THE FEMALE OBESE BODY IN THE TELEVISION MEDIA DISCOURSE: AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT
This article discusses the media discourse that denies the obese body and transmits a standard of beauty of the female body. This paper analyzes the aesthetic and moral criteria, which inscribes on the bodies the marks of identity and difference and the health problems to maintain a standard of beauty. We conducted a documentary and bibliographic research based on Cultural Studies as theoretical support to discuss cultural differences and power relations that permeate education and contemporary society. We note that the characters represent stereotypes marked by their differences and construct a legitimate identity of the use of bodies and of behaviors. The speeches of the television media are cultural pedagogies that suggest ways of being and produce stereotypes that mark the subject and produce symbolic violence. It is necessary to break the stereotypes, destabilize truths, deconstructing concepts and disquiet other educators regarding the possibilities of thinking about and looking at other forms of cultures and silenced bodies involving education.

KEYWORDS
Education; media; body; symbolic violence; cultural differences.

Introduction

Television is a cultural artifact that conveys dreams and/or creates stereotypes in their schedules as novels, films, television news, auditoriums programs and cartoons. The television content propagates values, attitudes and behavior styles that guide social behavior. Cultural studies offer theoretical support to analyze the cultural pedagogies of television content and discuss cultural differences and power relations that permeate education and contemporary society.

To know children’s culture, we analyze the influence of media discourse in the formation of body identity of children, as movies, cartoons and children’s novels suggest an ideal body imaginary world inspired by a princess (STEINBERG, Kincheloe, 2001). These media narratives addressed to children can increase the stigmatization of childhood obesity and lead to symbolic violence.

The multimedia technology expanded and favored the creation of excess material and immaterial products. The educational television offers images and messages that contribute to the cultural formation, but the media content also propagate hegemonic ideology forming...
opinions of viewers who watch their programs as sources of truth, without questioning this truth (TERUYA, 2006).

Louro (2000) questions the media culture that values the body appearance without questioning the historical and cultural processes that allowed certain characteristics to become cultural standards. The body goes through changes caused by cultural interpellations of the media and by various interests such as economic, political and social.

The complexity of the body's manifestation aroused the interest of researchers who elect the notion of the body as a contemporary device, noting its representations and new cultural products in advertising and in the consumer market. The media society view various body concepts published in magazines, books, newspapers, which show different positions and criticisms about body image. Historically, the concept of beauty is associated with the perfect body, young and healthy and that is the propagated body image in the media. This relentless pursuit of the beautiful body, perfect and untouchable, which is the aesthetic standard of the global body, also has the technological advances and the discursive strategies used by advertising. By recreating the body type, which becomes the means of communication, establishes links between the senses and experiences (Garcia, 2007).

McLuhan (1964) wrote that the medium is the message. Proliferated in a media culture that occupy people’s time, the medium is the message that makes the human being an extension of himself and transforms the environment in an extension of the subject.

The automation has brought changes in human life and in their relationships with each other: in the negative sense, it eliminated jobs, and in the positive sense, people had to develop other functions and more participatory relationships. The message mediated by technology changes the way that this medium enters the human life and often blind it, considering the message an extension of it, even as the body (McLUHAN, 1964).

Following this logic, we can infer that technology is an extension of our body, but this expansion requires new balance of relations between the other organs and extensions of the being. From the moment that it included an extension of ourselves challenged by the images of television, we adopted such an extension and we have modified according to each culture. It is important to note that the medium controls the actions and subject to interpretations (McLUHAN, 1964).

In the history of the body in the field of pathology and demographics, the research that rely on bio based place less emphasis on historical processes; but the body is also linked to power relations and political domination, which the productive body undergoes as a labor force. Power relations operate on the body, “(...) they invest it, mark it, they control, imposes it, subject it to work, undertake in the ceremonies require you signals” (Foucault, 1987 p. 25). This need not be done through violence or ideology, it can even be subtle and without using weapons. Still is a dominating physical form.

It is somehow a microphysics of power brought into play by the apparatus and institutions, but whose validity field stands somehow between those big runs and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces. Now the study of microphysical assumes that the power it exercised is not designed as a property but as a strategy that its effects of domination are not assigned to an ‘ownership’, but the provisions, the maneuvers, the tactics, techniques, the operation (Foucault, 1987, p. 26).
In the mid-eighteenth century, the author explains, the focus was the discovery of the body as object and target of power. During this period, attention was dedicated to the body that can be manipulated, shaped and trained to meet the demands of that his forces multiply. Thus, the amenable body notion is that he can be transformed, improved, used, so that the more obedient one is, the more useful. This discipline allows one to control in detail the body’s operations and realize the constant subjection of its forces, imposing a docility-utility relation.

[...] the discipline manufactures like that submissive bodies and exercised, ‘docile bodies’. The discipline increases the body forces (in economic terms of utility) and decreases these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In a word: it dissociates power of the body; makes it on the one hand a “fitness”, a ‘capacity’ that it seeks to increase; and reverses on the other hand the energy, the power that could result from it, and make it a strict subjection relation (Foucault, 1987, p. 119).

The human body is manipulated by a cohesion policy, that is, the body enters a power machine that means and reframes the process to analyze, decompose and recompose to work efficiently. These bodies step into the high schools and primary schools, and, stuck in power relations, press and impose limitations and obligations (Foucault, 1987).

In the school context there is a debate on the issue of body, delimiting spaces and discipline their bodies and minds in the schooling process. The discipline has always been concerned to watch, control, and mold, correct and builds bodies of boys and girls (Louro, 1997). The author explains:

The school defines spaces. Making use of symbols and codes, she says that each can (or cannot) does, it separates and institutes. Informs the ‘place’ of small and big, of boys and girls. Through his paintings, crucifixes, holy or sculptures, points out those who should be models and also allows the subjects to recognize (or not) in these models. The school building informs all its reason to exist. Its brands, its symbols and architectural arrangements ‘make sense’, establishing multiple meanings, are different subjects (LOURO, 1997, p.58).

We realize that the research of this author contributes to the questioning of a school that refers to images of saints and crucifixes as role models. In a country with the continental dimension of Brazil and inhabited by people of diverse backgrounds, public schools must respect and value this ethnic-racial and religious diversity without favoring people of European or Christian pattern and hegemonic religion. Undoubtedly, there have been many advances in research, contributing to the formulation of laws establishing the access of minority cultures in the Brazilian school space.

Soares (2005) collaborates with the discussion concerning the body to point out that from childhood students receive an education that focuses on posture and guides their bodies to remain always straight and slim. The physical exercise is conditioned to maintain good silhouette shape, so, from that perspective, the obese body is seen as a lazy and unproductive because the body does not practice such activities. In the author’s words:

Pedagogies that are elaborated to educate the body incorporate in their slow formation processes, changes the sensitivity of each season and, more precisely, a rationalization of the supervision over the other and about himself, over his own body (SOARES, 2008, p. 75).
By situating the body in relation to the school space and the cultural space, Santos (2007) presents a distinction in the way the body is taught. At school the priority is to teach the care of the body, developing hygiene habits and behavior to not get sick, like the study of diseases. Unlike what is taught outside the school, the media emphasizes health, but has the representation of the healthy body as beautiful, muscular, tanned, desired. Besides being desired it is necessary to consume the suggested products to have a healthy body. Certain bodies “are used to sell miraculous weight loss soups, body shaping devices, the more different products to keep us beautiful, thin, with shiny hair, with skin stretched” (SANTOS, 2007, p. 82).

In the consumer society, the pursuit of health is associated with a fitness image, but the procedures for weight control costs are expensive because it “(...) requires special mechanisms and tools that only the consumer market can provide” (Bauman, 2001, p. 95). This author also warns of the dangers to health when consuming drugs to control weight while consuming food.

The images offered by the media in human life produce a transformation in the subject and operate on their bodies. Moreover, if we live in a disciplinary society, as pointed out by Foucault (1987), especially the bodies submit themselves to real tyranny in search of beauty (Fischer, 2007):

> The description of the tyrannies of fashion-beauty complex, which continuously produce pathological forms of subjectivity to the woman of our time, for example, justified and entirely in Foucault and, in a way, beyond, since it highlights the female body and the inscription on it, the power struggles between man and women (Fischer, 2001, p. 593).

In “good shape pedagogy”, highlighted in the fashion market, are the cultural brands that enhance the look of the body and establish a postmodern identity - whether of gender, race or social class - mediated by the media (GARCIA, 2005, p. 23).

The ugliness is also related to the old body, and so the beauty industry offers products that promise to slow aging. “There is a desperate need for a useful body, strong, handsome and young” (SOARES, FRAGA, 2003, p. 87). With this, the company is interested in the media messages that advertise beauty products. Who has economic conditions submits to surgical procedures, aesthetic treatments, hair implants and silicons, as well as walking in parks and work out in the gym and weight training academies (Garcia, 2005).

The search for the beauty of the body is the result of a personal and economic investment designed by massed speeches. Body transformation of obese people are done with surgery to reduce stomach, plastic surgeries and other procedures that offer a high self-esteem made possible by the sensations of having a beautiful body. For this, people do not care about the consequences or the risks arising.

In this sense, the deviant patterns are the overweight bodies and obesity. Overweight is an alert to the subject, since it is above the ideal weight set by society and medicine; in turn, obesity marks the excess weight associated with both the standards established as the relationship between measured weight and the body (Garcia, 2005).

From the perspective of contemporary culture presented by the media is acceptable in society that the ideal body should be achieved with great effort and objectivity (GARCIA, 2005). Thus, obesity and thinness are always struggling to fit the body standards (Camozzato, 2007).
The body contradicts this consumerist society, because it establishes a connection to both worlds: the inside and the outside. The body must survive by a biological metabolism at the same time is influenced by the outside world. This process contributes to the appearance of specific pathologies of our time, such as bulimia and anorexia (Bauman, 2010).

For Bauman (2010), bulimia is a complex phenomenon because it is attached to the pleasure of eating and the pursuit of maximum physical fitness and anorexia is related to the egocentric pattern of contemporary society. To meet the requirement of the social environment, which imposes a slim body, culture promotes the idea that to enjoy the pleasure you must have a suitable body in shape.

 [...] The bodies classified as abnormal (those which are above or below the weight, anorexia and obesity, for example) are exemplary for the establishment of a standard body, normal or average. Thus, there is talk of abnormal bodies to regulate the ‘said’ bodies normal. And when I say “spoken” here, I refer to the set of techniques, practices and discourses that make up this body, making these operations look for established and consistent they are, perfectly natural, desirable, serving for the welfare all. And it just happens because these techniques, practices and discourses find their materiality in the world - “emblematic bodies,” or copies, those that appear in the media, such as artists or athletes. (SANTOS, 2007, p. 85)

Besides promoting a type of body, publicity offers a fictional narrative in order to provide a media body⁴, that seen as ideal marked by trends and technological innovations. The media uses a discursive strategy of power that presupposes a truth in advertising messages and questions the subject (GARCIA, 2007).

Therefore, the body is comprised of signs and languages. Considering the concept of representation as a set of meanings that have a subject in a certain way (MARTINS, 2006), it is important that this research problematize discourses and representations made about the obese body, linked to identity and difference:

Thus, it can be said that it is about everything in the body that our identity is manifested through signs [...] These signs whose meanings are not stable or have the same importance or relative penetration, combine and recombine permanently together, and is mainly in the body that they become visible (MATOS; Zoboli; MEZZAROBA, 2012, p 100.).

You can tell it is the body that expresses our identity, which is embedded the difference: “Just as the identity depends on the difference, the difference depends on the identity. Identity and difference are therefore inseparable “(SILVA, 2007, p. 75). Thus, by assuming the identity of having the fat body establishes the difference in relation to lean body.

Canclini (2009) states that the difference is established between the social and cultural systems and that is through the distinction of social class, popular culture, high culture and political and aesthetic ideology that people express themselves in works of art. For the au-

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⁴Garcia explains in his book Body & Mediation - Essays and Reflections (2007) that the media sells the idea that it is possible to have a media body buying beauty products, performing plastic surgery and aesthetic interventions, taking diet pills, to fit the ideal body pattern. 4 Garcia explains in his book Body & Mediation - Essays and Reflections (2007) that the media sells the idea that it is possible to have a media body buying beauty products, performing plastic surgery and aesthetic interventions, taking diet pills, to fit the ideal body pattern.
Thor, the symbolic structure of society is based on an antagonistic view of determining the strong and the weak, fat and thin, and suggests that this setting is ideal.

This view is part of a socially constructed process and culturally naturalized. In this reflection, Silva (2007) emphasizes that the identity and difference are produced by language acts: “(...) we are the manufacture, in the context of cultural and social relations. The identity and difference are social and cultural creations” (SILVA, 2007, p. 76).

Final Considerations

In this research we analyze the implications of the representation of identity and body fat as different in the educational field, the target of symbolic violence that we must fight. We note that the media builds identities and differences that mark the subject and produce subjectivities. To spread one’s images and messages, the media exert a cultural pedagogy that produces a way of being and behaving. In order to reflect on identity, difference, standardization bodies and the naturalization of events, we try to understand the effects of symbolic violence against fat people at school.

The transformations developed culturally value the body appearance and the media plays the role of bringing people into idealized and uncritical standards. In this quest for a healthy and slim body, there is a persuasive speech anchored in the standard of beauty. The analysis of the narratives of the novels addressed to young people and children naturalize caloric eating habits and associate body fat with food in a stereotypical view. The identity of the characters is marked by props, objects and behaviors that always refer to food, especially the caloric food.

Therefore, the media reinforces ways of seeing, of being, thinking and talking that establish false truths about the ideal standard body. In this analysis we identified that, to experience their subjectivity and legitimize the chosen identity, character builds his dream world and representations of what is romantic or not, in order - even if unconscious - to resist the symbolic violence produced by others. It is in this space of struggle that the fat body assumes its identity, but we ask: will it be necessary to fight for a space?

In this perspective, to educate our gaze, deconstruct concepts, discuss representations and develop criticality in relation to media discourses requires teacher training. We consider relevant to our research offer possibilities to combat violence, destabilize and dislodge certainty, to respect and value the identities and differences, questioning standards bodies produced culturally.

Bibliographic References


