

## **The Fisher's contributions for the body image research**

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Apoio: CNPQ

The beginning of the century XX was marked with the concern of the neurologists about the understanding brain structure and its organization and functioning. The idea of a body image encountered clinical tries to understand phenomena like phantom limb or anosognosia. The researches were interested in find links between distorted body perception and brain damage, but the psychological features were not considered (Fisher, 1990).

The neurologist Henry Head (1926) proposed the integration between the various body perceptions and the influence of unconsciousness aspects in these experiences. Schilder (1950/1999), also a neurologist, boarded the body image by a systemic way, considering the physiological and socio-cultural issues in the body image building. He proposed that the body image is a multidimensional, complex and dynamic phenomenon, experienced by everyone.

Fisher, a psychologist interested in the improvement of this new scholarship, worked to group the isolated studies that were being realized, organizing them in a systematized way, through the publication of three revision books.

In Brazil, with the exception of the "The female orgasm" (Fisher, 1973), any book else were translated to Portuguese. Recognizing the importance of Fisher in the international scientific environment (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Cash, 2004), it is adequate and necessary that his ideas are better distributed between the Brazilian researchers. So, the aim of this abstract is to present, by a systematized way, the knowledge produced by Fisher.

It was realized a bibliographic research, based on the scientific rigidity proposed by Salvador (1982), Cervo and Bervian (1975) and Lakatos and

Macconi (1991). After the survey, that allowed identifying books (Fisher, 1968, 1970, 1973 and 1986) about the body image phenomenon, it was realized the analyses and interpretation of the findings, through the informative and interpretative lectures, respectively.

Based on Schilder's presumptions, Fisher (1969/1958, 1970, 1986) integrated his findings in a theory to demonstrate how the body image act in the personality functioning, in the organization of the body experiences, in the cognitive processes and in the fantasy construction. To Fisher (1970), the body experience assumes a psychological meaning and it will influence in the individual behavior and his decisions. Fisher (1986) presents the researches that realized which were focused in test and assess the main theoretical concepts proposed by him. These concepts fit on four big topics: organization of the body image boundary, assignment of meaning to specific body areas, general body awareness and distortions in body perception.

Fisher treated the distortions in body perception in terms of body size experience. In that epoch, the majority of the studies focused to analyze why people differ in his perception of how big or small they are. The size variations attributed to his own body or to a part of the body involve feelings related to this body (Fisher, 1970).

Another finding brought by Fisher was that some body regions are typically overestimated and others are underestimated. The issues that influence this select forms of perception can be psychological (satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the body), cultural, functional (for example, a disability) or the localization of the body in the space (a sample body rotation to another position can alter the perception). The different sizes attributed to parts of the body also highlight qualities and worth attributed to them (Fisher, 1986). The exaggerate judgment (to more or to less) can still be the expression of a defensive reaction against disgusting body changes that break body stability and rise anxiety.

Fisher concluded that two basic findings were relevant in the literature about the distortions of the body perception: (1) the attributes of human body size are experienced as being distinct to the attributes of object sizes; (2) the sizes attributed to body areas are influenced by valor and intentions. These

findings help to establish that the body space have special perceptual proprieties that highlight the individual psychological orientation.

Fisher (1968/1958) proposed the body boundary concept. The surface of the body is what separates the interior world to the exterior world. To Fisher (1973), the individual is constantly constructing the notion of an individualized body and experiencing things that improve or break the security of his body boundary. There is a constant search to percept himself as secure and protected entity, removing a feeling of vulnerability that is related to the possibility that something bad can enter through his body or some fantasy, feeling or thought that he doesn't want to share can go out of his body. The idea of a boundary refers to a protect function attributed to the surface of the body (Fisher, 1986). To assess the body boundary, Fisher developed two instruments, the Barrier score and the Penetration score, derived by the Test of Rorschach and verified the relationship between body boundary and personality aspects, social relationship, patterns of responses and conditions of coping with body threat. For Fisher (1986), the body boundary acts as a mechanism of defense against internal and external forces that individual feels as unacceptable, dangerous and that can put in risk the integrity of his body image.

Fisher (1970) also studied the body awareness concept as a crucial aspect to the body image organization. This phenomena refers to how individual pay attention to all of the more important parts of his body, attributing them different meanings. The level of attention to the various body parts was intimacy linked to personality. To investigate how a person distribute attention to different parts of his own body, Fisher (1970) developed the Body Focus Questionnaire.

The relative brightness of the various body regions in the body schema serves like a system of organization to regulate responses. The individual develops a series of apparatus that come to be source of signs that modifies judgments and responses. It was demonstrated that the prominence of some body regions in special affects the individual attitudes and is congruent with the theory that, in some level, body image have a peripheral signet with defense and adaptations proposes. These signs offer information that will predict if determinate stimulus have to be avoided or not, because of his power to break out anxiety.

The general body awareness plays a role in phenomena like emotion and memory. The body perceptual prominence appears as a strength psychological aspect. It was verified that there are marked differences in the way that different people are awareness in relation to their own body. Some of them are focused on body sensations and others seem to minimize body perceptions. Fisher developed the Body Prominence to assess this general body awareness. The findings indicated that people with high scores were inclined to be sensible to body sensations and manifested more words with body connotations. It was observed that the improvement in the score was associated with some conditions like the waiting for a surgery, the gynecological exam experience or the physical activities.

The Fisher's importance, primly, is that, as a psychologist, he paid more attention on psychological issues of body image. He parted from the projective tests and its subjective characteristic to assessment scales able to offer quantitative findings. His intuit was not to do a generalization of the personality traits, but to find the common traits in a specific population. This would help the interventions turned to this population, but without giving up the singularity of each individual.

Fisher was responsible to group the body image researches, that were being realized in a isolated way around the world, and offered to the researchers the body boundary new concept, allowing them a new understanding about the body image organization.

To Fisher, the body is the involucres of the *self*, the unique safe place that individual has, is the secure operations base that integrates the internal and external worlds. The body image functioning is based on the stability of a central axis, which function is promote a *self* map, a armour that is the guaranty to a continuous notion of body identity and, on the other hand, based on a dynamicity that gives the possibility to constant reconstructions required by body changes adaptations and to transformations that allow individual re-meaning his experiences.

Fisher worked to understand the relationship between body image and human behavior. Treated, specifically, the body perceptions, body boundary and body awareness dimensions, and correlated them with adaptation processes, body satisfaction/dissatisfaction, body anxiety and mechanisms of

defense. Considered too the personality and the culture role in the interface of these relations.

The body image researches in the beginning of the century XX had a neurological perspective. When Fisher appeared in this scenery, he adopted the approach proposed by Schilder and offered a psychological view to body image phenomena, supplying it with his baggage of formation and researches and opening a new field of studies for the psychologists.