

Good Body Posture: an esthetic, moral or health concern?

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Abstract: This study was to comprehend, from a Body and Health Anthropological point of view, the motivations from those who search a postural education program. Method: Fifty semi-structured interviews were analyzed. Results: One main argument was identifying to justify their interest in joining a postural education program: the desire to have a good posture. Conclusion: The emphasis given to a good body posture shows a permanent intersection between health, esthetic and moral.

Keywords: Posture. Anthropology.

1 GOOD BODY POSTURE: AN ESTHETIC, MORAL OR HEALTH CONCERN?

The emphasis given to the body in the 20th century caused the proliferation of countless forms of intervention that seek different ways of improving appearance, performance, beauty, health and well-being. To have a young and healthy appearance, which is guaranteed by the image and feeling of a strong, agile, resistant and beautiful body, is a value incorporated in contemporaneity and reason for personal investments through preventive measures, exercises and treatments, as shown, for example, by the anthropological studies united in the book *Nu & Vestido* [Naked & Dressed], which discusses the culture of the Rio de Janeiro body (GOLDENBERG, 2002).

These measures directed toward beautifying, prevention, maintenance or recovery of health exult the value of the body, emphasizing in different ways in the discourses the need to take care of the outer appearance and inner well-being (SHUSTERMAN, 2000). However, in a culture where the body has become a consumer product, there is a tendency for us to be more attentive to appearance because, according to Sabino (2002, p.157):

[...] a culture in which entertainment, consumerism and advertisement have become existential pillars, spectacularization now constitutes the day-to-day of individuals concerned with their personal marketing. The body, besides representing the truth of this individual, is also his showcase.

Good posture is one of the requisites that gains highlight when the subject is prevention, maintenance or recovery of health or corporal well-being. The means of communication (FIORAVANTI; SHIMMA, 1992; GLOCK, 1997) and scientific articles

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(CASAROTTO, 1995; SCHENK, 1996; VANDERTHOMMEN *et al.*, 1999) disclose that 80% of the population is affected, at some time in their lives, by backaches that emphasize the need for good posture to guarantee or recover good functioning of the organism. In hospitals, schools and clinics, programs are suggested for education of posture that, based on biomedical knowledge, aim at teaching correct postures to treat or prevent pain problems (CHUNG, 1996; SOUZA, 1996; HENROTIN *et al.*, 2001). However, as well shown by Vigarello, (1978) in the book *Le Corps Redressé*, the discourses on good posture are often permeated by esthetical and moral ideas of the body's positioning, often indicating a primary concern with body appearance. Healthy posture and beautiful figure are mistaken in the discourses on posture and become almost synonymous: the form and corporal action idealized as perfect are the main references to judge the normality of posture and to indicate how to proceed toward maintaining or constructing a healthy posture, believing that construction of the figure idealized can guarantee the individual's well-being.

Our intention in this article is to understand the reasons of those who seek to, among so many corporal practices available and disseminated today, a postural education to care for oneself.

2 METHODOLOGY

Our interest, in this article, was to develop a reflection, from the viewpoint of the body and health Anthropology, on the motivations of those who seek a postural education. This information had the purpose of letting us know the conceptions of posture, the motivations and expectations of those who seek an intervention on posture.

To meet this objective, we defined a methodology that allows us to access how posture was conceived and perceived by those who, interested in a posture education, enrolled in the ESEF/UFRGS Postural School Program. In this process, we outlined choices and built a particular viewpoint – among so many possible ones, on the world of meanings, experiences, reasons, feelings, aspirations, beliefs and attitudes related to good posture and its education, in the attempt to contemplate a deeper space of relations, processes and phenomena that could not be reduced to the operationalization of variables (MINAYO, 1993).

The first choice was to define the research as qualitative. According to Bogdan & Biklen, (1992), the qualitative research is descriptive and its essential concern is the meaning.

According to Guba (1985) and Triviños (1987), once, in the qualitative research, the phenomena are complex and linked to the context, the subjective data is considered important source of information. Thus, these authors privilege qualitative methods and an open outlining, which are structured according to the objectives and to the theoretical-philosophical referential of the research in question.

Therefore, analysis of the information collected during the research is understood as a way of thinking and practice developed from the theoretical referential of the body and health anthropology. In the anthropology, according to Víctora, Knauth & Hassen, (2000), one recognizes that the real world actually exists in the extent in which we become part of it and it makes sense to us. The investigations are interpreted from micro social processes, in which the individuals share meanings related to the social world they live in. According to Geertz (1978, p. 31), the anthropological text is an interpretation in the sense that it is “something constructed”, “something modeled”, where the imagination and perspective of the author cannot be denied. The interpretation aims at “saving what is ‘said’ in such discourse of its possibility of extinguishing and fixing it in researchable forms”.

Through the objectives presented, these methodological prerogatives seemed adequate to us and served as reference for the analysis of information collected from this research's participants.

The analyses presented in this article and the testimonies cited result form the semi-structured interviews conducted with an intentional sample made up of 50 participants (36 women and 14 men with ages varying from 20 to 73 years), enrolled in the Extension Program “ESEF/UFRGS Posture School” in the years 2002 and 2003. The Program was disclosed through posters fixed at ESEF/UFRGS and notes in the dailies *Zero Hora* and *Correio do Povo*; the criterion for inclusion in the sample was enrollment in the Program, there being no exclusion criterion. In the first half of 2002, the interviews were conducted with 11 participants during the Program. In the second half of 2002, they were held in the week before its beginning with 19 participants, and with 20 in the first half of 2003. The interviews lasted an average of thirty minutes and were conducted in an appropriate room (with presence of the researcher and interviewee only), recorded in cassette tape and transcribed in their entirety. Later, the units of meaning were grouped to compose the results and the discussion presented in this article.

The questions that guided the interview were on conceptions of posture, corporal perceptions and motivations and expectations in relation to a postural education program.

All names cited are fictitious: Those interviewed were informed that a doctorate study was being conducted during the program and all allowed the information collected to be used, signing a consent form.

The complaints and reasons that led those interviewed to seek a postural education showed many subtleties that particularize them, but also allowed us to identify in their talks a main argument for taking part in a postural education program: the desire to have a good posture. This therefore guided the reflections of this article.

1.2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: A FAULT IN THE “VISIT CARD”

One of the frequent complaints among those interviewed was the lack of satisfaction with their postures: they considered that they did not remain sufficiently erect and symmetrical, that is, that they did not correspond to the parameters of good posture in effect in our culture. The column “flexed” and “drooped shoulders” were the problems most cited in relation to corporal form and were associated with hereditary factors, the habitual way of performing certain activities, the age and lack of discipline, control and care with posture. Out of the thirty-two research participants who mentioned corporal appearance as a strong reason to seek a postural education program, fourteen of them did not show a relevant picture of pain, the concern with good posture being related to other factors. One of the factors that call attention is the relational component of this concern, which is usually linked to demand from family members, friends or workmates, as shown by Antônio:

Those with bad postures usually do not notice, right? But some people demanded this issue of posture [...] I, for one, do not care much for this, even because we do not notice, but people noticed, and due to this, right?
(ANTÔNIO, 45 years)

The words of Adriano, on defining posture, helps us understand why having a good posture becomes a concern relevant to social life: “Posture [...] is the main form of body manifestation, I therefore see, for instance, that it is basically one’s visit card.” (ADRIANO, 32 years)

If we think of posture as a visit card¹, we understand why others tend to interfere in other people's postures. Posture becomes almost an item, a garment that, as such, can be modified and that shows the care with oneself and the status of the individual. Antônio's "visit card" did not correspond to the model of good posture, which caused him problems because, according to him, having a political position, his appearance became visible and tended to be judged by others. However, it is interesting to point out that Antônio did not have musculoskeletal pains. His "abnormality" did not generate, differently from what is suggested in the discourses on posture, an "internal" complaint of pain: it was related to a complaint that came from "outside", it was the look of another, on feeling inconvenienced, which indicated to him a problem and requested a change.

In majority of the participants' stories, the demand in relation to posture did not begin in adult life, on the contrary, it began in childhood or adolescence, in the heart of the family itself, as described by Cecília:

Father always corrected our posture. So this thing of walking too bent, too curved forward and such. This was something that he always sought to correct in us right from our childhood. And I took this along with me, right? So since this opportunity arose, I thought it was time to see if things were correct or what could be improved. (CECÍLIA, 59 years).

These looks that inspect body posture greatly remind us of Foucault (1987) regarding the disciplined and docile bodies, the family being one of the institutions incumbent with controlling and educating posture. In another instance, Cecília complemented her remark, making it clear how, in her understanding, this intervention on posture was carried out positively by her father:

Father was very affectionate in this regard, he was very gentle, [...] he would come and touch us lightly [...], touch us lightly with the hand, 'let's straighten the body', especially during mealtimes. Today, I think this is not right, because during mealtime we have to be relaxed [...] When I sat, and he saw me curved, he would make me sit next to him at table to be able to touch me lightly, and we knew what he wanted [...] it was those manners: of sitting right, eating right and such, it was at the time when we were about 10, 12 years of age". (CECÍLIA, 59 years).

¹ The term *visit card* to refer to the body also appeared in the text by Malysse (2002, p. 80), when he talks about his impression on Rio de Janeiro bodies. The author states: "each one seems to do everything in his reach for his body to be at par with one's ego and to be transformed into one's perfect incarnation – as if showing off one's visit card."

On taking part in the interview, Cecília was 59 years old and, despite her father's insistence and her care with her own posture, she did not have, like Antônio, a "straight spine" and also did not complain of pain. She, like Antônio and others, did not have an "internal" discomfort that was related to posture. For these participants, the discomfort came from an "external" information, from another person's remark or from seeing their postures in a mirror or photograph.

Helena was another participant advised to straighten herself due to being "bent", but who believed she had never had problems because of her posture. Like the others, it was the others who had a problem: "When I was younger, my older sister was always nudging me: straighten your back, your back is bent, and I think I am, my posture is not very good, a little hunchbacked." (Helena, 51 years)

Helene enrolled in the program due to her daughter's insistence, who is a Physical Education teacher and was concerned with her mother's posture, but Helena said she was not very interested in reconsidering her posture. It is relevant to point out that other participants also came to the program not due to personal interest but due to the insistence of others.

In the remarks of the participants, it was possible to notice that the demands are related to the expectation of seeing the body straight, the more usual indications being: "stand straight", "sit straight" – indications, advices or demands that denote a corporal action, without making it clear how to do so to meet the demand. "Ah, yes, the whole day inside the house, this always, sit right, this was always something that was in my nature since childhood, the saying: 'sit right, you know?' (CÉSAR, 23 years)

These considerations lead us to question the idea, present in our culture, that to improve somebody's posture, it is enough to request that he or she stand "straight", "straighten up", "stand right", without explaining what it is and not showing how to do this "right". On talking about "What is good posture?", Feldenkrais (1977, p. 92) points out that the word *right* "[...] does not express what we wish to attain or see after improvement". Furthermore, he often states that not even the person asking the other person to sit or stand "right" knows exactly what is required to take on such a posture. We can agree with Feldenkrais (1977) that the idea of "right" is vague and does not have any explicit indication of what should be done. However, considering the statements by Mauss (1974) about corporal techniques, we can say that there is no, explicitly, single technique that teaches one to stand

straight or right – as there is, for example, a technique that teaches one to swim, there exists implicitly a cultural consensus about that “standing right” means and about how we can achieve this. It is a technique that is oftentimes not taught formally, but that one learns by imitation, through tone of voice and through the meaning itself of the words used to demand correct posture.

It becomes relevant to reflect on the meanings of the word *right* and, from this, on the different meanings that can accompany the demand “Sit right!”. The word *right* explains physical-moral meanings, showing the imbrication between the attitude of the body and moral attitudes, an attitude that is supervised by another through an indication that is always more implicit than explicit such as in the 12th century (SCHMITT, 1995) or even in the 17th century (VIGARELLO, 1978). For centuries, it has been indicating a social norm, a requirement for corporal contours, without making clear the means through which this norm can be met with ease; oftentimes, the tone of voice itself that accompanies the command “Sit right!” implicitly indicates the rigidity that must accompany the act, such as a military command, keeping alive a very old social representation of posture.

Posture and rigidity are associated not only through the request to keep the torso erect, activating the back muscles, but also by the way in which it is requested. The manner of speaking and the words have multiple meanings that influence the education of posture. They indicate cultural associations between states of the body and soul, moral precepts and esthetic ideals; and, thus, how the word *right* refers us to many subtleties, in the same way that meanings of the verb *relax* (which also has physical-moral connotations) deserves considerations when we talk of body posture. According to Ferreira (1999), the Aurélio dictionary of Portuguese language states that *relax* refers to: [1] reduce force or tension of; loosen; [2] waive fulfillment of (law or duty); [3] corrupt, pervert, deprave; [4] become negligent, slovenly; [5] demoralize oneself. Therefore, the different meanings present in these definitions lead us to associate relaxing, that is, reduction in muscular tension in the daily postures, with symbolic values of weakness, nonfulfillment of duties, neglect with oneself, demoralization and perversion. As Antônio states:

When I have to present a work... I concern myself with having a more correct posture. Why... the issue of posture also seems to be an issue of whether you are someone who cares for yourself or someone who is relaxed with your body, right? This must be a constant thing, not at certain moments, I had to concern myself with this always, right? But I sometimes let myself go. I'm a bit of a rebel too, suddenly it is my corporal rebelliousness. Well,

the thing is more complex, suddenly, than a simple postural issue, I think.
(ANTÔNIO, 45 years).

There is therefore a conflicting relationship between good posture and muscular tension/relaxation. Despite many of those interviewed considering the fact that comfort is related to muscular relaxation, at the same time they consider good posture (being straight) the opposite of relaxation. On observing Antônio, we could note that he did not have a relaxed musculature, his muscles were short and tense. His “rebelliousness” was possibly more related to a relaxing of the norms of rectitude than a muscular relaxation, issues that are usually mistaken due to believing that bad posture, being a moral relaxation, is linked, by analogy, to muscular relaxation. As stated by Samanta during the interview on being asked if she was usually careful about her posture:

Careful? Sometimes: It is like I told you, sometimes I don't care, I am completely bent, allow me to suffer a little, you know? According to my mood. Sometimes I am great, people even compliment me [...] If you stand straight, people find it nice. And you must serve as a model, sometimes you become a model, until you become stiff a little to serve as a model, right? But I think, when you see the rush it is, you end up not paying attention [...] It generates a conflict, you try to relax, but at the same time you must maintain your stance. (SAMANTA, 38 years).

Samanta is a Physical Education teacher and considers it necessary to “stiffen the muscles a bit” to serve as model for her students², showing how the idea of a tense body predominates in the conceptions of good posture. According to Goldenberg & Ramos (2002, p. 31), in the hodiernal culture of the body, which “classifies, hierarchizes and judges from the physical form, it does not suffice to be thin – one must build a firm, muscular and toned body, free of any sign of relaxing or indolence”.

We can also consider the talk of Taísa about this posture:

Ah, posture is a more adequate form of doing, for example, I am relaxed, right, making movements in a correct manner. I understand posture to be doing, right, because people often, the manner of walking, of getting up. I am aware that I have the wrong posture, for example, on sitting, getting up. (TAÍSA, 40 years)

² Lupton (2003), on talking of the ideal citizen that the curriculum of Physical Education in Health imposes on schools in various Australian states, also called attention to the concern of Physical Education teachers in needing to correspond to the dictates of an ideal body because they are placed, before the students, as models of this discourse.

Good posture is therefore usually regarded as incompatible with a state of muscular relaxation, which symbolically leads to laxity, to loss of morally adequate corporal attitude – in other words, to a loss of self-discipline and self-control. The individual must “do”, that is, produce in the own body the correct posture, which is regarded as necessary to meet the social norms of good discipline. Norms that, despite being enveloped by a salutary discourse, always seem to be permeated by a moral concern with the body’s appearance (VIEIRA; SOUZA, 2002).

The relation between muscular strength/weakness and moral strength/weakness is very well presented and discussed by Duarte (1986) on drawing an anthropological view of the nervous life in the working classes. The author uses the notion of physical-moral disturbance to think of the social representation of the nervous phenomenon, which can also be used to think of the representation of the postural deviations. In this wise, we can infer that the moral concern with muscular relaxation refers to posture terms like *correction*, *control* and *command*, as it continues in the attitude of the body that the subject shows to be morally correct, disciplined, controlled and *right*. This concern disregards the fact that “to be/being bent” does not necessarily mean muscular weakness or relaxation and that “to be/being straight” does not imply muscular tension or force VIEIRA (2004); are daily associations – often distorted, of the relation between corporal positioning and state of muscular tension. It possibly involves the more significant and problematic mistake in understanding body posture and which can compromise it.

Lapiere & Aucouturier (1985) causes us to think, from the theoretical perspective of psychomotricity, present an interpretation on the possible relation existing between the state of tension in our muscles and how we organize our actions, our affection and our relationships:

The voluntary dynamic contracting is how to act in the world and constitutes, therefore, the initial reference around which all conducts of action are organized. On the other hand, tonic contraction is how to be in the world, to feel it. It constitutes the reference base on which affection and relationship with others is organized. (LAPIERRE; AUCOUTURIER, 1985, p. 23)

If we hold such affirmation as true, we can say that it is possible to introject, in the flesh, a moral ideal; working on the posture, which is maintained mainly by the tonic

contracting of the muscles, we are indicating to the person a way of being and of re-feeling the world and interfering in his affection and relationship with another. The manner of teaching posture, the instructions and orientations suggested and the practices proposed do not act on corporal mechanics only. The pedagogic actions (formal or informal) always interfere, one way or another, in the construction of bodies-subjects and in how they should act in the space and relate in the social scope.

The commands that aim at controlling corporal misalignment – discomfort misalignment to those who see signs of neglect in this attitude of others, often does not indicate what should be done to change the attitude; the means that can facilitate corporal organization to allow vertical sitting are not considered, or are even unknown. On listening, assimilating and internalizing this voice of command, the individual begins to endeavor to straighten the spine by stiffening the muscles of the back and to learn to associate muscular effort to good posture and to “good behavior”.

If we think of posture as an issue of corporal appearance, resulting from a muscular balance/imbalance, we can say that its construction depends mainly on self-discipline or self-control, each individual being responsible (and guilty) for his good posture, as well as for his youth, beauty and health and vision that, according to Goldenberg & Ramos (2002), predominate today. In this wise, good posture is presented as a personal success, as a virtue, a visit card, something achievable through dedication. As Vanessa states:

I think.. I know I do not have a good posture, right? But I think I lack discipline, isn't it? I keep asking myself what is a good posture: you must always remain straight and walk on high heels? Maybe this is what I wanted. I mean, on top of high heels, straight, but for how long could I keep it up?” (VANESSA,45 years)

Vanessa shows interest in corresponding to the esthetic standards of good posture and female elegance and considers that this would be possible through personal endeavor and self-discipline, but also recognizes that, for such, she would have to exceed her limits of corporal comfort and well-being; that is, to correspond to the model of perfection, she would likely have to give up a state of “internal comfort”. A remark that shows the possible contradiction between the discourses that defend correct posture as a prerequisite to corporal well-being. It is also important to point out the idea, present in this view, that to have a good posture, one

only needs to have discipline and endeavor oneself, suggesting that, without this, it is impossible to have a correct (physical or moral) posture.

Despite the idea and valuing of an “internal control” to obtain or maintain good posture being predominant in the talk of those interviewed, they were not unanimous. Some participants showed belief that good posture depends on an “external control”. Ilda & Cecília, for example, despite finding during childhood the control of their family members to be annoying, today value it due to considering that, without this control, their postures would have been worse. The relevance of an external control to acquire or maintain good posture was also cited by Vanessa, who considers that her bad posture is associated with the lack of external control during childhood and in adolescence: “I always regarded my posture as ugly. I even think it was a fault during childhood, adolescence, or in school, nobody demanded that I maintain a good posture”. (VANESSA, 45 years)

Vanessa seems to believe, like Ilda & Cecília, that had she been demanded of her posture during childhood, today it would have been better. Vanessa considers, likewise Amanda & Eduarda, that she will only improve if someone brings about this “external” demand from her. According to these participants, the change is seen as dependent on the interest and control of another, not of themselves. The responsibility for not fulfilling the norms is moved from the subject to the social group.

The inclusion of another in the responsibility for good or bad posture leads us to consider the different layman conceptions about the causes of health problems presented by Helman (2003). According to the author, all the individuals present an explanatory model as consistency and internal logic on the causes of their problems. This model can be based on scientific knowledge and/or cultural and folkloric beliefs that are usually part of more encompassing conceptions on the origins of mishaps in general. The author divides the causes as residing: in the individual, in the natural world, in the social world and in the supernatural world.

With regard to posture, it was possible to identify that some participants considered the cause of their bad postures as coming from a personal vulnerability resulting, for example, from a hereditary factor – from something that is located within the body, but outside personal control and that, therefore, does not depend on individual and social actions. However, going by the results given above, we can notice that majority of those interviewed seem to oscillate between considering the cause of their bad postures as a matter of individual and/or social

neglect. Control over posture and cares with it are identified by the participants as a social norm to be demanded and obeyed in order to maintain the good image of oneself and of the group to which one belongs. Good/bad posture can be seen as a concern with personal and collective degeneration (VIGARELLO, 1978), which justifies a concern with posture not only in the present but also in the future.

Some of those interviewed showed a concern with the emaciation of appearance, the image of the old man who loses his physical exuberance being the emblem of these fears present among the participants and of the interest in caring for posture:

I see that, if I do not do something, evolution will be for us to see old people walking on the street, bent, with walking sticks, taking shaky steps and, of course, this is something nobody wants for himself. (RONALDO, 38 years)

I am too bent [...] I look at myself, and here we see [...] I do not want to be like those old women, you know how, all bent, I do not. I... I thought 'no, I will correct myself, correct the spine which is very neglected, because even to wear clothes it is better, isn't it? (JÚLIA, 68 years).

However, the interest for the education of posture also proved to be a concern in favor of others, mainly children and grandchildren. Soraia, for example, sought the program because, despite considering that she had a good posture, felt pains and wanted to acquire more information on posture to solve these pains and help the children to prevent future problems:

I think it is important in the person, I think it is one of the things that makes you more beautiful, healthier, with a healthy look, isn't it? The straight person, not empanada, which I also see as very artificial, but I think it is very sad to see a young person, who talk so much that adolescents have shoulders projected forward, falling, all that. It is something that I correct a lot in my children, that I think that will later be a problem, they will be adults their whole lives with that problem, so I correct it beforehand. Good posture, I thought, it was the body at least, as straight as possible. I don't know, I think that those with good postures do not feel back pains. (SORAIA, 42 years)

The above talk, like that of other participants, shows that the interest to learn the posture is not only by those who wish to correct themselves, but also by those who wish to correct others, once again showing the presence of a social control over body posture. It also refers us to the doubt about up to which point esthetic connotations are subjacent to a discourse that – through the argument that, if nothing is done to improve the misalignment,

one day this “laxity” will be cause of pains and pathologies, defends the need for corporal alignment. Soraia is an example that invites us to reflect: she makes a relation between corporal alignment and pain, deeming it important to correct the posture of the children in order to prevent them from having spinal problems and others; but she herself is a person who, despite considering herself well aligned, complains of pains.

We always had the impression that the pains would begin closer to 60 years of age, isn't it? And when we reach 40, we do not feel that we are old, and I already started having very bad pains at 40. So I was surprised at this, then I said ‘oh no, who knows maybe I can find out something else I'm doing wrong, to correct it. (SORAIA, 42 years).

Soraia's case suggests that corporal alignment is probably not guarantee of corporal well-being and that other issues must be considered to find this well-being because, even though corresponding to the standard of good posture, Soraia complains of pains she cannot understand and solve.

Another argument that refers us to a reflection was presented by Ronaldo, who used the perfect bodies from anatomy books to justify the need for correction. On comparing with the images from the books, Ronaldo states:

In the anatomy books [...] I do not see the model of little bent men. So of course I have something different from the desired standard. So, despite not having pain yet, if I do not do something to correct it, the natural evolution is that this will become a source of pain [...]. So something must be done. It is only recently that I began to notice this more and I also began to study orthopedics more. Then it became clearer to me. (RONALDO, 38 years)

We must consider that these images of perfect bodies do not appear only in anatomy books, but in all advertising materials that use human bodies. The imperfections in the corporal contours are viewed only in ordinary subjects, being, in a certain way, banished from the cultural world, and which contribute greatly toward the symbolic construction that normal and healthy bodies are erect bodies³.

³ Sabino (2002) also calls attention to this, stating that “through technological advancement and expansion of telecommunication, the image of body perfection is now part, constantly, of the day-to-day. The physical ‘imperfection’ of ordinary individuals constantly faces images of ‘perfect bodies’ in movie theater screens, TV screens, computers and outdoors. Such images [...] tend to induce to persecution of this ideal type of body under the shelter of happiness”. (p.144-5)

The relation, present in the books and talk of the participants, between bad posture (regarded as body misalignment) and pain was not evident in many of those interviewed, some of whom complained of bad posture, but without pains, while others complained of pains, but without bad posture. Bruske; Souza; Vieira (2003) also did not identify correlation between misalignment of the head in relation to the torso and the pain in the cervical region on conducting a statistical analysis based on photos and questionnaires on pain obtained from the participants from EsEF/UFRGS Postural School between 1998 and 2003. May the defenders of bio-typologies are correct: they state that in the 50s nothing proves that bad posture inevitably generates corporal discomfort or pathologies in the musculoskeletal system (VIGARELLO, 1978; RASCH; BURKE, 1977; SHELDON, 1950). Even because, as stated by Kendall, McCreary & Provance (1995), defenders of the need for body alignment, we hardly find someone who corresponds to the ideal posture. Therefore, considering that almost all people have “deviations”, we easily find a change in the musculoskeletal structure that can justify a complaint of pain. The causes of musculoskeletal pains seem to involve many other factors and are much more complex than that exposed in most theories that relate them to body posture, as well shown by the comments of the participants. However, we did not find published articles on posture, discussions on cultural factors that involve postural education, suggesting the need for a more in-depth reflection on this subject among health professionals.

3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The image of the body in perfect alignment, constant in western history, continues to be a strong reference when talking about posture, a term that also almost always implies a judgment. To talk of posture is to say (or think of it) as good or bad, straight or bent, right or deviant – in a sense in which it there seems to be an evaluation of the character of the one who has it. When someone thinks about posture, it is the image of the body idealized in our culture (balanced, beautiful, rectilinear) that appears; this common sense, illustrated by the talks of those interviewed, is legitimized and substantiated in the theoretical perspectives and pedagogical and therapeutic approaches.

Regardless of how much in recent decades posture has been considered in terms of body mechanics, arguing that care with posture is necessary to prevent back pains, that is, to

maintain or recover body health and well-being, we found in the talk of those interviewed a concern with posture that is predominantly esthetical and moral.

We must think if the lack of perfect rectitude can actually be taken to mean a sign of bad health. If the experts themselves admit that the organism can dispense with the perfect body alignment, why place so much emphasis on this parameter when talking of body posture? Note that we are talking of small deviations, and not great changes in body structure. Rectitude, which many refer to, is delimited by the plumb line instead of by an image of verticalness.

The argument that pains and pathologies are related to certain postural difficulties liable to be treated is coherent; but this does not mean that the difficulties can be measured by the misalignment or that they are restricted to it. There are many intervening factors in the functioning of the musculoskeletal system and in the manner of approaching them that should be considered.

Knowledge and control of posture are instruments of power useful to discipline the body, imposing norms and rules, as well as to free it, exposing its possibilities and causing it to reflect on the norms and rules in force. We must then pay attention to how this knowledge is presented and used in the definitions of good posture. We must think of the feelings that are being constituted, reproduced and incorporated in the discourses on posture and in the pedagogical proposals that aim at facilitating body posture through a postural education, since the knowledge is not restricted to the transmission of mechanical parameters on the human body – they establish values that encompass a certain way of understanding oneself in the world and thinking of existence.

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