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DOSSIER EDUCATION, HEALTH AND RECREATION

ARTICLE - GEORGES HÉBERT AND WOMEN'S PHYSICAL  
EDUCATION IN BRAZIL<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** In the book *Muscle et beauté plastique* (1909), dedicated to young French women, Georges Hébert established the concepts of health, beauty and strength oriented to women's emancipation by means of his Natural Method. This book was read in Brazil by authors from the field of physical education such as Rangel Sobrinho (1930) and Lotte Kretzschmar (1932), who proposed national methods for "women's physical education". This article analyzes the principles of women's education in Hébert's work and discusses its reception in Brazil in the 1930s. The sources used comprise Rangel Sobrinho's and Kretzschmar's books, Brazilian publications of the period and Hébert's book *Muscle et beauté plastique*. We were able to determine that this French work was innovative regarding women's education for proposing physical and moral emancipation, opposing the wearing of corsets and high heels and advocating equal exercise for men and women. However, the Brazilian works presented limitations regarding women's training, since the idea of equality was proposed but not actually applied to the training program.

**Keywords:** Georges Hébert. Physical education. Women. Brazil.

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## GEORGES HÉBERT E A EDUCAÇÃO DO CORPO FEMININO NO BRASIL

**RESUMO:** No livro dedicado às jovens francesas, “*Muscle et beauté plastique*” (1919), Georges Hébert, consagrou os conceitos de saúde, beleza e força voltados para a emancipação feminina por meio do seu Método Natural. No Brasil, essa obra foi lida por autores da educação física, como Rangel Sobrinho (1930) e Lotte Kretzschmar (1932) que propuseram métodos nacionais para uma “Educação Física feminina”. O objetivo deste artigo é analisar os princípios de educação para as mulheres na obra de Hébert e discutir acerca de sua recepção no Brasil na década de 1930. As fontes constituídas foram livros de Rangel Sobrinho e Kretzschmar e periódicos nacionais publicados nesse período e o livro de Hébert, “*Muscle et beauté plastique*”. Foi possível constatar que a obra francesa foi inovadora quanto à educação feminina ao propor a emancipação física e moral, ao combater o uso do espartilho e salto alto e ao propor treinamento idêntico para homens e mulheres. Contudo, as produções brasileiras apresentaram limitações quanto ao treinamento dedicados as mulheres, pois a equiparação aparecia no discurso, mas não efetivamente no treinamento.

**Palavras-Chave:** Georges Hébert. Educação do corpo. Mulheres. Brasil.

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## THE NATURAL METHOD AND WOMEN'S PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Georges Hébert (1875-1957) was a French Navy officer and creator of the Natural Method. He held several important positions throughout his career, the most notable being Technical Director of the Lorient Marines School and of the College of Athletes in Reims, France. His early education was in the navy, where he had the opportunity to travel in the French Colonies and the Americas, including Brazil. There he also obtained the support of generals and War Ministers at the time and became well-known. In his civilian career, besides helping to found the College, he directed its awarded Physical Education Center, considered the cradle of Hebertism. Originally created by the Marquis de Polignac, it was located in Pommery Park.<sup>2</sup> Boasting innovative facilities for the time, as early as 1913 it had a Women's Annex run by Madame Melle Yvonne Moreau, head monitor of the institution and Hébert's future wife (*Revue L'Éducation Physique*, 1955, p. 5).

**Figure 1.** Madame Yvonne Hébert. Model of modern female athlete ( HÉBERT, 1919, pl. 5)<sup>3</sup>

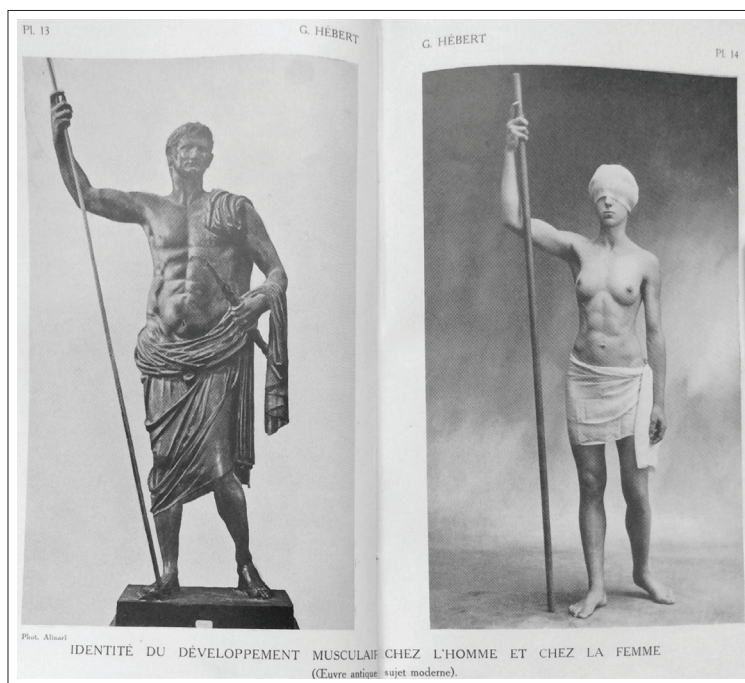


The book *L'éducation physique féminine: Muscle et beauté plastique*, written by Georges Hébert in 1919 and dedicated to French young women, established the concepts of health, beauty and strength oriented to women's emancipation through his Natural Method. In Brazil this work was read in the 1930s by authors in the field of physical education such as Orlando Rangel Sobrinho and Lotte Kretzschmar, who proposed national methods for "women's physical education." Therefore, the main goal of this paper is to interlink the French and Brazilian sources, i.e., to analyze the principles of education for women in Hébert's work and discuss its reception in Brazil in the 1930s. The sources used to this end were Hébert's book *Muscle et beauté plastique* (1919); Rangel Sobrinho's 1930 book *Educação Física Feminina* [Women's Physical Education] and Kretzschmar's 1932 book *Cultura física feminina* [Women's Physical Culture]; and the Brazilian publications that addressed Hébert's book, such as: *O Imparcial* newspaper (1920); *Careta* magazine, (1928); and the journals *Revista Educação Física Exército* (1937) and *Revista Educação Física* (1938; 1942).

In early 20th-century France, Hébert's enthusiasm addressed women's education by promoting various initiatives dedicated to them. He argued in his writings that men and women had the same capability

for comprehensive physical development and could cope with an equal workload, their organic differences being restricted to reproductive functions. The author argued that both genders had equal physical skills and similar conditions to undergo the same kind of training and thus achieve identical muscular development. He supported his point of view when, for example, he compared the statue of the Emperor Augustus to one of his female students, stating: “Author’s student, whose muscle development of arms, abdomen and legs is comparable to that of the athlete opposite.” (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 13-14). Hébert aimed at women’s “emancipation” and his ideas could actually be considered in line with post-World War I feminist discourses. And unlike the commentators of the time he made no references to motherhood in his writings (BOHOUN; QUIN, 2014, p. 209-210).

**Figure 2.** Identity between muscular development of men and women. Statue of Augustus. Author’s student, whose muscle development of arms, abdomen and legs is comparable to that of the athlete opposite (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 13-14)

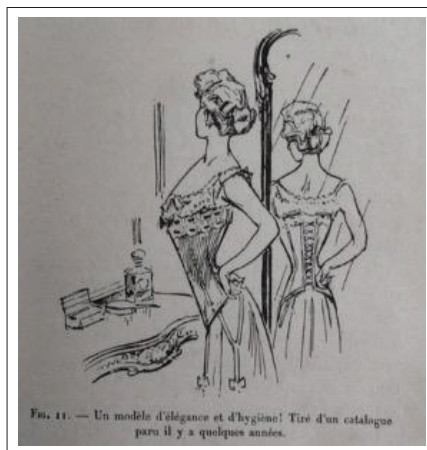


Concerned about physical exercise for women, in 1918 he founded *La Palestra: Gymnastics College for Women and Children* in Deauville, in the French north-west region of Normandy. As the college was only open six months a year in the summer, Hébert created

an alternative winter “palestra”<sup>4</sup> in 1923 in the southern Cotê d’Azur (PHILIPPE-MEDEN, 2017, p. 193 -194). Ten years later, in 1929, the French officer created also in Deauville the Women’s Nautical School, or marine “palestra.” Operating as a naval school in the ship *Alcyon*, it was intended for boys under 14 and girls of any age.<sup>5</sup>

These initiatives confirm Hébert’s disapproval of the type of education received by young French women, which condemned them to physical immobility. In his view, at school they were advised not to take part in running games and at home they were restrained by their mothers, who would say, “Would you keep still?”<sup>6</sup> As teenagers they were cooped up, already living a fairly inactive life, and the end of their physical activity was decreed with the wearing of what he called a “ridiculous instrument of torture, the corset.”<sup>7</sup> And thus would girls live on, sickly and immobile, until adulthood (HÉBERT, 1919, p.13-14). Given this context, the author expressed his displeasure with the way young women were being educated in his country. He claimed that the beauty items intended for them rendered them static and that they were advised to restrict themselves to their studios or offices. Girls were deprived of their rights to engage in active play and practice any type of exercise, or even sports, in the name of fashion and etiquette.

**Figure 3.** A model of elegance and hygiene! Taken from a catalog published a few years ago. (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 47).



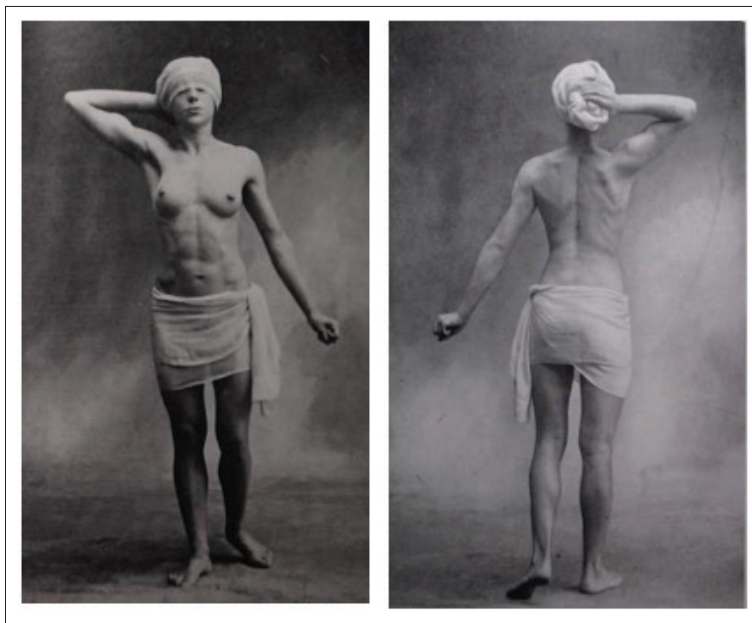
**Figure 4.** The follies of fashion. A challenge to common sense (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 53)



The author raised a delicate issue, for girls at the time were not supposed to take exercise and were instructed to follow strictly the standards dictated by fashion. Hébert drew people's attention to a woman who should be resilient, free from foolish prejudices, healthy, beautiful, strong and independent. Therefore he created a series of physical and moral principles to guide them regarding the dangers resulting from lack of exercise, including the following: comprehensive physical development; female beauty; body proportions; and emancipation. His method would thus be the most suitable for young French women.

At the College of Athletes or at the Palestras he created, they wore loose orange tunics, embroidered with a Greek symbol in violet, and braided hair (PHILIPPE-MEDEN, 2017). In sample pictures shown at lectures they were depicted in throwing positions, classical poses, jumping, wrestling, dancing and doing manual labor. In the book *Muscle et beauté plastique* they displayed full muscle development with naked torsos and exposed breasts, but sometimes concealing their faces and always covering the abdomen. In those environments Hébert's young female students practiced the exercises of the Natural Method at the same sites and in the same way they were executed by male groups. Although there was no mixed-gender training, it afforded women a certain level of "equality" with men, ranging from training to clothing.

**Figure 5.** Detail of the female figure (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 39-40)



In view of such initiatives, Hébert introduced women to the Natural Method of Gymnastics. Like men, they would achieve physical development by means of the same principles he had created, above all the methodical practice of utilitarian exercises; resistance building by exercising outdoors (in the sun, cold, etc.); the qualities of virile action or values – energy, will, courage. This movement to include women in physical training in the early 20th century can be understood according to Vigarello, since

The female body is for the first time part of the “physiological” manifestation of “activity”: visible, “elastic,” “exercised” muscle, so far an exclusive male domain. The image is insistently repeated in 1930s beauty treatises: “Slender, athletic figure, thin, muscular limbs with no parasitic fat and energetic and open demeanor: that is the current ideal of female beauty.” (VIGARELLO, 2006, p. 150).

In this sense, Hébert evoked the development of qualities such as endurance, dexterity, speed and strength also for women. His aim was to put an end to the prejudices they suffered, retrieve the self-love they had lost and attain his ideal of physical and moral emancipation for French girls and young women.

The initiatives ranging from north to south of France consolidated Hébert’s interest in women’s physical education. At



the beginning of the last century, besides the Female Annex of the College of Athletes and the winter and summer Palestras, the author published in 1919 the book *Muscle et beauté plastique*, entirely dedicated to them. This was the French author's first publication dedicated specifically to his country's girls and young mothers, thus gaining a prominent position within his body of work. It is also possibly one of the first to offer a comprehensive criticism of the physical education of young French women of the early 20th century.

. . . Georges Hébert's *L'éducation physique féminine* marks a twofold evolution in the history of the practice of physical exercise and in the history of women. . . . *L'éducation physique féminine* is part of a profound social change that offers women greater autonomy (BOHOUN; QUIN, 2014, p.212, authors' emphasis).<sup>8</sup>

This work features the fundamental and comprehensive principles of Hébert's Method, such as moral and virile education achieved through physical exercise carried out in outdoors. Prominence is given to the importance of characteristics such as dexterity, strength and character in women's development.

Hébert's interest in and concern for the education of 20th-century French girls is therefore unquestionable, as is evident from the excerpt in which he mentions the "‘doll-woman,’ delicate and fragile, from head to toes, dressed, adorned, covered in make-up, invariably perched on high heels, wearing luxury trinkets, whom no one would dare touch for fear of breaking (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 46)."<sup>9</sup> In this excerpt Hébert describes the prevailing model of woman at the time. She should be a "doll," fragile and delicate, always full of adornments and make-up, as would be expected. Thus, concerns about women's physical education and studies on the development of the female body gained prominence in Georges Hébert's work and proposals. The method he created was recommended to prevent women from developing diseases such as diabetes, rheumatism and irregular heartbeat, seemingly caused by sedentariness and debility, leading to early old age. Both in the palestras and the College of Athletes, as well as in many other Hebertist Centers that emerged at the time, they climbed trees, ropes and walls, swam in the ocean, ran on the beach, carried weight, jumped over obstacles and engaged in lifesaving and fighting exercises with their companions. Contact with sunlight, seawater and all kinds of adversity were part of the routine of the young women, who were taught how to act in difficult situations and under harsh weather conditions.

**Figure 6.** Girls carrying a companion over their shoulders (HÉBERT, 1941, pl. 146)



**Figure 7.** Girls exercising by throwing and warding off punches (HÉBERT, 1941, pl. 57)



In Hébert's proposal they underwent the exact same training as men, in similar spaces. Moreover, his work raised issues such as women's "moral happiness" which, by offering his students physical experiences, placed them on an equal footing with men and thus afforded them more elements to overcome the prejudices and social limitations they suffered. Identical training was prescribed for both genders, and physical and moral qualities and organic development could be attained by both men and women. The principles of acquiring robustness through bathing and exposure of bare skin to sun and

cold and the methodical execution of utilitarian exercises formed the basis of the Natural Method. Its applicability was universal, that is, women were included in this kind of training.

### **MUSCLE ET BEAUTÉ PLASTIQUE: HEALTH, BEAUTY AND STRENGTH**

Health, beauty and strength are the guiding principles of the book *L'éducation physique féminine: Muscle et beauté plastique*, in which Hebert defended the thesis that health, beauty and strength could be acquired and preserved by means of physical exercise. For models of the “beautiful woman” he sought inspiration among the female manual laborers of the Fort-de-France General Transatlantic Company, such as the coal women, the women of Ernest Molier’s circus and in classical statuary.

**Figure 8. Model of coal woman of the General Transatlantic Company (PHILIPPE-MEDEN, 2017, p. 51)**



In his reasoning, the author denounced the fact that the French women of the time were constant victims of prejudice

and would thus be slaves to social conventions that caused them body deformity and atrophy. Their physical development would also be compromised, as the lack of regular exercise would lead to imperfect figures. Vigarello and Holt (2009) detail the historical background to Hébert's arguments about women at the time:

The Victorian medicine of the age liberated the male body but shackled that of middle-class women in a corset. It underlined the differences between the sexes and considered that exercises requiring vigor posed danger to women. The bourgeois woman was viewed as weak and hypersensitive. Sports which demanded physical strength and aggressiveness were thought to be unfit for the new wealthy class represented by housewives with enough money and time to take exercise. Most of the others were too busy doing housework, raising their children and/or working to have any energy left for sports. (VIGARELLO; HOLT, 2009, p. 453)

Hébert nevertheless claimed that there was a new generation of women eager to change this reality and who aspired to freedom, and were capable of attaining physical and moral emancipation through the systematic practice of utilitarian physical exercise. Physical exercise would eradicate certain inherently female diseases and provide a complete transformation in women's mindset by making them aware of their strength and worth. Regarding this new group, Vigarello and Holt (2009) contribute elements that complement the understanding of who they were.

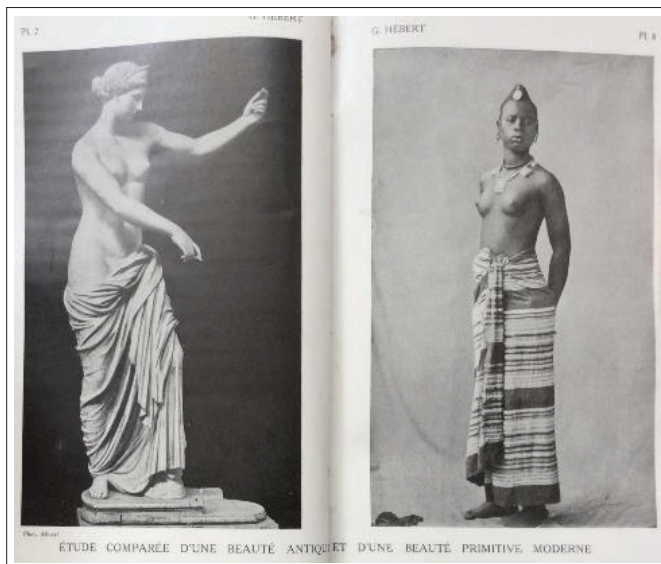
Significant changes emerged, however, in the late 19th century. Middle-class women, particularly teachers, increasingly rejected the notion of a weak and passive female body (HOLT, 1991). The principals of the all-girls schools that had been set up during the second half of the century began to conceive their own version of school sports, adapting certain male activities to women. . . . Women of the lower classes, however, were excluded due to early marriage and motherhood from such activities, which they had no opportunity to practice at school. (VIGARELLO; HOLT, 2009, p. 453-454)

In the two passages above, Vigarello and Holt claim that exercising was considered inappropriate for rich women and those of middle or lower class had no time to devote themselves to physical culture. For all of them Hébert wrote, between 1910 and 1912, in *Revue L'Éducation Physique*, a series of articles entitled "Advice to Ladies," in which he questioned why women were not included in the movement for physical exercise and pointed out that, besides prejudice and social conventions, office work or domestic chores made them neglect physical culture. The author's advanced view of female education is noteworthy, since rhythmic gymnastics in the early 20th century emphasized gracefulness rather than muscular strength or endurance

in the female body (BOHOUN, QUIN, 2014). Generally speaking, the creators of methods for women viewed them as luxury items or ballroom ornaments and upheld the idea that they did not have to cultivate their muscles. Hébert was praised by the feminist critics of the time (PHILIPPE-MEDEN, 2017) for providing them with a comprehensive method that aimed at their complete development in terms of strength, endurance, agility and beauty.

Therefore, in *Muscle et beauté plastique*, Hébert develops his argument by highlighting the need for women to regain control over their physical fitness by means of moderate, graded and dosed exercise. The work should undoubtedly be based on natural life. He repeats here the formula of his Natural Method, introduced in other books (1909, 1911), reaffirming that exercise performed rationally and methodically, inspired by the life and actions of “primitive” beings, would lead to strength and the production of an amount of work proportional to the age, physical constitution and degree of training of each individual (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 40).

**Figure 9.** Comparative study of an ancient beauty and a modern primitive beauty. Venus Victorious (National Museum, Naples). African black youth whose magnificent torso development can be compared to the Venus opposite (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 8).

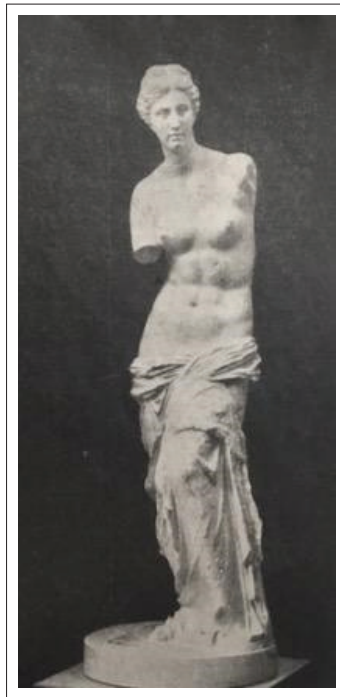


The book raises a subject dear to the author: female beauty. Women should overcome the prejudices of society, and of men in particular, to achieve full beauty. This would not be limited to tending

to the face, but involve a blossoming of the whole body, reflected in the harmony of proportions, the slenderness and firmness of shapes, as well as the gleam of the eye (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 2). The observation of ancient statuary, both Greek and Roman, helped him exemplify the “personification of beauty.” The model of lower and upper limb and abdomen muscles reflects admirable athletic development and thus explains beauty.

For example, the Venus de Milo, published in *Revista Educação Physica*, represented that ideal, a model of classic beauty for the female body.<sup>10</sup> With perfect measures and fully developed abdominal muscles, Venus was a far cry from the body of women who wore corsets and did not practice any type of exercise.

**Figure 10.** Venus de Milo (Louvre Museum, Paris).  
(REVISTA EDUCAÇÃO PHYSICA 1938, n. 14, p. 15).



Between 1910 and 1920 – the period in which Hébert’s book was written – in keeping with the author’s ideal of beauty and in defense of “Hellenic women,” Brazilian physicians and hygienists of eugenic inspiration, such as Renato Kehl,<sup>11</sup> criticized

... the taste for fragile bodies, for doll-women averse to the practice of sport and

physical education. Many women, despite being white, were seen as artefacts in human form, thin and weak. Kehl did not disguise his desire to see “Hellenic” young ladies on Brazilian beaches, who, according to him, were women with firm breasts and legs, smooth skin, with no signs of disease. Writers and doctors attuned to this way of thinking criticized harshly the bodies of Brazilian men and women, “the recent fashion of short skirts has revealed what many people did not know, to wit, the extent of feet deformity among women.” . . . The writings of eugenicists and hygienists inspired by such assumptions reveal how much “race” depended on aesthetics. (SANT’ANNA, 2014, p. 63-64)

In this sense, both in Brazil with Kehl and in France with Hébert, fashion and the harmful consequences of the corset to female beauty were strongly criticized. The French author stated that very small body measurements and the wearing of such items would cause spine curvature and sagging and/or deformed abdomen; the lack of physical exercise would lead to fragile muscles, rigid joints and awkward and graceless movements; and the wearing of high heels would deprive the feet of their natural movements and deform them. Assuming a firm stance on the matter, Hébert dedicated himself to the creation of a “beautiful body” standard based on two different but complementary elements: the *proportion* between the various parts of the body and its *forms*:

The *beauty of the proportions* is due to the size and conformation of the frame, which thus relates to the parts of the skeleton, and the *beauty of the forms* or *muscular beauty* is related to the development of the muscles. These two independent elements of beauty are rarely found in the same individual.<sup>12</sup> (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 78, author’s emphasis)

Hébert had in mind the beauty of a female body that, as a result of exercising, was undergoing striking transformations in his century. According to him, the perfection of muscle beauty, proportions and forms resided in the harmony between ten measurements, for example: height; trunk to limb ratio; bust, hip and neck width; torso breadth; etc. These formulas were intrinsically related to his model of body development and physical exercises, besides serving to measure the muscular development of women.

In *Muscle et beauté plastique*, more than a beauty standard, Hébert proposed a new way of viewing women and their body that, as of the 19th century, was undergoing significant modifications. The physical beauty of the French woman was starting to change with her engagement in new activities such as “shooting, fencing, hiking in nature, swimming classes, frequent reading of newspapers. She intends to go beyond the limitations generally imposed for women, with her physical activity proving to be ‘a hobby conducive to the development of graceful movements and beauty’” (VIGARELLO, 2006, 113).

Hébert anticipated a strong and well-developed body for women, who were experiencing a new reality in which gracefulness and vigor were associated with delicacy and strength through the practice of physical exercises. In the hierarchy established for women's exercises, he proposed the complete development of their bodies, ranging from chest, shoulders and arms via the abdomen to the lower limbs. They were recommended, for example, to do push-ups for the upper limbs, lateral sit-ups for the abdomen and feet-raising for the lower limbs, besides natural exercises like running, hiking and jumping (HÉBERT, 1919).

In addition, Hébert provoked the fashion world and the way girls were educated in society to remain “protected” and “preserved” inside their homes and offices. His views were in agreement with new ideas of woman living “outdoors” and free from corsets. Vigarello (2006) states that as early as the 1930s people expressed the notion of “independence that beautifies” and the need for women to occupy open-air spaces; he also emphasizes the practice of camping, which was recommended as the “main recipe for youth and beauty” (VIGARELLO, 2006, p. 148). Hébert, despite having attitudes and expanding ideas well advanced for the time, upheld others typical of his age in which women were still viewed as mothers and caretakers, as essential for the progress of the French nation.

Below is offered a more in-depth analysis of how such ideas arrived in Brazil and influenced the work of physical education teachers in the 1930s.

## **GEORGES HÉBERT AND THE FIRST PUBLICATIONS ON WOMEN IN BRAZIL: THE GYMNASTICS METHODS AND THE BRAZILIAN PERIODICALS.**

Women's physical education is the first chapter of all physical regeneration. It is the foundation upon which rests the physical reinvigoration of a race. Nothing can be expected of this if women are not physically prepared for the fulfillment of their higher mission – motherhood. However, having derived from physical exercises the best possible benefits, women will find themselves to be at the time of procreation in excellent physiological conditions, indispensable for giving birth to healthy and strong children. That is why women's physical education has asserted itself in all countries as a powerful adjutant of eugenics, and should not be relegated to a second plane, on the contrary, it must be well developed and maintained at least on the same level as that of men. (REVISTA EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA EX., 1937, n. 37, p. 35)

The “guardian of the household” should fulfill the role of mother, wife and housewife, and be responsible for the preservation



of childhood, viewed as the future wealth of nations. The “keeper of the household” should regulate the home’s daily routine, pay attention to schedules, prevent illnesses and deviations, that is, act as an ally of doctors, bringing hygiene standards into the house. She had to teach her children moral rules and healthy habits and would be directly blamed whenever they had a health problem. The doctors, in extending their advice on hygiene, health and cleanliness to the private lives of families, instructed “wives to keep the house always very clean and prevent their husbands, manual laborers exhausted by heavy physical activities, from drinking alcohol, smoking too much, frequenting bars and brothels, etc.” (RAGO, 2014). In this sense, in the early 20th century, the development of the female body became a national concern, since it should be prepared for these tasks assigned to women.

A new normative model of womanhood reached the 1930s and established the figure of “wife-housewife-mother,” devoted to her home, destined for a domestic career and charged with caring for her husband and raising her children. Of a fragile nature, her femininity was supported by a weak body (RAGO, 2014). The exercises recommended to them should strengthen hips and lower limbs, so that they could adequately fulfill their function of procreation. Gracefulness, beauty and harmony of body were recommended to improve their languid physical condition. The opening passage of this section was published in *Revista Educação Física – Exército* in 1937, that is, in a decade that, according to Soares,

... is strongly marked by an incentive to physical activity by state policies that stimulate and enhance a culture of the body, of physical vigor, of athletic features. It is also in this decade that a few publications specific to the field of physical education and sport emerge more systematically in Brazil, contributing to spread and assert a body culture in different sectors of society and in different social classes (SOARES, 2011, p. 4)

It is in this context of national incentive to physical activity that authors in the field of physical education proposed specific methods for women and differentiated their physical skills and training goals. Although Hébert did not identify differences between the physical condition or training of men and women, his ideas resonated in women’s physical education in Brazil in the 1930’s with such distinctions.

In the Brazilian bibliography we identified Orlando Rangel Sobrinho and Lotte Kretzschmar as the earliest authors in the field of physical education to quote Hébert regarding the themes of physical culture, beauty and proportion of female forms. Both followed similar paths and systematized specific physical exercise programs

for Brazilian women in the 1930s. Rangel Sobrinho published the book *Educação física feminina* (1930), in which he translated excerpts from Hébert's books, and Kretzschmar wrote *Cultura física feminina* (1932), reproducing the photographs used by Hébert in *Muscle et beauté plastique* (1919). One notes, however, that reference to Hébert is occasionally simply omitted by the Brazilian authors. The book in question was Hébert's first publication dedicated specifically to French girls and young mothers, thus gaining prominence in his body of work as a whole. It is possibly one of the first to offer a comprehensive criticism of the physical education of young French women in the early 20th century. In *Muscle et beauté plastique* Hébert did not propose a specific method for women, for he understood that the Natural Method was universal and therefore its principles, such as moral and virile education achieved through physical exercise and sports practiced outdoors and the importance of skills, strength, self-control and character, also applied to women.

#### **CULTURA PHYSICA: FOCUS ON WOMEN AND THE BRAZILIAN METHODS**

The first Brazilian book we investigated in our research and which will be addressed here is Rangel Sobrinho's *Educação física feminina* (1930). Besides his military training, the author also attended Law School and the Polytechnic School in Rio de Janeiro. The book is based on his end of course paper for the Physical Education Military Center (RJ). In this work he proposed a method of physical education for the "modern woman," raising important issues at the time such as race improvement, which would only be achieved through the development of strong bodies based on the French method. Having attended a military school and pursued a career in the army, he presented the advances in the field of modern physical education through French-speaking authors, who had strong military influence and inspired the Brazilian proposals. The introduction of this method in the country was explained by Soares:

French gymnastics was officially introduced in Brazil on April 12, 1921, through Decree 14784. However, it arrived in 1907 with the French Military Mission that came to the country to give military instruction to the Public Forces of the State of São Paulo. (SOARES, 2012, p. 55)

The French missions were also extended to Rio de Janeiro, like that of 1928 at the Realengo Military School (CASTRO, 1997). Influenced by the physiology-oriented gymnastics method, Rangel Sobrinho based his proposal on authors such as Francisco Amoros

(1770-1848), Georges Demeny (1850-1917), Etienne Jules-Marey (1830-1904) and also Georges Hébert. He addressed the issue of women, especially regarding the themes of hygiene, character building, beauty and physical vigor.

Like Hébert, Rangel Sobrinho offered a historical view of physical education, with classical Greece as the main model of education and culture. For him, women were an important element that played a leading role in society, and therefore were highlighted in his book. However, this role was restricted to female and motherhood aspects which, according to him, would benefit the conservation of the species through reproduction. Goellner (2003, p. 24) states that during this period women were criticized for their excessive clothing, indolence and confinement to the home. The goal was to forge a modern woman capable of coping with the new times, agile, responsible and supportive; however, alongside this idea of “emancipation” she should not forget to preserve her virtues, gracefulness and femininity, nor forgo her duties to the home and the raising of children. In this respect, Rangel Sobrinho argued that:

Women’s education should be shaped by their social and sexual role, in view of their way of life and especially *their sublime role as mothers*. . . . Besides the education necessary for women’s physical development, *it is essential to guide them in caring for their children*. (RANGEL SOBRINHO, 1930, p. 34-35, emphasis added)

This passage highlights the importance given to motherhood, with women devoting themselves to procreation and providing the country’s children with appropriate educational and hygienic care. From this perspective, with the entire proposal founded on the French method, the result of women’s physical education would be inspired by the guidelines given by Hébert in *Muscle et beauté plastique*. Given this set of recommendations, for Rangel Sobrinho – reaffirming Goellner’s (2003) considerations – women should achieve functional balance, beauty and proportional forms, with health, intelligence, physical and intellectual adaptation to the environment and the harmonious development of muscles affording them beauty and gracefulness.

When the female issue is highlighted one identifies more literal references to Hébert, viewed as an authority on scientific physical education. Rangel Sobrinho wrote a brief introduction about his deeds in the French Navy, especially in the post-World War I period, and about his travels in Africa and America. According to him, Hébert was greatly influential in French gymnastic methods. In his work the Brazilian author cited six books, namely: *Guide Pratique d’Education Physique* (1909), *Le code de la force* (1911), *Leçon-type de Natation* (1913),

*La palestra — camp d'entraînement pour jeunes filles* (1922) and *Le sport contre l'Éducation Physique* (1925). However, one notes a predilection for the book *Muscle et beauté plastique* and content related to beauty, health and strength. Hébert's influence on Rangel Sobrinho's book is striking, even with the latter acknowledging only the fundamentals and contents suitable to the principles of Brazilian society at the time.

The author defended the same thesis as Hébert, that “women's comprehensive physical development is acquired in the same way as men's” (RANGEL SOBRINHO, 1930, p. 60), for Hébert believed that both sexes had the same physical capacity and conditions to undergo equal training and thus achieve identical muscular development, as in the image in which he compares the statue of the Emperor Augustus to one of his students (cf. Fig 2); however, he ignored in his book, for example, the proposal of equivalence with men's training. Paraphrasing Hébert, he also envisaged an “emancipation” of women, but without losing sight of the maternal duties typical of the age.

In Brazil, however, the idea of an “emancipation” of women was not unanimous. Sant'Anna, when analyzing gender differences in sports practice in the early 20th century, states that

... it was not easy or quick to accept the image of women practicing sport. Even when advertisements showed drawings and photographs of young women in full activity, people tended to associate their posture with classical ballet. There was also a clear division between genders and sports. Therefore, running, swimming and jumping belonged much more to the male sphere. Perspiration and physical effort were preferably linked to men. And even for them, strength in lifting weights was valued over body flexibility in advertisements. As if no trace of lightness were welcome in their robustness (SANT'ANNA, 2014, p. 39).

In keeping with the mindset of the Brazilian elite presented by the author, the Brazilian gymnastic methods proposed by Rangel Sobrinho and Kretzschmar protected women against what they considered “excessive effort” and also against strength, impact and anything that might affect their fragility and threaten their natural gracefulness.

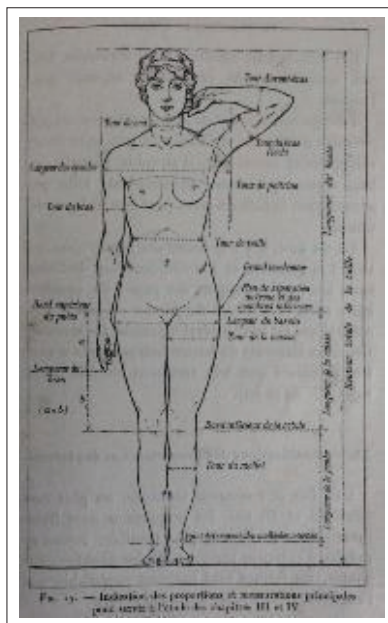
This same elite, who had access to gymnastics in institutes or to sports in clubs, reinforced the contrast between female fragility and male strength. Women should stand out for their “robustness of spirit and gracefulness of body,” passive and obedient, for woman should be, above all, virtuous (SANT'ANNA, 2014).

Another particularly relevant issue was the proportionality of women's forms. The theme was addressed as early as the 1930s in French magazines and beauty treatises. At that time – with the current technological advances – women were beginning to worry about indicators and figures that would define them as either beautiful

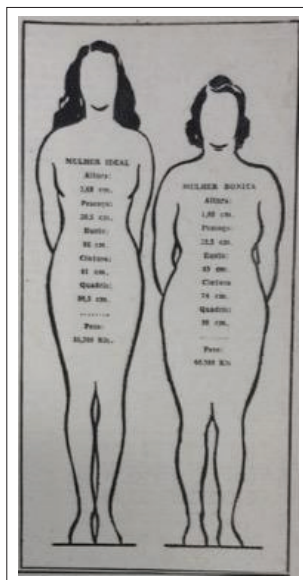
or ugly. They started measuring and weighing themselves more often, which led to the evolution, for example, of a previously unpopular device: scales (VIGARELLO, 2006, p. 151).

In line with this trend, Rangel Sobrinho established his own “table of measurements,” whose numbers would reveal the concept of a “beautiful body.” He defined a standard of proportions a woman’s body should meet to be considered beautiful. He published in his book two tables of measurements inspired by Hebert, especially from chapter three of *Muscle et beauté plastique*:

**Figure 11.** Indication of main proportions and measurements to be used to study chapters II and IV (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 77).



**Figure 12.** Check, reader, whether your beauty is modern (REVISTA EDUCAÇÃO PHYSICA, 1942, n. 67, p. 33). [Ideal woman; Pretty woman]



These studies of the proportions and forms of the female body became a regular feature of physical education magazines. Rangel Sobrinho's chart was published in 1942, the same year of the note "Check, reader, whether your beauty is modern," both in *Revista Educação Physica* (1942). In other words, the study of measurements featured in publications that proposed to popularize scientific knowledge, offering a combination of numbers that would serve as a standard to qualify women's beauty. Rangel Sobrinho claimed that Hébert conceived his measurement standards from his studies on ancient statuary.

After examining the various photographs in *Muscle et beauté plastique*, Rangel Sobrinho notes the "harmful influence of civilization on women's forms" and that this same modern culture promoted the "physical and systematic degeneration of women" (RANGEL SOBRINHO, 1930, p. 33-34). Listing the main causes of bad posture caused by modernity, he presented the three main ones: initially, generalized muscular atrophy; next, laziness and apathy executing movements; and, finally, poorly executed gymnastics exercises, which caused deformation in the female body. He recommended, based Hébert's principles, the performance of natural and utilitarian exercise outdoors. Like his predecessor, he condemned the wearing of corset and high heels for believing that woman should wear only the "muscle vest" (Rangel Sobrinho, 1930, p. 71), suitable to the natural physical beauty provided by physical exercise.

Linked to Rangel Sobrinho's work we find the book *Cultura physica feminina*, written by Lotte Kretzschmar in 1932. Published only two years later, it is similar to Rangel Sobrinho's book, since, as already mentioned, both proposed a method of women's gymnastics based on Hébert's. Both addressed physical exercises, beauty and forms of the female body. Having been published later, Kretzschmar's book featured citations from Rangel Sobrinho's work, besides emphasizing principles analogous to those proposed by him and Hébert, such as the importance of physical culture; the relation between beauty and body proportions; the "natural muscle vest" which provided young women with a correct and docile attitude; the need to prepare them physically to be the supporting mothers of future generations.

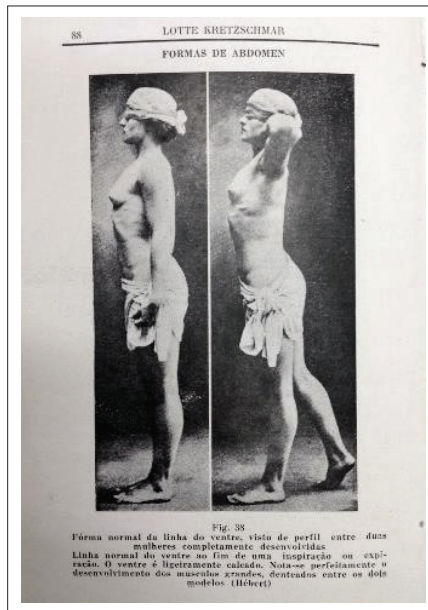
A more in-depth analysis reveals that the authors address those principles in distinct ways. In Kretzschmar's book, political issues, for example, are limited to the preface written by Augusto de Lima.<sup>13</sup> In it the politician extolled the role of the mother as "caretaker" of the family. In addition, he briefly raised issues regarding the strengthening and resistance of the Brazilian race, in his view the greatest and most current problem of the Brazilian state:

The insufficiency of such care, which only civilization can provide, makes of savages imperfect human beings. There is no beauty in the primitive jungle. If there is no lack of physical vigor in the Indian, he is utterly devoid of the aesthetic dexterity, agility and elegance that distinguish the man of improved physical education. (LIMA, 1932, p.v)

Here is an important example of the resistance faced by Hébert's theory in Brazil in the early 20th century. The views of an important professional politician regarding the physical state of "savages" affords us clues to understand the rejection in Brazil of the image of the "savage" widely disseminated in Hébert's studies. Therefore, the previous citation is vehemently opposed to the ideas of the author, who so strongly praised the physical fitness and skills of the "natives" of the French colonies, especially the coal woman of the Transatlantic Company depicted above (cf. Fig. 1).

In addressing the topic of female physical culture, Kretzschmar followed three different strands, all of them supported by the French gymnastics method. The first was historical and moral, the second was anatomical and physiological and the third related to the prescription of exercises. The first two interest us most, for in them the author carried out an exhaustive analysis of Greek statuary, using the twenty-nine images reproduced in full from the book *Muscle et beauté plastique*, including the photographs of Hébert's students.

**Figure 13.** Abdomen forms (KRETZSCHMAR, 1932, p. 88).



**Note:** [Normal form of the abdomen line, profile view, of two fully developed women. Normal abdomen line at the end of inspiration or expiration. The abdomen is slightly compressed. One notes perfectly the development of large, serrated muscles between both models. (Hébert) ]

**Figure 14.** Study of abdomen forms. Normal form of the abdomen line, profile view, of two fully developed subjects (author's students) (HÉBERT, 1919, pl.48).



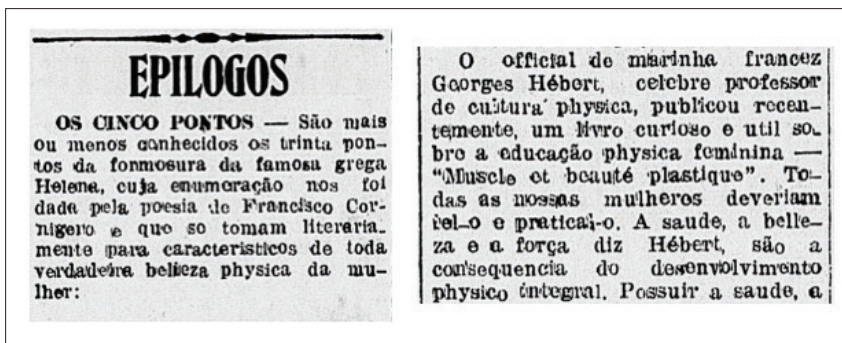


The author only gave Hébert credit for nine of the twenty-nine photographs. These images were widely used to illustrate the perfections and imperfections of forms, as well as proportions and ideal muscle development. They showed the existing physical types and body deformities (spine, limbs, abdomen, etc.) caused to women at the time from wearing corsets.

Kretzschmar and Rangel Sobrinho praised the solid scientific bases of the French method of gymnastics when they proposed their methods for women's physical culture. The works by Demeny and Marey were relevant, but the most prominent author in both cases analyzed was Hébert. It was noted that this author was mentioned in Brazil largely due to his book *Muscle et beauté plastique*. Despite this strong influence, very little was found about the need for contact with nature, as proposed by him. On the other hand, the themes of women's beauty, health and forms were the most extensively addressed. However, the authors ignored some of Hébert's principles for women's training, such as physical strength, skills, endurance and muscle development, appropriating those which most interested them, such as caring for women's physical education in order to prepare them for motherhood.

Also noteworthy is the repercussion of Hébert's book (1919) through two articles published in mainstream periodicals. This confirms the hypothesis that the book *Muscle et beauté plastique* was one of his most reported books, and possibly the one that was most read in Brazil. One of the articles selected was written by Plácido Barbosa in 1920 for *O Imparcial*<sup>14</sup> newspaper and addresses the theme "women's physical beauty," referring to the recently released book *Muscle et beauté plastique*:

**Figure 15.** Excerpts from the article "Epilogos: Belleza physica da mulher" [Epilogues: Women's physical beauty] (*O IMPARCIAL*, June 22, 1920, p. 2).



**Note:** [THE FIVE POINTS – Many are more or less familiar with the thirty points of beauty of the famous Greek woman Helen. The five enumeration was given to us by the poetry of Francisco Cornigeiro and which are taken in a literary sense as characteristics of all true female physical beauty:]

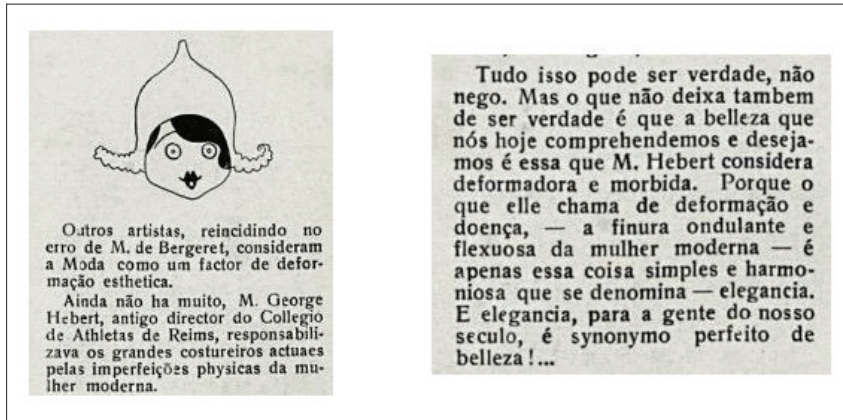
The French Navy officer Georges Hébert, a celebrated professor of physical culture, has recently published a curious and useful book on women's physical education – *Muscle and beauté plastique*. All Brazilian women should read and practice it. Health, beauty and strength, says Hébert, derive from comprehensive physical development.]

This article is relevant for it recommends Hébert's book as useful reading to be enjoyed and practiced by Brazilian women. The author details each of the principles exalted by Hébert – health, beauty and strength – and encourages women to seek the harmony of forms, delicacy, as well as the proper functioning of organs, endurance and agility through the practice of “physical culture.” At the end Plácido Barbosa asks, “Why do we Brazilians seem take pleasure in sickly women?” (*O IMPARCIAL*, 1920), a criticism of the cult of the poetic pallor and morbid gracefulness of “affected ladies.” Thus he raised the well-known banner of race regeneration by claiming that “. . . one does not make a strong race with such mothers and our race needs to be remade.”

In contrast to this article extolling Hébert's book, an article was found in *Careta* magazine<sup>15</sup> defending feminine elegance and electing the 20th century as the “century of thin women,” slender and long-limbed. However, it did not completely deny some of the organic problems that fashion might cause women, such as spine curvature and rickets. At the time, changes were underway in fashion which were favorable to Hébert's principles. According to Soares (2011, p. 30), as of 1910 skirts became shorter, in 1920 Coco Chanel's wide-leg trousers appeared and fabrics became lighter. In addition, petticoats and corsets fell out of fashion, transparent fabrics appeared and waistlines became less cinched.

Hébert, still according to the Brazilian article, criticized modern sport and its specialization that would equally harm women's harmony and plastic beauty and strongly condemned enduring fashions such as high heels and corsets which negatively influenced the preservation of female physical beauty.

**Figure 16.** Excerpts from the article “Um sorriso para todas” [A Smile for All Women] (CARETA, August 25, 1928, p. 26).



**Note:** [Other artists, repeating M. de Bergeret’s mistake, consider fashion a factor of aesthetic deformation. Not so long ago, M. George Hébert, former director of the College of Athletes in Reims, blamed the famous fashion designers of today for the physical imperfections of modern women.]

I do not deny that all that may be true. But it is also true that the beauty we currently understand and desire is that which M. Hébert considers deforming and morbid. For what he calls deformation and disease – the sinuous and lithe slenderness of modern women – is no more than this simple and harmonious thing called elegance. And elegance, for the people of our century, is a perfect synonym for beauty!]

These last two examples show that the beauty model of the time was still that of the affected, lean, morbid-looking and fragile woman who, defended by international fashion, was the delight of Brazilian men. Fashion, as an instrument of class distinction and individuality in industrial societies (SOARES, 2011), was inspired by major international magazines that imposed a standard of female figure and a profile of femininity. However, Hébert’s work continuously emerged as an alternative to this pattern. The ideals of health, beauty and strength that would lead to the desired female emancipation objectively influenced physical education in Brazil and permeated the methods dedicated exclusively to women up to the 1930s.

In Brazil, Hébert’s ideas were always effectively linked to the ideal role played women in regenerating and improving the race, as well as to the need to develop a female physical culture. In France, in turn, Hébert showed his dissatisfaction with the way young women were being educated. They were deprived of their right to take part in active games and practice any kind of exercise, or even sports, in the name of fashion and etiquette. Hébert’s interest in and concern for women in the early 20th century is therefore unquestionable;

by officially introducing French women to the Natural Method of gymnastics, he would help them develop endurance through direct contact with nature (sun, cold, etc.) and the qualities of virile action or principles – energy, will, courage. As Vigarello discusses,

The female body is for the first time part of the “physiological” manifestation of “activity”: visible, “elastic,” “exercised” muscle, so far an exclusive male domain. The image is insistently repeated in *1930s beauty treatises*: “Slender, athletic figure, thin, muscular limbs with no parasitic fat and energetic and open demeanor: that is the current ideal of female beauty.” (VIGARELLO, 2006, p. 150, emphasis added).

In the Brazilian context of the 1930s, newspaper and magazines articles and books fostered debates and criticisms about body, beauty, fashion and race, besides giving origin to physical exercise programs for Brazilian women, who, at that moment, were supposedly prepared to take ownership of their “slender figures” and sportive bearing.

## CONCLUSION

Women’s physical education is an important subject in understanding the reception of Hébert’s work in Brazil. The ideals of health, beauty and strength prescribed in the Natural Method mark a change in the representation of the feminine figure and the beginning of a new concern with preserving women’s physical fitness. Modernity brought about new meanings and perspectives for the female body and its beauty, and, consequently, criticism regarding the matter, such as:

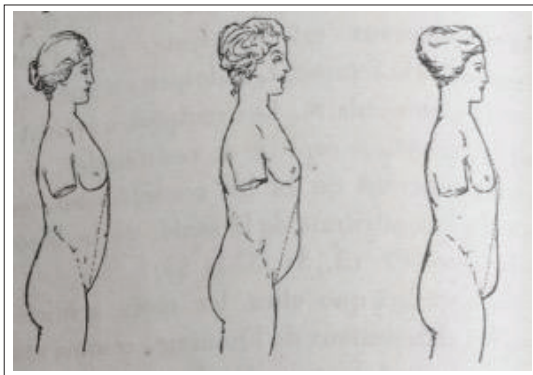
. . . criticism of the wearing of girdles, since constraining the body had “disadvantages of suffocating the pores” and “modifying the form of the buttocks.” It was necessary to place more confidence in the capacity of each individual to face her supposed laziness. Physical education would soon support this pretension. . . . criticism of heavy and bulky clothing. Diligence and agility required light garments. Physical modernity was no longer compatible with outfits that placed various layers of cloth between the skin and the outside world. The fashion of the 1920s implied fabrics close to the skin, gliding coolly over the figure, neither tight nor loose. A fashion made of smooth surfaces, averse to obstacles and constraints (SANT’ANNA, 2014, p. 54-55)

Female beauty was under constant attention and the society of the time found it difficult to admit that women’s body belonged to them, which hindered the attainment of women’s freedoms throughout history (SANT’ANNA, 2014). Discussions on weight monitoring and measurement control are inserted in this context. Physical deficiencies caused by excess or lack of exercise were also components of this panorama. As Vigarello analyzed,

the anatomical design converts time into figure, detailing the decisive moments of the fall: no longer mere gradual differences between animal species, but gradual differences between the increase in the weight of flesh, the insensitive sagging of skins, the insensitive collapse of shapes. The fallen line engenders, in other words, the numerical investment. The heavy curves, hitherto neglected by science, become the object of their explorations (VIGARELLO, 2011, p. 219)

In Georges Hébert these excesses were analyzed and criticized in detail in the anatomical drawings that illustrated his book. Deformities of the abdomen, of the measurements of body, waist, breasts, calves, caused by the wearing of high heels or corsets or by insufficient exercise revealed the new awareness stressed by Vigarello: “The types of increased belly volumes, for example: the ‘all-round inflated belly,’ the ‘balloon-shaped, bottom-rounded belly,’ the ‘dangling or sagging belly.’ The areas of ‘fatty deposits’ and also the ‘fat upper waistline’ . . .” (VIGARELLO, 2011, p.220) were widely reported in the athletic literature in France, and in Brazil they also appeared as concerns in sports and health journals.

**Figure 17. Abdomen deformities cause by insufficient muscular development (HÉBERT, 1919, p. 140)<sup>16</sup>**



In analyzing the situation in Brazil, Silvana Goellner, in her study of female images of the 1930s, argues that:

Held accountable for their physical appearance, women are encouraged to engage in physical activities, striving not only to benefit their health but also to be recognized and approved by the male gaze, a gaze that subjects them to the imperative of seduction, i.e., a discourse based on the association of women’s appearance with physical beauty and joviality. Being pretty is every woman’s right and if beauty is viewed as a personal enterprise, based on body looks, women must develop the habit of systematic physical exercise, enhancing their perception and knowledge of aesthetic and hygienic aspects in order to incorporate certain standards, recognize themselves in them and thus manage their body by shaping it according to their willpower and energy (GOELLNER, 2003, p. 34-35).

Besides the periodicals, principles of physical exercise for women also influenced publications on physical education in our country. The methods conceived by Rangel Sobrinho and Kretzschmar in the 1930s were directly influenced by the proposal of *Muscle et beauté plastique*. In promoting their physical exercise programs for Brazilian women, the authors extracted from Hébert's book only those principles that reflected moral virtues, since, at the time, female beautification was linked to moral and spiritual qualities (SANT'ANNA, 2014). Therefore, despite presenting a discourse defending the development of women's full physical vigor – so they could fulfill their roles of procreation and caring for home and children – in practice the exercises comprised graceful, light and soft gestures in delicate movements devoid of strength or impact, considered unnecessary and excessive for women's fragility.

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## NOTES

1 This paper was funded by Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo — FAPESP/CAPEs.

2 Pommery Park was inaugurated on November 28, 1911, in the city of Reims, 145 kilometers from Paris, designed by the architect and landscaper Édouard Redont. The park was named after the Marquis's mother, Mrs. Jeanne Alexandrine Pommery. In 2004 it was renamed Campagne Park.

3 Original caption: Type d'athlète moderne. Muscle et beauté plastique (HÉBERT, 1919, pl. 5). This image of Madame Yvonne Hébert, head monitor of *Collège d'Athlètes* in Reims and of the Palestra in Deauville was also cover of *Les Modes* magazine, with the following title: *Type d'athlète moderne entraînée par la pratique de la Méthode Naturelle*. (PHILIPPE-MEDEN, 2012, p. 507).

4 The (feminine) Latin word *palaestra* derives from the Greek *palaistra*, meaning a place for physical exercises (especially, but not only, wrestling), with changing rooms, etc. It can also mean the activities of the palaestra. Reference: Oxford Latin Dictionary. Oxford: The University Press, 1968.

5 With the advent of World War I, which lasted from 1914 to 1918, Hébert was forced to return temporarily to his activities in the Armed Forces. *Collège d'Athlètes* was destroyed by bombing during the war.

6 In French: Veux-tu rester tranquille.

7 In French: ce ridicule instrument de torture: le corset.

8 Original text: [...] L'éducation physique féminine de Georges Hébert marque un double évolution dans l'histoire des pratiques d'exercice corporel et dans l'histoire des femmes. [...] L'éducation physique féminine s'insère dans un changement sociétal profond, qui voit les femmes prendre plus d'autonomie.

9 Original text: [...] la “femme-poupée”, délicate et fragile, toute en tête et en jambés, parée, fardée, invariablement juchée sur ses talons hauts, bibelots de luxe auquel il semble qu'on n'oserait toucher de peur de la casser.

10 The Venus de Milo, despite this perception of beauty of the female body, can also be interpreted as representing the limitation of that body due to the amputated arms.

11 Renato Kehl, in the 1923 book *A cura da Fealdade* [The Cure of Ugliness], cites Georges Hébert's book *Muscle et beauté plastique* and uses his models and drawings in the chapters titled “Female plastic perfection” (KEHL, 1923, p. 76) and “Of beautiful and ugly conformations” (KEHL, 1923, p. 97)

12 Original text: la beauté des proportions, qui tient à la grandeur et à la conformation de l'ossature, ainsi qu'au rapport des pièces du squelette entre elles, et la beauté des formes ou beauté musculaire, qui est liée au développement des muscle. Ces deux éléments de beauté indépendants n'existe d'ailleurs que très rarement chez le même sujet.

13 Antônio Augusto de Lima was a poet elected in 1903 member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, of which he became chair in 1928. He was also a journalist and graduated in law from the University of São Paulo. In politics he was governor of Minas Gerais in 1891 and federal deputy for the state of Rio de Janeiro in 1906. Source: Academia Brasileira de Letras. Available at: <<http://www.academia.org.br/academicos/augusto-de-lima/biografia>>. Accessed on April 2, 2016.

14 “O Imparcial: political, literary and informative newspaper.” Daily Rio de Janeiro newspaper published between 1860 and 1910.

15 *Careta* magazine was published from 1908 to 1983. Its publication was suspended from February 1961 to October 1964 and from December 1964 to May 1981.

16 Original text: Les deformations de l’abdomen par insuffisance de développement musculaire.

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