
PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS IN FITNESS CENTERS: BODY PAIN AS WORK PERFORMANCE

PROFISSIONAIS DE EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA ATUANTES NA MUSCULAÇÃO: A DOR CORPORAL COMO PERFORMANCE LABORAL

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ABSTRACT

The meanings and definitions related to the body and pain are valued differently by each social group in a specific time in history. Therefore, the main objective of this work was to identify and discuss how Physical Education professionals in a large fitness center work between the “limit” of work performance and body pain. Using the theory and method of the Symbolic Interactionism and the Anthropology of Performance as references, this research consisted of an ethnographic study of Physical Education professionals over ten months between 2012 and 2013. The analyses of the observations recorded in the field diary indicated that the working competence of the Physical Education professionals was in some cases associated with body performance, represented by the capacity to prescribe physical exercises and train on the “limit” of pain.

Keywords: Pain. Fitness centers. Physical education and training.

RESUMO

Os sentidos e os significados atribuídos ao corpo e às dores são valorizados de modo singular por cada grupo social e particularizados em dado tempo histórico. Assim, o objetivo deste trabalho foi identificar e discutir em que medida os profissionais de Educação Física do setor da musculação de uma academia grande porte atuam entre um “limite” de performance laboral e de dor corporal. A partir dos referenciais teórico-metodológicos do Interação Simbólico e da Antropologia da Performance, empreendeu-se uma etnografia com profissionais de Educação Física durante dez meses entre os anos de 2012 e 2013. As análises das observações registradas em diário de campo indicaram que parte da competência laboral do profissional de Educação Física estava atrelada ao desempenho corporal representado na capacidade de prescrever os exercícios físicos e treinar no “limite” das dores.

Palavras-chave: Dor. Academias de ginástica. Educação física e treinamento.

Introduction

The relationship between the body and its status within a particular context and social group is increasingly becoming the subject of anthropological studies. In this field of research, which captures the visibility of certain “bodies”, this work is based upon the rapprochement between the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism^{1,2} and the methodological-theoretical backing of the Anthropology of Performance^{3,4}. That is, it is understood that professional work in Physical Education in fitness centers is constructed in daily life and relativized according to the types of face-to-face contact in certain interaction situations which may reveal the performance of social roles connected to societal structures. Thus, instructors are seen as social actors on “stage”, the students are the “audience”, weight training is the “performance stage” and the process of exercising on the “limit” of body pain is the work performance necessary to belong in that space.

This investigative undertaking was established in the field during the coexistence of the researcher with his interlocutors. Even though body pain is a relatively common occurrence for those who work with the physical effort required by body exercises, the regularity and intensity of the face-to-face contact between the researcher and the study

participants provided what DaMatta⁵ calls an “ethnographic discovery”: the moment when the researcher begins to notice particular social rules in certain native logic. Thus, over time, it was possible to detect the relevance of body pain in particular social roles and given situations and, equally, in the interactions between the subjects in the fitness center, especially in the weight-training area.

The notion of “body capital” is used to reflect and investigate which implications occur when some “bodies” are considered or classified as more or less acceptable in a given social environment and historical time⁶. Some research has identified the body of the Physical Education instructor in fitness centers as a value given to its functionality, as well as the need for a specific appearance to perform the activity⁷⁻¹¹. This becomes more evident in large fitness centers, where there is evidence that advancing age reduces prestige, the possibilities of building a professional career and the chances of remaining in the labor market, as the competence associated with youth and image overrides experience and knowledge gained over time¹²⁻¹⁵.

The objective is, therefore, to identify and discuss the extent to which Physical Education professionals in the weight-training area of a large fitness center work between the “limit” of work performance and body pain. Here, pain is understood as defined by Sarti^{16:4} “The uniqueness of pain as a subjective experience makes it a privileged field for thinking about the relationship between the individual and society. [...] Experiences lived by individuals [...] will be constitutionally referred to the society to which they belong.” The data of this manuscript are part of an ethnographic research outlined in a doctoral thesis defended at the Institute of Studies in Collective Health of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro¹⁷.

Methodological procedures

This work does not consider ethnography as a method¹⁸, but as a way for the observer to conceive and recognize him/herself as part of the process of knowledge. This positioning of the ethnographer should be constantly revisited or mistrusted at all times, as the result of research represents a dialogue and a negotiation of points of view¹⁹, i.e., the (re)construction of knowledge is established through intersubjectivities²⁰.

The participant observation aimed to capture the point of view of the individuals studied by way of the prolonged, in-depth, everyday insertion of the researcher in the field²¹. The participant observation was carried out between the years 2012 and 2013, during ten months, for four hours twice a week, primarily in the afternoon/evening. A field journal was created to note the experiences and dialogues established during the study, as well as the analyses and interpretations of the researcher in this period.

The observation was then limited to the weight-training area of a large-scale fitness center in a neighborhood considered “wealthy” or “rich” in the city of Rio de Janeiro. This fitness center, located in a neighborhood considered having high purchasing power, includes upper- and upper middle-class families, with an above average socioeconomic reality compared to the other regions in Rio. The place analyzed is part of one of the most prestigious chains of fitness centers around Brazil in terms of its infrastructure, the number of customers, the number of branches in Brazil and the variety of exercise modalities and services offered to its customers.

For the researcher to enter and circulate around this fitness center, which is private and highly hierarchical due to being considered a mega-company, the help of a gatekeeper was required, i.e., someone to grant entry into the establishment in order to carry out the study²². The ethnographer got in touch with one of the fitness center managers whom he knew in order

to present the research proposal. After three months, after meetings and assessments about the content of the study, the participant observation was authorized. In this sense, although the instructors of the establishment assigned several identities to the researcher (supervisor, trainee, professional, owner, student/client, Regional Physical Education Council inspector, etc.), he was accepted as an investigator circulating freely in the weight-training area, without doing the exercises, as can be seen in Silva¹⁷. It's worth noting that “[...] despite having obtained all official permissions, it is essential to construct the acceptance of the researcher and his/her study with the various local actors”^{23:166}, which was made possible during the coexistence with interlocutors.

The universe analyzed here are Physical Education professionals with the following profiles: a) aged between 20-30 years; b) predominantly male; c) predominantly with Bachelors degrees from private universities; d) many had already obtained *lato sensu* post-graduate degrees; f) working on average two or three times a week, 6 hours per day, earning from 8 to 12 reais per hour/class in the weight-training area and complementing their income in other establishments and/or with personal trainer work ranging from 60 to 150 reais per hour/class. This information was solicited from the research participants in informal conversations during fieldwork in order to offer or comprise an overall picture of the instructors working in the fitness center studied. However, this study did not intend to “[...] see types of people as analytical categories [...] instead, types of activities in which people engage occasionally”^{24:68}. Thus, in addition to delineating the social markers and individual trajectories of the instructors, we decided to analyze social situations and interactions which the subjects established on a daily basis, i.e., “in each of these contacts the person tends to employ what is sometimes referred to as a line – in other words, standards of verbal and nonverbal acts with which he/she expresses his/her opinion on the situation [...]”^{2:13}.

The Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Studies in Collective Health of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro approved and authorized the carrying out of this study (CAAE no.: 01559712.7.0000.5286 / Ruling number: 203.235), therefore being in accordance with the ethical aspects included in Resolutions 196/96 and 251/97 of the National Health Council. All research participants signed an informed consent form (ICF), being given fictitious names in this paper to ensure the anonymity of the participants of the study.

Presentation and discussion of findings

Body pain between instructor-student and professional-customer

The various notions of “limits” of body pain of students/customers which were constructed during physical exercises and of Physical Education instructors/professionals in their daily work translated as ways to legitimize themselves at the establishment in question. More than any physical feeling or psychological perception, these “limits” of body pain morally represented exercising certain roles in given social interactions and situations. Goffman^{1:135} mentions that “the actors are aware of the impression that they create and generally also have destructive information regarding the spectacle”.

The interaction between instructor and student in this fitness center was characterized as a relationship between a professional and a customer. Instructors said that what they “learned in college” or what “scientific articles said”, were far from the practical reality of their work precisely because the attendees were seen as “clientele”. In fact, the way instructors greeted or said goodbye to the students reminded me of any commercial establishment: “Welcome! Whatever you need, just call me!”, “Another day in the gym, make yourself at home!”, “I hope you were satisfied with the service, come again!” or “Have a great weekend, we're here with open arms waiting for you to return!”.

In this perspective, the instructor's body was a "commodity". The logic was that the instructor should be a "coach"; while monitoring the physical efforts of students, they should also take part in the exercises. This was particularly true when the instructor had to be a model of how to withstand body pain arising from training to win over their clientele. The "instructor's body" was an example of his/her professional competence, given that the more they could overcome or enhance their "limits" of pain related to physical exercises, the higher the recognition from their students would be. In this sense, Schechner^{4:175} points out that "If the participants expect more than the instructors can offer, the performance is inadequate [...]".

The level of body pain experienced by most of the professionals during the physical exercises was beyond that which they proposed to their students, as they had a sense of the body not as "an end in itself", but as an important way to relate socially. For example, this could be seen during frequent observations of large conversations around the gym equipment, demonstrating that the fact they were exercising was of secondary importance. Sometimes they also talked about how their sociability in sharing aspects of their personal life, their access to consumer goods and leisure, went beyond the matter of whether or not they felt any pain during the physical exercises. In one of those encounters, I heard a student calling another telling them to "grab a beer and sit with them in the room", joking as if they were in a bar or some moment of leisure.

The perception of "limits" of pain in physical exercises was different between professional and customer:

Silvia: Régis, I'm all sore from training!

Régis (instructor): It's normal, this is a result of the combination of all the classes you have done with weight training.

Silvia: Then what should I do not to feel it?

Régis (instructor): It's normal, forget about it!

Adelmo: I've just worked out! My arm feels as if I'm about to draw blood with that elastic thing, my arm is really tight!

Alfredo (instructor): It's normal, this is how it grows!

Adelmo: Are you sure? I've never felt it as strong as this.

Alfredo (instructor): Relax! Keep this up and you'll go far!

Me: Hey, Adelmo, how was your workout today?

Adelmo: A little weird, I'm feeling a lot of pain!

The representations of the physical education instructors reproduced what that team of professionals prioritized: demanding the maximum from students regarding body pain. According to Goffman^{1:99}, "a team is a group, but not a group in relation to a structure or social organization, instead it is in relation to an interaction, or series of interactions, in which the appropriate definition of the situation is maintained". Therefore, for a large part of the instructors, there was an increasing search for body productivity during the maximum time that could be extracted from a certain period as a form of "wrinkle education", i.e. physical efforts should be visible on the faces of the students. In this case, there was a management of body care as if these bodies were machines from which they had to extract the highest performance. Peres²⁵ points out that the exercises carried out in today's large fitness centers are linked to the idea that maximum productivity of the subjects should be demanded.

Paradoxically, most students who avoided strenuous physical efforts demanded a certain professional attitude from their instructors for them to be demanding and push them to the "limit" of body pain:

Wanda: That instructor's ab exercises are really tough, right?

Renata: Yeah I agree, even if I'm tired, I think he gives less, but it's good anyway.

Romeu: Were the exercises good?

Guilherme: They were, we only had 30-second intervals!

Romeu: So it was great. This new instructor is amazing!

Guilherme: But gradually, I started holding back a bit on the effort.

In other words, a “good” instructor would be one that pushed the student to the “limit” of their physical activity. Thus, constant encouragement and stimulation were expected from the instructor in order to overcome their body “limits”, but at the same time, the instructor is expected to be careful with their individual tolerance levels. Crossley²⁶ states that only certain types of pain can be “pleasant” to the fitness center regulars, with the idea of being an “adequate pain” for exercise.

Body pain and professional legitimacy

The physical education instructor is unique as he/she uses his/her own body as an element of professional mediation¹⁴. In this sense, the professionals must deal with their own body “limits”:

Me: And your knee? How is it? You're limping a bit, right?

Gilmar (instructor): The knee is good, it was just a sprain in the medial collateral ligament. I'm doing physiotherapy. Because I have to work for a long time on my feet, I have to leave the weight room and put ice on it. I've been taking anti-inflammatories for a few days, no problems now! It doesn't affect me anymore! That's it, nothing serious.

Me: Reginaldo, you've worked in other fitness centers, so help me understand something: do the clients here act differently than in other gyms with regard to pain?

Reginaldo (instructor): The poorer crowd generally has a higher pain threshold, here in Barra they're all “sissies”, I know because I've worked in another gym, over in the west zone, in Campo Grande. Just yesterday my student was a case in point: we were running on the sand and he spent the whole time complaining about his soleus muscle. He keeps saying that he's got to stop and stretch, all the time the same thing, and meanwhile I've got this huge pain in my knee, it felt like someone was sticking a needle into my knee cap, so I just kept running without saying a word to him. Then we had to move into the woods, he said it would be better because he wouldn't feel pain, come on, he doesn't even know that there's more impact on my joints there.

In other words, the professional experienced and attributed new meanings to the act of giving physical exercises in an experiential way from their own body - i.e. fragmented in terms of physical dimensions. During interactions with students, the instructor gained legitimacy if he worked his body to the “limit”, going along with the common perception that the body of a physical education instructor is better “prepared”. Exposing pain or not exposing pain to students would depend on the context, depending on whether it would affect this legitimacy. The pain should only be declared if it serves to show the instructor's ability to withstand it, but if it serves to show weakness, it should be hidden. In general terms, the physical education instructors dramatized that which Goffman^{2:13} called the “[...] line – in other words, standards of verbal and nonverbal acts with which he/she expresses his/her opinion on the situation, and through this assesses the participants, especially him/herself”.

Thus, on the one hand, the act of remaining on the “limit” was a legitimate detail shared among the instructors to demand “more” from the students who may also have the same symptoms. The professionals reported that if they were able to work with such pain, students could and should undertake the exercises in the same way “without asking

questions”. On the other hand, sometimes, it was necessary to hide their pains in order to not compromise the validity of their professional competence.

In addition, I witnessed numerous situations that showed distinct representations of pain between the physical education instructor and student:

Me: What’s up? How’s the series?

Elaine: It could be worse. Let me tell you something off the record. The instructors here demand too much of us, so you know what I do? When the instructor decides the weight I should use, I pretend it’s too heavy for me, so the instructor will stop bothering me. Sometimes it’s really light, but I make a strained face so he doesn’t keep insisting I have to increase the weight. I also do this in the assessment, my results are well short of what I could manage, but that doesn’t matter to me, you know? The people here are like that! I’m not here for torture, you know?

João: Is your work related to physical education instructors?

Me: More or less, why?

João: If it is about instructors it won’t change anything, it’s a professional and life culture that they have to destroy the students, they want to screw me. For example, here I take seventeen and a half kilos, but I could do twenty-four kilos, you know? But I don’t want to, I’m fine, I had a personal trainer three years ago, he talked all the time, it was like a speech therapy class, he wanted to screw me all the time. The instructors don’t want to know if we have a “ceiling” for exercise, they all want to go past it.

In other situations, the place of the teacher was inverted with that of the student in the sense of caring for the body. The students advised professionals to care more for their own health from the perspective of biomedical rationality, to work less, to pay attention to the establishment’s “labor exploitation”, to have more time for family and leisure, etc. Students found it strange when instructors had pain and did not show interest in checking what was going on with their own body or the risks they were taking.

The fact they have to work tirelessly for long days forces the instructors to live with great physical discomfort. For a physical education professional, his/her body corresponded to a “body of manual labor” summed up as a “productive and instrumental body” in virtue of the weight-training work. For students, they looked for certain physical forms. Although not an absolute prerogative, Boltanski’s²⁷ idea was confirmed that there may be distinctions between certain uses of the body in accordance with professions; for example, the higher the social class, the greater the tendency to practice physical activities and lesser the tendency to use the body in work activities.

The utilitarian logic of aptitude for work understood and given new meanings by the professional clashed with the students to the extent that, for the instructors, “Health, in their representation, is at the service of labor, so the instructor, as a rule, has an obligation to be able to perform their duties of employment, leaving other issues in the background”^{7:51}. Thus, the data in this survey counteract those of Guimaraes^{28:211} when they state that the professional “[...] neglected his health to increase his salary, by way of an increased quantity of personal trainer clients and group classes”, because, on some occasions, the ability to work was regarded exactly as “health”.

In other words, for the professionals, being “healthy” meant, in part, whether their body pain could legitimize or not their work performances. For students, in most cases, feeling pain was synonymous with “fragile or compromised health”. In general terms, both the instructor and the student exercised or moved through different performances which purport to adjust the social roles according to social and personal circumstances³.

Thus, the work performances of physical education instructors should be kept in face-to-face interactions with students in order to give legitimacy to their work. The instructors' intention was that this kind of "limit" imposed on the body would not compromise their "facade", in the same meaning given by Goffman¹, i.e., his/her role in carrying out professional skills in the weight-training area.

Body pain and work performance

The physical education instructors understood that only with pain in physical exercise would the body produce any result. This occurred by positivizing the potential physiological effects of the "no pain, no gain" logic or by creating a way to keep the customer to the extent that it made the student dependent on or in constant pursuit of their own "limits" of bodily pain. Imperative, intimidating or challenging speeches were present in the instructor's work when addressing students or other professionals, such as: "I think it's too light, right?", "The next exercise isn't easy!", "This exercise will leave you purple, don't cry!", "Are you afraid of more weight?", "You're going to suffer in this exercise here, let's see!", "Stop crying, hurry up and do it!", "If you can't take this weight, don't take it out on me later!", "You have five minutes to do this exercise and no complaints!", "I'm going to destroy your hamstrings today, you'll see!".

Among them there a constant demand and/or challenge in relation to body performance. The logic of "if I can do it, then you can and should do it" reigned:

Volney (instructor): You're not finished yet, right? We're working out together, slow down because I'm not even feeling any pain yet, are you?

Lucas (instructor): Not me.

Volney (instructor): I learned from a teacher at school that it only works if you feel pain, and I'm pretty far from that here. Now it's your turn to say what exercises we're going to do because so far it's just me talking.

Lucas (instructor): You're more experienced in weight training, you tell me, that way we'll get to the pain quicker.

Roger (instructor): Do you do the same number of push-ups that I do?

Ciro (instructor): I don't know, but I don't think you do what I do: I clap my hands during the exercise.

Roger (instructor): That's very difficult, because, before this exercise, I do two exercises at the same time, combining them, really painful!

These competitions on who was the best with regard to getting to the particular "limit" of pain from exercise often took place in front of students. In other words, the body performance in the face of pain should be maintained by the instructor daily since it has become a professional skill. It was a personal marketing strategy to be better regarded by the students, or a way to attract the "looks" of customers if they were in doubt about who to hire as a personal trainer. On physical education instructors, Fonseca *et al.*^{9:376} highlight precisely that "[...] winning over a 'student' demands commercial strategy of the professional [...] involves experimental classes, strategies to convince students about the effectiveness of the exercise, such as, for example, the relationship of exercise and pain".

Thus, the competition between instructors with regards to the personal trainer market was large, as the locale attracted a large clientele base with a purchasing power much higher than other establishments in Rio de Janeiro. Some examples: showing customers that it was possible to perform dozens of physical exercises during breaks, surpassing their "limits"; moaning loudly during and after a "heavy exercise" was a strategy used by some instructors to gain visibility in the area; working out in key areas and at the entrance/exit of the weight-training room was another strategy used to call the attention of the customers. The use of the

internet and social media was also a good strategy to promote their body performance through photos and videos. Many instructors, with a view to standing out from the crowd, created atypical exercises compared to those routinely practiced in the locale, such as so-called “functional” movements, named for their supposed capacity to reproduce and protect the body in some everyday task. Other instructors spent long periods of time jumping rope or doing hundreds of sit-ups to demonstrate their resistance and professional competence. In short, the professionals exercised their performances which, to Schechner³, corresponds to doing something “successfully” by showing oneself to another with the intention of forming or modifying an identity, building or legitimizing a certain social group.

Thus, the interval “non-work” periods became, in fact, a moment of personal marketing and investment in attracting new customers. In other words, the work, even if it was not always physical activity, was uninterrupted. Quelhas^{11:207} identified in his research on Physical Education professionals that this apparently “free” time was “[...] occupied by work-related activities, such as the restitution of training for customers and personal exercises which seek to maintain the aesthetic standard required to work in this industry”.

Countless times, students praised or criticized the professionals who pushed themselves (or not) to their body “limits”: “I saw you training that day, you were great!” or “what a miracle seeing you training, I almost never see you at this intensity!”, etc. While showing their potential relative to pushing their bodies to the “limit”, the professionals were vulnerable to the scrutinizing looks of the students. The rationality of the “limit” of body pain was imposing in a two-way fashion. For example, when students said the professionals were working out without feeling pain or when comparing their performance with that of the instructor, they argued that they were not at the “limit”, they were only warming up, they were doing slight recovery exercises, they were at the end of a particular movement, etc.

Thus, instructors competed with each other to “win” students using the argument that “they were more demanding than the others”. Whenever a new student entered the gym, they were approached by almost all professionals with a view to “sell” what could be demanded from bodies at their “limit”. Often these competitive situations generated conflicts between the instructors in the running to be the personal trainer of potential students. I observed one professional who, after giving advice to another instructor’s student, gave his cellphone number to the student so they could get in touch with him after the end of his physical exercises. In another situation, I saw that while the receptionist had recommended a student to one particular professional, another instructor had made a point of introducing himself and acting as if he would be the one to work with the student. Another example that could be highlighted was the dispute between instructors to assist a specific student who came to the weight-training area wearing a number of gold accessories (necklace, watch, bracelet), showing his purchasing power.

From the idea of pain being part of the performance, whenever an instructor wanted to demonstrate a new exercise or correct someone in the gym, he would show off by using weights much higher than those the student could withstand; this overwhelmed the student and made him admire the professional’s performance. These demonstrations were made theatrical by the facial expressions that alluded to great physical effort; the professionals worked out alone with heavy weights, but in front of their students, even with lighter weights, they engaged in these dramatizations. I witnessed a few situations in which the student asked the instructor to lower the weight without the risk of injury, and the professional generally refused with the premise that “if I do it, you can do it too! At least try!”.

The disposition of gym equipment contributed to the professionals showcasing their performances in the face of pain. While the instructors were “actors” displaying their “spectacles” with exercises in the gym, most of the students watched them. They were, in fact,

an “audience”, spectators who were consumers of services of physical exercise. If the instructor could “act” as if he was better than others in relation to the “limits” of body pain, certainly he would be the most requested one as a personal trainer.

Thus, the physical education instructor assumed certain postures, provisions and body relationships, internalized throughout their career in their way of acting, feeling and thinking professionally. This is characterized by a kind of “personal facade” which is normally developed within a social and commercial establishment to win over the audience¹. I argue that there are certain types of “acting” for physical education instructors, as “their activity is focused on execution and advice of rhythm and corrections during the session, stimulating, correcting and encouraging the students”^{29:182}. In short, the “body language or posture” of physical education instructors emitting certain “signals” on how to “do” or “talk” during face-to-face contact, for example, pushing the “limits” in physical exercises reflected the image of “being the (and not only one in a group) professional”.

Similarly, by leading the student to the “limit” of pain and by devising certain performances for himself in the exercises, the instructor aligned himself to some lines of presentation on how to act with/for/in the body. The instructor would often carry out physical exercises in light of strict references on efficiency (generally, connected to biomedical-statistical parameters) and performance (ability and skill) derived from the training of the body with a view to obtaining results considered ideal from an aesthetic or health point of view, for example. Thus, from the premise that in face-to-face interactions, the body itself already has a certain performance in social relations², it was possible to observe that there was a type of work performance that permeated a certain ethos of the profession with regard to body pains.

Symbolic elements between men and women could also be observed in relation to pain and performance in this predominantly masculine environment. The few female physical education instructors who worked in the gym expressed that they felt “inferior” to certain male students, i.e., they said they did not feel useful or influential on that space because they didn't have as much visibility when compared to the male instructors. The women teachers also reported that some men did not seek them out and did not even believe in their guidance and advice. The two female physical education instructors were more sought out by the gay male clientele, by more stigmatized groups (overweight people, the elderly, etc.) or by male “fitness freaks” who wanted them to put together a “leg workout” as they understood that best, unlike the other five or six male instructors on site at that time. They reported suffering from harassment at the workplace from these students, either being “flirted with” or “ignored” upon helping them. One of the female instructors told me she wore a gold ring on her left ring finger to avoid tasteless “jokes” in regard to the “flirting”. Whenever I spoke about the issue of female professionals in the gym, it seemed they were very enthusiastic about the subject: they always wanted to know how my study was going, telling me about some “situations” without having to ask them, and asking how they could help with my work, etc.

These female instructors reported, which I also observed frequently, how they were ignored even by their fellow male professionals, who would tell them to get out of certain areas of the weight-training room arguing that they were not “specialists in heavy training”; or they were given orders to carry out tasks which were not their sole responsibility, such as: controlling the air conditioning temperature, writing down how many students attended the gym that day, arranging the gym equipment and accessories, etc. A large part of them did stretching exercises with students, in other words, “stretching” was more “feminine” due to involving little or no physical effort. Every month, a female instructor would resign or ask to be transferred to another area (functional assessment, team sports, swimming, etc.) or another location of the same fitness center chain, as in that place, according to them, it “was a pain in

the neck being a woman". For a few months of my fieldwork, the gym had no female instructors in the weight-training area. When a new female instructor was hired, I witnessed a number of "whispers" questioning her professional - and even sexual - capability.

Thus, the female instructors were stigmatized, particularly by the male professionals. Based on Goffman³⁰, they were seen in a derogatory light since, being women in the eminently "masculine" space of weight training, they had undesirable characteristics which made them "incompetent" in a professional sense. The male professionals reinforced that training to the "limits" of pain was a way of training for men with a capital "M". They ratified this certain performance by reiterating the idea of "saying" what would fit the interests of certain "clients", in other words, they played certain social roles according to face-to-face contacts¹. In this sense, the professionals still used to poke fun at each other to assert their own masculinity by hetero-normative logic, with jocular words and expressions such as: "sissy", "who has slept with more or less women", "who had the biggest penis", "who had looked at the other's penis in the bathroom", or even "who had slept with female professor X" etc.

Finally, many symbols and performances were always floating around this space. The physical education instructor can be considered an example of body performance with regard to their technique, i.e. the way in which they perform the movements making their body a kind of "laboratory" of accumulation of experiences and practices²⁹. Such a situation demonstrated that the technical and scientific discourse in the field of health in biomedical terms was not always applied "purely" by physical education instructors, since they gave new meanings to the uses of their bodies depending on day-to-day social interactions in order to maintain performances in their social spaces as professionals who are always pushing the "limit".

Conclusions

In short, it was possible to note that the physical education professionals specifically in the weight-training area of this large fitness center were on the "limit" of work performance and body pain. If the act of demonstrating performance means working more efficiently and with maximum productivity³ and if everyday face-to-face contacts are modulated depending on the contexts and social groups involved¹, then there was no distinction between body and work performances in the work of instructors with their students in regard to pain.

The body performances relating to pain were not only part of the job, but they were incorporated as one of the basic requirements to work professionally, which interfered greatly with the instructor's practice and day-to-day work. Thus, in addition to body aesthetics and to presenting an image regarded as healthy or physical aptitude being important requirements for the work of physical education professionals, it is suggested that demonstrating confrontation and resistance to pain also establishes itself as a means of affirming oneself or being recognized by students or clients.

Therefore, in this context, the physical education instructor's pursuit for certain "bodily authority" linked to the notion of "competence" indicates and illuminates how other professionals from various fields are able to cope with their own body. More than judging certain interventions with/for one another, it is about understanding that there is logic in the profession characterized by the requirement of certain "performances" in environments of heated market competitiveness aiming at winning over and retaining customers.

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