

Physical capital and the low enrollment of women in Physical Activity & Sport Science (PASS) Degree: analyzing the adolescent voices



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INTRODUCTION

The rate of women enrolled in the university degree of Physical Activity and Sport Science (PASS) remain scarce compared to men. Furthermore, women rate shows a worrying downward trend in Spain (21,40% in 2011) [1] especially when these rates are compared with the high participation of women in university studies. This could be attributed to a number of factors such as those that characterize PASS studies [2,3]:

- The privilege of traditional competitive sports and technical knowledge in these studies, reinforcing a hegemonic masculinity.
- The sport industry is perceived as a predominantly male profession with a lack of job opportunities and discrimination towards female graduates and the “glass ceiling” phenomena.
- The studies are linked to physicality, so it's an area in and through which bodies are inscribed with powerful gendered identities. The ability to perform in competitive organized sport and muscularity conform the physical capital valued.

These characteristics are linked to hegemonic masculinity conforming an academic field and hegemonic capitals that, we hypothesize, attract and privilege male students and discourage girls from choosing these studies.

OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this study is to describe and increase understanding of how the choice to study or not PASS Degree appears to girls and boys before starting university studies. To develop this research we focus on the analysis of physical capital as the embodied capacity to use the body as well as the appearance of the body [4,5].

METHODS

- A self-designed survey using a 5 point semantic-differential scale of 8 items (4 linked to femininity and 4 to masculinity) was applied to girls and boys for gender comparison. The validity of the instrument was achieved through a pilot study with 140 students and a panel of five knowledgeable professionals with expertise in areas related to the project or quantitative methods. Mean and SD and ANOVA test to stablish reliable difference were calculated using SPSS v.15 software.
- The representative sample was of 39 purposefully-selected schools from three regions with long tradition in these studies (Catalonia, Community of Madrid and Galicia). They represent a wide range of socio-economic circumstances across Spain (public and private schools; with and without Vocational training in PA and Sport). A total of 4,116 students (50,3% girls) of 15-17 years old participated in the study.

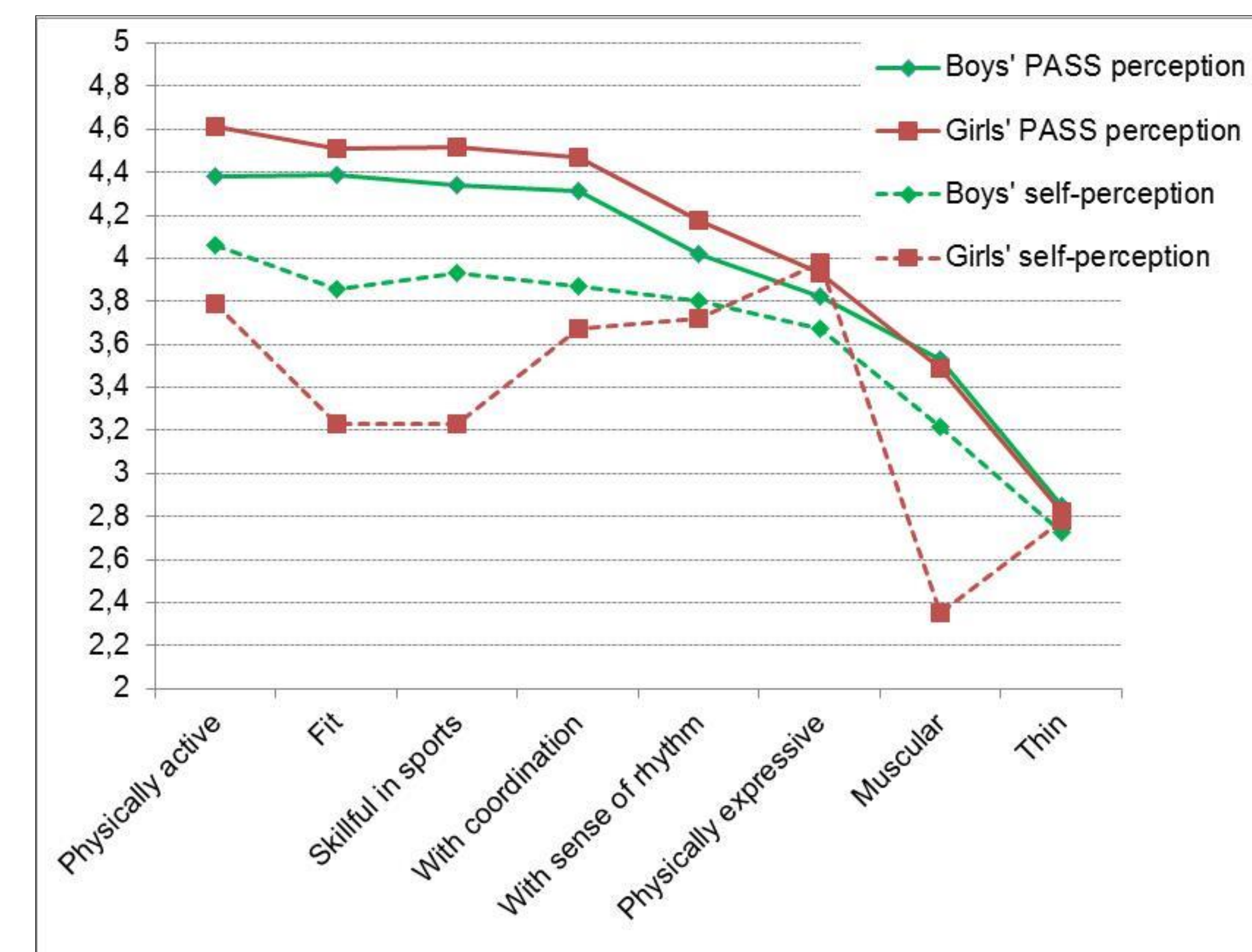
CONCLUSIONS

- The physical capitals more valued are those linked to hegemonic masculinity and therefore far from the embodied habitus of most of women and also non-hegemonic masculinities.
- They pointed to the needed analysis, reflection and modifications that should be done in these studies to make them more attractive to young women (i.e., encompassing a wide range of movements, capacities and appearances), as well to develop career advice strategies and polices to recruit specifically this population.

RESULTS

- The physical capitals more valued by girls and boys are those attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as being physically active, fit and skillful in sports. Capitals associated with femininity such as to have sense of rhythm and to be physically expressive are less valued, followed by physical capitals linked to appearance (muscular and thin).
- Girls have higher expectations of the physical capitals required to enroll in these studies as they valued significantly more than boys that a student of this degree has to possess specific characteristics (especially those linked to masculinity).

Graphic 1: Girls' and Boys' self-perception versus PASS perception.



- Both girls and boys perceive their own physical capital as lower compared with the rated physical capital to study PASS. However there are considerable gender differences between girls and boys, with girls valuing themselves as being less muscular ($p<0,05$), physically active ($p<0,001$), fit ($p<0,001$) and skillful in sports ($p<0,001$) than boys. Girls' values on being physically expressive ($p<0,05$). and thin ($p<0,001$) are higher than boys'.
- The strong discrepancy for girls between PASS perceived and self-perceived physical capital could discourage them from choosing these studies.

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