

ARTICLE

**GENDER NARRATIVES IN SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION: A SCOPING REVIEW OF THE BRAZILIAN SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE IN HEALTH SCIENCES<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study seeks to understand which gender narratives are present in the Brazilian scientific production regarding school Physical Education in health sciences. This is an exploratory study with a qualitative approach. The methodology used was the scoping review, and scientific articles in the Virtual Health Library were included. The sample of this study consisted of 16 articles, which were read entirely. As a result, it can be stated that: publications involve mostly public institutions, most of which happened in the decade of 2010. Elementary School was the most present educational level, and students had an important participation in these studies; the researches were mostly qualitative, being observations and questionnaires the most used collection tools. As to the concept of gender, the analysis made evident that all the studies that dealt with these relations understand gender as a social and historical construction. In this sense, we can conclude that the Brazilian scientific production in the field of Health Sciences that focused on gender relations in school Physical Education was outlined by searching for a better understanding of an excluding, sexist scenario, which stimulates in different ways the corporal experiences of boys and girls and reproduces stereotypes related to femininity and masculinity and, thus, throughout history, has placed girls in an inferior and unequal plan in basic education.

**Keywords:** school education, sexism, body culture, periodicals as subject, review literature as a subject.

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<sup>1</sup> The translation of this article into English was funded by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais - FAPEMIG, through the program of supporting the publication of institutional scientific journals.

## AS NARRATIVAS DE GÊNERO NA EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA ESCOLAR: SCOPING REVIEW DA LITERATURA CIENTÍFICA BRASILEIRA NAS CIÊNCIAS DA SAÚDE

**RESUMO:** Este estudo tem como objetivo compreender quais as narrativas de gênero presentes na produção científica brasileira nas ciências da saúde no que diz respeito à Educação Física escolar. Trata-se de uma pesquisa exploratória, de abordagem qualitativa. A metodologia utilizada foi a *scoping review*, e foram incluídos nesta pesquisa artigos científicos encontrados na Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde (BVS). Chegou-se a 16 artigos, os quais consistiram na amostra deste estudo e foram lidos na íntegra. Como resultado, pode-se afirmar que: as publicações envolvem instituições públicas em sua maioria e a maior parte delas aconteceu na década de 2010; o Ensino Fundamental foi o nível educacional mais presente e os(as) estudantes tiveram participação importante nessas pesquisas; os trabalhos se mostraram, majoritariamente, qualitativos, sendo a observação e o questionário os instrumentos de coleta mais utilizados. Em relação ao conceito de gênero, a análise evidenciou que todos os trabalhos que tratavam dessas relações entendem gênero como uma construção social e histórica. Nesse sentido, pode-se concluir que a produção científica brasileira no campo das Ciências da Saúde que se debruçou sobre as relações de gênero na Educação Física escolar esteve delineada pela busca de melhor compreensão de um cenário excludente, sexista, que estimula de maneiras diferentes as vivências corporais de meninos e meninas e que reproduz estereótipos relacionados às feminilidades e masculinidades e, assim, ao longo da história, colocou as meninas num plano inferior e desigual na educação básica.

**Palavras-chave:** educação escolar, sexismo, cultura corporal, publicações periódicas como assunto, literatura de revisão como assunto.

## NARRATIVAS DE GÉNERO EN LA EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA ESCOLAR: SCOPING REVIEW DE LA LITERATURA CIENTÍFICA BRASILEÑA EN CIENCIAS DE LA SALUD

**RESUMEN:** El objetivo es comprender qué narrativas de género están presentes en la producción científica brasileña en ciencias de la salud con respecto a la Educación Física escolar. La metodología fue la revisión de alcance y se incluyeron en esta investigación 16 artículos científicos que se encuentran en la Biblioteca Virtual en Salud. Como resultado, se puede decir que: la mayoría de las publicaciones involucran a instituciones públicas, y la mayoría de ellas tuvieron lugar en la década de 2010; La Enseñanza Primaria fue el nivel educativo más presente y los estudiantes tuvieron una participación importante en estas encuestas; los trabajos fueron en su mayoría cualitativos, siendo la observación y el cuestionario los instrumentos de recolección más utilizados. En cuanto al concepto de género, el análisis mostró que todos los trabajos que abordaron estas relaciones entienden el género como una construcción social e histórica. En ese sentido, se puede concluir que la producción científica brasileña en el campo de las Ciencias de la Salud que se centró en las relaciones de género en la educación física escolar estuvo delineada por la búsqueda de una mejor comprensión de un escenario excluyente, sexista, que estimula de diversas formas la vivencias corporales de niños y niñas y que reproduce estereotipos relacionados con la feminidad y la masculinidad y así, a lo largo de la historia, ha situado a las niñas en un nivel inferior y desigual en la educación básica.

**Palabras clave:** educación escolar, sexismo, cultura corporal, publicaciones periódicas como asunto, literatura de revisión como asunto.

## INTRODUCTION

Bracht (1999) believed that Physical Education was born with the function of building healthy and docile bodies, with an aesthetic education being, moreover, based on the medical-scientific knowledge of this body. According to the author, from the 1940s on, Physical Education went through a process of ‘sportification,’ which influenced its teaching at school, in which some sports, such as futsal, volleyball, basketball, and handball, became its only subjects. In the 1980s, the author states that this process started to be problematized in Brazil, thus emerging new theoretical and methodological proposals that defended the diversity of knowledge in the classes, the ways to develop them, and the re-signification of sport.

Daolio (1996) considers Physical Education part of human culture (i.e., it is an area of knowledge that studies and takes place in a group of practices related to body and movement and produced by the human being during their existence). Therefore, according to the author, we speak of a body culture or culture of movement, which is the games, gymnastics, dance, fights, and sports in general, already systematized in other publications, such as Coletivo de Autores (1992), Daolio (1996), and Kunz (1994).

Such systematization is corroborated and expressed by the Common National Curricular Base (BNCC) (BRASIL, 2018), which, concerning school Physical Education, states that it is developed from six thematic units: games, sports, gymnastics, dances, fights, and adventure body practices. According to the BNCC, these practices can be experienced at any stage and modality of education as long as they respect the criteria of knowledge progression, considering the singularities of the subjects and the context in which they live.

Therefore, the role of Physical Education at school, according to the BNCC (BRASIL, 2018), is to improve the experiences of children, adolescents, and adults in Basic Education, promoting access to a wide cultural universe of knowledge that is inscribed, but not limited, to the characteristic rationality of scientific knowledge that usually guide pedagogical practices at school. In addition, one of the skills of school Physical Education is the ability to experience and explore the various forms of expression of the body (BRASIL, 2018, p. 213).

However, this is not the reality found in the literature since, according to Altmann (2015), besides boys understanding Physical Education classes as synonymous of soccer, there is a clear picture of exclusion that involves gender relations and the level of ability of the students. Additionally, for Jacó (2012), the different forms of class participation promote different and unequal learning, which brings limitations so that those who do not participate effectively can acquire new knowledge and body skills.

According to Goellner (2010), bodies can reveal the time in which they were educated and produced; thus, simultaneously, there are numerous differences and similarities between individuals, although body constraints are diverse. Goellner (2010) understands that the construction of gender involves a series of processes that mark the bodies, stating that if the bodies are distinct, so are the genders and sexualities, and they construct the identity of the subject.

Louro (2019) states that the school institution has always played a specific role, separating subjects since it was constituted differently for rich and poor, boys and girls. Moreover, for the author, the movements and meanings produced at school and incorporated by boys and girls become part of their bodies. It is essential to recognize that the school, besides reproducing the perceptions of gender and sexuality that society propagates, produces these perceptions itself. Thus, according to the author, the observation and censorship of sexuality are fundamentally conducted by the achievement of “normality.”

Much of the discussion of gender in society, according to Connel and Pearse (2015, p. 46), highlights a dichotomy. Thus, starting from a biological division between men and women, gender is defined as “[...] social and psychological differences that correspond to that division, being built upon it

or caused by it.” Although the images we have about gender are mostly dichotomous, the reality is not. Goellner (2010, p. 75) questions this dichotomy: “What really is male and female? Can we refer to these terms in the singular, or could we not think there are different ways of experiencing masculinities and femininities? Are there fixed ways of so being and so appearing?”

Therefore, Connel and Pearse (2015) suggested that all these created standards are part of a social effort to direct people’s behavior and, therefore, ideas that there are appropriate behaviors for each gender tend to appear constantly. Thus, for the authors, the media, schools, families, and religious institutions favor the creation of these differences when they manifest exemplary masculinities and femininities.

For Scott (1995, p. 96), the definition of gender is given by a relationship between two ideas: “(1) gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes and (2) gender is a primary way of giving meaning to power relations.” Louro (2008) understands that when it comes to the cultural realm, there is a struggle to assign meanings produced amid power relations. Furthermore, Scott (1995, p. 89) further states that the category gender “[...] provides a means of decoding the meaning and understanding the complex connections between various forms of human interaction.”

For Prado and Ribeiro (2010), body and sports practices produce marks related to gender and sexuality, educating the bodies beyond their performances, beauty, and health. Nonetheless, according to the authors, in several circumstances, these marks try, in a way, to limit the subjects to a representation that is pre-established and recognized by society as appropriate, not allowing the infinite possibilities of human life.

Thus, there is a naturalized sense of gender which, according to Fernandes (2010), is one in which there is a binary composition of body that composes man/male and woman/female. The bodies considered different from these established are placed in a field of pathologies, needing to be repaired, silenced and/or hidden. In the school environment, this sense is very present and associates, all the time, sex and gender, thus establishing unequal sociocultural places for children.

Prado and Ribeiro (2010) state that when noting Physical Education as a cultural artifact, it is understood that, just like its practices, its discourses also carry a formative trace and that they compose subjects with specific bodies, genders, and sexualities.

In this sense, the problem of this study is: what are the gender narratives present in the Brazilian scientific production in Health Sciences regarding school Physical Education? Therefore, this study aims to understand which gender narratives are present in the Brazilian scientific production in Health Sciences regarding school Physical Education.

Thus, it is expected that this study can provide an overview of Brazilian science in the field of Health Sciences around the theme of gender, Physical Education, and school, which, at first, presents a relationship marked by exclusions, interiorization, and unequal opportunities. The manuscript presented here results from the primary data from a master's dissertation defended in 2021.

## SEARCH METHOD

This is an exploratory study with a qualitative approach, which, according to Minayo (2009), is characterized by working with human phenomena (meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes), which are considered part of social reality, since human beings are differentiated by their thoughts and actions according to their lived and shared reality.

For this study, the methodology used was a scoping review, which, according to Arksey and O’Malley (2005), aims to map the main concepts of a given study area, its primary sources, types of evidence, and/or show its conceptual limitations.

The Ethics and Research Committee of the Federal University of São Paulo approved the study under opinion number 4160120520.

## Data collection

The Joanna Briggs protocol (PETERS *et al.*, 2020) suggests a strategy for creating a practical question, that being the use of the acronym PCC (Population, Concept, and Context); with that, in the following table, the study elements that will be considered in this review are indicated:

- Population: school community (teachers, students, mothers/parents/guardians);
- Concept: gender relations;
- Context: Brazilian School Physical Education.

In this sense, the guiding question of the present context consists of uncovering the gender narratives in Brazilian school Physical Education in the field of health sciences. To this end, this study included scientific articles found in the Regional Portal of the Virtual Health Library (VHL) from the following databases: Lilacs, Medline, Index Psychology, São Paulo State Health Secretariat, HISA - Health History, and RHS Repository. The search included manuscripts published in Portuguese, Spanish, and English using the terms “gênero and educação física,” “género and Educación física,” and “gender and physical education.” The intention of covering the three languages is due to their local (Brazil), continental (Latin America), and global (other continents) coverage.

The inclusion criteria were:

- studies published from 1980 to 2020: considering the period of democratic reopening in Brazil and the impact of the recent *stricto sensu* post-graduation in Physical Education started in Brazil (the University of São Paulo in 1977 and Federal University of Santa Maria, 1979) (SILVA, 2005);
- open-access policy;
- to be a publication by Brazilian researchers in the context of Brazilian schools.

After the search, the titles, abstracts, and keywords were read in order to identify the studies eligible for analysis from the following exclusion criteria:

- studies with a theoretical and methodological matrix based on Natural Sciences;
- studies developed in non-school contexts;
- systematic, integrative, narrative, and/or scoping review studies;
- reviews;
- magazine editorials;
- essays;
- letters to the editor;
- publications of event proceedings in special issues of periodicals;
- articles not limited to Physical Education as a curricular component, in the perspective of Souza Júnior (2001). For the author, a curricular component is:

[...] an element of the school's curricular organization that, in its specificity of contents, brings a selection of knowledge that, organized and systematized, should provide the student with a reflection about a dimension of culture and that, together with other elements of this curricular organization, aims at contributing to the student's cultural formation (SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2001, p. 83).

- articles that do not have gender relations in school Physical Education as an object of study.

The search was conducted on May 24, 2020, and 1,282 articles were found; after excluding repeated papers, 674 remained. The exclusion criteria were applied; thus, 16 articles made up the study sample and were read in full. The aim was to obtain material produced by empirical research developed in everyday school life.

## Data Analysis

According to Thomas, Nelson, and Silverman (2012), all qualitative research in its data interpretation phase provides readers with an analytical narrative to form a holistic picture of the phenomenon studied. For the authors, the analytical narrative is a “[...] short and interpretive description of an event or situation” (p. 381) — in the case of this study, the gender narratives in school Physical Education. To this end, the objectives of the studies and the respective concepts of gender were analyzed.<sup>2</sup>

## RESULTS

Box 1 shows the objective of the selected studies and the concept of gender that the authors presented in their texts. Thus, it is noted that these works aimed to expand the understanding of participation, diversity, sexuality, and exclusions present in school Physical Education.

**Box 1 - Objective(s) and concept of gender in the selected studies**

Article	Purpose of the study	Gender concept(s)*
Kleinubing, Saraiva, and Francischi (2013)	To understand how dance can be configured as a space-time to share experiences in physical education classes in high school.	They understand “[...] this category as a social construction [...]” (p. 71).
Franco (2016)	To identify and problematize signs of destabilization that the presence of trans women teachers would cause in the schools in which they worked.	“[...] gender is understood as a cultural construct denying that it is set by sex or a casual outcome defined by its biological structure [...]” (p. 50).
Silva and Avila (2018)	Analyze the gender relations in the insertion of male teachers in Early Childhood Education.	“[...] analytical category that conceives of differences between men and women as discursive constructions, therefore not biologically determined.” (p. 434).
Silva and Daolio (2003)	To analyze how a certain group of preschool children give meanings to gender relations in the games they play in a day-care center environment.	“[...] the word gender is used to accentuate the non-biological differences that exist between the sexes, such as behaviors, interests, dress, etc.” (p. 16).
So, Martins, and Betti (2018)	Analyze the girls’ meaning relations and mobilization with the knowledge of struggles.	“By gender, we consider the organization of socially perceived difference between sexes, which is crossed by power relations, constituting inequalities of opportunities and resources for the genders.” (p. 31).

<sup>2</sup> The original study also analyzed: journals, year of publication and their respective evaluation in the Qualis Capes system (Interdisciplinary area); authorship and institutions involved; educational level involved in data collection: Kindergarten, Elementary School, High School, or Technological High School; population studied; research method; data collection instruments. However, due to the limits imposed on a text such as this, it was not possible to incorporate these data.

Cruz and Palmeira (2009)	To present propositions about the practice of school Physical Education to analyze its contributions in the process of gender identity construction of the students.	“[...] gender refers to socially constructed aspects [...]” (p. 119).
Altmann, Mariano, and Uchoga (2012)	To analyze the relationships between gender and movement in Early Childhood Education based on two research studies carried out in institutions at this level of education in different cities in São Paulo State.	“[...] gender is a social and relational construction in which biological differences are not discarded but part of a broader and more complex process of producing differences, of which educational institutions are part.” (p. 290).
Dornelles (2012)	To problematize that the biological discourse runs through and constitutes the justifications enunciated by teachers to separate boys and girls in school Physical Education.	“[...] a category that traverses and constitutes subjects in an uninterrupted way throughout life [...]” (p. 194).
Uchoga and Altmann (2015)	To understand how gender relations occur in the different contents of school Physical Education and how their diversification interferes with gender relations during the classes.	Gender is constructed by society and gives different opportunities to female and male bodies.
Jesus and Devidé (2006)	To investigate the students’ representations of the school Physical Education classes separated by gender and mixed.	“[...] social construction of sex. That is, as an analytical and political category, it highlights that masculine and feminine are social and historical constructions” (GOELLNER, 2005, p. 207) (p. 124).
Cardoso, Felipe, and Hedegaard (2005)	Determine whether a particular motor pattern was important in an individual’s perception as “divergent gender.”	They understand the social construction of gender and the stereotypes they carry since the students are considered divergent from their gender expressions.
Santos (2010)	To address evidence of senses and meanings of femininity and masculinity in physical education classes.	“[...] a socio-historical construction of gender-based differentiations [...]” (p. 842).
Brito and Santos (2013)	To identify the processes of inclusion/exclusion in a male elementary school physical education class.	“[...] a way of referring to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women, identified as masculine and feminine.” (p. 237).
Sampaio <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Evaluate how classes are structured, teachers’ perception of student behavior, and analyze the strategies used in positive action on the topic.	“[...] a social construction of gender on sex. What is socially expected as proper for boys and girls seems to stem from biological determinants, without noticing the cultural-historical construction from which gender stereotypes result.” (p. 83).
Garcia and Brito (2018)	To problematize how gender relations and sexualities were constituted in Physical Education classes at a municipal school in Rio de Janeiro, with emphasis on reports of the participation of a boy student who did not fit into the binary gender norms.	“[...] social maintainer of hierarchies, it acts as an important device not only regulating sexualities but also directing school pedagogical practices.” (p. 1327).
Duarte and Mourão (2007)	To investigate the representations of 4th-grade schoolchildren about the selection criteria used for their participation in mixed classes.	“[...] is a social and historical category understood in different ways by different cultures.” (p. 42).

**Source:** Data collected in the study.

\*Excerpts were extracted in which the authors defined the concept of gender. In the absence of a specific passage, an interpretation of the concept was made in light of the complete reading of the article.

\*\* Free translation of articles written in the English language.

Box 1 also shows that the concept of gender in the evaluated researches was from the perspective of social and historical construction. Nevertheless, two articles that also had as the object of study the gender relations in school Physical Education, being them Uchoga and Altmann (2015) and Cardoso, Felipe, and Hedegaard (2005), did not present a definition described in their text. However, they discussed this issue, leaving implicit the concept of gender they took as a basis, enabling readers to have their own interpretation.

Uchoga and Altmann (2015, p. 164), for instance, when discussing the separation of boys and girls in Physical Education classes, highlighted that “[...] the separation occurs and is justified on behalf of certain conceptions of the possibilities of the body before the movement, perceived as distinct for men and women,” corroborating the idea that gender is constructed by society and gives different opportunities to female and male bodies.

In the same way, from interviews with teachers and/or teachers of Physical Education, Cardoso, Felipe, and Hedegaard (2005, p. 356) reported that there is confusion between gender divergence and uncoordinated motor behavior, concluding that appearance and motor skills have an important role when teachers classify their students. With this, it is implied that the authors understand the social construction of gender and the stereotypes it carries since the students interviewed in this paper are judged as divergent by their teachers based on their gender expressions, which are not expected or desirable within society.

Given the above, the set of 16 articles analyzed allowed us to identify two gender narratives,<sup>3</sup> namely: 1) Femininities, Masculinities, Body, and Culture (SILVA; DAOLIO, 2003; CARDOSO; FELIPE; HEDEGAARD, 2005; JESUS; DEVIDE, 2006; CRUZ; PALMEIRA, 2009; SANTOS, 2010; ALTMANN; MARIANO; UCHOGA, 2012; DORNELES, 2012; BRITO; SANTOS, 2013; KLEINUBING; SARAIVA; FRANCISCHI, 2013; SAMPAIO *et al.*, 2014; FRANCO, 2016; SILVA; ÁVILA, 2018); and 2) The School, Pedagogical Practice, and Body Experiences (SILVA; DAOLIO, 2003; JESUS; DEVIDE, 2006; DUARTE; MOURÃO, 2007; CRUZ; PALMEIRA, 2009; ALTMANN; MARIANO; UCHOGA, 2012; BRITO; SANTOS, 2013; KLEINUBING; SARAIVA; FRANCISCHI, 2013; UCHOGA; ALTMANN, 2015; FRANCO, 2016; GARCIA; BRITO, 2018; SILVA; ÁVILA, 2018; SO; MARTINS; BETTI, 2018).

## THE GENDER NARRATIVES

### Femininities, Masculinities, Body, and Culture

For Prado and Ribeiro (2010), there are plural ways of living and experiencing masculinities and femininities. The concept of gender makes it possible to pluralize the representations of masculinity and femininity, dissociating the homogeneity of what it is to be a man or a woman. Furthermore:

[...] femininity and masculinity are in permanent transformation, not fixed determinations. They have a multiplicity of ways of being a man or woman in our society, a multiplicity in which numerous tensions, conflicts, and scenarios emerge (SANTOS, 2010, p. 842).

In this same line of thought, Sampaio *et al.* (2014) also stated that gender differences are based on femininities and masculinities considered fixed and in opposition, thus reinforcing stereotypes and generating exclusion, which hinders the integral development of boys and girls. In addition, school Physical Education, according to Santos (2010), is an environment in which the construction of subjectivities happens through the production and reproduction of masculinities and femininities, which is reflected in the modes of participation in the classes. The author also reiterates that the construction of femininities and masculinities of the subjects also happens in a corporal way since “[...] each human being learns gestures, movements, and speeches disseminated by the culture” (SANTOS, 2010, p. 843).

Thus, according to Brito and Santos (2013), boys are educated to be superior and girls are educated to be emotional and sentimental; moreover, there is surveillance by families and schools for boys to maintain their masculinity. Added to this, according to Sampaio *et al.* (2014), toys and games that

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the same article may have permeated both narratives.



are encouraged or forbidden are taken by historically and culturally constructed gender stereotypes during childhood.

In fact, Cruz and Palmeira (2009, p. 121) stated that “[...] gender differences are not products of biological differences, but consequences of social and cultural structures that exalt the masculine and devalue the feminine.” As the authors highlighted, in school Physical Education, sports practice becomes another tool that allows the maintenance of the belief of feminine inferiority.

As for school, Silva and Ávila (2018) believed that it establishes limits on what it means to be a boy and a girl since, in this space, girls should be restrained, pure, modest, and sweet, while boys should be aggressive, competitive, and virile. With this, for the authors, there is the construction of desirable identities and others that are rejected. Thus:

The conception of virility, strength, attitude, and aggressiveness inherent to the masculine has translated this gender as predominant in power relations. Due to biological conceptions first described in antiquity, women have historically suffered attributions as incomplete beings (phallogocentric perspective), assigning to their bodies related to fragility, delicacy, passivity, and above all, submission to the priority gender (FRANCO, 2016, p. 57).

Therefore, the space of the game, such as the multi-sports court, for example, according to Jesus and Devide (2006), becomes a field reserved for the expression of virility and the construction of masculinity, which causes the exclusion of girls from the game. In the same way, from the point of view of Silva and Daolio (2003), there is a “game” of power when it comes to the use of school spaces by girls and boys; hence, while the stage has a feminine belonging, the playground has a masculine belonging. The authors also stated that, for this to happen, children use artifices to admit or not the presence of the “other” of the “different” in games, which is full of meanings characteristic of a specific group. In the case of dance:

There is also a consensus that girls are the ones who receive the earliest stimulus to perform and engage in activities that work with expressiveness since, in the social imaginary, dance represents an action or behavior linked to the feminine universe (KLEINUBING; SARAIVA; FRANCISCHI, 2013, p. 71).

In addition, the authors state that masculine and feminine representations occur from the production of discourses produced by the articulation between body and gender. An example of this appears in the study by Cardoso, Felipe, and Hedegaard (2005), when, for male and female teachers, students who presented gender divergence were boys who showed themselves as effeminate or strange; in addition to this, girls considered masculine were more accepted than boys with feminine characteristics.

Concerning bodies, Franco (2016) understands that the body goes beyond its exclusively biological definition but is also defined by the social and cultural meanings in which it is inserted. Thus, according to Cruz and Palmeira (2009), each body reveals parts of the society in which it is inserted. Therefore, as stated by Altmann, Mariano, and Uchoga (2012), it is necessary to think of the body as a product of culture because, when it is denaturalized, the idea that the body is historical emerges, since, for Silva and Daolio (2003), genders are inscribed in the bodies within a cultural context, carrying the marks of this culture.

Dorneles (2012, p. 189) explains, “The body is always a provisional and unfinished result” since social categories cross the construction of bodies. Similarly, Santos (2010) also argues that bodies are always subject to transformation since they live in a society with its own culture and history. The body is also a consequence of discourses that seek to fix identities, whether sexual or gender.

Therefore, Santos (2010) understands that Physical Education classes are an essential space in which the body is converted into a field where multiple meanings will be inscribed — in this way, working with bodies means acting in the society in which this body is inserted. Therefore, besides the

issues related to femininity, masculinity, and the body, it is also necessary to understand how the school, pedagogical practice, and body experiences influence gender relations in Physical Education classes, which will be addressed below.

### **The school, pedagogical practice, and body experiences**

Silva and Daolio (2003) believe that society, its innumerable institutions, its discourses, practices, and symbolisms participate in the construction of gender. School is one of these institutions, being a producer and shaper of subjects. School and family, for Cruz and Palmeira (2009), “[...] are considered the main responsible for the construction and/or reproduction of misconceptions, or rather, stereotyped values about gender issues.” In this perspective, Prado and Ribeiro (2010) state that school Physical Education must understand its formative, political and social role and intervene to appreciate diversity as it forms subjects with specific bodies, genders, and sexualities. In this way, Cruz and Palmeira (2009, p. 119) maintain that “The different ways of treating boys and girls at school make them assume certain postures towards society” because the bodies are inscribed with the marks of schooling.

Thus, according to Duarte and Mourão (2007), the school is guided by practices that aim to fix and shape the bodies since childhood since school Physical Education reproduces a normalizing behavior. Thus, for Franco (2016), the school space reproduces the prejudice and discrimination in society; it also appears as a normative space, reproducing and reiterating negative concepts about non-heterosexuality (SILVA; ÁVILA, 2018).

In addition, Garcia and Brito (2018) stated that in the school environment, bodies are gentrified. In this space, boys and girls are educated and learn differently as school pedagogies are shown to be heteronormative and exclusionary. For Cruz and Palmeira (2009), teachers must understand their role as educators and social beings who contribute to the development of a school culture, which will directly influence the ways of thinking and acting of the students. Therefore, teachers must be able to look at differences and see them as essential issues to be discussed and problematized to promote equal opportunities for all students. Therefore:

The teacher’s pedagogical intervention becomes fundamental for the deconstruction of some stereotypes and the minimization of the separation of the sexes in PE classes, encouraging the practice of both male and female students in the same body activities, contributing to the development of solidarity, generating a better understanding of the social construction of gender differences and consequently, the tolerance of both sexes about their performance in the proposed motor activities (JESUS; DEVIDE, 2006, p. 128).

Thus, Prado and Ribeiro (2010) state that teacher problematizations about gender and sexual orientation should be promoted by teachers, detaching the cause-and-effect relationship between these two terms. The authors further stated that it is also the teacher’s role to encourage respect and citizenship with the multiple possibilities of human sexuality to improve interpersonal relationships.

Nevertheless, Franco (2016) understands that the teacher responsible for the class should promote inclusion, which means fighting discriminatory attitudes, thus allowing education for all, stimulating dialogue, and fighting prejudice. Garcia and Brito (2018) go further, stating that:

[...] the (non)attitude of the responsible teacher collaborated to legitimize, naturalize, and favor the crystallization of heteronormative precepts already entrenched in the controlling discourses of sexualities, thus allowing the establishment and maintenance of identity hierarchies among the students themselves (GARCIA; BRITO, 2018, p. 1331).

Accordingly, Brito and Santos (2013) reiterate that class planning must be done according to the limitations, needs, and abilities identified in the students because

In adolescence, the physical and hormonal transformations are in process; the major body changes (appearance of pubic hair, change in the tone of voice, growth of beard or breasts), which were conflicts when they begin to manifest themselves, are being consolidated. In physical education classes, the body of girls and boys is in evidence, building identities and highlighting differences (DUARTE; MOURÃO, 2007, p. 42).

Kleinubing, Saraiva, and Francischi (2013) reported that there might be a feeling of shame at the beginning of a dance class, which can be avoided when gender stereotypes in this activity are discussed and problematized by the teacher. Altmann, Mariano, and Uchoga (2012) noted in their research that during physical education classes, there is the presence of “[...] educational practices that construct and/or reinforce differences determined by gender.”

Therefore, for Jesus and Deive (2006), the methodological approach of the teacher that involves coeducation combats sexism, freeing students from the chains that establish what each sex can and should experience regarding body practices since body movement is taken by patterns of behavior that prevent coeducation and the diversity of experiences that it provides.

For Kleinubing, Saraiva, and Francischi (2013), the idea that there are improper body practices for boys and girls hinders diversity and restricts the possibility of experiences, thus hampering comprehensive development. The authors also believed that the presence of sexist practices in school Physical Education leads to prejudice against feminine performance due to the lack of opportunity to experience some practices, the permanence of the idea of men’s physical superiority, and the discrimination regarding social roles.

According to So, Martins, and Betti (2018, p. 38), “[...] when they state that women are not endowed with the necessary skills for fighting, a naturalization of their bodies is produced, informing, from not disinterested biology, their fragility, and incapacity.” However, for these authors, the issue concerning skills is related to a different cultural construction of bodies, as boys usually experience a more significant number of body practices compared to girls.

Thus, Cruz, and Palmeira (2009) believe that the greater resourcefulness of boys in sports practices can be explained by their greater motor repertoire, since they have more experiences. In addition, the authors argue that this supposed male superiority was culturally constructed, supported by the different ways boys and girls are brought up; thus, each gender ended up developing specific skills.

Therefore, So, Martins, and Betti (2018) reported that girls excluded themselves from the proposed activities. In general, there was a relationship with the fear of taking risks in class, trying something unknown, or exposing a supposed inability. Similarly, Sampaio *et al.* (2014) stated that the exclusion of girls in classes happens due to a lower ability since, due to cultural factors, girls have fewer motor stimuli compared to boys. Thus, the authors suggest that school Physical Education classes offer the same stimuli and experiences for boys and girls. From this, concerning participation in the classes:

From the analysis of the participation of boys and girls in several corporal practices in the school environment, we notice that the inequality of participation in different practices is still not overcome. Although not supported by law, they occur from generalized conceptions of body and physical abilities, which discursively place and consider girls as less skilled when compared to boys (UCHOGA; ALTMANN, 2015, p. 169).

When it comes to early childhood education, Altmann, Mariano, and Uchoga (2012) reported that the possibilities of moving are related to the transgression of rules and behavioral norms, meaning those who transgress more, move more, thereby having greater learning opportunities, furthermore showing boys as the transgressors of rules.

In Jesus and Deive (2006), for example, the students understood that the difference in motor skills between boys and girls was natural, of biological order, not considering the sociocultural and historical influence related to body practices. Nevertheless, Brito and Santos (2013) pointed out that in mixed and sex-segregated classes, there are difficulties in dealing with the differences in motor skills

between male and female students, although there is greater affectivity in female classes, which decreases the exclusion frames.

Regarding gender discussions at school, the National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs), developed by the Federal Government in 1997, aimed to guide educators' practice, pointing out some key factors of each subject, pointing Sexual Orientation as a cross-cutting theme to be discussed in the classroom. However, the BNCC, which today replaces the PCNs, does not contemplate in its plan gender and/or sexual orientation, which shows a setback in the national education policy. Therefore, with the absence of issues such as gender, race, and ethnicity, this document silences some discussions, emptying conflicts and tensions in the production of differences.

In the BNCC, the transversal contemporary themes deal with the environment, economy, health, citizenship and civics, multiculturalism, and science and technology, and within each of these themes, there are subthemes. In the PCNs, Sexual Orientation deals with gender relations, respect for difference, and diversity of values and beliefs, besides considering democratic and plural cultural expressions. Therefore, since the students bring pre-established concepts and ideas from home, this repertoire must be considered, allowing a discussion that generates reflections and debates so that the students can build their own opinions (BRASIL, 1998).

Thus, according to the PCNs (BRASIL, 1998), schools are responsible for promoting a pedagogical intervention that brings reflections about sexuality, gender relations, postures, taboos, and values, without, however, invading the students' privacy or directing their behavior — and that is where teachers start to play their role as formators.

With the BNCC in force since 2018, these discussions were lost, and gender relations and sexual orientation are no longer considered contemporary cross-cutting themes to be addressed within the school environment. Although within the subthemes of Family and Social Life and Cultural Diversity, gender relations could be addressed, the BNCC does not contemplate them.

Given the above, it is possible to notice that none of the articles analyzed in this study described a relationship of equality between boys and girls in Physical Education classes, and there are several reasons, including shame and fear of the sport masculinization to the stereotypes they carry. Since the school is a reflection of society and one of its central institutions because it is responsible for the subjects' education, children are subjected to a reinforcement of the culture present in society. Hence, they already arrive at school with gender expressions that obey patriarchy and its hegemonic heteronormativity.

Although the school is understood in these studies as an institution that reproduces stereotypes and prejudices, it is important to think of it also as a generified space that is also the fruit of the society in which it is inserted; therefore, the school is also a space for confronting oppressive normativity.

Moreover, for Couto (2010), the school environment, where children and young people will interact in everyday life, is a power structure that will promote the construction and reinforcement of identities, including gender identities. The author also states that it is in this environment that gender stereotypes are created and reproduced, understanding that the use of stereotypes in our culture has the function of standardizing and regulating behaviors since they are used to deal with the insecurities and ambiguities that accompany human diversity.

Whereas society reproduces the idea that boys should have more masculine characteristics and girls should be more feminine, there are various ways of expressing femininity and masculinity. Besides, these representations have no relation whatsoever with the sexual orientation of individuals, and they are just traditional representations based on heteronormativity and, therefore, should be understood as an aspect in constant metamorphosis, giving multiple possibilities for the meanings of what it is to be a man or a woman, as well as not being part of this socially established binarity.

Similarly, Louro (2008) understands that the construction of gender and sexuality happens during life, constantly through various learning and practices. Equally important, for the author, being a

man or a woman occurs in the cultural sphere, and it would be illusory to understand them as a binary scheme. Couto (2010) states that it is amid the collective that individualities are built; the school is where these interactions take place and femininities and masculinities are built based on patriarchy and that precede their arrival at school. This is because, at birth, they are already designated as boys or girls; when they grow up, they need to confirm an identity imposed on them.

From birth, the behavior of parents, family members, and friends toward a male or female child is completely different. Naturally, a boy's first toy is a ball, while a girl's is a doll; thus, boys learn to be active, curious, and risk making moves they are not used to, while girls are taken to calmer, more behaved games where there are not many moves or adventures.

As Daolio (1995) states, in addition to a boy's first toy being a ball, there is a huge incentive for him to give his first kicks, while girls, besides not being encouraged to do so, are also forbidden to participate in games that involve kicks and ball at their feet. Thus, the author states that motor skills should also be considered a cultural transmission component. This behavior is taken to school, where there is also a reproduction of stereotypes that dictate how girls and boys should behave and be. As a consequence, these factors interfere significantly with the participation of boys and girls in school Physical Education classes, giving boys the power regarding the use of school spaces. In contrast, girls are excluded by the boys or exclude themselves for not having the same baggage of body experiences, which bring security to participate in games and/or classes in a mixed way.

Silva, Medeiros, and Quitzau (2020) point out that hegemonic masculinity is present in sports, transforming body practices into a place of categorization in which male and female bodies hardly mix. In addition, in the same way that there are spaces reserved for practices considered masculine, which boys dominate, such as the court, there are also spaces reserved for practices considered feminine, such as stages and dance halls, which girls dominate. This possession of spaces and their generification contributes to an incomplete and limited training of these children and adolescents, in which boys and girls have completely different corporal experiences.

In this perspective, the study by Altmann *et al.* (2018) showed that boys have a more intense and meaningful body experience compared to girls since sports practice was more frequent among boys, while girls showed difficulty in finding pleasure in the practice and recognize themselves as less skilled for physical activities and sports. Butler (1990) defends the idea that there is not only one identity in human beings but that they are plural and that, throughout life, their expressions of gender and sexuality change since the author believes that gender is fluid and non-binary. Based on this assumption, no matter how much sexuality and gender relations have been discussed and studied since the last century and how much progress has been made, there is still a huge way to go. Furthermore, according to Silva, Medeiros, and Quitzau (2020), the studies of gender and sexualities were elaborated to dispense with biological determinism and its binarity, thus emphasizing the social character of the differentiations of the sexes.

For society to see gender as a social construction and sexuality as something dynamic and fluid, children and adolescents must find this thought in the environment responsible for their formation as human beings. With this in mind, the school institution must be prepared to receive boys and girls without pre-established ideas or stereotypes about gender, sexuality, or any other theme, so that it will be possible, little by little, to build an equal society, one that understands that each individual is unique and respects differences.

Although the gender issue has been discussed in school Physical Education since the 1990s, there are still numerous challenges and limitations in the discussions of these issues within schools since gender issues are a content of the school as an institution, and not only of the Physical Education classes.

The most recent studies are still not very different from older studies regarding class participation, gender stereotypes, and exclusions. One of the possible reasons why it is not possible to see so much evolution in school practices, even after thirty years of research, is that public education policies do not emphasize this type of reflection in the school environment. Although they were removed

from the BNCC, their importance was described in the PCNs, but without a very efficient practical application according to the articles selected for this study, and were written in the last decade.

On top of that, the scenario in Physical Education classes remained and still is in an excluding and stereotype-laden context. The fact that the BNCC came into force in 2018 does not consider gender relations and sexuality as contemporary cross-cutting themes may be a factor that favors this picture, and, therefore, this was an expected event.

In this sense, the education and training of male and female teachers are fundamental so that they can reflect on these issues during classes, in order to, according to Auad and Corsino (2018), treat the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual integrity of children and adolescents completely and broadly, without reductionism.

First of all, it is vital that teachers welcome their students, showing them that school and the classroom, the court, or any other space within the institution are safe environments for them to show who they are and, over time, discover how they feel and what they want to be, which goes far beyond a professional choice. The school space is often where children spend most of their days, with the educators they live with as examples and inspirations.

Secondly, teachers can encourage discussions and reflections on various topics that are present in everyday life in order to make their students aware of the cultural, social, and sexual differences that may exist, thus teaching them to live with and respect these differences. Therefore, when it comes to school Physical Education, the teacher responsible needs to encourage mixed practice in a healthy way, in which girls, whom most of the time are automatically excluded by their gender, and boys who do not fit into the expressions of masculinities can participate in the classes and have the opportunity to experience the infinite possibilities of the human body and develop completely and integrally.

However, for the teachers to act in such a way, they must have the sensibility to see the difficulties faced by some students during the classes. In addition, how the teacher will include these students will also be fundamental since they should feel comfortable during the participation and not more embarrassed and/or discouraged.

There are some challenges to be faced by the teacher who intends to give equal opportunities to male and female students. According to Devide *et al.* (2011), discussions on gender in school Physical Education are scarce regarding the undergraduate disciplines in Physical Education courses. There are pedagogical challenges, such as building more inclusive classes, thinking from global learning to the specific one, realizing the needs of their students, and stimulating reflections from obstacles that may appear during the classes. There are also sociocultural challenges, such as, for instance, convincing boys that physical education classes are not only about soccer but go far beyond that; convincing girls and boys who are excluded from participating in the classes, showing them that they are capable, and, finally, showing that sports, movement, new learning, and body experiences can be pleasurable and are for everyone.

Consequently, during the classes, instead of creating new rules that include all the students in more developed and complex games, the teacher can start with simpler and more global activities, observing the limitations and abilities of each one to then be able to meet the needs of all with a plan that is procedural and aims at the development of children and teenagers during the year, to promote equal movement opportunities for the students.

Therefore, regarding the performance of teachers, it is important to emphasize that the reality described in the 16 articles analyzed are only pictures of a movie of what a class of Physical Education at school is, i.e., they show a specific reality within a certain period, but they do not represent the whole reality. There is a daily confrontation of the oppressive normativity present at school by many teachers, which aims to make Physical Education classes more egalitarian, allowing the participation of all in an attempt to improve the scenario of these classes.

Another challenge to be faced is the way science is done in Physical Education within Health Sciences. Although Physical Education has a dialogue inherent to Health Sciences (which justified the

choice of the database), it is known that many journals from the field of education, for instance, do not circulate or are not indexed in the VHL Portal, which represents a limit of this study. Another limitation concerns the inclusion of articles with free access, disregarding published articles that have restricted access upon payment of some fee.

Thus, in terms of synthesis, the discussion presented herein understands that the 16 productions that were part of the scope of this study dealt in their texts with the differences and exclusions that are present in the daily life of school Physical Education classes, discussing subthemes that involved the concepts of femininities and masculinities, the body as a social instrument, the pedagogical practice and the school as a generative space. These studies showed the reality of schools and the challenges that Physical Education classes bring when thinking about gender relations experienced in childhood and adolescence.

It is necessary to understand that the manifestations of femininities and masculinities are plural, transitory, and manifest in the body. Otherwise, this body should always be seen as a cultural production, besides being understood beyond its biological structure, allowing countless meanings to be given to what it is to be a girl or a boy. Hence, knowing that the reproduction of stereotypes will hinder the full development of children and adolescents and that school is a space in which the construction of the subjectivities of its students takes place, teachers must discuss gender issues in the classroom, even if the BNCC does not consider gender, sexuality or sexual orientation as a cross-cutting contemporary theme.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this sense, we can conclude that gender narratives present in the Brazilian scientific production in the field of Health Sciences have their knowledge outlined by the search for a better understanding of an excluding, sexist scenario, which stimulates in different ways the body experiences of boys and girls and that reproduces stereotypes related to femininity and masculinity and, thus, throughout history, has placed girls in an inferior and unequal plan in basic education. Therefore, it is a framework that urgently needs to be overcome to have more inclusive classes and a gender relationship in a more egalitarian perspective in school Physical Education classes. Although discussed here as one of the themes in Physical Education classes, gender relations do not only appear in these classes. However, they are also part of everyday life at school as a whole; therefore, the gender issue is also a content of the school as an institution.

In the articles analyzed in this paper, children and adolescents appear as passive beings who receive and reproduce what a reflection of the society in which they are inserted is. However, it is important to reflect and think of them as agent beings, as social and active beings in their socialization process, capable of producing culture, not just as a depository of reproductive actions.

As for the BNCC and the contemporary cross-cutting themes that this document considers, there is the emptying of some fundamental topics, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity, for example, silencing the differences and underestimating these and other conflicts and tensions in the production of differences.

Although the study has limits regarding the analysis by a single database (the BVS Portal), in which, possibly, publications dealing with gender relations in school Physical Education were not present in the journals indexed there, it is believed that this work is relevant in the sense of provoking concerns that are urgent in the school scenario, especially towards new pedagogical practices that include coeducation and a plural Physical Education and that become part of the school routine.

Another limitation that brings even more reflection is the binarisms of the Portuguese language employed in this text, which is limited to the opposition male/female, making it impossible to expand the terms to the various LGBTQIA+ genders, showing a problematic power relation and

violent that accompanies our language. In addition, the study shows the need for new pedagogical policies, especially concerning the BNCC, so that discussions about gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation are part of the contemporary cross-cutting themes.

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## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

Moraes BCSL has worked on project conception, data curation, formal analysis, research, methodology, project management, writing, critical review of content, and approval of the final version for publication.

Dias JRA worked on data curation, writing, critical review, and approval of the final version for publication.

Oliveira RC worked on project conception, data curation, formal analysis, research, methodology, project management, writing, critical review of content, and approval of the final version for publication.

## **FINANCING**

Capes.

## **DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with this article.

**Submitted on:** 04/04/2022

**Approved on:** 24/04/2022