Visual methodologies, physical activity and young people's construction of the body

Metodologías visuales, actividad física y construcción del cuerpo por los jóvenes

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Abstract

The purpose of this article has been to analyze the use of photo elicitation research as a research methodology in Physical Culture Studies, with a special emphasis in Physical Activity contexts and the role of this visual methodology in order to understand the social construction of body and gender among children in physical education. The physical self-image and how others perceive the body make a huge difference when social interaction is taking place, since there is a hegemonic model or image of the body, and it is widespread in society. Psychologists, teachers in general and physical educators need to pay more attention to both how adolescent girls' cultural perspectives contribute to their sense of self and how important is to provide girls with many opportunities to analyze and stimulate critique discursive practices that shape embodied subjectivity. All of them should be aware of their relevant role as agents of cultural change and reproducers of sociocultural trends and so select both the most appropriate curriculum and content to eliminate the existing stereotypical views.

Key words: body construction; visual methodology; physical activities; adolescents.

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo ha sido analizar el empleo de la fotografía como instrumento investigador y metodológico en estudios sobre Cultura Física, con un énfasis especial en los contextos de actividad física, así como el papel de las metodologías visuales para comprender la construcción social del cuerpo y del género entre la educción física escolar. Tanto la propia imagen física, como la forma en que otros perciben el cuerpo se ve muy influida en las situaciones de interacción social, ya que existe un modelo hegemónico, o imagen del cuerpo, que está muy extendido en la sociedad. Psicólogos, educadores en general y profesores de educación física deben prestar más atención a estas cuestiones y a como la perspectiva cultural que tienen las adolescentes contribuye a dar sentido a su yo, y hasta qué punto es importante ofrecerles oportunidades para analizarlas y estimular la crítica discursiva que configure su subjetividad corporal. Todos ellos tienen que ser conscientes de su papel como agentes culturales de cambio y reproductores de tendencias socioculturales, para con ello seleccionar el currículum y los contendidos más apropiados para eliminar las visiones estereotipadas de estas cuestiones que existen en la actualidad.

Palabras clave: construcción del cuerpo; metodología visual; actividades físicas; adolescentes.

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Introduction

Classical social theory has traditionally neglected and suppressed the body. The cause for it to happen comes from a variety of sources, namely the inherited Cartesian dualism that gave priority to the mind and its properties of conscience and reason over the ones of emotion and passion (Martínez, 2004). Classical sociology aims tended to avoid the social world that took into account the human body, focusing on the human actor as a creator of signs and meanings. In addition, the body was treated as a natural phenomenon, not social and, therefore, not as a legitimate subject for research.

Nowadays, however, we live in an age where image plays a preponderant role in all areas of life, leading to situations of success or social failure. A time when the cult of the body affects the way we relate and appreciate others (and ourselves) and shape our identity and self-esteem (Becerril, 2011). Photo elicitation is a new way to examine the relationships among body, culture and society, and probably as Azzarito (2010) wrote, the body has become very much a 'seen' phenomenon. Sociological analysts and researchers in physical education have used this technique to examine subjective experiences about different topics, such as body shape and size, and their relationship to physical activities such as sport and exercise.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the use of photo elicitation research as a social transaction in Physical Culture Studies, with a special emphasis in Physical Education contexts and the role of this visual methodology in order to understand the social construction of body and gender among physical education students.

Brief theoretical perspective

Since the dawn of civilization, the human body has always been both recipient of social meanings and producer and transmitter of them. It has definitely played a symbolic role in our culture. The notion of body is the result of a social construct that goes along with a particular time and society. Individuals have the ability to express and find meaning in their bodies.

In the world of advertising, the dominant models in which the thin, young women began dieting and hating their more rounded bodies, have become popular (Kogan, 2003), nowadays this model is beginning to change to more rounded and sensual bodies. The social environment significantly influences our youngsters by encouraging them to look at their bodies and corporeal beings in very concrete ways. Such state of things will bring about a subsequent desire for building ideal body images and finding the most efficient ways to fulfill the purpose. As indicated by Le Breton (1995) the individual inhabits his body in relation to the social and cultural orientations in which they live. Differentiations should be made between the social function and the social formation of the body. According to what has been defined by many Physical Education (PE) and Sport Sociology scholars, the present social order is strictly based on and informed by the sportive order. Moral values and behavior as well as physical aesthetics and behavioral patterns have been created and developed to cope with the social demands of a new established 'physical body' model.

Hargreaves (1987) defines the hegemonic body model of modern society, in his research the author states that one ritual symbol above all condenses these values – the mesomorphic image of the body – and what is connoted by this image is probably more significant than what is denoted. This author categorized the human body into the three different and classical body types:

➢ *Mesomorphic body type*: a muscular torso and limbs, small waist and broad shoulders, in the case of males; a less pronounced musculature, yet well-built and well-proportioned frame, with more rounded contoured shape, in the case of females.

➢ *Ectomorphic body type*: the thin or 'skinny' body.

➢ *Endomorphic body type*: the fat-body type.

The body itself possesses characteristics and an image that may affect both the individual and society. In turn, culture shapes the mind and body meanings aligning with the prevailing models of the moment (Duch & Melich, 2005). We can observe this when Hargreaves (1987) affirms that the body concept is important in the process of identity-formation in the individual and is a significant determinant of social interaction. The body is viewed from a dualistic perspective, material parts act on thinking parts to establish individual characteristics such as self-confidence, self-esteem, self-identity, and other personality-related qualities. At the same time, they establish social characteristics such as authoritative behavior, easiness of socially relating and interacting, and a propensity to have more 'friends' (González, Ruiz & Carrasco, 2007).

The physical self-image and how others perceive the body make a huge difference when social interaction is taking place, since there is a hegemonic model or image of the body, and it is widespread in society. This not only gives its owner certain social advantages and prestige, but also fills him with confidence, social prestige and recognition (Cavalli & Cavalli, 2009).

The embodiment is constituted as an instrument of expression of our own personality, also serves to make contact with the outside world, comparing with other bodies and objects, so that we can speak, within the body schema, body order, i.e. isolated representation we have of our body itself, and the lived body, which refers to the way our corporeality is manifested in our human relationships and socialization.

The social construction of the body has been mainly analyzed from the critical pedagogy. For example, whereas bodies are seen as objects at which to look within the context of a social space, this does not occur in a private setting (namely, at home). The critical pedagogy examines relationship between power and knowledge, identifies inequalities and injustices and empowers individuals/groups to take social action. Critical pedagogy puts an emphasis on fields related to ethics, morals and politics. Its aim is to relate diverse elements such as school, physical education, teachers and the social reality. And it is through critical reflection about history that teachers can reflect about their daily practice and the political, social and moral dimensions of their educative acts (McBride, 1991; Tinning, 1991).

Currently, the body has become the target of many kindnesses and, at the same time, the target of large investments. All this new interest in the body is closely linked to profound social changes, both in the mode of production and forms of relationship and the emergence of new forms of domination. According to Kirk (1988), a critical pedagogy concerned with emancipation, empowerment, and cultural critique are key features to an educational rationale in physical education. The major concern of critical pedagogy is emancipation from unjust and inequitable practices. Examples of such practices are differential treatment of individuals based on gender, sexual preference, race, skin color, disability, and age (Kirk, 2006).

One of most important issues is the social interpretation of biological sex and the way that physical activity is constructed for girls and women (Scraton, 1992). In this sense, different methodologies of research have been implemented in order to change and adapt to new challenges and new sets of circumstances between social construction of gender and the

physical education as social change. The different strategies to research this issue has focused from observations, questionnaires and interviews conducted with girls and boys, enrolled in secondary education schools of different countries. The visual methodology as photo elicitation enables young people to participate in research and to be exposed to a meaningful understanding and identity of their body and the relationship with physical activity (Azzarito, 2010; Gonzalez et al., 2007; Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003). It is becoming increasingly apparent that curricula and pedagogical strategies are not supporting significant physical education experiences for students, girls in particular.

Thus, the physical activities within the school curriculum contribute to the reinforcing of images of femininity or masculinity and the development of gender appropriate behavior (Ruiz, 2011). Sports and physical education are intimately connected with the construction and maintenance of embodied, hegemonic masculine stereotypes (Hickey, Fitzclearance & Matthews, 1998), and as Azzarito (2010) affirms, the contemporary Western societies are increasingly characterized by global trends through which popular media culture fabricates infinite images of the active body, health, and sport contexts.

Body shape and size and their relationship to physical activities such as sport and exercise, have increasingly become markers of gender identity. Many authors report this evidence by considering young people's constructions of their relationship between masculinity and muscle, connecting femininity to muscularity, and analyzing their perceptions of the risks of transgressing conventional boundaries of gender and sexuality (Gorely et al., 2003; Kogan, 2003).

Visual methods

Visual methods describe any research design that utilizes visual evidence. Cameras and photographic images are drawn upon most widely (Phoenix, 2010). Photographs have been the key part of the interview process and have become increasingly popular as a research method to be used with young people in physical education contexts.

It aims at triggering responses and memories and unveiling participants' attitudes, views, beliefs, meanings and experiences with their bodies, so promoting a more direct involvement of the informants in the research process and encouraging and stimulating the collection of quantitatively and qualitatively different information to that obtained in conventional interviews (Bignante, 2011). The term photo-elicitation was first adopted by photographer and researcher John Collier (see Collier & Collier, 1986) who, in a multi-disciplinary research project on housing, proposed using photographs in interviews in order to examine how certain immigrant families adapted to living amongst ethnically different people. A pivotal aspect to this approach is not so much studying the images as analyzing how informants respond to them, attributing social and personal meanings and values (Harper, 2002).

Photo elicitation has been considered a way of social transaction that examine the links between the body, visual culture, and society (Azzarito, 2010). In photo-elicitation interviewing, the researcher assumes that the images of the body, the meaning (s) we attribute to them, the emotions they arouse in the observer, and the information they elicit generate insights that do not necessarily or exclusively correspond to those obtained in verbal inquiry.

The photographs used in photo-elicitation research extend along a continuum. At one extreme are what it might be considered the most scientific, mainly visual inventories of objects, people and artifacts. Like all photographs these represent the subjectivities embodied in framing, exposure and other technical considerations. Photographs of this type are typical of anthropological field studies (Harper, 2002).

In the middle of the continuum are images that depict events that were part of collective or institutional pasts. These might be photos of work, schools, or other institutional experiences, or images depicting events that occurred earlier in the lifetime of the subjects. These images may connect an individual to experiences even if the images do not reflect the subject's actual lives. At the other extreme of our continuum photographs portray the intimate dimensions of the social – family or other intimate social group, or one's own body. Elicitation interviews connect core definitions of the self to society, culture and history.

One domain in which the use of visual methods has been implemented is that of physical culture and kinesiology. Physical culture implies human physical movement occurring within recognized cultural domains such as sport, dance and, more broadly, outdoor and indoor recreational activities involving expression through physicality (Phoenix, 2010). These photos are really important when they are inserted in a context where it is possible to observe something in them or can elicit some kind of feeling (Atkinson, 2010; Hockey & Allen, 2006; Reyero, 2009), such as what a picture communicates on someone's body and for whom you communicate, what unfolds and what silences a photographed body, or what information can provide to informants. The concrete nature of the information garnered in a photo-elicitation interview about the body can generate information in relation to perceptions, feelings, and cultural stereotypes that have special names and nuances an outsider would not know (Curry, 1989).

The photographic representation of the human body is a visually distinct modality of modern society in both its private and public spheres. Representations of the body are prominent in the realm of visual arts, for they become a platform for registration and protest that accommodates the most diverse manifestations: from the art of injury, body art and radical surgery to techno-art, tattooing, piercing and body building (Escudero, 2007).

These pictures are perhaps the media that has helped to shape our own notion of body and reflect the social control to which an individual is subjected (Pulz, 2003). When photographs are combined with interviews from key informants, the result is a rich mixture of material that may be used in a number of ways. They may stand alone, as a phenomenological account of how individuals see their own worlds. The photo-elicitation interview may also be used as a way to build trust: as both the interviewer and the respondent talk about the photographs, they may be setting the stage for a rewarding and mutually enlightening interaction, and the interviewer may find a ready invitation to return with more pictures. Researchers know that photographs may tap into hidden emotions about the perception interviewees have about their bodies that would otherwise be missed (Curry, 1989).

What are the most used images in physical education research when photo elicitation is implemented?

In general, three groups of body images have been described that explore the social construction of gender. The pictures of the first group were selected from popular fitness and health, fashion and sport magazines (Lynn, Hardin & Walsdorf, 2004; Azzarito, 2009). The second group, corresponding to pictures of women and men with different with different body sizes, shapes, muscularity and ethnicities (González et al., 2007; Azzarito, 2009). A third group corresponded to images of illness people (e.g. anorexic)(González et al., 2007) or persons with disabilities (Hardin & Hardin, 2004).

It is interesting to note that there is just a few studies in this regard where the showing of a set of pictures has been utilized (Gorely et al., 2003; González et al., 2007). In the study of González et al. (2007), those slides characterized by feminine and muscular bodies are rejected by the pupils independently of their age or gender. A social rejection exists among

students to those masculine attributes that appear in women, namely a muscular body. On the other hand, although the image of an excessively muscular man is likewise dismissed, many students pointed out the advantages of what a muscular body implied, specially increased levels of strength. As demonstrated in these results, although teenagers did not want to look like them due to the perceived suffering involved in the daily workouts, they did like body stereotypes linked to the figure of a female diver. The hyper-muscular female is the most rejected stereotype owing to their similarities with men's bodies, which are said to be muscular and ugly.

Similar results are reported in Gorely et al. (2003) and Azzarito (2010). They noted that hyper-muscularity, particularly when this was for display rather than use, presented one of several contradictions within this conventional construction of masculinity. Gorely et al. affirms that secondary students accepted the relatively straightforward equation of muscularity with masculinity and the antithesis of this articulation for femininity.

The teenagers liked the dancer body-type, but the dancing activity itself was rejected as feminine. In general it can be established that the content of P.E. classes is sexist since the rejection comes from the activity and not from a stereotyped idea of the body (Martínez de Quel, Fernández & Camacho, 2010; Sáenz-López, Sicilia & Manzano, 2010). However, the image of female and male ballet dancers prompted further discussion of the gender-appropriateness of physical activities. Some boys and girls perceived ballet itself as stereotypically feminine. All students agreed that the anorexic stereotype is so thin that it becomes as unpleasant as the excessively muscled body (some even think of it as a ill body). Finally, the absence of images with persons with disability in physical education textbooks reinforced the hegemonic notion that sport is a realm for abled bodies and rejected the images of individuals with disabilities (Hardin & Hardin, 2004).

Findings and Discussion

Recently Azzarito (2010) has published an excellent revision on the visual methodologies employed in kinesiology and physical culture contexts in which she highlights the importance of the use of these methodologies in the study of social construction of the body, and how the selection of the images by the researchers has provided more insight into the subjective dimensions of this process.

Staffieri (1967) asked to assign 39 adjectives of various behavior/personality traits to silhouettes that represented extreme endomorph, mesomorph, and ectomorph body types to 90 male children from 6 to 10 years of age. The results clearly indicate a common stereotype of behavior/personality traits associated with various body types; all the significant adjectives favorable were assigned to the mesomorph image; the adjectives assigned to endomorph were socially unfavorable and socially aggressive; the adjectives assigned to the ectomorph were primarily unfavorable (personally) and of a generally socially submissive type. Children showed a clear preference to look like the mesomorph image and demonstrated reasonable accuracy in perception of their own body types. This study demonstrated that by age 6, perceptions and evaluations of children's behavior and personality were related to their design and physical preferences. Thus, whereas fat body received the worst evaluation, the mesomorphic one received the best.

Irrespective of their own gender, children and adults tend to attribute personality traits differentially to endomorphs, mesomorphs, and ectomorphs. Many studies have been found in which people have highly favorable stereotypes of mesomorphs and highly negative stereotypes of endomorphs (Felker, 1972; Lerner, 1969a, 1969b; Ryckman, Dill, Dyer, Sanborn & Gold, 2001).

The social construction of body and their relationship with participation in physical activity has been studied using quantitative methods as questionnaires (Azzarito & Solmon, 2009; Hagger, Stevenson, Chatzisarantis, Gaspar, Leitão and González, 2010). Azzarito and Solmon (2009) studied the young people's embodiment in 528 students (262 females and 266 males; 183 blacks and 300 whites) from a public high school of the United States and concluded that gender and the race are crucial factors in the participation of students in physical education practices. As the authors affirm, physical education practices operating through these discourses reproduced ideals of feminized or masculinized physical activities and functioned to privilege boys by encouraging their participation in physical education.

For example Hagger et al. (2010) examined the effects of culture, gender and age on the structure and mean levels of physical self-concept (PSC) and social physique anxiety (SPA) in 3528 adolescents from Portugal and Spain. An additional aim was to examine the effects of these variables on the PSC-SPA correlation. The results indicated that females tended to have significantly higher average SPA levels and lower PSC levels relative to males. There was a general downward trend in PSC in males and females in each cultural group. SPA was relatively consistent in females and higher than males in most groups. SPA was relatively similar in males and females in younger age groups (born 1994–1996), but declined in older males.

Different studies have investigated male and female student experiences in school-based physical education (Bramham, 2003; Camacho, Fernández & Rodríguez, 2006; Ruiz, 2011; Taboas & Rey, 2011a, b). Sports and physical education are intimately connected with the construction and maintenance of embodied, hegemonic masculine stereotypes (Hickey et al., 1998). Recent studies about the P.E. formal curriculum provide compelling evidence suggesting that many girls are underserved by the existing provisions (Gorely et al., 2003), and this tendency seems to be repeated around the world. In many PE secondary school lessons, girls are currently allowed to choose the activities in which they wish to participate. They are given this flexibility since most PE programs are dominated by masculine values. (Penney, 2002; Wright, 1996; Reynold, 1997).

Body shape and size and their relationship to physical activities such as sport and exercise have increasingly become markers of gender identity. Many authors report this evidence by considering young people's constructions of their relationship between masculinity and muscle, taking femininity and muscularity into account and analyzing their perceptions of the risks of transgressing conventional boundaries of gender and sexuality (Gorely et al., 2003).

Oliver and Lalik (2004) examined what happened during their efforts to develop a curriculum strand designed to be implemented in girls' physical education classes. The curriculum strand had the objective of helping adolescent girls to name the discourses that shape their lives and regulate their bodies. These perspectives allowed them to think carefully about ways of working with the girls. William and Bedward (2001) stated that there was a cultural and generational gap between teachers and students, and this gap had led to neglected girls' interests in PE, and was also reinforced by traditional family structures (Deam & Gilroy, 1998; Kay, 1995).

Ruiz (2011) suggested that physical education in school excludes corporeity that use their capacity for action to adopt models and positions that are often different from those advocated by education theory and considered that current pedagogical corporal practices fail to acknowledge alternative projects that subjects manage to build in the margins of mainstream school discourses and customs. Brown and Evans (2004) studied the role played by male P.E. teachers in reproducing gender relationships and ideologies, and reached the conclusion that

the gender dispositions embodied by student teachers constituted a powerful influence on their professional behavior. Hargreaves (1994) suggests that in order to gain public recognition and acceptance of their participation in PE, women have increasingly had to *"play like men"*.

Evans, Davies and Penney (2001) consider gender differences evident in primary school years, to become greater with age and persist in extra curricular leisure activities. Thus, activities such as aerobics/ pop activities, dancing pop music, or hip-hop dancing, circuit training and general fitness have greater levels of participation among women than in men. To many post-structural feminists, the body is a symbol of desire in its psychic, discursive and material dimensions (Kelly, 1997).

Social perception of the body, which is based on thinness and physical development, has been of vital importance in the development of masculine and feminine stereotypes (Hall, 1996; Matthews, 1987).

Research about the concept of body dimension in teenagers is key to establish conceptual differences between boys and girls (Davies & Harre, 1989). Shen, Chen, Tolley and Scrabis (2003) examined the extent to which personal interest; situational interest and measurable learning outcomes were associated with gender. Girls demonstrated higher personal interest in dance than boys. Girls were not as physically active as boys; their skill/knowledge outcome measures were higher than those of boys. However, it appears that gender may have little impact on the motivational effect of situational interest. Along with these conclusions, it also was found that girls´ in-class learning may have higher quality than that of boys as a result of higher personal interest.

González, Rodríguez, Kirk, Carrasco and Rodríguez (2004) stated that every shape of currently practiced sports demands a certain body figure, which is ideal for its practice. The idea of a muscular body as a synonym for masculinity becomes a reason for controversy when such body is feminine. This leads to the use of pejorative adjectives like "butch woman" or "she looks like a guy!" Young people used to make comments of this kind because these muscular women didn't fit into typical feminine stereotypes (Paechter, 2001). When developing a PE program, a reflective teacher should take into account several considerations:

1) It is necessary to have the ability to change the class curriculum and to be able to modify socio-cultural viewpoints, which are negative for certain, groups (Penney, 2002).

2) It is necessary to maintain certain acceptable standards for every ethnic and religious group, e. g., the extent to which Muslim girls can freely use their body (Young, 1980; Benn, 1996).

But if many physical activity programs are adapted to such specific groups, can we achieve the same objectives for the remainder of the group? For example, in Physical Education the main researches using these methodologies have focused their interest on girls and boys conceptions of the gendered body (Azzarito & Solmon, 2009; Azaritto, 2009; Gorely et al. 2003 and González et al., 2007). Gorely et al. (2003) used eight slides of male and female track and field and dancers, and a photo of anorexic girls trying to provoke subjective reflections of young´s body representations. The authors concluded that the associations made by the young people between forms of femininity and masculinity and body shapes and sizes, and the risks associated with transgressing heterosexuality through the use and display of the body, had a significant influence in their discussions of gender-appropriate physical activities. These discussions support the notion developed in the literature on muscularity and gender that the sporting and exercising body is a site gendered and sexual identity. The group and individual interviews also reflected this tension between increasing awareness of equity of

access on the one hand and the continuity of sex-differentiation of activities on the other. The boys and girls expressed views that supported the right of individuals to participate in activities that interested them.

The study conducted by González et al. (2007) had the objective of analyzing individual differences in the perceptions about masculine and feminine stereotypes in physical education experiences among secondary students through photo-elicitation interview using the same methodology and instruments previously employed by Gorely et al. (2003) with the purpose of studying the perceptions of Spanish secondary students. The tools consisted of eight slides showing different body types (divers, male and female bodybuilders, anorexics, dancers and female discus throwers).

Data reported for this study was collected over a 4-month period. Three hundred students, ages 12 to 17 years old participated in this study. Images were intended to stimulate discussion among the group members. Such discussions focused on topics identified in the literature as important to the construction of embodied identity among young people, mainly body shape and size, attractiveness, gender-appropriate bodies, and athletic bodies and gender (Azzarito & Solmon, 2009; Azaritto, 2009). It was used an open-answer survey with 41 questions to collect data with respect to students' preferences toward different body types (divers, male and female bodybuilders, anorexics, dancers and female discus throwers), used by Gorely et al. (2003) in their research study. It was of interest the students' opinions about:

- *The appearance of the person in the picture.*

- *Comparison of the picture's body and their own body.*

- *The advantages of looking like the person in the picture.*

- *Comparison of the different body types.*

The central focus of these questions was to discover how young people made use of particular discursive resources about body shape and size as part of the process of socially constructing femininities and masculinities. The results of the Spanish sample were broadly consistent with those obtained by Gorely et al. (2003). However, it is important to add that there were two underlying processes converging. First, as these authors found, young people claimed to have a liberal view of body shape. In theory, individuals could be presented in any shape, for the same body image perception fluctuates in students of the same age group. Opposed to this view, however, there was a second process. Young people's conceptions were shaped by enduring and extremely powerful conventional notions about the range of body shapes and sizes that might be considered appropriately feminine and masculine (Hickey et al., 1998; Bramham, 2003).

Body conceptions were clearly activated when young people considered how they would like to be and to look themselves. The existence of these two apparently contradictory processes is important in education. On one hand, they suggest that it may be possible to assist young people in having a broader view of gender-appropriate body shapes; on the other hand, helping them to do so may be very difficult, especially in the short term. Slides where feminine bodies were muscular were rejected by students, independently of their age or gender.

A social rejection existed among students to those masculine attributes that appeared in women as muscular mass. The socially accepted feminine figure does not possess masculine attributes such as a muscular body. Nevertheless the image of a buffed man was also dismissed. Even though the majority of the students agreed on the advantages of possessing certain characteristics inherent to that type of body configuration -namely, muscular strength-,

none of the male or female students wanted to look like him. The results of this study indicated that a "social construction" of the body based on masculine and a feminine pattern exists. Research have demonstrated that teenagers liked body stereotypes connected with the figure of a female diver, although they did not want to look like her because of her muscles and the "suffering" implied by her training. Both the female bodybuilder and female discus thrower's body were the most rejected stereotypes owing to their similarities with men's bodies, which were said to be "muscular and ugly."

Hyper muscularity, particularly when this was for display rather than use, presented one of the several contradictions within this conventional construction of body masculinity. Teenagers rejected the dancer's body, although not so forcefully as they rejected the female body builder, because they considered the dancer to be less muscular. The 12 and 13 year old male students liked the body type of the dancers, but the dancing activity itself was rejected as a feminine activity. Nevertheless the 14 to 17 year old pupils didn't think it was so bad. All students agreed that the anorexic stereotype was so thin that it became as unpleasant as the excessively muscled body (some even think of it as an ill body).

Young people's construction of the body was based on a stereotypical body view that determines the way they face physical activities. Certain body patterns were rejected because of an extended belief in a disapproving social stand against female muscular bodies and the effort required to possess it. This may lead to men and women to practice a group of sports that go aligned with their mental image in relation to masculine stereotypes (muscle cult) and feminine stereotypes (thinning cult). In this sense, physical education teachers may fall into stereotypical views of physical activity in the event they do not take these aspects into consideration.

Conclusions

It seems necessary to analyze the importance of gender-focused PE. In addition, it is also important to consider how sports contribute to gender stereotypes, especially the idea that muscular bodies are masculine and not feminine (Connel, 1996; Hickey et al., 1998; Oliver & Lalik, 2004). These stereotypes are the result of the connection young people make between shape and size of the body, gender and physical activity, so the socially constructed "gender appropriateness" in students can mediate their motivation in learning physical activities (Martínez de Quel et al., 2010; Young, 1980; Shen et al., 2003).

Educators in general, psychologists and physical educators need to pay more attention to both how adolescent girls' cultural perspectives contribute to their sense of self and how important is to provide girls with many opportunities to analyze and stimulate critique discursive practices that shape embodied subjectivity and desire (Azzarito, 2009). Some particular sports and physical activities such as dance are themselves gender-differentiated, and that the physical value they offer to girls is perceived to have little exchange value outside the field of physical activity (Wright, 1996; Shen et al., 2003).

As Brown and Evans (2004) proposed in relation to the elimination of sexist connotations about body size and shape, it is important to recognize the role of PE teachers as direct promoters of physical activity and sport. In fact, physical educators should be aware of their relevant role as agents of cultural change and reproducers of sociocultural trends and so select both the most appropriate curriculum and content to eliminate the existing stereotypical views.

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