

## “Malhar” as a metaphor of physical exercise <sup>1 2 3 4</sup>

### *Malhar como metáfora da exercitação física*

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#### **Abstract**

This research seeks to contribute to the understanding of the problem of motivation to the regular practice of physical and sporting activities. To do so, we analyze the metaphorical use of the word “malhar”, which, in Brazil, is associated with physical exercise. One hundred ninety four people participated in the “free association method”, by saying from one to three words or expressions that came immediately to their minds, from the inductor term “malhar”. We also conducted ten interviews. We conclude that there is a correlation between professional performance in physical education and the problem investigated. The demand for performance produces a negative (unconscious) affection that operates in the body as a force (tiredness, discouragement, and suffering).

**Keywords:** physical activity, physical education, affection, motivation

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## Resumo

Tendo como objeto de investigação o emprego metafórico, no Brasil, da palavra malhar associado à exercitação física, esta pesquisa busca contribuir para a compreensão vinculada ao problema da motivação para a prática regular de atividades físico-esportivas. Participaram do “método de associação livre” 194 pessoas adultas, citando de uma a três palavras ou expressões que lhes tivessem vindo imediatamente à lembrança, a partir do termo indutor malhar. Na sequência, realizaram-se dez entrevistas. Concluiu-se que há correlação entre a atuação profissional em educação física e o problema investigado. Com a exigência da performance, produz-se um afeto negativo (inconsciente) que opera no corpo como uma força (cansaço, desânimo, sofrimento).

**Palavras-chave:** atividade física, educação física, afeto; motivação

## Resumen

Teniendo como objeto de estudio el uso metafórico, en Brasil, de la palabra “malhar” (machacar) asociado con el ejercicio físico, esta investigación busca contribuir a la comprensión relacionada con el problema de la motivación para la práctica regular de actividades físico-deportivas. 194 adultos participaron del “método de asociación libre”, citando de una a tres palabras o frases que vinieron a la mente inmediatamente, a partir del término inductor “malhar”. A continuación, realizamos diez entrevistas. Concluimos que existe una correlación entre el desempeño profesional en educación física y el problema investigado. Con la demanda de rendimiento, se produce el afecto negativo (inconsciente) que opera en el cuerpo como una fuerza (cansancio, desánimo, sufrimiento).

**Palabras clave:** actividad física, educación física, afecto, motivación

In Brazil, the word *malhar*<sup>5</sup> started to be used as a metaphor for physical exercise, and simultaneously picked up steam through television programs (soap operas and humor shows) and songs that successfully used it as a theme (Coelho Filho, 2007). In 1983, for example, the composer Marcos Valle recorded the album “Marcos Valle”, with songs written by him, among which “Estrelar” (whose *single* sold around 90,000 copies, almost receiving a Gold Record), in it, we hear: “You have to run, have to sweat, have to *malhar*...”. Here we can see the power of

<sup>5</sup> Translation note (T.N): In this study, we deal with *malhar* as a living metaphor of physical exercise, restricting the problems of interpretation to the dimension of reference. We found no corresponding word in English for the word *malhar*, which, etymologically, carries on it the idea of stain (blemish), of hammering, mauling, punishing the body, of ridiculing, mocking. Therefore, we opted to keep the Portuguese word.

media persuasion (mediatic status) and its relation with language, but also the historicity of the metaphor.

Ricoeur (1975, 2011[2010]), echoing the opposition established by Benveniste (2005[1966]) between semantics and semiotics, observes that metaphor is always the carrier of an emerging meaning granted by some specific contexts and can be considered a linguistic creation or, more precisely, a semantic innovation. However, if a metaphor starts to be used by a significant part of the community that speaks a language it can, on its turn, become a usual meaning and join the polysemy of lexical entities. In this last stage, when the effect of metaphorical meaning reaches such a change of meaning that increases polysemy, in the terms of Ricoeur, the metaphor is no longer a living metaphor and becomes a dead metaphor.

According to Benveniste (2005[1966]), semantics is the science of phrases and semiotics is the science of signs. Semiotics corresponds to what Saussure (2006[1916]) called language, that is, an unconscious and formal structure in which signs do not have a *meaning* and, therefore, do not refer to a referent or a specific reality, but are *valid* in opposition to other signs within an unconscious system. They are no longer a *sign of* (a representation), but have their immanent value to the language system.

In the *Cours de linguistique générale* (Course in General Linguistic), when distinguishing value and meaning, Saussure (2006[1916]) states that the value of a word will not be fixed,

so long as one simply states that it can be "exchanged" for a given concept, i.e., that it has this or that signification: one must also compare it with similar values, with other words that stand in opposition to it. Its content is really fixed only by the concurrence of everything that exists outside it. Being part of a system, it is endowed not only with a signification but also and especially with a value, and this is something quite different [original highlight]. (p. 134)

In *Écrits de linguistique générale* (Writings in General Linguistics), we read:

It must be accepted however that value expresses better than any other word the essence of this concept, which is also the essence of the language system (*langue*) itself, namely that a form does not *have meaning* but *has value*: that is the crucial point. It *has value*, hence it implies the existence of other *values* [original highlight]. (Saussure, 2004[2002], p. 30)

It is in semantics that *signification* operates, when the sign that only has an immanent *value* in the system (semiotics) becomes speech (discourse) and creates roots in reality and starts to have *meaning* (semantics). The sign, within the system and its division signifier/signified, is simply a form and has a *value*. When it is updated in the speech and occupies the position of a

phrase or a longer and more complex discourse to be enunciated by a particular speaker, the sign may update the unconscious system. Each semantic innovation emerges in the speech and in a particular phrase (individual), to later internalize itself in the language, this unconscious and collective structure. A *living metaphor*, to Ricoeur (1975, 2011[2010]), is what makes a word receive, from a specific context, new meanings and displace itself from its previous position, entering in the language, and changing the unconscious structure itself, updating the system of signs. When placing history within a system, metaphors resignify reality.

The word *malhar*, incorporated in the unconscious, has its history of transformation from *speech* to *language*, from *semantics* to *semiotics*; it was a living metaphor and a semantic innovation that, later, grew roots in our language with a new sense, relatively stable. In this sense, it creates roots in our understanding of the world and has a history, the history of *malhar* as a living metaphor. The history of the transformation of the word *malhar* is, also, the history of production of speakers.

We make three records related to the historicity of the word *malhar*: (1) etymologically, it carries the idea of *mancha* (blemish), of hammering, mauling, punishing the body, of ridiculing, mocking; (2) the contextual action that favored the establishment of a new meaning, specifically, which founded itself as a (living) metaphor of physical exercise in our country, was evident in the 1980s, in the context that Courtine (1995) identifies as considerable development of the market of products and services targeting the “maintenance” of the body; (3) only in the turn to the 21<sup>st</sup> century it enters the dictionaries referring to the practice of physical exercise; in the “New Dictionary Aurélio of Portuguese Language. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition revised and updated”, published in 2004m we find the meaning “to vigorous exercise aiming bodybuilding or weight loss” (Ferreira, 2004, p. 1257).

Therefore, even if the body that *malha* (works out) can refer to the image of a body endowed of super vitality (Teixeira & Caminha, 2010), the act of *malhar* represents a way of resistance against the different forms of physical decadence (Santos & Salles, 2009), when we focus on the motivation problem for the regular practice of physical and sport activities (Coelho Filho, 2014), the preunderstanding (Ricoeur, 2011[2010], p. 99)<sup>6</sup> invites us to explore a

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<sup>6</sup> “To understand a text, one needs to have a previous preunderstanding. This preunderstanding cannot be eliminated without the risk to break away with the pact between the interpreter and the interpreted, which guarantees to the interpreter, the access to the meaning intentions of the text. From the epistemological viewpoint, this implication of the interpreter in the interpreted thing can only be seen as a weakness, a subjectivity fetish, faced

hypothesis: the movement of approximation of the word *malhar* to characterize the practice of physical exercise was anchored, consciously or unconsciously, on the etymological meaning of punishing the body, i.e., the act of violence against a matter that should be shaped through strokes (Coelho Filho, 2007; Hansen & Vaz, 2004).

Two elements are connected to this work hypothesis: the first, refers to something that determines it; the second, its specificity. Regarding the first element, the attention turns to the field of professional work in physical education (school and otherwise), a continuous act, for those corporal practices that establish themselves grounded by the logic of physical and sport achievement and the demand of *performance* (Coelho Filho, 2007; Hansen & Vaz, 2004). As stated by Carvalho (2020), alluding to the university education in physical education, when “the theme is the *body*, for example, the idea of the ‘man-machine’ and the practices resulting from this logic of thought still prevail [original highlight]” (p. 52). Concerning the specificity of the hypothesis, the statement brings on itself its epistemological potential and the possibilities to intervene in reality: it seems to offer subsidies to understand why many people start to practice physical exercises stimulated by several reasons, but cannot incorporate the exercises to their daily life, abandoning them most of times (Santos & Knijnik, 2006). Coelho Filho (2007) observes that, for the regular practice of physical and sport activities, there needs to be a desire, the satisfaction of a psychic need, and asks: why do subjects often wish, but cannot reach the behavior in the practice? Where does determination, either “positive” or “negative”, come from?

Ricoeur (2011[2010]) discusses on the reason for the action:

An action is, at the same time, a certain configuration of physical movements and a possible enactment to be interpreted in terms of intentions and motives (...) The semantics of the action shows a mixed category, that of *desire*, that demands the merge of psychic categories, exclusively reserved to people, with common physical categories to people and things. (p. 41)

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by the objectivity that seems to demand the ideal of scientificity. Heidegger justifies the hermeneutic circle showing that the epistemological weakness is the one that always exists between the pre-understanding and the intramundane situation to interpret. The circle is not vicious, but establishes a positive condition of more original knowledge” (Ricoeur, 2011[2010], p. 99).

Surely, regarding the physical and sport activities<sup>7</sup>, done and those not done, more precisely, what *propels* people, or not, to take part in them is the motto of public policy and an object of scientific value. The World Health Organization, when arguing in favor of the “Global action plan on physical activity 2018-2030” (World Health Organization, 2018), warns that the world is becoming less active, that the levels of inactivity have increased in countries who are developing economically. To Palma (2020), there needs to be an attitude that faces the participation of physical activities/corporal practices as a complex phenomenon, in which different attributes act synergistically or in opposition for the final result.

Thus, starting from the hypothesis that the metaphorical use of the word *malbar* associated with physical education emerged anchored, consciously or unconsciously, to the etymological meaning of punishing the body and the relation of this hypothesis with the professional work in physical education (in schools and otherwise). In this research, we aim to unveil elements that can contribute to understand the problem of motivation for the regular practice of physical and sport activities.

## Method

This research has a qualitative nature. The hermeneutics tradition of qualitative approaches start from the assumption that people act depending on their beliefs, perceptions, feelings, and values, and that their behaviors follow the order of a meaning that does not immediately show itself, but needs to be unveiled (Alves, 1991). According to Frey (2011), the “natural inclination of hermeneutics, defined as a ‘general theory of interpretation’, is scrupulously connected with the interpretation of human signs, be them symbols, texts, or almost texts (actions) [original highlight]” (p. 8). In this sense, we briefly highlight a specific difficulty. In this investigation we deal with a *living metaphor*, therefore, with the “problem of the

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<sup>7</sup> The term physical and sport activity has been used in the scientific literature to characterize corporal practices that became traditional in the field of physical education, such as gymnastics, sports, games, dances (Coelho Filho, 2014). Physical activity can be generically understood as associated to the many different corporal movements and that results in a higher expenditure of energy than the resting levels. Physical exercise, on its hand, can be understood as a *planned physical activity*, or, in other words, a *physical activity based on a systematization, on a method*, aiming to reach, for example, the pedagogical objectives related to health or beauty. Besides gymnastics, the subject can use sports, games, and dances to exercise, grounded in some method, some systematization. In this sense, physical-sport activities can be understood as a physical exercise, but also as a physical activity.

return of the sign to the thing in the level of the metaphorical statement” (Ricoeur, 2011[2010], p. 32). Thus, we had to design a methodological pathway, restricting the problems of interpretation to the dimension of *reference*, “understood as the possibility of the discourse to be applied to an extra linguistic reality regarding which it says what it says” (Ricoeur, 2011[2010], p. 72). Some background questions: the word *malhar* starts to be used as a metaphor for physical exercise (it says what it says), why? What is the reference?

In the scope of a qualitative research in which the complexity of the object and the creativity of the researcher can determine the choice of instruments that will be used to collect data (Alves, 1991), so that we could have the opportunity to consider the greatest number of facts provided by the *text*, the option was to conduct an empirical data collection through a “method of free association” and the “interview”, as the procedures described below.

## Procedures

The gathering of empirical data, conducted by the researchers themselves, was subdivided into two phases. Both were interrupted when we considered that the information gathered was enough or the possibility to find new relevant data to justify its continuity was little.

Initially, using the “method of free association” (Sá, 1996), we got closer to the elements of the social representation of *malhar*. The focus of this first phase was the literal meaning, which is the whole semantic area, therefore, the set of possible contextual uses that can establish the polysemy of a word. As pointed out by Ricoeur (2011[2010]), in the lexical level, the words “have more than one meaning; only by a specific contextual meaning of triage is that they assume in a certain phrase a part of their semantic potential and acquire what we call a determined meaning” (p. 74).

The *association* or *free evocation* consists in asking participants to, from an inducing term presented by the researcher, say words or expressions that immediately come to their minds. The “method of free association” has benefits for its spontaneous character and its projective dimension, allowing the access, more quickly and easier than in an interview, to elements that establish the semantic universe of the term or the object studied (Sá, 1996).

In this first phase, we had the voluntary participation of 194 adults (114 men and 80 women). They were approached in public spaces in the city of Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais, Brazil, and invited to participate in the research, saying one or three words or expressions that immediately came to their minds from the inducing term (*malhar*). The evocations were recorded in a small voice recorder. From a total of 436 evocations, we registered 137 different ones, which were reduced by semantic affinity into six categories: etymological sense; exercise; condition; health; beauty; sensation/feeling. The set of evocations corresponding to each of these categories appear on the figures in the next section of the work.

Having unveiled the possible elements of social representation and, thus, getting closer to the contextual uses that currently establish the polysemy of the word *malhar*, we continued to the second phase of empirical data collection in which we conducted 10 interviews. In this phase, the participants were recruited from researchers' social circles, based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) having between 40 and 60 years of age; (2) having a university diploma (undergraduate or post-graduation) in the humanities area of *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (Fundação Capes, 2019). We adopted these two inclusion criteria because we wanted in the study people who lived through the 1980s and 1990s, when the world *malhar* was not yet part of the polysemy of lexical entities connected to physical exercise. We also wanted people with an education connected to humanities and possibly familiar with qualitative studies and the exercise of objectified critical thought. The criteria are supported in the idea that such a profile of participants could bring contributions to reflect on the metaphorical use of the word *malhar* associated with physical exercise.

**Table 1 - Characterization of the group interviewed**

Interviewees	---	Age	Education
I1	Woman	46	Doctor in Education
I2	Man	49	Doctor in Education
I3	Woman	51	Undergraduate in Geography
I4	Woman	40	Master in Education
I5	Man	52	Undergraduate in Business
I6	Woman	60	Undergraduate in Letters
I7	Woman	52	Doctor in Linguistics
I8	Man	52	Undergraduate in Business and Law
I9	Man	47	Doctor in Philosophy
I10	Man	45	Doctor in History

*Note.* Interviewees are identified by the letter I, followed by number from 1 to 10.

The interviews, closer to informal conversations (Kaufmann, 2013[1996])<sup>8</sup>, firstly focused on the participants' experiences with physical education (in and out of school) and the practice of physical and sport activities, and, later, why the reason for the movement of social appropriation of the word *malhar* to characterize physical exercise. The data collected in the first phase (free association) also provided subsidies to foment the dialogue with interviewees. The discourses produced during the interviews were recorded with a small audio recorder and later transcribed. The transcribed material generated a "Word" archive with 23,776 words.

## Information Analysis

To Ricoeur (2011[2010]), "interpretation consists precisely in the alternation of phases of understanding and phases of explanation, through a singular 'hermeneutic arch' [original highlight]" (p. 24). The moments of understanding can be characterized by the intuitive and global apprehension of what is approached, by an anticipation of the meaning that borderlines guessing, by an engagement of the knowing subject; while the moments of explanation are marked by the predominance of the analysis, the subordination to a particular case to the rules, laws, or structures, by the distance of the study object regarding a non-implied subject (Ricoeur, 2011[2010]). Thus, in the following development, we seek to articulate *something* of the empirical data collected in the two phases with the *materials* arising from the understanding and the explanation.

In figure 1, we have a total of 13 evocations, when compared to the 436 words or expressions raised by free association. We highlight the few evocations that recover the meanings associated with the etymology of the word.

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<sup>8</sup> Kaufmann defends that, in the interactions at stake, the deeper data are revealed in situations of more intensity but, mainly, of greater naturalness. Thus, as the interactive style gains shape, the conversation around the theme flows (a chat).

**Figure 1 - Etymological sense**

Words and expression – n.º of evocations
To trash talk – 1; talk about others – 1; trash the government – 1; trash [...], and [...] (two known people) – 1
<i>Malhação</i> – 2; to hit – 1
<i>Malha</i> (spot) – 1; spotted cow – 1; horse – 1
<i>Malha</i> (game) – 2
<i>Malharia</i> – 1
Total of evocations – 13

The interviewee reflects on the use of the word *malbar*:

*We study a lot the question of linguistic variation and I believe that malbar has an origin in the use of slangs, in the use of slang as a jargon. It is a slang that has become a jargon in the sporting world, mainly. (14)*

The guidance of the interview is coherent with the data from the free association, because they show that the word *malbar* is currently used in the city of Juiz de Fora, as a dead metaphor, especially associated with physical exercise and connected to it (for example, the ideas of health and beauty). A dead metaphor is a usual expression in which there is no metaphorical sense, that is, a dead metaphor is no longer a metaphor. As stated by Ricoeur (2011[2010]):

semantics shows that the metaphorical meaning of a word cannot be found in a dictionary. In this sense, it is possible to continue to oppose the metaphorical meaning to the literal meaning, as long as we can call as a literal sense *any* sense cited among the partial meanings coded by the lexicon [original highlight]. (p. 74)

Thus, we could see that, in the contextual use (nowadays), the semantic potential of the word *malbar* is reduced because it assumes substantially a meaning correlated to which has joined the polysemy of lexical entities in the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in fact, to “do a vigorous gymnastics aiming bodybuilding or weight loss” (Ferreira, 2004, p. 1257).

On figure 2, we can see how representative the evocations related are to the exercise of force, but also that the use of the word *malbar* is not restricted to such exercises.

**Figure 2 - Exercise**

Words and expressions – n.º of evocations
Exercise – 24; physical education – 6; to exercise – 1
Force – 15; weight (load) – 8; weight lifting – 5; exercise body muscles – 1; weights – 1; lift bars – 1; to pump iron – 1; push-ups – 1; not completely necessary (associated to weightlifting) – 1
Gymnastics – 11; flexibility – 1; <i>jump</i> – 1; zumba – 1
Jogging – 4; walking – 1; running – 4; treadmill – 1; bicycle – 3; aerobic – 1
Sport – 3; swimming – 2; soccer – 1; ball – 1; <i>performance</i> – 1
Activity – 2; move – 2; movement – 2; physical activity – 1; to scrub clothes – 1; to sweep the house – 1; work – 1
Total of evocations – 111

Figure 2 indicates exercise options, an array of alternatives that can motivate (be the reason of) the subject to act. We call the attention to the fact that a reason “is always a *reason of*; as such, it is logically implied in the notion of action, because we cannot mention the reason without mentioning the action of which it is the motive [original highlight]” (Ricoeur, 2011[2010], p. 40). Therefore, the problem of (the lack) motivation for the regular practice of physical and sport activities is located in the relation of the action with its agent: *for what reason* does the subject want, but does not acquire the behavior in practice? We consider here the premise: the subject has a higher probability of not acquiring a behavior in practice, when intrinsically anchoring the action to a rationality that looks at a body and sees only an organism (men-machine), focusing solely on the relation between the acute and chronic effects (physiological, biomechanical) of the specified/prescribed exercise. Highlighting the field of physical education:

The body which emerges, becomes a “sample”, a number, in the amount of capability subsumed by an instrumental rationality concerned with the quantification of information – measures, tests, and questionnaires –, the standardization and the narrowing of the focus using descriptive strategy as a tool to treat data [original highlight]. (Carvalho, 2020, p. 52)

It is a physical education that, in a sense, also ends up in the school space:

As high-performance competitive sport invaded with its influence the ways to guide the school educational sport, it modified the meaning and framing of competition within the school (annulling, in general, the concept of teaching educational-formative sport to all the levels of students’ evolution, and focusing on seeking sport talents imposed by current society), and also the technical level typical to its teaching methodologies. (Dallo, 2007, p. 360)

The word *malbar* is associated in the common sense to physical education and to “exercise” (Figure 2), which awakens the professional work of physical education within the school.

When stimulated to elaborate on their life experiences related to school physical education, the interviewees were assertive and stated that this space did not contribute to their identification with physical and sport practices:

*Physical education to me was a place where I felt very exposed, because I wasn't good at volleyball, wasn't good at basketball, wasn't good at soccer. (I10)*

*I was forced to do physical education, because it was part of the curriculum. I didn't like that type of class. I had to do the kangaroo! A horrible thing! (I3)*

*What I hated the most in life was to go to school to do physical education, for the simple fact that I had to put on some very short clothes. I thought all that was terrible. (I7)*

*I don't remember much about the first years of elementary education, of physical education. I think that, today, looking back, I can see this clearer, that the street is a space of games, of exercise, and school was the place to be seated. (...) Physical education was not obligatory at school. Boys would play and I don't know what I did. It was only soccer, and I never liked soccer. (I2)*

The data allow us to recognize a school physical education connected to a certain “ideology of performance” (Molina & Beltrán, 2007, p. 161), that is limiting and negative as it creates contexts that positively value young people with the best achievements, and negatively those whose performance is weaker, reaching the extreme of creating intolerance and rejection against the later (Molina & Beltrán). Thus, as few stand out in this “normative field of physical and sporting performance” (Coelho Filho, 2014, p. 199), we are faced by a school physical education that indicate a mass of young people that, due to certain difficulties emerged from physical and sport practices, “feel excluded or marginalized and live a series of negative experiences that lead to inhibition, avoidance, or even rejection towards the issue” (Molina & Beltrán, p. 158), in this case, school physical education, but also the practice of physical and sport activities. According to Neira (2018):

With classes focused on motor abilities, sporting learning, or notions restricted to health and body care, any perceived difference is justified by congenital characteristics. It is in this context, the unskillful, the incapable, the slow, and the uncoordinated are produced. (p. 7)

These are indications that contribute to explain a social imaginary associated with physical education that unveils itself in different contexts. For example, in a research aimed to

highlight some senses related to the approach of school physical education in the 18<sup>th</sup> season of *Malhação*, a soap opera broadcasted by *Rede Globo* from 1995 until 2020, Cândido et al. (2015) discovered that the competitive perspective predominated during the plot connected to class situations, having as a background the practice of two sporting modalities in the technical perspective.

We understand that there is a close relation between school physical education and the problem of (lack) motivation to regularly practice physical and sport exercises. However, professional action in physical education surpasses the school space. An interviewee says:

*The gym to me is something that I practice if there is a need, to build up muscles. When I fell a pain in the knee, I do some exercise to finish up. But it is not an activity that I like doing, an activity stuck inside a gym. I like activities that allow you to also enjoy other aspects. When you run, you have the scenery, there are many things going on. I really like when I run in road lanes, on small roads. I escape to places with no cars, so I can really run in nature. (I9)*

To an interviewee, muscular strength in the gym is present in exceptional cases of injury, far from pleasure. It is a testimony that leads us back to figure 2, mainly the association of exercising (*malbar*) with the use of muscular power and weight (loads, iron, bar, weights), as well as gets us closer to what our interviewees say:

*When I think the word malbar, I think more about weightlifting. (I8)*

*That is gym. So, what changes is the amount of weight you can lift here. You are always doing the same sequences of exercises. (I10)*

*I enrolled in a gym. I liked to go and so on, I just got there to lift weight. (I4).*

*When I think about malbar, the first thing I remember is to hammer iron, the idea of catching a metal and repetitively hit it. (...) surely associated with the idea of weightlifting, of creating muscle. The creation of muscle is done through suffering, through heat, through constant exercise; repeat, repeat, as a forger. (I7)*

We highlight the space of the gym and the repetition. According to Peres (2014), “the indispensability of equipment, in *malhação*, shows a pragmatic relation with the body, in which spontaneity is abolished, as they allow only ‘localized’ movements, fragmented, and repetitive [original highlight]” (p. 153).

What interviewees say connect to Figure 3.

**Figure 3 - Condition**

Words and expressions – n.º of evocations
Gym – 33;
Lack of Money (I want to, but I didn't do because of this) – 1; <i>personal</i> – 1
Disposition – 6; energy – 3; effort – 2; dedication to <i>malhação</i> – 1; discipline – 1; effort – 1; perseverance – 1; to battle – 1
Clothes – 2; sneakers – 2
Supplement – 2; anabolic – 1; food – 1; nutrients, because you need a good diet – 1
<i>Malbar</i> is not working; who <i>malba</i> doesn't work – 1
Total of evocations – 61

The word gym, assembled in the group of evocations corresponding to the category (condition), raises the question: to what measure does attending a gym is a condition to practice physical and sport activities in Brazil nowadays? The interviewee that escapes “*to places with no cars, so I can really run in nature*” continues:

*Our cities are dangerous, they are dirty, often have no good sidewalks. So, it doesn't help to have a daily healthy life (...) in a society that urbanization itself was not done in a way, let's say, well planned, the need to attend gyms and things like that are greater. (I9)*

Public policy is sensitive to the problem worldwide. In the release of the “Global Action Plan on Physical Activity”, the director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, stated that to be active is key for health and, added that, in the modern world, this is increasingly more challenging, in part because the cities and communities are not well-planned (Organização Pan-Americana da Saúde, 2018).

Beyond urban conditions, however, we should measure the cooperation of the world of capital towards the proliferation of gyms in contemporary society. It is symptomatic how competitive the market is, seeking to attract practitioners with well-designed advertisements, promising several benefits, creating desires, but also a dependence (heteronomy). The concept of health, according to Roble et al. (2015), seems to be a jack-of-all-trades for advertisement discourses created by commercial institutions, always representing something good to have, but conveniently adequate to different actions that will be established anchored on the services they offer. At the core of such discourse, exercising in the gym can have a *status* of medicine for uncomfortable sensations that afflict the subject (Silva & Ferreira, 2018), to the point that missing the gym (not going) can bring more discomfort, when the absentee has a “guilty consciousness” when absent (Coelho Filho & Andrade, 2013). Peres (2014) makes an analogy

with the work in the capitalist system to observe that, in the scope of *malbação*, physical exercise presupposes regularity and rational constancy, she continues: “absences bring guilt, referring to the ideas of commitment, repetition, discipline” (p. 154).

We then guide the focus to physical exercise done and stimulated within the gyms, by the client and the “physical educator” in the space (only as a practitioner or even practicing, at that moment, their professional activity). Hansen and Vaz (2004) see within these institutions, what they call “processes of sportivization”: “there is a series of characteristics that consolidate the *ethos* of gymnastics and weightlifting, among them, a training and performance character incorporated to the common rule” (p. 137). The authors refer to the logic of “high performance sporting universe”, correlated to the uses and visibility of the body in these spaces: the fear of failure or to be under an ideal performance, the self-imposed sacrifices. In fact, it is not something unveiled, but out in the open, which makes us see the professional work in physical education and, by extension, the field of university education in physical education (undergraduate and postgraduate). On this education, we ask: is a hegemonic identity established and strengthened in and at the *stricto sensu* postgraduate school that influences, decisively, the undergraduate degree?

Physical education, further from a broad understanding on health and closer to a restrictive and biological one (Lima & Coelho Filho, 2018), continues to be permanently crossed by a technical discourse that invokes an alleged experimental efficiency. For example, when stating a positive causal relation between physical exercise and health (Mira, 2000), making the common sense absorb that idea, as can be seen on Figure 4.

**Figure 4 - Health**

Words and expressions – n.º of evocations
Health – 88
Life quality – 5; life – 3; vitality – 2; good life – 2; to live well – 1;
To live longer – 1
Physical conditioning – 2; physical condition – 1; <i>fitness</i> – 1; physical preparation – 1
Good – 4; necessary – 3; essential – 3; important – 1; own investment – 1; beneficial – 1;
does the heart good – 1; good for the ego – 1; self-esteem – 1;
All should <i>malhar</i> – 1
Total of evocations – 124

The information regarding exercise in the market of active life (Fraga, 2006) seems to be working, considering the number of evocations of the word health. However, the understanding on the importance of exercise for health is not, in any case, a sufficient reason (motive) for the action to take place:

*I think I was always aware that physical activity was needed. Today, I'm completely aware that it is necessary. But to have the initiative to leave home, walk, do some weightlifting activity at home, really; I know I can do it, but I just can't press the little "start" button and go [original highlight]. (I1)*

According to Arango Vélez et al. (2014), physical activity during free time emerges in the literature as a useful tool to prevent chronic noncommunicable disease, as well as to improve life quality related to health. However, the authors observe that, despite evidence, the studies indicate that the adherence to the recommendation of physical activity is weak, pointing to the lack of motivation to enact it.

Data show a representational bond that we will characterize as good, positive, in the sense that *malhar* is good for the "health", improves "life quality", gives more "vitality". At the same time, we can infer that the subject practices physical exercises because it is necessary, it is essential, a practice that, maybe, will take place connected to obligation. The interpretation can then suggest an integration to an ethics of good (development of a life ruled by sensible intentions), to an ethics of obligation (Ricoeur, 2011[2010]). However, focusing on the semantics of the action and, consequently, to the category of desire, we need to consider the "affective side, expressed by the terms hate/love" (p. 64). Therefore, maybe a negative affection (unconscious) associated with the practice of physical and sport activity operates corporally as a *force*. Malabou (2014[2009]) observes that there are two types of negativity: "One, affective and unconscious, which coincides with the process of repression. The other, intellectual, which makes negativity a function of judgment: something is or is not. The latter is a result of the first" (p. 64). She adds: "The origin of the judgment of attribution is on the tendency of eating what you think is good and spit what you think is bad" (p. 64). The interviewee elaborates her thoughts:

*I think it ends up being an obligation and there lies malhar. It is the weight, the force, the obligation, the pain. It is a bitter medicine for the liver that you have to take. It is bitter, but you have to take it, because it is necessary. But when I can skip this dose of medicine here, I will. (I6)*

Evidently, the interpretation that points out towards the possibility of producing/working a negative affection can easily be applied when the objectivity of the result implies the inherent suffering to exercising.

The relation cause and effect between physical exercise (*malhar*) and “beauty” is presented on Figure 5.

**Figure 5 - Beauty**

Words and expressions – n.º of mentions
Beauty – 9; aesthetic – 2; youth – 1; fashion – 1
Physical shape – 7; physical – 6; body – 5; good shape – 3; beautiful body – 2; fit body – 2; defined body – 1; perfect body – 1; to keep in shape – 1; to shape the body – 1
To lose weight – 3; to be thin – 1; weight loss – 1
Muscle – 2; muscular – 1; hypertrophy – 1
Parties – 1; body display – 1; exhibitionism – 1
Woman – 1; hot – 1; to attract women’s attention – 1; hot man – 1
Total of mentions – 58

Simply stated, physical exercise favors ascension, the pathway to a higher space, in the sense of reaching, even if fleetingly, the desired corporal beauty, the “physical shape”, etc., what is good. At the same time, we understand that an obligation (guilty, commitment) imposes itself, related to the social/moral statute of “beauty” (physical appearance, in the common sense), which, as Figure 5 indicates. This aspect refers to the need to losing weight or to be muscular, to fashion, to exhibitionism; and this obligation becomes more severe as the exercise presupposes pain (because it is associated to the ideology of performance and demand of performance, to self-imposed sacrifices), we can postulate that establishment of an “intellectual negativity” (logic that works in thought) as an “affective negativity” (Malabou, 2014[2009]).

We then analyze the relation of the professional work in physical education and the social/moral statute of “beauty”. In the article of *Revista O Globo* (Ribeiro, 2016), we read: “Disputed in gyms, the equipment that works as stairs helps to strengthen thighs and buttocks and to lose weight in intense training sessions”. The “coordinator of cardiorespiratory activities” in a famous gym in the city of Rio de Janeiro: “It is an equipment that works the respiratory system and muscular action”. The “technical director” of a chain of gyms says: “In an ideal world you should exercise twice a week”, in the case of beginners. “If they are advanced, three to four”. The practitioner testifies: “The stairs are terrible, but always crowded. I do half an hour

and leave completely destroyed”. Another says: “Out of all activities I practice, I perceive that the stairs equipment was in fact the one that lifted my butt” (p. 41).

The images of practitioners that sacrifice themselves in the “terrible” equipment and in the intense training session and leave them “destroyed” shows a loss, as the investment of energy is guided towards the (re)meeting with a body that disappears in time/space, interior/exterior, psyche/soma.

It is an image that has a singular power, because it portrays the dialectic of enthusiasm and anguish.

Naturally, there is a *voyage downwards*; a *fall*, even before the intervention of any moral metaphor, it is a psychic reality of all times. We can study this psychic fall as a chapter of poetic and moral physics. The *measure of psychic level* constantly changes. The *general tone* – this dynamic data so immediate to any consciousness – *is immediately a measure of level*. If the tone increases, thus the man rises [original highlight]. (Bachelard, 2001[1943], p. 11)

On one hand, we see destruction, effort; on the other, the increase of muscle tone, the ascent. The need and the desire to (re)meeting join a game of possibilities that show the lack, the absence. As can be perceived in the article of *Revista O Globo* the rationality of physical education, whose gaze are guided solely on the physiological objectivity of the exercise prescribed, comes into play and produces effects (gaps) in the subjectivities. Soares (2008) reminds us of the “*multiple tactics of modeling and taming the body*” [original highlight] (p. 75), correlated to the field of physical education (gymnastics, a hygienist pedagogy). For example:

*Measure* becomes, in fact, the action and the intention, first to tame the body, to fit it into a supposed normality. Measure the weight, the force, the resistance, the speed, the flexibility, and, nowadays, more intensively, to measure the *body mass indexes* [original highlight]. (p. 76)

It is no coincidence that Santos and Neira (2019) point out the need for school physical education to form people that know how to defend themselves from ideological traps that surround the discourses on corporal practices.

Modeling, taming. Ambiguity of affection (something is or is not). Sensations, feelings. As we can see on Figure 6, “wellbeing”, “pleasure”, etc., in opposition to “laziness”, “dislike”, “sweat”, etc.

**Figure 6 - Sensation/Feeling**

Words and expressions – n.º of evocations
Wellbeing – 19; pleasure – 2; therapy – 2; rest – 2; relax – 2; leisure – 2; excitement – 2; happiness – 2; to be well in life – 1; plenitude – 1; joy – 1; fun – 1; gives a good feeling – 1
I need (absence) – 2; I don't <i>malho</i> – 2; I miss it (absence) – 1; less frequent (absence) – 1
Laziness – 5; don't like – 4; sweat – 3; difficult – 2; boring – 2; boredom – 2; complicated – 1; obligation – 1; oppression – 1; repetition – 1; tiredness – 1; tiring – 1; monotony – 1
Total of evocations – 69

Following the testimony:

*I see malbar as something to battle, to suffer. Malbar does not refer to such a pleasant idea. The pleasure is in finding the result, but the pathway is something that will be painful, that will not be easy. (I1)*

We consider here the need to remind: our work hypothesis (that the appropriation movement of the word *malbar* to characterize the practice of physical exercise needs to be grounded, consciously or unconsciously, in the etymological sense of punishing the body) points out to the singularity of desire; a desire that “happens as a *meaning* that can be mentioned in the intentional language and with a power that can be mentioned in the language of physical energy [original highlight]” (Ricoeur, 2011[2010], p. 41). Though the size of the article does not allow us to embrace more detailed this complex interpretative pathway, establishing a limitation, what we call the “subject of the unconscious” (negative affection) that acts in the body as a *force* (laziness, boredom, tiredness). According to Freud (1987[1925], p. 266), the “attribute about which one should decide could originally be good or bad, useful or harmful”. In the relation between body and culture (physical exercise, physical education), the bad experience is the one that leaves a mark, or even more, the mark of experience:

*Malbar Judas<sup>9</sup> is not to hit slowly, it is to hit with force. So, this discontinuity in exercising. I think it is related to the etymologic origin of the word malbar. You think, if you hit very strongly, it is something you can't take for long, nor every day, nor for a long time in a day. There comes a time that you throw it away and say: “done, Judas is malbado”. In a way it clears the consciousness that you're not good and move on with your life. (I10)*

<sup>9</sup> T.N: “Malhação de Judas” or the “Burning of Judas” is a Christian tradition originated in Europe but strong in Latin American. The custom is to strongly hit (and/or) burn an effigy representing the biblical figure of Judas (the apostle who betrayed Jesus).

## Final remarks

Hermeneutics, defined as a general theory of interpretation (Frey, 2011), distances itself from the ideal of generalization and empirical verification, because, following the path of uncertainty and qualitative probability, it emphasizes an “openness to the world” (Ricoeur, 2011[2010], p. 90). In the perspective of opening a world, the metaphor has a notable force even enabling the thought process in science. This is when, through the intermediation of the latter, we enter into unknown areas of reality, implicit, to a certain point, in the metaphor. Thus, aiming to unveil the elements that can contribute to an understanding connected to the problem of motivation for the regular practice of physical and sport activities and considering the *evidence* in the interpretation of information, we highlight the following conclusions.

The metaphorical use of the word *malbar* associated with physical exercise happened anchored, consciously or unconsciously, in the etymological sense of punishing the body. It is a *punishment* imposed by physical exercise. Why? Because the discourse that hegemonically imposes itself in the field of professional work in physical education (in school or otherwise) is the base in which corporal work is grounded. A discourse impregnated by the ideology of physical achievement and a demand for performance. A professional work, resulting from an undergraduate education, that is decisively influenced by *stricto sensu* postgraduate in physical education, therefore, it is deliberately influenced by a certain rationality that looks at the body and sees only an organism (*man-machine*) which focuses only in the relation among the effects (physiological, biomechanical) acute and chronic of the exercises prescribed.

There is an important correlation between the professional field of physical education (at school or not) and the problem of the lack of motivation for the regular practice of physical and sport activities. A correlation that indicates, in fact, a non-desired effect, or even perverse, of professional intervention.

The “search for the reasons for action is endless, getting lost in the chain of motivations amidst unfathomable internal and external influences” (Ricoeur, 2011[2010], p. 45). Notwithstanding, the reference to the goods and evils, in the sense of satisfactions (physical exercise is good, for example, for the health and for beauty) and painful experiences (physical exercise associated to obligation, oppression, sacrifice, suffering), indicates to us, in the scientific field, the importance of considering the influence of painful experiences, related to the problem of (lack) motivation for the regular practice of physical and sport activities.

We hope that new perspectives added by this research can lead to others and stimulate the critical review of methodologies and practices connected to physical exercise and the field of professional work in physical education (at school and elsewhere).

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