

# **ANALYSIS OF RACIAL PREJUDICE AGAINST BLACK WOMEN IN GYMS LOCATED IN THE CITY OF JUIZ DE FORA – MINAS GERAIS.**

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Racial discrimination has been accompanying women since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century (Freire, 2000). In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, such discrimination still remains, affecting black women within different Brazilian cultures. In cities where the practice of physical activities has a relevant role, such as the city of Juiz de Fora (Minas Gerais), there is a great valorization of some features which create the model of an ideal body, this not only has pre-defined shapes but the color of the skin can be a determining factor to such ideal body model.

In Brazil, the racial and color prejudice categories were redefined throughout the centuries. Such categories outlined hierarchies and positions among the members of Brazilian society, placing black people at a lower position within the social hierarchy (Abrahão, 2009). Regarding the female body, it is known that the so called ideal body is an important factor when it comes to social relationships. The “ideal” female body, besides being thin and toned, which demands several hours of exhaustive work in gyms, may also have an ideal color, that may not be black skin (Aldelman, 2003).

In this way, studies regarding racial prejudice against black women in places where the ideal body is praised and valued, such as gyms, are important and necessary to provide a broader knowledge of the construction of the these people’s identities, since social features influence, according to Schilder (1999) and Tavares (2003), the construction of body identity and, therefore, body image. The latter is understood as a mental representation of the body identity and is possibly being reconstructed in women who suffer racial prejudice. The aim of the present study was to do an explanatory research study about the racial prejudice against women in three gyms in the city of Juiz de Fora/MG.

## **Methodology:**

The study has a qualitative approach and was developed in two stages: the first one was to search for theoretical references to sustain the elaboration of the semi-structured interview script with the use of a questionnaire answered by the participants and a study through bibliographical revisions. At the second stage the interview was applied, that is, that was the moment of data collection.

### *Sample*

The sample comprised 08 women, self-declared black, who practice aerobics and weight training at tree gyms located in Juiz de Fora/MG, between 20 and 40 years of age. The managers of the institutions were invited and information regarding the research was made available to them. The black women who attend those gyms were approached by the researcher and those who freely agreed to take part in the research and declared themselves as black were then invited to take part in the present study.

### *Tools*

The tool used to collect data was a semi-structured interview script, with open and multiple-choice questions developed by the researchers. Said script was submitted for the analysis of five Doctors of the Sports and Physical Education College of the University of Juiz de Fora, who considered the tool appropriate for the aim of this study. The script contained questions which aimed at tracking discriminations that occurred within the context of the gyms under analysis. The questionnaire consisted of the following questions: have you suffered discrimination inside the gym; have you changed gyms due to discrimination; does discrimination negatively affects your self-esteem and the reason why you practice physical activities.

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee and the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, on May 20, 2010, according to the protocol number 2053.112.2010.

### *Data analysis*

The data were analyzed quali-quantitatively through the use of description of the facts and percentage through the program SPSS.

### **Results:**

The participants averaged 30 years of age ( $\pm 7,111$ ). The sociocultural features of the sample show that 12.5% of the women have concluded elementary school, 25% have not concluded high school, 37.5% have concluded high school, 12.5% have not concluded higher education, and 12.5% have concluded higher education.

In what regards prejudice in gyms, 37.5% of the women reported they had suffered discrimination and 62.5% said they never had. Although the minority of the participants reported having suffered from some sort of discrimination in the analyzed gyms, such data is still relevant when you take into consideration the body image of these people. Schilder (1999) states that other people's relationship with their own bodies and with our bodies can influence our body image. A relationship of discrimination can, therefore, negatively affect the body image of the participants in the present study.

The participants who reported that they had been subject to discrimination considered other members and the receptionists of the gyms as the people who mostly discriminated against them. For that reason, it was stated that 37.5% of the discriminated women decided to change gyms in order to stay away from the place of discrimination. A serious finding was that 50% of the participants who suffered discrimination reported that the discriminative act negatively affected their self-esteem, which may have affected their body image.

### **Conclusion:**

Through the present study which took part within gyms located in Juiz de Fora, it is possible to confirm that nowadays, as happened in past times, racial prejudice still exists. Such prejudice can negatively affect the body image of black women, and more complex studies need to be conducted in the future in order to confirm this finding. The present study points out that professionals

related to Physical Education can effectively act in order to promote a paradigm shift regarding the racial prejudice in their work environment. Such professionals can raise awareness to and practice equality among all students in Physical Education classes in gyms and even in schools, all around the country. Also, the practice of physical activities, whether individually or in groups, can be a relevant tool to raise awareness to the battle against racial discrimination, which still occurs in this country

**Key words: black women, racial discrimination, racial and cultural relationships, physical activity.**

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