health and the biomedical influence. Without taking this into account, we have the risk of having a reductionist view of the body and its relations.

Therefore, this paper aims at identifying and regarding the cult of the body as a cultural phenomenon, relating to the health sphere; the professional performance; the expectations of the performers of physical education before the Physical Education professionals; the media; and the different types of language and manifestations of the contemporary corporality.

The hypothesis is that the cult of the body is part of a civilizing process, in Elias' (1990) sense, and it functions as a control factor, being therefore moralizing.

AESTHETICAL DIMENSION, CULT OF THE BODY AND HEALTH

The concerns with the ideals of beauty accompany the human being throughout the different ages and civilizations. Beauty and generosity can be considered universal values since the Greek's ideals. Although nowadays the moral criteria seem to be dissociated from the aesthetical, artistic and creative criteria, both characteristics remain as significant values in our culture (PENIOLA, 1998). Even though beauty has always been an important value, it is impossible to ignore the modification of the standards over time and on the different historical contexts. Nowadays it presents itself with the characteristics of our time, in function of the popularization of the models and appeals. For the evolutionists, it is an essential item for attraction, conquest, and reproduction of the species. Some points are considered indicators of health potentiality and guarantee of perpetuation of the species; namely, the symmetry of the facial features, the state of the skin, the proportion between waist and hips, and others. Oddly, these are the same aspects observed regarding beauty. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the cult of beauty walks alongside the cult of health. Maybe it is more convenient, morally speaking, and well seen that individuals should affirm that they are more concerned with their health than with their personal aesthetics. The aesthetical preoccupation runs the risk of revealing the futility and shallowness of the corporal approach; thus, beauty is associated with health, which presents a utilitarian character being therefore more acceptable in moral terms.

It seems useful to stress that the word aesthetics is common sensually used as a synonym for beauty; but one should not lose sight of its philosophical origin as a discipline related to the experience of the senses and to subjectivity. And it is exactly because it favors the experience of the senses that to look at something that is pre-established as beautiful redounded in the use of aesthetics as a synonym for beauty (LACERDA, 1998).

Beauty affects people, objects, places, emotions, and behaviors, among other aspects of human life. In relation to the places, those that live in Rio de Janeiro suffer the influences of this space, since the city is considered wonderful because of it natural beauties, represented especially by all the seaside beaches. In Rio, the valorization of the cult of the body of the beauty that manifests itself via the exposition of bodies on the beaches and on public places is notorious. Perhaps the peculiarities such as the large number of beaches and the carioca's (native of Rio de Janeiro) relation with the body, which differentiates them from other cities and groups, are interesting points to begin or analysis with. Especially in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the body is used as a passport for social circulation. It is does not matter if you are naked, but you must be thin, beautiful and tanned (VILLAÇA, 1998). Other models that belong to other groups, such as the bodybuilders, can accompany this basic corporal model. One way or another, the exhibition of bodies goes on, calling attention to the point of fomenting several anthropological studies, some of them destined especially to the carioca population (GOLDENBERG, 2002).

FORMS, MODELS AND BODY LANGUAGES

In times when the institutions are weakening the reliance starts to be placed in the Self. The body becomes the territory where individuals have the possibility of control, choice, sense of power of decision and overcoming. It is the territory where different languages of corporal representations take place, these representations range from dysmorphic body disorders (DBD) that cause permanent dissatisfaction regarding the body's shape, to the obesity problem which is seen as

1- See AZEVEDO, L. G. M. A imagem do corpo do professor de Educação Física frente ao mercado de trabalho. Undergraduate paper. Physical Education, UGF, 2005; BERTOLINI, R. O aluno de Educação Física da UGF e o seu corpo. Undergraduate paper. Physical Education, Rio de Janeiro, UGF, 2003; FERREIRA, R. G. C. Os profissionais de Educação Física diante da corpolatria: a visão de professors de musculação nas academias da Barra e Recreio. Undergraduate paper. Physical Education, Rio de Janeiro, UNESA, 2003; HENRIQUES, S. C. A visão do professional de Educação Física atuante no segmento de musculação. Undergraduate paper. Physical Education, Rio de Janeiro, UGF, 2003;LIMA, R. B. Questões e reflexões sobre estética na Educação Física. Undergraduate paper. Physical Education, Rio de Janeiro, UGF, 2005; RODRIGUES, H. C. A visão do aluno de oitavo período da UGF sobre o corpo e mercado de trabalho. Undergraduate paper. Physical Education, Rio de Janeiro, UGF, 2003; TARANTO, R. A visão do professor de alongamento sobre o corpo. Undergraduate paper. Physical Education, Rio de Janeiro, UGF, 2003; VASCONCELLOS, E. O professor de Educação Física e o seu corpo. Undergraduate paper. Physical Education. Educação Física, Rio de Janeiro, UGF, 2003.

2- The above-referred shows can be seen on the cable TV channels, proceeding from North-American television under the suggestive titles of *Extreme Make-over* and *The Swan*.

negligence, leisure and abandon of the body, and bodybuilding as a language of physical strength, among other forms of manifestation and communication with the surrounding world.

The individual concept of body generates a message in the same way as t-shirts with stamps and thematic motifs, which denounce the sympathies of the one who wears them. The bodies of bodybuilders and of those that make body art and body modification indicate the way these people see the world and are placed in the world. Another less radical example than those that practice bodybuilding or body modification, but no less eloquent, is the choices relating to the approaches and treatments of TV actresses towards their bodies. Before the wrinkles and the relentless aging process, the use of all reasonable resources in order keep the appearance is observed, including facelifts, botox, and others. These expressions and manifestations show the severe compromise with the corporal image.

For Kofes (*apud* BRUNHS, 1989), in modern society the body favors a language of affirmation or transgression. The body language is capable of reformulate, stress and point out issues that sometimes the speech cannot express by itself.

In the thread of thought of the perfect body as a social passport, of the unrestricted acceptance, it is worth noting the body of the handicapped person. Although this issue is not in the scope of this study, there is the uneasiness about how they fare. How do those that do not fit in the model deal with the Spartan regime of the empire of beauty and good shape?

The concern with the cult of good shape privileges the ones that can afford it or the ones that were born bearing the differential marks of beauty (BRUHNS, 1989). This concern affects both men and women. The contemporary woman, for example, besides the wish of being considered beautiful also might be identified by means of a strong and well-built body, wasting the image of fragile sex. Men worry about their beauty, use creams and undergo treatments never before consumed and are denominated metrosexuals, which differentiates them from the traditional man. Simultaneously, they also ritualize in their bodies the eagerness of searching the image of physical strength and power, to the point of jeopardizing their health, when they use drugs and steroids. The use of drugs destined for veterinary usage with horses which is an animal related to potency and boldness in our imaginary is relatively usual. For Goldberg (2002), the construction of the hypertrophied man is similar to the construction of masculinity, since the man that is considered truly masculine must be constantly proving to himself and to others that he is strong.

Perhaps it is possible to perceive both genders as excessively concerned with aesthetics and image. While women cultivate jobs that express the strength usually associated to virility, men cultivate more subtle concerns regarding aesthetics, and are not set apart from the social demands regarding fitness and beauty. It is possible to notice that the valorization of body language focused strictly on the aesthetical model can be perverse and enslaving, since it only rewards the beautiful, the strong, and the perfect ones.

THE MEDIA AND THE MORALIZING ASPECT OF THE CULT OF THE BODY

For Goldberg (2002), since the second half of the 20th century the cult of the body has entered in the mass era and has conquered a social dimension that it had never enjoyed before. Several phenomena mingled to ground a new moment in the history of female and male beauty. The industrialization and commercialization, the new careers that appear resulting from the aesthetical ideal, the inflation of new cares with the face and body, and the generalized diffusion of norms and images are taken into account.

The focus of the body as social passport, objects of worship, control instruments, and hyper-valued element leads to the adoration of the body, in the sense proposed by Codo and Senne (1985). For these authors, we observe the cult of the body with religious, dogmatic, and idolizing characteristics, including miracles made possible by plastic surgery, cosmetology, and other resources. The cult of the physical shape is passed on as a gospel, creating a system of beliefs as powerful as that of any religion. It takes control of the habits of a representative slice of the population: the average urban stratum. Beauty and health becomes an end in itself, the ultimate end. It is not a matter of becoming beautiful or healthy in order to feel good, enjoy life and fulfill personal projects. The matter is to look good to be seen. The miracles can be observed and accompanied on the TV reality shows, where after several procedures including surgical ones the person is presented as a new Cinderella, ready to enjoy all benefits made possible by the attained beauty. These programs give a hope of eternal happiness resulting from the miracle of transformation.

The huge power of the media goes beyond television and influences individuals, generalizing the passion for fashion, spreading the consumption of beauty products and transforming the appearance in a fundamental aspect of identity for a larger number of individuals. On the 1980's the Brazilian press has produced the two major magazines regarding the thematic of the body, *Boa Forma*, in 1984, and *Corpo a Corpo*, in 1987 (CASTRO, 2003). The road was paved to the exploitation of the subject, skillfully explored by the publishing industry. From then on, several publications about the subject appeared. Even the ones that initially did not show interest in it, for instance the *Veja* magazine, started to give cover stories and dedicate sessions to issues and discussions about the body (LACERDA; CASTRO, 2004).

According to the media discourse: “only people that do not take care of themselves are ugly and grow old” (GOLDENBERG, 2002, p. 9); “it is essential to learn to take pleasure from self-discipline, eating, and sleeping, this helps to build good emotional and physical relationships. This is the only way you will make immediate contacts with the world in great shape” (PASCOLATO, 1999 *apud*; GOLDBERG, 2002, p. 27); “pure vanity, I love to see the biceps and the thighs growing” (ROGAR, 2000). One can clearly perceive the responsibility attributed to the individuals when it comes to their beauty or health. In this narcissistic culture this can be called the culpability of the victim.

The saying “you are ugly only if you want to”, similar to the one that says “you are only fat if you want to”, or still “you are only ill if you want to”, distracts the attention from other factors and problems that really contribute to the distortions. Is it possible that the day worker that works more than eight hours in our homes, earning R$4,00 a day, who lives on the periphery of the city, sometimes travels two or three hours to come and several others to return, eats and sleeps poorly, and cannot even buy sufficient food or some indispensable remedy, is ugly because she wants to, while the famous actress who uses caviar-based anti-wrinkle products is beautiful because she also wants to or because she uses such a expensive product.

Considering the matter of aesthetics in relation to the social classes, the exaggerated preoccupation with aesthetics that assaults especially the middle-class, may become a model that creates an affliction without possibility of resolution on the poorer classes. Health and beauty are not the main attributes on this slice of the population. In fact, the example of the impoverished class in spite of its strength is not, in this case, the focus of the thematic of the cult of the body, which is predominantly pervaded by middle-class expectations. However, perhaps it is useful for us to observe that, in both cases, the aesthetics or health dimensions when coercive and taken to the last consequences may become as cruel on one society as the other. The exaggeration of behaviors can affect all without distinctions. Due to the firepower of the media, the same day worker of the above-referred example dreams of using the same product that the celebrities use.

NOXIOUS EFFECTS

The noxious effects of the cult of the body are: the obsession with perfect shape; the permanent dissatisfaction with one's physical attributes (symptoms of the DBD disease); the compromise with thinness or hypertrophy; the multiplication of regimens and compulsion with physical activities; the dissemination of fat aspirations, facelifts, silicon implants, botox and steroids for more immediate effects. Each of these situations testifies the exaggerations and the anguishes that generate the effects that are called perverse or noxious of what could be a vantage in the individual's life, the search for beauty and health.

The examples of eating disturbs such as anorexia and bulimia, framed into the category of pathologies and depending on the degree controllable, are also examples of the excessive compromise with the so-called good shape. These exaggerations and brutalities are aggressive.

CONCLUSION

There are many illusory expectations of perfection based on the scientific discourse of specialists (physicians, psychiatrists, Physical Education teachers, nutritionists, aestheticists, and others), promising everything once all their orientations are followed. This search for perfect beauty or health, which originates from personal motivations, is perhaps the most sophisticated form of self-control in our society. Self-control also functions as seduction for the individual that considers himself to be autonomous and independent (SERRA; SANTOS, 2003).

The necessity that the organizations have of structuring themselves in all societies of varying control levels reaches an optimal point when this control comes from inside and not form outside. The necessity of self-control to achieve beauty and health can be extended to other control necessities. This is the civilizing process mentioned by Elias (1990) following its course with the pertinent adequateness to the time and present context. If we are to imagine the author's reasoning, for the carioca society and on the present scenario, we will verify that the desired control degree in a moment where the aesthetical nudity and moral are valorized can be considered a high level of civility. The control developed over the individual himself, through the cultivation of health, alimentation, and practicing of physical activities can also constitute an excellent exercise of the civilizing process of men and of the self-control adapted to the demands of communal sociability (LACERDA; CASTRO, 2004). Still following this reasoning, for Goldberg (2002, p. 25), "due to the newest moral, the one of good shape, the exposition of the body nowadays do not demand only the control of one's impulsions, but also of the (self-)control of one's own physical appearance. The decorum, which previously seemed to be limited to the non-exposition of the naked body, is now concentrated on the respect to the rules of its exposition."

These rules referred by the author are increasingly severe and they are all of aesthetical order. In order to feel comfortable to expose the body anywhere without constraint or inhibition it is necessary to invest more and more on the body, on the will, self-discipline, which generates an increasingly self-control of the physical appearance.

In spite of the plurality of offers for the manifestations of corporality and of the search for perfection it is not possible to identify a single model to be followed. There are tendencies to the slimness, as in the case of models, to those with well-defined muscles, or to models inspired on the bodybuilders (FRAGA, 2001 apud SOARES, 2001). The mould of the shape is not important, what is common to all is the struggle for low fat percentages and a seductive image.

It is observed on the conventional literature, on the stories broadcasted by the media, and on the speeches of the frequenters of academies and of performers of physical activities that from the *bombados* and *sarados* popular terms for bodybuilders to the slim the choice of the targeted model passes by their subjectivities, as a mark of aesthetical dimension and of individuality; by the moralizing aspects of control of the biological body reflecting itself on the control of the social body; and by the dissatisfaction with the surroundings which promotes changes on the corporal territory. Because the latter belongs exclusively to the individual it starts to be the major stage for personal transformations. The major concern is to blindly follow the fad and the demands imposed by the groups, privileging the immediateness at all costs or under much anguish and uneasiness.

Among the works that were used as data for this research, all reports revealed the indications of exaggeration, of severe demands regarding the maintenance of the physical shape, and of the rigor of the demands of the professionals of physical activity. The sample works involved teachers of Physical Education already graduated and acting on the market as well as students concluding the undergraduate courses. In some cases, it is possible to timidly observe references to health which sound much more as a politically correct idea than a bodily experienced truth. Personal demands of approximation with the image expected by others were also identified, along with the demands of the employer before the image sold by the teacher.

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Rua Visconde de Santa Isabel, 489, apto.703, Grajaú. Rio de Janeiro-RJ/Brasil
CEP: 20560-121.
Telephone: 21-25788428
Yara Lacerda
yaralacerda@mls.com.br
yaralacerda@superig.com.br
Universidade Gama Filho
Universidade Estácio de Sá

CULT OF THE BODY, AESTHETICS AND CONTROL

ABSTRACT: This study aims at identifying the ideas of teachers and students of Physical Education about the corporality issues before the ever-growing demands of perfect bodies. The study was based on eight undergraduate papers

for Physical Education courses at universities of Rio de Janeiro. Authors such as Goldenberg (2004), Elias (1999), Vilaça (1999), Perniola (1998), Lacerda (2004), and others were used as theoretical references. Each of the consulted papers was presented as an explorative and descriptive study, with data collected via questionnaires. It was observed that there is a major concern with good shape, which, in Elias' view, seems to be a significant control and moralizing factor.
Key Words: body, aesthetics, control.

CULTE AU CORPS, ESTHÉTIQUE ET CONTRÔLE

RESUMÉ : Cette étude a l'intention d'identifier les constructions des professeurs et d'élèves d'Éducation Physique à propos des questions sur la corporéité, en face des exigeances de plus enplus sévères de corps parfaits. L'étude s'est inspirée en huit monographies de graduation élaborées dans des cours d'Éducation Physique des Universités de Rio de Janeiro. On a utilisé des références théoriques d'auteurs comme Goldenberg (2004), Elias (1999), Villaça (1999), Perniola (1998), Lacerda (2004), parmi d'autres. Toutes les monographies consultées se sont présentées sous la forme d'études exploratrices et descriptives, ayant comme outil de collecte de données en forme de questionnaires. On est arrivé a la conclusion que l'attention dispensée à la bonne forme est une grande préoccupation et apparaît comme grand facteur de contrôle et moralization sous l'optique d'Elias.
Mots-clés: corps, esthétique, contrôle

CULTO AL CUERPO, ESTÉTICA Y CONTROL

RESUMEN: El presente estudio intenta identificar las construcciones hechas por profesores y alumnos de Educación Física respecto a las cuestiones de corporeidad frente a las exigencias siempre más severas de cuerpos perfectos. Se inspiró en ocho monografías de graduación producidas en cursos de Educación Física de Universidades de Río de Janeiro. Para tanto se utilizaron referencias teóricas de autores como Goldberg (2004), Elias (1999), Villaça (1999), Perinola (1998), Lacerda (2004), entre otros. Todas las monografías consultadas se presentaron como estudios exploratorios y descriptivos con instrumentos de colecta de datos en forma de cuestionarios. Se ha llegado a la conclusión que la atención dispensada a la buena forma es la grande preocupación y parece ser, bajo la visión de Elias, un gran factor de control y moralización.
Palabras-llave: cuerpo, estética, control.

CULTO AO CORPO, ESTÉTICA E CONTROLE

RESUMO: Este estudo pretende identificar as construções feitas por professores e alunos de Educação Física sobre as questões da corporeidade, diante das exigências cada vez mais severas de corpos perfeitos. Baseou-se em oito monografias de graduação realizadasnos cursos de Educação Física de universidades do Rio de Janeiro. Foram utilizados referenciais teóricos de autores como Goldenberg (2004), Elias (1999), Villaça (1999), Perniola (1998), Lacerda (2004), entre outros. Todas as monografias consultadas apresentaram-se como estudos exploratórios e descritivos, com instrumentos de coleta de dados sob a forma de questionários. Concluiu-se que a atenção dispensada à boa forma constitui-se grande preocupação parecendo ser, sob a ótica de Elias, um grande fator de controle e moralização.
Palavras-chave : corpo, estética, controle.