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## SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE FORMATION OF IDENTITIES OF WOMEN PLAYING TEAM SPORTS

### A EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA ESCOLAR NA FORMAÇÃO DE IDENTIDADES DE MULHERES PRATICANTES DE ESPORTES COLETIVOS DE CONFRONTO

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#### RESUMO

O artigo relaciona identidade de gênero e esporte e contextualiza narrativas de mulheres praticantes de esportes, de tradição e predomínio masculino, a partir da memória das trajetórias esportivas delas na infância, na Educação Física Escolar e nas alteridades vivenciadas na prática do esporte na vida adulta. O estudo se configura, do ponto de vista metodológico, como observação participante realizada com jovens adultas praticantes de esportes coletivos de confronto num centro esportivo público do subúrbio do Rio de Janeiro. Os resultados descrevem os processos de inserção, enfrentamentos, identificação e permanência dessas mulheres em esportes, que no local estudado são de predomínio masculino, e a relação desses processos com a memória da infância e Educação Física Escolar. Como conclusão apresenta a importância da Educação Física Escolar para a construção das estratégias e narrativas identitárias que sustentam a permanências dessas mulheres nas modalidades esportivas dadas como espaço dos homens.

**Palavras-chave:** Esporte Coletivo. Identidade. Gênero. Educação Física.

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#### ABSTRACT

This article relates gender identity and sports and contextualizes narratives of women who play sports known to be traditionally and predominantly masculine, based on the memory of their sports journeys in childhood, in School Physical Education, and in the otherness experienced while playing sports in adulthood. From a methodological point of view, the study is designed as a participant observation carried out with young women playing team contact sports at a public sports center in the suburb of Rio de Janeiro. The results describe processes involving the insertion, confrontation, identification and permanence experienced by these women in sports, which, in the studied place, are predominantly masculine, as well as the relationship of these processes with their memories of childhood and School Physical Education. As a conclusion, this investigation presents the importance of School Physical Education in building strategies and identity narratives that support the permanence of these women in sports known to be a men's space.

**Keyword:** Team Sports. Identity. Gender. Physical Education.

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#### Introduction

Today's society demands a more egalitarian world and, at the same time, observes the valuation of individualities and differences<sup>1</sup>. The order of the day is to tackle persistent gaps in sex, gender, generation and race. Taking gender roles in Western contemporaneity, we must recognize that, despite all progress, there are still places of interdiction for underprivileged groups in the sense of Butler<sup>2</sup>. Sports practices are examples of said places. Physical Education, as of the 1990s, took on the challenge of seeking solutions, reflecting on more democratic and inclusive pedagogical actions. Research on School Physical Education (SPE) and gender, in particular, has provided promising knowledge on the topic, but has left gaps as well.

Chan-Vianna, Moura and Mourão<sup>3</sup> pointed out how gender studies on SPE, in the 1990s, addressing the theme in this field, approached discrimination and sexism in SPE classes with poor empirical evidence<sup>4</sup>. The studies operated with the gender category to mark symbolic disputes in a specific socio-cultural context that fixed the man-woman categories to denounce

men's hegemony in sports and other places. One statement in such studies was the perpetuation of socialized inequality and injustice in SPE because the content of classes is based on team contact sports (TCS). The argument is strong when, following Dunning<sup>5</sup>, we consider that such sports originate as a private space to exacerbate the masculinity of men and when, even considering that there are team sports modalities for women, that the sports market, in terms of athlete remuneration, audience and interest is, in general, still predominantly masculine, despite women's achievements in this territory. Thus, according to the studies reviewed by Chan-Vianna, Moura and Mourão<sup>3</sup>, by privileging this type of content in classes, one would (re)produce the cultural mechanisms that excluded female students.

Despite these statements, Chan-Vianna, Moura and Mourão<sup>3</sup> pointed out how the studies themselves also described female students who produced resistance, conscious or not, in the process of domination in this school space. However, investigations have treated these cases as exceptions, not giving up on the generalization of the analytical categories concerning males and females. Thus, they did not provide keys to a more refined understanding about power relations in SPE classes. Exception female students would not allow problematizing specific issues as to school socialization through sports, nor specific gender relations produced in the social space of the school. As a result, analytical questions and misconceptions were generated at the origin of the field of study dedicated to the relationship between sports, gender and SPE. Devide et al.<sup>6</sup> stress that, in the most recent production on the theme, approaches still focused only on the deficit of women's participation still persist, with epistemological, analytical, conceptual and political misconceptions. The starting question of the present study was: If there is, as research suggests, a male dominance in SPE, how do some girls manage to fit in and play TCS? Considering the hypothesis of the negative consequences of a division by sex and the consensus that TCS are hegemonically masculine, we raised, in this article, the following specific question: What meanings does SPE have for girls who play TCS, and what does this represent when they are identified as women in men's spaces in their adult sports life?

To answer this question, we present an investigation with the aim of understanding the meanings of SPE for TCS players and the identities at stake present in the narratives of themselves<sup>7</sup>. The research focused on leisure-time TCS players, in the suburb of Rio de Janeiro, with a view to understanding the meanings of sports in their life journeys and the relational processes through which their identities are built. Based on the result, we propose a reflection on the construction of knowledge in the socio-cultural studies on Physical Education, problematizing the way of looking at daily life and at practices involving sports and Physical Education.

## Methods

Participant observation<sup>8</sup> was carried out with young female adults who play TCS at a public leisure sports center, in the suburb of Rio de Janeiro, which offers modalities of sports, gymnastics and arts aimed at the local population, with the supervision of Physical Education teachers. The research was approved by the ethics and research committee under number 1.598.922. CAAE: 55593116.3.0000.5196.

Thus, the scenario<sup>9</sup> and interactions were recorded in a field diary for 10 months. It is noteworthy that the suburb of Rio de Janeiro is socially represented as a conservative space when it comes to the social behaviors disseminated in the South of the city. The South side of Rio is socially represented as the home of a middle class with good jobs, higher education levels, composed of people who are more liberal and tolerant in their customs, despite having poor communities in the region; on the other hand, the suburb is represented as a conservative place inhabited by the working class or unskilled people working in the city, and by poor communities scattered around different neighborhoods with different socioeconomic levels.

The census data correspond, in a certain way, to native representations about these territories of the city; however, it should be noted that native representations tend to culturally scrutinize and homogenize identities without considering the diversity that can inhabit each of these regions in the city.

The observed subjects were selected intentionally, as it was not the purpose to find an average for the entire population, but rather the specificity of a certain group in their social experience<sup>8</sup>. Thus, players in adult TCS classes with more than two years of practice at that place were selected. Ten players, aged between 18 and 22 years old, were interviewed – basketball (2), handball (3), football/indoor football (4), and handball and football/indoor football (1). The interviews tried to capture narratives that would interpret the meaning of the choice and permanence in TCS of these women, as well as their previous experiences with TCS. These sports used to be mostly played by men at that place, reproducing what is still commonly seen in sports more generally. For this reason, we will call them male-dominated sports.

The region had a low Human Development Index and, to a large extent, preserved a traditional way of life<sup>10,11</sup>. The players lived in different neighborhoods and belonged to different socioeconomic segments. The relationship between them was established at the studied sports center. This piece of data points out how, despite all different journeys<sup>12</sup>, the regularity in their speeches shows that they have experienced similar stories and collectively conformed identity narratives in their routine interaction through sports.

Consented by the participants, the interview started with open-ended questions about their sports life history until they presented reasons for their interest in TCS. The field investigator at that time teased the participants to bring back their memories of sports. The choice of sports that could stigmatize<sup>13</sup> the role of women appeared without specific questions. Care was taken not to impose on the interviewees questions directed at the researchers' intentions. It is inevitable, however, that there was some discomfort due to the presence of the recorder, of the interviewees' perception about the research topic, among others.

These remarks are justified as we think that mobilizing the subjects for investigations of this nature necessarily create a reflexivity from the respondents in relation to what the researcher expects to discover. In addition, it implies the need for the research subjects to activate identity discourses.

The results of the interviews indicate speeches from a primary and controlled dialogue. However, it does not mean a lack of richness and depth. According to Goffman<sup>14</sup>, when we interact we tend to act by following socially shared behaviors, producing representations at some level of the lived reality that frees our own face and that of others from constraints. This condition does not mean that the data are irrelevant. The superficial argumentative layers<sup>15</sup> reveal daily maneuvers made by the interviewees for them to stand in the face of mixed contacts<sup>13,14</sup>. Taking into account the scenario and considering the interview as a social interaction in which the informants organized their arguments to free their own face or that of the interviewer, the result of the analysis shows how they elaborated the narrative of themselves to build their self-identity<sup>5</sup> by equalizing what they think with what could be said. In this way, the data become precious, despite not capturing more intimate motivations or inferring on social structures that would guide their daily actions.

From the collected data, we defined memory and otherness as analysis categories. Both are fundamental in the construction of identities. With memory, the meanings of childhood and SPE for the TCS players are discussed. With otherness, the symbolic disputes fought by the research participants are analyzed.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Memories*

Identity operates through the discourse built on the relationship with the other. The coherence of this discourse is built on the basis of individual and/or collective memory, which always constitutes itself in the game of remembering and forgetting, articulated to the demands of this type of discourse in the present. That which is remembered or forgotten has the function of presenting normativities that make up the individuals before the other. The identity discourse is revealed in the need to affirm differences from the other; this discourse, therefore, is always a power struggle<sup>16</sup>.

As presented in the introduction to this article, seminal studies on SPE and gender denounced classes as a place of conformation of a male hegemony, with TCS having its focal point of domination; Brandolin et al.<sup>17</sup> reinforce that male high school students are more satisfied with Physical Education classes. However, they report that SPE, by providing access to sports for boys and girls, with all the gender cleavages that may exist, also provides a place for learning and contesting the norms genderized by TCS players.

The SPE that all interviewees reported experiencing follows the model considered in pedagogy as a class marked by pedagogical models generically referred to as traditional. Its contents are based on conventional team sports and recreational activities. The space/time of classes is divided by the teacher, keeping the separation by sex. However, the interviewees reported that SPE was one of the few opportunities to play sports:

I'd stay home doing nothing. I'd ask my mom to bring me (to the sports center), but my mom wouldn't bring me. My sister (older) used to come here, but couldn't bring me either because she'd go somewhere else. At home my mom was like: "Oh! You're so young for that" and stuff like that... Until one day I turned thirteen and she said: "I'll take you there, you got me so fed up that I'll take you there". And she did. [Before so] (...) I'd stay home. I'd go to school. From home to school, from school to church (...) nothing sports-related. Only in PE at school (Basketball player, 18 years old)

The players' report on their own childhood and adolescence points to the relevance of SPE in the introduction of sports practice in their socialization. Family organization was at the hands of their mothers, who valued their studies and took on their domestic obligations, but did not invest in their daughters' sports training. The girls had access to the street as a leisure space, but this was not equipped for their development in sports. Until they achieved some autonomy of choice and urban mobility, the school and, in some cases, the church were the places where they would transit outside their houses. The research participants report that the school would have played a strong role for socialization in sports that, later, led them to choose TCS at the sports center of the investigation.

Despite the restrictions, their desire for TCS is shaped long before their first experience in the formal spaces of these modalities. In their life stories, they described children's activities that were always linked to popular games. *Dodgeball, capture the flag, hide-and-peek, kite, a rope tied to the tree to play volleyball and football* (which expressed various games recognized in the family of games played with the feet<sup>18</sup>) were the most mentioned activities. Almost no game of a female tradition is recalled. It is easy to assume that, at some point in their childhood, they played with dolls, played house or with a collection of stationery paper with friends, but these were not included in their reports. Memory works by reconstructing fragmented images of a knowledge with which we identify. These images are constantly being redefined by new experiences accumulated<sup>16</sup>. That is why the aforementioned activities are relevant, as they have in common the relationship of forces between two competence networks, which defines team sports games<sup>19</sup>, presenting central characteristics such as speed, strength and aggressiveness.

The same happened as to the participants' memories of schooling. The importance of SPE for the players can be measured in the statement by one of them, when questioned about the timid presence of women in TCS. When narrating her personal journey and the strategies

she used to be able to insert herself into typically-male sports, she says vehemently: *I think it starts at school. Girls who don't like Physical Education? That's over!* (Basketball player, 18 years old).

The school is pointed out by the informants as a space to experiment with ways to negotiate a deviant practice<sup>20,21</sup>. One of them reports her action strategy to insert herself:

I remember everything, we'd be separated, I'd leave where I was because I liked it more what the boys did and I played with them. (...) the girls would even dance sometimes, but I didn't like it, some girls would come play football too, two liked it and would come with me to play, but, mostly, it was handball, or dodgeball, or capture the flag, really girly things (...) sometimes I'd play with the girls, sometimes with the boys. Then I'd play with the boys, and played a little bit here, a little bit there, but I really remember about handball and football, until eighth grade, that was my Physical Education... That was it. (Football player, 19 years old).

The reports pointed out that the contents were different, with girls playing recreational games typical of childhood, and handball as the only sport option, while boys would be primarily assigned with varied TCS. The speech here, continuing with the childhood memory, suggests a delay in the bodily education of the other girls who would not play street games and would not be able to play more complex sports, which could even define the content chosen by teachers for each sex.

The Physical Education teacher, who mediates these negotiations, appears with an emphasis in the stories. In general, there are no reports of tacit actions by the teacher in order to prevent the girls from moving from one game to the other. Interestingly, the only report on the prohibition to play football referred to the context of a private school, considered as belonging to the economic elite in the region. Broadly speaking, the reports presented positive memories of the public school and highlighted the figure of the teacher as an enabler for the players to move between the genderized spaces.

Male teachers, according to the interviewees' report, appear emphasizing the talent of the players and referring them to sports training places. Female teachers, in their turn, seem concerned with the image that playing together with the boys could generate, but without discouraging sports participation, just indicating how they should behave in order to avoid *mean comments*. In one of the reports, a female teacher appears as someone who encouraged the female student to play, but stressed that she should *not be carried away by the boys' violent attitudes*, showing that gender is on the pedagogical agenda even when the activities allow the participation of both boys and girls.

Thus, the players credited their male and female teachers with a large portion of contribution to their success in keeping playing TCS in adulthood. Even when they criticize their SPE, which was a mess, or the school that *would not encourage them, would not having them playing in student championships*, the players recognized their SPE teachers as a mediator to negotiate and conquer their spaces in the classes and in the experiences that followed in their sports journeys.

An SPE teacher plays, if we use Giddens' terms<sup>11</sup>, the roles of a guardian of tradition and of an expert. In the former, by handling the organization of classes before the school, the teacher contributes to the continuity of the division of genderized practices informed by the culture. In the latter, due to a greater naturalization with the masculinized stereotype of the female body<sup>22</sup>, and for nurturing the belief that sports are a positive path for everyone, the teacher negotiates possibilities and encourages more flexible adjustments in the genderized experiences of practices for female students during classes.

Individuals move in the culture based on a project<sup>12</sup>, which includes both careers<sup>20</sup> and the most immediate interests and satisfactions. Teachers and students can be motivated, at

different levels, to transgress or conform to the established situation, and each one does so within a field of possibilities<sup>12</sup>. Rather than absolutely succumbing to a social determinant, individuals have a margin and capacity to reflect on the context and find a unique path, in accordance with their experiences lived, the potential of their bodies, and the choices that they make.

A school that reinforces the traditional role of men and women<sup>17</sup> also prioritizes the taste of the most capable ones for sports and, whether intentionally or not, promotes opportunities for experimentation and socialization of new possibilities for gender identification. In this regard, SPE is the oriented space in which individuals have a greater opportunity for expression and comparison of bodies, so fundamental for the construction of behaviors, identities. Thus, those girls who were already sensitive to the taste for practices with characteristics typical of the male universe would experience, as in a laboratory, the stigma and negotiations that would follow them in their attempts at leisure-time TCS.

Childhood games and SPE presented themselves as fundamental for the players in their speeches. Even if we recognize that memory speeches will never be a total reconstitution of what has been lived, we are concerned here with indicating the meanings given by such experiences in the constitution of the identities of these women. In this sense, they attributed to childhood their desire to play TCS, and recalled SPE as the fundamental environment to equalize actions that opposed the normativity of the feminine in the context in which they were inserted. Memory became the basis and space for the equalization of a coherent narrative that presented the roots of them being women playing sports traditionally reserved for men.

This identification process is what is at stake in social struggles<sup>23</sup>. In the studied context, *dyke, brutes and masculine* represented accusations that the players perceived to be ascribed to them. *Choosy, delicate, between quotes, fussy*, selfish and exaggerated about their aesthetic concern were how they identified the model of women they opposed. Therefore, the stigma, present in the daily lives of the players since school age, is not an element in the culture that acts in an absolute manner to move them away from TCS. For those who did not fit that type of normativity of the feminine, it was the stigma itself and the opportunities to experience this process, largely in SPE, that contributed to them choosing TCS and continuing to build a deviant identity<sup>20</sup> in the school space.

### *Otherness*

Identity always appears in opposition to someone else, whether between people or networks of belonging. Identity is thrown into dialogue when power shares are in dispute in a social interaction. The narratives built for those involved in these disputes may be of conformity, but also of struggle for personal and collective interests. The players found themselves in this dilemma. While struggling to make TCS a conventional practice for women, they were distancing themselves from the femininity informed by the local culture. The drama before them needed the building of symbolic boundaries that protected them while they shaped narratives that justified what they would be or wished to be. Two points proved to be important in this identity strategy: the accusations and the affirmative actions.

In the accusations game, it was possible to understand that they felt constantly overseen for participating in TCS. In Goffman's terms<sup>13</sup>, they considered themselves discredited by others, perceiving the imputation of a virtual social identity, always hiding a real social identity that they recognized as legitimate.

It is about marking otherness without presenting accusers. The narratives generalized the players of traditionally-female sports. More precisely, the female social role of passivity, individualism and exaggeration in the aesthetic concern, described by Mourão<sup>24</sup>, labeled in female-dominated sports. One of the players reported what she thinks of herself and what she assumes that other people think about the players of the modality she chose:

Like, I'll be straightforward – dyke. Because, like, basketball is: Oh” You'll look like a man, likes baggy clothes, and stuff like that... Handball, it's more girly, football too... Got it? Now, not volleyball, like, the girls are more, like, delicate, between quotes, you know? Like, a little bit, right? I really don't know if I'm making sense. (...) Depending on where you go! I like playing basketball, I can play basketball and football, I like baggy clothes, I wear baggy clothes a lot, man! Then they come, like, from afar – Look! That girl is a dyke, that's nonsense, it means nothing. (Basketball player, 18 years old)

In almost all of the collected narratives, there are suspended speeches, silenced words, when the topic is the stigma related to deviation from the cisgender identity. The suppression or omission of a term in the interviewees' speech can be interpreted as a limit that this theme may incite in the reflexive interaction with the interviewer, because the dialectics between normativity and deviation may generate obstacles in the conversation; however, this theme always ends up appearing in the interviewees' speech, in a more explicit or nuanced manner.

The report complains that the choice of a bodily practice considered as masculine produces stigma because she adopts the style or a corporeality typical of her modality. This type of relationship is established from an undesirable feature, in which the stigmatized person ceases to be a normal individual, being judged inferior by others and less desired by the flaws that she has<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, the stigma was not a concrete, face-to-face accusation, as there were no explicit recriminations or acts of rejection at the place of the activities. In this direction, the players would take on the condition of deviants from traditional femininity and felt that they did not fit in, so they produced narratives about how they are seen by others who were not present. The relational other here is what the culture indicated to be the male and female standard incorporated by the players in their everyday relations.

*Dyke* was a synthesis of the stigma. The ambiguous term in the players' speech served more to hide explanations than to clarify behaviors. Homosexuality, the male stereotype and playing aggressive sports could or could not be contained in the term. The regularity in which the term appeared in the interviewees' speech seems to work, however, as an operation that separates sports practice from these other possible connotations that the term expressed. Some players were not bothered by the accusation of homosexuality, others did not refer to body aesthetics. However, there was consensus in the interviews that choosing TCS was not anchored on any behavior other than the enjoyment of playing. They stated *that the fact that someone is homosexual has nothing to do with the sport they choose*. However, choosing TCS, in the studied case, represents in itself a narrative, conscious or not, that puts at stake the cisgender standard.

The accusations of being women who do not fit the norm are marked in these narratives. Nonetheless, the report can easily lead us to a moral criticism of the social condition of oppression suffered by the players. Up close and from the inside<sup>25</sup>, however, it is interesting to note how such players establish categories for those who are outside TCS – volleyball or anonymous watchers – and for those close to them, creating a hierarchy, centered on the modality they play – with basketball being less masculine than handball and football, and different from the *delicate-between-quotes female volleyball players*.

The second point in the identification game of the TCS players were affirmative actions. The narratives of themselves<sup>7</sup>, the feeling of belonging to one group, and the differentiation from the relational other were present in all arguments, as in the following reports.

Man, team sports require way more contact than the others. And it's a lot of bumping, I don't know. Many girls are super fussy about it. I used to be like that. (...) but, I don't know, girls think: "Damn!" Indoor football is a men's thing", "Oh! Handball is so aggressive". It's always like that. They prefer something more like volleyball,

swimming, aquarobics, things without much contact. (Handball and indoor football player, 18 years old).

If you look, physically, you'll see, like, a stronger thigh. Always more resistant and, I mean. So, when you play like that, some games are not so intense, other girls who are not from here are fussier (...) [In TCS] you are faster to get things, (...) better to perform well at anything you do, better reaction time. (Basketball player, 19 years old).

Even when they talked about themselves or about their own social belonging, they always presented a relationship of otherness with other women. When they expressed themselves directly about the difference between different sports, the boundaries appeared more strongly:

So [the others] think a lot about their looks, even about not wanting to get hurt, thinking that this is too violent, that if they come that's gonna be bad. So they try what? To be a model, to be: "Oh! I'll study, work". That's it. (Basketball player, 18 years old).

If half of the girls knew how much these sports improve your body, improve even your energy, they would sure be playing. I don't know, I think girls are kind of sedentary. I don't know. They like to stay home watching TV, gossiping about the life of others. I'm not into this kind of thing. (...) And here nobody is so fussy. So nobody cares If I wear baggy shorts, If I wear tight shorts, If my nails are painted, If my hair is tied. Nobody cares. Everyone is here to play. (...) These girls who are not from here, I don't know them much, because I don't talk to them much. Some of them are even unfriendly for me. But the team sports girls, and things like that, it's not because they play a more aggressive sport that they stop being feminine. They are feminine, but they have their femininity time. You're here to play, you're not here doing your makeup to get a boyfriend. (Handball and indoor football player, 18 years old).

The TCS players made accusations by disabling that which they assigned as a women's tradition. In the interviews, they imitated players of female-dominated sports in a caricatured and mocking manner. The expression *fussy* or *delicate*, *between quotes*, was recurrent and appeared to ridicule the attitudes of these other women, just as the rugby men described by Dunning<sup>5</sup> did. The otherness of the English context was between the traditional male style and the advancement of women in several important social segments of the last century. If the rugby men constituted a reserved space for masculinity, we can suggest that the TCS girls built a space for transgressing the essentialization of femininity and, by extension, disrupting the cisgender worldview. The data point not to the preservation of an established condition, but to the advancement of dissonant expressions about the social norm of being a female. In addition, the relational other converges with Scott's thinking<sup>26</sup> about changes in gender representations, since they were not objectively men, but the expression of femininity represented by sports modalities traditionally linked to women who embodied the identity contested by the TCS players.

While facing the accusations, the players listed arguments concerning personal choices as a type of vanguard about the conformism of normative femininity. They claimed to be women of attitude, sagacious, and having a spirit of camaraderie. This way, they established another way of being a woman, building otherness with normative femininity, materialized in the players of sports of a female tradition – volleyball, gymnastics, dances.

It was notorious how the stigma was converted in their speeches into a positive argument. It is important to stress that the "terms of stigmatization" only have an effect when the power shares of the established individuals are much higher than those of the "outsiders".

However, “when accusations start to be insulting, it is a sign that the power relations is changing”<sup>27</sup>.

The male-dominance argument appeared only once in the narratives. One basketball player, in the only mixed class among the studied classes, claimed to be discriminated against when losing for being a woman. It was possible to observe that victory seemed to suspend the social labels of any kind and to highlight the good personal and collective performance of the winners. Now, to justify the defeat, the same actors accused team members of being a woman, obese, short or newbie. Sports, in general, because they deal with the unpredictability of the result in explicit confrontations, is a fertile ground for accusatory categories to emerge, which are disseminated in the culture beyond athletic performance analysis. Moreover, the accusations observed had, at times, a tone of perversity and embarrassment for the accused one and, at times, of playfulness, but always making the environment open for confronting differences and dialogues between the players.

We must remember that identity is situational and relational<sup>23</sup>. It is not innate, nor is it hostage to cultural determinisms. The identification of a person is gradually built by their unique journey on the orientation maps that the culture informs<sup>28</sup>. Identities are not fixed either. Each individual activates them, or not, depending on the contingency of the scenario and on the social actors in interaction at that given moment<sup>9,13,14</sup>.

The *woman* category can be explained within this context. Both the informants of the seminal studies on SPE and gender and the TCS players do not deny belonging to the woman category, but, reflexively, constituted in their narratives what it would mean to be a *woman exactly*, in accordance with the field of possibilities<sup>12</sup> that each one had from their singular journeys. In this process, they pulled, or not, the trigger of the woman identity based on the line<sup>9</sup> that they defined to present themselves in the game of social interactions, in each situation that they encountered.

## Conclusions

In the individual journeys, traditional SPE proved significant for the players in the study to define their taste for TCS, as well as to build social skills to negotiate their desire and permanence in male-dominated sports. The encounter in sporting leisure with other players that had similar journeys constituted a space of accusations against the traditional model of “being feminine” and of affirmative actions for the construction of a self-narrative that would equalize the identities of women and players of sports of a male tradition. The permanence in a male space in that context did not mean, however, an arena of symbolic disputes between men and women, but of expression of a deviant femininity that contributed to them continuing playing sports not intended for them.

The male-female analysis category, fixed and *a priori*, as used in the seminal studies on gender in SPE, could limit the understanding of the phenomena studied here. The native models<sup>10</sup> of femininity captured in the research opened doors for understanding the distinctions experienced by the women in that context. The analyses comparing men and women would guide a research towards the reification of generalizing theories. Therefore, just as gender, other analytical categories from socio-cultural studies on Physical Education, categories which are constituted previously and externally to the study object, may not capture the rapid transformations that take place in the most emerging scenario of bodily practices and, thus, limit interpretations and the reach of our research in the field.

The investigation of identities in everyday life, considering native models, can enable interesting studies for us to capture the rapid and complex social transformations of contemporary times in the dynamics of sports practices. We will move forward if we abandon inquisitive notes and explore under what circumstances, for instance, each individual is

inserted, persists and remains in a practice, amid the various symbolic disputes in the space/time of sports, Physical Education classes and identities at play in society.

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