

# THE BODY MANIPULATIONS ON THE SOCIAL IMAGE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE STUDENTS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES

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## **Abstract**

The objective of the work was to analyze the social image of teenage girls in the Physical Education classes of the senior year of High School in a State school in the city of Marechal Cândido Rondon, Paraná, in order to verify the articulations between the representations of the students and the body manipulations produced by them to validate the image demanded in the interactions experienced in class. Referring to the notions of representation and of body manipulations, observations and semi-structured interviews were performed to describe and analyze the attributes of the face presented by the students and the schemes of their acting line in relation to the body manipulations. Having developed the analysis in categories, it was concluded that the representation of the social image of the teenage girls in Physical Education classes is a consequence of the body manipulations performed by them, and the choices of these manipulations are characterized as strategies related to other people in the group and the educational situation.

**Keywords:** Body Manipulations - Representation - Social Image - Female Students - Physical Education

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## **Introduction**

Even the most distracted people are able to realize that in the last decades significant changes in how women beautify themselves, how they feel, how they are and how they behave have happened. If the first half of the twentieth century, the main virtues of women were give birth to strong children, take care of themselves, their husbands and their homes, preserving family and social integrity of the time (GOELLNER, 2003), there is no doubt that in recent decades there have been changes in the field of appearances, sexuality, family and women's work, particularly as to setting the

mandatory trio beauty-youth-health (DEL PRIORE, 2000). The image of women has changed and this transformation has gone through the cultural form they relate to their body, learning how to exercise, more and more, different ways of being that are intertwined with everyday situations and vary according to each environment where she is inserted.

The image of women in society is defined and understood, in this work, in relation to the representations it develops in the interactions to be recognized from certain social attributes, whose work includes, increasingly, the manipulations of the body. This understanding is linked to the notion of representation developed and introduced by Goffman (1970, 1975, 1988) and to the notion of body manipulation developed by Le Breton (2003, 2006). Metaphorizing, Goffman (1975, 1988) describes that the individual lives as if on a stage in a play. Each person strives to control the image that gives the other being the leading actor of his own existence/image, representing all the time; at times, moving away from their real identity, wearing a mask to look like what you want others to see it, camouflaging or hiding stigmata. Le Breton (2003, p. 28), in turn, deals with the manipulation of the body in the sense of accessory-body, stating that "anatomy is no longer a destination, but an accessory of the presence of a raw material to be shaped, redefined, submitted to the design of the moment".

The social phenomenon of diversification in the way of being of women and these notions of representation and manipulation prompted the body to look at a particular environment, the school. The purpose of this study was to analyze the social image of girls (teenagers) in the interactions during physical education classes, in 3rd year of high school class of a State College in the city of Marechal Cândido Rondon, Paraná. Understanding Physical Education as a time when the body is the its highest exposure (MAZONI, 2005), we have studied the link between social representations of the students and body handling produced by them to enforce the required image in the interactions experienced during classes. This is aimed to understand how the students handle or care for the body to project its image in social interaction, developing a performance capable of keeping balanced what "they think about themselves" (virtual social image) and what "people think about them" (real social image).

The theoretical and methodological framework for evaluating the performances of students in social interactions during the class, attributes and schemas were described as what Goffman (1970) called face and line. Goffman (1970, p. 13) defined face as "[...] positive social value a person effectively claims for themselves by the line others assume that was followed during a particular contact. The face is the image of the person outlined in terms of approved social attributes [...]", it must be accepted and cohesive in relation to the situation in which it is inserted. The line, however, explains the author, refers to a "[...] scheme of verbal and nonverbal acts whereby [a person] expresses their view of the situation, and its assessment of the participants through it, especially themselves. It does not matter whether or not the person intends to follow a line; they will find that in practice they do so"(p. 13), working to convey the impression that matters, avoiding being discredited or inconsistent.

In the survey, noting the line, schemes related to the handling of the body to enforce the image sought were described primarily, considering the body as a support, an unfinished matter, variable in the state of the subject, whose purpose is to serve the demands of self-representation (LE BRETON, 2003). In addition to the changes triggered in the body (removal, distortion, additions, writings in the skin), treatments, accessories, concealment, disclosure, use, control and body cover-ups present in situations of physical education classes were also considered as handling.

## **Methodology**

The attributes of the face and the schemes of the line of action were discussed in a descriptive way, from: 1) observations of semi-structured physical education classes, a class of 3rd year of high school of a State College in the city of Marechal Cândido Rondon, Paraná, between August and September 2008, and 2) semi-structured interviews with the students in the class. Before the survey of the information, letters of request and authorization were submitted to the school and to parents, along with a Consent Form, stating the objectives of the study and research conditions.

First, general observations of 18 students from the group were performed in two classes to identify similarities and differences between them in relation to the face and to the line. Based on this

information, six students were selected to be observed for more than two classes (these students were identified with letters A through F). The choice of only six students was necessary because it is a study of the interactions face-to-face, inspired by the works of Goffman (1970, 1975, 1988), involving many details of the interactions. The criterion for the selection of these students was that they behave distinctly during the classes, and also by adopting well-marked (typical) ways over how to represent their social image. After the observations, in two other classes, interviews were conducted with six students.

The observations of interactions were conducted in a semi-structured way. In a form previously elaborated, with specific fields, we recorded the faces (i.e., the primary image that was obtained by observing the students, corresponding to a positive social value that they claimed for themselves during interactions in classes) and lines of action (i.e., spelling out the acts of verbal and nonverbal manipulations on the body of the students to enforce the impression that mattered - removal, distortion, additions, writings in the skin, treatments, accessories, concealment, disclosure, use, control and cover-ups). The interviews were also semi-structured. From the accumulated information of the observations, scripts issues specific to each student were prepared, with questions about the faces and lines. The interviews were carried out individually in the classroom, while other colleagues participating in physical education classes, and recorded on a tape recorder. Later, they were transcribed and subjected to analysis, along with information of the observations.

With notes of observations and transcribed interviews in hand, the analysis of the information was developed through a process of coding and categorizing, following a reduction strategy through categorizations and paraphrases (FLICK, 2004). The operation represented a codification of the fragmentation of texts into units of meaning (a total of 101), i.e., phrases, sections or even paragraphs that characterize an attribute of the face or a scheme of the line, and categorizing an effort to group units of meanings in a paraphrase which represented, in general, the face and line of students.

### **Handling of body representation in social**

The analysis of observations and interviews resulted in two categories, which were developed in the form of headings. The results

and discussions were presented in the sense of showing: 1) the face claimed by the students, 2) the line of action developed by them in interactions, and 3) an exercise in interpretation, in which the results are articulated with other studies.

### Vain, strong and active students: the body as capital

The face, paraphrased as a vain strong and active student was represented by three of the six students (A, E, D) and is related to positive social value of having/being a good body care, especially in relation to the thin ideal, based on concern with appearance and expectation of seduction, i.e., in the eyes of others. It also includes attributes of a strong, challenging, free and active teenager in interactions in physical education classes. The performance developed by these students (involving bodily care and handling) to make this picture is that other people believe it was formed with the following line of action:

- Care with body shape: the students can be recognized by the exposure of the body or its parts, hence the caution in administering it as an enterprise. An example is the statement of student A: I have been careful with food for a week, eating more vegetables, because I realized that I was gaining too much weight.
- Care about what may or may not appear in the interactions: the showed longing for clothes that valued certain parts of your body. A student who had a thin body opted to use shirts that would stick to the body and pants the legging type, which makes the curves of the body clearly visible. Another one, for being overweight, has chosen to use T-shirts and shorts, highlighting the legs and hiding the belly.
- Eye Care: they use eyeliners and mascara, and sometimes eye base, the same color of the clothes they are wearing. They said they feel the need to highlight the look. [...] I feel like I'm dull without makeup, especially the eyes, it is a place of our face I like to showcase more, said the student;
- Hair Care: they said they do hair hydration, care about the color and cut and, when possible, like to straighten their hair. On this care, student D explained that [...] for me, the hair is what makes a person. I'm always doing something to not fall into the routine, I cut it and dye it [...] I have had red hair and felt powerful.
- Nail care: they were long and well cared for. One student highlighted it with drawings of flowers and color change.
- Use of accessories: they were big and flashy, mostly long earrings,

bracelets and colorful, many of them of different materials (acrylic, metal), necklaces with large pendants and usually silver in color. [...] I really like big things, something that really draws attention, explained the A student, in the interview.

- Active participation in class and facing the boys: it was observed that the students showed they face boys (when teams are mixed) and lead girls teams. They have sports skills and seem to like classes in practice because they engage, regardless of the sport. On this type of participation, two students said: I love to play ball, any sport fascinates me, at the time of the game I become a boy [...]. I really go face to face with boys [...], all the girls are scared and I'm not, I face them, I get the ball, I want to make a difference in the game (the student), I like to play as the goalkeeper, because it seems like they are is a key part of the team and I like to be the important there, everyone will see if I let the ball in or not, or if I have what it takes or not (Student D).

- Relationships with colleagues, it was observed that only one student talked to most of the group (boys and girls) during the game, while the other two highlighted this feature still on the path of the classroom to the sports arena, or other where the practice would be held. The relationship with colleagues, said the student, is emphasized during Physical Education classes, in the classroom, I'm used to talking more with my friend [name of friend], but at game time I talk to everyone. Regarding this group participation, Student D reports: [...] I hate doing things alone, and as in physical education classes are all in a group, all as a team, I participate because I really like groups.

- Body marks<sup>1</sup>: two students had body arts. One, a piercing with a red stone on the nose, the other one, a butterfly tattoo on the ankle and a silver piercing in the nose (later during the interview, it was found that this student also had a tongue piercing). Student D describes the reasons and the meanings of piercings and tattoos to her, [...] nose piercing because I find it very beautiful, and the tongue was because I felt like having it, when I saw it in girls, it seemed like they were strong and I think the same about me, I'm a strong person, I'm a person who persists, and did it to demonstrate the strong side, who was not afraid to have her tongue pierced[...]; I did (three butterflies, which means transformation and I did right when I was getting more mature, when I started to live by myself.

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1-The term body marks is used here in the sense of the formulation of Le Breton (2003, p. 34), when the author reports that the body, as a projection surface of itself to the other, is burned, mutilated, shot, cut, tattooed, hindered in inappropriate costumes.



This line of representation developed by the students A, D and E, through bodily manipulation to make others believe in the face of vain, strong and active teenagers, shows that in the interactions of physical education classes, the physical appearance is so relevant that the physical presentation of yourself seems to be worth socially by moral presentation, as argued Le Breton (2006). Thus, the manipulations of the body, how to dress, pinching the face, nail care, seek support bodily attributes culturally accepted and understood as favorable social group. Vanity and thinness, the enhancement of appearance expecting seduction are positive social values, as it experiences a time of "aesthetics in everyday life ", a phenomenon that, in Featherstone (1995: 98-100), is related to the existence of a project to turn life into a work of art to highlight the aesthetic issues.

The project is in progress when the students use body trickery to recognize and enforce the impression that matters, hiding possible labeling, as it was possible to verify in a student who was overweight and looked forward to slimming. She chose clothes that disguise the protruding stomach - which, according to the study by Smith and Davis (2007) and Albino and Vaz (2008), is not regarded as a body mark linked to beauty and health - and which show legs where there is a tattoo. According to a study by Sabino (2000), the representation of what is beautiful for the body of women is rooted in ratings that prioritize the male point of view and preferences, and the legs of these locations - thereby drawing attention to this "part" the body and looking away to others which do not fit a standard social aesthetically beautiful.

By highlighting the aesthetic issues through manipulations of body appearance in the hope of seduction, the body in physical education classes, and renumbered as a capital in the sense used by Goldenberg (2006, 2007) in his analysis of the meaning women's body in society. The administration of the body (LE BRETON, 2003) as a capital is related to a position within the students of Physical Education, to mark their appreciation for the other (the sensitive and protected students, as following, and the boys).

In addition, participation in sports activities in physical education classes in equal or facing the participation of children, reveals a resistance to the social discourse of the female body as weak and submissive. The involvement of women in sport was discussed by Adelman (2003). The author reflects on the fact that the participation

in sport is articulated with a rupture of the ideal of femininity characterized by weakness and submission of the woman's body. It is also through sports that the notion of active, self-determined woman is developed, avoiding the risk of being characterized as "abnormal." It means that the active participation during physical education classes, the vain, strong and active students are not just competing for a point or a goal, they are making an effort to support a social image.

The dynamics of resistance and confrontation behind the face of the vain, strong and active teenagers is very evident in the production of the marks existing in the body (piercing, tattoos). What do these marks tell us is that resistance and confronting the students boast an idea of subversion of standards, meaning they belong to themselves with such security that exposure of the body does not cause them shame or embarrassment. It is this sense of legitimacy on the handling of his own body as if to escape the constraints that Le Breton (2003) relates the growing success of body marks "[...] the implicit idea that the body is a malleable object, a provisional form of the very fractal presence" (p. 36), associated in many societies "[...] the rites of passage in different life stages or are linked to precise meanings within the community" (p. 38 ).

Students delicate and protected: the body measured

The face of entitled delicate and protected student as a representation of positive social values, refers to a measured exposure of the body, without, however, neglecting the care of the appearance (to the eyes of others) that should be discreet and sensitive, making the ideal of femininity safe from questions (protected). To legitimize this face (played by three students - B, C, F) the line of action was developed characterized by:

- Care body shape: the discourse of the students this is the effort to manage the body, with emphasis on health. [...] I am careful with food, I think it runs in the family said to Student B. The same concern was described by Student F: On weekends I eat heavier stuff and sweets, so during the week I go a little easier on them, I eat more fruit.

- Discretion of body care (beautification): the students, during class, were concerned with appearance, taking care not to draw attention because of that. [...]I don't like anything that draws much attention, because there are people who are very prejudiced, and if they see



anything flashy, they will soon be having thoughts, argued Student C. With that same sense, Student B reported: [...] I like the colors, I think they are more beautiful, I also do not like loud things that make much noise. A student says that I don't wear makeup! I don't like it, never used it. [...] People around me know me without makeup, if I used it, they would see it and that would draw too much attention. Student C states she does nothing "different" with her hair, I take care of it, but it's always like this, I like it like this, it's straight, and I feel good, I like to let it loose [...], I don't do anything in the hair, no lights nothing, it is plain natural.

- Use of delicate and discrete accessories in classes: small earrings, a few and thin bracelets, always in bright colors. Very large earrings draw a lot of attention, and it does not suit me, I like tiny and delicate earrings better said Student C. Student B did not show any enhancement for the duration of the interview. The use of accessories is linked to local interactions, such as two students explain: I like to use accessories to go out but not to come to school, especially in physical education classes (Student F), we have to figure things out, to go out we can wear things we can't in school, there is just for studying, we don't have to dress up for anyone (Student C).

- Choice of clothes that do not mark the body: students approved the mandatory use of uniform or clothes that do not show their body. When asked if they would use another type of clothes in case there was an obligation of uniform, they responded that: I would come wearing a uniform, I feel better that way "(Student F) I always come in uniform, I think it's good to come in uniform to classes [...]" (Student B) If you could go out in uniform, I would wear medium term jeans, which don't leave marks and don't tighten and a shirt that wouldn't leave marks and that weren't large and tennis shoes (Student C).

- Participation in a smaller group: show a preference for small circles of friends, most of the time had a preference for a friend. Student B confirms this observation when she said: [...] I greet [colleagues], but I have friends, my friends that I trust, a few people in the room.

- Limits of exposure of the body in physical education classes: it was found that students participate in classes by obligation. I don't like a bit of physical education and any sport, I do it to get good grades (Student B) [...] I don't participate when we have to do it with boys, and I don't like to play with them, especially soccer or association soccer, because they are very rough, thinking that girls are weaker, (Student F). A student submitted a medical certificate to not participate in school activities.

Through this line of work developed by the three students to support a coherent and protected gentle face in interactions, they claim, in effect, a different view of the other people who participate in classes. These students do not want to go unnoticed from the eyes of others, but design a presentation that seeks to leave the body except the questions that may arise. Therefore, they minimize their exposure, they are subtle in the use of accessories and clothes, they link care with appearance to health. They seek to, regarding vain and lean students (at the former category), distance themselves from the ordinary use of the body as a capital to be managed and invested in the interactions of the classes. They engendered a different performance to make people believe that detachment of the body, which resembles the aristocratic ethos and bourgeois morality.

The social representation of the sensitive and protected students incorporates what Elias (2001) called the aristocratic ethos in the Society Court figurative game as it encompasses a wide ability from them to observe the scene, define the situation as it is, control emotions, choose partners and define the image they project to others. This social image presented in physical education classes has to do with the virtues of a bourgeois morality, described by Goellner (2003), in a study on the female body in the first half of the twentieth century, the duty of women to take care of their body, but not display their physical attributes and enhanced form, which could attract the gaze of others too much, distorting the image of an "ideal woman". That is why, as a positive social value of the face, the sensitive and protected students allow the display of the female body, while promoting control strategies on the image to be represented in physical education classes as a kind of fear of the demoralization facing the opposite view.

When considering that the bodies show the time and space where they were educated and reconstruct the past in the same way they project the future, Goellner (2008) states that there is an appreciation for the display of the female body, but that view is marked by restraint on a representation of femininity, which values the compulsory heterosexuality, the delicacy and grace as virtues. This "strategy of restraint," the author explains (p. 247), "can be identified in several instances that work in the education of the body, for example, in food, clothing, architecture, formal education, religion in the family, among others".

This restraint in view of the body was found in sensitive and protected students and helps to understand the dynamics of the minimization as protection of their own femininity. They define the state of the classroom as a space not suitable for seduction, shirking of humiliation, shame and embarrassment. The disinterested way they handle, as they take care of the body, reflects a new development to safeguard before themselves and toward others (the vain, strong and active students and coarse, crude boys) their sense of femininity (i.e., heterosexual, delicate, graceful women with composure).

### **Final considerations**

The presentation and discussion of the results showed that the social representation of teenagers in Physical Education classes in the 3rd year of high school studied, is tax of handling the body that has taken place/been developed by the students. The two faces found (1 - proud, strong and active student; 2 - delicate and protected student) and the corresponding lines of action have shown that the way to handle or take care of their bodies as classes are articulated with the social representation, i.e. the effort to enforce the impression that they want others to have about them. While the vain students, exhibit strong and active body interactions, use accessories, clothing and care to highlight the appearance, bringing body marks (piercing, tattoos) , the delicate and protected students minimize the presentation of the body in the interactions, are subtle in the use of clothing, accessories and care with the look.

It was also concluded that the choice of body handling (lines of action) cannot be interpreted only as a substance of the students, but as relational strategies of placing themselves in physical education classes because they are chosen and that has taken place in the interactions (in relationship) with other people in the (situation of) physical education classes. Both vain, strong and active students (seeking to support the body as its capital - an accessory to the presence of a strong, independent, active woman), and sensitive and protected students (who seek to consolidate the image of the restrained body - protected from troubles and shames, leaving the ideal of womanhood safe) adopt this line of action in relation to each other and for the kids in class, but also consider their definitions of

the situation (school).

Finally, it became possible to conclude that the line of action developed by the students impacts on the involvement in the activities of Physical Education classes. This conclusion, despite not having a link with the objectives initially presented, shows a possible further research in order to ascertain the extent to which representations of the students are combined with the development of Physical Education classes in schools.

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