

Difference, Adapted Physical Activity and Human Development: Potential Contribution of Capabilities Approach

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This paper is a call to Adapted Physical Activity (APA) professionals to increase the reflexive nature of their practice. Drawing upon Foucault's concept of governmentality (1977) APA action may work against its own publicized goals of empowerment and self-determination. To highlight these inconsistencies, we will draw upon historical and social factors that explain the implicit dangers of practice not following policy. We propose that APA practitioners work according to ethical guidelines, based upon a capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2006, 2011; Sen, 2009) to counteract possible adverse effects of APA practitioner action. A capabilities approach is conducive to the development of each individual's human potential, by holistically considering the consequences of physical activity (i.e., biological, cultural, social, and psychological dimensions). To conclude, this paper will offer suggestions that may lead to an ethical reflection aligned with the best interest of APA's users.

Keywords: adapted physical activity, capabilities approach, disability, human development, reflective practice.

The development of Adapted Physical Activity (APA) has a relatively long history, but it is only since the 1980s that this term has had international currency (Jespersen & McNamee 2008). Reid (2003) provides an historical overview of Adapted Physical activity using the four paradigms proposed by Polloway, Smith, Patton, and Smith (1996). Paraphrasing these authors, Reid suggests the first half of the twentieth century is associated with the facility based paradigm characterized by incarceration of persons with disabilities. At that time, no attention was paid to physical activity issues except as a tool for corrective therapy. In the second half of twentieth century, a service-based paradigm reigned, aimed at integration or reintegration of individuals with disabilities into society, through individualized, therapeutic, developmental, remedial, or special programs set up to meet individual problems. The third paradigm proposed is a support-based paradigm born out of the

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failure of formal integration, advocating true inclusion of individuals in all settings, regardless of their differences. Within this paradigm, special programs are seen as potentially marginalizing and adapted physical activity aimed to accommodate all relevant individual differences rather than just disability. The current paradigm is based upon the empowerment and self-determination emphasis in which the goal of increasing personal control for one's own life is paramount. This more recent paradigm is incompatible with views of difference in abilities as "diseases" or "problems," characteristic of what became known as the *medical model* (Oliver, 1990), a model that seems to be infused in the three first paradigms highlighted. Simply put, the medical model conceptualizes disability as a medical problem to be solved. Approaching "difference" as "disease" undermines all the complexity inherent to the human experience of being "different." Importantly, it also promotes the internalization of difference as inadequate and individualized. Under this frame reference, dependence toward "specialized" professions is reinforced, increasing their social status and the power differential between "experts" and "clients."

In apparent accordance with the philosophy of this paradigm, disseminated by the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity, the definition of APA is now articulated as follows:

APA is defined as a cross-disciplinary body of knowledge directed toward the identification and solution of individual differences in physical activity: It is a service delivery profession and an academic field of study that supports an attitude of acceptance of individual differences, advocates access to active lifestyles and sport, and promotes innovation and cooperative service delivery programs and empowerment systems. Adapted physical activity includes, but is not limited to, physical education, sport, recreation, dance and creative arts, nutrition, medicine, and rehabilitation. (IFAPA, 2004, art. 5)

This definition can be understood as an attempt to detach from a reductionist view of difference present in the previous paradigms: APA is a "cross-disciplinary body of knowledge." In the definition above, the phrase "individual differences" is preferred to disabilities¹ as it illuminates the need for integration in mainstream physical activity systems. APA is justified by the need to facilitate the "acceptance for difference" in physical activity and words like "inclusion," "integration," and "empowerment" seem to pervade professional and academic discourses (Reid, 2003). But, while this industry advocates for "access and empowerment" and some work has been developed in that domain (Blinde & Taub, 1999; Goodwin, 2008; Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, & Auweele, 2002; Hutzler & Sherrill, 1999; Pensgaard & Sorensen, 2002), there is limited evidence that these goals are being systematically pursued, achieved, and assessed. For example Hutzler (2008) suggests "the methodology of APA as an empowering and socially liberating agent is to be disclosed" (p. 162). Reid (2003) concurs: "This last period [empowerment and self-determination] has not yet had a profound impact in adapted physical activity, although it has had considerable influence in recreation and leisure" (p. 22).

Some authors express concern that certain practices might even go in the opposite direction. Emes, Longmuir, and Downs (2002) acknowledge the still prevalent categorical approach to disability within APA discourses and professional preparation; Jespersen and McNamee (2008) accuse the weight of medical

tradition within APA and the lack of research and discussion on issues of ethical orientation; Howe and Jones (2006) point out the controversial effects of sport competition classification systems, to give just a few examples.

The historical link to disciplines such as medicine and education systems allows us to analyze the development of APA through a Foucauldian lens. This approach has a good deal of currency within Disability Studies (e.g., Snyder & Mitchell, 2006) but to date has not been effectively adopted in the social cultural exploration of APA. Foucault's work on governmentality, by which he means the practice of organizing and controlling people's behavior through physical and social techniques (Foucault, 1977), is instrumental to explore the potential for adverse effects of current and past practice in APA. We hope this discussion can be used as a tool to avoid the pitfalls of social control associated with oppressive normalization techniques (Shogan, 2003) and to illuminate APA practitioners' understanding of difference akin to ideals of empowerment and self-determination. To support this aim, we will focus upon the capabilities approach.

A capabilities approach, in broad terms, is a new theoretical paradigm that conceptualizes social justice in terms of equality of opportunities for the individuals to be and do what they value. Its main theorists are Amartya Sen (2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2006, 2011). The capabilities entail two main normative claims. First, the freedom of all every single individual to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance. It can never be undermined in favor of collective well-being. Second, the freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of capabilities—the real opportunities to do and be what individuals have reason to value—and not in terms of human rights, basic needs, resources, or preferences satisfaction as in other approaches to well-being and quality of life.² It has also provided the theoretical basis of human development paradigm adopted by United Nations Development Program (UNDP; Fukuda-Parr, 2011; Fukuda-Parr, Shiva, & United Nations Development Program, India, 2009). The same theoretical framework is frequently referred as Human Development and Capability Approach, Capability Approach, or Capabilities Approach. The terminology we adopt is aligned with Nussbaum's perspective (2011): "I typically use the plural, 'Capabilities,' in order to emphasize that the most important elements of people's quality of life are plural and qualitatively distinct: health, bodily integrity, education, and other aspects of individual lives cannot be reduced to a single metric without distortion" (p. 18). Capabilities are the valuable things people freely chose to be and do while enjoying the opportunities to realize them.

The first part of this paper will suggest some connections with Foucault's work that will assist in the identification of institutional and professional practices that might work against APA's empowerment goals. In the second part of the paper, we will focus upon the capabilities approach as a theoretical framework with potential to ethically guide and assess APA action and to align its impact with its disciplinary mission. A brief account of the most common criticisms to capabilities approach is provided before summarizing the main ideas hereby exposed and proposing some avenues for the application of capabilities approach within APA contexts. In sum, the purpose of this paper is to alert practitioners to the dangers inscribed in institutionalized and taken for granted practices and to suggest a capabilities approach as a conceptual and practical tool to ethically guide and evaluate APA's impact.

APA as a Mechanism of Governmentality

Disability scholars have shown us the usefulness of adopting the Foucault's work to expose how some disciplinary fields (especially medical sciences) have been instrumental in the creation and perpetuation of distortions, stereotypes, and ideologies, contrary to the best interests of those they were designed to help (Snyder & Mitchell, 2006; Tremain, 2005). As Longmore (2003) suggests, "People with disability have served as a source of profit, power and status" (p. 215). Developments in APA can be seen to follow a "disability business" model, similar to the "rehabilitation industry" highlighted in the work of Albrecht (1992), where the discipline of medicine is at the core. We are not suggesting, however, that APA professionals blindly follow the medical model but rather that the foundations of our field are grounded in discourses that Foucault would characterize as *biopower*. Foucault (1990) uses this term to highlight how vital characteristics and capacities of human bodies and the conduct of individuals and collectives are regulated through the processes of governmentality. In essence, biopower centers "on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls" (Foucault, 1990, note 6, p. 139).

The control exerted through biopower can be illustrated by the development of medical statistics during the nineteenth century. Acceptance of statistics increased the power of medicine and allowed those within the field to scientifically justify normalized views of how the bodies should look, function, and behave (Davis, 1995; Shogan, 1998). Shogan (2003) stresses that "statistics as practised by Galton and Quetelet produced social meaning about the 'normal' and the 'abnormal,' 'ability' and 'disability,' and created categories such as the 'intelligent,' the 'deviant,' and the 'disabled'" (p. 69). As societies began to reinforce the norm, the "bodies" started to be disciplined—that is, educated or corrected in institutions of educational, medical, and political correction (Foucault, 1973, 1977). As the norm started to be accepted "as how things ought to be," disciplines that proposed to hide, correct, rehabilitate, or cure these "errors" were able to become more influential (Foucault & Gordon, 1980). As a consequence, marginal individuals began to internalize their difference, further reinforcing the power of those corrective institutions. Difference meant not only a lack of ability to be productive and efficient, but also inferior moral worth (Stiker, 1999), and therefore the ones marginalized started to feel compelled to be "cured" or at least to be "normalized." The alternative was either neglect or social exclusion (Foucault, 1977).

The historical routes of APA are connected with these scientific fields. APA was developed through the social demand to cure, rehabilitate, or repair "disabled bodies," equating disability to "individual problems." One cannot assume the situation is much different today. The phenomena of social stigmatization, marginalization, and social inequality are still familiar realities to many of those who stand out from normalized views of humanity. Knowledge of these historical connections and the positive and negative aspects of past experiences is a vital step to critically evaluate APA practices of today. Mechanisms of governmentality and normalized and "normalizing" views of the world reinforce each other.

Examples of APA exerting governmentality are appropriate here. The negative connotation of some terminology still used today such as "special populations" can

be seen as an example of governmentality as can the excessive financial investment in mainstream sports and activities and correspondent insufficient investment in new formats and opportunities, more in consonance with a broad range of different abilities (Nixon, 2007). Some examples from other settings: in rehabilitation, the tyranny of “independence” goals (Goodwin, 2008) and the development of it as a business (Albrecht, 1992); in the world of academia, the neglect of reflection on the social implications and ethical value of some research projects (Bredahl, 2008); in elite disability sport contexts, the reinforcement of some “disability sport ghettos” (Howe, 2008; Mastro, Burton, Rosendahl, & Sherrill, 1996) and the social control attached to classification processes (Howe & Jones, 2006; Wu, Williams, & Sherrill, 2000).

In sum, although institutional and academic discourses advance self-determination and empowerment as the new paradigm, there are several factors that create the possibility for APA to reinforce mechanisms of governmentality: its historical roots, the pervasiveness in wider society of misassumptions on disability and difference based in dogmatic norms; the internalization of inferiority by their users; and finally, the need to demonstrate social legitimacy through socially accepted (and normalizing) formats (such as constructing the Paralympics in the image of the Olympic Games and the closeness to a medical tradition). The enormous challenge for APA as a professional and academic field is to find the right balance between operating with social credibility in a world where (some) difference is undesired, responding to people’s wishes of “being like everyone else” and daring to challenge normalized standards of physicality, helping to create the foundation for people to be appreciated as they are and do not feel the need to “be like everyone else.” For this, it is imperative to be aware of the multiple factors operating when any given difference/ impairment becomes a disability, always contesting dogmatic assumptions. In this sense, the contribution from humanities (anthropology, philosophy, sociology) is essential to motivate critical thinking and to stimulate a very much needed ethical reflection. The importance of that contribution, namely the insights from a “social-constructionist” view of disability and impairment, has been already acknowledged (DePauw, 2000; Grenier, 2007). We defend, however, that the discussion should overcome the traditional quarrels between medical model and social constructionist model of disability. Both constitute reductionist positions of body ontology, as Seymour (1998) so well denotes: “Constructionist perspectives cannot account for the presence of the lived body; biological perspectives fail to acknowledge the presence of society” (p. 9).

The argument that follows intends to suggest ways of avoiding (or reduce) the negative effects of Foucauldian governmentality as highlighted in the concept of biopower that may act as barrier for the achievement of empowerment and self-determination of APA clients.

Avoiding Governmentality in Adapted Physical Activity

The use of terms such as adapted, integration, or inclusion are benchmarks of a discrepancy between an individual or group and those who are accepted as the “usual,” the “good,” or the “right.” These different understandings of normality may distinguish a functional adaptation from one that aims to correct a “defect.”

John is a good sitting volleyball player. An accident caused him to have his left leg amputated above the knee, close to the buttock. Although he likes to play and is reasonably good at it, his amputation creates imbalances every time he bends to his left side. John could work intensively on all his postural muscles to compensate for this imbalance, spending a considerable amount of time and energy in the gym. He could use a corrective prosthesis, which improves balance but causes considerable discomfort and pain; or he could just accept his condition and work on improving his abilities, technical skills, and general fitness. The first response considers the “problem” and tries to compensate him; the second approach stresses the “defect” and intends to correct it; the third solution accepts it without attempting to compensate or correct it and focuses upon all the other possibilities available. None of these approaches are right or wrong in the abstract. The possible approaches must be analyzed within the specific context and matched very closely to the aspirations and wishes of John, taking on board what he “has reason to” value as important. The meaning of the expression in quotation is crucial in capabilities approach and will be developed later on.

While the word adaptation can be seen as problematic, the example above shows that the expression in itself does not preclude any judgment. In essence, the concept of normal as the “regular” or the “usual” is indispensable in allowing us to make sense of the world. Because the contemporary world is a place of normalization and standardization, adaptation is a valuable quality and is pervasive in our lives. This acknowledgment is not intended to curtail an acceptance of diversity and the recognition that, in one way or another, all human beings are “different.” Notwithstanding, *disability*, *im-pairment*, *dys-functional* are all words with negative semantic elements (Stiker, 1999). There is, understandably, some suspicion regarding the use of the word “adapted” in APA, based on the fact that “too much specialization promotes change or adaptation when none is required and diverts attention from changes needed in regular physical activity programmes. In turn, this promotes differences, not similarities, and might lead to segregation, rather than integration” (Reid, 2003, p. 21). We argue, in response, that adaptation equates to segregation only when it considers difference as an individual problem, and from this starting point, it limits strategies to individual changes. We defend, in contrast, that the best adapted approaches have to consider a whole range of options, including individual changes if these are in the best interest of the client.

Some authors have been trying to get APA to adopt a more holistic view in the pursuit of its goals and to shape adaptation as a multifactorial concept. Hutzler (2007) defends the adoption of a Systematic Ecological Modification Approach (SEMA), which incorporates elements from several dimensions (task, behaviors and skills, environment, barriers, and facilitators) highlighted by Sherrill (1995). Difference is an “individual problem” as much as a product of cultural and environmental constraints, and the concept of adaptation ought to address that complexity; however, the holistic view is sometimes lost in the assessment of APA programs. When their impact is compartmentalized, emphasizing some areas of life and overlooking others, one loses sight of the person as a whole, which can lead to distorted and reductionist understandings. Although the positive effects of physical activity are well documented, common assessments consider specific dimensions such as health or psychological indicators. Seldom are they based upon a holistic approach that considers the interdependence of all life dimensions that most matter

to the individual. Often positive effects in one area can compromise other important areas of life. For example, Maria is a woman in her 60s and a Portuguese emigrant in England, whose favorite leisure activity is to go to her Portuguese afternoon singing club that she has attended for many years and be able to have a laugh with her friends. Due to serious osteoporoses, Maria was advised to join a gym with a special program for her condition. Because of the schedule of sessions, and the tiredness they provoked, Maria started to skip the singing sessions and gradually became socially isolated. After twelve months of the “program,” there was significant impact on her physical functionality, her ability to move improved, and the pain lessened; however, Maria had never felt so sad and unhappy since she had been isolated from an important social network that, it could be argued, gave her a greater sense of well-being than the gym classes.

This is an example of how overemphasizing impact in health indicators may divert attention from other crucial aspect of lives often marked by marginalization, like the value of pleasurable activities in a friendly environment with others where it is possible to establish affiliation and friendship. Equal danger exists when considering a priori a dimension of life as more important than another, which often shows disregard for users’ values, preferences, and worldviews. Within APA, the impact of physical activities ought to incorporate multidimensionality, as Hutzler (2007) suggests, emanating “from a holistic view of the human being” (p. 288). We believe the importance of physical activity cannot be presumed in all the situations, irrespectively of the specific characteristic goals of the activity and its impact on multiple dimensions of life. To defend physical activity as inherently valid without grounding it in ethical terms and evaluate its impact in holistic terms may reinforce processes of governmentality and create a political device aimed at the social promotion of APA field as a “disability business” (Albrecht, 1992).

Judgments about positive or negative impact must be grounded in ethical and scientific criteria, always keeping the person at the center of concern. On the other hand, the importance of physical activity cannot fully rely on individual self-determination, because the extensive development of an individual’s potential can also be undermined by the internalization of negative views of his/ her physical difference. Absorbing expectations of physical inaptitude, dependence, lack of ability, which are continuously being placed upon them, people develop their identities aligned with those expectations. In some cases, this negative self-perception can even be enlarged through participation in physical activity contexts (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Mastro et al., 1996). The contribution of self-determination theory, which emphasizes that “individuals have the natural tendencies to be intrinsically motivated and to internalize and integrate extrinsic motivation and thus to be autonomous and self-regulating” (Vansteenkiste, Ryan, & Deci, 2008, p. 201) does not provide reliable solutions to overcome the fact that most of the people with disabilities are often excluded from the control over their lives and internalize the societal low expectations of their potential (Charlton, 2000; Morris, 1991; Oliver, 2009). Hence, to rely just on individual preferences and perceptions might not alone provide valid criteria to evaluate the adequacy and impact of APA practices.

The question remains how to avoid governmentality, value user’s input, and remain sensitive to the effects of negative self-perceptions and low expectations. Some suggestions: First, APA must robustly articulate the value of physical activity to develop human potential, considering equally the impact in several important

areas of life. Second, it is important to keep expectations as high as possible in relation to users' abilities. Third, APA professionals ought to make sense of different sources and types of information, from a range of different disciplines. In all situations, the APA professional should strive to resist personal and social distortions and get the most accurate picture of the real potentialities of each person, based in plural and reliable information. In this way, it will be possible to evaluate whether what the person values as reasonable and his/her expectations are realistic and attuned with his or her potential and abilities, without losing sight of the resources available. Judgments must be made according to reliable information from different sources, which should be transmitted to the participants in terms they understand. Trying to reach this neutral position, where a professional is able to stand above social and personal distortions, poses extremely difficult ethical and practical challenges for APA.

The most significant way to begin this endeavor is to emphasize the similarities among human beings, accepting and celebrating difference as a reality of human condition and not as an aberration (Stiker, 1999). In the long term, this perspective diminishes the external prejudice imposed on people marked by difference; in the immediate, when internalized, it harmonizes power relations between client and professional. Discrimination and oppression of women, the poor, minority ethnic groups, and differently-abled people must be a universal concern and not just a minority problem. In other words "a particular type of universalism, framed in terms of general powers and their development, offers us the best framework within which to locate our thoughts about difference" (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 7). The capabilities approach incorporates this universalism and provides an ethical, political, and practical comprehensive framework to contextualize and give coherence to projects aiming for human development. While explaining the core concepts and principles of this approach, this article now turns to highlight some of the possible positive consequences of adopting them to guide the evaluation and analysis of APA practices.

Capabilities Approach, Social Justice, and Difference

The difficulty of adopting a "neutral" or impartial position that allows ethically valid professional judgments was highlighted above and focused upon the tension between promoting a person's participation and the need to counteract the effect of internalized negative views of difference. We also developed the idea that the "adaptation" concept, core of APA identity, is not inherently problematic but at times can be negatively manifested in "corrective" practices. These steps were vital in identifying sensitive ethical issues within APA. The current section aims to build a bridge between theoretical developments in social economics, political philosophy, and the field of APA, highlighting the usefulness of capabilities approach.

Standard economics approaches, popular internationally during the 1970s and 1980s, equated development and progress with economic growth. Focusing only on economic indicators, the degree of social inequalities and record of human rights were not considered relevant in the ranking system. The use of GDP (Gross

Domestic Product) presumed a correlation between national economic growth and the development of individual human choices, when in reality, by working with aggregates and average indices, they overlooked individuals' well-being. Mahbub ul Haq, a Pakistani economist responsible for the Annual Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), was influential in shifting the analysis and evaluation of development from economic growth to people (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009). In 1990, the first UNDP report defined human development as "both the process of widening people's choices and the level of their achieved well-being" (UNDP, 1990, p. 9). A decade later the same report redefined human development as the process of increasing choices by enlarging capabilities and functioning as ideal goals but also the "human outcomes of these functionings and capabilities" (UNDP, 2000, p. 17), applying the concept of capabilities developed by Amartya Sen (1980, 1985, 1987). In essence, human development equates to capabilities' expansion, the expansion of valuable and valid opportunities and the actual realizations of these in "what people are able to do and be" (Alkire & Deneulin, p. 23). This is a qualitative difference in relation to previous approaches, since these are not externally imposed but chosen and acknowledged by individuals themselves. Nonetheless, judgments on what is valuable must be grounded in basic and consensual normative ethical principles on what are the important features of a life worthy of human dignity. A capabilities approach also offers a new paradigm to evaluate individual well-being and quality of life, to address issues of inequality, social justice, and the prosecution of human rights and development goals (Robeyns, 2006).

This perspective eliminates three potential flaws in previous approaches to human development and social justice. First, a capabilities approach shifts from material criteria "to the things the person can be, now and in the future" (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. 23). Second, by focusing on each individual as the ultimate unit of analysis, capabilities approach illuminates the situation of individuals from social minorities. Third, capabilities imply multidimensionality.

Three fundamental concepts operate in this approach: *capability*, *functioning*, and *agency*. Capability stands as the potential (opportunities for choice) that a person possesses to "achieve functionings that he or she has reason to value" (Sen, 1995, p. 5). Functionings are "the various things a person may value doing or being" (Sen, 1999, p. 75). In laymen's terms, important functionings are for instance to be nourished, to be employed, to have friends, but can also be formulated in more specific terms like being able to play football for fun, show up in public without shame, or to be an elite runner even if your body is not technically and aesthetically "perfect."

Capabilities refer to the range of real opportunities that people face to become or do what they value. These capabilities are limited when for example, Jason, who has a severe physical impairment, likes team sports and had his heart set on playing wheelchair rugby, but the only option available near his home is boccia; or when Susy, a girl with cerebral palsy who loves to run, and does it at a very high standard cannot join a Paralympic team because the institutional funding available does not include her type of impairment: "In other words, [capabilities] are not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social and economic environment" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 20).

The main virtue of capabilities approach is to defend that objective achievements and opportunities of choice are equally important. As a result, the informational basis of capabilities is pluri-dimensional, considering the complex myriad of factors interfering with individual capabilities, not excluding the material circumstances (Sen, 1995, 1999, 2009). A focus on the expansion of capabilities implies the adoption of a holistic framework overcoming reductionisms of previous approaches (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2009).

The expansion and concretization of capabilities is also dependent on conditions of agency and freedom: “Agency refers to a person’s ability to pursue and realize goals that she values and has reason to value” (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. 31). Freedom is understood not only as the right of noninterference from others as it is defended by political liberal theories but also as the real opportunity for choice that is often denied to people in situations of social deprivation (Sen, 2009). These positive freedoms must be actively promoted and not just made available, given their significance for human development. Nevertheless, an important caveat is that “to promote capabilities . . . is not the same as making people function in a certain way” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 25), precisely because freedom of choice and self-determination can never be compromised. Translating these insights to the APA field, goals should be directed to create valuable opportunities and not just increase participation. Moreover, people with disabilities may not even consider the possibility of physical activities because of their self-perceived incompetence. In this case, not only should the opportunities be made available but also actively promoted; however, the options given must provide conditions to deconstruct internalized distortions about physicality, movement, and physical activity, not reinforcing them. For example, should emphasis be placed on walking “correctly” or demonstrating alternative forms of movement? Using a capabilities approach we feel the choice should be up to the service user, guided by informed professional advice. This brings to a head the tension between the imposition of physical activity and the ethical choice associated with capabilities (see e.g., Bannerman, Sheldon, Sherman, & Harchik, 1990).

Centering attention on the development of opportunities (capabilities) and achievements (functionings) of each individual diminishes the possibility of reinforcing established social inequalities, thus minimizing the effects of biopower mechanisms and increasing the possibility for positive (real) impact on the lives of people in disadvantaged social positions. The concept of *human dignity* is also central to this approach: since all human beings possess inherent dignity and are moral equals, all social projects must therefore consider each person as an end in herself (Nussbaum, 2006).

Capabilities Approach and APA

To direct efforts toward the opportunities for all people to lead valuable and dignified lives seems an obvious goal to pursue in developed human societies, although it often remains at the idealistic level. Nevertheless, if APA institutions articulate theoretically and empirically the reasons why “access to active lifestyles and sport” (IFAPA, 2004) must be advocated in terms of its contribution to the expansion of individual capabilities, it will be taking a huge step toward the social empowerment of its users. It would also position the field at the vanguard of a

robust conceptualization of human development that further enhances APA's social legitimacy. To commit to capabilities development goals is to actively engage in the impassioned politics advocated by Sherrill (2007) in the 16th International Symposium of Adapted Physical Activity.

Highlighting the usefulness of a capabilities approach, we will use an illustrative example. Two similar programs centered in the development of sitting volleyball teams are being set up in two different countries. In country A, the main goal is the attainment of a medal in the next Paralympic Games whereas in country B, the main goal is to provide participation opportunities for a large number of people. Project developers in country A and B undertake great effort in the process of recruiting a large number of potential players. Over four years, country A centers its actions on reducing the pool of players to maximize resources for the development of competition skills of a reduced number of players. At the same time, in Country B, developers extend the scope of their program and give more and more people the opportunity to participate, including nondisabled players (which means these players are not eligible for international competition). The indicators chosen by country A to evaluate the effectiveness of its project were proficiency in technical and tactical skills, physical fitness indicators, and competitive behaviors. On the other hand, the criteria chosen by country B for the same purpose were expansion of individual friendships, health indicators, psychological indicators, and the number of positive changes in the community. In country A, all the indicators were shown to have been positive, and the male national team won a gold medal in the world championships. Country B also achieved positive outcomes since there were significant progressive changes in all the indicators. Sporting success was achieved, despite not being a major goal. Mainly because they had such a big pool of players to choose from, the male national team was 5th at the Paralympics.

Country A omits the statistics regarding the number of people that gave up engaging in a team sport due to rejection with no additional support. It also fails to acknowledge the lack of opportunity for women to engage in the same type of competition, the intrusion into personal lives, the control of all free time, the disregard for some practical "different" needs of the players, all in favor of the common good of competitive success. On the other hand, a group of people with disabilities could experience competition at the highest level and be used as role models to increase awareness and motivation for others. In a conference on elite disability sport, this project was acknowledged as an example of success to be followed by other nations. This success made financial support available to continue the project.

In country B, because of increased levels of social and physical confidence gained through engaging in an activity with other people with a huge diversity of conditions and abilities, the quality of participants' lives significantly increased. Some were able to find jobs through connections developed in the club; others engaged in relationships; some others are now meeting every week with a group of friends at the town theater. Three of the athletes are involved with the national team. The nondisabled players became more and more at ease with disability issues. Even with modest success in elite sitting volleyball, some NGOs in country B were able to value the outcomes of such a project and provided more funding to continue it.

Considering that empowerment and self determination are the crucial goals of APA action, some pertinent questions arise by this example to which a capabilities approach can advance useful insight:

1. What are the most valuable capabilities considering the human being as a whole? The ones pursued by country A or B?
2. Which indicators should be chosen to evaluate projects of physical activity?
3. Which is the most robust ethically?
4. Which project is more attuned with ideals of empowerment and self-determination? How should success in APA be assessed?
5. Which of the examples is exerting more biopower, therefore limiting the possibilities for empowerment and self-determination?
6. Which one is potentially the more empowering approach? What are the basic conditions for empowerment?
7. Do we have enough information about each individual participant in the project?
8. Are the basic entitlements inherent to the dignity of each person guaranteed in all cases, even if it affects the success of the whole group?
9. Were individual negative experiences hidden by a statistical interpretation of indicators based in average measures?
10. Were the most important factors impacting on project success considered? (The relevant information is based on projected goals; therefore, the formulation of the most appropriate goals is hugely important.)

These are no easy answers to these questions and the capabilities approach does not possess a magic wand. It does, however, possess the strength to focus on significant goals and to pose relevant questions, increasing the likelihood of effective answers in terms of social justice (Brighouse & Robeyns, 2010) and equality (Kaufman, 2006). Identifying what people value and have “reason” to value, which priority functionings and capabilities each APA initiative should aim to expand, and its efficacy in expanding them are important questions this approach imposes. In this regard, we feel a capabilities approach illuminates the need for social justice across both able and disabled populations (Barry, 2005).

Because the scope of ethical values can be quite heterogeneous, discussion on how and what values should be promoted is paramount. Both Sen and Nussbaum emphasize the role of ethics in providing a normative reference to evaluate the state of affairs in any given situation. For Sen, this normativity is contingent, incorporating the possibility for a plurality of reasons, and it must be publicly discussed and reached through consensual reasoning (2009). His concept of normativity is not substantive and prescriptive, and that is why he opposes to the idea of a normative list of capabilities. Who decides, what are the priorities, and what is acceptable are dependent on the specificities of each situation. Nussbaum, on the other hand, advocates an institutional prescriptive normativity to guarantee minimal conditions of dignity for all human life, proposing a list of ten capabilities that ought to be developed up to a minimum level: “among the many actual features of a characteristic human form of life, we select some that seem so normatively fundamental that a life without any possibility at all of exercising one of them, at any level, is not a fully human life, a life worthy of human dignity, even if the others are present” (2006, p. 181).

Despite disagreeing on how to reach normative consensus and its format, both authors share the view that human development can only be achieved by connecting the goals of equality, social justice, and individual agency. These goals demand

for ethical normativity, a reasonable level of consensus on what constitutes human development, the basic conditions of a “good” life. Sen considers that to advance justice, it is more viable to aim for a better situation rather for the ideal solution (comparative approach), to focus in what happens (realizations) and not just in formal demands and rules (institutional arrangements), to prioritize the most severe cases of injustice, and to include all voices in public reasoning (Sen, 2009).

Nussbaum proposes a more prescriptive approach: the establishment of a minimum threshold for each of the central capabilities for a dignified human life in terms of “constitutional principles that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations” (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 5). Nussbaum’s most recent version of central capabilities list includes the following areas: life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, and control over one’s environment (2006, pp. 76–77). Nussbaum argues that political equality demands support to guarantee minimum conditions of life in each of these areas. For her, the central capabilities proposed are not only instrumental for a life with dignity, they are prepolitical entitlements inherent to that dignity and political institutions should be made accountable for them (Nussbaum, 2000, 2006, 2011). If we accept the importance of ethical normativity and institutional accountability to aim for central capabilities, it can be considered as morally imperative. The expansion of opportunities of physical activity for voiceless people will not happen without recognition of it as a matter of social justice and human rights (Sherrill, 2007; International Disability in Sport Working Group Secretariat, IDISWG, 2007). The legal enforcement of central capabilities, making social institutions accountable for their achievement, might be the most effective way to guarantee equal access to sport and physical activity for people with disabilities, since claims on the basis of human rights seem to remain ineffective (Lang, 2009). Another important characteristic of the Nussbaum list that might be useful in APA contexts is its irreducibility: all capabilities are intrinsically important and none of them can be made subordinated to another: “The capabilities are not seen as isolated atoms but as a set of opportunities that interact and inform each other” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 98).

Criticism of Capabilities Approach

One of the criticisms raised against capabilities approach is the universal imposition of ethical values rooted in western culture. Nussbaum and Sen devote some space to refute these charges (see Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2009). One of their most important arguments is that capabilities expansion increases choice instead of imposing specific functionings. Another criticism concerns the difficulties of operationalization and implementation of this approach. This is the main concern among academics and practitioners from all areas. Relatively abstract concepts are difficult to be translated into operational indicators, a process that can lead to inevitable reductionisms and pose innumerable challenges (Robeyns, 2006). There is some literature focusing on issues of operationalization, measurement, empirical application (e.g., Brighouse & Robeyns, 2010; Comim, Qizilbash, & Alkire, 2008), and examples of research already undertaken (Alkire, 2002; Anand & Van Hees, 2006; Burchardt & Vizard, 2011). In physical activity, to the best of our

knowledge, such a step has not yet been taken. There are obviously challenges in translating theoretical insights into empirical work, but these should not detract the APA community from building that connection. APA professionals must be aware that the conditions to exercise their professional judgment will be limited unless they actively participate in this quest for social justice in a way that guarantees more opportunities for all to engage in physical activity.

Summary

The field of disability studies has developed some valuable work instrumental to alert us to the potential dangers of disciplines dealing with the “body” and “difference” (e.g., Albrecht, 1992). Foucault’s concepts of governmentality and particularly his articulation of biopower can enlighten us to some potential dangers of the APA enterprise. Part of the danger comes from inappropriate application and understanding of the “adaptation” principles. Adaptation cannot equate to the imposition of a standardized conception of moving bodies. If empowerment and self determination as well as opportunities “to choose to pursue an active life style at all ages through participation in physical activity” (Hutzler & Sherrill, 2007, p. 10) are seen as central in APA’s mission, we need to remain alert to processes of biopower. An important statement in this regard is to clearly articulate how APA activity can positively and negatively impact on people’s lives. Moreover, it is our belief that the expansion of personal capabilities is the best way to morally ground APA action.

The capabilities paradigm is aligned with ideals of human development that gather significant and cross cultural international consensus. In many respects, this dovetails nicely with human rights philosophy with the added benefit that the focus on individual’s life assessment acts as a potent weapon against discrimination. Because the idea of capability includes not only the actual realizations but also the opportunities/alternatives available, working toward capabilities expansion can potentially increase people’s freedom to pursue the type of life they value, thus enhancing empowerment and self-determination. In practical terms, capabilities’ development values individual’s personal views of meaningfulness, what is incompatible with imposed goals retrieved from APA manuals and with prescriptive ideas of “acceptable” bodies, movement, and physical activity. It demands individual differentiation as the basis for adaptation and denies categorical approaches based for instance on type of impairment. On another level, capabilities’ expansion also implies attention to the inherent complexity of any personal situation, considering factors acting in all dimensions (individual, cultural/social, material) to identify the best combination to achieve success.

When designing or leading a program aiming for the expansion of a range of capabilities, its evaluation will have to consider the potential effects on different areas of people’s lives, respecting individuals’ hierarchies of values. The commitment to multidimensional goals demands from APA practitioners more flexibility in the use of theoretical and practical knowledge, as they ought to remain attentive to user’s input. In this sense, the popular debates over the appropriateness of segregation or inclusive practices may be missing the fundamental point: the interest of the person for whom we are working. No strategy is right or wrong in the abstract. It ought to be analyzed in relation to a myriad of circumstances and always in dialogue with the client.

In addition, the role of agency in the expansion of capabilities implies not only the need to consider the person's own system of values, but work toward its development. Being aware of the effect of internalized prejudice, APA practitioners must be able to robustly evaluate the adequacy of individual's self expectations and promote the development of skills and knowledge that allows the client to make the best informed decision. Agency is intimately connected with the awareness of the relevant factors used to evaluate one's own life conditions. In this case, the practitioner cannot ignore the insights and information provided by their client, nor can the client assume the practitioner is acting in professional self-interest. The character of practitioner-user/client relation has to be characterized by trust and honesty and devoid of any trace of charity, paternalism, professional biopower, or corporative interest. Understanding the user of APA services as equal citizen is paramount in this respect.

Suggestions for Future Development

This article is an attempt to present capabilities approach to APA practitioners. It is meant to provide a basic understand of the relevance of these concepts to the field of APA. Capabilities approach not only provides a tool to measure the impact of physical activity in terms of opportunities and actual achievements but also helps to lay down the obstacles and increase the strengths of APA field to act as an agent of human development. As a consequence, APA institutions and professionals will be better able to articulate and ground their social relevance and moral legitimacy.

The following list presents steps that we consider vital to the application of capabilities approach within APA.

1. Develop and articulate, theoretically and empirically, the arguments that support the instrumental importance of physical activity for the expansion of central human capabilities (as presented by Nussbaum, 2006, in her list);
2. Prioritize ethical discussion within all aspects of APA and using the capabilities approach not only by observing and respecting its moral principles, but also by following and applying some of the methods proposed by its theorists, for instance, stimulating public reasoning through participatory processes opened to all relevant actors (including clients and outsiders);
3. Work intensively toward the establishment of general ethical guidelines as a way to avoid incoherence between outcomes and empowerment goals;
4. Support the two previous points with accurate information on the beliefs, understandings, and practices of APA professionals across the field. This line of development would benefit tremendously from the contribution of a robust integration of social sciences in APA.

End Notes

¹In this definition, the potential public of APA services includes all individuals in need of some "adaptation" to engage in physical activity. Although traditionally APA is related with conditions of disability, there is ongoing discussion challenging this understanding (cf. Hutzler & Sherrill, 2007).

²Human rights approach lacks practicality, remaining often at the institutional level (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009) and might be seen as "intellectually frail" (Sen, 2005, p. 151); basic needs

approach is too narrowed in terms of its essential claims and undermines individual empowerment and self determination (Alkire & Deneulin); resource based approaches fail to understand resources do not intrinsically guarantee well-being (Berges, 2007; Sen, 2009); preferences satisfaction (utility and welfare based approaches) rely on indicators highly permeable to individual adaptation to own life conditions, whether these are of wealth or deprivation (Sen, 2009; utilitarian economic approaches rely heavily in aggregate indicators and on average utility, undermining the situation of individuals at the social fringes. Moreover, it entails a narrow and very limited conception of quality of life focused mainly on personal interest and satisfaction (Nussbaum, 2006).

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