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Secondary education student bodily practices: implications of gender in and outside physical education classes

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Abstract—The present study aimed to analyze the bodily practices of high school students inside and outside of the physical education classes from the perspective of gender. A total of 426 students (63.7% girls and 36.3% boys) enrolled in the 2nd year of public high schools in a municipality in the interior of São Paulo State participated in the study. To collect the data, a questionnaire was elaborated and analyzed based on categories of survey and systematic cross-gender comparisons. The results showed that, in general, boys are more physically active than girls, regarding practices inside and outside of physical education classes. Distinctions were found regarding the bodily manifestations chosen by each group, the behavior associated with the social and the cultural contexts to which boys and girls are exposed from birth to adult life.

Keywords: high school, gender, physical education, physical activity.

Introduction

The historical construction of the representations regarding gender identities permeates different social contexts, which highlights the importance of the elaboration of public policies aimed to guarantee equality and citizenship. School is part of this process and the curricular components must viabilize a critical comprehension on how men and women build their gender representations (Flintoff & Scraton, 2005; Garrett, 2004; Hay & Macdonald, 2010; Kirk, 2002).

According to Scott (1986), gender is an extremely useful category of historical analysis. The author defines gender as “a social category imposed on a sexed body”; i.e., a social conception based on the common understanding of the supposedly suitable roles of men and women in different societies. Functions, normalizations and characterizations are established from the gender distinctions perceived by men and women. These differentiations emerge from social and cultural aspects, and provide means for the decodification of complex views regarding gender (Scott, 1986; 1988).

Goellner (2005, p. 207) defines gender as a social construction upon the anatomical sex; i.e., a political and analytical category, an evidence that masculinities and femininities are social and historical constructions. The differentiations underlying gender appropriations result in power relations, which have been historically associated with the hegemonic masculinity (Louro, 1997). This fact illustrates the importance of the discussions about gender in all social contexts with a view to broadening perspectives to achieve more equality between men and women (Connell, 1987; Scott, 1986).

Therefore, it is critical to deliberately include discussions and reflections about gender in school in Brazil, once this environment is marked by multiple relations between boys and girls, who are experiencing the process of human formation (Louro, 1997). In order for effective transformations to happen, the school needs to stablish a deep and significant dialogue about the historical representations of men and women in society. Thus, in the Brazilian context, school must promote the development of relations based on equality and respect for different ways of thinking and behaving, and further studies are needed to ground the promotion of such relations.

With specific regard to Physical Education, in Brazil, further research approaching gender relations at school with a view to create significant interventions for the pedagogical practice is critical, and should be encouraged (Altmann, Ayoub, & Amaral, 2011; Duarte & Mourão, 2007; Flintoff, & Scraton, 2005; Garrett, 2004; Goellner, Figueira & Jaeger, 2008; Hay & Macdonald, 2010; Jesus & Devide, 2006; Kirk, 2002; Prado & Ribeiro, 2010; Penney, 2002; Mariano, 2010; Romero, 1994). Studies aimed to bring significant interventions in the context of physical education classes in Brazil may contribute to the development of more democratic and assertive comprehensions about the gender relations in society, especially regarding physical activities and corporal culture manifestations.

The development of strategies to better understanding gender relations in the Physical Education classes is a challenge (Flintoff & Scraton, 2005; Garrett, 2004; Hay & Macdonald, 2010; Kirk, 2002), considering the historical impositions that attribute different activities for boys and girls based on

discriminatory and hegemonic conceptions associated with the male domination present in society (Bourdieu, 2001).

These inherited hegemonic conceptions are present in the physical education classes, being easily identified in apparent discriminatory actions, such as the separation of boys and girls and the choice of different modalities to be taught to these groups (Jesus & Devide, 2006; Prado & Ribeiro, 2010). The practices that segregate students from the other sex through discourses, gestures, actions and representations also demonstrate the presence of these conceptions (Altmann, Ayoub & Amaral, 2011; Duarte & Mourão, 2007; Louro, 1997). When analyzing the practices of everyday life, Certeau (1994) named “tactics”, the individual actions (gestures, actions, representations, etc.) having emerged from consumer society, claiming that these tactics significantly interfere in the cultural production of many societies.

In Brazil, critical analyses of the issues associated with gender in physical education are present in studies aiming to identify how the relations are constructed by teachers and students over the pedagogical practice and the influence of historical and social elements on these constructions (Altmann, 1998; Daólio, 1995; Duarte & Mourão, 2007; Jesus & Devide, 2006; Louro, 1997; Souza, 2008). Brazilian classes frequently reflect the practices cristalized by the discriminatory differentiation between boys and girls, as if boys were not suitable to dance or practice rhythmic gymnastics and girls could not play soccer or practice fighting. Duarte and Mourão (2007) showed that, despite the normalizations establishing mixed classes, the teachers more often than not “circumvent” the determination of these equality principles, mixing or separating boys and girls depending on the activity to be performed.

According to Louro (1997), the separation of boys and girls to perform specific activities is more explicit in physical education classes. For the author, although some teachers have tried to adopt the principles of coeducation, the curricular component is the one that shows the most resistance regarding gender integration, and this fact is grounded on argumentations that valorize the biological differences and the influence of the social context. Moreover, studies have demonstrated different levels of involvement from boys and girls in physical activities (Tassitano *et al.*, 2010), which suggests that effective intervention programs should be implemented, especially those aiming at the inclusion of the girls (Westerstahl, Barnekow-Bergkvist & Jansson, 2005).

Therefore, it is critical to develop programs to stimulate the students in relation to physical activities, especially girls, whose adherence is affected by historical and social elements (Garrett, 2004; Luke & Sinclair, 1991; Penney, 2002). The understanding of the gender relations in the physical education classes can contribute with the construction of practices favoring more democratic processes. This assertion is vinculated to the need to listen and analyze the students’ opinions about the bodily practices in and outside the school environment, and effectively comprehend the implications of these opinions on the gender relations.

Correia (2009) reported that adolescents, young individuals and adults from high school bring with them a set of experiences,

expectations and tastes related to the corporal manifestation universe, which has to be respected under the citizenship education perspective. Thus, it is important to consider the students as active part in the pedagogical practice, valorizing their opinions, desires, perspectives and knowledge about physical education and their relations with gender conceptions.

According to Certeau (1994), the students’ opinions must be seen as the result of social practices. Therefore, analyzing the students’ social representations under the perspective of gender allows us to understand that the spaces where these relations are developed are intercrossed and can be constantly modified by the relations among the subjects (Certeau, 1994).

Some of the questions that oriented the development of the present study were: ‘How are the bodily practices seen by young individuals part of their daily life?’ ‘How do physical activities operate important social and cultural modulations when inserted in the school environment?’ Finally and more specifically, supported in the conception of daily life given by Certeau (1994), mainly concerning the young individuals’ habits of cultural consumption, ‘How has the analytic category of gender been developed from opinions and representations, particularly, in what corresponds to the involvement in bodily practices inside and outside of school?’

Thus, the present study aimed to examine the bodily practices performed by boys and girls studying at high school inside and outside of the physical education classes, discussing these practices under the perspective of gender.

Methods

This study was based on the exploratory research aiming to describe a situation and the relations among its components, allowing the exploration and a better comprehension of the situation studied (Cervo, Bervian & Silva, 2007). This type of study was chosen because the scientific literature about gender in physical education in Brazil has not established consistent critical analyses regarding the students’ motivation to perform physical activities, the promotion of bodily practices in a democratic perspective or how relations between activities in and outside school are established. Thus, the exploratory analysis allows the exploration of ways to comprehend this issue in specific contexts, once the existing data cannot be generalized to other environments without the investigation of the specificities inherent to each social context. The *survey* technique was used, aiming to determine practices and opinions regarding a specific population (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2011).

Participants

This study surveyed a total of 416 students, 265 girls (63.7%) and 151 boys (36.3%), aged between 15 and 19 years old, and with an average age of approximately 16 years and 2 months (± 7.2 months). All the students were enrolled in the 2nd year of high school, morning and afternoon shifts, in a public school

located in a medium sized city in the countryside of the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

The following eligibility criteria were adopted for the participants: a) be enrolled in the second year of High School; b) be enrolled in the Physical Education classes and not be exempted from this discipline; c) be at least 15 years old; d) have the Free and Clarified Consent Form completed and signed by the parents or guardians. The following exclusion criteria were considered: a) be enrolled in High School evening courses, as it does not include PE classes; b) refusal to participate in the research. A simple random draw was performed in each school among the students who met the eligible criteria, and a sample of 416 participants was obtained, representing approximately 27.3% of the total population.

Research Instrument

An assessment questionnaire was specifically elaborated to collect the data, based on previous research found in the literature. This instrument was chosen for allowing to analyze large samples with more precision (Cervo, Bervian & Silva, 2007).

The questionnaire content was validated (Pasquali, 1998) after the content analysis by five specialist professionals in the area, who proposed alternative and dissertative alterations in the original version. The questions addressed the following: general information (age and sex), leisure (physical activity practiced, games and playing activities in childhood) and school physical education (interest in the discipline, content of the classes and appreciation of the contents). This study performed a gender-based analysis of the data regarding leisure and school physical education.

Data collection

The data collection started with a random query of ten schools located in different parts of the city where the studied was conducted. The administration of each school was informed about the purpose of the investigation and all the documentation regarding the research project was presented (presentation letter, research project, Free and Informed Consent Form and questionnaire). Only seven schools accepted to participate in the research.

After the acceptance of the school direction, the students were informed about all the procedures of the research, especially anonymity and the voluntary nature of the study. The students willing to participate received the Free and Clarified Consent Term (FCCT) to be completed and signed by their guardians.

The questionnaires were applied during the school period, not necessarily during physical education classes, and the students were always supervised by one of the researchers, who was also available to answer any questions the respondents could have. The participants were asked to answer the questions as honestly as possible and to avoid external interference as well.

Data Analysis

According to Thomas, Nelson and Silverman (2011) and Lüdke and André (1986), the analysis of data is present in several stages of the research, from the collection – when the researcher classifies, organizes and relates the data - to the final phase, when the research becomes intense and formal. In this study, the data were presented through a graph representation where the questions were selected according to the frequency of answers given by the participants. The answers were then categorized by topic and the sex of respondent, culminating in a systematic comparison between the groups. The study was approved by the research ethics committee of the authors' institution of origin under the protocol number 1796/ 03.11.2010.

Results and discussion

The results were described and analyzed in two broad categories, aiming to facilitate the understanding of the data regarding the students' practice inside and outside of the physical education classes. The first category comprises a discussion regarding the relations established by boys and girls towards physical activity practices, establishing a parallel relation with historical and cultural aspects. The second category was structured under a gender perspective and presented an analysis of the physical education classes from the students' point of view, including the three main points of the study: participation in the classes, contents developed and appreciation of the participants regarding these contents.

This organization was adopted taking into consideration the results obtained throughout the research, once the characteristics of the participant groups were very diverse regarding both gender issues and the relations established inside and outside the scope of the school.

Physical Activities performed by boys and girls outside the school context

This category investigated the data concerning the comprehension of physical activities performed by boys and girls outside the daily school routine, once the intentions and cultural inferences that rule the practices performed outside the physical education classes are discrepant.

The results showed that most participants perform one type of physical activity outside of the physical education classes. Out of the 416 subjects, 276 (66.3%) practice some activity apart from the physical activities at school. It is important to highlight that the point was exclusively considered whether or not the participants performed an extra-school activity; not the time dedicated to such practice.

The group responding not to performing any physical activity outside school presented several justifications, and the main reasons pointed out were related to lack of free time (24%) and lack of will (19%). Studies have demonstrated that high school students show a lower level of adherence regarding physical

activities when compared with other age groups (Hallal *et al.*, 2006; Tassitano *et al.*, 2007). Some studies show that, in Brazil, depending on the region, 39% to 93% of adolescents present low levels of physical activity (Oehlschlaeger *et al.*, 2004; Silva *et al.*, 2005). This wide range of percentage variation is an important confounder factor in the analysis of this particular population.

An important parameter for this discussion is found in the National Survey of School Health¹ (Pesquisa Nacional de Saúde Escolar - PeNSE - 2012) conducted by IBGE – Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistic. This study included 109,104 students enrolled in the 9th year of fundamental school, the year that immediately precedes high school in Brazil. Among several other factors investigated, the PeNSE – 2012 demonstrated that the national average of students performing any physical activity without administrative dependence of school was of 24.9% - with a range of 150 to 299 minutes in the previous seven days; and 30.1% - with 300 minutes or more in the previous seven days (IBGE, 2012).

These agglutinated values result in approximately 55% of young individuals performing at least 150 minutes of physical activities outside school. This data is concerning in terms of health and quality of life, once adolescents should perform at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity daily (Cavil, Bidlle & Sallis, 2001).

The data obtained in this study point that 66.3% of the students perform physical activities outside school, which can be considered an expressive number, considering that the number regarding participation in the physical education classes is much smaller. This scenario suggests that disliking physical activities is not a reason why high school students do not participate in the classes, once they perform these activities in other spaces.

A hypothesis to explain the dissent found between the need of the students to perform physical activities and their distance from the physical education classes can be associated with the premise that this discipline, in general, is not attractive to the students. Thus, these students end up trying to find in other spaces that the school does not provide, as pointed out by Darido (2004) and Betti & Zuliani (2002) while analyzing the number of students who require exemption from this curricular component.

Tenório *et al.* (2010) identified that the participation in PE classes is associated to the adoption of both active and sedentary behavior; i.e., this discipline may either stimulate or discourage the practice of physical activities, depending on its representativeness and application during the school years. Therefore, this curricular component is of extreme relevance in the formation of the young students with regard to health and physical education issues. Moreover, the practice of physical exercises in the period of adolescence is very beneficial, preventing the risk factors of some chronic diseases (Hallal *et al.*, 2006; Strong *et al.*, 2005) and promoting the adoption of healthy habits in adult life (Rowland, 2006).

When these data are separately analyzed under the perspective of gender, more concerning differences are observed, corroborating the distance of the girls in relation to physical activities. In this study, 58% of the surveyed girls perform a kind of activity outside the school, while this percentage increases to 81% for the boys. Similar data were obtained in investigations which point the superior levels of physical activities performed by boys in comparison with girls (Souza & Duarte, 2005; Tenório *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, international studies also found a greater distance of girls from different age groups regarding physical activities (Caspersen *et al.*, 2000).

These factors can be associated with the social and cultural contexts to which boys and girls are exposed from birth to adult life, once there are behaviors, characteristics and preferences historically considered suitable for each gender.

In this study, when the girls were asked about activities performed in childhood, the most frequently mentioned activity was “play with dolls”, along with “play on the street” (30% for each category), other mentioned activities were: 18% for “practice sports” and 16% for “play *videogames*”. In our society, girls playing with dolls is considered a natural behavior, in addition to being very encouraged by the parents. Contrarily, “play with toy cars” was mentioned only by 4% of the girls, as this activity is considered suitable for boys.

The results are reverse for the group of boys; “play with dolls” was mentioned by only 1% of the participants, while “play with toy cars” reached 21%. This data shows the cultural influence associated with these practices in determining what social behavior is expected from each gender, through the social representations reflected on the play activities.

The street games showed high percentages in both groups; however, some differences were observed, especially regarding the type of activity. For example, the girls mentioned activities traditionally linked to the female childhood universe, such as hopscotch, “button, button, who’s got the button?” and nursery rhyme games; while boys mentioned fighting, ball and action games, such as “cops and robbers”, activities typically intended for boys.

Game play bears relation to the social “feminine” and “masculine” roles, replicating the position each gender will socially occupy in adulthood. Girls are expected to be delicate, sensitive, dependent and dedicated to domestic chores; while boys are encouraged to be strong, competitive, dominant, future family providers (Romero, 1994; Souza Júnior & Darido, 2003).

When these social constructions are not debated in educational settings, they may be interiorized, normatized and eventually naturalized. Thus, when attitudes, desires and behaviors do not fit the established standard, they become a target for prejudice and discrimination (Prado & Ribeiro, 2010).

Another important point to be observed refers to the analysis of data presented by the boys. The values attributed for each activity are distributed more linearly than the girls; thus, play outside (26%), practice sports (25%), play *videogames* (25%) and play with toy cars (21%) showed close values. This analysis shows that the individuals of this group have practiced different activities since childhood, demonstrating a richer and broader exploration of motor experiences in comparison with the girls.

¹ The National Survey of School Health, performed in 2009, was the first nationwide research to investigate the level of physical activity among Brazilian adolescents. It has been considered an important parameter for different studies on this thematic.

The cultural separation of the girls in relation to some bodily practices can be associated with the little prevalence of this group in physical activities during adolescence and posteriorly in adult life. This can be explained by the lack of opportunities offered to this group to explore motor challenges, which makes the girls less skillful and consequently less motivated to practice physical activities (Daolio, 1995).

Why cannot girls play with toy cars, play soccer, practice skateboarding or fighting? Are their organisms unsuitable to perform tasks culturally established as manly? These questions disregard the historical gender construction and extrapolate physiological and biological dimensions. According to Goellner, Figueira & Jaeger (2008) the body is constructed and transformed by the relation between biological, psychological, cultural and social elements, carrying marks of different times and conditions.

The motor differences between boys and girls are rooted in these historical and social distinctions (Altmann, 1998; Altmann, Ayoub & Amaral, 2011; Daolio, 1995; Souza Júnior & Darido, 2003). Daolio (1995) reports an example extracted from his teaching practice, in which, during a mixed-sex volleyball game, after a reception error asks herself: “*Why am I stupid?*” The author highlights that this indagation shows the underlying dissatisfaction girls have toward the superiority of the boys regarding motor skills.

This situation exemplifies the difficulties that many girls have in facing the motor challenges in the physical education classes, which may discourage this group to explore other bodily practices in adulthood. Such scenario reinforces the importance of the physical education teacher’s intervention in order to revert the negative self-image of many girls in relation to their motor abilities (Darido, Galvão, Ferreira & Fiorin, 1999; Prado & Ribeiro, 2010; Souza Júnior & Darido, 2003).

The games played in childhood and physical activities in adolescence seem to be related for both boys and girls. As previously mentioned, the childhood context of the girls is permeated with more static activities, such as “play with dolls”. In adolescence the girls end up choosing simpler bodily practices, such as walking, which reached 32% of the participants. With specifics regard to sport, this percentual decreased to 16%, illustrating the significant distance of the girls to this practice.

The boys presented different results, as 34% of the participants mentioned “ride a bike” as the most practiced activity, and ranked practice sports in second (30%). These results show the distance girls keep from sport, preferring simpler activities that do not require complex abilities, like walking. As most sports require combined or specific abilities, and girls lack appropriate spaces and motivation to practice them since their childhood, their performance tends to be inferior.

The comparison between the practices performed in childhood and those maintained in adolescence show that girls and boys carry cultural marks regarding physical education, and these marks are enhanced in adulthood, when the social representations of both genders are more defined.

For Altmann, Ayoub & Amaral (2011) these realtions are constructed within a social and historical spectrum, thus there are other elements that intensify the problems of inequality regarding the abilities of each sex, for example, the age, the social context in

which the students are inserted, the relations maintained within the group and the motor experiences, among others.

However, the importance of the reflection over the space occupied by the gender issues in these discussions and the need of the teacher’s intervention have been recognized, avoiding the neutralization of the girls and motivating all the students to perform physical activities not only at school, but also in other social contexts.

Physical education classes from the perspective of students and the implications for the practice of physical activities

This category include data to analyze the physical education classes from the students’ point of view, who were at first questioned about their interest in the subject, after which content they has already experienced, and finally about which contents they considered the most important, in order to comprehend the boys and girls’ views about this discipline. For a better visualization and comprehension of the data obtained, three analysis topics were elaborated, each one presenting a discussion under the perspective of gender.

Appreciation and participation in physical education classes

When surveyed about the physical education discipline, 43.8% declared they enjoyed and participated in the classes, 39.5% declared to participate only in the activities they enjoyed and 12% answered they participated in the activities despite not enjoying them. Finally, 4.7% admitted neither enjoying nor participating in the classes.

These results show that the students do not share the same level of preference for the discipline. Although there is participation in the classes, this participation is greater for the activities the students prefer. Probably the students who do not enjoy the activity remain seated or perform other non-related activities. In the studies by Darido *et al.* (1999) and Melo & Ferraz (2007) the lack of interest and/or ability of the students are pointed out by the teachers as their main concerns. For Betti and Zuliani (2002), this distance is explained by the fact that students grade more the bodily practices performed outside school.

According to the National Curricular Guidelines for High School Education (Brazil, 2006) the physical education aims to provide opportunities for different practices of the corporal cultural, building autonomy and criticism to experience, elaborate and organize them both for the individual and the society. It is necessary to promote changes and transform the activities of the physical education classes, contextualizing them and making them meaningful to all students, reducing the distance and the lack of interest in the discipline (Souza, 2008; Brasil, 1998).

Analyzing the issue separately in the groups of boys and girls, it is observed that boys show more appreciation and participate more in the PE classes (64%), while most girls (44.2%) participate only in the activities they enjoy. Moreover, girls present a higher percentual in the last category (do not enjoy and do not participate in the classes).

Table 1. Percentage distribution of students' participation on physical education classes.

	girls (n=265)	boys (n=151)
Enjoy and attend classes	33.2%	64.9%
Perform only activities that they enjoy	44.2%	30.5%
Do not enjoy but attend classes	16.6%	4.0%
Do not enjoy and do not attend classes	6.0%	0.7%

A significant difference was found between the participation of boys and girls in physical education classes, which may be associated with their distinct formation, based on socially constructed stereotypes and the inequality regarding opportunities and spaces available for the practice during the classes. According to Duarte and Mourão (2007), the ability and technique to perform the physical education activities still determine the success of the students, and this explains the distance of the girls.

The girls surveyed in this study reported that the physical education classes are more appreciated by the boys because boys are more skillful and play better than girls; however, they also believe that mixed classes are more efficient to promote learning and relationship, favoring both genders. The girls also believed that teachers should diversify the contents of the classes, demanding fewer technical abilities and creating different strategies to include all the girls and stimulate them to participate in the activities proposed (Duarte & Mourão, 2007).

Since in the early childhood, boys and girls are raised differently, controlled by a set of social, cultural and psychological determinants. Household chores, family care and education are assigned to women, who devote all their time to these functions. While men play the role of family providers, exerting their authority upon women (Duarte & Mourão, 2007; Mariano, 2010; Romero, 1994).

This behavior is reflected over the school years and culminates in high school, when the teachers face the challenge of stimulating the girls to participate in PE classes, as they refuse to perform some activities stating that they do not want to sweat, break their nails or spoil the make-up. This scenario, built since childhood, interferes in the preferences and in the participation of the girls in the PE classes, being directly related with most girls' lack of ability to perform the activities.

These imposed factors explain why some teachers prefer to separate their students by gender during all classes or some activities, stating that the differences in the ability levels interfere in the performance of the whole class (Erarslan & Rankin, 2013). Altmann, Ayoub and Amaral (2011) interviewed PE teachers and found that half of the participants were concerned about gender issues while planning their classes and tried to offer equal opportunities for both genders. Despite the effort to plan co-educative strategies, this action reinforces gender stereotypes, given the force of historical representations in the society.

Although there are many challenges, a possible strategy is to include the students in didactic units based on the logic of coeducation, diversifying the contents to increase their interest, create more involvement and demand less ability in the

performance of the activities. In addition, the teacher needs to analyze the classes with a critical and reflective view considering all the actions regarding gender.

The contents of physical education at school

The questions below are specific to the contents of school physical education, analyzed under the perspective of the corporal culture, which understands the contents as "the result of socially produced knowledge, historically accumulated by humanity and that need to be redesigned and transmitted to the students at school" (Soares *et al.*, 1992, p. 39).

Thus, the following contents are seen as manifestations of the corporal culture: gymnastics, sports, fighting and martial arts, capoeira, dance, games, adventure physical activities (APA), circus and alternative corporal practices (ACP). Such contents are fundamental for the historical and social formation of the citizen, which suggests that they should also be taught throughout the school years.

The students were asked about the contents they had experienced considering all the physical education classes they had had up to the moment they were completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire presented more than 20 options, in addition to one named "other", and the students should mark all the contents already presented in the PE classes. The answers are shown in the figure 1.

In general, hegemony was present in the traditional sports in the physical education classes such as volleyball (94.6%), soccer (91.6%), basketball (89.6%) and handball (45.3%), sports popularly known as in Brazil as "fantastic quartet"². Interestingly, volleyball was the most frequently option indicated by students, most likely because it is one of the most rapidly growing sports in the country and has consolidated female participation.

In addition to the sport contents, games and play (66.3%) were significantly present in the classes. Rhythmic gymnastics (23%) and alternative corporal practices (ACP) (18.6%) were mentioned in the sequence, and the others [rhythmic gymnastics (10.6%), swimming (9%), capoeira (9%), street dance (8.3%), adventure activities (6.6%), folk dance (5.6%) and boxing (5%)] were less mentioned. These less mentioned contents were also less present in the classes, demonstrating the lack of content diversity throughout the students' school life.

This result confirms that school physical education is still heavily influenced by the sport model implemented in Brazil in the 60s, emphasizing the practice of sports (Betti, 1991).

The predominance of sport content is many times related with a more traditional class, in which technical procedures are emphasized, and where there is little space for the critical comprehension of the bodily practices (Betti & , 2002; Kirk, 2010; Kunz, 1994). This model tends to differentiate boys and girls during the classes, reinforcing gender stereotypes. Still, as a hegemonic content in the physical education classes, sport prevent the development of other elements of the corporal culture.

2 Name given to the four most commonly taught sports in physical education classes in Brazil: soccer, basketball, handball and volleyball.

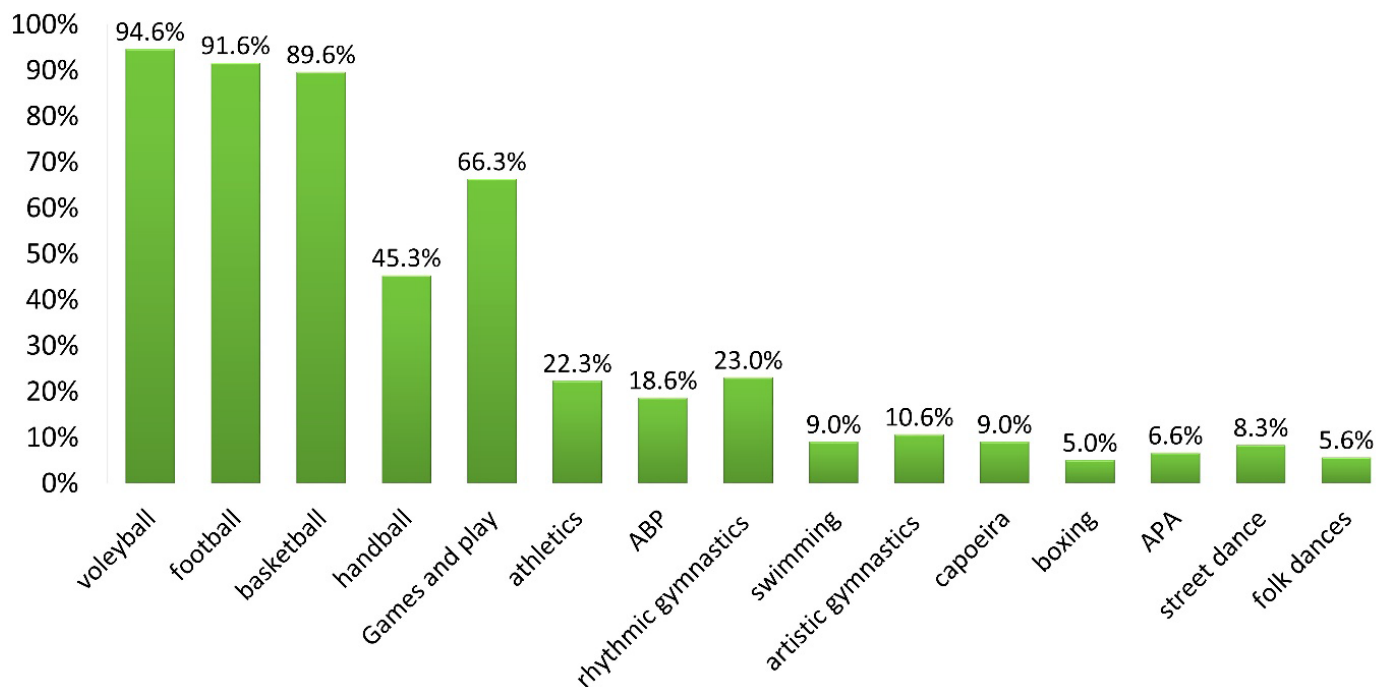


Figure 1. Contents students already experienced in PE classes throughout their school life.

A good formation provides the teacher with conditions to experience and acquire knowledge about bodily culture in order to apply these concepts while teaching. According to Forquin (1993), Mello (2000) and Neira (2011), one should master the contents and their meaning before teaching them.

Appreciation of the school contents by boys and girls

After pointing the most experienced and the less relevant practices in the physical education classes, the students were asked about their preference regarding the contents in a scale from 1 to 9, in order of preference. The final score was obtained calculating the average of all the grades attributed to each practice; thus, the scores closer to 1 are the most appreciated, while the scores closer to 9 are the least appreciated by the respondents.

In general, sports are regarded by the students as the content with higher priority, while circus is ranked last. The students appreciate more the contents they have already experienced; e.g. sports, contents related with their lives in different instances, which are present in the media or regularly performed outside of school.

Circus practices might have been considered less important for the students due to the fact that such bodily manifestations are not approached at school or even it is taught with very little significance. This is a concerning perspective, once one of the roles of physical education is to provide diversified knowledge and experience, aiming to favor the formation of critical individuals (Darido & Souza Júnior, 2007).

Significant discrepancies are observed in a comparative analysis of the preferences of boys and girls regarding some

bodily practices as shown in Figures 2 and 3. The results go beyond “dislike” for not having knowledge about the practice and are associated to with social representations regarding these practices from the perspective of gender.

Sports was ranked first by the girls, with a grade of 3.2 while the highest grades (less favorite contents) were attributed to fighting and martial arts (6.1), capoeira (6.8) and circus (6.9).

The boys attributed a score of 2 to sports, considering this content more preferable in comparison with the girls, who attributed grade 3.2 to this content. Games and play (4.1) and adventure physical activities (4.1) were ranked second and third, obtaining the same score, following significantly being the first-place sport though. Similarly to the girls, circus was ranked last by the boys (6.9).

Dance is the third favorite content for the girls (3.8), while the boys pointed this content as the eighth (6.2). Corroborating these results, Moreno, Ribeiro & Mourão-Carvalho (2010) found that dance was the favorite bodily practice for the girls in comparison with the boys, who preferred soccer and fighting. These findings clearly show that, despite enjoying a particular bodily practice, the opinion of the students is grounded on the social characteristics of these activities.

According to Andreoli (2010), the gender construction regarding dance is associated with more sensitive bodies and the estetic hegemonically represented by the female body. For the author, the men, marked by the virile masculinity, have to overcome huge social barriers to develop this practice.

The boys are also distant from other corporal practices, as gymnastics. This content also presented discrepancy in the preference between boys and girls, being ranked in second by the girls (3.6) and fifth for the boys (5.5). This corporal practice, like dance,

is culturally related to the female body, being less attractive for boys, despite the existence of modalities for men (Ferretti, 2011).

Fighting and martial arts also presented different views from boys and girls, pointed as the fourth favorite content by the boys

(4.2), and seventh by the girls (6.1). Unlike dance, fighting and martial arts represent masculinity and virility; therefore, the women who practice this sport also suffer prejudice and are very often considered homosexual.

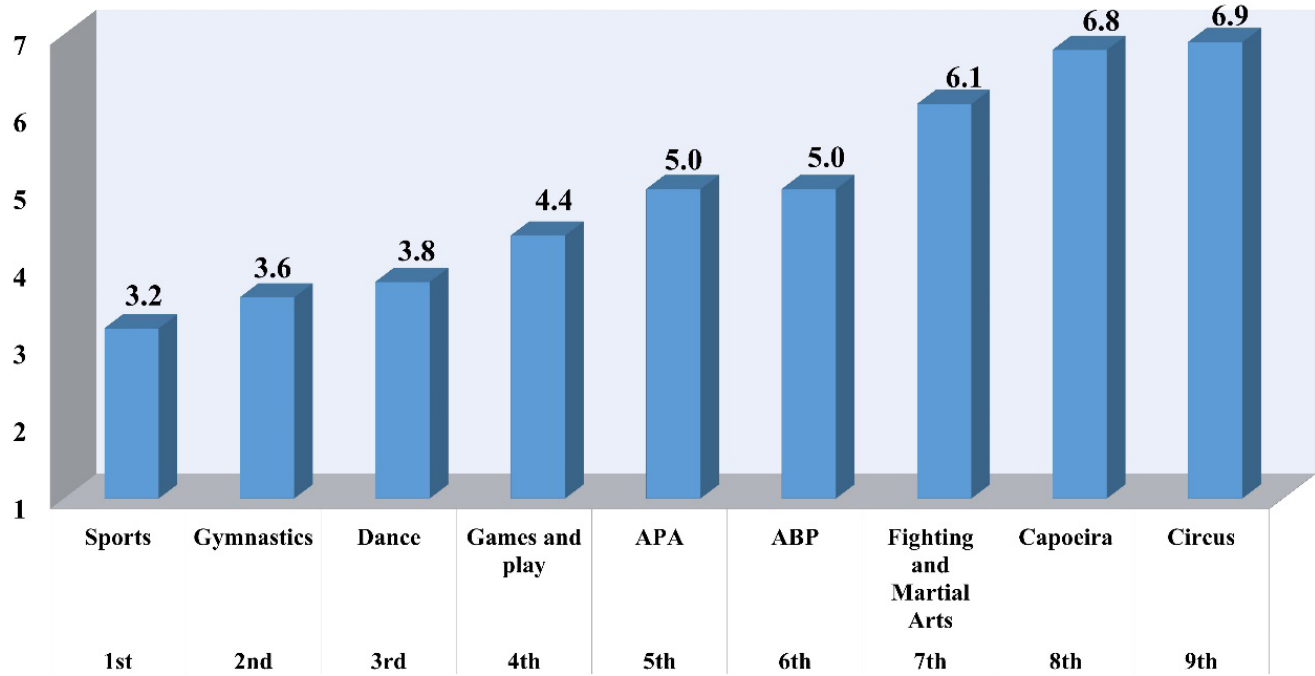


Figure 2. Order of preference for different contents associated with school physical education according to the girls' opinions.

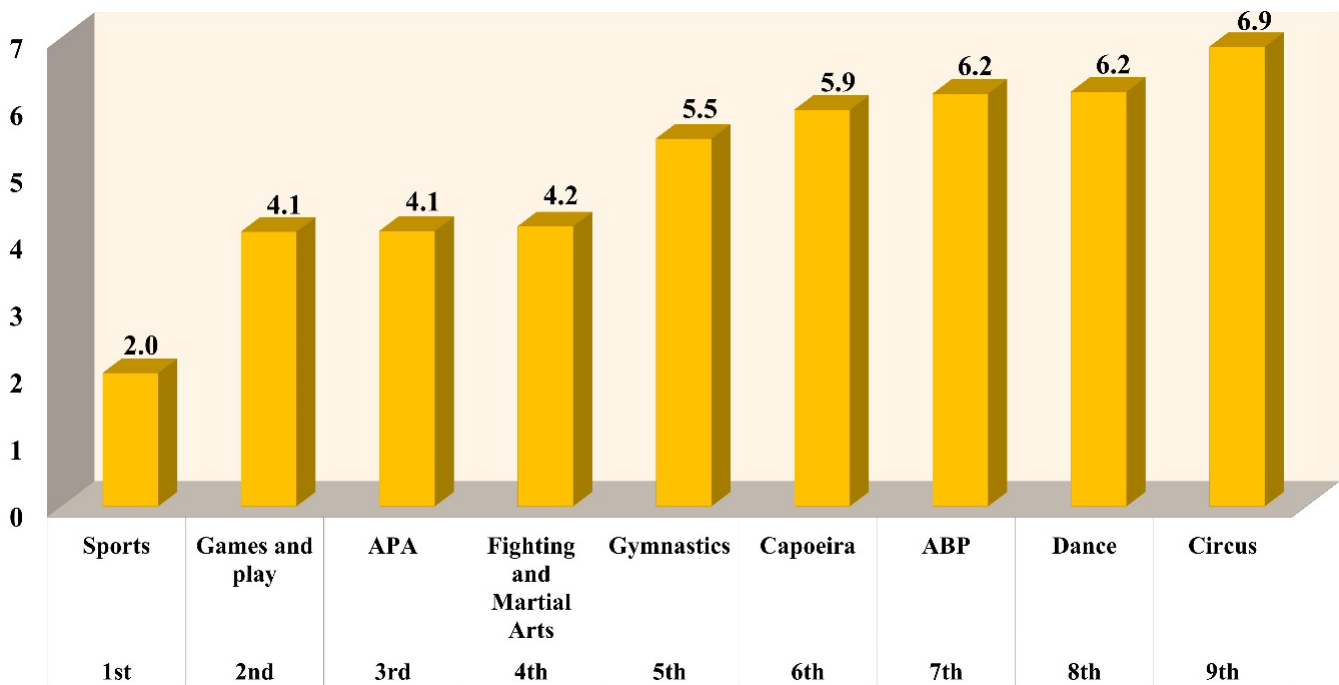


Figure 3. Order of preference for different contents related to physical education according to the boys' opinions.

The gender representation on the corporal practices in present in the school physical education, interfering in the students's tastes and in the contents associated with this discipline. The official documents (Brazil, 2002; 2006) that regulate physical education in high school establish that the teachers should promote the coeducation, with equality for knowledge acquisition, respect for the differences, and good relationship, avoiding sexist behavior that reinforce gender stereotypes. Such actions are critical to prevent students from creating prejudice against the different contents in physical education.

Altmann, Ayoub & Amaral (2011) claim that interest and participation in the classes exceed gender issues; however, these issues may reinforce the need to diversify the contents and methodologies in order to engage and maintain the students. This means that the students cannot simply 'dislike' the activities based in gender stereotypes, without experiencing them.

Thus, it is of utmost importance that the physical education teacher provides the students with diversified contents, in order to amplify their cultural repertoire. Even more relevant is the presence of the thematic of gender, emphasizing the importance of social relations marked by respect, minimizing the sexist stereotypes.

Final Considerations

This study aimed to analyze the bodily practices performed by high school students both inside and outside physical education (PE) classes, arguing from the perspective of gender. In general, it was observed that boys are more physically active than girls with regard to both the practices performed outside of school and their participation in PE classes.

The results of this study indicate that boys and girls show distinctions in their choices and preferences for body manifestations. Outside of school, girls prefer activities such as walking and cycling, while in school they prefer sports, gymnastics and dance. Boys, on the other hand, prefer sports, games and fighting, both in and outside of school. In terms of bodily practices, the students' relationships reflect the social imagination regarding demonstrations that are considered masculine and feminine, constructions that are historically grounded on prejudice and discrimination.

There is a feedback relation between the mechanisms of involvement with the different bodily practices in and outside of the physical education classes; i.e., what the students do outside of the classes influence what they do during the classes, and the contents experienced in class are also related with the practices and experiences outside of school. Therefore, the PE classes play a fundamental role in the formation of a critical view regarding bodily practices and should bring concepts to be experienced in concrete situations of teaching and learning.

High school students bring good and bad experiences that need to be explored and transformed in the physical education classes under the perspective of gender. Thus, this curricular component should contain different physical activities to be performed by all students, abolishing discriminatory barriers rooted in the culture.

Despite the exploratory character of the present study, once there are few similar investigations in the literature and the data available cannot be generalized to other environments without the analysis of the specificities inherent to each context, this study has some implications and provides important information for the elaboration and orientation of the contents in physical education classes and their relation with the performance of physical activities outside of the school under the perspective of gender. It is important to highlight the importance of the students' preferences and representations, once these social actors are more than often disregarded during the education process.

The results of the present study demonstrated that: 1) The social marker of gender has been neglected as a category inserted in the education process at schools, more specifically regarding physical education, which may cause a number of deficiencies and misunderstandings concerning the role of men and women in fair and democratic societies; 2) There is a global concern regarding the low level of physical activities performed by young individuals nowadays; however, there are significant differences between boys and girls, and a thorough analysis of such differences shows the historical influence of prejudice against women, who are therefore less involved with bodily practices outside school; 3) With specific regard to physical education classes, there is little interest in this curricular component, especially from girls. The small variety of contents, the hegemony in some sport practices, the lack of interest and the discredit on this curricular component lead to the students' absenteeism. In addition, the classes do not include discussions about gender; 4) Finally, there seem to be a clear relation between the physical activities performed outside of the school and those performed during the PE classes; i.e., gender discussion during PE classes can bring new comprehensions for the category gender for the bodily practices related to leisure and quality of life outside of the school environment. However, further studies using the same methodology are needed to better investigate these interactions. A deeper analysis on how the physical activity practice can be vinculated to the concept of everyday life defined by Certeau (1994) is an important indicator in terms of new investigations. Thus, new studies can analyze, among other things, how the development of bodily practices is socially operated as an expression of young individuals' everyday lives.

The challenges regarding effective transformations in gender representations are numerous and exceed the specificities of physical education; however, this curricular component cannot be exempted from pursuing equality and respect. The diversity of contents elaborated from a critical and creative perspective is a possible way to minimize the gender differences in physical education, creating an environment where all students are able to practice and appreciate the bodily practices unbiasedly, as both boys and girls have the right to fully experience different bodily culture manifestations.

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