41 - WOMEN IN *FITNESS*: MOTIVATIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

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I. Introduction

The social phenomenon related to the search of bodily aesthetics can be perceived as a cultural manifestation in contemporary days, when the body operates as an important element of the subject's physical and psychological identity, and the search for a bodily aesthetics becomes a fact to strengthen social relations. It can be stated that the contemporary culture related to the cult to the body can be considered to have triggered, according to Garcia (2002), an aesthetical self-observation linked to the pleasure of seeing and being seen. Behind the body (re)-constructed by bodily intervention techniques, a new image and a new position in relation to the world is recreated. It is also possible to perceive the idea of a body transformed into an asset that becomes the target of personal investments and interested industries. The body can be interpreted as an aesthetical object since it is regarded from a prevailing aesthetical standard and, thus, men and women privilege it.

According to Sant'Anna (2001), the body is "bio-cultural" because it is the biological and symbolic territory that can reveal and also hide traces of its subjectivity and physiology. That is the reason why it is not feasible to separate it from the nature and from its historical and cultural context when some research is carried out about what is unknown about the body. Because of it its finite conditions that follows individuals from birth to death, the body is liable to several transformations, which are not always desirable or predictable.

This study intends to investigate the meanings revealed by physical activities women practitioners in a gym in the south zone in the city of Rio de Janeiro about their motivations for the practice of physical activities.

In this sense, the representations that women's control about their physical activity practice depend on the way the integrate their knowledge, the information, images, beliefs and opinions about this topic that circulate around their daily lives, on the experiences and values that are their own (spontaneous knowledge), reflecting the process they apply to take hold of a specific aspect of reality.

The *fitness* market the construction of a harmonious, elegant, beautiful and healthy body has become an important area of professional work in Physical Education. It has become increasingly interesting for the greatest part of diligent students. So, it has become necessary to give continuity to the processes of construction of knowledge in this area through the investigations about the guiding habits and values for the body in its everyday activities in gyms.

II. Methodology

This study is characterized by a qualitative approach and refers to the participating research; its design is data appraising.

In order to understand the meaning referring to the motivations for the practice of physical activities, this study chose the Theory of Social Representations. This theory allows us to grasp them by considering their political, economic, psychological, social and cultural aspects. The social representation approach adopted in this work follows the conceptual framework formulated by Moscovici (1978) and developed by Jodelet (1984, 1988 and 2001) and Sá (1998).

Jodelet (1988) places social representation in the interface between the psychological and reality, a form of social knowledge about everyday life (a common sense knowledge) that must establish the necessary articulations between affection, mental and social elements. So, social representations are structured on knowledge (cognitive aspect) and on the subjects' affection, according to the socio-historical-cultural context where they live. For the authors, the social representation is a form of practical knowledge that is aimed at guiding the subjects to understand and communicate with the world.

2.1. Subjects of the Study

Fifteen (15) women at the age group between 25 and 57 years make up the study population. They belong to the middle and high classes; they practice gymnastics, stretching, muscle building, walking and running in a gym located in the Lagoa Neighborhood, in the south zone in the city of Rio de Janeiro. All of them were informed about the study before it started being developed and accepted to collaborate. They signed their decision to adhere to the study in a letter forwarded to them.

2.2. The Instrument of the Study

A semi-structure interview was applied, with the use of an idea association test based on the Social Representations Theory.

Most interviews were carried out at the academy where the research participants practiced their activities. Some other interviews happened at collaborators' homes.

The data collected from the interviews were interpreted according to the guidelines proposed by Bardin (1977).

III. Interpreting Speeches According to the Motivation to Physical Activities

This topic presents the analysis and interpretations of reports made by women collaborators concerning the motivation of people to frequent the gym and their own motivation to the practice of physical activities.

3.1. Motivation of the People to the Attend the Gym

When they are asked about the reasons why people attend the gym, most of the fifteen interviewed women replied that the reason was to embellish bodies.

Women emphasize in their speech the cult to the body in the Brazilian culture, that is, the local culture as the mentor of standards, norms of use and presentation of bodies, as it has already been referenced through the studies by Goldenberg e Ramos (2002). It can also be verified that the physical form is especially remarkable in Rio de Janeiro because of the beaches, leisure areas, high temperature, factors that favor body's nudity. This value and cult to the body characteristic among Rio de Janeiro dwellers stimulates the adequacy to an aesthetical standard considered ideal, represented by a thin, full of muscles (defined) body. No stretch marks, no cellulite, and no spots should exist in this body constructed by interventions legitimated by specialists' scientific knowledge and encouraged by the media, as for example, physical activities themselves. So, "the *carioca* culture to the body", indicated by some women in their interviews, was interpreted as a subcategory of aesthetical concerns since it directly influences the care for body embellishment. This can be detected in the following speech:

[...] it is an appeal from the people in the city where we live... **in Rio de Janeiro... the heat is ... people wear very few clothes ... the appeal is so strong that we have to be beautiful too, isn't it**? ... it's all about the body ... **the beach** ... you are wearing a bikini [...] you try not to look … any different, don't you?. (M9)

Other categories, which, according to other discourses, are related to aesthetics, and therefore can be interpreted as its subcategories were: "insecurity and dissatisfaction about one's own body".

Human beings seem to demonstrate a problematic relationship with their own bodies and their bodily images. This fact has already been pointed out by Portinari (2002), when he says that our bodies are always considered insufficient, unfinished and subject to occasional transformations that are often caused by our own dissatisfaction with our bodies and our bodily images. That is the reason why the techniques for bodily changes are resorts the subject relies on to give new meanings to his her body and to re-signify it through its appearance, adding power to its dynamics in the communication process.

Practicing a physical activity for the body embellishment can in some cases be perceived as an "obligation", another category of aesthetics.

The second indicated reason pointed for the collaborators for people's attendance to the gym is "health". Improving one's health can mean life quality improvement, but it can also be perceived as an obligation (health subcategory):

[...] **it is to improve the quality of life... I think that ... there are a lot of people who don't like it very much, but they come because they have got to be here** ((laughing)), you know? (M3)

Obligation as a reason pointed by the women for people's attendance to the gym may be related both to the category of aesthetics (obligation to keep or to improve physical fitness) and to the category of health (obligation to care of health to avoid diseases, to guarantee a long, healthy life among others).

The collaborators mentioned the search for "well-being" as a third reason for people's attendance to the gym. This "well-being" is understood as feeling good about oneself and about one's own body (psychological well being); so, it has relationships with the category of aesthetics. "Socialization" is the fourth reason presented by the collaborators in their reports referring to people's attendance to the gym. According to their discourse, individuals try to encourage social relations in gyms, that is, try to meet people to attend their affection needs, in order to date, go out with boyfriends and girlfriends.

3.2. Reports Referring to the Women Collaborators' Motivation for the Practice of Physical Activities

Most women collaborators in our study have indicated "health" as the main reason that motivates them to practice physical activities.

"Well-being" represents the second major personal reason that motivates them to practice physical activities. The other mentioned reasons, which, according to our interpretation, are associated with the category "well-being" were "pleasure", "addictions" and "emotional balance".

Well-being and health are related to the aesthetics category. However, aesthetical reasons for the personal motivation to the practice of physical activities received a lower number of replies, in opposition to the replies to the former question, which prioritized aesthetics as the main reason regarding people's attendance to gyms. The collaborators who referred to aesthetics as personal motivation to the practice of physical activities mentioned it together with the word "health", apparently in an attempt to attribute equal importance to the two categories. This fact can be observed in the report below:

[...] **care with the body .... both for health and aesthetic reasons, right?** [...] for my health and also **to make me feel better aesthetically speaking ... to go to the beach and feel good about it**. (M10)

The analysis of the reports enabled the hypothesis according to which aesthetics is associated with beauty, health, well being, but the women are somehow embarrassed to mention it. So, health and well-being seem to be considered sociably more acceptable as personal motivations for the practice of physical activities. Is there any embarrassment to talk about aesthetics? More specifically, is there any embarrassment to demonstrate any concern with one's own body when it comes to embellishment?

Along the interviews, it was observed that reports that justify what was said or what was revealed in their speech despite the so-called ethical control for the sociably accepted attitude.

According to Chacham and Maia (2004), the women's search to be in conformity with the contemporary aesthetical model is legitimated by the discourse about health: "the fallacy that associates aesthetics with health authorizes women to submit to procedures that can even harm health" (p. 80).

So, the legitimacy of health discourse in which the aesthetical motivations for the practice of physical activities is another explanation for the hypothesis that bodily aesthetics is marginalized and considered futile. Perhaps this futility regarding bodily aesthetics is related to the compliance with a specific contemporary aesthetical model encouraged by consumption society, in the search for bodily transformations authorized by the media and scientifically legitimized by the health discourse. The women seem to be aware of these facts. Women's awareness of the adequacy to an aesthetical standard is stimulated by the consumption society codes, making them feel that exposing their bodies or valuing a culturally ideal body, in the words of Chacaham and Maia (2004, p. 81) "transforms women in objects or things". Thus, they associate aesthetics with health so that they can change their bodies and demonstrate their concern about them legitimately in an "authorized" health-discourse.

Lovisolo (1997, p. 14) corroborates this conception. Although he states that "aesthetics" is a powerful constitutive vector of the new relations with the bodies", he recognizes that some critics of aesthetics-oriented values consider futile and immoral the efforts made by individuals, especially women, on surgeries, among other procedures, to accomplish aesthetically prestigious standards, and surrender to a consumption society.

IV. Final Considerations

This study has found out that regarding the motivation to the practice of physical activity, women have pointed aesthetics as the main reason for people to attend gyms. This consideration is represented when the interviews express concerns related to the physical form and refer to the embellishment of the body, to the *carioca culture to the body* as the mentor of standards, of norms of use and presentation of bodies, as well as to *insecurity and dissatisfaction with their own bodies* and the obligation to keep or improve the physical form.

The second reason pointed for the attendance of people to gyms is health, which would represent not only improvement in quality life but an individual's obligation as well. Individuals currently become socially responsible for the maintenance and quality of health and life.

Well being emerged as the third reason for people's attendance to gyms when the interviewed women refer to *improvement of quality of life*, to *relaxation*, to the increase of *self-esteem*, to the *occupation* of idle time and to *pleasure*. Socialization is the fourth reason revealed by the collaborators in their speeches referring to people's attendance to gyms and it represents the encouragement to social relations; it is also related to fashion trends.

However, checking the reasons that motivate women themselves to practice physical activities, health represents the main reason. Well being represents the second main reason to personal practice of physical activity, and it is related to *pleasure*, to *addiction* and to *emotional balance*. Aesthetics finally represents the third reason, enabling us to conceive the hypothesis according to which aesthetics is mentioned by the women in the study in a rather embarrassing way, and the contemporary bodily aesthetical model is, therefore, made legitimate through the discoursed of health.

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WOMEN IN *FITNESS*: MOTIVATIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

ABSTRACT
This study analyzed the representations of bodily aesthetics manifested by women who practice physical activities. An attempt was made to identify the meaning attributed by them to the motivations for the practice of physical activities. The approach applied was qualitative, referenced in the Social Representations Theory. Interviews were made with fifteen women who practice physical activities in a gym in the south zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro. In the list of reasons why the women felt motivated to practice physical activities, health represented the main reason, in opposition to the replies obtained about the reasons why people, in general, feel motivated to physical activities practices. For the latter case, reply number one on the list was aesthetics. Aesthetics ranked as the third personal reason for the practice of physical activities in the former case. This fact allows us to bring up the hypothesis according to which women mention aesthetics in a rather embarrassing way, and their attempt to comply with the demands of the contemporary aesthetical model finds it way to legitimacy through the discourse about health.
Key words: Bodily Aesthetics, Women, Motivations

FEMMES DANS LE *FITNESS*: MOTIVATIONS POUR LA PRATIQUE D'ACTIVITÉS PHYSIQUES

RÉSUMÉ
Cette étude a analysé les représentations de l'esthétique corporelle par des femmes qui pratiquent des activités physiques pour identifier les significations qu'elles attribuent sur les motivations qui les stimulent à la pratique des activités physiques. L'abordage du sujet a été qualitatif appuyé sur la Théorie des Représentations Sociales. Quinze femmes pratiquantes d'activités physiques dans une académie située à la Zone Sud de la ville de Rio de Janeiro ont été interviewées. À l'occasion de la vérification des raisons qui motivent ces femmes à pratiquer des activités physiques, on a constaté que la santé représente la raison principale, différemment des reponses sur les raisons qui motivent les gens en général à la pratique des activités physiques, qui donnent priorité à l'esthétique. L'esthétique représente la troisième raison personnelle pour la pratique d'une activité physique, ce qui nous a possibilité arriver à l'hypothèse que l'esthétique est indiquée par les femmes dans cette étude avec une certaine contrainte, et que son travail pour être d'accord au modèle esthético-corporel actuel est donc legitimé par le discours seur la santé.
Mots-clés : Esthétique corporelle, Femmes, Motivations.

MUJERES EN EL *FITNESS*: MOTIVACIONES PARA LA PRÁCTICA DE ACTIVIDADES FÍSICAS

RESUMEN
Esta investigación analizó las representaciones de la estética corporal presentadas por mujeres practicantes de actividades físicas, buscando identificar los significados atribuidos por ellas respecto a las motivaciones para la práctica de actividades físicas. El abordaje del trabajo fue cualitativo, fundamentado en la Teoría de las Representaciones Sociales. Se entrevistaron quince mujeres practicantes de actividades físicas en una academia situada en la Zona Sur de la ciudad de Río de Janeiro. Verificando las razones que llevan estas mujeres a practicar actividades físicas, la salud es la principal, diferente de las respuestas que dieron sobre las razones que llevan las personas, en general, a practicar actividades físicas, donde la estética fue la principal. La estética representa la tercera razón personal para practicar actividades físicas, lo que nos posibilitó la hipótesis de que la estética es indicada por las mujeres de nuestra investigación con cierto constreñimiento, y de que su busca para estar de acuerdo con el modelo estético corporal actual es, entonces, legitimado por un discurso de la salud.
Palabras-llave: Estética corporal, Mujeres, Motivación.

MULHERES NO *FITNESS:* MOTIVAÇÕES PARA A PRÁTICA DE ATIVIDADES FÍSICAS

RESUMO
O estudo analisou as representações da estética corporal manifestas por mulheres praticantes de atividade física, procurando identificar os significados atribuídos por estas sobre as motivações para a prática de atividade física. A abordagem foi qualitativa, referenciada na Teoria das Representações Sociais. Foram entrevistadas quinze mulheres praticantes de atividade física de uma academia localizada na Zona Sul do Município do Rio de Janeiro. Na verificação das razões que motivam as próprias mulheres a praticar atividade física, a saúde representa o motivo principal, ao contrário das respostas que forneceram acerca das razões que motivam as pessoas, de um modo geral, à prática de atividade física, que priorizaram a estética. A estética representa o terceiro motivo pessoal à prática de atividade física, possibilitando-nos a emergência da hipótese de que a estética é mencionada pelas mulheres do estudo com um certo constrangimento, e de que a sua busca para estar em conformidade com o modelo estético corporal contemporâneo é, portanto, legitimada pelo discurso da saúde.
Palavras-chaves: Estética Corporal, Mulheres, Motivações.