

Offsides in a Soccer Country

Tânia Maria José Aiello-Vaisberg¹  0000-0003-3894-1300
Annie Rangel Kopanakis¹  0000-0003-1414-2985
Gustavo Renan de Almeida da Silva¹  0000-0002-1012-1717

¹Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas, Campinas, SP, Brazil.
13060-904 – pospsico.ccv@puc-campinas.edu.br



Abstract: *In this research, we aimed to investigate the collective imaginary of female soccer athletes regarding their professional soccer careers from the perspective of concrete psychoanalytic psychology. It is organized as qualitative research with the use of the psychoanalytic method, involving female players who participated in a collective psychological interview, mediated by the Thematic Drawing-and-Story Procedure. Results are presented as three affective-emotional fields of meaning: "Living is struggling", "Soccer saved me" and "Soccer is a man's thing", indicating that these female athletes imagine soccer as a way of overcoming poverty and inequality through personal effort, according to their meritocratic beliefs. On the other hand, they feel affected by sexist views that do not conceive of femininity and soccer as compatible, which effectively hinders their professional lives.*
Keywords: Women's Soccer; Gender; Collective Imaginary; Psychoanalytic Method.

Impedimentos no país do futebol

Resumo: *Nesta pesquisa, objetivamos investigar o imaginário coletivo de atletas de futebol feminino sobre a carreira de futebolistas profissionais na perspectiva da psicologia psicanalítica concreta. Organiza-se como pesquisa qualitativa com o uso do método psicanalítico, abordando jogadoras que participaram de uma entrevista psicológica coletiva, mediada pelo Procedimento de Desenhos-Estórias com Tema. Os resultados apresentam-se sob forma de três campos de sentido afetivo-emocional: "Viver é lutar", "O futebol me salvou" e "Futebol é coisa de homem", indicando que as atletas imaginam o futebol como caminho de superação da pobreza e desigualdade a partir do esforço pessoal, segundo adesão a crenças meritocráticas. Por outro lado, sentem-se atingidas por visões sexistas, que não concebem feminilidades e futebol como compatíveis, o que dificulta concretamente a vida profissional das jogadoras.*

Palavras-chave: futebol feminino; gênero; imaginário coletivo; método psicanalítico.

Impedimentos en el país del fútbol

Resumen: *Esta investigación tiene por objetivo investigar el imaginario colectivo de atletas de fútbol femenino a cerca de la carrera de futbolistas profesionales en la perspectiva de la psicología psicanalítica concreta. Si ordena como investigación cualitativa con el uso del método psicanalítico, acercándose de jugadoras que participaran de una entrevista psicológica colectiva mediada pelo procedimiento de dibujos-historias con tema. Los resultados se presentan sob forma de três campos de sentido afectivo-emocional: "Vivir és luchar", "El fútbol me salvó" y "Fútbol és cosa de hombre", indicando que las atletas imaginan el fútbol como camino de superación de la pobreza y desigualdad, a partir del esfuerzo personal, segundo adhesión a creencias meritocráticas. Por otro lado, se sienten golpeadas por visiones sexistas, que no conciben feminidades y fútbol como compatibles, el que dificulta concretamente la vida profesional de las jugadoras.*

Palabras-claves: fútbol feminino; gênero; imaginário coletivo; método psicanalítico.

Introduction

Not so long ago, it was not uncommon for women in the course of psychological consultations to report that they experienced suffering in childhood due to a restriction of movement, generally associated with the forms of female socialization that were considered correct. Even today, we can see reports from *YouTubers* who faced many difficulties to contain themselves and/or circumvent adult surveillance in the face of the irresistible desire to participate in the fast-paced games of boys, among which soccer stood out.¹ If for many of us these two socialization processes seem unsustainable, what can we say about the fact that women's soccer was once forbidden by law? This is an established fact, as attested by historical studies conducted in Brazil, such as those by Mariane da Silva Pisani (2018), Giovana Capucim e Silva (2015), and Fábio Franzini (2005), in the light of which we can appreciate that a painful path had to be traveled so that we could witness, in recent decades, some important changes in a sphere of human activity traditionally considered male: soccer.

As Silva (2015) highlights, women were indeed legally forbidden to practice this sport for over forty years due to gender issues that prevailed in the sports context. It should be noted that, initially, Decree no. 3199, dated April 14, 1941, did not allow women to practice sports that were incompatible with their biological nature (BRASIL, 1941), in accordance with the prevailing political thought at the time. Later, in 1965, during the military dictatorship, Deliberation no. 7, established by the *Conselho Nacional de Desportos* (National Sports Council) (CND), extinct in 1993, demarcated the line that definitively segregated female soccer in Brazil, under article 54:

1. Women shall be allowed to practice sports in the manner, modalities and conditions established by the international governing bodies of each sport [...]. 2. The practice of fights of any nature, soccer, indoor soccer, beach soccer, water polo, polo, rugby, weightlifting and baseball are not allowed (BRASIL. NATIONAL SPORTS COUNCIL, 1965).

However, despite the prohibition, women practiced the sport illegally, including during the period of military dictatorship, and only found some degree of social acceptance when practiced by *vedettes*, in games that resembled spectacles eroticizing the female body, or by women involved in charity games, official competitions being beyond the female context at that time. It is worth noting that it was only in the year 1983 that the CND granted women the right to practice several sports, including soccer (SILVA, 2015).

However, even after the legalization and regulation of women's soccer in addition to, for example, initiatives such as the São Paulo women's soccer championship in 2001, women still encountered many obstacles to playing soccer. An example of this is that, in that same championship, athletes were required to conform to strict aesthetic standards, in order to deliver a soccer style associated with what was conceived as femininity. Consequently, the event's rules prohibited athletes with shaven heads, and the preference was for young women up to 23 years old and with long hair (Jorge Dorfman KNIJNIK; Esdras Guerreiro VASCONCELLOS, 2003; Silvana Vilodre GOELLNER, 2005).

The review of these historical events shows that women faced countless obstacles to be able to consolidate the right to play soccer. This achievement, in a country where this sport has an undeniable cultural importance, has many repercussions, because the visibility of the sport would probably increase the chances of girls not having their movement restricted in childhood, leading to greater motor freedom in the context of child's play. On the other hand, the whole path traveled, as well as the one yet to be taken, shows that the soccer sector is organized around gender norms that have contributed to excluding and hindering women's access to these spaces (GOELLNER, 2005; SILVA, 2015).

It is important to consider that, as a social space, soccer is permeated by the same phenomena that structure the society in which we are immersed, such as racism, social inequality and sexism. As an example, one can mention the issue of Blacks in Brazilian soccer, who faced institutional racism that was extremely evident in the initial conjunctures of the national game (Mario RODRIGUES FILHO, 2003). The issue of poverty, meanwhile, is deeply rooted in the dream of social ascension via soccer, which is very common in Brazilian society (Leticia Molina RODRIGUES, 2016).

However, we have slowly but surely witnessed significant changes regarding the advance of women's soccer in Brazil, such as the gradual approximation of women to the soccer environment, so that now there are important women's championships, with the sport having been consolidated nationally. As an example, it is worth mentioning the women's soccer World Cup games being televised in 2019, a sporting event that set audience records in several countries around the world, including Brazil (Breiller PIRES, 2019).

As a space recently occupied by women, soccer is, in our view, a social phenomenon that can be productively taken into account in research on gender issues, and those studies that seek to understand collective imaginaries from the perspective of concrete psychoanalytic

¹ For example, see Louie Ponto's YouTube channel.

psychology are particularly interesting (José BLEGER, 2007; Tânia Maria José AIELLO-VAISBERG; Fabiana Follador AMBROSIO, 2006; Débora Cristina Joaquina ROSA et al., 2019). In fact, studying collective imaginaries allows us to access the affective-emotional meanings that support the lived experience of female players, contributing significant knowledge, both in the field of psychology and in the search for broader social transformations.

The psychological care of female soccer players, in preventive and interventional aspects, can certainly be improved through comprehensive knowledge, such as that produced here. On the other hand, all activist efforts, which include fighting for the transformation of gender relations, can be strengthened through what can be apprehended and learned through qualitative research in general, and qualitative research using the psychoanalytic method in particular, which is done by listening specifically to those who play a leading role in women's soccer. Thus, this research intends to conduct a psychoanalytical study of the collective imaginary of female soccer athletes regarding their careers as professional soccer players, from the perspective of concrete psychoanalytical psychology.

Research Method

The study objective established here places the current work in a set of qualitative research on collective imaginaries, using the psychoanalytic method (ROSA *et al.*, 2019). Thus, starting from the concrete psychology created by Georges Politzer (2004) and further developed by Bleger (2007), we are interested in the production of comprehensive knowledge about human acts which, occurring inevitably in fields of relational character, are embedded in macro-social contexts, according to a conception that rejects focusing on them as mere effects of what happens in individual intrapsychic instances.

There are several ways in which psychoanalysis and qualitative research can be combined (Fabio HERRMANN, 2001). Our choice rests on the use of psychoanalysis as investigative method, a dimension from which theoretical constructions and clinical procedures derive. The method demands that we choose the local or amplified perspective for theorizing the research material, according to the available references: Lacanian, Kleinian, Winnicottian or Bionian, among many others. We work here with the referential of concrete psychology, proposed and developed by Bleger (2007) as a reader of Politzer (2004), which requires a previous conceptual clarification, through the presentation of the notions of conduct, affective-emotional field of meaning and imaginary as conduct and field.

The presentation of these concepts, with which those who deal with metapsychological psychoanalytic texts may not be accustomed, requires that we remember that the methodological purification that we have carried out over the years, from the indications of Bleger (2007), which was enriched by the contributions of Herrmann (2001), was guided by the cultivation of respect for two fundamental observations. On one hand, we tried to remain faithful to the method forged by Freudian psychoanalysis, unchanged over the decades, with respect to its fundamental constitutive steps, the floating attention and the free association of ideas. On the other hand, we seek to be congruent with the theorizing perspective in concrete psychoanalytic psychology since, based on dialectical materialism, it critically rejects all abstract and mechanistic theorizations of metapsychology, calling for the redefinition of the very concept of the intrapsychic unconscious in terms of a theory of fields.

According to Bleger (2007), all human sciences share the same object of study, namely, conduct. Conduct is a term that serves to delimit the fact that the human sciences should not consider supernatural or infra-human causalities in their interpretations, but should limit themselves to what derives from human agency, individually or collectively considered. Human acts manifest themselves in three interdependent areas, i.e. mind, body, and/or action in the external world, including products derived from them. It is possible to seek to comprehend the meanings of human acts from different disciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives, for example, by studying economic, geopolitical, cultural, or historical meanings of conduct. In the case of psychology, we strive to understand the affective-emotional meanings of human acts, conceived as occurrences that take place in inter-subjective relational fields that are inserted, in turn, in macro-social contexts, apprehensible from the aspects through which their complexity can be addressed.

From this fundamentally Blegerian perspective, psychology must start from the recognition that all human manifestations emerge from a constitutively binding background, called field, through which affective-emotional meanings are constellated (BLEGER, 2007). Such non-conscious psychological fields are conceived, from the perspective of concrete psychoanalytic psychology, as intersubjective unconsciousness, inhabited by individual and collective personalities, according to which collective imaginaries are organized.

In turn, the notion of collective imaginary as conduct and as field (ROSA et al., 2019), used here, has a merely descriptive character, but on the other hand, it lends itself to a very important clarification: being produced by human acts, which somehow thicken and form affective-

emotional environments, the fields should be considered as products of conducts – and, thus, as conducts. In this way, conducts and fields are not ontologically differentiated; what today is an act that oppresses women, for example, contributes to the collective creation of an environment hostile to femininities that, being inhabited by all people, including men and women, constitutes a productive background for new conducts. On the other hand, the acts that express renewed forms of relationships between personalities, which are expressed in inter-individual relations or in collective acts, such as the one that originates the approval and observation of a law, also create environments from which new conducts can spring up.

Having presented the basic concepts of concrete psychoanalytical psychology, it is now time to discuss the way in which we operationalize the psychoanalytical method. Guided by the need to seek clear forms of communication with researchers who adopt other theoretical references, we identified three investigative procedures, namely, production, register and interpretation of the research material.

The production of the research material was done by means of a collective psychological interview with the eighteen participants, using the Thematic Drawing-and-Story Procedure (*PDE-T* in the Brazilian Portuguese acronym) as a mediator. The *PDE-T*, developed by Tânia Maria José Aiello-Vaisberg (1999), consists in inviting the participants to draw a picture on a theme defined by the investigative interests at stake, and then to create a story about the drawn figure. It is a psychoanalytically conceived dialogical resource, which aims to favor a form of free expression that includes not only what can be rationally articulated by the participant, but also that which, ultimately, he/she does not know about himself/herself. This is a fundamental point, which differentiates the psychoanalytic referential from others that operate from a vision of the subject as transparent to himself or herself (AIELLO-VAISBERG; AMBROSIO, 2006).

Regarding the interviewed athletes, it is important to identify them as professionally linked to a women's soccer team from a club in São Paulo state. Nine of them had participated in grassroots soccer, and the other nine had not. They can also be described as young adults, since eight of them are between 20 and 25 years old, six are between 26 and 30 years old and four are between 31 and 35 years old. The majority, 14 among them, had completed High School and four had completed Higher Education.

Ten of these athletes identify themselves as white and eight as Black. Two of them have family incomes above 4 minimum wages, while four are in the family income range of up to 4 minimum wages, six are in the range of up to 3 minimum wages, four up to 2 minimum wages, two have family incomes of up to 1 minimum wage, while three of them receive government assistance. Thus, we can affirm that the majority of the young women interviewed belong to the lower social classes, while the others can be considered as belonging to the middle classes of Brazilian society, in terms of family income.

We proposed “a male/female soccer player” as the theme for the drawing and story. As none of the participants refused to comply with the request, eighteen story-drawings on this theme were produced, each one drawn by one of the athletes, who unanimously agreed to give us this material. We did not take notes nor did we record the meeting, trying to be as present as possible during the interview, as the psychoanalytic method demands.

As we know, every psychological interview is in itself an evanescent inter-human happening, which demands registration. We work here with two types of register: the story-drawings and a transference narrative (AIELLO-VAISBERG; Maria Christina Lousada MACHADO, 2008). Evidently, to the extent that the material made by the participants corresponds to the conduct of the third Blegerian area – actuation and products of actuation in the external world, it already constitutes, in itself, a register on which we can dwell. However, as these remnants of the interview took place in the middle of an inter-human encounter, we also opted for a second form of register, by preparing a memory narrative after the encounter with the participants, in which we report on both the occurrences and the impressions and affective-emotional impact subjectively experienced by the researcher who was in charge of the interview.

The registers were considered in the light of the psychoanalytic method, by following the methodological watchwords proposed by Herrmann (2001, p. 40): “let it emerge”, “take into consideration” and “complete the configuration of meaning”. In this manner, we arrived at the interpretative proposition of non-conscious psychological fields, which are conceived, from the perspective of concrete psychoanalytic psychology, as intersubjective unconsciousness according to which the collective imaginary is organized. As such, the study of collective imaginaries based on human productions, such as the *PDE-T*, allows us to reach interpretations of their unconscious affective-emotional determinants (AIELLO-VAISBERG; MACHADO, 2008), as performed in this study.

From the establishment of the interpretative results, we developed reflective interlocutions about the affective-emotional fields of meaning – which requires the suspension of floating attention and free association of ideas. At this juncture, we dialogued with authors who address the issues raised by the fields, seeking to deepen our understanding in a reflective way.

Reflective interpretations and interlocutions

As a response to our request for a drawing and story of a “male/female soccer player”, we obtained a total of 18 story-drawings. It is important to point out that our instruction clearly stated the possibility for the participant to choose the gender of the figure drawn, which translated into 14 drawings about female players and 4 drawings about male players. This configuration indicates that, from the psychological perspective, the athletes interviewed here were capable of presenting an imaginary corresponding to the possibility of women practicing this sport.

The psychoanalytic consideration of the material allowed us to interpretatively produce three intersubjective-emotional or intersubjective unconscious fields of meaning, according to an intersubjective paradigm of comprehensive knowledge production. They are: *Living is struggling*, *Football saved me* and *Football is a man's thing*.

The field *Living is struggling* is the one that is organized around the fantasy that the success of a soccer player depends exclusively on individual effort. This field underlies the conducts that appear in the following excerpts and images from the Story-Drawings produced:²

It wasn't easy to get to this level, but she had Faith in God, struggled and dedicated herself a lot to get where she is today, and the struggle to remain continues (...). P7

But for this to happen, she had to go through many things, among them was leaving her family behind, giving up her life, going through financial difficulties, and seeing the one she loved the most leave without even staying close. P13

Hardship is something that can be overcome through effort and hard work and above all willpower, for without it you won't even make it to the corner of your street. P14

Image 1 – Living is Struggling



Source: Story-Drawing produced by study participants.

#PraTodoMundoVer (#For all to see) The image depicts a drawing of a female professional soccer player, in uniform, with her arms half open and her right leg bent backwards.

We consider that the field *Living is Struggle* indicates what Bleger (2007) described, from a dialectic view of human nature, as myths of the human person,³ isolated and abstract, consisting of an anthropological perspective that, under the marked influence of Cartesianism, ignores the centrality of the concrete conditions of human existence, taking the individual as hovering above the human happening:

It is one of the most serious conceptual and methodological errors in the field of psychology, derived from the corresponding philosophical error. It consists in studying the human being as determined, isolated from the real, historical and present situations in which his/her life takes place, his/her personality is formed and all kinds of relations are established (BLEGER, 2007, p. 18).

From this viewpoint, political systems, such as liberalisms, can cultivate ideas that regulate social life in a sense that favors the oppression of the subalterns (Flávia BIROLI, 2018), to the extent that it declares a formal equality, while concealing and denying *de facto* inequalities. Such a conception runs through Brazilian society, so that success is often interpreted as the result of effort, although we know that success and failure are essentially linked to macrosocial contexts, which have a decisive impact on the possibility of developing capabilities and healthy personal maturation.

In this way, it is possible to infer that the model of liberal Brazilian society leads people to believe that greater or lesser individual capacity defines the position of success or failure they occupy in society, being subjected to situations of oppression and exploitation. Thus, as described by Rosângela Werlang and Jussara Maria Rosa Mendes (2013), the social situations of precariousness are configured as socially determined sufferings, which, often in subtle ways, affect people's lives.

This created/encountered field also dialogues with another field in the study by Aline Montezi, Tomiris Barcellos, Ambrosio and Aiello-Vaisberg (2013), of the Brazilian feature film *Linha de Passe*, which portrays youth soccer dramas. There, it was also possible to interpretatively produce a field called *Living is struggling*, which is organized around the belief that “human living is an inherently painful undertaking, a real battle, from which poor adolescents are not

² All excerpts from the story-drawings have been reproduced unedited, that is, we have chosen to maintain the way they were written by the research participants themselves (P).

³ In his own text, Bleger uses the expression “man” and not “human person”, which is understandable given the historical moment in which he lived. We have no doubt that his thought would be better expressed today if carefully separated from sexist resonances.

spared” (MONTEZI; BARCELLOS; AMBROSIO; AIELLO-VAISBERG, 2013, p. 81). Hence, there is an imaginary that the athlete performs heroic deeds, exceeds limits and experiences an important and satisfying personal achievement (Katia RUBIO, 2001; RODRIGUES, 2016).

Meanwhile, the affective-emotional meaning field *Football saved me* is one that is organized around the fantasy that poverty and social vulnerability can be overcome when a family member becomes a soccer player. As conducts that emerge from this field, it is worth mentioning the athletes' search for better living conditions for their families. In the imaginary of these athletes, material goods are unlikely to be attained without a significant source of income, which they believe can come from soccer, which appears as a salvation from conditions of poverty and social vulnerability, that is, an overcoming and a transition to good living conditions. We have used excerpts from the story-drawings in order to illustrate this important field:

After so much suffering and struggle, this girl becomes a multi-champion and is able to fulfill her family's dream of having better conditions and a house of their own. Along with her mother, they open an NGO and are able to help other people. P18

Through it [soccer] I study today and am able to help my family have a better life. P3

Image 2 – Football saved me



Source: Story-Drawing produced by study participants.

#PraTodoMundoVer The image above depicts, in the upper left corner, a drawing of a female soccer player, wearing a number ten jersey; in the upper right corner, there is a shelf with medals and trophies and, at the bottom of the image, a house with people inside and a church.

When we speak of social vulnerability, we are referring to the fundamental conditions for the well-being of the overall population. For the *Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada – Ipea* (Institute of Applied Economic Research), these are linked to three dimensions, which are largely the responsibility of the public sphere: urban infrastructure, human capital, and income/labor. Still based on data produced by Ipea, over a ten-year period, with the study ending in 2010, the dimension that most contributed to the reduction of social vulnerability was income and work (Marco Aurélio COSTA *et al.*, 2018).

However, according to Mary Garcia Castro and Miriam Abramovay (2002), the social vulnerability that is found in Latin American countries, particularly Brazil, does not refer only to a range of individual rights that are violated, such as the right to housing, food, income, health, and work. For these authors, it is also a question of an entire generation undergoing a certain historical moment, with its concrete conditions and socially determined sufferings. These sufferings, inherent to the precarious living conditions, result in juvenile conduct which moves in the direction of seeking a solution to this problem. An example of this occurs in Brazil in the context of child labor, which demonstrates a situation of socioeconomic deprivation common in the history of many Brazilians, as we can see in our research material (Ana Maria Viola SOUSA; Maria Aparecida ALKIMIN, 2017; Elenise Martins COSTA; Ricardo Luiz Vieira de SOUZA; Patrícia Beatriz Argollo Gomes KIRST, 2015; CASTRO; ABRAMOVAY, 2002).

It is important to understand that in Brazil, a country where job opportunities and quality education are scarce, especially for the low-income population, soccer also emerges as a youth conduct that appears as a possibility for economic advancement, since it is socially presented as a very high source of income, conferred on the best star players. As such, it is within this reality that soccer emerges as salvation, serving as a quality institution that can contribute to the handling of difficult living conditions.

Given this panorama, we must also consider how poverty intersects with other social markers, such as gender issues. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw (2002), these markers may overlap, potentiating significant sufferings. A result of this would be, for example, the existing wage inequality between female soccer players and male soccer players. According to Luiz Cosenzo (2019), only a minority of Brazilian soccer clubs with women's teams have female athletes officially on their books and actually pay salaries to female professional athletes; most provide scholarships and other resources.

Even so, soccer presents itself as a work opportunity for young people who have the desire to achieve financial autonomy through the profession of soccer player. In this sense, we realize that with the rise of women's soccer in Brazil, we are witnessing a movement of women who are increasingly trying to occupy jobs traditionally considered male, thus demonstrating important

historical ruptures. According to data from the Management Report of the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) (2017), conducted in 2017, there has been a substantial increase in the registration of women's contracts. It is also important to mention that, starting in 2019, CBF (2019) established that all clubs that are in *Serie A* of the Brazilian championship are required to have a professional team and a grassroots team that play at least one official championship. The new rule that affects women's soccer, breaking with the barriers that have been put in place for this sport over the years, is part of the licensing process for clubs, a document that regulates the season of professional competitions in the country, and follows the guidance of Conmebol, which adopts the same rule for clubs participating in the Libertadores and South American championships. In this way, clubs are bound by this new rule to be able to compete in these championships (CBF, 2019).

The work that involved access to the collective imaginary of female soccer players showed as a result a third field that deals with the gender normativity that permeates society and, consequently, the sports environment. The affective-emotional field of meaning called *Soccer is a man's thing* is the one that is organized around the fantasy that only men should play soccer. Conducts such as the devaluation of women in soccer, prejudice against female soccer players, the difficulty of accessing professional sports, and the debatable view that the female body should obey an aesthetic and biological ideal that does not correspond to high performance sports emerge from this field and resonate in the excerpts from the following story-drawings:

I started playing at age 7 at home with my father, and at age 9 with the boys at school and on the street. I was the only girl among them. I only started playing with girls when I was 15, through a teacher who discovered me at school and took me to a club. I entered this separate universe that is women's soccer. P3

Nowadays the world is very prejudiced against women who like to play soccer. But little by little we are gaining our space. I'll tell you Tatiana's story. She liked to play soccer and faced many barriers to make her dream come true; one of them was facing prejudice from her parents who said that soccer was for boys. P8

Image 3 – Soccer is a man's thing



Source: Story-Drawing produced by study participants.

#PraTodoMundoVer The image above depicts a drawing of a woman, with her hands behind her back, and from her head comes a balloon with the image of a soccer pitch.

The social perception that women's bodies are not suited to the practice of sports, such as soccer, occupied 20th century society and continues to this day through reflections that still reveal the difficulties experienced by female soccer athletes simply because they are not cisgender men. Silva (2015), in her study on the discourse of the São Paulo press about women's soccer in the period of its prohibition during the military dictatorship (1965 to 1983), discusses the impacts of gender norms on the lives of women, who are not perceived as having a body physiologically prepared for high performance sports. In this respect, the author says that the existing association between women and maternity, especially in medical sciences, justified State interventions on women's bodies, which reverberated in women's sports. In this way, it was understood that practicing sports as professionals would deviate women from their condition of mothers and affect their health.

Franzini (2005), in his historical study on women's soccer in the first half of the 20th century, corroborates the criticism of sexism that circulated in the soccer environment at the time, providing an excerpt from a letter by a male citizen addressed to the President of the Republic, which represents the prevailing thought in that period and was accepted by the Ministry of Education and Health, which found in this argument justifications to punish women's soccer, as shown below:

I have come to ask for Your Excellency's clear-sighted attention. I am referring, Mr. President, to the enthusiastic movement that is exciting hundreds of girls, attracting them to become soccer players, without taking into account that women cannot practice this violent sport without seriously affecting the physiological balance of their organic functions, due to the nature that disposed them *to be mothers*...

According to the newspapers, in Rio no less than ten female teams have already been formed. In S. Paulo and Belo Horizonte others are also being formed. And at this rate of growth, within a year it is probable that in all of Brazil there will be 200 female soccer clubs organized, that is: 200 centers that will destroy the health of 2,200 future mothers, who, moreover, will be imprisoned in a depressive mentality and prone to rude and extravagant exhibitionism; for since we have already reached the unspeakable folly of organizing soccer matches with a group of blind men running around chasing a ball with rattles, it is no wonder that the women's movement we are referring to

will be the starting point for, in the course of time, the daughters of Eve to also show themselves off in wrestling matches and bouts of the 'noble art', whose nobility consists in two contenders punching each other until they are drooling blood (José FUZEIRA *apud* FRANZINI, 2005, p. 319-320).

In this regard, as well as in the works of Silva (2015), Franzini (2005) and Pisani (2018), the third field created/encountered is aligned with what is expressed in Brazilian research that denounces the existing sexism in the context of professional soccer and in its difficulties as a sports modality. In other words, this field denounces how contemporary social life is strongly marked by gender issues, which configure different dramas and sufferings in the history of human beings.

Corporeal sports practices are deeply intertwined with a gender normative system that determines which sports are appropriate for men and women.⁴ In this way, we believe that women who practice sports traditionally conceived as male disrupt the representation of normalized femininity, transgressing and subverting gender norms. On this question, we dialogue with the study by João Paulo Fernandes Soares, Ludmila Mourão, and Igor Chagas Monteiro (2017), which sought to comprehend the gender experiences and construction of femininities of female weightlifting athletes, demonstrating that female athletes perceive they are subverting gender norms when they take part in a sport culturally identified as belonging to males.

Thus, it is important to point out that our results demonstrate that the drama experienced by female athletes, who find in soccer restrictions and difficulties linked to their gender, is related to social expectations about femininity and is configured as social suffering for them. In other words, when authors such as Valeska Zanello (2018) show that women are expected to practice sexual renunciation, relational docility, aesthetic beauty, and motherhood, we could well believe that it is not really appropriate for women to play soccer. As such, we found in this research that sport is not conceived as feminine conduct, and remains a challenge to be overcome by Brazilian society, where women still need to prove that soccer is also a space for them.

Final considerations

We are of the opinion that the transformations in women's soccer, in the sense of attributing equality and appreciation to the work of female athletes, are of fundamental importance in the evolution of this sport in Brazil and in confronting the many social sufferings that occur in a society that is recognized as sexist and unequal. We have noted, in this research, the professional involvement with women's soccer as a possibility for overcoming such degrading conditions, even when this sport is consolidated as a market favoring male athletes.

Thus, when we consider the suffering of women beyond the essentialist and individual aspects, that is, as an unfolding of everyday life and social life, we are heading towards the studies on social suffering that have been conducted over the years in the human sciences, as described by João Eduardo Coin de Carvalho (2008) about the work of Veena Das, or in authors such as Teresa Cristina Carretero (2003) and Werlang and Mendes (2013), who attach special importance to the production of critical and comprehensive knowledge about this theme in Brazilian society, which is overly permeated by sexist conduct.

The issue that underlies women's soccer, when it advances gender equality and proposes critical debates, is potentially mutative, since it stimulates society to change and evolve towards the achievement of women's human rights and safety.

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⁴ We are not defending a gender binarism here. However, we would like to point out that, due to social norms, sports are classically divided and assigned to men and/or women, and people who break with these norms are targets for prejudice and exclusion.

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Tânia Maria José Aiello-Vaisberg (aiello.vaisberg@gmail.com) is a Professor in Psychopathology at the University of São Paulo and lecturer at the Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas.

Annie Rangel Kopanakis (annie_rk@hotmail.com) is a psychologist, holds a Master's degree in Social Sciences from UNESP-Araraquara and is a PhD candidate in Psychology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas.

Gustavo Renan de Almeida da Silva (gustavo.renan.almeida@gmail.com) is a psychologist studying for a Master's degree in Psychology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas.

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Tânia Maria José Aiello-Vaisberg: conception, data analysis, preparation of manuscript, composition, discussion of results.

Annie Rangel Kopanakis: conception, data collection and analysis, preparation of manuscript, composition, discussion of results.

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