

Playing for honor: body and masculinity in a school for *street* boys

*Eduardo Martinelli Leal**

ABSTRACT: Article developed from a participant observation, conducted in 2006, in a school which tends street adolescents in Porto Alegre, RS. It refers to the importance of the body as a gender marker in experiences of group sociability. It analyzes soccer games as a space for the construction of borders and hierarchy of subjects, relying on the discussion about honor and masculinity. Soccer games are understood as social games as they define values built in a relational way in the daily life of boys and institutional agents.

Key-words: Social Group. Masculinity. Adolescents. Soccer. Street children. Cultural anthropology.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article integrates an ethnography conducted from a participant observation during the year 2006, in a school in Porto Alegre which attends *street* adolescents. The school develops a project articulated with several municipal care programs with shelters and street approach service, having as an objective the inclusion of those adolescents in the regular educational system. The survey conducted by the Fundação de Assistência Social e Cidadania (FASC) (FUNDAÇÃO..., 2004) was used as reference, the school tended during the year 15% (about 100 students) of the population of *street* children and adolescents from Porto Alegre, with an average of 25 students per day. This data is approximate and includes both sporadic contact and daily presence of adolescents.

*Attending a Masters Degree in Social Anthropology by the Post-graduate Program in Social Anthropology at UFRGS, Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. E-mail: martinelli_leal@yahoo.com.br

As soon as I started the field work in the school, I noticed the importance that boys attributed to the body. Some of the most introverts, with whom I could not talk at first, were more open after I played the first soccer game with them. It was after this observation of the emphasis on the body that the school board started offering one hour of Physical Education every day, at the end of the morning, besides other times when the boys could opt for the activity. At first, the discussion about the body seemed a little out of my object's scope – the problem of the *street* situation – but it became relevant, when it was shown as a way to access the understanding of the studied group. Observing the soccer games, I immediately referred to the classic text from Clifford Geertz (1978) about the Balinese cock fight; by the way it served as a culture metaphor in question, besides being an unexpected way for insertion in the field. To this end, I refer to the place the body occupies in the production of symbolic borders, configured in the social space of school through the group and the place of institutional rules.

Although I consider the concept inaccurate, I understand by *street* situation the condition of children and adolescents, with or without family ties, who have the street as the primary space for living or who are in this space only to look for the material support of the family, who lives in the outskirts of the city. To refer to the studied population in concrete situations, I will simply use the expression *boy* or *girl*, even if I do not mention examples of girls in this article. Hence, I analyze the observations conducted in the school soccer games paying attention to the challenges among the adolescents as markers of honor, as well as the place of intervention in the engendered practices in the institution.

Although the appreciation of the researched group assumes its delimiting as a socializing space which involves “competition” and “cooperation” (LECZEINSKI, 1995), this division does not imply considering it homogeneous and stable, but only reflects that it results from a work of construction of symbolic borders. To this end, how does it

operate the process of integration and hierarchy of the group in this space? What are the attitudes in daily relations that are converted in prestige for the group? How do group values interact, communicate or differ from the values of school professionals? The story of João Carlos will serve as a possible answer, even if partial, to those questions.

2 PLAYING FOR HONOR

I met João Carlos¹ on the first day I visited the school, when Pedro insisted that he showed me the pieces that he had made in the ceramic workshop room. In my second visit, João Carlos already seemed not so closed, coming to call me, as well as all the educators he could see, to show the ceramic pan he had made. One of the teachers asked if he had done it all by himself and he confirmed: “You know that I am a guy who does”. On another occasion, I commented on his new haircut, but he did not enjoy that very much. The educator explained to me then that the other boys had also talked a lot about the haircut, however “in a very different way” from mine: with laughs and jokes. That is the reason for his reaction. The educator told me moreover that almost all the boys had a haircut, but that only João Carlos was a target for jokes.

I tried to understand the reason for the marginal or inferior position attributed to João Carlos when the boys were in a group, as he was the favorite target for jokes, and making fun of and, mainly, of the demonstrations of physical force.² If among the boys João’s position was inferior or indefinite, among the teachers he could invert his *status*, because he would always be engaged in the activities, mainly in ceramics (a place where I would always meet him) and in soccer. The school professionals were, at almost any moment, watching João, i.e., the people that heard him talk about his

¹ All names are fictitious.

² There is more interest in the research and in reporting such behavior inside the school, although the phenomenon currently called bullying is not, in my point of view, such a recent practice.

improvements without jokes or discredit and from whom he would always receive a word of encouragement. The personal relationship with the educators offered the boy a possibility facing the group's denial.

Thus, João Carlos relationship with the educators seemed to complement the relationship with the boys. One of the reports from Marcos, the school Physical Education teacher, gives a good example of articulation of those relations. Talking about the intolerance of the boys with João's mistakes in soccer, Marcos told me that, when he started working in the school, the boys would not even let João Carlos take part. João's permanence in the games started being ensured by the presence of the teacher or of another adult in the activity. The entrance of this new character in the game scene, the educator, demonstrated that, above the rules and attributions of the boys, that there were people who could not play due to their inferior condition, there was the rule that everybody could have the opportunity of taking part.

I tried, then, to list a series of hypotheses for João's position in the group. Could it be because he was one of the shortest in height? Or the weakest? Or simply because of a possible lack of ability in the game? These hypotheses were not, however, enough to explain his position, as they constituted the most apparent part of this identity and, although they could offer partial answers, they did not appropriately explain the meaning of his *status*. We may support the limitation of those variables stating that they do not present possible answers to the following questions: why were João's mistakes less tolerated than the mistakes³ of the other boys? Why did the boys prefer to make jokes and play with João, even when there were other smaller, younger boys, and, maybe, weaker than him? And, although João has sports qualities that are valued in the game modalities played at the

³ According to what was reported by Marcos, the Physical Education teacher, soon after he started his work at school the boys reacted to João's mistakes by kicking the ball in his direction.

school, such as the strong and accurate kick, why didn't this ensure beforehand his respect as a player?

I believe that, to provide appropriate answers to these questions, we should consider another *game* that was developed in daily school relations. They are the experimentations of physical and moral order which would limit the symbolic borders and hierarchies. When the boys were in a group, they would *arriar*⁴ one another with pushes, kicks, punches and offences to the other and to their personal relations, trying, therefore, to affirm their own image through the impairment of the image of the other. This game was very dubious and the polarity playful-serious was not very clear. It would be necessary to consider it as a test or investigation on the identity of the other and getting to know about yourself. Hence, in this process of challenge, comparison and self-assertion, positions were marked and those who could not enforce respect were disrespected.

The subordination of the other was a basic ingredient of the *game*. For them not to be subordinate, each one imposed a defense: a verbal or physical revenge. That is why some offences would start, as if they were natural, being treated with indifference, not deserving use of much energy from the boys to react. I believe that we may understand João Carlos' position from this game. He was, invariably, very irritated when the boys would subordinate him, accepting all playfulness as serious, which would legitimate the position which he was assigned and reinforced the stigma on it (the boys would retake the attacks when they were successful).

I observed that the boys would play this game all the time and that usually they react in the same way: with a similar way of verbal aggression. For example, in one of the soccer games, before the penalty shots, Tiago says to a player in the opponent team: "I saw your mom smocking a stone

4 The meaning of "arriar" is close to "humiliate", but the idea of submitting, or dominating, the other, seems more pertinent for me. Although it is constituted by a power relation, such attitude is associated to the position of those subjects, which implies on the underlining of the relational character of this behavior.

(*crack*)”. The other boy answered in a similar way. However, João Carlos ended up assuming the position, as he was irritated, legitimating a comment, for example, a threat: “If you miss the shot...”.

The reference to women (mother, girlfriend, sister etc.) in the discussions of the boys points to the reciprocity between female and male universes. The attack to the male moral, done through the disqualification of the female image with whom the other is connected, allows us to notice that the dishonor of the female resonates in the boys’ honor. Their social games may be compared to the feeling of honor present in the challenges analyzed by Pierre Bourdieu (1988) in his ethnography about the *cabila*. The author shows that gender relations among the *cabila* happen in antagonistic and complementary ways. Even being absent in the centrality of the male universe, the female universe would correspond to the dimension of intimacy and secret, sacred spheres for male honor. The woman would be the vulnerable part, as she is constituted as the guardian of the *essar* (respectability).

Arlei Sander Damo (1995) observes in his work that street soccer constitutes a privileged space of male homosociability, where the boys “play to become boys” (DAMO; 1995: 139). The author stresses that this masculinity should be understood as a model in which violence, above all physical violence, and values such as courage, a virility and force are stressed. Hence, despite the importance of the gift/talent to play the game, it is necessary to have courage to act in this field of hostilities. The author still shows how the *status* categories should be constantly forged through the confronting and the hierarchy and how far this is instituted as a culturally arbitrary process. It is through the dramatization of male values around classifying categories that the game is developed.

Still according to Bourdieu (1988), the condition for the existence of the challenge requires the one who launches it to be able to recognize the one who receives it as worthy of it,

i.e., to recognize him simultaneously as a man and as his rival in honor. Just as, the one who responds the challenge should see in the other someone who is able to play, who knows the rules and is virtuous enough to respect them. The principle of mutual equality⁵ recognition in honor assumes that there is no superiority between any of the challenging parts.

Among the *cabila* there are specific concepts for honor, for the ability to defend it apart from its respectability. Honor (*hurma-haram*) constitutes that which exposes the group to offense. It is public and sacred. The point of honor (*nif*) is established as an answer to the offense directed to the honor – it is the personal duty to defend and restore it connecting the individual to the group. Respectability (*hurma-essar*) is earned and defended in front of others. It means the effective defense of honor and denotes the consideration of the group facing the role played by the individual. For the *cabila*, those three aspects are intimately connected, imposing the practical updating of moral values implied by the feeling of honor, which is the basis for linking with the group and for *cabila* identity:

The point of honor is the moral foundation proper of the individual who measures himself always under the glimpse of the others, who needs the others to exist, because the formed image of himself cannot be different from his image that is returned by the others (BOURDIEU, 1988, p.172).

One of the repeated themes in the bibliography about *street* boys is the formation of identity groups. Under the leadership and authority of older people, the groups are treated as an identity and spatial reference in the street, where, sometimes, they interact with the notion of reproduction of the

⁵ This equality assumes that: a) the challenge grants honor and for this it is necessary to be always ready to react; b) a man who challenges someone who is unable to respond or go on with the exchange, dishonors himself, as well as the one who exaggerates when humiliating his defeated opponent; c) only the challenge of an equal man deserves an answer: the indifference to the challenge results in humiliation to the challenger.

family institution. The groupings⁶ are forged by the coexistence – *be together* – in a determined place. The group regulates sociability in the street and operates through the interaction, which is the learning that demands coexisting, presence and daily practice. The rules established by the group are a minimum to ensure street coexistence, i.e., they enable a maximizing of the street experience with less risk (GREGORI, 2000). Besides, the group operates hierarchical classifications where the leadership and the attitude of elders or the most daring are valued. As local guardians and protectors, the leaders are seen as real heroes (LEMOS, 2002; LECZEINSKI, 1995).

Articulated as an individual action, but strictly related to the group, honor modulates the social behavior in a dynamic way. The character of challenge is evidenced by the nature of the response, i.e., according to the answer, it will be possible to know if it means merely a challenge or an offense. The existence of the challenge, therefore, does not constitute an offense, but it expresses a condition of possibility in a ritualized and institutionalized game or bet logic. The challenge puts the “point of honor” (“nif”) in jeopardy, in other words, the need to overcome the other in combat.⁷ João Carlos is always aimed at in those games, which shows that there is a recognition of his equality in the group, but the acceptance of the initial offense by him used to interrupt the

⁶ Opposing the ideas that street groups or groupings are founded on identity ties, Maria Filomena Gregori states that those “are not connected by ethnic, neighboring or cultural style ties” (GREGORI, 2000, p. 125). Hence, the fact that they are in group is not translated to an identity; as there is no differentiating when confronted with other groups. According to the author, the groups would serve determined aims, such as the family functions and roles, and the leadership would not be verbally admitted by the boys, as they value the idea of individual freedom. Even if there are no ties, singular codes and stability, the group is important for the transmission of concrete knowledge about daily life in the streets.

⁷ The game causes the opponent to answer: “The one who received the gift or suffered the offense is caught by the exchange gear and should adopt a conduct which, whatever he does, be it a response [even if he decides not to answer] to the constituted provocation by the initial act”. (BOURDIEU, 1988: 167). The challenged may extend the dialogue or interrupt it, and the response will always be a new challenge. Consequently, the resignation will imply on dishonor, but it can also mean the liberation from the rules of honor by the distrust of the challenger’s honor.

game, implying that the response would fall on his own moral.⁸

The defeated is not seen in a negative way if he fulfilled his duty, and he can even appeal to humility when showing the arbitrary and abusive character of the offense, but, for that, it is necessary that no misunderstanding occurs in the eyes of the group. Hence, the feeling of honor excludes the possibility of cowardice, such as the action of many against one.⁹ To Bourdieu, once the challenge is presented as a “[...] ruled sequence and rigorously necessary for the mandatory acts” (BOURDIEU, 1988, p. 174), this challenge may be seen as a ritual,¹⁰ where the mastering of the game and its possibilities are transformed in a confrontation of strategies, due to the degree of knowledge about the way it works. To this end, the challenges among the cabila should be understood, therefore, as “acts of communication” mythic-ritual system authorized and authorizers. So, losing the honor means dying socially. The author compares the logic of challenge and its response to an exchange or a gift, because the gift and counter-gift dissimulate an implicit challenge and constitute a “commitment between the contract and the conflict” (BOURDIEU, 1988, p. 173).

The notion of exchange is applied to the challenge, because it is always under risk of being transformed in competition and it brings in it the potential of conflict. The conflict of honor remains up to the moment when there is rupture. The logic of challenge seems appropriate to think the

⁸ The offense itself would not bring with it the dishonor, as it allows the possibility of response and, as long as there is this possibility, the dishonor remains virtual, becoming increasingly real with the delay of revenge. The challenge requires alertness and vivacity in the answer. The weakness and lack of courage constitute negative attributes, because the logic of challenge enables the smallest questions to expand. Aman of honor should always be in the defensive (BOURDIEU, 1988).

⁹ For example, at a certain moment of one of the games, João Carlos told Tiago he was sorry for the accidental nudge on him, saying that this fact was no reason for them to fight. Tiago answered: “Look at your size and look at mine, do you think I will beat you?” comparing the attitude to an act of cowardice.

¹⁰ The author mentions the example of wars among the tribes where the combat ended up taking the shape of a ritual with prescribed or institutionalized form of challenges, whose main objective was to show the superiority of a tribe over the other and not of annihilating the opponent.

relationship of the school boys. As a communication, action and exchange code, the challenge updates, through the body, values associated to a specific model of masculinity focused on force, virility and courage. João Carlos' position is perfect regarding the importance of learning and mastering the rules of challenge. However, the introduction of sports rules and of the dialogue through the intervention of educators puts on stage a new configuration where the learning of another model of sociability is necessary for the boys.

3 OTHER GAMES, OTHER RULES

It was common, during the soccer games, for me to have teacher Marcos as a real interpreter of meanings and of the way the boys mastered the sports. It was him who called my attention for the sneakers which were thrown in the corner of the court and that the boys used for the games. The sneakers did not really have an owner, but this avoided the boys damaging their best shoes playing – some would wear a sneaker on only one of their feet. The teacher remembered still that during the first few days when he started working at the school, he soon noticed the importance of some forms of soccer played by the boys. Marcos took the opportunity of the preference for those forms to encourage their practice with, for example, the promotion of championships. The ways of playing were “goal to goal”¹¹, the “three in-three out”¹² and the “matada”¹³.

¹¹ Free shots to the goal where the players kick from a distance not further than the middle of the field against the opponent's goal and tries to score a goal. The ball cannot be defended with the hands.

¹² Two players try to score a goal from outside the area against a goalkeeper, but the ball can only be kicked in the air. One of the players should raise the ball for the other to shoot. There are three attempts for the players to score a goal. If the ball goes out or the goalkeeper defends, they score a point. If the goalkeeper makes more points than the other players, the player who committed the last mistake becomes the goalkeeper.

¹³ Two (or three) players kick from inside their area towards the opponent's goal, aiming at scoring a goal. If the opponents are able to grab the ball without using their hands, they may play with their colleagues and try to score a goal from inside the opponent's area.

One day, before the beginning of one of the games, when Marcos had arranged that they all would play “goal to goal” and defined the order of participants, Tiago came and said that he wanted to play the “matada”, but Marcos explained that the choice was already made and that only after everybody had played he would be able to start playing another game. Tiago complained. In another moment, during one of the games when Tiago was playing, one of the educators came to call him, after previous warnings, to talk. From a distance, he started complaining to her to stop bothering him: “Go away, go away!”. The other boys laughed at his attitude of indifference. At this moment, Marcos called my attention to the fact that, in a few minutes, Tiago would attend the request from the educator, because, according to him, Tiago would only behave that way in front of his colleagues, not to be demoralized, but that in fact he cared. This was confirmed a few minutes afterwards.

The highest point of tension in the games was not marked by the presence of violence, as this was made natural as an important behavior attribute, but by the introduction of the technical rules in the game. In the most critical periods of the games, the intervention of rules performed by the teachers was many times understood by the boys as favoring one of the teams. Although the rules were not well regarded by the boys, most of the time they agreed to respect them and even in charging them, but they made it very clear that it was much more for them not to be bothered by the teachers than they were necessary for the development of the game. It was implicit that the strict following of rules was unnecessary, unless it could be used against the opponent.

Norbert Elias (1992) analyzes the “civilizing” impulse which operated a transformation in leisure activities towards what he calls “de-sportization”. Through a disciplining process, the sports would have been transformed from a utilitarian activity to an end in themselves. The “civilizing” impulse would correspond to a slow and growing change in conduct regularity and sensibility due to a determined

“configuration” of social structures, which imposed limits to the use of violence and physical force according to the introduction of rules:

[...] it is possible that, both industrialization and de-sportization, have been symptomatic of a deeper change in European societies, which demanded from their individual members a greater regularity and differentiation of behaviors.” (ELIAS, 1992, p. 225).

Here a metaphor is also valid for the sports rules introduced by the teachers and valued by the institution. For example, the boys could accept the rules and, hence, become their defenders themselves to avoid the interruption of the games by their teachers or they could also observe that those rules were acting against them when they were disadvantaged during a game, such as at the moments when the “referee” would expel a player for “any reason”. Such rules emerged in a specific “configuration” of values which imposed determined constraints to the relationships developed in this social space.

4 LEARNING HOW TO PLAY

The rules of depreciating, inferiorizing and excluding also allow an analogy like the social representations connected to the practical experiences of the boys. Those rules from the group witnessed by Marcos – to which he should constantly be alert warning them to legitimate in the game the rules from the sport and not the moral rules of the boys – are relevant to think about the experience of those boys in other social spaces such as the situations of physical and symbolic violence which they constantly suffer in the streets. According to Damo (1995, p. 152), “[...] the street is full of masculinity, covering spaces with male sociability far beyond the street itself”. For Gregori (2000), the street is constituted as a space of abuse and violence where the “law of the jungle” rules.

However, the hostilities are not only physical, because aggressions are much more in the potential and in the threat, as the roles of the actors are more or less rigid, until proven otherwise. However, it is also necessary to avoid violence, even incidental violence, because it is always interpreted as a personal confront. This symbolic game of interpretation and formulation of differences acts as a device of production of situational truths, constituting arbitrary categories that should be constantly forged.

In his ethnographic study with “kids” who used to stay at the Praça da Alfândega in Porto Alegre, Lisiane Leczneiski (1995) analyzes the occurrence of this type of challenges, fights and duels. The atmosphere of play, joking, aggression and assertion was nourished by gender representations. Through rhymes, music, stories with sexual overtones and challenges, the boys stressed honor and masculinity. The theme of physical disputes or fights attested the focus on male arrogance, the solidarity of the group and moral rules. The author describes the disputes which involve pushing, tripping, “whacks” on the ear and in several parts of the body as a form of provocation, a “joke” in disguise or an exhibition of force and courage. According to the author, serious fights would be rarer.

The confrontations are not violence in itself, but acts of communication in which symbolic and practical order elements are articulated. Through dramatization, values such as force and courage are updated and hierarchical leadership positions are marked. The challenges are not considered by the boys as violence, as it is naturalized as “an integral part of interpersonal relations” (LECZNEISKI, 1995, p. 105). The challenges would be characterized by verbal aggressiveness, by the statement of hurt/threatened male honor and by the confrontation or measuring of personal capacities. Although those challenges were repeated among young people from other social groups, the “kids” from Praça da Alfândega were differentiated by the “public, explicit and uninhibited character of this language” (LECZNEISKI, 1995, p. 106).

No matter how much the physical attributes are valued for the classification in the group, there are criteria referring to attitudes and behaviors which are also taken into account, such as intelligence, wit, prankishness and the fact that the members of the group are trustworthy.¹⁴ Leczeneiski connects the distance between the “kids” and the regulating institutions to the presence of a code of their own moral conduct, in which attributes such as cowardice and stinginess are seen in a negative way and many times would lead those with such traits to be expelled out of the socializing spaces in the street.

As in the example of the logic of challenges among the cabila explained by Bourdieu, Leczeneiski shows that there were principles of action which imposed to the games some norms such as the balance of forces, which implied on never hitting anyone who is smaller, from the back or in group, otherwise characterizing a coward action. Moreover, there was a pragmatism about the limits of disputes which avoided, for example, the “kids” taking the serious fights to the extreme, because the body is a producer of prestige and an instrument of defense of honor and, for that, it cannot be hurt (LECZENEISKI, 1995).

Therefore, we may notice how the body, through the challenges, reinforces the values culturally associated to the male sex, such as the attributes of physical force and the solution of conflicts through violence. However, the challenges do not say only this. As Leczeneiski highlights, the symbolic character attributed to the challenge indicates that, besides the conflict, there is a social relationship. In the challenges, the body mediates and updates the social relationships, creating ties, establishing borders and informing something understandable by their peers.

Let us take a situation observed in one of the soccer games between the students from the school and the boys from

¹⁴ Gregori (2000) stresses the importance of values such as not having “debts” and not “regulate”.

Vila Inca, situated near the building *Chocolatão*¹⁵. The boys from *Vila Inca* were ex-students from the school who lived with their families or ex-students from a school which received only “street” children. One of those adolescents came to the school during the week to arrange the time for the games. The confrontations were expected very anxiously. In the game in question, the boys played in an atmosphere of rivalry, taking the dispute seriously. Each one of the players formulated mistakes or problems caused by the presence of João Carlos in the game. However, his position seemed to be really that of a *scape goat*.

After the snack, during the break for the penalties, João sat next to me and complained about the boys, mainly Willian, because he had offended and threatened him in case he missed the shot: “I think that I am not even going to shoot, I am thinking about not shooting those penalties”, said João. I gave him some words of encouragement and for him not take seriously the comments and the shots. João was the first to shoot the penalty. The boys from the school screamed his nickname in a choir¹⁶ to encourage him. In fact, there was a little disdain about his potential – it is worth stressing that this treatment was not given to the rest of the team players. João shot the penalty and scored the goal. Afterwards he ran from one side to the other and congratulated teacher Marcos. Willian then teased João: “Go there and tell everybody from the school that you scored this goal”. João was anxious: he was walking from one side to the other and he patted Marcos on the shoulder. He seemed very involved and anxious about the shootings.

As there was no definition in the first round, João would have to start a new sequence of penalties, however these would be decisive: if João missed the shot, it would be the end

¹⁵ Federal Revenue building situated in the center of Porto Alegre. It is known by this name due to its brown color.

¹⁶ Difficult to reproduce, but the nickname was formed by a part of his name. The sense of the nickname seemed a little childish, as it was tender, as it was an essentially male universe.

of the game, as the opponent had missed their shot, João could have the decision of the game if he scored. There was again a lot of cheering and expectation. João shot the penalty successfully. From the place where I was I could not see the shot clearly, but I confess that it was difficult to avoid showing my involvement with the celebration scene. The boys carried João all around the school. João, afterwards, was recalling the details of his achievement for all the teachers.

João's position here was inverted, maybe only temporarily, as it was evident in Alisson's speech: "The most retarded scored the goal and the most correct ones missed". His position was borderline, but something to be built upon and affirmed, because there was a need to "learn how to play".¹⁷

Following the rapid changes in João Carlos in a short period of approximately one year, I could see that as he became wiser, or acquired more *confidence*, he started to adopt the same strategies as the other boys: *attacking* to defend himself. Needless to say that he had really already learned how to play, incorporating attributes such as bravery, courage and disposition for challenges. With this, João started to "arriar" with all the boys and, even, with the educators, forging many times the flaws of the other boys when he lost some game.

When he broke with the duality of body-meaning, Thomas Csordas (2008) used the concept of "corporeality". For Csordas, "corporeality" denotes a *state*, because the perception is instituted in the experience itself even before the objectification awareness – that is why the author's emphasis is in his "pre-objective" character. If the perception is pre-objective, his objectivity is manifested through the possibilities of the *habitus*,¹⁸ which acts as a primary process of meaning. The perception is already established through the objectivity of his cultural demonstration, through the engagement in the corporal experience.

¹⁷ Field diary, 09/05/2006.

¹⁸ According to Bourdieu (1983).

Transferring the previous definitions to the field of production of gender differences, and reflecting on the experience reported here, it can be said that gender is not noticed in the “natural” body or in the “signified” body, but in the experience that engenders the body as a body of gender. Gender is not also conceived here as an essence linked to the “biological” sex, as even this one may be socially built, i.e., there is no substantive gender identity: this is *performatively* built (BUTLER, 2003)¹⁹. Gender is, therefore, corporified and naturalized through socialization. Honor, as a gender mark, institutes a determined arbitrary ordination of the experience which is presented as a social reality. However, it is true that this mark is established in a much more efficient way the more it is founded on visible distinctions, such as biological differences (BOURDIEU, 1998).

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The opposition between the moral rules on which the social games of the group are developed and the universe of the institutional rules; does not mean that those would be less coordinated than these, but that both emerge and suffer changes in a determined “configuration” (ELIAS, 1992). There is no linearity among the values of honor and the values of institutional rules. Honor, as an element of change, communication and solidarity, marks borders of meaning restricted to the group itself, even if it is structured in an elusive and dynamic way. The institutional rules refer to a diverse context where actions and behaviors are backed by categories or institutional expectations founded on determined models of sociability.

¹⁹ Judith Butler (2003) deconstructs the old division between sex and gender which understood sex as natural and gender as a construction. Sônia Maluf (2002) brings an interesting empirical example which contributes to the premise of “biological” sex being arbitrary. The author shows how the transgender phenomenon is productive to think about other forms of gender construction, bringing as an example the relationship between corporality and desire, on which the possibility of the subject itself choosing his/her sex is placed.

The objective of this article was to show how “boys” have dialogues and negotiate values through “informed social bodies” (BOURDIEU, 1983). This definition allows thinking how the corporal practices are simultaneously inscribed in objective and subjective dimensions. Here, the duality body-mind is merely didactic, as the body is not a passive agent of culture, but rather the production space of the relationships where it is inserted.²⁰

The values implicit in the challenges are far from the perspective of a rationalist evaluation of “violent” or “uncivilized” behaviors, because they are built in a relational way on the experiences and practices of boys and institutional agents. To understand the soccer game of boys as a ritual or a social game does not mean to consider it the production space by excellence of those subjects, but rather a place where the social scenes are dramatized from which it is possible to learn the values that are, literally, at stake.

²⁰ This does not imply on reifying a cultural identity as a group, even if specific or temporary for “street” boys, but it implies on establishing relationships between corporal practices and delimiting social values in a determined institutional space.

Jogando pela honra: corpo e masculinidade em uma escola para meninos em situação de rua

RESUMO: Artigo desenvolvido a partir de uma observação participante, realizada em 2006, em uma escola que atende adolescentes em situação de rua em Porto Alegre, RS. Faz referência à importância do corpo como marcador de gênero nas experiências de sociabilidade do grupo. Analisa os jogos de futebol como um espaço de construção de fronteiras e de hierarquização dos sujeitos, valendo-se da discussão sobre honra e masculinidade. Os jogos de futebol são entendidos como jogos sociais na medida em que demarcam valores construídos de maneira relacional no cotidiano de meninos e agentes institucionais.

Palavras-chave: Grupo social. Masculinidade. Adolescentes. Futebol. Menores de rua. Antropologia cultural.

Jugando por el Honor: cuerpo y masculinidad en una escuela para niños en "situación de calle"

Resumen: Trabajo desarrollado a partir de una observación participante realizada en 2006 en una escuela que atiende a adolescentes en "situación de calle" en Porto Alegre, RS. Hace referencia a la importancia del cuerpo como marcador de género en las experiencias de sociabilidad del grupo. Analiza los partidos de fútbol como un espacio de construcción de fronteras y de jerarquización de los sujetos, considerando la discusión sobre honor y masculinidad. Los partidos de fútbol son vistos como juegos sociales al entender que demarcan valores construidos de forma relacional en el día a día de niños y agentes institucionales.

Palabras clave: Grupo social. Masculinidad. Fútbol. Jóvenes sin hogar. Antropología cultural.

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Received on: 15.10.2009

Approved on: 23.02. 2010