


WOMEN'S PHYSICAL EXERCISE AND GYMNASTICS IN URUGUAY: BODIES, GENDER, AND SEXUALITIES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER TRAINING IN THE 1950s


*Ejercicio físico y gimnasia femeninos en Uruguay: cuerpos,
género y sexualidades en la formación del magisterio de
educación física en los 1950s*

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Abstract. In the 1950s, Uruguay had outstanding international recognition at an educational and cultural level and was called “the Switzerland of the Americas”. In this context, the Third Pan-American Congress of Physical Education was held in Montevideo. This article analyses three conferences on women’s gymnastics presented at the Congress by prominent Uruguayans. Their writing reveals mainstream understandings of the female sex and the effects generated by physical exercises and various forms of moving over female bodies. Although these sources do not explicitly approach LGBTQ+ people, they condemn (either directly or indirectly) forms of being feminine and masculine that were linked to homosexuality. This paper studies the most recommended bodily practices, adaptations and prohibitions prescribed for women in the mid-twentieth century. These texts were not only published by the National Commission of Physical Education (CNEF), which regulated physical education and sport at the national level; they were also integrated into the curriculum for training

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physical education teachers in Uruguay during that decade. This study is framed by theoretical references of sex deconstruction, Judith Butler's critique of sex-gender binarism, and Michel Foucault's sexuality device. Finally, it shows how medical knowledge crossed the discourse of sexuality in the field of physical education and supported the justification of the prescriptions of exercises and movements. These recommendations and prohibitions for women were based on the heteronormative sexual matrix, invalidating the existence of LGBTQ+ identities in the realm of physical education and sport.

Keywords: Bodies; Gender; Sexualities, Physical education; Uruguay.

Resumen. *En la década del cincuenta Uruguay tenía un reconocimiento internacional destacado a nivel educativo y cultural, denominado la “Suiza de América”, en este contexto tuvo sede en Montevideo el Tercer Congreso Panamericano de Educación Física al que acudieron figuras relevantes a nivel internacional. El presente artículo analiza fundamentalmente tres conferencias relativas a la gimnasia femenina presentadas en el congreso por uruguayos que tuvieron un rol destacado a nivel nacional e internacional. Se entiende que estos textos muestran los principales sentidos en torno al sexo femenino y sus efectos en los cuerpos y modos de moverse y realizar ejercicios físicos. Se indaga sobre las prácticas corporales más recomendadas y las adaptaciones y prohibiciones que se prescribían para las mujeres en ese contexto. Si bien estas fuentes no abordan explícitamente la visión de LGBTQ+ people, directa e indirectamente condenan formas de ser femenino y masculino ligadas a la homosexualidad (lesbianas y gays). Estos textos además de ser publicados por la Comisión Nacional de Educación Física (CNEF) que regulaba la educación física y el deporte a nivel nacional, formaron parte del currículum de la formación de las y los profesores de educación física en el Uruguay en esa década. Para este estudio se parte de los referenciales teóricos de la deconstrucción del sexo, y la crítica al binarismo sexo-género de Judith Butler y del dispositivo de la sexualidad de Michel Foucault. Se muestra como el saber médico atravesó al discurso de la sexualidad en el campo de la educación física y estaba en la base de la justificación de las prescripciones de ejercicios y movimientos recomendados y prohibidos para las mujeres a partir de la matriz sexual heteronormativa, no habilitando la existencia de otras identidades LGBTQ+.*

Palabras clave: *Cuerpos; Géneros,; Sexualidades; Educación física; Uruguay.*

INTRODUCTION

In the 1950s, Uruguay had outstanding international recognition at the educational and cultural level, being called the “Switzerland of the

Americas". When the Third Pan-American Congress of Physical Education was held in 1950, Uruguay had already been governed for three years by neo-Batllismo¹ under the presidency of Luis Batlle Berres, which marked the beginning of the myth known as "the golden decade".² Neo-Batllismo promoted national industry through a growth model that substituted imports, expanding the state's sphere of action, trade union organizations and labour and social legislation, while strengthening political democracy. The main strategies of the export substitution model, an industrial policy oriented to the substitution of imported consumer goods, were: large subsidies to local industry, taxes or barriers to imports, and the prevention of direct foreign investments. Between 1945 and 1955, Uruguayan industrial production grew by 8.5% annually.³ By way of example, in 1950 the Family Allowances Council, which included representatives of the government, employers, and workers, granted economic subsidies to minors and health coverage with the creation of maternity and infant centres. At the same time, the establishment of a maternity salary and rules for equalising women's salaries with men's were other measures promoted during the period.⁴ All these aspects were key items in its agenda, denoting a clear idea of progress that permeated this historical period, even reaching beyond the government of the Colorado Party Collegiates that covered almost the entire decade, marking a developmentalist agenda.⁵ In this context the National Commission of Physical Education (CNEF) regulated physical education and sport at a national level.⁶ CNEF policies included: a wide international circulation

¹ This was a sector of the Colorado Party that aimed to deepen the reformism started in the early twentieth century by José Batlle y Ordóñez.

² A series of international triumphs in sports reinforced the myth of a golden decade: World Football Champion in 1950, third and fourth place in the 1952 and 1956 Basketball World Championships, fourth place in the 1954 Football World Cup, and good performances at the Pan-American athletics championships in Chicago and the South American tournament in Montevideo in 1958.

³ Benjamin Nahum, Ángel Cocchi, Ana Frega, and Ivette Trochón, *Historia Uruguaya. Tomo 7. Crisis política y recuperación económica 1930-1958* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2007), 125.

⁴ Nahum, Cocchi, Frega, and Trochón, *Historia Uruguaya*, 140.

⁵ Esther Ruiz, "Cap. 4. El 'Uruguay Prospero' y su crisis. 1946-1964", in eds. Ana Frega, Ana María Rodríguez Aycaguer, Esther Ruiz y Rodolfo Porrini *Historia del Uruguay en el siglo XX (1890-2005)* (Montevideo: Banda Oriental, 2008), 123-162; Benjamín Nahum, Ángel Cocchi, Ana Frega, and Ivette Trochón, *Historia Uruguaya.*; Benjamín Nahum, *Breve historia del Uruguay independiente* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2008).

⁶ CNEF was founded in 1911 with ministerial scope during the twentieth century. It was responsible for the physical education policies in the national education system (primary, secondary and tertiary

of ideas, agents and practices through various actions such as scholarships and study trips abroad; the participation of official delegations in the main events and congresses within the field of physical education both in Europe and the United States, as well as in other countries in the region; the organization of international congresses in Uruguay, welcoming figures of international renown; and the reissue of the CNEF's official journal. A certain discursive articulation can be observed between the moment when the CNEF was founded in 1911 in the first period of Batllismo, and this second stage, when Uruguayan physical education and sport policies gained momentum.⁷ They were very profitable in terms of transnational circulation, promoting the movement of agents, ideas, and material objects. It had been a little over a decade since Uruguay became the first country in the region to grant women the right to vote in 1927, thus increasing their political visibility.⁸ The first four women legislators in Uruguayan history were elected in 1942, and it was shortly after (1943-1947) that the Women's Civil Rights Act was passed. Still, the fact that "voting was not enough" soon became clear. "However, this notion of Uruguay as an exceptional country persisted for some time in Latin America, contributing to a 'myth' of absolute equality between men and women in the 1950s".⁹ This myth was further enhanced by the high rates of student enrolment and retention at all levels in the education system. In 1957, illiteracy above the age of 15 was down to 9.5%, setting Uruguay apart from other Latin American countries. Enrolment rates for secondary education rocketed with a growing number of female students and students from lower social classes.¹⁰ However, it is noteworthy that these changes and advancements did not have immediate effects regarding heteronormative sexual matrices. Heteronormative

education), the public sports facilities system, the regulation of sports associations and clubs, and the training of physical education teachers at the Higher Institute of Physical Education (ISEF), the only teacher training institution at the national level, established in 1939.

⁷ Paola Dogliotti, "Educación/enseñanza del cuerpo en la formación del profesor de educación física en el Uruguay (1948-1970)" (Tesis doctoral, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2018), checked on 3rd September 2021, <http://sedici.unlp.edu.ar/handle/10915/73914>

⁸ Gerardo Leibner, "Nosotras (Uruguay, 1945-1953): Las contradicciones de la escritura femenina comunista y sus significados sociales", in ed. Roland R. Forgues and J. Jean-Marie Flores *Escritura femenina y reivindicación de género en América Latina* (París: Mare & Martin, 2004).

⁹ Graciela Sapriza, "Nos habíamos amado tanto'. Años revueltos. Mujeres, colectivos y la pelea por el espacio público", *Revista Estudios Feministas* 23 (3), (2015): 939-58, 940.

¹⁰ Nahum, Cocchi, Frega, and Trochón, *Historia Uruguaya*, 156-7.

arguments such as motherhood were also used by the feminist movements to vindicate social participation, reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes.¹¹

It was in this context that the Third Pan-American Congress of Physical Education was held in Montevideo in 1950. Organized since 1943,¹² the Pan-American Congresses of Physical Education symbolized the consolidation of the circulation of knowledge on physical education and sport in Latin American countries.¹³ Gradually, these congresses were regarded as an important exchange space for physical education, even steering sport policymaking and training curricula in the region.¹⁴ This influence is quite visible in the Uruguayan case. Some of the lectures given at the Third Congress were published by the CNEF and formed part of the academic programme of the Higher Institute of Physical Education (ISEF). In this essay we analyse lectures on women's gymnastics presented by prominent scholar Alberto Langlade¹⁵ (Professor of Didactic Theory and Practice of Gymnastics), followed by works of other prominent Uruguayan scholars of the field, namely Nelly Rey de Langlade¹⁶

¹¹ Asunción Lavrin, *Mujeres, feminismo y cambio social en Argentina, Chile y Uruguay 1890-1940* (Santiago: Ediciones de la Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, 2005).

¹² The first two editions of the congress were held in Rio de Janeiro (1943) and Mexico (1946). For an analysis of the second congress, see Pablo Scharagrodsky, "Cartografiando saberes, grupos ocupacionales, instituciones, agentes y redes. El caso del Segundo Congreso Panamericano de Educación Física, México, 1946", *Revista Mexicana de Historia de la Educación*, 9 (17), (2021), 118-142, consultado el 12 de julio de 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.29351/rmhe.v9i17.336>.

¹³ Pablo Scharagrodsky, "Cuerpos, políticas y pedagogías en disputa. El V Congreso Panamericano de Educación Física, Buenos Aires, 1970", *Historia y problemas del siglo XX* | Año 12 (14), (2021), 146-163, <https://ojs.fhce.edu.uy/index.php/cont/article/view/1097>.

¹⁴ Scharagrodsky, "Cuerpos, políticas".

¹⁵ After an annual scholarship in Chile, Alberto Langlade (1919 - 1980) graduated as a physical education teacher from ISEF in 1945. Between 1946 and 1966, he taught Practical Gymnastics and Gymnastics Theory at ISEF and from 1948, he held the position of Head of Studies at ISEF until 1966, when he retired. He was also a professor of Special Gymnastics in the Physiotherapy course at the Faculty of Medicine and did frequent visits to specialized physical education centres in Europe. Through his mediation, several professors obtained scholarships to study at the GCI in Stockholm and the School of Physical Education in Cologne, Germany. In 1963 he was appointed Extraordinary Professor of the Faculty of Philosophy and Education of the University of Chile. He gave postgraduate courses and lectures on gymnastics and sports training at the international level. The ISEF is named after him by law 16.086 of October 18, 1989 (Available at: <http://www.parlamento.gub.uy/leyes/ AccesoTextoLey.aspLey=16086&Anchor>).

¹⁶ Nelly Rey de Langlade was primary school teacher and physical education teacher. She was a professor of Educational Gymnastics and Modern Gymnastics, Rhythms and Dances for women at ISEF (1949 -1960s). She attended several international congresses and made several study trips to

(Professor of Practical Gymnastics and Dance at the ISEF), and Dr. Juan M. Herrera (Professor of Anatomy, Ex-Professor of Physiology at the ISEF and Head of the Physical Sports Education Section of the National Commission of Physical Education). Our aim is to understand how particular understandings of the female sex and the effects of gymnastics on their bodies contributed to consolidating a heteronormative model of the body by condemning feminine and masculine ways of being which these authors associated with homosexuality. We understand that these sources do not speak directly about the LGBTQ+ population because they were not addressed initially to this social group. Furthermore, in 1950s Uruguay, all those who belonged to “sex-generic dissidences”¹⁷ and challenged cis-heteronormative regulations were not yet organised according to a transnational queer culture that currently gathers these dissidences around the monogram LGBTQ+.

The fact that these sources did not address this population directly could be an obstacle to research on this subject. However, instead of seeing them as an obstacle, one might consider them a possibility with challenges. The silences about those now organised as LGBTQ+ pose a challenge for historians since they could mean, at a superficial first glance, that these people did not attend sports and physical education spaces. As Ginzburg states, we must look for the “evidence that is imperceptible to most people”,¹⁸ which implies looking for the “infinitesimal traces” that could enable “the comprehension of a deeper, otherwise unattainable reality”.¹⁹ Working from this perspective means the historian must be careful to identify those subtle clues that could turn the silences into glimpses of the reality being analysed.

From the perspective mentioned above, the selected sources addressed to women’s gymnastics could be considered a clue to how Uruguay saw the relations between gender and physical exercises during

Europe to specialise in the field of gymnastics and dance. She gave theoretical and practical courses in this field in several South American countries. She was the representative for Uruguay in the International Federation of Physical Education (Langlade; Rey de Langlade, 1970).

¹⁷ Debora D’Antonio and Diego Sempol, “Cono Sur, Autoritarismo y Disidencias Sexo-Genéricas”, *Revista Uruguaya de Ciencia Política*, 31:1(2022), 7-23.

¹⁸ Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, myths, and the historical method* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 98.

¹⁹ Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, myths, and the historical method*, 101.

most of the 20th century. There are no manuals or conferences about men's gymnastics, for men were not a group who needed "special care". Men – white, heterosexual, male individuals – were still the model, and physical exercises did not pose a threat to their sexuality. On the contrary, physical exercises were understood as a fundamental element of male education. Women, on the other hand, had to be taken care of. It was believed that physical exercises for women, if not duly regulated, could threaten their health and, mainly, their sexuality. Thus, manuals on women's gymnastics are the kinds of publications where aspects such as sexuality are discussed (whether more or less explicitly). These documents are "privileged zones" that can give us clues as to how physical education in Uruguay was constructed and is still marked by a particular aversion to sexual and gender diversity.

In a previous work based on these same sources, we analysed, from a historical-discursive perspective: a) the discursive disputes between racial justifications and material conditions as an explanation for local adaptations of Uruguayan and Latin American women's gymnastics; and b) the discursive tensions between conceiving women and women's gymnastics mainly from a maternity standpoint, which is central to the eugenic discourse, and the possibility of transcending this view.²⁰ In addition, another Uruguayan study analysed an identical bound version of Alberto Langlade's lecture that had circulated amongst physical education teachers since 1947, when Langlade was an Assistant Teacher at the "Theory of Gymnastics" course.²¹ The study critically analyses women's gymnastics, focusing on the scientific assumptions of anatomy and physiology that justified differences between the sexes.²²

²⁰ Paola Dogliotti, "Sexuality and eugenics in female gymnastics in the mid-twentieth century in Uruguay", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 38 (2021), 1-15. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2021.1997996>.

²¹ Alberto Langlade, *Gimnástica Femenina* (Montevideo: Curso para la Preparación de Profesores de Educación Física, Comisión Nacional de Educación Física, n. p., 1947).

²² Tamara Parada, "Biopolítica y la gimnasia femenina de Alberto Langlade en 1947", in eds. Paola Dogliotti, Evelise Quitau and Gianfranco Ruggiano *Historia de la educación física: miradas desde Uruguay, Argentina y Brasil* (Montevideo: Comisión Sectorial de Investigación Científica, Universidad de la República, 2020), 225-36.

MASCULINE/FEMININE IDEAL TYPES CONSOLIDATED THROUGH GYMNASTICS

Alberto Langlade's lecture entitled "Women's Gymnastics" is the longest of the three lectures in the publication issued by the CNEF in 1950.²³ In the introduction, he discusses the new role that women should take at that time, with obligations and prerogatives that go beyond motherhood and housework and explains how women would benefit from physical education. He then briefly conceptualizes physical education with its different fields of action, such as sports, athletics, recreation, and gymnastics. Focusing on the latter, "incipient women's gymnastics", Langlade, points out: "Consider the many difficulties that must be overcome to create a female system or, if possible, to adapt a male system to the biological requirements of women".²⁴ For Langlade, a leading expert in gymnastics in the Southern Cone, the feminine system of gymnastics is built by adapting the masculine system according to biological differences. Naming Annie Collan, Elin Falk, Elli Björkstén, Bess Mensendieck and Agnete Bertram as "revolutionary figures and creators of new forms of women's workout", he points out that "this is how gymnastics evolved from men's gymnastics performed by young women to the current workout method".²⁵ Langlade seems to make a distinction between *women's gymnastics* and *men's gymnastics performed by women*, the former being the true gymnastics, which avoided "effeminacy and affectation" – as if there were a temperamental and biological (morphological) essentiality of the female being that separated the two gymnastics according to "sex" and made it possible to distinguish a woman from a weak man. He criticized a certain "affected" and "effeminate" way of acting in both men and women.

Langlade reaffirms a dominant binary and heterosexual sexuality, and a certain aversion to or rejection²⁶ of other affected or homosexual

²³ Herrera, Langlade y Rey de Langlade, *Gimnástica femenina*.

²⁴ Alberto Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", in eds. Juan M. Herrera, Alberto Langlade and Nelly Rey de Langlade *Gimnástica femenina en el Uruguay. Ponencia para el III Congreso Pan – Americano de Educación Física*, (Montevideo: Departamento Médico - Dirección Técnica. Comisión Nacional de Educación Física, 1950), 31-59, 33.

²⁵ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 33. Original in uppercase letter. All citations in uppercase letter appear like that in the original text.

²⁶ Judith Butler, *Cuerpos que importan. sobre los límites materiales y discursivos del "sexo"* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2005).

sexualities that do not abide by this dominant pattern. In a period where discussions on homosexuality were starting to take socio-contextual matters into account and where psychiatrists considered every individual could become a homosexual if inserted into a “perverted environment”,²⁷ Langlade’s viewpoint on gymnastics somewhat reflected these ideas. His remarks on women’s gymnastics indicate his ideas were somewhat related to “transfiguration instinct”, first presented in Uruguay by the Brazilian physical education teacher Inezil Penna Marinho in 1949 during a course on “Logical contribution to the Physical Education method”, and later published by the CNEF, in 1956. According to Marinho, this instinct could be defined as the “latent, potential, untamed, mysterious, and inexplicable force, responsible for the successive physical, somatic (anatomic-physiological) and, above all, mental or psychic (structural and functional) transformations”²⁸ and the great danger about such instinct was the fact that it could “sometimes manifest itself in a truly alarming way, culminating in sexual transfiguration”.²⁹ In a context where “homosexual” was commonly used to refer to a puzzled corporality and to allude to traces of the other gender, instead of sexuality itself,³⁰ gymnastics for women should not be a job for “weak men”, nor should it be male gymnastics disguised in “effeminacy”. The body, as well as women’s ways of moving and expressing themselves, should be educated based on their own practices, capable of maintaining a certain ideal of femininity. Although the aim is to keep women’s workout far from what could be considered a workout “for a weak man”, all considerations regarding strength exercises for women go in this direction. The anatomy and physiology of women is shown in terms of diminution and weakness, establishing a universal model of the female body which is always in a place of biological inferiority in relation to the male body. For Langlade, the proposition of a system of women’s gymnastics should involve a “comparative study of male and female anatomies, physiologies and temperaments [that] is adapted to their structure,

²⁷ Diego Sempol, “Homosexual: entre el insulto y el orgullo”, *Políticas de la memoria*, 18 (2018/2019), 222-234. Diego Sempol, *De los baños a la calle* (Montevideo: Debate, 2013).

²⁸ Paola Dogliotti and Pablo Scharagrodsky, “Eugenics and sexuality in Physical Education teacher training in Uruguay (1948-1970)”, *Paedagogica Historica*, 57 (2021), doi:10.1080/00309230.2021.1987483.

²⁹ Inezil Marinho, “El juego – Teoría de la transfiguración”, *Anales de Educación Física. Órgano de Documentación Administrativa y Técnica CNEF* 1, no. 2 (1956): 79.

³⁰ Sempol, “Homosexual”.

functions and temperament”.³¹ The bodily variables that should help to determine the types of exercise suitable for women, by studying their structure (morphology), functions (physiology) and temperament, are the structuring elements of biotypology.³²

From biomedical sciences, an ideal body is presented based on a balanced biometry, which is a sign of normality according to which all bodies should be adjusted, measured, classified, and hierarchized. A norm is created, defining the expectations regarding women’s bodies. Any bodies, behaviours or forms of expression that defied this pattern could be considered pathological, and physical education teachers should work to prevent these abnormalities.³³ Gymnastics must cultivate this body as the basis of physical education for the subsequent development of sports or athletic activities. Biometry stands as a “metromania” of western science,³⁴ as a conjunction of eugenic, biotypological, and psychological postulates that had great repercussions in the field of physical education, in its ways of measuring, classifying, and assessing it.³⁵ An example of this is the VARFCEFAMLERVe.Vr. coefficient (an acronym in Spanish), which is specific to the field of gymnastics: “In every gymnastic performance, a

³¹ Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 35.

³² Biotypology was a branch of eugenics founded in Italy by Nicola Pende. It spread widely in Latin America, creating solid networks. In the field of physical education in Uruguay, it had a certain impact at the instrumental level through the dissemination of techniques and tests for measuring bodies. A subject called ‘Biotypology’ was taught between 1948 and 1968 at the ISEF, and several degree theses dealt with this subject in the 1940s and 1950s. For a further analysis of these aspects, the following are recommended: Camilo Rodríguez, “El examen de ingreso al Curso de Profesores de Educación Física en el Uruguay. Una herramienta de selección en clave biotipológica”, *Cartografías del Sur*, no. 4 (2016): 196-223; Camilo Rodríguez, “La eugenesia en Uruguay y su vínculo con el campo de la educación física (1900-1948)” (master’s thesis, Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de la República, 2020); Dogliotti, “Educación/enseñanza del cuerpo”, 275-90; Dogliotti and Scharagrodsky, “Eugenics and sexuality”.

³³ As Canguilhem argues, norms are created in physiology and other biomedical sciences as a principal of classification and correction. Once a norm is scientifically determined, every intervention over people and bodily functions, from a biomedical point of view, aims at maintaining the subject close to the norm. Any deviance from the norm is considered a pathology. In the case of physical education, interventions aim to keep people close to what is considered the “normal physical fitness”. On Canguilhem’s ideas, see: Georges Canguilhem, *The normal and the pathological* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

³⁴ John Hoberman, “The early development of sports medicine in Germany”, in eds. Jack W. Berryman and Roberta J. Park *Sport and Exercise Science: Essays in the History of Sports Medicine* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 233-82.

³⁵ Eduardo Galak, *Educación de los cuerpos al servicio de la política. cultura física, higienismo, raza y eugenesia en Argentina y Brasil* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2016), 43.

series of values are exalted which are synthesized in the following coefficient: Velocity; Agility; Resistance; Strength; Coordination; Equilibrium; Flexibility; Attitude; Mobility; Localization; Aesthetics; Rhythm; Spiritual values; Reaction time".³⁶

Alberto Langlade and Nelly Rey de Langlade were never explicit as to the person who may have come up with this coefficient. However, the origin of the coefficient is to be found in French constitutional medicine, which was then adopted and adapted by Thooris's functional morphology and the by biotopologists Grasso and Pende.³⁷ In establishing the ideal women's gymnastics system on the basis of these postulates, the authors once again started from a certain hegemonic standard that sought to exclude any expression of femininity (and in turn masculinity) that could potentially express other possible sexualities.

ESTABLISHING DIFFERENCES, NORMALIZING BODIES

Langlade's 1950 article, "Women's Gymnastics", contained several elements that largely coincided with those that would later appear in his *Manual of Didactics of Gymnastics* published in 1956. This manual was the basis of the two programs of General Theory of Gymnastics located in the last two years of the career, the most challenging subject and which implied the highest demand for its approval according to the students of the time.³⁸ This program was the only one at the national level and trained students who would later work throughout the national territory. This subject, in turn, was the only one that trained in didactic and pedagogical aspects for the work of the physical education teacher in primary and secondary education.

³⁶ Nelly Rey de Langlade, "Untitled", in ed. Juan M. Herrera, Alberto Langlade and Nelly Rey de Langlade *Gimnástica Femenina en el Uruguay. Ponencia para el III Congreso Pan - Americano de Educación Física* (Montevideo: Departamento Médico - Dirección Técnica. Comisión Nacional de Educación Física, 1950), 11-30, 23.

³⁷ Andrés Reggiani, "Constitución, biotopología y cultura física femenina", in ed. Pablo Scharagrodsky *Mujeres en movimiento. Deporte, cultura física y feminidades. Argentina, 1870-1980* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2016), 127-59. In it there also appears a detailed chart with the taxonomies of athletes based on the cited authors' V.A.R.F coefficient.

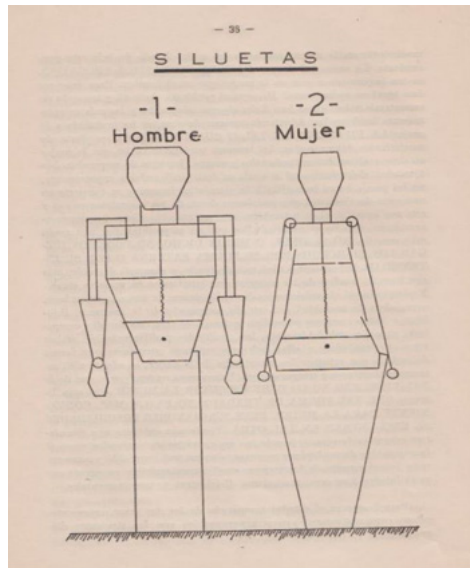
³⁸ Ana Torrón, "Gimnasia y Deporte en el Instituto Superior de Educación Física (1939-1973): su configuración y su enseñanza" (Tesis de maestría, Universidad de la República, 2015).

Through pedagogical, moral and hygienic prescriptions, the manual was configured as an articulating discourse of educating bodies and being a teacher, which went beyond the teaching of gymnastics but rather matrixed physical education in the different areas of professional performance. All these aspects show this manual's relevance not only for the training of physical education teachers in Uruguay but also for the field of physical education in general. Hence, they also coincided with the syllabus of the second "Theory of Gymnastics" course, which integrated the training course of physical education teachers in Uruguay according to the 1948, 1956, and 1966 academic programmes. In these documents, Langlade starts from the anatomical, physiological, and temperamental differences between women and men, and dedicates three sections to physical exercise and gymnastics in women. Temperament, as in biotypology, together with the physical differences of the body, is important to determine the types of exercise for each sex.

These exact topics were discussed in the same order in Chapter II of the 1956 *Manual of Didactics of Gymnastics*. The section entitled "Anatomical, physiological and temperamental differences between men and women" begins with the following footnote: "In this section, we transcribed what was expressed by Johannes³⁹ in his text 'Theory of Gymnastics'".⁴⁰ In both sources, there is an extensive comparison of the male and female bodies for which the following drawing is used as a starting point:

³⁹ Dr. Lindhard (1870-1947) was a Danish doctor and physiologist, part of the Northern Movement of Gymnastics. He worked in the field of physiological research and physiology of gymnastics. As his main contribution, he managed to interest the scientific world, mainly physiologists, in the general problems of physical exercise and mainly of gymnastics. Alberto Langlade and Nelly Rey de Langlade, *Teoría general de la gimnasia* (Buenos Aires: Stadium, 1970), 243-6.

⁴⁰ Alberto Langlade, *Manual de didáctica de la gimnástica* (Montevideo: Publicación n.º 1. ISEF – CNEF, 1956), 35.

Figure 1. Male (1) and female (2) silhouettes⁴¹

Langlade then elaborated on the size differences between men and women in height and weight, growth, and puberty, and in terms of their skeleton. The differences he describes between male and female bodies in the 1950s reproduce perspectives that first came about in the 18th century, when anatomical studies began to focus on describing the biological differences between the two sexes, with a clear tendency to collect data that would justify the fragility of the female body.⁴² While these differences initially focused on the male and female skeletons,⁴³ they began to focus on the uterus and ovaries during the 19th century and, finally, on the recently discovered hormones⁴⁴ in the first decades of the 20th century. In Alberto Langlade's model, women are generally presented in

⁴¹ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 36; Langlade, *Manual de Didáctica*, 35.

⁴² Thomas Laqueur, *Making sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁴³ Londa Schiebinger, "Skeletons in the closet: The first illustrations of the female skeleton in eighteenth-century anatomy", *Representations*, No. 14, (1986): 42-82.

⁴⁴ Nelly Oudshoorn, *Beyond the natural body. An archaeology of sex hormones* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994); Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the body* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Cecilia Rustoyburu, "Infancias, hormonas y género. Un análisis histórico de los discursos de la biotipología en Argentina en los años 1930", *Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad*, 11, (2012), 9-36, consulted on 18 November 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1984-64872012000500002>.

a differentially negative way with respect to men, as being weaker: “weaker bone and muscle development in women, together with a more abundant presence of adipose tissue”.⁴⁵ “(1)⁴⁶ man, has a more vigorous neck, of greater circumference and endowed with more muscular relief than (2) woman”⁴⁷ (see Figure 1). The words used always attribute greater power, strength, vigour, potency and superiority to men, while women are valued in terms of weakness, poor development, scarcity and inferiority.

Softness and delicateness are moral characteristics rather than organic ones, and they do not respond in any way to a supposed organic difference between the “sexes”. Differences are described based on scientific advances in descriptive muscular anatomy but are ideologically tinged with subjective attributes such as “softness and delicateness”, which are far from anatomical observation. Additionally, based on anatomical observation, features like a larger size and more muscular development are based, among others, on natural, organic, and genetic differences, disregarding any cultural construction of the body depending on what has been culturally exercised by each of the “sexes”. Cultural differences, which are the product of social stereotypes assigned to each “sex”, are hidden in a supposed anatomical differentiation of male and female bodies. The female sex is defined as weaker, less vigorous, more delicate, and softer than the male sex. All these are characteristics that have been constructed by the medical discourse and that constitute a biological imaginary. This is accentuated when the rates of workout for each “sex” are compared and indices are used to prove that men are more efficient than women, emphasizing the importance of biological determination over social determination. While the influence of social conditions is not ruled out it does reinforce towards the end the determination of “biological laws”.

⁴⁵ Langlade, *Manual de Didáctica*, 35.

⁴⁶ (1) Man and (2) Woman, according to the scheme. It is not random that Man appears first after number 1.

⁴⁷ Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 37.

BETWEEN THE “ETERNALLY WOUNDED” WOMAN AND THE HYSTERICAL FIGURE

The lectures presented by Alberto Langlade, as well as some of his other publications on women's gymnastics, reproduced an attempt not only to identify organic differences between men and women, but also to use them to construct certain discourses that always relegated women's bodies to a place of inferiority. These lectures also contributed to consolidate the idea of motherhood as women's main role. When describing the hip, Langlade does so with clear signs of weakness due to its “future mission”: motherhood.

(1) presents a narrow hip, strong and firm due to well-developed muscles and with a ligamentous apparatus that is not very extensible. [...] The pelvis of (2) is large, very voluminous, lower than that of (1) but much wider, its inclination is greater by four degrees and its ligamentous apparatus weaker because of its future mission.⁴⁸

The essentialization of the female body as inferior and destined for motherhood is also expressed through Langlade's observations on its physiological functioning:

From a physiological standpoint, the lesser development of the cardiac muscle makes women inferior to men for prolonged efforts. The female nervous system is more delicate, fragile and excitable than its male counterpart. This is shown by the greater intensity of women's emotional states. This excitability of a woman's system makes her reaction time slower than a man's, and increases her possibilities of distraction, since the calmer an individual is, the shorter their reaction time is.⁴⁹

Once again, we can see that the author intended to establish biological elements that would justify the supposed weakness of the normal female body. In the preceding quotation, when referring to the nervous system, although not explicitly stated, women are associated with the

⁴⁸ Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 38.

⁴⁹ Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 38-9.

figure of “hysteria”⁵⁰; more delicate, fragile, and excitable, with greater intensity of emotional states. It is determined without any basis whatsoever that the greater the serenity or calmness, the shorter the reaction time, a quality which is associated with men.

Laughter, crying, and weeping, blushing and heart palpitations, all express emotion, half psychic, half motor, and are all more difficult to master and control in women than in men. Women’s unstable nervous equilibrium is also demonstrated by the fact that they are more easily distracted in their workout than men.⁵¹

It is more accepted for women to show their emotions (laughing, crying, blushing) than men, but this is shown as a symptom of weakness and lack of rational control and mastery of themselves. This female instability is associated with menstruation.

The entire nervous system of women is also subject to fluctuations associated with the menstruation process [...] the so-called premenstrual period, in which nervous irritability increases, as if it were an accentuation of women’s lack of nervous equilibrium. [...] From mild, almost imperceptible cases to serious nervous disorders, which turn an individual into an invalid. [...] After the cessation, there is another period of increased irritability for another couple of days, which then gives way smoothly to the comparatively stable intermenstrual period.⁵²

Menstruation is discursively constructed as part of the device of hysteria, dominating a woman’s body and trapping her inside a place of affective instability, disorders, and illness to the point of “invalidity”. One of the pioneering historiographical studies on the relationship between

⁵⁰ According to Foucault, after the 18th century the hysteresis of women’s bodies was configured as one of the four devices of sexuality (of knowledge and power) that produced a political economy of the body and of populations. He defines it as a threefold process according to which the female body was analysed, integrated into medicine and traversed by social elements, always from a view that placed women, and especially the ‘nervous woman’, in a pathologized category. Michel Foucault, *History of sexuality. Volume 1: an introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁵¹ Langlade, *Manual de Didáctica*, 40.

⁵² Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 40.

menstruation and physical exercise is the work of Vertinsky.⁵³ She stated that the medical establishment on both sides of the Atlantic in the last third of the 19th century promoted a theory of menstrual disability that contributed substantially to positioning the female sex as weak and to stressing the unmodifiable nature of their physical inferiority and their special physical needs, which required permanent custody by these guardians and quasi-moral directors of women's intimate and personal behaviour. As Vertinsky points out from the analysis of medical discourses on the female body and physical exercise in the 19th century.

These notions identified by Vertinsky in 19th century Anglo-Saxon medicine also appear in Langlade's reflections on women's bodies. For the Uruguayan author, menstruation (and the consequent hysteria it produces) was seen as a "necessary evil" to be endured, and women were placed in a position of suffering, of being "eternally wounded", of sickness, of lack of movement, of an involuntary lack of control to the point of convulsion, of "hysteria". We agree with Scharagrodsky that

the flip side of motherhood as a metaphor for health was hysteria as a metaphor for illness [...] Calming women or tying up a "madwoman" were the opposite objectives of motherhood, insofar as women who did not become wives and mothers were considered dangerous or pathologically ill. In this scenario, the different bodily practices were powerful channelling moral means rather than physical ones, aiming at controlling the device of sexuality via the genital apparatus and, at the same time, the sexualization of the entire female body.⁵⁴

After citing a vast number of scientific studies on physical exercise and menstruation, with a variety of often opposing and contradictory results, Langlade concludes that:

a) All intense exercise, especially of a sporting nature, during menstruation is discouraged.

⁵³ Patricia Vertinsky, "Exercise, physical capability, and the eternally wounded woman", *Journal of Sport History*, 14, (1), (1987): 7-27.

⁵⁴ Pablo Scharagrodsky, "Entre la maternidad y la histeria. Medicina, prácticas corporales y feminidad en el Buenos Aires del fin del siglo XX", in ed. Pablo Scharagrodsky *Gobernar es Ejercitar. Fragmentos Históricos de la Educación Física en Iberoamérica* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2008), 105-35, 133-4.

b) All activities capable of causing trauma and strong emotions are considered to be dangerous.

c) It is advised to leave to personal will, and according to the physical and spiritual state, the performance of any physical exercise, either of light or mild intensity, during menstrual periods.⁵⁵

Although women are not forbidden to exercise during menstruation, this period is described as “delicate”, “special”, and it is left to the woman’s “will” whether she can exercise with “light or mild intensity” during this period. The normalization of menstruation and its management promotes a non-menstrual, masculine body ideal.⁵⁶ Women’s bodies are controlled based on a medical discourse that prohibits intense exercise and the experience of intense emotions. An ideology is constructed around menstruation which, together with a supposedly weaker skeleton, places women in a place of inferiority, incapability and suffering that keeps them in a lower hierarchical position than men. This combination of a supposedly weaker body and uncontrolled emotions verging hysteria put women closely to the idea of abnormality⁵⁷, and only a few exercises would be appropriate to keep women’s emotions and physicality within the “normal standards”.

THE BODIES DETERMINE THE PRACTICES: LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IMPOSED ON WOMEN

Regarding the difference between the male and female sexual organs, there was a great deal of negative differentiation toward the latter in terms of the movements and exercises that could be performed by one “sex” or the other. The large amount of work dedicated to this subject shows the fixation on and importance of the sexual organs in determining not only female sexuality but also in prescribing and prohibiting certain types of exercise. “The differentiation in the location of the

⁵⁵ Langlade, *Manual de Didáctica*, 46.

⁵⁶ Eugenia Tarzibachi, “Deporte y recreación durante la menstruación. historia de una habilitación a partir de la difusión de las toallas y los tampones industriales en Argentina, 1930-1980”, in ed. Pablo Scharagrodsky *Mujeres en movimiento. Deporte, cultura física y feminidades. Argentina, 1870-1980* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2016), 85-108; Eugenia Tarzibachi. *Cosa de mujeres. menstruación, género y poder* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2017).

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal* (London; New York: Verso, 2003).

sexual organs makes the gymnastic possibilities of the two sexes different".⁵⁸ In this argumentation, the uterus and the perineum were given a preferential position due to their location and constitution.

In the writings on women's gymnastics produced in Uruguay in the mid-twentieth century, there is a great obsession with determining normality and seeking a fixed position for the uterus. The uterus is described from an ideological approach rather than from a scientific one. The "causes of deviation of the uterus" come next. "The uterus, due to its extreme mobility, can go through a series of changes in its position that deviate from normal".⁵⁹ The causes and types of these "anomalies" or deviations from the "norm" are mentioned: "of all inflammatory processes, the largest percentage have their origin in blennorrhagia. Blennorrhagia can affect even married women as they may get it from their husbands".⁶⁰ Blennorrhagia was one of the main "evils", along with alcoholism, syphilis, and tuberculosis, and was combated as part of the main preventive measures of social medicine by the Uruguayan eugenic movement from the 1920s. According to Barrán, "for this reason, all medical records asked about hereditary background with special reference to syphilis, blennorrhagia, tuberculosis and alcoholism".⁶¹ In turn, "The second feature of Uruguayan eugenics was its obsession with the "destructive effect on our species" of these diseases".⁶² It also mentioned prolapse as another uterine "disorder", listing its multiple causes, which included "great efforts, such as lifting heavy weights [...] deep jumps or violent impacts when performing a jump".⁶³

All these accounts, supposedly based on scientific gynaecological knowledge, helped to create a discourse of control and power over women that put them in places of inferiority with respect to men in relation to the possibility of doing gymnastics and physical exercise. Anatomy, physiology, psychiatry, and gynaecology were among the medical disciplines

⁵⁸ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 39.

⁵⁹ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 43.

⁶⁰ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 43.

⁶¹ José Pedro Barrán, *Medicina y Sociedad en el Uruguay del Novecientos. La invención del cuerpo* (Montevideo: Banda Oriental, 1995), 214.

⁶² Barrán, *Medicina y Sociedad*, 216.

⁶³ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 44.

that most contributed to this device of female sexuality in an articulation with its main purpose, motherhood, determining their bodies and what type of physical exercise was allowed and forbidden. Traces of eugenic discourses can be found in these justifications. A vast bibliography has addressed the emphasis that eugenic policies placed on motherhood and the importance given to physical exercise geared to this end.⁶⁴ In this line, based on a long enumeration of the “anatomical, functional and temperamental differences of the two sexes”, the best form of workout for women was developed according to “their constitution and idiosyncrasies”.⁶⁵ The use of terms such as temperamental, idiosyncrasy⁶⁶ and constitution is not a minor issue: the first two integrated the biotypological discourse, while the third was used in constitutional medicine and was later adopted by biotypologists.⁶⁷

Medical knowledge, especially exercise physiology dictated the main prescriptions for adequate physical exercise that would not harm the special female anatomy and physiology. On the basis of “natural” differences between the sexes, the medical discourse configured a set of truths about the sexes and their physical exercises. Because of organic differences (both temperamental and constitutional), strength leg exercises were discouraged but flexibility exercises were promoted. Flexibility was opposed to strength, and it was said about the arms that “women’s lesser

⁶⁴ Marcela Nari, *Políticas de la maternidad y meternalismo político, Buenos Aires (1890-1940)* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2004); Nadia Ledesma and Adriana Valobra “Eugenésia y derechos: idearios médico-políticos sobre los roles públicos y privados de las mujeres en la Argentina, 1930-1945”, in eds. Marisa Miranda and Gustavo Vallejo *Una historia de la Eugenesia. Argentina y las Redes Biopolíticas Internacionales 1912-1945* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2012), 411-36; Adriana Valobra “Public health policies, women’s organizations and mothers in the province of Buenos Aires, 1946-1952”, in eds. Aran S. MacKinnon and Jonathan D. Ablard (*Un*) *Healthy Interiors: Contestations at the Intersection of Public Health and Private Space, Studies in Social Sciences* (Carrollton: University of West Georgia, vol. XXXVIII, 2005), 79-95. https://www.academia.edu/43248703/Public_health_policies_women_s_organizations_and_mothers_in_the_province_of_Buenos_Aires_1946_1952 (accessed April 2021); Grant Rodwell “The eugenic and political dynamics in the early history of physical education in Australia, 1900–50”, *Melbourne Studies in Education* 40(1), (1999), 93-113, 102, DOI: 10.1080/17508489909556327; Grégory Quin and Anais Bohuon, “Muscles, nerves, and sex: The contradictions of the medical approach to female bodies in movement in France, 1847-1914”, *Gender & History*, 24, (1), (2012), 172-86, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2011.01674.x>

⁶⁵ Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 44.

⁶⁶ According to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, “idiosyncrasy” is defined as “a peculiarity of constitution or temperament: an individualizing characteristic or quality”.

⁶⁷ Reggiani, “Constitución, biotipología”.

muscular power makes their joints essentially flexible".⁶⁸ In the following quotation, Langlade censures again a certain femininity, which he describes as exaggerated or stereotyped, consigning it to the realm of abjection.

The suppleness and softness to which I have referred are in no way languid movements, without a location and without a fixed plane on which to be executed. Languid, stereotyped movements and gazing at the great beyond are not typical of women's gymnastics, but of pseudo-feminine gymnastics born in a period of confusion.⁶⁹

Langlade rejects women's "effeminate", languid and stereotypical movements; he consigns both virile ("affected") women and women who are too feminine ("effeminate" or "gazing at the great beyond") to a place of abjection, categorizing them as "pseudo-feminine".

The device of sexuality configures different identities: gender, sexual, desire, pleasure, and emotional identities. The discourses referring to women's physical exercise are influenced by macro-political concerns related to the device of sexuality.⁷⁰ Both Langlade's and Herrera's lectures present an essentiality on women's way of "being in movement" associated with flexibility, softness, beauty and opposed to strength, energy, and precision.

To determine what a woman should do and how she should move, what she is and is not "fit" for, there is a continuity between her way of being and the way of moving ("a woman with a strongly muscled neck would not be feminine at all"⁷¹), from attitude and values to exercise, from her temperament to her physique, from moral to biology. The word "fit" becomes relevant and is used, like in the biotypological discourse, to prescribe and indicate the normality of the body and its movements.

⁶⁸ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 46.

⁶⁹ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 46.

⁷⁰ Scharagrodsky, "Entre la maternidad y la histeria", 106.

⁷¹ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 47.

Flexibility is presented as a muscular characteristic predisposed by female genetics, while power and strength are inherent to men (as if all women and men were the same). However, exercise adaptations, such as avoiding “static” positions, are prescribed only for women.

One must never lose sight of the unequal anatomical architecture of the two sexes [...] women, having less power (less developed muscles) must fight against greater resistance, so the contraction [...] shall be rapid and avoid, as specialists emphasise, remaining in “static” positions.⁷²

Flexibility is much more accentuated in women [...] The full flexion of the trunk to the front and down is a relatively easy exercise for women.⁷³

Trunk exercises in the frontal plane have little difference with the opposite sex. They shall only differ in intensity and duration.⁷⁴

In addition to exercise adaptations, exercises for women are prohibited without physiological arguments, which is not the case for men. It is claimed that women are prone to suffering from “an accentuation of their physiological lordosis”.⁷⁵ Langlade points out that balance exercises on the floor are more “suitable” for women than for men, but “this superiority [...] due to their constitutional conditions is lost when the exercise of balance on the floor also requires the strength factor”.⁷⁶ In agreement with Langlade, Herrera writes:

Balance exercises on the floor or on the bar, for which women’s physical conditions are admirable, shall be accomplished without reaching positions of strength and without danger of failure; I am here referring to the height and width of the bar.⁷⁷

⁷² Herrera, “Untitled”, 9.

⁷³ Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 48.

⁷⁴ Herrera, “Untitled”, 8.

⁷⁵ Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 49.

⁷⁶ Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 53.

⁷⁷ Herrera, “Untitled”, 8.

Women's possible movements are again limited, even in those exercises for which they have greater "aptitude", alluding once more to their "hysterization" through the instability and precariousness of their nervous system.

And although morphological conditions continue to favour women in execution, temperamental conditions work against them. The greater excitability of their nervous system, the fear of accidents, mean that the inhibitory psychic factor influences the morphological conditions – it is for this reason that the exercises of balance at height in women must follow a very careful gradation, and the height at which they workout must always be lower than for young men of the same age.⁷⁸

In terms of suspension exercises, although they may require strength, it is argued that they must be taught to women in an adapted form in case of an accident as it could save their lives.

In case of an accident, for example, in a fire, and being the only means of salvation to move along an extended rope, a woman, like any man, must be able to save herself by her own means. In modern times, this idea that a woman is a "bibelot" has been or must be discarded. A woman must possess not the strength of a man BUT ENOUGH STRENGTH TO CONTROL HER BODY. [...] THESE NOT ONLY MAY BUT MUST BE USED. [...] All suspension exercises which are in accordance with women's biotypology and temperamental conditions are appropriate for women's gymnastics.⁷⁹

Strengthening the female body becomes accepted for a very clear purpose: to save herself in situations of risk. If, on the one hand, she can no longer be a "bibelot", neither should she be transformed into a body that is too strong, too masculine. Although Langlade proposes a more active place for women, he considers that women should be obliged to perform suspension exercises in life-or-death situations. For this, he follows the parameters of a biotypology and puts women in a place of

⁷⁸ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 53-4.

⁷⁹ Langlade, "Gimnástica Femenina", 54-5.

inferiority in relation to men, constructing a gendered and hierarchical bodily and sexual order.⁸⁰

In the same vein, walking and running “shall not be as energetic and precise” for physical reasons (shorter strides due to shorter limbs and greater pelvic oscillations and torsion movements), but mainly for temperamental reasons. Moral reasons rather than physical reasons prescribe the type of exercise. Long-distance runs, which require functional and muscular endurance workout, are “not suitable for women” either. “Fast-paced races and short runs or jogs are particularly suitable for women’s general conditions”.⁸¹

The “differential importance” between the sexual organs of each sex and the classification of women (from a medical discourse and knowledge) according to number of pregnancies are factors that determine the type of jumping and agility floor exercises that they can perform. Women “are not particularly suitable for jumping”, as “the intra-abdominal pressure” that the perineum must withstand means they could suffer alterations in the position of the uterus. For this, Langlade presents “two fundamental female types, nulliparous women and multiparous women, and, within these, certain characters”:⁸² on the physical level, having shorter and less powerful lower limbs and greater weight in the pelvis; on the psychic level, “less resolution and decisiveness in action”.⁸³ A biological ideology is presented which determines not only the physical aspect, but also the psychic or temperamental ones.

RECOMMENDED BODILY PRACTICES FOR WOMEN

It was not only the type of exercise that needed to be “adapted” based on women’s organic, genetic, temperamental, and physical predisposition.

⁸⁰ Pablo Scharagrodsky, “Discursos pedagógicos, procesos de escolarización y educación de los cuerpos”, in eds. Valeria Varea and Eduardo Galak *Cuerpo y Educación Física. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas para Pensar la Educación de los Cuerpos* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2013), 15-43, 37; Pablo Scharagrodsky, “El padre de la educación física argentina: Fabricando una política corporal generizada (1901-1938)”, in eds. Ángela Aisenstein and Pablo Scharagrodsky *Tras las huellas de la Educación Física Escolar Argentina. Cuerpo, Género y Pedagogía: 1880-1950* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2006), 159- 197, 160.

⁸¹ Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 56.

⁸² Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 56.

⁸³ Langlade, “Gimnástica Femenina”, 56.

Women were considered a special group for which it was necessary to also adapt the bodily practices that were most suitable for their biotype. One of the bodily practices that contributed most to building and educating female bodies was rhythmic gymnastics. It is not a minor point that, on this subject, it was the female lecturer, a teacher of this discipline in the training of physical education teachers, who introduced the recommendations.

It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that the problem of women's gymnastics began to be considered [...] Elli Björkstén (1870-1947), who laid the foundations of modern women's gymnastics [...] introduced rhythm and the expression of moral values in gymnastics. She moved away from the stereotyped attitudes of male gymnastics, rounding and lengthening the movements and introducing new concepts of plastic arts. [...] In Switzerland, Jaques-Dalcroze (1865) was the creator of rhythmic gymnastics [...] the study of rhythmic gymnastics fortifies the metric and rhythmic senses, thanks to the joint study of the body's natural rhythms and music's artistic rhythms. It tends to regularize the nervous functions, strengthen willpower, develop the imagination and harmonize physical and spiritual faculties. It seeks to overcome the intellectual or physical resistances which go against the natural rhythms of personality and to ensure more freedom and awareness.⁸⁴

In these gymnastics, femininity is associated with the development of rhythm, expression, plasticity, and rounded movements. Metaphorically, it would be a "more rounded" body than the male body. This is all combined with what is natural and contributes to developing values that are somewhat "lacking" in women, such as "the regularization of nervous functions" because of sexual problems (hysteria at its most critical state), as well as to strengthening willpower, the imagination and the harmonization of bodily and spiritual faculties.

Attributes of rhythmic gymnastics such as flexibility, balance, harmony, spontaneity, good manners, grace, order, attention, and discipline are added, all of which are linked to femininity. There is a stable identification of

⁸⁴ Rey de Langlade, "Untitled", 17.

a type of gymnastics for each “sex”. “Nowadays, women’s gymnastics has become totally detached from men’s gymnastics. Its evolution is such that it has overtaken the latter, because men have fewer possibilities in the field of rhythm, plastic arts, and expression”.⁸⁵ Contrary to what was generally the case, women’s greater rhythmic, plastic, and expressive advantages in relation to men were shown, with a radical separation between men’s and women’s gymnastics. Like sex, gymnastics became binary and exclusive.

In 1956, an article entitled “Ideas for women’s physical education” was published in the CNEF’s official journal, which was the only one of its kind and had a wide circulation. In this article, Medau, one of the greatest figures of German rhythmic gymnastics, mentioned three requirements for an ideal physical education for women: health, beauty of body shape and posture, and grace of movement.⁸⁶ Through the enumeration of eleven theses with axiomatic brevity, the ideal physical education for women is associated with health (as opposed to sport), with biological maturational development (which determines spiritual development), with form and posture, relaxation, play, feeling, and with beauty and rhythm.

1. Before championships of sporting achievements, there must be championships of health.
2. Attention must be paid to growth and maturation power.
3. Reserve energy must be cultivated and perfected in every way.
4. New biological and psychological knowledge demands that physical exercise should be increased and expanded on the dynamic side, on the side of circulation and respiration.
5. The supreme form and the best state of training are only learnt in practice.
6. Attention must be paid to the body’s form and posture.

⁸⁵ Rey de Langlade, “Untitled”, 21.

⁸⁶ Henrich Medau, “Ideas para una nueva educación física de la mujer”. Translated by Baltazar Mezzera. *Anales de Educación Física*. Tomo I N.º 1, Enero-Febrero 1956, CNEF. Montevideo. The original text was published in German in the *Leibesübungen* journal (8), August, 1955, Francfort del Main, 79-83.

7. It is necessary to teach not only tension, but also relaxation.
8. Use more play as practice.
9. Cultivate willpower and cultivate feeling (the beauty of nature, form, movement).
10. Breathing is the gymnastics of old age.
11. Rhythm is fundamental to the physical education of women.⁸⁷

In addition to rhythmic gymnastics, Rey de Langlade recommends “training dance steps and dances”,⁸⁸ which, according to Herrera, except for violent and strenuous dances typified by acrobatic dance, offers a wide range of educational dances appropriate for women.⁸⁹

As can be seen when reading the construction of a modern scheme of educational gymnastics for women, he contemplates a series of works of which the Uruguayan Gymnastics Federation is interested in knowing their possibilities of application. Dance, in its natural or folkloric form, rhythmic, plastic art, working out with small apparatus, balance exercises, working out with Swedish walls (erroneously called ‘Swedish ladders’) and gymnastic jumps with and without support ARE ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS.⁹⁰

Women's gymnastics are essentialized in relation to certain specific characteristics of female bodies, according to the scientific knowledge of biology and medicine (anatomy, physiology, etc.).

“As for the workout with apparatus (large apparatus [German] or Swedish apparatus), women are also suitable for it and should take advantage of the benefits derived from its practice [...] This kind of workout can and in many cases should be done by women”.⁹¹ But Dr. Herrera clarifies:

⁸⁷ Medau, “Ideas para una nueva”, 83.

⁸⁸ Rey de Langlade, “Untitled”, 26.

⁸⁹ Herrera, “Untitled”, 9.

⁹⁰ Rey de Langlade, “Untitled”, 27.

⁹¹ Rey de Langlade, “Untitled”, 27.

with reference to the Olympic competitions in women's gymnastics, Uruguayan women, at present, would only be able to take part in simple individual or group exercises; exercises on parallel bars, benches and vaults without hoops would escape their possibilities. The future will show whether Uruguayan women's ability will progress sufficiently to use large gymnastic apparatus, as established by international programmes.⁹²

This prohibition is based on two aspects: "We are removing a great danger to the physical integrity of our women and at the same time we are eliminating an element that creates a sensibility that is alien to women's idiosyncrasy".⁹³ There is a certain contradiction: on the one hand, the argument is based on physical reasons because of insufficient muscular development due to the lack of physical education at school; on the other, it is based on temperamental aspects, on a "sensibility" that is opposed to her supposed identity. The latter overrides the former, labelling and pigeonholing Uruguayan women as submissive or inferior to European women who, conversely, do practise gymnastics with apparatus and are not forbidden to do exercises on parallel bars, horizontal bars, rings, ropes, and vaults with hoops. In conclusion to her work, Nelly Rey de Langlade recommends:

GIVEN THE CURRENT STATE OF WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS IN URUGUAY, WE CONSIDER:

[...]

2) That the aesthetic, rhythmic and plastic values so typical of female life are contemplated in modern female educational gymnastics, being therefore, and given the lack of previous basis, inadvisable to introduce purely rhythmic, plastic and expressive forms of workout. Example: Works by DALCROZE; LABAN; BODE; MEDAU; STEBBIS; IDLA; JALKANEN; etc.

3) That it is IMPOSSIBLE TO THINK AT PRESENT OF FEMALE WORKOUT IN LARGE APPARATUSES, even in its most attenuated forms. That, on the other hand, only in those countries

⁹² Herrera, "Untitled", 6.

⁹³ Herrera, "Untitled", 6.

which have intense political-social problems, where the action of women must in many cases equal and replace that of men, has gymnastics on large apparatus had any development. Example: Germany, Russia and some of their rudiments in countries which have been in intimate contact with them.

4) That as far as Women's Gymnastics Championships are concerned, their organization will be possible when the voluntary movement of women's gymnastics reaches greater dissemination. [...]

5) That educational dances and folkloric dances have an unquestionable value in women's physical education. [...]⁹⁴

In agreement with Herrera, Rey de Langlade⁹⁵ does not recommend gymnastics on large apparatus but explains the reasons why: it is practised in European countries where, due to political problems, women's actions have replaced men's actions. It then seems that what she proposes in the fourth point, for when educational gymnastics become more disseminated, does not refer to the practice of gymnastics with apparatus (despite having expressed that it was suitable for women). Instead, she would be referring to the skills involved in educational gymnastics and folkloric dances.⁹⁶ These two, together with educational dances, are the only advisable corporal practices within the field of gymnastics to be taught to the whole Uruguayan female population. Rhythmic gymnastics is reserved for small groups and only after a good basis of educational gymnastics, stressing formative and corrective-postural aspects over rhythmic ones.

⁹⁴ Rey de Langlade, "Untitled", 29-30.

⁹⁵ According to Dogliotti, Herrera and Rey de Langlade considered that gymnastics should be suited to the biotypical characteristics of Uruguayan women. Aspects such as differences in biotype, race and even material conditions between Uruguayan and European and Nordic women led these authors to recommend gymnastics without apparatus for Uruguayan women. For a detailed analysis on the subject, see: Paola Dogliotti, "Sexuality and Eugenics in Female Gymnastics in the Mid-Twentieth Century in Uruguay", 7

⁹⁶ The professor sees herself as a disciple of Dr. Juan Manuel Herrera, in a place of subordination in terms of her thinking when she expresses "Receive my admiration and this overwhelming satisfaction, seeing that I coincide in everything which was reported by the Head of the Physical Sports Education Section of the Medical Office of this National Commission, Dr. Juan Manuel Herrera, of whom I am honoured to be a pupil". Rey de Langlade, "Untitled", 29-30. The differences in the places occupied by men and women are reflected in this comment, which is not made in either Langlade's or Herrera's article.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article, we sought to understand key aspects about the female sex and the effects of gymnastics on their bodies according to the work of Alberto Langlade, and two other Uruguayan scholars who were speakers at the Third Pan-American Congress of Physical Education. These lectures were published by the National Commission of Physical Education and integrated the bibliography of the Teacher Training Course at the Higher Institute of Physical Education.

The lectures show how, in this period, physical education teacher training was based on a discourse which was still marked by elements of biotypology: it sought to create normality standards for men and women in terms of organic parameters as well as other elements, including morality and sexuality. In a country that was considered the “Switzerland of South America” and a progressive land regarding women’s rights, there was a struggle to keep this “virtuous society” from behaviours that could threaten its development, and homosexuality was considered a threat to this process.⁹⁷ In the 1950s, even though homosexuality was not sanctioned by Uruguayan law, it was considered a threat to society since it jeopardized masculinity and manhood – considered key elements for this society.⁹⁸ Uruguayan psychiatrists were starting to consider homosexuality as a product of socio-contextual factor rather than being a physical issue,⁹⁹ but these changes in perspective did not mean a more positive view over sex-generic dissidences.¹⁰⁰ Among other things, this meant creating normality standards for men and women, and Langlade’s work on gymnastics for women expressed these parameters. Even though his writings and lectures did not explicitly mention homosexuality, they did reflect an idea that was present in Uruguayan society of the 1950s, that is: any individual had the “risk” of becoming homosexual if

⁹⁷ Leandro Kierszenbaum, “La defensa del orden; construcción de amenazas sociales y su neutralización en Uruguay (1945-1968)”, *E.I.A.L.* 25(2), 2014: 59-70.

⁹⁸ Kierszenbaum, *La defensa del orden*.

⁹⁹ Sempol, “Homosexual”.

¹⁰⁰ As Diego Sempol has demonstrated in his research, LGBTQ+ organizations in Uruguay only started to gain public visibility in the 1980’s, after the end of the dictatorship period. However, the results from their political engagement only started to appear after the 2000’s, when leftist *Frente Amplio* took office. See: Diego Sempol, *De los baños a la calle.*; Diego Sempol, “Homosexual: entre el insulto y el orgullo”.

exposed to “subversive” or “pervert” environments. In this sense, physical education teachers should be trained in the sense of risks and guaranteeing that, physical exercises, especially those addressed to women, would contribute to the “correct” education of the body, preventing women from developing an ambiguous corporality, marked by characteristics usually attributed to men.

The teacher training process in Uruguay exhibited some traits of sexism that established an ideal body based on a male, white and heterosexual model, while the only *other* possible type of body would be that of an equally white and heterosexual woman, yet naturally weaker and less agile. These models were to be copied by physical education students and subsequently cultivated by them in the professional field. Based on these models, when becoming professionals, their actions would probably seek to prevent any bodily ambiguity (however small), as well as any behaviour that deviated from the expected norm. Thus, the lectures given by these Uruguayan scholars at that congress in 1950 allow us to affirm that the field of physical education has been marked by the rejection of everything that might escape this model: effeminate men, virile women, “bibelot” or “effeminate” women, hysterics, transvestites, homosexuals. Physical education has therefore been constructed in the country as a place for the normalization of bodies and behaviours and as a stronghold of intolerance towards those who escape the binary and heterosexual ideal.

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