ARTIGOS

Childhood body image: a school investigation with focus groups [1] [2] [3] [4]

Imagem corporal na infância: uma investigação escolar com grupos focais

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Abstract

For Cash and Smolak, body image refers to the multidimensional construct of the mental representation of the body, permeated by comparisons and internalizations. This study aimed to analyze possible influences of sociocultural factors: media, family, and friends, on body image. The focus groups were 32 girls and 32 boys, aged 6 to 8 years old, with an average of 7.15 (SD = 0.64) years, students from public schools in the city of Juiz de Fora, MG, Brazil. Data content analysis confirmed the assumption that sociocultural factors can influence children's perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes regarding their bodies. We highlight the importance of preventive programs in the educational process aimed at positive body image.

Keywords: childhood, body image, sociocultural factors, education

Resumo

A imagem corporal, para Cash e Smolak, refere-se ao constructo multidimensional da representação mental do corpo, permeada por comparações e internalizações. O objetivo deste estudo foi analisar possíveis influências dos fatores socioculturais: mídia, família e amigos, em relação à imagem corporal. Participaram dos grupos focais 32 meninas e 32 meninos, de 6 a 8 anos de idade, com média de 7,15 (DP= 0,64) anos, estudantes de escolas públicas da cidade de Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais. A análise de conteúdo dos dados confirmou o pressuposto de que os fatores socioculturais podem influenciar a percepção, os pensamentos, as crenças e as atitudes das crianças em relação ao próprio corpo. Ressalta-se a importância de programas preventivos voltados à imagem corporal positiva no processo educativo.

Palavras-chave: *infância, imagem corporal, fatores socioculturais, educação*

Introduction

Body image can be understood as a multidimensional construct, with positive and negative characteristics. It involves thoughts, feelings, and behaviors attributed to the body, establishing attitudes related to body image (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Ferreira et al. 2014). These attitudes have been commonly subdivided into 4 components, as indicated by Campana and Tavares (2009): *affective* (emotions related to physical appearance); *cognitive* (distorted thoughts and beliefs about the body); *behavioral* (hesitation in situations to expose the body and adoption of behaviors of body check); and *general subjective dissatisfaction* (depreciation that someone has regarding their appearance as a whole).

According to Thompson et al. (1999), the attitudes related to the body may be impacted by different sociocultural factors, such as media, parents, and friends. They can influence the search for an ideal body because children incorporate values, behaviors, and concepts that allow their formation as subjects inserted in a certain context. Racine et al. (2011) affirm that access to media may be associated with an increase in the development of body dissatisfaction among children faced by television programs and other media focused on physical appearance, with slim and muscular bodies. Parental influence has also been evaluated. Some findings show that the attitudes related to maternal and parental body images are related to their children's body image (Damiano et al., 2015; Duchin et al., 2015). Friends can also help children reinforce and criticize media messages related to the body (Tatangelo & Ricciardelli, 2013). Besides this, boys and girls fear the negative evaluation of their peers (Michael et al., 2014). Ferreira et al. (2014)

point out that, in the internalization of a model of an ideal body, even very young children can have their body image affected.

In this perspective, childhood emerges as a relevant phase to study this construct, through the possible relationships with sociocultural factors, as it is considered a highly meaningful period for human life in all its aspects: physical, cognitive, social, and affective (Rabello & Passos, 2016). However, there are few studies in Brazil on this topic and even fewer qualitative investigations focused on childhood (Neves et al., 2017).

A study of literature review about children's body image was conducted by Neves et al. (2017) analyzed 33 publications and identified only 2 qualitative works, confirming the lack of qualitative research in the area. Among these studies, Martin (2015) evaluates children's understanding of body image through cartoons and comments about the body. Tatangelo and Ricciardelli (2013) point out that 'being in shape' is an aspect of the ideal body highlighted by boys and girls. More recently, the study of Neves et al. (2018) points out that the children evaluated presented attitudes that indicated concern with the body, in general, and specific aspects, besides behaviors related to body image.

Faced with the findings of the literature and the lack of qualitative studies, this article aims to qualitatively investigate attitudes related to the body image of children in the early years of Elementary Education. More specifically, we want to verify how and in what measure the family, the media, and friends can impact and influence children's feelings, beliefs, and behaviors associated with the body.

Methodological aspects

This qualitative study aims to capture the conceptions, perspectives, testimonies, and experiences of participants, which could not be meaningfully expressed by numbers (Berg, 1995; Breakwell et al., 2010). The research had a total of 64 children, 32 boys, and 32 girls, from 6 to 8 years old, with an average age of 7.15 (DP=0.64). They all live in the city of Juiz de Fora, Brazil. They are enrolled and attend 2 public schools, selected by convenience, in the South and West regions of the city. The children participating in the study were available to participate in a focal group and to have their anthropometric measures taken. We did not consider in the

study the children that, for any reason, could not participate in the data collection during the time of the sessions. Nobody refused.

The instruments used were : (a) semi-structured script, according to the theme of interest in the group sessions to organize the subjects approached and better manage time; (b) auxiliary resources, such as action figures/dolls, colored and laminated images of children's cartoon and literature characters and different family representations which, besides highlighting different body parts, approached the influence of friends and family in the feelings and attitudes of the character (Rocha, 2015); (c) participants' self-portrait drawings; d) a scale and a stadiometer from the brand Filizola to collect anthropometric data (body mass and height) and the calculation of Body Mass Index (BMI).

We contacted the principals of both municipal schools, in which the study took place, to explain the research project and sign the Consent Form for Research in Schools. The students were interested after an invitation from one of the researchers in the classroom. They took the Consent Form home so that their guardians could know and authorize the study. We informed the children and their guardians that the sessions would be recorded in audio and video.

During the investigation with 8 focal groups, 4 were only boys and 4 were girls, selected by chance among those who returned the Consent Form signed. Each group had 8 children. The duration of each group varied between 45 and 60 minutes. The children and the researchers used name tags to ease the identification and communication among themselves. The environment was organized before each session. We prioritized classrooms without much information and less noise. We pinned up a poster on the door of the class asking them to not interrupt the study. The cameras to record the meeting were positioned in strategic places. We offered a snack with cookies, fruits, and juice to the participants, before or after the sessions, depending on the time of the focal group.

The anthropometric data were individually measured by physical educators. Children were dressed in their school uniforms and just removed their shoes. The measurement is justified by the possible relationship between BMI and dissatisfaction with body image (Brault et al., 2015).

The records of the group sessions were fully transcribed. After, we used Bardin's (2010) methodology of Content Analysis to stress the association of words for inference and interpretation. We organized the data in three phases: a) pre-analysis (organization of the

material, aiming to operationalize and systematize initial ideas); b) exploration of the material (definition of categories and identification of units of context and register); c) treatment of result, inference, and interpretation (condensation and highlight information for analysis, culminating in inferential interpretations). In the data analysis, each child received an identification code to keep their identity confidential. This code is composed of the number of the group (G) in the child participated (eg: G1, G2, G3...), followed by the number of the participant (P) in the group (P1, P2, P3...), and their sex, female (F) or male (M).

The Research Ethics Committee of *Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora* approved the research, under protocol n. ° 38768714.2.0000.5147, report n.° 971.049. Children's guardians authorized the participation of the minors by signing the Consent Report, as foreseen in the project submitted to the Committee.

Results and discussion

The anthropometric data shows that no participant child was underweight, according to the BMI classification. However, out of the 64 participants, 11 were classified as overweight and 9 as obese, corresponding to 17.2% and 14.1%, respectively, thus encompassing 31.3% of the sample. This data called our attention due to its percentage and participants' young age, which can lead to health problems and body dissatisfaction since childhood. It also reinforces the importance of projects toward nutrition education in school practices. Nonetheless, we highlight that 68.7% of children had an adequate weight for their age.

When signing the Consent Form and filling out the sociodemographic data, the children's guardians declared that 50% of the boys were white and 50% black or mixed race. Among the girls, 64% were declared white, and 36% were black or mixed race.

Using systematic Content Analysis (Bardin, 2010) on the data obtained through focal groups, we defined two main categories, according to participant's speech, related to feelings, beliefs, and attitudes associated with body image. Figure 1 presents the graphic representation of this division in categories.
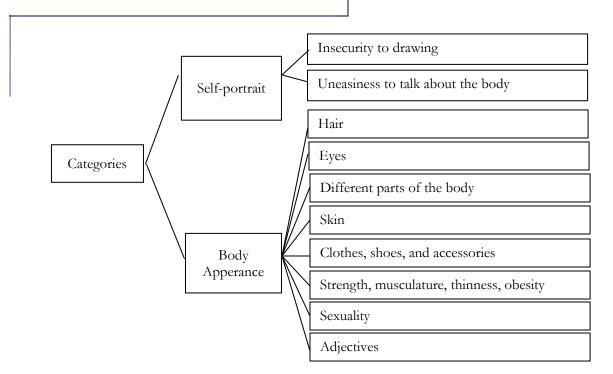
Figure 1 - Graphic representation of the categories

The first category, called *Self-portrait*, gathers the testimonies on attitudes related to the body, perceived through an activity in which they had to draw their bodies. The drawing was used only as a starting point to incentivize children to participate more effectively in the focal groups, that is, we did not deeply analyze the participants' drawings.

This category was organized into two subcategories: insecurity about drawing and uneasiness to talk about the body. They emerged from children's comments indicating insecurity and/or anxiety to draw or describe, in detail, their bodies. By this premise, Bombonato and Fargo (2016) affirmed that the perspective of a drawing record can lead to distress due to possible criticisms, which can compromise children's trust in themselves and their imaginary universe.

Regarding the *insecurity of drawing*, children's drawings were valued as the representation and expression of their thoughts and feelings related to their bodies. Gobbi (2014) highlights that children's drawing can show their perspective, whose analysis surpasses observation. During the allotted time dedicated to the self-portrait, some statements stood out:

> I can't draw. Oh, I'm very nervous. Can I do a skull?(G7P04-M). But I don't know how to do it right. Can I draw myself with a crown on my head? Can I make a dress? (G1P01-F). Do I have to draw only the face or the whole body? Ah! I'll do it from the waist up because it's a pain to draw the lower part (G8P02-M).

We can raise at least two hypotheses to better understand these phrases. The first is that they are related to the graphic difficulties to draw. According to the assumptions of Piaget (1976) regarding the stages of development of children's drawing, in the age range of the participants, children already have a defined concept of the human figure; however, differences in the scheme may appear — such as exaggeration, negligence, omission, or symbolic change —, what hinders the graphic representation of a more consistent body.

The other hypothesis that justifies these findings can be related to the development of a fragmented and negative body image. The participant children may have an unhealthy relationship with their bodies, portraying attitudes that suggest the internalization of beauty ideals and a consequent low body acceptance. Thus, they avoid representing their bodies in drawing, escaping from a negative image they believe they have. This hypothesis is concerning because an exaggerated discomfort with the body at such an early age can establish barriers to complete and positive development of the body image throughout life.

About the *fear to talk about the body*, when finishing up the time for drawing, as foreseen in the script proposed by this activity, the children were informed that, from their productions, they should describe their bodies and characteristics. Some participant girls showed some restrictions to talking about their bodies and, therefore, needed a greater incentive. "I don't know how to say anything about my body (…) I can't say anything else" (G1P03-F). "I don't want to talk! I'm embarrassed!" (G1P05-F). These comments corroborate the hypothesis of the previous subcategory, highlighting that children's drawings might be associated with their feelings and negative yearnings.

The second category, entitled *Body appearance*, was systematized considering the comments on the groups, attributed to specific aspects subdivided into hair; eyes; other body parts; skin color; clothes, shoes, and accessories; strength, musculature, thinness, and obesity; sexuality; abilities/superpowers; and adjective. According to Araujo et al. (2013), prescriptions of standards and behaviors regarding the body are constantly received as right or wrong, healthy or harmful to health. When considering these postures related to body appearance, these "rules" can be easily perceived. The subcategories of this topic deserve attention due to the richness of details and the content of children's comments.

The comments on *hair* deserve special attention because they were considered characteristics of beauty idealization, mainly feminine. Máximo et al. (2012) recognize in their

studies the nuances in terms of hair shapes and colors, as well as the need to consider them in the studies about body image.

Children's testimonies emphasized the importance of hair color, length, type, softness, shine, and styles. They appeared repeatedly in the description of personal body characteristics, opinions about the similarities with family members, the admiration for characters and media personalities, the attributes of beautiful women and men, the feelings and changes of attitudes due to friends' comments, the favorite parts of their bodies, and their wish to change something about their appearance. We highlight that most comments were done by girls. We selected some of them in the collected information:

> I have thick hair, when I put on something, it gets all soft (G8P01-M). I have short, dark brown hair (G1P07-F). I also like my hair because it's blond. I like to braid it. And when I wash it, it gets….[gestures to indicate that the hair gets longer] (G1P01-F). His hair is beautiful because he uses a straightener (G6P03-M). Blond [What is the most beautiful thing about Barbie] I like Barbie because she's pretty. Hair. (G4P05-F). [About Elsa from the movie *Frozen*] I like that one. The one with braided hair (G5P07-M). I wish my hair was straight (. . .) because it's curly when my dad brushes it with that kind of brush, it hurts. About changing my hair, I forgot to say the color: blonde [the color you would like your hair to be]. My hair, when I wash it, gets black and I don't like it (G1P01-F).

The considerable amount of comments on hair show how much this aspect is received children's attention. Brasil et al. (2015) affirm that the (dis)satisfaction in childhood with body image may affect different developmental phases of human beings, from an early age, when building their self-image, their perception of beauty ideals, and have serious consequences in adult life.

The color of the *eyes*, despite being mentioned less frequently than hair, emerged in the personal descriptions, preferences, similarities with the mother, important characteristics of body beauty, observation of media children's characters, and wishes to change, even citing a friend's eye color as a model:

> I have brown eyes (G1P02-F) (G1P04-F). (G1P07-F) (G2P05-F). My eyes, because I'd like to have blue eyes because it is beautiful [wish to change] Like Manu (G1P08-F). [Characteristics of a beautiful woman] Beautiful body and green eyes! (G1P03-F).

Based on the children's comments, we could see a distance between the real body and the body image that pervades their relationships with the world and the images presented to

them, showing that not only hair and eyes can be relevant to constructing body image, but also other characteristics.

Different parts of the body — such as feet, hands, nose, thighs, legs, mouth, arms, back, ears, and teeth — appear in the participants' speech, mainly associated with their dimensions (big or small). Some comments called our attention, for example, the influence of parents on body observations and the concern with dental aesthetics, even though they still do not have all their permanent teeth. Furthermore, boys observed women's nails, teeth, buttocks, and breasts as characteristics of women's beauty:

> Long nails. White teeth. [Description of the concept of women's beauty] Small ears (G5P04-M). [what a woman needs to have to be beautiful] Nails done [Breast size] Butt and breast. Big (G6P08-M). [how I wish my teeth were] My tooth is crooked. I wish I could change it. Really white (G8P08-M). I like it from the neck until the feet, because the head, I think it is kind of ugly (G8P06-M). My thigh is chubby (G7P04-M). My belly is very big! (G7P01-M). I wish I had a tiny ear. My father has a huge ear, and I think mine got big, yeah..big like his. I wish I could also change my foot because my feet are big like my dad's (G2P02-F). [Examples of similarities] Like my father. I'm like him because my body is the same as his. The feet, the thigh, the belly. But my father's is a bit like [makes gestures indicating a more muscular thigh], his belly is like that [shows belly] (G8P08-M).

Pimenta (2012) affirms that body shapes have never been as valued as a product of individual desire as nowadays, and, therefore, stand out in everyday life. These factors can be attributed to the increasing concern with appearance and body image. Our research findings corroborate the premise that social, cultural, and family contexts are key in the impacts related to the dimensions of children's body image.

The *skin* was another trace highlighted. Boys made the most comments on skin color. Some reports showed a concerning body dissatisfaction regarding being black and or the admiration and desire to have white skin. Máximo et al. (2012) highlight that mixed-race and black children have, in general, a negative emotional evaluation of their racial belonging. In this perspective, we present some participants' phrases:

> [Justification for the wish to change race] it is nice to be white. Because it is a pain to be black. (G6P05-M). [what women think about black men, according to the participant] black, auntie, the women think it is a robber (G6P02-M). they think it is Saci Pererê [a Black character of Brazilian folklore] (G6P04-M). I wish I could be born again and white! (G7P06-M). [when answering what is his color] I wish I could change my skin. I'd like a different color. I wish I were white or brown. I don't know, I think I'm black. (G8P01-M). [On the reason why the character Elsa, from the movie Frozen, is the prettiest] Her body and skin color. White. (G5P08-M). [what a woman needs to have to be pretty] White body and a pink dress up to the floor. [Example of a body that reaches the beauty standards of a participant] My mother's (G1P01-F).

We can see in participants' comments stereotypes related to ethnicity, the appreciation of the white race, and the dissatisfaction with the black skin, which establishes a concerning scenario as it deals with the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of a sample of children. We also highlight that the prevalence of black boys in this research (as shown in the results) is in synch with the comments on skin tone, which were also more present among boys, who seemed more dissatisfied with their bodies. This points out the importance of multiculturalism in school curricula when building the identities of Brazilian students.

Tatangelo et al. (2016) highlight that the development of body image is associated with sociocultural factors and children's relationship with their context, as they are influenced by messages that emphasize body stereotypes. In this context, Pimenta (2012) points out that the idea of whitening and eugenics in Brazil emerged, discriminately, as a possibility to improve Brazilians' physical aspect, as having blond hair and white skin was seen as a trait of the elites, considered as the prototype of beauty. Together, these findings point out the need to create and implement efficient and consistent public and educational policies to work on ethnic issues from an early age focusing on body acceptance and respect for human diversity.

The topic of *clothes, shoes, and accessories* also stood out. Items that add glamour, like a cape and a crown, were valued among participants. Besides the clothes themselves, their colors were often mentioned. Shoes and dresses appeared in many comments, especially the latter. Boys and girls talked about clothes, shoes, and accessories. Tatangelo et al. (2016) emphasize that media images focused on children present verbal messages or models of attitudes related to appearance and behaviors that are internalized by their audience. We also highlight that, in this research, boys pointed out that financial status and having goods were essential for men to conquer women. Some comments:

> [Doll preference] Barbie because her shoes are beautiful and shiny. (G4P03-F). [Character from the movie Frozen] I wish I had everything from Elsa. I really wished to have Elsa's crown (G4P04-F). I like Polly because I like her dress (G4P02-F). Polly uses a boot and purple clothes. (G6P04-M). To be rich, have a luxurious mansion, huge, it conquers beautiful women (G7P04-M). [What a man needs to have to be considered handsome for women] (. . .) to be rich, have style with women. If we ride a motorbike, a Ferrari, or a Camaro (…) if we give them a ride, they will fall for us (G7P06-M).

It is clear through children's comments that media is strongly representative when establishing physical, aesthetic, and behavioral standards, from psychological projection-

identification, often through clothes and artifacts. Thus, we corroborate the hypothesis that children are not only included in the consumption universe but also are part of it.

Strength, musculature, thinness, and obesity establish a topic of relevant children's declarations that emerged on the concern about body definition, especially the abdomen. In the boys' groups, they emphasized force and muscles; while in the girls' groups, the focus was on thinness. However, comments associated with the wish to be then were also said by boys, also frequenting the gyms and gaining muscles were indicated as important for women. Pregnancy was considered negative to women's beauty, due to belly growth. Furthermore, they revealed that nicknames regarding thinness or obesity tend to create negative feelings. Children's characters were cited by many participants as their favorites due to their force, definition, and muscles. Pimenta (2012) affirms that the use of the thin body to show force, beauty, and determination has been connected by the media as an ideal for contemporary society. Some comments:

> I like him, his six-pack, he has muscles (G4P04-F). [Comments on the character Superman] He is strong! (G3P01-F) (G4P04-F) (G6P08-M) (G6P03-M) (G6P04-M). [What is the most beautiful thing about Barbie] She is pretty! Her belly has a six-pack (G3P02-F). [Reason why she does not think the pregnant Monster High is pretty] she seems pregnant. Because she has a big belly like a killer whale. (G5P06-M). [Shows his arm to affirm his body part that gets strong] I go to the gym with my mom to get strong. I work out, I run. Today I'll go (...) my arm! I'm strong already (G7P05-M). [The participant points to his abdomen region, contracts his biceps, raises her arms, and punches the air] Men have to be stronger. To be handsome, have some balls here, balls of muscle. Like here in the breast when man moves. The man stretches, all strong and sweaty (G7P04- M).

The comments emerged in this subcategory — *Strength, musculature, thinness, and obesity* — refer to the reflection that types of values are transmitted to children, who are, precociously, concerned with beauty standards that can be considered a distant ideal, because few people can reach them, what can contribute to adopting inadequate methods to reach this body stereotype. In this perspective, Brasil et al. (2015) stress that the search for a body considered to be perfect and the changes in physical appearance seem to be evident concerns among children and teenagers, revealing a great body dissatisfaction.

Comments on boys' groups related to *sexuality* emerged in several moments. Among them, we highlight: the wish to date characters/media personalities; boys' resistance to play with dolls as they believed that were exclusive to girls and that doing that would hinder their masculinity image; the concept of homosexuality, and the prejudices already incorporated by the children; the statements that men should sexually take advantage of women; the erotization

of bodies when describing attractive women; the possibility of women to get an exuberant body, and the relationship of this result with gym training, as well as the exhibition of breasts, buttocks, and female genitalia as boys' body preference. We quote some excerpts of the transcriptions:

> [About action figures/dolls] I like all of them, except those of women (G5P02-M). I see girls' cartoons. Men can watch girls' cartoons, right? (G6P02-M). Some people like men, and some people like women. It doesn't matter, right? Let them live their lives (G6P03-M). [How a man should be] To be hot, enjoy women (G7P06-M). [Reason why women train in gyms]. They get a big butt (G7P03-M) (G7P04-M). [Referring to female genitalia about what he likes in a beautiful woman] I like her pussy (G6P02-M). [Referring to the characters Ana and Elsa from the movie Frozen] Very hot and their faces are beautiful. (. . .) and their bodies... look how smooth it is, could you imagine them shaking their butt in the [funk] ball (G6P03-M). [A man who looks like Max Steel] but he's a fag. He was on Sílvio Santos [television show]. A fag is a man that does this [gestures while playing with his hair] (G5P07-M). A fag is a man who uses women's clothes (G5P06-M). And also who has relationships (…) (G5P07-M) with man [complete other participant's phrase] (G5P08-M).

The precocity of these boys calls attention due to their thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes related to gender and the erotization of the bodies in their cultural context. According to Borges (2007), reflecting on the ways body representations and sexuality are produced and disseminated by the media, families, and classmates is important to understand the meaning of these representations to build the subjectivity of new generations, as media act in the insertion of children in the world of consumption, body representation, and sexuality built and portrayed by media. In this sense, reflexive practices that value respect, equity, and human rights are key in the educational context.

Characteristics such as *abilities/superpowers* were highlighted by participants as advantages of children's characters, media personalities, or those around the children. Despite not being directly connected to the body, these attributes were valued by the groups.

Several comments emerged about characters' superpowers and abilities that raise children's interest in their observations and preferences. Fly, jump high, save lives, throw objects, destroy enemies, fight, have ice powers, sing, explode things, and become a type of God were some of the comments that appeared in the research. Rodrigues and Dantas (2011) stated that children, especially boys, are increasingly more exposed to cartoons, mostly violent ones, and superhero movies, in which characters have superpowers, are not always well understood by children and can cause serious harm to those that believe they have the same powers or act similarly to the heroes on the screen.

> I wanted to be Goku because he can become kind of a God (G6P04-M). I like Superman because he saves lives (G3P01-F). Because he flies and he can fall and stand up (. . .) and doesn't get hurt (G4P04-F). Because he flies and shoots laser, and destroy his enemies (. . .) and he saves the city (G5P05-M). [Spiderman] He has super powers (G3P07-F). He is cool because he makes webs (G4P07-F) (G6P03-M) (G5P03-M). He fights and saves lives (G5P08-M). [character from the movie Frozen] Elsa because she can throw ice (G4P03-F) (G4P01-F) (G4P04-F) (G1P02-F) (G5P06-M) (G5P03-M) (G6P08-F). She has super powers (G5P02-M).

The acts of saving lives, flying, jumping high, throwing objects, and having superpowers were considered by the participants of the focus groups as aspirations of both genders. Assis (2009) contributed to understanding these questions by affirming that we live in an increasingly fast society, in which individuals of all ages are bombarded by several information. They can waken children's imagination and are incentivized to reproduce behaviors, habits, and ideologies. For this reason, the practice of critical reflection is important in the family and school contexts so that children's imaginary universe can be a positive one and not trigger future psychopathologies.

Some *adjectives* emerged as important ones for the children regarding physical and inmate characteristics. They were used by participants to explain their wish to look like someone, as well as the concept of what men needed, the body appreciation, the nicknames they wanted, and children's characters. We highlight some comments:

> I'm delicate! (G1P03-F). I'm smart! (G1P07-F). big body. Tall! (G1P08-F). I wish I looked like Anitta [singer] because she (. . .) is pretty (G1P01-F). For me, a handsome man needs to be elegant. And have a certain posture (...) he has to be smart and nice (G1P02-F). [what a man needs to have to be handsome] courage (G6P03-M).

We have noticed that several adjectives were used to characterize beliefs and thoughts related to the body. Assis (2009) emphasizes that the impact of images and sounds captures the imagination and fantasy of children, teenagers, and adults, at different intensity levels, according to their abilities and the narratives in which they are interpreted.

Final remarks

The study resulted in finds that advance the relationship between body image and childhood. One considerable development was the creation of effective semi-structured scripts

prioritizing approaches and meaningful resources to conduct several focus groups with children. The qualitative methodology effectively contributed to giving children a voice, allowing a deeper look at different issues about body image.

We could perceive the issue of overweight and obesity deserve more attention and educational interventions to avoid physiological and psychological damage to children. Furthermore, findings from this investigation corroborate that children, from an early age, have relevant beliefs, feelings, and attitudes on the judgment of physical appearance. Family, friends, and media also have a strong influence on body image.

Regarding physical appearance, different questions emerged and were discussed, such as children's apprehensiveness to draw their self-portrait, the use of adjectives to judge appearance, their negative feelings about their bodies, their wish for body changes their fear to gain weight, and the sensitiveness towards nicknames related to the body. In the comments of the groups appeared the concern about friends' opinion and acceptance, the considerable influence of media and children's characters/toys in body idealization, the comparison of body characteristics, preferences associated with family members, and how strongly hair is considered important to appearance.

We could see similarities and differences in the comments made by boys and girls regarding body image. As for similarities, we point out those related to the frequency of gyms to reach an ideal body, the importance of accessories, shoes, and clothes for beauty, and the relevance of abilities and superpowers of media characters. Boys were especially concerned with skin color, muscles, and body definition (mainly the belly). They also made comments regarding sexuality that stood out in the research due to the young age of participants and their thoughts on homosexuality and erotization of the bodies. The girls were more concerned with hair and thinness. The results of the analysis of focus groups emphasize the importance of educational projects related to diversity, cultural plurality, and body image in children's development and its: social, physical/motor, emotional, and cognitive aspects.

This study gives subsidies for future studies that aim to evaluate body image in childhood and the main factors that influence this construct, to invest in the prevention of possible and future psychopathological disorders. Studies with bigger samples and in other regions of the country are needed for more effective and generalized results with Brazilian children. We also believe it is important to develop adequate instruments for the age range

studies, which can condensate and evaluate children's beliefs, thoughts, and attitudes regarding their bodies, as well as the creation of health promotion policies for children's educators and families. Future works could also investigate the same constructs among family members and K-12 school teachers.

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