

International PhD Thesis

**“Nothing stops you, nobody.”**

**Construction of female embodied subjectivity  
in the Spanish Olympic karate team**

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Fabiana Cristina Turelli

Date: 23 January 2022.

Domination never fully eliminates the capabilities  
of indignation and denunciation of individuals,  
because they measure precisely the tensions of their trials  
criticizing injustices, big or small,  
of which they are victims or witnesses.  
*François Dubet*

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## List of publications and presentations during the doctorate course

### Publications

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- Rodrigues, A. I. C., **Turelli, F. C.**, & Kirk, D. (forthcoming). Fighting like a girl: Towards a critical pedagogy of martial arts.
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- Turelli, F. C.**, Kirk, D., Tejero-González, C. M., & Vaz, A. F. (2021). Women fighting for their place in Olympic karate: an analysis of the 2018 World Championships. *EASS 2021 International Congress* (on line). 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> September, Sevilla, Spain.
- Turelli, F. C.**, Tejero-González, C. M., & Vaz, A. F. (2021). Reinventing tradition: Brazilian interpretation of martial arts with a philosophical background of Asian origin – *Nei Kung* and *I Ai Do*. *IUAES Yucatán 2021 Congress* (on line). 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> November, Yucatán, Mexico.

## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the processes of construction of the female embodied subjectivity in the Spanish Olympic karate team. Embodied subjectivity is a dynamic concept that refers to the processes of production of oneself, leading the person to become a subject, from where, here I consider, they can achieve empowerment. The focus of the study is on the theme of gender, especially addressing the issue of women in the *karateka* field, which is structured in the binary order of gender. As a modality that combines martial art and sport, karate is configured as a complex practice that reaches the Olympic scene, albeit for a limited time considering that it will no longer be included in Paris 2024. This scenario increments the *karateka* environment, making it more public and, thus, making the athletes more visible. All these elements participate in the elaboration of the *karateka habitus*, grounded in tradition and hegemonic masculinity, and *female performativity*, which also affects strongly the construction of subjectivity. To research these and other elements inherent to the objective, I carried out a sports ethnography/autoethnography taking as the main source for the elaboration of this thesis the contributions of the Spanish women's karate team in preparation for the Olympic Games in Tokyo 2020 (2021). Among other ethnographic procedures carried out during the four years of the doctorate course and supported by my own experience, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each member of the team consisting of 14 *karateka* women and four coaches. I did the qualitative analysis of data from interviews and also videos of athletes' performances in competitions. Such full analysis was carried out taking into account substantive theory and formal theory, which is anchored in a literature review especially in sport sociology. From this emerged four chapters of findings and discussion. The first one is organized in order to present and contextualize the *karateka* environment and the position that women fighters occupy in it. The following three chapters are focused in order to answer the research questions launched for this study, which are: What factors affect the construction of female *karateka* embodied subjectivities in the Spanish Olympic team?; What are the means, resources or strategies adopted by women to gain space or to maintain themselves in this environment typically understood as masculine?; How sports culture influences the development of female embodied subjectivity in Spanish Olympic karate? The findings indicated that the construction of subjectivity continues regardless of the Olympic scenario, and this construction is influenced by the numerous factors that affect the *habitus* that women embody; they pay a price to come to belong; they have to resist the martial culture that lowers female performance, but not only it, lowering and putting in place of "other" women themselves; they need to deal with the sports culture added to the martial one, which, since it is a sport understood as masculine, accuses women of being masculinized; and this same sports culture also sexualizes their bodies, since in patriarchy the view of the woman-object at the disposal of the man-subject is naturalized. Thus, the woman, despite all the fights, even those that take place on the *tatami*, is still in a place of subalternity. In other words, the martial/sports environment is not different from what is found in society as a whole. In conclusion, the fact that women take a position where they are so challenged show how they are able to occupy that space, always told them that it was not theirs, without permission to expand themselves. In relation to the real potentials they have, most women still believe in their potentials in a reduced mode. Not only physically, but in the sense of embodiment and embodied subjectivity in which they produce themselves or how they conceive of themselves. However, they are still facing and overcoming many adversities. Thus, even in the midst of a challenging scenario, women's awareness, experience and empowerment, elements of a *refined* female subjectivity, can be able to work to slowly reverse

unfair situations in favour of women themselves and other vulnerable groups to heteronormativity.

**Key words:** women; gender; martial art; combat sport; embodiment; subjectivity; empowerment.

## Resumen

El objetivo de esta tesis es analizar los procesos de construcción de la *subjetividad incorporada* de las mujeres en el equipo español de kárate olímpico. La subjetividad incorporada es un concepto dinámico que se refiere a los procesos de producción de uno mismo, llevando a la persona a convertirse en sujeto, en oposición a un lugar de objetificación; a partir de ahí, aquí considero, puede lograr empoderamiento. Así, la presente tesis doctoral profundiza en los estudios de género, analizando especialmente la subjetividad de la mujer en el ámbito del kárate, el cual a su vez se estructura de forma binaria por razón de género (mujeres, hombres). Como modalidad que combina arte marcial y deporte, el kárate es una práctica compleja que ha llegado al escenario olímpico por primera vez en los Juegos Olímpicos de Tokio 2020 (2021), si bien es cierto que ha sido por un tiempo limitado, pues no será incluido en París 2024. En cualquier caso, el kárate ha recibido un impulso público que ha aumentado la visibilidad de quienes lo practican. Todos estos elementos participan en la elaboración del *habitus karateka*, anclado en la tradición y masculinidad hegemónica, y de la *performatividad femenina*, lo que también incide fuertemente en la construcción de la subjetividad. Con estos antecedentes, para investigar el objetivo mencionado, realicé una etnografía, con elementos de auto-etnografía deportiva, donde la fuente principal de información fue la selección española femenina de kárate en su preparación olímpica para Tokio 2020 (2021). Por ello, a lo largo de mis cuatro años de formación doctoral, entre otros procedimientos etnográficos y, como digo, apoyada por mi propia experiencia como *karateka*, llevé a cabo dos entrevistas semi-estructuradas con cada miembro del equipo, formado por 14 mujeres y cuatro entrenadores. Asimismo, realicé el análisis cualitativo de la información de las entrevistas y también de videos de las *karatekas* en competición. Los análisis se realizaron teniendo en cuenta la teoría sustantiva y la teoría formal, siempre apoyados en una revisión de la literatura del área de conocimiento especialmente de la sociología del deporte. De lo anterior surgieron cuatro capítulos de resultados-discusión. El primero presenta y contextualiza el entorno *karateka* de alto nivel y la posición que ocupan las mujeres *karatekas*. Los siguientes tres capítulos abordan las preguntas que dieron origen al presente estudio doctoral. Estos interrogantes de investigación fueron los siguientes: ¿Qué factores afectan a la construcción de las subjetividades incorporadas de las mujeres *karatekas* del equipo olímpico español?; ¿Cuáles son los medios, recursos o estrategias que adoptan las mujeres para ganar espacio o mantenerse en este entorno típicamente entendido como masculino?; ¿Cómo influye la cultura deportiva en el desarrollo de la subjetividad incorporada de las mujeres en el kárate olímpico español? Los resultados obtenidos indicaron que el proceso de construcción de la subjetividad continúa independientemente del escenario olímpico, y esta construcción está influenciada por los numerosos factores que inciden en el *habitus* que incorporan las mujeres; ellas pagan un precio a través de sacrificios por llegar a pertenecer; tienen que resistir la cultura marcial que rebaja el rendimiento de las mujeres, incluso ubicando en el sitio de “otro” a las mujeres mismas; necesitan lidiar con la cultura deportiva sumada a la marcial, que por entender el deporte como masculino, acusa a las mujeres de masculinizadas; y esta misma cultura deportiva también sexualiza sus cuerpos, ya que en el patriarcado se naturaliza la mirada hacia la mujer-objeto a disposición del hombre-sujeto. Como consecuencia, la mujer, a pesar de todos los desafíos y luchas que enfrenta, incluidas las que tienen lugar en el *tatami*, todavía recibe un rol de subalternidad. En otras palabras, el entorno marcial/deportivo no es diferente de lo que se encuentra en la sociedad en su conjunto. En conclusión, el hecho de que las mujeres asuman una posición donde están tan desafiadas muestra cómo son capaces de ocupar ese espacio, siempre asignado como no perteneciente a ellas, que no poseen permiso

para expandirse. En relación con los potenciales reales que tienen, la mayoría de las mujeres todavía cree en sus potenciales de manera reducida. No solo físicamente, sino en el sentido de incorporación (*embodiment*) y subjetividad incorporada en la que se producen a sí mismas o cómo se conciben a sí mismas. Sin embargo, aun así, ellas enfrentan y superan muchas adversidades, lo que significa que, incluso en medio de un escenario desafiante, la conciencia, la experiencia y el empoderamiento de las mujeres, elementos de una subjetividad femenina *refinada*, pueden actuar en pro de revertir lentamente situaciones injustas a favor de las propias mujeres y otros grupos vulnerables a la heteronormatividad.

**Palabras clave:** mujeres; género; arte marcial; deporte de combate; incorporación (*embodiment*); subjetividad; empoderamiento.

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## List of *karateka*-Japanese\* terms

Term	Meaning in the <i>karateka</i> field
<i>Ashibarai</i>	Sweep made to overthrown or unbalance the opponent.
<i>Bunkai</i>	Demonstration of the meaning of the <i>kata</i> and the application of the techniques used in it. This presentation only is made in medal disputes.
<i>Dan</i>	Term used to designate grades in karate after black belt. The <i>first</i> black belt is the first <i>dan</i> . From then on, they are counted increasingly.
<i>Deai</i>	Anticipation to the adversary blow.
<i>Dojo</i>	Name in Japanese to the martial practice location. Eishin* explains that 道場 ( <i>Dojo</i> ); 道 ( <i>Do</i> ) means a pathway; 場 ( <i>jo</i> ) mean a venue.
<i>Gi</i>	Abbreviation used to the karate uniform.
<i>Gyaku zuki</i>	Punch delivered with the back fist/arm of the guard ( <i>kamae</i> ). It is the reverse punch. Eishin* says 逆 ( <i>Gyaku</i> ) means reverse.
<i>Hajime</i>	Command given by the central referee ( <i>shushin</i> ) to start the fight. <i>Tsuzukite hajime</i> is the complete form.
<i>Ippon</i>	The highest score in <i>kumite</i> scoring system. Techniques performed such as kicks to the upper level ( <i>jodan</i> ) of the body or a move on a thrown or fallen opponent. They counts as three points.
<i>Karate-do</i>	Complete name of the martial art that means pathway ( <i>do</i> ) of the empty hands.
<i>Karategi</i>	The karate uniform.
<i>Karateka</i>	The term used to designate karate practitioners.
<i>Kata</i>	Fight against an imaginary opponent. It is performed as a choreography of martial blows, in synthesis.
<i>Kiai</i>	The scream accompanying the blows. It is understood as a <i>cry of power</i> , not just a cry from the vocal cords.
<i>Kime</i>	Literally “concentration”, but it also refers to doing things with focused vigour, strength and determination.
<i>Kimono</i>	Vulgar way of naming the karate uniform.
<i>Kizami zuki</i>	Punch delivered with the front fist/arm of the guard ( <i>kamae</i> ). It is the jab punch.
<i>Koto</i>	Competition area measuring 8mx8m, with more 2m of security area. The last meter inside the competition area is red to advise athletes they are near to leave, what represents a penalty (leaving). According to Eishin*, it comes from the word “court”, such as a tennis court.

<i>Kumite</i>	Fight itself within karate, structured by weight categories.
<i>Kyu</i>	Term used to designate grades in karate related to the coloured belts, and they count down until the first <i>kyu</i> .
<i>Mawashi</i>	A kind of kick ( <i>geri</i> – Eishin* clarifies that it is <i>Geri</i> (蹴り) in Japanese), possibly the most used. It is a circular/lateral kick delivered by the superior part of the foot in competition and with the sole in the area of the toes (to damage more) in self-defence/possible street fights.
<i>Oi zuki</i>	Punch delivered with the front fist/arm of the guard ( <i>kamae</i> ) in displacement. It is the lunge punch.
<i>Sensei</i>	“The one who has born before”, representing tradition. Is the graduated teacher, sometimes more than that, a kind of master.
<i>Senshu</i>	It is the <i>advantage</i> obtained by scoring the first point in <i>kumite</i> . If the fight ends in a draw, the athlete holding the <i>senshu</i> will be the winner.
<i>Shotokan</i>	School or style of karate understood to be the first one to the <i>modern</i> structure of karate. It is said that <i>Shoto</i> (“windblown pine canopy”) was a nickname of Gichin Funakoshi, and <i>kan</i> would mean “house”. So, the house of <i>Shoto</i> .
<i>Tatami</i>	Usually the way to call the area of practice, but it also means the material that covers the floor in the <i>dojo</i> , made of a synthetic material, 1mx1m, fitting like a puzzle, commonly in blue and red faces.
<i>Wado</i>	School or style of karate derived from the <i>Shotokan</i> school, headed by Hironori Otsuka, who prioritized <i>kumite</i> over <i>kata</i> . It means pathway ( <i>do</i> ) of harmony ( <i>wa</i> ).
<i>Zuki</i>	Any kind of punch delivered with the closed fist.

\* I thank my good friend, Dr. Eishin Teraoka, for checking the original Japanese interpretation of each term. Eishin is a native Japanese who did his PhD in Glasgow, under the supervision of David Kirk, where I had the pleasure of meeting him.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Subjectivity is a topic that falls within the scope of sociology, and like other sociological matters, it can be quite complex. The way a person is constituted in their relationship with themselves is not easily understood. This applies both to an understanding of the theme in general, and to an understanding of this intimate relationship in itself, of one with oneself. In other words, it is a complex topic and somewhat abstract. Also, I would add that the theme has a touch of refinement. Understanding it as a sociological topic, to some extent, requires study and reflection. And living it, understanding oneself in a subjective way and, more than that, developing or building oneself as a subject with a certain intentionality requires cultivation and care of the self, or technologies/techniques of the self, as Foucault (2016) calls it. So the inevitable question is how something that can be so elaborate (subjectivity) combines with something that can be somewhat “grotesque” (karate). After all, combat sports in general are not sports pursued by the social elite, which in the mix of different forms of capital (Kirk, 2020) can theoretically be refined, since at least people among the social elite have more conditions to cultivate themselves. Nor is it possible to say that these sports help their practitioners to refine or cultivate themselves, since their practice takes place in the midst of intense and, at times, violent physical contact.

On the other hand, martial arts have a dimension of seeking self-knowledge. When Foucault studied Greek civilization, he identified the famous “Know thyself” recorded in the temple at Delphi as one of the techniques of the self that the Greeks used to cultivate themselves (Foucault, 2016). From this perspective, martial arts could be understood as a form of technology of the self (see Pedrini & Jennings, 2021). They propose self-knowledge and self-mastery in a sense very close to what some Eastern philosophical-religious lines do. The mythological accounts within the *dojos* are sometimes rich in this direction, and information can also be found in the academic literature. The relationship is often established from Indian/Hindu culture, which organized its society based on castes (Aguiar, 2009). The warrior caste, or *kchatrya*, from Sanskrit, would represent the nature of men who in some way would be descendants of the god Mars. Although Mars belongs to the Roman pantheon, equivalent divinities are always found in different cultures, and Mars is especially interesting here because from it comes the name still adopted by the martial arts, that is, the arts of Mars<sup>1</sup>, the arts of war (Gastaldo, 1995).

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<sup>1</sup> It is named *Marte* in Latin.

Indian warriors were inspired by their holy books, *Mahabharata* and others, where warrior-disciples were trained by masters, equally warrior-disciples, for life as a metaphor for constant combat. It seems to be that what was sought was a state of integration with everything, as reported in the *Bhagavad Gita*, or the relatively well-known state of *Dhiana* (*Dhyana*), from Sanskrit. The similar state of mind is better known as “concentration” or “introversion” among the Chinese and “meditation”, or *Zen*, among the Japanese, when the philosophical-religious form that was spreading was Buddhism (Aguar, 2009). These would be the roots of the martial arts that were becoming different and multiplying over time, in addition to mixing with other cultural forms and social institutions, such as the West and sports, for example. If in that Eastern context or in the Greek one, where gymnastics was practiced as an embryo of sport, and which Foucault dedicated himself to studying and from there on he approached the subjectivity topic, if in such contexts subjectivity was fully experienced, it is difficult to know. As a man, perhaps this was the case, but it is less possible in women’s situation since, as far as is possible to know, they were largely excluded from these activities in both the Eastern and Greek contexts. In any case, the context as we know it in the present time leads Foucault to say that the production of subjectivity as an ethical experience in modernity is not possible, because he understands ethics as a reflected experience of freedom (Foucault, 2016). It means that since our possibilities of completely free and reflected experiences are quite restricted due to control mechanisms and broad promotion of discourse that values truth, subjectivity is not developed as an ethical experience, even though it still is experience, and then contributes in producing a *type* of subjectivity.

It is in a very current context, about 100 years ago, a little less, in fact, that the art of war of the unarmed or empty hands, *karate-do*, is created in the Japanese island of Okinawa (Krug, 2001). The suffix “*do*” indicates the meaning of “path” or warrior/disciple trail. However, the transition of the relatively young martial art from East to West, its contact with other cultures and social institutions, transformed karate into a complex sport. It combines several scenarios, as I will show through the chapters of this thesis, and heads to the Olympic one. Karate does not abandon its martial roots, understanding them as a distinctive factor, in the Bourdieusian sense, against the sporting world that must be maintained. Tradition, which I will address conceptually in the literature review, few words and objectivity from the East, as it is usually seen like that, are therefore highly valued. However, the benefit of concentration, for example, that can be obtained from the martial arts is not exclusive to them, since numerous sports also achieve it through their practices, even though their relationship with philosophy/religion is different, but is also present (Pich, 2020). Thus, karate is also partially

flexible in its roots, seeking the benefits that the sport can bring to make the practice even more attractive in the market in which it participates. The apex of the sporting world is belonging to the Olympic movement, thus, this also becomes the *karateka* goal, finally achieved, although it has also faded since karate has been excluded from the Paris Olympic Games.

As a mixture of martial art and sport, karate undoubtedly has blows, characteristic in movies, which can be performed aiming at efficiency, an objective especially found in its facet of self-defence, which I will present later on. These powerful and hard blows are also performed by women, and this leads to thinking about the *type* of women who engage in this practice. Considering my line of reasoning that the construction of subjectivity is configured as an ability to reflect on oneself, a link also established by Merleau-Ponty (2005) besides Foucault, and therefore, presents itself as something elaborate; and that karate as a mixture of sport and martial art can be classified among the non-exquisite modalities, to say it in some way; women who decide to join *karateka* practices end up being seen in prejudiced and/or stereotyped forms. After all, if the sport attracts men to perform it, who may have violent tendencies and be somewhat brutish or even ignorant, by analogy, the women who enter this field would share a similar “nature”, they would be the female version of the warrior caste. Another possibility is that they are extremely well-resolved women, who have already overcome all stereotypes, prejudices, hierarchies and power dynamics, and as self-determining subjects they simply take part in what they feel like.

It must be said that not necessarily all men who dedicate themselves to martial arts will be brutes and ignorant or will heed the stereotypes that affect them, as one might suppose. However, all of them end up benefiting from a context that privileges the martial tradition, that is, from Mars. What I mean by that is that women were not genuinely included in that lineage. The martial and bellicose world is designed for men, since this would be characteristic of their nature, with women having the opposite nature (Marcuse, 2018), something that I will dedicate myself to address at different times in the text of the thesis. Thus, the martial tradition perpetuated ends up trying to constrict women's space, imposing many challenges for their adherence to the modalities. And this implies that women who enter the martial field are not necessarily subjects completely sure of their potential, transcending the gender hierarchy. Nor do they have to correspond to the stereotype of masculinized women, which can vulgarly be linked to the possession of brutality by “essence” (Young, 1980), therefore enjoying spilling over and receiving violence. But what seems to be true is that they have obstinacy and resilience, which in turn are important elements for any fighter.

Bringing together the points raised here, *karateka* women who take part in the martial/sports environment, while influencing it to some extent, receive great influence from it, especially in the form of the *habitus* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) that they begin to embody. These factors constitute an experience that affects the (possible) development of these people's subjectivities. It is, therefore, the construction of subjectivity not in a meditative state, which is no longer exactly coherent with the context we are in, nor a free production of the subject, as Foucault (2016) points out, since different forms of manipulation that affect us are easily identifiable. However, a certain ability to reflect on oneself must, from my point of view, be cultivated in the midst of the action itself. In other words, subjective development, even though it cannot be pure, needs to be intentionally pursued nowadays through reflection on actions. Despite the present difficulties, or perhaps precisely because of them, I understand that non-objectification becomes an almost revolutionary act. Therefore, the association that I make between subjectivity and karate presents itself as the first step I envision, prior to the transformation. That is, the "contact" with oneself would be a necessity prior to the ability to act towards the change of what can be perceived as requiring revision.

### **1.1. Focus, objective and research questions**

My study object is female karate focusing on the problem of lack of space, protagonism and various adversities that women face in the *karateka* environment. From this broad perspective, I reduced the focus of the problem that I identify to female embodied subjectivity because I understand that in this combination of concepts it might also be possible to find some paths that help to find solutions to the bigger problem, which is the lack of space or the limitations imposed on women in the environment. Thus, I consider it essential to work in the construction of subjectivity in a holistic way and aiming at empowerment, for women to perform with intentionality and not under manipulations, or that it be under less manipulation at least. Such subjective development should at the same time enable the increase of real decision-making power in the processes that affect the elaboration of subjectivity, both in terms of resignifications and in terms of depth and refinement, and the way in which women athletes perceive themselves and choose to perform. Bearing this in mind and considering the various elements that confer a certain complexity to karate, such as the Olympic scenario, I defined the general objective of this thesis as to analyse the processes of construction of the female embodied subjectivity in the Spanish Olympic karate team.

The objective, as well as the identification of the problem I mentioned above, is justified from three perspectives. The first is personal, or my personal experience which, in addition to being a source of the research itself at certain times and thus being reported to some extent, encourages me to analyse, diagnose and, supported by the literature, recommend possibilities. The second justification is based exactly on academic literature, as the specific academic production in the scope of gender and karate, as it will be possible to see in chapter 2, is very restricted, which calls for more research and contributions. And the third concerns the social context in which women, and specifically women's sport, are inserted. It is an arena of manipulations and uses (Ahmed, 2019), as I will also explain, which converts the situation of women into a social problem. My perspective considers that from the subjective development that places the woman at the centre of herself, as is often said in martial arts (regards to centre oneself), she would be better able to achieve autonomy (Arendt, 1987) as one of the political values necessary to determine and transform her reality. To help me to respond to my research objective, I researched a group of athletes and coaches, the Spanish national team, in preparation for the Olympic Games. This team will be properly introduced in the methods section.

I compartmentalized the general purpose of this study into research questions that arose, as is common, from the identification of gaps in knowledge. The route to these gaps and the processes surrounding the questions themselves is described in chapter 2, however, I expose the research questions here as they guide all the work.

- What factors affect the construction of female *karateka* embodied subjectivities in the Spanish Olympic team?
- What are the means, resources or strategies adopted by women to gain space or to maintain themselves in this environment typically understood as masculine?
- How does sports culture influence the development of female embodied subjectivity in Spanish Olympic karate?

I seek to answer these questions throughout the thesis, which is structured into seven chapters following this introduction.

## **1.2. Structure of the thesis**

The next chapter is a literature review on female embodied subjectivity guided by the theme of gender, as it could not be different. My approach to gender is directed towards my purpose and takes into account the reality of the researched field, which is still structured around heteronormative and heterosexual binary notions of sex and gender. Considering this important factor, I outline the gender theme that needs to take into account topics such as hegemonic masculinity and tradition and hierarchy that, moreover, are inherent to the sports field. I also approach gendered embodiment, since the body is the raw material of sport and the achievement of embodied subjectivity should participate in a holistic conception of the human being. The theory in embodied empowerment and possibilities of changing reality from heteronormative and heterosexual traditions to queer alternatives is also introduced, as it will be used in other moments of the thesis. I close the chapter with an overview of studies carried out in gender and karate, with a special focus on sociological investigations and the ethnographic method.

In the methodology chapter, I detail the path taken, the reasons for the choices that were made, the methodological resources, the researched team and how trustworthiness was achieved. I present a section on the researcher's reflexivity, describe the instruments used for data generation, and also how the analysis of these data was constituted in its different moments. Next I present four chapters of findings and discussion. Although my research questions are finally three, with the collection and analysis of material from the field I felt the need to write a chapter presenting the context of karate, which at this moment perhaps the reader is missing. So, in chapter 4 I make this presentation contextualizing karate in its different facets, Olympic Games, women fighters and also insert comments about SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19, given its continuing presence. The chapter contains sections on athletes' motivations for joining and staying in karate; how they deal with pain, injuries, weight categories and menstrual cycle; the relationship between women and fragility from the psychological perspective, which attests to the great strength in rebuilding themselves from the various defeats, for example; how they face violence, aggression, confidence and fear; and finally the different forms of hierarchies that organize everyone's social positioning within context in obvious and subliminal ways.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 focus on answering the three research questions outlined here. In them, at the same time I present the findings, discuss them in relation to the existing literature and, quite often, I offer some possibilities that perhaps illuminate a direction of transformation of the *karateka* reality that requires this. I begin chapter 5 talking about the comfort that belonging represents, even though, at the same time, obtaining it comes with a cost, in terms

of freedom. Then, in order to understand the already constituted embodied subjectivity, I present sections on what it means to perform as *karateka* for the women on the team; the characteristics they perceive as capable, to some extent, of defining (for now) them; how or where they find inspiration to perform and also the process they begin to take part in inspiring others; and finally, their incorporation of the received tradition, passing it on, interrupting or altering it.

In chapter 6 I cover some of the difficulties of performing as a woman in a masculine environment. In the first section of the chapter I choose to contextualize a little the female fame in the martial milieu, especially among men, that women cry. Therefore, I make a synthetic recovery of the martial culture and the ways of understanding and denying women the possibility of individualizing themselves, of becoming a dignified subject to receive education in the same way as men. The masculine world is dominant, demanding that women adapt and seek to resemble such a format in order to be accepted and achieve recognition, or that they resign to submission and inferiority, which I deal with in the second section of the chapter. This section has a sub-topic of video analysis of athletes' performances in competitions in order to verify if and how they differ from men in the way they perform. The third section refers to the challenging theme of the supposed masculinization of women, and the fourth goes into what I call uncomfortable situations, dealing with the uses made of power and possible manifestations of machismo.

With chapter 7 I seek a greater focus on the sport culture that karate ends up sharing, especially considering the context of Olympic sport. In this chapter I place emphasis on how women are viewed and socially consumed from a heterosexual male perspective. The first section of the chapter approaches the topic of the body from a sociological perspective; the second, stereotypes related to femininity and sensuality; the third, the problem of women's eroticization in sport, focusing on their aesthetics and sex appeal and diminishing or making irrelevant their athletic performance; and the fourth, male gaze, in its "desirous" version, which is often seen as offensive, disrespectful and disgusting for women. Finally, I bring the chapter with the main conclusions of the work, also seeking to respond in a more synthetic way to the questions and general objective that I formally launched myself at the beginning of this doctoral course, although many questions precede it, as it will also be possible to verify. I bring together in the conclusions a summary paragraph with the possibilities of action for change that the realization of this study allowed me to identify, as well as I expose my genuine interest in continuing to work towards the transformation of this environment, which can also be very empowering.

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

La *subjetividad* es un constructo que se ubica dentro del ámbito de la sociología y, al igual que otros posibles conceptos sociológicos, su estudio es complejo. De hecho, la manera en que una persona constituye su relación consigo misma no es fácil de entender. Tanto de forma general, como de forma particular en la relación de una persona con ella misma, la subjetividad es un tema complejo y en cierto modo abstracto. Además, añadiría que el tema tiene cierto nivel de refinamiento. Entenderlo como un tema sociológico, requiere estudio y reflexión. Y vivirla, entendiéndose de manera subjetiva y, más que eso, desarrollarse o construirse como sujeto con intencionalidad, requiere cultivo de uno mismo y cuidados de sí, o *técnicas/tecnologías de sí*, como lo llama Foucault (2016). Así, la pregunta inevitable es cómo algo que puede ser tan elaborado (subjetividad) se combina con una actividad que puede ser algo "grotesca" (kárate). Después de todo, los deportes de combate no son, en general, elegidos por la élite social, esta que por diferentes combinaciones de capital (Kirk, 2020), en teoría, puede refinarse, ya que tiene más oportunidades para el cultivo de sí que otros sectores sociales desfavorecidos. De forma similar, tampoco es posible decir que los deportes de combate ayuden a sus practicantes a refinarse o cultivarse, ya que su práctica tiene lugar en medio de un contacto físico intenso y, a veces, violento.

Por otro lado, las artes marciales tienen una dimensión de búsqueda del autoconocimiento. Cuando Foucault estudió la civilización griega, identificó el famoso "Conócete a ti mismo" registrado en el templo de Delfos como una de las técnicas de sí que los griegos usaban para cultivarse (Foucault, 2016). Desde esta perspectiva, las artes marciales podrían entenderse como una forma de tecnología de sí (ver Pedrini & Jennings, 2021), proponiendo autoconocimiento y autodominio en un sentido muy cercano a lo que hacen algunas tradiciones filosófico-religiosas del mundo oriental. En este sentido, los relatos mitológicos desarrollados en los *dojos* son ilustrativos y el interés que despiertan también se puede encontrar en la literatura académica. La relación es a menudo establecida a partir de la cultura india/hindú, que organizó su sociedad en función de las castas (Aguiar, 2009). La casta guerrera, o *kchatrya*, del sánscrito, representaría la naturaleza de los hombres que de alguna manera serían descendientes del dios Marte. Aunque Marte pertenezca al panteón romano, las divinidades equivalentes siempre se encuentran en las diferentes culturas, y Marte es especialmente interesante aquí porque de él proviene el nombre aún adoptado por las artes marciales, es decir, las artes de Marte, las artes de la guerra (Gastaldo, 1995).

Los guerreros indios se inspiraban en sus libros sagrados, *Mahabharata* y otros, donde los discípulos guerreros eran entrenados por maestros, igualmente discípulos guerreros, para

la vida como una metáfora del combate constante. Parece ser que lo que se buscaba era un estado de integración con todo, como se informa en el *Bhagavad Gita*, o el estado relativamente conocido de *Dhiana (Dhyana)*, del sánscrito. El estado mental similar es más conocido como "concentración" o "introversión" entre los chinos y "meditación", o *Zen*, entre los japoneses, cuando la forma filosófico-religiosa que se estaba extendiendo era el budismo (Aguar, 2009). Estas serían las raíces de las artes marciales que se fueron volviendo diferentes y multiplicándose con el tiempo, además de mezclarse con otras formas culturales e instituciones sociales, como, por ejemplo, Occidente y el deporte. En todo caso, es difícil saber si la subjetividad se experimentó plenamente en el contexto oriental o en el griego, donde la gimnasia se practicaba como embrión del deporte, y que Foucault también estudió y de ahí abordó el tema de la subjetividad. Tal vez fuese así en el caso de los hombres, pero es menos posible en el caso de las mujeres ya que, hasta donde sabemos, fueron excluidas en gran medida tanto en el contexto oriental como en el griego. En cualquier caso, estos contextos, tal como los conocemos en la actualidad, llevan a Foucault a postular que la producción de la subjetividad como experiencia ética no es posible en la modernidad, porque este autor entiende la ética como una experiencia reflexionada de libertad (Foucault, 2016). Lo cual significa que, como nuestras posibilidades de experiencias completamente libres y reflexionadas están bastante restringidas debido a los mecanismos de control y a la amplia promoción del discurso con valor de verdad, la subjetividad no se desarrolla como experiencia ética, aunque sigue siendo experiencia, y entonces contribuye a producir un *tipo* de subjetividad.

Es en un contexto reciente, hace poco menos de un siglo, cuando el arte de la guerra de las manos desarmadas o vacías, el *karate-do*, se crea en la isla japonesa de Okinawa (Krug, 2001). El sufijo "*do*" indica el significado de "camino" o sendero del guerrero/discípulo. Sin embargo, la transición del arte marcial relativamente joven de Oriente a Occidente, su contacto con otras culturas e instituciones sociales, transformaron el kárate en un deporte complejo. Un deporte que combina varios escenarios, como mostraré a través de los capítulos de esta tesis, y que incluye el escenario olímpico. El kárate no abandona sus raíces marciales, entendiéndolas como un factor distintivo, en el sentido bourdieusiano, frente al mundo deportivo al que las raíces deben mantenerse. La tradición, aspecto que será tratado conceptualmente en la revisión de la literatura, las pocas palabras y la objetividad de Oriente, como se suele ver, son por tanto muy valoradas. Sin embargo, el beneficio de la concentración que se puede obtener de las artes marciales, por ejemplo, no es exclusivo de ellas, ya que numerosos deportes también lo logran a través de sus prácticas, aunque su relación con la

filosofía/religión sea diferente (Pich, 2020), pero también presente. Así, el kárate también es parcialmente flexible en sus raíces, buscando los beneficios que el deporte puede aportar para hacer la práctica aún más atractiva en el mercado en el que participa. La cúspide del mundo deportivo es la pertenencia al movimiento olímpico, por lo tanto, esto también se convierte en el objetivo *karateka*, finalmente logrado en los Juegos Olímpicos de Tokio 2020 (2021), aunque también se ha desvanecido, ya que el kárate ha sido excluido de París 2024.

Como mezcla de arte marcial y deporte, el kárate, sin duda, tiene golpes, característicos en las películas, que deben realizarse de forma eficiente, un objetivo (eficiencia) especialmente vinculado a la defensa personal, como presentaré más adelante. Estos golpes poderosos y duros también son realizados por mujeres, y esto lleva a establecer cuestionamientos sobre el *tipo* de mujeres que se dedican a esta práctica. Considerando mi línea de razonamiento de que la construcción de la subjetividad se configura como una capacidad de reflexionar sobre sí mismo, vinculación que también Merleau-Ponty (2005), además de Foucault, establece, y que por tanto se presenta como algo elaborado; y teniendo en cuenta que el kárate como combinación de deporte y arte marcial se puede clasificar, por decirlo de alguna manera, entre las modalidades no exquisitas; las mujeres que deciden unirse a la práctica *karateka* terminan siendo vistas de forma prejuiciosa y estereotipada. Después de todo, si el kárate atrae a los hombres, quienes pueden tener tendencias violentas y ser algo brutos o incluso ignorantes, por analogía, las mujeres que ingresan en este deporte compartirían una "naturaleza" similar. Serían la versión femenina de la casta guerrera. Otra posibilidad es que sean mujeres extremadamente bien resueltas, que ya han superado todos los estereotipos, prejuicios, jerarquías y dinámicas de poder, y como sujetos autodeterminados simplemente participan en lo que les apetece.

No obstante, hay que decir que no necesariamente todos los hombres que se dedican a las artes marciales serán brutos e ignorantes o prestarán caso a los estereotipos que les afectan, como se podría suponer. Sin embargo, todos ellos acaban beneficiándose de un contexto que privilegia la tradición marcial, es decir, de Marte. Lo que quiero decir con eso es que las mujeres no estaban genuinamente incluidas en ese linaje. El mundo marcial y belicoso está pensado para los hombres, ya que esto sería característico de su naturaleza, teniendo las mujeres la naturaleza opuesta (Marcuse, 2018), algo que me dedicaré a abordar en diferentes momentos en el texto de la tesis. Así, la tradición marcial perpetuada termina tratando de constreñir el espacio de las mujeres, imponiendo muchos desafíos a estas para su adhesión a las modalidades. Y esto implica que las mujeres que entran en el campo marcial no son necesariamente sujetos completamente seguros de su potencial, trascendiendo la jerarquía de

género, y tampoco tienen que corresponder al estereotipo de mujeres masculinizadas, lo que puede ser vulgarmente vinculado a la posesión de brutalidad por "esencia" (Young, 1980), y, por lo tanto, disfrutando de desbordarse y recibir violencia. Pero lo que parece ser cierto es que estas mujeres tienen obstinación y resiliencia, que a su vez son elementos importantes para cualquier persona luchadora.

Reuniendo los puntos que surgen aquí, las mujeres *karatekas* que participan en el entorno marcial/deportivo, aunque influyen en él en cierta medida, reciben una gran influencia de él, especialmente en la forma del *habitus* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) que empiezan a incorporar (*embody*<sup>2</sup>). Estos factores constituyen una experiencia que afecta al desarrollo (posible) de las subjetividades de estas personas. Se trata, por tanto, de la construcción de la subjetividad no en un estado meditativo, que no es exactamente coherente con el contexto en el que nos encontramos, ni una producción libre del sujeto, como señala Foucault (2016), ya que las diferentes formas de manipulación que nos afectan son fácilmente identificables. Sin embargo, una cierta capacidad de reflexionar sobre uno mismo debe, desde mi punto de vista, cultivarse en medio de la acción misma. En otras palabras, el desarrollo subjetivo, aunque no pueda ser puro, necesita ser perseguido intencionalmente hoy en día a través de la reflexión de las acciones. A pesar de las dificultades actuales, o quizás precisamente debido a ellas, entiendo que la no-objetificación se convierte en un acto casi revolucionario. Por lo tanto, la asociación que hago entre la subjetividad y el kárate se presenta como el primer paso que imagino, previo a la transformación. Es decir, el "contacto" con uno mismo sería una necesidad previa a la capacidad de actuar hacia el cambio de lo que se puede percibir como un fenómeno que requiere revisión.

### **1.1. Enfoque, objetivo y preguntas de investigación**

Mi objeto de estudio es el kárate femenino, centrándome en el problema de la falta de espacio, la falta de protagonismo y las adversidades a las que se enfrentan las mujeres en el entorno *karateka*. Desde esta perspectiva amplia, reduje el foco del problema que identifiqué para *subjetividad incorporada* femenina, porque entiendo que, en esta combinación de conceptos, también podría ser posible encontrar algunos caminos que ayuden a indicar soluciones al problema mayor de la falta de espacio y las limitaciones impuestas a las mujeres

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<sup>2</sup> Este concepto, *embodiment*, no existe propiamente en español. Es aquí traducido, pero es necesario pensarlo desde su elaboración y complejidad en inglés.

*karatekas* en el entorno. Por lo tanto, considero esencial trabajar en la construcción de la subjetividad de manera holística y apuntando al empoderamiento, para que las mujeres se desempeñen con intencionalidad y no bajo manipulaciones, o que estén, al menos, bajo la menor manipulación posible. Este desarrollo subjetivo debería permitir al mismo tiempo el aumento del poder real de toma de decisiones en los procesos que afectan a la elaboración de la subjetividad, tanto en términos de resignificación como en términos de profundidad y refinamiento, y la forma en que estas mujeres se perciben a sí mismas y eligen desempeñarse (*perform*<sup>3</sup>). Teniendo esto en cuenta y considerando los diversos elementos que confieren cierta complejidad al kárate, como el escenario olímpico, definí el objetivo general de esta tesis como analizar los procesos de construcción de la subjetividad incorporada femenina en el equipo español de kárate olímpico.

El objetivo, así como la identificación del problema que mencioné anteriormente, se justifica desde tres perspectivas. La primera es personal, basada en mi experiencia vivida como *karateka* que, además de ser una fuente para la investigación en determinados momentos, de lo que informaré en algunas partes de esta tesis, me anima a analizar, diagnosticar y, apoyada en la literatura, recomendar posibilidades. La segunda justificación se basa exactamente en la literatura académica, ya que la producción académica específica en el ámbito del género y el kárate, como se verá en el capítulo 2, es muy restringida, lo que sugiere que es necesaria más investigación y contribuciones. Y la tercera se refiere al contexto social en el que las mujeres, y específicamente el deporte femenino, están insertados. Se trata de un escenario de manipulaciones y usos (Ahmed, 2019), como también explicaré, que convierte la situación de las mujeres en un problema social. Mi perspectiva considera que a partir del desarrollo subjetivo que sitúa a la mujer en el centro de sí misma, como se suele decir en las artes marciales (respecto a la conquista del centro de uno mismo), ella estaría en mejores condiciones de alcanzar la autonomía (Arendt, 1987) como uno de los valores políticos necesarios para determinar y transformar su realidad. Así, para alcanzar mi objetivo de investigación, estudié a un grupo de mujeres *karatekas* y sus entrenadores, todos de la selección española, en su preparación para los Juegos Olímpicos. La descripción del equipo se desarrollará adecuadamente en la sección de métodos.

Para abordar el objetivo general de la investigación lo he compartimentado en tres preguntas que surgieron, como suele ser, de la identificación de lagunas de conocimiento. Cómo surgieron estas preguntas y cuáles fueron los procesos que orbitaron alrededor de ellas

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<sup>3</sup> Aquí hay otro concepto del inglés, *to perform*. Es un concepto que deriva de los escritos de Judith Butler (1990), que será abordado en el cuerpo de la tesis, de difícil traducción al español.

será algo que se verá en el capítulo 2. A continuación, entre tanto, expongo las tres preguntas de investigación, ya que guían todo el trabajo.

- ¿Qué factores afectan a la construcción de las subjetividades incorporadas de las mujeres *karatekas* del equipo olímpico español?
- ¿Cuáles son los medios, recursos o estrategias que adoptan las mujeres para ganar espacio o mantenerse en este entorno típicamente entendido como masculino?
- ¿Cómo influye la cultura deportiva en el desarrollo de la subjetividad incorporada de las mujeres en el kárate Olímpico español?

Como el lector verá a lo largo de este documento, busco responder a estas preguntas en la presente tesis doctoral, la cual se estructura en siete capítulos posteriores a esta introducción.

## 1.2. Estructura de la tesis

El siguiente capítulo es una revisión de la literatura sobre la subjetividad incorporada femenina, guiada por los estudios de género, como no podría ser diferente. Mi abordaje del género es direccionado hacia mi objetivo y toma en cuenta la realidad del campo investigado, el cual está estructurado en nociones binarias de sexo y género. Teniendo en cuenta lo anterior, yo hago un recorte del tema de género que considera tópicos como la masculinidad hegemónica y la tradición y la jerarquía, que son inherentes al ámbito deportivo. Además, abordo la *incorporación generificada (gendered embodiment)*, ya que el cuerpo es la materia prima del deporte y la subjetividad incorporada debe participar en una concepción holística del ser humano. La teoría en el *empoderamiento incorporado (embodied empowerment)* y las posibilidades de cambiar la realidad de las tradiciones heteronormativas y heterosexuales a las alternativas *queer* es también introducida, ya que será utilizada en otros momentos de la tesis. Cierro el capítulo con una visión general de los estudios realizados en género y kárate, con un enfoque especial en las investigaciones sociológicas y el método etnográfico.

En el capítulo 3 correspondiente a la metodología, detallo cuál fue el camino recorrido, las razones de las decisiones metodológicas que fueron adoptadas, los recursos metodológicos, el equipo investigado y cómo se logró la fiabilidad de la investigación. También presento un apartado sobre mis procesos de reflexión como investigadora y describo los instrumentos utilizados para la generación de la información, explicando cómo se analizaron

los datos en sus diferentes momentos. Posteriormente, presento otros cuatro capítulos de resultados-discusión. Aunque, como se ha visto, mis preguntas de investigación fueron tres, con la recopilación y análisis de material del campo sentí la necesidad de escribir un capítulo que presentara la realidad del kárate, lo que comento por si en este momento el lector echa eso de menos. Así, en el capítulo 4, llevo a cabo una contextualización del kárate en sus diferentes facetas, los Juegos Olímpicos, las mujeres luchadoras y la situación generada por la SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19, dada su presencia continuada. Este capítulo contiene secciones sobre las motivaciones de las deportistas para unirse y permanecer en el kárate; cómo lidian con el dolor, las lesiones, las categorías de peso y el ciclo menstrual; la relación entre las mujeres y la fragilidad desde la perspectiva psicológica, lo que atestigua, por ejemplo, la gran fortaleza para reconstruirse a partir de las diversas derrotas; cómo enfrentan la violencia, la agresividad, la confianza y el miedo; y, finalmente, las diferentes formas de jerarquías que organizan el posicionamiento social dentro del contexto tanto de manera obvia como subliminal.

Los capítulos 5, 6 y 7 se centran en responder a las tres preguntas de investigación descritas anteriormente. En estos capítulos, presento los hallazgos, a la vez que los discuto en relación con la literatura existente y, muy a menudo, ofrezco algunas posibilidades que quizás iluminen una dirección de transformación de la realidad *karateka* que tal vez lo requiera. Así, comienzo el capítulo 5 argumentando sobre la comodidad que representa la pertenencia al grupo, aunque, al mismo tiempo, obtenerla impone un precio, también en términos de libertad. Luego, para comprender la subjetividad incorporada ya constituida, presento secciones sobre lo que significa *performar* como *karateka* para las mujeres del equipo; las características que ellas perciben como capaces de definir las hasta cierto punto (y por ahora); cómo o dónde encuentran inspiración para *performar* y, también, el proceso en el que sienten que comienzan a inspirar a otras personas; y, finalmente, cómo incorporan la tradición recibida, transmitiéndola, interrumpiéndola o alterándola.

En el capítulo 6 cubro algunas de las dificultades de *performar* como mujer en un entorno masculino. En la primera sección del capítulo elijo contextualizar un poco la fama femenina en el medio marcial, especialmente entre los hombres, de que las mujeres lloran. Por lo tanto, hago una recuperación sintética de la cultura marcial y las formas de entender y negar a las mujeres la posibilidad de individualizarse, de convertirse en sujeto digno para recibir educación de la misma manera que los hombres. El mundo masculino es dominante, exigiendo que las mujeres se adapten y busquen parecerse al formato masculino para ser aceptadas y lograr el reconocimiento, o bien que se resignen a la sumisión y la inferioridad, lo que trato en la segunda sección del capítulo. También incluyo como sub sección un análisis de

video de las *performances* de las deportistas en competición con el fin de verificar si difieren de los hombres en la forma en que *performan* como competidoras. La tercera sección se refiere al desafiante tema de la supuesta masculinización de las mujeres. Y la cuarta sección se adentra en lo que yo llamo situaciones incómodas, tratando de los usos que se hacen del poder y las posibles manifestaciones del machismo.

En el capítulo 7 busco un mayor enfoque en la cultura deportiva que el kárate termina compartiendo, especialmente considerando el contexto de deporte olímpico. En este capítulo pongo énfasis en cómo las mujeres son vistas y consumidas socialmente desde una perspectiva masculina heterosexual. La primera sección del capítulo aborda el tema del cuerpo desde una perspectiva sociológica; la segunda, los estereotipos relacionados con la feminidad y la sensualidad; la tercera, el problema de la erotización de las mujeres en el deporte, centrándose en su estética y atractivo sexual y disminuyendo o haciendo irrelevante su rendimiento deportivo; y la cuarta sección, la mirada masculina, en su versión "deseosa", que a menudo se considera ofensiva, irrespetuosa y repugnante para las mujeres. Por último y para cerrar la tesis doctoral, el capítulo 8 se destina a las conclusiones del trabajo, buscando también responder de una manera más sintética a las preguntas y al objetivo general que formalmente formulé en mis inicios de doctorado, aunque muchas preguntas lo precedan, como también será posible comprobar. En las conclusiones traigo un párrafo resumen sobre las medidas y las posibilidades de acción para el cambio que se derivan de este trabajo doctoral, y expongo mi genuino interés por seguir trabajando en aras de la transformación de este ambiente, que puede también ser un entorno catalizador para el empoderamiento de las mujeres.

## 2. FEMALE EMBODIED SUBJECTIVITY

To scrutinize my object of study, I need to start from the macro scenario until reaching the specific context in which the construction of the female *karateka* embodied subjectivity takes place. Thus, the first and essential subject to address, which runs through the entire work and has always been challenging for me, is undeniably gender. When approaching karate performed by women, gender becomes the central line of my thesis. From it derive several other themes, as known, but which I will delimit according to the focus I am giving to my research. So, in this chapter I present some concepts and also the state of the art regarding the theme of gender in sport and martial arts. In the first section and its three subsections I seek to contextualize the conceptual and argumentative line of this research. I am bringing together here concepts that relate to my study object, female karate, and its problem, female embodied subjectivity, from a practical and lived perspective. It works as a kind of ground for the *karateka* environment, therefore it is taken as central also in my research and findings chapters. Nevertheless, other parallel concepts, as will be seen in the analysis, will emerge at specific points. Since they are to some extent derived from data analysis, besides encountering resonance with my own visceral *karateka* experience, they are not deepened in the current chapter but added in findings and discussion chapters. In the second and third sections of the literature review I present the general panorama of gender in sport and martial arts and combat sports as far as the scope of this work is concerned. Contact with the situation leads to the verification of some possibilities for action in the world of gendered sport, which are briefly addressed as sub-items. To close the chapter, I enter the theme of gendered karate that will be detailed in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

### 2.1. Gender

Sexologist John Money was one of the first authors to mention, in 1955, the term gender as a form of sex differentiation (Money, 1994). However, his production did not make much of an impact. It was in the appropriation of the concept by the feminists of the second wave of the movement in 1970 that the term came to be somehow popularized and deepened (England, 1999; Lloyd, 1999). Since then, much has been written on the subject, especially in the area of social sciences and humanities, while biology in general is more concerned with sex, although for Butler (1990) sex itself would be a socially constructed category designated by gender. According to England (1999), gender is a subject studied more by women than by

men and possibly due to this fact, the feminist movement itself with its strands (liberal, cultural, socialist, radical, multicultural or global, and ecofeminism, according to Lindsey, 2010) and the sociology of gender, have a kind of parallel evolution.

Perhaps the word nuisance is not enough to express what some scholars feel about the definition of biology for only two sexes. For them, perhaps Fausto-Sterling (1993) as an important representative since she is a professor of gender studies and biology, framing someone as male or female is extremely restrictive. It seems that there would be more sexes between these two definitions (something that makes them incomplete), which can be seen in the situations of intersex people, who are born with variations of what is conventionally accepted for genitalia, sex hormones, gonads and/or chromosomes (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). According to this critique of the normative establishment of two sexes, it is simpler to alter intersex individuals to conform to established norms than to alter norms according to the needs of such individuals.

In relation to gender, understood as a social and cultural category, it presents itself as a spectrum, that is, an extremely comprehensive umbrella term and, moreover, plastic or fluid, not remaining static (see Fitzpatrick & McGlashan, 2016). According to the World Health Organization (2017), "'gender' refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women." The strong influences built historically around *what is a man* and *what is a woman* form characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity that are also normative, leading to the establishment of the binary gender. In this sense, Ridgeway and Correll (2004, p.510) say that "gender is an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference." The critique of the normative gender order, that is, which takes males and females as a parameter, is in line with Foucault's (1988) social diagnosis with regard to the study of bio power. The way to promote the framing of people in pre-established norms, to adapt people to the existing logic, would be a way to control and regulate people's lives and possibilities of action and expression (Fausto-Sterling, 1993).

Still following the binary logic, for some time the idea of gender identity has been proposed, what the person is, in relation to spatiality and substantiality (Lloyd, 1999). That is, a woman would have an essence that links her to a series of characteristics (maternity, sweetness, beauty, passivity, for example) that, although they may vary in historical time, would always be opposed to the characteristics assumed in time by the man. Therefore,

masculinity as a social response to a supposed embodied nature would present itself as opposite and excluding of femininity; they do not combine, matching characteristics for example (Lloyd, 1999). However, this conception is challenged and changed from the writings of Butler (1990), who proposes the performativity of gender, although for Connell (2008, p.136) “The 'performances' have consequences-effects on the body, and effects on other people, feeding back on understandings of the self”. But Joyce (2004, p.84) explains that:

Performance is not a theatrical free play unconstrained by social or material factors. Instead, performance is discussed as a repeated citation of a disciplinary norm, a largely or normally nondiscursive (not prediscursive) enactment of a mode of being shaped by culturally situated precedents, that in turn shapes new cultural performances.

Regarding gender identity, it starts from fixed premises and features of identity that are normalizing and disciplinary in the Foucaultian sense (Fausto-Sterling, 1993; Lloyd, 1999; McRobbie, 2015) creating gender roles. Butler, though, argues that gender is not an expression of what one is, but rather something that one does in a relation more temporal than spatial, and more subjective than fixed. She addresses and criticizes the idea of internalized identifications, which can be many and embodied from social and cultural perspectives, rather than supposed expressions of the self.<sup>4</sup> In performativity, repetition plays a central role, since “It is not in a single act of constitution or invention that the subject is brought into being, but through re-citation and repetition” (Lloyd, 1999, p.197). The “being”/self-obtained from repetition, does not express something fixed, but something fluid, always possible to reposition, hence the more appropriate use of the term gender expression.<sup>5</sup>

Gender expressions are therefore multiple, and are “done” and possibly “undone” (Lindsey, 2010; Maclean, 2017) in an interplay of individual and collective factors. It seems to be that a central individual factor is subjectivity (Foucault, 2016) and a collective factor is the *habitus* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), although Butler criticizes Bourdieu's<sup>6</sup> work, and this

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<sup>4</sup> Later, in *Bodies That Matter*, Butler, in addition to providing reconsiderations and revisions about the materiality of the body (Butler, 1990), presented a more fluid relationship between psyche and gender with regard to identifications (Lloyd, 1999). “She claims that the unconscious plays a constitutive role in the fabrication of identifications. There is, therefore, in the possibility of the subject ever being able to fully control or manipulate their gender performances or identifications” (Lloyd, 1999, p.203).

<sup>5</sup> Even though this can be linked to Bourdieu's practice theory, I have chosen to use Butler's concept, since my study takes as central the theme of gender and she is admittedly an exponent in such research area. Besides that, my proposal is not about leaning over a singular author or line of thought, as long as the theories I use do not contradict each other.

<sup>6</sup> In his work on *habitus* and performativity, Jagger (2012, p.210) says that “The general consensus among feminist critics is that Bourdieu fails to employ the basic principles of reflexivity (...). He fails to

association between subjectivity and *habitus* is not made by her. Following Thiry-Cherques (2006, p.33-34), *habitus*

is acquired through social interaction and, at the same time, it is the classifier and organizer of this interaction. It is a conditioner of our actions. The habitus constitutes our way of perceiving, judging and valuing the world and shapes our way of acting, bodily and materially. It consists of: *ethos*, values in a practical, unconscious state, which govern everyday morals (...); the *héxis*, the principles internalized by the body: postures, corporal expressions, a corporal aptitude that is not given by nature, but acquired; and by *eidós*, a specific way of thinking, an intellectual apprehension of reality, which is the principle of a construction of reality based on a pre-reflexive belief in the indisputable value in construction instruments and constructed objects. (...) The habitus is infraconscious. It is like a second nature, partially autonomous, since it is historical and stuck to the environment. This means that it allows us to act in a given environment without calculation or conscious control. (...) The habitus is the product of the individual biographical experience, the collective historical experience and the interaction between these experiences. A kind of program, in the computer sense, that we all carry.

These elements mix and influence each other, coming to life in an embodied way. In this sense, straightness or queerness as performances of gender can also be understood as embodied “doing” through repetitions (Landi, 2018) and not definitive identities. However, despite the wide diffusion that the theme (gender) has, the general view of gender remains normative, guided by the diktats of the patriarchal society where the male prism is hegemonic (Lindsey, 2010). My research was conducted in a mostly male environment where the gender issue often takes on pejorative connotations, given its association by *karateka* with sexual orientation, and ends up being disdained. It is a context where the binary logic of gender and heteronormative remains strongly rooted. The “male = masculine” and “female = feminine” are mapped on to each other tightly. That said, although there is little gender continuum for

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incorporate a critical reflection of his own masculine position into the analysis”. Nevertheless, Fowler (2020) counterbalance that “For the late Bourdieu—hostile to ‘chic relativism’ (2000a, p. 71)—transformation is linked to invitations to ‘reflexivity’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In this respect, Bourdieu might be seen as the last of a long line of philosophers who advocate deliberation to understand how they should act in the world.” It is relevant to be noted here that I am presenting opposite positions in relation to an author to emphasize that I am aware of this. Notwithstanding, I found both theoretical contributions, that of Bourdieu and that of Butler, to be worth it in analyzing my research problem. Even though this cannot sound like the best idea, theories are serving my object, and not my object deepening theory, which, perhaps, could be the ideal.

men, though there is for women. Males can be masculine, often in an exaggerated way, possibly admitting some exception though, but females, with much more frequency can show characteristics of masculinity too. So there is built into this heteronormative sport a profound difference for men and women *karateka* in terms of ways of gendered being. Taking this into account, it is relevant to present the concept that underlies many of the practices in such a masculine environment, and which also imposes difficulties for the fruition of different expressions of gender in the patriarchal society, the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

### 2.1.1. *Hegemonic masculinity*

Although in the patriarchal society male domination obviously prevails (Bourdieu, 2012), the forms of masculinities (and femininities) that cross different contexts are different. In some contexts, forms of hegemonic masculinity are still present, despite the re-elaborations it undergoes (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This concept, “as an idealized form of masculinity that legitimizes certain ways of being male” (Brown, 1999, p.143), is relevant to this study given its relationship with the theme of gender and its ability to impose difficulties on the collectives that do not fit into gender, sex or sexuality norms. Even for cisgender women (perhaps especially for them according to Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), who are members of the binary order, hegemonic masculinity is configured as nefarious. It is also harmful to the forms of non-hegemonic masculinities performed by men and also in the cases of masculinities performed by women, as pointed out by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). When reviewing the concept, they explain that within hegemonic masculinity “processes of incorporation and oppression may occur among girls and women who construct masculinities” (p.848) and the same occurs, according to them, with the forms of marginal male masculinities. Brown (1999, p.143) contributes in this sense saying that “The key dynamic here is the way in which hegemonic masculine power actively situates other forms of masculinity and femininities in positions of subordination, marginalization or complicity, to sustain ideological dominance.”

Butler (1990) presents the writings of Wittig who says that there would be only one gender, the feminine, since the masculine would not be a gender, but would represent the “general” (frequently called also “neutral”; see Criado-Perez, 2019). It is probably this view of male supremacy that justifies the imbalance in binary, promoting the gender hierarchy that seeks to subjugate women to the supposed male superiority, since “the contestation for

hegemony implies that gender hierarchy does not have multiple niches at the top" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.845). Women are often accused of generating this gendered structuring (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), however, this is an argument that does not hold up. Rather, it is the oppressive reality that led women to establish the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s that was also dedicated to raising awareness of the need for change in thinking and in gender relations (Connell, 1995). Movements for the Liberation of Gays and the Liberation of Men (heterosexuals) were also structured, the latter in possession of different types of masculinities, not fixed, but oscillating in historical time (Connell, 1995), since the concepts in the social sciences "have a capacity to travel and may acquire new meanings as they do" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.853).

Masculinities and femininities respond to what is historically established in general, following some fluctuations according to specificities of societies and cultures and specific practices within them, and corresponding to characteristics linked to men and women (Marcuse, 2018). However, the combination of characteristics understood, assumed and performed as masculine or feminine leads to the emergence of a variety of femininities and masculinities, as well as female masculinities and male femininities (Ambjörnsson, 2020; Bennett et al, 2017; Bordo, 1997; Channon & Jennings, 2014; Connell, 1995; Paechter, 2006). Furthermore, according to Brown (1999, p.144), "A relational perspective on masculinities cannot properly develop understandings of masculinities without also bringing into question relationships between masculinities and femininities." In this sense, Paechter, (2006, p.20) says that:

We may have to distinguish between 'masculinity' and 'femininity' as ideal typical forms that are connected with a local hegemonic masculinity and either its Other or something that is related to it in a more equal way, and 'masculinities' and 'femininities' as actual ways that real people construct and understand themselves in terms of how they 'do' boy/man or girl/woman.

Thus, it is important to emphasize that the range of possibilities, although wide, is still regulated in the Foucaultian sense, especially for what has the recognition or validation given by hegemony. After all, even though "hegemony may fail" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.853), it is essential to take into account that "Gender relations are always arenas of tension. A given pattern of hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic to the extent that it provides a solution to these tensions, tending to stabilize patriarchal power or reconstitute it in new conditions" (p.853).

Hegemony is a Gramscian concept, for whom the historical context was always present, and whose thinking was oriented to the practical purpose of political action (Cox, 2016). Taking his inspiration from Lenin or Machiavelli (Cox, 2016; Gómez, 2016), Gramsci conceived that “The hegemony constitutes a historical bloc, it means a unit of different social and political strengths; and tend to keep them united through a conception of the world that it has traced and diffused”<sup>7</sup> (Gómez, 2016, p.158). It is an idea that operates, however, not only in the political and economic sphere, but above all in the moral and cultural<sup>8</sup> sphere, reproducing a pattern of domination that uses tools such as education and the media (Gómez, 2016; Hargreaves, 1986b). In addition, it uses power as an artifice for manipulation, as Cox (2016, p.140) describes:

Gramsci took from Machiavelli the image of power as a centaur: half man, half beast; a necessary combination of consent and repression. To the extent that the consensual aspect of power is at the fore, hegemony prevails. Repression is always latent but it only applies in marginal or unusual cases. Hegemony is sufficient to ensure conformity in the behaviour of most people most of the time. The Machiavellian connection frees the concept of power –and of hegemony as a form of power– from the link with historically specific social classes and gives wider applicability to relations of dominance and subordination.<sup>9</sup>

Connell explains that the combination of concepts she did was taking into account how Gramsci's concept was understood at the time. She and Messerschmidt (2005, p.833) clarify that “The Gramscian term 'hegemony' was current at the time in attempts to understand the stabilization of class relations (...), the idea was easily transferred to the parallel problem about gender relations.” After analysing a series of criticisms received about the created concept, but also taking into account its great expansion and applicability, they made a kind of update of the concept, even though it cannot remain fixed, given its intrinsic relationship with the historical process. With this in mind, they present revised conceptual ideas and guidelines on how to approach the theme of hegemonic masculinities. Some of their conceptual ideas are:

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<sup>7</sup> Translation from Spanish to English mine.

<sup>8</sup> Williams (1977), a cultural scholar, defines hegemony in the following terms: “For 'hegemony' is it concept which at once includes and goes beyond two powerful concepts: that of 'culture' as a 'whole social process', in which men define and shape their whole lives; and that of 'ideology', in any of its Marxist senses, in which a system of meanings and values is the expression or projection of a particular class interest” (p.108).

<sup>9</sup> Translation from Spanish to English mine.

Hegemonic masculinity appropriates from other masculinities whatever appears to be pragmatically useful for continued domination. The result of this dialectic is not a unitary pattern of hegemonic masculinity but a “historic bloc” involving a weaving together of multiple patterns, whose hybridity is the best possible strategy for external hegemony [dominance over women]. A constant process of negotiation, translation, and reconfiguration occurs (p.844). Hegemonic masculinity need not be the commonest pattern in the everyday lives of boys and men. Rather, hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (e.g., professional sports stars), symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them (p.846).

Regarding something like recommendations on how to approach the theme, they say that “hegemonic masculinity needs to incorporate a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy, recognizing the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups and the mutual conditioning of gender dynamics and other social dynamics” (p.848). Furthermore, they add that “hegemonic masculinities can be analysed at three levels: local (...); regional (...); global” (p.849). Although the undertaking proves arduous, considering that the environment investigated by me is generally permeated by types of hegemonic masculinity, the concept, in its intimate relationship with gender constructions, permeates my work. Hegemonic masculinity influences the researched environment (in different countries), and becomes an embodied *habitus*, affecting people's gendered embodiment. Thus, it is often embodied by women as its own hegemonic masculinity or in its counterpart, “emphasized femininity” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.848), strengthening the patriarchal gender order. Furthermore, embodiment occurs in a specific social context (see Connell, 2008), that is, they are intertwined elements, masculinities/femininities and environment, which promote a peculiar embodiment. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p.851) warn that “To understand embodiment and hegemony, we need to understand that bodies are both objects of social practice and agents in social practice.” Considering these things, I move on to another conceptual connection point in my work, gendered embodiment.

### 2.1.2. Gendered embodiment

The whole body is simply central to the vast majority of things we do. In fact, what can we do without a body?<sup>10</sup> Through the body we do gender; it is a performance that is only possible due to material concreteness. In other words, it is in and on the body that culture, social conceptions, experiences obtained in the most diverse environments are inscribed. Thus, the concept of embodiment has the potential to transcend the mind-body dualist view (Aartun et al, 2020). Embodiment encompasses everything that is somehow imprinted on the body, either by absorption of what is general in an environment or field or by what may contain local specificities translated in the form of *habitus* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In any of these cases, there is a social relationship of mutually affected embodiments, simple and/or complex, where "the field structures the habitus" and the "Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.127). For Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p.852), "social embodiment may be very direct and simple, or they may be long and complex, passing through institutions, economic relations, cultural symbols, and so forth—without ceasing to involve material bodies." The bodies receive inscriptions while they contribute their writing, also generating and participating in a "habitus as social made body" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.127). This is important to be said here since the combination of these concepts with forms of capital, power and interests (Idahosa, 2019) influence the production of masculinities and femininities that are constantly embodied. The embodiment of gender that my research participants do goes through all these elements.

Although Bourdieu has also referred to the theme of embodiment (Csordas, 2008; Mukherjee, 2020), it seems that Merleau-Ponty (2005) is the main reference on the subject. He defined the term as the perceptual experience obtained from the significant interpretation of what is lived by the body inserted in the world (Gattario et al, 2020; Merleau-Ponty, 2005). The body absorbs and somehow builds itself with what it lives, performs, experiences in different contexts.<sup>11</sup> The importance of reflexive processes as part of embodiment is also highlighted in studies on pedagogies of embodiment (Aartun et al, 2020; Oliver & Kirk, 2015), embodied learning (Standal & Bratten, 2021) and embodiment of gender (Velija & Kumar, 2009). Thinking

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<sup>10</sup> Even in cases where it is possible to find limitations of physical parts, as in the case of Paralympic athletes or people with disabilities in general, what is done is still through the body. I mean that without a body, there is no person. Even in cases where only the brain works, to say it in some way, the person remains embodied. If there is no vital function in the body, there is no person.

<sup>11</sup> The interpretation I make of the concept of embodiment is from a monistic perspective. However, it is worth noting that Butler considers another direction to some scholars. In her words: "Note the extent to which phenomenological theories such as Sartre's, Merleau-Ponty's, and Beauvoir's tend to use the term embodiment. Drawn as it is from theological contexts, the term tends to figure "the" body as a mode of incarnation and, hence, to preserve the external and dualistic relationship between a signifying immateriality and the materiality of the body itself" (Butler, 1990, p.95-96). Nevertheless, in order for this interpretation to work, it would be needed a religious belief in the immaterial.

embodiment from the perspective of gender is fundamental, since the lived experiences receive different configurations taking into account the bodily materiality, also the biology of the bodies, and the sociocultural action on them, shaping them according to certain characteristics (see Kirk, 1994). Mason (2018, p.95) presents the definition that “*gendered embodiment* refers to the ways gender (...) shapes our experiences of living within particular bodies. Gender affects how we learn to use our bodies, how we experience pleasure and pain, and how our bodies exist in relation to others.”

The study carried out by Velija and Kumar (2009) with female students from Year 10 presented among its results something that continues to be evidenced later, as demonstrated by Mason (2018). She writes that “‘doing femininity’ means engaging in action while remaining highly conscious of one’s body” (p.97), which the girls interviewed by Velija and Kumar (2009) also pointed out. Mason (2018, p.97) continues to say that “‘doing masculinity’ properly means acting with as little regard for the body as possible.<sup>12</sup> These gendered pressures on action—to attend to the body or to transcend it—carry consequences for people of all genders.” Thus, gendered embodiment is undeniably something constant in our lives, something that cannot be set aside, suspended or ignored. And this certainly leads to differences in embodiment according to the gendered social view. Although genderqueer conceptions, for example, have been expanding, the binary order of gender still prevails in patriarchal society. This normative order, also so that it remains prevalent, is marked by a “feminine embodiment characterized by the body’s alienation from the self” (Mason, 2018, p.96). This translates into the objectification of the female body (Oliver & Kirk, 2015), since the ideal of two types of gendered embodiment is established, the female as object in opposition and unequal (with a hierarchical sense) to the masculine as subject (Mason, 2018). Mason, who is inspired in her work by Iris Marion Young, who analysed in the 1980s how gender expectations shape the bodily experience, still clarifies that:

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<sup>12</sup> It is possible to wonder if this would still happen currently. Note that Mason study is from 2018 and she shows awareness by highlighting that “These ideal types oversimplify the realities of embodiment, of course” (p.97), even though it is found; besides that, it is true that there are being constantly produced new forms of masculinities or male femininities that can generate doubts around the topic. Perhaps it can be cited as an example of this, styles like the outdated metrosexual man, as called in the 90’s by Mark Simpson, and replaced by the spornosexual man and lumbersexual man (<https://www.flushthefashion.com/culture/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-metrosexual-man/>, accessed on 18/01/2022). Nevertheless, I cannot go deeper in this topic, under the risk of opening too much my focus and also due to the limitations of my material reality of female, as a first point. As a second one, from my point of view, the care of appearance is not necessarily attached to the care of the integrity of the body, which puts me in agreement with Mason. A man’s body can simultaneously act as an instrument to achieve his aims fearless of risks, and be groomed.

Masculine embodiment demands bodily competence, control of self and others, and a certain unself-conscious ease: the goal is to think as little about the body as possible, focusing only on what the body can do and not on what can be done to it. In contrast, binary thinking about gender associates femininity with passivity and the status of object. Feminine embodiment manifests as self-consciousness: a constant awareness of the body as vulnerable, as an object of desire (or of violence), and as an imperfect tool for accomplishing one's aims (p.96).

The binary view always tends to oppose male/female, subject/object. This leads Mason (2018) to question whether it would be valid, then, for women to adopt (although many already do) a masculine embodiment with the intention of becoming subjects. She replies that this is not the solution, as with this they would become the objectifiers of others, they would tend to conceive violence in a normalized way, and would seek a productive embodiment (body always controlled and effective). This makes to think about the participation of women in masculine environments and the embodiment through which they are subject to. They can integrate into the field, but do not abandon their gendered embodiment, receiving, however, several influences in its constitution and constant reconstitution. They are seen as gendered bodies, hence their objectification, and they also conceive themselves from a position of gendered embodiment. However, they add to this other elements that increase embodiment, perhaps with perspectives of transcending objectification or that include objectification itself as a constituent of their subjectivity. That is, despite objectification they certainly develop some kind of subjectivity, which is also constituted as a body, as a central category in the general process of embodiment.

### *2.1.3. Embodied subjectivity*

In the view of Merleau-Ponty (2005), the lived body, as he calls it, cannot be conceived and exist as an object to exist as a subject, "as a transcendent presence to the world", in the words of Young (1980). However, in addition to what Mason (2018) describes, related to the feminine embodiment corresponding to the objectified body, Young (1980, p.148) says that "for feminine existence the body frequently is both subject and object."<sup>13</sup> Although Young

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<sup>13</sup> Standal (2015), however, says that Merleau-Ponty conceives that the body is at the same time object and subject: "the fundamental element in Merleau-Ponty's non-dualistic ontology, where the body is at the same time object and subject" (p.94). Young (1980, p.148) writes that "According to Merleau-Ponty

departs from Merleau-Ponty's insights into the theory of the lived body (combined with De Beauvoir's theory), she at the same time presents a critique of his writings (Standal, 2015). Young considers that on a basic descriptive level, Merleau-Ponty's theory is applicable to human beings in general, however, on a specific gendered level, it would not be so. For the female existence, she conceives specificities in three levels covered by the corporal; spatiality, intentionality and transcendence. All of this finds relevance in the fact that Merleau-Ponty locates subjectivity in the entire body, and not in the mind or consciousness as understood before him (Young, 1980). So, when women experience through the body in a restricted, incomplete way, or simply do not experience some movements for example, this is certainly reflected in the way they develop their own subjectivity.

Subjectivity, for Merleau-Ponty (2005), is related to the individuality of each person, what is, in a way, unique to each one, the unique way of perceiving things and absorbing experiences. It is an abstract category, but situated within the body, therefore embodied (Fischer, 2002). Subjectivity is built from capturing the world through sensory perceptions (Maclean, 2017). The experiences lived are always, in one way or another, embodied, that is why Merleau-Ponty (2005, p.476) says that “my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world.” The perception of experiences constituting subjectivity, for him (see also Thorburn, 2020; and Thorburn & Stolz, 2019), are involved in a “perpetual beginning of reflection, at the point where an individual life begins to reflect on itself” (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p.72). However, it may be possible to talk about different depths of subjectivities, or greater or lesser richness of subjectivity, since people, men and women, who do not reflect on their experiences, for example, also have some type of subjectivity, after all, the world does not fail to impress itself in their bodies/in them. What may happen is that they may be less “cultivated”, paying less attention to Foucault's “care of the self”. In this sense, it is perhaps possible to say that the exercise of reflecting one's own experiences works, in a process, as a filter for the dissemination of hegemonic masculinity, for example. While the non-reflection and non-“refinement” of subjectivity allows for the thoughtless reproduction of *habitus*. Still may be possible, however, for reflection and the choice for reproduction of forms of hegemonic masculinity to exist, made by men and women, given the power such choice provides from the patriarchal dividend (Connell, 1995). Finally, Merleau-Ponty (2005, p.521) says that “subjectivity is nothing but an abstract notion of myself.”

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(1962), for the body to exist as a transcendent presence to the world and the immediate enactment of intentions, it cannot exist as an *object*”.

On the other hand, Foucault also brings a relevant/complementary conception of subjectivity to this study. For him, the way someone produces themselves in the relationship with themselves results in subjectivity; it is related to “ways of acting, to modifiable and plural subjectivation processes”<sup>14</sup> (Candiotto, 2008, p.88). Foucault (2016) develops the theme of subjectivity linked to the truth, since it is not possible, for him, for someone to build themselves as a subject without something that counts as truth. He says that “Subjectivity is conceived as what constitutes and transforms itself in the relationship it has with its own truth”<sup>15</sup> (Foucault, 2016, p.13). Furthermore, care of the self is necessary, which goes through the production of virtue and morals (Greek or Christian), as a qualification for the truth. This care is also called “technologies of the self”, which are “the collections of practices by which, on his conception, subjectivity constitutes itself” (Kelly, 2013, p.510). Care of the self encompasses the search for self-knowledge, but it is not limited to it. It can also be understood as an experience of freedom, since whoever takes care only of others, for Foucault and the ancient Greeks, is a slave. In the relationship between subjectivity and truth, Foucault identifies institutions that produce (normative) truth that contribute to socially and culturally institutionalised truths about subjects, which, being true or not, are admitted as true (Candiotto, 2008). This follows the disciplinary, repressive and administrative character of power (see Dews, 1984) that Foucault also exposes in other works (e.g. Foucault, 1988; 2009), especially in the form of bio power. Today this is strongly evidenced in the control of life through health/disease, the “letting die” or “making live”, but also through appearance (McRobbie, 2015) and the “evolution” to the pharmacopornographic controlling model (Preciado, 2008) which I will come back to in chapter 7.

This perspective of subjectivity production is especially relevant here since it considers the non-linearity in this construction in the way that the truths/discourses outside the subject affect them, as well as the subject also being able to affect to some extent such discourses, since subjects can resist them perhaps through ethics as a reflected experience of the truth (Foucault, 2016). In a way, this is also read in Merleau-Ponty, in the subject who composes/is composed by the world, and also in Bourdieu's *habitus*. However, Foucault brings the combination of subjectivity being built in parallel to the conceptions of truths, which cannot be universal, but which are accepted and recognized in certain fields, generating obligations (Foucault, 2016), as is the case of the sports field and particularly of the martial. In this sense, martial culture and sports culture, with their own truths, offer different elements for the

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<sup>14</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

<sup>15</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

construction of the athletes' subjectivity. Taking into account that my study deals with women *karateka* athletes, gendered subjective embodiment occurs, that is, their relationship with themselves passes through the truths that are assumed in the field as, perhaps, absolute about and for them. Such truths differ from those attributed to men in a similar sense to that exposed by Young (1980) and Mason (2018), which gives meaning to the embodied subjectivity considering the gender perspective, after all, it is built in the body (see Landi, 2018). If in an ontological sense there is a genderless self, we, incarnated and completely fused with the body, are quite far from such a "neutral" self. Material reality, also subjectively embodied, therefore, goes through us both viscerally and transcendently.

Thus, it makes sense to consider here, as for Young, the processes of female subjectification, but also of female objectification. As Williams and Annandale (2014, p.2) put it, "As the notion of reflexivity implies, the objective experiences of our bodies are informed by, but also inform, our subjective bodily experience." Or as put, more directly, by Standal (2015, p.94), "the body is experienced as an object by the body as subject", even though the objectification processes that the subject undergoes are often external to them, that is, made by other people in relation to them. However, all these processes shape the person's sense of themselves and the world. Foucault also conceives of processes in this direction, of objectification and subjectification: "As for objectification, it is about the implementation and development of the technologies of the self, a 'schematized' process. As for subjectivation, it deals with the formation of a singular and subjective connection between the individual and her/himself"<sup>16</sup> (Silva, Brito & Silva, 2019, p.5). It seems to be that these processes are intensified among women due to the gender hierarchy. This hierarchy also submits to other inferior collectives beyond the binary order, and everyone involved in the processes configures their subjectivities according to the experiences they live.

Continuing the literature review, I move on to the next section in order to verify the productions on gender in sport that can relate to the concepts I have presented so far.

## **2.2. Gender in sport**

Sport and gender research in the social sciences has grown considerably since years 2000. Studies are especially focused on the presence of women in the sports world, but they

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<sup>16</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

are not restricted to that. Although sports typically understood as female can also offer challenges to women (Boaventura & Vaz, 2020; Clegg, Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2018; Marfell, 2017), sports typically understood as male impose intensified forms of resistance to female participation (Alabarces, 2013; Anderson, 2009; Bernstein, 2002; Fernandes et al, 2015; Ferretti & Knijnik, 2007; Gonçalves, 2014; Kessler, 2015; Krane, 2001; Lovisolo et al, 2010; Rial, 1998; Souza, Capraro & Jensen, 2017; Stigger & Silveira, 2010). Research is often dedicated to verifying the forms of negotiation adopted by women to achieve some degree of acceptance and belonging in the sports field (Bennett et al, 2017; Bowes et al, 2020; Cahn, 2015; Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Pfister, 2003; Spencer, 2003; Tajrobehkar, 2016; Turelli & Vaz, 2011; Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018). In addition, it is also possible to find studies related to controversies surrounding hormone levels, especially testosterone in women (Karkazis & Jordan-Young, 2018; Loland, 2020; Roth & Basow, 2004; Schultz, 2019; Silveira, 2013; Wells & Darnell, 2014), and publications covering LGBTQIA+ collectives (e.g. Camargo 2012; 2015) or exclusively trans people (Fletcher, 2020; see also Devís-Devís et al, 2017; 2018, about trans people in physical education; and Silva & Vaz, 2020, about trans people in University).

With regard to the inclusion of inferiorized groups or gender minorities in sport, from my point of view, there is no doubt that this should be made a reality, overcoming backward prejudices and stigmas. More than “including” people in something that theoretically would not be appropriate for them, it is just a matter of respecting their right to take part in activities like anyone else. However, the topic is complex and requires analysis of different aspects. People often look for simple answers to matters full of variables, as will also be seen in chapter 6 of this work. Inclusion of inferiorized groups or gender minorities in sport is another of these cases. Perhaps the first point resides in the acronym that represents the collectives. Today it introduces itself as LGBTQIP2SAA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit (2S), androgynous and asexual), even though it is accepted as LGBTQIA+. What I want to highlight about it is the mix it makes between different genders and different sexual orientations, both non (hetero) normative, even though appearing to maintain the hetero normative as the referencing point. Although the issue of gender is often related to sexuality, they are different things, and in this acronym everything is associated, people of non-binary genders and also non-heterosexual people. Perhaps this occurs in inclusive action (is it?), or in great confusion and a certain disrespect. After all, situations where equality and equity are indiscriminately mixed and therefore nullified are not rare.

Another very relevant issue from my point of view is that which concerns high performance. I reiterate that the inclusion of people from gender minorities in the sports

world is behind schedule, that is, it should already be flowing much better than it actually is. I think this inclusion is positive for people in collectives individually, since sport has the potential to promote several benefits, and it is positive for sport and its environments, which can build a more humanized *habitus*. Some forms of martial arts even have their focus on training for self-defence, which unfortunately, given the many violent attacks that LGBTQIA+ people suffer, could deserve the attention of such minorities and be developed with them in mind. However, the context of high competition has many peculiarities. It poses several challenges to anyone who conforms to normative gender forms and wants to “scale up”. It is recorded historically how women had to fight to get their space in Olympic sports. Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the restorer of the Olympic Games, makes clear in his “Olympic Ideas” how he saw women as completely unfit for competition, and that it would be absurd to have to structure specific categories for them to compete, since they could not compete against men. The widespread idea of “sport for all” considered “all” only to men, implying the understanding of women as an inferior category of human beings, which served to literally “crown the winners” (De Coubertin, 1973). Alice Milliat faced years of arduous battle until she managed to insert women into Olympic competitions. She needed to organize Women's Games in parallel to the Olympic Games and demonstrate how the number of women was relevant (about 100 women from five different countries in the first edition, competing especially in athletics) as well as their capacity (Carpentier, 2018). Carpentier (2018, p.61-62) explains that

(Alice Milliat founded) the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI—International Women’s Sport Federation), in 1921, in order to unite women’s sports movements around the world. As President of the FSFI she organised four editions of the Women’s World Games between 1922 and 1934. Milliat’s main goal for these organisations was to develop women’s sport and organise competitions for sportswomen in a society which equated sport with virility, strength and courage, that is, with men. Faced with determined opposition from the male-dominated world of international sport and the more conservative, misogynist and often anti-feminist sections of society, she employed a wide variety of strategies to get her message heard. Nevertheless, the positions Milliat adopted and the way she tackled the obstacles her opponents put in her way can only be truly understood in the light of her feminist ideals and links with France’s First-wave feminist movement.

Ironically, on Women's Day (March 8th) of this year (2021), a statue of Alice Milliat was erected in the building of the French National Olympic Committee in Paris, commemorating

100 years of the Women's Games, with the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) himself sending his greetings.<sup>17</sup>

I relate these historical facts to illustrate especially Baron de Coubertin's resistance to structuring categories for the Games, that is, the inclusion of women would “mess everything up”. But in fact a reorganization was necessary, and from my point of view, the inclusion of people not identified by normative genders in elite competition, and in other competitive forms probably, requires a restructuring of categories capable of transcending binary. It should not be about fitting people in pre-established and normative schemas, but adapt schemas to people's reality. If we are able to restructure entire languages, “messaging up” the language, it is certainly possible to restructure competitive sport.<sup>18</sup> Differences in sexual orientations obviously do not require any of this (even though there does exist *Gay Games*. See Camargo, 2012), but gender transits seem to require adapting the sport to the new reality. The theme is full of variables, as I mentioned, but they need to be seen. The hormonal issue is now very controversial, especially with regard to testosterone levels, but this is just one factor and not the only one that should be looked at. In order to guarantee some level of formal equality of chances, as proposed by the IOC, the material reality needs to be taken into account for competitions, since the best and highest physical power is the raw material of this context (Devine, 2021). I understand and imagine that the decision to carry out the sexual/gender transition, involving surgical intervention and submission to hormonal treatments, is very hard, but perhaps also a source of relief from suffering given by inadequacy. However, this does not seem to be the only reason that especially lead people born under the male sex to make the sex/gender transition, even though there are many comments that can present themselves as disrespectful and prejudiced towards trans people. But, unfortunately, it seems to be that many people born as men make the (different levels of) transition to avail themselves of the privileges that their material reality can encounter when performing as or against women.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dw.com/pt-br/h%C3%A1-100-anos-jogos-ol%C3%ADmpicos-femininos-se-tornavam-realidade/a-56965224>, accessed on 19/07/2021.

<sup>18</sup> I consider it is fair to mention that one of the supervisors of this work sees the situation differently and thinks it is appropriate to include the person in the category they identify with, no matter what.

<sup>19</sup> J. K. Rowling has faced serious criticism for expressing her opinion on gender and sex issues. Among her arguments, I believe that there is sense in what she says especially in relation to the exclusive experiences that the female material reality provides, never attainable by people in transition, and which are irreplaceable in the (sociocultural and biological) construction of a girl/woman. The experiences of the menstrual cycle, for example, are not simulable, as is pregnancy, and also the completely undesirable different forms of harassment that girls and women face. The latter are not unanimous among all girls and women, but are much more frequent than among boys and men. <https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/>, accessed on 19/07/2021.

Some cisgender men, in an inclusive attitude, do not consider the competition of trans women alongside cisgender women to be a problem. In this case, however, these men cannot let go of their material reality to understand why cisgender women are dissatisfied with the situation.

So, in either of the two situations I have just described, and in others involving different genders, I think that when it comes to competition, it is fair for non-binary people and for binary people that they compete as close to formal equality of chances as possible, that is, in specific categories. After all, an inclusive practice for trans people cannot become an exclusive practice for (cisgender) women. As I said, this does not apply to training routines or sports practices in general, where everyone can only benefit from diversity and inclusion. An action that goes in the direction of inclusion and that presents itself as positive, in addition to being necessary, is the “Pride House Tokyo Legacy”<sup>20</sup>, which opened in the host country of the Olympic Games, a very conservative country, hence the achievement. It remains to be seen whether the initiative will be maintained in a genuine way, or if it is a political strategy, as the whole world was momentarily watching Japan. However, the IOC also included, probably rashly, one and the first trans woman athlete to participate in the Olympic Games. She participated in the female weight lifting category, which represents the frustration of many women, ironically ignored (see Devine, 2021), as one-woman athlete expressed: “A man cannot become a woman by lowering his testosterone. Women's rights must not end where some men's feelings begin”<sup>21</sup>. The trans athlete is not a “man” as the cis athlete expresses in her indignation, but it is understandable that the latter feels a certain degree of deception and sees it as disrespect for women’s sport. In short, it is necessary to rethink the binary gender model, and also the staticity of sport and its traditions. Several concepts presented here are configured as dynamic, but sport maintains a fixed structure that perhaps should be rethought and reformulated.

Undoubtedly, the theme presented impacts the construction of subjectivity of all the people involved, but it is worth noting how women are affected again. Although this subject is very relevant, my study is done under the binary logic of gender, as I mentioned. Considering female participation in sport in general, women usually need to deal with different

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<sup>20</sup> <https://pridehouse.jp/en/>, accessed on 19/07/2021.

<sup>21</sup> Information obtained from: <https://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/vida-e-cidadania/atletas-trans-olimpiadas-homens-biologicos-modalidades-femininas-primeira-vez/>, accessed on 07/19/2021. With translation from Portuguese to English mine. The athlete also expresses indignation because surgical intervention is not required in trans athletes, being allowed, therefore, to keep the genitalia and only demonstrate stable testosterone levels below 10 nanomoles per litre for one year and declaration of identification as a woman for four years, as a minimum. The IOC does not impose restrictions on people born to the female sex who identify themselves as male.

stereotypes, since the sports field is understood as a male preserve (Matthews, 2016; Theberge, 1985) and a masculine ritual (Tjonndal, 2019). Although some scholars perceive changes in this regard, and that sport certainly has its positive sides, its negatives are also quite well demarcated (Dashper & Fletcher, 2013; Musto & McGann, 2016; Theberge, 1985). The number of women in different sports and countries is much higher, as reported in the studies listed above, who are still faced with the reality of "sites for the promulgation of discourses stressing men's unique, heroic qualities" (Jakubowska, Channon & Matthews, 2016, p.413), with their "culture of power" (Glenn & King-Watkins, 2019). The environment is structured so that male's dominance is understood as natural and it is lawful and even encouraged that forms of hegemonic masculinity are practiced (Anderson, 2009; Hargreaves, 1986b). Walker and Bopp (2011, p.52-53) add that

masculine hegemony is the acceptance, widely found in Western society, that men have "rights" to authority, and, therefore, it is only natural that men are overrepresented in positions of leadership. This argument legitimizes and naturalizes the role of men as leaders in all realms of sport, including both women's and men's sports. Masculine hegemony is also used to justify the underrepresentation of women by suggesting that such underrepresentation is the "natural" state of sports.

If society has become "too civilized" and full of "care" towards "inferior" groups, "macho" style men find in sport an environment where they can "be themselves" and where the promotion of patriarchy is lawful (Phipps, 2020). And if women participate in such environments, or are designated to specific areas within sport for those who are supposedly not fully competent (Lev & Hertzog, 2017; Stoddart, 2010; Velija & Hughes, 2019), this is, in any case, due to male permission. In this sense, Walker and Bopp (2011, p.53) report that "Feminist cultural studies have suggested that sport continues to support the ideology of male hegemony through the continuous marginalizing and trivializing of women in sport", including through media coverage made of women's sport (Couture, 2016; Delorme & Pressland, 2016; Dunne, 2017; Hovden & Tjonndal, 2019; Khomutova & Channon, 2015; Quayle et al, 2019; Theberge, 1985; Toffoletti, 2016).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mutz and Meier (2016) found something different in their study: "Against expectations, gender differences do not figure in this: the attractiveness of male soccer players is equally important for popularity as it is of female soccer players" (p. 567). However, the data collection carried out by them presents a certain peculiarity that is perhaps worth taking into account: "The popularity of athletes can be illustrated by various indicators. In addition to survey data, specific demand indicators such as visitor numbers and viewing figures, but also fan article sales figures have been used in sport economics (cf. Kalter, 1999). In the study at hand, the popularity of the celebrity was measured by the frequency with which said person is looked up on the Internet search engine Google. We collected the Google search

Media coverage reinforces the main stereotype of sports culture in relation to women's sports, the sexualization of women's bodies. Athletes often correspond to emphasized femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) because they experience conflicts “between their feminine and athletic roles” (Theberge, 1985, p.198). And if they do not, often the Federations that administer the sport want to show off women's bodies/femininity through their uniforms.<sup>23</sup> An example of this is the case of female boxing that became an Olympic sport in 2012, with the proposal to dress fighters in skirts (Tjonndal, 2016; 2017). Joncheray, Level and Richard (2014), though, report the same as Theberge (conflicted roles) among female rugby players, and what is also relevant here is the character and tradition of male sport that rugby possesses. Therefore, women seek strategies to deal with another important problem of female participation in sports, in this case, especially of those perceived as male, which is the supposed masculinization of female athletes (Phipps, 2020). DiCarlo (2016), who investigated mixed-sex ice hockey, exposes that “female athletes who play traditionally male dominated sports, in particular, may not be free to construct any version of identity they desire; identity construction is thus influenced by a number of micro- and macro-social processes” (p.1365). This can lead women to correspond and comply with the normativity, possibly because they assume as truth the discourses they are submitted to (Foucault, 2016):

The women interviewed demonstrated that the sporting culture of ice hockey is a site – where these women were, at times, complicit in following – for reaffirming beliefs not only regarding the sex binary and gender logic, but also concerning the promotion of a hierarchical ranking of the sexes and the maintenance of heterosexuality (DiCarlo, 2016, p.1371).

The problem of masculinization appears in the literature, but it often presents a historical perspective that seems to consider that this is now overcome, given the advances in feminism and gender studies (see for example Simpson, 2001; Sutton, 2009). In some cases, it appears to be approached as the construction of new forms of femininity (for example, Channon & Phipps, 2017), which makes a lot of sense, but it does not seem to be understood that way by most people. Thus, I think that the problem has not been overcome and is related to another point that is normally seen as belonging to the past, the occupation of sport, that is,

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requests for male and female players from six national teams for the period of the last men's and women's UEFA” (p.572).

<sup>23</sup> This can be seen in the fine that the European Handball Federation imposed on beach handball players who refused to wear bikinis in one of their games. <https://www.dw.com/es/multan-a-jugadoras-noruegas-de-balonmano-de-playa-por-negarse-a-usar-bikini/a-58576724>, accessed on 29/07/2021.

the number of places occupied by women continues to be lower (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Litchfield, 2015; Melo & Rubio, 2017; Pfister, 2003; Walker & Bopp, 2011). Despite the fact that they are able to demonstrate adequacy of their performances in a similar line to men's according to Mason (2018), women are in a smaller number from the athlete positions to the managerial positions. All these elements point to a way of doing gender in sport that is still very challenging, at least for those who are not at the top of the gender hierarchy, performing forms of hegemonic masculinities. However, despite all this it seems that the sporting world has something to offer, either in terms of embodiment, or in terms of the development of subjectivities (resulting from both delight and difficulties). Women aspire to belong to the sports field (Mennesson, 2000), they do, and even enter the martial world, a place that has always been strictly male. In the next section I address exactly this point.

### **2.3. Gender in martial arts and combat sports**

The research in martial arts and combat sports<sup>24</sup>, within the social sciences, taking into account the gender topic, have been emerging increasingly (Carlsson, 2017; Channon, 2013; 2018; Channon & Jennings, 2013; 2014; Channon & Matthews, 2015; Channon & Phipps, 2017; Follo, 2012; Guérandel & Mennesson, 2007; Guthrie, 1995; Hovden & Tjonndal, 2019; Jakubowska, Channon & Matthews, 2016; Maclean, 2015; 2016; 2019; Maor, 2018; Mennesson, 2000; Mierzwinski, Velija & Malcolm, 2014; Salvini, 2017; Tjonndal, 2016; 2017; 2019). Women take part in this context, however, they are not exempt from various oppositions to access, in fact, quite the opposite. The martial world and combat practices in general, perhaps more intensely than the sporting field, is understood as a male property, given that it is a place of violent performances (Mierzwinski, Velija & Malcolm, 2014; Wacquant, 2002). Thus, as women inhabit spaces not designed for them, considered, on the contrary, inappropriate for them, they force the restructuring of such spaces in a very positive sense (Channon & Jennings, 2014).

However, even though this sounds simple and effective, it involves a series of quite complex factors and many difficulties, especially for women who become the protagonists of change in the “patriarchal orthodoxies” (Channon & Jennings, 2014, p.779; see also Channon & Matthews, 2015; and Phipps, 2020). Taking attention away, or only partially removing it from

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<sup>24</sup> Martial Arts and Combat Sports (MACS), “an inclusive, triadic model encompassing competition-oriented combat sports, military/civilian self-defence systems and traditionalist or non-competitive martial arts, as well as activities straddling these boundaries” (Channon & Jennings, 2014, p.774).

men, certainly does not please them. Hence, they present the most negative reactions possible. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) warn that exercising hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily simple for men. They say that “Without treating privileged men as objects of pity, we should recognize that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily translate into a satisfying experience of life” (p.852). I purposely use the verb “to warn” here, as I understand that if achieving full hegemonic masculinity in their territory, dominant, triumphant costs a price and demands cultivation from the men who achieve it, they certainly do not want to give it up. In other words, this needs to be known and women must proceed with caution. Men who perform hegemonic forms of masculinity will not be willing to admit that women traditionally conceived as “fragile maidens” in their “civilized bodies” (Mierzwinski, Velija & Malcolm, 2014, p.66) can be responsible for/protectors of themselves. This female capacity places women in a more complete subjective relationship with themselves, to the detriment of an objectifying male surveillance/care.

And what about man's relationship with his own role as protector, his preparation to protect by forging the body as a weapon (Mierzwinski, Velija & Malcolm, 2014)? If the woman deprives him of this function, where does he find his “satisfying experience of life”? The relationship with the world, with others and with oneself of possession, exploration, domination, in short, of objectification, cannot result in a fully and deeply satisfying experience. Thus, as there seems to be difficulty in finding other forms of satisfaction, often the reactions to female “invasion” into previously masculine territories become hostile, perpetuating “gender as a cultural code”<sup>25</sup> (Tjonndal, 2019, p.88) for the maintenance of male hierarchical privilege. Women are asked about their intentions (as if they were obsessed with

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<sup>25</sup> “The cultural coding of gender is based on an understanding of gender as socially constructed in the relationship between masculinity and femininity, categories which stem from social and cultural interpretations of sexed bodies. Masculinity and femininity are therefore relational categories constructed as a dichotomy and mutually exclusive” (Tjonndal, 2019, p.88). It is worth highlighting that “gender as a cultural code” structures itself based on understandings supported in the normative. It means that ideally there would be only masculinity and femininity, and more than that, the attributes that characterizes a man would be not compatible with the ones that characterizes a woman. So, a man would perform as strong, tough, protective, and not combining this with sensitiveness, weakness, vulnerability. The opposite is valid for a woman. This helps to explain why when women are accused of being masculinised this is clearly an insult. To this perspective, they are not making an achievement on mixing gender characteristics, but they are being odd. In the same direction, when they receive the male model to follow it does not happen in order to pursue a greater development for the woman. From my point of view, among other goals (like aiming for victory), this is about the quest for what is understood as the good/right way of doing things, which is not the feminine one. So they should go through changes in order to improve, and I risk to say that even when they change, they are still seen as not perfectly good/right, because by performing in life as women they are not seen as truly strong or competent. In other words, they are not taken seriously and are seen just as odd women, breaking normative schemes and bringing trouble. They need to adapt to space/*habitus*/field but it practically does not adapt to them.

affective relationships) when entering such environments (Mierzwinski, Velija & Malcolm, 2014); accused of being masculine, they have their sexual orientation questioned (Hargreaves, 1986b; Roth & Basow, 2004); they are not trained with the same care that men are, either being physically required like men (Channon & Jennings, 2013; Guérandel & Mennesson, 2007), or receiving training that considers their specificities, and end up having the performance always qualified as inferior (Tjonndal, 2016). They can also be ridiculed (Hargreaves, 1986b; Mierzwinski, Velija & Malcolm, 2014) and suffer exclusion, discrimination, harassment or sexual abuse, as highlighted by Tjonndal (2019, p.87):

Both female coaches and boxers struggle to be taken seriously in their sporting practices. For women coaches, a central challenge is being accepted and respected as “real” and capable coaches with valuable knowledge and experience in a male dominated sport. Women boxers on the other hand, are often subjected to unequal power relations with older male coaches. As expressed by the interviewed boxers, some men take advantage of these gendered power relations in terms of practices of exclusion, discrimination, and in some cases, sexual abuse.

Ridiculousness occupies a prominent place, as it is configured as a tool for women's control in relation to the shame and embarrassment it triggers and, therefore, restrains them in their actions (Mierzwinski, Velija & Malcolm, 2014). However, although many abandon the practices, others continue to want to integrate into the martial context. In fact, MACS have a lot to offer women, especially with regard to fostering an ability to move literately aligned with physical feminism (Roth & Basow, 2004), which I think needs to be done through embodiment that really transcends dichotomies, empowering the whole person. In the next three subtopics I go on to address what I consider to interfere with, intercepting or extending, the potential of martial arts and combat sports for women and people from other minorities.

### 2.3.1. *Tradition and hierarchy*

Even though karate is classified as a combat sport, that it is a “codified, institutionally governed sporting discipline” (Channon & Jennings, 2014, p.774) and is included among the Olympic modalities, it originates and maintains roots in a martial art. It is possible to find several *dojos* that definitely do not adhere to the competitive world of sport, but remain spaces for the cultivation of warrior art. The martial arts, as is well known, have a very strong link with their eastern tradition and are structured in an explicitly hierarchical way, as shown

by the belts, representative of *kyu* and *dan*. *Dojos*/gyms dedicated to competition generally do not completely abandon their martial roots and combine them with the sport. The sport presents differences in relation to the martial arts, but in the aspect of tradition, each one with its own, the differences are not so evident. Sport's definition as male preserve, for example, comes very close to what might perhaps be called the conservative patriarchal martial view, or the hegemony of the eastern man. In this sense, the very birthplace of the Ancient Olympic Games and gymnastics, Greece, only authorized "free men"/citizens to compete, whenever they fulfilled a series of requirements to participate, which resulted in enormous honour and respect from the whole society (Platão, 2007; see also Foucault, 2016). Thus, some MACS, such as karate, integrate the acronym not because it is a martial art or combat sport, but because they combine martial art and combat sport, understood as male. I dedicate myself here briefly to embroider the common element that, in general, male sport and martial arts have, tradition.

Collins (2011) endeavoured to analyse the origins of Australian rules football, which relate to national myths and imperial past, according to him, in a process of invention of sporting tradition. He also exposes throughout the text some examples about the roots of rugby and baseball, but with a focus on football, he exposes characteristics of the sport that suffered, in Australia at least, certain changes in history towards a new story. He explains that

The history of sport has become a palimpsest. Meanings, interpretations and purposes are written and rewritten over that history as people seek to give a broader significance to the act of play. Details and fragments are reassembled and rearranged to create a story that meets the desires and demands of different generations, social groups and ideologies (Collins, 2011, p.8).

His study draws inspiration from the theory of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) set out in the book that is entitled as the synthesis of the theory itself, "The Invention of Tradition".<sup>26</sup> Collins (2011) applies the theory to sport and adds features capable of helping to identify invented traditions:

This type of anachronistic misinterpretation is a feature of all forms of invented tradition. As Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger noted in their introduction to their

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<sup>26</sup> It is also worth to mention that Raymond Williams, as I will quote him soon, wrote about tradition in 1977 in "Marxism and Literature". For him, *all* tradition is invented. It is a selection and shaping of the past in particular ways by the dominant class. John Hargreaves wrote about this in 1986a in "Sport, Power and Culture". David Kirk wrote about it in relation to "traditional physical education" in 1992 defining physical education.

1983 collection, *The Invention of Tradition*, 'the peculiarity of "invented" traditions is that the continuity with ("a historic past") is largely factitious... they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition'. Moreover, we can go further and identify four other key characteristics shared by invented sporting traditions. The first of these is that the 'founding father' of the sport must have had minor rather than extensive involvement in it. (...) Secondly, the weight of evidence to support the invented tradition is based largely on hearsay or personal affirmation, usually of one person. (...) The third common feature is that these traditions emerge at pivotal moments in each sport's history. (...) Fourthly, supporters of the invented tradition ultimately base their position on an unverifiable act of faith rather than on the historical record. (...) And finally, the invented tradition projects back into the past a picture of how the inventors would like to see the world (p.11-13).<sup>27</sup>

Hobsbawn (1983), in turn, explains that many traditions that are presented as old are often recent or even invented, or even a combination of these things. This invented form of tradition is not based on complete arbitrariness, but on practices "normally by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (p.1). Even as a "truthfulness" factor for wide acceptance, invented traditions "normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past" (p.1). Hobsbawn explains that the characteristic of traditions, whether invented or not, is invariability. In other words, it should be noted that he does not say that all traditions are invented, "the strength and adaptability of genuine traditions is not to be confused with the 'invention of tradition'. Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented" (p.8).<sup>28</sup> However, for him, any form of tradition seeks to perpetuate a fixed way of being and not change. Remembrance of the past, whether real or invented according to Hobsbawn, plays a role in the traditions of an unshakable fixed structure to which one can/must always return, as a lighthouse, and at the

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<sup>27</sup> Hobsbawn (1983) adds yet three other factors that help distinguish invented traditions: "They seem to belong to three overlapping types: a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior" (p.9).

<sup>28</sup> Hobsbawn (1983) provides more ways to differentiate traditions: "One marked difference between old and invented practices may be observed. The former were specific and strongly binding social practices, the latter tended to be quite unspecific and vague as to the nature of the values, rights and obligations of the group membership they inculcate: 'patriotism', 'loyalty', 'duty', 'playing the game', 'the school spirit' and the like" (p.10). He also adds that many symbols, such as flags, images, ceremonies and music, are historically new and invented.

same time as an anchor, which supports by one side, but on the other, it holds. Fixed practices are achieved and reproduced in time, when it is the case, through repetition. Hence the importance of ritualized/routine activities, always taking place in the same way. Martial arts usually have ritualized protocols of respect and hierarchy, even if it mixes with sweat, screams (*kiai*), blows, pain, fun.

On the other hand, Raymond Williams (1977) presents a conception of tradition that operates in conjunction with hegemony. At some points, the views of Hobsbawn and Williams may find affinity, however, Williams has a, perhaps one might say, more political perspective. He writes that:

(Tradition) is always more than an inert historicized segment; indeed it is the most powerful practical means of incorporation. What we have to see is not just 'a tradition' but a selective tradition: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification. (...) in a particular culture, certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and certain other meanings and practices are neglected or excluded. Yet, within a particular hegemony, and as one of its decisive processes, this selection is presented and usually successfully passed off as 'the tradition', 'the significant past'. What has then to be said about any tradition is that it is in this sense an aspect of *contemporary* social and cultural organization, in the interest of the dominance of a specific class. It is a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present (Williams, 1977, p.115-116).

Williams' definition allows to establish relationships with Foucault (2016) and his conception of subjectivity linked to truth. The selection of relevant parts of the tradition (where, by the way, the vulnerability of the process is, following Williams, 1977) according to the interests that one has, while it can manipulate history, it also builds "truths" with the value of authority recognized by time, by the ancient founders of something, by a supposedly pure origin. It is a fact that history itself is written according to versions, usually those of the winners, and that the way historians perceive the facts varies according to a multitude of factors and, furthermore, subaltern versions are not widespread. Thus, considering versions of history and selections made from tradition, it seems that many discourses with the power of truth are taken for granted when, perhaps, they just come closer to what might actually have taken place. In any case, the character of truth or the power of tradition, added to hierarchical forms justified by tradition itself, govern and shape many practices that we participate in

today. For tradition is never lost, it only becomes residual and perhaps latent (Williams, 1977). Generally, the discourse of tradition is imbued with an honourable and differentiating air, in the sense that it takes the activity in question out of the ordinary, implying that it is not an "orphan" activity, but belonging to an important and conserved genealogy. The recuperation of gymnastics, as a predecessor of sport, from the Greeks, as well as the easily identifiable martial tradition, confers distinction and a certain symbolic and, in this case, cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to such physical activities and to its practitioners.

However, these androcentric traditions, and many others, value men and place themselves (traditions) or are placed as interceptors, very often, of female development, since they were built to ensure the place of male authority, with the gender hierarchy established almost unquestionably. They are a stable structure, as an anchor, for the establishment of male hegemony. So, if today women can have access to the originally male territory (Scott, 2020), this is due to the generous concession that the contemporary (superior) man gives to the (inferior) woman. At other times this is simply due to the application of laws, which are remarkably necessary. In either case, though, women have to deal with a range of problems, many of them well-hidden to the point that they do not realize it, and others that are easily identifiable. However, despite this, the practice of MACS can also certainly bring several benefits to women. In the next point I present possibly the main one.

### *2.3.2. Embodied empowerment of women and vulnerable collectives*

Many studies have reported the empowering role that sports or physical education classes conducted following innovative/critical approaches provide for girls, women, and LGBTQIA+ people (e.g., Channon & Jennings, 2014; Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003; Hill, Sandford & Enright, 2015; Lamb, Oliver & Kirk, 2018; Liechty, Willfong & Sveinson, 2016; Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Empowerment can take place both individually and collectively, making people more independent to act in the world to the point of emancipation (Luguetti, 2014). Other features might be greater awareness of freedom, challenge of gender stereotypes, self-esteem, self-determination, acquisition and mastery of skills, and social benefits (Liechty, Willfong & Sveinson, 2016). Empowerment is also related to power –people who did not have access to forms of power, and then they have–, resources –material and non-material, such as knowledge– and collaboration –support, collaborative and voluntary engagement– (Luguetti, 2014). When people feel empowered in an emancipatory sense (Freire, 2005), they develop a

critical understanding of themselves and the environments they frequent, which in turn can be reverted to even greater empowerment. People feel in possession of a certain extra strength that drives them to fight for what they want, believe, deserve, and also have a greater capacity to maintain their achievements (Luguetti, 2014).

However, there does not seem to be a methodical prescription capable of resulting in empowerment. What seems to happen frequently is that girls/women or disempowered minorities are listened to and have their demands considered and, in the case of physical education classes, activity programs are often set up taking into account the requests and suggestions of the students. More than that, students and teachers co-construct the physical education experience (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). In the case of sports, it seems to be that the highly successful cases associate some kind of theoretical foundation for their actions, such as feminist theory, combined, of course, with physical activity. As the version that women have been led to believe of themselves refers to the frailty myth (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009), always in need of protection, the perception that they are physically capable is essential. As an informant in Guthrie's study (1995, p.113) reported, "Our strengths are pruned as is the bonsai, we become disabled." Due to this fact, McCaughey (1997, cited in Liechty, Willfong & Sveinson, 2016 as the forerunner of physical feminism) considers that if "women increasingly enter the arena of aggressive activities (e.g., boxing, shooting, football), they challenge the assumption of men's inherent physical superiority over women, thus disrupting assumptions of a binary sex related to violence and power" (Liechty, Willfong & Sveinson, 2016, p.307). Physical feminism refers to the possession and use of physical strength by women, which works as a tool for empowerment; it developed as a branch of feminist theory due to the assumption of some kind of negligence of such female strength among traditional feminists (Velija, Mierzwinski & Fortune, 2013).

It is also important to consider the perspective of the female tradition in physical education. This perspective highlights the position of certain domain exercised by women in the physical therapy profession (Wrynn, 2016), in addition to the female role in dance and Swedish gymnastics (Vertinsky, 2016), for example, in countries such as England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Kirk & Vertinsky, 2016). In the opposite direction, therefore, from what is proposed by McCaughey (see McCaughey, 1998), the female tradition in physical education could consider the entry of women into environments seen as masculine as a dissolution of female forces and the consequent loss of a space that would be conquered by women. However, although this deconcentration of female forces can perhaps be seen as intentional, it is also necessary to see where female dominance (Wrynn, 2016) occurred. When

relating to the care of war patients, or even others, the female space was the space for the maintenance of life, nutrition, characteristics historically associated with the idea of female nature (Verbrugge, 2016). In the sense of this nature, women practiced and specialized in gymnastics, to cultivate health, hygiene and beauty (Vertinsky, 2016). The physical education they taught was not associated with the sports model as it came to be with men taking the subject (Kirk, 2016; Wrynn, 2016). Furthermore, women lost space when men returned from Second World War (Vertinsky, 2016), which could indicate some of their permission for women to occupy spaces in their absence. I will return to this point, related to the supposed female-dominated spaces, in other points of the thesis. Here, however, I would like to draw attention to this relative opposition between physical feminism and female tradition. While the first, representing the achievements of women taking over the characteristics understood as masculine and performing them, is often presented as a great achievement of women (e.g., Liechty, Willfong & Sveinson, 2016; Maclean, 2014; Tjondal, 2017), the second could indicate that women would lose their own tradition by pursuing their integration in male environments (Vertinsky, 2016).

The point, it seems to me, is that the different areas would not have reasons to be gender-dominated, but rather allow any gender to perform the most diverse activities in an equitable way. After all, these could be and have potential to be empowering experiences. However, it is also necessary to take into account that sometimes the self-satisfaction of integrating the environment that is theoretically not theirs, the masculine one in this case, and performing in a way opposite to that oriented towards femininity, can end up holding back women. They may run the risk of being content and considering that everything has already been transformed (apart from the risk that they just take the men's place, performing hegemonic masculinity in their place, which does not solve the problem and is not my proposal). Thus, entering male environments and populating them is, from my point of view, an important step to be taken by women, but there are others to be taken. Because from a critical perspective, the entry of women into male environments influences them (women) and can change them (women) considerably. Even though their presence in such environments does influence the cultivated *habitus*, it usually does not change the environment in the same proportion as the environment transforms women. So, I think it is an achievement for women to combine attributes related to femininity and masculinity and cast questions about normative gender performances. However, even if possibly every external transformative process, such as the transformations of a martial environment, reflects in some change also in those who witness it or apply it, what should be primarily transformed is the environment.

Otherwise, the old trajectory repeats itself, that of women redesigning and adapting to new realities, always giving up the space, as perhaps to some extent has happened in the case of the female tradition.

So, it is necessary to empower women physically. However, since it is a type of embodied empowerment, conjugated/non-dichotomous (mind-body) actions will likely find positive results. This is of fundamental importance, since if a body is strong but does not feel confident, there is no real empowerment. Another karate practitioner from Chicago and also a participant in the study conducted by Guthrie (1995) reported the following experience:

(...) not only do we have the physical ability to defend ourselves, we also have the right to defend ourselves. This requires another level of acceptance, rooted in a valuing of the self which many women don't possess. The skills are worthless if you don't feel you have the right to defend yourself on the street, at home, or in the workplace (p.112).

This is justified relatively simply: "Just as oppression is always embodied, the feminist care of the ethical self also must be embodied" (Guthrie, 1995, p.118). There seems to have been a certain inversion in the feminist proposals, that is, first it was just an ideological posture, and then it migrated to a work focused on the physical, when the two things should be combined. The empowerment that can come from sports practices understood as masculine, such as ice hockey and tackle football, especially if in a process of "holistic embodiment", according to Liechty, Willfong and Sveinson (2016, p.306), "provide an important avenue for challenging gender ideologies and the gendered power structures that exist in sport." This leads to a "sense of breaking boundaries as they participated despite challenges" (p.305), which is empowering also because it provides a feeling of confronting the established order, generating certain discomforts and annoyances in such established order. These discomforts and annoyances have therefore subversive potential. Specifically in relation to MACS, Liechty, Willfong and Sveinson (2016) report yet that these activities "also provide a unique setting for women to engage and negotiate experiences of pain and physical aggression, which contradict traditional views of appropriate feminine behavior" (p.306).

Empowerment, however, can also occur indirectly. I mean, work combined with theoretical foundations does not seem to be what commonly happens. This format would be ideal for empowering women individually or in small groups where such education can take place. Most of the time, though, women take part in training and draw valid experiences from it, by becoming physically able and strong only, or through the process of reflection that builds their subjectivities, in the best scenario. In other cases, all too frequently, they simply abandon

the practices because they cannot deal with the experiences. However, the simple fact that women enter the male arena can become a social good, as Tjonndal, (2019, p.93) points out, “women’s continued participation in this hyper-masculine sports is contributing to change and renegotiation of gender stereotypes and dominating perceptions of women, men, gender, masculinity and femininity.” So even when the experience cannot be fulfilling, it can be transformative and, to a large extent, altruistic. After all, MACS have great potential, as noted, but while being permeated by tradition, hierarchies, hegemonic masculinities, they do not naturally tend to be open to broad acceptance of differences and “strangeness”, or to be inclusive. Therefore, in the next sub-topic I address a subversive possibility for the martial context that could become inclusive.

### 2.3.3. *Queering martial positions and pedagogy as a possibility*

In addition to the benefits it can bring, and despite the difficulties it can impose, sport can also be seen as a place for social struggles, which aim to break various discriminatory cycles (Hargreaves, 1986b). The sports environment, and especially the martial one, are configured as (hetero) normative environments. Heteronormativity assumes that all people are heterosexual and that this is the natural, correct and only legitimate sexual orientation; it is therefore naturalized and difficult to challenge (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021; Bourdieu, 2012; Devís-Devís et al, 2017; Phipps, 2020). From this, homophobia is an important problem that works as a way of expelling those who do not fit into the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990), and that presents itself with much more vehemence in male sports than in females (Phipps, 2020). Berg and Kokkonen (2021) work on the concept of heteronormativity in association with that of *habitus*, as they understand that “Habitus is central to how gendered norms and inequalities become embodied” (p.4).

Gender normativity, in turn, considers binary gender as what is valid, and links it with characteristics that supposedly naturally belong to men and women, characteristics that conform, therefore, to normative gender, with forms of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Against normative practices in sport, and in physical education classes, queer theory has been shown to be an effective option (see, for example, Berg & Kokkonen, 2021; Devís-Devís et al, 2017; 2018; Kirk, 2020; Landi, 2018; lisahunter, 2017; Maor, 2018; Mason, 2018; Phipps, 2020; Rodrigues, Turelli & Kirk, forthcoming; Standal, 2015). Even when a study does not focus exclusively on LGBTQIA+

populations and/or sexuality, this does not prevent queer theory from being used as a transforming perspective of (hetero) normative contexts (Phipps, 2020). It seems to be that queer theory developed out of the gay liberation movement that followed the 1980 AIDS crisis, as many clashes were raised against gay people (Phipps, 2020). However, lisahunter (2017, p.2) considers that

Queer theory emerged from a foundation of several origins and influences including, but not limited to, activist and academic iterations of feminism, lesbian and gay movements promoting political transformation of recognition and rights for diverse sexualities, poststructural and postmodern theory, critical theory, radical race theory, postcolonial theory, disability and transgender studies. Normative notions of sex, gender and sexuality along with assumed relationships between the three, and a critique of identity categories and their markers resulting in social difference were all targets of queer studies and queer theory. (...) The point of difference and similarity between queer theory and lesbian/gay/feminist/women's studies was the shift from a politics of identity to a politics of difference, challenge and resistance, an anti-identity premise.

Queer etymologically means "twisted or crossed" (Standal, 2015, p.129). lisahunter explains that "queer theory seeks to dismantle categorical notions, challenge the heteronormative perspective, and move beyond sex, gender and sexuality categories" (p.1). This conception is very relevant because it expands some boundaries, not placing theory as the possession of certain minorities (Mock, 2003). Perhaps queerness can be obtained in the experience of different inadequacies, discomforts, maladjustments in different situations (Ahmed, 2004). Feeling strange, weird, oblique, out of place can be configured as the necessary baggage to understand what is queer, as pointed out by Landi (2018, p.11),

Being queer is an embodied experience, one that only comes from being entrenched in queer experiences and spaces. In other words, my sexual preference does not make me queer. It is the thousands of hours I have spent in queer neighbourhoods, queer organisations, and experiencing the affects of being queer that have shaped my 'queerness'.

Furthermore, experiences of marginalization, of being left out, contribute to making the queer feeling known (Ahmed, 2004; Devís-Devís et al, 2017). In this sense, Phipps (2020, p.365) contributes that "heterosexuals who fail to perform appropriate gender norms would also be scrutinized and marginalized." In a way, one lives the experience of "orphanhood",

something that, according to some scholars, will contradictorily contribute to political action (Arendt, 1972; see also Ahmed, 2004). In this sense, Standal (2015, p.135) considers that "situations in which we confront obstacles that prevent us from advancing in the direction we were going or compel us to stop can generate insight." Mason (2018, p.105), in turn, argues that

*Queer*, as a political stance, marks a resistance to the normal that we might also call failure; instead of finding happiness within the status quo, feminist queer theorists have suggested that the "different rewards" of failure might include authenticity, political consciousness, and a greater freedom to explore one's body and its desires.

However, the undertaking is certainly not, again, simple. As physical education is usually a normative and stereotyped context (although at the same time it has queer potential in itself, as lisahunter, 2017, points out), many studies propose queer actions in the implementation of activist and transformative approaches (Oliver & Kirk, 2015), in addition to critical approaches (Kirk, 2020). As verified in practices that promote empowerment, "queer pedagogy entails conversation between privileged and oppressed discursive positions in order to understand the other" (Devís-Devís et al, 2018). Scholars in the field propose queering pedagogy in order to transform straight pedagogy (Fitzpatrick & McGlashan, 2016; Kirk, 2020; Standal, 2015), in a sense that can be related to sexual orientation, but that also transcends it. After all, being "straight" can relate to, in this context, being harsh, too formal, demanding and attached to rules, rigid, somewhat militaristic, conservative, and even undemocratic. I comment on this because such definition finds similarities with the competitive sports field and especially with the martial environment in general. In such environments, a pedagogy of pain and suffering seems to prevail (Gonçalves, Turelli & Vaz, 2012; Turelli & Vaz, 2006; Vaz, 1999) associated with a pedagogy of attrition (Rodrigues, Turelli & Kirk, forthcoming), which in a gendered sense are variations on straight pedagogy.

Thus, proposals for transforming the environment are positive, but certainly very challenging. Especially the high-performance context is not open to change, however, queer attitudes and actions, if taken as an option, only tend to benefit people and environments, since the culture and *habitus* they would supposedly embody could favour construction of less "straight" subjectivities. Some scholars explain how to do queer. Berg and Kokkonen (2021) found simple actions that the students carried out for their own good and which are queer: "they see shortcomings in these (PE) practices, wish to change them, and do not always act

according to the existing 'feel for the game'<sup>29</sup>, such as by changing their PE group or activity and by **asking the question 'why'**<sup>30</sup> (p.11). Although switching groups may not be interesting or possible for athletes, for example, questioning may be. Kirk (2020) and Standal (2015) propose the use of "queer moments". Mock (2003, p.20) says that "'Doing' queer means possessing the agency to defy and destabilize gendered behaviors, sexes, and sexualities through continuing and conscious decisions." Iisahunter (2017, p.2-3) also contributes by exposing that

Unsettling assumptions, challenging the work and outcomes of normativity, revealing oppressions associated with categories, exposing essentializing identities and subject positions, creating heterogeneous and fluid identities, stripping categories of their naturalness, decoupling sex/gender/sexuality, stimulating relationships beyond androcentric notions of able bodies, etc. is all part of doing queer work, or queering.

There is a good example related to this quote in Fitzpatrick and Russell (2015) where Dan, the physical education teacher, wears a netball skirt when he is teaching his class. It is not just this act, though, that queers the lesson, but Dan's teaching around and through this action. In an article directly related to martial arts, Maor (2018) also proposes queer actions. She puts as possibilities the adoption of queer or hybrid postures by female fighters, as "The queer identities adopted by women when training in the martial arts of not being man-like, but producing something different" (p.42). She explains that "creatively and strategically combining performances of femininity and masculinity female martial artists can form queer identities that are not based on sexuality" (p.45). Ideally, in Maor's study, men would participate in adopting nurturance postures, that is, being queer as well as women and supporting them and change. Relying on male support would be great, and if some people who have prominent positions adopt subversive attitudes, such as athletes who approach the Olympic scene and people in power roles, these are attitudes towards the destabilization that precedes change. And isolated postures can add up until to become, slowly, queer pedagogy for entire *dojos*. Given the traditional perspective full of "straightening devices"<sup>31</sup> (Standal, 2015) on which martial practices are based, queering the full pedagogy as a first step is, from my point of view, even more difficult. It must be emphasized that perhaps not all martial arts will face such difficulties. Nevertheless, in some of them the method is static, guided by the

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<sup>29</sup> Bourdieusian concept related to *illusio*.

<sup>30</sup> Highlight mine.

<sup>31</sup> "I understand (straightening device) as a process of straightening what is queer or oblique so that it follows the 'normal' or straight line. Social expectations are one example of a straightening device, hetero-normativity is another" (Standal, 2015, p.130).

belts' programs, and not initially open to change. However, there is no doubt that the contents can be interspersed and combined with queer moments.

Taking all of this into account, I move on to the last point of this chapter, seeking to verify the situation of gender specifically in karate.

#### **2.4. Gender in karate**

The gender theme is being very focused in MACS, however, specifically in karate it is still not widely explored. Certainly there are studies unrelated to the social sciences, which focus, for example, on the performance of certain karate techniques, as will be seen in chapter 6, but which generally take male performance into account (e.g., Alinaghpour, Zareian & Ardakani, 2020; Balsalobre-Fernández et al, 2013; Chaabène et al, 2014a; Chaabène et al, 2014b; Martinez-de-Quel et al, 2003; Martínez-Majolero et al, 2013; Petri et al, 2016). Research is also available related to aspects understood as philosophical of martial arts, such as self-knowledge, introspection/concentration, wellness/wellbeing and even spirituality. There are numerous studies of Asian practices in general, and those that are dedicated to karate or contain it in its scope are also published, however, they do not usually focus on the gender perspective (for example, Brown, Jennings & Molle, 2009; Cavalcante & Potiguar, 2019; Fuller & Lloyd, 2020; Kumpf, 2018; Lautert et al, 2005; Mainland, 2010; Turelli et al, 2020; *Corrigendum* 2021). Still outside the gender spectrum, but presenting itself as relevant studies on karate, it is worth mentioning what seems to be the first research that considers this Japanese-Okinawan martial art (Channon & Jennings, 2014) carried out by James and Jones (1982). Krug (2001) also plays an important role, as he focused on studying the process of change that Okinawan Karate went through in its integration with Anglo-American culture. Bar-On Cohen (2006), in turn, conducted a study on embodiment (of *kime*) and Rao (2008) already talked about the inclusion of people with disability in karate.

Certainly there are other diverse ethnographies about karate in different countries that may not be published and that is why they are not so well known (e.g. Chapman, 2004). However, specifically on the topic of gender within karate, as far as I was able to find, the researchers are still not voluminous. Even in relation to the measurement of quantitative variables, technical performance, injuries, history, these aspects do not focus on women and even less on LGBTQIA+ collectives. This finding reveals a gap in scientific production and at the same time says something about the way the *karateka* field is generally structured, that is,

with emphasis on the male. In the social sciences, studies are emerging, although they are still few, and it seems that the study carried out by Guthrie (1995) is one of the pioneers. She devoted herself to studying a group of women *karateka* that practiced *seido* karate (focused especially on self-defence) from Chicago. She did qualitative research involving participant observation and interviews with 30 female practitioners in female single-sex classes. Guthrie found, among other things, that women's empowerment occurred in the combination of the development of physical skills with the awareness of their potential, due to the support from feminist theory. Guthrie's research was about karate and gender, without entering, however, the sports scene.

In addition to her study, probably the most relevant work in karate and gender is that carried out by Chloe Maclean. Maclean (2015; 2016; 2017; 2019) carried out her doctoral research focusing on British/Scottish karate. She simultaneously investigated three *dojos*, one of them female-only or single-sex classes, interviewed athletes and also participated in training sessions, in addition to taking into account her career as an athlete. Maclean considered the importance of the senses in gendered relationships and in gender embodiment. She argues that karate practice is capable of undoing conventional performances of gender and wrote that "Together the findings of this thesis point towards the role of the minute, mundane, and thus often overlooked or unconscious elements of our bodily practice in 'naturalising', reproducing, or subverting gendered arrangements of power" (Maclean, 2017, p.3). She presents some contrasts to my point of view, which will be addressed later. Here, however, I point out two of them due to the relationship they have with concepts I already indicated as helping to expose my object of study. In sum, Maclean (2017) says that "women's embodiment in karate indeed largely diverted from Young's conception of feminine embodiment" (p.273) and "this research suggests that Connell's notion of a gender order framed around a lived or imagined hegemonic masculinity is certainly not universal to all social contexts" (p.286-287), referring to a different gender order found in karate.

Maclean's study was carried out in the context of competition karate, but it has certain specificities. It seems that the Scottish Karate Governing Body is associated with the World Karate Federation (WKF), the body responsible for Olympic karate. However, Maclean has sporting titles associated with exclusive *Wado* style/school competitions, something that can be associated with the continuation of the *Wado* tradition in the world, rather than a possible universal karate, something the WKF undertakes to do. A style or a school is a line that derives from and/or differs in some way from the first, normally accepted as being the *Shotokan*

school, started by Gichin Funakoshi. Each school or style has its master/responsible person. According to the WKF itself:

The different styles of karate, diversity of the rules and lack of unified protocols that govern any type of competition indicated a need to create an international governing body comprising united National Karate Federations that could start to address these issues from a unified global perspective. Ryoichi Sasakawa, President of the Japan Karate Federation (JKF) and Jacques Delcourt, President of the European Karate Union (EKU) jointly proposed a series of meetings that would produce not only the first amalgamated international rules for sport Karate, but also the establishment of the World Union of Karate Do Organizations (WUKO) on October 10, 1970.<sup>32</sup>

WUKO was therefore created in 1970 and in 1992 it received a name update, renamed to the World Karate Federation. It had only three presidents in this time, Ryoichi Sasakawa, one of the founders, during the years 1970-1992. In 1992, the founder of the WUKO/WKF, Jacques Delcourt, took over the international body, remaining in the role between 1992-1998. The third president of the WKF was and is Antonio Espinós, from 1998-Present.<sup>33</sup> According to the WKF website and Rios et al (2018), approximately 100 million people are involved with competitive karate, and it is worth noting that WKF data is from 2014, before the promotion of karate as an Olympic sport. This fact may have increased the number of practitioners, among which, girls and women certainly. In addition, WKF data shows that the population under the impact of the practice and its *habitus* is relevant. All these practitioners, therefore, receive influences to their subjective conformation. It is also relevant to note that the WKF includes *kata* competitions for people with disabilities. It is called “para karate”, “for wheelchair athletes, visually impaired athletes and athletes with mental disabilities”<sup>34</sup>. Para karate, however, is not included in the Tokyo Paralympic Games.

I expose the trajectory of "official" sports karate, or at least the organisation which is in charge of Olympic karate, because a certain disagreement between different federations/bodies responsible for the forms of karate in the world was what for a long time seems to have justified the failure to rise to Olympic sport. In other words, different bodies could consider themselves in charge of sports karate, which generated disorganization and

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.wkf.net/thebook/>, accessed on 26/07/2021.

<sup>33</sup> Information obtained from <https://www.wkf.net/thebook/>, accessed on 26/07/2021. The time of government of presidents is noteworthy. However, the last president was re-elected every six years, according to information from his CV available at <https://www.wkf.net/structure-governance#welcome>, accessed in 27/06/2021.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.wkf.net/sport-parakarate>, accessed on 26/07/2021.

insubordination; besides that, perhaps, it was not so attractive to the public. Perhaps the disputes relate to (and originate from) a certain overlap in the martial or at least *karateka* world of hegemonic masculinities, and claim for the right to certain pure descent or direct heritage from the tradition. My experience in relation to different federations and some confusion was lived in Brazil, after black belt, in the second *dojo* where I trained. Due to my *sensei*'s disagreement at the time with the *Federação Catarinense de Karatê* (FCK), a smaller body within the country affiliated to the WKF, he changed federation, passing to the so-called *Federação Interestilos*, and all practitioners were, obviously<sup>35</sup>, with him. We spent a short time in the *Interestilos*, where competitions required the use of head and chest protectors outside the *gi*, as in *tae kwon do*. I competed in just one competition using all of this, and experienced the feeling of being, at that moment, an astronaut. After a short period of time and new disagreements, *sensei* decided to return to FCK. After that, and considering that I started my practices and did my entire belts degree course in federation affiliated with the WKF, I always look for karate *dojos* that are sporty and clearly affiliated with the WKF.

Returning to Maclean's study, she clearly focuses on competitive sports karate. But it responds at the same time, as I understand it, to the peculiarities of the UK, with bodies affiliated with the WKF, sports karate, and at the same time offering traditional karate<sup>36</sup>. And also linking to specific competitions of exclusive schools, such as a world championship exclusively for athletes practicing *Wado* or *Shotokan* style, for example. Thus, I believe it is possible to say that my research presents itself as a pioneer in women's Olympic karate, seeking to reduce the gap of karate gender studies in high performance. Furthermore, the theme of the female embodied subjectivity and the way in which it builds, redesigns or accommodates itself in dealing with various adversities, makes this study a contribution to the theme of gender and subjectivity. This specific place where the subjectivity of so many people, according to the WKF data, is built or influenced, mixes several elements, such as (hetero) normativity, tradition/hierarchy, masculinization and/or sexualization of women, possibilities of empowerment and subversion, and the Olympic context. Although it is a complex mixture, it is important because, as Williams (1977) points out, where there are weaknesses, or resistances, in this case, there are also strengths and potentials. In this context, amidst the difficulties is the potential for change, which is why I sometimes use inspiration from activist, critical or queer approaches to drive actions capable of impacting different resistances. For

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<sup>35</sup> By "obviously" I mean that his decision was unquestionable. Whether or not the athletes were in agreement with him, in a hierarchical institution, that has no relevance.

<sup>36</sup> See <https://skgb.com/traditional-karate>, accessed on 26/07/2021.

that, I followed a path already done by other researchers, which combines ethnography with autoethnography, or, following Delamont (2009), moments of reflexivity on my practice. To close this literature review, I briefly present the ethnographic approach, which also links with the next chapter of the thesis.

#### 2.4.1. *Ethnography and autoethnography to research sport*

As my study addresses the theme of subjectivity, and I refer to the *habitus* of the *karateka* environment that influences the construction of this subjectivity, and I recognize that such *habitus* was also embodied by me throughout my time of practice, at times I use this personal experience as a basis for this study. I consider that I reflect on the experiences that can contribute to the understanding of what is being reported by the athletes, as it is certainly not a monologue about me, but the experiences of elite *karateka* women. This is relevant to be said since Delamont (2009) presents a critique of autoethnographies when “It is about me and my introspective emotions and my personal life” (p.57). She, contrary to the use of autoethnography in social sciences, explains that it is necessary to differentiate “productive and unproductive uses of reflection versus autoethnography” (p.57). With this in mind, I highlight some studies that are methodological references in ethnography and autoethnography and contribute to the understanding of the research object.

Some scholars report that they used ethnographic methods to gain greater depth in their investigations (for example, Walton & Fiset, 2013), while other studies, contrary to what Delamont (2009) thinks, are entirely dedicated to autoethnographic reporting (for example, Fiset, 2015). Spencer and collaborators (2016), also in the direction more favourable to the inclusion of the researcher in the research, carry out “performance ethnography”. Quoting Johnson, they explain what they refer to: “envisioning performance as a ‘border’ discipline that rigorously challenges positivism, expands the meaning of texts, and privileges embodied research” (Spencer et al, 2016, p.492). And they add that “Our participation takes shape to create an experience where we are part spectator (audience) and part performer (researcher), building our discourse from static to motion-filled meaning” (p.493). Standal and Bratten (2021) also relied on autoethnography, where the second author sought to research her role as a teacher in a very specific course she was developing in PE. As her proposal was articulated around the embodied self-knowledge, she started from the principle that knowing for herself how the movements were experienced and felt was

important to know how it would arrive and be perceived by the students. Standal and Bratten understand that the autoethnographic researcher “aims to elucidate cultural and social features of the context in which the self is embedded. As such, this research method is not a form of introspection or auto-biography, although both of these are a part of the auto-ethnographical method” (p.3).

Landi (2018), who considers that the concept of objectivity, in scientific terms, is impossible to maintain, argues that autoethnographies “challenge the objectivity of a silent researcher” (p.6). He explains that this is not an exercise of egocentrism, but he understands that the research process, as it goes through the researcher, is personal:

When we consider the ‘body-as-assemblage’ that is entangled with matter, meaning, and being, we recognise that all research is subjective and affective. (...) This autoethnography, a reflection of self-experience, is one way to disrupt the notion of ‘objectivity’, by using highly subjective narratives to offset the ostensibly objective nature of research (Landi, 2018, p.6).

Sparkes (2020) presents a very interesting and intriguing study on his task of performing evaluations of autoethnography papers. I say it is intriguing because even though it must not be the case since he is interested in studies around embodiment, the way he refers to “my (his) evaluative self” sounds disembodied. Nevertheless, he clarifies by quoting Adams and Herrmann (2020) that autoethnography needs to comply with three dimensions, “‘auto,’ ‘ethno,’ and ‘graphy.’ Thus, autoethnographic projects use selfhood, subjectivity, and personal experience (‘auto’) to describe, interpret, and represent (‘graphy’) beliefs, practices, and identities of a group or culture (‘ethno’)” (Sparkes, 2020, p.290). He also addresses confusion often occurring between autoethnography and “confessional tales”, something Delamont also refers to. He still names different kinds of autoethnography, among which my current research tends to transit between analytic and critical autoethnography, as it will be seen through the chapters.<sup>37</sup> Taking inspiration from Anderson (2006), Sparkes (2020, p.293) explains that

the purpose of analytic autoethnography is not just about documenting personal experience, providing an insider’s perspective or evoking emotional resonance with the reader. Rather it is about, using empirical data “to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves” (387).

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<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, my study combines autoethnography with interviews and video-analysis, as it will be described in the methods chapter, giving the final nature of the research as it can be found in such chapter.

In turn, by quoting Boylorn and Orbe (2014, p.20), Reed-Danahay (2017, p.144-145) describes critical autoethnography “as incorporating three aspects of critical theory: ‘to understand the lived experiences of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination’.”

Finally, it is very important to mention Loic Wacquant (2002), who within the MACS is considered a great reference, developing his ethnography/autoethnography in Chicago boxing. Although martial arts ethnographies have older records, he certainly inspired many studies that continued to find relationships between the sport and Bourdieusian concepts. Sports ethnographies, and not just them, are rich because they end up establishing several interdisciplinary relationships, such as among sociology, anthropology, philosophy, pedagogy, religion, history, art, media, economics, biology, physiology. A broad spectrum that seeks to understand a specific topic in depth. Gendered karate and embodied subjectivity undeniably require a long deep journey, and in contact with different areas of knowledge, to be understood and, perhaps, transformed.

## **2.5. Chapter closure**

In this chapter I sought to better understand concepts that guide, under the perspective presented here, the investigative line of this research. I also carried out a survey of academic productions that touch my object of study in order to verify how much is already known about it and what gaps still exist to be filled. The theme of gender, although widely studied, continues to require investigation, perhaps especially in somewhat more conservative fields, such as martial arts.

Departing from the biological category of sex, gender is differentiated as a socioculturally constructed category, although in the conventional way of understanding it, it continues to relate to the characteristics historically accepted as masculine and feminine. It is also often associated with sexual orientation. The (hetero) normative view of these elements, which is still in force in the patriarchal structure of society, imposes limitations on gender expressions and maintains the binary meaning. This work, which is carried out in an institution with normative conceptions, ends up referring to the binary gender, even though at times it takes into account minority groups. However, considering the fluidity of gender and that it can be done and undone in a series of repetitions, gender performativity is adopted here as

central, as this allows for wide possibilities of performances of masculinities and femininities even within the binary.

The hegemonic masculinity still performed in various environments of patriarchal society contributes to the maintenance of normative structures and gender hierarchy. This is a concept that is reformulated in its relationship with history and gives rise to different forms of hegemonic masculinities. Despite the re-significations, it always maintains the relationship with the concept of hegemony, and precisely in the possibility of redesigning itself lies the biggest challenge for the collectives that suffer its domination, especially for women. Hegemonic masculinity is strengthened in the relationships it establishes with its opposite, emphasized femininity; and hegemonic masculinity is also strengthened by submitting to, complying with, accommodating and maintaining, in different ways, other forms of masculinity and femininity.

Gendered embodiment is a concept that seeks to emphasize the overcoming of the dichotomous view of the human being, taking into account that performance is gendered, that it cannot be “neutral”. The reflexive processes of the experiences lived in contact with the world are very important for embodiment and also embodiment of gender, which considers both the social aspect of life and the materiality of bodies. The way in which experiences are lived, perceived and reflected is fundamental for the development of objectification processes in the relationship with oneself, or of subjectification, which can lead to a deeper, holistic or cultivated development of oneself.

Through the relationship with the body passes the development of embodied subjectivity. It is not neutral, departing, therefore, from gendered embodiment. Subjectivity is developed in the relationship with the world and with oneself, and in the reflections that are drawn from it. It also relates to the truth or to discourses assumed to be true, which guide established relationships (with the world and with oneself). It includes care of the self, where the search for knowledge and self-knowledge occupies a privileged, but not exclusive, place. The possibility of taking care of oneself or cultivating oneself optimizes the construction of subjectivity, while taking care of others only by reducing the dedication to oneself can stagnate or limit subjective development. In this sense, the practice of sports can be understood to some extent as an action of care of the self. However, discourses assumed to be true can guide the construction of subjectivity in different directions, as more objectifying or subjectifying.

In relation to gender studies in sport, there are several investigations that are carried out focusing on the theme. Minority groups are also starting to receive attention, they must,

from my point of view, be included in a positive process, benefiting from sport and contributing to the generation of a more humanized sporting *habitus*, without generating exclusion of cisgender women, though. The sports field is still configured as a space of male domination and preservation, imposing difficulties and challenges for female sports in terms of, for example, media coverage, which contributes to the sexualization of women's bodies. In addition, in sports understood as male, women deal with stereotypes of masculinization and, therefore, accusations of homosexuality, which often lead to an exaggeration of femininity or the development of dual, female-athlete identities, and perhaps a certain fragmented subjectivity.

With regard to gender studies within the field of MACS, it also presents fertile ground. Many studies point to the potential that this set of martial arts and combat sports has to enable women to empower, physically to be more capable and subvert the common understanding surrounding the myth of female fragility. However, possibly because both sport and martial arts are environments permeated by tradition and hierarchy, women face many adversities. It is often understood that they participate in the MACS world due to the concessions that men allow them, but women would continue to be inferior and unable to perform as true warriors.

The maintenance of the sports and martial field, both supported by tradition, could be linked to the interest in not giving up the hegemonic place. Some scholars explain how traditions are elaborated, perpetuated, or shaped according to existing goals. These traditions assume values of truth and start to guide hierarchical places, embodiment processes and especially the development of subjectivities. However, the fact that women remain in such environments being challenged also challenges the environments themselves. This action is capable of generating collective empowerment in an altruistic sense, and can also generate, whenever women find ways to remain, individual empowerment; either through physical feminism/skills development, or through the understanding/transcendence of socially given limiting beliefs. The best scenario is that these two possibilities can be combined. In this sense, critical, transformative and activist approaches can offer contributions. The possibility of queering positions and pedagogy in martial arts, although very challenging, can present itself as a way of opposing the straight pedagogy that generally fills martial spaces, albeit in derived forms, such as pedagogy of pain and suffering or pedagogy of attrition.

Finally, gender studies specifically within karate, as far as one can tell, are not yet voluminous. In competitive and Olympic sports karate, possibly my research presents itself as a

pioneer investigating a group of *karateka* women. The relationship of this with the construction of subjectivity they make amidst several challenging elements can contribute and enrich gender studies and the social sciences. Understanding that amidst the difficulties lies the potential for change, I followed a path already constructed by other researchers, which combines ethnography with autoethnography, something that ends up establishing interdisciplinary relationships and, therefore, helps to deepen a specific theme. Gendered karate and embodied subjectivity analysed with the help of different areas of knowledge can possibly be better understood and perhaps transformed.

Having made this theoretical path that suggests the need for research in high-performance female karate and that especially takes into account the implications for subjective female development, I move on to the next chapter. In it I will clarify methodological issues, describing my research design and the various items included in the methods.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I describe all the steps taken and followed to result in this final research report. Although this document concentrates on a part of the investigation process, I narrate here the complete path that made up my doctoral research, since some fragments of it can be found in other publications. However, the thesis focuses on what was decided among my supervisors and me as the central theme of the study. Therefore, I will describe the paths taken over these four years of studies.

#### 3.1. Worldview

The set of concepts capable of guiding actions and the very understanding of the world can be defined as a paradigm (Çelik & Köksal, 2019; Guba, 1983; Hammersley, 1992). The paradigm in which a researcher is based, or that researcher's worldview, therefore influences their decisions when defining research methods and instruments that can best help to understand an investigation problem (Ferreira, 2019). This is combined with the requirements, certainly, of the nature of the research that is carried out and everything that is necessary for it to be complete and able to respond to what is proposed to be investigated. My research focuses on a series of subjective elements and, therefore, lays on subjective epistemology (Krause, 1995), adopting a relativist ontological perspective (Çelik & Köksal, 2019) as I seek to understand and analyse the construction processes of the female embodied subjectivity in *karateka* access to the Olympic context. For Çelik and Köksal (2019, p.193), "ontology shapes the researcher's beliefs about reality", or truth, while epistemology has its main concern in "the relationship between the researcher and the knowledge by questioning how knowledge is acquired." Both, ontology and epistemology, which can merge each other in constructionist paradigm (Krause, 1995), are linked to methodology (Guba, 1983; Krause, 1995). In this regard, my study is classified as qualitative (Ferreira, 2019; Krause, 1995), of ethnographic inspiration, but it is not identified exclusively with a theoretical line.

Due to the multifaceted nature of the topic and in an effort to better understand it, I chose to dialogue with different literature references. Thus, scholars of feminist theory, also from different lines, make up the theoretical framework of this study (for example, Bordo, 1997; McRobbie, 2015; Rich, 2010; Roth & Basow, 2004; Young, 1980); these references often point to Foucault's poststructuralist direction (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1988; 2009; 2016; Preciado, 2008). However, the phenomenological perspective (Merleau-Ponty, 2005; Standal,

2015) also contributes to the subjective aspects and embodiment, especially, and even though it presents certain contrasts, it can be complemented from the contents of critical theory (Adorno, 1986; 1995; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1985; Marcuse, 2018). Finally, Bourdieu's constructivist structuralism (1983; 1984; 1986; 2001; 2012) also adds to the reflections of this research, in addition to the contributions of the activist pedagogical approach in physical education and sport (Kirk, 2002; 2020; Oliver & Kirk, 2015). This combination of theoretical lines and authors makes it possible to say that the study follows a social constructionist perspective (Dieronitou, 2014; Krause, 1995) in which human agency operates within and constantly remakes a range of structuring properties of the culture of karate as an elite sport.

My complete research consisted of several steps that share the same qualitative nature and integrate the ethnographic method. This method was chosen because of its potential to help answer the questions initially raised, in addition to presenting itself as an intellectual enterprise that seeks to develop thick descriptions of the investigated cultural contexts (Geertz<sup>38</sup>, 2008). Ethnography is a way of looking at cultural phenomena anchored in the anthropological tradition of investigation. In turn, anthropology is a “kind of science of translation (which) has begun to recognize that collective behaviours are not naturally occurring, but socially constructed and, for more strange they seem, have meaning for members of their respective social groups”<sup>39</sup> (Stigger & Silveira, 2010, p.3). Initially, anthropological studies arose with the aim of making familiar what appeared to be strange. However, while studying the behaviour of societies that were already familiar, anthropologists consider the idea of making the familiar strange as well (DaMatta<sup>40</sup>, 1987).

Ethnography has become an important perspective for studies in sports. The main advantage is the possibility of presenting a thick description (Geertz, 2008) of the analysed reality, in addition to allowing an approximation to the topic, looking from within (García & Casado, 2008), for a more global understanding of reality. Also, it allows the opportunity to re-elaborate the investigation according to the *emic* information, those that emerge from the

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<sup>38</sup> Clifford Geertz was an American anthropologist. I took as reference a version of his work translated into Spanish because this version was used by professors at my University. At other times I use translated versions of works and not the original ones due to practicality and also a certain intimacy with such works. Bourdieu's works are an example of this, with the observation that these works, in the original, are not in English either.

<sup>39</sup> My translation from Spanish to English of all quotes from Stigger and Silveira (2010).

<sup>40</sup> Roberto DaMatta, and also Gilberto Velho, who will be mentioned in this chapter, are pioneer Brazilian authors in the field of urban anthropology. I use their works in Portuguese, as they are the original and familiar versions to me, as pointed earlier. However, if the reader wants to check literature, it is possible to find materials especially from DaMatta translated into English, such as “Carnivals, rogues, and heroes” (DaMatta, 1991).

field across the collection of data, in addition to the *etic*, previously planned (Rodríguez Navarro & García Monge, 2009; see also Çelik & Köksal, 2019). However, as it is a dynamic movement, the investigative knowledge is built in collaboration with the investigated field. Wacquant (2015, p.4) considers that “Ethnography –that particular technique of data production and analysis that relies on the skilled and sensible organism of the observer as chief investigative tool– is uniquely suited to helping us re-incarnate society by restoring the praxeological dimensions of social existence.”

As a limitation, this investigative method can find in its potential strength its weakness. That is, studies can acquire an overly subjective character, as pointed out by Delamont (2009) in relation to autoethnography, for example, in addition to a certain difficulty in distancing oneself from the topic according to criteria solely for the researcher involved directly. Because of this, the triangulation of data collection techniques was adopted by me throughout the doctoral course, as I will describe below, in order to manage this problem; and the triangulation of researchers also played a fundamental role, with three supervisors comparing the material collected and prepared by me (from the design of data collection instruments to the final reports). In the next section, I will specifically address the theme of the researcher's positionality and the relationship with the field; how this is configured and how much the researcher's positionality can interfere, positively or negatively, in the reading and interpretation of information.

### 3.1.1. *Researcher positionality and reflexivity*

*Regarding identity, it is first female, then the kumite team and then everyone (Spain).  
(Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)*

I start this section with the words of Ceres, athlete of the Spanish team I researched, because it somehow portrays my own position in relation to my research topic. Ceres is saying that she considers herself a woman first, then identifies with her female fellow fighters, and then with the entire Spanish team. In the data analysis chapters this will become clearer, the differences, for example, between *kata* and *kumite* teams, between men and women. However, my aim using her phrase now is just to draw an analogy with my own perception. When I was on a stay/internship in Glasgow, Scotland, David, my supervisor there and after there, asked me *who* was writing the reports and blogs that came to him. That made me reflect for several days. It was excellent because from then on, I believe, I am better able to

identify when a martial artist is writing identified with her/his topic and when she/he is analysing it. From my own perspective, I put it at that moment (2019) for David and keep it now, I express myself primarily from my social place as a woman, that is, I do not see myself able to abandon my gendered subjectivity and generate and then read the data from a “neutral” point of view. After that, I consider my expression to be that of a researcher, finding contexts strange and with a strong interest in social problems. Finally, my expression as/of *karateka* is presented, with some knowledge and mastery of the modality that allows me to capture internal elements of it.

As I mentioned earlier, due to the anthropological roots of the ethnographic method, there is always a recommendation in it to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Velho, 1978). I have a certain familiarity with karate, since childhood, in fact, embodying it on a carnal level, as suggested by Wacquant (2015). However, for particular reasons, I stayed away from it for ten years, long enough to see other things in the world, I would say, and to mature, perhaps, in my relationship with the sport. When I returned to karate practices, I was bodily remembering many things that remained imprinted in and on me. However, other baggage adds to the realization of my interpretation, undeniably less passionate about the martial art and combat sport, although I certainly find pleasure in training. So, it is definitely not something I have forgotten, but I think I am able to look at karate and find it strange in many ways. Perhaps the fact of resuming practices in different countries from where I made my initial trajectory is a favourable point and facilitates strangeness. Because I came across relatively different cultures, different languages, groups of practitioners/athletes unknown to me, *sensei* never seen, and on the occasions of competitions, new opponents. And the athletes I interviewed, members of the high-performance Olympic level, belong to a context never experienced by me.

On the other hand, the positive dimension that my previous knowledge of the sport can offer also deserves to be seen. I believe that my experience of and intimacy with the practice gives me the possibility to make, many times, thick descriptions of what I observe. As Wacquant says (2015, p.4):

To make the most of ethnography, the field sociologist must methodically mine and thematize the fact that, like every social agent, he (*sic*) comes to know his object by body; and he can leverage carnal comprehension by deepening his social and symbolic insertion into the universe he studies. This means that we can and should work to become “vulnerable observers” in our practice of fieldwork.

To some extent, I am an “insider” (Lugueti, 2014). After all, even though I am foreign and do not participate in high-level competition, I am *karateka*, involved in karate before many of the athletes I interviewed, and I am a woman, factors that give me some credibility with them. Furthermore, I received access to them through my Spanish *sensei*, who holds a position of power in the Spanish *karateka* federative body. All athletes and coaches interviewed by me were extremely professional, in the sense of responsibility and punctuality. The interview period stipulated in my schedule was easily accomplished, given everyone's excellent disposition. I attribute this initially to high-performance policies, that is, people need to develop commitment, at a minimum, to meet the demands of these environments. However, perhaps the position occupied by my *sensei*, and consequently the position that such a configuration gave me, also favoured me. In any case, I consider that the interviewees provided highly relevant information and did so in an open way, certainly finding openness and acceptance on my part as well.

With this, I want to highlight how the researcher-field and field-researcher relationship can, to some extent, be mutually affected (Cupani, 1989; Goldman, 2008; Turelli & Vaz, 2011; Velho, 1989). In some situations, focusing on what is the main source of this thesis, the interviews, I could see, for example, how some interviewees re-elaborated their opinions/views as we talked, or from one interview to another (they were two with each person, as I will describe soon). For my part, I also noticed throughout the research how there is a continuous movement of evolution, I would say, that the researcher goes through. Whether in the relations with the field and its agents, or in the incorporation of new theories; once the investigative action begins, it has transformative potential.

Regarding the reading made of the collected information whose partial presentation will be carried out in this document, it is also done from a particular perspective. In addition to the elements I have already highlighted about my proximity-distance relationship with karate, and the triangulation work with my supervisors, I recognize that my place of speech assigns a specific prism to the analysis. In other words, if someone else read the same data, they would probably interpret them differently than I did. Actually, they might possibly ask different questions. Therefore, in order for the reader to know where I am speaking from, to end this section and then move on to the description of research design, I briefly expose some aspects that influence my subjectivity, worldview and positionality.

I describe myself as a 37-year-old cisgender woman, white, middle-class, and physically active. Due to the scope of my research, it may be relevant to say that, despite the fluidity of

this subject, I see myself as heterosexual, and also that I am Brazilian and “half” European, due to the possession of Italian citizenship. These elements are relevant as they contribute to the reader’s knowledge of where I am speaking from, which is not a place of extreme oppression. However, the simple fact of performing as a woman allows experiences capable of leading to understanding, to some extent, other experiences of oppression. The glimpse of how such experiences can be oppressive helps to justify my efforts on behalf of women and other socially inferiorized groups. In other words, different experiences that generate the feeling of “orphanhood” (Arendt, 1972; also in Ahmed, 2004) seem to be enabling, by approximation or similarity, to understand “orphanhoods” of other natures, even though many of them can be drastically more severe.

### 3.2. Research design and procedures

This thesis followed an ethnographic design, strongly supported in elements of autoethnography. Taking into account the topic of study, female embodied subjectivity inserted in the high-performance/Olympic context, and the methodology established to carry out this research, the process of gathering information that would help answer the questions presented in the introduction, will be described by me from now on. The process was developed on the basis of steps, over four years of exclusive dedication, without financial support. Having moved to another country and started a doctorate, I resumed *karateka* practices. I kept a field diary of my personal experiences of this retake, including participation in competitions I entered, seven in total between Spain and the United Kingdom. The first competition was certainly the toughest, as it took place days before I returned to training, even though I had already met the *sensei* and the *dojo* in Madrid. I will report what I collected as material to support my ethnographic/autoethnographic experience of returning to the modality, since this constitutes the sources that legitimize my path. However, the material from personal experience is not analysed in this thesis due to the focus on high-performance karate, a place in which I do not find myself.

My ethnographic journey of retaking *karateka* practices was composed, therefore, above all by a field diary of personal experiences. The first record date for this diary is February 17th, 2018, and it contains notes of competitions and training I did up to March 20th, 2020, the last recorded date and time when training was interrupted due to SARS-CoV-2, or COVID-19. After that date I also performed training, no more competitions, but as we had already

defined, my supervisors and I, that the thesis would focus on the embodied subjectivity of the athletes of the Olympic team, I stopped keeping the field-diary records<sup>41</sup>. In any case, this *Microsoft Word* file, my field diary, consists of 157 pages written in Spanish and Portuguese. I have a second field diary (differentiated as “K1”) where I report observations I made of the Olympic team in their concentration<sup>42</sup>. This file, however, consists of only four pages. I reported my observations from March 10th and 11th, 2020 at the *Centro de Alto Rendimiento* (hereafter CAR), or High Performance Centre, and the last entry referred to the then next national team meeting, also in Madrid, from March 19th to 21st, 2020. I, who kindly received a CAR access card to accompany the team, was advised that the CAR was closed due to COVID-19 and so I waited for the return notice.

That did not happen. Athletes resumed their training in 2021, however, as is understandable, the structure was not open to anyone who was not strictly necessary within the space. This forced me to redesign a part of the initial research project. I intended to establish a closer bond with the Spanish athletes observing their training, and, with luck, even doing some training with them, but this was not possible as I idealized. However, in my first face-to-face contact on 10th and 11th March, we had a small meeting at the end of the first day, where I introduced myself and explained my research, which generated, as far as I am able to perceive, receptivity on the part of several of them. As I mentioned earlier, they and the coaches who also met me personally on those days were very cooperative with me. Regarding the CAR, with the completion of the Tokyo Olympic Games and the end of the 2021 vacation period, activities may possibly return to normal. However, this remains unknown today. I pause in describing this high-performance scenario to proceed with the secondary materials I started describing earlier. I will return to this point to describe the participants and main data collection tools that I used with the elite team and became the main sources of this thesis.

Also part of my data collection is the non-participant observation of two important competitions that I attended for investigative purposes. The first of these was the *24th Karate World Championships Madrid 2018*, celebrated from November 6th to 11th, 2018. I took notes in an exclusive field diary for this event, as well as taking some photos and videos of the event for personal use and without any exhibition or dissemination of the material. I outlined the first categories of analysis, the *etic* ones (Rodríguez Navarro & García Monge, 2009) supported by the literature when observing this event and from there, with the observations of the

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<sup>41</sup> These records, to be clear, are just personal written notes in my field diary.

<sup>42</sup> “Concentration” is the way the training camp previous to competitions is named by the Spanish team.

competition, I wrote a short article (Turelli et al, forthcoming). The second competition I observed without participating was the *Campeonato de España*, Spanish Championships, held on January 12th and 13th, 2019 in Leganes, a city belonging to the Community of Madrid. Likewise, I took notes in a specific field diary and collected images and videos, again, for personal consultation/record. Several of the athletes that make up the Spanish Olympic karate team were competing in these competitions. Thereafter, at the end of March 2019, I started an eight-month stay/internship in the UK with the purpose of deepening my knowledge in qualitative investigations. That is when my Brazilian supervisor and companion throughout my academic career, Alexandre, put me in contact with David, in Glasgow.

As soon as I arrived in the completely unknown place, besides trying to communicate with a lot of effort, I started looking for a *dojo* to train. In my experience, I found that training is a very good way for me to even learn the languages, as I already know the *karateka* language and so I can make associations. Furthermore, the reactions of the *karateka* who receive me are usually positive, wanting to assess my technical level, make friendship, have fun with my idiomatic mistakes. In Glasgow I visited three *dojos* and spent more time in the third of them, carrying out what was called at that time a pilot study for my thesis. I took personal notes of my experiences, participated in competitions and conducted interviews with members of the *dojo*. An article was published about this experience (Turelli et al, 2020; *corrigendum* 2021). However, two of the participants withdrew their consent to the use of their data, and by consensus among my supervisors and I, the investigation previously carried out was cancelled and so is omitted from this thesis.

I still availed myself of a great experience in Glasgow related to a literature review started before the decision to carry out the pilot project there. The literature review was interrupted at that time to prioritize the empirical fieldwork, however, I kept the material collected from the last five-six years (2014-2019) in six scientific journals on sociology of sport. David gave me some general criteria, but left me free to choose journals. That was my first contact with: *Sociology of Sport Journal*; *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*; *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*; *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*; *Soccer and Society*; *Sport in Society*. Having selected papers related to my research first by abstract (50 papers), then by introduction and methodology (20 papers) was really helpful. Furthermore, the fact that I am writing this thesis in English right now was the result of the work in Glasgow. First, David's work of patience! And secondarily, his work with blogs. He requested the weekly writing in English of a free-themed blog to be sent to him by me. Initially only 200 words, then 500, and with me sometimes exceeding the limit. Blogs were written for a number of

pedagogical purposes, not for research, and are a feature of David's supervision of all of his doctoral students. They have become for me a space for reflection on different themes, but especially related to the ethnographic experience, whether to reflect on my experiences or on the theoretical framework. And about life itself, in general. Many of the blogs helped me come up with ideas that would be covered later in the thesis. I have *religiously* kept up the weekly delivery of blogs for over two years, wherever I was living. And I received feedback on every blog I submitted. Today, September 2021, they number 124 in total.

In the second semester of 2020 I had a short stay/internship of three months in Italy<sup>43</sup>, where I also participated in karate training, however only for two months, as due to COVID-19 the establishments were closed while I was there. In the first half of 2021, with the pandemic situation still in place, my *dojo* in Madrid resumed training with social detachment and the use of various sanitary measures, among which masks were mandatory, certainly. I finally got back to seeing my training partners, among them a woman, the only female mate in my group, who volunteered to be my pilot interviewee a year earlier, in advance of the interviews I would do with the elite athletes. Going into the sources of the thesis itself, I go on to describe the participants who make up the study population and the data collection instruments that I used specifically with them.

### 3.3. Participants

I explained my research to my *sensei* and sent him an abridged version of my research proposal. He gave me formal authorization to proceed with the study and put me in contact with the CAR's physical trainer. In an agile way, without delay, I received my CAR access card directly there on the day I started observing the concentrations/training camps of the Olympic team. As I reported, at the end of the first day I had a brief meeting with the athletes on the mat, when they finished their *kumite* training. The female *kata* athletes (two on the day) were still training in their group, so they were not at the meeting. The *kumite* athletes were

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<sup>43</sup> The three-month stay in Italy was funded by PIF (*Personal Investigador en Formación* of UAM) via 1b2. There I dedicated myself to studying contents related to the anthropology of the body, which can be read to some extent in the literature review and chapter 7 of this thesis. Again it was my Brazilian supervisor, Alexandre, who put me in contact with Professor Eduardo Galak and he, in turn, with Leonardo Tonelli, from *Associazione Leib*. Through Leonardo I met Professor Alessandro Bortolotti, professor at *UniBo, Università di Bologna*. Due to the pandemic context and the way it affected the dynamics of *Associazione Leib's* activities, I ended up working more with Alessandro. A short article relating "body" and the COVID-19 pandemic was written from this experience and published in *Giornale Italiano di Educazione alla Salute, Sport e Didattica Inclusiva* (Turelli, Kirk & Bortolotti, 2021).

receptive and wrote their contacts in my notebook (eight athletes). The *karateka* who for different reasons were not present at that meeting, but are part of the Spanish team, were also contacted by me. I got their contacts from my *sensei*. The complete women's team is made up of 16 women and has five coaches, who are the same for the men's group. I decided to embrace the group of women and trainers fully as participants in the study. However, a *kumite* athlete, a *kata* athlete and a coach were reluctant/too busy to participate. They were always polite, but I noticed that the *kumite* athlete was not comfortable and seemed to avoid contact, not responding to some messages. I was honest with her in saying that no one was evidently required to participate, and I warned her clearly when I was nearing completion of data collection, so that she would know that she would be out of the study, and that she would not feel in any way refused. She answered by saying she was aware that she would be out and she was okay with it.

The world-ranked number one *kata* athlete and her coach are certainly in high demand for work, whether training, interview requests and other media issues. They highlighted these difficulties and were willing to answer questions by email. I explained that it was a series of questions that followed a protocol I was applying, but I said I would email them if that was the only alternative. I believe the demands ended up preventing them from completing the process with me. As with the *kumite* athlete, I warned them when I was close to completing the data collection so that they would be aware that I was not excluding them from the process.

The six athletes who were not present at the concentration I watched were contacted by me and responded favourably to participation in the study. In summary, an overview of the participants can be sketched as follows:

**Table 1**

*General population of participants and non-participants*

Total female athletes: 16		Total coaches: 5	
Total interviewees: 14		Total interviewees: 4	
10 <i>kumite</i>	4 <i>kata</i>	3 <i>kumite</i>	1 physical trainer
Not interviewed: 2		Not interviewed: 1	
1 <i>kumite</i>	1 <i>kata</i>	1 <i>kata</i>	-

Thus, the study participants reported here were 18 people, 14 athletes from the female Spanish *karateka* Olympic team and four male coaches. These people have to some

extent public prominence, however, I must take care not to expose them and maintain the confidentiality of their data and especially of their testimonies. With this in mind, all the quotes I use from their interviews are identified by pseudonyms inspired by Greek and Roman mythology. Since most participants are women, when it comes to the four men in the study speaking, I have added “man” to their interview information. Due to the intentional disposition of the data, the information presented in this chapter cannot be linked to the comments made by the interviewees. However, here I present a general framework that provides enough information for the reader to know elements that are possibly relevant to understanding the constitution of the participants' subjectivity. I chose not to keep even the initials of their names. Even though these people can be found based on their weight and country (and later by the videos that I cite as analysed), the reader would need to set out to look for and “find” the person. It is not my intention that the identification takes place by simply reading the thesis. By this I mean that all possible measures of keeping participants' identities securely anonymised were taken by me. At some point of my writing process, Carlos, my Spanish supervisor, suggested not revealing the country where the study was carried out, notwithstanding, it could result in some kind of inconsistency, which led to us discarding the idea. Therefore, athletes are identified here as “A1-14”, and coaches as “C1-4”. All information is related to the time of the interviews (the dates will be detailed in a table in the interviews section, in addition to being included in the quoted extracts from the interviews, with pseudonyms though).

**Table 2**

*General presentation of participants*

General information							
N.	Athlete	Category	Age	Karate time	Dan	Education	Another profession*
1	A1	<i>Kumite</i> -50	23	19 years	1st	Degree underway	CAR internal**, stud.
2	A2	<i>Kumite</i> -55	24	19 years	1st	Msc	Student
3	A3	<i>Kumite</i> -55	28	24 years	3rd	Msc	Region karate coach
4	A4	<i>Kumite</i> -61	32	25 years	3rd	Msc	<i>Sensei</i>
5	A5	<i>Kumite</i> -61	22	13 years	1st	Degree underway	CAR internal**, stud.
6	A6	<i>Kumite</i> -68	33	26 years	2nd	Msc	Coach assistant
7	A7	<i>Kumite</i> -68	20	14 years	1st	Degree underway	CAR internal**, stud.
8	A8	<i>Kumite</i> -68	19	14 years	2nd	Degree underway	Student
9	A9	<i>Kumite</i> +68	33	26 years	4th	Degree	Police officer
10	A10	<i>Kumite</i> +68	23	20 years	3rd	Degree underway	Student
11	A11	<i>Kata</i> team holder	23	17 years	1st	Degree underway	CAR internal**, stud.
12	A12	<i>Kata</i> team holder	22	17 years	1st	Degree underway	Student
13	A13	<i>Kata</i> team reserve	20	15 years	2nd	Degree underway	Student
14	A14	<i>Kata</i> team reserve	20	13 years	1st	Degree underway	Student
N.	Coach	Occupation	Age	Karate time	Dan	Education	Another profession*

15	C1	<i>Kum</i> national coach	58	42 years	8th	Degree	National selector
16	C2	Physical trainer	33	17 (retired)	2nd	Msc	-
17	C3	<i>Kum</i> CAR coach 1	62	47 years	8th	Unfinished degree	<i>Sensei</i>
18	C4	<i>Kum</i> CAR coach 2	45	36 years	5th	No degree	-
<b>N.</b>	<b>Pilot</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Karate time</b>	<b>Dan</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Profession</b>
0	P0	<i>Karateka</i> mate	44	10 years	2nd	Degree	Programmer

\*Related to another profession being currently exercised.

\*\*CAR internal is the same athlete profession, but with the exclusivity that these people live in the CAR, just going home in weekends.

Finally, it remains to be said that the participants come from different regions of Spain, and maintain their training and lives in their respective cities. When summoned by the Spanish national team, they travel to “concentrate”, meet, train together and prepare for competitions. In addition, the athletes who do not live and train daily in the CAR receive training worksheets, especially in terms of physical conditioning, as I have been informed, to carry out wherever they are. However, they attend their *dojos* and usually work with their closest coach/*sensei*. During the pandemic period, sending training sheets and even virtual training sessions was highly emphasized. In chapter 4 I will make a presentation of some elements that athletes deal with and this will help to understand the general context. Now I will describe the instruments used for data generation.

### 3.4. Data sources

In addition to the instruments that I used and, based on them, was accumulating information over these four years of research, I used semi-structured interviews with two groups of people, the athletes and the coaches, as the main source of information for my analysis here. I also performed video analysis of the athletes' fights, and I will describe exactly how I proceeded in the task. As these are the two main sources of information analysed in this document, as observations specifically of concentrations were forcibly stopped, I will describe interviews and video analysis in more detail in the following sections. I point out that I still used the document analysis technique as defined by García (1993), something that can be seen in the article about the 2018 World Championships (Turelli et al, forthcoming). For the writing of the thesis, I certainly needed to look at a series of documents, now found virtually, especially issued by bodies responsible for sports karate, as can be seen at different times in the writing. However, I am focusing on the instruments that provided me with the greatest

input and volume of information of what is narrated here, and that was involving other people, expanding the framework of my personal experiences, consultations, investigations.

### 3.4.1. Interviews

In the ethnographic context, the interviews are understood as “a very especial listening” (Stigger & Silveira, 2010, p.4), which can reveal fundamental elements of the processes that otherwise are not possible to capture. For Callejo (2002, p.416), the interview “is a speech to be observed. As such, the greatest methodological relevance of the interview is found in investigations that seek to approach the experiences of the subjects.”<sup>44</sup> In anthropology, as already introduced, Clifford Geertz (2008) has called thick description of the process that takes into account more than the obvious, and that considers cultural values and meanings, as well as involved social relationships. In this direction, Hammer and Wildavsky (1990, p.26) contribute that when the interviewer is “familiarized with the objective situation, they can recognize whether the silences are symbolic or functional, as well as the distortions, what is bypassed or blocks of the interviewee, (so) we could say that they are much more prepared to explore the message.”<sup>45</sup>

Following Fuertes (2015) and Hammer and Wildavsky (1990), I adopted the open-ended semi-structured interview, consistent with the qualitative methodology and capable of allowing fluidity in conversations. The general script for interviews with athletes and coaches can be found in Appendix A and B, respectively, of this thesis. I followed very similar scripts with both groups, as the intention was to verify the same points, but perceived from different perspectives. So, I just adapted the script to the reality of each group. However, even though much of the information given to me by the interviewees was similar and responded to the categories I had foreseen, the *etic*, others appeared as exclusive and ended up redirecting the conversation or part of it. This contributed to the emergence of some *emic* categories, not expected by me before the interviews with the athletes. The fact that some things were repeated in different interviews with different people converted them into *emic* categories/subcategories (Rodríguez Navarro & García Monge, 2009); for example, the notion of “having a life”, which will be covered in chapter 4. I heard this repeatedly in interviews and it was something previously unknown to me. But as I listened over and over again, I paid

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<sup>44</sup> Translation from Spanish to English mine.

<sup>45</sup> Translation from Spanish to English mine.

attention to it, obviously, reflected on it and wrote a blog about it, and then I started asking about it in subsequent interviews. In other words, the open-endedness of the interviews was extremely useful, in addition to being necessary in this case, as it also allowed me to constantly re-elaborate my own performance as a researcher.

The fact of having two interviews with each participant was also positive. Because as I was reformulating or including talking points during the first round, the first interviewees could find themselves outdated, but with the second possibility of contact, I was able to return to relevant elements not discussed in the first meeting. The decision for two interviews was strategic, in order to be able to establish some bond with the participants and that the interview would not be “cold” (Hammer & Wildavsky, 1990). I certainly wanted interviewees to be honest with me and reveal important information to me, as I understand they did. So I opted for a first interview focused on the interviewees' athletic profile, their motivations, something including their exploits, in the sense that the martial environment is tough and how it is, then, for them to be there. I know these specificities and in the interviews in general related to the familiarization of the stranger, in the anthropological direction, this is what a researcher usually deals with. I, at least, have done it other times. That is, trying to know the reality of the interviewee, allowing them to report what is special/different/peculiar about their experiences. And this has a “approximator” potential, not necessarily with all people, but with most of them, since in this case we are dealing with something mutually known (between them and me). The second interview, then, would deal with my research topic more properly (on the application of more than one interview for participant see the work of Hickey and Roderick, 2017). All participants knew this from the beginning, as I sent an explanation of the research and its format along with the free and informed consent form (Appendix C) that everyone gave me signed. Also, in the first few minutes of the first interview I explained again what it was about and how it would work. And then proceeded to the recording of the interview, also authorized, of course, in audio and video, once due to the pandemic restrictions on personal contact, I did interviews through Zoom. In addition, I kept in touch with study participants via text messages on a regular basis. Some people more than others, as is normal, and with everyone at the Olympic Games occasion, for example.

Another relevant aspect of mention is the language. Since Spanish is not my mother tongue, this point always makes me pay more attention. The linguistic theme has always attracted me, with the different ways of speaking, structuring and understanding things. I believe that, after Portuguese, Spanish is the language I master the most, whether to express myself or to understand people. So, I consider that I understood everything that was being said

to me in the interviews, unlike the experience I had of interviewing people in Scotland. However, when interviewing people from different regions of Spain (and perhaps in possession of different forms of capital, in the Bourdieusian sense), they evidently used expressions relevant to their regions that, at times, made me think for a few seconds. When something was not clear to me, I would openly ask what they were referring to and then everything would be cleared up. At other times, I could perfectly understand what was being said in the context in which it was said, however, when trying to translate into English, the meaning was lost. I have made more than one failed attempt at my translations.

I must first say that Carlos, my Spanish supervisor as previously said, checked all my translations from Spanish to English, checking to see if they were compatible. In each findings and discussion chapter where I prepared the substantive theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I submitted all of the interview extracts that I would use for Carlos' review. At no point did he highlight anything related to Spanish that needed to be corrected, and the corrections or suggestions regarding English were minimal. Thus, I consider that I understood perfectly what was being said to me in Spanish, and I adjusted the transcriptions specifically of the passages that I would use for a better understanding, and Carlos approved them. The interviews were recorded both by my cell phone recorder, *Voice Recorder Version 21.1.06.11 Apache License*, generating MPEG-4 files, and by the *Zoom Video Communications 2020 Platform*, generating MP4 audio and video files. Interview transcripts were made using *Microsoft Stream* software, *Microsoft Corporation 2020, Version 1.0.2531.5*, generating VTT files. Transcripts using automated software are not output to perfection. So, all the excerpts that were selected by me for use were, at first, revised and corrected until obtaining what was being said literally in Spanish. And here I return to the language theme. In the process of transcription (Spanish) and translation (English) I searched for many words, some including their etymological origin. For example, "*vacilar*" (literally, "to waver/vacillate"). One athlete insisted on using this word to express that it is socially acceptable for men "*vacilar*" (behave badly, disdain, play) with women. In Portuguese it does not make much sense, but I understood in Spanish, researched, translated, Carlos approved, but David did not recognize it in English! This was repeated many times!

So, it must be said that I adapted some translations, as their literal transcription did not fit. But of course we know that translation is concerned primarily with meaning, not what is literally "correct". Also, I eliminated some swear words. In Spanish culture it is used very often, for example, "*joder*" (literally, "fuck"), and this is not necessarily heavy. Well, it is heavy, but maybe more acceptable as not necessarily rude and offensive as it might sound in other

languages/places. It does not necessarily express anger, or name-calling, for example. But still I chose to remove some of these expressions, also common among Spanish *karateka*, that could make the sentences, in English, something too heavy. I also reduced the use of “that” which naturally exists in Spanish speech, much more frequently even than in Portuguese, which also uses this word a lot. The swear words and anaphoric/polysyndetons idiomatic expressions were kept by me when I considered them to be relevant to understanding what was being said.

The interview schedule was drawn up in partnership with the interviewees. I initially planned to conduct observations of the concentrations, watch the Olympic Games in Japan in person and then interview people. However, as we know, everything changed. When I came across a new scenario in March 2020, I talked to my supervisors, waited a bit, and as the scenario that was unfolding seemed to get worse and worse, we opted for virtual interviews, as already described here. Over three months, then, I conducted 38 interviews, including the pilot in this count. I communicated and scheduled each of the interviews with each of the participants, and between the months of June to September 2020 I therefore carried out the data collection that refers to the interview technique. It is possible to see the process in more detail in table 3:

**Table 3**

*Description of the order and dates of the interviews with the participants*

N.	Interviewed	Interview 1 n.	Date	Interview 2 n.	Date
0	P0	38	28/06/2020	-	-
1	A2	1	29/06/2020	12	12/08/2020
2	A13	2	12/07/2020	18	24/08/2020
3	A14	3	14/07/2020	22	02/09/2020
4	A5	4	21/07/2020	13	13/08/2020
5	A3	5	21/07/2020	14	15/08/2020
6	A8	6	22/07/2020	15	17/08/2020
7	A4	7	24/07/2020	17	23/08/2020
8	A7	8	25/07/2020	16	18/08/2020
9	A6	9	27/07/2020	21	27/08/2020
10	A9	10	27/07/2020	20	27/08/2020
11	A11	11	29/07/2020	19	24/08/2020
12	A1	23	03/09/2020	26	07/09/2020
13	A10	24	05/09/2020	25	07/09/2020
14	C2	27	14/09/2020	33	25/09/2020
15	C3*	28	15/09/2020	30	17/09/2020
16	A12	29	15/09/2020	31	18/09/2020
17	C1	34	29/09/2020	35	29/09/2020
18	C4	36	30/09/2020	37	30/09/2020
*3. 32. 21/09/2020					

The interviews lasted an average of 1h10min, reaching a total of more than 44 hours of recordings. A third interview was carried out with C3 because the previous ones were very extensive. I had to close the first interview because I had another interview scheduled (with A12), and the second with C3 was also long. So we agreed to do a third interview to complete the list of questions and so we did. Having explained these things, I now report the procedures followed to carry out the video analysis.

### 3.4.2. *Video-analysis*

The decision to carry out video analysis of the athletes' performances in competitions was due to the fact that, very recurrently, they have their performance classified as inferior to the men's. Furthermore, there is the question at hand as to whether there would be a female way of fighting. So I decided to adopt this analysis technique which, above all, also contributes as a criterion of scientific rigour, triangulation of techniques and investigation validity (Colás & Buendía, 1992; Guba, 1983). As I mentioned, I kept in touch with the athletes and in January 2021 I asked all of them to send/indicate me two of their videos where they considered that they had had the best performance of their sporting careers. They responded promptly and positively. I explained that I could select videos myself from *YouTube* and WKF channel, but then I would define some criteria by date, competition or best performance according to my opinion, and maybe technical difficulty. So, as the study deals with their subjectivity, I considered that the best criterion would be the best performance experience according to their own view. This was very positive as some ended up sharing videos with me that are not available online, even though most are. Some still shared more than two videos, which I took into account, of course, but I do not include in the analysed videos table to comply with the stipulated criteria. In order to make the analysis somewhat transparent and perhaps allow for the dependability criterion (Colás & Buendía, 1992) of the investigation, and at the same time striving for the preservation of the athletes' identity, I present a table of the videos analysed below.

#### **Table 4**

*Videos provided by the athletes for analysis*

Video Analysis							
N.	Athlete	Video 1	Date	Place	Video 2	Date	Place
1	A1	WKF Junior, Cadet & U21 World Championships – gold medal	2017	Tenerife	National League – gold medal	2021	Leganes
2	A2	Premier league – bronze medal	2019	Madrid	Open of Paris – ticket to bronze medal	2020	Paris
3	A3	Premier League	2019	Madrid	Series A	2018	Shanghai
4	A4	Open of Paris – gold medal	2016	Paris	European Championships – gold medal	2009	Paris
5	A5	Spanish Senior Championships – gold medal	2020	Leganes	National League – gold medal	2020	Leganes
6	A6	WKF World Championships – bronze medal (fight in Spanish <i>kumite</i> team)	2018	Madrid	Premier league – bronze medal	2018	Istanbul
7	A7	WKF Junior, Cadet & U21 World Championships	2017	Tenerife	Premier league	2021	Lisbon
8	A8	Young league – bronze medal	2018	Bulgaria	Spanish Championships	2020	Malaga
9	A9	WKF World Championships – bronze medal	2014	Bremen	Premier league – bronze medal	2021	Lisbon
10	A10	Spanish Senior Championships – gold medal	2019	Leganes	Premier league – bronze medal	2019	Madrid
11	A11	European Karate Championships – gold medal (Spanish <i>kata</i> team)	2019	Guadalajara	Premier league – gold medal (Spanish <i>kata</i> team)	2018	Rotterdam
12	A12	European Karate Championships – gold medal (Spanish <i>kata</i> team)	2019	Guadalajara	Premier league – gold medal (Spanish <i>kata</i> team)	2018	Rotterdam
13	A13	European Karate Championships – gold medal (Spanish <i>kata</i> team)	2019	Guadalajara	Spanish Senior Championships – gold medal (regional <i>kata</i> team)	2020	Leganes
14	A14	WKF Junior, Cadet & U21 World Championships – gold medal	2019	Santiago	Spanish U21 Championships – gold medal	2019	Spain

The athletes who, for whatever reasons, took a while to send me the videos, received my suggestions for videos to be analysed. Those who did not agree, then sent me those they

considered the best of their careers, and others confirmed and authorized me to analyse according to my suggestion. To carry out the analysis, I used a series of criteria established by me with the help and supervision of David, based on the sum of my experience as a *karateka* and my experience as a researcher, especially with regard to the observation technique. I checked in the literature for possible analyses of gendered movement videos and they are, in this specificity, absent. All the material I found is described in chapter 6, where I present the analysis of the videos themselves. Here I focus on reporting the aspects of the observation technique that I have taken into account in carrying out the analysis and present the criteria developed by me to fulfil the task.

In general, anthropological studies have flexibility for observation, since the observer must be open to capturing the different elements that arise in situations. Other authors, however, suggest the use of an observation sheet with clearly delimited criteria of what one seeks to observe (Anguera et al, 2011). In this sense, Anguera and Hernández-Mendo (2016) establish differences between direct and indirect observation. Regarding direct observation, they say that it “requires a complete or total perception, and our organ of vision or a videographic camera can capture the images in its totality, as well as segment its sequence of production, as a function of the needs of the study” (p.22). On the other hand, the indirect observation, “is characterized by a partial degree of perceptiveness, and implies the existence of hidden behaviours that will require an inference, for which we will have to compensate with greater methodological guarantees”<sup>46</sup> (p.22). In general, my way of using the observation technique follows what Geertz (2008) recommends, being governed by *guidelines of meanings*, more open than systematic and structured. However, for the analysis of videos, direct observation, with defined criteria of what is taken into account, is presented as pertinent. For situations like these, where recordings are analysed, Lorenzo, Jiménez and Lorenzo (2006) consider that observation

(...) has sufficient entity to obtain scientific knowledge that does not intend any other objective than to capture a present behaviour with sufficient discovery power, not only to describe that behaviour and/or situation, but to get to explain it properly and establish various relationships, adjusting to the schematic structure of the general method of science<sup>47</sup> (p.2).

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<sup>46</sup> Translation from Spanish to English mine.

<sup>47</sup> Translation from Spanish to English mine.

Considering these aspects of observation, I defined criteria, as mentioned, for the analysis of the videos that the athletes sent me, and from them I categorized and classified their ways of fighting, presenting the results, which are not simple, in chapter 6. Regards the adopted criteria, and thinking about what it means to fight like a woman and if there is a feminine way to fight, the sociological literature used in this research provides a series of information that can be converted into verification criteria for the methodological work of video analysis (Mondada, 2012). I selected some of them:

- The **use of space** made in different ways between men and women (Maclean, 2016; 2019) in addition to the possession by men of symbolic space (Atkinson, 2011; MacInnes, 1998), with the purpose of domination, whether territorial or submission on the other for the biological/testosterone potential (Wood & Stanton, 2012).
- **Expansive male movements** (Young, 1980) with long sequences of strokes, which leads to the forced occupation of space and presupposes skill (Connell, 1995).
- **Restricted female movements** (Young, 1980), with defences that are very close to the body in a somewhat contained and modest way (Bordo, 1997).
- The ***kiai*** as a revealing element of restraint and embarrassment of many women (Maclean, 2019).

Among coaches, the criteria used to emphasize differences between the way men and women fight are:

- Difficulty for women to perform **sweeps, projections and melee work**.
- They tend **to risk less**, holding on to known and mastered techniques.
- They are **less aggressive** than men, making mistakes more often than they do.
- Women have difficulty doing **tactical work**.
- Women find it difficult to get **complex time-gesture coordination** (peculiar agility in *deai*/anticipation time).
- The women's way of express ***kiai*** does not match the expected patterns (it is usually shriek, long and sometimes before the blow, which can be configured as a warning to the opponent).

The predominant criteria listed by the athletes, although some may disagree on certain points, about what is evidenced as a difference in the way they fight in relation to men are:

- They see themselves as **more careful and assertive**, attacking less impulsively and less hot-headed.
- Do not waste techniques and do not seek volume of points, but do what is **necessary to score**.
- Do not create or test new things at the time of the competition; they do not seek to “make a show” or make an attractive fight, but **to do the basics that work**.
- They feel that they do **less projection work** than men because other things are more effective for them.
- They are **aesthetically more zealous** than men (also *kumite* athletes).

Taking into account these 15 observational criteria for the analysis of gendered movement, I, as an observer researcher, but also without completely detaching myself from my experience as a *karateka*, watched the 28 videos that the athletes sent me<sup>48</sup>, 20 videos from *kumite* and eight from *kata*. It is important to make it clear that I am not constructing an “objective” measurement scale with these criteria. I am instead going to use these criteria qualitatively to discuss the fighting of the women, looking for the obvious and not so obvious aspects of fighting from a gender perspective.

For continuing the methodology chapter, I will describe in the next section the general data analysis procedures, in addition to those already discussed.

### 3.5. Data analysis

I started analysing the data in early December 2020. My first action was transcribing the interviews, followed by coding them (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). I trained in 2018 on the software used for coding qualitative data *NVivo* (Trigueros, Rivera & Rivera, 2018) with one of its creators. In addition, in 2020 I also participated in training with the creator of the *Delve* coding software. I think these are very useful tools, however, I ended up deciding to follow the classic format I was used to, which was manual coding. As I already had an outlined system of *etic* categories, I chose to group the excerpts from the interviews, which I still had relatively fresh in my mind, into such categories. Then, I coded the compatible excerpts among the

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<sup>48</sup> Some athletes sent more than two videos, as previously said, and I evidently considered them too. However, the order they gave me defined the two videos that appear in the description found in Table 4.

different interviews that gave me the new categories, *emic*. Going back to the categories I had initially outlined in my research project, they were described based on the research objectives and consisted of:

**Table 5**

*Specific objectives and categories initially (February, 2019) designed for the research*

<b>Initial proposed categories' system</b>	
<b>Specific objective 1</b>	To investigate what factors favour or inhibit the construction of female <i>karateka</i> subjectivity
<b>Subcategories</b>	Behaviours and social traits accepted in the environment
	" <i>Identifications</i> ": what inspires and what repudiates
	Stereotypes and prejudices
	Social relations between equals and <i>different</i> (gender and function)
<b>Specific objective 2</b>	To analyse how sports and martial culture influence the development of female subjectivity in Olympic karate
<b>Subcategories</b>	Women in sports are not usually valued for their sports performance (Ferretti & Knijnik, 2007; Souza, Capraro & Jansen, 2017)
	<i>Woman fights well when she does it like a man</i> (Gonçalves, 2014; Souza, Capraro & Jansen, 2017)
<b>Specific objective 3</b>	To know what are the means or resources (negotiations) used by women to gain space –or to remain– in this environment typically understood as male
<b>Subcategories</b>	Defence of the martial tradition (Gonçalves, 2014; Lovisolo et al 2010)
	<i>Overcoming the hegemonic historical concept of the figure of women</i> (Boaventura, 2008; 2011; 2016)
	Support in stereotypes and social relationships
<b>Specific objective 4</b>	To investigate the possibility of development of plural <i>karateka</i> subjectivity, that is, not restricted or exclusive of the feminine or masculine
<b>Subcategories</b>	Overcoming various known stereotypes and prejudices
	Development of an innovative and authentic environment

However, once the coding process was completed, the category system was restructured based on real data from the field. I therefore redesigned the *etic* categories and added the *emic*, resulting in a set of nine categories. In January 2021 I shared with my three supervisors ten *Microsoft Word* files with the material resulting from my analysis, totalling 181 pages. This is relevant to be said since the work of supervisors also served to ensure the reliability of the data collected by me and the research itself. The files consisted of nine categories with extracts from the interviews corrected in Spanish and translated into English, and a tenth synthesis file, exposing general points about the analysis, a synthesis of each category and my objective with each one, its subcategories and possible references theory for

each category. Although the final material underwent small modifications, at that time the category system was structured as described below:

**Table 6**

*Etic and emic categories and subcategories resulting from data analysis (January, 2021)*

<b>Categories' system after data analysis</b>	
<b>Category 1</b>	Motivations, dedication and achievement of perfection or having a life
	Why karate?
	Self-surrender and everything that is left behind.
<b>Subcategories</b>	Having a life.
	Beauty: karate to be felt.
	Fruition: flow experiences or their absence.
<b>Category 2</b>	Differences from a normal <i>dojo</i> : approaches to pain and scales challenges
	Martial art vs. sport: pain to form character or for performance.
<b>Subcategories</b>	Overcoming injuries.
	The extra pounds.
	Female exclusivity: menstruation.
<b>Category 3</b>	Women and fragility: dealing with victory and defeat and the need for psychological support
	The control over nerves.
<b>Subcategories</b>	One version training and another competing.
	Psychological support.
	Victory and defeat.
<b>Category 4</b>	Aggression and confidence – fear and reality
	Be aggressive and fearless.
<b>Subcategories</b>	Fighting styles.
	Violence.
	Realism and respect for danger or lack of self-confidence?
<b>Category 5</b>	Social positioning: hierarchy; acceptance of the neutral: <i>gi</i> and <i>kiai</i> ; space negotiation and coexistence designed
	Obvious and subliminal hierarchies.
<b>Subcategories</b>	One-size-fits-men: <i>gi</i> as a strengthening of the gender hierarchy and the aesthetic hierarchy.
	<i>Kiai</i> : cry of power according to gender and courage parameters.
	Space and coexistence: each one's place and the convenience of competitiveness.
<b>Category 6</b>	Looking from different angles: athletes and coaches, challenges for everyone
	The challenge of being an athlete.
<b>Subcategories</b>	The challenge of being a coach.
	Does being a woman have an influence?
<b>Category 7</b>	Construction of the <i>karateka</i> female subjectivity
	What it means to be <i>karateka</i> .
<b>Subcategories</b>	Characteristics that define them as <i>karateka</i> women.
	Get inspired by or inspire to?
	Incorporation of the received tradition.

<b>Category 8</b>	The still present difficulty of being and showing up as a woman in a male environment 1
<b>Subcategories</b>	Martial culture: women cry.
	The ideal of fighting like a man or accept inferiority.
	Masculinization of women?
	Uncomfortable situations: power and machismo.
<b>Category 9</b>	The still present difficulty of being and showing up as a woman in a male environment 2
<b>Subcategories</b>	Female stereotype: femininity and sensuality.
	Body of the <i>karateka</i> woman.
	Sports culture: erotization of women in sport.
	Desiring gaze.

I added the video analysis of the athletes' performances and made some changes to this category system, as can be seen directly in the findings and discussion chapters. In terms of video analysis, I shared four randomly selected videos with David so that he could also watch them in order to oversee my analysis work and the criteria setting I was doing. We talked about them in a virtual meeting and then he requested videos of men's fights so that he could help me verify what was established as my question for that analysis, around the way of fighting of women. I sent him two videos of male fights and later another one of a number 1 non-Spanish female fighter in the rankings, in order to clarify an argument I presented in chapter 5. We had regular meetings to talk about the analysis that I was building and he gave me written feedback on each of the chapters I sent him.

Regarding table 6, I have grouped categories 1-5 with their subcategories, coming especially from the interview 1 carried out with everyone in chapter 4, and this chapter works as a background on the specificities of *karateka* martial-sports training. Category 6 and its subcategories consisted of the last subcategory of chapter 4, however, it was undocked. So, after talking to David we decided to dilute it among the other categories. Categories 7, 8 and 9 and their subcategories correspond respectively to chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the thesis. They are mainly the result of the interview 2 with the participants and respond to the main objectives of the study, thus deserving each one of them a specific chapter. From February to June 2021 I dedicated myself to writing these four findings and discussion chapters. Following Glaser and Strauss (1967), I first carried out, in each of the chapters, the work with the substantive theory, drawn from the empirical material, and then complemented the interpretation with the formal theory, which is already conceptually established. Carlos gave me feedback, usually over phone calls, for each of the chapters sent. And I had meetings between May and June with Alexandre to complete analyses of the beginning of the doctorate, such as the 2018 World

Championships, and other processes of my ethnographic/autoethnographic experiences. Finally, and to conclude this chapter, I briefly present the formal elements that ensure the reliability of this study, in addition to what I have been describing so far, as well as the ethical aspects followed.

### 3.6. Trustworthiness

Guba (1983), Colás and Buendía (1992) and Krause (1995) define research validity criteria as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria, summarizing the reliability of the material presented here, were ensured especially through the triangulation of experts, guaranteed by my supervisors, as I have already described. I also used triangulation of data collection techniques, combining several of them over the four years of research, as I have also reported here. The dependability criterion is possibly the most difficult to be reached, in the sense of achieving the same results as I did. I have sought to describe steps taken in detail so that, if this is intended, the procedures can be repeated. However, this is a considerably specific context, from what concerns my subjectivity as a woman/researcher/*karateka*, to the subjectivities of the research participants who are currently part of the elite Spanish team, added to the Olympic *karateka* context, which is also one-off. In any case, the method is described and can be re-applied; I try not to present a biased view, always reflecting on my position and resorting to the unbiased view of supervisors, male/*non-karateka*; they also ensure the credibility of the data collected (Alexandre following my academic trajectory from the beginning<sup>49</sup>), as do the various sources/techniques for collecting information; and readers can assess the possibilities of transferability of the findings to other contexts, although several studies with similarities of different nature are even cited here.

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<sup>49</sup> It is important to report that materials written by me previously and mentioned throughout this thesis as Turelli and Turelli and Vaz were carried out while I was part of a study group coordinated by Professor Alexandre Fernandez Vaz, in Brazil. The group is named NEPESC –*Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas Educação e Sociedade Contemporânea*, Nucleus for Studies and Research in Education and Contemporary Society–, and is located at the *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina*, Federal University of Santa Catarina–, supported by CNPq –*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico*, National Council for Scientific and Technological Development– and FAPESC –*Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa e Inovação do Estado de Santa Catarina*, Foundation for Research and Innovation of the State of Santa Catarina–. Other studies mentioned here, such as those by Gonçalves and Boaventura, also come from research and researchers belonging to the same group.

### 3.7. Ethical considerations

I followed all the procedures recommended by the Ethics Committee of the Autonomous University of Madrid to carry out my investigation. I obtained formal consent from a member of the Spanish Karate Federation to carry out the study with the *karateka* Olympic team, and all participants provided me with an informed consent/interview assignment statement, a model of which can be found in Appendix C with all its details, filled in and signed. This model explains the voluntary nature of participation, as well as the right to have confidentiality preserved. The Ethics Committee considered that my project met the ethical requirements to be carried out and approved my study in 2019 (CEI 102-1930). Such resolution can also be verified in Appendix D.

### 3.8. Chapter closure

In this chapter I have presented all the steps taken to generate this research document, from my ethnographic/autoethnographic experiences, to and especially the investigation carried out with the Spanish female *karateka* team. I began by describing the worldview that guides the study, which classifies it as qualitative, ethnographically inspired, identifying it with different theoretical lines. I presented some strengths and limitations of the ethnographic method, as well as the measures taken to resolve these weaknesses. The researcher's section on reflexivity and positionality helps to explain how potential weaknesses can be converted into positive points, how a certain familiarity with the object can thus be favourable. I described the process of approaching the participants, as well as a general informative table about them, taking care to keep, however, the confidentiality of their data.

Afterwards, I focused on exposing the main information gathering techniques that resulted in this thesis, although other materials were published as a result of investigations throughout the doctoral course. I then presented a schedule of the interviews carried out, as well as specifying the videos that made up the analysed set of the athletes' performances. Finally, I detailed how I performed the analysis of the data coming from the field, how I did the coding and categorization of them until they resulted in the findings and discussion chapters exposed here. At the end of the chapter, I presented the criteria that guarantee the reliability of the investigation and the ethical procedures. That done, in the next four chapters I therefore show the answers that data collection provided to my research questions.

#### 4. SPECIFICITIES OF HIGH PERFORMANCE KARATE

In this chapter I seek to present and contextualize the *karateka* team researched in this study as well as some elements that contribute to constructing the subjectivity of women athletes. Karate is a complex modality and is multi-faceted. It is a martial art loaded with tradition, where rituals and protocols prevail (Segalen, 2002). In this traditional approach, *karateka* build a sense of honour, discipline and respect through hard work and establish a relationship with the martial philosophy that guides a lifestyle (Lautert et al, 2005). Another facet, very close to the first one, is dedicated to the idea of self-defence (Krug, 2001). Supported by films promoting a popular view of martial arts (Bowman, 2010; 2013; 2017), this form of karate focuses on combating violence, in a contradictory way many times, since a defence ends up becoming an attack and, in the name of the defence, there may be an authorization for violence. Both facets are often mixed with one another. Moreover, karate has become a sport since its transition to the West (Chan, 2000; James and Jones, 1982; Macedo, 2006; Maclean, 2015). Many *dojos* are dedicated to competitive sport karate, but they do not leave behind traditional aspects of the martial art. Tangled up in these interwoven facets of karate are the women fighters. In a martial art designed by and for men, perhaps women add another facet to karate, or perhaps not necessarily. There is a final facet, exclusively dedicated to sport, that although it is not capable of completely abandoning tradition, it prioritizes competition above all. So a team dedicated to high performance is formed, with the best fighters, the champions of a nation, Spain, and it is in this context that my study is located, among a group of women dedicated to elite karate and in preparation to compete in the Olympic Games.

Therefore, I dedicate this chapter to present the scenario of Olympic karate, as well as to situate the position of women in the team. That is, *what* and *who* are these women? What kind of fighters? How do they participate in the environment and elements that compose it? Since the context proves to be complex, the idea is to situate the group in relation to the facets of karate that I mentioned. Where they are in relation to tradition, self-defence, sport, all with a few brushstrokes of gender. I say brushstrokes because the theme of gender, central to the thesis, will be addressed in detail in the next three chapters. Gender is however implied if not explicitly examined throughout this chapter. To begin, I report the current panorama of combat sport on its way to the long-awaited Olympic Games, but not without obstacles, since it needs to face the great challenge imposed by SARS-CoV-2.

#### 4.1. Karate, Olympic Games and pandemic

In 2016, it was announced that karate would be part of the Olympic Games for the first time. The following edition, to be celebrated in Japan, the place of origin of karate, would finally have combat sport as one of its modalities. For many of the *karateka* of my generation, it was a dream to be able to participate in karate at the Games, something that was becoming less and less possible for me personally, given the advancing age and especially performance drop. However, on hearing the news in 2016, I, who was withdrawn from karate, both from training and competitions, as well as from research, started to rethink my return. And in fact, I returned to the sociological studies of the sport and training, participating in a few competitions as well.

Considering my own previous experience, I intended to research something related to the social place of women in this modality, which, for me, has always presented itself as a challenging male environment, to the point of abandoning it. However, my experience was limited to the karate of my home country, Brazil, a country where social differences of all orders are undeniable. I wondered if that would happen in other countries considered more developed as well, if the context would be predominantly masculine and challenging. And yet, if the challenges I faced would also present themselves to women at the highest levels of the sport. Since I always knew that, although I was respected for my technical level and had some good results in competitions, I was only part of the selection of my state in Brazil, which does not correspond to being part of the elite of world karate.

So I started my ethnographic trajectory with a view to discovering what intrigued me: is the problem me or is it something bigger? In my ethnographic adventure I trained in Spain, the United Kingdom and Italy, also competing in the first two. And I can say that the experience felt in the body itself is very useful to confirm what could be just assumptions; in addition to serving to understand what the research participants, women who are in the world karate elite, will say, keeping the proper proportions. In other words, I used my own possibilities to train in different places to expand borders and learn about other realities; and I looked for ways to talk to some of the women who are at the highest levels of the sport. Both actions were planned, but it is important to note that I was also lucky enough to meet helpful people who facilitated this contact. My Spanish *sensei* provided me with contact with the entire team and their coaches. And once this process started, the truth is that it was a great pleasure to talk to everyone and learn a lot from them.

Having made this brief introduction to the chapter, I need to mention the non-permanence of karate on the Olympic scene. In February 2019 I presented my research project at the *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* and obtained its approval from the evaluation panel. I was very happy, because then one knows if what one is proposing makes sense and can actually contribute to the social sciences community or not. However, on the same day, news was released that karate was not included in the next 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. My Spanish supervisor informed me of that and, of course, for a moment I had doubts about my research and even about the doctorate. Would it be necessary to change everything? After the brief moment of darkness, I was able to show myself that my study had meaning for that moment and that occasion, whether or not going forward in the Olympic context, leaving and returning to it later, or whatever the outcome was.

The fact is that the future of karate in Olympic terms still remains unknown. At first, it will not be in Paris, but keep trying to be reaccepted. And with the advent of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, COVID-19, the debut *karateka* in Games that would be in 2020, transferred to 2021, something unprecedented in the history of the Olympic Games, Modern and even Ancient Games, was involved in doubts. I, as a researcher more than *karateka*, included assisting the Tokyo Games as part of data collection. So the uncertainty surrounding the event, once it relates to my research, again put me in awe. However, again I needed to reflect and realize that just like all the work done by the elite team remains valid whether or not there are Games, because this worry existed, my research with them also. Thus, on March 20, 2021, the Five Parties (the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG), the Organising Committee Tokyo 2020 and the Government of Japan) met virtually. They announced that the Games would be held without a foreign audience. Athletes would need to comply with a series of measures to be able to participate without causing health complications and only Japanese spectators would be able to attend the Games. With this decision, the organizers sought “contribute to ensure safe and secure Games for all participants and the Japanese public”<sup>50</sup>.

When conducting the interviews, I asked the athletes about how the period of total confinement lived in Spain in 2020 affected them (in relation to this, see Bowman's article, 2020). In general, it harmed their performance but it also represented something like a necessary pause in the midst of the intense pace of travel to which they were subjected:

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<sup>50</sup> <https://tokyo2020.org/en/news/statement-on-overseas-spectators-for-the-olympic-and-paralympic-games-tokyo-2020>, accessed on 25/03/2021.

The muscles and that has been very difficult to maintain (...) The weight has also been difficult to control. Well, then what is that, training karate, to make displacements and the strategy part and all that has been complicated, practically nothing (was done). (Vesta, Interview 8 (1), 07/25/2020)

Then I trained, I trained on my own, I did not follow Hermes' training, because I did not want to set schedules I was a little out of place there. (...) I was moving, at least I was moving. Now it's hard for me because I haven't trained everything I should train, but hey, it has been very good for my head. (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

Confinement and the stoppage of competitions came at the perfect time for me. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

They resumed training as soon as possible and had national competitions still in 2020, which they attended with a mask and the public was not allowed. Internationally, competitions resumed in mid-March 2021, with the Premier League in Istanbul. Thus, regardless of whether or not Olympic karate would continue, the fact that the sport saw this possibility affected it considerably. This is also verified by the testimonies of the athletes:

Before (being an Olympic sport), karate was a minority sport, it was practically not taken into account. (Proserpina, Interview 18 (2), 24/08/2020)

When a sport is Olympic, you already reach a point where you can live off the sport. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

In Spain, four years ago, there was no media broadcast that there is now. (...) If you have the Olympic label, it seems that it is more important. At least in my autonomous community, which gives a money scholarship to athletes, before I used to receive much less than what I am going to receive now, I don't know, four times less. So when the Olympic Games pass, well, I think we are going to come back, because less money for the federations, less aid for the athletes, whoever they had; a bit like that, and everything is relayed back to the clubs, to everything. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

Even athletes who were about to retire –one of them had retired and returned– sought alternatives to extend their time until the Games:

They gave us a push by becoming Olympians, so a lot of people who were, uh, it was understood that we were at the moment of retirement, more or less, we tried to

extend it a little more. So I think that this has been a push for many of us, in this case females I am speaking to you. And I think that this has been the main reason that now in karate internationally the age of the competitors has increased. (Hera, Interview 9 (1), 27/07/2020)

Also for coaches and other levels of karate, not only in sports karate, by the way, it seems that the effects of becoming an Olympic sport have arrived. It is known that sport is also an entertainment industry to a large extent, and the Olympic Games are the culmination of sports exhibition (Amâncio et al, 2019). The event involves an exorbitant amount of money, especially through television broadcasting (Vigarello, 2008). The transmission of the Games is capable of making the sport even more spectacular according to Vigarello (2008). Thus, when taking part in this process, karate was strongly affected in different aspects, as the data show. In the view of so-called traditional karate, not focused on competitions but on traditional martial art practices, opening up to the Olympic scenario would represent a loss of values for karate. For fans of combat sport more than traditional martial art, there is an opportunity, as pointed out. The athletes add:

There are people who say that with the Olympic Games the essence of Martial Art is lost. I don't think so, I think that people who have a more traditional philosophy (linked to the purist side of karate) still have it and those who don't have it, still don't have. But the intensity, the involvement, all of that has risen a lot, because even the issue of sponsors and everything, it kind of became professional. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

I think it has favoured both senses (sports and traditional karate), people say no, that traditional karate has been badly affected. I think the way of seeing karate has changed, I think it have changed competition karate, it has evolved. That is true. But I think the traditional one, no. And it is benefiting from the publicity, from a series of things that being Olympians has given, that without being Olympians it would not have opted for karate on a television level, far from it, nor would there have been any news, or anything at all. (Hera, Interview 21 (2), 27/08/2020)

This Olympic novelty, therefore, brought its implications and raised the level of demand in the sport to the maximum.<sup>51</sup> It is true that karate even before the Olympic

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<sup>51</sup> Another new experience lived by the athletes concerns the procedures of the International Olympic Committee, something they had not yet experienced. For example: "There are several people on the national team, me too, who were on the Adams project (anti-doping). You have to put where you are now every day, for example, imagine every day at 7:00 in the morning that I am at my house, so they

possibility celebrated world championships every two years and already had international competitions that had a ranking. However, criticism has grown, perhaps, also because the novelty ends up messing with consolidated or established concepts for a long time. Sport was promoted by Baron Pierre de Coubertin as an amateur practice, that is, practiced for love<sup>52</sup>, something only possible for the social economic elite. This fact was not exclusive to France, occurring in other countries, with emphasis on Britain and the education promoted in the schools (Kirk, 2002) that formed the country's social elites. It was in the Victorian England the origin of the amateur ideal with sport played by gentlemen purely for pleasure, for *sport* (Gay, 1995), meaning something done out of expecting recompense, “for fun”. In this way, as Vigarello (2008, p.457) writes, “gaining muscle to make money is to make your strength servile, it is to eventually accept 'betraying', depending on the payer and not on yourself.”<sup>53</sup> This criticism evidences the view that “the body of the professional athlete is a mercenary body” (Vigarello, 2008, p.457) and that the popularization of sport, leaving something select for the masses, was frowned upon. Although karate is far from being a sport of social and economic elite, it has its purist side, in defence of tradition and values. Thus, those who practice it for love, without economic interests, or without the required technical level to become professional (Turelli & Vaz, forthcoming-b), are not satisfied to see the group that commercializes their art become an “elite”. They are historical roots of social class disputes that are quite interesting to watch; concepts that are not found in our everyday memory, but that are constantly reproduced. In any case, the international competitions that took place before the Olympic possibility, because of this one, were reformulated and converted into Series A and Premier League. The scores obtained there counted towards the few positions that would be occupied by those who would actually arrive at the Games.

The female *kumite* competitions are divided into five weights: -50kg, -55, -61, -68 and +68kg. There are also *kumite* per team, made up of three female fighters and up to two reserves, and *kata* competition by team, also by three women, in addition to individual *kata*. At the Olympic Games, not all categories were included. Contests were concentrated on individual *kata* only and *kumite* at -55, -61 and +61 weights<sup>54</sup>. It means that only a maximum of four female athletes per country, if classified, would have a chance to participate. For this reason, a scoring system and the pre-Olympic championship were created, this one a very

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can come, they hit the doorbell and do me doping control. And then in competitions.” (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

<sup>52</sup> In French there is a relationship between the words *amateur* and love, which is *amour* in that language.

<sup>53</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine in all citations of this work, Vigarello, 2008.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.wkf.net/olympics>, accessed on 03/02/2021.

important competition to define who would finally represent Spain in the most coveted competition in the history of karate. An athlete says:

The decision to go to the pre-Olympic was with an internal selection. That through the championships that had since January, the world circuits that, well, the Paris Open, there were five competitions that scored and (...) whoever had more points within those five championships was the one that was going to go to the pre-Olympic and there the thing was left without pre-Olympic and with nothing. (Diana, Interview 4 (1), 07/21/2020)

Taking all this into account, we are faced with a high-level sport scenario with its culmination in the Olympic Games. However, now I start to cut out this broad scenario, working with something like a sample of it, the team of women athletes of the elite Spanish *karateka* and their coaches. They are among the best in the sporting world and help answer the questions I asked myself at the beginning of this chapter, considering the background of the study laying in autoethnography, with my “personal truths”, however, also being subjected to questioning (Çelik & Köksal, 2019). Do some problems that I perceived according to my own experience also exist at other levels (in high performance)? Is the challenging male context also perceived by these women? How do they deal with some uncomfortable situations?

These women will normally share the context of a *dojo* where they do their usual training, when they are not in periods of many consecutive trips meeting the demands of the national team. Some of them are interns of the CAR, as I showed in the methods section, in Madrid, and others live in their cities, traveling when they are called. The experiences they narrate at the same time have elements known to me and other *karateka* who train in common sports karate *dojos* and also relatively unknown elements. I say relatively unknown because the main difference is in the way of facing these elements or situations, since their context is increased by a much greater stress load, which forges them, perhaps, in another way. The way they relate to pain seems to be something different, as well as the way they develop to deal with victory and defeat and other elements. So these are similarities that need to take into account a level of proportionality.

Thinking about these similarities and differences, to facilitate the visualization and understanding of the researched team, I will make a general presentation of the most relevant points that were configured as secondary or transversal categories that emerged from the field, especially from the first interview. I consider them to be relevant elements because they guarantee prior and fundamental support to the central research questions, addressed in the

following chapters. In addition, the categories exposed here represent the bases on which women's subjectivity was and is constructed. Their constitution as girls and as *karateka* took place at the same time, as well as their maturation to women while still being *karateka*. Thus, *what* and *who* they have undeniably become finds in these categories some explanations. Certainly they received other influences in life, but as karate has undoubtedly occupied and occupies a central place throughout their childhood, adolescence and adult life, it participated vigorously and continues to participate in the construction of their subjectivity.

So, I start by summarizing the motivations that led these women, then girls, to choose karate, a sport generally considered peculiar to females. Then, I approach the subject and experience of pain in different senses and how it is viewed by women, often seen as weak, but who prove otherwise. After that I briefly present how they deal with the psychological wear and tear generated by defeat, more frequent than victory, and the need to rebuild themselves quickly and continuously. The next topic deals with fear, aggression, self-confidence and perception of real danger, a danger that is present even for highly qualified fighters like them. In the subsequent category, finishing the chapter, I focus on the different forms of hierarchies that exist in karate, obvious and subliminal, that indicate the place of each one.

#### **4.2. Motivations, dedication and achievement of perfection or having a life**

As I commented, there are some similarities and some differences in the trajectories of the women who make up the Spanish Olympic karate team in relation to amateur *karateka*. Generally, the motivations that lead people to look for martial arts are related to the acquisition of the ability to defend themselves. Especially karate, which finds in the films an association with self-defence of some evil enemy, nourishes in the subconscious or in the imagination of many people the image of martial art suitable for fighting injustice and violence at the individual level (Bowman, 2010; 2013; 2017). Usually when people start practicing as adults or teenagers, they look for something that can help them feel more secure, protected, capable. Also, there is often the case of teenagers who suffered bullying at school and want to put a stop to such events. In Brazil, a country where street violence is unfortunately a frequent reality, it is common to create social projects using karate as a positive option for children and adolescents (Lautert et al, 2005). I worked voluntarily and professionally on some of these projects years ago as a karate teacher for children and teenagers. Such projects are also

presented as an attempt to avoid adherence by adolescents, especially, to the world of trafficking and crime (in this regard, see the work and pedagogical proposal of Luguetti, 2014).

However, there are other cases. Children who do not live in social vulnerability usually do not choose karate for themselves. In my specific case, I, as a child, did not live in an environment of social vulnerability, nor in a large city that had different sports projects and options during the school day. My family environment involved violence, though. I never imagined practicing any fight, since what my father used to watch on television (wrestling) did not please me. I liked to skate with rollerblading! But during my childhood, after my parents got divorced, we moved from the countryside to the city and there was a karate academy. I believe that due to some courageous attitudes I had, my father proposed to me to start karate. And I accepted. He did not live with us and never followed my injuries or competitions. My mother, who followed closely, was always against the practice. But, as is common in traditional and macho cultures like that of my family, she had no voice, not even with me, and even though divorced she was subordinate to my father's decision, which I supported myself to continue training.

I recount all this to say that karate was my father's choice for me, which I submitted to. I suffered, I cried a lot (hidden) being the only practicing girl for most of my 12 years of training in the *dojos* I attended in Brazil. But I never considered abandoning the practice because I could not stand it, because I was a girl or for any other reason. That option just did not exist for me. I undeniably embodied some elements that were common to the culture and pedagogy adopted by the *dojo*. To some extent, these elements were shared in my family culture.

What is similar between my trajectory and those of Spanish fighters is that most of them did not choose karate either. Except for one athlete<sup>55</sup>, the parents were who have chosen the modality for them, since they started the practice very early in childhood, or ended up adhering to the option offered at school after the regular classes, as many of their colleagues did. They report:

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<sup>55</sup> "When I was little, I was an *earthquake*. I wanted to do either karate or soccer. And my father took me to ballet. My father told me that I was not going to do either of the other two things, that I was going to ballet. And I told him that I was not going to ballet. Well, my father signed me up for ballet. I was there for a year; I went to ballet every day crying. I didn't want to go to ballet. So when, when already... I told him, I was seven years old, and I told him 'Dad, I don't want to go to ballet, I don't like it, I want to do karate or I want to play soccer.' And in the end my father, well, he came to his senses and pointed me in karate." (Venus, Interview 3 (1), 14/07/2020)

Honestly, my parents chose it, that is, my mother was quite fearful and wanted to put me in karate because of the fact that I learned how to defend myself and well, I entered karate. (Demeter, Interview 10 (1), 27/07/2020)

Oh well, it's a story... I really wanted to be a dancer. As a child I wanted to be a dancer and my parents wanted me to learn to defend myself, so they told me, "Well, we will sign you up for one year to dance and another to karate and then you choose what you like the most." Well, I went to dance one year very happy. And then I went to karate for a year not so happy. But since I knew that I could decide later, I said, "Well, I'm going to wait a year" and when the year came they didn't let me choose, they left me in karate, that is, there was no possibility of choosing. So, at first I also played soccer and so forth, but hey, I like to dance, but they didn't let me choose, they let me do karate. And at first I didn't like it at all because were *kata*, but when I started fighting I got a taste for it and then... I was seven years old. (Hera, Interview 9 (1), 27/07/2020)

There was an option that is cycling, because my cousin was runner-up in Spain in cycling, or doing karate, which was like the activity that took place the most in the school that I went to. And then in the end I decided to do karate with my friends from school. (Afrodite, Interview 11 (1), 29/07/2020)

It is not uncommon for us not to be the masters of choices in our lives, or, to put it another way, to be driven to do things without being completely clear why we are doing them. Bowman (2020, p.134) clarifies in this regard that

Once we acknowledge that there are complex social forces and relations acting on the contexts of our lives, many of which we may have no conscious awareness of and certainly no control over, the net result is the same. The analytical status of "motivation" and "intention" becomes opaque.

So, it may be more relevant to see why we stick to the things we started. As I mentioned before, I did not consider leaving the sport. I believe that at some point we develop something like a commitment to the group and the doctrine professed there. You take part of the context and become part of the group after passing the challenges that are presented. Proving resistance in training, enduring punishment to the body and even evil comments that test moral resilience, presenting some results in competitions. These elements, when supported, point out that the person is of sufficient value to be a member of the *dojo* in question (Gastaldo, 2011), in addition to paying the monthly fee. And I would add that even though all these things come at a price, being the only girl training among boys 25 years ago in

a country town, guaranteed a remarkable exclusivity. In other words, all my friends were surprised that I was doing what none of them had the courage to do, even if I invited them to participate. So I confess that I felt authentic, even though I was going to cry in the shower.

When I asked elite athletes why they keep training, the answers were varied. From some who do not think about it, to others who are a little obsessive about getting results in competitions, to those who incorporate karate as a fundamental part of their lives.

I don't know! I have never thought, the truth, why I continue. I would say first, that... Because it is a sport that I see very complete, and that many things can be worked on. And it has a part of martial art and a part of sport and that's what I like and I don't know, it seems like a pretty entertaining sport. (Vesta, Interview 8 (1), 25/07/2020)

What I like the most is the adrenaline of the championships, that is, I love to compete, I love, I love, I love to compete, I love to compete with good people. (Hera, Interview 9 (1), 27/07/2020)

And right now it (karate) is a part of me. (...) It is a pleasure and it is something that my body asks me for. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

To compete at the level they are at, women need to decide to give themselves up to the sport. Some decide to enter with such intensity in the pursuit of results that they understand that everything else in their lives must, at least in this moment of high performance, be left aside or suspended.

So let's say personal life, well, I imagine that in everyone's case, you have to put it aside a bit. Yes, Yes. I'm telling you, I think, I put a couple in that equation and I shoot myself, hahaha. (Atena, Interview 5 (1), 21/07/2020)

This is the great question that your friends or family ask you, "really everything you have done –I have not made the account of the money you spend on sports, but– really everything you do, go train every day, traveling, not being with your family in important moments, not celebrating certain parties, is it really all worth it?" I... Yes, I cannot find the explanation, but it is worth it, because it is as if it would not be me. If I didn't give everything, it's like I would be failing myself, it's like my way of being, it's like how to face life, giving everything and if you give everything I think it's worth it. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

I am trying to pursue a goal that in order for it to come out you have to put it before everything or almost everything. So sometimes it is not understood very well, but it has to be like that, otherwise I would not do it if it were not the objective that is above the others. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

Well look, in my particular case, my boyfriend asked me to marry him in January of last year, 2019, and we are putting off getting married because of karate. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

If you want to make your name in karate, if you want to leave history, if you want to travel, if you want to meet people, places... well, it is the, let's say, the reward for all the bad things you have. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

This self-denying way towards a personal life putting karate before everything else goes on saying something about women and their life projects (Gonçalves & Vaz, 2016), what they aim to achieve, that keeps them in the sport. However, other athletes have a different view of this. They understand that it is necessary to have a life and not leave everything behind for something that may not be worth so much, that has a level of uncertainty and turnover. They put on a scale their goals understood as professionals and what, in fact, is a priority in their lives, what cannot be replaced for them. Some of the athletes speak about it:

I like to have a life apart from karate, that's why I have never asked to be in Madrid (in the CAR) as an intern. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

We know that karate will end one day, so we consider it a bit silly to focus only on karate, when the former, it does not usually feed, for example. Very few people who are living off karate right now, I because I live with my parents, I am getting a pinch, medals and others, some scholarship that comes to us, but as a general rule you cannot live from it, we are very clear that you have to get something else out. (Afrodite, Interview 11 (1), 29/07/2020)

I believe that you have to carry both things forward. I also have a boyfriend and I also like spending time with my family, with him, with my friends, because in the end... I'm training right now, I'm on a diet too, I can take all things forward, I think you also have to live a little because in the end you say, "okay, after I finish competing I can live", but you will not be 23 years old, you will already be 30, so I think you can combine the two things. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

When we girls reach a certain age we want to be mothers, almost all, or all. (...) (In the future) I want to have my family, I want to be a normal person, since now I cannot be because it is my moment as an athlete. So, it's temporary, that is, one year, two years, three years, four years, I don't know how long it can be. (...) I'll start studying because, in the end, if you don't study, you have nothing. And I, right now, my life is not normal. But I want it to be normal in the future, a person you say, "well, look, she has a son, she has her husband, she has her job and she has, I don't know, and she goes on vacation to Ibiza." (Venus, Interview 3 (1), 14/07/2020)

It is interesting to note that women, even if in two apparently opposite strands, seem to participate in a common scenario for both. There are women who understand that the dedication to the sport must be almost monastic, and on the other hand those who understand that karate is only one aspect of their lives and that they should not leave other facets suspended because of it. I would dare say that both groups are influenced by a larger issue that affects the female collective. The demand for perfection that falls socially on the woman is something that does not leave immune to the immense majority of women. According to McRobbie (2015, p.7) "the idea of 'the perfect' emerges as a highly hetero-normative vector of competition for young women today." McRobbie refers to the creation of an archetype of woman who has value, the ideal woman, who is admired and sought after, almost desperately, and who is nothing less than a super woman. This woman who is sold to society is simply unreal and her persecution leads women to sick states, especially depressive, but even reaching suicide (McRobbie, 2015). As an athlete well observes:

I like to do things once, do them two, three, four times, until I get it perfect, because I'm a very perfectionist, too. That is a problem, because you end up getting frustrated. (Hestia, Interview 6 (1), 22/07/2020)

This perfect woman should be competitive in her career, sure of herself, successful financially and in her relationship, an excellent mother, always impeccable in appearance, extremely cultured and continually in a good mood, confident as well as healthy and (hetero)sexually active (McRobbie, 2015). Certainly, the neoliberal demands fall on women and men, nevertheless, in the patriarchal social structure what corresponds to each is distributed according to its widely known normative criteria. McRobbie's definition of demands of perfection focus on women, she says,

By the perfect I mean a heightened form of self-regulation based on an aspiration to some idea of the "good life". This also functions as a border-marking strategy, and a

new dividing practice, since it is predicated on calculation and self-assessment against some elevated and rarely described benchmarks (p.9).

And it is interesting to note that “in seeking this degree of excellence in life the young woman is therefore doing herself proud” (McRobbie, 2015, p.7). Who gives society this model? I will return to this point when dealing with the central research questions in the following chapters. I just say here that although the two lines that the groups of women athletes adopt are divergent they seem to be based on the same: dedicating themselves monastically to achieve perfection; or not to restrict life to an area, being perfect in its various possibilities.

Returning to the idea of why athletes keep practicing karate, I identified other reasons. Although they do not say this directly as an answer or that they are not necessarily aware of it, since as Bowman (2020, p.134) observes, “our rationalizations for our activities may well be alibis and pretexts whose real motors operate entirely outside of our consciousness.” One of these reasons that keep them there, I understand, is that karate is a source of aesthetic experience (Kirk, 1996; Maivorsdotter & Lundvall, 2009; Maivorsdotter & Quennerstedt, 2012) for them. I believe that this is revealing about why many remain; the way they feel beauty through karate. Some examples of this in the words of the athletes:

Karate is felt at the end. You have to feel it. If you do a *kata* without feeling it, the *kata* is empty. It does not work. (Proserpina, Interview 2 (1), 12/07/2020)

They have always told me that I have stood out for my technique and my aesthetics, it's like when I go out, I try to show outside what I feel, what I have. So as a general rule I transmit a lot and let's say that I transmit it beautifully, (...) let's say that when I go out you see something beautiful or that is what has come to me, what I also try to convey. (Afrodite, Interview 11 (1), 29/07/2020)

Beauty in karate... I love *kata* when it transmits well. (...) I love *kata* team, *bunkai*. (...) A well-made *shotokan* is what I fell in love, it is that I see it so clean, so beautiful, so subtle, so technical. It's that the air breaks, it's that I love it. And in combat as well, when you understand and when you know a super fast technique (...) that has been at the perfect moment. (...) And the beauty of when a person wins, my hair stand on end, when I see a person win. (...) The other party seems precious to me, when the other person loses the semi-final. It has two faces, the one who is winning and is screaming at the air of adrenaline, and the one who is on the ground crying, that frustration also seems precious to me. It is that feeling that... (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

When I see the body of a sporty woman or man that is muscular, strong, such, it is true that it is something that seems beautiful to me. But what is the beauty of karate, in *kata*, is very plastic, like a feeling that the person doing things has to convey. But in combat for me perhaps many times (beauty) is in the moment. (...) It is incredible when sometimes the technique is in the moment it has to be. Suddenly, how the person saw that the other was going to go there. (...) It is as if the technique is one second before the other. That seems to me the most beautiful thing about karate, being able to see or make a move for ten seconds and suddenly finish it. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

I see it as a set, I could not tell you that beauty is only aesthetics or technique, I think it is a set of aesthetics, technique, strength, expression. In the end, it's nice for me because it gives me goose bumps, you know, so I think it's a set to give you goose bumps, it has to have a set of everything. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

I really see beauty when karate is well executed, when it is lived and felt, when it is executed with feeling. For me that is beauty, in the end, when you live what you do. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

Perhaps it is a *cathartic* experience for them which they express through using the word "beauty", an experience that transports them to another state, almost mystical, which is still ironic, since it materializes in the midst of blows. But the fact is that they experience a kind of ecstasy when contemplating beauty even in events that, a priori, would be devoid of it, as in the frustration of defeat, for example. Gumbrecht (2007) points out different "fascinations" that high-level sport may be able to awaken in viewers, and one of them is "timing", which athletes call the perfect moment, the ability to put the correct movement in time and correct space/place. It is a perfect combination of patience, related to the chronological time, with opportunity, the timing guided by awareness. For Gumbrecht, sport is an object of pleasure and enjoyment when watched, it is "a phenomenon that paralyzes the eyes, something that constantly attracts, without indicating any explanation for the attraction"<sup>56</sup> (Gumbrecht, 2007, p.20). He defines this as "presence culture". That is, the value is in the presence of the perfect moment or the emotion that impacts, that chills; no other explanations or purposes are required. Beauty, in this case, is justified by itself. And it seems that athletes share this feeling, since they often do not know how to translate their reasons for continuing to practice in words. But when talking about beauty, they reveal what leads them to epiphany (Gumbrecht,

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<sup>56</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine in all citations of this work, Gumbrecht, 2007.

2001) and finally a certain fascination with sport. Gumbrecht (2010) explains that the sum of ephemerality, given by the culture of presence with the epiphany, what happens in a moment and then disappears, causes fascination for both athletes and the public, since in this experience is a suspension of reality.

Kirk (1996) clarifies that, even though the word is current in the *karateka* discourse, “beauty” is part of a terminology that is inappropriately used to conceptualize experiences lived in physical activities. The appropriate concept in this field is that of aesthetic experience, a concept that also encompasses experiences more democratically. This refers to the fact that the aesthetic experience is not something exclusively experienced by high level athletes, but that it can also be experienced by beginners in sports (Kirk, 1996). That is, the aesthetic experience is achieved whenever the performance has “a certain quality that, when evaluated in relation to an individual's own standards of excellence for such events, make that event special enough to evoke an appropriate emotional response” (Kirk, 1996, p.131). However, there is a difference in the experience lived by the performers of the movements and people who watch. The spectator needs to use discernment to perceive the quality of the movement; her/his experience is based on what she/he is able to capture through vision; it is a “detached” experience. Whereas the practitioner's experience is “involved”, own and kinesthetic (Kirk, 1996).

In addition, athletes experience complete fruition through the body, through the most concrete senses, but which transport them to something like another dimension, subtle, inspired, free from what could be concrete bonds; something that leads them to “lose themselves in the intensity of concentration” (Gumbrecht, 2007, p.45). This is about the concept of flow, from Csikszentmihalyi (2000). The athletes report:

The times I think I have entered, when I finish the fight or when I finish the competition, I don't know what I have done, that is, you are so deep, that you do not remember how you scored, you do not remember what, what you did. It is a feeling that you are only for what you are (present, concentrated) and the rest of the aspects, no, no, they do not exist. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

I remember that one day I mentioned it to the psychologist, and he called it the state of flow. I have been fighting and I know before throwing the technique that I am going to score. What happens is that I think I'm going to score and then I score or is it that you really know for some reason that you're going to score? I do not know. (Atena, Interview 5 (1), 21/07/2020)

On Monday, when you get home, you are the same person having won or having lost. But just that moment of having achieved a small goal, I think that is the form of the reward. I think that **moment of happiness**<sup>57</sup> does not give you anything. Knowing that you have given everything and that everything has become what you wanted, it is not a medal, it is that moment. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

There are many championships that you say, "OMG, things work out for you", that is, you do a technique and everything goes smoothly (flow). The truth is that it is a sensation... the best of all, I wish it were always like this! But it is difficult, it is difficult to get it. It doesn't always come out. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

The association of the achieved goal and the flow with happiness seems very revealing to me and could justify the athletes' continuity in the sport, as well as their submission to a series of elements that they themselves point out as unpleasant. The pursuit of this personal achievement, reaching a goal, achieving a life project and, above all, being happy, even if not permanently, justifies the price they pay.

Although I will not go deep in this direction here, it is important to mention the work of Sara Ahmed (2010). She criticizes the idea of insatiable search for happiness. For her, "the science of happiness thus relies on a very specific model of subjectivity, where one knows how one feels, and where the distinction between good and bad feelings is secure, forming the basis of subjective as well as social well-being" (p.6). Ahmed expounds many other aspects and arguments that surround the theme of happiness, considering it ultimately as a disciplinary technique. Perhaps this goes hand in hand with the theme of the search for perfection raised by me earlier from the work of McRobbie (2015).

Some of the athletes still experience pleasure in *performing* and being looked at. This action has relation to Butler's concept of performativity –and to that of Foucault, the "male gaze", to which I will return later–. For her, "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (Butler, 1990, p.15). Performing and being the centre of all the looks generates, for some athletes, a pleasant feeling. Pleasure and happiness are not the same thing, however, pleasure generates satisfaction and thus is configured as an enjoyable experience for the senses.

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<sup>57</sup> All the griffins found in the quotes of interviewed people are mine in order to highlight some ideas.

I think that all of us who compete generally like people to look at us, because in the end we have gotten used to it, to being like the centre of attention for a moment. So I think that every athlete who competes, I think they partly like to be looked at.

(Afrodite, Interview 11 (1), 29/07/2020)

My coach says I'm a diva because I love being looked at hahaha! So as I am in my sauce, every time they look at me is like, because I really like that they look at me and I really like that, above all, there are many people looking at me. (...) I love it, that is, they look at me, applaud me, that... in the end they make me go higher. (Venus,

Interview 3 (1), 14/07/2020)

While for other athletes, the experience is the opposite, and they definitely not enjoy being watched. One athlete exemplified this:

For me to go out to compete by myself and feel that level of tension (everybody looking at her), I am ashamed... and in *kumite* we are moving! I am not able to perceive that people are looking at me, where do I hide myself? (Atena, Interview 5 (1), 21/07/2020)

And it is also true that athletes experience the dimension away from that of pleasure or happiness, the deplorable one, that emerges when everything goes very badly, preventing all fruition. Apparently, the absence of flow can be as striking or at least remarkable, memorable, as its occurrence. An athlete says:

What I like the least, there are times when things don't work out in training. And, of course, there are three of us (*kata* team), and if things don't work out for me, I'm bothering two others. So that feeling that something does not come out or even that something does not come out for them and, for example, a fall from a *bunkai* does not come out or a projection does not come out as well as it should come out, and maybe they are the ones that do and I look, or that feeling of not being able to help. Or that something does not come out for me and that they cannot help me either, that I think is the worst part. (Proserpina, Interview 2 (1), 12/07/2020)

This feeling of lack of self-realization, of frustration in the end, is something that athletes need to learn to deal with as much as other unpleasant elements that, it seems, contribute to making themselves stronger, shaping their subjectivity. So, having presented these examples on the motivations of athletes to start and stay in practice, even though there

may be as many engines that are not so revealed (Bowman, 2020), I will now proceed to address the elaborate way that *karateka* have to deal with pain and some of its correlates.

#### **4.3. Differences from a normal *dojo*: approaches to pain and control of challenges**

The dynamics of training and interpersonal relationships experienced in *dojos* can be considered full of peculiarities. In these environments, the way practitioners relate to training and its demands often becomes something that impresses. One of the elements that derives from training and is usually very present in the life of *karateka* is pain. Usually, the way of looking at it is like a purifying element, almost capable of purging defects. Perhaps this unconscious association appears due to cultural incorporations related to religion, where punishment of the body and mortifications had the function of atoning for sins. In fact, many martial arts develop in a way that approaches religious practices (Brown, Jennings & Molle, 2009). Similarly, perhaps, also unconsciously, suffering pain can represent for athletes who are transforming their bodies, converting them into a polished instrument, tailored by the technique, so that it is efficient in its purpose, of progressive performance (Wacquant, 1998).

So the pain ends up being, in a mixture of scientific knowledge of sports training with mythical beliefs of the tradition, converted into a glorified element. Athletes praise the pain and everything that is achieved with “sweat and blood”, that is, that it cost a lot, that it involved suffering and sacrifice (Turelli & Vaz, 2006). And the *sensei* are able to apply punishment with the authority of experience and knowledge of the body's mechanisms of self-protection or economy:

If you train alone, notice that you are very tired, you stop. Your training has arrived here. If you train with someone who demands more of you, you don't stop and you get higher. Sure. Because your body protects itself. Our body is smart; it tries to protect us. It is something normal of nature. (...) By yourself, up to here, you have cut. That can go higher if there is someone with a whip, cheering, motivating. (Hefaistos, man, Interview 37 (2), 30/09/2020)

From the perspective of martial pedagogy (Turelli, 2008), the really hard, demanding, strenuous work that required sacrifice on the part of the participant is what was worth it, which dignifies it, even when there is no victory, for example. There may even be defeat and it will not be dishonourable if there was a sacrifice (Rial, 1998). Sacrifice is a peace-making element of athletes' internal disturbances, in general. It is linked to religious practices, again

(Mauss & Hubert, 2005; see also Pich, 2020). It is interesting to note that sport itself went through periods where it was understood as sacred. For Helal (1990), sport is born as secular, it becomes sacred, returning to the secular, as profane or distanced from the sacred. However, according to Helal, sport retains elements of both classifications, which can be seen, for example, in the profane tendency to convert sport into a spectacle and, ultimately, into commerce. This would be its secular character. And the sacred would be verified in the devoted, surrendered and fanatical posture of spectators or even athletes, in the modern version, since in the old version the sacred character was given by the very dedication of efforts to the gods. The ratings today are mixed. In this sense, Brown, Jennings and Molle (2009) develop a topic in their research on sport and religion titled "Martial Arts as Secular Religions". For them, some martial arts would create an interdependence between sacred and profane factors, mixing self-cultivation, values, ideology (with a pathway), identity, membership, transcendence (rites of passage); and then the competitive scenario in some martial arts and a certain commercialization of the teachings.

The scenario usually found in martial environments is full of sacrifices, understood as dignifying. The athletes of the Olympic team, in turn, preserve traces of these elements; that is, of this way of understanding the strenuous training that requires sacrifice in its fulfilment, pain and punishment of the flesh almost in a process of approaching death to then regain life, as the best training. This was shown at certain times in their interviews. They were educated in this culture/pedagogy/ethos and somehow internalized the values of karate, as they call it, and the master/*sensei* himself (Foucault, 2009; Freire, 2005). An athlete exemplifies this point:

I love that they are demanding, hard workouts, that when I finish I say "well, I've done my best (given everything) and I can't even move." I mean... after 10 minutes I'm fine, but I love the workouts that are demanding, that I end with the feeling that I have given everything and my body at that time was no longer enough. (Minerva, Interview 1 (1), 29/06/2020)

However, the athletes as a group also reached a very specific level of performance, confirmed by their selection to represent their country. Therefore, they need to go through a movement of differentiation from ordinary athletes, those who have not achieved their results. Integrating the selection, they can no longer maintain everything as before under the risk of stagnation. To keep going and developing, they need to adapt to a new reality and go through a process of relative detachment from traditional martial culture. Perhaps this is in line with the historical reasons supported here by Vigarello (2008), Kirk (2002) and Gay (1995)

presented previously, which generates some disgust for purists of the martial tradition. Because these *karateka* are martial artists at the same time as they are elite athletes (of the technique, not of privileged social classes). Objectively said, they could be cast as traitors to the origin and essence.

To perform in top-level sport, *karateka* need to embrace the scientific side of sports training to the detriment of the mythical beliefs of tradition. In this reality, even though pain is an inevitable element, it is not worshiped or desired, as the athletes narrate.

Since I came to CAR, yes, in the first year, I had pain everywhere! And even then my knees hadn't hurt and they started to hurt. (...) I had to go to the physio three times a week. (...) Well, I always had the concept of "well, you have to hold on a little more", but sometimes it's the other way around. (Vesta, Interview 8 (1), 25/07/2020)

The body needs to progress to the maximum, being arguably demanded and worked through doses of measured stress, in a kind of prescription for medical treatment, respecting the principles of sports training (Dantas, 1998). Thus, in opposition to the dynamics of the common *dojos*, in the elite team where the results need ultimately be delivered, the pain must be minimized to allow the maximum use of the body. Then the coaches explain how they work:

My goal as a physical trainer is that the athletes are in full condition to perform the sport they do. In karate they will improve doing karate and if they cannot do karate because they are injured, they will not be able to improve. So my main objective is that they can do 100% of the karate that is proposed to them, both by the national coach and the CAR coaches. (...) So I do focus a lot on not having injuries, on compensating for weak links that we have. In the end, karate creates very serious decompensations (in the body). (Apolo, man, Interview 27 (1), 25/09/2020)

I am one of the coaches who think that less is more, for many years. Less is more as long as you do it well, know what you are doing and once you have understood it. If you want, do more, more, more, but having understood what you are doing, not doing for doing's sake. And that part can be very difficult. (Hermes, man, Interview 28 (1), 15/09/2020)

There are other parts of the season, which simply the physical part has to be a job of releasing muscular tension, of compensating for some weakened muscles. (...) The

objectives are set, the competition is set in which you want to perform at 100%, which are perhaps less important... (Apolo, man, Interview 27 (1), 25/09/2020)

Since, in this context, pain does not replace results, regardless of how much honour it may have generated, pursuing results in the midst of pain and injuries is not something desired, pleasant or dignifying. In summary, if the positive result arrives and the journey to it involved less suffering, so much the better. To be worthy of the medal in a one-off competition, no referee takes into account the personal sacrifices of each athlete. They only evaluate the objective performance of that moment. So the mythical sacrificial logic of the martial artist loses all meaning in this context. An athlete explains how to proceed:

Within a competition, nothing hurts. (...) Training, yes, which is more complicated when you have pain, if different negative parameters come together and apart from having pain from an injury, there is a moment when you get frustrated, when you cry, and... You have to know how to control yourself, know your body and control what you can control. (...) So. Take great care of yourself, that is, with our age, that is, I have done it since I was little, since I was 18 years old that I have a notion, because I stretch before I start, I do a good warm-up... Likewise, even if you have pain, know when you have to stop and know how you have to train, because you can also train with pain, taking certain care. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

What at this level of performance can be considered as basic martial art and combat sport is already incorporated by the athletes. In other words, they have no difficulties in enduring the strenuous dynamics of training:

I believe that I am a person who tolerates pain quite well. (...) Many times I train with boys, and when they hit, they hit harder or these things. Well, I never had to stop, for example, when you do these training sessions that you say "I want to die", well, I will die, but here until the end. I have always thought that it was one of my strengths, to hold on like "I'm here until I can't be here anymore." (Atena, Interview 5 (1), 21/07/2020)

And what differentiates them is that they do not give to this endurance an excessive importance, as can happen in ordinary *dojos*, where the narratives of painful episodes become almost heroic deeds. In the *dojo* of every day fighters "have at their disposal a rich 'motif vocabulary' that allows them to face pain (...) not through silent denial, but through personal valorisation and collective solemnization" (Wacquant, 1998, p.82). On the other hand, at the high performance level, taking into account what Horkheimer and Adorno (1985, p.20) wrote,

that “only the thought that makes violence to itself is hard enough to destroy the myths”<sup>58</sup>, the athletes naturally and serenely discuss the ways they need to act in relation to the different pains that affect them. In other words, the mythical emphasis and importance that pain receives in the sports karate *dojos*, loses space in the elite sport, much more demanding than the former. Some unpretentious comments from the athletes evidence this natural way of discussing pain and related matters:

Before training in the afternoon it is difficult for you to start or even do some movements with stiffness, but at the end of the day it is 1:30 that you do and when that hour and a half ends, then you can go to rest. (...) And against fatigue, the only thing that can cure it is to use willpower. (Diana, Interview 4 (1), 21/07/2020)

I have a part, the pyramidal, I have it quite loaded. (...) Above all I have the pyramidal, the psoas quite loaded. (...) When I saw myself with the pain that I can't take it anymore, that's when I go (to the physio), when I know I can do that, little by little, I forget (the physio). (Hestia, Interview 6 (1), 22/07/2020)

Sore always. (...) You live with pain; you have to live with pain. (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

The way injuries are viewed, injuries that can be serious, also draws attention. In general, it seems that there is a normalization of body shattering in high performance sports (Vaz, 1999). Athletes start to deal with parts of their bodies, or even the whole body, as objects. They depersonalize themselves and create distance from themselves, in an impersonal process, of indifference to themselves; probably as an easier way to deal with situations that, if they were too identified and involved with, they would not find simple alternatives to overcome them. Again the athletes provide examples:

This little finger I broke around there in a championship, but I kept fighting and then I was third. With the black finger, but I competed. What I'm telling you, I'm a bit gross! (Hera, Interview 9 (1), 27/07/2020)

The European I will always say that I won by the head that I have. (...) And when I started in the semi-finals I was crying because I couldn't hold my leg, I was already dragging my leg. And I said, look, if I break my leg, well I break my leg, but I win, and well, I won. (Venus, Interview 3 (1), 14/07/2020)

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<sup>58</sup> Both translations of this paragraph, Portuguese-English, are mine.

On Sunday I decided to fight for bronze. And when I fought that day they bandaged it (her foot) very hard and then I passed, I lost, but well... I needed to be there with the spotlights, it was my moment, I had won that, everyone told me no, not to fight, except the coach, of course, he was also interested in the medal, let's say, and me too, to all, to the Spanish team. And we said *ahead*, I said that I train to fight. And I don't train to... "I've been injured, what a shame, I'm going to recover", no, I'm going... if my foot was going to break, let it break completely. And when I arrived in Spain, I had many problems, I was stopped for almost a month and a half. Or more. To this day, I have not recovered my ankle, I have it without mobility. (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

It is interesting to notice the relationship developed with the body itself. The body is taken care of so that it can perform to the maximum, at the same time that it is mistreated, also so that it can perform to the maximum. The punishment inflicted on the body is justified since it shapes the body, transforms it in the sense of power through technique, even though it represses it in spontaneity. There is a domestication and dressage of the body, perhaps more than its education, in a holistic view. But it is still a matter of adopting a pedagogy to work with the body, a corporal pedagogy (Bourdieu, 1983). It finds a certain parallel with outdated methods of education used in different contexts, which used to justify rudeness due, supposedly, to love. That is, supposedly because there is love, because there is an implication of someone who cares, if they beat the students, for example. "I care about you, so I correct you", overcoming the line of setting limits and possibly entering the loss of control. Without holding on the merits of these arguments, they develop a mixture of emotions based on love and hate, towards others or towards oneself. Horkheimer and Adorno (1985) approach the theme as love-hate for the body, something that is not restricted to the somatic scope of the person, but to the person entirely, thus causing psychological problems.

To stay in progress, athletes are injured following scientific protocols, dealing with their bodies in a reified way (Adorno, 1995); for it is certain that if they analyse the processes they submit to excessively and allow their subjectivity to occupy the space of objectification, they could face personal conflicts. And that does not mean they do not. Perhaps they understand these things and still choose to submit. My point here is just that this submission, conscious or not, takes its toll. It produces in the person a series of decompensations that, as in a vicious cycle, will again lead to pain and suffering. The suffering of deprivation and restriction, for example, is extremely present in the subject of weighing. For many athletes, it is common to live in one weight and compete in another, as their bodies have developed over

the years, they have gained muscle mass, or they and their coaches have chosen to be in a more favourable category in relation to size (wingspan) or to adversaries' quality. Thus, weight control presents itself as a constant challenge for many of them:

I have always been gaining weight. When I entered the national team, I was under 47, I was very tall, but I was very thin. And every time I went up in the category, I also gained weight, cadet I did in less than 47. Junior, less than 53 and under 21, less than 55. And it seemed that 55 was the weight in which I was going to stay. (...) And then, when the other girl retired, I said "okay, in sub 21, I have my place in the lower category, I stay at 55, and senior I fight at 61." (...) In fact, when I went to the senior European it was at 61 and the U21 at 55. What's going on? That when I saw that I was doing well in 61, in sub 21 I also decided to change it, because it also started to cost me to give the weight, I began to... (Diana, Interview 4 (1), 21/07/2020)

My problem, my biggest problem is weight, always. I... can... I mean, physically I'm fine, technically I'm very good, but the weight yes, I'm... I'm out of the *kata* standard. The *kata* girls we usually are, they are small and the weight is between 50-55 kg, on the other hand I am 65. 67-65. So, of course, they are always "you have to lose weight, you have to lose weight, you have to lose weight." (Proserpina, Interview 2 (1), 12/07/2020)

What I like least are the weigh-ins, without any doubt, also because when I weigh well, I always have the stress of "you see, the scale, if it weighs less than mine." When I go anywhere "and if I get fat on the plane, and if I don't achieve (the weight), and if I drink this glass of water", that is... It is a subject that is a chaos. (Atena, Interview 5 (1), 21/07/2020)

In addition to representing a huge challenge for athletes, behind the theme of weight control can be found very relevant aspects of contemporary society. The control-repression they face there is not exclusive to this context, as already pointed out by Foucault (2009). It is still true that sport could be configured as an auxiliary tool in controlling appetite, which "is merely the most concrete expression of the general rule that governs the construction of femininity, that female hunger –for public power, independence, sexual gratification– it must be contained"<sup>59</sup> (Bordo, 1997, p.23). Although *karateka* women do not need to submit to aesthetic criteria, at least those of *kumite*, as could happen in rhythmic gymnastics and ballet,

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<sup>59</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

for example, the extreme care of weight undeniably enters the field of standards stipulated for female athletic bodies.

The fact of imposing severe deprivations sacrifices the athlete's natural drive, since she needs to restrain instincts, appetite, in this case, and later this action will at the same time yield and demand some kind of reward. The passage of the hero Ulysses<sup>60</sup>, narrated by Horkheimer and Adorno (1985) in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, when in Sirens Song, is related to this. In the name of knowledge, the hero sacrifices the desire to pursue the mermaids. He uses his cunning and reason to remain tied to the mast of the boat and to be able to know, listening to the song. However, his nature is unsatisfied. This will lead, according to psychoanalysis, to melancholy (Matos, 1987) and a certain compulsion to cruelty (Vaz, 1999). It is his own nature that turns against him, due to the dissatisfaction generated. The parallel with this passage serves to illustrate what can happen to athletes in situations where they repress themselves in order to educate or tame the body, to make it enlightened or technically efficient (Vaz, 2001). The weighing case is always an example of this containment of desires and consequent dissatisfaction, which ends in self love-hate for the body. The athletes evidence this point:

Right now I weigh 55 kg and I fight less than 50. (...) Now that I have been so hungry, I love to eat, like everything, before maybe I didn't want vegetables, now I eat everything because I have been very hungry. (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

What I like least is the preseason training, when you come with three kg more and you have to start to put the form and they blow you up and it is disgusting how ungrateful the body is. You are up here for two weeks and your body seems to have forgotten everything, that makes me feel terrible, it is the part that I like the least because I think it is very unfair. (Demeter, Interview 10 (1), 27/07/2020)

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<sup>60</sup> It is interesting to note how in most mythologies the heroic character is represented in the figure of a man, while his opponents, challengers, monsters are usually portrayed in the figure of women. It is known that the mythological language is a symbolic language (Campbell, 2004). However, as De Beauvoir (2011, p.31) warns, "lawmakers, priests, philosophers, writers, and scholars have gone to great lengths to prove that women's subordinate condition was willed in heaven and profitable on earth. Religions forged by men reflect this will for domination: they found ammunition in the legends of Eve and Pandora. They have put philosophy and theology in their service." This is relevant to be noted since it works in the production and enforcement of an "unconscious" social moral *habitus*, in which women receive devalued places, seeking, therefore, to do what is needed (asked of them) to change such condition. This perhaps can help to explain why women often adapt to masculine environments, as the sportive, willing to achieve a better place.

And this whole problem can also be compounded by an exclusive female factor, menstruation. All athletes have something to say in this regard, from stories and complaints to claims:

I think we should make a claim asking for more margin in weigh-ins. Because this is something that is so, if they want proof, you could prove that you have the period. And it is that the weight is very noticeable and now that the weighing regulations have come out, they leave 200 grams more, then okay, I understand that leaving two kg more would be a savagery. But imagine they said 500 grams. And even so... I think that a little more margin would be much fairer than the same weight for everyone, because it is not the same for a boy to give the weight than for a girl. (...) It is not the first time to meet girls at the weigh-in "how are you?", "I'm with my period, imagine", and when someone says that, they usually have the face of "I have not eaten for four days", and that's not fair. (Atena, Interview 5 (1), 21/07/2020)

Menstruation affects athletes in weight, mostly, but not just in this regard. It is a factor that has repercussions from other orders as well, as can be seen from their testimonies.

We girls also have the problem of when we have periods and so on. We have to... being with the period is very, very difficult. For example, it affects me a lot in terms of fluid retention and others and the level of stress that this generates when competing, because it is no longer just being aware of your pressure to lose, to win, not to I don't know what, you also have to be aware that your period is affecting you because it is retaining fluids and you need to lose weight and everything that entails and also, girls have their period and not be able to eat and have to train hard, it generates a horrible level of fatigue and is overwhelming. (Minerva, Interview 1 (1), 29/06/2020)

As soon as (the period) comes to me I am more tired. Also yes, the weight also, one kg, even if it is one kg more, yes that weight. And also on the subject, that, that we are wearing white, well, be aware if you have stained or what... (Vesta, Interview 8 (1), 25/07/2020)

To train, there is a day that is the first more or less, yes, one: that you do not like anything, but nothing, nothing, nothing. And two: you are clumsy, you sweat more and you are very clumsy in the technical part, in the physical part maybe not. But the technical part, you are clumsy, super clumsy. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

With extremely demanding training and the need to lose weight abruptly, it is not uncommon for women to face amenorrhea, something I have also known. During my adolescence, in addition to having menarche at 14.5 years old, when the population average is at 12.6 years old according to Takada and Lourenço (2004), I was three years without menstruating. Although my focus on issues for athletes did not go along these lines, some athletes pointed out the problem. According to Rogero, Mendes and Tirapegui (2005), menstrual dysfunction will present itself when the body fat index is below 22% and is combined with exhaustive exercises. And perhaps to this can be added the stressors or the very sudden loss of weight that the athletes undergo.

With the weight problem when I have my period and I have a weigh-in, as my body is suffering so much because of I do not eat and I don't drink, it does not come. So until I don't weigh myself and it has been a couple of days or even the weigh-in, until then, it does not come, until my body recovers. (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

In fact, I had a very irregular period, that is, I did not get the period until (...) I was 16, at 16 I was weighing 47 kg and training four hours a day, then the amenorrhea set. (Diana, Interview 4 (1), 07/21/2020)

The fact is that women need to deal with several elements to prove their value for the sport. They face the challenges and find different ways to overcome them, giving peculiar contours to their subjectivity, as I tried to show briefly in this topic. In the next one, I will follow this line a little bit, trying to address the issue of fragility, which is culturally associated with women, but which they attest to the contrary, not without difficulties, though.

In the general popular conception, pain tends to be understood more as a characteristic of the somatic; I tried to focus here as it is psychosomatic, manifesting itself in the person as a whole, without dividing it. Because many concrete physical pains are subtly felt, while “psychological” pains (Gonçalves & Vaz, 2016) are also felt in the flesh. It is important to take this into account in order to enter the next section, regarding fragility. Also in the general popular conception, it is often fragmented and sometimes located in the physical, sometimes in the psychological. However, fragility is in the body as a whole, embodied in the person. It is at the same time a reflection and projection of the relative weakness of the whole, of psychosomatic and spiritual unity, if one wants to mention it. To illustrate what I say as well as to introduce the next section, I close this one with the testimony of an athlete:

I ended up going to a psychologist because it happened to me in two or three championships, (...) I trained very well and the time came to the competition and my body was like stiffening, my muscles were tense so much that I was not able to move. And it is a frustration to have trained so much to get to that moment in the competition and to be stuck there and to come out at this speed (slow) when I know that I am the fastest of all training. So it was such a frustration, that I ended up looking for a little help. (...) I am warming up super well, I see myself in the warm-up zone and I am super fast and when they tell me the “*hajime*”, my legs started to tremble, I cannot, I am not able to control what I do or do combat many times even with amnesia, that is to say, I do not know what I have done during combat. (Minerva, Interview 1 (1), 29/06/2020)

#### **4.4. Women and fragility: dealing with defeat and the need for psychological support**

Continuing with the previous topic, in this category I present the experiences that women athletes narrated that, according to my interpretation, could be, at least in part, consequences of martial pedagogy. As I mentioned earlier, traditional martial art pedagogy is gradually being internalized by practitioners. Over time they no longer need the *sensei* to command them and end up becoming their own oppressor. Following this logic of reasoning, Foucault's (2009) arguments on bio power are related to this issue, and I will return to this later. Here I establish a parallel with the work of Freire (2005) who spoke about the pedagogy of the oppressed, who will seek liberation. Thus, in accordance with Freire's ideas, by intimately absorbing the teachings, athletes would take part in the “existential duality of the oppressed, who are at the same time themselves and the oppressor whose image they have internalized” (p.61). An athlete reports her ability to discipline, which ends up being understood as something very positive, but which may have more than one reason for being:

I am a self-demanding person and I don't need nobody to be behind me to try my best. I can, I can do it alone. (Minerva, Interview 1 (1), 29/06/2020)

Evidently, to do this with yourself requires remarkable moral strength. However, it is also a fact that the way sport is conducted produces moods that are not always positive, as previously illustrated in Adorno's analogy through the figure of Ulysses. It is also necessary to mention that I am addressing one dimension of sport here, among several that it can take on. As Luguetti (2014) points out, sport itself is not necessarily good or bad. It would be a kind of

tool, adapted according to how it is used. It is clear that the importance of the adopted pedagogy is fundamental. If sport or physical practices in general become tools for the application of critical pedagogies, for example, they will have a certain repercussion as pointed out by many studies (Kirk, 2020; Lamb, Oliver & Kirk, 2018; Luguetti et al, 2017; Marttinen, Meza & Flory, 2020; Oliver & Kirk, 2015). If the pedagogy used is of pain and suffering, as usually occurs in performance sports, its implication for the body will certainly be different (Gonçalves, Turelli & Vaz, 2012; Turelli & Vaz, 2006; Vaz, 2005a). I only point out other possibilities that may exist given its relevance, but I must focus here on the pedagogy that exploits the body, which requires it, because the object of study of the research focuses on high performance sport. And in this reality, one cannot expect to find anything other than that, as the people involved, athletes and coaches, know.

It's high performance, it's not winning the fight for myself. High performance is winning. Get the medal. (...) It is a pyramid, so in the pyramid, at the top of the pyramid is performance and in the pyramid not everyone fits. So it is hard and I know that there are people who do not share it and I know that it is not the best as a transmitter of values or that area, but it is like that. We can't be the whole world in it. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

Here you talk about performance, is that it is not worth being better than yourself. You have to be better than the other, it is not worth anything other than getting a medal and the results. But it is not valid for them, nor is it valid for me, nor is it valid for the federation. We play at the highest level. That is why I am quite strong, quite efficient, and I set the tone in a very, very *warm* way, to say the least. "And I'm tired", well, "you're tired", "and it hurts", well, "it hurts." Another thing is that we look for the solution to recover that, so that you are in the best situation, but sometimes you have to train with pain, you have to fight with pain, sometimes you have to play to the limit. (Ares, man, Interview 34 (1), 29/09/2020)

Taking into account the context and the pedagogy used in martial arts, it is not surprising that women tolerate pain, suffering, that they submit to effort and sacrifice. After all, that is what this is about. To a greater or lesser depth, they know that this is in the package. The point of greatest relevance, it seems to me, that most caught my attention in their interviews refers to the internalization of other elements that may not need to be present. They are guilt and remorse. From my point of view, this will again relate to the condition socially occupied by women. They embody, along with the oppressive figure,

whoever it may be, the values and judgments that this figure, and so many others, makes of them. They, then, police themselves because there is a normalization of the acceptance of oppression. They are unable to free themselves from the weight of the judgment of others and, as it could not be otherwise, this increases their suffering. Making the necessary adaptations, Freire (2005, p.63) again helps to understand the process:

Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything –that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive– that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness.

I will return to this theme in the main chapters of the thesis. This is an aspect that arises in this category, of women needing to fight with internal embodied enemies since they were constituted as girls/women, and also as *karateka*, which for most of them, having started so early, occurred at the same time. These internal enemies appear as voices that seem to be trying to undermine them. Some testimonials can illustrate this point:

And then you are afraid, because when you win, you already have to hold on, that moment when I can be afraid and say damn! I've won, now for the next time if I don't win... People forget and you're already bad, and because you've fought that badly (judgements), and the moment of failure after victory is the worst. (...) Hermes tells me that I have a saboteur who tells me bad things and I tell myself it's a way to protect me, like when you make excuses, "I'm going to lose, I'm going to lose, I'm going to lose", like if you lose, you were already saying you were going to lose. (...) Although I'm feeling bad training whatever it is, deep down I say "let's see if I win", but on the other hand I say, "I'm going to lose", it's a constant fight. (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

I was taking some competitions that I had not just found comfortable at international level and then that caused me a lot of frustration, like a feeling of despair, that I do not know what is happening, what is wrong and I cannot find my way. (...) I think that what hurts me is when I don't do things well. (Atena, Interview 5 (1), 21/07/2020)

This last year also that it always happened to me a little, dragged to the next competition, the previous competition. So that's why I didn't feel good because I threw extra rocks in my backpack that I didn't have to carry. (Diana, Interview 4 (1), 21/07/2020)

They need to believe in themselves and find stability, which is not always simple to achieve in the culture where women especially are inserted and have been educated. Self-destructive thoughts often present themselves, perhaps because it is difficult for women to really believe, without external approbation, that they are capable. Other comments illustrate this fact:

I had more faith in her than she in herself. (Hermes, man, Interview 28 (1), 15/09/2020)

If I lose, I do think "I'm not good for this, I'm never going to get it." Those kinds of thoughts, yes, I'm still thinking for an hour. But, I don't know, little by little you try to turn them around. (...) At the beginning I did throw myself a week after the championship, as I was still in the championship... (...) You also consider if yourself is up to that, that is, "I won't compete ever again." (Vesta, Interview 8 (1), 25/07/2020)

However, in addition to these elements, another aspect of this category relates precisely to the strength that female fighters are able to develop to, in the midst of so many adversities, remain there, fight for space (which I will also explore further), negotiate, overcome, start over. The theme of defeat appears and is extremely hard. It is a form of rejection by showing that you are not the one of elected. Defeat challenges athletes to strengthen themselves morally to be able to keep going in the sport. The women demonstrate how it is necessary to "persist in the face of defeat"<sup>61</sup> (Rubio, 2006, p.88):

With so many championships, you have many opportunities to lose. Because we, in *kumite*, always lose and win one, and if you win! Because sometimes we have had streaks of losing the first fight, one and another, and another, and another, and another. (...) So it is true that there is a point where either you get out of there, or you sink, that is, you sink. It's hard. (...) You have to be clear that you are doing your job well and that it will come out in the end. (Demeter, Interview 10 (1), 27/07/2020)

You are always going to have more defeats than victories. I think that on a sporting level as long as you are not able to combat the frustration of defeat in a good way, you cannot be able to reach a good level. (Hera, Interview 9 (1), 27/07/2020)

I needed a painful defeat for the next championship to say "well now they are going to find out what I am capable of". (Minerva, Interview 1 (1), 29/06/2020)

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<sup>61</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

Whenever I competed I felt very nervous. It was a very intense stress, something I detested, because I had prepared so much, showing a good performance in training, receiving great feedback. But I arrived at competitions and most of the time I was not able to express the same performance as in the *dojo*. I even wished that it would just end soon, which does not make any sense, since it is the culmination of all the preparation, extremely demanding. It should be the moment to shine, as some athletes especially in *kata* comment. But for me, more in tune with the feelings usually expressed by *kumite* athletes, they were moments of agony. As I highlighted in the introduction to the chapter, high performance athletes have some similarities with amateur athletes, each at their own level. Some of the *karateka* reported that at the moment of the fight they are not able to present the same performance as the training, which I know from personal experience, is extremely frustrating.

My problem is then when it comes to competing that I still don't dare to show what I have learned. Maybe there is something that is working out very well for me, then I go and it is like I forget that I have learned something new. (Vesta, Interview 8 (1), 25/07/2020)

A feeling that I don't like is when you find yourself super good training and you get to compete and you make it terrible or you don't feel like you train at all. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

I will not forget that they gave me an opportunity to go to a European Championship, my first European Championship and I was not capable of giving one... I was in the warm-up and I said to the coach, "look, it's that I can't, God, it's not me, I just don't know what's wrong with me, no matter how hard I'm trying, I can't". (...) Yes, that is true, but it was like wanting to give of myself and not being able to. So it is frustrating because you have prepared for a long time for something very important and at that moment you do not have your day and you do not give what you have. (Afrodite, Interview 11 (1), 29/07/2020)

However, other athletes also claim that over time and the amount of competitions they participate in, all the stress involved decreases:

I personally think that maturity, that is, the number of championships, has helped me the most. Having gone to so many championships has helped me more than working with a psychologist, for example. It is true that it gives you guidelines and that helps you, but I think that in the end it is getting used to it. And the personality of each one... I have never been very nervous. Yes, I have sometimes blocked myself and I still block,

which is normal, but I have never been very nervous about vomiting, for example, that there are people who vomit or who cannot sleep the day before. And it is true that everyone<sup>62</sup> does less than we can in the championships, but I think that now I am better thanks to the personality I have, the years that I have been, and a little to the psychologist too, of course. (Hera, Interview 9 (1), 27/07/2020)

Fighters who have not yet reached this level pointed out by this athlete, seek without fear for psychological support to be able to deal with these elements, converting them more into allies, in a way, than weaknesses. They seek a certain domain of the fear that arises, or of the nerves, as they call it, so that it does not become panic and stops them completely, as illustrated by a *karateka*.

I think there are always nerves and there are fears and if there aren't, it's because you don't really care. Because you want to or not, you cannot be quiet in a competition. No, I think it's impossible, well you can control it, but those nerves, that fear is there, they don't go away. So the idea that I have towards that is to relax it. (...) So that you can also think, because fear and nerves block you, they don't let you think, you can't, they don't let you reason. And that is more or less what we need, to think and reason. (Hestia, Interview 6 (1), 22/07/2020)

They do the invisible training, as pointed out by a coach, to try to optimize performance:

There is a part called the invisible training. It is what the psychologist has to do. All elite athletes must do training, which is the one that is not seen. Because the most important of all is that your head is fine. (Hefaiostos, man, Interview 36 (1), 30/09/2020)

Together with these testimonials, the quote I used to close the previous section and introduce this one now returns and relates to the others. The athletes talk about this point, about the sensation that somatises and seems to start in the psyche or in what they call the

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<sup>62</sup> Among the interviewees, there is only one athlete who reports better performance competing than training: "Well, there are people who give 100% training and when they come to compete they are not capable of giving 50. On the other hand, while training, I try to give my best and I don't reach 60, I think, 70. Sometimes I say, 'but it is that, Artemis, what is this you are doing?' But when I go out to compete, when I'm... I fight a final better than the previous rounds, because the more people there are watching and such, the more I... the more I like it. (...) Yes, the adrenaline gets me high, literally. I really like that feeling. In fact, the more difficult the opponent, the more I like to fight. I don't want the first fight to be easier, because if I think the fight is very easy, I lose and go home. I like that they are hard fights to get to 100, because otherwise I do not activate and I think the other one is bad, I do not activate and I also lose." (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

head, like the coach; and that is why they seek help from psychologists. Other women comment on this:

I work with... for about five or six years I have been working with a psychologist, I think it is very important, because there are times that for whatever reason, an external or internal agent blocks you and you do not give everything and it is a frustration, moreover personal, that is, why can't I? (...) The head is as important as, or more. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

I started going to the psychologist a long time ago because I had a problem that was, I think, with confidence. The championships were coming and I was in the warm-up zone and it was the typical "this one is very good...", they were all very good, except me. (...) I feel confident and I feel very stable, but I kind of make the determination that, just as I train other things, this also has a lot to train. (Atena, Interview 5 (1), 21/07/2020)

In summary, women are looking for alternatives to develop greater resilience. There are many elements that they need to deal with as athletes, of course, but also as women. Perhaps it is possible that the *habitus* that they incorporate has a major implication in their emotions. According to Thiry-Cherques (2006, p.33), "For Bourdieu, habitus is a system of dispositions, ways of perceiving, feeling, doing, thinking, which lead us to act in a certain way in a given circumstance."<sup>63</sup> In other words, a concept that encompasses more than the concrete plane of body techniques (Mauss, 1973), but that can express itself through them, as if being leaked through the pores as a reflection of emotions and thoughts.

The dispositions are neither mechanical nor deterministic. They are plastic, flexible. (...) They are acquired by the interiorization of social structures. Bearers of individual and collective history, they are so internalized that we ignore that they exist. It is the unconscious body and mental routines that allow us to act without thinking. The product of a learning process, of a process of which we are no longer aware and which is expressed by a "natural" attitude of conducting ourselves in a certain environment (Thiry-Cherques, 2006, p.33).

I consider it important to be taken into account because, from my point of view, the *habitus*, which denotes the system of durable and transferable dispositions (Thiry-Cherques, 2006), is embodied by the athletes producing tension in them. What I mean by this is that the

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<sup>63</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine in all citations of this work, Thiry-Cherques, 2006.

reading of *karateka* women, both professional and amateur, is that they are not able to do what men do, especially related to a level of quality. This is clearly demonstrated in the coaches' interviews, as I will try to show in the following chapters.

However, *habitus* is related to the general expression of women in the martial field and outside it. In other words, I venture to say that there is a general *karateka habitus* (see about martial *habitus* in Brown & Jennings, 2013) male oriented, but that there is also a female *karateka habitus*, constructed and constituted by relatively rigid, tense, contained bodies. The social construction of women in the wider community and in the martial environment is strongly permeated by tensions and fears from which men are freer or at least they experience that differently. Maybe related especially with the *eidos'* aspect of *habitus* (Thiry-Cherques, 2006), the social construction of men, in a patriarchal society, works in the opposite direction than the female social construction usually does. As explained by Foucault (2009) in talking about capillarization of power, women, usually objectified by the male gaze, generally internalize that and act according to that to a large extent. On the other hand, men are not objectified by a female gaze. Men also are subjected to the male gaze, hegemonic in the current society, which can be a problem to homosexual men, for example, and even to heterosexual men who sometimes need to prove masculinity (Connell, 1995).

Speaking on feminine experience for girls and women, Young (1980, p.143-144) points out that “we often lack confidence that we have the capacity to do what must be done” and “we have more of a tendency than men to greatly underestimate our bodily capacity.” It is necessary to mention that even though Young’s work continues to have relevance, it is somewhat dated since feminism has evolved since this publication. Women surely became viewed as stronger than then, nevertheless, my stubbornness about keeping her work here is related to the form of expression of women in the *karateka* field, their way of fighting, which is basically different from that of men. This is not about just stereotyping fighters. Exactly to avoid it, in chapter 6 I will present analysis of Spanish female *karateka* style of fighting. However, I consider it important that the association with fears and insecurities, which become a burden, something like a weight that flattens women figuratively, be already verified. It is the case that women are able to train and develop, even though they were lead to believe they are not capable of doing so.

So, the idea I understand that women fighters transmit here is that although many weaknesses may be evident in them, besides that there are reasons for these weaknesses, they show persistence despite the contrary forces. In summary, they are strong in the face of

adversity and mature to accept or overcome “no” or what are forms of rejection given by defeats and high competition, since they lose more than they win, as seems evident in their own accounts. They start again continuously, rebuilding themselves with great speed, and this is reflected in their subjectivity.

In the end this is a long distance race and not a sprint race. If you lose once, the next day you train harder so that the next time you win. And it's not the fault of the one who beat you. In the end I have done my job, the other has done her job, if the other was liked more (by *kata* referees), then I will have to do another job, or better my job so that the next time I will be liked more. So, well, losing sucks, yes, of course it sucks. But in the end you can't blame yourself on “I've lost, I've lost”, because in the end the only thing that is going to do you is more damage. Then, the moment of defeat, because you will have a low, but as soon as you recover you cannot think again about what happened, you have to think about the next competition. And that's it.

(Proserpina, Interview 2 (1), 12/07/2020)

One of the coaches also illustrates their dynamic:

Once it is finished and lost, you have to try to cut and reset again, because you have to go out with someone else and you have to give your 100% again. Easy it is not.

(Hefaiostos, man, Interview 36 (1), 30/09/2020)

This theme could certainly be explored in different ways. However, as I pointed out initially, the idea of this chapter is just to make a general presentation of the most relevant aspects that the elite athletes offered especially with the first interview and that introduce and situate the central theme of the thesis. So, I leave the subject here, perhaps provisionally.

In the following section, still with the purpose of presenting the team and contextualizing the main themes that will be addressed in the chapters that follow, I bring a somewhat complex panorama again, since it is made up of complementarities and contradictions. I will focus on the athletes' conceptions of self-confidence, aggression, danger, fighting styles and something of violence.

#### **4.5. Violence: aggression and confidence, fear and reality**

When describing the civilizing process, Elias and Dunning (1992) explained how society became less violent, since in the past this was a much more prominent feature than in the

present day, as described by them. There, sport would play a fundamental role, since it would be configured as an arena of simulated and combined conflicts, governed by the rules. In a way, sport would replace wars, preventing people from actually killing each other on the battlefield to fight each other on the fields of games and sports, stopping before death. Or rather, death occurs, but it is symbolic, given by the defeat of the opponent. Sport then prevents societies from becoming “feminized”, in a pejorative sense, once it helps in keeping the virile characteristics, present in real combats, as showed by Gay (1995) when describing the history of Victorian England. If people are civilized, but somehow maintain the violent drives within themselves, it can be said that the fields, tracks, *kotos*, rings, would be authorized spaces and, more than that, well-regarded (Vaz, 2005b) spaces to enact violence and to exercise aggression.

It is perhaps relevant to note that sport had the power to pause wars in Ancient Greece, the birthplace of the Games of at least four types<sup>64</sup>, but with greater prominence attributed to the Olympians. *Ekecheiria*, a truce established among Greek kings, stopped wars during the Olympic Games (Durántez, 2010). The interpretations of this agreement are many, and it may be possible to say that, following the line of Elias and Dunning (1992), sport temporarily took the place of war as a way of giving a break to barbarism, but maintaining the bellicose character of people; replacing the concrete with a symbolic war, disputed, assisted and applauded by male citizens. Sport continues to be studied as a war metaphor. Recently golf scholars, an apparently very peaceful sport, have analysed the journalistic form used to publicize an important women's tournament, the Solheim Cup, using war terms (Bowes et al, 2020). Bowes and collaborators identified a strategy to elevate women's sport without making use of the common stereotypes that involve female athletes. However, the course adopted is intriguing in putting them in the role of soldiers in defence of their nation against opponents and announcing “We are going to step on their necks” (p.439).<sup>65</sup>

In the past, brute violence, in which force is used, was allowed much more than today<sup>66</sup> in struggles, as the narratives of the pankration, the ancient boxing art, demonstrate.

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<sup>64</sup> Olympic Games, held in Olympia in honour of Zeus; Neemeus Games, Nemea, in honour of Hercules; Isthmic Games, Corinth, Poseidon; Mythical (*Píticos*) Games, Delphi, Apollo. Of lesser importance, Hereos Games, for women, subordinated to the Olympic Games, dedicated to Hera, wife of Zeus in mythology (Durántez, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> In Bitencourt (2005) the opposite is true, the sports language being used by news coverage to narrate the war between the United States and Iraq.

<sup>66</sup> Perhaps it incurs in a relevant exception to mention the sport I discovered, not without surprise, during my stay in Italy. Florence cultivates the existence of the sport called *calcio storico fiorentino*. A mixture of rugby and fighting, played exclusively by men, only once a year, given the level of violence, in order to preserve the tradition of gladiators (Reza, 2020).

The tolerable threshold of violence for civilized culture has increased, making gross violence much less acceptable in general. Certainly, civility is related to some level of refinement of the senses. It also includes the education by culture of the drive characteristics that our temperaments could carry. Although the purest or least worked-up drive state, to say it in some way, may be welcome at times:

The *kumite* in the end is instinct. So you can be very badly trained, you don't even know what you're doing, but your instinct makes you a predator and they never hit you and you always hit. I have an example of a person who does not know what she is doing, but what a predator from birth is. Artemis. Artemis doesn't even know what she's doing. Yes, but the only thing to say to Artemis is "Artemis, very good, you, come on, trust, Artemis, you, yes, come. Get on". She eats it. (Hermes, man, Interview 28 (1), 15/09/2020)

However, if culture is able to at certain point build people as men or women, would not it be able to work towards redirecting drives? In other words, I understand that we are educated in the most diverse dimensions that we can have. Bourdieu (1984) talks about the formation of taste, for example. He says that "scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education" (p.1), and that it is not an innate element in human beings. "Bourdieu considers that the taste and cultural practices of each of us are the result of a bundle of specific conditions of socialization"<sup>67</sup> (Setton, 2008, p.48). Friedland et al (2007) carried out an interesting study in the United States to analyse the field of cultural consumption of the population. The authors state that "there is a clear correspondence between civic behaviour, political ideology, and the social positioning of taste cultures within the U.S. context" (p.48). They also found that "the distribution of positions is largely defined by patterns of taste that discriminate between refinement, moderation, nurturance, and a communal orientation, on one side, and coarseness, excess, aggressiveness, and an individual orientation, on the other" (p.31). Following these arguments, these elements are socially constructed for the most part, less likely to exist innately, even violence. Some people may, perhaps, have a greater predisposition to violence than others according to their temperament, since this is one of the aspects that can influence behaviour following Bowlby, the author of Attachment Theory, quoted in Page (2015). The other aspect, though, is environment (Page, 2015). So if a child has been in excessive contact with violence it is not surprising that as an adult he/she reproduces what they have received, especially when they

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<sup>67</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

are deprived of possibilities for enlightenment. Attachment is crucially important for small children's development and also to avoid social maladjustment. If there is no attachment and types of violence are present, violence becomes a reasonable choice to resolve problems. In this sense, people would be trapped in a kind of vicious cycle of victim-predator or oppressor-oppressed (Freire, 2005).

In any case, if the drives of violence were not worked on, educated, channelled, redirected, they will seek satisfaction, as in the case of Ulysses and appetite previously reported. Perhaps I can risk that, as society in search of civilization imposes restrictions for life to flow, this same society develops other ways to satisfy the malaise, as Freud (2010) calls it, that the privations imposed cause it. Among other possible paths, one that is particularly relevant is that of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2012). If that makes sense, since people maintain drives of violence, even in civilized life they would continue to be violent, just masking it with brushstrokes of refinement and keeping their hands clean. Or they would seek to vent, as it happens a lot and it is not necessarily a negative thing but only an escape route in this case, through sport. In this regard, two coaches make very interesting observations:

At the international level we have a problem because in the society we have, you have an educated child, your home, the values... We go out and we need warriors. If your house, your son, you prefer that he not fight with anyone so that he is educated. When you go out to compete internationally, that doesn't work. I need a girl who comes out to win. That she receives a blow and "you will see, I don't care, I'm going for you because I want to win." (...) When one feels trapped, it is something that one does not normally express in public, because of course we are civilized people. When one comes to competing, one has to express it. (...) It is not the same to do sports as a hobby than to do it out of necessity. (Hefastos, man, Interview 36 (1), 30/09/2020)

There have been many gyms with a lot of fame, the big competitors pulled out, all in slums, all of them. (...) There is a direct relationship between the people who beat themselves on the street who won. The reasoning is very simple. You hear people say, "I trained in the older group" or the girls, "I hit the boys and if the boys don't hit me, how is this girl going to hit me?" or "I hit older people and then when I do later with my age, if the older people have not killed me, how is this one going to kill me?" If you are in the street beating up with a bare fist with a guy who wants to rip your head off and who may be carrying a stick and maybe carrying a knife and you hit him, you are

not afraid. How can you be scared with a guy who has gloves on and a referee in front of you? (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

Achieving civilization presupposes body self-regulation, which means control, dominance, limit, discipline. According to Foucault (2009, p.139), ultimately “a disciplined body is the basis for an efficient gesture”<sup>68</sup>. Perhaps it is possible to affirm that bodies and behaviours that deviate from efficiency, from discipline, from some degree of aesthetics, present themselves as coarse and uncivilized. To achieve civility, which is really necessary for life in society, bodies need to be domesticated and contained, a process that is inserted in different social institutions, from the earliest age. Sport would be an auxiliary tool applied since school, also because “when students are in the sports field, it’s easy to keep an eye on them, dedicate themselves to a 'healthy' activity and direct their violence against their classmates rather than directing it against the facilities themselves or harassing their teachers” (Bourdieu, 1983, p.12).

When asking athletes about the contact they may have had with violence in their lives, they consider it practically null. Only one of them had problems with violence due to racial prejudice and another lived in a neighbourhood considered violent, in her childhood. However, they all know how to position themselves in a respectful way, I understand, in relation to the subject. Considering that they are aware of their potentials and limits, they present differentiations about what violence is and the real danger that it can carry and represent for their own lives; about what is the sport they practice and their fighting skills, developed based on rules and techniques; what self-defence training is, with feminine specificities or not; and about what aggression is, an important ingredient in the performance of their sport.

*Karateka* consider themselves courageous and aggressive, in general. In karate, being aggressive refers to embodied learning that is expressed through a posture. Having an aggressive attitude means being offensive, attacking, full of initiative, opposing a passive way of being/performing. Athletes and coaches talk about the subject:

*Kumite* athletes, apart from being intelligent, have to be aggressive, because it is a contact sport. Confront a person who wants to win, with some rules. You have to face that person. Everyone is not good for that. (Hefaiostos, man, Interview 36 (1), 30/09/2020)

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<sup>68</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine in quotes in this paragraph.

I think that I change a lot when I enter the *tatami* and salute, my personality changes a lot. Because in real life I am quite an introverted person, until I feel confident, but when I enter the *tatami*, I start to fight, I forget everything and I am quite forward. I am quite an attacking person, so I think yes, that my competitive side is aggressive. (Minerva, Interview 1 (1), 29/06/2020)

I am a super stubborn girl and if I want something I go for it and until I get it I do not stop. (Venus, Interview 3 (1), 14/07/2020)

I am quite an aggressive person, I am also patient, in the fact of knowing how to wait for the moment, but I consider myself a person who when I want to score or when I want... I have a very aggressive character. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

Not aggressive, but if I want to achieve something, I will do it and I will be the best. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

Athletes are aggressive, even when they say not so much! Nevertheless, coaches have made carefully a critique about competitors training reflexes through videogames tools, for example. Three of them expressed their opinion about the relationship between aggression and especially violence, as I understood, and good performance in combat sport. The general message is that too much civility counts against excellence in fighting. Aggression undeniably is a fundamental ingredient as I showed but more than that, a *touch* of violence seems to be required. I risk to say that it is related with the idea of keeping virile characteristics in sport which is an environment where hegemonic masculinity usually has its comfort zone, turning away feminized behaviours (Gay, 1995). But the truth is that violence cannot be openly stimulated in sportive karate. This plays against the rules, even though everybody knows that there are ways to subtly transmit the message. Officially, though, the purpose is to perform technically, something that many athletes honestly dedicate themselves. Then, competitors are aware that they play a combat sport, that they are not war soldiers, save the type of language used to describe them, as in the case of golf mentioned above, or street fighters. Women prepare their bodies to meet the expectations of their sport or *art*. As I wrote earlier, the scientific side of sports training comes into play, as well as different technologies, to optimize performance supported especially by the speed of the attack. Although again there are similarities with war, since to fight well athletes and coaches develop strategies, work tactics, study the opponent, finally the athletes will not eliminate it by force. They and their coaches will together establish plans and build fighting styles to reach the opponent's symbolic death, knowing that everything is a kind of game, at this level of sport in the name of the

defence of their country and their flag, ultimately, which is intriguing. In their own voices, the athletes and coaches illustrate this point:

Many countries are clear that it is a game. You don't have to kill anyone. When we were young you did have to be the alpha male, you had to hurt, you had to win, not now. (...) I think right now they are very aware that this is a game, it is not a fight. For us it was a fight, now it is a game. But how is it still karate and still fighting, because even though it has become a game of chess, the blows still hurt. And that must be taken into account and I think that the one who only plays, has little chance of winning. It has to be very, very, very clean, very fine, playing to beat an angry guy who has to... suddenly he wants to hurt you. Yes, because you may win, but you may also get a very big blow. (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

My coach from home or there with our national coach, well they send us, they send us a bit like the rival fights, apart from what we each already know, but well I always talk to my coach and he tells me "be careful, she is very good at that, very good at doing the other thing", and you have to do your job, but always thinking a little about the rival and then the fight because you also see how she moves, like... You don't go with a plan... you go with a pre-established plan, but always to which modifications can be made. (Minerva, Interview 1 (1), 29/06/2020)

The athletes become skilled, potent in their art, developing styles that are a combination of talent with polishing or cultivation.

I think it (talent) comes with me, and what Ares and the coaches are doing is taking it out. (...) Everyone has to have something to do karate and that *something* has to be found, it has to be worked on and it has to be shown, as if it were a butterfly. The cocoon begins, it remains in the shape of a butterfly, but it is the same. I am still in the process of creating a *karateka*. (Hestia, Interview 6 (1), 22/07/2020)

And then with this combination of talent and cultivation they become efficient in their styles. This theme will also return later when I deal with what is embodied by the athletes according to the models they receive and how they express their shape, their *habitus* as a tangle of actions and tensions, *ethos*, *héxis* and *eidos* (Thiry-Cherques, 2006), from video analysis of their fighting styles. For now, in this extended introduction, I expose something of how the athletes see themselves in their performance, taking into account that it is a composition according to them of what they bring with what coaches develop in them.

In relation with competition I have been trained as a very anticipatory person, as they have always trained me, but I do more counterattack, I am a bit of a mix, but hey, I really like to anticipate and counter. And what is technically and tactically, I provoke and take advantage of. (Demeter, Interview 10 (1), 27/07/2020)

I am passionate (fighting), that is, it depends on the feelings that I have, I will act one way or another, but I will always finish, I will not let them eat me. If I consider that I am moving on the outside, it is because I want to, because it is the game that I want. I believe that I am more oriented by feelings and if I have to attack more, I attack, if I have to be more defensive, I am defensive and I think I have a tactic inside me, what you say, unpredictable. (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

My father (and *sensei*) tries for me to be as complete as possible, that is, if I have to attack, then attack with ease, but if I have to wait, be patient and do it well, don't go crazy. (...) My father when I compete, he plays *play* (videogame), he is playing *play*. He says to me "Juno, go ahead" and I don't even think "my father has told me to go ahead." You can see in the videos of the fighting that he says something to me and I go out like that, I do what he tells me, but in a second. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

This form of training inevitably resembles automation, which is in fact desired, that the technique integrates the body by robotizing it to a certain extent, like a videogame doll. Amid so much power and mechanical responses, I asked the women, who are among the best in the sport in the world, if they feel safe to defend themselves on the street. It was extremely interesting while comforting to know that they do not have unwavering confidence. Why do I say it was comforting? Because I also do not feel ready to defend myself. In other researches I did, I asked amateur women athletes the same question and some told me that they felt very sure of themselves. As I always evaluate myself, I was a little in doubt as to why I did not see myself prepared, and technically I often had better results than people who were confident. So I wondered if it was just my fear, the education I received, or something like an unreal and somewhat illusory view of these amateur *karateka*. Evidently, it is positive that sport gives confidence due to a certain empowerment that it generates in women. However, if they think they are much more capable than they really are, this may even pose a greater risk to them.

Perhaps knowledge with ownership of skills and limitations is a virtue. As in the case of Ulysses, who is known to be weak, who recognizes that he could not resist the sirens' singing and then ties himself to the mast of the boat in order to listen to them. In his case, in the

knowledge of his weakness lies his strength. Perhaps the case of the elite athletes is similar to this. Or perhaps they believe themselves to be or have become weaker than they actually are, due to the education they have received. It is hard to know for sure. However, the fact is that elite *karateka* seem to have a very accurate view of the real danger and the vast majority do not intend to find out if they are able to defend themselves or not. They are generally confident, but they prefer to run from the threat, literally. They are aware that their training is specific and does not focus on self-defence guaranteeing a specific *habitus* (Brown & Johnson, 2000), for example, as their testimonies attest:

I don't know, because I do sports karate, that is, in the street... of course, if the other one were voting (floating) and doing *zuki*, *mawashi*, so, yes. But on the street it is something else, that is, the street, there can be anything, from weapons, stab weapons, to much stronger people, and I have not done self-defence for a long time. So I don't know, it depends on the situation, it depends on the person in front of me. I am, I walk confident, huh? I walk confidently on the street. I am not afraid, because my friends who say "well, if I go at night and meet a man", this fear, I do not have it, for example. (...) The best thing is to run, you don't hurt yourself, or anything. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

There is a great deal of trade about what is called female self-defence, how women should defend themselves from male attacks. This leads me to reflect on the doubts that many women have about their own potential within an embedded patriarchal culture that impedes physical feminism (Maor, 2018), since girls grow up believing in physical inferiority (Roth & Basow, 2004) while boys/men believe in their physical superiority. And, more than believing in such physical inferiority, actually producing it, confirming it, once women conform to the contained and short movements that are taught and allowed (Roth & Basow, 2004); on how female self-defence includes previous aspects, to avoid conflict, which overburdens women with responsibility and frees men from being the generator of the threat, allowing them to exercise domination (Bourdieu, 2012) also out of fear; and about real self-knowledge and danger, since as I said many women may believe that they are more capable of self-defence than they actually are. The content of this paragraph requires further study. For now, I offer other examples of how women perceive and seek to avoid real danger.

If there were one... I had to hit someone because I have no other (choice), I would know how to hit. And I know I can hit really hard. But if for example, uh... That fear, for example, that they will follow you or whatever, I don't feel safer for knowing karate.

You know? I mean, maybe they tell me "well, but you are walking down the street alone and knowing karate you will not be afraid". No. I do have it. (Diana, Interview 4 (1), 21/07/2020)

Karate gives you confidence when practicing, everyone who knows something about this because it gives you extra security in yourself especially and the reflexes are much greater than perhaps someone who has not practiced at all, you are more used to it. Force... all that helps you, but there are situations in which if they take a knife or something, or a person who is using cocaine to the top, you may already know... the situation is difficult for everyone. (Demeter, Interview 10 (1), 27/07/2020)

It depends, I mean, I feel confident. When I walk down the street and I see that it is a bit of a situation, that I say "something could happen here", I walk stronger than ever, I swell, I put my face up and I feel confident. But you never know what can happen, if maybe it's with a man... Maybe with a woman, if I have problems with a woman, I feel confident, but with a man, maybe it depends on the situation. I can kick down and run or... But I feel confident, I'm not afraid either. (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

Because there are so many rapes, so many kidnappings of women... as women make armour against these men. For example, if a man came to you on the street, he would ask you, "hey, can you show me where is the street 'x'?" Like right now, if when a man was going down the street, "can you come with me?" I would say, "no, sorry", even if there is nothing wrong, I would not do it out of fear of. (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

Undeniably, the theme brings many super interesting nuances. As I said, these women are some of the best in their art, and yet they say that what they would do in dangerous situations would be to run. Even though the women define themselves as aggressive and can add sometimes a touch of violence to the sport, they know they are playing a kind of game and are not practicing self-defence. This makes them aware that real danger is different from the situations in competitions. On the other hand, most of them say they feel confident walking on the street, for example, which at first sight seems a contradiction. From my point of view, there are two possible interpretations for this apparent contradiction. One is that subjectivity is a complex composition of varied elements. It is possible to mix a feeling of power given by techniques perfectly executed and a highly able body with timidity, a tensioned body and beliefs in physical inferiority. So you have a person who is confident most of the time, with moments of fear, when thinking about dangerous situations. And this leads to the second

interpretation of the contradiction. Countries in Europe, in a general view, are not violent compared to Brazil, for example. So I would say it is possibly easier to be confident in Spain, where violence is not constantly at your side. Like in the situations athletes and coaches mention the opponent hitting you and then you become a little humbler, with violence I would say it is similar. When you live with something intimately, you can develop a huge trauma, needing a long time to recover your confidence.

Besides all this, I risk to say that these women have the ability to perceive real danger in addition to the lack of vanity that would make them believe they are invincible. Verifying this among them generates respect from me towards them at the same time as indignation with society based on masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2012; see also Brown, 2006). Because I can see that highly trained women are not free from fear, that they also feel threatened, and worst of all, this is understood as normal. That is why I wrote at the beginning of this category that the brushstrokes of civilization camouflage and mask violence, making people with poorly controlled drives feel free to threaten others. These others need to withdraw, inhibit and take care not to provoke any problem, since it is possible, finally, that the responsibility for the problem triggered turns against the victim herself, that is, the person becomes guilty. Any violence becomes “her fault”, for example, for dressing or behaving “provocatively”. And all of this, of course, impacts and affects the construction of women's subjectivities.

I leave the topic here with a view to deepening it at another time. The five introductory sections in this chapter are a kind of setting the stage for the central chapters, as I have said. However, little by little the sections get closer to what will be treated as the main subject of the thesis. To this end, in the following category I will address the theme of hierarchies and their multiple facets.

#### **4.6. Hierarchy as social positioning: space negotiation and coexistence designed**

Now there is a lot of competitiveness around the whole issue of the Olympic Games, at the end of the pre-Olympic championship only one goes (in the weight) and it must be said that way. As there is only one opportunity for the Olympic Games that there will be no more in Paris... (Apolo, man, Interview 33 (2), 25/09/2020)

Karate has an explicit hierarchy given by the belts, however, in addition to this there are other forms of hierarchies, such as the position that each *karateka* achieves by their results, by the technical level, by the time of training. In the Olympic team, all athletes are

black belts, but their *dans* vary, as can be seen in the methodology. For most of them, scaling the hierarchy of *dans* is not a priority now. They plan to continue training karate when they withdraw from competitions, and then it will be time to take the exams. In a common karate *dojo*, martial art protocols and rituals strictly follow the hierarchy of *kyus* and *dans*, usually organizing the starting and ending rows of classes according to the graduation of the belts. In this sense, this hierarchy precedes that of time, for example. If someone decides to stay in a certain *dan*, however the person takes 50 years of training, which happens, the superior *dan* even in a young person, defines the most graduated. But this extremely experienced person is respected. And maybe even more is the person who differentiates due to technical level or results. Thus, the objective hierarchy is that of the belts. But time and especially technique/results play a fundamental role, mixing body capital with symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2001).

Many martial arts rituals and symbols are typically masculine (Segalen, 2002). Segalen (2002) explains that the more traditional the context of a particular practice, the more ingrained it maintains male elements. For these types of practices linked to traditions were mostly created by men. Logically, if the environment is cultivated supposedly from its origins, without or with few changes, the original elements are theoretically protected. Hence, some of these environments are seen as places of preservation of male primordial privilege, which is why they are called male preserves (Matthews, 2016; Theberge, 1985). This point supports the relationships that will be established based on the dynamics of power and gender hierarchy. Because many martial environments due to their relationship with traditional elements, among other reasons, are undeniably male environments, as also seen in Atena's comment:

I had been giving talks about sports and women and they called me precisely because of that, because it is a sport that is not for girls. (Atena, Interview 5 (1), 21/07/2020)

It is true that sport relatively transforms traditional environments to make them more modern. However, the sport itself, in addition to having its history and traditions, in its renewed version reinvents technologies, structures, hierarchies, pedagogies, and sometimes traditions (Hobsbawn, 1983; Williams, 1977). It remasters forms when it retains original ideologies, perhaps as in the case of war, while giving them a new look, contributing to the placement of new masks on an old skeleton (Silva, Medeiros & Quitzau, 2020). So the sport maintains elements of male hegemony that helps to preserve the pre-established order. Its reproduction occurs even among women, since they are formed in this environment, embodying everything that is conveyed there. These women who are part of the high

competition sports context, live the hierarchy of the best performance and results and also of gender, whether in the figures of male athletes or coaches. In their national team, no matter what *dan* they have:

I think that in the end respect, well, is measured in other ways than simply by wearing your belt. (Minerva, Interview 1 (1), 29/06/2020)

The time they remain there is relevant, since it means that they have been living up to expectations for a long time to be kept there, something difficult to achieve and therefore worthy of respect. One of the athletes demonstrates this when she answers my question about how she would organize the hierarchy if it depended on her, what would be the criteria that she would take as fundamental.

Well, I would put above all... it shows those who have more years of experience and more years in the national team. Ah, that really shows. So, mind you, that in the selection I would put the girls, the older ones, Demeter, Ceres and Hera, before even some boys. I'd put them something higher. (Vesta, Interview 8 (1), 25/07/2020)

The emphasis she places on some women being in higher positions than some men cannot be overlooked. That is, *a priori* men occupy the top positions "naturally". However, returning to the question of the hierarchy conferred by seniority, if a novice arrives exhibiting a perfect technique or performance and, more than that, achieving the best results in fact, that person undoubtedly rises in position within the hierarchy.

The fact of seniority is still maintained a lot and I have been told a lot "when you are more veteran, when you are more veteran", no! I have shown that I am at the level to be one of the veterans, not because I am 23 years old, but because when I go to the *tatami* I demonstrate, so I think that the one who demonstrates on the *tatami*, the one who looks confident is the one in which to bet. (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

The medal, so to speak, is like the key to be seen. (Proserpina, Interview 18 (2), 24/08/2020)

I believe that you have to be yourself when training, that is, there was a time when I had to conquer my place, so I had to train more, get results and I think it is to continue or improve on that line. And then the other thing no longer depends on you, if tomorrow comes a girl who is better than me, well I give as much as I can. And if she's better than me, then I'll applaud her. I have nothing against this girl, Diana, I get along super well with her and, I know that she will grow and I also have to maintain my own,

but in a totally sporting way and with sport values. (...) Striving every day as always, that's it, if you settle in, it is clear that another comes from behind, wants your place, those things. It is not accommodating. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

It is true that I like the (*kata*) team a lot, but well. Actually, every girl's goal, or I guess, I don't know, at least mine is Sandra's<sup>69</sup> relief. Me, my goal is to be Sandra's replacement and to be the new individual. It is true that in the team it is super, super cool, super cool, because in the end you are not training alone all the time, but actually what to me, my future plan is to be the individual, not to be in the team. (Venus, Interview 3 (1), 14/07/2020)

In addition to the idea of hierarchy of results, these citations also reveal the competitiveness behind hierarchies, what sustains them. Coexistent relationships within the team among peers and superiors also account for the positioning, perhaps as a kind of contrived coexistence, not always genuine. In other words, I say that the structure is complex because there seems to be an architecture of relationships, which have implicit rules never agreed in dialogues, for example. The situations are set and are subliminally known to all, although they do not intimately like them. It is a hidden language, but contradictorily clear, as pointed out by the athlete and the coach:

If you arrive and you are new, you have to do certain things that you don't feel like doing. They say "hey, let's have dinner all the girls." Just like you, you don't feel like going to dinner, you want to rest, but you know you have to go because it's the team, it's the way to do a bit of a group and be with them. If you always stay in the room, if you don't do this kind of thing, I don't think you're going to thrive as an athlete. You can be very good, but if you are not well received in your group, although you get along well with them, if you do not create that more family bond or more of friendship... (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

If it is a coexistence subject, the one that takes the longest (is above). If it is in inside the *tatami* subject, the performance. But when the two get together, then there is no doubt. (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

And yet other implicit ways that work towards establishing hierarchies of power relate to something like an internal competition between the sub-modalities of karate, *kata* and

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<sup>69</sup> Sandra Sánchez. As explained in the methodology chapter, due to her schedule, she did not participate in the interviews.

*kumite*. All are part of the same team, however, athletes often say that they are almost two different sports:

For me, combat and *kata* are two completely opposite worlds, it is the same karate, but they are two worlds, in competition, they are two completely opposite worlds. (Diana, Interview 4 (1), 21/07/2020)

The athletes report a big difference between the *karateka* personalities of each sub-modality and as, in fact, each sub-team needs to do their specific training in their respective subgroup, the *kata* members have their own dynamics while those of *kumite*, theirs. The differences pointed out by women occur in the most diverse areas:

The *kata* girls can get up two hours before going out to get ready, I hallucinate, come on, I comb my hair in the pavilion. And even now with long hair, I put my ponytail on and go out to fight. We're different. (Demeter, Interview 10 (1), 27/07/2020)

Internal competitions are established between the groups, which is not avoided by the coaches, given their relevance from coaches' point of view. And among athletes there are always small attacks, I would say, aimed at the opposite group.

The combat *karategi* looks like pyjamas to me. It seems to me that they put on their pyjamas and go out to compete. And there are many combat girls, when you are out there (other country), who go with some hairs that, what do I know, as if they had woken up and at the end the pyjamas, then you say "OMG, what? is that karate?" And then maybe you see the *kata* girls with their combed ponytail, their *karategi* well on, I don't know what, and you see this one... And they both do karate, eh? (Venus, Interview 3 (1), 14/07/2020)

It is true that they value the work done by the other group, but they also try to show that their respective group is more demanding, from their point of view, and they still have the central element that the other group supposedly holds. A small war is established between aesthetics and courage, since there seems to be a certain effort to prove that there can be beauty with bravery (*kumite*), and there can be brutality with comeliness (*kata*). I present a testimonial from an athlete of *kumite* first, followed by two from *kata*:

I have to tell you that we also fix ourselves for, that is, today we also comb our hair, we make the ponytail our own, I don't know what... It is true that *kata* is more aesthetic, first because they are not hitting on anyone. They don't catch them and grab them and throw them to the ground, in the *bunkai* yes, but when they are doing a *kata*, what is

the *kimono* going to move? The *kimono* does not have to be moved at all. (...) And on an aesthetic level we are great too hahaha. (...) It seems wrong to me that it is true that *kata* is so aesthetic and in the end if you are beautiful, you earn more than if you are ugly, that is so and it seems terrible to me. That is, if you see one that goes with the longest *karategi* or with hair a little here or with a loose hair, this is very bad. (...) And on the other hand, we do not care because in two seconds the *karategi* is going to come out, we are going to have to put it back on. (Hera, Interview 9 (1), 27/07/2020)

I think that in *bunkai* we hit each other more than in *kumite*. In fact, I have come out crying from *bunkais'* training because maybe they have said, that is, "100%, strong..." (Proserpina, Interview 2 (1), 12/07/2020)

I mean brute because although it seems that I am like, if you look at everyone in general, "she is super feminine, super girl, super...", but then I have my outings, I love being brute. (Afrodite, Interview 11 (1), 29/07/2020)

These elements do not seem to be completely conscious for the group, but are accepted or embodied automatically by the nature of the scenario in which they are immersed and the competition. Following the same line, the athlete points out:

I at least give a lot, a lot, a lot of importance to the image, because it is not the same that you see a person enter who is careless, without putting on the *karategi*, yellow, not so combed, you say, "uff...", well it will not look the same as you seeing a girl who has made an effort to put on makeup, fix her *karategi*, put on her belt. I think everything counts. (Afrodite, Interview 11 (1), 29/07/2020)

Even though they are internal sub-modalities to karate, when they differ so much and produce hierarchical differences, this finding leads to thinking about the social position that is triggered from there for those involved. Bourdieu (1983, p.16) provides other elements to help think about the issue that continue to have contemporary relevance:

Everything suggests that the probability of practicing different sports depends, to varying degrees for each sport, on economic capital and, secondarily, on cultural capital and free time; this through the affinity that is established between the ethical and aesthetic dispositions associated with a determined position in the social space and the profits that due to these dispositions seem promised for different sports.

To a greater or lesser extent, athletes raise the points mentioned by Bourdieu. However, it is also necessary to take into account that Spain today has the best results in the

world in *kata* sub-modality. The number one female athlete in the world is Spanish, and the number two athlete in the world in the male suit is also Spanish. Team *kata*, although it does not participate in the Olympic Games, is in all other karate competitions, it has in Spain the female and male teams that usually are in the finals. A coach notes in this regard:

Luckily in Spain the *kata* competitors are the best in the world. Well, that makes us respect them a lot, doesn't it? But they are still the least integrated in the team. You know? (...) I have a theory that the bigger you are, the more important, you have to be humbler. But everything must be respectable. (Hefaistos, man, Interview 36 (1), 30/09/2020)

Evidently this generates a certain "ego", as the coaches call it, something like vanity in *kata* athletes; on the other hand, it can get to bother *kumite* athletes, who participate in the sub-modality with much less objective evaluation criteria than those employed in *kata*.

In *kata* I think there is even much more competition, for us. In combat there can be many spades (small provocations), because there are always spades in any competitive sport, of course, but *kata* I think even more. *Katas* it is true that there are people like it should be done, there is the person who gets into her *karategi* and does her *kata*, her movements and such. But I think *kata* people are more, wanting to look over their shoulders or such because it is much more difficult to carry. It is that in elite sport is what you have. It does not accept all. As for values, it is very bad, because in the pyramid at the top, not everyone can fit. (Diana, Interview 4 (1), 21/07/2020)

This discourse of evaluation criteria is recurrent not only among athletes, but also among coaches. *Kumite* is an unpredictable open skill modality, where someone unknown can emerge in a given competition, as it depends on how they performed in that one-off competition. If a person won the previous one, but this time receives a series of blows to the head, as the natives to the field usually say, that person is no longer the champion. Everything is moving and it is necessary to deal with things as they are happening, with agility and a good ability to respond relatively without previous preparation.

In *kata* you fight against the rival and the rival cannot give you any blow, I think they are a little bit in general, not with anyone, they are a little haughtier in saying "well I'm very good, I don't know what". You can't in combat, because the moment you say "I'm terrific", the other one comes and punches you in the mouth and it's over. So I think that is the difference between combat and *kata*, of the personality of the people, both boys and girls. I think that in combat you cannot believe it at any time, because to

what you are saying, "I am terrific and I don't know what" they kick you in the head, and in *kata* you do the *kata* and that's it and there it is that you don't risk anything. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

Distinctly, in *kata* it seems to be a process that is built. The criteria do not change and if the athlete is able to make presentation always in an increasing tone, there is no risk that someone will interrupt the plan in the middle of the path. It is a closed skill modality where improvisation is rarely required. Coaches also point out that they are different personalities:

More maniacs, straighter (those who do *kata*). They better accept the rules. The *kumite* guy is a rebellious guy, "I want to hit you to win, I have to hit you, so I don't accept orders, you're not going to dominate me." The *kata* competitor accepts orders, "I have to be perfect." You are giving him orders, orders, orders, like a dressage horse, the dressage horse does what it's asked and makes it perfect. It can rebel, but you put it back on track. The *kumite* person is like the jumping horse, which suddenly reduces and the rider hits a blow, because the horse refuses, stops short... So it's different, the *kata* competitor accepts correction much more, it comes out flawless "go out with the ironed *karategi*, with the back starched so that it is rigid and looks like a tail" ... a lot of nonsense that you die, "I have to go out with my eye like this..." *Kumite* you go out and the uglier you are, the more fear you get. Look at the *karategis* of Aghayev (athlete from Iran), some *karategis* that you said "I'm going to get typhus, I'm going to get Ebola as he touches me with that *karategi*, it's full of shit", the man must smell horrible. Well, the badder you are, the better competitor, it's true. (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

In the *kata* subfield, it seems that the battle is really with yourself, even if there is an opponent, but each one presents themselves separately. While in *kumite*, the opponent is also in front of you to fight you.

I always say, when someone tells you, "I don't like *kumite*", I say, "this one receives more than he/she gives". And when someone likes it and when someone "I love *kumite*", this person gives more than they receive, that's the way it is. (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

With greater or lesser resistance, athletes submit to this general hierarchy because somehow this defines them, differentiates them, individualizes them, identifies them and helps them to configure their own subjectivities. Thus, *karateka* are subjectively constituted as they mix in themselves discipline, strength, beauty, courage, elements that are related to the

hierarchical elements of karate. It is a process of subjective embodiment. They are also elements that integrate the hierarchical system, such as pedagogical resources to help strengthen the hierarchy of pre-established models, this issue explored in through the *gi* and *kiai*.

*Karategi* is the uniform commonly used to practice karate. Colloquially it is also called *kimono*. The adoption of *karategi* came about in an improvised way, since in Okinawa practitioners used only shorts and T-shirts to train. However, it is said, to make a presentation to publicize the sport, Funakoshi, that is accepted as master founder, was in his usual clothes, shorts and T-shirt. He, who would share the presentation with Jigoro Kano, master founder of Judo, derived from Jiu Jitsu, was advised by *judoka* to show himself a little more formally. He borrowed a *judogi* at the time. Upon returning to Okinawa, Funakoshi adapted the *judogi* to a *karateka* model, basically lighter (Reguera, 2010). A coach highlights in this regard:

I think that karate is not in a *karategi* or a T-shirt. Karate is inside. And that was later, in Okinawa they trained with their shorts, with their underpants and in a T-shirt. (...) I think it is a one-sided way of differential, as a sport. On the other hand, maintain a little union, with what is ours, to demarcate. (Ares, man, Interview 34 (1), 29/09/2020)

As athletes often do not wear the full uniform to train, due to several factors, the coach argues that this does not necessarily lead to the loss of tradition. On the other hand, he also points out that it is a uniform, something that identifies the practitioners, placing them in unity, and differentiating the sport. Segalen (2002) says that it is possible to identify the existence of a ritual where an emblemized body is characterized by clothing. This means that the *kimono* contributes to the strengthening of tradition, carrying it with rituals and returning to rooting the originally masculine practice in people's subconscious. Hence my insistence on the importance of *gi*. Another coach is a little stricter than the first and defends the tradition:

Then there is also the issue of tradition, damn it, by H or by B, because they are coincidences of life, karate is practiced with a *karategi*, with belts, man, why aren't we going to respect that? (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

However, at another time the same coach ponders other elements and considers an exception regarding the protections used by women:

I asked Vesta if the inner breastplate (protection) that the girls wear is shaped like the breast and she said it is not the same. I see it incomprehensible. Because, of course, the moment you put on something that is already creating a void, you can't bring the

related elbows together, it had to be something that fit, it had to have, just like bras have sizes. (...) I am absolutely convinced that the male and female breast had to be different. The *karategi* no. (...) I don't think the *karategi*, but the breast yes (they should be different). (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

As I pointed out earlier, the conversion of karate into sport with its migration to the West would tend to soften a number of traditional elements. However, they seem to find resignifications, without leaving behind the supposed original powerful charges. From my point of view, the *gi* and even the inner protection that the coach mentions, are resources capable of strengthening the male model. Marfell (2017), dedicated to the study of Netball with its controversial game clothes, considers that the uniform is a key piece for gendered embodiment. It could not be different, since the garments demarcate the body territory. Through the uniform, an adornment that becomes an extension of the body, messages are emitted and subjectivities are communicated. Thus, it is not a neutral element, an argument often used in favour of *karategi* as a piece that would bring equality to everyone, unifying the forms (uniform), without generating unnecessary separatisms, they say.

In the specific case of Netball, considered a sport of environment and origins both feminine (Henley, 2017), although “specifically designed with patriarchal definitions of femininity in mind” (Tagg 2008, p.410), when men enter this space, they evidently do not need to wear the uniform according to the female model. There is no doubt that in netball the “dominant femininity” is praised (Marfell, 2017) and men need to deal with “stigma associated with practicing a sport for girls” (Tagg, 2015, p.11). However, men only wear female model uniform with the intention of satirizing men's netball (Tagg, 2008). I bring this example, albeit extreme, to try to show how uniforms are not necessarily egalitarian. This was, by the way, an important topic touched during Olympic games in Tokyo 2020 (2021), especially criticizing sexualisation of women's bodies, theme that I will address later.

In any case, the vast majority of the information I obtained related to *gi* mentioned the differences between what is used for *kata* and that of *kumite*; the technologies employed to optimize them for performance; whether they are beautiful or not, of better or worse quality, which refers to a certain type of hierarchy, since using better *kimonos* would supposedly influence the perception of performance by the judges and perhaps for the athlete herself.

For a few years, when I compete, I always compete in a beautiful *Arawasa* (brand) *kimono*, I straighten my hair, I go to compete feeling myself. I'm dressed up, I'm doing well, and I'm from *kumite*. Sometimes you see yourself a little... influenced or you

allow yourself to be influenced a little by the environment, because it is like it also conditions your confidence. Well, the image is very important, I think it happens a bit in everything, we are in a sport that is totally subjective, because refereeing karate is very complicated. If you come to a *tatami* mat with really bad appearance, you have a better chance of losing that fight. This is a bit sad to say it like that, but I think it's true, that it conditions the thinking that the referees are going to have about you. And then if there is a clash of two punches, you and the other one, the good one looks like the other one because you go there with a crumpled *Decathlon kimono* or whatever (it means inferior quality). And I think that conditions a lot. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

For both boys and girls, the *karategi* that we wear right now is like a sack of potatoes, it is very wide, it has no shape, it does not fit either the boys or the girls, we both look terrible. (...) I because more or less I have it fixed that my grandmother knows how to sew very well and she has fixed it for me, she has taken me from here (shoulders), she has put it on me, because otherwise horrible. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

However, I realized that athletes are not critical of the *gi* following a male model. They worry about what can be more comfortable to train in, often mentioning the *gi* pants with a T-shirt, without the *gi* jacket and the belt, or even in shorts and T-shirt. But I think they don't think that the *gi*, in a subliminal way, works in favour of the gender hierarchy, and in fact conceive and accept the neutrality of the *gi*.

I believe that from the beginning it is very good to wear the same *karategi* for men and women, because otherwise we do another differentiation. But I think it's getting used to it, you have time for everything and it's a traditional thing. Since it doesn't matter to put on a *karategi*... why do you feel less feminine, more feminine... if what matters is that you feel feminine, not what others say. (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

Taking a very critical position, the athlete's phrase refers to the reification of conscience (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1985), since it proposes the annulment of subjectivity and distance from oneself. This position appears a little in opposition to that of the uniform as an element of expression of subjectivity. The *gi* does not cease to express embodied subjectivity, of course, but it can work to format the subjectivity of athletes without them having so much active choice. There are studies that suggest the subversion of the gender hierarchy through the ways in which uniforms are used, when a problem is detected there. Maor (2018) intentionally proposes the adoption of a form of dress by women that exactly resembles the

men's way. Maor suggests the option for queer identities, since this would break the logic of the woman wearing in a way to exalt female marks, such as tying the belt well demarcating the waist, for example. She proposes to tie on the hips, as men usually do. Carlsson (2017), on the other hand, who conducted a study at a boxing academy in Scotland, a type of environment generally understood as a host of hyper masculinity, proposed the exacerbation of femininity in space. Carlsson envisioned in the initiative a way to force men to deal with it and make room for women. Thus, she suggested using gloves with flowers and fighting uniforms in non-traditional colours for the fight, which should break men's expectations for the context. These are examples of valid individual initiatives that may be more or less effective according to each environment.

Criado-Perez (2019) presents a criticism of the neutral, mentioned here a few times, assuming that the neutral does not exist, but that it is a masculine standard taken as universal. She calls "one-size-fits-men" to the various elements that in social life are considered "neutral". The *gi* seems to be one of these elements, since it carries a subliminal message as a strengthening of the gender hierarchy. I think that maybe with a little conversation and reflection the athletes could come to terms with this. I observed the initial reflexive process of the athlete who said the phrase previously quoted, putting something relatively reformulated during the same interview, as can be seen:

The *karategi* still feels like a sack or feels very big, because the pieces of the *karategis* do focus much more on the characteristics of a man. For example, there are no female *karategis* or male *karategis*. What should there be? Well, since we've been women for so long, it should be made. But in the end *karategi* is something of karate. Like it or not, you have to wear it. (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

The second element that I listed as a kind of pedagogical resource to help strengthen the hierarchy of pre-established models is the *kiai*. *Kiai* is defined as a cry of power, something that should start not just from the throat, but also use the power of the diaphragm and express a kind of inner strength (Echenique, 2002). It follows the same principle that underlies screams and even grimaces that some warrior tribes, like Maori or Sioux, according to oral tradition, use against an adversary. In this sense, the *kiai* should serve to impact the opponent while being useful to vent the fear that the person who emits the *kiai* has inside. Every warrior in the past and fighter contemporaneously feels fear. However, the fact of using the fear itself to one's own advantage and not allowing oneself to be paralyzed due to it would be, for traditional martial arts, what differentiates one warrior/fighter from another (Echenique,

2002). Thus, the pedagogical sense of *kiai* is relevant. When martial arts practitioners understand it, it makes a big difference. The *kiai* would then be a support, and not something demanding. That is, issuing the *kiai* would mean a release and not a burden. The athletes offer some comments:

When you teach karate to someone else, they don't understand the shout, even because of they typically will laugh, right? When you've been doing *kiai* for twenty-some years... I, for example, don't know how to train hard without doing *kiai*, I mean, I feel terrible. Sometimes we have gone to championships we have had to train inside a hotel, whatever, they have thrown us off and we ended up training without *kiai*, it is horrible. I can't train without *kiai*. It is something part of karate, of *kumite*, which is intrinsic to it. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

Well, at first it did seem a bit strange to me, so the coach had to be remembering, “you have to say *kiai*, otherwise you won't have a point”, and so on. Now obviously, well, that comes out, it comes out alone. (Vesta, Interview 8 (1), 25/07/2020)

Karate has *kiai* as a basic element, taught to and practiced by beginners. In my experience, it was also quite strange in the early years to scream at the same time as to strike. And I would say that it was because of the lack of understanding about the purpose of *kiai* and perhaps the pedagogy that *sensei* used to teach it (Channon & Jennings, 2014). Over time, the practice was embodied and today I would say that the movements performed with power, in the routines more charged with energy and enthusiasm, bring *kiai* as something of vibration and passion. But no doubt this element was learned and embodied by me. I do not consider it to be “natural”. Today the shout comes out of me “automatically”, “exits” from the diaphragm/throat in time with the kicks from hips/legs. It is as natural as writing by hand, I would say. You learn, as you learn body techniques (Mauss, 1973). As more confidence one develops in techniques in general, in the body itself and its responsiveness, I believe that *kiai* is also consolidating itself. A coach explains his view of the process:

The *kiai* at the end is the release of inner energy. So it is something free, you emit the sound that comes out. It's curious. At the centre of high performance are also those of *tae kwon do*. Hear the karate shouts and they are one way, and hear the *tae kwon do* and they are completely different. Curious, right? When the function of that cry is the same. So maybe it depends on what you have heard, have seen. What we humans do is imitate. You train in a gym or *dojo* and they do the *kiai* in a certain way and you imitate that. You go to an international competition and you see the world champion,

listen to that and you want to imitate him, because he is supposed to be an example to follow. People do not try to imitate the one who lost in the first round, not that one, because it is wrong. People imitate. (Hefaistos, man, Interview 36 (1), 30/09/2020)

I consider that the points that he brings about both the release of inner energy and imitation are very relevant. Imitation is related to the concept of mimesis (Benjamin, 1987). Mimesis is imitation, but it also surpasses it, it is an action that, while reproducing something, creates a new action. As Schlesener (2009, p.150) highlights when analysing Benjamin's work,

Mimesis is precisely the process by which the children learn to accommodate themselves to the adult's temporal order: they begin by imitating the actions of their parents, but this imitation is also creation, because they **imitate and invent**, at the same time, **and build their own identity**.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, *kiai* is embodied and at the same time expresses something individual about whoever issues it; it is an element of *habitus*. Recalling my experience, I consider that *kiai* is a shared form of embodied learning and, at the same time, it has something that is mine, that is, my way of shouting, the expression of my subjectivity, which could fit in the inner energy that the coach speaks of, which is individual, “free” as he mentioned. Therefore, it sounds strange when *kiai* corrections are made, as well as that there is a specific model of *kiai* to adopt, even if it follows the group's *habitus*. However, in *dojos* often practices are performed specifically and exclusively for women to learn to scream (Maclean, 2019). And even among the elite team this seems to happen, as some athletes report having gone through this experience:

I'm not going to fool you, the *kata* coach is constantly messing with my *kiai* because he says I don't take it out like the inside, but I take it out of my throat. But when I get to that moment, my way of expressing with more anger is that I have it that way, like I have learned it that way and that is my way. Well, he says no, that *kiai* is not right because that way I'm going to get hoarse and hurt my throat. But it's like I have that need to do it like that, to shout it like that, I don't know why, because it comes out of me like that. So maybe that inside of me is not the same as what the *kata* coach expects. It is like something that seems silly that is a cry and that's it, but it also depends on many things, it depends on concentration, well on sensation, on... (Afrodite, Interview 11 (1), 29/07/2020)

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<sup>70</sup> My emphasis. Translation from Portuguese to English also mine.

I think that has always come from within me, because since I'm a bit of a brute or something like that, I kind of always scream very loudly. But there is a breath that is not the *kiai*, but what we do in the rest of the movements (in *kata*) that each person does in a way. There are people who make it stronger, others weaker, others are hardly heard and that I have had to learn a bit, because it changes a lot if you do it very strong, or if you do it weak or if you do it too long a sound. (...) So, that I have had to keep changing, learning to do it. The *kiai* is more, then you scream and that's it. (...) Besides, the *kata* coach always tells us that we don't have to do it very hard, the *kiai* yes, but the other breath that has to be to come out of the inside, that we don't do it from the throat or that, and that still, we have to do similar. (Perséfone, Interview 29 (1), 15/09/2020)

Evidently, the art to which they dedicate themselves requires that they perform in sync, that being in three, they become one. That is, they need to mimic and resemble each other a lot. However, it also seems that the athletes need to achieve an ideal of shouting, something that is simple, but again strengthens the subliminal hierarchy of the model to follow, leaving corrections to what is theoretically personal. It is interesting because one can think that as one learns to punch, one must learn to scream. This is correct, to some extent, I would say. In each person's punch there is technique and a personal touch. In *kiai* it is the same. And in *kiai*, however, there is something extra personal, authentic and untransferable. The *kiai* has something like a power that reveals, exposes the person, something that is less deep in a punch. So, the fact of correcting *kiai* draws attention since it does not seem to be restricted to the similarities required by the team. Another trainer reveals his vision:

The fact that *kiai* is something that has nothing to do with what they do, none gives *kiai*, it is a scream, then none of them. (...) In girls it is already bordering on the ridiculous. (...) I corrected Vesta the other day. (...) In the current competition, the *kiai* for me is for one thing very clear. To indicate to the referee that you have done it voluntarily, that it is in that stroke where you want the point (in *kumite*). (...) The *kiai* is to say to the referee, "look at this, this is where I want you to give me the score". That's my version of the *kiai*. (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

This seems to be another subliminal theme, like that of the *gi*, which remains in the athletes' unconscious without manifesting itself as a problem:

I had never talked about this topic, really, wow! It's just that I get it, it's that I think I couldn't change the *kiai*, it's very difficult. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

And when it is the case, they end up accepting the imposition of the neutral, considering that the neutral, as seen previously, has a standard tendency to be observed also in *kiai*, a more serious or deep tone of voice, read, masculine:

There are some girls who scream very high-pitched and there are times that it has been criticized, like they laugh if someone screams very... as it does not impose so much. (...) In other words, there are always comments, maybe they don't tell you to change it, but there are comments behind it. (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

Of course, it is necessary to take into account the context, as pointed out earlier. Perhaps in this scenario, given the need to obtain the results, even if someone is aware, she could decide to omit in the name of what must be done to maintain her post, achieve the goal and so on. Submission to different forms of hierarchies is part of the work, in a way, and also contributes to the construction of women's subjectivity. In the different ways that the hierarchy finds itself to be expressed, from very objective to a kind of unspoken but communicated language, it is based on the authority that, in turn, supports the dynamics of power. Authority, for Arendt (1956), is a complex concept. She criticizes the association of the term with exaggerated conservatism while seeing it, authority, as necessary for the transition from education to the new reality. Even though the text is dated, the content is quite current. In the view of Gordon (1999), "she helps us bridge the gap between the old (tradition) and the new (change)". Authority *per se* is legitimacy, a type of power, hierarchical, certainly, but it may have been earned and used with discrimination. In Arendt, authority is related to responsibility, distancing itself in its correct application from the authoritarian systems that existed historically. For this reason, she says that violence is mistakenly associated with the pure concept of authority (Arendt, 1956). In other words, the problem would be in improperly using functions that confer authority, converting them and hierarchical systems into authoritarianisms.

My intention here is not necessarily to criticize the personal postures adopted. I only present the issues that are relevant, as I have highlighted. Undoubtedly the theme of hierarchy, be it in highly competitive sport, or in the martial environment that is sustained by the hierarchical system, carries several facets full of complexities. I am aware that it is a little bold on my part to raise this issue, but it would be a little irresponsible to choose to ignore it. These are relationships that need to be considered, from my point of view. Possibly they are not easily changed, but if they begin to be the object of reflection and awareness, even if individually, the process may already be valid.

#### 4.7. Chapter closure

The various topics presented in this chapter were intended to contextualize the martial-sports-high-performance environment in which the researched *karateka* women are located, in addition to providing elements to perceive something of the subjectivity of these women, on which bases it is built. Having made this presentation, at least up to this point, I believe I can say that many things are similar to what I saw in my country of origin. The questions I raised at the beginning of the chapter find answers, albeit partial, but so far they tell me that elements identified by me years ago continue to be present also in other countries and even in elite sport. The emphasis on training changes, of course, and according to the approach of each country, especially, and also certain preferences of the coaches, probably some elements are emphasized more than others. But they are there. However, these are the lateral or transversal themes of the thesis. It remains to be seen whether the similarities are confirmed in the central themes.

Regarding each transversal theme in particular, I summarize them as follows: the motivations that led these women to start or choose karate as a sport are less voluntary than one might suppose. That is, in general it was not a choice of their own free will, but something they were led to do, especially by their parents or schoolmates. However, I have identified reasons that can contribute to athletes remaining in training. In addition to the obvious reason related to the possibility of participating in the Olympic Games and what could result from it (financial resources, work, status, achievement of a life project), they find delight in the aesthetic experience and flow.

The athletes are intimately aware of the relationship with pain, suffering and sacrifice arising from martial training. However, they are at a level where they need to seek a certain distance from the traditional with a view to scientific that optimizes performance and minimizes injuries and pain, since they do not crown. Nothing substitutes for concrete results. They also need to become strong in order to control themselves in the direction of deprivation and overcome different challenges, including a very present one, weight. The subject is still growing due to the female exclusivity of menstruation, which brings fluid retention and a state of mind/humour that can be even more affected by the necessary fasting.

Women develop great moral resilience through training in rejection of defeat. They are forged strong as a psychosomatic unit, but end up embodying a *habitus* that seems specific to

the female *karateka* group. I notice this because they tend to carry something like an extra load, not common to men, consisting of guilt and resentment. In addition, the fact of internalizing figures to which the function of judgment is attributed, makes them always pending external evaluations, whether or not they correspond to the expectations of others, which always produces personal dissatisfaction. They are humble enough to seek psychological support to transform weaknesses into strongholds, but the process is evidently slow, as many issues of social construction for women are also involved.

The theme of violence resignifies itself and continues to find ways to present itself. *Karateka* are very clear that they practice a combat sport and are not convinced of self-defence skills that they may not have. Thus, they respect the real risks that violence can pose even for them, elite fighters. However, even though this can seem a contradiction, they see themselves as very self-confident and aggressive in their fighting styles. This all leads me to raise some questions regarding the social construction of women again, the *habitus* that females embody and express, the real possibilities and those that are perhaps, only accepted as truths by women –which, in the end, institutes them as unquestionable truths–.

The female team also constitutes its subjectivity when dealing with varied and elaborated forms of hierarchies. From objective hierarchies, such as that of the belts, to implicit hierarchies. I pointed out the social position given by the time of practice, the technical skill and the results, the architected coexistence among teammates and superiors, the competitiveness between the *kata* and *kumite* teams, the hierarchy of aesthetics and bravery, and the *gi* and *kiai* used as resources to strengthen the gender hierarchy supported by pre-established models, supposedly neutral.

Throughout the categories I was also placing the group in relation to the facets of karate (martial art-tradition; self-defence; common *dojo* sports karate; high competition sport; elite *karateka* women). All this information intertwined with the five transversal thematic categories had and have intended to bring to light what kind of fighters these athletes are. I tried to show a little how they insert in and participate in this environment of markedly masculine traditions, as well as the elements that make up this environment that undeniably affects them. The repercussion of all this in their embodiment reveals *what* and *who* they become. From there it is possible to begin to read the subjectivity of this group of women.

Having said the above, I think I can go into the treatment of specific issues that touch some stereotyped elements that generate extra challenges for the fighters because they are women. This impacts their lives and may extend beyond themselves.

## 5. CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE KARATEKA EMBODIED SUBJECTIVITIES

This is the first of the three main findings chapters of the thesis. They concentrate on answering the central objectives proposed for the research, derived from the research questions. Here the initial objective designed in the research project was to expose some factors that *favour* or *inhibit* the construction of the female *karateka* embodied subjectivity. However, in the course of the research I realized by analysing both substantive and formal theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that subjectivity is inevitably built in. That is, there are no factors that inhibit its manifestation. It will shape itself even to the elements that could be negative for the development of a fuller, more empowered and equitable subjectivity, for example. But the fact that it adapts to different elements cannot mean that it is not built. In addition, I also realized that subjectivities are plural and that there is not one unique or exclusive form. Although I refer to the female *karateka* collective constantly, and that many verified elements represent women *karateka* as a whole, their subjectivities are nuanced by diversity. Sometimes this diversity is made up of agreements between the members of the group, sometimes of divergences. I try to portray them here, understanding that all these factors make up the athletes' subjectivities.

Thus, it was necessary to reformulate the initial objective, modifying it to *expose factors that affect the construction of female karateka embodied subjectivities in the Spanish Olympic team*. These factors present themselves both as *etic*, identified with the help of the literature, and *emic*, empirically emerging from the field (Rodríguez Navarro & García Monge, 2009), as explained in the methodology chapter. The previous chapter is of fundamental importance to understanding transversal elements to this construction of the athletes' subjectivities. With the categories presented in this chapter in mind, it is now possible to enter more directly into the treatment of information related to the *karateka*'s perception of themselves.

I addressed this issue in a more indirect way in the previous chapter, by presenting *what* and *who* women athletes are and how they are constituted from the various elements that form karate. I contextualized that that influences the *ethos* of the group and the peculiar *habitus* that is shaped by the fusion among the characteristics of karate in its different mixed facets, the group with all its members and women as a smaller group. Now I seek in this chapter to deepen the research with a focus on understanding *who* these *karateka* women are from their own point of view, where they speak of themselves as "intimate insiders" (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014). I understand that this is relevant since dimensions of ourselves are known only to us. That is, listening to athletes to a certain extent reveal themselves and their worldviews is

a fundamental part of the work to understand how they construct their subjectivities. The experiences they have embodied through karate affect and perhaps even shape their view of themselves and of the world, especially because before they became *karateka* their time of life was considerably short, as can be read in Table 2 in the methodology chapter. Finally, understanding how this interdependent relationship between sports and the subjective construction of athletes occurs is important because it allows us to gain some insights into the functioning of social microstructures (Bourdieu, 1984), such as the martial world. This can be transferable and applicable, often, to broader contexts or to other environments that have similarities.

So, considering the interest in knowing the process of subjective formation of women and how much karate affects this process, I asked women in the interviews what it means for them to be (to *perform* as) *karateka*; which characteristics define them as *karateka* women and whether these characteristics are collective, shared by the *karateka* of the world or whether it would be something more “nationalist”, specific from Spain, or even individualized. I also tried to find out where they find inspiration for their self-construction as well as the extent to which they incorporate and reproduce what is transmitted to them through belonging to karate. Bearing in mind that, since they were girls, they grew up immersed in the *karateka* context, the environment undeniably influenced their constitution as fighters and, moreover, as people, specifically as women. The process of social construction of subjectivity is plural in the sense that the influences that compose us are multiple and received from different sources. With that, it is normal that we have, as social beings, selves that overlap, different facets that constitute our subjectivity, making it undoubtedly complex. As Shilling (2004, p.480) points out, we go through, repeatedly, processes of “internal dialogue (between the ‘me’ [the identity that others attribute to us] and the ‘I’ [our subjective reflection on this identity])”.<sup>71</sup> In having karate as a central element of life, these women embodied it into themselves, although perhaps in different proportions. However, both in cases where they decide to have a life despite karate, and when they choose for absolute dedication, karate remains the centre around which they move and organize all other aspects of their lives. In other words, the place occupied by karate in structuring who they are is highlighted as being of the greatest importance.

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<sup>71</sup> Even though identity can be usually easier understood than subjectivity, the former refers to the “being”, somewhat fixed, hence the evolution, if this can be said this way, of the concept presented by Butler (1990) and adopted here, performativity. It refers to a fluid subjectivity, liable of change, a continuum.

I also presented in the previous chapter some of the motivations for the permanence of these athletes in the sport. Undeniably, they find elements which they identify with to stay, given that permanence itself is something complex, involving a process of acceptance and belonging. Considering the importance of these elements for all identification with the modality that will follow, before entering the categories of analysis themselves, I will present a topic related to acceptance and belonging in the sport.

### **5.1. Finding your place – the comfort of belonging**

As the social beings that we are, we cannot and usually do not want to live alone. We look for associations with other people and they help to define us also individually (Tralci Filho & Rubio, 2012). Being and feeling accepted is something of immense importance. The search for acceptance affects the construction of subjectivity, perhaps especially when we are young and looking for groups that identify us as people, helping to define to the world who we are. The need for acceptance justifies many personal changes we undergo and imitation processes, usually more unconscious than conscious, to integrate into a group.

In relation to imitation, in addition to the comments provided by one of the coaches when talking about *kiai* in the previous chapter and the contributions of Benjamin (1987) in that sense, Mauss (1973) also addresses the theme when dealing with body techniques. He points out that “what takes place is a prestigious imitation” (Mauss, 1973, p.73), that is, actions performed successfully by people who are admired or who have authority are repeated. That which somehow arouses admiration in the observer or which is understood by the beginner as the correct way to do something, is imitated. When entering a group, the novice becomes a mirror in an attempt to assimilate the context and resemble its members. Equalizing, in this sense, means being absorbed. So the beginner seeks, like a mirror, to reflect what others do, especially those who have a certain prestige. Such prestige can be recognized according to the criteria of the novice her/himself or, more commonly, by someone who has power or authority in the environment, as a *sensei*. What the *sensei* points to as an example to be followed becomes the goal of beginners. Thus, “the individual borrows the series of movements which constitute it from the action executed in front of him or with him by others” (Mauss, 1973, p.73).

The borrowing of movements or ways of moving from others carries the desire for approximation by similarity of peers who need to approve and accept the impersonator. At a

certain point the movements will no longer be borrowed and will become their own, considering that the newcomer is accepted and absorbed by the group. That person will then develop, even though the process of imitation does not necessarily cease, but returns periodically, to learn new techniques, for example. When embodying what is conveyed in an environment and carrying it in the body, there is an identification of the person with what they do and with the group in which they participate. By incorporating the current *habitus*, the person forges her/himself and becomes a constituent part of the environment itself and of the group that, for this reason, accepts and also incorporates the person. It is a dynamic two-way street that, according to Agier (2001), establishes the process of immersion in an “identity culture” that is constantly being made. These factors build up the presumed identity of people, that is, those things that indirectly say who they are by exposing what they identify with and what defines them externally. This is all directly related to the process of construction of subjectivity, a process that never ends, but remains in constant movement and restructuring (Agier, 2001).

With all this, it may not be an exaggeration to say that it is impossible to maintain immunity when taking part in a group. That is, when one enters an environment, this person has a certain influence on that environment and is undeniably affected by the characteristics that make it up. This is how the process of belonging is elaborated. Along with the embodiment of new movements, body combat techniques, the philosophy of the environment, the beliefs conveyed there, as well as a certain “love for the shirt” are being embodied by the person. DaMatta (1982) studied football anthropologically as an expression of Brazilian society. Among several elements of relevance presented by him is also a certain process of loyalty that occurs from the fans to the team and from the players themselves to the team. This has relation to the idea named by Steen (2015) as “tribal loyalties”, or even as designated by Holland (2018) as “subcultures”. “Wearing the shirt”, the shirt being a symbol of what the fan or athlete is loyal, faithful and even devoted to, means fighting for your team with all your strength and never abandoning it, whether in joy or sadness.

In this sense, it is understandable that when competitions are guided by the defence of your club, with its own logo, against other clubs, then your state against other states, and then the fight on behalf of the country, the identification with the flag for which one fights is created. Ultimately, the idea of belonging to a nation, loving it, honouring it and defending it is the basis of nationalism (Alabarces, 2013). According to Bowes et al (2020, p.427), “one of the most significant and/or prevalent symbols of nationhood is to be found in the international sporting arena. (...) It is here where nations are embodied, and where they do battle in the

world's sports stadiums." It is relevant to remember the proximity that can be found between sport and war, as I pointed out in the previous chapter. Martial arts were conceived as literally war arts (Sun Tzu, 2004). Whether for defence or attack, the martial context was engendered as warlike, following foundational myths as much as sport (Maguire, 2011) and naming its members as warriors.<sup>72</sup> This origin can explain the proximity that exists between martial behaviour and militarism, between the warriors and the soldiers that defend the nation. Thus, it is not surprising that athletes incorporate the nationalist ideology (Maguire, 2011) and often work in any of their country's armed forces.

The idea of belonging, therefore, is found at the roots of nationalism, and is expressed in different social contexts. It is in the love of the shirt in sports, in loyalty to the club, and also in religious practices, for example. Someone loyal to the group chosen to be joined does not betray it, does not change it, does not abandon it. Something considered worthy and honourable, but that, at times, can also carry excesses and even fanaticism (Boyle & Haynes, 2002). Fanaticism, in turn, is what can convert the view of a certain distinction from the others into exclusionary separatism, attributing levelled qualifications to people and justifying from enmities to absolute intolerances. It would be appropriate to reflect on whether "the difference differs laterally or hierarchically" (Brah, 1996, p.117). However, I will not go into the discussion around this subject even though nuances of this differentiation may show up in the data analysis.

Resuming the theme of belonging, it occurs, according to my experience, in a non-peripheral way when there is the embodiment of the elements that cross the group. In other words, integrating into the group, in fact, requires appropriation of more than the techniques, in the case of sport. Achieving belonging, which is usually associated with the acquisition of traditional values according to Aggerholm and Breivik (2020), means reaching a deep level in the process of integrating into a group, where the surface is abandoned. Thus, even if the sport is performed with excellence, not taking part in the group's *ethos*, at least in the usual culture that exists in the martial environment, leaves the person in a marginal situation. She or he remains on the periphery and not in the centre of the group. This situation leads to a hostile context that is difficult to resist. Such a context seems to require someone to give in. Or the novice, outsider, decides to join the group, embodying its own language; or the person

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<sup>72</sup> In the martial art scope is room for modalities seeking peace other than *external* or physical war. They present a more meditative nature; nevertheless, even though I do not know all of them, of course, I dare to say that the proposition of a kind of *inner* battle is always there. I will come back to this point in the next chapter.

abandons it, because very rarely will the group give in, making exceptions to the requirements, to a stranger who diverges from the group.

Holland (2018) describes something of the process related to this identified in her research carried out in three stages (1997/1998; 2010; 2018) with women in alternative subcultures. She reports that “One way of marking out the authentic from the inauthentic is to name those who are ‘outsiders’” (Holland, 2018, p.199). In doing so, according to Holland, people who do not carry the authentic signs of the group, do not belong to it and leave it. Luguetti and Oliver (2017) explain the challenging process of joining a group, in this case with a pedagogical proposal. In Luguetti (2014), given the possibility of greater extension in the research description, the acceptance she needed to achieve from the group to avoid being seen as an outsider is exposed. In the process of integrating karate, the goal is also to become an insider, moving away from the status of outsider. Therefore, it is necessary for people to identify with the art they practice and to identify with each other, which requires a certain similarity with peers, until the outsider dilutes in the group and becomes “one of ours”.

The relationships and bonds between people in the *dojos*, whether friendly (Maclean, 2016) or hierarchical, are therefore fundamental. The status of Ronin, a wandering man without a master, was already in feudal Japan seen as dishonourable. A Ronin, although he could carry a sword, was considered a true samurai when he managed to join a clan. And many samurai were categorized as Ronin when they lost their lord and master, and they did not commit *hara-kiri*, the ritual suicide of that culture<sup>73</sup>. In the current context, and particularly in the West where *hara-kiri* has never been a practice, there are no Ronin. Wandering warriors without a master and without a clan, or without a club and without federative affiliation today, are simply not allowed to compete.<sup>74</sup> In a way, the members of a group constitute a body. In analogy with biology itself, if a cell is strange to the human body, for example, it will not be recognized and will somehow be expelled, isolated, eliminated. A karate group that identifies a strange body among themselves, usually acts in a similar way, albeit unconsciously. Hence the importance of becoming an insider. Because if this conversion does not occur, as I commented, abandonment will come, which can become recurrent in martial arts (Lovisolo et al, 2010). The

<sup>73</sup> <https://es.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C5%8Dnin>, accessed on 18/03/2021.

<sup>74</sup> Due to nationalist political problems it is possible to find in the Olympic Games (and possibly in other competitions) "independent Olympic participants" (IOP). They have no ties to a homeland, although they end up forming a team, that of independent participants, and compete under the Olympic flag. However, they must be linked to the federations of the sports in which they compete. [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participantes\\_Ol%C3%ADmpicos\\_Independentes](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participantes_Ol%C3%ADmpicos_Independentes), accessed on 17/08/2021. Other than that, possibly an exception can be made to professional fighters in some combat sports that do not respond to institutionalised bodies, such as MMA.

group strives for the unification and uniformity of its members in a certain cultural and behavioural line, since technically and individually there will obviously be differences. Everyone in the *karateka* environment should embody, even if in different proportions, the *karateka habitus*.

Then a mixture of similarity with differentiation originates. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, athletes need to differentiate themselves from ordinary practitioners in order to belong to high performance. However, at various times they seem to recapture the roots that keep them connected to the large *karateka* group, as if it were a fraternity/sorority of martial artists. Thus, sometimes they consider themselves athletes, sportspeople like any other, and at other times they expose the view that karate has certain characteristics that are distinctive of its practitioners, as the following statement illustrates:

The people who do sports, and especially in high performance, we know very well what discipline is, what it means to be constant and what it is not to get things the first time. (...) All sports at the end of the day give you positive values if you train them well, but karate in particular, I think it gives you a lot of discipline, a lot of respect to the elder and that takes it out (for life). (...) We do sports karate and high competition karate, but we have learned in a gym and our teacher is our master, he is not just our teacher. He teaches us more things and not just karate techniques, he teaches us a way of life and a lifestyle that can be taken more to tradition, or you can take it less to tradition. But the essence is there. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

Taking into account this introduction about acceptance and belonging in a group that can justify the embodiment of the local *habitus*, from now on I will start to show the comments of the athletes themselves about the construction of their embodied subjectivities undeniably influenced by their belonging to karate. The first category of this chapter presents women's view of what it means for them to be/perform as *karateka*. The second seeks to deepen the issue of women fighters, precisely by exploring what, in their view, characterizes them as fighters. They perceive exclusivity, sometimes related to karate and other times related to the fact that they are female fighters in a challenging and masculine environment. In the third category I bring the athletes' considerations about taking others as models. They have ideas or concepts that inspire them, but few take other people as models. It seems that they are beginning to take this position for others, on the mat and in life. And as the last category in this chapter, I address the topic of the transmission of tradition and the way

women deal with it, how they absorb and embody it, and how they pass on and continue the stream of tradition.

## 5.2. “We are authentic.” – What it means to be/perform as *karateka*

Although many of the interviewees consider themselves to belong to a generic category of *athletes*, most women have the view that being/performing as *karateka* can represent the insertion of some values in the lives of practitioners. I present some of the testimonies that attest to this:

I consider myself an athlete, but I believe that karate is a sport that has a background there. (...) I think that karate a bit what transmits you is that ability to make an effort, that self-denial you always have to keep working. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

Karate gives you a series of values that perhaps other types of sports do not give you, although you have been doing them for many years. So I think that karate moulds your character and way of being, and we do have specific characteristics that maybe you don't have them with other sports. (Hera, Interview 21 (2), 27/08/2020)

Whatever sport I had chosen... it was by chance that I started in karate. (...) It is true that karate later helps you (...), I think that it does help me to be an educated, respectful person, that opens up paths that other sports may not. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

Discipline, especially those of us that are in competition, we need a very demanding discipline and have a very focused head because most of us who are here have studies or are studying. So discipline does that too. Probably if many of us had not done karate and trained so many hours, we would have been on the streets and we would have gone, because like today's children, most of them find it difficult to direct their studies. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

Luguetti et al (2016) present sport as a means of directing, in a certain way, the choices of young people who live in vulnerable environments, avoiding their insertion in the world of crime especially. In the studies presented by Luguetti, who works with the activist approach, she prioritizes the use of sport as a tool that transforms reality. In the comment of Afrodite, the *karateka* expresses something similar, highlighting the importance of competitive karate in

her life as a kind of driver of choices, including extending these effects to her fellow athletes. It is relevant to comment again that the line that I have been following here, considering that it is a high-performance sport, cannot fail to take into account the disciplinary character that sport can assume (Vaz, 2005a; 2005b). In this sense, the values found could often be configured as devices of control and social conformation, of domination in the last instance. However, it is an undeniable fact that athletes identify in karate important values for their lives and for the construction of their subjectivity and this is, of course, worthy of respect.

*Karateka* cites capacity for selflessness and effort, respect, education, discipline, values that shape character, as advocated by Funakoshi (2003), the accepted founder of karate, as concepts related to being/performing as *karateka*. Although they see themselves as members of the macro category *athletes*, as they are elite sportspeople as those of any modality, they see in karate something as a special touch that differentiates them from other athletes, which seems to be putting them in a somewhat superior condition. Being/performing as a *karateka*, therefore, would escape a widespread classification. In addition to the testimonies already mentioned that follow this line, I present some more:

Inside of us we can feel something that makes us different from others, I don't know exactly what it is. The way you take things, respect. I don't know, everything you do, in the end regarding the *tatami*, all that makes you a respectful person in your day-to-day life as well. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

I think they (*karateka*) are people who know how to behave, serious people, who are on their own and are reserved. (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

I sincerely believe that *karateka* have a different mind than any athlete or person. I believe that we have been so governed by discipline, rectitude, knowing how to be, helping our partner, and that does not apply in all sports and within karate it does. And I think that we also take that into our daily life, that this also helps you so that if you enter a job, you... Everything that karate has instilled in me comes out. (Venus, Interview 22 (2), 02/09/2020)

I commented earlier that the possibility of being authentic and different attracted me and contributed to the choice to remain in the challenging practices of the often hostile environment. While as social beings we need identifications and similarities, and belonging to some group gives us a sense of security, the character of a certain exclusivity gives value and distinction. So it is necessary to belong and become similar to the group, diluting oneself many times in it, but outside it, better if there is differentiation. So I venture to say that being

separated from the category of athletes, even if elite athletes, guarantees a place of prominence. A woman who fights, even nowadays, is someone who can be stranger, and for this reason this condition can take her to a special place. Especially because it draws attention, attracts looks, causes an impact, takes away from what is common and little appreciated. Something can be little appreciated precisely because it is considered common and banal. Perhaps it is possible to say that our mentality is socially designed to be attracted to the exclusive (Donnelly, 2006). What is massive, easily accessed, is neither special nor original. I believe that the search for this place of originality often causes people to attribute a special status to what they dedicate themselves to, whether that status is real or not. And this can end, in extreme situations, by generating unhealthy separatisms, elitizations that distance people and categorize them, as I commented earlier.

On the other hand, there is also an opposite view of the special values promoted by karate in the investigated *karateka* group. One of the athletes and one of the coaches illustrates this objective conception:

The romantic part of karate... I believe that sport itself, any athlete is disciplined, in the sense that you have to put on that mask (in COVID-19 times) to train, you see a disciplined athlete and he puts on the mask. I believe that this "martial art" or that "honour" or that such, I believe that that has been lost. There will be the oldest ones, but I no longer have that romantic feeling of the *karateka*. I think that has been distorted a bit... maybe it is also because of the environment that I move in, but I do not see it reflected the feeling of *karateka*. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

All the things that we attribute to karate, each and every one of them are within what Baron Pierre de Coubertin wrote about the sport. I don't know why we *karateka* think we are special. (Hermes, man, Interview 32 (3), 21/09/2020)

These sceptical comments could reveal, perhaps, greater or lesser disappointments with the modality, or just show experience. When I asked the same coach, Hermes, about whether there was a specific way of being/performing that would characterize *karateka*, in addition to expressing his view of the fighters as normal and non-special athletes, he again emphasized the difference between *kata* and *kumite* practitioners:

I think that in *kata* there may be a way of being and I don't know what... In *kumite*, not so much, we are more anarchic. The *kumite* is more anarchic, the *kata* is more orderly, it is pre-established. (...) The *katero* (*kata* practitioner) combs his hair, puts himself on,

goes out and has succeeded. But the *kumitero* (*kumite* practitioner)<sup>75</sup> fixes himself, combs his hair, goes out, they slap him, nothing he has done works for him and he has to find something else. "My goodness, I thought I was going to score and instead of scoring I got scored." (Hermes, man, Interview 32 (3), 21/09/2020)

The first point that perhaps deserves to be observed concerns the valuation that is attributed to the different sub modalities. Donnelly (2006, p.220) notes that

This positing of "us against them," in which us is imbued with particular cultural values related to what it means to be a member of the subculture and them is a denigrated, devalued group requiring little consideration, is a type of classification that certainly tells us more about the people engaged in it than about any true differences between core subcultural participants and the people they define as other. A key and often neglected issue with respect to discussions of authenticity is the continuous struggle over its definition and who gets to define it.

In addition, another relevant point is that once again there is an emphasis on what is visually attractive and that provides an aesthetic experience (Kirk, 1996) for athletes and spectators (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014). The experience is more elaborate when it associates the sensation of aesthetic perception with the risk assumed especially in *kumite* that involves open skills, as I mentioned earlier, while *kata* unfolds in the scenario of closed skills. Athletes in both sub modalities though, need to deal with the exhibition, which is part of the competitive context, and with the idea of performing to please others, referees and the public. Being a fighter involves taking risks, and this submission to risks is linked to courage and a certain degree of authenticity as well, in addition to high status if the result obtained is positive. If it is negative, though, there is a lot of shame, almost unbearable, that for Vogel (1982) is related to death, and that in the samurai tradition came to justify the suicide of the defeated in the name of maintaining or recovering honour<sup>76</sup>. This is consistent with what Ryall (2019, p.141) states, "Feelings of shame may be externalized in other ways, such as aggression, violence, addiction, depression, self-harm or even suicide."

It is impossible to deal well, from my point of view, with the shame of receiving three kicks to the head, for example. Unfortunately, I also know what that is like. I will never forget the fight in which I punched the *senshu*, and then I received the first kick to the head. Obviously receiving such a blow affects an athlete, I would venture to say that at any level of

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<sup>75</sup> These are ways used in Spain to designate the practitioners, not original Japanese terms.

<sup>76</sup> <https://es.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C5%8Dnin>, accessed on 18/03/2021.

performance. With the second kick in the head and the score at 1x6, I was already in my shame process and was not reasoning well, which made room for the third kick and the defeat by 1x9. This shame is absurdly terrible, especially at the moment, but also after and even now, years after the fight took place. It is seen as shame and felt as a social death (Vogel, 1982). For Partridge and Wiggins (2008, p.704), who researched the concept of shame among several scholars, “shame is a warning signal resulting from a loss of social status or devaluation which threatens inclusion.” It is interesting because I also won 8x0<sup>77</sup> fights, but their memory is not as vivid as this fight of the three kicks in the head. And I am not referring to physical pain, but to ego aggression, which has never healed.

Confessing my painful defeat has a didactic function here, that of showing how “being beaten” causes an athlete to lose even the right to have a way of being. As the coach points out in his response to me, the *kata* athlete, even if she/he loses, maintains her/his unwavering position. The *kumite* athlete when being beaten, not only when losing, but when being beaten, is humiliated and then withdraws and shrinks, even though the reactions may be diverse, as Ryall (2019, p.137) points out, “Shame can manifest itself in various ways, from depression and withdrawal to anger and aggression.” Being beaten is not related to physical aggression in the fight, but with the idea of humiliating defeat. Perhaps this explains the attitude of many athletes who prefer a less daring and less attractive fight, but safer in an attempt to avoid being beaten and embarrassed in public. This bitter experience may be related to what Partridge and Wiggins (2008, p.704) explain, “Internalized trait shame is indicative of internalization of negative external evaluations, which may lead to expectations of failure. Conversely, expectations of failure may serve as an antecedent to state shame and humiliation.” Again, it is possible to link this experience with the internalization of external judgments and opinions, the figure of some oppressor, guilt and remorse that I mentioned earlier based on the works of Foucault (2009) and also Freire (2005).

Another coach says something associated with this when giving a prominent place to the posture that must be presented, that is, what is displayed must please and attract others, and this is what, in his view, is linked to a way of being/performing as a *karateka*.

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<sup>77</sup> Karate fights last for three minutes, winning the athlete who has the highest score at the end of the time. If time runs out and the athletes are tied, wins the one that scored the first point and that has the advantage of the *senshu*. If the fight is 0x0, the referees define the winner. However, if a difference of eight points is achieved before the passing of the three minutes, there is no need to wait for the time to end. A kick to the head counts as three points, an *ippon*.

I always say the same thing, a good attitude, but in both men and women, a good attitude, presenting oneself well, good feelings, the way of doing gestures and all that, it is valid, because in the end there is someone who scores (evaluates) you. And a good aesthetic is not the same as a bad aesthetic, so a good aesthetic always attracts. (Ares, man, Interview 35 (2), 29/09/2020)

This way of behaving, performing for others, is certainly part of the *karateka habitus* embodied by practitioners. A *habitus* combined with the *karateka* social field and physical and perhaps moral capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Shilling, 2004), which leads me to affirm that athletes get used to carrying a certain weight with them. In this sense, Ryall (2009, p.139) notes that “Participating in sport, and in elite sport in particular, where the gaze of others is felt more intensely, is to recognize that you are in their world; you are fixed as an object in the eyes of another.” Not receiving recognition from the other, be it the coach, other athletes, or spectators, or being judged by them, contributes to the emergence of feelings that question the self-worth (Ryall, 2009). In this same direction and still in relation to shame is the contribution of Sartre (2003, p.312):

Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being *an* object; that is, of *recognizing myself* in this degraded, fixed, and dependent being which I am for the Other. Shame is the feeling of an *original fall*, not because of the fact that I may have committed this or that particular fault but simply that I have “fallen” into the world in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am.

The following quote from one of the athletes, relating to this, reports the incorporation of tradition that, according to her, is closely linked to the way of being/performing as *karateka*, something that must be inherited:

It also depends on the master you have, the coach. If he instils in you the basic characteristics of karate since always, you will have that knowledge. For example, I do *kumite* and I know many things about karate, about its past, about *kata*, then I think it is more how they teach you than what you are practicing (*kata* or *kumite*). (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

The inheritance left by the master has the power to dictate the future paths of students-disciples. Hestia referred naturally to her master, without placing emphasis on his male figure. However, this is revealed as another incorporated element, since the right to receive the title of master is intended for men. Among the few *sensei* women who can exist in

karate, I have never in my experience come across any of them being called "master". Maybe this contributes to understand why, unconsciously, some women prefer having male coaches (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). The absorption and internalization of this kind of elements, the heritage of karate "since always" passed on by the master, helps in the process described by Foucault (2009) in *Discipline and Punish*. In a way, as I have been trying to show, athletes could embody the teachings to the point of becoming their own regulators. Perhaps this could explain the emergence of guilt, in close relationship with shame (Partridge et al, 2020) and the excess burden that some say they feel they carry, which is still a form of self-punishment. Analysing Foucault's work related to this subject, Probyn (2000, p.23) writes that "like power, shame is infectious".

I asked some athletes "who are you?". It was interesting to see how difficult the question was and ended up showing something else that seems to constitute the *karateka* female *habitus*. Their difficulty in responding carries something of lack of confidence, another characteristic that is related to shame (Partridge & Wiggins, 2008), at the same time as determination and strength. This is a contradiction that intrigues and draws attention, as noted in the following comment:

Complicated this question! As for life, I think I am very authentic and I am very real. (...) I'm serious when I have to be serious (...), and very disciplined, but then if you stop to meet me, I'm a bit of a crazy person. (...) I can be serious, I can be disciplined, but at the same time I tell you things as they are and if I don't say them, I'm not comfortable. And when it comes to karate, I always say that your personality shows according to the way you fight. The same happens to me. When I fight at my best, I am authentic. Maybe I don't have a spark, that you say... maybe, my matches don't seem super attractive, super entertaining. But I do my job and if I am good at a technique, I am good at that technique and I will not care what the other person does. I'm going to hang my technique on you causing your failures. Training, maybe I have a big repertoire, but then competing I do A, B and C. And if the A, B and C don't come out, I haven't fought well. I am like that and I am like that (being emphatic about the way she is). I adapt and I can modify myself, but... (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

The authenticity that Diana sees in herself, as well as other athletes consider in them too, combines elements with a bit of contradiction. That several athletes see themselves as authentic and exclusive is perfectly reasonable, since "authenticity is a relative and dynamic concept and not something homogeneously accepted and perpetuated by all members of a

subculture” (Donnelly, 2006, p.220). In relation to the contradiction, it may be worth noting how this apparent contradiction can precisely confer authenticity and configure a peculiar type of subjectivity, even though this can sound strangely. I say this because for many of the women who undoubtedly went through the process of acceptance and belonging, and who are still looking for ways to belong as I showed in the category about hierarchy, being/performing as *karateka* means being different. Holland (2018, p.203) helps to explain this process:

Being authentic is about belonging. You may have found yourself (or situated yourself) on the margins all your life except within a subculture. For these reasons the term subculture continues to be a meaningful term for members of those subcultures. For women, who are historically marginalised, being relegated to the margins after feeling oneself to be at the authentic “centre”, must be guarded against.

In this sense, belonging to the *karateka* subculture and finding authenticity there has a power that contains and attributes a certain amount of meaning to what is done in life.

Another athlete answered my question about who she is by emphasizing characteristics of persistence and determination, as I can summarize, that keeps her striving perpetually. She did not put herself in a victim position because she is a woman, but she draws attention to the difficulties that may be increased due to this and that will be shown with greater emphasis in the next chapter.

Well, I think I'm a fighter. In many ways. Because it has cost me a lot to get to where I am now, because as a child or when my (male) teammates have been (selected to be) in the younger categories, I was not there, because well, I did not have the level to be. So I've always fought a little against the tide to get where I want to be. And then my studies and my personal life as well. I believe that I am a tireless fighter and that will take me wherever I want. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

This last quote serves as a link to the next category where I will continue to address this issue by approaching the characteristics that define the *karateka* woman from the point of view of the fighters themselves. Thus, they reveal elements, sometimes more obvious, in others not so much, that make up their subjectivities.

### **5.3. “We are warriors.” – Characteristics that define them as *karateka* women**

Negotiation is part of the process of acceptance of women in the group, and probably not just of them, in order to gain space. It is true that a certain recognition and even space needs to be achieved more than it is gifted. But as I showed in the topic about hierarchy, subtle and subliminal norms are included in social positioning, and architectural coexistence must be respected and followed in order for a stable place within the team to be obtained. It is not enough to be technically good, for example. After having entered, to be accepted, to have space and to belong to the group, it is necessary to follow certain protocols, as the *karateka* themselves demonstrated. An athlete makes an observation in this sense when citing the “head” as the main characteristic that defines the *karateka* woman:

Head, a lot of head. There have been a lot of people, there are a lot of examples of girls who had it all, physically, technically, if they really wanted to... and they have been spoiled by the head. For me, I think it is the most important thing because in the end everything is trained, giving it more hours, everything always ends up training, instead, the head is something that you have to have and you have to be very clear to be on the top. (Proserpina, Interview 18 (2), 24/08/2020)

It is necessary to know how to manage the place achieved and to move socially within the group with intelligence. The way to move around is extremely relevant, both as an action and as a concept. This means that even though I asked women about characteristics that could define them as *karateka* women, no definition given is watertight. I recognize, as I pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, that my own research is evolving and that the views I had when writing the research project have changed. Another one is presented here based on the positioning theory offered by Davies and Harre (1990). Such a theory contributes to my reflexivity as researcher and review of points of view. I asked the athletes to point out characteristics that could define them and this is a valid question. However, it is necessary to take into account that their answers will not be definitive, in the sense that they will probably be reformulated or developed over time. In addition, the answers refer to an aspect or position occupied by them in their lives, and not to a totality. I have already been punctuating this flexibility when addressing the idea of subjectivities, for example. In this regard, Davies and Harre (1990, p.47) point out that:

Human beings are characterized both by continuous personal identity and by discontinuous personal diversity. It is one and the same person who is variously positioned in a conversation. Yet as variously positioned we may want to say that that

very same person experiences and displays that aspect of self that is involved in the continuity of a multiplicity of selves.

Thus, the athletes are indicating characteristics that define them in the *karateka* position. But it is necessary to bear in mind that “Each of these possible selves can be internally contradictory or contradictory with other possible selves located in different story lines” (Davies & Harre, 1990, p.58), something that has been shown in different moments of the text, normally demarcated as apparent contradictions. Considering this aspect of dynamics, I will continue to present the characteristics that they indicated as evident in this facet of their lives that occupies a centralized position for most of them.

Perhaps due to the proximity of karate to what is traditional, martial and military, dynamic positioning is often mixed with consolidated views typical of the aforementioned contexts. So, many times, women place their most evident characteristics as opposed to what would be the strong point in men, corroborating the current and normative binary view of men and women. They emphasize as female characteristics the ability to think and discern, seeing themselves as more rational, intelligent and even strategic than men, who would be more impulsive and "physical", using less the “head”.

I think the head. We use intelligence much more than boys. Boys are more physical, and for that reason they also score more points. Generally, the scores of the boys' fights are bulkier, I think they defend less, that they go crazy. In girls they are much tighter results, they score less because I think they are much more thoughtful when attacking. So the combat is more paused than that of the boys who go further forward, more crazy. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

Cold blood, perhaps, I would say. Guys get hotter. (...) I don't want to say that we girls don't get stung, because we get stung a lot, but we know how to do it in a different way than simply "well now I get hot and hit you and I destroy you..." (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

It is possible to observe that the incorporation, apparently, of the conception and acceptance of what has historically been defined as masculine and feminine occurs. Marcuse (2018, p.82) highlights that these are

(...) characteristics that have been attributed, in the long history of patriarchal civilization, to the feminine, and not to the masculine. Formulated as the antithesis of the dominant masculine qualities, such feminine qualities would be receptivity,

sensitivity, nonviolence, tenderness, and so on. These characteristics appear, in fact, as the opposite of domination and exploitation.<sup>78</sup>

It is very interesting to see here the different view that athletes and their coaches have in a specific sense. That is, while coaches undeniably recognize men as physically superior and more skilled, they also see men athletes with greater strategic capabilities, which will be evident in the next chapter. So, while women consider their own performance to be more rationalized and calculated, coaches will point out something related to this as just a shortfall in women. The tactical aspect, which requires mental calculation, is what characterizes good fighters, for coaches, and also what, according to them, women lack. The coaches emphasize, in summary, that women need to achieve, as I understand, the characteristics that historically are attributed to men (Marcuse, 2018).

The main one I think is the analysis of the opponent and that it can benefit me from what I have at a technical level. Many people fail there. We find very good girls, with a lot of technique, raising their legs, very fast, but then at a tactical level... Today at a strategic level in combat that does not help you if you are not able to deceive the opponent, make her fail and I think that what fails is the analysis of the opponent and knowing how to take advantage of the defects of the other to use them in your favour. (Apolo, man, Interview 33 (2), 25/09/2020)

This definition of being clear that you are going to achieve it, or that part of aggression that transforms women, well that the whole history was made a bit with those women who were really special in history, in wars, in which they have a temperament really strong, they really are able to get the most out of it. I think that's the point. Then on a technical-tactical level, well, I think that she surpasses everything with those strength, I think she surpasses everything else, the rest is more workable. (Ares, man, Interview 35 (2), 29/09/2020)

To be a good *karateka* the first thing she has to have is: physical qualities; character; intelligence; and illusion (motivation). (...) It is what moves us towards a goal, the desire to achieve something. (Hefaistos, man, Interview 36 (1), 30/09/2020)

Coaches speak of a differential like what makes a woman, in fact, a good fighter. However, some of these fundamental elements appear at the same time as the main deficiencies in women, according to the coaches' view, or that only a few exceptions have the

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<sup>78</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

differentiating elements. It seems, however, that coaches describe the characteristics that are possessed by the best fighters of all, who are always men, and that even other men, most of them by the way, cannot fully possess. When adding the aggressiveness attribute, historically a characteristic understood as masculine, they go as if dictating a model to be followed, in case one wants to be highlighted and to be recognized. Thus, it is important to note that the acquisition of supposed masculine characteristics by women is not encouraged in the sense of subversion (Maor, 2018), but of adequacy and standardization, meeting the criteria dictated by male parameters.

The characteristics have historically been attributed to male or female, however, in themselves they are neither masculine nor feminine evidently. Thus, theoretically there would be no problem with this requirement for women to develop characteristics such as aggressiveness, character (strong temperament), strength, strategy, tactics and even violence, as it appeared earlier, or domination. Nevertheless, I think there could be some problems, depending on the characteristics assumed. The first is that perhaps from the point of view of gender and the gender hierarchy more specifically, there would be only a replacement of men for women. That is, more people, women in this assumption, helping to reproduce and strengthen heteronormativity (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021), hegemonic masculinity, domination and violence. In this sense, the problem simply remains as pointed out by Mason (2018). In addition, by requiring women to incorporate such blunt characteristics in one scenario, but at the same time maintaining others understood as traditionally feminine in other scenarios so that they can be *considered women*, create great difficulties for them.<sup>79</sup> That is, the stereotype of masculinization falls on them, which triggers another problem, that of standardized and exacerbated femininity as an attempt to compensate and to resolve doubts about their sexualities (Anderson, 2009; Cahn, 2015; Jakubowska, Channon & Matthews, 2016; Krane, 2001; Lovisollo et al, 2010). The following chapters will address these issues.

Returning to the data, the fourth coach has a vision that follows the same line. I consider it relevant to take into account the coaches' view, in addition to listening to the women as the main source of data, given that what the male coaches say, their discourses, have impact and power over what the athletes will seek to develop. Women pursue such qualities pointed out by the coaches in order to be on the team, especially, but also due to the

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<sup>79</sup> It would be possible to present as arguments contrary to this that it would only be about dynamic positions occupied by women, or different performances, in a subjectivity always under construction. However, such demands seem to present a level of exigency that transcends the concepts of positioning and performativity, entering the unfair terrain of construction of a kind of fragmented subjectivity.

internalization of the hierarchical figure, of the male gaze, which can even be reproduced by the women themselves. The trainer explains that:

The good karate woman in *kumite* competition has a lot of genius. She has a lot of genius, a lot of temperament. She heats up easily and when... I don't know if easily or not, but when she heats up she has a lot of genius. (...) The doubt is that, with good work you can be in the top ten. With a lot of good work, you can be in the top five. But can you be number one without having that violent, aggressive gene? I have no idea, girl. (...) I think that socially in Spain we are very accommodated (not exposed to violence) and there are countries where they are not accommodated at all. And that also influences a lot. (Hermes, man, Interview 32 (3), 21/09/2020)

It is noteworthy that he highlights that what makes a woman a good competitor is precisely the element that women attribute to men, as I showed in the first quotes of this category. However, somehow women understand the message and I have often seen them reproducing in what they say and in the *habitus*, which is evidently going to happen. They embody this archetypal fighter ideal and begin to search for it. The first and simple evidence may be that they always compare themselves with men. I did not ask about the characteristic of the *karateka* woman in relation to the *karateka* man, however, the comparison was made repeatedly. In addition, women understand that to be accepted and belong with a certain exclusivity and originality, they must adapt to what is seen in the field as the best. They are guided by the parameters coming from outside, given by coaches and teammates (Ryall, 2009). There is a contradiction here, of course. They achieve originality by matching up. Nevertheless, it is about equalling the best, which are masculine archetypes, and this differentiates them and distances them from ordinary women, conferring a status for the few who do what is understood as proper of men, even those men who do not fight sportively; conferring therefore distinction for these women fighters, a complex symbolic capital that is difficult to understand. Thus, they pursue characteristics considered in the field, and embodied by them, as important to build themselves as *karateka*:

It is a sport considered more for boys, so for woman to be there they have to have character, a strong personality, I say. (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

I believe that having character, having a lot of character, and a lot of capacity for sacrifice. (Juno, Interview 25 (2), 07/09/2020)

I would say courage or will. I think that in the end a woman who gets into a sport that *a priori* is considered masculine, first of all, has a personality or even a girl, has a

(strong) personality, but also has the courage and the will to take and get there and against the stereotypes that are marked. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

When you do a sport like ours, which in principle is like more of men, many times, you will surely have lived this too, which is like you want to endure the same as others. Well, there are partners and I have a person much bigger than me and I am here, I am such *dan* in karate and that strength is very important. But while I was thinking this, the word brave also came to me, because it's a bit "well, I have to stick with this one that came to me now," well onward (bear what comes). (...) That strength of facing things that scare you and working when you are tired. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

Another point worth mentioning is the frequency with which everyone calls women "girls". It is true that in Spain it is quite common to hear older people call younger people *chica* and *chico* and even *niña* and *niño*, being adults. I, not so young, felt a little surprised the first times that they addressed me as *niña*, especially. However, it is also possible to identify, in addition to the local cultural issue, the most universal culture of infantilization of women and their association with normative femininity and heteronormative sexuality (Kessler, 2015). In a way, it is understood that the man matures as he ages, while the woman deteriorates. There is an association with the ideal of eternal beauty, a characteristic historically associated with the feminine, perhaps the main one, and with perfection and a form of praise to the woman if she remains young (McRobbie, 2015). Social pressure sometimes leads to disproportionate effort to preserve a supposed youth, since it is linked to beauty and also to a certain degree of sensuality. According to this view, there is no beauty in maturity, which to be physically avoided justifies all types of surgical intervention.

Alabarces (2013) writes a sentence in his text about football, women, rugby and homeland that articulates the idea of infantilizing women with other ideas of great relevance. He comments that the male rugby team (*Pumas*) achieved with an international victory the condition of heroes of the Argentine nation. The male players represent for the people the virtuous characteristics that women try to possess, but which are denied them regardless of the results they obtain. The Argentine women's hockey team, describes Alabarces, is the one with the greatest international success of all the modalities of the country, male and female, however, female players are not taken by representatives of the nation.

...Pumas are, above all, *machos*, virile, brave, irreducible to pain and even defeat. The girls could not and cannot, at least not yet, articulate those meanings. They must win,

they must remain women –remain being *chicas*– they must continue to imitate men and limit themselves to it. And never even dream of being the heroines of the country (Alabarces, 2013, p.34).<sup>80</sup>

Countless times *karateka* women also identify themselves as "girls". Possibly it is often just the usual treatment among Spaniards. However, I cannot help showing that this feminine infantilization occurs, treating women in a sweeter and fluffier way so that, perhaps, they adapt to the sweet and fluffy way of being, as children, always being, moreover, directed and supervised (Kessler, 2015); although to fight well they must have the violent gene, which is still another contradiction. In the sequence I put some quotes where this element of supposedly affectionate infantilization appears, at the same time that women expose others of their main characteristics as fighters.

I think perseverance and determination. I mean, I want something and I'm going to do everything to get it. I train, I train, I take care of my diet, and so on. (...) I also speak to you a little about my husband, who is a coach. He has always told me that he has trained better with the girls. I think when he talks about that he says it because he thinks that girls are more focused (than men). Well, (if) we are training, we are training. (...) If the girls are made a correction, we are more... we have (want) to improve. So there is more perseverance, more work or more seriousness at work, there are always exceptions, of course, but a general rule. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

I think we are authentic. Because I think we are the ideal girl that everyone thinks is a boy, but when they meet you they really realize that you are a real girl. That not because you do karate you have to like girls –I have nothing against that– but that you like girls (to date) or... many people think that, that we are *machungas*. And when they really know you... I think the girl in karate is authentic. (Venus, Interview 22 (2), 02/09/2020)

Venus' speech touches a very relevant point for a typically masculine sport practiced by women. The accusation of homosexuality just for participating in a male environment tends to be very frequent and becomes a stereotype that women need to deal with, regardless of the affective option they take. Karate, a context marked by traditional norms as I have highlighted, is a mostly heterosexual environment, where heteronormativity (Rich, 2010)

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<sup>80</sup> Translation from Spanish to English mine.

predominates. Women normally understand the association with homosexuality as a stigma and often end up looking for ways to exaggerate femininity (Tajrobehkar, 2016; Wells & Darnell, 2014). In reviewing my own experience, I also evidently had to deal with prejudices in relation to my affectivity. A shy teenager that I was and extremely dedicated to training without having a relationship over many years, I ended up being included in the rumours of the social youth of my small rural town. Twenty to twenty-five years ago, the view in the Brazilian countryside, where the traditionalist gaucho<sup>81</sup> roots were very strong, was undoubtedly a very strict and straight view. Not knowing how to confront that, as soon as I could, with the option of studying at the University in a relatively large city, I left the countryside at the age of 18.

It is interesting to note that in my *karateka* trajectory in four countries, I had contact with only two homosexual people, which has come to my knowledge at least, one man and one woman. Anyway, women react to prejudice, which seems to happen from all angles (Rich, 2010), and they end up reinforcing heteronormativity when seeking to emphasize femininity (Ferretti & Knijnik, 2007; Gonçalves, 2014; Stigger & Silveira, 2010; Tajrobehkar, 2016; Wells & Darnell, 2014) as a way to deny homosexuality. This theme will be further explored in the next chapter, when addressing the supposed masculinization of *karateka* women, something that is present in many other sports that are typically understood as masculine, and is nonetheless disturbing. Women need to face this and so many other issues and forge themselves as athletes despite the difficulties. As one of the athletes commented to me in a moment of trust, and for this reason I do not put the literal quote here, I make an adaptation of what she said given its applicability: they are forged athletes often not thanks to the sport, but despite it. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, the problem is not in the sport itself, nor in the martial art, but in the way it is practiced and the environment of the *dojos*, for example, where it is carried out. This creates space for other testimonies of *karateka* about their characteristics as fighters:

We are warriors. I focus more on combat when I give you this definition, but I think we are all a bit warriors, even if they do *kata*, but I think it defines us more in combat. (...)

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<sup>81</sup> Some characteristics include a great pride for the land where one was born, for one's surname (family) and for being a gaucho; the maintenance of tradition is very important and that is why there are *CTGs*, *Centros de Tradições Gaúchas*, Gaucho Tradition Centres, where men, so-called gauchos, present themselves in *bombacha*, hats and often carry a knife in their belts; women, called *prendas*, wear a long, swirled and armed dress to dance to the typical songs. In these Centres there are also rodeos, as there is a very close relationship with horses and oxen loop competitions. Historically, the gaucho has populated Argentina, Uruguay, southern Brazil and smaller regions in other South American countries. <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaúcho>, accessed on 05/04/2021.

So it is true that I think warrior is a word that defines us quite well. (Hera, Interview 21 (2), 27/08/2020)

We fight to the end, and that defines us, not giving anything up. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

I would say that brave or fighter, forward, that nothing stops you, nobody. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

To be a female athlete you have to be confident and to do karate too. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

Women define themselves as fighters and warriors, either on the mat, for space in sport, or in life itself. In fact, the social construction of women is limited by certain barriers to the achievement of goals that are also reflected in the sports environment. However, they continue to fight, literally in this case, for their place. The fact that they need and in a way give in to this need to pursue objectives given from the outside is very important and will continue to return to the text. They incorporate and sometimes reproduce what is said to them, at other times it may not happen, since some begin to launch themselves into a position of possible model for others.

In the following category I present and discuss the theme of the positions, examples to follow or inspiration taken from somewhere; or the perception that begins to emerge from the possibility of being looked at by others. With that, I try to provide another part of the answer to the chapter's objective, another factor that influences the construction of female *karateka* embodied subjectivities; with whom women identify, from where they get inspiration to shape themselves as fighters and how they deal with the perception that they are beginning to influence others.

#### **5.4. Get inspired by or inspire someone?**

This category is basically structured in three parts. Some of the athletes point out that they are looking for models to mirror and to inspire them. Others say that they do not think this is good for them and prefer to develop their own style. Finally, some of the athletes see that they are observed and begin to be taken as models or inspiration by others. Before presenting the comments of the athletes, I return to the ideas of Davies and Harre (1990) in order to reinforce the importance of positioning theory with regard to positions in contrast to

role. Positioning theory was developed on the language and the possibilities of changing or intercalating positions in a conversation. I consider that the theory is transferable to other contexts, as already demonstrated in other studies raised by McVee et al (2018). The body communicates languages and expresses literacy and changes in positions, specifically in karate, can occur several times in the same fight, for example. The athletes explained how they can be at times attackers, at times more defensive or unpredictable. And a particular position that I am interested in highlighting here is when they consciously accept to assume the position of prominent figures. This place where others look at you exists anyway, however, it makes a difference, I consider, when it is consciously assumed.

So, following Davies and Harre (1990) here I adopt the concept of position before role, even though the latter may be a more consolidated concept in the field and for that reason it still appears. McVee et al (2018, p.382) explain that “roles are, or are perceived to be, more static or fixed, even in more interactive approaches. (...) In contrast to roles, positions are seen as fluid, dynamic, and immanent.” Davies and Harre (1990, p.61) argue that “the move from role to position is both analytically and politically necessary in the study of people in their contemporary everyday worlds.” And “In moving from the use of role to position as the central organizing concept for analysing how it is that people do being a person, we have moved to another conception of the relation between people and their conversations.” This conceptual observation is relevant in this study since it focuses on the subjectivity of women, a dynamic category that requires a coherent theoretical position.

In addition, the concept of position can provide greater flexibility in the female positioning against the pursuit of the fixed model of perfection (McRobbie, 2015) generally assigned to women. They can move through positions without settling into a single one, and occupy the inspirational place for other people, as it happens but which, however, is not necessarily a permanent place. The non-permanence of the model position is especially noticed among women, for whom being taken as a model is extremely difficult. The martial world, priority male, rarely makes room for the female model as the one of real prominence and inspiration for others, and if it does, perhaps taking into account the politically correct and the current demands for equality, it is fleeting or impermanent. It is true that in the sporting world the “stars” are quickly replaced. However, some figures last longer than others. Outstanding public social positioning has consequences for positioner and positioned. Perhaps this is related to the fact that the scope in which women exercise the position of inspiring model is often reduced to a small circle, not acquiring global dimensions, usually. When this happens, the valorization of women's physical attributes comes into play, for example, much

more than their sporting abilities, as will be seen in chapter 7. Now I go on to show some testimonies of athletes who feel inspired by other people:

At an international level, yes, always, because she was my weight, I have always liked Sara Cardin<sup>82</sup>, the Italian. When I was younger I would see her and in fact when we have fought together I have felt self-conscious about the fact that I was fighting with a person whom I idolized. So it was a bit my example to follow in terms of *karateka*, but then I do not know her personally, I cannot say that she is my total example. So if I have to stay with someone, well Demeter, because not only as a *karateka*, but as a person I think she is an example. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

One person who causes me a lot of admiration is Sandra Sánchez<sup>83</sup>. She awakes in me a lot of admiration for her sporting successes, but especially the fact that she made the national team after going through everything that happened. I many times when maybe things happen to me... a summons or something and I feel "what are you saying? God, what do I have to do?" (for not being called), you feel so desperate, I think a lot about people like her. In the end there are athletes who I love, who have great ability and who I admire, but the athletes that I usually look at are those who are of an age and who are still there. I think "God, how difficult it must be." Or be receiving blows (of life) and endure, having that ability not to throw in the towel. (Athena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

Always in training there was always the name of "look Damián<sup>84</sup>, where has he arrived, look Damián, where has he arrived". So I think that everyone in my gym, in one way or another, always has Damián as a reference, but because our coach has always instilled in us that he is the role model, that he has grown up in T..., that it is a little town... (Proserpina, Interview 18 (2), 24/08/2020)

I've always said that I want to be like my parents, who have been super humble all their lives and super workers. They have always come out ahead, I have had my example at home. They have managed to get out of everything with sacrifice, they have raised a family, so I consider that with humility and work, everyone is capable of getting ahead. (...) Also my boyfriend in part, because at first I was a little more crazy-

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<sup>82</sup> *Kumite* fighter. World and European champion. 34 years old.

<sup>83</sup> Spanish athlete, mentioned earlier. Number one in the world ranking of female *kata*, world champion in the individual sport and six times European champion. 39 years old.

<sup>84</sup> Spanish athlete, number two in the world ranking of male *kata*, individual runner-up world twice and six times European champion. 37 years.

headed. And seeing me by his side, comparing myself to him in training sessions and so on, seeing that certain things worked for him made me sit down and learn from him too. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

The athletes in their multiple possibilities of positions to assume, turn their gaze to people from whom they can learn something. As I put it earlier, we are social beings and we do not live alone. With the intention of belonging, often imitation processes happen, especially of the one who has a prominent or prestigious position as emphasized by Mauss (1973). In the sporting world, although women are undeniably gaining space at the expense of much insistence, the prestigious positions remain those of men (Bernstein, 2002; Burstyn, 1999; Follo, 2012; Hills & Croston, 2012). Sport is still understood as male terrain and many modalities are male preserve spaces (Matthews, 2016; Theberge, 1985). Thus, women entering this field end up absorbing some of the ideology disseminated, perhaps unconsciously, by coaches, colleagues, the media and, ultimately, patriarchal society. They find inspiration in different sources, as is clear from the quotes above, however, successful male figures have a prominent place, perhaps because it is understood that they are the ones who make the best sport and the best media sport. In fact, other athletes have repeatedly cited Rafael Nadal, a Spanish tennis player man, as a great example and model. I do not mean to deny he can be or that men cannot be taken as role models. My point is that even though women can switch positions, it seems that they themselves have internalized the central place occupied by men, and that marks women's attitudes.

Many times women are conscious of the issue around gender hierarchy, and other times they are in a subtle way reinforcing the problem, given the intimate absorption of the male gaze so present in the patriarchal society we are. The media and web are configured as more possibilities for strengthening male hegemony in sport by showing male sport always as the best or "true" sport. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Vigarello (2008) already pointed out the way the entertainment industry shapes itself to make the sports show extremely attractive to the public. On the one hand, seeking media coverage and repercussions, many modalities make changes to their rules, some may even insert women in some positions to demonstrate that their sport is acceptable, correct and egalitarian. On the other hand, the global media sport marketplace dispose of many platforms thirsty for modalities to display (Hutchins, Li & Rowe, 2019). In any case, the fact is that the television coverage values male performance (Koivula, 1999), while the exhibition of female sports will focus much more on the physical attributes of athletes (Souza, Capraro & Jensen, 2017),

forgetting in a wrong way to return attention to women sports performance. Athletes have a lot to say in this regard. Therefore, this theme will return in chapter 7.

In my *karateka* trajectory, as I reported earlier, I started, grew and developed, always training with boys and then men. Girls and women as training partners were scarce or completely absent, over long periods of time. Although it made me definitely exclusive, since I was the only girl in my *dojo* and then for periods the only woman, today I can reflect that this could probably be positively different. What I mean is that today I consider that if I had had female examples, that would have given me at least more diversity of options to incorporate or, more likely, it would have altered the *habitus* that I came across and embodied. My presence certainly<sup>85</sup> had an impact on the group, but it was not enough to cause significant changes, which, if this had happen, I would have noticed. Perhaps also because I was not aware that I could exercise an important position in the *dojo* my presence did not impact the *habitus* as much as it was impacted by such *habitus*. More women practicing, especially if they are aware of the positions they occupy in these places, since *dojos* are places of power (Matthews, 2016; Stoddart, 2010), can contribute to changing the current logic and *habitus*.

An athlete, a bit like a transition point between those who seek inspiration and those who want to create their own style, reports her experience in relation to references to follow:

In my gym they haven't told us much about karate references. (...) It is easier to have a reference because you try to imitate them. But for me, the closest references have been the same Spanish team. Because they are the ones who, from a point of view, say, "if they get this, I'm here, too." (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, imitation is like a stage in the process of belonging. Aiming at acceptance, the neophyte imitates her/his peers and superiors, because she/he wants to look like them to dilute her/himself in the group. The novice, therefore, incorporates the *habitus* that is current in space and participates in a normal process of looking at others and building oneself subjectively. Perhaps due to the passage of time of practice or another type of personal characteristic, some athletes prefer not to seek a kind of fixed inspiration outside, but something more plural, taking examples of techniques,

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<sup>85</sup> I verified this impact through research carried out years ago in Brazil. Something of the experience can be read in Turelli and Vaz (2011) or Turelli and Vaz (forthcoming-a).

postures, positions from different sources to develop the best of themselves. Some testimonies from *karateka* report this:

I believe that each person is different, unique, so if you want to look like someone, it will end up being a replica of that person, you will not end up being you. What you can do is take things from each one, what interests you the most, look at their qualities or whatever, because you can learn something from everyone, not just from one person. If you focus on one person, you don't see what's around you. (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

I have not wanted to appear to anyone, I simply wanted to make my own style, I with what I have. Do that better instead of looking like someone else. But it is true that there are people who inspire me in things... (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

Imitations (not being authentic) are never good, this is clear. Each one has to give their touch, their spark. (Proserpina, Interview 2 (1), 12/07/2020)

The coaches expose their points of view that follow a similar line to this one, of not setting idols to the fighters, although at other times they work with models to demonstrate techniques, for example, during the training itself:

Fabiana: Do you give them someone as an example? That is, "that person, look at what she does..." Hermes: Let's see, just like that, no, for the simple reason that I want them to beat those people. Do you remember that I told you that in the 80s, the late 70s, the early 80s, I filmed myself? So that is very good because I have learned many things, but it is also very bad because somehow if I am watching your fights and learning from your fights I have you here (top), then how am I going to fight with you later and I'm going to win? (Hermes, man, Interview 32 (3), 21/09/2020)

The ideal is that you get the best out of yourself, you cannot be a copy of the other. There are some bases that give you more effectiveness, but they are tactical bases, lines, and so on. But what is your model... You, what are you like? You get the best possible juice from what you, from your virtues. I never wanted any of my competitors to be as me or similar to me, because each one has to take advantage of their physique, their characteristics, both physical and psychological, technical and tactical. (Ares, man, Interview 35 (2), 29/09/2020)

This form of work seems to me quite adequate, going in the direction of something individualized. In the athletes' perception, this is not always felt, however, as one athlete points out:

Historically training has always been done for boys, and girls have adapted to that training. And in some sports, female training or individual training is applied, because girls have other qualities, better or worse, but different qualities that are often better, but they do not know how to take advantage of them due to the fact that a workout for the girls is not made. (...) I think that not everyone is the same and it could be done much better if we did a training session for girls, specific. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

Regardless of the way of working, I consider that if the athletes were willing to take active positions of influence within the mat, this could prove to be extremely positive. Evidently, the prominent positions are not limited to athletes who are looked at and admired. They must extend to all hierarchical levels, however, this will be addressed later. Here I want to focus on the fundamental position that women can exercise in the daily shaping of the *habitus* that reaches all practitioners, in the *dojos*. Perhaps their conscious presence contributes to the development of martial environments that are not only strong and overcoming, but also inclusive, equitable and empowering (Rodrigues, Turelli & Kirk, forthcoming), especially for girls and women, but also for boys. This could contribute to the fact that they no longer incorporate hegemonic masculinity, all of them. Some of the *karateka* begin to notice how they are looked at with admiration:

Right here in my club as some girls I've seen, "I want to be like Vesta." Well yes, when they start saying those things to you, you notice a certain amount of responsibility. (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

I've never had a role model, I might like some things that a *karateka* does, because I say, "look at this guy", but at a specific time. I don't have a role model. (...) It is true that for children and that in the end you are looked at. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

*Karateka* are references for others primarily because they are winners. However, other athletes, also winners and especially experienced, prefer to avoid the responsibility that implies being ahead. I will present the most modest view, perhaps, of these women in the next category, which deals with the incorporation of the received tradition. The fact that they are relatively recognized figures also exerts a certain force on the imagination of those who can

look at them. Vigarello (2008) highlights the creation of heroes in sport as a way of making a greater impact on people and promoting sports spectacles as, basically, business. The champions become national heroes, something that is also emphasized by Alabarces (2013). In this approach, a social role is created, and here I have tried to promote the idea of the dynamic position that can be adopted by women. They do not become heroines in the sense that the authors expose, something that Alabarces has already proved in Argentine society, where men and not women become national heroes. But the women can take positions of responsibility for subversion (Maor, 2018).

I believe that 25 years ago women with possibilities like these were scarce, but today with all the feminist baggage conquered, women have the strength to promote change, especially when they are aware of their positions. As I reported, my experience had to stick to what was there, a unique and hegemonic model. Today it is possible to generate new examples, more positions available to be looked at, plural and complex, it is true, but there is also the diversity that must be respected and valued. Perhaps the emergence of female masculinities (Channon & Jennings, 2014) or masculinized femininities are not negative, since they can contribute to open space in the traditional. Depending on the approach taken, the traditional can be exclusionary and hurt many subjectivities that do not fit what exists as an accepted standard.

In this sense, queer initiatives (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021; Devís-Devís et al, 2017; Devís-Devís et al, 2018; Landi, 2018; Maor, 2018) could emerge as possibilities, undoubtedly challenging, of subversion or opposition to the traditional, hegemonic and normative. The construction of new types of femininity can also be understood as an answer or a way of dealing with hegemonic masculinity. These ideas need to be further developed with a view to their applicability in this context and for this reason they will return over the next chapters. Now I continue with the topic by addressing the last category of this chapter, on embodiment and the consequent way of transmitting the embodied tradition.

### **5.5. Embodiment of the received tradition**

As I mentioned at the closure of the previous category, some athletes prefer to abstain from positions of greater visibility in karate. They are able to see how implication in such positions would hold them accountable. They also glimpse the difficulties of exercising positions of power, given the emphatically male context in these positions, which is repeated

in several other modalities (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Melo & Rubio, 2017). I bring two examples of testimonials of athletes that go in this direction:

If competitors, male and female, were referees, I know it would be better, but I am more attracted to training people than refereeing. It's because it doesn't appeal to me. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

I don't think I know how to transmit, I can know about *kumite*, but to form *kata* or techniques I don't feel qualified. No, I think it's a lot of responsibility and no. (Demeter, Interview 10 (1), 27/07/2020)

I asked these athletes about taking on such outstanding positions, given that they are extremely experienced and as far as I am able to assess, mature for that. In addition to them, there are evidently more fighters in this highly qualified elite team, as it will be possible to see as I move forward in the next chapters, by the comments they address on various topics. I decided to start this category by the testimonies of these two athletes because I think that the posture/position that they adopt is perhaps more frequent than one might suppose. Many other women avoid prominent positions due to numerous reasons, among which Fasting and Pfister (2000, p.93) supported by other studies indicate “less status, lower salaries and less power than their male counterparts”. Fasting and Pfister’s study is already 20 years old, so it would be possible to conclude that many things have changed. However, unfortunately, few things appear to have changed. Perhaps the most attention spent in this period of time has been around equal pay, which is obviously important. But I venture to say that none of these inequalities have been fully addressed to date. And there are certainly other difficulties that count for *karateka* to prefer not to assume prominent positions and I definitely do not criticize them. Another athlete helps us to understand the process:

I believe that in the end if I am a coach and I am used to always receiving from others “you did not do this well”, and you are judging yourself harshly, I think that makes women in general be much more insecure than men. Because there is always a criticism of what you do, always. If you go very covered, you are a nun, if you go uncovered, you are a whore, if you paint yourself, why do you paint yourself, and if you don't paint yourself, you don't explore yourself. There are always comments on everything about you. I think in the end it conditions you as they say “well, you want to have this position, selector?” And I think many say “and can I do that? And will I be able to...?” Because they have always put it in you that it is not your site, that you have many things that you can do wrong. (...) I think that in the end it is not the same to go

on a flat road than to go uphill. If you put me uphill, it makes it much more difficult for me to arrive, than for you (man in flat road) to arrive. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

What this athlete says translates Foucault's (2009) theory into practice in relation to the internalization of male gaze. The level of demand is such that it often leads women to question whether they are capable of performing in other positions. It also justifies that they often reproduce what they have always seen men do, that they imitate men, in order to minimize the criticism received. As I said, I do not criticize women for backing down in the face of demands since my own personal process goes through that too, and I know to some extent how difficult the journey is. In my trajectory in karate I trained for 12 consecutive years in Brazil, I was an athlete all that time and a beginner *sensei* for four years, three years as a teenager in my hometown and the first year of university. I always preferred to be an athlete over a teacher. In fact, even today I do not think I can identify myself with the title of *sensei*. Throughout my practice time, in addition to embodying *karateka habitus*, reproduced by me with my students, I also encountered problems. I confess that due to the immaturity of adolescence and the longing for an outstanding belonging, I ended up trying to ignore many problems. I trained in two different *dojos* in Brazil, both in the same state, but very distant from each other, keeping in mind the distances in Brazil. As I am, I did not ask to leave or to change. I only did change because I moved from the city due to the beginning of the university course. I continued training in the same style that I practiced, *Wado*, with a *sensei* friend of my first *sensei*, from his same line. What were, from my point of view, problems, were repeated and I could not help feeling them. I say I felt them because more than seeing them consciously, I always felt them. And at a certain point I abandoned karate, because I just did not know how to deal with that.

I spent ten years without karate training, although I always kept my *gi* and the protections that were used at that time, surpassed today, of course. I did other sports during this period and what is most relevant to comment here is that I trained for two other martial arts of a more philosophical nature than karate, which was sportive. I trained, even obtaining graduations, *Nei Kung*, martial art of Chinese origin, for seven years, and *I Ai Do*, traditional Japanese fencing, for three years (see Turelli, 2008; Turelli Thumé & Vaz, 2018; Turelli & Vaz, forthcoming-b). However, the experience was not fulfilling. My body was not able to experience the same sensations as in karate. I think that because I embodied the *habitus* so early, while still a girl, I did not feel so adjusted and comfortable bodily. On the contrary, philosophical practices seemed boring, full of restrictions, because I wanted to jump like in

karate, but I needed to keep the soles of my feet on the ground, for example. The restrictions blocked all kinds of *catharsis* that I could get to experience. Furthermore, the environment was not exempt from the hegemonic masculinity that I witnessed in karate, even though it was less explicit (Turelli, 2008).

Having told these things, I get to the point that I have reported before, that I decided to return to studies and training in karate with the announcement of its inclusion in the Olympic Games. I wanted to expand my academic and life experience by doing a doctorate abroad. In Spain then I resumed training in another style of karate, *Shotokan*. I made contact with the Spanish Karate Federation and then I started to have contact with the person who became my *sensei* in my return to the sport. I told him that I had trained in *Wado*, but he recommended his *dojo* to me because of the distances, and it was *Shotokan*. It seemed interesting to me to see how things were happening in another country, in another style. When I was in the UK and Italy I also looked for *Shotokan*, as I would be very confused if I tried something different, I believe. The fact is that, at the time of my return (I have a long personal field diary reporting this experience in training and competitions, as mentioned in the methods chapter) I was obviously a misfit and slow. Everything hurt after the first training sessions. But I quickly saw my body memory return and I went back to having some flow experiences in training.

And why do I tell all of this? To say that after a long break I still felt something like a pending process with karate and a responsibility to other people like me, more to women, although not exclusively with them. I refer to people who can enjoy a sport, but find it difficult with the environment, inclusion or other order. And so I thought that the solution is not, in some cases at least, to abandon the context, nor to embody those elements that we definitely disagree with. But perhaps to work for its transformation, even if it is slow, small, without so much emphasis. I want to say that it is necessary to find the place for each one. Mine, I understand, is in the study of the sport. And I believe that every woman who has an interest in acting should fight to find her place.

Returning to the comments of the athletes, they are aware of the hegemonic male presence in the sport and consider that if there were more women, they might be able to see this fact revert in their favour:

I believe that inevitably the masculine continues to be transmitted... Maybe if some technical position was given to women, or if they made an example from the parts above, then maybe the concept of women... "Hey, you have to give a course in Latin

America." Well, call a woman, a female technician and you take her there. It would be positive. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

Yes, I miss the fact that there are female coaches. Because we are two genders, no matter how much equality there is and we try to find, there are two personalities. And no matter how much feeling you may have with a man, it is not the same that you are going to have with a woman. Yes, it may be the same, but not at first face. So sometimes the more understanding side that we have is missing. There is a need for a female coach in the senior team. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

There are times when I see a (female) coach in other teams, like she has more of a feeling with the girls. Nor do I say that a female coach has to go only with the girls and a male coach only with the boys. Not that either, but for certain things the help is even greater. (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

It may be that maybe my confidence with women (coaches) was greater than with men, although I have confidence, but maybe the relationship was closer with a woman than with a man. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

The study carried out by Fasting and Pfister (2000) presents two points in particular that find compatibility with what *karateka* say, even though there is a 20-year gap between that scenario and what athletes say today. Fasting and Pfister conducted a qualitative research of 38 elite female soccer players from Germany, Norway, Sweden and the USA. Through semi-structured interviews they sought to verify coaches' expectations and assessments from the athletes' point of view and whether the coaches' gender influenced that. The first point that is compatible and that relates especially to the speeches of Diana, Vesta and Artemis, is that many athletes from the four different countries "prefer female coaches because they like the female style of communication, which is described as understanding and caring. There is also the belief that 'female coaches are better psychologists'" (p.103). This gains more relevance when considering that "the players believed that women should be coached differently from men, not because of physiological differences, but due to psychological differences" (p.105). This is something also pointed out by Demeter:

I believe that sometimes we are forgotten by technicians or by education in general, that men and women are different, not physically anymore, because it is okay that there are differences, but mentally and psychologically we are different, neither better nor worse, we are different. So when you work with a team, you have to give men one thing and women another. (...) So I think that more importance should be given to that

emotional aspect that women have. That many times by trying, I don't know, not to make inequalities, we are not being treated as we should. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

The second point of compatibility with the text by Fasting and Pfister (2000) is that the gender view presented is stereotyped, agreeing with the characteristics historically attributed to men and women, in both contexts:

These results can be interpreted as mirroring the old-fashioned gender stereotypes where women are nurturing, emotional, while the men are aggressive and rough. But at the same time it mirrors the traditional gender order, where women are looked upon as the 'weaker' sex, and in relation to sport, not worth putting too much energy into, or taking too seriously. Both the gender stereotypes and the gender order seem to be very resistant to change, which is illustrated by the fact that these themes occur cross-nationally. (p.104)

The maintenance of this view over time, in the *karateka* scenario, may be explained by the fact that the athletes build their subjectivity while embodying the *habitus* of the environment, which is traditional and heteronormative. Because many of them, especially the youngest and who are the majority, receive an education that is already supported to some extent in feminist literature, since Spain, some regions more than others certainly, seems to value this current of thought. Therefore, in some interviews, I noticed a certain effort by the athletes to try to make the different scenarios compatible, for example, in the following quote:

Karate is quite egalitarian, there are exceptions, those from countries that are a little more closed for religious issues and such, but... (...) In fact I believe that I am a feminist and I think that every woman should be a feminist, but I think that also right now the term feminism is badly related and to this day with the acts that are taking place in different places I don't want to be related to those acts that take place practically every day because I don't feel related to that. (Proserpina, Interview 18 (2), 24/08/2020)

These are contradictions that catch the attention. At the same time that the athlete, a woman, practices a sport seen as being of men and then achieves an original place that has the potential for subversion, the goal of feminism, she belongs to the heart of the *karateka* group and cannot go against their ideology. Somehow, this unconsciously approaches a kind of betrayal, something that can also be seen in the testimony of another athlete, who begins to

perceive complexity and even confusion when scrutinizing the theme of the transmission of tradition.

Karate itself has been invented by a man, it has the traits of this person. So I think that what is transmitted is from this person, who is a man, but I don't think that is why the person is male or female. Maybe a woman would have done it differently. Just like karate, I'm talking about sport in general, because doing push-ups, I don't think it's for a man, doing glutes, I don't think it's for a woman. I believe that feminine self-defence does not exist, it is self-defence and you apply it, because it is not female, not male, or anything. It is sold like that, as feminine, but I think it's stupid. So I think that a man invented it and what this man has invented is transmitted, but I don't think that, I don't know, I wouldn't enter into masculine or feminine. I do not think that now because I am a woman, I transmit something more feminine. What they have taught me. I don't know. I do not know how to say it. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

The athlete has a posture that does not intend to inferiorize the woman, which she also brings in another quote that I will put in the sequence. From my point of view, her intention of not making women inferior is absolutely valid. However, there are differences between men and women that are undeniable. When she mentions the subject of self-defence, for example, it is interesting that, as it can be seen in the previous chapter, some athletes say that they feel confident, but the topic of defending themselves on the street is something to be avoided. They say that if they needed to defend themselves against a female aggressor, they feel empowered to do so, but they do not feel prepared against a man. There will always be exceptions, but in general female body shaping is with broad hips and narrow shoulders. In the male body conformation, generalized I highlight, it occurs exactly the other way around. Do these facts have an implication in the biomechanics of bodies that deserve to be taken into account to develop methods or strategies for self-defence?

When searching the databases on this I found studies on hip (and knee) injuries of practitioners of karate and *tae kwon do* (Alsaed, 2018); motor adaptations necessary for the practice of self-defence (Harasymowicz & Kalina, 2005); biomechanics of martial arts and attack and defence techniques (Mustapha et al, 2015) and other studies of similar lines, especially related to injuries. However, they show no differences between men and women due to the lack of research on women I venture to say, which highlights a relevant gap in scientific knowledge. In addition to continuing to demonstrate that the martial field is male-

dominated, reflected even in scientific research, even though it is not exactly the same in the social sciences where research is looking precisely at social problems.

In chapter 7 I will return to the subject of the female body in martial practice, especially from a sociological point of view. However, I find it important to realize the disturbing confusion with which Ceres is deflagrated. Karate cannot manifest itself without a transmitting vehicle. People's bodies channel and give life to sport. Thus, karate is moulded to the body that materializes it and to the culture of the place where it is practiced. In this sense, karate is a tool, created by men and aimed at them, with performance standards to be beaten by those who present themselves to practices that are also masculine, and that are based on the one that has the best performance (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009). So, the different social conditions of women and men make it inappropriate for everyone to be equalized and seek to achieve the same stipulated male standard. That is why the theme of equity is relevant, given the need to value differences, within a space of citizenship (Arendt, 1987) that is a space of equality (Barros & Sousa, 2016), that make women original and not an imitation of men in order to approach what would be a better finished model. Fasting and Pfister (2000), based on other authors including, say in this sense that "it is not enough to get more women into the organization, if women are merely imitations of men" (p.105). The athlete makes another statement:

I have always trained with the person in front of me, be they a woman or a man, that is, in general, the gym, there have been quite a few girls, but my teacher has never distinguished between men and women, they give the same and it doesn't matter, that is, our personal capacity. (...) In other words, as a teacher, I do it too. (...) If you make girls only get on with girls, they will not improve and they will remain in a group of inferiority. In other words, you have to be able to get them to hang out with boys and make them grow more. I think it is positive that they are with boys. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

Mixed-sex classes are already proven by the literature (Channon, 2013; Maclean, 2016; 2017) as effective for a certain female empowerment in addition to influencing and leading to changes in markedly male environments, which then need to adapt to new demands. Initiation experiences in *Brazilian Jiu Jitsu* though reveal how the late female initiation option can be optimized from single-sex classes (Rodrigues, Turelli & Kirk, forthcoming). Given that many women are challenged to a level that prevents them from starting or staying in the martial environment, the creation of an initial safe environment (name that is intriguing, by the way)

strengthens and empowers them, in addition to working towards their gradual inclusion in mixed groups. However, besides to being an inclusive and equitable proposal for *dojos*, that is, it does not refer to high performance, this requires a lot of work. For this type of action, it is necessary to work with and prepare the mixed group that will receive the women later and the *sensei* of the single-sex group, for coherence a woman, needs to be someone very aware of her position. It is important, for example, that the *sensei* herself is not reproducing the hegemonic masculinity usually conveyed in *dojos*. In relation to this and returning to the interview quotes, the athletes make some comments that reflect on the reproduction or re-elaboration of the received tradition:

He (her *sensei*) has a way of teaching that I really like. So when I come to teaching karate, he has taught me how to teach some things. I was already teaching, but there are many things that I had learned with him about how to teach, that have served me well. (Hera, Interview 21 (2), 27/08/2020)

I believe that when I come to teaching, I will teach like my father, because since I was a child with him, and he teaches very well, for my taste he teaches very well! He has always been involved a lot with young children, he has made a lot of games for children to learn, so I think that... since I have learned karate, I would like people to learn it, you know, having fun, having fun. (Juno, Interview 25 (2), 07/09/2020)

I have no materials to analyse the way athletes are as teachers, nor their *sensei*. However, their testimonials lead me to think that they decided to reproduce what they received by means of direct transmission, something that from their point of view is positive. Due to belonging to the group and embodiment of *habitus* and different elements of the environment, as many as I have been presenting in this and the previous chapter, it is a fact that many women end up wanting to fight and teach as men do. Often this is not conscious, as I have said and as it happened to me. However, the way of being and behaving performed by the *sensei* is incorporated as the ideal model, as what is really good, and we all want to be good. Fasting and Pfister (2000, p.106) highlight that “Women who enter this world must learn to play the game, which they often do.” So there ends up having a search for *be the same as men*, as the coach says:

I personally consider that they (women as *sensei*) can be the same as men, or they are the same as men. But it is true that we live in a society that is sexist, unfortunately. So when you want your son to learn karate, if there is a male coach and a female coach, people usually decide on the man. It is a prejudice of the society that we have. If you

have a daughter, you prefer that she go with that female coach. Why? Because you consider that she will understand her better, do you understand what I want to tell you? But it is my personal opinion. (...) If you are looking to compete or looking for self-defence, parents usually go to look for that (a man), that's the way it is. I personally do not share it, but it is the society we are in. (Hefaistos, man, Interview 37 (2), 30/09/2020)

The coach's comment brings the vision of society, as he says, society in which we are all inserted. In other words, our small contributions also make it up, either in the sense of strengthening this male hegemony (Gramsci, 1992), or in the sense of presenting alternatives to it. Fasting and Pfister (2000, p.106) note that "a cultural change is necessary if there is to be a marked change not only in the number of female coaches, but also in the philosophy of coaching." However, this pursuit of the ideal model seems to lead women to approach something known as masculinization, or there lies a social stereotyping and perhaps an opportunity for subversion, as I said at the end of the previous category. How and to what extent this occurs is something that I will address in the next chapter.

## 5.6. Chapter closure

This chapter sought to expose some factors that affect the construction of female *karateka* subjectivities in the Spanish Olympic team. In order to respond to the objective, before addressing the four categories that make up the chapter, I tried to contextualize the theme of acceptance and belonging in a martial group. The acceptance and belonging process includes imitation, visceral identification with the team, flag, nation, which gives the practitioner a place in the clan and converts them into insiders who undeniably embody the local *habitus*.

Next, I tried to give women a voice by discussing field data in dialogue with the literature in the presentation of the analysis categories. The first one explored the athletes' view of what it means to be/perform as *karateka*. They consider themselves members of the athletes' category, but they also attribute an extra value to the fact that they are *karateka*, finding there a difference that makes them authentic. The search for authenticity, however, can involve some risks, especially in *kumite*. When experiences unfold negatively according to the established criteria, they lead to an intense feeling of shame that is related to the internalization of different forms of judgment. The internalization process of external

evaluations facilitates and perhaps predisposes the intense experience of shame and the experience of shame strengthens internalized elements, such as guilt, remorse, a feeling of humiliation. These elements also constitute the female *karateka habitus*. In summary, it seems to be that *karateka* means to be authentic. However, the price to be authentic is high.

The second category sought to identify, from the athletes' own view, their main characteristics, respecting the dynamics of the theme, as women fighters. They repeatedly positioned themselves in opposition to men and indicated their characteristics as typically feminine, seeing themselves as more rational, intelligent and even strategic than men. Men would be more impulsive and "physical", using their "heads" less, from the point of view of women. However, coaches consider that the strategic aspect is precisely what is missing for women fighters and is present in men, as well as physical potency. The coaches point to the archetypal fighter model, achieved by a few, but also pursued by women who often begin to repeat the coaches' speeches of the characteristics they should have. Another indication, subtle though, of the adaptation of women to the environment is in the form of treatment aimed at them, always like the "girls". Childlike, they could be more easily led, supervised, dominated. Amid various definitions, the fighters see themselves as warriors. Perhaps just because they are women in this environment full of challenges and stereotypes, they are already warriors.

In the third category, I presented the athletes' considerations about taking others as models, developing their own style and seeing themselves as inspiration for others. All situations around dynamic positions that can be assumed by *karateka*. The presence of women in general in *dojos*, and of these elite athletes who already have a position of some prominence, may contain a subversive potential, of movement towards change. Some athletes notice how they are looked at and this is primarily because they are winners. However, if they chose to consciously assume positions of prominence, power or responsibility, they could actively act in the subversion of the current order. The fact that new types of femininity are generated can be, in addition to being understood as a response or a way of dealing with hegemonic masculinity, yet another way that contributes to unmasking it. Synthetically, social beings look to their peers and learn from them, having figures of inspiration to a greater or lesser degree, and becoming figures of inspiration/people who are looked at, consciously or unconsciously.

In the last category of the chapter I addressed the theme of the transmission of tradition and the way women deal with it, how they absorb and embody it and how they pass

on and continue the stream of tradition. Due to the various drawbacks, some of the athletes prefer not to assume prominent positions in the martial world, since they have to deal with a series of pressures that are not the same as those presented to men. Other athletes, however, report that they just miss more women to lead them and a more welcoming aspect, typically associated with women. The discourse presents itself as old-fashioned, but differences between men and women that value equity and do not force the “equality” in which women must imitate men, have their relevance. Although many of the women are dedicated to seeking the stipulated model. Other athletes still, are satisfied with the teachings they have received and intend to transmit them while preserving the original style. In short, it is a fact that tradition goes through all *karateka* generating different impacts and consequently different attitudes towards the future. They undeniably have potential for future action, reproducing or altering the *habitus* to which they were subjected.

The factors that affect the construction of female *karateka* embodied subjectivities punctuated here tell a little more about who these women are. And in the form of embodiment of the *habitus*, they lead to the vision/conception of authentic *karateka*, warrior women, athletes who inspire (themselves in) others and who are links in a chain of tradition and can transmit it from the same or from a different form than the one received. These factors, which are possibly not all that influence the construction of women's subjectivities, but are the ones that were selected by me as essential, lead to the subjects of the next chapters. So, considering these elements, I will move on to the next chapter on the masculinization of *karateka* women. On the one hand, as I have shown here, many women will pursue the male model, and this will have its effects. On the other hand, they are prepared for a series of negotiations that are, first of all, tough. But they can also contain a subversive character as I will try to demonstrate.

## 6. THE STILL PRESENT DIFFICULTY OF PERFORMING AS A WOMAN IN A MALE ENVIRONMENT

In this chapter, possibly the main one of the thesis, I seek to present the means, resources or strategies adopted by women to gain space or to maintain themselves in this environment typically understood as masculine. It is a male environment due to the general predominance of men; karate is a modality created by and for men, as already discussed; and it conveys the general masculine *habitus*, impregnated by the social and historical characteristics attributed to men. Thus, it is a fact that, even today, despite the various struggles that took place especially through the feminist movement, women face several difficulties to simply perform (Butler, 1990) as themselves in this environment. It is undeniable that the feminist movement has obtained very important achievements in numerous areas, and perhaps the advances in certain environments are not taking place so profoundly due to the reworking they go through. In other words, the patriarchy and sexist structures of society also find ways to update and perpetuate themselves, which is, according to Gramsci (1992) and pointed out by Williams (1977), how hegemony works. It is a constant process of asserting then re-asserting dominance.

Thus, women who enter the martial environment, usually linked to traditional aspects previously described, need to deal with/embody these elements to achieve belonging and permanence in the sport. They do this, and they do it basically in two ways (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). First, through an alleged masculinization and then the consequent search to compensate for this, exaggerating aspects that may be capable of attesting to femininity and, often, sexual orientation. The stereotyped aspects that are attributed to female athletes related to exacerbated femininity, sensuality and eroticization are characteristic of sports culture as a whole and will be the subject of the next chapter. In this chapter, I will deal with the stereotypes present in martial culture or sports that are generally seen as masculine. For being inserted in these contexts, accusations fall on women regarding their sexuality and they are seen socially as "masculine". Within the modality they are also faced with stereotypes that they need to fight against. The fact that they express emotions, crying for example, is something little tolerated, because they should be similar to the ideal male model.

As I tried to show in the previous chapter, women find themselves somewhat authentic in differentiating themselves from other non-*karateka* women. They can feel unique and a bit irreverent due to the fact they are doing something not common among the most of women, approaching the supposed men's world. However, in order to achieve this feat in the

context outside karate, in the *karateka* context they often strive to achieve a model given to them by other people, who normally indicate the best fighting men as archetypes for all. In other words, in the inner world of karate they could, if following this model, move away from the authenticity of simply maintaining themselves. Performing as a woman in this world is not so simple. As pointed out by Atena in a comment in the previous chapter, the most diverse behaviours of a woman are always the target of criticism. Thus, simply performing as a woman and moving around the environment requires some preparation. Performing as a *karateka* woman, who in general cries, is not as bold as men in fights, nor does she generate combats voluminous in points or perform *ashibarai* with mastery<sup>86</sup>, gives her a depreciated place in the martial environment. When, on the other hand, a woman approaches the characteristics opposite to those just mentioned, which are seen as typical of men, then her appreciation grows. This, of course, leads many women to pursue performance that can give them more applause than criticism. And, perhaps, the fame of being recognised as a "masculinized women".

As I presented in the literature review or chapter 2, research in the social sciences around the presence of women in sport has grown considerably, and also in martial arts and combat sports gender studies have emerged. However, the theme of women's masculinization is not usually addressed, which is not strange, given its complexity. In other words, it is a sensitive terrain, difficult to move on and capable of causing some indisposition among people. Obviously the difficulties also present themselves to me, who honestly avoided touching the subject for a long time, studying masculinities in the past. I do not intend in any way to cause indisposition, however, I understand that it is necessary to address the topic, contributing to the advancement of the knowledge already produced by previous research projects. I venture to say that this is a problem that affects most women who engage in typically male sports. And I think that this problem needs to be brought to the light of consciousness as an important step so that it can be better understood. Perhaps, thus, it can help to confer a greater degree of freedom, equity and empowerment to women so that they can perform authentically, as they see fit, in any environment.

Women's struggle for the conquest and maintenance of space, which takes place in different ways, is repeated in the *karateka* environment, clothed with greater or lesser degrees of awareness of the social problem that is ultimately central to all this. I asked elite

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<sup>86</sup> These are some of the characteristics pointed out by the interviewed coaches and athletes as differentiating the way *karateka* men and women fight that will be shown throughout this chapter.

athletes if they agree that karate is configured as a male environment.<sup>87</sup> The answers I got from them were:

Here in T... (city) I was the only girl at my age. Another girl signed up, I was with her for many years, but when we started to get older, what usually happens... it was studying or training, she didn't combine everything and she quit. And I started going to the CAR, I only went with boys from T..., we were four from T... going to occupy a car and for the parents to rotate because we were little, we couldn't drive. It was with boys and there in the CAR, I remember some more girls, there were more girls than there were in my gym. But then when I entered the CAR, we have always been less girls. (Diana, Interview 4 (1), 21/07/2020)

I have trained quite a bit alone, only with my coach. (...) The *sensei* did the training sessions just for me and (...) when I had an assistant to do, to demand more of me, they were all boys (...). When I have been out of my club in the national team, both in the autonomous region of C... and in Spain, I have trained with both girls and boys. But all that difference can be noticed a little more in the clubs, that there are more boys. (Minerva, Interview 1 (1), 29/06/2020)

My female mates from before left karate for studies, because they went to live abroad to study and that. So now I always train with boys, mostly because of the height issue. (...) At least I don't care about training with boys, training with girls. It is true that some girls are a little more scared, in respect training with some boys, in case they are brutes or something, but I don't really care. (Hestia, Interview 6 (1), 22/07/2020)

In my lifelong gym, the little group my age was all boys. How was it carried? Well, very good because **I was the one who won the most of all**. So they didn't provoke me in that sense, at no time have they told me the thing that "the girls have less level, it's easier for you to win", no. There has just always been that little joke "**you are the one wearing the pants**." (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

Karate is a male and masculine environment. I was slow to know the difference between the words "male" and "masculine", since for Latin languages both are translated equally, there is no precise differentiation in the vocabulary as in English. But it is an important difference. Only when I understood it did I realize the key element in the translation of

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<sup>87</sup> The exact question, not a leading question, can be consulted at Appendix A, Interview 2: "What do you think about what is said that karate is a masculine space?"

Bourdieu's work into "Masculine Domination" and not "male domination", as I used to name the work for my supervisor David when in internship in the UK. He, very diplomatic and aware that I was learning the language practically from scratch, was completely tolerant of my mistakes. But I see now that the translation is not random and it helped me to understand something very important. Bourdieu speaks of the domination of the socially given masculine model, which can also be embodied by women and reproduced, of the characteristics socially understood as masculine, rather than the biological male. Not all men behave in ways, consistently, that are characteristic of masculine domination, but all do consistently benefit from it, even though the *amount* each can receive in the patriarchal dividend will not be exactly the same (Connell, 1995). Thus, to be a boy or man in a patriarchal society is to be privileged in relation to girls and women. As Paechter (2006, p.5) emphasizes, "Hegemonic masculinity thus confers considerable power, vis-à-vis women, not just on the hegemonically masculine but on all men". So, the high number of men present in an environment evidently has an influence on what the environment is.

Thus, karate is a male environment, with a predominance of men in all sectors, as will be seen in other comments from the athletes. And it is a masculine environment, with a masculine *habitus* cultivated and disseminated among its practitioners, composed of a set of customs, habits and behaviours that are based on the characteristics typically attributed to men. "Customs" is the translation found for the Latin word, "*mores*", or moral<sup>88</sup>. I highlight this etymology because, for me, *habitus* also contains a moral component associated with different types of capital. The customs of a subculture impact the construction of *habitus* as well as the customs of society (Spanish, in this case) where the subculture is situated (Holland, 2018; Thiry-Cherques, 2006). Spanish society in general has well-defined religious traditions, which perhaps play an important role in customs associated with guilt, for example (in this connection, not specifically for Spanish society though, see Shilling, 2002; 2017; and Macdonald & Kirk, 1999). On the other hand, but in a complementary way, in association with forms of capital and internalized dispositions (Brown & Jennings, 2013; Shilling, 2004), *habitus* helps to designate each one's place (Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003). The symbolic capital obtained by Diana's conquests is an example of this.

If Diana wins, the men do not mess with her, but they respect her because she is playing what would be, for them, the man's role. She is the alpha of the pack. In other words, culturally it is a consensus that the role of leader belongs to man. If a woman occupies this

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<sup>88</sup> [https://www.fcav.unesp.br/Home/departamentos/patologia/ANTONIOCARLOSALESSI/etica\\_e\\_moral](https://www.fcav.unesp.br/Home/departamentos/patologia/ANTONIOCARLOSALESSI/etica_e_moral), accessed on 16/05/2021.

position, she is automatically the one who “wears the pants”, because the “dresses” are typical of the submissive. The language of the clothes is figurative, although it does not fail to refer again to netball, where women, super “feminine”, dress “like women”, emphasizing beauty and sensuality (Marfell, 2017). The woman who “wears pants”, the one who “fights like a man”, the one who “has the last word” (...), is a woman who would be occupying supposedly masculine positions, losing femininity and becoming, therefore, “masculine”. As I have said, women will pursue a prominent place, so they often assume and incorporate elements of the environment. However, their behaviour, like that of men in leadership positions, definitely does not need to be authoritarian, imposing and subjugating of others<sup>89</sup>. The problem, it seems, is that many people are trained to only respond “positively” to harsh and forceful attitudes, as I will try to show by exposing something of martial culture.

I will continue the chapter by moving on to present and discuss the findings organised by four categories. It was important to highlight the male/masculine scenario in karate as an introduction to why it is still difficult for women to establish themselves in the *karateka* environment, performing authentically, it means, without the need of imitating men to be accepted. Subsequently, the first category of the chapter deals with female “fame” in the martial context, of weeping women. The way women express themselves is often seen as disconcerting and irrational. For many men, women are far from achieving the ideal of a fighter, what is around a high-performance male model, not attainable even by most non-alpha men. Thus, the second category will deal precisely with the ideal of fighting like a man or accepting inferiority. Many times women seek to model themselves on men in order to conquer their space in the challenging environment. However, the way they express themselves has significant differences in relation to the way men do it. To deepen this statement, I bring a subcategory with analysis of videos of athletes' fights, verifying what their bodies communicate, in addition to some beliefs. This will lead to the verification of what it means to fight as a woman. In the following category is the subject of masculinization, where I will also seek to address some possibilities of subversion. Since male hegemony remains

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<sup>89</sup> A comment in this regard: “Within the technification group, when we go to a championship there are more technicians and I am a girl, I have to call their attention, I have to tell them what they are going to do, and they are reluctant and I notice it, and it is ‘this girl, what is this girl going to tell me?’ So what I'm trying to do is try to do it in a way... like being neutral, trying to say things in a way that doesn't hurt the other. So if I have to scold him, even though I would yell at him, what I try is –also not only for that, we have to try to live together– I try to say, ‘look, this can't happen again because... I know that anyone makes a mistake...’ You try to handle a little better, because if the situation that I am the authority can produce rejection, if I were much more hierarchical, which is how men tend to be, that is, a man who is in power, if you fail, I think he would throw you off, but I try to do it much more like a conversation, I call you aside, we talk... Because I think that in the end it is also appropriate, you cannot go out there yelling at people.” (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

socially and the tradition of martial arts is not widely known, besides that it is previously considered positive, the latter category exposes some athletes' narratives about some uncomfortable situations that they identify related to power and machismo.

### 6.1. Martial culture: women cry

Before we can consider contemporary martial culture in which “women cry”, it is important to locate this culture within its historical context. Martial culture finds its roots in a remote past, especially in the East. It is a fact that it is also possible to think of martiality present in the ways of life of ancient Western peoples, such as Sioux, Maori, Vikings, Picts and others. As these were warrior cultures, they can also, I believe, be called martialized cultures. However, the martial arts known today originate in the vast majority in the East, so I focus here on addressing the roots of martiality in that area of the globe.

There seems to be a relationship between martial arts and monastic life. Many warrior practices (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indian, Tibetan) are configured as means of seeking self-knowledge, introspection/concentration and even spirituality (Cardoso, Turelli & Galvão, 2006; Cavalcante & Potiguar, 2019; Draxler, Ostermann & Honekamp, 2010; Wang et al. al, 2013). Long before the emergence of karate, it is said that there was an important monk known as Bodhidharma in India, Tamo in China and Daruma in Japan, who was also a great martial artist.<sup>90</sup> He would have been responsible for disseminating the martial knowledge acquired in the Shaolin temple (Aguar, 2009). Probably mythical elements and other native narratives are mixed with historical facts. From this character and the Shaolin temple, many fantastic stories come to life in the imagination of martial artists from around the world. But my specific objective here is to reflect on the presence of martial arts in the monasteries and their implications that still reach us today.

The martial culture inherits and insists on preserving the tradition and customs that are taken as typical of ancient Eastern monasteries. Exactly how things were going on there, I cannot vouch for it. However, some *sensei*, especially from the purist schools, place themselves with the authority of continuing a stream or direct line of masters who, going back in time, would reach the origins of the martial arts. Hence the importance for those who are attached to and want to maintain hegemony of tradition of clans, families (surnames), schools,

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<sup>90</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhidharma>, accessed on 02/05/2021.

flags (logos). This is still perpetuated, in some places more than in others, referring to a “pure” or “clean” genealogy, preventing possible authentic or somewhat freer expressions. Many reasons that could explain actions today are *lost* in time, but actions do not cease to be reproduced. So, in practice, it is easy to come across *dojos* that apply very strict training and behavioural disciplines, based on the pedagogy of pain and suffering. This, however, can be linked to the life of the monasteries. As far as one can know from outside, monastic life was/is radically simple, in addition to being harsh, and demanding and restricted in areas where human beings usually find pleasure, such as food, sleep/rest, sexual/affective life. In addition, the geography and climate found in the places where the monasteries were in East also acted as natural adversities for the monks. The monks, by the way, it seems that they were all men.

They used martial arts as part of the method of character forging, since the modality was imprinted on the body through strenuous practices and deprivations. The “domesticated” flesh was made docile to the mind or spirit. In the conception of this culture, adversity shapes those who submit to it, a statement that is sustained, with some variations, in different lines understood more as philosophical than religious (for example, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism/Brahmanism, Zoroastrianism). Practitioners would look for ways to forge a self superior to emotions and instincts, which seem to move away from control and dominance, the ultimate goal to be achieved in martial arts (Echenique, 2002). Being at the mercy of emotions means being away from the rationalized world, where each action is theoretically thought out, and not impulsive (Turelli & Vaz, forthcoming-b). Being “master of yourself”, the aim of oriental martial philosophy, is achieved when the martial artist is in the “centre”, from where he/she observes everything, especially his/her own emotions, and dominates them in an inner struggle, without having to fight physically and externally. Therein lies the concept of “winning without fighting”, which is also very much appreciated in oriental martial philosophy (Lautert et al, 2005).

The search for control of oneself, body and emotions, values objectivity; objectivity to analyse situations, without getting carried away by them or their circumstances. Objectivity and coolness are also needed to eliminate an enemy. This helps to explain a certain indifference and detachment cultivated in the martial environment towards the body, of oneself and the other's. In the context of a monastery, linked to philosophies (or religions), it makes sense to conceive levels of transcendence or spirituality, which also somehow reduces the importance of matter (body). Thus, although it may be a little contradictory, since many practices advertise themselves as holistic (Cushing, 2013; Kumpf, 2018; Tapley, 2007), the body is objectified, faceted by the technique to perform as a machine. The technique would work as

a domesticator of the irrational in human beings. This is relevant as it helps to silence emotions, especially negative ones (as anger, fear, rancour, violence, hate), but not exclusively them. Since the internal place of self-domination somehow frees the martial artist from shackles that rob him/her of focus, even though they can also be configured, in a sense, as reifying experiences (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1985).

Well or poorly interpreted, this perspective reaches the West, and it may or may not make sense to the reader; in any case, I return to the theme of women in this context. And the first to say is that they were not allowed in monasteries, that is, they were not given the right to dominate themselves, perhaps simply because they are supposed to exist to be dominated, directed and protected by others/men. In this logic, they are weak and vulnerable, if they could protect themselves then men are diminished. With this, the woman who enters the martial world today, who still preserves these roots even if unconsciously, this woman needs and seeks to adapt.

In the end, it is a swampy terrain where you may be treading well, but you may be treading and the (symbolic) blow enters you. (...) I have learned that things do not affect me personally. Injustices hurt me, injustices make me very angry and I'm super complainer. Hermes must have told you that I always complain. But **I have learned to be quiet a little, I have learned to stop myself.** (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

The woman is, in general, interpreted as irrational and even somewhat uncontrolled in the martial environment. This is a context of showing a frown to hide fear and mask pain, and not a place to honestly expose weaknesses. In modalities such as ballet and rhythmic gymnastics, which can be seen as socially authorized places for women to produce themselves femininely and to honour the female tradition (Vertinsky, 2016), something interesting happens. Athletes must continuously display a smile and a smooth, friendly and light facial expression, even though behind that kind of face mask they are trying hard, feeling pain and suffering (Boaventura & Vaz, 2020; Gonçalves & Vaz, 2016; for a subversive line of patterns in ballet, see Hill, Sandford & Enright, 2015). In martial arts something similar occurs, although the mask to be used is the opposite. It is necessary to display an expression of bravery, anger, which causes fear in the opponent. The origins of this seem again to go back to ancient Eastern periods, where samurai wore armour that literally contained purposefully ugly and frightening masks (Echenique, 2002). In addition, the way of shouting in combat should serve to put one's fear out and, at the same time, frighten opponents, as I mentioned when talking about *kiai*. The fact is that it is given the type of mask that should be displayed, not revealing the effort,

pain, fear, fragility, insecurity that are behind it. With that, if the fighter expresses her emotions and, for example, cries, that person is not fit for karate. She does not dominate herself. The comment from one of the coaches helps to verify this:

The difference is brutal. Abysmal, if it seems more beautiful to you, it is an abyss between training boys and training girls. (...) The first thing that surprised me, training the women's team is that you say something to someone, I don't speak... I can speak it harshly, because maybe I think I'm being very affectionate and suddenly I'm being very rough. But I have never happened to say to a boy "but let's see, how do you come in like that when you are seeing that the other..." and suddenly they turn around and are crying. So! Do you see my hands? (Like someone who doesn't understand what's going on.) That kills me, kills me. Well then, well, it happened to me, I'm not going to tell you with all of the women. Maybe yes. Maybe yes. And you say "damn, but let's see what this is about. What is this?" (Hermes, man, Interview 28 (1), 15/09/2020)

It is true that having to deal with people's emotional situations can be disconcerting. However, in the field this is seen in a condemnable way, because that is a place of hardness, it is the environment where being tough is praiseworthy (Rodrigues, Turelli & Kirk, forthcoming). In addition, the control of emotions is a distinguishing factor. If someone loses control by getting angry, externalizing anger, aggression and even violence, it is less embarrassing than someone who cries, unable to hold back tears, as if this reveals excessive fragility and shames the *dojo* (Turelli, 2008). However, non-rationalized responses in general, especially expressed by women, occupy a devalued place. This inevitably leads to questioning the attribute of intelligence assigned to women rather as a compensating factor for their lack of strength in relation to men. The comments in the previous chapter highlighted the relatively more "instinctive" way, as named in the field, of fighting that *karateka* men tend to have. Another comment in this regard:

The man and the woman are different. Physically, men are stronger, but women tend to be smarter. We have said that one of the important qualities for karate is being smart. Because you have the physical as the limitation of the woman. That's why women fight with women and men fight with men, there is no more. You cannot follow the same pattern for everyone, you cannot have the same girls as boys. It is so, by force and because genetically and physically we are different, that's it. Each one takes advantage of their resources and their qualities. The man takes advantage of the

brute force theme and the woman uses her head more. (Hefaistos, man, Interview 36 (1), 30/09/2020)

In this specific context, in order to corroborate the view attributed to women (and men) in the field exposed previously, women are conceptualized as more rational, tending to act less and even think too much. However, in the scenario of self-control, the woman is seen as irrational, allowing herself to be too carried away by emotions. Another contradiction. Regardless, the coach talks about the inconvenience of having someone crying in training, and how, in his conception, the situation is dealt with:

There is nothing worse than giving a workout and having an athlete of yours crying. (...) Each one reacts in a different way. So well, here in Spain what we say is that "you have to bullfight." (Hefaistos, man, Interview 36 (1), 30/09/2020)

The fact is that women lose credit for expressing their emotions, even though this is culturally allowed to them, and denied to men due to the dictates of hegemonic masculinity (MacArthur & Shields, 2015). So, in a very intriguing way, if women are highly self-controlled, as it was exposed in Diana's comment earlier, if she is respected for being the victor, "wearing the pants" and commanding her group "in the place" of a man, the self-controlled woman is again associated with the male figure. In other words, the positive achievements of women occur the more they approach the masculine; to put it another way, what is valid is held by men; or, the "good" is masculine. Thus, it seems to be that it is a terrain of false conquests for the woman, because if she expresses herself freely, she is seen as uncontrolled; and if she has a high self-control, besides being called cold, she is ultimately masculinized. Atena contributes in this regard:

I have even heard it in the coaching courses "it is that with the girls the tactic cannot be worked". Fabiana: And why? Atena: Because they say that we are unbearable, that you say to a girl "look, what you are going to do is, imagine, well now I want you to dodge and do..." and that we start to cry, that we have a very bad character, that I don't know what, these comments I have heard in the coaching courses. I tell them "well, I'm not like that", and they tell me "it's because you're a boy." That is the turn. The first time "you can't because women are unbearable", and the second time is "of course you do, but because you're a boy." (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

Atena's association with the male figure is due to her capacity for self-control, restraint, and perhaps it can be added, as pointed out by herself in another moment of the interview, to the few sensual appeals she uses. She identifies herself as heterosexual and

extremely focused on her work and athletic career. Possibly all of these things contribute to the way she is seen in the field. This also gives her some respect, even if partial, I consider. Because she is respected for approaching, in this aspect of self-control, the male figure, and perhaps she is not disrespected/harassed due to the way she exposes her femininity. The fact that she does not exaggerate femininity in the hegemonic sense can disassociate her figure from heterosexuality (Lindner, 2013). And this avoids problems, such as being affectionately harassed by men, but it is still unfair from my point of view, since all the responsibilities fall on the woman. This subject, however, will be covered in the next chapter. Returning to the theme of women who are uncontrolled and difficult to work with, the coach reports another of his experiences:

I have had teams from those many years, we have won many Spanish championships, but always with boys, never... it occurred to me once to make a team with girls, but I don't know what went wrong. Something that you say "hey, we do with this one, no, with this one..." With boys very well and with girls, I never got it. (Hermes, man, Interview 28 (1), 15/09/2020)

Gonçalves (2014, p.149-150) presents an interesting argument to help understand this way of thinking about women:

It is necessary to note the place of other that women occupy in this discourse. Like children and young people, they are distinguished from adults, that is, from men. They are part of that group that has not yet reached the age of majority, which is not fully autonomous, fully rational. Women, young people and children would be at a lower stage in the process of clarification, still being very much driven by passions, impulses and desires, which are not at all dominated. But children and young people still have hope, insofar as their condition as a minor is just a moment, a passage. One day, they will become adults. Women, on the other hand, cannot stop being women and, in this way, remain in the eternal condition of minority, which would reveal an inability to take care of themselves.<sup>91</sup>

The supposed female irrationality bothers men and, more than that, as pointed out in Gonçalves' quote, it reveals how women are often seen as "others" and not equals. Hence the difficulty for men to admit women on an equal footing. Perhaps what they "allow" women to do is something like the concession of some whims, from the point of view of men, but they do

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<sup>91</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

not really conceive of equality. I heard something like that from my father, when I graduated in university, outside my hometown. He said that at that moment when I had already caught my whim, that was the word, it was time to go home and work for real. I never came back. So, I think that women often have some space given by law, and not necessarily by recognized right. They are not taken seriously nor treated with equality in relation to men, since they are seen, by many, as children, with which men, adults as Gonçalves says, play.<sup>92</sup> From the point of view of some men, the woman did not reach her majority, remaining immature, uncontrolled, thirsty for guidance and at the mercy of some hypothetically conscious man to protect them (sometimes even of the women themselves). Women need guidance because, unlike men, they lack the attitude to suppress emotions, which was socially instilled as allowed (Lindner, 2013). In other words, from a young age, girls are educated to be emotionally freer than boys, a freedom that makes them prisoners later on from the same boys who were pruned in childhood, perhaps already in training to exercise domination. Juno explains how difficult it is to her to suppress emotions and how not doing it creates bad impressions:

I am very expressive at all times (...), if I feel like crying, I can't, I can't be without crying because if I repress it, I am going to exploit in another way. Then I prefer to express what I feel at all times and there are times when many people get angry, because I express my feelings, let's say, but I can't help it. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

Even though I know most of the human beings express their emotions in different ways, and that emotions are culturally coded, my point here is that the most common female expression is not well tolerated in the field. It is disapproved. If they rebel with anger, which is clearly also possible, they are labelled irrational. If they cry, it because male coaches or peers do not know how to deal with it; it because they are insensitive to the way women express themselves; or because women should just not be there; they are again labelled irrational, uncontrolled women. The tolerance to men's emotional expressions and behaviours in the field tends to be much bigger and to find justifications easily.

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<sup>92</sup> In this regard, a simple comment illustrates the current conception: "Working with women has to be very patient, more than with men, you have to speak to men in a different way at a certain moment. Almost scolding. You do. With women, instead of scolding, you have to be... well, a technique called 'sandwich'. Fabiana: I don't know. Hefaistos: I'll tell you. You introduce the subject of what you want to say, the central part is like where you reproach her for what she was not doing well, but ends up again highlighting her virtues. In other words, if you only tell that person what they are doing wrong, they will find themselves under attack. It is only a part. Once you have told her how well she is doing, I don't know what, you explain what she is not doing well, but you end up commenting that maybe that will be good for her; what you are playing is with her head, finally. Perhaps the most important thing about an elite athlete is her head. So what you do is deceive her, you deceive her so that she does not feel attacked, do you understand what I mean?" (Hefaistos, man, Interview 36 (1), 30/09/2020)

Again, recalling my personal experience, I often cried after training, duly hidden, of course, especially because of the psychological pressure I felt during training. Only once did I cry during training when I was 15 years old. I trained with a hand injury that required medical/surgical intervention, so I used a splint to ensure recovery, which prevented the hand from closing. Practice was tough, I was the most graduated/highest belt and *sensei* put a lot of pressure on me that day. Normally I could stand it, but maybe because of the awkward situation with the hand and the splint, punching all the time with one open hand and the other closed, I cried in public. He told me to sit down. After a while he came to talk to me and even though he was not extremely harsh in his words, he sent me away before finished training session, so that I could recompose. Although that could have an immediate relief effect, when I left the space, I evidently knew that it was symbolically terrible, requiring effort to recover the social place among everyone and my own sense of honour.

By this I mean that I am able to understand how the environment is often hostile to women, how the difficulties for them to remain in it are diverse. They are led to behave in non-authentic ways, even though it is possible to ask “what is authentic?”, if we are moulded since we were born, to deserve a place. Due to the roots of martial culture, from my point of view, women are belittled for crying and supposedly not controlling emotions in the specific way idealized in the field. And they are also devalued for not performing like men, and more than that, they are devalued for simply performing as women, as evidenced by the next comment:

Within the arsenal available to a competitor are fist attacks, leg attacks, but there are also imbalances, sweeps. Now yes, that part no girl right now... there may be some, but I don't know her. Throughout history there have been some, but for a long time there were no girls, none. You didn't see imbalances, you didn't see these... Fabiana: but why, Hermes? Why do you think that, that there are some techniques... Hermes: Because for the same reason that you cry. Because you are girls. Because you are girls. (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

In this view, women cry and are unable to perform some techniques because they are women. This comment serves as a bridge to the next category, where I will seek to examine the feminine way of fighting, which undoubtedly differs from the masculine. But it also relies on the extra imposition of barriers on women, especially social and cultural ones, which often become truths for women themselves. In other words, they are led to believe that they are not capable, even when they are only body techniques that can be learned (Mauss, 1973), and that

certain activities are not suitable for them because they are women (Young, 1980). The way they should behave is dictated at all times, especially by men within the patriarchal order, in clear or symbolic messages. Often in the midst of a series of doubts, they end up internalizing the oppressor (Foucault, 2009; Freire, 2005), and accepting the place they are assigned, or striving to achieve the model established from the outside.

## 6.2. The ideal of fighting like a man or accepting inferiority

The theme of the way of fighting of a man or a woman is, perhaps, as an introduction to the topic of masculinization, already complex. The first thing to note is that there are always comparisons between men and women, even if they do not fight each other in competitions. Then, women will always have their performance judged to be inferior in this comparison. Secondly, it is possible to observe a hesitation in expressing opinions, given that in general people today seek to respect the politically correct, even if they in truth do not agree with that. However, as the athletes themselves pointed out, the *karateka* environment is a man's environment. Due to their reasons, some of which were addressed previously when exposing athletes' motivations to start and stay in karate, women want to be in the environment and have positions there. Thus, they inevitably submit to the stipulated models as a form of negotiation to achieve acceptance and the desired place. In this context, I will report the comments that the athletes and coaches made to me, in which it is possible to perceive how some seek to say things carefully, the constant comparisons and the place that is understood as the woman's own. The first testimony is related to *kata* athletes:

They (men) have a more demanding rhythm, because in the end it is that the man's body really, although many times the girls say that there is no such issue, the man's body is stronger as a general rule. So they can hit harder and come out faster, but not for anything, but because they have it innate. They are able to endure the *kata* with that demand and that's it. We, maybe other things come out better for us, but not because we are male or female, but because each one has physical conditions and they are neither better nor worse. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

The athlete seeks to put her words carefully, covering different angles, although she emphasizes the superiority of some physical characteristics understood as masculine and possessed by *karateka* men. However, I would venture to say that in karate it is in the modality of *kata* where the greatest similarity of performance between men and women can occur. In

an overview of the sport, women who do *kata* are considered more feminine, as I explained earlier. *Kata* is a form of presentation, closed skill, seen as a choreography, full of martiality, but where there is no direct contact with an opponent. This is a place where women “fit in”. Whereas the women who dedicate themselves to *kumite* are usually the ones who are seen as masculinized. However, the similarity between the execution of *katas* by women and men is greater than the way of fighting by men and women. In a logical supposition, if the way of performing is more similar between *kateros*, men and women, and more different between *kumiteros*, women and men, the more "masculinized" women would be those who dedicate themselves to *kata*, being more similar to men. But the opposite happens.

Some points to reflect, therefore: do *kata* women get closer to the male ideal and then have less problems in the judgment they receive? Are they in a category previously considered to be more feminine (which can cause problems for men who engage in *kata*, with feminizing comments) and then are "in their place"? Do *kumite* women have more problems around masculinization because they do what they do not have to do, in a place that does not belong to them? Perhaps this is annoying, the fact that they are where they theoretically should not be, and that they do not do exactly the masculine way, disfiguring the sport. They do not compete against men, so why fight like them? Possibly the fact that they enter the masculine space has more inconveniences for men than can be supposed initially, because the female fighters destabilize their male preserve as well as the feeling of power that they have. Also a type of power related to control towards protection. If men's role historically was to protect women, and now they can protect themselves because they can fight, this unsettles the hegemonic order of patriarchy. Some comments that may relate to this:

It will be for education, it will be for whatever, boys have fought all their lives and girls not so much. (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

Although you want to fight against it, we (men) at the minimum that the danger is put to us, the secretion of testosterone, growth hormone, adrenaline and others, is much higher, because we had to be aware of taking care of ourselves and the survival of the whole group, the herd, or whatever you want to call it. So that competitive point and the release of hormones causes it to activate earlier. The girls, all the perseverance, all the work, the sacrifice they make can come a little from the maternal burden of having to take care of children, of having to take what is family forward. (...) And then at the level of education or society, the girl has not had the opportunity to compete or to be in the same positions that men have been. I believe that little by little it is being seen

and now there are girls, and those who are in high performance have practically no difference in terms of motivation, competitive level and others that some boy may have. What happens is that the boy will always have more testosterone, he will have more muscle mass and he will look superior. That in the end is genetics. (...) And a boy is always going to be superior to a girl. I don't think there is any possibility of... Yes, it is true that high performance girls are going to be able to win boys who are not at such a high point of performance. I believe that you have to give time to everything and you are already seeing improvements in training and competition with all these projects that are coming out to favour women' training and preparation. (Apolo, man, Interview 27 (1), 25/09/2020)

We have four generations of men, well, we have of women... I do not know, 40 of men, well 20 of women. It is normal that differences are still noticed. In a while, well you will not say. (...) Women still have a deficiency in hunting methodology. If fighting is a hunt, a hunt, they don't hunt well. Some yes, but almost all, no. Look, the shark is said to be a perfect weapon for killing. Well, a shark decides to kill you and it kills you. Well, a karate competitor has her prey in front of her and many make a lot of mistakes. I believe that 80% of them or 90% make mistakes. Of the boys, 80% do not make mistakes and 20% do. More or less. (...) So it is not that there is a specific way of fighting for girls, it is that they are not at the level of the great male predators. I mean, if this were a predator thing. But not because I could be *machista*, just because you've been less years. (...) I take the Spanish national team, none of them knows how to sweep, none. (...) In our Western culture, there is that equality, but now they give you the same bicycle as the boys and does not make the female gender measure up. Because right now there may be three generations of girls who ride bicycles, but boys have been 40 generations ago. So in the end, the genes, I mean it, huh? (...) Is there a female way to fight? Yes. It has less level than the masculine one. Period. Period. The woman who gives the masculine level you no longer know if she is a boy or a girl. But it is that they do not have the male level normally. (...) There is still not the level in girls that there is in boys –although there is a very high level–. (Hermes, man, Interview 32 (3), 21/09/2020)

The comments are definitely full of relevant elements. I start their analysis here, but I will keep returning to them throughout the entire category. On the one hand, the biological and genetic aspect is well demarcated, and on the other, the social and cultural aspect. They overlap each other. It seems to be uncomfortable that the woman wants to enter a terrain

that is not "naturally" her own. There are reports of this inconvenience generated by women in male spaces also when journalists proposed to cover male sporting events in the 1960s and 1970s and were taken by invaders of men's spaces.<sup>93</sup> They were forbidden to access changing rooms, as other men reporters did, and so they simply could not do their job. It seems to be very difficult to understand that they just wanted to work. For wanting to enter there, they were accused of even being prostitutes. And then the obvious question: why do women want to enter such spaces? In the case of journalists, simply because they would collect information there and be able to do their job; the athletes were already tired of being interviewed when leaving the locker rooms and there was nothing left for the female reporters. In the case of *karateka* athletes, they want to enter the space because they also feel like fighters. And so on, for all environments understood as belonging to the men that women want to integrate. I cannot say that about absolutely every case, but I suspect that most of the time they want to enter for reasonable reasons, much simpler than people think.

In the masculine conception, fighting would be a practice intrinsic to the masculine nature and artificial for women. Fighting has been a cultural and genetic heritage of men since prehistory. In this conception, women are responsible for the care of the family, inside the home, while men are responsible for the outside, which will be conquered and dominated by them. Undoubtedly there is value in this maternal position attributed to the woman, as long as she is in agreement and satisfied with that position. However, it is also possible that she wants other things, that she also claims protagonism even from her genetics. After all, the historical periods of matriarchal, or better said, matrilineal societies where progesterone should be praised, of warrior tribes of women such as Amazons, for example, and so on, as anthropology can reveal, are usually forgotten.<sup>94</sup> Would these elements also remain registered in female genetics, or does the rule not apply to them? It is indisputable that hormonal differences exist, even though the factors that influence variations and the hues they can acquire in different human organisms are numerous (Schultz, 2019).

Male athletes typically have testosterone levels between 10-12% higher than female athletes (Karkazis & Jordan-Young, 2018). Schultz (2019, p.6) states that "Prior to puberty, there are no significant testosterone differences between boys and girls. After puberty, the

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<sup>93</sup> ESPN Films – Nine for IX – *Let Them Wear Towels* <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6h48pk>

<sup>94</sup> There are controversies in relation to matriarchal societies, where power would be concentrated and exercised by women just as it occurs in patriarchy, by men. However, matrilineal, matrilocal and matrifocal societies are easily located in history and even today in certain cultures, such as some peoples of China and India. In such forms of social organization, power, as the researchers reveal, is not exercised in the same way as it is, in general, in patriarchy, that is, under the law of domination. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matriarchy>, accessed on 18/08/2021.

healthy adult male produces 15 to 20 percent more circulating testosterone than the healthy adult, premenopausal woman.” It is also necessary to take into account that girls who start training before reaching puberty will have differences in their natural testosterone production compared to girls who only do it after menarche. However, undeniably hormonal differences do exist. And just as there is today an overvaluation of physical attributes understood as masculine, there is also an overvaluation of predominantly male hormones. In a patriarchal society, high levels of progesterone, the ability to bear children, bringing the female figure almost to sacred or mystical aspects, are not valued facts. In patriarchal society the woman is, in opposition, vulgarized, used to be fertilized by the virile male with all potency in his seed. The woman is, there, figurative, a supporting role of the man. Perhaps it is also relevant to look at some consequences not always emphasized of higher testosterone levels, as Wood and Stanton (2012, p.149) point out:

Testosterone is also associated with reduced empathy (Hermans et al., 2006b), reduced perception of negative emotions (van Honk et al., 2005), enhanced attention to social threat (van Honk et al., 1999), and enhanced amygdala responses to social threat (Hermans et al., 2008; but see also Stanton et al., 2009b), which may promote an increased willingness and interest in attaining dominance over one's competitors independent of the consequences for one's competitors. Additionally, testosterone has been linked to increased risk-taking in economic domains (Stanton et al., 2011a,c; van Honk et al., 2004, but see also Stanton et al., 2011c) and social domains (Mazur, 1995).

I am being a bit radical in the argument, but only in order to reflect on what is said, always valid in one direction and not in the other. The trainers are in agreement with the “biology-is-destiny formulation” (Butler, 1990, p.12). However, it is known that epigenetics supports the existence of gene expression variations, even though the DNA sequence remains intact<sup>95</sup>. In a short-term reversible and hereditary process under the influence of the environment during the stages of human development, the phenotype is affected (Bedregal et al, 2010). In other words, the immense changes suffered by humanity in relation to prehistory are also absorbed and expressed by genes. Epigenetics establishes a bridge between genes and the environment, so factors such as nutrition, tobacco, toxic substances, mistreatment, can initiate chemical processes that alter the epigenome (Bedregal et al, 2010; Huanca, 2013).

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<sup>95</sup> Pollution appears to be able to directly damage DNA, and maternal prenatal stress caused by peer violence promotes epigenetic DNA changes that are also detected in the blood of teenage children (Radtke et al, 2011).

Even what is genetically hereditary can be expressed under new views. Thus, scientists speak of an “epigenetic code” that controls the expression of the genetic code (Bedregal et al, 2010). This means relatively simple environmental factors exert an important influence on the expression of genes, which can alter elements understood to be unalterable. Due to the new forms of life that we were, as human beings, assuming over time, our genes were and are adapting, in a clear evolutionary process. A very simple example of this is how the inclusion of certain foods in the diet, or the plastic packages that release substances that act on the body like xenormones, alters the production and levels of testosterone and oestrogen in the vast majority of people. This may contribute to the fact that few men today are as prepared as hunters in prehistory. As Karkazis and Jordan-Young (2018, p.7) point out,

“T [testosterone] makes men athletically superior to women” feels like a truth, despite the fact that millions of men the world over have vastly more T than do 95 percent of elite women athletes, yet are not as fast or as strong as those women.

The great male predators are few and on their level there are neither women nor the vast majority of men. Comparisons of athletes with animals are, by the way, frequent and intriguing. Among horses, wolves, bulls and sharks, males and alpha, when it is applied, are highlighted, never females. I also sought to talk to a medical friend to clarify my doubts about biological issues. And it is a fact that at a certain point he recommended to look for testosterone checks in animals, since there the elements that can alter it in humans would be less relevant and, therefore, the most reliable findings. I understand that the findings are reliable for animal groups, and not exactly or always transferable to human beings, that we are social beings and we are differentiated by the social and cultural complexity we achieve, in addition to the ability to choose, especially if conscious. Although testosterone exerts its influence on human performance, this influence shares the stage with other factors. It is necessary to consider biological, psychological, social, political and cultural aspects and their complex interaction (Schultz, 2019). This is not about having a direct and easy answer. The topic is really complex and requires different points of analysis, which I am trying to present here.

Taking into account epigenetics, many changes at the biological/physiological/evolutionary level are absorbed, and this leads to the thinking that cultural conceptions are able to perpetuate very strongly, contributing to the inflexible maintenance of concepts. For example, although testosterone levels in children do not differ in boys and girls, girls receive an education that makes them believe in physical inferiority. Roth

and Basow (2004, p.249) argue that “Femininity discipline begins working upon females during childhood (perhaps even infancy) by transmitting to children a mental connection between femaleness and weakness and by forcing girls to embody that weakness in their bodies.” And that “Because girls are typically not taught how to throw in this society, girls' bodies are not able as boys to do so” (p.250). Clegg, Owton and Allen-Collinson (2018) researched ballet and the differences found by the dance educators who taught boys and girls in the dance studio. Among the findings they present that girls usually initiate dancing in the early childhood, while boys start in early adolescence. This is important because the biological development into the dance space, the absence of external experiences and, I would add, the embodiment of the local *habitus*, make girls much more obedient to teachers' commands. The boys, in the opposite situation and having patriarchy in their favour, are more challenging of teachers' classes.

Possibly another of these somewhat rigid conceptions is that homosexual women necessarily have more testosterone than heterosexual women, and how this would be directly linked to the way of fighting. Again, it is interesting to see how there is the association of women who have some success with the male testosterone model, in this case. If the woman somehow stands out, this is justified by her approximation to some characteristic considered masculine in the field. In addition, Roth and Basow (2004) present another relevant argument in the process of destitution of female physical power. They add that

Encouraging sexuality and femininity in female athletes will not work for all women in all sports. In such cases, then, the objective is not to deemphasize women's power by focusing on femininity but to threaten women's power by admitting it exists and claiming that its very existence implies that the woman is not a real woman. When is a woman not a real woman? When she is a lesbian, of course. (p.253)

The Spanish Olympic team has a lesbian athlete, something she openly assumes. She has great results, however, her heterosexual women partners in the team have too. It was not my research focus to verify the sexual orientation of the athletes and the correspondence of this with their athletic results, even because it seems to me something inconsistent. When dealing with the subject of masculinization, as well as dedication to karate, the affective issue came up. However, from my point of view, the masculinization of fighter women does not necessarily go through a biological/physiological process, but is rather more cultural and social. However, it seems that for most men and other people who buy into the hegemonic conceptions, a woman does not have the capacity to perform standing out. Thus, if she does,

doubts arise about “what” she is, which ends up justifying the sex tests/gender verification (Karkazis & Jordan-Young, 2018; Roth & Basow, 2004; Schultz, 2019) as in the case of Caster Semenya<sup>96</sup> (Wells & Darnell, 2014). So, while among men those who stand out become alpha, maximum praise for a male, women who naturally stand out become freaks. Although testosterone can influence and naturalize negative behaviours in men, “testosterone is viewed as actually poisonous only to women” (Karkazis & Jordan-Young, 2018, p.7).

I looked in the literature for possible differences between testosterone levels in heterosexual and homosexual women in case it might have a relevance, unknown to me. Downey et al (1987, p.347) already presented that “There were no significant differences in sex hormone levels between the two groups of women”. Dancey (1990) is in complete agreement, even considering lesbian women who have never had sex with men, those who have had, and heterosexual women. Agrawal et al (2004) presents a study in which lesbian women suffer more from polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), although testosterone levels between groups do not differ. It is worth noting that the study was supported by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. Smith et al (2011, p.191), on the other hand, in addition to not reporting differences in testosterone, state that “PCOS and related factors did not differ by sexual orientation.” Thus, it seems to be that the most man-like way of fighting that some women can achieve cannot necessarily be justified by them being lesbians.

Another relevant point indicated by the coaches concerns the time needed to incorporate improvements in the way women fight. They refer to the genetic incorporation of experiences, however, this would be an extremely long process, in addition to being affected by other variables, as I have already pointed out. It is a fact that, over time, the modalities show progress, the performances are improved and it is clearly observable how the sport, the marks obtained and records, the techniques used, how all this evolves and converges to a sport that also improves. Thus, perhaps the attention to technologies and training methods specific to women, as already raised here by athletes, which can take into account hormonal differences and even genetic trends in women, will optimize their performance. They perform on the basis of the training they receive, normally thought of as effective for men. I have heard in my social circle, for example, that 50 years ago women's football was “ridiculous” and that today it is fine. In 50 years women have not incorporated changes in their genes in the way of playing football. But in 50 years society has changed, although still requires a lot of evolution,

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<sup>96</sup> The IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federations) sets the testosterone threshold for cisgender women competing among women at five nanomoles for six months.  
<https://mujeresconciencia.com/2019/05/30/el-caso-de-caster-semenya/>, accessed on 18/08/2021.

and it is a fact that women have started to do things that they were previously completely impeded. In a society of complete modesty and where supposedly a woman's uterus would be damaged by playing sports, she did not even run. So the female aplomb in running was perfected simply because the woman started to run; there was a “lack of practice in using the body and performing tasks” (Young, 1980, p.144). That is, women learn body techniques when they are no longer denied them; like men, when exposed to body techniques, women learn (Mauss, 1973), and learn it, moreover, with remarkable speed. If they have been deprived of this kind of knowledge for so long, it is definitely short the time they need to make so much progress, in so many areas (see about it in weightlifting, for example in Huebner, Meltzer & Perperoglou, 2019). This possibly poses a threat to male preserve and male privileges.

Something related to this is presented in the study of Evaldsson (2003). She carried out research in a school in Sweden with a group of children with immigrant backgrounds and from low-income families, aiming to investigate girls' physicality and in doing so challenging Young's very well-known text, quoted by me many times. Nevertheless, Evaldsson found that “the girls studied here were not restricted in physicality (or spatiality)” which “indicates that there is considerable variation in female physicality” (p.475). Does it mean that Young was wrong? I do not believe so. Evaldsson also describes in her paper how the school created a context where girls had as much opportunities as boys:

Girls' participation in team sports such as handball, basketball and soccer were promoted through physical education classes in cross-sex groups during school hours and same-sex sport clubs outside school. (...) Moreover, in their classroom practices, the teachers seldom sorted kids for the purpose of control. The teachers even prevented pupils from creating same-sex groups and linking behaviours to gender or ethnicity in class. (...) The playground included six foursquare courts. Girls and boys generally occupied similar numbers of courts on the playground and had equal access to equipment. The fact that all classes had a ball of their own and a rotating scheme with one week for boys and one for girls provided girls and boys with similar access to the activity (p.479-480).

It evidences how girls and women are capable of performing any task, since they have the means and opportunities for doing so. They become modest exactly because of the lack of practice and, sometimes, the refined education they receive to perform as classy women, exaggerating the care towards the body (Mason, 2018). The background of the children, not always, but in some cases, can also help them to be freer to move, since they are not being

watched all of the time if the family members need to work, for example, and leave them with siblings or other similar situation.<sup>97</sup>

Returning to the testimonies of the athletes and coaches, I present others precisely related to the ability or lack of ability to perform techniques and movements and some elements that distinguish women and men as fighters:

I think the way a boy fights is different from a girl, you can see it and it has always been seen. When I see videos from before and that, the guys kind of have used more resources, so to speak. Or I do not know. The sweeps, now it is very noticeable that the boys use more than the girls, there are different ways, but that does not mean that it is worse, because it is not necessary to use everything to be there. (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

Working with boys is a more intense job and above all you work with them much more body to body. (...) Boys can try to throw on their opponents many times to the ground. The girl practically does not use this resource. A girl to do a job of throwing on her rival is going to need many hours. (...) It's that simple, in the boys' work it is necessary because of the way they fight. Above all I would see the difference in that aspect, more in the matter of the work of the sweeps, the grabs, the melee work. (Hefaistos, man, Interview 36 (1), 09/30/2020)

The girls because they don't know how to sweep? Well, I don't know, but when you explain them, it is difficult for them, it is difficult for them to understand the concept and I really explain it well, eh, it is not a question that I transmit it badly. But, it costs them. (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

I believe that by force yes (women are different from men). Because tactically she evolves less, well, or a little later, perhaps neither that. By force, yes, but I don't think the rest (in other aspects women and men could be the same). I think the notion of women is a bit simpler tactically, more basic, because it is as if they have less tactical development. Note that women are more cerebral, but they have less development, they have "something that suits me and I keep that all the time." The man changes more in tactical aspects "well, now I'm changing and I'm going to do something else."

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<sup>97</sup> In regard to this, see the documentary "Babies" (Thomas Balmès, 2010). There is a report of the first year of life of four children from different countries, cultures and backgrounds. The difference among them in the ability with their body in the end of the year is impressive.

(...) Less tactical development in women and less strength in women, but nothing more. (Ares, man, Interview 35 (2), 29/09/2020)

Given the constant comparisons, it would be to deny the obvious not to look at men and women as fighters and the possible similarities and differences they present. As I have already highlighted several times, the differences between them exist, which, it is a fact, is even given genetically. This also justifies the sport to be organized in separate categories for men and women, in addition to the weight categories in the case of martial arts, in order to ensure equal chances, as announced by the IOC. Thus, the concepts of equality and difference are mixed. Recognizing the existence of differences is what leads to the concept of equity, when simply matching may not be possible or sufficient. However, derogatory differentiation is obviously not equity. It is understandable that in terms of performance, coaches need to look at their athletes from the place that aims for the best results. Athletes know this too, they submit to it, and it is all basically agreed. What seems to cause discomfort, however, is that the woman does not make some movements according to idealized expectations, that they do not match up to men performatively. Vesta tries to say that performing differently does not necessarily imply worse performance, and she adds:

Well, many times they try to make you fight like a boy, because in the end they always put them as a reference to you, almost all the boys. They do not see that the way the girls fight is right; they do not see that yet. (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

Thus, what occurs is not an appreciation of differences, but, perhaps, an attempt at standardization. According to the trainers, women have less strength, less sophisticated tactical capacity, great difficulty in performing melee work and sweeping. All of this in relation to men. The characteristics of skeletal muscles are genetically determined, however, they are also influenced by the environment through training, which epigenetically affects the expression and even constitution of muscle fibres (for example, see Tucker & Collins, 2012). With this, although hormonal issues also play a very important role, women can modulate their capacity for strength. She can be perfectly strong to throw her opponents to the ground, especially since it takes technique to do so more than brute strength, and the fighters are all usually in a similar weight range. The athletes make comments that relate to this, the particularity that the genetics of size of each gives them:

I trained more with girls because of their height, more than anything, because besides, I am underweight, to train with a 1m90 guy is not worth, for nothing. (Artemis, Interview 23 (1), 03/09/2020)

Yes, the boys in my gym have a higher level than the girls, because the girls don't train as much, so I always train with all of them, I don't care what level they have, but it's true that I train more with the boys because they train the most, they have more level. But for example in the national team, when we train with the A... team (regional selection) we train all the girls together and usually in the Spanish team too, I train with girls. What happens is that I do not dislike putting myself with boys because in the end, as the people of our category (heavy weight) they are so tall, **it is convenient for me to train with strong and tall people**. And there are many times that I train a lot with Artemis, but there are times when it is true that it is better for me to train with a child, than with Artemis (light weight). (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

When we change partners we generally change among ourselves (women), because training with more than 84 (male weight category) is of no use to me, for example. In general, because of size (I train) with the girls. **Or some little guy too**. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

This is a very simple fact, but it seems to be that it is not always taken into account, that is, against the alpha male, very few people have a chance of success. If the analysis were limited to the physical domain, Juno is also at an advantage over Artemis, and both are women. Artemis also does not see a problem in training with small men like her, or closer to her physical structure, as men will continue being bigger than her<sup>98</sup>, as this brings her closer to the competitive conditions of the sport she is dedicated to. And does that then eliminate the differences that exist? No, not at all. Sex is, in fact, a given genetic characteristic, subject to modification only through extreme interventions, with hormonal treatments and surgeries (Tucker & Collins, 2012). However, the factors I mentioned here, such as the simple similarity or difference of size, are not taken into account in the definitive statement of female inferiority. Women athletes do not seek to prove that they are better than men, neither male athletes nor males on the street, as I have already presented in the topic on violence. But, their performance is depreciated in relation to men, in a kind of need for physical, psychological and spatial dominance. Roth and Basow (2004, p.249) explain:

The masculine ideal is one of physical strength, large size, and aggressiveness. The feminine ideal, on the other hand, is beautiful, small, thin, and, perhaps most importantly, weak. (...) The ideal of the feminine (i.e., weak) body is transmitted to

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<sup>98</sup> The lightest male weight category is -60kg.

women and men in virtually all aspects of life and through all societal institutions: family, religion, professional life, and the media.

The fact that women do not do so much melee or sweeping work is not associated with genetics either. The physical structure of the hips and shoulders may affect the aesthetic form of movement and even the levels of difficulty, which unfortunately has not been scientifically studied. However, these are perfectly trainable elements. It is known that in swimming<sup>99</sup>, for example, the joint mobility of some athletes contributes to performance, optimizing it, but it is not a determining factor of ability or inability for the sport. If melee work and sweeps were an irreversible disability for women, they would not be able to fight *judo*. And none of the elite *karateka* interviewed was rejected in *judo* and therefore sought karate as a second option because they were unskilled in sweeping. Although this is a bit comical in tone, I mean they are trainable skills. According to Ericsson, Nandagopal and Roring (2009, p.199), “the distinctive characteristics of exceptional performers are the result of adaptations to extended and intense practice activities that selectively activate dormant genes that are contained within all healthy individuals’ DNA”. Athletes who reach the level of experts in their sport, according to Ericsson (2006, cited in Tucker & Collins, 2012), accumulate 10,000 hours of training. The intense and prolonged work leads to the expression of inactive genes, as compared to the use of the neuronal cells that we do the most of the people. Cerebral potential exists, but it is inactive.

Similarly, tactical work can be optimized. As a somewhat common view, it is said that the spatial intelligence of women does not develop as well as that of men. This statement does not inspire credibility. I think this is a workable aspect of the brain, as much as emotional intelligence, commonly attributed to women, but evidently capable of being optimized by men. Many of these statements are culturally established, leading women themselves to believe in limitations given from the outside, which inevitably strengthens such assumptions. However, when they are not convinced of this, something opposite occurs and they show that they are up to it (Roth & Basow, 2004), either because they impose themselves, or because they are also physically large and not easily put down. In some cases, this leads to discomfort,

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<sup>99</sup> In this regard, Schultz (2019, p.14) ponders that “Relative to his height, Phelps has short legs, a long torso, and a disproportionately long wingspan. He also has big hands and feet, flexible joints, and, reportedly, a large lung capacity and low lactic acid production, and all of which help him cut through the water with optimal speed and efficiency. But the types of biological and physiological gifts that male athletes have don’t trouble sport administrators in the same way that advantages unique to female athletes do.”

as I have said, since they act to destabilize the male preserve. I provide two comments that illustrate this:

I think that when you arrive new anywhere in the world, they (men) will say "and who are you?" and laugh and hesitate, until the moment you say "hey, don't be confused with me that I..." I mean, I'm not going to shut up in that sense. If the boys are smart, "no, it's because the boys are smart." Well, to this day I think the boys love me very much, because at that first moment I said, "look, don't be smart with me because if you do we are going to have a problem." I mean, **I put myself at their height.** (...) If you don't respect yourself, if you don't make yourself respected, then obviously you're not going to be comfortable. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

We have had a problem with the boys because they see you as a woman, they see you as a girl, and first they are careful, they do not train the same as if they trained with a boy. And we told them "hey, you can train and hit normally, nothing happens". And **they ignore you.** Well, **you start hitting, and it bothers them.**<sup>100</sup> Then they get angry and they start to hit you harder, but of course, they went to find Demeter and me, we are brutes. (...) Then of course, since they couldn't, since they couldn't with you, **since they can't with you, they get angry,** it's a bit like that, right? (...) "How are you going to hit me? Don't worry, I'm going to hit you harder" (men's thinking), you know? (...) We have stamina, that is, within what is karate. I mean, they weren't punching to kill either. But within what is karate, I can take any kind of punches, no problem. (...) We do not shrink about being a woman... because we are brave. Well, in the end Demeter is wide, she's shorter than me, but she's big, she's wide and I'm tall and strong too, so... If we were two girls, 1m50 and thin, but in the end we are two women great that we have strength. (Hera, Interview 9 (1), 27/07/2020)

Women have to continue occupying more and more these and other spaces that could be destabilizing male preserves. They have, as a collective, general specificities that differentiate them from men, but these differences need not be inferiorising. Populating, femininely, places, is an act of conscience for the sake of social good, even for men, who can get rid of the penalties that the exercise of hegemonic masculinity also imposes on them (Roth & Basow, 2004). Competitiveness is another characteristic that is culturally understood as being masculine. When women enter the world of competition, they are not always well

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<sup>100</sup> In relation to this theme and the yearning to fight without receiving advantages for being a woman, see the works of Channon and Jennings (2013) and Guérandel and Mennesson (2007).

interpreted. In the general conception, woman should provide welcome and be a nourisher of life. From my point of view, she can do both, welcome/nourish and compete. Occupying competition spaces without shyness can be an act of strong empowerment, individual, through the development of physical and social capital (Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003; Shilling, 2004). Socially, women are not always well regarded even in command positions, taken to be “bossy”. Will there be situations where they embody hegemonic masculinity? Probably. But there will also be situations where the woman leads and competes simply in her own way, being told, therefore, that this is not her place. But by being present she contributes to a large extent to the destabilization of male preserves, she generates a very beneficial nuisance. Furthermore, this will force more studies to be carried out in relation to female performance, possibly promoting advances in training technologies, and filling knowledge gaps.

Taking advantage of the competition's theme, I will briefly present in the next pages an analysis of the fight videos of elite Spanish *karateka* women athletes. The idea is to carefully analyse their ways of fighting, primarily under the highly speculative aspect of masculinization, but also in relation to effectiveness.

#### 6.2.1. *Video analysis: women in action*

*“In analysing movement capability, movements as they are objectively performed, and as they are subjectively experienced, must be brought together.”*

*(Nyberg, 2015, p.111)*

In my training experience in Italy it was that I heard biomechanical explanations during trainings as to why we should perform the movements in a certain way. Especially when the body performs movements a little "off the axis", understanding the principles of physics involved in the displacement and mechanics of the body considerably help to correct postures and to precise blows, since the gain of effectiveness can be measured bodily. In fact, after years of doing kicks with the hips not fully seated, I have understood, theoretically and bodily, a few things in a short period of training that help me perfect the moves now. It is demanding, since I already have the misadjusted mode built in and it, the misadjusted mode, is comfortable for me. However, the adjustment confers some efficiency and, especially, aesthetics to the blows.

Nyberg (2015) explains that the epistemological perspective of the ability to carry out a movement does not necessarily need to be known for it to be well carried out. Nyberg,

supported by Polanyi's theory, says that tacit knowledge of movement is personal knowledge and developed with practice. In other words, just knowing theoretically the laws that govern the displacement of body mass and centre of gravity according to the different and fast positions that are adopted during combat does not guarantee its effectiveness. Embodied knowledge is required. I believe that tacit knowledge that also contains something of “theory” is ideal to avoid reproductions based only on tradition, sometimes with touches of ignorance, a risk of the extremely hierarchical environment of the martial arts. However, it is with the body that one learns to perform, in a process of embodied learning, of “knowledge in use”. “The tacit component is embodied, a knowing, integrated through experience” (Nyberg, 2015, p.112).

The elite karate athletes in this study started training very early in childhood. They have certainly incorporated the movements and developed, I believe, some degree of “practical knowledge”, “physical literacy” and “kinaesthetic intelligence” (Clegg, Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2018; Nyberg & Carlgren, 2015). So the fact that they are not able to perform some techniques, especially *ashibarai*, intrigues me. What disables them? What kind of knowledge or learning through the body do they lack? The movements they perform are repeated countless times, to the point that they become automated. Automation undeniably refers to a certain reification, but it also reflects a state of mastering, of knowing of the body. What is incorporated is not universal, but varies according to the teachings received. I have checked this out personally while training in different countries. Even though I did not know the totality of *dojos* in each country where I trained<sup>101</sup>, I consider that I have a valid sample.

Briefly, my experience has shown me that Brazil and Italy are more similar to each other in the way they fight, especially in the use of the back leg for kicks and in the attention paid to flexibility works. If the group is dedicated to *kumite*, which was always sought by me, *kata* practically does not exist in training. Whereas in Spain and the UK the *kata* is never completely abandoned, given normal training *dojos*, not high performance, where specificity is obviously the law. These last two countries are similar in the way of fighting using the front leg for kicks and a well-lateralized fighting guard. I comment on this briefly because the embodiment of movements undeniably involves the culture of the place and the way in which knowledge is transmitted. Nyberg and Carlgren (2015) report the experience of teaching and learning complex movements in physical education classes (see also Kirk & Macdonald, 1998, on situated learning). It is a challenge for teachers and students. They explain that “the

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<sup>101</sup> I trained karate in two *dojos* in Brazil, one in Spain, three in the United Kingdom and one in Italy.

technical description of how the movement should be performed is not sufficient” (Nyberg & Carlgren, 2015, p.614), since an “embodied understanding” (p.618) is necessary. Somatic involvement needs to be integral and active, as “the required awareness involves all the senses” (p.626).

It is important to note this because the practice of sports, with its tendency to think of the body as a machine, can distance athletes from subjective body perception, which can also contribute to the difficulty of acquiring complex techniques. In the case of *karateka* women, I wonder if what *sensei* report in relation to the difficulty they present is related to this, that is, to a type of individual unconsciousness of potentiality or social belief of incapacity (Roth & Basow, 2004); or whether it would be some kind of transmission failure, perhaps too theoretical, or the absence of this, the absence of concepts and knowledge of female training methods, taking into account physiology, biomechanics, anatomy of the women's collective. I point out these questions by assuming as reality what is being said by the research participants about the execution of techniques and considering the relationship of surrender that exists in the sports environment in general and specifically in the martial environment. Athletes surrender their bodies to be trained and rely, often blindly, on their coaches. They grow up being guided by their coaches, often becoming devoted to them. Athletes will do what coaches say, they will shape themselves, pursue the goal given in order to obtain achievements and a place of prominence. Thus, their ability or disability could be seen as a shared achievement.

This observation leads to thinking that limitations and expressions are allowed and built in the athlete's partnership with the coach. By limitation allowed I mean objectively the inability to do sweeps and melee work. In a way, it seems to be allowed, perhaps unconsciously fostered, for women not to be able to. And with a built expression I mean behaviour seen as masculine, obtained from the pursuit of the masculine ideal of a fighter. Considering these things, I analysed two videos of fights and *kata* presentations of each of the athletes, indicated by them as their best performances so far, as described in the methodology chapter. The analysis aimed to verify what it means to fight as a woman and if there is a female way of fighting. To answer this, from reflections shared with my supervisor David, I established some analysis criteria based on the sociological literature that supports this research, the coaches' comments and the athletes' comments, also described in the methodology chapter. In addition, I tried to identify possible general similarities in the way of fighting for female weights, taking into account what was presented in the previous category in relation to “sizes”, an aspect of considerable relevance. The table of analysed videos is presented in the methodology and I do not make any association with it here again due to the

care to avoid identifying my informants. I will refer to the weights in a generic way, being able to take into account more athletes than just the Spanish ones, and regarding the analysis criteria of the videos, they are centred on the Spanish athletes, as they were given by them and their coaches, in addition of literature.

In general, karate does not require a specific body for fighters especially, as other modalities can do. I am not referring to aesthetics, which I will cover in the next chapter, but in terms of performance. For example, elite swimmers need a specific body composition to stay afloat in the water. Basketball or volleyball players can be selected by height. *Karateka* people of different physique will be allocated to different weight categories.

I believe that karate, I have always said it, I believe that karate is a sport that anyone can do: fat, thin, tall, short. In other words, when you are in better physical shape, obviously better, but any type of body can do it. (Hera, Interview 21 (2), 27/08/2020)

It is true that elite *kateros* tend to be shorter, but outside the elite this is not a criterion either. Therefore, there is an emphasis on dedication to training, effort and observation of other factors (social, psychological) in interaction with biology (Martinez de Quel, 2003), as already mentioned.

In karate, each person can apply their physical qualities in a different way, as it is such a complete sport, I would say. We see it internationally, it seems that he is fat and suddenly he has brutal timing, he has a very good technique and the "chubby" has beaten you. (...) It is true that in karate it is seen how the physical is not something totally fundamental. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

However, within each weight there may be general characteristics of the way of fighting that relate to the shape of the bodies<sup>102</sup> (see as supplementary information, since it refers to young *karateka*, Martinez-de-Quel et al, 2021). Even if people play a little with the weight in order to meet the general goals of coaches and athletes, this will normally occur between the weights nearby (-50/-55), and not among the most distant ones (-50/+68, for example), since there the discrepancy in the way of fighting is more evident. In a nutshell, I consider the main characteristics of the way to fight for each weight:

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<sup>102</sup> Some cases are noteworthy when they perform slightly differently from others in their category. A Chinese athlete, for example, at -68 appears to be faster than her peers and also visually lighter. Perhaps she is at 62 kg, for example. Another Ukrainian athlete is significantly taller than her weight mates at -55; she presents a form of movement (not related to the execution of techniques) somewhat slower than the other athletes in the category.

- -50kg: usually have short and fast movement; they bounce quickly, staying more in the air than on the ground. They can rotate a lot through the *koto*, with no direction limitations. They perform very fast entries (attacks) and exits. Fighting position with legs closer together, practically “standing”.
- -55kg: athletes enter and exit explosively, in general. They usually occupy the mat moving, since they tend to be, like the previous weight, relatively small. They fight more “on their feet” to gain height, and move nimbly, with short bounces and remarkable use of feints.
- -61kg: This appears to be a transitional weight as the athletes are not “standing” and neither are with their base low. They are explosive to enter and can be explosive to exit, even though the emphasis is on attack. The movement/bounce is no longer short, but neither are the bounces as long as those of the next weight.<sup>103</sup>
- -68kg: what draws the most attention in this weight is the occupation of the mat, since generally the athletes are tall and the base they use is wide. That is, they use more space. They do not fight “standing”, and they tend to move with relatively long, high bounces, which makes it feel like they move a little slower.
- +68kg: usually have a more solid form of fighting, with the feet on the ground, although the jumps can also be short. But they are more on the ground than in the air. The position of the legs is wide, open, lowering the centre of gravity and giving greater stability to the body. They usually place the front arm extended away from the body to keep distance from the opponent. They present an attack explosion (entrance), without exiting with the same speed.

Finally, some considerations about *kata*, which is another modality within karate as it is known. Its execution undoubtedly requires explosive capacity, speed, balance, coordination, flexibility, strength and power. It is a modality that follows performance standards, so it is not possible to see much variation among high level athletes, especially in the sense that they show their personalities. In *kumite*, although there are general ways to fight by weight, each athlete has and exposes in the fights, open skill, something of how they are. In this sense, *kata* is less revealing of athletes. They need to adapt to what each *kata* they intend to perform requires. The *kata* is already given; they must approximate the perfect execution of such a

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<sup>103</sup> Perhaps these specificities are also founding criteria for the combination of weights for the Olympic Games: -55, -61 and +61.

sequence of movements. An athlete specializing in *kata* can certainly explain better than I do what a *katero* needs:

Those of *kata* are like more thin, more defined. (...) I think we are little, toned and I am 1m56, I imagine Sandra (Sánchez) will measure more or less the same. The Japanese will measure a little more, the Italian like me. (...) In the end you think that you need your centre of gravity to be very low, because the higher you are, the clumsier you are. The bigger you are, the slower you move and in the end it influences. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

Now I present the general overview of published studies using video analysis in karate. They are especially related to physical and sometimes psychological performance in *kumite* and indicate, in general, the prevalence of techniques used to score and, with few exceptions, focus on male performance. So, what I am looking for here, to check the women's fighting style, still does not find much basis in the produced scientific knowledge. Regarding what is produced, Alinaghpour, Zareian and Ardakani (2020) analysed ten male final fights of the WKF (World Karate Federation) 2016 World Karate Championship, seeking to determine the techniques that score the most and their frequency. *Kizami zuki* was most used, followed by *oi zuki*. Petri et al (2016) analysed the “anticipation” criterion in four men's fights in Germany, concluding that attacking technique jabbing punch/*kizami zuki* is the most used.

Ross (2009) also analysed female fights and then presents that the most used technique among them is, or was, considering that this may have changed over time, the *gyaku zuki*. Perhaps it can be said that this technique requires a more solid basis for effective realization. He analysed eight female and 19 male final fights from the 2004 and 2006 WKF World Championships. Among his conclusions, he explains that “the male *karatekas* (*sic*) also revealed a statistical significant result with regard to the number of initiated attacks” (p.4). This observation is interesting from my point of view as it predates the establishment of *senshu*, the golden point, officially established in 2010. Often the fear of suffering the point and being at a disadvantage is something that inhibits competitors, who contain their attack initiatives. However, the observation predates the *senshu*, as I said, and Ross reports that women had less initiative, which cannot, therefore, be attributed entirely to the fear of losing the gold point advantage.

Chaabène et al (2014a), on the other hand, analysed physiological responses and movement time of ten high-level athletes, men, in real and simulated matches, concluding that the responses differ considerably between real and simulated matches. Chaabène et al

(2014b) verified the same responses, physiological and movement time, among 14 elite male fighters, looking for differences between winners and losers. They found no significant differences. However, other minor conclusions from the study catch my attention and may be relevant here. They state that “karatekas predominantly use upper-limb karate techniques. Karate’s nature is intermittent, with fighting activities representing ~6% of total combat duration and ~84% of actions lasting less than 2 s, with ~21-s mean time interval in between” (p.307). Considering that they analysed only men, it is relevant to observe the predominance of upper limbs and not legs or sweeps and, especially, the time of the fight that is used in attacks. In other words, men are in attack/defence only approximately 6% of the time of the fight, even though it is said that they act much more than women. In addition, the attacks themselves are temporally short, in less than two seconds, and with a very long interval between them, which is not so visible when watching the fights, that seem much busier than the female ones. A simple reason for this would be, from my point of view, the spatial occupation made by men on the mat due to their size, in general, which can produce something like an optical illusion of more movement. If the mat of women's struggles were smaller, perhaps this would alter to some level the brain's perception of female combat.

Friesen et al (2017) carried out a study seeking to verify the variations in emotions of a coach and three athletes, including a woman. They took 90 video shots among competitions and training to analyse the emotions that, undoubtedly, affect performance. The results suggest that “athletes will typically be pleased with their performance when they are also successful at regulating their emotions” (p.12). That is, even if the videos record actions that do not look so good, the athlete's emotional perception, combined with other factors, can lead to a positive experience. This is in accordance with what was pointed out by Nyberg (2015) as the epigraph of this subcategory and what can be seen in some videos of Spanish athletes, commented on later. Finally, Tabben et al (2018) analysed 120 elite *kumite* athletes, 60 men and 60 women, during the 2012 and 2014 WKF World Championships seeking to evaluate the “decisive-moment” (DM). “DM represents the moment from which one of the two opponents dominates uninterrupted the other until the end of the fight” (p.3). They do not report significant differences between men and women in the factor they assessed, giving greater importance to the difference between winners and losers. They report that:

DM occurred at 49.49±32.80% (163±96 seconds) of the total fight time (328.3±89.0 seconds in total). Irrespective of winning or losing, 51.1% of decisive actions were offensive vs. 48.9% defensive-techniques. Upper-limb techniques represented 84.4% of the total decisive actions, against 11.1%, 3.3% and 1.1% of lower-limbs, throwing,

and combination-techniques, respectively. At DM, 70% of total techniques were targeting the head vs. 30% the rest of the body (Tabben et al, 2018, p.8).

Tabben et al do not say this since they do not consider men and women separately, but even if women were responsible for lowering the scores in the sweeps, 3.3% is undeniably a low percentage. Other studies using video analysis were still found, however, they were too distant from my perspective, and were then disregarded.

Returning to the videos analysed in this study, as can be seen in the table of videos presented in the methodology, I also requested videos of the *kata* athletes and analysed them. However, as I mentioned, the masculinization archetype does not surround them as much when it is known that they are dedicated to the *kata*. As *kata* is a presentation, they also emphasize aesthetics through makeup, for example, something already narrated in this work. Perhaps all these associated elements release them a little from the charge of masculinization, in addition to the fact that they specifically in their modality, at least, do not generate such an uncomfortable confrontation to male privilege. It seems that they can fight imaginatively without being bothered, after all a *kata* is a fight against an imaginary opponent. What women cannot do is yearn to be authentic warriors; they can be warriors, in an ever inferior performance, only as a concession from the male world.

As an analysis of the material, qualitative findings and discussion, I consider that there are undeniable differences in the way of fighting of women and men. However, I can point out general considerations, and in relation to a specific group of women. In other words, to say that with this a feminine universal form of fighting is established would certainly be mistaken. Some women will come closer to the male model, others less, and there cannot be a completely fixed pattern. However, after learning socially to perform as a woman, in addition to the undeniable biological burden, it is difficult to stop performing as one, for me at least, even for a moment. Thus, as Young (1980, p.144) observes, “one can nevertheless sensibly speak of a general feminine style of body behavior and movement”. But outside the general, the way someone fights, to be precise, must take into account the individual, in their biological, emotional, cultural, social composition.

Regarding the question of what it means to fight as a woman, I think it is understood that there are a series of general considerations, as indicated by the criteria used for analysis. That is, there are general considerations that say how a woman fights and that, basically, this form implies poor performance. This brings me, finally, to the analysis that presents itself as more complex than just a meaning of fighting like a woman as “good” or “bad”. Based on the

athletes' videos I noticed that their fights seem to have less actions than the equally elite men, less points volume, which makes them look like slower fights. However, the study by Tabben et al (2018) challenges this perception based on the quantitative data it finds, discussed earlier. The female elite athletes use the space quite extensively in relation to *karateka* women in their training in common *dojos*, who usually just move back and forth (Maclean, 2019). In relation to high-level male athletes, with whom female elite athletes are compared, men fill the space with their bodies more easily, given that the *koto* remains the same size for men and women, and male bodies are usually bigger. I did not analyse male videos as I did female ones, however, it is not difficult to notice the trend towards territorial domination that men seek to exert, taking over spaces, as the literature points out.

Some of the athletes notably prefer to wait for the opponent's attack to anticipate their blows or counterattack. This could be related to the fear of losing the gold point, since according to what was raised by Tabben et al (2018, p.9) "72% of the winners scored the first point". But they can also simply be related to hesitation or lack of initiative, as pointed out by the study by Ross (2009). In fact, regardless of comparisons with men, women are considerably hesitant in the videos I watched. In some cases, they do not complete attacks, which happens, I venture to say a little for my experience, for attacking already thinking about exiting and avoiding suffering a point, and avoiding the harsh experience of shame described in the previous chapter. Thus, some attacks seem average, that is, they are not carried out at 100% power. A point to be scored needs good form, sporting attitude, vigorous application, awareness, good timing, and correct distance<sup>104</sup>. Possibly this is also related to the long-pointed out observation by Young (1980), of the female tendency to perform short movements close to the body, with a defence that does not defend (not effective), something that I also know, and an attack that fails in reality. In a way, perhaps, as sometimes my Spanish *sensei* corrected me, we see the fight as a game, where there is a kind of agreement between the fighters that they do not really fight each other. So we do not really defend and we do not really attack. This also helps to explain why some coaches saw the experiences of violence on the street in suburban neighbourhoods as valid. But, in addition to all this, the preference of some athletes for anticipation reveals that complex time-gesture coordination can be a successful experience for them.

It is possible to notice sometimes the tension, nervousness and fear on the faces of some athletes. These elements are contrasted with and diluted by aggressiveness. It seems

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<sup>104</sup> [https://www.wkf.net/pdf/rules/wkfcompetition-rules-2019\\_en-pdf-en-764.pdf](https://www.wkf.net/pdf/rules/wkfcompetition-rules-2019_en-pdf-en-764.pdf)

that while the fight does not "start" it is not possible to release the tension, and it seems, observing the fighting, that the fight only begins after scoring or giving away the first point. When this happens, athletes become more aggressive, out of confidence or out of necessity. Although they may sometimes want to protect the point, if they have scored it before, they fight harder. Tabben et al (2018, p.9) state that "after DM, winners demonstrated a higher offensive/defensive ratio. (...) After DM, losers increased the rate of combination techniques compared to before DM". This leads me to think that it would be better to "start" the fight soon. However, it is very easy to see, criticize and opine from here, off the mat. Being there, with the feeling that you are about to go to slaughter, is quite another world. My performance does not come close to that of any of the athletes studied, but I proposed to critically analyse their performances and that is what it is about. Critically, I also say that there are few attempts at sweeping and that some of them, when the opponent "forgets" the leg after the kick, are performed ineffectively. In this specific case, I consider that the athlete does not believe she is capable of carrying out the projection, regardless of her size. However, there are other athletes who project their opponent with confidence and vigour. It seems that the more experienced the athlete, the more conviction she has to perform this type of technique effectively. And, especially, the more the athlete exceeded in technical training and, in this case, the more she understands and applies as tacit knowledge the laws of physics and biomechanics, the more qualified she is to sweep.

Regarding *kiai*, it is a little inconsistent point. I mean, the athletes emit *kiai*, sometimes with nervousness and something of shyness, but it is *kiai*. Perhaps the athletes could make themselves more imposing through it, but together with the aggressiveness, after the fight "starting", the *kiai* also tends to be freer. Some athletes sent fights for me a little older, including when the women fought two minutes<sup>105</sup>, and it is possible to see how they fought more modestly. Now some of them tactically show the point to the referee, attesting that they are capable of learning the game; it is a matter of training from my point of view. One of the athletes, for example, sent a video where she repeatedly moved to position herself to punch always in the same position, because those referees, from that angle, were giving her the point. Some of the older fights seem less technical than some current fights from the same athletes. However, they pointed out those, old ones, as those of their best performance. They can make a projection/sweep, for example, in some other combat, but they indicated those old ones to me. I must analyse those, of course, but I cannot help noticing some of the points that I am critically reporting here. And this also leads me to confirm Nyberg's (2015) sentence

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<sup>105</sup> The time given to them only equalled the time given to men in 2019, three minutes.

with which I opened this category text. Those combats, technically perhaps not so qualified, generated sensations of perception of the movement in flow; the context, the moment, the difficult opponent, the victory with a special flavour, all these subjective factors need to be taken into account.

Finally, there are certainly also assertive and confident attacks that leave the opponent helpless. Otherwise, the athletes would not be part of the team where they are. They move very well, keep a good distance, playing with this element frequently, using it as a device to approach/depart at the right time and cancel the opponent's work. From my point of view, it is clear there the athletes who are studying their opponents and have training from very close, with a personal coach, for example.

Regarding *kata*, its evaluation takes into account a part of technique (70%) and another of athletic preparation (30%). Possibly there are sub-criteria in each part, but generally speaking, this is what counts for the attribution of the grade, with “discounts” for failures, such as imbalances. The athletes sent me videos of performing *kata* by team and also individual. The first, when the team reaches the final, they also have the presentation of *bunkai*. Although the *bunkai* exposes possibilities of application of the techniques presented in the *kata* performed immediately before in sync by the three athletes, it has a strong spectacle aspect. Because of this, many people regret its non-inclusion in the Olympic Games as it attracts a lot of the public. However, there is only room for the individual *kata*.

The videos of the Spanish *kateras*, often occupying the highest place on the world podium, are obviously spectacular. When performing the *kata* by team, they perform as if they were one, they have perfect physical balance, a criterion where other teams usually slip up. They also perform movements that require explosion and are very accurate. When performing the *bunkai*, there is a lot of creativity in the techniques chosen to represent the applicability of the movements performed in the *kata*, thus attending to the spectacularity, but without forgetting a certain degree of reality, which is obviously important. The athletes perform the strokes with a sense of excellent distance, which helps to give reality to the execution. They, as they told me in the interviews, even hit hard each other by going beyond the limits of the presentation. But this is mutually agreed, since they aim at victory.

Finally, in both team and individual *kata* performance, the athletes seem to be facing the opponent in front of them. The opponent, however, is not present. I consider it important to note this element since other martial arts are also very dedicated to *kata* as a way to find inner harmony, or balance, perhaps the so-desired self-mastery, or emotional control that I

have already pointed out. Therefore, it may be possible to establish, perhaps, a relationship of the achievement of control through this practice, always very aligned, and at least apparently, centred, something that in *kumite* is not seen in this way, which can take on shades of lack of control at certain times. Perhaps this is the scenario where more precisely “the combat efficacy-efficiency disposition, the practice-perfection-mastery disposition and the body-self-environment awareness disposition respectively” (Brown & Jennings, 2013, p.2) is found. Possibly this relationship of the *kata* women and the centring, even if unconscious, can contribute to the decrease of their fame as masculine, and the opposite of the *kumiteras*.

To close this analysis, I believe that it is worth mentioning the experience of tennis players Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova. They faced each other for 18 years, playing 80 matches that finally ended in 43-37 for Navratilova, albeit always in an atmosphere of friendship (Spencer, 2003). “Evert excelled at a baseline game that was more often associated with femininity, whereas Navratilova played an aggressive serve-and-volley game as more masculine” (Spencer, 2003, p.19). According to Spencer, Navratilova's success was always diminished by the media due to her constant association with homosexuality, an explanation for her “masculine way” of playing, in addition to foreign identity and link with communism. Her non-compliance with the standards stipulated for a woman generated a deep discomfort, even though, in practice, the disputes between her and her opponent, “feminine and maternal”, were very balanced. However, I point out this situation here as well to highlight that playing in a way not dominated by opponents can give positive results. Many teams, in team and individual sports, adopt this strategy according to the opponent they have. Thus, to destabilize opponents of the same weight it can be effective to fight like another weight, for example. However, what would it be like for a heavy man to fight like a light man? It is certainly not impossible, but it would require a lot of work, to the point of impacting by overtraining the epigenetic expression, that is, it would be necessary. Likewise, I do not see it as impossible for a woman to perform close to the male model, but it will be difficult, challenging and possibly frustrating for her. What is asked of the woman, therefore, can be configured as a type of violence, expecting her to transform herself in an extreme level, since what she is/how she performs does not seem to be of great value.

### **6.3. Masculinization of women?**

Performing as a woman in a masculine environment without becoming a man is obviously and perfectly possible. It seems, however, that many women experience difficulties in finding their personal worth, as patriarchal society extols everything masculine. Thus, some women may start to pursue what, ultimately, is a way of performing recognized and valued (McRobbie, 2015). The tradition of some ancient cultures was linked to the transmission of supposed values through the family, the clan, the name. Traditionalist families still carry something of a great honour for belonging and possessing a certain surname. Perhaps because of the Italian roots that my family has, it is also a reality among its members the understanding that the surname needs to perpetuate. In Brazilian culture, where until a few years ago a woman should assume her husband's surname, having male children was of particular value for this perpetuation of the family line, full of domination. Ironically, my parents were the only ones in their families, among many siblings, not to have any son. It embittered their lives, and mine and that of my sisters too, for sure. Even though it is full of irrationality, I remember being, as a child, always striving to please them, to somehow show that even as a girl I could be "good" too, be of some worth. Evidently at that time in childhood I was not aware of it, but I see how intimately I believed I was in an inferior place because I was a girl and sometimes I wished I was a boy. The conception of what was really relevant, serious, important was around the boy/man, and the girl/woman was just an extension of them, secondary, corroborant and futile. An authentic feeling of the "second sex", as De Beauvoir (2011) points out.

Although this is just one example among the billions of families that exist in the world, this may possibly be repeated with greater or lesser proximity on other sides, helping to establish cultural and social visions. My way of seeing ideologies reproduced in society leads me to perceive some degree of similarity with facts reported by athletes. Evidently, I cannot and am not claiming that people lived in the same situations as I did. What I consider is that, whatever their experiences, the social understanding of certain diktats finds similarities, as possibly the reader also identifies in the comments:

We do want to resemble them in many ways, because they are stronger and more... they attract a lot of attention, but it (training) is very separate (women's and men's *kata* per team). (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

I believe that some of us do adopt (masculinized traits), because we also spend a lot of time with them (men) and there is always... But I don't think it's bad either, because I think it's complementary to women, I don't think it's bad. (Venus, Interview 22 (2), 02/09/2020)

I think that I am, among the girls, like more... the one who does the *kata* more like the boys, because I am a bit brute. But there are also guys who make it very, very aesthetic, very beautiful. Yes, like combat girls, there are very elegant girls. Very, very rough girls, so there is a bit of everything. (Perséfone, Interview 29 (1), 15/09/2020)

I get along just as well with a boy as I do with a girl. In fact, many times I even get along better with a boy than with a girl as a general rule. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

I have always had a better relationship with the boys than with the girls, let's see, there has always been a very good relationship, without any problem and I liked their competitiveness more, because if I was with them I would try harder to be stronger, more, you know, so I've always gotten along with them very, very well. (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

As Venus points out, the incorporation of characteristics considered masculine is not necessarily negative for women. The characteristics themselves are not masculine or feminine, as I already said, they are just designated this way or that socially. However, the reasons why women might deliberately want to resemble men may say something important. In other words, if similarity is sought as the only way to achieve respect and personal value, even justifying the incorporation of hegemonic masculinity by women, it seems to me that there is a problem. If that is not the case, it is certainly okay to carry any features at all. As Young (1980, p.140) points out, "it is not necessary that any women be 'feminine' –that is, it is not necessary that there be distinctive structures and behavior typical of the situation of women." It could even be positive and subversive to take positions that somehow confront the established, destabilizing it (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021; Carlsson, 2017; Landi, 2018; Maor, 2018). However, it is first necessary to recognize, I believe, where we are, that is, to identify the social postulations that culminate in this accusation of a masculinized woman. Since, most of the time, I would say, just for entering the male field, she is labelled as masculinized. An athlete points in this direction something very simple, but that seems to be part of what people in general believe:

People have this stereotype that we are more masculine because there are fewer women who practice sports than men, so simply the fact of wearing a tracksuit... They are not used to seeing, the population is not used to seeing a tracksuit on a woman. That happens to me a lot, with my friends too. I have the tracksuit because I study sports science, because I am not going to wear jeans at the university. (...) But that

does not mean that after leaving the university I don't like to be super groomed, super painted and super flirty, the only thing that there is one thing for everything (a way that respects the occasion). So how are there fewer women in this area –in my career, I have done in a class of 60, and we were two girls– people are not used to seeing girls and that is why they think that we are more masculine. But we are not masculine, we are equal. There is machismo in reverse. It's not that I'm more masculine, it's that it's not a boy thing, it's the field, it's the terrain. The only thing that sport is associated with the male. (...) We have a very stereotypical “pink for girls, blue for boys”. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

Diana criticizes that what could be taken as equality becomes what she calls machismo in reverse, with the social vision calling for “inequality”, emphasizing differences, in this case, of little or no relevance. This is very simple, an argument that may appear to have little weight perhaps, but which could turn into something complex. Being two women among 58 men, how are they expected to behave? If they emphasize feminine attributes, will they not be inquired what they are doing? Will they not be accused of affectionately provoking men? They make themselves equal to their peers, therefore, but are not freed from feathers either. The fact that they enter environments widely accepted as masculine, even though they do not belong to men, destabilizes the security and power of men. So, the inconveniences generated lead to the question of why the woman wants to do what she is not supposed to do, as I commented in the previous category. If it is not her own, she would infiltrate the environment to corrupt men, like the reporters of the 1960s-70s, being responsible for arousing the desires and fantasies in men. Women would be a kind of temptation.

Vaczi (2016) developed a study which discussed the perspective of the female presence in male sport as the “fatal woman”. As a fan, athlete or girlfriend, women could be destabilizing men, since she “is a ‘dangerous destabilizer’, a woman whose sensuality may threaten the male order of sport performance” (p.301). From then on, women are given some characteristics and responsibilities such as “demonization, fetishization, the pathologization of sex and the proliferation of erotic fantasies” (p.299). It is intriguing to note how susceptible men are, in this case, to women. If they were really in control of themselves, they should be able to resist the “temptation” that women create. In other words, not having access to something is not synonymous with self-control. Not even for monks. Any woman who deprives herself of the temptations of the world, isolated somewhere, could become a saint too. My point is: what kind of self-control is this if what threatens it is absent?

Another possibility that is often considered to answer why women want to enter male environments also mentioned earlier is because there they would be with their peers, all together those who “like women”. Athletes help to understand the prejudiced vision that is thrown at them:

They talk a lot about “well this girl does karate, she already likes girls; look at her, that’s *machunga*; look at how she’s dressed”. There are many labels and it is that those labels really... they are not like that, because as it says it is a label. (Venus, Interview 22 (2), 02/09/2020)

To me, since I was a girl, girls used to say the typical thing to me, “you’re a *machorra* (lesbian), *machorra*”, I didn’t care because I knew that... I didn’t care, I would play soccer with the children, basketball, karate and I said “look, if I have a good time...”, and I was very young, “if I have a good time, I don’t care”. And right now when I’m older I don’t care, people know I’m not a *machorra*, but even if I was, there is nothing wrong, well, nothing, if you are *machorra*, then you are *machorra* and that’s it, no problem, just like a person who is nice and another who is angry. I don’t care, with my style, well, about dressing, I’m the way I am, so I don’t care what people think. My close people know what I am and then I don’t care. (Juno, Interview 24 (1), 05/09/2020)

What I have noticed the most is, even from close up, that people do not want that for their daughters (doing karate and being accused of homosexuality). (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

It happened to me at the institute (school) and they keep telling me it even today, I think the last time I heard it was doing the national trainer course, about being a man. Many times they tell me that I am a boy, “you are a boy, you are half a boy”, the typical phrase. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

It is extremely uncomfortable to have your sexual orientation questioned, something that does not concern anyone. Thus, Roth and Basow (2004, p.253) observe that “The fear of being labeled or outted as lesbian can lead to an even greater emphasis on femininity by female athletes either to prove that they are not lesbians or to hide the fact that they are”. In this sense, Tajrobehkar (2016) conducted a study that concluded women who do bodybuilding need to show that even though their bodies are strong and muscular, they are feminine. Muscles seem to reduce the aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010) of women in the hegemonic view that guides society. Gorely, Holroyd and Kirk (2003) also verified how the

impact of the physically muscular image leads young people to reject what they consider to be too strong female bodies. However, appearance and physical power (Roth & Basow, 2004) and even sexual orientation (Rich, 2010) can become somewhat subversive attitudes adopted by women. Through those simple attitudes they emphasize they are strong enough, for example, to protect themselves freeing men from this supposed need.

McRobbie (2015) talks about the ways of controlling women through the restrictions imposed on their bodies and the ideal designed for them of perpetual search for a perfection that never arrives or will never arrive. Breaking this somewhat vicious cycle would lead to a fundamental bodily liberation for female empowerment. Roth and Basow (2004) argue that physical feminism has enormous liberating potential for women, and that, however, not even some feminist positions take it into account, not giving it all the importance it deserves. As a result, women remain in a place of physical weakness when they should exercise their physical power, unknown even to them. In a more radical way, Rich (2010) in her critique to an ideology that overvalues heterocentricity even among feminists, considers that the lesbian existence is erased in feminism. In her view, heterosexuality functions as a political institution that removes the power of women, always making them submissive to men.

From these contributions in the literature, it is possible to extract another view of the accusations of masculinization and use them as new possibilities for making gendered embodiment. However, it is necessary to note that women are able to deal with this, first. And then they could use the accusations to further transgress the spaces of male preserve. As Hera pointed out in a comment, “you start hitting, and it bothers them. Then they get angry and they start to hit you harder”. When men feel in any way cornered, they attack. This possibly motivates the accusations directed against women, of “strange”, “abnormal”, “masculine”, since “heteronormative discourses also regulate the way of looking at and over the bodies” (Devís-Devís et al, 2017, p.3). Offended, perhaps women will leave the space, kept under male domination. On the other hand, if they are capable to say, as Juno put it, “I don’t care”, and at least stand firm there, they are making space for manoeuvre. And if, going a little further, they are able to adopt postures that somehow confront men and their power, this could be destabilizing the consolidated structures. By adopting confrontational postures, I mean somehow embracing accusations of masculinization, and not denying it. Perhaps there are possibilities to interrupt the *habitus*, as suggested by Gorely, Holroyd and Kirk (2003). They state that “it is precisely because the habitus is socially constructed that it is susceptible to change” (p.442). However, the undeniable question arises, already raised by Young (1980), and considered also by Gorely, Holroyd and Kirk (2003, p.443), “how they could change within

patriarchal culture". And in the case of martial arts, an environment so permeated by traditionalism, this possibly encounters extra difficulties. Diana offers a perspective:

I believe that there cannot be a change if there is not a radical change. (...) Just be radical. When it is radical and everything has been seen from different eyes and from other perspectives, that is when it can give equality. If there is no radical change, that equality will never exist, from my point of view, because (men) will always be superior in number. (...) You can't just go without being noticed. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

Perhaps the possibilities provided by the literature sound radical, and then Diana would be in resonance with the authors. The materials exposed here are configured as ways to impact and advance in direction of change. Gorely, Holroyd and Kirk (2003, p.443) propose "physical empowerment of young people" and "to de-stabilize both stereotypical femininities and masculinities" to interrupt the *habitus*. Actually, women in karate and other martial arts does precisely this, which is why, probably, there is so much push-back from men. So, having your sexuality questioned, as I said, is unpleasant, as is being labelled masculine, something that seems unfair from the point of view of women in this position, who do not see themselves that way. But if the accusations are reactions to the discomfort generated and a reflex of some degree of destabilization of the hegemonic order, this is valid and deserves to be suffered. It can configure a new *habitus* and a new type of femininity and, as a result, a new type of masculinity, in addition to help building an elaborated type of subjectivity. An embodied subjectivity, as Cromby (2007, p.7) describes, "the dialectical relation between the outer and the inner, between emergent subjectivity and ongoing social relations, between activity and experience", which is built with somewhat revolutionary aspects.

However, I believe that women often opt, in the sense of acceptance, for this association with masculinization for two main reasons, which are not connected with the conscious subversion of the established order. The first is the simple search for dilution in the group, for belonging, the natural incorporation that occurs of the current *habitus*, in addition to the pursuit of the archetypal model given from outside<sup>106</sup> and the (re)conquest of personal value, of the feeling of importance to the world. And the second reason is the attempt to avoid harassment. If you are not noticed, you are also not harassed. These can be, therefore, means,

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<sup>106</sup> A comment in this respect: "My coach from before also told me when I was thinking about physical preparation 'you already have to impose directly with them seeing you physically.' And of course, you transfer that and it's like you have to have a physical constitution of... man!" (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

resources or strategies commonly adopted by women to gain space or to maintain themselves in this environment typically understood as masculine, even though they may cause them discomfort. In this sense (it would be different in the sense of subversion), these are conceptions sadly rooted in the social imagination, which are also suffered by participants from other modalities of contexts considered masculine. An athlete reports this when trying to deny the association of *karateka* with masculinized traits.

Yes, football or rugby you can say that they are more masculine, but karate, contact sports... Maybe too, but I don't see it the same, maybe it's because I'm inside and I don't see it anymore. I think it is quite well seen and there are a lot of super feminine girls, because maybe I am a little more masculine, but Juno is a diva. There is a bit of everything, then in the end, because the same thing that is here maybe there is in basketball, I don't know. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

Another athlete, though, sees the same theme with a little more breadth:

I think it is a stereotype that we have in society that is bad. They have even told me "you are too thin to do karate", a man. In other words, (her thoughts on the man's affirmation) "What do you know about karate?" So first we would have to define what is masculine and what is feminine, because it is not a line... complicated to talk about that is masculine and that is feminine. And second, not by doing karate you are more masculine or more feminine. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

Coaches also express opinions against the masculinization reputation of *karateka* women. Although this may present some points of contradiction with other moments of their speeches, their contribution is, like that of the athletes, obviously valid and respectable:

I have always worked in sports, the girl to do sports that is more "tomboy", whatever you want to say, I think it is a point back in the equality of men and women. If you play sports, you play sports. In prehistory we all played sports and ran to survive. I know girls who don't do sports and have much more gross features than those who do sports. I don't think it's the sport's fault. (...) For me there is no difference and I think that should change for equality. In the end, the person or even the women themselves are the ones who label and with that inequality is created. If a girl plays sports, she does sports. Not for that reason she will be more masculine. (Apolo, man, Interview 33 (2), 25/09/2020)

I think karate can be very feminine and super pretty. In fact, it fits very well with women and also because of the way they do it and their techniques, the aesthetic of women in karate itself is very beautiful, that is, the development of movements, the way of kicking, not having to exert too much force in the blow for it to be scored, and being very aesthetic movements and such, I think it also contributes a lot to women. In fact, my workouts are joint, boys and girls, and they are the same for boys and girls. And I may be wrong, I don't know, but I think they should train together and train the same. I think karate is karate and there is no more. The usual thing is that girls train with girls and with boys, which they don't... It is true that we try, when there are teams, to move more between girls, due to the characteristics of the work, but nothing else, absolutely nothing else. (Ares, man, Interview 35 (2), 29/09/2020)

I believe that we are people and there are people who on a sentimental level are much more... how to say it... I don't know how to tell you, like they give themselves more, or are capable of getting more out of these feelings and others are not. In my case, I believe that I am a very sensitive boy, because I like dealing with people much more, that closeness, making affection, being at ease, and this does not mean that I feel feminine or less of a man. (...) We want to match in things that do not need to match. Each one is as they are, whether you are a man or a woman. (...) I believe that we are not equal, but we are not equal either between two men, so I do not want to equal myself with another, how do I have to equal myself to another man? (...) You have these qualities and each one has to know how to take them out in their field. I know a lot of girls in their fields who are the best, but they are the best not because they are girls or boys. (Apolo, man, Interview 33 (2), 25/09/2020)

I recognize that this is complicated terrain and the subject is complex, as I mentioned at the beginning, and that anything you say can be used against you. In relation to the various issues involving gender, people often try to express themselves in a correct or politically correct way, but the fact is that the theme has a constant dynamism. Taking this into account, I see as relevant the observation of one of the trainers to carry out the training of men and women collectively, with the intention of working equally. The interaction between men and women in combat sports precisely because of mixed-sex training (Channon, 2013; Maclean, 2016; 2017) will undoubtedly strengthen women and add value to the spaces as a whole. It is only necessary to consider also that this does not invalidate equitable work in parallel, taking into account the differences that exist between men and women, as karate, which is unique and universal, was not designed for women, and thus, today requires adaptations. In addition,

women benefit from training by strengthening themselves, it is true, but this happens to them as much as to men. The point here is that she is understood as weak, and needing this concession from the male world, from men who theoretically were born strong. She supposedly has nothing to offer to the field, just benefiting from it, which is obviously not the case.

By karate becoming sportier and more aesthetic than violent, according to the coaches' view, it fits with woman, understood according to hegemonic femininity. Furthermore, they punctuate the theme of equality/equity, which is certainly what women are looking for. However, the argument used by one coach that equality is asked for in things that do not fit can be controversial, as this view often expresses that problems are less important than the importance that women attach to them. And finally, the accountability of women themselves for the existing inequality, that is, theoretically men would not see differences between women and men if women did not point it out to them. I disagree with this statement, which seems an argument in the direction of domination and, I would add, manipulation and symbolic violence, leading woman, the “other”, to feel responsible and guilty for the gender order.

My proposal is not about a competition between men and women. However, if women just conform to the power dynamics and accept that they do not have space if they do not achieve what men say to them, they will continue not having space and this could even result on the contrary, increasing disadvantage. As Criado-Perez (2019) says, everything that is previously established and said to be not gendered, presented as “neutral”, is actually not neutral, it is masculine. Therefore, even though it is not a competition against men, it is very important to mark the place of women. Roth and Basow (2004) criticize a view established among cultural feminists that women are superior to men and should not go down to their level. This posture can be more elegant, comfortable and avoid confrontation, something, by the way, that would not be characteristic of women (confrontation), however, it seems that this posture does not lead to change either, preserving the social position of women as fragile, weak, submissive, dominated. I believe it is already clear that I do not deny the evidence given biologically nor the fact that male violence is frightening for the vast majority of women, including elite athletes. However, simply accepting inferiority and not arguing, in this case, against positions identified with hegemonic masculinity, does not seem to me the way to solve the problem.

Considering all this, which in fact serves as a bridge to the next category, I will present the athletes' testimonies about uncomfortable experiences lived in the martial world.

#### **6.4. Uncomfortable situations: power and machismo**

Due to the fact of being a woman, well I have felt anger, helplessness... due to the fact of being a woman. And well, what is happening is not fair, but I have to put up with it. I imagine it will be a feeling very similar to those that a person has, maybe being from another race, or is it "how do I solve this?" If it has no solution, it is totally unfair, then, you have to put these things on the table because sometimes people are not aware or do not know that things are like that and how you feel about that. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

Some things, although harsh, are understood to be characteristic of the sports environment, of the culture that is created by punishing the body (Vaz, 2005b). That is, there is a certain permissiveness for things that outside the sports field would not be tolerated. Reification, as pointed out by Horkheimer and Adorno (1985), takes place in a kind of method that disciplines the body to the point of machinization, and teaches how to subject oneself by developing a certain insensitivity. So it seems to be that some things are less felt, or are at least accepted as "part of the game". That is, inside the *dojo*, the court, the field, the track, things happen that can be more or less harsh, but that must remain there, that are suspended when people leave the environments. The athletes bring some examples of this:

We are training and the coach is with a boy in an exercise, he is lazy and the coach tells him, "don't be a sissy", because he is hitting lazy. So for me that is simply machismo and situations like that I have lived, but it is that situations like this are inevitable not to live. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

It is a hidden language, that is, direct situations, no. Leaving me aside for being a woman (for example), no. But jokes, yes there are. There are today and every day, yes. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

At the high level is that at the end... when a person sees that... (the person) was stepping on you, that the person come to your side and, maybe she or he is already older than you, in the end there is always like gestures or things that, which they are, are not violent because nothing like "I'm going to punch you and I'm going to kill you"

has never happened, no. But gestures and words that perhaps were unnecessary at that time. Have I been to any of them? Yes, but I think that is normal, it comes with the elite and it comes with... sometimes it will be better, sometimes it will be worse. But this is linked to high-level sport, it is what you have to do, period. (Venus, Interview 3 (1), 14/07/2020)

I remember once that I was going to give a class in the coaches course, (...) I was preparing things and a comment they made me was "don't worry, being a girl the safest thing is that they won't listen to you, they're there looking to you and that's it". You know that is... Sexualizing you at the level, you are a... (...) They had introduced me to the course, instead of saying my professional resume, they said "I'll leave you with Atena, who is gorgeous", it's a shame. Later in the course of machismo, I notice that men get super aggressive when I talk about these things, and I am not accusing them specifically, I simply say that it is something that happens. And then one of them raised his hand and said "well, you were introduced like this today," I said "and what do you think, it is machismo or not?" (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

It is interesting to note in this last comment how inquisitive male observation reveals the belief that “women complain, but deep down they like it”, which in turn spells out how some men believe they know what women want better than women themselves. That is, what women say does not mean what they are clearly saying, but what men decide to understand, after all, supposedly women do not know what they are saying from their place of “other”, childish and unworthy. In any case, as the athletes point out, there are some situations that are part of the package, which are part of the sports environment, even though they generate disgust. However, there are others that go beyond what can be tolerated. Often they come through as jokes, which makes it difficult to understand clearly and, perhaps because of this, from my point of view, they become even more violent. In sports culture in general, what is not allowed in the broad spectrum of jokes is related to racist practices. It is interesting that in the opening sentence of this category, Atena says exactly that, that she feels such a degree of discomfort “due to the fact of being a woman” that she compares her sensation/feeling with what a person of another race possibly experiences. Thus, it is worth asking why so many actions that offend women at a level that can be compared to that of racism are normalized. It is clear that the presence of women, understood as “other” (Young, 1980), not perfectly aware and capable (Gonçalves, 2014), has the potential to bother people identified with hegemonic male environments. But, sometimes, in fact, she is not considered a person under the same conditions as men. Long before Young, Aristotle (Aristóteles, 1996) equated women, children

and animals, all holders of a place of subalternity, which was also done, as we know, through different religious traditions. In some cultures, where it to some extent still remains, this is taken to an extreme:

For example, those from Saudi Arabia, who do not take girls to compete, only boys. (Proserpina, Interview 18 (2), 24/08/2020)

For example, those from Iran are training. Okay. And suddenly they have all the space and when you arrive and invade them, they look at you as if to say "what are you doing, woman?" (...) When you arrive and stand up to them and say "no, this place belongs to everyone", they are left as if to say "but what is this girl doing?" (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

However, also in Western and European culture, seen in a way as central in the world, in addition to being considered the most advanced and evolved in several aspects, prejudices and discriminations of all kinds are present:

A colleague who was before in the national team had once commented that if she was going to train and there were two in class and there were just two girls, the teacher did not give them the class. But if they were two boys, he did give them the class or if it was a boy and a girl, he did give them the class. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

It is something that we do without realizing it, there are many behaviours that people are not aware of. (...) I know many coaches who believe that being a coach for girls, it is not cool, that the (high) level is in the boys, and what they like is male *kumite*. Last year, the senior Spanish championship, we stayed to watch the men's senior *kumite* team final. And after finishing the men's senior team *kumite* final, my fellow coaches stand up and say "well, we're going now." So I said "no, we see the boys and we don't see the girls? Don't screw me!" I said it like this. So, "ah, yes, yes, sorry, of course, you want to see it". We see the boys' final and the girls we skip it. We don't see either, or we see both. Now for fifteen minutes we wait for the girls to finish because it's the final that interests me. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

In addition, the then president of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games Organizing Committee, Yoshiro Mori, in February 2021 made macho statements about women. He said that "Boards of directors with many women take a long time. If you increase the number of female executive members, and if their speaking time is not limited to a certain extent, they will find it difficult to finish, which is annoying". And he added: "Women have the spirit of

competition. If one raises their hand (to speak), the others feel they should also express themselves.<sup>107</sup> That's why everyone ends up talking. We have eight women on the organizing committee, **but they know how to stay in their place.**"<sup>108</sup> According to the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper, male assistants present at the meeting laughed at Mori's macho statements. He, after the polemic, resigned his post.

The female presence in the Olympic Committee does not meet the requirements of the entity's governance project, which provided for 40% of women in the composition (Gonçalves & Vaz, forthcoming). In relation to karate specifically, athletes also have something to say:

I think it's a lot of struggle for a short time. I think several generations will pass, much to our regret, until we start to see female referees, coaches, and women in assemblies. I recently commented to my teammates that there was a photo of the WKF assembly in which eight, nine people were members of the assembly, it is that they were all men, over 50 years old, all in the same role, there was not a single woman in the assembly of the World Federation. It is something that to me... it kind of hurts me, because I believe that a female head can contribute the same or more... It was age and gender. I don't know how long it will take, but I think it will take a lot to break that barrier. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

If there were not this inequality, we would not have the need for that program (favouring female sport) to exist. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

I do see is that the girls' team is still three and the boys' five and I don't understand why. In fact, in the world championships we are more girls' teams than boys, if there are five weights, why can't there be five competitors in a team? Apart from that I see it in the technical part, in the part of the assembly, no women. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

In Spain I would like to see more women in the assembly of the Spanish Federation and they are not seen, I would like to investigate why. I think it's not because there aren't any, but because they (men in charge) put more obstacles on them (women), because they have created like their circle, that they can do very well in sport, so as an

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<sup>107</sup> They may not be competing but cooperating. Possibly an unknown language.

<sup>108</sup> The translation from Portuguese to English, as well as the griffins in order to highlight the place attributed to women and to which they, educatedly, correspond, are mine. The report can be accessed at <https://globoesporte.globo.com/olimpiadas/noticia/presidente-do-comite-toquio-2020-faz-declaracoes-machistas-sobre-presenca-feminina-em-reunioes.ghtml> (accessed on 27/05/2021).

athlete I don't have to say anything, but it does bother me at the “woman” level and prepared woman, because I see around me how there are many prepared women who do not have opportunities. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

Pfister (2003) carried out an analysis based on quantitative data from Germany, Denmark, the United States and Australia in relation to female leadership in sports organizations. She points out that women do not have the same status as men. Also Fasting and Pfister (2000), as well as more recently Melo and Rubio (2017), report how the positions of power in the sports market are not occupied by women. This leads to the mandatory establishment of quotas through laws to ensure that basic rights and some degree of respect are guaranteed to people, in addition to preventing some contexts from being configured as “male clubs” (Pfister, 2003, p.12) or “‘women-free’ zones” (p.16)<sup>109</sup>. Moraga-Contreras, (2020, p.67) explains that

Quotas are a specific type of affirmative action or also called positive actions, a case of inverse discrimination through which there is a decisive impact with the aim of reducing that proven and quantifiable gap that has not been able to be shortened in another way.<sup>110</sup>

In other words, if it had been possible to achieve equality by other means, it would not have been necessary to resort to mandatory legal means, as pointed out in Diana's previous comment, which undeniably signals social injustice. Minerva also expresses her opinion in this regard:

It is curious to see how it is strictly enforced. If there must be two girls out of 12 people in the assembly, there are two girls. Why can't there be four, five or six? That bothers me and it squeaks me because it's like "you've put in the first shift to fill the quota and that's it." For me that is also machismo, because it is like saying “that you force me to put two girls in? Okay. I put in the two and that's it." So you fix nothing there, because they are complying with the law, but they are not complying with it in a way that they understand, they comply because it has to be that way and that's it. Otherwise there would be three, four... No. There are two. For me that is also a reality of machismo, that the law is strictly enforced, period. It is true that at the institutional level, they are supporting us more, or there is a project for women and sports... The boys say "why does it have to exist?" Well, that argument seems the same to me as

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<sup>109</sup> All quotes from Pfister (2003) were translated from Portuguese to English by me.

<sup>110</sup> Translation from Spanish to English mine.

those who say why does the gender violence law have to exist. Well, because it is something historical that has happened and we must fight against it. Yes, is there violence from women towards men? Yes. (But) historically it has always been men to women and today the percentage is brutal. Well, the same in sports. What are the differences in terms of sports in which you have to support the boys? Yes, but it is 5% in relation to other sports. So they are arguments against which you have to fight at the bar, talking to your friends, because you have to say “yes, there has to be a gender violence law; yes, there has to be a woman and sports law”, because we have historically been fighting against a lot of barriers that if they don't support us a little we won't be able to break down and we see how they are not breaking down (the barriers). So, well, little by little we fight against those micro machismos, but in my opinion it will take several generations until we see a little bit of equality. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

However, not all athletes share Minerva's view, which is normal. Some *karateka* do not see the problem as centrally important. Some seek to understand coaches, which also makes sense, but say that there are scholarships for women's sports, which is not egalitarian, as there are none for men. Furthermore, some consider that women are often too fixated on machismo, as it may just be the education received by some people, especially older people. In some ways, they are in line with “traditional supply-based approaches (of work that) place the 'blame' of female segregation in the market on women themselves and their 'decisions'” (Pfister, 2003, p.30). An athlete and coaches contribute in this regard:

The money, we charge the same money, if there is a championship the same is charged for men and women... Maybe I miss and it makes me a little angry that there is not so much presence of women, but I understand that it is a sport that has always been for men, there are more men behind, the directive is more likely to be all men. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

I think you have to give the story time. Since our grandparents have passed 50 years, they were not able to make food themselves (grandfather), they did not do any housework, and in 50 years we are now living in a time in which man, maybe not 50-50 (%), but he is already doing housework. It is not a woman's work; it is a housework. So what I think has come or is coming to that, that the woman has started to work and has realized that she cannot alone, or that she cannot handle both. Before, culturally the woman did not work, then the housework was done by herself, while the man

worked. Now women have gone to work, society is changing so the task is divided between men and women and although it is still more with women, in matters of the home or childcare, I think little by little it is catching up and I think it is catching up with time. But haven't passed, if you look at history, just in 40, 50 years, it seems like a brutal advance to me. And we want to change things that cannot be changed from, at the end, from education. (Apolo, man, Interview 33 (2), 25/09/2020)

I'm not *machista*, huh? But I insist that it is a bit of history, my father was born in 1914 and that's it. (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

I have not seen any machismo. I feel lucky to be where I am. I have not seen anything strange, that is, I cannot comment on a subject of those. (Hefaistos, man, Interview 37 (2), 30/09/2020)

In the opposite sense to what was explained in Apolo's comment, Pfister (2003, p.27) contributes by saying that "In relation to the sexual hierarchy, sports organizations are a faithful reflection of societies as a whole, characterized by an imbalance of power and status." She also provides considerations about the history:

When reflecting on the reasons why women are a minority in the highest positions in the sport, one should keep in mind the history of this practice. As already mentioned, the sport was "invented" and developed by man and for man and, for a long time, "it was obvious" that men were the athletes and also the "born" sports leaders. And it takes a long time to change traditions... (p.28)

In line with Pfister are comments from other athletes, who are more firmly positioned in relation to the problem:

The world of karate is a bit *machista*, on a historical level. In the end, the great masters were all men, right? I imagine that there would also be women who practiced karate, but the karate world has been a bit *machista* in that sense, also like everything, little by little, because we will have to make our way. And well, it is a bit of being national coaches, being a coach of your community, or little by little to get into that world. (Hera, Interview 21 (2), 27/08/2020)

Initially, only men were allowed to participate for a very long time. This earlier participation of men over women makes them specialize more. (...) I think it goes a bit for historical reasons and then because the industry revolves around men, which is what sells. So, changing something that pays a lot, football (male), basketball (male),

which gives a lot of money to bet on something that you do not know if it will give money (female sport), it is complicated. I think that history also predates sport a lot. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

Ceres' commentary contains important information that begins to extend a bridge to the next chapter. What sells the most? Relying on women to coach the most profitable men's teams is something almost impossible, given the prevailing belief that women are supposed to be incapable of achieving success on their own.

The course taken by this category leads to a somewhat desolate scenario, which in fact is also pointed out in other areas. However, as I have been commenting, it is necessary to situate ourselves, to know where we are, and then also to act. Athletes have an attitude, in general, of non-conformity, of continuing to fight, and this is extremely positive:

If you compare it (Spain) with the rest of countries, we are not so bad. But it is true that this is conformism and if we settle for “not being so bad”, in the end we will not achieve the objective we have. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

Undoubtedly it is demanding for women in general and athletes in this context in particular to deal with the adversities that are imposed on them. And why are adversities imposed? Unbelievably because they were born women. With the athletic potential that they have and work to develop more and more, if hypothetically, under similar conditions, they had been born men, where could they be? It seems to me completely insane, that by performing as a woman one's potentials are contained. Gender is a social construction that structures our lives based on the modulations it receives from the most diverse social institutions. Normally, according to Lorber (1994, cited in Pfister, 2003), family, work, state, sexuality, language, culture are taken into account. However, sports organizations also strongly influence this construction. In other words, if we are faced with an overly prejudiced society, working in the different institutions that make it up would be a driving force for change. The sports world is an institution of great social power, because unlike some other institutions, it works with the person in their entirety. That is, the contribution it offers to the construction of gender is embodied: gendered embodiment and embodied subjectivity.

By this I mean that the potential that can be exercised by sport, if well managed, is extremely powerful. It can promote embodied empowerment for many people, in which many women are undoubtedly willing to contribute, as the athletes point out. They can help to build environments that are more just, equitable and empowering, changing the hegemonic logic of traditionally male environments, which becomes good for everyone since it allows everyone to

perform authentically. However, it is still necessary to become aware of other problems that prevent the expression of free embodied subjectivity, addressed in the next chapter.

### 6.5. Chapter closure

Despite all the path already traced by feminism, women still face several adversities to perform as themselves in different environments, the martial being one of them. This chapter aimed to present the means, resources or strategies adopted by women to gain space or to maintain themselves in the *karateka* environment, typically understood as masculine. Throughout the course of the categories I have been dialoguing with the information offered by the field and with literature in order to find possibilities or argue against widely established diktats. Initially, the situation that was configured was that of the prominence of woman when she approaches what is understood as masculine. In other words, the valorisation is always attributed to the masculine, the fact that some success is starred by a woman could be taken as a mere detail.

In order to understand the female fame acquired by women in the martial world of “weeping”, in the first category of the chapter I approached the specific culture of the martial world, bringing something like a historical rescue that can connect the links. Self-control and control of emotions would be supposedly not achieved by women who, ironically, were not allowed to receive the education that could lead them to such conquests. At times, however, this view becomes contradictory, as the woman would also be too rational to fight. She is approached and distanced from male supremacy according to convenience, which leads to the verification of her as “other”, an incomplete being and incapable of achieving completeness.

In the search for acceptance and some degree of prominence, many women start to pursue the male model of someone who knows how to fight, which is given to them from the outside. So, in the second category I dealt with the masculine ideal of fighting like a man and, therefore, by approaching the masculine, having some consideration among the fighters, or the acceptance of the inferiority of fighting like a woman, that is, who theoretically does not know how to fight. Some comments especially from coaches around genetics, testosterone and prehistory required an analysis close to biology, which undeniably adds value to the reflections, demystifying some points and corroborating others. The lack of practice or intense training of some movements, as well as specific training considering the general female biology are issues to be considered. In addition to the observation related to the size of the athletes

and the spaces, which could generate somewhat misperceptions in relation to the performances. In favour of women populating competitions, I moved on to the subcategory of analysing videos of their fights in elite championships.

The observation of the gendered movement of *karateka* that I carried out took into account qualitative criteria established on the basis of the sociological literature and the considerations of the athletes themselves and their coaches. All of this talked to some extent with publications from other video analyses carried out around karate, albeit in their entirety non-sociological. Among the findings, it is evident the importance of the link between what is performed objectively and what is perceived subjectively by those who perform. Furthermore, there seems to be a difference again between the *kata* and *kumite* sub modalities and their form of acceptance in the field. Finally, and in response to the objectives of the analysis, it is possibly appropriate to say that there is a feminine way of fighting, but only with generalized characteristics, since there is a rich plurality of styles, as many as there are women. And about what it means to fight like a woman, for the field it means poor performance, however, from my point of view and considering the countless factors analysed, I would say first that it is a very complex topic, requiring a deep analysis, and second, that it means “to fight”, not just on the mat. It is not impossible for a woman to perform like a man, however, this requirement is steeped in symbolic violence.

Then I developed the possibly most expected category of work, on masculinization. Persecution for personal worth and a certain recognition in the world can lead many women to submit to the role models imposed on them. Thus, they often adapt and mould to the contexts in which they are seeking acceptance and belonging, in addition to not wanting to be perceived in order to avoid being harassed. They need to face questions about their sexual orientations, suffering accusations of tempting/seducers from men or accusations of being their equals regarding *taste* for sexuality, it means lesbians, in a view of them as addicted to relationships. Supported by illuminating studies that provide more or less radical ideas on how to deal with the problem, I brought possibilities of subversion to be reflected on, developed and applied by women towards change. I consider that through destabilization of the traditional martial male preserve women can find some greater degree of liberation, even though for that they need, in whatever form, to embrace accusations of masculinization.

The last category of the chapter addressed uncomfortable situations experienced by women throughout their *karateka* life. They reported prejudices and machismos that they suffered personally or that they saw in the environment, also offering some alternatives

towards change. The field is still dominated by men, with rare female figures especially in positions of power. Again the place of “other” attributed to women has shown itself and, interestingly, sometimes it seems to be a genuine conception among some men, that is, that in fact women are something like another category of human being for them, evidently bottom. And in other cases, it is possible to notice the deliberate yearning for domination and subjugation.

Considering all these negotiations presented here, but also the subversive character that sleeps in them, I close this chapter. However, in the next one, I will continue to bring up aspects that women deal with in order to stay in the sport. I will work on other stereotypes widely spread within the sports culture that involve women in veils of sensuality and eroticism to the point that this seems to be their vital function, that of satisfying men.



## 7. STEREOTYPED SPORTS CULTURE: THE DESIROUS MALE GAZE

Participating in martial arts, a field widely understood as a male preserve, imposes typical stereotypes of the martial world on female fighters. Women are, then, especially labelled as whining and emotionally unbalanced, in addition to being described as masculinized, which makes the accusation of homosexuality fall on them also (Roth & Basow, 2004). Or they are yet accused of wanting something else with men for being in “their” environment, supposedly tempting and destabilizing them in their serious labour as athletes (Vaczi, 2016). However, as I already mentioned, the martial arts went through a sporting process with its migration or transport to the West. When becoming sport and joining the MACS group, they also incorporated the prejudices of sports culture in relation to female athletes. In other words, there is no replacement of martial arts’ prejudices for sports’ prejudices, they only mutually reinforce each other.

It is true that the accusations of masculinization or the temptress are not exclusive to martial arts, but are presented in sports understood as male terrain in general. However, the fact that in martial arts women generally share the environment with men, not training separately as in rugby or football, leads to their intentions being even more questioned. It is interesting to note how acceptable it is for men to get together for the pleasure of the game, while women would get together for something else, as if there were always hidden interests. In any case, even in sports that do not have this type of male territorial possession clearly defined, where women are simply athletes and do not need to deal with the issue of masculinization, they still have to face other adversities, such as the constant eroticization of their bodies. As part of the sporting world, the *karateka* woman athlete also needs to deal with this problem. In this chapter I approach the stereotypes about women in sporting world in general which, it seems, are cumulative.

The place for women in the sports field does not seem to be without intentionality. In other words, the modalities with which the woman “fits in” are freely accessible to her. A girl who integrates rhythmic gymnastics or other “feminine” modalities is learning how to behave, knowing her place, perhaps being moulded within the capitalist, productivist, disciplinary and competitive logic (McRobbie, 2015) to act in society. These girls and women conform to environments like this and in so doing, they do not bother or bother less the established order. As highlighted by Horkheimer and Adorno (1985, p.106), “the dominant man refuses to the woman the honour of individualizing her.”<sup>111</sup> She does not have the right to autonomy, to self-

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<sup>111</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

govern (Arendt, 1987), only receiving concessions from the male world, even when she seems to be in charge, placed there by some man. After all, “The manner of this renunciation (of power, by men) transforms it into a symbolically powerful repudiation of power” (Paechter, 2006, p.9). Thus, in this logic, the man authorizes her whims, especially those that will end up being useful and profitable for him as well, such as the enjoyment of the sight of their beautiful bodies. And very often it is possible to come across the belief that if a woman is looked at by a man who wants her, she should feel happy, after all she is not ugly<sup>112</sup>, and arouses interest in someone. As will be seen in the categories of analysis, the athletes honestly say that they can feel valued when they realize they attract others, which does not necessarily imply a problem if with respect, after all, it is normal to feel attraction. The problem is that women are expected to feel happy because their bodily capital is being purchased for consumption, which is obviously different and denotes disrespect. In this conception, she is reduced to a predator's prey, is not valued as a person, and is learning the rules of the objectification market.

From my point of view, you sell the woman as a product. And it seems like it's sexier that way. Why sexier? Because we have in mind that the more women show, the more sensual they are. (...) The more tanned... or if you put a girl in *karategi* in a mud pool fighting with another, come on, I don't even tell you what you sell. (...) The problem is that that mentality and that image or that imagination should not be like that. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

The consumer industry of women's bodies values, in a definitively contradictory sense, the body, beauty and sensuality of women. This is accomplished through the objectification and sexualisation of their bodies, which works towards the damage of their subjectivity, reifying them. Physical objectification promotes the dualism of the person, moving them away from themselves. While this facilitates self-submission processes, that is, submission of the body to mistreatment of various types since there is de-identification with it, the relationship with the body is that with a “thing”, a dead body (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1985). This can occur,

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<sup>112</sup> In this regard, the statement made by the president of Brazil in 2014 when he was only a deputy, Jair Bolsonaro, inevitably comes to mind. He made his statement to a reporter, referring to another deputy, Maria do Rosário. Translating from Portuguese to English, what he said was: “She doesn't deserve (to be raped) because she is very bad/disgusting, because she is very ugly, she is not my type of women, I would never rape her. I'm not a rapist, but if I were, I wouldn't rape, because she doesn't deserve it”. From this point of view, a rapist would be rewarding his victim. The article has several male comments in defence of Bolsonaro's position. The fact that he has become president demonstrates how his vision is supported by the population. <http://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2016/06/bolsonaro-vira-reu-por-falar-que-maria-do-rosario-nao-merece-ser-estuprada.html>, accessed on 12/06/2021.

for example, in sports training and affectivity, you submit the body as if it was a thing apart. But what is done somatically affects the whole, just as what surrounds the emotional and mental finds consequences manifested in the physical. Thus, the embodied subjectivity is built. Horkheimer and Adorno (1985) say that mutilated consciousness leads to a love-hate relationship with the body, to its objectification. Bassani and Vaz (2003) suggest that the process in the opposite direction is also possible, that is, an objectified body will lead to the mutilation of consciousness. The objectifying hegemonic heterosexual male gaze, even though it is not unanimous among men, it is broadly felt by women, and also the way in which it dictates and authorizes the places to be occupied by them, such as in “female” sports, where they will provide the desired visual pleasure. It is intriguing to see how men and women deal with and control their desire. Obviously women also have sexual desire, no matter how much men try to deprive them of pleasure, as demonstrated by acts such as clitoral mutilation (Dallery, 1997; Rich, 2010) in order to monopolize jouissance. And even women who have higher testosterone levels, a factor that culminates in polycystic ovary syndrome, whether homo or heterosexual (Smith et al, 2011), they tend to control their desire more skilfully than men. However, this kind of control is not praised in patriarchal society.

So the pleasure that can come from the visual stimuli to which some men submit, eroticizing and fantasizing from them with ease, it seems, leads them to repeatedly search for the triggering factor. It also seems to be that it is this desirous gaze that sustains the pornographic industry, where the woman is the central figure. Preciado (2008) theorizes about a new type of capitalism, which he calls the pharmacopornographic regime. He argues that the leading industries of capitalism today, along with the war companies, are the pharmaceutical and pornographic industries, optimized by the virtual world. Related to the widespread dissemination of the pornography industry is the belief that women in general are satisfied with suffering sadism from the dominant man (Rich, 2010). Following this line, Roth and Basow (2004, p.256) present results of other investigations in their study that show how men enjoy “victimizing, hurting, exploiting”. And they also mention a survey carried out in 1991 in which “more than 90% of men said they liked to dominate a woman, and more than 60% claimed they got excited when a woman struggled over sex or would be excited to use force against a woman” (Roth & Basow, 2004, p.256; for more recent research reporting similar findings, see Zurbruggen & Yost, 2004; and Davis et al, 2018). In addition to this being clearly related to rape, it leads me to establish links with the fantasies that are created around the female fighter. She is normally a stronger woman than the average woman, and she is able to take blows in her athletic life. Of course this is restricted to athletic life, however, in fanciful male ramblings she

can fit as a woman fulfilling both the sadistic and possibly masochistic desires of men, given her endurance and strength.

By all this I mean that the place occupied by women is that of merchandise. In the sporting world ultimately men are also marketed. However, men sell performance and feel they are in their world, whereas women would be intruders in this world, and would be for sale themselves. That is, they do not sell their performance, which is disdained. But they are sold as the product itself, an object of consumption depending on the level of sex appeal they may have. Hence the importance given to sports uniforms, preferably small and adjusted to the female body, even if extremely uncomfortable. In this sense, the *karateka* uniform escapes the rule of sexualisation in the name of preserving tradition, bringing women closer to masculinization. As a subversive element of sex appeal to the Western culture, the *gi* works relatively well. However, it encounters a problem in taking the male model as a parameter, which ignores differences, imposing the one-size-fits-men (Criado-Perez, 2019). An alternative uniform that neither sexualizes nor masculinizes women would be perfectly possible.

Considering these issues, my aim in this chapter is to analyse how sports culture influences the development of female embodied subjectivity in Spanish Olympic karate. Therefore, I present four categories of analysis with testimonials from elite Spanish karate athletes and their coaches who relate to established ideas in the sports world. By becoming an Olympic sport, even with a stipulated expiration date, which can later be reversed if karate returns to the Olympic scene, karate is certainly more visible, being more publicized, much more covered than as an amateur sport. Achieving a place among the Olympic modalities, something that karate has sought in its sporting facet and by its practitioners for a long time, means reaching the summit. The level of visibility and economic investment in Olympic sports is incomparable to non-Olympic sports (Vigarello, 2008). It is certainly expected that the investment will result in greater consumption of the modality, returning the vote of trustiness in a profitable way. Therefore, the modalities need to be digestible to the public that will consume them, which explains the changes that many of them undergo over time.

Taking part in the Olympic scene has put karate in a place where sports culture has penetrated it like never before. That is why I consider it relevant to verify how this fact affects the construction of subjectivity of women practitioners. Few will actually compete in the Olympic Games. However, this scenario reverberates and impacts the subjectivity of other practitioners, even at levels of amateur competition. However, I think it is necessary to consider, despite the negative points, the visibility acquired by the modalities when they

become Olympic, which also has some advantages. In other words, at the same time that the sporting spectacle commercializes the modalities and the athletes, it has the potential to avoid invisible injustices of other natures, making public some problems that could unfold without anyone's knowledge. Although objectifying sports culture can be accentuated in the *karateka* martial environment, visibility can be an important and favourable factor to combat worse oppressive practices, where objectification is one of the elements. Besides, before being Olympic, sports culture was not completely absent simply because the sport was amateur. It is now intensified, but perhaps it is compensated, that is what I dare to consider, for its visibility, since as an amateur sport it was almost totally bared, allowing for arbitrary inequalities and actions rooted in tradition in an unrestricted way.

In the following pages I will dedicate myself to presenting the analysis of the elements contributed by the Spanish *karateka* team in relation to the hegemonic sporting culture. I especially consider sensations and feelings that are triggered in athletes from the experiences they live and how they express embodied subjectivity through their behaviour. I start with the category that sociologically addresses the subject of the *karateka* female athlete's body and the different conceptions around it. Then, I bring the team's considerations on the complex topic of femininity, including ideas about beauty and sensuality, relevant elements for thinking about the situation of women and female performativity. As a next category, I present the thoughts related to the eroticization of female athletes, with contrasting as well as complementary opinions of *karateka*, greatly enriching the subject. In the last category, about the desirous male gaze, the athletes honestly narrate the feelings they try in experienced situations that often lead them to indignation.

### **7.1. "Once the championship is over and they dress as a woman, their body shows itself."**

#### **– The body of the *karateka* woman**

In many spheres of society, possibly in most of them, there are still no precise ways to express a human being integrally or holistically. Probably because they are not understood that way. The division between body and mind is still quite recurrent, sometimes used in a somewhat didactic way, at other times an expression of the Greek cultural heritage, particularly in the West (Le Breton, 2011). The Greeks, who as far as it is possible to know the historical past, attributed to the human movement sports/gymnastic characteristics. They used the combination of music and gymnastics to educate the mind/soul and body, respectively

(Platão, 2007). As their heirs, the Romans began to use the well-known phrase “*mens sana in corpore sano*”, which was later adapted by the Baron Pierre de Coubertin. He would be enchanted by sport, already in fact conceived as such, with which he made contact by entering English culture and viewing team games, particularly rugby. In his effort to combine cultures, recover concepts and ideas from the past, and also to cure his disappointment at the defeat of the French in combat because they were, in his interpretation, physically weak, the Baron ordered a new version of the Latin phrase. “*Mens fervida in corpore lacertoso*”. In other words, the body should be trained to carry an enthusiastic mind (Cousineau, 2004).

All of this just reflects that the dichotomy remained. This division generally respects a hierarchy, where the body is subordinate or, more precisely, there is “an active mind mounted on an absent, inert, and dumb body” (Wacquant, 2015, p.2). By combining body and mind in this way, what is achieved, according to Wacquant (2015), is that both are disembodied. This makes a lot of sense, since it is not difficult to observe the subject disconnected from themselves, as a stranger to themselves. They, dichotomized, do not recognize themselves as a body when they look at themselves from the perspective of the mind, nor is the body linked to the stratified ideas that want to command them. This process ends up objectifying the whole. Wacquant therefore suggests that “We need to recognize the reality and potency of carnal know-how, the bottom-up, visceral grasp of the social world –in the double sense of intellectual understanding and dexterous handling– that we acquire by acting in and upon it” (p.3).

The mind elaborates everything that the body captures, replete with nerve endings. In other words, neuronal cells occupy our skin, our heart, our intestines and everything else, anatomically and didactically organized to form a unit. The instinctual sensations that warn of danger are a knowledge “of the body”, captured by the intestine rather than the brain. Sexual desire, considered dirty by different social institutions, is attributed to the body and contributes to relegate it to a devalued place. However, the desire is equally elaborated by the mind, also obviously active in the emotional and sensory capacity (Maclean, 2017). So the body also thinks and the mind also feels, and both act. The lived experiences occur through embodiment (Aartun et al, 2020; Oliver & Kirk, 2015). All subjectivity is embodied, expressed through an intellectual elaboration immersed in and taken over by feelings and sensations. If not, it could possibly be said that we are facing something devoid of life, or someone partially or at different levels devoid of life, which leads to the reification or objectification of that person.

The person is, therefore, as a whole. Everything is transcribed in the body (Le Breton, 2011), but it takes some time and some contact to deepen the knowledge of the subjectivity of the human being in question. The movements of the person say a lot, and so do the words in a conversation; everything in one person communicates something. People embody the education given to them, and even though it is predominantly intellectual education, it is expressed in the straightness of forms and customs (Soares & Fraga, 2003), since it is embedded in the body, viscerally incorporated. At other times, education is concerned with adapting the body, civilizing it (Elias, 1992) and disciplining it or making it docile (Foucault, 2009). In this direction, the introduction of scales to monitor the body and its weight (Sant'Anna, 2012) as a heap of meat (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1985), just like the socially assumed consensus of what can be displayed or should be hidden (Soares & Fraga, 2003), contribute as control devices while strengthening the canons that govern what is considered beautiful (Bordo, 1997).

The moulding of the body finds special emphasis among women, since “the woman, representing (consciously or unconsciously) in the classical world, the principle of life, the body and sexuality” (Scott, 2020, p.6) would be herself understood as a material principle of life, while man would represent the spiritual principle (Scott, 2020). Young (1980), however, in line with De Beauvoir, conceives the feminine not as a universal essence or principle, but as a social construction. However, it seems to be that Cartesian conceptions and those prior to Descartes still exert a great influence on contemporary culture. Thus, the construction of female subjectivity remains facing methods and techniques that culminate in a pedagogy of female bodies (Albino & Vaz, 2005). Through it, beauty prescriptions produce a woman and a conception of woman that becomes universally accepted, associated with what is “natural”. In a similar way, the behavioural prescriptions made by *The Good Wife's Guide* of 1955 structure the place of servant-body to the husband, of the wife. The formula of how a woman should perform is disseminated. According to Bordo (1997, p.20), “female bodies become what Foucault calls 'docile bodies': those whose forces and energies are used to external control, subjection, transformation and 'improvement’”<sup>113, 114</sup>.

With all this, the vision that is formulated of a woman revolves around what she is bodily, and she performs the required gendered embodiment expected from her in society and

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<sup>113</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

<sup>114</sup> Only very recently, in 2012, female bodies were allowed to participate in all sports that are part of the Olympic Games agenda (Fernandes et al, 2015). It is certainly an achievement, however, the fact that it took so long generates in me more indignation than joy, since it demonstrates how women are still conceived as unequal.

its spheres. In sport this is evident with the modalities revealing themselves through the bodies (Donato, Tonelli & Galak, 2019) shaped by and for their practice, as well as in the character of their practitioners, in the hardness they can express, in their mentality, and so on. I asked the Spanish *karateka* team how they perceive the athlete's moulding process by and for the sport, whether practices produce impactful physical changes or not. This has relevance since it affects the construction of the practitioners' subjectivity as well. The answers obtained can be summarized in three relatively convergent lines. The first expresses the understanding that there is no impactful change in the person's constitution, especially physically:

It does not happen to us, for example, like swimming, which is a very special body, very marked. And less in karate that there are so many weights, then there is a lot of variety of bodies. A body of less than 50 (kg) and a body of more than 68 or less 68, has nothing to do one with another. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

I think the mind changes a lot, I don't think that karate itself changes the body. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

The second line understands that changes occur, however they would be generic, for playing sport, and not specific to the modality:

If you are doing sports as a child, your body will have a different structure than if you don't. (Apolo, man, Interview 33 (2), 25/09/2020)

I believe that the body of the athlete woman is the body of the athlete woman and the one who does not do sports, obviously does not do sports and it can be noted. (Venus, Interview 22 (2), 02/09/2020)

Well, (body changes) like the one who trains any physical activity. (Ares, man, Interview 35 (2), 29/09/2020)

The third line follows the direction that visible changes occur, but which would be harmonic or homogeneous:

The body of the *karateka* woman changes because the sport practiced requires it. Not because she says "come on, I'm going to change my body to do karate." (Juno, Interview 25 (2), 07/09/2020)

I think that on the constitution we have to be, be toned, more or less thin, more or less, I tell you, but it does change the body. (...) But I think the development is quite homogeneous. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

I believe that karate makes very beautiful bodies, both for men and women. (...) It sculpts your body. (...) A very harmonious body is sculpted. (Hermes, man, Interview 32 (3), 21/09/2020)

In *karategi* it is not noticeable. Once the championship is over and they dress as a woman, their body shows itself. Physically they are sportswomen, they do not lose their feminine part, but they are sportswomen who are lean, toned, strong. Great. (Hefaistos, man, Interview 37 (2), 30/09/2020)

The changes generated or not are probably related to the amount/intensity of training performed, in addition to biological/genetic factors. But the point to which I want to direct the discussion, already announced from the sociological perspective, is for the alteration or not of the gendered embodiment. Remaining a woman, that is, expressing elements traditionally linked to the feminine in the sports environment, and even more in the martial environment due to the associations with masculinization, seems to be fundamental. So it may be relevant that when not in martial action but “dressed as a woman”, the *karateka's* body can be intentionally perceived as feminine. During martial action, while the movements to be performed require an especially joint adaptation, they generally maintain a gestural (Guzmán, 2016) and performative (Butler, 1990) charge that is associated with the form culturally transmitted to men and women (Young, 1980). That is, the person is impregnated with what was transmitted to them as girl/woman or boy/man, they embody gender and express it in and through the body and the performed movements that, in order *not* to identify a performance as masculine or feminine, it would be necessary to change the concepts behind the masculine and the feminine. To make myself clear, I do not agree with the view that a woman's performance is inferior, nor that she cannot perform movements that men do, as I defended in the previous chapter. What I am saying is that the performance of women, with few exceptions, is permeated with femininity, even if not in accordance with the hegemonic meaning. I consider that the contemporarily situated femininity is culturally ingrained in the female viscera. This converts a woman into a culturally constructed being in combination with her material reality, especially with regard to exclusive feminine processes, such as experiencing menstruation, as seen in chapter 4. I will cover the topic of femininity in the next section of this chapter.

From my point of view, it is difficult to de-identify from the feminine education received, even because the body techniques themselves are taught taking into account, above all, that this is a girl/woman, and this, as a general rule, is not due to equitable treatment

(Hardin & Whiteside, 2009). Marcel Mauss (1973) himself presented his theory on body techniques as divided and varying according to sex, and age. Vesta contributes in this regard:

**Basically it is what they have taught you** (how to be feminine), the clothing comes to mind, the wanting to get ready, put on dresses or that type of garment and then the form in the same physical behaviour, the way of expressing the movements, yes it shows. (...) The boys I do notice the way they walk. It is different, in general than those of the girls. But if a girl is sometimes going to walk like a boy, you say "she is not feminine." (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

When I was 13 or 14, I am not sure, I heard from a friend that I walked with my legs open, and that girls do not walk with their legs open. I did not like to hear that, obviously. I felt uncomfortable with the comment and also momentarily hated her, being honest. So I started to observe and tried to walk crossing my knees, but I felt completely artificial, and I abandoned the idea, always keeping the already embodied form that is very similar to that of my sisters and cousins who lived near us. In other words, there is something genetics, something cultural and something about decision, since I did not want to change and walk tripping over myself.

Although some forms of expression may be more stereotyped for some people than others, I find it generally relatively difficult to abandon the social situation of a woman acquired over the years (Young, 1980). And by that I do not mean stereotypes around sex appeals. It in no way means that a girl and a woman cannot develop strength, denying the frailty myth (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009), or, contradicting Mauss (1973), that they cannot perform any bodily technique he describes, with an obvious exception of the male reproductive technique. However, I find it difficult to perform in other ways than those which reflects the gendered embodiment done throughout life, especially in childhood and adolescence, although, as I commented in the previous chapter, this should not be impossible. From my point of view, a woman can perform effectively and masterfully as a woman, without needing to imitate the male model, and without needing to use sexually appealing artifices. Roth and Basow (2004) argue that the athlete's identity is what should prevail when practicing a sport, over the woman's identity. This statement of theirs is what triggered my reflection on feeling like a full-time woman. They refer to performance being valued at the expense of possible sexual appeals that gender can provide. I agree that performance is what is in focus for an athlete, without a shadow of a doubt. However, I recognize that I am strongly identified with my social situation as a woman and with my gendered embodiment. Although I have already ceased to exercise other positions I occupied in life, it is difficult for me to try to

abandon or neutralize my female subjectivity, even though in childhood, due to circumstances, I fleetingly wanted to be a boy.

Abandoning female embodied subjectivity is difficult even when others see you differently. My strongest embodied experience in this regard took place when I was approaching adulthood. I think it is relevant to narrate as it brings thoughts about aspects of physical feminism, which I consider to be of great importance for female empowerment. I remember when joining a new group of friends that some would subtly tell me that I was too strong, and that was not a compliment, especially for the way I touched things or themselves in any situation. Some also confessed after a few years that they had doubts about my sexual orientation. This is just interesting. I transitioned through the weight categories in my athlete days like not all fighters do. It is true that my *sensei* never imposed any weight on me to fight, but they suggested it and I, trying not to disappoint, obviously accepted it.

In less than three years, I have oscillated 26 kg. So at a time when I was stronger, and also fatter, I was noticing the reactions of other people to me, including women. It is unpleasant, and it puts enormous pressure on how you should be. Also, I observed from myself how, for example, I spoke aloud easily, which is definitely not my habit. When I was at the opposite end of weight, thinner, and also weaker, talking took effort, and some people even thought I was sick. On the other hand, joint mobility is ample and greatly facilitated with the low weight, as well as the movement agility is optimized. And with more weight, a punch, for example, is considerably stronger, even though it is demanding to move more mass volume. Both too light and too heavy, both for my own measure, of course, I ran into major injuries. That is, when I was under the weight I perform basically well, training I tear a muscle group in my right leg that took me a few months away from training and left sequelae for years. And when I was overweight training I broke a toe in my right foot that required two surgeries.

In all situations, I continued to be present. I mean, people's reactions are usually to what they see, it is common to classify relying only on the look. They might consider me more feminine in one place in my weight shift, and more masculine in another. However, fat or weak, both sounding negative, or strong or thin, culturally positive, I kept in all these places my usual insecurities and my female embodied subjectivity, even if it in constant re-construction. New experiences in different aspects of life will increase what I am holistically, but I do not stop performing in life. Thus, classifying a person by their body is certainly a sectarian action, capable of hurting the other. And this needs to be taken into account when thinking about

empowerment strategies through physical feminism (see Hockin-Boyers, Jamie & Pope, 2020), because to be strong cannot become another way of putting pressure on women. I mean, maybe it would be more accurate if working (and also naming it) in an “embodied feminism” dynamic.

However, this is the predominant way of social relationships, that is, to dichotomise. The sports field, as I have been saying, in addition to existing through physical performance, has its culture closely linked to the aesthetics of bodies. Aesthetics, as a branch of philosophy, refers to the sensitive perception of beauty and is guided by some subjective aesthetic values such as beauty, harmony, balance, delicacy, elegance (Vigarello, 2005). As much as some authors such as Corbalán (2010) argue that aesthetic criteria would follow exact proportions called *auric*, and that these would guide classic beauty contests, they are described as subjective values, therefore they are also related to taste (Bourdieu, 1984). Taste involves social construction, class experience, access to culture or a particular type of culture. Thus, each person can report their preferences according to their individual experience combined with what they incorporate from the *habitus* in which they are immersed. I bring some examples that relate to a greater or lesser appreciation of what is visually expressed:

This very fibrous body seems a bit that... I don't define it as masculine, but rather that I don't like such a fibrous body for a woman, but for example, I love a defined woman, but not so, so, so, so definite. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

I have many (examples of) comments about the bodies of sportswomen and how ugly that body is. It is a comment that hurts me a lot, and I am not as strong as Alessandra Recchia<sup>115</sup> or Sandra Sánchez, but I think it would be logical that towards people that have a body like this, the first thing you feel is respect for the amount of work hours that there is behind that, and admiration for the amount of work hours that are behind that. It is an issue that seems terrible to me because it is a comment that comes from both men and women. I wanted to wear a dress and it's "of course, dresses like this don't favour you, because it's possible to see your arm." There are girls who don't want to do certain training because of that, "I just don't want to do weights, imagine my arms, because if later I put on a short sleeve and I'll look like a man." (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

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<sup>115</sup> French *karateka*, world champion in *kumite*, 32 years old.

In addition to taste, here is added the investment factor for the acquisition of bodily/physical capital (Shilling, 2004), which is appreciated or, especially when women work to acquire more muscle volume, depreciated. Even though it is about the acquisition of bodily capital, when it is not appreciated, it is not considered aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010) in accordance with the canons of hegemonic femininity. Gorely, Holroyd and Kirk (2003) indicate in their study how young students consider the physical capital of more muscular women, or that are too muscular in students' opinions, as something derogatory. Tajrobehkar (2016), in turn, highlights how women weightlifters seek ways to compensate their muscles, seen as masculine, exaggerating femininity through makeup, heels and, in general, the use of sensuality. This point already establishes a link with the next category. Before opening it, though, I expose two last testimonials from athletes with their considerations and tastes about the body or aesthetics of the *karateka* woman as a fighter entering the mat:

When you have a slightly thinner body, finer when it comes to karate, it looks prettier too, that is true, although later it is not the most important thing. But whether you like it or not, it does affect both the aesthetics, your body and then also the elegance when going out on the mat, your expression... (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

I cannot conceive of entering a *tatami* with a loose ponytail or with a poorly made ponytail, or without makeup, or with a *karategi* that looks bad on you. (Proserpina, Interview 18 (2), 24/08/2020)

The athletes' testimonies are important especially because they mention women in their martial practice, since when they are outside the martial environment, as pointed out by the coach who has part of his testimony entitling this category, *karateka* "dress as a woman". Within the mat, for him, it seems to be that women are to some extent less women because they do not show off their bodies<sup>116</sup>. Does this mean that the prevalence of athlete identity proposed by Roth and Basow (2004) is achieved? If so, why does it bother athletes looking to prove they are women? Possibly the moral concern with the judgment of others, the incorporation of the gaze of the other leads again to the effort to deny the stereotype of masculinization. This whole picture brings me another word into mind, manipulation. Women are so socially manipulated, in so many different ways, that this in itself is a social injustice. The situations are placed in such a way that they very often look like the villain. She is guilty of

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<sup>116</sup> Another coach also contributes in a similar way: "There are those who are very feminine, but not training, in their life. In their life there are many who train very hard and are very feminine and there are others who train very hard and are not feminine at all. (...) I am very surprised when I see them off the *tatami*." (Hermes, man, Interview 32 (3), 21/09/2020)

“tempting” men, and guilty of the gender-based violence she receives<sup>117</sup>; she is guilty when she becomes pregnant, which she cannot do alone; she is guilty of not forever maintaining beauty and being replaced, but she is also guilty of destroying stable marriages. In other words, it seems that no matter what she does, she will be condemned, even though the Inquisition is in the past.

Even though the athletes' views in these last comments are especially in line with heteronormativity, their testimonies drive the search for alternatives to deal with the scenario. I exposed something of my subjectivity here, permeated by discomforts (Ahmed, 2004), in order to say that even when a woman does not make impressions on others of emphasized femininity, approaching closer to the stereotype of masculinization in the eyes of others, she continues feeling/performing, generally and if she wants to, like a woman. In other situations, perhaps, she just wants to give up or move away from the social condition/gendered embodiment in which she was raised. And in yet another situation, maybe she can express femininity but not match heteronormative patterns in her sexual orientation, for example. Possibly these are ways of thinking about subversive actions that break stigmas, create a nuisance or a certain disruptive chaos, and disrupt consolidated *habitus*. They are queer actions, expressed through the body, conceptions and/or behaviours, in a holistic sense, that can destabilize the hegemonic order (Ahmed, 2004; Berg & Kokkonen, 2021; Devís-Devís et al, 2017; Kirk, 2020; Landi, 2018; lisahunter, 2017; Maor, 2018). Many of these experiences are uncomfortable for those who live and play them. Along these lines, Sarah Ahmed (2004, p.148) exposes how feelings of discomfort and inadequacy occur:

Discomfort is a feeling of disorientation: one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled. I know that feeling too well, the sense of out-of-placeness and estrangement involves an acute awareness of the surface of one's body, which appears as surface, when one cannot inhabit the social skin, which is shaped by some bodies, and not others.

Ahmed's contribution is very relevant here since the woman's body is explored in different ways, making her feel maladjusted very easily, it seems, even in queer environments (Ahmed, 2004). Possibly the experience of maladjustment does not occur with all women, for different reasons. However, the observation that it occurs with many leads me to think and

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<sup>117</sup> In this regard, see, for example, the case of a Spanish woman who had her two daughters murdered by her ex-husband, and that a priest blamed her, since she was in a new relationship. [https://www.elespanol.com/reportajes/20210613/parroco-culpa-asesinatos-anna-olivia-infidelidad-madre/588692003\\_0.html](https://www.elespanol.com/reportajes/20210613/parroco-culpa-asesinatos-anna-olivia-infidelidad-madre/588692003_0.html), accessed on 15/06/2021.

defend that queer strategies must be “holistic”, in the sense that a kind of female moral empowerment needs to be achieved together with the physical. In other words, I am referring exactly to the construction of a woman's embodied subjectivity, she needs to feel empowered.

With this category I simply wanted to introduce the problem around female body views in the sport/martial environment. In the next one I go into more properly the theme of stereotypes that try to reduce female freedom, since they constantly want to dictate how she should perform and live.

## **7.2. "She's very good (fighting), but she's horrible." – Stereotyped athlete woman: femininity and sensuality**

As much as it is said that no-one prevents a woman from moving, that she is free today as never before, the subjective perception of inequalities converts them into personal experience (Dubet, 2020). That is, although no-one (I would hope) physically binds a woman to prevent her from acting, the weight of the diktats of patriarchal society can do so to a great extent psychologically and morally (Foucault, 2009). In an article about the presentation conference of the book “The age of sad passions”, by François Dubet<sup>118</sup>, he explains that

In France, inequalities between men and women have been objectively reduced over three generations, that is, women work more, are better paid and, nevertheless, inequalities persist and are endured much worse by women than 50 years ago, when those inequalities were most important. For a sociologist, the inequalities that count are those that are perceived as unfair and unbearable, not the real ones.<sup>119</sup>

The fact that inequalities have been minimized over time is certainly something positive and expected, given all the feminist struggle involved. However, what I have here called acquiring new masks for old problems I insist is a reality, and that masks cover-over problems but do not eliminate or solve them. The fact that in Western culture by and large physical atrocities or unreasonable exploitation of women does not occur, as seems to be still tolerated elsewhere, does not mean that equality has been achieved. As many problems are

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<sup>118</sup> <https://www.infobae.com/cultura/2020/12/09/francois-dubet-el-metoo-es-un-movimiento-formidable-de-mujeres-ricas-que-denuncian-injusticias-pero-no-cuestiona-las-desigualdades/>, accessed on 13/06/2021.

<sup>119</sup> Translation from Spanish to English mine.

disguised and carried out through symbolic violence<sup>120</sup>. Thus, the unfair and unbearable perception of the context of life, as Dubet explains, is undeniable, even when the numbers may, in some cases more than others, show progress.

In the sporting environment, inequalities are felt intensely. Among several possible perspectives from which to focus this fact, I will focus here on the one that objectifies the woman. As a strategy to break down this problem in the specific *karateka* context, I have listed some themes to study that follow a line of reasoning. They are body, beauty, femininity, sensuality, eroticism, desire. These are important concepts since they relate to the problems faced by women in the sports and martial field, both in terms of masculinization and sexualisation. Following this line, I posed some questions to the team I researched, very simple questions, but of demanding answers, in the sense that they required a little reflection from the interviewees. They did very well in this process, given that I recognize the complexity of the themes I put to the team, and they made great contributions to my object of analysis. As I explained in chapter 4, I wonder if some questions, insights, and experiences are uniquely mine or shared. It is clear that they are shared, which does not necessarily translate into something positive. In this category, my main focus is around the themes of beauty, femininity and sensuality, which are related, and I start by presenting some testimonials from athletes on how they understand these concepts. The first one, femininity:

I think it is like the way of being, politically accepted by society in general, of the girls in terms of the way of speaking, the way of dressing, the way of acting. You are not supposed to be feminine by wearing clothes a little looser, or a little more masculine; Or, being female, you have to do a series of social protocols, you have to give two kisses when boys can shake hands –to me it is something that has always hurt me a bit the fact that men can maintain that distance and why, to a person that I just met, do I have to approach his face, being able to shake his hand too? It is something that simply because of you are female you have to do. Because if you go to someone who you have just met in an institutional or important event, and you go hand in hand, it is not very feminine. And it is something that I have never understood and that I do not

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<sup>120</sup> In this regard, Salvini, Souza and Marchi Júnior (2012, p.408) say that: “gender prejudice towards women who play soccer or practice sports established as male, can be thought of as symbolic violence, which, in turn, takes place in the sense of making people believe and reproducing beliefs, in which bodies, especially the female body, are conveyed as an object of consumption in the sport's mercantilization process.” Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

share. And now with Coronavirus I very much agree that I have to do everything the same. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

In line with Butler (1990), Minerva refers to an expected *performance* of women, which is related to the moment in which we live and its demands or meanings about the social place of each one. In other words, a way of being and behaving, of performing, situated in time and space. In a slightly less conceptual way, and reflecting the indignation that what is felt as a social imposition generates, other athletes express themselves:

Femininity: a person who takes care of herself. And that's it. And the person is satisfied with herself. (...) For wearing heels I am not more feminine. That I love heels and adore them, but when I wear sneakers I am also feminine. (...) You are totally putting women as a product, a product of being beautiful, a product of being liked by others and a product to please and show that you are feminine. No. I am feminine in sports clothes. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

I think it depends on each, there are girls who are more feminine and girls who are less, but these things make me a bit... What is feminine? Always I wear a dress, a skirt, one of the first comments that accompany me is that of my mother, who says (ironically) "what feminine legs", because many times I have bumps and bruises on my legs. The legs, if they have a bruise, are they not feminine? Why do we label so much what is feminine and what is not? It seems terrible to me. A feminine coach. I don't know what a feminine coach is. The coach who paints her nails, or has her hair straightened? If I don't have my hair straightened and I wear a ponytail, am I a masculine coach? Well, being feminine will depend on the woman. What defines you being feminine and what is it not? It is an issue that bothers me, because maybe there are people who have some tastes, people who have others, but I believe that a female coach is feminine, if she is a woman, she is feminine because she is a girl and that's it, regardless... I don't know... it's how I understand these things; I don't know if you understand me. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

What Atena says about a woman expressing femininity simply because she is a woman makes sense "in 'common-sense' sociology-speak, (where) femininity or femininities are seen the ways of 'doing girl or woman'" (Paechter, 2006, p.6). However, some authors already work with concepts of female masculinities (Ambjörnsson, 2020; Channon & Jennings, 2014; Paechter, 2006) and, consequently or in reverse, male femininities (Paechter, 2006). But I understand that Atena is expressing her outrage at stereotypes and prejudices. What she says

finds a certain resemblance to what I narrated about my own embodied subjectivity, when, for other people, I was far from idealized femininity, even though I still felt “feminine”. I understand that what Atena and Diana put up is very relevant especially because it exposes how they feel feminine. In other words, embodied femininity, particular and subjective, is an experience that is defined through perceptions, feelings and emotions, making it something non-transferable and completely multifaceted. It is not about being produced to please the eyes of others, meet market expectations and so on. However, it is necessary to be aware that not meeting these expectations, even if it is something they face, that is, they face these difficulties, the confrontation does not comfort them. There is discomfort in this position. Following Ahmed (2004, p.149), this could be, contradictorily, a good sign, as “Such (queer) lives would not desire access to comfort; they would maintain their discomfort with all aspects of normative culture in how they live”. Ahmed speaks of the queer existence to break with the (hetero) normative, and further on in her text she states that “Queer politics are also about enjoyment, where the 'non' offers hope and possibility for other ways of inhabiting bodies” (p.162). I mean, the discomfort could also become somewhat pleasurable. When I suggest generating discomfort in the environment of hegemonic masculinity, I mean finding some fun in what is ultimately a cause for struggle.

Returning to the athletes' reflections on femininity, I share some other testimonies:

You can wear baggy pants, a wide T-shirt, not paint yourself, but be feminine. So I relate it to a woman who feels like a woman and that's it, I don't want to relate to the stereotype that says that she is the groomed one, that likes fashion... I think that this is not seen or understood in society, but I do not want to relate it with that directly.  
(Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

A feminine woman is the one who likes to take care of herself based on her concepts.  
(Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

For me she is someone fine or elegant in her way of being. (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

Nothing comes to mind that she is a person dressed in pink, that she likes *Princesses*... if that's what you were wanting me to tell you, that doesn't come to mind! A feminine person for me is a person, a woman who likes herself and who takes care of herself. A person who likes herself, it does not matter if she is dressed in a skirt or pants, with boots or heels. A person who likes herself, that for me is femininity. Not that she wears

a crown and is going to dress up as a princess all the time! (Venus, Interview 22 (2), 02/09/2020)

Feminine refers to a stereotype. In the end, feminine is something that has been created like that, so a fine woman, I don't know, exposing the opposite traits between femininity and masculinity that they have created. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

Artemis's comment also refers to the expected feminine performativity of women, which is related to the present moment, although it has a historical path to its establishment. She mentions the opposite traits between femininity and masculinity that could help define by contrast. Paechter (2006, p.6) explains that "there is an understanding of 'femininity' which in some ways parallels hegemonic masculinity, but in others is more a mirror image of hyper masculinity: emphasized femininity as super girly." In other words, the understanding by contrast makes sense, however, it should not necessarily be so. The combination of elements understood as specific to masculine and feminine can help to give rise to new possibilities, new forms of femininity (Bordo, 1997) and masculinities, perhaps not so stigmatized.

Among the testimonies, those who conceive the performativity of femininity a little more in accordance with its traditional understanding were also present:

We can also be feminine if we put on our skirts and our dresses and our heels. (Hera, Interview 21 (2), 27/08/2020)

You can also put on gloves and wear painted nails or go makeup. (...) It depends on the person, because there are people who are women, but they are not feminine at all. (...) It may be because of their clothes, their way of walking, their way of speaking, expressing themselves, making gestures, so I also believe that it is to see the person, as a model. (...) I almost never paint myself (face) and I usually paint my nails, so it is true that if you see me at first you think I am feminine, but you really don't know. And I think it is not necessary to show your feminine part. I think not, because I don't know. I think it is intuited. (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

Gentle, elegant gestures, smooth skin. She is feminine, because she has smooth skin, she is feminine, she moves with elegance, smoothly. (...) Elegance, softness, harmony, softness on the skin, I don't know... She is careful, take care of everything, the fingers of the hands, well, that... the hands, the care, aesthetic care of the body, too. (...) They fix their nails, cuticles, such... (Hermes, man, Interview 32 (3), 21/09/2020)

Hestia contributes by saying, in a way, that judgments around what is or is not feminine can be wrong, relying only on appearances. In general, all athletes go in this direction. However, she also mentions intuited femininity. As I mentioned earlier, I recognize that the topic is demanding and can be fraught with pitfalls. In no way my intention is to trap people, to judge or disdain their opinions and time. Rather, I am learning from them. So I interpret Hestia as referring to what can be perceived by a woman subjectively, to what is picked up by the ancestry of our senses, somehow recognized in the intestines and transmitted to the brain, if we want to compartmentalize things. On the other hand, her comment also refers to Young (1980), when Young says that her studies, like those of De Beauvoir, go in the opposite direction from those who conceive the existence of a feminine essence. Young talks about the situation of women in a given context:

I take "femininity" to designate not a mysterious quality or essence which all women have by virtue of their being biologically female. It is, rather, a set of structures and conditions which delimit the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves. (p.140)

Hestia also brings up another point related to Young's writings. She, like other athletes, mentions the relationship between femininity and the way to move, with gestures, the way to express oneself. There are techniques of the body (Mauss, 1973) taught to girls, possibly taking into account as a first criterion they are females, their situation as girls in patriarchal society (Young, 1980). She learns to perform (Butler, 1990) more or less politely or elegantly according to the social class she belongs to (Bourdieu, 1984; see also Pope, 2015; and Light & Kirk, 2001). Expression and gestures (Guzmán, 2016) are as refined, again generally, as the general context in which her education took place. The tone of voice used seems to follow the same pattern, generally taking into account that girls speak more quietly, which again leads to the difficulty that most women find to emit *kiai*. These elements that compose femininities, compose them as *performances*, as "regulated repetitious processes, norms that are internalized in the form of body style, public representation and dramatization"<sup>121</sup> (Preciado, 2008, p.181, referring to Butler's definition).

Hermes' comment finds similarities with what Vigarello (2005) says when describing the historical process traced by art, which contributes to consolidating, perhaps in some historical moments more than others, the place of each one in society. Vigarello says that "the

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<sup>121</sup> Translation from Spanish to English mine.

woman must take care of this skin, in order to better recreate and rejoice the tired, exhausted man (from working)”<sup>122</sup> (p.30). Vigarello shows in his process of analysing art over time how the figure of the woman has always been inferiorized, even though in the European Renaissance “the second sex becomes the beautiful sex” (p.29, quoting Lipovetsky). In other words, there the woman would be something farther away from her common place as a demonized figure, in addition to the disassociation of beauty and strength that was being promoted (Vigarello, 2005). So it is not difficult to understand that, just before, in the European Middle Age, between being considered a demonic figure and going to the bonfire, women accepted the second option, which was the idea of making themselves weak and beautiful, changing their social place drastically.

Taking advantage of the mention of the “demonic”, I start to approach a theme that is more or less coupled with beauty, which is sensuality. In line similar to what Hestia commented and which led me to Young's concept (1980), Afrodite ponders sensuality as an innate attribute:

Sensuality also often goes a bit in the way of gestures. One can be beautiful and then having rather ugly gestures, that it does not attract you, and the character... also the character itself, I think it is a little of everything, you have to have a little of everything to... But it is also true that many times a woman who is beautiful, who likes to dress up, that sensuality is like she has it a bit innate. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

I think another athlete's testimony on the same subject may help explain what Afrodite is referring to:

I believe that when a woman feels beautiful, she is sensual. It is true that sensuality is your own, but it is also what you display abroad. Perhaps it is also closely linked with the other person, with what the people who look at you feel or do not feel. But when a woman feels pretty and feels beautiful, she gives off an aura that is more sensual, I think. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

Other athletes engaged in reflection on the concepts of sensuality and beauty, and whether they have a close relationship or not necessarily, since most people talk about the presence or absence of beauty in women. However, beauty is linked to a conception of purity, including as a kind of divine prize (Vigarello, 2005). And what men especially consider as an

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<sup>122</sup> All quotes from Vigarello (2005) are my translations from Spanish into English.

essential factor for the set that makes up the performativity of hegemonic femininity today is the capacity for seduction. Hakim (2010, p.500) states that “To some extent, beauty is about facial attractiveness in the main, (...) sex appeal can also be about personality and style, femininity or masculinity, a way of being in the world, a characteristic of social interaction.” In the opinion of the athletes,

Sensuality is more of a way of being than how you really are objectively, but it is true that beauty is something more or less objective, a symmetry, a... more or less. And you can see people who may be less beautiful, but nevertheless, their way of being makes them be or have more sensuality, or they can be more attractive than a more beautiful person. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

Beauty does not have to be related to sensuality. I relate sensuality a little to sexual attraction, you see a person and say "well, this person attracts me a little physically, it awakens that attraction in me", so that it is something sensual. But there are many people who seem to you to be very beautiful and that feeling does not awaken you. I believe that beauty and sensuality do not go on the same side. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

I don't think that she is sensual simply because she is beautiful, nor do I think that it has to go hand in hand. Many women are beautiful and want to respect in their own way... they are more for themselves (they do not expose themselves). Other women are pretty and they also like it to be seen that they are pretty. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

Athletes comment on relevant points, especially relating sensuality to attraction, and a certain display of beauty, perhaps as a display of the body itself. This observation by Artemis takes me back to Young (1980), when she describes the process of something like the construction of modesty in a girl. Young especially refers to the girl's mobility and her use of space, as well as her familiarity with her own body. However, this could possibly be extended to other aspects of female embodied subjectivity. The girl's education is generally, and was even more in the past, around modesty, physical and moral, with the idea that the “serious lady”, the “respectable lady” is modest. Young says that the girl develops a “bodily timidity which increases with age” (p.153) from the many restrictions she experiences in her attempts to appropriate the world. Thus, the action and also the exposure of the female body was/is repressed. This changes over time, somewhat towards the subversion of norms, and somewhat towards the interested directions of male gaze.

So, even though beauty and sensuality are only weakly related concepts, sensuality is often understood as a criterion of beauty, and a hierarchical dispute is established between them. Beauty, as I mentioned, carries an air of purity, used in history of art as a sacred attribute given to deserving women (Vigarello, 2005). In contrast, sensuality would be demonic, characteristic of Lilith, mythologically presented as the first woman (Nogueira, 2020) in the Jewish religious tradition. She would have been Adam's partner before Eve, created like him, and who did not want to submit to him. Thus, she would have been expelled from Heaven or abandoned it by her own will, both versions are narrated. Eve, in turn, would have been engendered as subordinate to Adam, and also a sinner, since she ate the apple, as reported by Christian tradition, perhaps offered by Lilith disguised as a serpent<sup>123</sup>. Interesting to note how Adam was supposedly the victim of the two women. With this I want to draw attention to the way men perceive, use and foster feminine beauty and sensuality from the prism of their own desire. In the next sections in this chapter I will return to this subject. Now I go back to the athletes' testimonies. A bit in a "rebel" line, Hera brings an observation that is out of the ordinary:

A woman who is not pretty can be sensual. In fact, this is usually the case, the ugliest ones are more sensual because in the end they work with another type of... because the one that is very pretty doesn't need it. (...) So I think that goes the other way around, the more beautiful she is, the less... It doesn't have to be less, but in general you work on it less. (Hera, Interview 21 (2), 27/08/2020)

She is referring to something like a market of attraction, conquest and relationships, where a certain search for success dictates the need to develop and employ one or another attribute. In criticism of a woman's commodification, Diana positions herself:

That is a prototype and something we are used to because we have women as a product. So the more beautiful, the more sensual. (...) We are not products; you cannot associate with an image that is more sensual or is not more sensual. It's just what is sensual to you? It depends. There are people who like the smell of rain and there are people who like the smell of coffee. (...) Society is based on aesthetic canons and so we always have a figure that we want to pursue. (...) Right now we have the image that the women's top is a slim, tall and curvy woman. But it is that perhaps in prehistory it was the opposite, large women, with large breasts, were the ideal. It is simply by times and by styles, but we always tend to make some canons and look for

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<sup>123</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilith>, accessed on 17/06/2021.

perfection or a role model, which is not the case. There are no role models, that's the problem. There are role models in terms of people to admire and feel that you have to admire that person for 'x' values, and not 'x' fashions. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

What can a woman be used for? That is a troubling question for most women, I dare say. After all, use is something you make of an object, or an objectified person. And certainly the utilitarian view of people is open to all criticism. However, Ahmed (2019) presents intriguing questions about the *uses of use*. It is an interesting idea that transcends obvious boundaries of what things are for. I will return to it in a few moments to try to assign other uses to martial space, for example, or to provoke reflections on the utilitarianism given to women. In this sense, I understand Diana's indignation, since the consumption of women as if they were a product or object, subject to any manipulation, is something that undoubtedly hurts subjectively. Hakim (2010, p.503) says, for example, "An attractive and charming spouse has greater value for monarchs, presidents, and company directors, among whom public display and social networking are prioritized, than for the local plumber or electrician. Erotic capital is thus partially linked to social stratification." Diana also reports to the woman's situatedness in time, to what was a certain worship of female fertility in other cultures<sup>124</sup>. And she also mentions the variability that exists in tastes and criticizes the establishment of standards, with the imposition of models that destroy equity among women. Other athletes criticize the problem they feel or see up close:

There are people who say "she's very good (fighting), but she's horrible." That is what I see in the comments of the boys that many times more than to see the fight between two girls... Boys are fighting, they see the fight perfectly, but if they see two girls fighting it is to criticize or praise their physique. (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

There are some examples that seem clear that because of your form, because of your physical appearance, you win a little more in sports. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

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<sup>124</sup> In this regard, Hakim (2010, p.501) reports that "Among many West Indian groups, fertility is so crucial to a woman's sex appeal that girls demonstrate their fertility before a marriage is finalized. Thus, it is commonplace for fiancées to get pregnant and deliver a healthy child before a wedding is arranged." Even though the focus is on fertility, it is impossible not to see how women are objectified. In other words, before "buying her", it is necessary to test her to see if she "works". It is related to this, also, women used as "gifts", or when the dowry is paid for them (Rich, 2010).

Karate I still believe that it is quite a man's society. The referees are men, so the cuter I am going to do a *kata*, maybe it might have an influence –and I have talked about this with men, yes, and they have said it is so–. (Ceres, Interview 7 (1), 24/07/2020)

I have spoken with male referees that yes, if you have two *kateras*, who are equal level (technically), but one is more beautiful, or has a more open neckline, the beautiful one wins. This I swear to you and if you talk to Hera and Demeter, because they were there too, that a referee told us. (...) It is not in the regulation, but I also think it comes from the issue that men are the ones who referee, sure, sure. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

If you are watching a *kata* and the form of the *kata* and the movements are harmonious, fast, on top of that the figure you see is pretty, damn, much more harmonious than if you see a monster. But hell, you are judging the performance of the *kata*, not judging if she is beautiful, harmonious, you are judging the performance of the *kata*. (Hermes, man, Interview 30 (2), 17/09/2020)

Athletes show how appearance can govern some men's assessment of women. As mere human beings, that is, not in some hierarchical condition that requires evaluation, they feel entitled to evaluate women simply because they are men and supposedly have that power. They, heading the patriarchal society, conceive “beauty as a feminine attribute, and its pursuit as a feminine responsibility” (Anderson, 2010, p.566). The performance of an athlete, as Vesta shows, is secondary to her aesthetics for men as spectators, and may even be completely unimportant if the woman is “horrible” or “a monster”. It means to say that if she is “horrible”, it does not matter how good she is technically. Men as spectators view the performance of women athletes as of secondary importance, and it seems that they also prioritize the aesthetic aspect when there is an equal technical level between competitors in the situations they actually have the authorization of the evaluation, as referees, as Ceres reports.

The stereotype of the beautiful and/or sensual woman precede her sporting ability from a male perspective. The fact is repeated in *karateka* sub-modalities, *kata* and *kumite*, as well as in sports in general. However, it is worth mentioning the fact that *kateras*, perhaps by dedicating themselves to something like choreography and being in what is supposedly the place of women in karate, as I described in the previous chapter, feel a perhaps even greater demand for eroticization. They are not associated with masculinization as much as *kumite* athletes are; the performance of their modality, closed skill, allows them to be well dressed

most of the time; and perhaps they do not generate so much discomfort for men where they are, so much so that the female *kata* modality is the place in karate where you can find the greatest number of women as coaches, even though they are still a minority in relation to men. However, the erotic charge attributed to *kateras* and *kumiteras* will ultimately also be a matter of taste and preferences.

Having followed the definitions and reflections presented by the team on femininity, sensuality and beauty that help to think about how these themes are connected to the field, I present their latest statements. Such testimonies bring the view of the athletes themselves about female performance disconnected from the attributes of emphasized femininity, even though they continue to perform as “feminine” women, on and off the mat.

I don't think that training, sweating and hitting a bag you have to lose anything (of the scope of a woman). (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

For some things I consider myself super feminine. But for other things –I really like to take care of my image, I like to be quite feminine, within the world of karate– but if I have to get together with a boy and do as brute as possible, if I have to stain my hands for whatever, whatever we say is assigned as to the stereotype of man, I have no problem. (...) Feminine is care, right? But I, when I am not that careful, well I feel feminine just the same. I don't call it masculine, but I call it being a brute girl or something like that. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

I think we are authentic because we are feminine, but we have adopted some boyish things. (...) We all have our point, a little bit of “that I took from a boy because I spend a lot of time with boys”, but I think we are very feminine. (Venus, Interview 22 (2), 02/09/2020)

The athletes propose, to some extent, the adoption of a type of contemporary femininity that mixes styles, performances, representations. It is true that at times they take on elements that relate to traditional meanings. Given the strength that tradition has in the environment in which they embody *habitus*, which is very intense in their lives, and considering the pressure exerted by sports culture and patriarchal society, it is understandable that this occurs. But at other times they combine the traditional or hegemonic view with touches of indignation, with the feminist heritage that, in some way, accesses women. This process often includes discomfort, as pointed out by Ahmed (2004), as there is no authentic identification with what is traditional in the martial/sports environment and its consequent prejudices, but it is also difficult to deny it completely. However, if that serves any purpose,

from my point of view, it is okay to be that way. I believe this is a process. A struggle in progress that has the potential to lead to change. Although Butler (1990) is against adopting an ambivalent position, I think it is a process, and it is valid. Although at times athletes are forced, in a way, to exhibit femininity and do so, at other times they are precisely questioning and confronting these established elements. Is this contradictory? A little bit. But this can also be queer, since queer "has become a name for an alternative political orientation" (Ahmed, 2004, p.166). This may also be building another type of femininity or female masculinity that moves away from hegemonic masculinity.

Ahmed (2004, p.155) also says that "Queer feelings may embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us." As a proposal to deal with the uncertainty that precarious times bring, Kirk (2020) presents queer alternatives for his area of expertise, physical education. lisahunter (2017) also describes the context of physical education as a potential queer space. All these ideas together can offer possibilities. The martial environment is based on tradition, and this implies that the strange or queer does not find an opening to enter and be welcomed, instead facing a hostile environment. However, if queer actions are taken by those who are already inside and have some prominent place, I envision this as a path to change. From there, from within, it would be possible to open up for the strange to enter and, with luck, obtain support from some sensible men in the process of struggle (Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018). A process that combines the benefits described in the literature, which involves physical activity, uncertainty and a certain risk, and queer, and finds in the challenge itself certain joy and enjoyment with the feelings of discomfort, in its most positive sense.

For this to happen, though, it is necessary that women who choose this posture, which does not seem so far from some things they already do, feel confident and empowered. Everything revolves around embodied subjectivity, again. As they feel able to do what they surely can do, it is simpler to put it into practice. Self-confidence, a certain degree of self-esteem and empowerment are necessary factors to facilitate and make the *fight* viable. Enjoying the benefits could include a change, probably not so fast, in the view of women's performance. Today, this performance is seen as inferior and undeniably linked to the sensualisation and eroticization of the woman's figure, containing levels of symbolic violence for wanting to dictate how she should perform to meet heterosexual male desires, please others and have space. However, women are dedicated to doing a good job in regard to their sport, they do it, and they should not need to worry about whether or not they are

approaching the male model, “losing” their status as a woman and consequently seeking to compensate for it with exaggerations. Their athletic potential is what should be appreciated in addition to the somewhat influential position they can adopt, helping to promote different uses (Ahmed, 2019) of the martial space. Such uses could relate to a space of promotion of authenticity, educating authentic warriors, fostering a new type of empowering *habitus* for women and other stigmatized collectives. After all, there is “an important spatial relation between pleasure and power” (Ahmed, 2004, p.164). That is why it is important to combine the Olympic sport status that karate receives, and amateur sport. The Olympic scenario gives karate a type of power and greater visibility and impact, which may limit problems such as authoritarianism, for example, on discriminated groups. And the amateur context is configured as the counterpart of the practice, the space where changes are, perhaps, more feasible.

In the next category, I focus on the essence of sports culture and the position it assigns to women, sexualizing their bodies and promoting something like intrigues and criticisms among the female collective directed at themselves. In other words, another manipulation strategy that places women as without self-control and self-balance, fighting each other to attract the male gaze.

### **7.3. "I do it just because and not to show you anything." – Sports culture: erotization of women in sport**

Sport is a fundamental element of the civilizing process (Elias, 1992) in its function of managing and regulating violence through rules. At the same time, it is an organized way to maintain male virility (Gay, 1995), preserved, authorized and prized in sporting environments. Thus, sport and the culture cultivated within sporting environments, in general and taking into account its beginning, values the friendly agreement between gentlemen who, governed by rules and respecting them, will give their blood, make every effort to overcome the opponent using all the permitted resources. That is, sports arenas are safe and civilized, in the sense that no-one should or can kill or be killed while playing sport. It is a game, simulating oppositions and battles, but not battles *per se*. However, it is also configured as a space with more permissions than that of everyday life, where a fight, for example, between two people can end up in jail. Thus, the space and sports culture are hybrid and special, finding themselves in a privileged place that mixes security, as there is no risk of death, and excess, as it is allowed to involve violent impulses and aggression.

Vaz (2021a) presents reflections on the mediated authorizations of violence in sport, specifically in boxing. He explains how this mediation of violence takes place, using “various control devices, such as similar weight between the contenders, use of gloves and other protective structures, prohibition of multiple blows, limited time for each round, presence of a referee, physician and other officials”<sup>125</sup> (p.98). In addition, he explains how the sporting scene requires, like the military and religious scene, specific laws, since these are places that are somehow suspended from the general reality outside these environments. He says:

Sport, like institutions such as barracks and church, has legal structures apart from civil and criminal law –respectively, sports, military and ecclesiastical justice–. Perhaps it is not a mere coincidence that this condition common to these three universes, all with peculiar ways of admitting and promoting suffering, each one keeping the bodies aligned under its jurisdiction in a regime of total mobilization demarcated, in particular, by the renunciation of pleasures, resistance of pain and the surrender of oneself, in sacrifice, to an entity that is often imaginary, be it at war, on the run tracks or in churches, have it the name of honour, medal or salvation. (Vaz, 2021b, p.101)

The peculiarity that is somehow attributed to the sporting environment and the suspended place in which it finds itself relativize many situations and behaviours that out there, as is clear, would be considered improper. Although the sexualized way in which women are generally seen is something that permeates the patriarchal society as a whole, where the heterosexual male gaze still dominates, in sports culture this seems to be accentuated. In the sports environment, the relationship with the body and the movements performed are the raw material for the bodily performative result, that is, the visibility and focus on the body are intensified, which contributes to an even greater sexualisation and eroticization of female athletes. Just as degrees of violence are allowed in a special way in the sporting environment, it seems that the relationship with the body, its exhibition, the way of touching it to teach or correct techniques, for example, also find privileged access.

It has happened that when they say "come on, let's go" (to motivate and slap on the back), they slap you a little lower. (Vesta, Interview 16 (2), 18/08/2020)

However, although women also learn to tolerate the elements that are especially intensified in the sporting environment, there is a limit for some things more than for others. Women deal with levels of aggression and violence, with demands and discipline imposed on

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<sup>125</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine in quotes by Vaz (2021a, b).

the body, with pain, sacrifice, abstinence and psychological suffering or fear, as described in chapter 4. They also know that playing with prank calls/hazing (Bitencourt, 1999) and rituals typical of the sports or martial arts world (Turelli, 2006) are part of the package, as well as hierarchies and some power dynamics. In addition, they can adapt and tolerate a certain type of humour (Maclean, 2019; Turelli et al, 2020; *corrigendum*, 2021) that can be harsh, unpleasant odours (Maclean, 2017) from the mat, training equipment, companions and themselves, all impregnated with sweat. They adapt to the taste of blood in the mouth, whether by a blow received or by the intensity of training. All this, with more or less discomfort, is part of the package. But what comes close to being intimate is definitely out of the package for most female athletes. So much so that harassment situations are infinitely more difficult to overcome than any injury. I will not go into this specific subject in this study because that would be a study in itself.<sup>126</sup> Here I dedicate myself to analysing the various discomforts that *karateka* signalize to the way they subjectively perceive and feel the eroticization that is made of their bodies, reducing athletes to the category of objects. They consider that:

It is unfair that of all that it means and all the work that there is, in the end they value your beauty or those attributes (related to sex appeal), because everything that is behind it... as if to focus only on that. I think there are other things much more important and of much more value behind. (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

I believe that many times these things (focus on female attributes) try to reduce us to that (object of desire), because it is what serves as a claim. But that is for me a mistake of society. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

Women know themselves as non-other, that is, they know they are “normal” people, that they are just people and not “other” (Young, 1980). They know that their somatic portion, if seeing it somewhat dichotomized, is a facet of themselves, important, but that is not all they are. Thus, when they feel reduced to “meat”, as an athlete will express, they often find their subjectivity hurt, which will find different kinds of interpretation in psychology, for example (Freud, 2010; Matos, 1987). In relation to the *karateka* that I interviewed, I would say that the vast majority of them adopt a posture contrary to objectification, showing variations in the level of tolerance to this aspect of sports culture. Among the team, the modest view appears,

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<sup>126</sup> It is worth citing Celia Brackenridge in this subject, who pioneered research into sexual harassment in sport (see, for example, Brackenridge & Kirby, 1997).

which could perhaps be a reflection of the traditional education received or of religious influences:

I wouldn't do it because I wouldn't feel comfortable doing it (sexy photos). But other people do it, maybe it is to feel more feminine, more sensual. (...) I don't understand those things, because I don't share them, I think "why do you want to do this?" Why do you want to take a photo in *karategi* and with heels? I do not get it. If you want to wear heels, then dress accordingly. It's as if I put on... I'm going to train with a wig! (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

The athlete reports that she would not feel comfortable displaying her sensual or erotic aspect and slightly criticizes the women who do, a criticism that is frequent, in different ways. The field embraced by *erotica* includes the use of the senses, everything that is sensual, therefore, and that which is associated with sexual attraction (Hakim, 2010), something that the athletes will comment on here. However, it moves away from pornography, which exposes intimate (genital) areas of the body and the sexual act, making the private, public (Preciado, 2008). *Erotica*, thus, refers to the field of sexual desires, but not to their consummation. O'Neill (1997, p.80) explains that "the erotic is what has a content considered more sensual than obscene and that can provoke sexual interest in the viewer"<sup>127</sup>. By mentioning spectator, athletes resorted to examples talking about photos and images many times in their responses to me on this subject. Although other senses are activated for the sexual experience, vision has a privileged place taking on the role of stimulator. What is taken as erotic works as a stimulant of desire, and perhaps most of the time it achieves the objective of stimulating through vision. The dissemination of sexually, erotic and even pornographic images is growing exponentially (Hayes & Dragiewicz, 2018). Thus, it is not surprising that the athletes resort to this imagery language to express their opinions. Another *karateka*, in addition to the comments that I will present later related to the images interpreted as sensual or erotic content, talks about the sexual attraction that can be perceived, but which is configured, in a specific sense, as lack of respect:

I believe that many times female sport is linked to that sensuality, with that sexual attraction and that seems terrible to me. I am heterosexual, that does not matter, homosexual or whatever, I am watching a sport or whatever and I can see bodies and admire them. Say "God, what a beautiful body" without waking up any kind of desire and concern. I can understand that this can happen to a person. Look, I'm watching a

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<sup>127</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English are mine of all quotes from O'Neill (1997).

championship, a game in whatever and then suddenly you like a person a lot and you feel attraction. But it seems to me a lack of respect when maybe there are people who go to watch sport and who go with that idea. Beach volleyball is always talked about. You will see what you will see (beach volleyball). It seems to me a tremendous lack of respect towards athletes, female or male, if it is the other way around. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

The fact that Atena exposes her sexual orientation, even it is indifferent if homosexual or heterosexual, speaks about the relationship between the stimuli received by the vision and the attraction that can be felt by all people who feel sexual attraction. That is, according to Yule, Brotto and Gorzalka (2016), only 1% of the world population does not feel sexual desire, if this can be said this way, configuring asexual individuals. With that, Atena is saying that it is something normal and that it can happen to almost anyone, or 99% of the population. I emphasize this point in her testimony to clarify that this is not about female puritanism. So, taking this into account, she clearly addresses her criticism to the situations of objectification of the female athlete, where sexual attraction does not arise unexpectedly as she describes it, but is seen as the (unique) fruit of women's sport (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009). It means disrespect to her. On the other hand, other athletes take the matter less seriously. They consider that the display of the body does not necessarily carry problems, even though they mention the existence of certain limits:

That happens at all levels of this society. So it doesn't bother me specifically in sport, I find it to be wrong in general. It seems to me something that we have normalized. But in the end it seems fine to me, always within limits. Well, a girl who has a good body, because if she is an athlete, well, "hey, what a great body you have", or the boy just like "hey, look at what body he has". Well, yes, he has it. I don't think it as sexist. (...) I don't see it that way, if they told me "what body you have", well yes, I'm an athlete, I see it in a good way. (...) It goes a lot in line with what I've told you that things don't affect me much. Yes, just as if they call me "ugly", it doesn't affect me either, your opinion and that's it. The same with "what body do you have", it does not affect me. (Hera, Interview 21 (2), 27/08/2020)

I believe that we are free people... each person does with their body what they want and I believe that we are free and that we do not have to put another label on ourselves, and especially among women, because that is very typical of us, to say "this is a slut, because, look, she is showing... she is in top (sports bra)". I believe that each

person can do what they want with their body and with themselves. (Venus, Interview 22 (2), 02/09/2020)

I see it so natural. I mean, why can a man be shirtless and pose in a magazine and a woman who is in top is like she is erotic? No. I already see it perfect, it seems amazing to me, of course, and each one shows what they want. I respect those who do not show, as those who show. Also, what does the body have for? To show it. What do you work it for? To show it. Yes. I at least think so. Well yes, I'm talking about showing something, showing naturally, obviously. Maybe I wouldn't want there to be a girl just thinking about provoking, which there is too. But as a general rule, if a girl has a body and if she wants to... I change clothes on the *tatami*, warm-up room and stay in top, even many times I stay in short tights and, sometimes, even in panties and I don't mind. And whoever likes it, good, and whoever doesn't, no. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

In fact, people are free and it is not about censoring or restraining behaviour to keep women in a place of shyness and modesty (Young, 1980). Ultimately, the problem lies in the interpretation one makes of things. However, it is also necessary to consider some other factors. First, it is possible to notice a difference in the level of criticality or discomfort that athletes have in relation to the consumption that is made of their bodies. Hera mentions that physical display and enjoyment is not problematic, "always within limits"; Afrodite also speaks of "showing something, showing naturally, obviously"; and Venus indicates a direction in how to interpret this, by saying that women judge themselves, in a movement that is "very typical of us". The male gaze moves between the regulatory and desiring functions. In other words, the manipulation system is designed in such a way that it is capable of covering the female collective from different angles. The regulatory gaze makes a part of the women position themselves in a place that brings them closer to the woman-mother-sanctified figure-aligned with morals and good customs. This group often directs criticism at women who somehow identify a little more with the disturbing figure of Lilith that I mentioned earlier. However, this is a disturbing figure for the group of "pure" women, since some men, in using the male's version of the gaze as desirous, enjoy her. And yet, in some cases it seems to be that there is a combination of manipulative action when women can attend to both the desirous and the regulator gaze. This would be, in an evidently negative sense for women, a great success of the hegemonic order, since when dealing with the conduct of other women, they disperse their attention there and do not focus on the central problem. From my point of view, all women

end up being, to some degree, victims of the male gaze, of the social structure rooted in hegemonic patriarchy.

Anderson et al (2010) presented a study on the characteristics of aesthetic capital, in which they focus on elements that especially value beauty. Hakim (2010) has dedicated herself to studying what she calls erotic capital. I think the comments presented here by Hera, Venus and Afrodite are related to what Hakim said, even though she seems to suggest fewer limitations than the athletes suggest. Hakim's definition of erotic capital is "the combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society, and especially to members of the opposite sex, in all social contexts" (p.501). She proposes the use (another possibility of use, following Ahmed) of erotic capital, according to her the form of capital where women stand out over men, as a type of female "weapon". She explains that "Many women are unaware of this because men have taken steps to prevent women exploiting their unique advantage, and even persuade women that erotic capital is worthless" (p.505).

Hakim criticizes both Bourdieu, who, according to her view, did not include this form of capital among those he listed, and feminists, who for her adopt a very moralistic position and do not exploit this capital as a subversive element. However, it seems to be that Hakim's proposal ends up favouring male gaze, facilitating, if I am interpreting it well, their games with erotic dolls that perform well and willingly for them. I do not think that men who behave in such way (or maybe, in this case, no men) would become susceptible and naive to a supposed female domination carried out through techniques of seduction and sexual pleasure. Besides that, they would be "weapons" that are somewhat appealing. I pointed out in chapter 5 that I think the posture some women have that they are simply better than men and therefore do not fight them can be a posture with pitfalls, as it is comfortable and elegant, but not subversive. In other words, I believe that action is needed. However, Hakim's proposal considers as subversion something that, from my point of view, is configured as contrary to the struggle itself, as it pleases the male gaze.<sup>128</sup>

Returning to the testimonies, Artemis, even in the midst of the difficulty that the subject presupposes and perhaps fearful about what could be more appropriate to opine, perhaps politically correct, offers a very interesting reflection as well:

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<sup>128</sup> Also consult Dallery (1997) on the "radical alterity of women's erotic corporeality" (p.76) in a line that is somewhat divergent from Hakim (2010), especially as it refers to lesbian eroticism.

It seems to me that there is a problem. Women's volleyball, why do men have a t-shirt, long pants and girls have to play in a top and panties? At least for me it would be super uncomfortable, maybe when you wear it all your life, you no longer realize it, you just assume it. But it is embarrassing, I find it embarrassing in that sense. I don't know. I don't know exactly, I don't know, I don't know what to say. (...) If it were their own decision, as long as everyone does what they want, that's fine, the problem is that it is a decision of a federation led by a man! (...) When I see it in the press and they put "the (female) Barcelona Soccer Club goalkeeper more beautiful than ever", things like that. If you do not put that of Messi, it says "he is stronger than ever", "he is bad", instead of her you will put "she is more beautiful than ever". They do it directly to attract attention, knowing how this society is, the criticisms it is going to have, I think they are looking for criticism. So **men look at her and women criticize her**, and then the topic becomes famous. (...) They (men) are consumers, they do consume more sport than we do, it is true, more than women. (...) If it was a decision of each one, but in the end it is something that they order you to do from above. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

I tried to make her calm to express her opinion, always telling everyone that there is no right or wrong. Artemis raises the question of the uniform. I have covered *gi* before, but I will come back to it here briefly, dwelling a bit more on the belt's role. Demeter commented to me at the end of her interview that, with the possibility of the Olympic Games, she heard that they (karate authorities aligned with the IOC, I suppose) were thinking about changing the women's *kimono* to a model that emphasized women's physical forms. She was supposed to send me the material that spoke of that. However, she cannot find it. Almost ten months after her interview, she found something similar in *tae kwon do* and then shared it with me, explaining that the proposal for karate was going in that direction. It was a model made of mesh, which covered the body, but was attached to it, and kept the belt around the waist. I bring this situation here now to explain that when I say that it is possible to have a *gi* model that does not lead women to be accused of being masculine, I am not referring to what they did for *tae kwon do*, which goes to the other extreme.

Regarding the belt and the way to tie it around the waist, it follows a standardization in the high performance karate. I mean, the belt is worn by women exactly at the waist, in a way demarcating femininity, but where it is also, it is true, more comfortable in my personal opinion. In the martial environment, people often say that the belt serves to hold the *gi* and indicate hierarchy. However, I would go further. It seems, for example, that the band/belt that

most monks wear around the waist would have the function of reminding them of the separation (dichotomization) between what would be the instinctual life and the conscious life, something that I was taught while practicing martial arts from a philosophical background. In other words, instincts, especially sexual, in this case, would hinder the development of the monks' consciousness. Then they would isolate themselves, as the superior portion of themselves that governs the inferior, from the portion often understood to be impure. They would do this to forget about the "animal" in themselves and work on the "human", something that Platonic philosophy also references and ends up converging with the body-mind dichotomy.

I relate this to martial arts since they emerged in monasteries. Women were forbidden to enter them, where they would represent temptations to men in their effort to control the drives and emotions. Women were either barred from the work of mastering the emotions as I pointed out in chapter 6, or they had their monasteries where generally martial arts were not practiced. This is reported here to say that the belt has another representation in addition to those commonly known, functioning as a reminder, in the past, that man has in himself an upper and a lower part, reinforcing the dichotomous view. In any case, it seems to be that for most men the pedagogical resource was not effective in the sense of subjugation of desires, which did not happen as planned. Nevertheless, in order not to admit failure, the woman is blamed for being a temptress. The uniforms that are made for her, as pointed out by Artemis, would reinforce this belief of the tempting woman, even though she occasionally objects to wearing these uniforms, as happened even in the Tokyo Olympic Games. In martial arts, tying the belt around the waist is a simple act capable of demarcating femininity. For many women it is almost insignificant. However, the desiring male gaze led Maor (2018) to propose tying the belt around hips in a subversive attitude, as I already pointed out.

Artemis still speaks, as I mentioned earlier and that is why I emphasized in her testimony, about the process of judgment that is promoted among women, while in men, desire is promoted. She puts the topic as promoted by the media, something that several other athletes will also point out, and so I will go back to the subject. This undeniably refers to the problem of the cultural industry which, following Preciado (2008), reframes itself and adopts the products that sell the most or are most widely consumed in contemporary capitalism. For Preciado, the products that promote sexual desire are the ones that move the market today.

Like Artemis, many other athletes see a problem in the sexualisation of women in sports. They criticize the way women's sport is consumed and talk about how their photos make an impact:

It seems to me that it is objectifying or sensualizing something that is not necessary. I think it happens to women in all sports. (...) You can be just as sexy so to speak in *karategi* than in bikini, but it sells more to the male image which is what it seems we have to always serve, to what men say, to whom men like, so wear a bikini. I do it anyway because I like how the bikini fits me doing the karate technique, which is not to sell that femininity and sensuality, but sadly it is like that. We see many times on *Instagram* or social networks that you upload the same photo in *karategi* and the same photo in a bikini, and the photo you upload in a bikini will have much more impact than the photo you upload in *karategi*. And you don't upload it to have repercussions, you upload it because you liked it, for whatever reason, and people think it is to sensualize you in your sports field, to sell you, when it should not be like that. But I believe that it is not our problem, but of the one who sees it. The one who sees us with the eyes that he wants to see us, we see it as "I do it just because and not to show you anything." (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

It should be the same, but the reality is when a girl is exposed to put on a bikini or something tighter, and it comes out in the media, she is valued not as an athlete, but because of the body she has... So that I think it's a negative part that I personally don't like. Then she is going to be given repercussions for being viewed as a piece of meat; you see it, you like it and it's all. I am very free, on the beach I go topless, so and so, but the reality is that I don't like it at all because it is not valued, in today's society, it is not valued the same way that a man wears without a shirt. (...) "Cristiano Ronaldo<sup>129</sup>, the super player". I think there is a Brazilian who is very good at soccer, if she gets on

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<sup>129</sup> Even though Ceres is citing Cristiano Ronaldo, it is a fact that his body also is often comment on in neoliberal times. He is included among spornosexual men (<https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2616948-inventor-of-the-term-metrosexual-says-cristiano-ronaldo-is-spornosexual>, accessed on 21/01/2022). According to Jamie Hakim (2018), "The word 'spornosexual' is a portmanteau of sports star and porn star and refers not only to the athletic bodies these men are striving to achieve (high musculature and low body-fat), but also the erotically charged nature of the images they are sharing." This leads to think that the proposition of Catherine Hakim (2010) about women possessing an exclusive kind of capital, the erotic one, was also appropriated by men and matched with the hegemonic masculinity some of them adopt. Not all men, I emphasize it again. But certainly Cristiano Ronaldo.

top she is going to be looked at "wow, what boobs she has", instead of saying "look at her (Marta), how good she is." (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

We are not valued only for our karate, for our sport. I don't want to have more followers, for example on *Instagram*, because they like my sensuality, the way I am in the photos, but I would like to have more followers or be a reference for someone because of, first, my way of being, or being like a *karateka*. I would not like a woman to end up being eroticized because she is... I want to be an example to follow for my way of being and for my karate, not because I am more beautiful, less beautiful, because they sell me more or less in the networks. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

Ceres prefers to restrict exposure that may be linked to her athlete position. In this sense, Atena even suggested the creation of two profiles on social networks, one for the athlete and the other for the woman. This is something also pointed out by Bennett et al (2017) when studying elite female basketball players. Many of the basketball players reported that they ended up adopting something like a dual identity to negotiate athletic femininity. Minerva, in turn, exposes how the meaning she finds for uploading photos is different from what is generally assumed to be unique by most people. I consider that postures that benefit the general female topic are the most positive. However, I do not condemn any position, since it is possible to understand that women have been subjected to many diktats for a long time, in addition to being subjected to the repression of sexuality (Foucault, 1988). I commented in the previous chapter that women's motivations for entering male environments are suspected and that normally such motivations are much simpler than people might believe. Minerva exposes something along these lines as well. Afrodite says in a comment I will feature in the next category that she is not "provoking" with her attitude. She considers that she is just changing her clothes and wants to have the right to be able to do this with the same freedom as men do. From this perspective, it would be a step backwards to say that women need to keep their bodies covered, for example, so as not to provoke men, ending up victims (of rape, for example) as guilty (Roth & Basow, 2004). On the other hand, it is also necessary to take into account that certain attitudes feed the male gaze. In this sense, other athletes comment:

I believe that a boy who uploads (his) photos in balls (naked or almost naked) or whatever, does not get as many likes or as many followers as the other way around. I think that we girls don't care so much (for almost naked men); we don't like that so much. On the other hand, when it is a girl who uploads the photos, yes. I have thought about that sometime, because sometimes you see things of sportswomen who upload

to the networks and that many times are a bit that (sensual or sexy). I think that if you do that as an athlete you will have more followers, maybe the sense of sponsors may interest you. But I think that if you are an athlete, what you have to upload is results, you have to upload your work, you have to upload... Get followers why? Because they are telling me "how beautiful you are in that photo", that does not favour me, or women's sport. People stop looking at the athlete to see "this girl is so hot!" And I didn't want that to happen to me with my profile. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

It does not value the person who is taking the photo, but her body. Because even the woman is a world champion seven times, and you are going to meet that woman for having a photo like this (sexy), not because she is seven times champion. (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

Atena's comment on the different way of interpreting male and female nudity is addressed by O'Neill (1997, p.84-85). She explains that:

The classic male nudes, in their posture and gestures, generally transmit physical and sexual potency. Furthermore, they often evoke a sense of religious and political potency (Walters, 1979). Male nudes are vigilant and express action in public space; they are also used to represent what some believe to be the most powerful force of all: God. (...) The case of classic female nudes is quite different. These figures are often portrayed in a private space or fantasy setting, where their nudity is aimed at the male viewer.

Classical Western art, as already pointed out by other authors, helps to didactically teach the place of each one in the heteronormative order at the same time as it persuasively educates, according to O'Neill, the gaze.

Regarding strategies to break with the devaluation that women face in the sports environment, the literature provides approaches from different perspectives. I return to the studies of Carlsson and Maor here to help the subject. Carlsson (2017), in her study of a space of hyper masculinity as boxing has often been/is characterized, proposed to feminize the environment using female elements that contrast with the scenario. She reports results of breaking some barriers imposed on women in the environment, although the elements used can be seen as stereotyped. I mean, brands that produce equipment elaborate something stereotyped to attract women as consumers, for example pink coloured equipment with flowers. Maor (2018), on the other hand, proposed something like not allowing the pleasure of

the male gaze. In a more confrontational way, she suggests the adoption of queer postures, capable of shocking by strangeness or, at least, not sensually attracting.

When I read their texts, my first reaction was to disagree with the two proposals, because I thought that placing women in the role of consumer of stereotyped products continues to reduce their subjectivity and make them childish; and I thought that depriving women of expressing themselves as best suited them would be unfair, as they would need to adopt a posture to confront men, which would continue taking into account (albeit in the opposite direction) the male gaze as guide. However, these are also my processes. After rethinking the texts, I saw that both proposals can be *useful*, depending on the context, and they are actions carried out, tested, therefore, in isolated contexts that already have results, which can be expanded. Perhaps it is only necessary to pay attention to the queer attitude prevailing over the adoption of hegemonic characteristics of masculinity or (emphasized) femininity. When I suggest embracing masculinization, for example, I am thinking of subversive ways of countering hegemonic male power, and obviously not the opposite, "with the adoption of a form of hegemonic masculinity and a claiming of a share of male power through acting as an honorary boy" (Paechter, 2006, p.10). However, to wear pink *kimonos*, which do exist in karate market, that receive this colour but keep the broad shoulders and narrow hips' model, seems to be just playing with women and emphasized femininity, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity.

Returning to the testimonies, a coach also recognizes that the problem is in the male gaze and reflects that he does not know if the promotion of sex appeal is positive for the female athlete or her sport:

The problem is in the sick mind of man. (...) I think there would be no problem for women, the feminine idol, if we weren't sick like we are. I think it does have a problem... I don't know... (...) Look, I really liked the ads where they showed cute girls moving in 1000 ways and such. Well, my couples, friends, my mother such, "the truth is that it is a shame that they have to go out doing that." What did I say when I was 15 years old, "what is wrong, it's good". Until suddenly I don't know what time in my life, half naked guys started dancing on a TV show and I, "damn, for God's sake," you know? Well then, how that has happened to me I don't know what to answer you anymore. (...) Would you see well that certain female sports figures (...) disseminate sport (by exposing their body)? Well, I wouldn't see it badly, but I don't know if it would be good for them or for the sport. (Hermes, man, Interview 32 (3), 21/09/2020)

Hermes comments on ads and TV show, which gives me the opportunity to return to the subject of the cultural industry. Athletes not infrequently located the problem of the excess of sexualisation that is made of them in the media:

I think that most journalists, let's say, try to eroticize the body of the athlete woman. Instead of saying "good, well, you've won, a photo with your Cup", and that's it. (Juno, Interview 25 (2), 07/09/2020)

For example, Diana. "Diana has a new boyfriend." "Diana has a new partner." Instead of "Diana has won the gold." "Cristiano Ronaldo is the best player in the world." They don't say at any time "Cristiano Ronaldo has hooked up with three people", but about Diana they can say "she has hooked up with three people." They don't look at athletic achievement. (Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

There are a number of published studies that mention this problem, the way women's sport is (sensually) approached by the media (Bernstein, 2002; Ferretti & Knijnik, 2007; Koivula, 1999; Souza, Capraro & Jensen, 2017; see also Amâncio et al 2019; and Bowman, 2020), their underrepresentation (Dunne, 2017; Petty & Pope, 2019), but also how the media quickly consume everything they sell, certainly including sport (Boyle & Haynes, 2002; Hutchins, Li & Rowe, 2019; Rowe, 2013). It is possible to say that the media-sports market occupies an important place in the theory of Horkheimer and Adorno (1985), especially Adorno, about the cultural industry. They basically refer to the deliberate and passive consumption of goods that are not a conscious consumer choice. Sport as a spectacle configures itself as another product to be consumed by the public (Vaz, 2000; Vigarello, 2008), and the narratives exposed by the athletes also indicate, as it is clear, that it is about consumption of them through their images/media coverage. Also included in this repertoire are the athletes' reports about experiences with sponsors or disclosure of their achievements:

They once proposed to me, "Hey, look, can you put the advertising on your bum?" and I say, "no." Fabiana: In the *gi*, do you say? Demeter: yes, in the bum or in the pants on the bum, like volleyball players do. They put it in their bum because it is what sells the most. Well that bothers me. If you wear shorts it is because you are more comfortable, not because you have to sell the sport. That pisses me off. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

It happened to me... I would have won a title, something, they took me out as "Jupiter's girlfriend". I mean, not my name, it was like that in the press. And the news was, well, I don't know, "Ceres has won x". Well, no. "Jupiter's girlfriend has won x." I

mean, look up to what point... it's horrible, horrible... Fabiana: I mean, you don't exist, Jupiter exists, you are... Ceres: I am the complement, exactly. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)<sup>130</sup>

Apparently Ceres is not sexualized in the account she presents, as nothing is said about her body or appearance, and it is reported that she has won some title. However, being advertised as someone's girlfriend, without even having her name mentioned, places her in Jupiter's possession, subordinated to him, as “other”, whose subjectivity is completely ignored. The news is disrespectful and a promoter of Jupiter, who neither fought nor won the title. This points to the devaluation of women and women's sports, which Ceres adds:

Women's sport is still far below, compared to men's. (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

Although female marketing is evident among countless women, that it feels like a big problem and creates a lot of discomfort, men generally do not see a problem. Like two of the coaches, they consider that the issue of women's eroticization in sport is not a problem, it is something to be enjoyed, or that the problem is in each one's mind:

It's not eroticizing sport, I like it, I like a girl... but I like it because she takes care of herself, I like it because she does for her body, for her life, for her health, because she improves. And I like that as a man, let's say I like that a girl is like me, that she likes to take care of herself, I like that she likes to be healthy. So I am attracted to a girl who does sports because of those values, not simply because of the sport itself. And then the other point, because if the woman does sports, usually physically she is within the canons of beauty that one has. But there are also people who maybe like girls with a little less bum, like everything else, because it is already within the tastes of each one. (...) The beauty canon of a girl who takes care of herself and has a more defined body, more so, since it can attract more, than a body that maybe does not take care of. But I already told you that I must be a little strange boy because those things are not something that I say "oh" (does not impress very much). I like it because of the canon of beauty and the values that this woman transmits to me, knowing that she plays sports and takes care of herself, I like it. But I'm talking about a kind of knowledge, that is, a general valuation, not simply for the fact of taking care of herself, in the end, if she takes care of herself, she does sports, but then you cannot speak two words with her

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<sup>130</sup> In order to ensure Ceres' confidentiality, I also assigned a pseudonym to her boyfriend.

because she has no culture, she has no such... Well, does not worth it. Well, I will tell you that it is a beautiful body, but the eroticism will go away in two minutes, there will be no more! In the end it is all, at least for me, a general valuation. The sportswoman usually has the best body according to the ranges of beauty that are stipulated in society, so that's why I think it could be (that women are eroticized in sports). (Apolo, man, Interview 33 (2), 25/09/2020)

In the society we are in, in 2020, no one is scared of anything, because we have seen everything. It all depends on the importance that you want to give it. You go to a physical therapist and you take off your clothes. So if that is traumatic for you, then you have a problem. I have been doing karate since I was very little, since I was nine years old, so I am used to changing in a changing room with many people. Clear. The person who has not gotten used to that and arrives at a changing room with a certain age, is hesitant that others see him/her. The problem depends on each person, not on others. Today everyone knows what each one has. If you do it naturally, no problem. (Hefaistos, man, Interview 37 (2), 30/09/2020)

Performing as a woman in Olympic karate, the apex of what makes up the sports culture, puts pressure on women as in other sports, especially associated with eroticization to promote consumption by the heterosexual male public through the uses of the media. Meanwhile, despite this, as I have commented, failing to integrate this scenario may imply other problems for women, such as the total absence of visibility. It may seem contradictory, but visibility, while commercializing sport and women, also ensures some benefits, such as equality policies and even quotas. If there is not this visibility, it becomes easier to maintain the modality as a lawless land, where force rules and tradition reigns. Warriors are usually male, with the few female warriors only having a certain concession from the male world. So, the tendency is that many fewer women are who achieve acceptance and belonging in the environment, for example. And those who are may suffer pain in a way too anonymous.

So, I consider that, although the fight of women against eroticization still needs to endure, it becomes more favourable if hooked to the Olympic context. Right now the reality is the opposite of that, that is, karate is out of the 2024 Olympic Games. But it may return in 2028 or later. Certainly this will continue to be sought in a general way, certainly not with the search for space for women as the first objective, though. And although there are very few women who will one day come to participate in some Olympic Games, and that even there they have to continue fighting against stereotypes of masculinization and eroticization, it

seems to me, first, a less disadvantaged struggle and, second, that the fact is capable of benefiting girls and women also from the amateur context.

To complete the chapter, I will approach a last category, where the athletes honestly expose the feelings that the desirous and misplaced male gaze awakens in them.

#### **7.4. "Look, how disgusting, how he is looking at you." – The desirous male gaze**

Many authors spoke about desire from different perspectives, influenced, if I can say it like that, by their professions and subjectivities. Among them, possibly exponents are Freud, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. I will not stop, however, in exposing their theories, as well as not going into the question of the gaze itself, just using these two elements to analyse the problem perceived and felt by *karateka* women. I start from the principle that the gaze is collectively trained, as Vigarello (2008) reveals when he describes how the sports' shows are built. The gaze, as a sensory capture, is targeted and excited, trained to be curious, accelerated, a recipient of various options, always thirsty and never appeased or satisfied, always wanting more. The gaze is, therefore, combined with desire, trained to desire, to want to appropriate everything. The eyes see and immediately lead to salivation and restlessness of the hands. The body reacts to a need created by images, but also by greed and degrees of selfishness. The desirous being wants, wants for himself, and wants it now. The gaze and its eagerness, since desire is an engine that sets life in motion, have overtaken the ear.

Viewing the sporting spectacle especially by the heterosexual male audience makes women's sport seem surrounded on all sides. I explained earlier that many coaches do not want to train women because they consider women's sport not to be true sport (Pfister, 2003). Many of those who train women and men together do not give women opportunities to demonstrate techniques, for example, because they supposedly do not do it right, so coaches prioritize male athletes. However, there are cases of male coaches who "value" women, want to work with them and call on them to demonstrate. In many of these cases, the focus is not on the potential of the female athlete and sport or on the technique she demonstrates, but on the privileged view she provides of her figure. In saying this I know I can hear the counterargument, as in the case of the *gi*, that nothing satisfies women. However, the embodied experience of many female athletes from different sports attests to what I am asserting. The feeling of inadequacy, discomfort, doubt, and often deception that many women experience is a valid indicator that things are wrong. There is a problem in the

different gazes that women are the object of, which can be gazes of exploitation, inferiority, domination, regulation and desire.

Women's sport, as shown in this chapter, finds space in the sports marketplace as it markets its protagonists (Tajrobehkar, 2016). However, for many of the athletes this is a high price they have to pay for insisting on practicing their sport. I believe that they are absolutely right, that is, they should not give up this space, but continue to fight from then on out of respect. This aspect of sports culture undeniably affects the development of female subjectivity in a way that can be deeply painful. Although this subject has different levels of depth, I approach here a relatively superficial level, which is restricted to the scope of the gaze. Even though it is something simple and perhaps considered harmless, it impacts the subjectivity of the athletes, in this case, recipients of the gaze, quite intensely. Certainly other collectives, such as that of homosexual men, could report relevant experiences related to the male heterosexual gaze, possibly not of desire or regulation, but of violence, I risk. In any case, I consider that the gazes cast by men under the heteronormative regime are often looks that cause damage and that are imbued with symbolic violence.

So how does the experience with symbolic violence adhere to the body and become embodied subjectivity? I envision this occurring through equally symbolic damage and scarring in people's subjectivity. It is not uncommon to hear people saying that they need to make peace with themselves or their bodies. This always leads me to suspect that they have their subjectivities wounded, perhaps in some distant relation to Bolwby's Attachment Theory I mentioned in chapter 4, adapted for adults. In relation to *karateka*, they generally report very unpleasant experiences when they see themselves approached by the male desirous gaze. I purposely use the word "approached" because it is not simply about being looked at, but it is about an invasive look, which generates embarrassment and intimidation, which attacks, many times. In other situations, however, they do not feel bad. So they honestly make some differences, describing the pleasant cases and the ones that make them feel disgusted. I start by presenting general situations:

You run down the street and sometimes a man looks at you and it makes you a little uncomfortable. I have never been afraid on the street, but it is discomfort and helplessness. "Why do you have to look at me just because I have passed by your side? I don't turn to look at you, why do you have to turn to look at me?", it's something that makes me uncomfortable. And in karate it is true that I do not pay much attention, but there is also in the warm-up areas, in the bleachers there is a little of that look, that

attitude of the boys to look when the girl, for any reason, goes down or... Things you see and that I don't like. I do not like. That they do it to another girl I don't like to see, and that they do it to me I don't like either. But when you see it from the outside, it kind of grabs my attention. That you are sitting in the bleachers calmly and you see like a boy, simply because two girls have passed, he has to look and says to the friend "look..." It's something I hate. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

Well, in fact, in championships it has already happened that there are people from other cultures, men from other cultures who may not be used to seeing, what we have said about staying on top (sports bra) in the middle of a warm-up room... What's in the beach, that thing that you take off your shirt and have underneath... And there are people, men from other cultures and... men from your same culture who are scandalized... the truth is that the look is somewhat annoying because **it is out of place**. (Proserpina, Interview 18 (2), 24/08/2020)

Minerva explains how the inappropriate situations perceived with other women also bother her. I consider this relevant from two perspectives. The first is, certainly, empathy with peers, given that she somehow recognizes that another woman is in the process of being consumed, which could be happening to herself. And this leads to the second perspective, that the desirous male gaze is authorized and does not require discreet care, for example. It is lawful, and perhaps represents some value in male logic, that the desire is made explicit. Possibly this relates to the expectations of virility being demonstrated. Some men need to provide evidence among themselves of courage and attributes of hegemonic masculinity, which leads them to use women as an object and "other" for their tribal purposes, disregarding women completely (Turelli & Vaz, 2011). Proserpina, in turn, brings up the important point about the gaze being out of place, which seems to be a key element indicating that something belonging to the private sphere is brought to the public and also by someone often unknown who feels in the right to behave as intimate. In a similar line, other athletes honestly reveal how they consider that there are proper moments for each thing, as they admit that "everyone likes to be liked". I understand this is a well-known Spanish expression. I got in touch with it when conducting the interviews, however, listening to it from different athletes, I think it is about the local culture:

I think that everyone likes to be liked, that is, it doesn't bother me because on top of that, you feel flattered. (...) As long as everything is with respect, it seems perfect to me. I would not like it if I were about to fight and someone came to say something to

me in that sense, I would not like it at the moment, that's strange thing, each thing at the right time. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

Well, it depends on the man too, if the man is an orc, I don't like him, it's like "what is he doing looking at me?" But if he is a man who is very handsome, then obviously. Everyone likes to be liked. (Venus, Interview 22 (2), 02/09/2020)

Feeling somewhat flattered, considering the contact is made in a respectful way, can have an empowering aspect, as Diana will point out. However, Dimen (1997, p.42) warns that a lot of attention is needed because when "they are physically intimidated, economically dependent or emotionally needy, women surrender to patriarchy."<sup>131</sup> In any case, the athletes comment on the male approach moving between being empowering and ridiculing:

It also depends on the person. If you have something to do with that person, you know them, you talk to them, so they will surprise you or not, but if they are someone you don't know, you don't like at all, they do it with other intentions, apart from desire they look at you with other intentions... No, I don't like that at all. What's more, I am a person who someone looks at me that way or I feel intimidated by those gestures or by that look or by how they are behaving, I am the first to say "hey, no." Or I would do anything to cut that, to make things clear and that's it. If it is something that is reciprocal, then I would not be so tangent, so firm, it is normal. But for me, those people who, you walk down the street, and they whistle or say "hey, what a beautiful, I don't know what," I don't like that at all, because you don't know me at all, you don't know who I am, you don't know if it's going to bother me, I don't owe you anything, that is, respect. It doesn't look good to me. (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

It depends to what extent, it depends in what way, it depends on the moment and it depends on the person looking at you. If he is a person that I like and he looks at me with desire, well, yes (I like), even if I have nothing with that person. And that he does it with subtlety and that... I like it. Because we all like that others like us. But that is one thing and another is the typical drool, male or female, that looks at you as if there is no tomorrow, that does not know you at all and that wants confidence, and there is no confidence. (...) There is nothing more beautiful, from my point of view, there is nothing that empowers you more, both feminine and masculine, than feeling desired by someone you love. It is a very great self-esteem tool. But that does not mean that

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<sup>131</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

you know how to differentiate (it is needed to differentiate) it from the other, **it is not hypocrisy, it is simply two points and you have to know how to differentiate it.**

(Diana, Interview 13 (2), 13/08/2020)

For me there are moments for everything. It is not the same to be flirting with a person and feeling that look of desire –that I like in that case, it is a pleasant thing because you notice that you are attracting that person–, that being in a competition or in a professional field, and feeling something like that is very unpleasant for me. Because I don't know where to go. (...) I feel very uncomfortable with things that are a bit out of context for me. And it even makes me feel a little ashamed and uncomfortable, it's that I don't want to keep talking to this person, and many times you can't either, I don't know, it's not politically correct to say "goodbye. You're talking to me... you're looking at me." It's something that you can't prove either, maybe it's a feeling, and sometimes you also feel a bit silly because you say "I don't know, maybe it's me, but I'm feeling terrible talking to these people." (...) If someone comes and says "you're an idiot", then you can say that this person called me an idiot, I will answer or I'm leaving here... But a person who is looking at you like that and, maybe you are noticing that... but... what do you say? "Stop looking at me." The person will tell you "I'm not looking at you in any way", you know? It remains there a bit in a limbo of "I don't know what happens." (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

The fear of being ridiculed is related to what I introduced in chapter 5 about shame. The experience can be so internally conflicting that it becomes frightening. Shame, in addition to being characterized as a certain fear of social rejection, results from internalized external evaluations at the same time that it causes expectations of failure and, in turn, the experience of more shame (Partridge & Wiggins, 2008). As a strategy to avoid failure and especially the shame that comes with it, many people prefer not to have certain experiences. Thus, the possibility of being ridiculed when interpreting someone else's actions in a wrong way leads many women to remain silent in the face of countless unfair situations in life, to actually run away from them, as Atena implies when she says "I don't know where to go". Sometimes there is doubt about the other person's intentions, and women are very hesitant, after all, they are also afraid of committing injustice. And they fear being rude, as Atena's words make clear. I understand it, however, I also think that it is not necessary, and not even possible, to please everyone. So I would say that if she feels awkward and is not able to maturely clear things up, that she simply walks away from the situation. Will she be labelled crazy? Surely. But if she is

unwilling to satisfy the person who is bothering her, she will be branded as something bad anyway, so at least leave without expending too much energy.

What Hestia proposes seems very appropriate, to speak clearly about things. However, if what Atena describes occurs, about the “game” being turned in a ridiculing and unfair way, when, many times, both involved know that it is an inadequate situation, this leads to indignation. The woman obviously has the right to refuse relationships or situations that bother her, however, some men can react very badly to rejection, no matter how well placed it may be. It is not uncommon, then, for men with their wounded pride to try to humiliate women (Rich, 2010) that do not want them. In their mind will be something like, I wonder, “who do you think you are to refuse me?” These are power relations in which the powerful “no” confronts desire (Foucault, 1988) and the thirst for domination, which can lead to the awakening of *machista* fury. So it is not uncommon for them to try, in their minds, to “teach a lesson” to those who disallow them and, in a symbolic way, castrate them. Hestia also contributes in this regard:

You still do not know those situations, and you only try to be a good person, nice, educated, with the person or with the man and everything is misinterpreted. Then you don't have to be crazy to make that mistake. (...) That happens constantly, because if you give a person an affectionate gesture, the person thinks “OMG, she likes me”, and speaks with other intentions. And in the end the person is only like that, she is good and tries to pay you a compliment, or to make you feel better... Then the misinterpretation is horrible. Because you never know how things are going to happen. (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

Returning to Diana's comment, she makes it clear that there is a difference between the two situations she conceives, realizing that she attracts those she is interested in or being the object of desire of those who think “there is no tomorrow”. In fact, having high self-esteem favours and, more than that, enables empowerment, a necessary and powerful tool, as she describes it. However, following Dimen (1997) again, it is necessary to pay attention so that the desire, also present in women, the desire to feel special, accepted, loved and authentic, does not blind the female gaze. The female desire, often thirsty for acceptance, allows itself to be satisfied very easily.

Going a little deeper into the centre of the problem that generates intense discomfort, other athletes report how they feel repulse when approached in a way that intimidates them. This has the potential to happen especially when there is a certain power involved, which, in

turn, can result in the inquisition of the athletes themselves, being possibly discredited if they report what happens to them (Rich, 2010).

Thank God not much has happened to me, but there is a referee who has made a comment or has looked in a way that you say... That disgusts you, that disgusts you very much, makes you uncomfortable and you don't even know what to do or how to explain it, because they are subtle things that you almost cannot talk with other girls, if they will understand it, or with a boy that you trust... But you can't help it because that person... (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

This evidently helps women to remain silent and only reveal problems when they are already recovered.<sup>132</sup> Not talking about what happened right away can lead to mistrust about the women's "versions". But speaking at the time can also be very hard, or, in some cases, almost impossible, as it is very painful and even difficult to elaborate on. Although this scenario presents itself as bleak, it seems to be that it could be even worse. It is also important to point out the problem of places where women are widely accepted as "other", that is, accepted as possession and object of use in a much more explicit way that is conceived in Western culture:

It is true that practically all the championships there are some countries, especially Muslim, that have women a little like a step below, that we have seen some things. (Proserpina, Interview 18 (2), 24/08/2020)

Even though this is another culture, it is not so difficult to see how conservatism positions women as prey (Turelli & Vaz, 2011), without demanding, it seems, so much or no effort to conquer them, simply finding them as likely to be used, "devoured" by the male in question. Afrodite portrays what I am looking to point out in a male assault that does not even require conversation:

When they look at me because I do karate well, I like it, but when they look at me with that desire, OMG, I take it very, very, very, very bad, I take it terribly. They are looking at you because you are super pretty, like that, I think of it as "look, how disgusting, how he is looking at you." Many times I had a bad time, I don't like it at all, above all, everyone knows that I have a boyfriend and that I am quite settled with him and we both compete internationally and there are people who do not care, and they look at

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<sup>132</sup> In this regard, see the dramatic and impactful documentary about US gymnastics athletes, "AthleteA", directed by Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk. TM & Copyright, 2020.

you. Look, actually, last time, an Azerbaijani came to me... like... he touched me... he put his part on my bum. And I turned around and looked at him with a disgusted face, you know? I also told my boyfriend and he said "last time." Because some go smart, they look at you like that with such... (...) **I'm not provoking!** It is that I am changing to put on the *karategi* as you do (the same way the man does). (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

In the view that sees women as the prey of someone who seeks immediate satisfaction, even games of seduction lose their meaning. If these men are used to getting what they want without even having to ask for it, politeness and respect seem to be something they would consider unnecessary for women. They ridicule women, possibly in front of a male audience with whom bets were often made. Also, something that is not unique to Middle Eastern culture and surroundings is that when men just want to explore and have fun, they do not care that the woman is compromised, something that in Afrodite's view would keep her protected and respected. They want to have fun with her, enjoy her body, and maybe later defame her. It even seems that there are some classifications from the male gaze. If a woman nurtures the desirous male gaze, she has a specific "use". The "serious and respectable woman", the one who is seen under the regulating male gaze, will be more than a man's prey, she will be his possession, and then no-one touches her, because with her the man is considering starting a family. However, this same man is the person who converts the desired woman into a disrespected woman, who re-enacts the ancient rituals of stoning in the public square of a woman who supposedly corrupts nations by not keeping morals intact (Foucault, 1988). This can also be related to attitudes of war, where the dishonour of women in enemy terrain conveys a message of enemy domination and humiliation (Turelli & Vaz, 2011). Without any doubt, these are unhealthy/insane behaviours, so waiting for respect or responsibility ends up becoming naive. Afrodite adds:

The situation in which you are walking (in a sports arena, bleachers) and they are looking at you, maybe a group of boys, you say "is it necessary?" Or even many times I ask to go to the bathroom with someone, I tell someone to accompany me because it even bothers me to go alone. You know? But not out of fear or such, but because it makes me uncomfortable. Or meet someone who make a gesture or something like that. It's that I don't like it at all, it's that I hate it. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

Afrodite describes that what she feels is not fear, but extreme discomfort because, in a way, an invasion of not only a physical space, but also a psychological space occurs. Roth and Basow (2004) report how what they call “rape mystique” has the power to force women to “constrict their lives” (p.256). Also, I commented earlier on the case of journalists who struggled to do their job interviewing male athletes. One of those reporters, Lisa Olson, was known to suffer in a locker room what she described as “mind rape”<sup>133</sup> (see also Kane & Disch, 1993). Perhaps it is no exaggeration to associate what Afrodite says with some degree of this, as it clearly causes her disturbance, makes her seek not to be alone, and develops strategies for getting around. She clarifies:

It's really not because they're going to do something to me, but because maybe they'll look at me, see me alone and say... I don't know what... let's see, because I'm super radical for that, **I kind of hate it, so I don't like to face it alone.** (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

Like Afrodite, Perséfone negotiates with the scenario also in this sense of disrespectful desire, in addition to others described before. The impact that the possibility of unwanted experiences can have on her embodied subjectivity leads her to hide, in a way, to avoid discomfort, annoyance, embarrassment, disgust and, ultimately, suffering.

I usually feel quite uncomfortable, maybe I'm a little special for that. I don't know how to tell you, I don't like nothing, nothing, nothing to provoke. So I usually dress in clothes... with long pants, I don't like to wear shorts or very short pants, I don't like to mark the body, I wear wider clothes or so because not, I don't like that it can draw attention to someone and they look at me because it is uncomfortable for me. (...) Just as I don't upload anything to my networks that could lead to their comment, I don't like uploading photos in a top or bikini or, I don't like any of that. Because it is very uncomfortable for me to receive comments or looks like that. (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

It is very interesting to note that Perséfone's attitude is configured as a kind of escape. She could adopt the same posture in subversive action, however, she feels cornered, intimidated by the desirous gaze to the point that she accepts the supposed guilt attributed to the woman of “provoking”. In a way, there is an understanding that it is normal and natural for men to feel desire and it is up to women not to awaken it. This reinforces, from my point of

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<sup>133</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lisa\\_Olson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lisa_Olson), accessed on 24/06/2021.

view, the need to empower women for action, helping them to move from a place of inhibition, guilt, shame and inferiority to one of equality/equity, expression, freedom and justice. Juno, in turn, presents a position of opposition and confrontation that seems quite healthy:

I don't like it at all. Every time they do that to me, I stare at him and until he looks away I don't take my look off. And if they tell me something, I answer them, well, I don't care, one day something will happen to me, but it seems to me from the 30s, those things from the Middle Ages. We are in the 21st century, these things did not have to be done. **Men believe themselves to be amazing**, they do it, well, it gives me a courage that I cannot shut up, there I can't shut up. (Juno, Interview 25 (2), 07/09/2020)

Juno reveals her way of acting and confronting these situations. With everything I have been exposing in this category, I think it is clear that the position of opposition to moments that have the potential to blend with intimacy, even for female fighters, is not easy. It seems that the female tendency is to retreat and withdraw. And I venture to say that men who “believe themselves to be amazing” know this and “use” it on their behalf. They develop the ability to match manipulations and reduce female reactive potential. However, I think women could make some efforts to stand up, not shut up, confront what is simply unfair to them, along the lines that Juno demonstrates here. It is important, though, to note that they need to find support. Support among other women, support from sporting authorities, which can be complicated, considering the traditional environments, but I think that channels for receiving narratives of problems of this nature should be open, in a welcoming, non-discriminatory or prejudiced way. Also, having the support of a few men with greater understanding capacity is invaluable, as they are obviously internal to male culture. I always think that “infiltrated” agents, belonging to the problematic environment but aware of the problems, are essential agents. Can they also, in turn, face problems? Probably, but they will not be any bigger than those of women within the sports field who are seeking change, I dare say.

Wheaton and Thorpe (2018) present satisfactory results in action sports on the work that uses the help of some influential men committed to reversing the scenario where women ask for change. This is, of course, very welcome, since women have to deal with the problems and look for the solution for them, apply it, face the consequences, rework plans, in short. So having some men active in changing processes, even if not many in a realistic approach, not putting the full weight of action on women, would certainly be a positive thing. In addition,

women within the field and with some prominent place already conquered, as I have been pointing out, represent fundamental places of struggle. From the inside, even if slowly, they could open doors. Doors that give access to the different, strange, subversive, queer, an impact and uncomfortable factor for the heteronormative that, while in the domain of doors (the heteronormative), it does not allow the entry of what is not “conforming” and “straight”. They could slowly open doors that enable new uses for the martial space. Uses that physically, psychologically and realistically enable women as proposed by physical feminism, which lead them to build an embodied subjectivity that empowers them, thus not requiring the pursuit of any external model. As Sara Ahmed points out, “To queer use, to open up spaces to other users and uses usually requires more than just turning up and turning a post-box into a nest or a room into a shelter.”<sup>134</sup> lisahunter (2017) also talks about possibilities for change to the space of physical education that can be both queer and conservative. lisahunter proposes a space in constant and continuous queer acting, strange, dynamic, different, in transition.

These attitudes would be some that, as I have already pointed out, would cause some discomfort for women. However, when I think logically, women are already uncomfortable, so it would just be about changing the form of discomfort. As Ahmed (2004, p.151) points out, “Ideally’ such lives will maintain a discomfort with the scripts of heteronormative existence.” Discomfort or even the feeling of orphanhood, indicates the capacity for non-conforming or breaking the established, which makes it essential and almost appreciated. Appreciated when efforts turn to change, perhaps. Along these lines, all the suffering already experienced by so many women can assume a redemptive function, that is, it gains meaning, it ceases to be in vain and becomes justified. It is still suffering, I mean, obviously better if it could have been avoided. But the cause of acting to avoid possible future suffering, known in one's own skin, is, precisely because of this, the empathic knowledge of how much it hurts, a powerful driving force for change. In other words, suffering some pain in your own skin can be, in this sense, a driving factor of criticism that leads to the denial of the (straight) pedagogy that damage and to the search for transformative approaches. Transformative actions are neither easy nor comfortable, but in addition to being necessary they can be healing. A form of ethical care (Clement, 2018) for oneself and others.

## 7.5. Chapter closure

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<sup>134</sup> <https://imma.ie/magazine/ideas-of-queer-use-by-sara-ahmed/>, accessed on 16/06/2021.

In this chapter I sought to answer the objective of analysing how sports culture influences the development of female embodied subjectivity in Spanish Olympic karate. Starting from the idea of verifying if some things that I observed in my sporting life and in the context of my country of origin would be repeated in other places, I brought considerations about the processes of objectification and consumption of women athletes. Women's sport is universally devalued in terms of women's athletic performance, and contradictorily valued in the sense of the sensualisation and sexualisation of their bodies, favouring a desirous male gaze. *Karateka* need to deal with this stereotype, which does not replace, but adds to the masculinization that they suffer from participating in a modality included among the MACS, typically understood as masculine. Sports culture undeniably influences the development of female subjectivity, leaving important marks on it, however, I also consider that the visibility that the Olympic Games give to karate has its importance, as it can contribute to removing possible injustices from anonymity.

In the first category of the chapter I focused on the body of the *karateka* woman. I started by mentioning the dichotomization that still affects society to then dealing with the type of body that is moulded in karate. In a sociological perspective, I sought to expose how the gendered embodiment occurs despite the *gi* and despite the different forms among which the body can oscillate, such as the large variations in weight. Even though women are often led, in different sports, to exaggerate femininity when out of sport, this is due to the fact that they seek to please the male gaze and adapt to the hegemonic order. They continue to feel like women in different situations in life, with different clothes, when performing their sport, whether male or not. Men are the ones who see them as more feminine when “dressed as a woman”. In a context of exploration of the female body, I propose queer attitudes and behaviours as subversive possibilities.

In the next category I approached the topic of femininity, including ideas about beauty and sensuality, where the athletes provided very relevant information to think about the situation of women and female performativity. In the sports environment, inequalities are felt intensely in the form of symbolic violence that constantly classifies women and their attributes, even if the performance criteria are definitely objective and not related to heterosexual male personal taste. The athletes propose, to some extent, the adoption of a type of contemporary femininity that mixes styles, performances, representations. Although at times they are forced to exhibit femininity and do so, at other times they are precisely questioning and confronting these established elements, and this is valid because they may be

building another type of femininity or female masculinity that moves away from hegemonic masculinity.

In the third category, I presented the team's thoughts related to the eroticization of female athletes, with contrasting opinions at the same time that complementary. I explained how the peculiarity given to sport as a hybrid place, of permissions and prohibitions, also plays with excesses in what for women means limits of intimacy. As is common, their limits are understood by some men as likely to be exceeded and so they interpret women's actions always with a provocative sexual purpose, even if they are not going in that direction. Athletes used imagery resources to talk about the subject, topic that lead to shows how women can be dispersed of the central problem when they get lost in the criticisms of one another. Men simply enjoy the scenarios, whether using the desirous or the regulator gaze. Athletes still bring up the undeniable problem with the media that sells them, accentuated by the rise to an Olympic sport.

In the last category, about the desirous male gaze, the athletes honestly narrate the feelings they try in experienced situations that often lead them to indignation. The gazes that are cast on them can be gazes of exploration, inferiorization, domination, regulation and desire. And the feeling they experience moves among inadequacy, discomfort, doubt and, often, deception. They also admit that "everyone likes to be liked", but clarify that the situations they like are quite specific. Men's games often lead to the ridicule of women, and where men feel they can simply have what they want without having to ask for it, the woman's objectification reaches its extreme, making the psychological discomfort deeply unsettling. However, women's awareness, experience and empowerment could be able, with challenges, to work to slowly reverse unfair situations in favour of women themselves and other groups vulnerable to heteronormativity.

## 8. CONCLUSION

My aim for this thesis was to analyse the processes of construction of the female embodied subjectivity in the Spanish Olympic karate team. To carry it out, I used a qualitative methodology that combined data collection techniques, relied on the triangulation of experts, and resorted, at certain times, to personal ethnographic/autoethnographic experience. The literature review on female embodied subjectivity guided by the theme of gender showed the lack of research and consequently of knowledge in martial arts, and specifically in high performance karate, in this sphere. The number of people dedicated to sports karate (WKF) is relevant, and therefore, it is also relevant that these people have the construction of their subjectivity to some extent affected by the elements that make up the *karateka habitus*. After all, it is a peculiar context that mixes heteronormativity, tradition and hierarchy, masculinization and sexualisation of women, possibilities of empowerment and subversion, and Olympic context.

Evidently, few people were able to participate in the Olympic moment that karate achieved. In 2024 it is out of the Paris Olympic Games, however, the search for karate to return to that scenario remains. In fact, I believe this is a good thing for practitioners of this sport in all its different contexts (martial art-tradition; self-defence; amateur *dojo* sports karate; high competition sport; elite *karateka* women). I see this as positive since the Olympic setting is the spotlight setting, as seen in the 2020 (2021) Tokyo Games. In this sense, even though the opinions on the positions adopted and exposed at the event may be diverse, it is still a political space. Furthermore, to integrate such a scenario, a series of requirements are made to the modalities. Clearly the spectacle is profitable and has several motivations for it to take place, however, what I do is a balance between pros and cons to position myself in defence of Olympic karate. Considering the damage that can be caused to *karateka*, especially to women, with the sport/martial art kept veiled and the authority guaranteed by the hegemonic tradition to the highest positions in the hierarchy, I give in to the damage caused by the sporting and commercial mega-event that are the Olympic Games.

Karate presents itself as a complex multifaceted scenario, as seen throughout this work. It is permeated by conservatisms justified in the hegemonic and normative tradition, which contribute to establishing it as a male preserve where hegemonic masculinity is allowed, even though it is often masked. However, it also carries important subversive potentials, especially through the promotion of embodied empowerment. I draw attention to the concept of embodiment as presented here, that is, an embodied empowerment that comprises the

person as a whole, and not fragmented, acquiring only physical techniques, which as I believe it was possible to see, are not enough. Thus, karate combines and offers women difficulties and resistance, at the same time as possibilities of subversion, empowerment and another form of resistance, precisely to the normative order in which it originates. That is, as Williams (1977) points out, where there are weaknesses, there are also strengths according to females' interests. Because of this, I have resorted to alternatives that have proven effective in other contexts, taking inspiration from activist, critical and queer approaches to drive actions capable of impacting different resistances.

### **8.1. Key findings**

With this general context of the study in mind, I would like to go back to the research questions that I asked myself initially and that gave rise to the objectives for the four chapters of findings and discussion presented. The initial questions were three, however I thought it pertinent to elaborate a fourth chapter, the first of the findings and discussion, with the function of presenting and contextualizing the *karateka* team researched as well as some elements from karate that contribute to constructing the subjectivity of women athletes. This chapter, a kind of general contextualization of karate, therefore, had its own questions, which were: do some problems that I perceived according to my own experience also exist at other levels (in high performance)? Is the challenging masculine context also perceived by these women? How do they deal with some uncomfortable situations? At the same time as I sought answers to these questions I also exposed the scenario of Olympic karate, situated the position of women in the team and showed elements that compose it and the fighters. I made use specially of the information that the interviewees provided me with in the first interview and that generated several topics, covered in a summarized form.

The key findings in this chapter pointed out that entry into the sport by these athletes was not voluntary, meaning their own choices, in the case of the vast majority of them. They stayed in the sport for a number of reasons, among which I highlight the aesthetic experience they find and which was what most caught my attention in conversations with them. However, the non-voluntary entry even questions what is called motivation, since they did not choose it, but embodied it and became skilled at it. Hence, they certainly reap advantages, but they also pay the price of developing themselves as girls/women inserted in such an environment. This leads to the undeniable fact that parents must make some choices/decisions in their children's

lives for their good while they are not mature enough to do so. Maclean (2017) suggests in her thesis that karate be initiated from a young age. I would, however, suggest that parents carefully assess and select the environments to which they will submit their children and also and especially the teacher/coach to whom they will hand their children over. Because at the end of the day, they are handing their children over to someone else to help parents build them.

I also showed in chapter 4, in summary, how the high-performance *karateka* context differs from the amateur competition *dojo*, where pain and suffering are often glorified (Gonçalves, Turelli & Vaz, 2012; Turelli & Vaz, 2006; Vaz, 2005a) and where a pedagogy of attrition (Rodrigues, Turelli & Kirk, forthcoming) is sought as a forger of character. In elite competition, what is sought is the productive body, uninjured, therefore, so that it can always and increasingly progress. Weight presents itself as an important and challenging villain, since food deprivation is demanding and increases the stress level of athletes who position themselves in the most favourable weight for their performances, and not for their nutritional comfort. Added to this is the female exclusivity of the menstrual cycle, which weighs, literally, due to fluid retention, and symbolically, due to the psychological pressures that can be felt with hormonal fluctuations. This factor of female material reality is often too much ignored. Its inconveniences are so many for an important part of women that athletes commonly feel happy when in amenorrhea, for example. Regarding the psychological aspect, the athletes also seek to train this dimension of themselves, as they say. But they seem, despite this, to take part in a specific female *habitus*, something that Bento (2006, cited in Salvini, 2017, p.71-72) called gender *habitus*, “constructed by reiteration, which, in primary socialization, will find in family, school and religious institutions those responsible for this process of reproduction of the truths that, little by little, are naturalized and incorporated.”<sup>135</sup> That is, institutions profess truth-value discourses that say how women should perform to be in the norm and therefore to be accepted and “normal”. This *habitus* is absorbed by them and in relation to other facets of their lives, combined with other possible *habitus*, configures their subjectivities in a sense similar to that described by Foucault (2016), presented in the literature review.

Whether because women do not believe in their real physical potential or because male brute strength is greater, the fact is that the rates of male violence against women are much higher than female violence against men (Silva, 2010). Evidently this ignorant brutality exerted as physical or psychological violence is a pity, and very often, almost always, it is due

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<sup>135</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

to the fact that men consider themselves at the top of the gender hierarchy (Rich, 2010; Roth & Basow, 2004; Silva, 2010). Knowing this, despite the fact that the athletes are aggressive in their fighting styles, know how to strike hard and emit *kiai* displaying a fierce face, they do not feel prepared to defend themselves against possible male attacks in the street. They are confident women, however, they recognize that male attacks can be brutal and prefer to avoid them, including running from them if need it be. They are realistic, admitting an unfortunately extremely unfair and outrage-producing reality. But this also points to something very important. Women cannot believe that they are prepared to face dangers simply because they score points in fights and are able to perform kicks with elegance and control.

I have heard a lot in my martial trajectory that if a fighter is able to bring their foot close to their opponent's head and control themselves, it means they could annihilate that person if they overdo themselves a little. In this sense, having control would be more difficult than exercising violence (Turelli et al, 2020, *corrigendum* 2021). However, I think that coldly and intentionally imprinting violence on another person's integrity is not simple for someone mentally/psychologically healthy. So a sport kick and a violent kick are quite different things. I never fought other than in competition. And it impacted me once in childhood when I witnessed a fight in school between two teenage boys. One of them, who did *capoeira*, began to *gingar*, the type of movement traditionally used in *capoeira* when fighting. And the other, who did not fight sportively at all, took a piece of wood that was nearby and destroyed the *capoeirista*. I was already doing karate at the time and learned that day that violence does not require technique or any belt. And that what can be mortal in a martial art does not exactly reside in the martial art, but in the person who performs (or not) the martial art (see Tejero-González & Balsalobre-Fernández, 2011; Tejero-González, Balsalobre-Fernández & Ibañez-Cano, 2011; Tejero-González, Ibañez-Cano & Pérez-Alonso, 2008). Thus, although it is very unfair that women need to take this care for themselves and also for men to prevent them from attacking women, I consider it a sign of self-knowledge to take into account real risks, which present themselves with greater intensity in some places than others.

In chapter 4, I also addressed the theme of hierarchy intrinsic to the martial art. It presents itself in exquisite ways; as I mentioned earlier, the man feels at the top of the gender hierarchy, but also from other perspectives. It will always be, however, a form of legitimate domination. Perhaps the most relevant to recapitulate here are the hierarchies given by aesthetics and courage, related to the *kata* and *kumite* teams, respectively, and the *gi* and *kiai* themes, which are configured as tools to reinforce a gendered hierarchy. The theme of aesthetic hierarchy will be reflected later in the judgments made by *kata* athletes as

performers of a somewhat more feminine sub-modality (Brum, 2016, cited in Salvini, 2017) in relation to *kumite*. Given that beauty is historically recognized as the feminine characteristic *par excellence*, its maintenance in sport and in forms understood as more aesthetic, convert *kateras* into more feminine women, for the heteronormative conception, than *kumiteras*. The latter are accused of being masculine for several reasons, but one of them ends up being the possession of the characteristic historically understood as masculine, courage and direct confrontation with an opponent. These hierarchical elements mix with countless factors and make different stereotypes fall on women. In general, *kumiteras* are more accused of being masculinized than *kateras*, and *kateras* tend to be more sexualized than *kumiteras*. However, a single stereotype is not exclusive to each group, that is, both teams end up experiencing different levels of varied stereotypes.

Through the idea of one-size-fits-all (Kirk, 2020), the veiled maintenance of male hegemony is inserted. The ways of dressing socially and traditionally assigned to girls/women are configured as means of restricting their space, a space that physically must be small and contracted, enabling expansion for men (see Scott, 2020, on anthropology of space). Feminine silence can also be associated with the occupation of space by presence (or absence). Someone who does not speak out verbally is less noticed and demanding. Analogously transporting these considerations to the martial space, anthropologically understood as masculine (Scott, 2020), the woman sees herself, albeit indirectly, restricted. She is supposedly free to emit *kiai* and must do so, however, she is taught and corrected in the right way to scream and must follow a male model, understood as “natural” and right.

Maclean (2017) reports how girls who start their practices young and are normally the daughters of male karate instructors present little difference in the way they emit *kiai*, among other things, in relation to men. Maclean's interpretation of this is that both men and women, as they progress in the sport, perform less “gendered deviations of karate's dispositions” (p.277). In this sense, karate's dispositions would be neutral, a kind of one-size-fits-all dispositions. From my point of view, however, karate is, as I have sometimes pointed out, a martial art and sport created by and for men. Hence, I have argued that women are encouraged to approach the male model since, according to Criado-Perez (2019), the neutral refers to the one-size-fits-men. That is, even if a punch itself is just a punch, the form of punching acquires male-oriented contours, and this becomes the standard, the correct form of punching. I think this is repeated in the case of the standardized *kiai*, which follows a male line to which women are directed, with no corrections in *kiai* issued to men. Their *kiai* is lower/deeper not necessarily because it “come more from the diaphragm” than the female,

which is always required of girls and women, but perhaps simply because their tone of voice is naturally lower/deeper.

In relation to women's uniforms and clothing, it is first necessary to say that usually small and uncomfortable garments, which expose the woman (as an object), limit her movements and, therefore, space. In karate, specifically, the *gi* does not expose the female body according to Western exposure parameters, but it is necessary to go back to the Japanese tradition, where the female way of dressing is/was extremely restrictive of movement and space, even reducing the feet of women. Geishas wear *kimonos* that cover their bodies, but provoke a “silent sensuality”<sup>136</sup>, limited in voice and movement, without generating attraction due to exhibition, but equally fulfilling the sensual function for that culture, perhaps through submission. Thus, *kimonos* in martial arts are perpetuators of an Eastern tradition that may not end up being understood in Western culture.<sup>137</sup> And it is still possible to interpret that the maintenance of *karategi* for men and women is based on the fact that the martial art never considered the inclusion of women. This can also be seen in *I Ai Do*, Japanese fencing that I practiced for a few years. There, too, the woman wears the *hakama* like the man, and it is certainly not because they are being seen as equals.

About the initial questions of the chapter and if elements that I identified and lived within karate in my country of origin were repeated in other contexts and places, I concluded that many things are similar, it means, elements identified by me years ago continue to be present also in other countries and even in elite sport. I return to this here because I understand that it points to an important direction, that it is not an individual and particular issue, but a social problem, as it is repeated in other places and with other people. An isolated issue is already an important problem, but when it presents itself repeatedly, it is even more serious and becomes a social problem. To assess this problem, it is necessary to take into account the modality's internal culture, which certainly relativizes many identified elements, as well as the social context. Both contexts seem to be compassionate with forms of violence against women, perhaps especially symbolic violence that authorizes the conception that men occupy a higher place in the gender hierarchy, even if women are fighters. This was verified with the other chapters of the thesis. The confirmation of the similarities is not surprising, given the global context that we have reached nowadays. What ends up happening in local

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<sup>136</sup> <https://www.jpaoemfoco.com/fatos-e-curiosidades-sobre-as-gueixas/>, accessed on 12/08/2021.

<sup>137</sup> In this regard, see the documentary “Little miss sumo”, of Matt Kay (2019), Wolf – Walks of Life Films. A Japanese female athlete who advocates the expansion of female sumo beyond university age explains the view of the ideal Japanese woman. She must be modest and always walk three steps behind the man. As it is said in the documentary, “a woman who is not visible”.

contexts is the verification of some specificities, which are always very relevant, but which no longer tend to be the majority or the rule. Women, then, engage in forms of negotiation to deal with uncomfortable situations that recur.

Now I will focus on the main issues and chapters of the thesis, which are based especially on the content of the second interview conducted with the participants.

## 8.2. Research question one

Chapter 5 sought to answer the question what factors *favour or inhibit* the construction of female *karateka* embodied *subjectivity* in the Spanish Olympic team. The final objective, however, was presented as to expose factors that *affect* the construction of female *karateka* embodied *subjectivities* in the Spanish Olympic team, and directed the chapter to the *karateka*'s perception of themselves. This self-perception took into account the fact that the athletes make an effort to achieve acceptance and belonging in a martial group. These processes include imitation, visceral identification with the team, flag, nation, which gives the practitioner a place in the clan and converts them into insiders who undeniably embody the local *habitus*, which is not a neutral or de-gendered *habitus*. With this in mind, the athletes perceive themselves to be authentic for dedicating themselves to a sport full of peculiarities, after all to find belonging in the *karateka* subculture has a power that contains and attributes a certain amount of meaning to what is done in life, since it is not common to women, in life, to be in the centre of a subculture (Holland, 2018).

However, authenticity is produced in a process involved in attrition, especially with oneself, that is, a true process of production of one's own subjectivity. The achievement of authenticity that the athletes understand they possess takes place in the midst of the process of self-consciousness that they are observed, evaluated and approved/disapproved in their attitudes and behaviours. This constant observation of them, made by others and also by themselves, keeps them in the culturally nurtured vicious cycle of doing for the other, as highlighted by Mason (2018). Following the guidelines of the male gaze, women end up internalizing something as a continuous repression of their performance as women. Thus, they internalize shame, guilt, remorse, a feeling of humiliation, which constitutes a type of *habitus* that may perhaps, in the direction that Bento (2006, cited in Salvini, 2017) pointed out, be called *gender habitus*, or, as I called it, *female habitus*. Such *habitus*, combined with the martial *habitus*, masculine oriented, directly impacts, of course, the subjective construction

that *karateka* make of themselves. Although they consider themselves authentic, and they are, in fact, it is necessary to note that this definition combines performance for the other with the self-consciousness of being continuously observed. This certainly influences ways of performing, and thus makes a questioning of authenticity appropriate, or converts it into something like partial authenticity, if it is possible to say it that way.

This chapter also pointed to the tendency that exists in the field to indicate, and consequently pursue, an archetypal model of *karateka* performance. This model is masculine, difficult for women and non-alpha men to reach, but even so it is sought after by women who internalize many of the discourses assumed to be true that they hear. What happens is an acceptance by naturalization of the contents of the speeches. In other words, male behaviours are legitimized and demand female adaptation in the name of the common/social good. For example, the naturalized and accepted speech that men are impulsive. It means to say that there would be a masculine essence that leads them to behave like this (and in a violent and desiring way, therefore), and women, in the supposed opposite polarity of this nature, should adapt so as not to be qualified as uncontrolled, abnormal and even disqualified. They are often called “girls” as a way of maintaining a childlike state which, in turn, denotes the interested need for direction and control taken by others. Obviously the feminine essence (De Beauvoir, 2011; Young, 1980) or masculine essence is not justified and there is no reason to accept masculine forms of performing as more legitimate than feminine forms. However, due to the gender hierarchy, women are often questioned about their behaviour, as supposedly their inappropriate actions would trigger “natural” reactions in men.

On the other hand, I also asked athletes about people they might look at as inspirational figures. This point is relevant since they themselves are people of some prominence and who end up being taken as inspiration. I drew attention to the power that can be contained there, as *karateka* could use such positions politically, that is, they will be looked at, so the positions they take will influence other people, perhaps especially other women and girls. In this direction, drawing a parallel with what could be pejoratively understood as sport heroes/heroines, Salvini (2017), studying Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), questions in her thesis whether women practitioners of MMA would be doubly dominated. She refers to the domination related to gender and the marketing aspect that concerns MMA, positioning it as a type of dominated combat sport in front of the large sports market, and where women certainly occupy a subordinate place. Salvini emphasizes that the way women position

themselves in this regard has the potential of *repositioning* them, since “the relations of forces and struggles mobilize and transform the fields”<sup>138</sup> (p.241).

This is one of many examples that exist to show that the issue of gender needs to be discussed very rigorously, without accepting discourses that differences are not relevant and that they and their discussion are the cause of separation and disputes between men and women. Butler (1990), for example, recommends attention to language, that its negligence is a mistake, that it is necessary to look at it and make people who “are between the lines” exist. They need to be “on the lines”. It is similar with women in sports. Interested speeches, from my point of view, come up saying that “good athletes” are the ones who do not get attached to gender, that they just perform well no matter what, “no excuses”. However, there are so many implications around the topic that they cannot be ignored. Maclean (2017, p.277) writes that “for some experienced karateka, sensuous unisex karate and practice enabled the development of a sense of self that made ideas of gender distinction less relevant to who they are.” Of course I respect Maclean and her study participants' point of view and experience, however, I would take an opposite direction, understanding that experienced *karateka* are supposedly better able to identify and position themselves in relation to problems that are based on binary gender. As I pointed out in the body of the thesis, I consider that we are far from transcending sex and one's own sexual needs<sup>139</sup>; it is 1% the asexual population in the world; the relationships that still exist between all this and gender are very intimate; and our social construction, within sports or in society, is not neutral. Thus, considering that Maclean herself admits that “occasional sexist jokes would be made” (2017, p.281), stating that gender distinction can be seen as less relevant may be configured as a denial of the problem and a way to legitimize the gender hierarchy. In the *karateka* context, this can be a way of perpetuating the stream of tradition. Maclean, however, also recommends that *skilled* women can be made role models for other women and girls. She also presents two other recommendations that have some bearing on this topic and help me connect with the conclusions in chapter 6, so I will comment on them briefly. These are competition-related recommendations in this case.

She says it is appropriate to reduce the competitive focus to “women/girls and less physically confident men/boys” (p.288) so they have a comfortable inclusion. Inclusion may

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<sup>138</sup> Translation from Portuguese to English mine.

<sup>139</sup> It is worth recognizing and emphasizing here, as I described in the section on the researcher's reflexivity, that this is evidently my reading of the social and *karateka* context and the data provided by my informants, added perhaps to the vision that these informants offered. It is by no means, as is coherent, a hegemonic view that cannot be questioned.

require this and other elements, such as single-sex classes (Maclean, 2017; Rodrigues, Turelli & Kirk, forthcoming), and I add formative work with men who may welcome women at some point in mixed-sex groups. However, in the aspect of female empowerment I consider that participation in competitions (local, regional or whatever is possible), as I promoted in chapter 6, is favourable. I do not mean a skilled performance necessarily and full of pressure, but a female population/occupation of the competitive space. The girls and women should be there, from my point of view, in greater volume and gain confidence there. They do not need necessarily to compete well, according to standard good performance levels, I mean. They can also do it "badly", just having fun, but disrupt the hegemonic order. I believe they should be there and make that environment their environment. After all, this refers to the aesthetic experience that it is possible for them to live. As I presented in chapter 4, Kirk (1996) clarifies that the aesthetic experience is not something exclusively experienced by high level athletes, but that it can also be experienced by beginners in sports. This reframes the standards of beauty in sport, or elegance, as Maclean calls it, and also of skill, I would say, not completely absent, of course, but not exclusive to elite levels. And maybe it reframes the competitive order itself. Even if these girls/women lose in such competitions, which happen to most competitors anyway, maybe they will develop a way of dealing with defeat that is lighter, feel less pressured to compete and care less about the external gaze and judgment.

And Maclean's second recommendation is related to promoting competitions between boys and girls. Even though physiological differences are not as relevant in childhood, cultural differences are already in place, and as I mentioned in relation to transgender inclusion, I think training sessions are spaces for complete inclusion, but competitions need to deal with differences and be specific.<sup>140</sup> It is also a way of fighting in defense of female sport. This implies celebrating the differences that give us some authenticity, that is, the discourses of equality and equity need to be combined, and not convert equality into an action that crushes. Even because the winner is just one, I mean, it is very little! If among everyone on the planet there is only one, that is exclusive. If there are more categories, there are more possibilities for champions, that is, more people, in their specificity, will reach the coveted first place. Maybe in this direction is the specific championships that different karate schools or styles promote in their own. While only one "the best" in the whole world, such as an Olympic champion in the current model, just makes believe that all the others are useless. It is a different way of seeing

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<sup>140</sup> My first fight ever ("ribbon combat", combat simulation adapted for children) was against a boy, since there were no other girls to compete with me. Evidently I "survived", but I would have preferred to fight a girl in the competition, even if I always did all the training among boys and teenagers boys.

it, it is still competition, but with more possibilities and opportunities. The celebration of differences is, therefore, more inclusive, as it reverts, in this sense, to more champions. And it can help to avoid feelings of inferiority and doubt of self-worth, as many are led to believe that they do not fit because they do not match or surpass the alpha. Furthermore, I believe that the pressure of proving that they are better than boys is not fair on girls. And ideally they would find pleasure in competing, not necessarily for the result, but because they are exercising their rightful space, which should not need to be disputed with boys.

This all links me to chapter 6, which, among other aspects discussed, entered the competitive theme.

### **8.3. Research question two**

In chapter 6, the main part of the thesis, I focused on the question that sought to ascertain the means, resources or strategies adopted by women to gain space or to maintain themselves in this environment typically understood as masculine. I related the objective to elements of the martial culture that establish certain diktats, and I considered that gaining some depth into that specific internal culture could help answer the question. Again, the widespread understanding of male superiority was shown, including pointing out that if something is done well by a woman it is due to the fact that she does it approaching characteristics consensually understood as masculine. The conception of women as “other”, immature and incomplete, that is, a lower category of human beings, justifies what are, finally, injustices against women. In the historical martial culture, they were deprived of education to reach the same levels of personal development as men, being considered uncontrolled, whining, in short, irrational.

However, women who at other times are qualified as those who “think too much”, tend to have more education than men to exercise the same social functions.<sup>141</sup> That is, the simple fact of being born a man ensures access to jobs, for example, which women need to prove they are capable of exercising through an often extensive investment in qualification/education (Aguar, 1983). What occurs is the overvaluation of male performance, which maintains the social position of male supremacy. Even with the trajectory of feminist

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<sup>141</sup> <https://www.ethos.org.br/cedoc/participacao-laboral-e-menor-entre-mulheres-com-baixa-escolaridade-na-america-latina/>, accessed on 15/08/2021.

struggle, women go from being a fragile<sup>142</sup> and childlike figure that requires protection, care and continuous surveillance, to a figure who has a lot of energy and is capable of doing many things at the same time. McRobbie (2015) draws attention to the many demands placed on women, demanding perfection, after all, to compensate for the fact that they are women, they must handle everything. In other words, historically placed female exploitation takes on new forms, and is maintained today, producing a kind of neoliberal subjectivity. All this reaches the vast majority of women, making them pursue the model of perfection given from outside to please the male gaze. Considering the pertinent adaptations, I think it is possible to perceive this scenario also in the martial field, even though the woman is doing something not thought of for her, subverting to some extent the hegemonic order. However, the constant devaluation of women found in many social institutions is also seen here, where the woman who does not resemble the ideal fighter model is not truly fighting. She may be, perhaps, playing, and even playing well. But fighting, with the masculine symbolic load (Segalen, 2002) that this activity carries, she is not seen, under the male gaze, as apt for this.

This scenario links me to the analysis of videos I presented. It aimed to verify what it means to fight like a woman and if there is a female way of fighting. As a direct answer to these questions, even though the analysis has proved to be quite complex, I concluded that there is a feminine way of fighting, but only with generalized characteristics, since there is a rich plurality of styles, as many as there are women. The gendered embodiment, cultivated throughout life, cannot be annulled, or at least, not easily annulled. And even though women can be magnificent in the execution of the techniques, and they are, they also perform as women in the training sessions they do, where the binary conception of gender is, still, hegemonic. So, even though “pink gloves”, as Channon and Phipps (2017) say, also grant “black eyes”, the way women distribute black eyes differs in relation to other possible glove colours. Of course, the fact that it is different, as I think has already been made clear here, does not in any way mean that it is inferior. They are still black eyes!

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<sup>142</sup> The frailty myth (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009), although it remains, it also had already been denied by Sojourner Truth in a speech among feminists in 1851. She was a former American slave and had to work as much as men, without being helped or protected by them, for nothing. White women were engaged in an arduous fundamental struggle, but, it is noteworthy, in conditions not as precarious as those of black women. These worked as much as slave men, saw the fight for the right to non-pregnancy of white women in a different way, as they were compulsorily sterilized, and also saw in a more complex way the increase in punishment for rapists, requested by white women. Rapists would certainly deserve the punishment, however, the problem in black women's view was that black men were often wrongfully guilty of rape and took the penalty in place of white men (Davis 1981).

And that connects me with the second question of this analysis, about what it means to fight like a woman. For the field, dominated by men, it means poor performance in comparison with men which, moreover, are made very frequently. However, from my point of view and considering the factors analysed, I would say first that it is a very complex topic, requiring a deep analysis, and second, that it means really “to fight”, not just on the mat. I would say that it is the rudeness with which women are evaluated in all aspects of life, hence why I have brought up so many of these aspects here, that leads to this inferior conception to be so easily accepted, even if mistaken. Given the numerous adversities, it is correct to say that the female martial performance surpasses expectations. Finally, the analysis led me to assert that it is not impossible for a woman to perform like a man, however, this requirement is steeped in symbolic violence.

As perhaps secondary points in this observation of the gendered movement of *karateka*, I also drew attention to the importance of the link between what is performed objectively and what is perceived subjectively by those who perform. That is, the sensations experienced and the experience of moments that may not be relevant to those who judge or watch, may be for the performer what makes all the difference. In other words, someone who watches, even though they can at best delight in what they see, as Gumbrecht (2007; 2010) points out, or condemn what would be bad performances, obviously does not have the same place as the performer. From this place, things are lived that become imprinted, if it is possible to use this term, in the person's subjectivity. Still on the analysis of videos, there appears again the difference between the *kata* and *kumite* sub modalities and their form of acceptance in the field. This is perhaps due to the fact that *kateras* are not seen as excessively outside the martial norm, but rather as somewhat adequate to the place they may belong. They certainly challenge the environment by simply being there, but they are less of a problem as they are more adjusted to the understood female normativity. In this sense, it is possible to see how women who disrupt the hegemonic order, fleeing the rule of docile bodies are assumed to be problematic and problem generators. An extreme example of this is the fact that transgender women who conform to the IOC norms seem to find a place in elite sport some times somewhat more easily than cisgender women who do not conform to their respective norms, usually hormonal. And even though many cisgender women manifest themselves in this regard, they are ignored (Devine, 2021), perhaps because they are still, to some extent, seen as in the Classic Games, as part of the people, and not as authentic citizens.

The category that dealt with the theme of masculinization revealed the difficulties arising from the view of women as interested in affective relationships. That is, their intentions

to enter the male environment are very often read as a sexual interest in men or women. This is not so, I mean, they do not engage with karate based on their desires for relationships. Their motivations have already been presented in chapter 4. Thus, I brought possibilities of subversion to be reflected, developed and applied by women towards change. I consider that through destabilization of the traditional martial male preserve women can find some greater degree of liberation, even though they need, in whatever form, to embrace accusations of masculinization. In this sense, I started to present ideas of queering positions and pedagogy, since the environment is based on straight pedagogy in terms of its heteronormativity and heterosexuality (Fitzpatrick & McGlashan, 2016; Kirk, 2020; Standal, 2015). My perspective considers that the athletes, from the place they already occupy, would be able to use such positions in a non-normative way, working as access facilitators for other people who in the traditional context do not find space to stay, develop and empower themselves. The mischanneled environment can be extremely disempowering and frustrating. On the other hand, if handled well, it has transformative and empowering potential, as I strenuously pointed out. Ensuring access to people who overtly do not fit into heteronormativity, and that these people can also show their obvious potential, such means individuals who identify within the LGBTQIA+ minorities, for example, can also contribute to transformation.

Also as a way of negotiating to remain and maintain their place in sport, women reported experiences of machismo and the use of power. The field is still dominated by men in positions of power, with rare female figures in highlighted roles. This is interesting to be observed even in the Olympic Games, in the most diverse sports, where almost equality in the number of women and men participating as athletes is preached. In addition to the fact that some modalities still have fewer female categories than male ones, as in the case of boxing (Tjonndal, 2017), it is necessary to consider other elements that do not appear in major events. As I presented in my analysis of the 2018 Karate World Championship (Turelli et al, forthcoming), in events such as a world championship and even more in the Olympic Games, the number of people competing in the final categories in such competitions will be similar. However, in grassroots work, in the daily life of the *dojos* or in smaller competitions, as the informants revealed at the beginning of chapter 6, the number of girls and women athletes is still considerably smaller than that of boys and men. This is seen among athletes, and much more emphatically in other positions in which power increases. It is also noteworthy that girls are led to compete so often at the Olympic Games, something that is not recurrent among boys. A possible interpretation of this is that women are no longer participating in the sport, given other tasks, and so some modalities find representation for female categories among

children, girls, to avoid being discovered. Perhaps, in addition to the quantitative problem, the place of “other” attributed to women is presented here again, replaced by children in process of development, as pointed out by Gonçalves (2014), and not respected either.

I take a brief break from my process of reflexivity, considering that my conclusions may be being harsh and perhaps overly critical. However, although I undeniably see value in the possibilities and potentials possessed by karate, as I have already pointed out and will come back to do so soon and for the last time in this work, I cannot fail to point out the social problem in which karate constitutes itself and, constituted, corroborates. This constitution is not neutral, “pure” or isolated, but rather connected with a number of other points that are ultimately longstanding political problems. I am therefore aware that my work goes beyond the scope of karate, which can be criticized. On the other hand, a karate isolated from the world does not exist and it would be naive to think of it that way. So, admittedly very late, I ask the reader's license for all my associations with other areas of knowledge, in case they have become bothersome. But I judged them necessary, although so many others exist and escape me. Having made this observation, I return to the key findings from chapter 7.

#### **8.4. Research question three**

The last chapter of findings and discussion tried to answer the question how sports culture influences the development of female embodied subjectivity in Spanish Olympic karate. To answer it, I sought to analyse a series of elements that increase certain problems around the female performance given by the sports culture already well known in several other modalities, where women face similar problems. What is worth noting here is that sports culture does not replace or nullify the martial culture that I presented in some of its aspects in chapter 6, but it adds to martial culture, intensifying the challenges imposed on women. The culture of sports understood as masculine that do not share the martial culture also has some affinities with the sports culture identified in karate. And finally, there is still in karate the general sports culture in relation to female sports, which in short is not focused on female performance, but on the aesthetics and sensuality of their bodies. This again highlights the idea of the woman-object who supposedly exists to satisfy the male gaze.

This chapter highlighted the gendered embodiment that reveals itself even when it could theoretically be nullified. That is, despite the femininity enhancement techniques, which include, for example, clothes and makeup, even when women do not use them, they continue

to act in accordance with the situation of women and female performativity. Despite the fluidity of the gender theme, it seems that they conceive their way of performing independently of appearances. Men are the ones who see them as more feminine when “dressed as a woman”. Thus, when they respond to these calls, they are led to do so by the pressure of the male gaze that guides behaviour. It is important to emphasize, however, that this does not refer to a struggle to maintain femininity, and even less to the emphasized femininity that could contribute to a certain legitimation of hegemonic masculinity. What seems to happen, however, is that the athletes build a new type of contemporary femininity or female masculinity, which combines strength, aggressiveness, determination, persistence, confidence, with moments of insecurity, doubts, and different fears. In other words, it mixes styles, performances, representations. Not all the new types of femininities produced are, however, approved by the male gaze, which ends up relapsed into the problem of accusations of masculinization. But the fact that women interpose themselves to male appeals, when they do, in different ways, and embrace what is called masculinization through different behaviours, becomes a subversive act. In this sense, where what happens is the exploration of the female body, objectifying the woman as “other” to meet needs and be consumed, I proposed again queer attitudes and behaviours as subversive alternatives.

The sports field is a hybrid place, of permissions and prohibitions, as it allows going beyond the limits of life outside the sports arena, while restricting, controlling and in some way repressing the expression of all impulses by its rules. This hybrid character often leads people to become confused and lost as they overreach themselves. In the case of this work, I called attention to the crossing of some boundaries with women. Because even though sport and specifically high performance speaks of extreme demands on the body, where it must advance towards almost infinite progress, the limits of intimacy do not have to be exceeded. This is unjustifiable and completely unnecessary for any sport performance. In other words, the extreme requirement, in this context, ends up becoming legitimate, however, the way to make this requirement and the artifices it uses could be revised without negatively impacting the results, perhaps the opposite.

But commonly female limits are understood by some men as likely to be exceeded and so they interpret women's actions with a provocative sexual purpose, even if they are not going in that direction. Athletes interviewed consensually oppose this, however, they deviate a little from the central problem when they engage in criticism of other women. This leads to the interpretation that men simply benefit from already established hegemony, even those who do not actively work in its defence. They simply enjoy the scenarios, whether using the

desirous or the regulator gaze, as I exposed. The notable media-related problem that sells the athletes also emerges. However, the athletes are very aware of the problem, criticizing it fervently. They receive through this instrument of the cultural industry, although it is not the only one, gazes of exploration, inferiorization, domination, regulation and desire. And the feeling they experience moves among inadequacy, discomfort, doubt and often, deception. It is also relevant to comment on the unfair feeling experienced when women can be ridiculed by men, which is configured as the exercise of male domination supported by symbolic violence.

### 8.5. Key messages

Considering the exposition of my main conclusions in relation to the questions that I asked myself and that guided all this work, I now proceed, as a final synthesis, to answer the general objective of the work, where does the title of this thesis come from. The analysis of the construction processes of the female embodied subjectivity in karate that enters the Olympic context, through the Spanish team, cannot count on an easy answer, given its complexity. Perhaps the first thing to say is that although all this is related to the Olympic context, which to some extent even motivated the resumption of my studies and, therefore, these writings, clearly transcend such context. That is, the construction of subjectivity continues regardless of the Olympic scenario. Elements become more or less intense, perhaps, but the subjectivation's processes (Candiotta, 2008) continue and are affected, in fact, by all these comings and goings, not being/being/not being Olympic, for example. This construction is, therefore, influenced by the numerous factors that affect the *habitus* that women embody. They pay a price to come to belong and have to resist the martial culture that lowers female performance, but not only it, lowering and putting in place of "other" women themselves. They also need to deal with the sports culture added to the martial one, which, since it is a sport understood as masculine, accuses women of being masculinized. This same sports culture also sexualizes their bodies, since in patriarchy the view of the woman-object at the disposal of the man-subject is naturalized. Thus, the woman, despite all the fights, even those that take place on the *tatami*, is still in a place of subalternity. In other words, the martial/sports environment is little different, in this regard, from what is found in society as a whole.

Society influences the internal culture of modalities, and modalities, in turn, return what is developed within the sporting world to society. The sports world is an institution of great social power, because unlike some other institutions, it works with the person in its

entirety, constructing the person in the interaction between the practiced *habitus*, gendered embodiment and embodied subjectivity. That is why I insist so much on transforming the environment towards a critical perspective. Thus, still in response to the general objective of the thesis, the fact that the woman takes a position where she is so challenged shows how she is able to occupy that space, always at the same time being told that it was not hers, without permission to expand herself. She enters there, however, and defies numerous impositions. This also, of course, makes the construction of her subjectivity more refined. I think that in relation to the real potentials they have, most women still believe in their potentials in a reduced mode. Not only physically, but in the sense of embodiment and embodied subjectivity in which they produce themselves or how they conceive of themselves. However, they are still facing and overcoming many adversities. Thus, even in the midst of a challenging scenario, I believe that women's awareness, experience and empowerment can be able, with challenges, to work to slowly reverse unfair situations in favour of women themselves and other vulnerable groups to heteronormativity.

Related to this, it is worth mentioning that in February 2019 I had asked a fourth research question<sup>143</sup>, as it appears in the methodology. However, over time I excluded it because it did not apply exactly, even though I kept looking for some kind of action that could have a transforming character in the context, and not just point out the problems. Pointing out the problems is obviously something very relevant and necessary. However, I would also like to be able to say something perhaps “constructive”. With this purpose, then, my inspiration in the activist approach within a critical pedagogy with queering actions of current reality of straight pedagogy is justified. The academic experience I had in Glasgow was fundamental for this. The intention of being able to provide solutions to the identified problems exists in me for recognizing at the same time, as I have stressed several times, the positive potentials of martial arts. Thus, even though the *karateka* context has intense adversities for women, the problem of exclusion, use, and infra valuation of women constitutes an even greater problem. In other words, I see the situation in a similar way to being/not being in the Olympic scenario. It is better to be there and it is better for the woman, undoubtedly, to face, overcome and grow with the challenges imposed by the martial/sports world, belonging to it. Following Ahmed's (2004) ideas about discomfort, queer/inadequacy feelings and also the conceptions around the orphanhood experience (Arendt, 1972), precisely because it is a male environment,

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<sup>143</sup> The fourth question was "Is there the possibility of development of plural *karateka* subjectivity, that is, not restricted or exclusive of the feminine or masculine?" I proposed the following categories: "Overcoming various known stereotypes and prejudices"; and "Development of an innovative and authentic environment."

the *karateka* environment becomes a political environment for women. With this, I understand that they should populate this and other similar spaces in order to obtain female empowerment, a challenge to gender hierarchies and also to transform the environment itself, humanizing it and opening it up as an empowering possibility to other non-normative collectives. Certainly, as I also insisted, the task is arduous. However, I believe that transformation from inside, preferably in partnership with other initiatives, could be effective.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) state that hegemony may fail. *Habitus* can be interrupted and redesigned (Gorelly, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003; Salvini, 2017). Gender is fluid, being done and undone (Butler, 1990). Subjectivities are built in movement (Foucault, 2016), in a process of dynamic embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 2005). In other words, they are all elastic elements, capable of being re-signified through action, in this case, in the martial environment, to transform the then consolidated tradition. It is important to bear in mind that the change involves a certain loss of control, possible de-cohesion and “mess”, that is, it involves a certain degree of conflict. In this sense, I return to highlight the important adherence to this proposal of transformative movement that conscious and possibly influential men can represent (Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018). They are also configured as support in the midst of an arena of hard and long-term conflicts, such as power dispute processes. Thus, it would also be necessary to develop a certain capacity to deal with and live in a degree of conflict; and to accept the conflict, perhaps as a starting point. This is part of democracy, opposed to the imposition of the straight order, often tyrannical, where there is no questioning, no dialogue, no mess. But there is oppression exerted by the hegemony of concentrated and supreme power. Dealing with conflict, managing it, means adaptation and enjoyment, especially in times of precariousness (Kirk, 2020; Turelli, Kirk & Bortolotti, 2021). In this context, queer alternatives find a fit even more easily, given their unpredictability and non-straightness.

Thus, the uses (Ahmed, 2019) of some resources that can hide subversive potentials behind their basic purposes would form part of a set of combined actions towards transformation. I believe that the use of high-level athletes' positions (because they are the ones that achieve acceptance, belonging and recognition) can contribute to change integrated in opening doors from within; have men aware of the problem who are committed and supportive; the maintenance of karate in the Olympic Games in order to guarantee visibility; more women and girls participating in the daily life of the *dojos* and in general competitions; women who do not reproduce hegemonic masculinity as *sensei*; women with a vision of the possibility of interrupting the *habitus* and stream of tradition in important positions with real power of action and not figuratively; conscientious LGBTQIA+ people participating in training,

competition, acting as *sensei*, and in positions of power; training that takes into account women's specificities while physically empowering them without placing them in an inferiority collective; queer attitudes and queer moments fostered inside the *dojos*; mixed-sex classes associated with feminist education for women and men; support for laws in defence of often ignored rights.

Then, regarding the main objective of the study, it is possible to say in a summarized way that this thesis provides evidence that *karateka* women are under prejudices both from martial and sports culture, but also that female athletes becoming conscious subjects would contribute to promote changes in the martial environment.

### 8.6. Strengths and limitations

Before closing this work, it is still necessary to mention its limitations and contributions. COVID-19 presented itself as a limitation to my initial research plan and ended up forcing the redirection of some actions, such as the impossibility of continuing with the observations *in situ* and to accompany personally the team in the Tokyo Games, and the necessity of conduction of virtual interviews. It is also relevant to mention the limited human capacity to absorb literary productions. I certainly left very relevant material out of my references. I also add to this the limitation that the historical time in which we live puts on us, in the sense that my interpretations of the past or of other cultures are made from the present and from my subjectivity. The way of reading the data also passes by my subjectivity, constructed from my personal experiences, undoubtedly reflected by and with influence on the autoethnographic process. Surely other researchers would follow a different line of thought to analyse the topic and the data, perhaps more suitable than my choices. Nevertheless, the limited capacity mentioned is felt, especially when trying to absorb together scholarly productions made in different languages. Some of these absent productions (such as Demetriou, Classen, Miller, Weber, Giddens) and even sociological theories or topics within theories developed by sociologists (such as hysteresis, *amor fati*, dehistoricization, practice, and many others), in my personal case, of course, are not just about being read. It takes some time to be understood and to some extent embodied by me. Besides that, it is also necessary to recognize that the gold thread drawn through the thesis was not always clear or configured as a *straight* thread. Maybe this is due to the fact that the research itself has become queer. By saying this I do not mean that the study could not be improved, which

surely it could be. But I mean that, also, new ways of doing research, if achieving a basic level of quality, can be developed. Furthermore, the fact that the interviews are concentrated in one national team may present itself as a limiting factor, although I believe that the findings may to some extent be transferable and applicable to other environments that have similarities or even broader contexts related to female sport. In this sense, it is perhaps possible to say that the work brings contributions to social sciences and sports feminism.

I will work in order to publish this results making them more visible, through scientific papers and congress presentations, aiming that the final recommendations can be practical applied in daily training, if possible. I especially consider that the set of suggestions that arise from the analysis of the data provided in this research, centred in this conclusion, can be taken as a contribution to the martial field, especially if confirmed effective. Thus, areas for future studies, even if they are quite vast, from verifying whether elements identified with this team are repeated in other contexts and exploring gendered karate in several possible directions, would be essentially valid if they applied and tested the suggestions made here. They represent, for me, a responsibility towards the martial community, especially the female one, which I would like to see become a reality and not be reduced to utopia. In this way, I would like to be able to work with female athletes who are interested in contributing to change, queering the normative, giving them theoretical support for action and, if valid, friendly support. I would also work with men with a genuine<sup>144</sup> interest in transforming the context. As this is a complex process of change, I understand that willing and engaged people will be needed, as well as more studies that can confirm, present new directions towards truly and completely empowering environments.

### **8.7. Postlude**

Karate probably learned from the experience of insertion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games, which introduced categories unequally for men and women (Tjonndal, 2017). Karate debuted in Tokyo 2020 (2021) with men and women participating, however, both with reduced categories. As I described in the text, the sport has five categories for each gender (binary), with the same fight time since 2019. In the Olympic Games, both men and women

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<sup>144</sup> I say genuine interest because that is fundamental and unfortunately I have met men with an interesting facade about equality, but that it is just a fake appearance in defence of women.

had three weight categories, and individual male and female *kata*, without showing team *kata* and consequently, *bunkai*.

Sandra Sánchez, a Spaniard, was first placed in the Olympic *kata*. Participants in my study, however, were unable to attend the Olympic Games. The *kata* athletes interviewed were part of the team *kata* modality, absent from the Games as I explained. The ten *kumite* athletes interviewed went through selection processes to obtain the three athletes who could go to the pre-Olympic competition. The selection processes considered the position occupied in the weight ranking, and in the case of different weights that added up and the ranking might not be enough to define, it was considered the placements within the country in a competition held between the athletes of the weights together (-50 and -55; and -68 and +68). Thus, among the ten athletes, three were selected, one was injured, which gave the other an opportunity, and these only went to the Paris pre-Olympic, celebrated between June 11th and 13th, 2021. To qualify for the Olympic Games, they needed to be in the top three places at their respective weights in the pre-Olympic, which they did not achieve.

I think it is still relevant to mention that due to a problem with the male athletes' team, the coaching team was changed at the end of 2020, which may also have had some influence on the athletes' performance in the pre-Olympic competition.

## 8. CONCLUSIONES

Mi objetivo para esta tesis fue analizar los procesos de construcción de la subjetividad incorporada de las mujeres en el equipo español de kárate olímpico. Para llevarlo a cabo utilicé una metodología cualitativa que combinó técnicas de recolección de datos, conté con la triangulación de expertos y recurrió, en determinados momentos, a la experiencia personal etnográfica/auto-etnográfica. Por otra parte, la revisión de la literatura sobre subjetividad incorporada de las mujeres, desde una perspectiva de género, reveló la falta de investigación y, consecuentemente, la ausencia de conocimiento producido sobre esta temática en artes marciales y, específicamente, en género y kárate de alto rendimiento. El número de personas que se dedican al kárate deportivo (WKF) es relevante, y, por tanto, es también relevante que estas personas tengan la construcción de su subjetividad afectada en cierta medida por los elementos que componen el *habitus karateka*. Después de todo, es un contexto peculiar que mezcla heteronormatividad, tradición y jerarquía, masculinización y sexualización de la mujer, posibilidades de empoderamiento y subversión, y contexto olímpico.

Pocas personas han podido vivenciar el kárate como deporte olímpico, como lógica consecuencia de que el kárate solo ha sido incluido en Tokio 2020 (2021), dado que en París 2024 no formará parte de los Juegos Olímpicos, aunque se mantienen los esfuerzos por volver al escenario olímpico. Pese a ello, desde mi punto de vista, lo anterior ha sido algo positivo para los practicantes de este deporte en sus diferentes contextos: artes marciales-tradición, defensa personal, kárate deportivo de *dojo* amateur o aficionado, deporte de alta competición, mujeres *karatekas* de élite. Lo interpreto de forma positiva porque los Juegos Olímpicos son el escenario donde están los focos, como se vió en los últimos Juegos. En este sentido, si bien las opiniones sobre las posiciones adoptadas y expuestas en el evento pueden ser diversas, éste se configura como un espacio político. Además, para integrar tal escenario, se hacen una serie de requisitos a las modalidades. Claramente el espectáculo es rentable y tiene varias motivaciones para que se lleve a cabo, sin embargo, lo que hago es un balance entre pros y contras para posicionarme en defensa del kárate olímpico. Considerando el daño que se le puede causar a los *karatekas*, especialmente a las mujeres, con el deporte/arte marcial mantenido velado y la autoridad garantizada por la tradición hegemónica a los puestos más altos de la jerarquía, cedo al daño causado por el deporte y mega evento comercial que son los Juegos Olímpicos.

El kárate se presenta como un escenario complejo y multifacético, como se vio a lo largo de este trabajo. Está impregnado de conservadurismos justificados en la tradición

hegemónica y normativa, que contribuyen a establecerlo como espacio de preservación masculina donde se permite la masculinidad hegemónica, aunque muchas veces enmascarada. Sin embargo, también conlleva importantes potenciales subversivos, especialmente a través de la promoción del empoderamiento incorporado (*embodied*). Llamo la atención sobre el concepto de *embodiment* aquí presentado, es decir, un empoderamiento incorporado que comprende a la persona como un todo, y no fragmentada, adquiriendo solo técnicas físicas, que como creo que se pudo constatar, no son suficientes. Así, el kárate combina y ofrece a las mujeres dificultades y resistencias, al mismo tiempo que ofrece posibilidades de subversión, empoderamiento y otra forma de resistencia, precisamente al orden normativo en el que se origina. Es decir, como señala Williams (1977), donde hay debilidades, también hay fortalezas según los intereses de las mujeres. Por ello, he recurrido a alternativas que han demostrado su eficacia en otros contextos, inspirándome en enfoques activistas, críticos y *queer* para impulsar acciones capaces de impactar diferentes resistencias.

### 8.1. Hallazgos clave

Con este contexto general del estudio en mente, me gustaría volver a las preguntas de investigación que me planteé en el comienzo de la tesis doctoral y que dieron lugar a los cuatro capítulos de resultados-discusión. Como se ha visto, aunque mis preguntas iniciales fueron tres, me pareció pertinente añadir un cuarto capítulo con la finalidad de presentar y contextualizar el equipo *karateka* investigado, así como algunos elementos del kárate que contribuyen en la construcción de la subjetividad de las mujeres deportistas. Este capítulo, una especie de contextualización general del kárate, por lo tanto, tuvo sus propias preguntas, que eran: problemas que percibí según mi propia experiencia ¿también existen en otros niveles (en alto rendimiento)?, ¿el contexto masculino desafiante también es percibido por estas mujeres?, ¿cómo ellas afrontan algunas situaciones incómodas? Al mismo tiempo que buscaba respuestas a estas preguntas también expuse el escenario del kárate olímpico, ubiqué la posición de las mujeres en el equipo y mostré los elementos que lo componen y *atravesan* a las luchadoras. Para elaborar este capítulo, utilicé especialmente de la información que me brindaron todos los y las entrevistados(as) en la primera entrevista, de la que emergieron varios temas, que son tratados de forma resumida.

Los hallazgos clave de este capítulo señalaron que el ingreso en el kárate de estas atletas no fue, en la mayoría de los casos, una decisión voluntaria, es decir, no eligieron ellas

mismas su participación en este deporte. Asimismo, su continuidad en este deporte se debió a una serie de motivos, entre los que destaco la experiencia estética que las deportistas encuentran en el kárate, siendo una de las cuestiones que más me llamó la atención en mis conversaciones con ellas. Sin embargo, la citada entrada en el deporte, no por su propia elección, incluso cuestiona lo que se llama motivación, ya que no eligieron el kárate, sino que lo incorporaron y se volvieron hábiles en la modalidad. Por tanto, aunque las deportistas han cosechado ventajas, también pagan el precio de desarrollarse como niñas/mujeres introducidas en ese entorno. Lo anterior es debido al hecho innegable de que los padres y madres deben tomar algunas decisiones/elecciones en la vida de sus hijos e hijas para su bien mientras estos no sean lo suficientemente maduros y maduras para hacerlo. Al respecto, cabe mencionar a Maclean (2017), quien sugiere en su tesis que el kárate se inicie desde una edad temprana. Sin embargo, yo sugeriría que los padres y madres evalúen y seleccionen cuidadosamente los entornos a los que van a someter a sus hijos e hijas y que valoren, especialmente, quién será el maestro(a) o entrenador(a) a quien entregarán a sus hijos e hijas. Porque al final, están entregando a ellos y ellas a otra persona para que ayude a los padres y madres a construirlos(as).

También mostré en el capítulo 4, en síntesis, cómo el contexto *karateka* de alto rendimiento difiere del *dojo* de competencia amateur, donde el dolor y el sufrimiento a menudo son glorificados (Gonçalves, Turelli & Vaz, 2012; Turelli & Vaz, 2006; Vaz, 2005a) y donde se prioriza una pedagogía del atrito (Rodrigues, Turelli & Kirk, de próxima publicación) como forjadora del carácter. En la competición de élite, lo que se busca es el cuerpo productivo, ileso, por tanto, para que pueda progresar siempre y cada vez más. El peso se presenta como un villano importante y desafiante, ya que la privación de alimentos es exigente y aumenta el nivel de estrés de las deportistas que se posicionan en el peso más favorable para su rendimiento, y no para su bienestar nutricional. A esto se suma la exclusividad femenina del ciclo menstrual, que pesa, literalmente, por la retención de líquidos, y simbólicamente, por las presiones psicológicas que se pueden sentir con las fluctuaciones hormonales. Este factor de la realidad material femenina a menudo se ignora demasiado. Son tantos los inconvenientes para una gran mayoría de mujeres, que, por ejemplo, las deportistas suelen sentirse felices cuando están en amenorrea. En cuanto al aspecto psicológico, las deportistas, como dicen, también buscan entrenar esta dimensión de sí mismas. Pero parecen, a pesar de ello, formar parte de un *habitus* específicamente femenino/de mujeres<sup>145</sup>, algo que

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<sup>145</sup> Este concepto es más claro en inglés, donde *female habitus* es un *habitus* femenino que se refiere a las mujeres como categoría especialmente biológica. Si hiciera referencia a lo femenino únicamente

Bento (2006, citado en Salvini, 2017, p.71-72) denominó *habitus* de género, “construido por la reiteración, que, en la socialización primaria, encontrará en las instituciones familiares, escolares y religiosas los responsables de este proceso de reproducción de las verdades que, poco a poco, se van naturalizando y siendo incorporadas”.<sup>146</sup> Es decir, las instituciones profesan discursos con valor de verdad que dicen cómo las mujeres deben actuar para estar en la norma y, por lo tanto, ser aceptadas y “normales”. Este *habitus* es absorbido por ellas y en relación con otras facetas de sus vidas, combinado con otros posibles *habitus*, configura sus subjetividades en un sentido similar al descrito por Foucault (2016), presentado en la revisión de la literatura.

Ya sea porque las mujeres no creen en su potencial físico real o porque la fuerza bruta de los hombres suele ser mayor, lo cierto es que las tasas de violencia masculina contra las mujeres son mucho más altas que las de la violencia de las mujeres contra los hombres (Silva, 2010). Evidentemente esta brutalidad ignorante ejercida como violencia física o psicológica es una lástima, y muy a menudo, casi siempre, se debe a que los hombres se consideran a sí mismos en lo más alto de la jerarquía de género (Rich, 2010; Roth & Basow, 2004; Silva, 2010). Sabiendo esto, a pesar de que las deportistas son agresivas en sus estilos de lucha, de que saben pegar fuerte y emiten *kiai* mostrando un rostro feroz, no se sienten preparadas para defenderse de posibles ataques masculinos en la calle. Son mujeres seguras, sin embargo, reconocen que los ataques masculinos pueden ser brutales y prefieren evitarlos, incluso huir de ellos si es necesario. Son realistas, admitiendo una realidad lamentablemente extremadamente injusta y que produce indignación. En todo caso, lo anterior apunta a algo muy importante. Las mujeres no pueden creer que estén preparadas para enfrentarse a peligros simplemente porque marquen puntos en las luchas de competición y sean capaces de ejecutar patadas con elegancia y control.

He escuchado mucho en mi trayectoria marcial que, si un luchador es capaz de acercar su pie a la cabeza de su oponente y controlarse, significa que podría aniquilar a esa persona si se excede un poco. En este sentido, tener el control sería más difícil que ejercer la violencia (Turelli et al, 2020, *corrigendum* 2021). Sin embargo, creo que imprimir violencia fría e intencionalmente a la integridad de otra persona no es simple para alguien mental/psicológicamente sano. Entonces, una patada deportiva y una patada violenta son cosas muy diferentes. Nunca peleé más que en competición. Y me impactó una vez en la

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como categoría social, la palabra utilizada sería *feminine*. En español esta diferencia no es clara, así que recorro a la comprensión y debida interpretación del lector en relación a qué me refiero.

<sup>146</sup> Traducción del portugués al español hecha por mí.

infancia cuando presencié una pelea en la escuela entre dos adolescentes. Uno de ellos, que hacía *capoeira*, empezó a *gingar*, el tipo de movimiento que se utiliza tradicionalmente en la *capoeira* cuando se combate. Y el otro, que no practicaba ningún tipo de lucha, deportivamente, tomó un trozo de madera que estaba cerca y destrozó al *capoeirista*. Yo ya estaba haciendo kárate en ese momento y ese día aprendí que la violencia no requiere técnica ni cinturón (ver Tejero-González & Balsalobre-Fernández, 2011; Tejero-González, Balsalobre-Fernández & Ibáñez-Cano, 2011; Tejero-González, Ibáñez-Cano & Pérez-Alonso, 2008). Y que lo que puede ser mortal en un arte marcial no reside exactamente en el arte marcial, sino en la persona que realiza (o no) el arte marcial. Así, si bien es muy injusto que las mujeres deban cuidar de sí mismas y también de los hombres para evitar que las ataquen, considero una señal de autoconocimiento tener en cuenta los riesgos reales, los cuales se presentan con mayor intensidad en algunos lugares frente a otros.

En el capítulo 4, también abordé el tema de la jerarquía intrínseca que existe en el arte marcial, siendo una jerarquía que se presenta de maneras requintadas, bien sea, como mencioné anteriormente, porque el hombre siente que ocupa la cima de la jerarquía del género, bien sea por otros motivos más sutiles. En todo caso, siempre será una forma de dominación que se ha legitimado. Quizás lo más relevante para recapitular aquí son las jerarquías dadas por la estética y el coraje, relacionadas con los equipos de *kata* y *kumite*, respectivamente, y los temas *gi* y *kiai*, que se configuran como herramientas para reforzar una jerarquía de género. El tema de la jerarquía estética se verá reflejado más adelante en los juicios que se hacen de las deportistas de *kata* como *performadoras* de una submodalidad algo más femenina (Brum, 2016, citado en Salvini, 2017), en su contraste con el *kumite*. Dado que la belleza es históricamente reconocida como la característica femenina por excelencia, su mantenimiento en el deporte y en formas entendidas como más estéticas, convierten a las *kateras* en mujeres más femeninas, en la concepción heteronormativa, que las *kumiteras*. A estas últimas se les acusa de masculinidad por varias razones, pero una de ellas termina siendo la posesión de la característica históricamente entendida como masculina, la valentía o coraje y el enfrentamiento directo con un oponente. Estos elementos jerárquicos se mezclan con infinidad de factores y hacen que sobre las mujeres recaigan diferentes estereotipos. En general, las *kumiteras* son más acusadas de masculinizadas que las *kateras*, y las *kateras* tienden a ser más sexualizadas que las *kumiteras*. Sin embargo, un único estereotipo no es exclusivo de cada grupo, es decir, ambos equipos acaban experimentando distintos niveles de estereotipos variados.

A través de la idea de *one-size-fits-all* (Kirk, 2020), se inserta el mantenimiento velado de la hegemonía masculina. Las formas de vestir social y tradicionalmente asignadas a las niñas/mujeres se configuran como formas de restringir su espacio, un espacio que físicamente debe ser pequeño y contraído, permitiendo la expansión para los hombres (ver Scott, 2020, sobre antropología del espacio). El silencio femenino también se puede asociar a la ocupación del espacio por presencia (o ausencia). Alguien que no habla verbalmente es menos notado y exigente. De manera análoga, transportando estas consideraciones al espacio marcial, entendido antropológicamente como masculino (Scott, 2020), la mujer se ve a sí misma, aunque indirectamente, restringida. Supuestamente es libre de emitir *kiai* y debe hacerlo, sin embargo, se le enseña y corrige en la manera correcta de gritar y debe seguir un modelo masculino, entendido como “natural” y cierto.

Maclean (2017) reporta cómo las niñas que comienzan sus prácticas jóvenes y normalmente son hijas de instructores de kárate varones presentan poca diferencia en la forma en que emiten *kiai*, entre otras cosas, en relación con los hombres. La interpretación de Maclean de esto es que tanto hombres como mujeres, a medida que progresan en el deporte, realizan menos "desviaciones de género en las disposiciones del kárate" (p.277).<sup>147</sup> En este sentido, las disposiciones del kárate serían neutrales, una especie de disposición única para todos y todas. Sin embargo, desde mi punto de vista, el kárate es, como he señalado a veces, un arte marcial y un deporte creado por y para hombres. De ahí que haya sostenido que se anima a las mujeres a acercarse al modelo masculino ya que, según Criado-Perez (2019), lo neutro se refiere a los hombres (*one-size-fits-men*). Es decir, incluso si un puñetazo en sí mismo es solo un puñetazo, la forma de golpear adquiere contornos orientados al masculino, y esto se convierte en el estándar, la forma correcta de hacer un puñetazo. Creo que esto se repite en el caso del *kiai* estandarizado, que sigue una línea masculina a la que se dirigen las mujeres, sin correcciones realizadas en el *kiai* emitido por los hombres. Su *kiai* es más grave no necesariamente porque “proviene más del diafragma” que el emitido por las mujeres, lo que siempre se requiere de las niñas y mujeres, sino quizás simplemente porque su tono de voz es naturalmente más grave.

En relación con los uniformes y vestimentas de las mujeres, primero hay que decir que las prendas deportivas generalmente pequeñas e incómodas, que exponen a la mujer (como objeto), limitan sus movimientos y, por tanto, el espacio. En el kárate, específicamente, el *gi* no expone el cuerpo femenino según los parámetros de exposición occidentales, pero es

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<sup>147</sup> Todas las citaciones de Maclean en esta conclusión están traducidas del inglés al español por mí.

necesario volver a la tradición japonesa, donde la forma femenina de vestirse es/era extremadamente restrictiva de movimiento y espacio, incluso reduciendo los pies de las mujeres. Las *geishas* visten *kimonos* que cubren su cuerpo, pero provocan una “sensualidad silenciosa”<sup>148</sup>, limitada en la voz y en el movimiento, sin generar atracción por exhibición, pero cumpliendo igualmente la función sensual para aquella cultura, quizás a través de la sumisión. Por lo tanto, los *kimonos* en las artes marciales son perpetuadores de una tradición oriental que puede que no se entienda en la cultura occidental.<sup>149</sup> Y aún es posible interpretar que el mantenimiento del *karategi* para hombres y mujeres se basa en el hecho de que el arte marcial nunca consideró la inclusión de la mujer. Esto también se puede ver en el *I Ai Do*, esgrima japonesa que practiqué durante algunos años. Allí también la mujer usa el *hakama* como el hombre, y ciertamente no es porque se las considere iguales.

Sobre las preguntas iniciales del capítulo, donde me preguntaba si elementos que identifiqué y viví dentro del kárate en mi país de origen también se repiten en otros contextos y lugares, debo concluir que muchas cosas son similares. Es decir, algunos elementos identificados por mí hace años continúan presentes también en otros países e incluso en el deporte de élite. Vuelvo a dicha reflexión en estos momentos porque entiendo que apunta a una dirección importante, no siendo una situación individual ni particular, sino un problema social que se repite en otros lugares y con otras personas. Incluso si fuera una situación aislada, sería un problema importante. Teniendo en cuenta que se presenta repetidamente, cabe interpretar una mayor gravedad, convirtiéndose en un problema social. Para evaluar este problema, es necesario tener en cuenta la cultura interna de la modalidad, que ciertamente relativiza muchos elementos identificados, así como el contexto social. Ambos contextos parecen ser compasivos con las formas de violencia contra las mujeres, quizás especialmente la violencia simbólica que autoriza la concepción de que los hombres ocupan un lugar más alto en la jerarquía de género, incluso si las mujeres son combatientes, lo cual también se verificó con los otros capítulos de la tesis. La anterior confirmación de similitudes no es de extrañar, dado el contexto de globalización en el que nos encontramos en la actualidad. Lo que acaba sucediendo en los contextos locales, no en sentido globalizado, es la constatación de algunas especificidades, que siempre son muy relevantes, pero que ya no suelen ser mayoría ni la

<sup>148</sup> <https://www.japaoemfoco.com/fatos-e-curiosidades-sobre-as-gueixas/>, consultado el 12/08/2021.

<sup>149</sup> Al respecto, ver el documental “Little miss sumo”, de Matt Kay (2019), Wolf – Walks of Life Films. Una atleta japonesa que aboga por la expansión del sumo femenino más allá de la edad universitaria explica la visión de la mujer japonesa ideal. Debe ser modesta y caminar siempre tres pasos detrás del hombre. Como dice el documental, “una mujer que no se ve”.

regla. Las mujeres, entonces, se involucran en formas de negociación para lidiar con situaciones incómodas que se repiten, globalizadamente, como se verifica.

Ahora me centraré en los principales temas y capítulos de la tesis, que se basan especialmente en el contenido de la segunda entrevista realizada a todos los participantes.

## 8.2. Pregunta de investigación uno

El capítulo 5 buscó responder a la pregunta de qué factores *favorecen o inhiben* la construcción de la *subjetividad* incorporada de las mujeres *karatekas* del equipo olímpico español. El objetivo final, sin embargo, se presentó como exponer los factores que *afectan* la construcción de las *subjetividades* incorporadas de las mujeres *karatekas* del equipo olímpico español, y dirigió el capítulo a la percepción que las *karatekas* tienen de sí mismas. Esta autopercepción tuvo en cuenta el hecho de que las deportistas se esfuerzan por lograr aceptación y pertenencia a un grupo marcial. Estos procesos incluyen imitación, identificación muy profunda con el equipo, bandera, nación, lo que les da a las practicantes un lugar en el clan y las convierte en *insiders* que, sin lugar a dudas, incorporan el *habitus* local, que no es un *habitus* neutral o sin género. Con esto en mente, las deportistas se perciben auténticas por dedicarse a un deporte lleno de peculiaridades, al fin y al cabo, encontrar pertenencia a la subcultura *karateka* tiene un poder que contiene y atribuye cierto sentido a lo que se hace en la vida, ya que no es común que las mujeres, en la vida, estén en el centro de una subcultura (Holanda, 2018).

Sin embargo, la autenticidad se produce en un proceso de desgaste o atrito, especialmente con uno mismo, es decir, un verdadero proceso de producción de la propia subjetividad. El logro de la autenticidad que las deportistas entienden que poseen se da en medio del proceso de autoconciencia de que son observadas, evaluadas y aprobadas/desaprobadas en sus actitudes y comportamientos. Esta observación constante de ellas, hecha por otros y también por ellas mismas, las mantiene en el círculo vicioso culturalmente nutrido de *hacer para el otro*, como lo destaca Mason (2018). Siguiendo las pautas de la mirada masculina, las mujeres acaban interiorizando algo como una continua represión de su actuación como mujeres. Así interiorizan la vergüenza, la culpa, el remordimiento, un sentimiento de humillación, lo que constituye un tipo de *habitus* que quizás, en la dirección que señala Bento (2006, citado en Salvini, 2017), se denomine *habitus* de género, o, como lo llamé, *habitus* femenino (*female*). Tal *habitus*, combinado con el *habitus*

marcial, de orientación masculina, impacta directamente, por supuesto, en la construcción subjetiva que las *karatekas* hacen de sí mismas. Aunque se consideran auténticas, y lo sean, de hecho, es necesario señalar que esta definición combina la *performance* para el otro con la autoconciencia de ser continuamente observada. Esto ciertamente influye en las formas de *performar* y, por lo tanto, hace apropiado un cuestionamiento sobre la autenticidad misma, o la convierte en algo así como una autenticidad parcial, si es posible decirlo así.

Siguiendo con el capítulo 5, este capítulo también señaló la tendencia que existe en el campo del kárate de indicar, y consecuentemente perseguir, un modelo arquetípico de *performance karateka*. Este modelo es masculino, difícil de alcanzar para mujeres y hombres no-alfa, pero, aun así, es buscado por mujeres que internalizan muchos de los discursos que escuchan y que son supuestamente verdaderos, interiorizando una aceptación por naturalización del contenido de los discursos. En otras palabras, los comportamientos masculinos están legitimados y exigen la adaptación femenina en nombre del bien común/social. Por ejemplo, el discurso naturalizado y aceptado de que los hombres son impulsivos. Significa decir que habría una esencia masculina que lleva a los hombres a comportarse así (y de manera violenta y deseosa, por tanto), y las mujeres, en la supuesta polaridad opuesta de esta naturaleza, deberían adaptarse para no ser calificadas como incontroladas, anormales e incluso descalificadas. A menudo se les llama "chicas" como una forma de mantener un estado infantil que, a su vez, denota la necesidad interesada de direccionarlas y controlarlas. Evidentemente, la esencia femenina (De Beauvoir, 2011; Young, 1980) o esencia masculina no está justificada y no hay razón para aceptar las formas masculinas de actuación como más legítimas que las femeninas. Sin embargo, debido a la jerarquía de género, las mujeres a menudo son cuestionadas sobre su comportamiento, ya que supuestamente sus acciones inapropiadas desencadenarían reacciones "naturales" en los hombres.

Por otro lado, también les pregunté a las atletas sobre personas que podrían considerar figuras inspiradoras. Este punto es relevante ya que ellas mismas son personas de cierto protagonismo y que, a su vez, pueden ser figuras inspiradoras para otras personas. Llamé la atención sobre el poder que se puede contener allí, ya que las *karatekas* podrían usar esas posiciones políticamente, es decir, serán observadas, por lo que las posiciones que tomen influirán en otras personas, quizás especialmente en otras mujeres y niñas. En esta dirección, trazando un paralelo con lo que podría entenderse peyorativamente como héroes/heroínas del deporte, Salvini (2017), al estudiar Artes Marciales Mixtas (MMA), cuestiona en su tesis si las mujeres practicantes de MMA serían doblemente dominadas. Se refiere a la dominación

relacionada con el género y también con el *marketing* que concierne al MMA, posicionándolo como un tipo de deporte de combate dominado frente al gran mercado deportivo, y donde las mujeres ciertamente ocupan un lugar subordinado. Salvini enfatiza que la forma en que las mujeres se posicionan al respecto tiene el potencial de reposicionarlas, ya que “las relaciones de fuerzas y luchas movilizan y transforman los campos”<sup>150</sup> (p.241).

Este es uno de los muchos ejemplos que existen para mostrar que el tema del género necesita ser discutido con mucho rigor, sin aceptar discursos de que las diferencias no son relevantes y que ellas y su discusión son causa de separaciones y disputas entre hombres y mujeres. Butler (1990), por ejemplo, recomienda prestar atención al lenguaje, diciendo que su negligencia es un error, que hay que mirarlo y hacer que existan personas que “están entre líneas”, pero que necesitan y deben estar “en las líneas”, lo cual es similar con las mujeres en los deportes. Así, surgen discursos interesados que, desde mi punto de vista, postulan que los “buenos deportistas” son los que no se apegan al género, que simplemente se desempeñan bien pase lo que pase, “sin excusas”. Sin embargo, hay tantas implicaciones en torno al tema que no se pueden ignorar. Maclean (2017, p.277) escribe que “para algunos karatekas experimentados, el kárate sensorial unisex y la práctica permitieron el desarrollo de un sentido de sí mismos que hizo que las ideas de distinción de género fueran menos relevantes para quienes ellos son”. Por supuesto yo respeto el punto de vista y la experiencia de Maclean y de los participantes de su estudio, sin embargo, tomaría una dirección opuesta, entendiendo que los y las *karatekas* experimentados(as) supuestamente son más capaces de identificarse y posicionarse en relación con los problemas que encuentran fundamento en el género binario. Como señalé en el cuerpo de la tesis, considero que estamos lejos de trascender el sexo y las propias necesidades sexuales<sup>151</sup>; es de 1% la población asexual del mundo; las relaciones que aún existen entre todo esto y el género son muy íntimas; y nuestra construcción social, dentro del mundo deportivo o en la sociedad, no es neutral. Así, considerando que la propia Maclean admite que “bromas sexistas eran ocasionalmente hechas” (2017, p.281), afirmar que la distinción de género puede verse como menos relevante puede configurarse como una negación del problema y una forma de legitimar la jerarquía de género. En el contexto *karateka*, esta puede ser una forma de perpetuar la corriente de la tradición. Sin embargo, Maclean también recomienda que las mujeres con *habilidades notables* puedan convertirse en

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<sup>150</sup> Traducción del portugués al español mía.

<sup>151</sup> Vale la pena reconocer y enfatizar aquí, como describí en la sección sobre la reflexividad de la investigadora, que esta es evidentemente mi lectura del contexto social y *karateka* y los datos brindados por mis informantes, sumados quizás a la visión que estos informantes ofrecían. De ninguna manera, como es coherente, es una visión hegemónica que no pueda ser cuestionada.

modelos a seguir para otras mujeres y niñas. La misma autora también presenta otras dos recomendaciones relacionadas con lo expuesto y que me ayudan a conectarme con las conclusiones del capítulo 6, por lo que las comentaré brevemente. Estas son recomendaciones relacionadas con la competencia, en este caso.

Maclean (2017) mantiene que es apropiado reducir el enfoque competitivo a “mujeres/niñas y hombres/niños con menos confianza física” (p.288) para que tengan una inclusión cómoda. La inclusión puede requerir este y otros elementos, como clases para grupos compuestos apenas por mujeres (Maclean, 2017; Rodrigues, Turelli & Kirk, de próxima publicación), y agrego trabajo formativo con hombres para que puedan acoger a mujeres en algún momento en grupos mixtos. Sin embargo, en el aspecto del empoderamiento femenino considero que la participación en competencias (locales, regionales o lo que sea posible), como propuse en el capítulo 6, es favorable. No me refiero necesariamente a una actuación extremadamente habilidosa y llena de presión, sino a una ocupación femenina del espacio competitivo. Las chicas y mujeres deberían estar ahí, desde mi punto de vista, en mayor volumen y ganar confianza en sí mismas ahí. No es necesario que compitan bien, de acuerdo con los niveles estándar de buen desempeño, quiero decir. También pueden hacerlo "mal", simplemente divirtiéndose, pero trastocando el orden hegemónico. Creo que deberían estar allí y hacer de ese entorno, su entorno. A final, esto se refiere a la experiencia estética que les es posible vivir. Como presenté en el capítulo 4, Kirk (1996) aclara que la experiencia estética no es algo vivido exclusivamente por deportistas de alto nivel, sino que también puede ser vivido por principiantes en el deporte. Esto replantea los estándares de belleza en el deporte, o elegancia, como lo llama Maclean, y también de habilidad, diría yo, no completamente ausente, por supuesto, pero no exclusiva de los niveles de élite. Y tal vez replantee el orden competitivo en sí. Incluso si estas chicas/mujeres pierden en tales competencias, lo que le sucede a la mayoría de los competidores de todos modos, tal vez desarrollen una forma de lidiar con la derrota que sea más ligera, se sientan menos presionadas para competir y se preocupen menos por la mirada y los juicios externos.

Y la segunda recomendación de Maclean está relacionada con la promoción de competencias entre niños y niñas. Aunque las diferencias fisiológicas no son tan relevantes en la infancia, las diferencias culturales ya existen y, como mencioné en relación con la inclusión transgénero, creo que las sesiones de entrenamiento son espacios para la inclusión completa, pero las competencias deben abordar dichas diferencias y ser específicas.<sup>152</sup> Desde mi punto

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<sup>152</sup> Mi primera lucha (“combate con cintitas”, simulación de combate adaptada para niños/niñas) fue contra un chico, ya que no había otras chicas para competir conmigo. Evidentemente “sobreviví”, pero

de vista, lo anterior es una forma de luchar en defensa del deporte femenino. Esto implica celebrar las diferencias que nos dan cierta autenticidad, es decir, hay que combinar los discursos de igualdad y equidad, y no convertir la igualdad en una acción que aplasta, aunque porque un único ganador ¡es muy poco! Si entre todas las personas del planeta solo hay un vencedor, eso es excluyente. Si hay más categorías, hay más posibilidades de campeonas y de campeones. Es decir, más personas, en su especificidad, llegarán al codiciado primer lugar. Quizás están en esta dirección los campeonatos específicos que diferentes escuelas o estilos de kárate promueven. Mientras que solo uno, "el mejor" en todo el mundo, como un campeón olímpico en el modelo actual, solo hace creer que todos los demás no sirven. Es una forma diferente de verlo, sigue siendo competición, pero con más posibilidades y oportunidades. La celebración de las diferencias es, por tanto, más inclusiva, ya que se revierte, en este sentido, en más campeones, y puede ayudar a evitar sentimientos de inferioridad y dudas sobre el valor propio y la autoestima, ya que a muchos se les hace creer que no sirven porque no igualan o superan al alfa. Además, creo que la presión por demostrar que son mejores que los niños no es justa para las niñas. E idealmente, encontrarían placer en competir, no necesariamente por el resultado, sino porque están ejerciendo el espacio que también es suyo por derecho, que no debería ser disputado con los niños.

Llegados aquí, lo anterior también enlaza con el capítulo 6, que, entre otros aspectos discutidos, abordó el ámbito de la competición.

### **8.3. Pregunta de investigación dos**

En el capítulo 6, parte principal de la tesis, me centré en la pregunta que buscaba conocer cuáles son los medios, los recursos o las estrategias que adoptan las mujeres para ganar espacio o mantenerse en este entorno típicamente entendido como masculino. Relacioné el objetivo con elementos de la cultura marcial que establecen ciertos dictados, y consideré que profundizar un poco en esa cultura interna específica podría ayudar a responder la pregunta. Nuevamente, se demostró la comprensión generalizada de la superioridad masculina, incluso señalando que si una mujer hace algo bien se debe a que lo hace acercándose a características entendidas consensualmente como masculinas. La concepción de la mujer como "otro", inmadura e incompleta, es decir, como una categoría inferior de ser

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hubiera preferido pelear con una niña en la competencia, aunque siempre hiciera todo el entrenamiento entre niños y adolescentes chicos.

humano, justifica lo que son, finalmente, injusticias contra la mujer. Al fin y al cabo, cabe destacar que, en la cultura marcial histórica, ellas fueron privadas de educación para alcanzar los mismos niveles de desarrollo personal que los hombres, siendo consideradas descontroladas, lloronas..., en fin, irracionales.

Sin embargo, las mujeres que en otras ocasiones se califican como las que “piensan demasiado”, tienden a tener más educación que los hombres para ejercer las mismas funciones sociales.<sup>153</sup> Es decir, el simple hecho de nacer hombre garantiza el acceso a trabajos, por ejemplo, a los que las mujeres necesitan demostrar que son capaces de ejercer mediante una inversión a menudo importante en cualificación/educación (Aguar, 1983), ocurriendo una sobrevaloración del desempeño masculino, que mantiene la posición social de supremacía masculina. Mismo con la trayectoria de la lucha feminista, la mujer pasa de ser una figura frágil<sup>154</sup> e infantil que requiere protección, cuidado y vigilancia continua, a una figura que tiene mucha energía y es capaz de hacer muchas cosas al mismo tiempo. En este sentido, McRobbie (2015) llama la atención sobre las múltiples exigencias que se les imponen a las mujeres, exigiendo la perfección, al fin y al cabo, para compensar el hecho de que son mujeres, deben manejarlo todo, y sin bajarse de los tacones. En otras palabras, la explotación femenina históricamente colocada adquiere nuevas formas y se mantiene en la actualidad, produciendo una especie de subjetividad neoliberal. Todo esto llega a la gran mayoría de mujeres, haciéndolas perseguir el modelo de perfección dado desde fuera para complacer la mirada masculina. Considerando las adaptaciones pertinentes, creo que es posible percibir este escenario también en el campo marcial, aunque la mujer esté haciendo algo no pensado para ella, subvirtiéndolo en cierta medida el orden hegemónico. Sin embargo, la constante devaluación de las mujeres que se encuentra en muchas instituciones sociales, si no en todas, también se ve aquí, donde la mujer que no se parece al modelo ideal de luchadora no está realmente luchando. Quizás esté jugando, e incluso jugando bien, pero luchando, con la carga

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<sup>153</sup> <https://www.ethos.org.br/cedoc/participacao-laboral-e-menor-entre-mulheres-com-baixa-escolaridade-na-america-latina/>, consultado el 15/08/2021.

<sup>154</sup> El mito de la fragilidad (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009), aunque permanezca, también ya lo había negado Sojourner Truth en un discurso entre feministas en 1851. Ella era una ex esclava estadounidense y decía que tenía que trabajar tanto cuanto los hombres, sin ayuda ni protección de parte de ellos, para nada. Las mujeres blancas estaban envueltas en una ardua y fundamental lucha, pero, es digno de mención, en condiciones no tan precarias como las de las mujeres negras. Estas trabajaban tanto como los hombres esclavos, veían la lucha por el derecho al no embarazo de las mujeres blancas de manera diferente, ya que eran esterilizadas obligatoriamente, y veían también de una manera más compleja el aumento de la pena para los violadores, solicitada por las mujeres blancas. Los violadores ciertamente merecerían el castigo, sin embargo, el problema desde el punto de vista de las mujeres negras era que los hombres negros a menudo eran culpados injustamente de violación y tomaban la pena en el lugar de los hombres blancos (Davis 1981).

simbólica masculina (Segalen, 2002) que conlleva esta actividad, no se la ve, bajo la mirada masculina, como apta para ello.

Este escenario me vincula al análisis de videos que presenté. Tenía como objetivo verificar qué significa luchar como mujer y si hay una forma de luchar que sea propia de las mujeres. Como respuesta directa a estas preguntas, si bien el análisis ha resultado bastante complejo, concluí que existe una forma de luchar de las mujeres, pero solo con características generalizadas, ya que existe una rica pluralidad de estilos, tantos como mujeres existen. La *incorporación generificada (gendered embodiment)*, cultivada durante toda la vida, no puede anularse, o al menos, no puede anularse fácilmente. Y aunque las mujeres pueden ser magníficas en la ejecución de las técnicas, y lo son, también *performan* como mujeres en los entrenamientos que realizan, donde la concepción binaria de género es, todavía, hegemónica. Entonces, aunque los “guantes rosas”, como dicen Channon y Phipps (2017), también otorguen “ojos negros”, la forma en que las mujeres distribuyen los ojos negros difiere en relación con otros posibles colores de guantes. Por supuesto, el hecho de que sea diferente, como creo que ya se ha dejado claro aquí, no significa en modo alguno que sea inferior. ¡Siguen siendo ojos negros!

Y eso me conecta con la segunda pregunta de este análisis, sobre qué significa luchar como mujer. Al respecto de esta cuestión, en el campo del kárate, dominado por hombres, significa un desempeño pobre en comparación con los hombres, comparaciones, alias, muy frecuentes. Sin embargo, desde mi punto de vista y considerando los factores analizados, diría primero que es un tema muy complejo, que requiere un análisis profundo, y segundo, que significa realmente “luchar”, no solo en el *tatami*. Yo diría que es la rudeza con la que se evalúa a las mujeres en todos los aspectos de la vida, de ahí que haya mencionado tantos de estos aspectos aquí, lo que lleva a que esta concepción inferior sea tan fácilmente aceptada, aunque esté equivocada. De hecho, dadas las numerosas adversidades, es correcto decir que la actuación marcial femenina supera las expectativas. Finalmente, el análisis me llevó a afirmar que no es imposible que una mujer *performe* como un hombre, sin embargo, este requerimiento está impregnado de violencia simbólica.

Como puntos quizás secundarios en esta observación del movimiento *karateka generificado*, también llamé la atención sobre la importancia del vínculo entre lo que se realiza objetivamente y lo que perciben subjetivamente quienes lo realizan. Es decir, las sensaciones vividas y la experiencia de momentos que pueden no ser relevantes para quien juzga o asiste, pueden ser para el *performer* lo que marca la diferencia. O sea, alguien que mira, aunque en el

mejor de los casos pueda deleitarse con lo que ve, como señala Gumbrecht (2007; 2010), o condenar lo que serían malas performances, obviamente no ocupa el mismo lugar que el *performer*. Desde este lugar se viven cosas que se imprimen, si se puede utilizar este término, en la subjetividad de la persona. Aún en el análisis de videos, vuelve a aparecer la diferencia entre las submodalidades *kata* y *kumite* y su forma de aceptación en el campo. Esto quizás se deba al hecho de que las *kateras* no se consideran excesivamente fuera de la norma marcial, sino más bien como adecuadas al lugar al que pueden pertenecer. Ciertamente desafían el medio simplemente estando allí, pero son un problema menor ya que están más ajustadas a la entendida normatividad femenina. En este sentido, es posible ver cómo las mujeres que trastocan el orden hegemónico, huyendo del dominio de los cuerpos dóciles son asumidas como problemáticas y generadoras de problemas. Un ejemplo extremo de esto es el hecho de que las mujeres transgénero que se ajustan a las normas del Comité Olímpico Internacional parecen encontrar un lugar en el deporte de élite a veces con algo más de facilidad que las mujeres cisgénero que no se ajustan a sus respectivas normas, generalmente hormonales. Y aunque muchas mujeres cisgénero se manifiestan en este sentido, son ignoradas (Devine, 2021), quizás porque todavía, en alguna medida, son vistas, como en los Juegos Clásicos, como parte del pueblo, y no como ciudadanas auténticas.

Por su parte, la categoría que abordó el tema de la masculinización reveló las dificultades derivadas de la visión de la mujer como interesada en relaciones afectivas. Es decir, sus intenciones de entrar en el entorno masculino a menudo se interpretan como un interés sexual en hombres o mujeres. Esto no es así, quiero decir, no se involucran con el kárate en función de sus deseos de relaciones. Sus motivaciones ya han sido expuestas en el capítulo 4. Así, postulé acciones de subversión para que las mujeres reflexionen sobre ellas, las desarrollen y apliquen hacia el cambio. Considero que, a través de la desestabilización del espacio marcial tradicional de preservación masculina, las mujeres pueden encontrar un mayor grado de liberación, aunque necesiten, de diferentes maneras, abrazar las acusaciones de masculinización. En este sentido, comencé a presentar ideas de *queering* las posiciones ocupadas por las atletas y la propia pedagogía marcial, ya que el ambiente se basa en la pedagogía *straight* en cuanto a su heteronormatividad y heterosexualidad (Fitzpatrick & McGlashan, 2016; Kirk, 2020; Standal, 2015). Mi perspectiva considera que las atletas, desde el lugar que ya ocupan, podrían utilizar dichos puestos de manera no normativa, trabajando como facilitadoras de acceso para otras personas que en el contexto tradicional no encuentran espacio para permanecer, desarrollarse y empoderarse. El ambiente mal canalizado puede ser extremadamente frustrante y debilitante. Por otro lado, si se maneja bien, tiene un potencial

transformador y empoderador, como señalé enfáticamente. Asegurar el acceso a personas que abiertamente no encajan en la heteronormatividad, y que estas personas también pueden mostrar su potencial obvio, como personas que se identifican dentro de las minorías LGBTQIA+, por ejemplo, también puede contribuir a la transformación.

También, como una forma de negociar para permanecer y mantener su lugar en el deporte, las mujeres relataron experiencias de machismo y uso del poder. El campo todavía está dominado por hombres en posiciones de poder, con raras figuras femeninas en roles destacados. Esto es interesante de observar incluso en los Juegos Olímpicos, en los deportes más diversos, donde se predica casi la igualdad en el número de mujeres y hombres que participan como deportistas. Además de que algunas modalidades aún tienen menos categorías femeninas que masculinas, como es el caso del boxeo (Tjonndal, 2017), es necesario considerar otros elementos que no aparecen en los grandes eventos. Como presenté en mi análisis del Campeonato Mundial de Karate 2018 (Turelli et al, de próxima publicación), en eventos como un campeonato mundial, y aún más en los Juegos Olímpicos, el número de personas que compiten en las categorías finales será similar. Sin embargo, en el trabajo de base, en la vida diaria de los *dojos* o en competencias menores, como revelaron las informantes al comienzo del capítulo 6, el número de niñas y mujeres deportistas sigue siendo considerablemente menor que el de niños y hombres. Esto se ve entre deportistas, y mucho más enfáticamente en otras posiciones en las que aumenta el poder. También es de destacar que las niñas sean llevadas a competir con frecuencia en los Juegos Olímpicos, algo que no es recurrente entre los niños. Una posible interpretación de esto es que las mujeres ya no participan en el deporte, dadas otras tareas, por lo que algunas modalidades encuentran representación de categorías femeninas entre niñas, evitando la falta de representación. Quizás, además del problema cuantitativo, se presente nuevamente aquí el lugar del “otro” atribuido a las mujeres, reemplazadas por niñas en proceso de desarrollo, como señala Gonçalves (2014), y tampoco respetadas.

Llegados a este punto, tomo un breve intervalo para mi proceso de reflexividad de la investigadora, considerando que mis conclusiones pueden estar siendo duras y, quizás, demasiado críticas. Sin embargo, aunque es innegable que veo valor en las posibilidades y potencialidades que posee el karate, como ya he señalado y volveré a hacerlo pronto y por última vez en este trabajo, no puedo dejar de señalar el problema social en el que el karate se constituye y, constituido, corrobora. Esta constitución no es neutral, “pura” o aislada, sino que está conectada con una serie de otros puntos que son, en última instancia, problemas políticos de largo tiempo. Por tanto, soy consciente de que mi trabajo va más allá del ámbito del karate,

lo que puede ser criticado. Por otro lado, un kárate aislado del mundo no existe y sería ingenuo pensarlo así. Entonces, ciertamente muy tarde, pido licencia al lector para todas mis asociaciones con otras áreas del conocimiento, en caso de que se hayan vuelto insistentes, pero consideré que eran/son necesarias, aunque existen muchas otras que se me escapan. Habiendo hecho esta observación, vuelvo a los hallazgos clave del capítulo 7.

#### 8.4. Pregunta de investigación tres

El último capítulo de hallazgos y discusión trató de responder a la pregunta de cómo la cultura deportiva influye en el desarrollo de la subjetividad femenina incorporada en el kárate olímpico español. Para responder esta cuestión, busqué analizar una serie de elementos que incrementan ciertos problemas en torno al desempeño femenino dado por la cultura deportiva, bien conocida en otras modalidades, donde las mujeres enfrentan problemas similares. Lo que vale la pena señalar aquí es que la cultura deportiva no reemplaza ni anula la cultura marcial que presenté en algunos de sus aspectos en el capítulo 6, sino que se suma a la cultura marcial, intensificando los desafíos impuestos a las mujeres. La cultura de los deportes entendidos como masculinos que no comparten la cultura marcial también tiene algunas afinidades con la cultura deportiva identificada en el kárate. Y, finalmente, todavía existe en el kárate la cultura deportiva general en relación con el deporte femenino, que en definitiva no se centra en el rendimiento de las mujeres, sino en la estética y sensualidad de sus cuerpos. Esto vuelve a resaltar la idea de la mujer-objeto que supuestamente existe para satisfacer la mirada masculina.

Este capítulo destacó la *incorporación generificada* que se revela incluso cuando teóricamente podría ser anulada. Es decir, a pesar de las técnicas de potenciación de la feminidad, que incluyen, por ejemplo, la ropa y el maquillaje, incluso cuando las mujeres no las usan, siguen actuando de acuerdo con la situación de la mujer y la *performatividad* femenina. A pesar de la fluidez del tema de género, parece que conciben su forma de *performar* independientemente de las apariencias. Los hombres son los que las ven como más femeninas cuando “se visten de mujer”. Así, cuando responden a estas llamadas, se dejan llevar por la presión de la mirada masculina que guía el comportamiento. Es importante destacar, sin embargo, que esto no se refiere a una lucha por mantener la feminidad, y menos aún a la feminidad enfatizada que podría contribuir a una cierta legitimación de la masculinidad hegemónica. Lo que parece suceder, entre tanto, es que las deportistas construyen un nuevo

tipo de feminidad contemporánea o masculinidad femenina, que combina fuerza, agresividad, determinación, persistencia, confianza, con momentos de inseguridad, dudas y diferentes miedos. En otras palabras, mezcla estilos, performances, representaciones. No todos los nuevos tipos de feminidades que se producen son, sin embargo, aprobados por la mirada masculina, que acaba recayendo en el problema de las acusaciones de masculinización. Pero el hecho de que las mujeres se interpongan ante los llamamientos masculinos, cuando lo hacen, de diferentes maneras, y abracen lo que se llama masculinización a través de variados comportamientos, se convierte en un acto subversivo. En este sentido, donde lo que ocurre es la exploración del cuerpo femenino, objetificando a la mujer como “otro” para satisfacer necesidades y ser consumida, volví a proponer actitudes y comportamientos *queer* como alternativas subversivas.

El campo deportivo es un lugar híbrido, de permisos y prohibiciones, ya que permite ir más allá de los límites de la vida fuera del campo deportivo, al mismo tiempo que restringe, controla y, de alguna manera, a causa de sus reglas reprime la expresión de todos los impulsos por sus reglas. Este carácter híbrido a menudo lleva a las personas a confundirse y perderse cuando se exceden. En el caso de este trabajo, llamé la atención sobre el traspaso de algunas fronteras con las mujeres. Porque a pesar de que el deporte y específicamente el alto rendimiento hablan de exigencias extremas sobre el cuerpo, que debe avanzar hacia un progreso casi infinito, los límites de la intimidad no tienen por qué ser ultrapasados. Esto es injustificable y completamente innecesario para cualquier rendimiento deportivo. Es decir, la exigencia extrema, en este contexto, acaba por legitimarse, sin embargo, la forma de realizar esta exigencia y los artificios que se utilizan podrían revisarse sin impactar negativamente los resultados, siendo, quizás, al contrario.

Pero comúnmente algunos hombres entienden que los límites femeninos son susceptibles de ser ultrapasados, por lo que interpretan las acciones de las mujeres con un propósito sexual provocativo, incluso si no van en esa dirección. Las deportistas entrevistadas se oponen consensualmente a esto, sin embargo, se desvían un poco del problema central cuando critican a otras mujeres. Esto lleva a la interpretación de que los hombres simplemente se benefician de la hegemonía ya establecida, incluso aquellos que no trabajan activamente en su defensa. Simplemente disfrutan de los escenarios, ya sea usando la mirada deseosa o reguladora, como *expuse*. También surge el notable problema mediático que vende a las deportistas. Sin embargo, las deportistas son muy conscientes del problema y lo critican con fervor. Reciben a través de este instrumento de la industria cultural, aunque no sea el único, miradas de exploración, inferiorización, dominación, regulación y deseo. Y el sentimiento que

experimentan se mueve entre la impotencia, el malestar, la duda y, a menudo, el engaño. También es relevante comentar el sentimiento injusto que se vive cuando las mujeres pueden ser ridiculizadas por los hombres, lo que se configura como el ejercicio de la dominación masculina apoyado en la violencia simbólica.

### 8.5. Mensajes clave

Considerando la exposición de mis principales conclusiones en relación con las preguntas que me planteé y que guiaron todo este trabajo, procedo ahora, como síntesis final, a dar respuesta al objetivo general del trabajo, de donde viene el título de esta tesis. El análisis de los procesos de construcción de la subjetividad incorporada de las mujeres en el kárate de contexto olímpico, a través del equipo español, no puede contar con una respuesta fácil, dada su complejidad. Quizás lo primero que hay que decir es que, si bien todo esto está relacionado con el contexto olímpico, que hasta cierto punto motivó la reanudación de mis estudios y, por tanto, estos escritos, también trascienden claramente dicho contexto. Es decir, la construcción de la subjetividad continúa independientemente del escenario olímpico. Algunos elementos se vuelven más o menos intensos, quizás, pero los procesos de subjetivación (Candiotto, 2008) continúan y se ven afectados, de hecho, por todas estas idas y venidas, el no ser/ser/no ser olímpicos, por ejemplo. Esta construcción está, por tanto, influenciada por numerosos factores que inciden en el *habitus* que incorporan las mujeres. Pagan un precio por llegar a pertenecer y tienen que resistir la cultura marcial que rebaja el rendimiento femenino, pero no solo eso, rebajando y colocando en el sitio de "otro" a las propias mujeres. También necesitan lidiar con la cultura deportiva sumada a la marcial, la que, al tratarse de un deporte entendido como masculino, acusa a la mujer de masculinizada. Esta misma cultura deportiva también sexualiza sus cuerpos, ya que en el patriarcado se naturaliza la mirada hacia la mujer-objeto a disposición del hombre-sujeto. Así, la mujer, a pesar de todas las luchas, incluso las que tienen lugar en el *tatami*, sigue en un lugar de subalternidad. En otras palabras, el entorno marcial/deportivo es poco diferente, en este sentido, de lo que se encuentra en la sociedad en su conjunto.

La sociedad influye en la cultura interna de las modalidades deportivas, y estas, a su vez, devuelven a la sociedad lo que se desarrolla dentro del mundo deportivo. El mundo del deporte es una institución de gran poder social, porque a diferencia de otras instituciones, trabaja con la persona en su totalidad, construyéndola en la interacción entre el *habitus*

practicado, la *incorporación generificada* y la subjetividad incorporada. Por eso insisto tanto en transformar el ambiente hacia una perspectiva crítica. Así, aún en respuesta al objetivo general de la tesis, el hecho de que la mujer tome una posición donde está tan desafiada, muestra cómo es capaz de ocupar ese espacio, siempre asignado como no perteneciente a ella, que no posee permiso para expandirse. Ella entra allí, sin embargo, y desafía numerosas imposiciones. Esto también, por supuesto, refina la construcción de su subjetividad. Creo que en relación con los potenciales reales que tienen, la mayoría de las mujeres todavía los creen de manera reducida. No solo físicamente, sino en el sentido de *embodiment* y subjetividad incorporada en la que se producen a sí mismas o en cómo se conciben a sí mismas. Sin embargo, todavía están enfrentando y superando muchas adversidades. Por lo tanto, incluso en medio de un escenario desafiante, creo que la conciencia, la experiencia y el empoderamiento de las mujeres pueden, con desafíos, trabajar para revertir lentamente situaciones injustas a favor de las propias mujeres y otros grupos vulnerables a la heteronormatividad.

Relacionado con lo anterior, cabe mencionar que en febrero de 2019 me había hecho una cuarta pregunta de investigación<sup>155</sup>, tal como aparece en la metodología. Sin embargo, con el tiempo la excluí porque no encontraba encaje adecuado, aunque seguí buscando algún tipo de acción que pudiera tener un carácter transformador del contexto, y no solo señalar los problemas. Señalar los problemas es obviamente algo muy relevante y necesario. Sin embargo, también me gustaría poder decir algo quizás “constructivo”. Con este propósito, entonces, se justifica mi inspiración en el enfoque activista dentro de una pedagogía crítica, con acciones capaces de *queering* la realidad actual de la pedagogía *straight*. La experiencia académica que tuve en Glasgow fue fundamental para ello. La intención de poder dar soluciones a los problemas identificados existe en mí por reconocer, al mismo tiempo, como he subrayado en varias ocasiones, los potenciales positivos de artes marciales. Así, aunque el contexto *karateka* presente intensas adversidades para las mujeres, el problema de la exclusión, uso e infravaloración de las mujeres constituye un problema aún mayor. En otras palabras, veo la situación de manera similar a estar/no estar en el escenario olímpico. Es mejor estar ahí y es mejor para la mujer, sin duda, afrontar, superar y crecer con los retos que le impone el mundo marcial/deportivo, perteneciendo a él. Siguiendo las ideas de Ahmed (2004) sobre el malestar, los sentimientos *queer* y de inadecuación y también las concepciones en torno a la experiencia de la orfandad (Arendt, 1972), precisamente por tratarse de un medio masculino, el entorno

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<sup>155</sup> La cuarta pregunta era "¿Existe la posibilidad de que se desarrolle una subjetividad *karateka* plural, es decir, no restringida o excluyente de lo femenino o masculino?" Propuse las siguientes categorías: "Superar varios estereotipos y prejuicios conocidos"; y "Desarrollo de un ambiente innovador y auténtico".

*karateka* se convierte en un entorno político para las mujeres. Con esto, entiendo que deben poblar este y otros espacios similares para lograr el empoderamiento femenino, desafiar a las jerarquías de género y, también, para transformar el propio entorno, humanizándolo y abriéndolo como una posibilidad de empoderar a otros colectivos no normativos. Ciertamente, como también insistí, la tarea es ardua. Sin embargo, creo que la transformación desde dentro, preferiblemente en asociación con otras iniciativas, podría ser efectiva.

Connell y Messerschmidt (2005) afirman que la hegemonía puede fracasar. El *habitus* puede interrumpirse y rediseñarse (Gorelly, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003; Salvini, 2017). El género es fluido, se hace y se deshace (Butler, 1990). Las subjetividades se construyen en movimiento (Foucault, 2016), en un proceso de *embodiment* dinámico (Merleau-Ponty, 2005). Es decir, son todos elementos elásticos, susceptibles de ser resignificados mediante la acción, en este caso, en el ámbito marcial, para transformar la tradición entonces consolidada. Es importante tener en cuenta que el cambio implica cierta pérdida de control, posible descohesión y “desorden”, es decir, implica cierto grado de conflicto. En este sentido, vuelvo a destacar la importante adhesión a esta propuesta de movimiento transformador que pueden representar hombres conscientes y posiblemente influyentes (Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018). También se configuran como apoyo en medio de un escenario de conflictos duros y de largo plazo, como los procesos de disputa de poder. Por tanto, también sería necesario desarrollar cierta capacidad para afrontar y vivir en mayor o menor grado de conflicto; y aceptar el conflicto, quizás como punto de partida. Esto es parte de la democracia, opuesta a la imposición del orden directo, a menudo tiránico, donde no hay cuestionamientos, ni diálogos, ni caos, pero hay opresión ejercida por la hegemonía del poder concentrado y supremo. Enfrentar el conflicto, manejarlo, significa adaptación y disfrute, especialmente en tiempos de precariedad (Kirk, 2020; Turelli, Kirk & Bortolotti, 2021). En este contexto, las alternativas *queer* encajan aún más fácilmente, dada su imprevisibilidad y falta de *rectitud*.

Así, los usos (Ahmed, 2019) de algunos recursos que pueden esconder potenciales subversivos detrás de sus propósitos básicos formarían parte de un conjunto de acciones hacia la transformación. Creo que el uso de puestos de deportistas de alto nivel (porque son ellas las que logran aceptación, pertenencia y reconocimiento) puede contribuir al cambio integrado de apertura de puertas desde adentro; tener hombres conscientes del problema, comprometidos y solidarios; el mantenimiento del kárate en los Juegos Olímpicos para garantizar la visibilidad; más mujeres y niñas participando en la vida diaria de los *dojos* y en competencias generales; mujeres que no reproduzcan la masculinidad hegemónica como *sensei*; mujeres con una visión de la posibilidad de interrumpir el *habitus* y la corriente de la tradición en puestos importantes

con poder real de acción y no figurativamente; personas LGBTQIA+ conscientes participando en entrenamientos, competencias, actuando como *sensei* y en posiciones de poder; entrenamientos que tengan en cuenta las especificidades de las mujeres y las empodere físicamente sin ubicarlas en un colectivo de inferioridad; actitudes y momentos *queer* fomentados dentro de los *dojos*; clases mixtas combinadas con educación feminista para mujeres y hombres; apoyo de leyes en defensa de derechos a menudo ignorados.

Entonces, en cuanto al objetivo principal del estudio, se puede decir de manera resumida que esta tesis aporta evidencia de que las mujeres *karatekas* están bajo prejuicios tanto de la cultura marcial como de la cultura deportiva, y también que el hecho de que las mujeres atletas se conviertan en sujetos conscientes, alejadas del lugar de objetificación, contribuiría a promover cambios en el ambiente marcial.

### 8.6. Fortalezas y limitaciones

Antes de cerrar este trabajo, aún es necesario mencionar sus limitaciones y contribuciones. La pandemia ocasionada por el SARS-CoV-2, la COVID-19 se presentó como una limitación a mi plan de investigación inicial y terminó forzando la redirección de algunas acciones, como la imposibilidad de proseguir con observaciones *in situ* y acompañar el equipo personalmente en los Juegos de Tokio, y la necesidad de conducción de entrevistas virtuales. También es relevante mencionar la limitada capacidad humana para absorber producciones literarias. Ciertamente dejé material muy relevante fuera de mis referencias. A esto le sumo también la limitación que nos impone el tiempo histórico en el que vivimos, en el sentido de que mis interpretaciones del pasado o de otras culturas se hacen desde el presente y desde mi subjetividad. La forma de leer los datos tratados en esta tesis también ha sido filtrada por mi subjetividad, construída en base a mis experiencias personales, indudablemente reflejadas e influyentes en el proceso auto-etnográfico. Seguramente otros investigadores seguirían una línea de pensamiento diferente para analizar el tema y los datos, quizás más adecuada que mis elecciones. Sin embargo, la limitada capacidad mencionada se siente especialmente cuando se intentan asimilar, a la vez, aportaciones académicas realizadas en diferentes idiomas. Algunas de estas posibles aportaciones ausentes (como Demetriou, Classen, Miller, Weber, Giddens) e incluso teorías sociológicas o tópicos dentro de teorías desarrolladas por sociólogos (como histéresis, *amor fati*, deshistorización, práctica, y tantas otras), en mi caso personal, por supuesto, deben implicar más que su simple lectura. A mí me exige algún tiempo entenderlo y,

hasta cierto punto, *incorporarlo*. Además de eso, también es necesario reconocer que el hilo argumental trazado a través de la tesis no siempre fue claro o por lo menos no se configuró como un hilo recto. Tal vez esto se deba al hecho de que la propia investigación se haya vuelto *queer*. Al decir esto no quiero justificar que no se pueda mejorar el estudio, lo que seguramente podría ser hecho. Me refiero a que, además, se pueden desarrollar nuevas formas de hacer investigación, si se logra un nivel básico de calidad. Además, el hecho de que las entrevistas se concentren en un equipo nacional puede interpretarse como un factor limitante, aunque creo que los hallazgos pueden, en cierta medida, ser transferibles y aplicables a otros entornos que tienen similitudes o incluso contextos más amplios relacionados con el deporte femenino. En este sentido, quizás sea posible decir que el trabajo implica un avance de conocimiento para las ciencias sociales y el feminismo en el deporte.

Trabajaré para publicar estos resultados haciéndolos más visibles, a través de artículos científicos o capítulos de libros y presentaciones en congresos, con el objetivo de que las recomendaciones finales sean de aplicación práctica en los entrenamientos diarios, si es posible. Igualmente, considero especialmente que el conjunto de sugerencias que emergen del análisis de la información de esta investigación, concentrados en esta conclusión, son una aportación al campo marcial, sobre todo si se confirma su efectividad. Por lo tanto, las áreas para estudios futuros, aunque sean bastante amplias, desde verificar si los elementos identificados con este equipo se repiten en otros contextos y explorar el tema de género en el kárate en varias direcciones posibles, serían esencialmente válidas si aplicaran y probaran las sugerencias hechas aquí. Ellas representan, para mí, una responsabilidad hacia la comunidad marcial, especialmente la femenina, que me gustaría que se hicieran realidad y no se redujeran a la utopía. En este sentido, me gustaría poder trabajar con deportistas que estén interesadas en contribuir al cambio, *queering* lo normativo, dándoles un soporte teórico para la acción y, si es válido, un apoyo amigo. También trabajaría con hombres con un interés genuino<sup>156</sup> en transformar el contexto. Como se trata de un proceso de cambio complejo, entiendo que se necesitarán personas dispuestas y comprometidas, así como más estudios que puedan confirmar y presentar nuevas direcciones hacia ambientes verdaderamente empoderadores.

### 8.7. Postludio

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<sup>156</sup> Digo interés genuino porque eso es fundamental y lamentablemente me he encontrado con hombres con una fachada interesante sobre la igualdad, pero que es solo una apariencia falsa en defensa de la mujer.

El kárate probablemente aprendió de la experiencia de la inclusión del boxeo femenino en los Juegos Olímpicos, el cual introdujo categorías de manera desigual para hombres y mujeres (Tjonndal, 2017). El kárate debutó en Tokio 2020 (2021) con la participación de hombres y mujeres, sin embargo, ambos con menos categorías. Como describí en el texto, el deporte tiene cinco categorías para cada género (binario), con el mismo tiempo de lucha desde 2019. En los Juegos Olímpicos, tanto hombres como mujeres tuvieron tres categorías de peso, y *kata* individual masculino y femenino, sin que hubiera *kata* por equipo ni consecuentemente, *bunkai*.

Sandra Sánchez, española, ocupó la primera posición en el *kata* olímpico. Las participantes de mi estudio, sin embargo, no pudieron asistir a los Juegos Olímpicos. Las atletas de *kata* entrevistadas formaban parte de la modalidad de *kata* por equipos, ausente de los Juegos como expliqué. Las diez deportistas de *kumite* entrevistadas en este estudio, pasaron por competiciones de selección con la finalidad de que tres de ellas pudieran acudir a la competición preolímpica. Las competiciones de selección consideraron la posición ocupada en el *ranking* de peso, y en el caso de que los diferentes pesos que se sumaran, si el *ranking* no pudiera ser suficiente para definir, se consideraron las colocaciones dentro del país en una competición realizada entre las atletas de los pesos juntados (-50 y -55; y -68 y +68). Así, entre las diez atletas, se seleccionaron tres, una resultó lesionada, lo que le dio una oportunidad a otra, y estas solo acudieron al preolímpico de París, celebrado entre el 11 y el 13 de junio de 2021. Para clasificarse a los Juegos Olímpicos, necesitaban estar entre los tres primeros lugares en sus respectivos pesos en el preolímpico, lo cual no lograron.

Creo que aún es relevante mencionar que, debido a un problema con el equipo masculino, el equipo de entrenadores se cambió a fines de 2020, lo que también pudo tener alguna influencia en el rendimiento de las atletas en la competición preolímpica.

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**APPENDIX A: semi-structured interview script 1 and 2 with athletes**

**Athletes**

**Interview 1:**

Some questions about your biography and athletic profile:

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from?
4. What is your graduation? Do you want to go up in graduation (*dan*) rank?
5. Do you have an academic background? Which one?
6. What is your profession?
7. When did you start training and competing in karate?
8. Why have you chosen karate as a sport?
9. What types of competitions do you participate in?
10. How is the dynamics of training/competitions/trips...?
11. Have you had many injuries?
12. How is your personal/family life affected by your choice to be in elite sport?
13. Have you trained in different *dojos*?
14. Have you always been able to train with other women?
15. What do you like the most in karate? And in training? And in the life of an elite athlete? Don't you like something? Why?
16. Do you consider yourself *aggressive*?
17. Can you tell me a little about your career in training and competitions?
18. Do you feel comfortable in competitions? How do you feel about defeat? Victory?
19. How do you define your karate style? Attacker, defensive? Do you see that it was developed on you or you already had it? Is it easy to learn new skills and techniques or do you prefer *familiar* ones?
20. Have you already experienced flowing effortlessly? In competition, training sessions...? Can you comment on that?
21. Have you had experiences with violence? In training, competitions, outside of karate?
22. Do you feel confident to defend yourself on the street?
23. Why are you doing karate today? Do you propose to do for life, after stopping competing?
24. If you needed to establish a hierarchy in the team, who would be at the top? What criteria do you use, belt, technique, results...?
25. What is your opinion about our uniform, the *gi*? Do you prefer to train in gym clothes?

General topics: weight – (female) period – pressure – pain – COVID-19 – psychology – personal trainer – training routine – Olympic Games – how you were selected.

**Interview 2:**

Questions about the female process in karate:

1. How do you evaluate your relationship with the other women on the team? (Has that always been the case throughout your karate life or is it specific to this team?) And with men?
2. What is the main characteristic(s) for you of the *karateka* woman? Do you think it is a characteristic of Spanish karate fighters or shared by all karate fighters in the world?
3. Do you think there is a *karateka* "way of being"? How is it? Is it unisex or are there female specificities?
4. Does the novelty of the Olympic Games affect this "way of being"? How?
5. As a karate fighter, who or what do you identify with? Is there an idealized model?
6. Could it be said that what you identify with synthesizes your life or is it restricted to the field of karate? (Who are you?)
7. Is there a team identity? And can an individual identity be maintained at the same time?
8. How is the price charged to guarantee a place in the elite group? Is it fair to you?
9. There will be a reward, of course... How does the reward come?
10. How do you gain and maintain space among so many men? Is respect always there, is it conquered...? How?
11. Do you think that some kind of change is made to achieve space or growth? Clear and said or subtler?
12. Do you think that the woman who trains karate changes her body? Is there *a proper body for karate*?
13. And does the woman who trains adopt "masculinized" traits? (What do you think about what is said that karate is a masculine space...)
14. Is the woman who trains a *feminine woman*? Beyond yourself, what do you observe of women in general?
15. When we talk about femininity, what comes to mind? (What do you think about... femininity...)
16. Where is the beauty in karate for you? (Bodies...? Technique...? Order...?)
17. Is a beautiful woman both, beautiful and sensual? (And the issue of beauty... and sensuality...)
18. Do you see a problem with eroticizing women in sports?
19. Do you find the gaze of desire uncomfortable (related to women in sports) or do you like it?
20. Is there a situation in karate that really bothers you?
21. Have you lived or witnessed any situation of machismo in karate?
22. Do you consider that there is equality between women and men in karate in all areas? (Opportunities for all... How is the distribution of power?)
23. Have you ever witnessed any uncomfortable situation (of power or also another category) between men and women?
24. Before ending the interview, would you like to provide any other information that is relevant to this research?

Thank you very much for your time and collaboration.

**APPENDIX B: semi-structured interview script 1 and 2 with coaches****Coaches****Interview 1:**

Some questions about your biography and athletic profile:

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from?
4. What is your graduation? Do you want to go up in graduation (*dan*) rank?
5. Do you have an academic background? Which one?
6. What is your profession?
7. When did you start training and competing in karate? (As athlete and as coach)
8. Why have you chosen karate as a sport?
9. What types of competitions do you participate in? (As coach)
10. How is the dynamics of training/competitions/trips...?
11. Have you had many injuries?
12. How is your personal/family life affected by your choice to be in elite sport?
13. Have you trained (given training sessions) in different *dojos*?
14. Have you always been able to train with other women?
15. What do you like the most in karate? And in training? And in the life of an elite coach?  
Don't you like something? Why?
16. Do you consider yourself *aggressive*?
17. Can you tell me a little about your career in training and competitions? (Synthesis as athlete and coach, if possible)
18. Do you feel comfortable in competitions? How do you feel about defeat? Victory? (Of yourself and your athletes)
19. How do you define your karate style? Attacker, defensive, technical, strategic? Do you see that it was developed on you or you already had it? Is it easy to learn new skills and techniques or do you prefer *familiar* ones?
20. Have you already experienced flowing effortlessly? In competition, training sessions...?  
Can you comment on that?
21. Have you had experiences with violence? In training, competitions, outside of karate?
22. Do you feel confident to defend yourself on the street?
23. Why are you doing karate today? Do you propose to do for life, after stopping competing with the team you coordinate?
24. If you needed to establish a hierarchy in the team, who would be at the top? What criteria do you use, belt, technique, results...?
25. What is your opinion about our uniform, the *gi*? Do you prefer the athletes to train in gym clothes?
26. Are there differences between people who do *kata* and *kumite*? Which ones?
27. How to work the *kiai* with women?

General comments on female' topics: weight (nutrition) – (female) period – pressure – pain – COVID-19 – psychology – personal trainer – training routine – Olympic Games – how to select a person – fear.

**Interview 2:**

Questions about the female process in karate:

1. How do you evaluate women's relationship within the team? (Has that always been the case throughout your karate life or is it specific to this team?) And among men?
2. What is the main characteristic(s) for you of the *karateka* woman? Do you think it is a characteristic of Spanish karate fighters or shared by all karate fighters in the world?
3. Do you think there is a *karateka* "way of *being*"? How is it? Is it unisex or are there female specificities?
4. Does the novelty of the Olympic Games affect this "way of *being*"? How?
5. The Spanish female fighters have people who they identify with? Is there any idealized model?
6. *Who* they are, from your point of view, your athletes? How do you identify them?
7. Is there a team identity? And can an individual identity be maintained at the same time?
8. How is the price charged to guarantee a place in the elite group? Is it fair to you?
9. There will be a reward, of course... How does the reward come?
10. How to gain and maintain space among so many men? Is respect always there, is it conquered...? How?
11. Do you think that some kind of change is made to achieve space or growth? Clear and said or subtler?
12. Do you think that the woman who trains karate changes her body? Is there *a proper body for karate*?
13. And does the woman who trains adopt "masculinized" traits? (What do you think about what is said that karate is a masculine space...)
14. Is the woman who trains a *feminine woman*?
15. When we talk about femininity, what comes to mind?
16. Where is the beauty in karate for you? (Bodies...? Technique...? Order...?)
17. Is a beautiful woman both, beautiful and sensual?
18. Do you see a problem with eroticizing women in sports?
19. Have you lived or witnessed any situation of machismo in karate?
20. Is there a situation in karate that really bothers you?
21. Do you consider that there is equality between women and men in karate in all areas?
22. Have you ever witnessed any uncomfortable situation (of power or also another category) between men and women?
23. There is difference in the way of performing *kata* and *kumite* by a man and a woman? The body moves differently...?
24. How is the subject of parties after competitions?
25. Before ending the interview, would you like to provide any other information that is relevant to this research?

Thank you very much for your time and collaboration.

**APPENDIX C: Término de consentimiento libre y esclarecido y Declaración de cesión de derechos de entrevista** (Free consent and Declaration of assignment of interview rights)**Término de consentimiento libre y esclarecido**

Mi nombre es Fabiana Cristina Turelli Thumé, soy doctoranda en Ciencias de la Actividad Física y el Deporte en la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid y estoy desarrollando la investigación hasta entonces titulada “Construcción de la identidad femenina en el kárate como deporte olímpico”, cuyo tutor y director es el Profesor Doctor Carlos María Tejero González y codirectores son el Profesor Doctor David Kirk y el Profesor Post Doctor Alexandre Fernandez Vaz.

El objetivo de esta investigación es verificar cómo la mujer karateca está construyendo su identidad en este deporte que se hace olímpico. Ya he realizado una primera parte de la investigación junto a un grupo de kárate en Glasgow, Escocia, en periodo de estancia en el exterior, bajo la supervisión del Profesor Doctor David Kirk, de la University of Strathclyde. Y la parte central consiste en verificar el objetivo del estudio junto al equipo femenino Olímpico Español y sus entrenadores.

Metodológicamente, la referida investigación configurase como cualitativa, caracterizándose como una etnografía del deporte. La elección de las participantes se debe al hecho de que participan activamente de este momento de construcción de la identidad femenina en el kárate y componen el equipo español de élite. Así, serán realizadas entrevistas semiestructuras de final abierto, con guion formulado a partir de preguntas-guías, y con grabación de audio e imagen. Debido al momento en que todos nos vemos afectados por el estado de pandemia del Covid-19, realizaremos las entrevistas en formato virtual, vía Skype, en dos momentos. El primero cumplirá con la función de rescate biográfico de las atletas y sus entrenadores y el segundo tratará de las cuestiones de la investigación propiamente.

En cumplimiento de la Ley Orgánica 3/2018 de 5 de diciembre, de Protección de Datos Personales y garantía de los derechos digitales, se asegura la más absoluta confidencialidad de las informaciones e informantes. Utilizaremos códigos de identificación de los sujetos. Los investigadores serán las únicas personas a tener acceso a la integridad de los datos.

Recordamos que su participación es voluntaria, lo que significa que no percibirá ninguna remuneración por participar de esta investigación. Dos vías de este documento deben ser rubricadas y firmadas por usted y por el investigador responsable. Haremos firmas digitales en los documentos o fotos de su impresión firmada. Recomendamos guardar cuidadosamente su vía, pues es un documento que contiene importantes informaciones y garantiza sus derechos como participante de la investigación. Usted no tendrá ningún coste proveniente de su participación en la investigación.

También garantizamos la plena libertad de los participantes para decidir sobre su participación, pudiendo retirar su consentimiento, en cualquier fase de la investigación, sin perjuicio alguno. Por fin, garantizamos a los participantes el acceso a los resultados de la investigación y de la versión final de la tesis.

Los resultados de la investigación serán utilizados exclusivamente para la tesis de doctorado y otros fines académicos, tales como artículos, capítulos de libro y comunicaciones en congresos.

Yo, abajo firmante, he concordado en participar de este estudio como informante de la investigación. Fui esclarecida por la investigadora Fabiana Cristina Turelli Thumé sobre el tema y el objetivo de la investigación, y también la forma cómo ella será llevada a cabo. Recibí la garantía de que puedo retirar mi consentimiento a cualquier momento, sin que esto me traiga cualquier prejuicio.

Este *Término de consentimiento libre y esclarecido* deberá ser firmado, quedando una copia en poder de la participante y otra con la investigadora. En caso de dudas o informaciones contactar los investigadores en su dirección física, teléfono y *e-mail* abajo descritos.

Informaciones sobre procedimientos de ética e investigación con seres humanos, en la UAM, pueden ser encontradas en: Comité de Ética de la Investigación, [http://www.uam.es/UAM/comite\\_de\\_etica/1446745192735.htm?language=es&nodepath=Comit?%20de%20?etica%20de%20la%20Investigaci?n&pid=1446745192735](http://www.uam.es/UAM/comite_de_etica/1446745192735.htm?language=es&nodepath=Comit?%20de%20?etica%20de%20la%20Investigaci?n&pid=1446745192735).

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Carlos María Tejero González

Profesor Tutor/Responsable

---

Fabiana Cristina Turelli Thumé

Doctoranda CAFyD/UAM

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Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Informante de la investigación

Madrid, \_\_\_\_ de \_\_\_\_\_ de 2020.

### Declaración de cesión de derechos de entrevista

Yo, abajo firmante, declaro:

1. Que he leído y entendido toda la información oral y escrita en relación a la participación en la investigación “Construcción de la identidad femenina en el kárate como deporte olímpico”.
2. Se me ha entregado una copia del Término de consentimiento libre y esclarecido y de la Declaración de cesión de derechos de entrevista, fechados y firmados (virtual). Se me han explicado las características y el objetivo del estudio.
3. He tenido la oportunidad de debatir y preguntar sobre dicha información y he recibido las respuestas adecuadas por parte de alguno de los miembros del equipo investigador encargado de este estudio.
4. Se me ha asegurado que se mantendrá la confidencialidad de mis datos.
5. El consentimiento lo otorgo de manera voluntaria y soy consciente que soy libre de retirarme del estudio en cualquier momento del mismo, por cualquier razón y sin que tenga que dar explicación alguna.
6. Doy mi consentimiento a la utilización de los datos obtenidos con la entrevista por mí concedida a los investigadores Fabiana Cristina Turelli Thumé, Carlos María Tejero González, David Kirk y Alexandre Fernandez Vaz, en su totalidad o en partes, sea en el formato audio, vídeo y/o texto, para los fines académicos (elaboración de la tesis de doctorado, producción de artículos, capítulos de libros y también comunicaciones en congresos).

La Dirección de la investigación garantiza en cumplimiento de la Ley Orgánica 3/2018 de 5 de diciembre, de Protección de Datos Personales y garantía de los derechos digitales, que toda la información que se obtenga será utilizada exclusivamente para la consecución de los objetivos del proyecto de investigación, asegurándose la más absoluta confidencialidad de los datos de los participantes en el estudio.

Nombre completo: \_\_\_\_\_

Dirección: \_\_\_\_\_

Ciudad: \_\_\_\_\_ Teléfono: \_\_\_\_\_

Correo electrónico: \_\_\_\_\_

Firma: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha de la entrevista: \_\_\_\_\_ de \_\_\_\_\_ de \_\_\_\_\_