

## **Sport as an Educational Agency in the Prevention and Rehabilitation of Youth Deviance Phenomena**

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### **Abstract**

*This work aims to observe and investigate the way in which sport, understood as an educational agency, represents an effective element for the prevention and rehabilitation of different youth discomfort phenomena. Through its educational role, sport supports and carries out a significant indirect preventive intervention, offering spaces and times where children, adolescents and young adults are faced with the psychological and social developmental challenges in a protected context; the latter, at the same time, by placing the promotion of value systems and pedagogical models at the top of its educational objectives, becomes a valuable resource for the prevention and rehabilitation of deviant behaviors in young people. Therefore, sport becomes an educational and pedagogical agency to all effects, capable of creating contexts that promote psychological and social well-being.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Contemporary society is defined by the multitude of existing disciplinary areas as "postmodern"; it is very difficult to find an unambiguous definition that can fully explain what is meant by postmodernism. Bauman, for example, defines ours as "society of uncertainty", "liquid modernity", and "individualized society", to indicate its prevailing characteristics: uncertainty, loss of meaning, liquidity, and individualism. With the fading of classical moral values there has been a gradual weakening of tools and techniques, as well as a fluctuation and a fragmentation of identity. These transformations that we are all experiencing determine a rapid "liquefaction" of social structures and institutions, reducing community time and space, and leading to the structuring and deconstructing of subjectivities. They destroy limits and boundaries, thus challenging the construction of identity, the sense of belonging to institutional and relational organizations which provide for the field of experience and elaboration, and consequently regulate the construction of the individual-community relationship and of subjectivities. Outlining the faded horizons of the postmodern society in which we are is a decisive task for the understanding of all those bio-psycho-social phenomena implicated in it; but only by starting from an analysis of these horizons can we attempt to understand these phenomena. In such a society, the speed of scientific-technological, socio-political and ethical changes deeply influences not only the constitution of a socio-cultural paradigm, but also the creation of a personal and identity paradigm necessary to design formative paths for educational institutions, starting from the family up to the school, extracurricular and post-school formative agencies. The identity crisis of school and extracurricular educational agencies and their consequent disorientation has made it necessary to rethink mainly the different needs of social actors so as to redesign objectives, methodologies and techniques, after having understood the subjects and their discomforts. In this liquid era, this becomes a primary need to be included at the top of any area of pedagogy, and is a task of a psychological nature; the latter represents an epistemological gap between the post-modern society and the past modern society, which, unlike the current one, focused only on fulfilling educational and pedagogical tasks. This is proved by the exponential increase in the phenomena of youth

deviance in recent years. Currently, the news is full of cases of deviance, bullying, cyberbullying, peer aggression, violent acts of racial and sexual discrimination, suicides, difficulty in social adjustment and withdrawal; among the causes there are also the phenomena of deviance, in which the most fragile subjects feel passive and helpless, and which often lead to the development of maladaptive and symptomatic relational patterns and constellations.

### **THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN THE PHENOMENA OF YOUTH DEVIANCE**

In order to understand the notion of deviance, we must examine its origins. This notion originated in the United States in the early 1930s. It was initially referred to the set of behaviors that break the set of those regulating the values in a given historical moment, which that particular social context establishes as valid but that still do not violate the criminal code. Subsequently, it was used to encompass the much more serious violations of a rule of the penal code, which defines a behavior as a crime and attaches a penalty to it. Deviance, therefore, is everything that results as an exception to regularity, and encompasses several categories including that of criminality. Accordingly, not all that is deviant is criminal, but all that is criminal is deviant. Thus, it can be defined as any act that goes against rules, norms, intentions of a particular social group, and is evaluated negatively by the majority of the components of that group (Bargagli, Colombo, Savona, 2003). Consequently, deviance is changeable and fluid as it depends on social conventions, which change with the succession of different historical conditions. When analyzing youth criminality and seeking to trace its causes and social motivations, it is necessary to refer to the study of the cultural aspects that generate it and, among these, it is important to reflect on the institutional and human realities with which young deviants interact: family, school, teachers, peer groups, places of social aggregation and, among these, places where sports are practiced, such as sports clubs and organizations with which young people come into contact every day. Institutions and sports agencies therefore become educational, acting not only as promoters of technical tasks, but also as promoters of educational tasks and agencies that can potentially be useful in regulating and controlling the phenomena of youth deviance, starting from the redefinition of their tasks and supporting their pedagogical and moral function. In fact, as stated by Sibilio (2005), "pedagogical sciences make it possible to correlate motor-sports activities to the educational values and training processes of the person" and, as affirmed by Milani (2010), they "help to contain negative factors. In particular, these activities generally promote socialization, and thus allow the individual to broaden his or her social network, helping him or her to escape isolation and loneliness, and creating a beneficial ripple effect implementing socialization opportunities and the possibility of accessing new human and concrete resources; they stimulate the person's ability to cultivate a project by focusing on something positive, constructive and concrete; they develop a sense of self-efficacy and nurture that of competence, because they allow the individuals to master situations and develop new skills, by enabling them to nurture the story of their successes and promoting self-esteem and self-confidence; in addition, they make it easier to relieve moments of stress or psychological pressure caused by personal problems, removing the source of stress or the memory of the traumatic event" (p. 35). Only the continuous collaboration and interaction between educational agencies ensures greater effectiveness in educational interventions, designed to support young people who adopt deviant and / or irresponsible behavior towards themselves and others. Sport has often a revealing power regarding the submerged discomfort of young people and their families, as often allows to identify behaviors and risk factors that could potentially lead to dysfunctional lifestyles and/or deviant behavior. This function of sport

should then be enhanced and included within synergistic interventions with schools and families, aimed at developing and implementing integrated actions for promoting well-being and preventing-reducing discomfort (Maulini, 2006; 2014; Isidori, Migliorati, Maulini, 2016).

### **SPORT AS AN EDUCATIONAL AGENCY IN THE PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION OF YOUTH DEVIANCE PHENOMENA**

As mentioned above, among the educational agencies (in addition to schools and families), sports clubs and associations and all organizations involved in sports should be recognized and valued. Indeed, sport represents an instrument capable of developing the person's psychosocial and physical dimensions. In order to implement the intervention of these tools and achieve the potential of sport, it is necessary that sports operators aim at "improving physical fitness and mental well-being, and forming social relationships" (Council of Europe, 1992, art.2, par. 1); research has long recognized the importance that the body has in a person's emotional and cognitive development. Sports activity often contributes significantly to the integration of different aspects of the subject's personality; the awareness of one's own bodily, psychological and emotional limits is the first step towards an integrated identity structuring, which is solid enough to ensure easy relationships with oneself and others, as well as an effective problem-solving possibility. With respect to these developmental tasks, sports activity is a process of informal lifelong education, which guides the person towards the acquisition of useful skills to face life's emergencies with resilience" (Boerchi, Castelli, Rivolta, 2013, p. 16). It would be enough to think of the remarkable ability of some athletes, who have suffered medium and high severity physical injuries, to manage the physical damage in the short and long term. They represent protective and supportive factors on which athletes can rely, since research has identified a positive self-concept, high determination, social support and coping spirit in samples of athletes who have suffered an injury during sports practice; these factors have allowed them to overcome the uncomfortable conditions of the injury with positivity and strength, without incurring post-traumatic stress symptoms. In addition, many authors emphasize the atmosphere created by the sports activity as a useful element to be included in functional methodologies so as to promote relational components between athletes and coaching staff, indicated as psychological and social predictive factors for the achievement of a stable identity and for acquisition of adaptive relational modes. Likewise, during childhood and adolescence, sport is considered one of the extracurricular and free-time activities that best prevents deviant behavior and the involvement in risky and criminal contexts. Therefore, from this perspective, sports organizations can carry out a significant indirect preventive intervention by offering spaces and times for experiencing psychological developmental challenges in a protected context, which simultaneously promotes a system of healthy pedagogical models and moral values. It should be emphasized that not only sport is a factor protecting against psychosocial risks, but its practice (though not necessarily competitive) can play a very important role in helping people develop psychological and emotional skills to be used in adverse situations of everyday life. Literature is full of research works that have identified protective factors to be considered both as preventive, increasing people's ability to cope with risks, and as utilitarian, facilitating and promoting help interventions where discomfort already prevails. Among the promoting factors most frequently mentioned in the literature (Boerchi, Castelli, Rivolta, 2013), for the developmental stage (childhood and adolescence), we can find:

- Individual factors: good state of health, temperament, intelligence, self-control, good interpersonal skills, self-esteem, creativity, ability to seek resources, appropriate coping strategies;

- Family factors: good inter-parental relationships, warm family atmosphere, adequate educational care, emotional support, good living conditions, presence of caring extended family;
- Environmental factors: good social network, pleasant home and neighborhood, good school atmosphere, safe gathering places, stimulating school activities, dissemination of cultural values, appropriate social norms.

These studies make us reflect on how many factors relate sports practice to the promotion of psychosocial well-being in the prevention of deviance, creating a strong link between these two worlds which clearly shows the "possibility that sports practice constitutes a training in human and social relationships, in civic virtues, and a means of civic and moral education". (Farinelli, 2005, p. 14).

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