

## MECHANISMS OF RELIGIOUS DIFFERENTIATION: SELF-EXCLUSION AS A GENDERED IDENTITY STRATEGY IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

The study aims to identify the meanings attributed to expressions related to religion in physical education classes, in order to understand the incidence of specific codes and mechanisms of exclusion or self-exclusion. The study is anchored in ethnometodological approaches and its qualitative approach, using the following data collection instruments: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Evidence indicates that self-exclusion occurs primarily among females. The results show that the female religious group embraces self-exclusion as an active identity project rather than merely passive submission. Self-exclusion is naturally accepted by teachers, demonstrating little critical reflection on the conflict between religious freedom and compliance with the mandatory curriculum.

**Keywords:** Physical Education. Religion. Gender Identity. Curriculum.

## MECANISMOS DE DIFERENCIACÃO RELIGIOSA: A AUTOEXCLUSÃO COMO ESTRATÉGIA IDENTITÁRIA DE GÊNERO NA EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA

### RESUMO

O estudo tem como objetivo identificar os significados atribuídos a expressões relacionadas à religião nas aulas de educação física, para compreender a incidência de códigos e mecanismos específicos de exclusão ou auto-exclusão. O estudo ancora-se no patrimônio etnometodológico e sua abordagem qualitativa, utilizando os seguintes instrumentos de coleta de dados: observação participante, entrevista semiestruturada e grupo focal. As evidências indicam que a auto-exclusão ocorre principalmente no grupo feminino. Os resultados mostram que o grupo feminino religioso assume a autoexclusão como um projeto identitário ativo, e não como uma mera submissão passiva. A auto-exclusão é naturalmente aceita pelos professores, demonstrando baixa reflexão crítica sobre o conflito entre a liberdade religiosa e o cumprimento do currículo obrigatório.

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**Palavras-chave:** Educação Física. Religião. Identidade de Gênero. Currículo.

## **MECANISMOS DE DIFERENCIACIÓN RELIGIOSA: LA AUTOEXCLUSIÓN COMO ESTRATEGIA DE IDENTIDAD DE GÉNERO EN LA EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA**

### **RESUMEN**

El estudio busca identificar los significados atribuidos a las expresiones relacionadas con la religión en las clases de educación física, para comprender la incidencia de códigos y mecanismos específicos de exclusión o autoexclusión. El estudio se basa en enfoques etnometodológicos y su enfoque cualitativo, utilizando los siguientes instrumentos de recolección de datos: observación participante, entrevistas semiestructuradas y grupos focales. La evidencia indica que la autoexclusión ocurre principalmente entre el grupo femenino. Los resultados muestran que el grupo religioso femenino asume la autoexclusión como un proyecto de identidad activo, no como una mera sumisión pasiva. La autoexclusión es aceptada con naturalidad por el profesorado, lo que demuestra poca reflexión crítica sobre el conflicto entre la libertad religiosa y el cumplimiento del currículo obligatorio.

**Palabras clave:** Educación Física. Religión. Identidad de Gênero. Currículo.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Physical education as a curricular component and conceived in a critical perspective, besides its specific objectives, aims to discuss, reflect and deepen the understanding of the mechanisms, codes, and languages used in daily life (Gonçalves; Silva, 2023; da Silva; Devide, 2009; Bracht, 2005; Daolio, 2004).

One phenomenon in several schools in Brazil is the increase of religious influences in the school environment (Pinel; Da Silva Reses, 2021; Cavaliere, 2007). By religion, people see life in a specific way, with a particular form of building the world (Geertz, 2008). In multiple universes of religions, the movement that grows in Brazil is the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal evangelical movement (Fajardo, 2011; Mariano, 2008). Silva (2009) presents Protestantism in three strands: Traditional, Pentecostal, and Neo-Pentecostal. Pentecostalism's elements have been incorporated by historical Protestantism and by the charismatic movement of Catholicism, demonstrating the strength that these media present (Csordas, 1988). According to the demographic census, the number of evangelicals in Brazil increased by 61.45% in 10 years (IBGE, 2010.). The evangelical expansion, mainly the Pentecostal and the Neo-Pentecostal, is not recent; it became the second-largest religious group in the country. Its progress is not expressive only in religious and demographic plans. There is a significant increase of evangelical directors, coordinators, teachers, and students, provoking changes in educational institutions' daily lives. Pentecostalism has increased public visibility, legitimacy, and social recognition (Mariano, 2004).

The literature consulted indicated studies on self-exclusion due to religious issues. It was possible to identify works related to Physical Education and Religion in Brazil (Rigoni; Daolio, 2017; Rigoni; Prôdocimo, 2013; Rigoni, 2009; Silva; Silva, 2009). In another context, studies demonstrate the influence of religion and culture on low physical activity in women from the Pacific Islands. The women in this context suffer from religious pressures that end up indeterminate independence and physical activity, encouraging them to meet family obligations (Eskes; Duncan; Miller, 1998). A study carried out in England with Muslim immigrants identified the influence of religion on schools' physical education practice. Nevertheless, in the third generation of these immigrants, there was a relaxation of religious norms and greater girls' participation in the physical education classes (Dagkas; Benn; Jawad, 2011).

However, the self-exclusion of physical education classes due to religious norms is not an issue with great participation in the literature. To what extent is religion influencing the non-

participation of girls in physical education class? This research joins this theme, seeking to contribute to Physical Education and other areas of knowledge, promoting debates and actions to reduce the exclusion processes (Crelier; Silva, 2018).

The study aims to identify the meanings attributed to expressions related to religious aspects that occur during physical education classes to understand the incidence of specific religious codes and mechanisms of exclusion or self-exclusion in practical classes.

The thesis of this article is that self-exclusion is an active mechanism for constructing gender and religious identity, rather than mere obedience to dogma. This study is urgent and essential due to a gap in the literature. However, it goes further by reflecting on the implications for academic management and pedagogical practices, as well as for the guarantee of the right to education.

## **2 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

This research has a qualitative approach (Sabirón Sierra, 2006), with the support of ethnomethodology (Coulon, 1995; Garfinkel, 1967; Silva; Votre, 2012; Da Silva et al., 2015). It uses three instruments to data collected: participant observation, semi-structured interview, and focus group. In addition, we opted for an analysis methodology that emphasized interpretation in interactive contexts and allowed the production of new ideas, meanings, and definitions.

### **2.1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

The chosen field for the data collection was a federal public institution of high school, located in Niterói, Brazil. The option for this locus it anchored in three reasons: a) it is one of the most traditional public institutions of Basic Education in Brazil; b) it has 14 campuses, and only one in Niterói; c) with almost 13 thousand students, offers classes ranging from Early Childhood Education to Regular and Integrated Secondary Education, as well as Youth and Adult Education.

### **2.2 DATA COLLECTION**

Observations and interviews occurred in the second half of 20241. After two months of observations, we verified a self-exclusion process, mainly of a group of students, which happened with the teachers' consent. From there, away was outlined for the semi-structured interviews and the focus group.

## 2.3 PARTICIPANTS

Two teachers integrated the participants as they worked with the investigated group when we made the observations. Ten high school students, aged between 15 and 17 (the participants were in their second year of high school), were selected for the focus group (Barbour, 2009; Gaskell, 2002). The students' participants are five evangelical (four girls and one boy), two atheist students, one girl and one boy, two agnostic2 girls, and one girl Catholic Church, totaling the 10 participants. Students repeated expressions common to religious aspects during the observed physical education classes: "Leave them alone, teacher. They are from the church". "They don't do physical education; the pastor doesn't allow it". Based on the observation of such expressions, we sought to bring this group closer together, since it used to pray in the breaks between classes. The Pentecostal evangelicals selected for the focus group are part of this prayer group3. Evangelicals have different specificities and religious ties, which makes all the difference (Portela, 2012; Mariano, 2004). When we refer to evangelicals, we are talking about a lot. The denominations are many and complex. However, for this study, when we see evangelicals, we deal with the Pentecostal group. Pentecostals have ramifications, but this specification would not fit here, given the attempt to maintain the respondents' anonymity and religious affiliations. The non-evangelical participants were invited after informal conversations based on their interest in the research. As we carried out participant observation, assuming a posture of participant-observer (Silva; Votre, 2012; Coulon, 1995) since we have worked as a teacher at the institution for some years, we had prior knowledge of the students. Thus, we sought to select those who declared interest in the study and were not part of the evangelical prayer group. A convenience sample was configured to promote an analysis based on the subjects' experiences without looking for statistical representations. The Ethics Committee from Universidade Salgado de Oliveira, in Brazil, approved the project. The students' parents signed the consent form. The teachers signed the Free and Informed Consent Term (TCLE)

## 2.4 ANALYTIC PROCESS

We analyzed the data following a semantic approach in the interviewees' statements. The patterns in the speeches received ethnomethodological treatment. The following steps were: 1) Pre-analysis when the speech marks were systematic. 2) Exploration of the fragments identifying the "indicative elements". 3) Inferences regarding the objective of the study. The indicative marks of the speeches received analyzes their relevance for this study's

purpose, with the support of the theoretical framework of ethnomethodology.

### 3 FINDINGS

After in-depth reading of the speeches, we highlight certain discursive marks (DM) in the analysis; these brands were built according to the ethos emitted by the interviewees. Hence, they are consecutively named DM 1, DM 2, etc.

#### 3.1 INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS

To preserve identities, we created fictitious names to present them: Prof<sup>a</sup> Valeria and Prof<sup>a</sup> Milena. It is essential to mention that one of them is agnostic, and the other is not evangelical; this may be considered a vies of this study. We observed gestures and body codes that denounced discomfort related to religion. Even expressing openness to the discussion with her students, she verbalizes: [...] I tried to take away the part of the religion and have no confrontation of an ideal".

Milena also demonstrated discomfort. All times, she gestured with her hands and expressed disapproval. In the end, Milena emphasized the need for respect for the other: "To try to raise awareness that we could do a program like this, rhythm, or dance, without, however, hurting any honor".

One day a boy who was rehearsing turned around and said: Teacher, I am not going to dance. I am not going to dance because another schoolgirl said she is not my friend anymore because I am going to dance! However, what happened? She said that whomever this dance is the devil's thing, and if I danced, she would not be my friend anymore. It has nothing to do with religion. We are going to do a typical dance. I think we can not lose and deny this part of the culture. So I tried to take the part of the religion, to have no ideal confrontation there. However, some children said: no, my mother will not let me, and I will not dance! (Prof<sup>a</sup> Valeria).

A time there we did a dance group, right! To do a choreography, because it would culminate in a championship. Moreover, then at that time, some girls did not want to participate because they said: Oh no, I do not wish to and such. So I went to talk about why? What was going on, and some, and some said they were from the church, would not allow (Prof<sup>a</sup> Milena).

DM 1 - Prohibition. The teachers' answers revolve around the indiciality of the idea of prohibition. According to Watson and Gastaldo (2015), it is the method of hitting the pointers, promoting a self-explanation of fact, or a descriptive summary. Valeria explains the prohibition

by understanding it as repression that the girls suffer on the part of the church, not to practice certain acts or to wear some clothes.

DM 2 - Gender specifications. Another point to emphasize in Valeria's answers is the use of the word 'she', since the use of the article 'a', that in Portuguese is female definer. In the question, there was no gender specification. With this, in the responses of this teacher, we highlight another characteristic of the expressions: 'religion' and 'church'. The words are used and directed to the girls during the speech, leaving the boys out.

You can not do it! 'From the church', that it was a prohibition, so a prohibition not, as it speaks? She was dismissed, more or less like that: she could not wear pants only skirt, and how she would participate in the activity that had to have appropriate clothes. She is 'from the church'; she does not do sports or exercise (Prof<sup>a</sup> Valeria).

When they talk like that: is 'from the church', I think they refer to this specific group, the more rigid church. A church that the pastor probably does not allow them to do things, and they have in the figure of the pastor a value of authority who places laws there (Prof<sup>a</sup> Milena).

DM 3 - Labels. Teachers see 'religion' and 'church' as labels. According to Becker (2008), a determinate group decides and builds what a deviation is. The other group acts differently from the standard formulation, dictated by the first group, and called deviant. However, in this case, the group 'of religion' makes a point of assuming this denomination.

The two teachers report that the religious group refuses certain conditions stating that they can not participate. However, Milena still insinuates that this group reprobates the situations they do not understand or feel are wrong. Jobs like these can lead the affected group to anticipate their destinies, subjectively excluding themselves before being objective due to school situations and tensions (Dubet, 2003).

DM 4 - Self-exclusion is a project. Evangelicals do so deliberately, for they learned to differentiate themselves and make these differences evident. They are only interested in being included among the "Brothers and sisters of faith". Self-exclusion, in this case, is not random but a project. When referring to self-exclusion, we could mention 'world differentiation' (LESSA, 2012). This concept helps us understand the distinction made by Pentecostals to what is mundane (exterior) and God (inside).

I saw it as a label, and it is not just a label that other students put in, but a label that the students themselves put on. We can not! They left them as well, and even the professor did not enter into this discussion merit. No one had this encounter (Prof<sup>a</sup> Valeria).

I do not see the larger group, excluding the religious group. I think this group is self-excluding. I still see it, at least in the experiences I had right! There were not many! However, I saw this group much more self-excluding than the large group excluding (Profª Milena).

Pentecostalism has contributed to the weaker sections of the population accessing economic and social goods from which they were previously excluded (Portela, 2012). Some studies point out that Protestantism's historical churches have lost space for the Pentecostal movement (Cavalcante, 2002); some even say that Protestantism will implode (Mariano, 1999). However, Freston (1994, p. 14) states that the "characteristic of the modern movement is that the evangelical religion becomes mass religion. As it grows, it becomes more like the society that receives it". Thus, Protestantism and even Catholicism eventually incorporated charismatic elements of Pentecostalism. "The stereotype of the way of being religious in this country is getting more and more evangelical. Even more so than the Pentecostal churches, what is expanding is the characteristics of this religiosity" (Almeida, 2008, p. 55).

In the first instance, both described the religious struggles experienced more mildly, trying not to judge or obscure the situation's understanding. However, perceptions refer to doctrines characteristic of the evangelical religion, such as the use of different clothes and non-participation in dances.

Another clue revolves around the terms 'prohibition' and 'she'. The prohibition comes as an indiciality that reflects the thinking about being evangelical. The girls are affected by the 'prohibitions' experienced by the evangelicals. The education brands with a religious base impregnate, mainly, the female body (Rigoni; Pródromo, 2013; Dos Santos; Da Silva, 2015).

DM 5 - Special accommodation. One more clue is related to the term 'self-exclusion' used by both teachers. The responses admit that this group is that of evangelical girls labeled and stigmatized by their obvious religious choice. We speak in appearance because they are characterized by conceptions seen in the physical body or speaking. The teachers explained that this group of girls did not participate in the proposed activities—the interviewees' attitude in 'respecting' the group's decision.

This respect for the group's decision seems strange since Pentecostalism has curbed its customs preoccupation. This religiosity would market by emphasizing pragmatic questions; by more fragile ties between believers and their communities and religious denominations (Passos; Rocha, 2012).

### 3.2 THE FOCUS GROUP WITH STUDENTS

DM 6 - Labeling. Bruna (evangelical) says everything that thought and realized has to aim to please God in the first place. During Bruna's (Evangelical) response, Marcia (agnostic) was already willing to interrupt, displeasing what she heard. Soon after, she answered all questioning with the term 'clownery'. According to Watson and Gastaldo (2015, p. 108) "a statement shows its meaning at least partly by how the interlocutor reacts in the subsequent shift." Marcia (agnostic) recovered the meaning and meaning of the term 'macumba' and the affirmation of Bruna (evangelical) that everything it does must be to please God.

Clownery represents to Marcia any attitude imposed or disseminated by the religion that comes to materialize in reactions and thoughts exposed by the group members, in this case, evangelicals. Therefore, a first impression of the sequence represented by the term clowning reveals that it is to the evangelicals and represents a negative aspect directed to that group. Already the term 'macumba' shows Marcia (agnostic) incorporating the discourse of evangelicals. It was as if everything that was not in the church's precepts was macumba. She intends to attack the church and needs to summarize reflect on what she thinks of religion and its impositions.

Interviewer: What could each report about religious issues and the activities of the Physical education class?

Marcia (agnostic): Macumba! (High-pitched, harsh and critical statement) [silence of everyone in the group - tense mood].

The ethos and the expression used by the interviewee, when pronouncing the word 'macumba', was pejorative and began to discuss the subject bringing a tone of rivalry and confrontation. There was a long silence and expressions of disapproval and acceptance mixed at that moment by the word 'macumba'.

Interviewer: Macumba? [all silent].

Bruna (evangelical): I am not going to lie. However, I already danced and noted; then I was like this: Oh my, I did something very wrong. I believe I was born. I was raised in the way of the gospel, right?! So everything I do has to be for God if I'm dancing funk1: come on, man, you're going down to hell, you are getting bigger! However, whomever I please, do you understand? [Marcia (agnostic) already raised her hand to speak, demonstrating by facial expressions that she did not like what heard]. Everything I dance is for Him [pointing up] so ...!

Marcia (agnostic): So [retracted position], my idea about it and specific subjects, I honestly think it's a clownery. Ah!, but it also has that chance of you having the right to believe in the clowning you want! I will say ah; for example, she says she wants to

please God. I think so if you believe He will want to see you happy if you do something that makes you happy, you will to please Him. But it is also right for her to believe in these antics [she made a quotation]. In my opinion, which can be an essential thing for her and her life! That is it!

Paula (evangelical): In the beginning, Bruna (evangelical) was talking about not dancing funk, and Marcia (agnostic) spoke, which to her, this was a clown, like discrimination, as a prejudget, a prejudice. It is not good because all these things are a particular type [making movement away with hands], excluding people! The person has the thought of her, the person has a build-in her mind about that, and if you turn to the person and say: ah she is 'from the church', she is against [pointing to the side showing exclusion and revolt]. You are labeling! You are done with her voice right, because you are judging her where she is [busy with arms a center] and not that I, you know, I believe that if the person is inside a place, she agrees with the more significant part of at least the thoughts of that place.

DM 7 - Accountability. We understand that Paula (evangelical) was offended by the pronouncement of the word clownery. However, from the moment it is labeled, the groups of individuals are categorized based on attributes and stereotypes. According to Goffman (1988), possessing a stigma is to have a characteristic not approved by the dominant social group and imposes pejorative features to mark the stigmatized group.

Paula (evangelical): Sometimes, the words we use affect people in a much healthier way than we think. When Márcia (agnostic) said that this is a joke, certainly for her, it is like this: clowning. At first, I did not like clowning, it is a healthy thing, but first I try to do things without problems because I understand that people sometimes have no intention of offending.

Marcia (Agnostic): Forgive me for who feels offended by clowning. I did not mean to offend anyone. I try to be as open as possible and so I consider something that I know makes sense to you. I can not understand how you interpret it in such a way. However, it is that thing; if I have the right to believe what I want, you have it too.

Interviewer: Considering the previous discussion and your opinion on the subject, to whom, which group, are the terms 'church', 'religion' addressed?

Promptly the students: Bruna (evangelical), Márcia (agnostic), and Joice (evangelical), answered together: It is for evangelicals!

Gabi (Catholic): Like, I think it depends on the situation because I know many people like that, who are Catholic and do not dance funk and I know evangelical people and dance funk like that, understand ?! However, the label of those who do not because it is 'of the church' is more for evangelicals!

Laura (agnostic): Most Catholics do not strictly follow these 'church' things, like Ah! People impose ideas on them, can not do it can not do that!

DM 8 - Indicia terms. There is a consensus as to who the words are. Two evangelical and agnostic students affirmed, at the same time, that the words are to the evangelicals. The other two responses, one Catholic and one agnostic agree that words related to religion are

evangelicals. Still, at the same time, they cite circumstances in which they would refer to another group. These addendums attributed to the rules instituted by religious institutions as the primary attribute for the person to be labeled. Laura (agnostic) classifies the religious group as people who follow the regulations and prohibitions imposed by the churches. Gabi (agnostic) reveals the same fact but exposes one of the bans imposed on those of the church. If the person does not dance the funk and participates in some religious institution, she is of the church in the case of catholic or evangelical. Still, if she dances the funk and engages in some religious institution, she does not necessarily receive the label. The label is only for people who obey religious institutions' rules, not those who break them. Respondents can understand why the use of these words by other groups. But, according to them, the terms are to those who follow the customs imposed by the evangelical churches.

Interviewer: In the eyes of each one, why can not they mainly dance funk, maculelê, capoeira, among other prohibitions?

Laura (agnostic): Ah, this capoeira business is complicated. My godfather and wife are from the church, and their children are capoeiristas, and it is okay for them. Still, my godfather's family finds it absurd because they play capoeira, which is not compatible with their religion.

Marcia (agnostic): And as for the drum, capoeira, I think this is wrong because you have a stepfather brothers. I have a spiritist family, and they say that is devil's thing when it comes to spiritualism. Ah, I am a believer, but you are the first to say that macumba is of the devil, that drumming is you turning to 'caveirinha' (little skull) as if one thing leads to another. I have an aunt who does not let my cousins dance capoeira because she says those who dance capoeira are evangelical, worship the devil, or an entity like that!

Joice (evangelical): I see capoeira as a usual fight. I do not see by the beat; it is drum and such, so in class, I do, but it depends on what denomination one is! If it is 'petenca' (Pentecostal), it does not!

DM 9 - Demonization. Laura (agnostic) reports two cases in her family that members have different ways of seeing capoeira. Joice (evangelical) relates her vision of capoeira: a content taught in class, no matter its intrinsic meaning, but its practice by practice. Leaving aside meanings expressed by the drum and beat that could be prohibited due to possible relations with aspects denied by religious institutions. It is also essential to clarify and understand the difference the student makes between the visions of the evangelical denominations. Secondly, the petenca is a term directed to the Pentecostal evangelicals. To be petenca is to follow rigid customs related to dress and adornments, besides being the group that sees capoeira as malignant, macumba, or something of the devil.

Interviewer: Carlos (Evangelical) said that he has never listened and is not offended by these words. Does it have any differentiation in the gender issue?

Joice (evangelical): It is for women! For sure!

Paula (evangelical): I agree with that, I think things fall more heavily on women, on girls.

Bruna (evangelical): She even talked about the short in the church, right?! Oh, people, my mother says so much in my ear! I love to wear shorts. I think it is beautiful, except that my mother keeps talking and I'm asking her to stop. She says she can not! I have pressure inside the house because of the gospel, sometimes some things in the Bible she talks too much! I ask God first because she keeps talking a lot! I can not!

Carlos (evangelical): But what it seems, two church people, a man and a woman in the same situation would be different, for me would be: ah his 'fagot'. To her: oh, are not you from the church? It seems that it is worse for women because there is a thought that the woman has to be pure.

Marcia (agnostic): It is for them [pointed to the evangelicals], you do not have the boys like the church [making quotes with your hand], it is the believer who has jeans skirt down to the knee and long hair!

Suze (atheist): In this situation, it is much more directed to the woman than to the man. Moreover, when directed to the man, it would be like this: why are you going down to the ground? It is a woman's thing! Now, the whole problem is in how the church puts the roles of man and woman.

DM 10 - Gender differentiation. Looking at the use of the article 'a' (in Portuguese), we resolved to raise the final questioning by understanding whether the continued use of the article is related to the idea to define women. There was consensus in the answers that affirmed that this is directed to the women, not reaching the men.

Those belonging to the religious group report situations in the daily life of the members where it is visible a lowering or submission of women to the men of the same religious institution. They describe situations in which there is differential treatment. If you are a woman, you must be kind, pure, and modest, and you should have modesty in dressing. Now, if you are a man, you have few prohibitions, you should not do acts that cast doubt on your masculinity, a characteristic well emphasized by Carlos (Evangelical).

Marcia (agnostic) says: "I think society puts much male chauvinism in our head, and we can not deconstruct it." According to the interviewee, the church reproduces the profile of the ideal woman who is still widespread. Suze exposes another vision, quotes an image posted on the internet concerning the church's thinking about the family hierarchy in which God would be the higher being, being below him the man and soon after the woman below the man.

## 4 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illuminate the complex interplay between religious identity, gender, and the school curriculum, moving beyond a simplistic understanding of self-exclusion as mere obedience. The analysis suggests that self-exclusion from Physical Education (PE) classes among evangelical girls is a multifaceted phenomenon: a deliberate project of identity differentiation, a socially negotiated label, and a practice deeply inscribed by gendered norms.

### 4.1 SELF-EXCLUSION AS AN ACTIVE PROJECT OF WORLD DIFFERENTIATION

A central finding of this research is that self-exclusion is not a passive or hidden act. Contrary to being a simple submission to external prohibition, it is a proactive strategy for identity construction. The students' insistence on using the "from the church" label, their formation of the "clubinho" prayer group in a highly visible school area, and their clear articulation of behavioral boundaries all point to an active process of what Lessa (2012) conceptualizes as 'world differentiation'. This Pentecostal practice involves creating a clear distinction between the mundane (the world) and the sacred (God). In the context of the school, PE classes—especially content involving dances like funk or practices like capoeira perceived as having Afro-Brazilian religious roots—are categorized as part of the "outside world." Withdrawing from them becomes a public performance of faith and a way to "affirm themselves as such," as noted in our findings.

This active self-exclusion creates a significant pedagogical dilemma, captured in Thematic Axis 1. The teachers' stance of "respecting" the students' choice (DM 5), while seemingly tolerant, effectively normalizes the non-fulfillment of a mandatory curriculum. This aligns with Dubet's (2003) concerns about how school dynamics can lead students to "anticipate their destinies, subjectively excluding themselves." By not engaging in a deeper discussion about the curricular importance of body culture and diversity, the school inadvertently accommodates a process that Bracht (2005) and Daolio (2004) would argue contradicts the very purpose of a critical PE, which is to reflect on the mechanisms and codes of daily life, including religious ones.

### 4.2 THE SOCIAL NEGOTIATION OF THE "DEVIANT" LABEL

The social interaction within the school reinforces this identity boundary. The findings in Thematic Axis 2 demonstrate a dynamic process of labeling. Using Becker's (2008)

framework, the evangelical group, by deviating from the school's standard of universal participation, is cast as "deviant." This is evident in the use of terms like "clownery" by non-evangelical students (DM 6 & 7). However, the evangelical students do not internalize this as a stigma in the classic Goffmanian (1988) sense. Instead, they invert the label, wearing "from the church" as a badge of honor. They engage in what Watson and Gastaldo (2015) would call "accountability," demanding justification for their peers' pejorative statements. This shows that the "deviance" is not a passive attribute but an ongoing social negotiation where the group asserts its right to a distinct identity, even at the cost of curricular inclusion.

#### 4.3 THE FEMALE BODY AS THE PRIMARY LOCUS OF RELIGIOUS CONTROL

The most persistent finding across all data was the gendered nature of this phenomenon. Thematic Axis 3 clearly shows that the discourse of prohibition and control is overwhelmingly directed at female students (DM 2, DM 10). This is consistent with the literature that points to how religious-based education "impregnates, mainly, the female body" (Rigoni & Prôdocimo, 2013). The conversations in the focus group revealed that for evangelical girls, the body is a site of constant vigilance regarding modesty in clothing and the "purity" of movements.

This gendered control operates through two key mechanisms. First, there is a demonization of specific bodily practices (DM 9). Capoeira, funk, and samba are often framed as "macumba" or "the devil's thing," linking them to spiritual contamination. This reflects the findings of Silva & Silva (2009) on the religious interference in bodily practices, where activities with African origins are particularly stigmatized. Second, the students' reports highlight a internalized hierarchy within the religious community, where women are expected to be "pure" and subordinate, a reproduction of a broader societal "machismo" within the religious framework, as pointed out by one of the participants. This creates a double bind: while evangelical Pentecostalism may offer its adherents access to social goods from which they were previously excluded (Portela, 2012), for young women, this inclusion often comes at the cost of surrendering bodily autonomy and full participation in the school's cultural and physical curriculum.

The self-exclusion of evangelical girls from PE classes is far more than a logistical or disciplinary issue. It is a complex identity strategy. It is a deliberate act of "world differentiation" that uses the school space to mark religious identity publicly. This strategy is socially negotiated through labels and counter-arguments and is fundamentally gendered,

applying a system of control and demonization primarily to the female body. The school's and teachers' current approach of accommodation, while well-intentioned, fails to address the underlying curricular conflict and may inadvertently reinforce the very exclusion it seeks to tolerate. This situation calls for a critical dialogue within the school community, as suggested by the conclusion of this paper, to reconcile the right to religious freedom with the right to a complete and diverse education, as guaranteed by the national curriculum.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the self-exclusion of evangelical students from Physical Education classes is a complex phenomenon that transcends simple religious prohibition. It is, fundamentally, a deliberate project of identity affirmation, predominantly enacted by female students as a way to publicly mark their religious belonging and adhere to gendered norms of conduct.

The school's accommodating stance, while respectful of religious freedom, inadvertently normalizes the non-fulfillment of a mandatory curriculum, a problem unique to Physical Education within the observed institution. The discovery that self-exclusion persists even when some students engage in the prohibited activities outside of school reveals a deeper complexity: these actions are not just about obeying rules but about performing a specific religious and gendered identity within the school social field.

These findings necessitate a critical dialogue within school communities and the field of Physical Education itself. We must confront the gendered nature of this issue and develop pedagogical strategies that respect religious diversity without abdicating the responsibility of providing a complete and legally mandated education. Future research must continue to explore the tensions between identity affirmation and educational inclusion, asking not just if students exclude themselves, but what social and identity-related work this exclusion performs in their lives. Deve reiterar os objetivos do estudo e resumir as descobertas mais importantes, enfatizando sua relevância e implicação prática ou teórica.

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