

16 - THE CORPORAL PRACTICES BY THE MEDIA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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This work proposes an analysis of the meanings of the physical fitness for visitors of a public park, discussing how those subjects understand the influences of the media. For that, a research was accomplished with base in the theoretical-methodological references of cultural axis, through an ethnographic perspective.

It takes a part in the research seven physical fitness practicers (A., B., E., F., L., R., e S.), which frequent the most important public park of Campinas city in São Paulo. Every inquired are male, between 20 and 30 years. The contact with them begins through formal interviews and observations done in the area of muscular activity of the park.

The research tries to understand what the subjects do, as they do and as they justify what they do. We try to identify the meanings of the physical fitness for the seven visitors of the park and how they understand the influences of the media.

After describe all the received and observed information, we tried to accomplish something close to the conception from Geertz (1989) denominate "dense description". In other words, it was made an interpretation of the significant structures related to the muscular activity practice.

The author is cautious when recognizing the limits of the ethnographic practice, considering that the researcher makes an interpretation of the studied culture in an indirect way, since the subject of the research is that interprets the codes of his directly half, because it is his culture that is being described. Therefore, it is a researcher construction. The author recognizing those limits and identifies three characteristics of the ethnographic description:

" (...) It is interpretative; that interprets the fluency of the social speech; and the involved interpretation consists of trying to save the statement" (Geertz, 1989, p.31).

There is still a fourth characteristic that the author identifies in your way of practicing the ethnography: "it is microscopic" (Geertz, 1989, p.31). That is a characteristic that delimits the researcher's field, although the author recognizes that this doesn't mean there are not anthropological interpretations in great scale, of whole societies. On the contrary, the author proposes an extension of the analyses to wider contexts, in other words, when doing a 'dense description' of the culture of groups or specific societies, the anthropologist leaves of such a context to understand wider questions of the social structure. Such study does this attempt. When accomplishing the dense description on the meanings that the physical fitness practicers confer to this practice and the way as they understand the influences of the media, we propose a reflection on questions inserted in the referring social structure to the health, corporal beauty, ideology of the media etc.

For the accomplishment of the interviews, in the first encounters the participants were questioned on the habits with relationship to the corporal practices, the period of time that they frequent the park, the schedules in that they are there and the frequency. Soon after, they were questioned on the daily habits about general information, which were the principal means of information that they used. When they talk about the newspapers, magazines or television programs, the following question was destined to know which newspaper, magazine, program of television in a more specific way.

Other two questions were asked:

1. What is the meaning of the physical fitness and of the other practices that you accomplish here in the park?;
2. Do you notice the influences of the media in that (s) option (s)?

In agreement with the given answers other questions appeared. Themes as health, alimentary cares, corporal beauty, orientation of exercises and personal relationships, they are some examples of subjects that were part of the interviews. For the analysis of the meanings attributed to the physical fitness we looked for arguments in the authors' ideas that understand the body and the corporal practices as cultural constructions. We presented to follow the construction of the theoretical reference and the analysis of the obtained data.

The cultural construction of the body

To understand the body as being a cultural construction is fundamental to justify the existence of different corporal patterns of beauty, in different times, groups or specific societies.

According to Daolio (1995), "(...) in the body are enrolled every rules, norms and values of a specific society, for being it the way of the primary contact from the individual with the atmosphere that surrounds" (p.39). We identify and analyze that group of rules, norms and values in an individual, and we can understand a private society, once in the body the cultural codes of such society are printed.

The participants of this research attributed to your practice some meanings that they link to the atmosphere of the park, to the friends that do together, subjective aspects and for medical recommendation. However, what gets the attention it is the unanimous concern with the corporal aesthetics, as we can notice below in the example:

"I think the main meaning of the physical fitness is to win some weight, even of mass it is ... I was thin sometimes ago and now I have been recovering a little weight" (Interviewed A.)

This concern with the corporal beauty seems associated to the strong influences of the media, which transmits messages daily reminding the subjects on the cares with the health and the corporal beauty. In other words, it seems to be a cultural logic that it relates the corporal practices to certain corporal patterns of beauty, also influencing the physical fitness practicers that participated in the research. The search for the corporal beauty involves the use of several interventions related to the corporal aesthetics. According to Maisonneuve & Schweitzer (1984), that is in reality an individual and collective desire to arrest to normative social models in relation to the physical aspect. And, when we intervene in the body, we think in reaching an idealized representation of ourselves, in which the beauty is not the only thing that counts. Such authors also associate those corporal changes to the change of social order, affirming that, when we modify the corporal aspect obtaining a more desirable aspect, it is tended to acquire social *status* and better family or professional situation. In other words, when we intervene in the body through different techniques (surgical, tattoos, corporal practices etc), we modify directly the subject's external reality and indirectly the form as we were seen by the society. In other words, we will also transform the vision and the attitudes of the other ones in relation to us.

Another important point in the research is the association that some interviewees do between corporal beauty and health:

"(...) without noticing I was involved with the physical fitness, it makes me feel well. After about three, four months, did my body begin to change ...so I think... the physical activity, what is it? Of course, the aesthetics of the body, without a doubt, and life quality, the health even. My health" (Interviewed E.).

It is noticed that, in the citation above, the interviewee refers to the question of the health and of the life quality without considering that they are different concepts, in fact, that association seems to be also common in the physical education area.

Another type of done association is between health and corporal beauty, taking to understand the meanings of the physical fitness as part of certain social order, that, influenced by the consumer culture, diffuse daily a concept of health as being synonymous of a beautiful body.

Starting from that logic, the body, for being subject to an older process, it should be modified and rejuvenated, and, the physical activity, among other intervention practices, will serve as middle for that. In other words, the message is addressed to the exclusive concern with the aesthetics of the body, not importing the consequences for the subject's health.

Featherstone (1995) identifies three fundamental perspectives for the consumer culture. First of all, the author talk about the expansion of the capitalist production of wares, which created a vast accumulation of material culture in the form of wares and places for consumption and shopping.

With that, it has been happening the proliferation of activities related to the leisure and to the consumption. Among those activities there are the corporal practices and the group of meanings attributed to them. In second place, Featherstone (1995) makes reference the sociological conception. In this second perspective, the accumulation of wares leads the people to create ties or establish social distinctions. In third place, the author discusses on the emotional pleasures of the consumption, the dreams and desires that are part of the cultural imaginary of the consumer society and the specific places of consumption that produce several types of physical excitement and aesthetic pleasures. Those three perspectives make possible to contemplate about the established relationship among the subject of a specific society and the meanings that are related to the consumer attitude.

In the interviewee's statement F., we can identify as that incentive process to the consumption it is diffused strongly by the media. The interviewee talk about his nourish habits:

" (...) I have a lunch when I am in a hurry, fast food, you know? Then a lot of thing like that... not very healthy ... to eat snack, Macdonald's, at night pizza, Coke the whole day (...)."

The interviewee mentions one of the traditional snack bars and one mark of soft drinks thoroughly spread and globally known, and, those marks substituted the name of the product.

The search for the corporal beauty seems also to do part of the consumer attitude of the subject of a certain middle, identifying a widespread thought process that is constituted in true standardization of the aesthetic rules. In this case, the consumption is leading for the body image that is looked for.

Most of the interviewees speaks about a body type without excess of muscles as reference of model of masculine beauty and the physical fitness as a middle for that, sentences like " feels well " and " to maintain the form " are examples of terms used to justify the practice of the physical fitness.

Featherstone (1994) argues that in the contemporary western societies the exacerbated process by the search of a conduct and a younger procedure happens "(...) for the strong emphasis in the physical appearance, in the visual image that is one of the fundamental elements that impels the consumer culture" (p.67). The same author refers to the volume of images of the human body, associated to the youth, health and beauty, used to sell goods and several practices through announcements. Those ideas are central for the aims of this work, since the corporal practices are part of a culture that, besides diffusing images of beautiful bodies as being synonymous of healthy bodies, those influences reach different societies and social groups. In that sense, both the followers of the corporal practices and the professionals that work with such practices are involved in that logic influenced strongly by the media in the diffusion in symbolic ways.

The influences of the media for the physical fitness practican

The televisions, the newspapers, magazines, folders, the different institutions of the media are strong influence in the construction of values and meanings attributed to the body and the corporal practices.

Such discussion brings to understand the phenomenon of the mass communication. But what is such phenomenon specifically? Thompson (1998) defines the term as: " (...) *institutionalized production and widespread diffusion of symbolic goods through the fixation and transmission of information or symbolic content*" (p.32).

In spite of considering such term appropriate to refer to the group of developments happened in the communication means starting from certain historical moment, the author is cautious when doing considerations with relationship to your use. One of his observations is about the term "communication". For the author, the technical means possess particularities that chance the idea in co-presence context.

The second point is the concept "mass". For him, the term allows to think in the 'homogeneity of passive subjects', therefore, it can win a mistake meaning. Thompson (1998) considers wrong your use if we think in the new types of net information and communication that are usual nowadays. Thompson (1998) considers wrong your use if we think in the new types of net information and communication that are usual nowadays. In your conception, the terms "mediated communication" or "media" are the most appropriate, given the diversity and complexity of the actual technical means and the different interaction degrees that it provides.

The subjects, social agents, constantly interact the influences of the media and with your symbolic constructions - are culture receivers and producers, in other words, they interpret and they attribute sense to their lived reality. That fact allows thinking that exists a group in symbolic ways that circulate in the media and so much can be to sustain relationships of power, as they are interpreted in a critical way, serving as resistance to such relationships. The interviewee A., when commenting on the consumption of nourish complements, makes reference to the information of the media:

"The only thing that I have been taking is vitamin and mineral salts, you see... is the only that I have been using. Until those days I saw in television the report speaking about some products that tell some things in the propaganda. in anyway... it has other, of anabolizants that is not describing in the label, I saw in television but I don't remind which reportage was... if there is some newspapers I don't remember which was (...)."

It is important to point out one of the characteristics of the media presented by Thompson (1998) that is the one of diffusing messages, images, information, reaching different socio-cultural contexts. It is remains to know how those received

messages are interpreted. In the interviewee's case A., the television mentioned reportage gives back-up to confirm the interviewee's option for the vitamins and mineral salts. In his speech, the use of those products is more worthy of support of the anabolizants, but could be that this interpretation type is not one more way of symbolic power of the media?

After being questioned about the meaning of looking for some information in the media, A. answered:

"I have not been looking for something specific in the area. But... so... if appears like this one reportage in magazine that speaks about one part of the body, I am interested, even in current magazine. Look! Those other magazines there, sometimes appear some reportage... but I have not been looking for anything like this... yes... particularly for muscular activity

At the first moment, it is interesting, the interviewee uses the back up of the television themes to justify his option for the vitamins and mineral salts instead of other types of commercialized products. And, soon after, he denies looking for specific information for physical fitness, what looks like a way not to be contradictory, once in the beginning of the chat he had denied to be influenced by the media:

"(...) looking for that... this meaning there, I don't see very much [he was saying that he didn't notice the influences of the media in his practice, affirming that it has been trying to look for in the practices that it accomplishes in the park, willpower, a little more of mental force, disposition and body power]. I see... really... only the beauty aesthetics. In the propagandas, motivating just the appearance (...)" (Interviewed A.).

Although the interviewee affirms not to be influenced by the media, he receives the spread messages and interprets them in a specific way. It is important to consider that sometimes this process is unconscious. Fact that can justify the interviewee's attitude in not noticing initially that the simple fact of commenting on the information of the media, already expresses the influence of the same.

For the answers of most of the interviewees, the media exercises strong symbolic influence, so much with relationship to the search for certain corporal patterns, as for the diffusion of practices and habits associated to the healthiest life. However, this influence happens in a subtle way, most of the time being denied by the interviewees:

"If there is beautiful person in television it doesn't influence me, it influences weak people, but not me" (interviewed L.).

In another moment this interviewee refers to certain habits and spread beauty patterns from the media that are present in his representations:

"(...) I think I link up the body with the health. If the person has 150kg but has health, that is for me already the ideal. Now... physically, it is the man... has wide shoulder, the abdomen... until me... I cannot speak that I haven't [it is noticed that he does a self-description]... arms more or less strong, then physically it is that, it is that, what you look and speaks like this 'that guy is not then sedentary'... it is that" (Interviewed L.).

The interviewee's speech takes to reflections: there is the statement that the health is not related with the subject's weight, however, when continuing the sentence, the sedentary idea it is evaluated by the glance, for the appearance of the other. There is here an example what Thompson (1998) denominates symbolic power of the media, originate in the production activity, transmission and reception of the meaning in the symbolic forms.

Conclusion

In the present study, were analyzed the meanings done to the physical fitness by a group of visitors of a public park of Campinas. For the obtained answers, the means of information are characterized as fundamental elements in the diffusion of a consumer culture that involves the search for certain corporal models of beauty and of health.

The reasons why the subjects practice physical activity it seems to have relationship with change in the life due to the professional career, the search for better life conditions and investment in the studies, for the factor age or for some event that caused changes in the life as the case of a recent matrimonial separation. The physical activity, among other practices that accomplish in the park, contributes to changes in the body, what could be a necessary factor for affirmation of the roles in the social life.

For it be susceptible to different interpretations, the information transmitted by the media can be read in a critical way. The multiples receiving individuals can question the received information, opposing to the logic of the market and of the consumption, and making other choices in the life, different from those proposed by the same.

We can remind the importance of the physical education professionals and of the need of a performance that considers the meanings attributed to the body and the corporal practices, built culturally. Those professionals can propose another ways to think the body, the health, the beauty, urging your students to a critical reading of the information transmitted by the media. For that, it is fundamental a formation that provides to the futures teachers the understanding of the dynamics of the social relationships and the cultural determinations.

It is waited that the discussion on the treated themes if it doesn't drain in what it was presented, but that other studies can give continuity here to the reflections done, once the cultural influences are constantly produced, and in other times, groups or societies, different meanings can be attributed to the corporal practices, just as other interpretations they can be done regarding the information transmitted by the media.

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ABSTRACT

Through a qualitative study it was possible to identify and interpret the meanings of physical fitness to seven practicans who regularly attend a public park in Campinas, São Paulo. Upon interpreting the obtained data, it was concluded

that, of all the meanings that the interviewees attribute to physical fitness, they were unanimously concerned with physical beauty and health. At certain moments, the interviewees showed an understanding of the consumer logic of the media, but this did not seem to be enough to keep them away from its influence. This work attempts to contribute to Physical Education professionals will be able to rethink their concepts about body and physical fitness practices and better understand the mechanisms of the media.

KEY-WORDS: media (publicity), health, physical beauty.

LES ENTRAÎNEMENTS CORPORELS ET LE MÉDIA: UN ETHNOGRAPHIC ÉTUDIE

RÉSUMÉ

À travers une étude qualitative c'était possible identifier et interpréter les significations de mise en forme à sept praticants qui régulièrement assistent à un parc public dans Campinas, São Paulo. Sur interpréter le données obtenu, il a été conclu que, de toutes les significations que les interviewés attribuent à mise en forme, ils se sont inquiétés de beauté physique et santé à l'unanimité. À certains moments, les interviewés ont montré une compréhension de la logique du consommateur du média, mais cela n'a pas paru être assez pour les garder loin de son influence. Ce travail essaie de contribuer aux professionnels de l'Éducation Physiques sera capable de repenser leurs concepts au sujet de corps et la mise en forme pratique et mieux comprend les mécanismes du média.

LES MOTS DE LA CLEF: le média (publicité), santé, beauté physique.

LAS PRÁCTICAS CORPÓREAS Y LOS MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN: UN ESTUDIO ETNOGRÁFICO

RESUMEN

La realización de un estudio cualitativo permitió identificar y interpretar los significados de la musculación para siete personas que frecuentan una plaza pública de la ciudad de Campinas, SP. Al interpretar los datos escuchados, se llegó a la conclusión de que, los significados atribuidos a tal práctica, la preocupación con la belleza corporal y la salud son unánimes. En algunos momentos, los entrevistados mostraron comprender la lógica consumista de los medios de comunicación, pero eso pareció no ser suficiente para distanciarse de las influencias de la misma. Este trabajo intenta contribuir para que los profesionales de Educación Física puedan repensar sus conceptos sobre cuerpo y prácticas corporales y comprender mejor la estructura de los mecanismos publicitarios.

PALABRAS-CHAVES: publicidad, salud, belleza física.

AS PRÁTICAS CORPORAIS PELA MÍDIA: UM ESTUDO ETNOGRÁFICO

RESUMO

A realização de um estudo qualitativo permitiu identificar e interpretar os significados da musculação para sete frequentadores de um parque público da cidade de Campinas, SP. Ao interpretar os dados obtidos, chegou-se à conclusão que, dos significados atribuídos a tal prática, a preocupação com a beleza corporal e a saúde foram unânimes. Em alguns momentos, os entrevistados mostraram compreender a lógica consumista da mídia, mas isso pareceu não ser suficiente para se distanciarem das influências da mesma. Esse trabalho procura contribuir para que os profissionais de Educação Física possam repensar seus conceitos sobre corpo e práticas corporais e compreender melhor os mecanismos dos meios de informação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: mídia (publicidade), saúde, beleza física.