

“It is about discomfort and helplessness” – The hegemonic sports culture informed by the male gaze affecting karateka women’s embodied subjectivities

“Se trata de incomodidad e impotencia” – La cultura deportiva hegemónica informada por la mirada masculina que afecta la subjetividad incorporada de mujeres karatekas

Fabiana Cristina Turelli

University of Manitoba, Canada
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3202-3007>
fabiana.turelli@umanitoba.ca

Alexandre Fernandez Vaz

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Brasil
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4194-3876>
alexfvaz@uol.com.br

David Kirk

University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9884-9106>
david.kirk@strath.ac.uk

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Abstract

Karateka women may be characterized as masculine when viewed from the traditional martial culture and stereotyped and sexualized within the sports culture. These characterizations are gender binary organized. Women are in an arena assumed to be hegemonically masculine, with the male gaze guiding their performance as athletes and dictating expectations for their performativity as women. We carried out a study with the Spanish women’s karate squad in preparation for the Tokyo Olympic Games, aiming to analyze how the hegemonic sports culture affects karateka women’s embodied subjectivities through the diktats of the male gaze. The data generated with athletes and coaches, mainly through interviews carried out twice with each of them, informed processes of objectification and consumption of women in sport. Their athletic performance is devalued while, contradictorily, there is an apparent valuation of them through the sensualisation and sexualisation of their bodies. It is not valuation, though, since it keeps just favoring a desirous male gaze that, due to hegemony, addresses women as others. At times, athletes get lost in criticisms of one another, as data reported, but they are brave in being there, facing oppression daily, and becoming stronger. They often develop reflexivity and criticality of their situation, but it is not an easy task to be carried out alone. So, a community of practice among women is welcome as much as having the support of conscious men, those with greater understanding capacity, as they are internal to male culture.

Keywords: gender, women’s sport, martial arts, hegemony, ethnography, Tokyo, Olympic Games.



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Autor de correspondencia:
Fabiana Cristina Turelli

Resumen

Las mujeres karatekas pueden ser consideradas masculinizadas cuando se las mira bajo la cultura marcial tradicional, y estereotipadas y sexualizadas bajo la cultura deportiva. Tales culturas siguen el orden binario de género. Las mujeres se encuentran en un ámbito que se supone es hegemónicamente masculino, en el que la mirada masculina guía su desempeño como atletas y dicta las expectativas sobre su performatividad como mujeres. Realizamos un estudio con la selección española de kárate femenino en preparación para los Juegos Olímpicos de Tokio con el objetivo de analizar cómo la cultura deportiva hegemónica afecta las subjetividades de las mujeres karatekas a través de los dictados de la mirada masculina. Los datos recopilados con atletas y entrenadores, especialmente a través de entrevistas realizadas dos veces con cada uno de ellos, informaron procesos de cosificación y consumo de las mujeres en el deporte. Se devalúa su rendimiento deportivo mientras, contradictoriamente, hay una aparente valoración de ellas a través de la sensualización y sexualización de sus cuerpos. Al fin y al cabo, sin embargo, no es valoración ya que sigue favoreciendo una mirada masculina deseosa que, por hegemonía, endereza las mujeres como otros. A veces las atletas se pierden en las críticas de unas a otras, como los datos comprueban, pero son valientes al estar ahí, enfrentando opresiones diariamente y volviéndose más fuertes. A menudo desarrollan reflexividad y crítica del contexto, pero no es una tarea fácil que puedan realizar en solitario. Entonces es bienvenida una comunidad de práctica entre mujeres tanto como contar con el apoyo de hombres conscientes, aquellos con mayor capacidad de comprensión, por ser internos a la cultura masculina.

Palabras clave: género, deporte femenino, artes marciales, hegemonía, etnografía, Tokio, Juegos Olímpicos.

Introduction

“It all depends on the importance that you want to give it. For example, you go to a physical therapist, and you take off your clothes. If that is traumatic for you, then you have a problem. (...) The problem depends on each person, not on the others. Today everybody knows what we have (as for genitalia). (Hefaistos, coach, Interview 37 (2), 30/09/2020)

Sport is a male preserve (Matthews, 2016; Theberge, 1985) that no longer can deny women's participation. It is still predominantly gender binary oriented and heteronormative, especially in high-level sport, specifically in karate. Karateka¹ women may

be characterized as masculine when viewed from the traditional martial culture (Turelli, 2022), and stereotyped and sexualized within the sports culture (Turelli, Vaz & Kirk, 2023a). Karate was momentarily² included as an Olympic sport for the Tokyo

¹ Karate practitioners. | ² Karate is no longer included for Paris 2024.

2020 (2021) Olympic Games, which increased its sports side while not detaching from the martial roots. Women fighters attended the event though fighting other challenges in addition to opponents on the mat. They are in an arena assumed to be hegemonically masculine, with the male gaze guiding their performance as athletes and dictating expectations for their performativity (Butler, 1990) as women. They supposedly should attest to emphasized femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), ignoring objectification (Walker & Bopp, 2011), and accepting that if they feel uncomfortable with exposure or eroticization, as coach Hefaistos pointed out in his comment above, they would be exaggerating or creating problems non-existent from others' points of view. There is, thus, a neoliberal approach (McRobbie, 2015)³, naturalizing sexism and blaming women for overthinking –and completely ignoring the trans experience (following the comment on supposed obvious genitalia), which is still absent in the gender binary karate context but a reality in society.

We carried out a study with the Spanish women's karate squad in preparation for the Tokyo Olympic Games. As possibly happens in other countries, Spaniards may present a questioning feminist critical view that confronts other Spaniards taking a conservative stance, guided by religion and memories of an imperial past (Collins, 2011) of colonization and domination (see Gullo, 2022). Such a general social structure resonates with sports culture within the country and with the general sports approach at a high-level, in which competition relies on domination and masculine hegemony. In this context, men's supposed superior position is normalized as part of their essence (see Young, 1980) as competitors, warriors, and conquerors by nature. Thus, it would be expected that they have impetus and drives, in a (hetero)normative and gender binary order, towards women, with their desirous gaze over women not viewed as improper or disrespectful. Just looking at someone does not read as something offensive or violent, especially when there are people advocating for the increase of testosterone for men in

society arguing that diminishing it is causing society's feminization, in a pejorative sense (see Gay, 1995). On the other hand, there are authors taking an approach to women's self-defense who suggests there should be an increase in their level of violence (e.g., McCaughey, 1998). From our point of view, though, more violent women do not solve the problem of men's violence, while less violent men do not mean a castration of their nature (see Williams, 1977).

In this paper, we are focusing on how sports culture views and locates women's sports and athletes. We researched women's sports karate, a sport still not so studied particularly from a gender perspective and at the specific moment of its debut as an Olympic sport. Women karate fighters share stereotypes with women fighters in other martial arts and combat sports (MACS) or sports understood as masculine, like accusations of masculinization (e.g., DiCarlo, 2016; Phipps, 2020). But they also share stigmas surrounding women in sports in general, related to the eroticization of athletes (e.g., Souza, Capraro & Jensen, 2017). Our study provides evidence of such sexualization despite using a uniform, the karategi, that does not expose athletes' bodies. Considering this, our aim for the research carried out was to analyze how the hegemonic sports culture affects karateka women's subjectivities through the male gaze. In doing so, we start by presenting two brief theoretical sessions, one on naturalized sports culture and the second on the concepts of hegemony and the male gaze. After that, we describe our methods, then, share and discuss our findings. The findings are organized into two categories, in which we share testimonials from elite Spanish karate athletes. The first category considers athletes' thoughts related to the eroticization of women in sport, with contrasting as well as complementary opinions of karateka. The second category focuses on the desirous male gaze, with narratives of feelings triggered by experiencing unpleasant situations. We close the paper with our concluding thoughts.

³ McRobbie reads neoliberalism under a feminist perspective, arguing that a neoliberal social structure rests on individualism and permanent competition, with western women holding the apparent status, though under disguised manipulation, of complete free choice and self-definition with total control over their bodies. She says that in the maintenance of existing power relations, "male dominance is carefully disguised through the dispositif which takes the form of feminine self-regulation" (McRobbie, 2015, p.3).

Naturalized sports culture

“**Sport continues to support the ideology of male hegemony through the continuous marginalizing and trivializing of women in sport” (Walker & Bopp, 2011, p.53).**

According to Elias (1992), sport is a fundamental element of the civilizing process in its function of managing and regulating violence through rules. At the same time, it is an organized way to maintain men’s virility (Gay, 1995) preserved, authorized, and prized in sporting environments (Bittencourt, 2005; Bowes et al., 2020). Thus, sporting environments are, on the one hand, safe and civilized, in the sense that no-one can or should kill or be killed while playing sport, and on the other hand, they are also spaces with more permissions than those of everyday life. For example, a fight between two people in the street can end up in jail, while a boxing match has tickets sold to be watched as sport. It means that sports culture is hybrid and special, controlling while allowing violence, especially among men, that often take violence as art in addition to exhibitions of power. Sporting spaces are regulated by specific laws, suspending them from the reality outside sports environments (Vaz, 2021). They relativize, therefore, the violence happening in sport, and such relativization is usually extended to other situations involving women. This means there are different forms of violence in sport, from overt to symbolic violence, which is taken as part of the game. Similarly, there are other excesses that may be considered part of the game, but they can border on abuse. In general, sports culture naturalizes excesses, demands on bodies, tough forms of treatment in order to obtain the highest performances and outcomes. It may be naturalized, but feels odd for people experiencing it, especially when it approaches some level of intimacy.

Although the sexualized way of seeing women is something that permeates the patriarchal society as a whole, in sports culture this is accentuated, giving privileged access to women’s bodies, often minimalizing the importance of it. Thus, de-

spite there being a number of challenges defying women in sports and they stand up to such challenges, most of the women cannot deal easily with and overcome harassment situations as they can with pain from training sessions or even injuries. We do not focus widely on harassment in this paper though⁴, just analysing some discomforts that karateka pointed out regarding the eroticization of their bodies which, on the other hand, is a form of violence and harm linking back to harassment. There are coaches who do not want to train women in sports (Turelli, Vaz & Kirk, in review) because they consider it not to be true sport (Pfister, 2003). However, there are yet men coaches who “value” women in sport as a marketing device, and due to the privileged view and access they may have to their bodies. This is an objectifying culture, accentuated within karate with the Olympic condition reached, leading the athletes to report feelings of inadequacy, discomfort, doubt, and often deception. They are object of gazes of exploitation, inferiorization, domination, regulation, and desire. We acknowledge that gay men may also struggle under the heteronormative male gaze in other ways than women. However, our focus here, as pointed out, is on the heteronormative gender binary that informs general karate context, establishing it in a hegemonic manner, as we approach next.

Hegemony and the male gaze

“**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” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.853).**

Hegemony is a Gramscian concept. Gramsci conceived that “The hegemony constitutes a historical bloc, it is a unit of different social and political strengths; and tends to keep these strengths united through a conception of the world that it has traced and diffused”⁵ (Gómez, 2016, p.158). In addition to political and economic spheres, it operates in the moral and cultural spheres, reproducing a pattern of domination that uses tools such as ed-

⁴ Celia Brackenridge pioneered research into sexual harassment in sport (e.g., Brackenridge & Kirby, 1997). | ⁵ Translation from Spanish into English ours.

ucation and the media (Gómez, 2016; Hargreaves, 1986b). It uses power for manipulation, drawing in a metaphor of a centaur, in a necessary combination of consent (half man) and repression (half beast) (Cox, 2016). In turn, Williams (1977) defines hegemony as a concept that includes and goes beyond “‘culture’ as a ‘whole social process’, in which men define and shape their whole lives”, and “‘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). Following this line, Walker and Bopp (2011, p.52-53) focus on the concept linked to men, defining 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.” Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also explain that the hegemonic masculinity concept was proposed considering that “The Gramscian term ‘hegemony’ was current at the time in attempts to understand the stabilization of class relations” and “the idea was easily transferred to the parallel problem about gender relations” (p.833).

The hegemony that men enjoy is a given fact in sports environments (Walker & Bopp, 2011), and in karate’s context, hegemonic masculinity prevails, corresponding to the updated features pointed out by Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) such as appropriation of other masculinities that may be useful for continued domination, encompassing multiple patterns and hybridity (p.844). It also relies on symbols that have authority, like professional sports stars, giving boys and men an ideal to pursue (p.846), while trivializing women’s participation in sport through media coverage (e.g., Dunne, 2017; Toffoletti, 2016). Media coverage reinforces the sexualization stereotype of sports culture for women’s sports, often leading the women themselves to internalize the demands made over their performativity. Foucault (2009), talking about the capillarization of power, explained that the male gaze objectifies women, and women may end up acting according to that. On the other hand, in the binary logic of gender and sexuality, a female gaze does not hold the same power to objectify men, considering that the positions established in patriarchal

ideologies are supported by hierarchical inequalities. Such objectification done from hegemonic positions and often disguised through hybridizations and combinations of features of other types of masculinities leads women to be confused in a neoliberal approach (McRobbie, 2015), ending up wondering if they are just not mistaken about feelings that they experience, as it will be shown with their testimonies. Before sharing them, though, we proceed to describe the methods we used in the attainment of the study.

Methods

We carried out research with the Spanish women’s karate squad, interviewing 14 athletes who were preparing for the Tokyo Olympic Games and the four men coaches working with them. The COVID-19 pandemic affected our initial plan of following them to the Games and performing an immersive ethnography. Due to the distancing measures required, we had to adapt our procedures, interviewing participants online, analyzing videos of their fights (Turelli et al., 2022), in addition to observations and participant observations carried out before lockdown, and inclusion of auto ethnographic (Turelli, Vaz & Kirk, 2023) notes from the lead investigator of the study (see Standal & Bratten, 2021). The lead investigator and first author has been an amateur karate practitioner and competitor for almost three decades, being originally from the Global South despite training in karate in several countries of the Global North as well. Thus, her experiences were used to corroborate in a manner of comparison what elite-level athletes from Global North were reporting. The other authors of the paper worked in a manner of triangulation of scholars to assure trustworthiness for the research, in addition to the triangulation of data collection techniques. They are not karate practitioners, but highly experienced researchers in the sociology of sport.

In order to provide more context and information for the study, athletes and coaches were interviewed twice each (Hickey & Roderick, 2017), with the first interview aiming to know the karate history and athlete profile of each one, in addition to

generating some proximity; and the second interview entering the topic of research more properly, asking them about their embodied subjectivity in the unique Olympic moment that karate/karateka were experiencing and the issues surrounding it. Interviews were conducted for three months, between June and September 2020, totaling 38 interviews, considering that we performed a pilot. They were open-ended semi-structured interviews (Hammer & Wildavsky, 1990), lasting an average of 1h10min. This article focuses on data provided by these interviews. They were coded manually by the first author and shared with the other authors, crossing data emerging from the field with the outlined system of categories (Rodríguez Navarro & García Monge, 2009). The initial outlined categories were described based on the research objectives, and reformulated when coded compatible excerpts of interviews were crossed with a critical reading of the literature. Our research proposal was submitted, analyzed, and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Autonomous University of Madrid, with the approval code CEI-102-1930.

Findings and discussion

The data generated with athletes and coaches informed processes of objectification and consumption of women in sport. Their athletic performance is devalued (see Turelli et al., 2022) while, contradictorily, there is an apparent valuation of them through the sensualisation and sexualisation of their bodies. It is not valuation, though, since it keeps just favoring a desirous male gaze that, due to hegemony, uses (see Ahmed, 2019) and plays with women as others (see Gonçalves, 2014; Luguetti et al., 2022). Considering this, next we present the team's thoughts related to the eroticization of female athletes, with contrasting opinions while complementary among karateka. Athletes used imagery resources to talk about the subject, showing some dispersion of the central problem when they engage in criticisms⁶ of one another. Then, we approach the second topic with athletes reporting feelings they have experienced, often leading to indignation. They clarify that there may be situations they enjoy compliments,

but such situations are quite specific, perceiving extreme objectification when they are not even asked about what they want just because the will of men is hegemonic, ending up in deeply unsettling discomfort for women.

“I do it just because and not to show you anything” – Sports culture and the erotization of women in sport

Athletes interviewed showed variations in the level of tolerance to objectification. Among the team, the modest view (Young, 1980) appeared, which could be an outcome of a traditional education or yet religious influences. On the other hand, there are athletes who feel they may explore such appeals to serve themselves, and finally, other athletes who would have conceptions perhaps influenced by feminism, being freer without accepting objectification. We share examples of the three different perspectives:

People do (sexy photos) maybe 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 karategi⁷ with heels? If you want to wear heels, then dress accordingly. (Hestia, Interview 15 (2), 17/08/2020)

It seems fine to me, always within limits. Well, a girl who has a good body, because if she is an athlete, well... (...) If they tell me “what a good body you have!”, well yes, I'm an athlete. I see it in a good way. (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 it is very common among 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)

⁶ Please note the difference between the concepts of criticality and criticism, the former a desired condition and an outcome of awareness of issues and reflexivity, and the last an attitude that may relate to just blaming others. ⁷ Karate uniform.

Analyzing the three perspectives, Hestia offered a more traditional view, telling us during her interviews how supposedly well-behaved women should conform to given rules. Photos and images were used many times by athletes as a way to make it easier to speak on this topic. Hestia tended to criticize women who to some extent, break rules and expose themselves through sexy photos, entering the erotica terrain. Erotica refers to sexual desires, but not to their consummation (Hakim, 2010). At times, though, Hestia presented a more open view and evidenced that she was questioning her own beliefs, trying to find coherence, despite the fact that we know complex topics require deep reflections to resolve contradictions.

On the other hand, Hera wanted to explore possibilities and perhaps follow proposals such as those defended by Hakim (2010), on erotic capital as legitimate female capital.⁸ 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 using erotic capital, a form of capital where women stand out over men, as a type of female "weapon". She criticizes both Bourdieu, for not including this form of capital among those he listed (see Bourdieu, 1986), and feminists, for adopting a moralistic position and not exploiting this capital as a subversive element. From our point of view, though, it seems that Hakim's proposal ends up favoring the male gaze.⁹

Finally, Venus brought a non-conforming position, advocating for freedom, although falling into criticism towards other women, which from our point of view, dismantles women's struggles and ends up serving masculine hegemony as well. In fact, people should feel free to perform as they want, and it is not about censoring or restraining behaviors to keep women in places of shyness and modesty (Young, 1980). But the criticism coming together with the claim for freedom works in a manner of us against them (see Diversi & Moreira, 2018) yet among us. It means, within women's collective, there are women fighting women in order to reach places of prominence among men

to achieve belonging, be respected, and feel worthiness (see Turelli, Vaz & Kirk, 2023b). In sum, if this third perspective becomes lost in internal criticisms, the three perspectives have in common benefits provided to patriarchy. Afrodite, influenced as well by the strong masculine hegemony in karateka environment and in society itself, took a similar stance:

Why can a man be shirtless and pose in a magazine and a woman who is in top is erotic? No. I see it perfectly; it seems amazing to me. Each one shows what they want. (...) What is the body for? To show it. What do you work it for? To show it. Yes. I think so. Well, yes, I'm talking about showing something, showing naturally, of course. Maybe I wouldn't want there to be a girl just thinking about teasing, which there is too. But, in general, if a girl has a good body and if she wants to... I change clothes on the tatami¹⁰. I stay in top, many times I stay in short tights and, sometimes, even in panties and I don't mind. Whoever likes it, good, whoever doesn't, I don't mind. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

It is noticeable a difference in the level of discomfort that athletes have with consumption of their bodies. They are educated under the male gaze, moving between its regulatory and desiring functions. The regulatory gaze makes some women position in a place of woman-mother-sanctified figure aligned with morality and good manners. This group often directs criticism at women who may identify with the disturbing mythological figure of Lilith (see Turelli, Vaz & Kirk, 2023a), those supposedly responsible for awakening the desirous gaze in men. Yet, there may be ways to direct together both gazes at women, with them embracing and embodying such gazes, reproducing it (see Freire, 2005). So, they work for patriarchy, warranting great success for the hegemonic order, once they end up policing (Foucault, 2009) the conduct of other women, while pleasing men. Therefore, in this context, all women end up being victims of the male gaze. Artemis corroborated this:

Why do men wear a t-shirt, long pants and girls have to play volleyball in a top and panties?

⁸ See also Anderson et al.'s (2010) study of aesthetic capital, focusing on elements that especially value beauty. | ⁹ See also Dallery (1997) on the "radical alterity of women's erotic corporeality" (p.76) in a line somewhat divergent from Hakim (2010), especially as it refers to lesbian eroticism. | ¹⁰ Area of practice.

(...) If it were their own decision, that's fine, but it is a decision of a federation led by a man! (...) When I see it in the press "the (female) Barcelona Soccer Club goalkeeper more beautiful than ever", things like that. 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, 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. (Artemis, Interview 26 (2), 07/09/2020)

In addition to the point on the gazes that athletes are left open to, Artemis raised the question of uniforms. Karate indeed uses undifferentiated karategis for men and women, which do not necessarily mean equality but the socially required (in terms of policies of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) acceptance of women into the masculine terrain (see Turelli, Vaz & Kirk, in review). Nevertheless, even wearing a uniform that does show women's bodies, fantasies around them arise (see Turelli, 2022, for more details). Artemis highlighted the processes of judgment and desire that are promoted by the media, something that several other athletes pointed out as well. They reported it as a serious problem, the way they feel sold and consumed in sports through media and social networks:

Many times, on Instagram or social networks, you upload a photo (...) and you don't upload it to have repercussions; you upload it because you liked it, or whatever reason, and people think it is to sensualize you in your sports field, to sell you, when it should not be like that. I believe 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)

Maybe 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? Be-

cause they are telling me "this girl is so hot!" That does not favour me, or women's sport. (...) But it serves as a claim. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

Everything that is behind it, all our work... as if to focus only on that... There are other things much more important, of much more value behind. (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

I think that most journalists try to eroticize the body of the athlete woman, instead of saying "good, well, you've won, a photo with your Cup", that's it. (Juno, Interview 25 (2), 07/09/2020)

For example, Diana. "Diana has a new boyfriend." Instead of "Diana has won the gold." (...) They don't look at our 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 (e.g., Ferretti & Knijnik, 2007; Souza et al., 2017), women's underrepresentation (Dunne, 2017; Petty & Pope, 2019), but also how the media quickly consume the sport and athletes they sell (Boyle & Haynes, 2002; Hutchins et al., 2019; Rowe, 2013). The narratives of the athletes indicate as it is clear, the consumption of them through images/media coverage. There are also 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 said "no." Fabiana: In the karategi, do you mean? 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. That pisses me off. (Demeter, Interview 20 (2), 27/08/2020)

I won a title, and they took me out as "Jupiter's girlfriend". I mean, not my name, it was like that in the press. The news was not "Ceres has won x". Well, no. "Jupiter's girlfriend has won x." I mean, look up to what point... it's horrible, horrible... (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

Ceres was not sexualized in the account she presented, but she was advertised as someone's girlfriend, without even having her name mentioned, placing her in Jupiter's possession, subordinated to him, as other. The news is disrespectful and a promoter of Jupiter, who neither fought nor won the title. Women's marketing is evident and creates a lot of discomfort, putting pressure to promote consumption by the heterosexual male public, who consumes the most as Artemis pointed out previously, through the uses of the media. In the next category, we approach feelings shared by the athletes that reveal unpleasant experiences with the desirous and misplaced male gaze.

"Look, how disgusting, how he is looking at you" – The disturbing desirous male gaze

It is not uncommon to hear people say they need to make peace with themselves. This may refer to some healing processes that people need to go through to overcome trauma (Lynch et al., 2022). Among karateka women, they reported unpleasant experiences when approached by the desirous male gaze, some of which were traumatic experiences. It is not simply about being looked at, which they may evaluate differently and even enjoy, but refers to facing an invasive look, which generates embarrassment and intimidation. They reported:

...It is about 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?" (...) That look, that attitude of boys to look when a girl, for any reason, goes down or... just passes. Things you see and 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. It's something I hate. (Minerva, Interview 12 (2), 12/08/2020)

In championships there are people from other cultures, men from other cultures who may not be used to seeing women on top in the middle of a warm-up room... It's not different from a beach, you take off your shirt and have underneath... And men from other cultures and... men

from your same culture actually are scandalized... the truth is that the look is annoying because it is out of place. (Proserpina, Interview 18 (2), 24/08/2020)

Athletes' comments reported how the desirous male gaze seems authorized despite that for them it is out of place and hated. Notwithstanding, it is lawful for men, even representing some value in male logic, due to the consensual virility among men to make desire explicit. Athletes may evaluate things differently, though, giving specifics for each situation as Diana pointed out and we share next. However, they highlighted the need for respect, situatedness, and context, in addition to clarity in the actions, because at times they are left lost and feeling ridiculous, as Atena exemplified as well:

The typical drool, male or female, that looks at you as if there is no tomorrow, that does not know you at all and wants trust, and there is no trust. (...) Feeling desired by someone you love empowers you. It is a great self-esteem tool. But that does not mean... you need 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)

I feel very uncomfortable with things that are out of context. It even makes me feel ashamed. (...) 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 this person called me an idiot, I will answer or I'm leaving. But a person who is looking at you, 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. (Atena, Interview 14 (2), 15/08/2020)

The fear of being ridiculed is related to shame. The experience can be so internally conflicting that it becomes frightening. Shame, in addition to

being characterized as a fear of social rejection, is a result of the internalization of external evaluations at the same time that it causes expectations of failure, and 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 incorrectly leads many women to remain silent in the face of countless unfair situations in life. Other athletes commented on how they feel disgusted when approached in a way that intimidates them, especially when there is power involved, which can result in athletes being discredited if they report events (Rich, 2010). Ceres shared on this:

Thank God not much has happened to me, but there is a referee who has made comments 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... You can't help it because that person... (Ceres, Interview 17 (2), 23/08/2020)

This leads women to remain silent and only reveal problems when they are basically overcome.¹¹ Not talking about what happened right away can lead to mistrust about the women's "versions". But speaking at the time can be too hard, or impossible, as it is painful and difficult to elaborate on. Afrodite portrayed a tough situation from the past, remembering with indignation since it was so disrespectful to the point of not requiring conversation:

When they look at me with that desire, OMG, I take it very, very, very, very badly, I take it terribly. 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. (...) An Azerbaijani came to me... like... he touched me... he put his (genital) 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 to him "last

time". (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

If such men are used to getting what they want without even asking for it, respect seems to be something unnecessary towards women. They ridicule women, possibly in front of a male audience (see Turelli & Vaz, 2011). This can relate to attitudes and strategies of war, where the dishonour of women in enemy terrain conveys a message of enemy domination and humiliation. Afrodite still added:

Many times, I ask for going to the bathroom with someone, because it bothers me to go alone. You know? Not out of fear, but because it makes me uncomfortable. Meet someone who makes a gesture or something like that. I don't like it at all, I hate it. (Afrodite, Interview 19 (2), 24/08/2020)

Afrodite said she did not feel fear but extreme discomfort. However, the invasion of a space that transcends physicality constrains her freedom of displacement and may be linked to what Roth and Basow (2004) called "rape mystique", with the power of forcing women to "constrict their lives" (p.256). Also, there is the famous case of Lisa Olson among journalists who struggled to do their job interviewing male athletes. She was known to suffer in a locker room, while just doing her job, which she described as "mind rape"¹² (see Kane & Disch, 1993). Even though in these situations there was no physical violation, the disturbance or the seeking to not be alone, developing strategies for getting around in Afrodite's situation, is evidence that things are definitely not right. She clarified:

It's not that they're going to do something to me, but because maybe they'll look at me, see me alone and say... 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)

Similarly, Perséfone also negotiates with the scenario of disrespectful desire, not raising her voice, but inhibiting herself in an attempt to remain invisible, so not need to face unwanted experiences.

¹¹ In this regard, see the dramatic and impactful documentary about US gymnastics athletes, "AtheteA", directed by Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk. TM & Copyright, 2020.

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lisa_Olson, accessed on 24/06/2021.

She prefers to be hidden, then avoiding 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 tight pants, I don't like to mark the body, I wear wider clothes because I don't like that it can draw attention and they look at me, it is uncomfortable for me. (...) I don't upload anything to my networks that could lead to their comments. It is very uncomfortable for me to receive comments or looks like that. (Perséfone, Interview 31 (2), 18/09/2020)

Perhaps Perséfone could adopt a similar posture in a subversive action; however, she feels cornered, and intimidated by the desirous gaze to the point that she seems to accept the supposed guilt attributed to women 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 awake it. Juno, in turn, presented opposition and confrontation to such women's subjugation that seemed quite healthy:

I don't like it at all. Every time they do that to me, I stare at the guy 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 Middle Age. 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 courage that I cannot shut up. (Juno, Interview 25 (2), 07/09/2020)

Juno revealed her way of acting and confronting these situations. Her attitude of standing up, not shutting up, confronts what is simply unfair. This seems powerful. It is important, though, to note that most women, also fighters, need to find support. Support among other women and support from sporting authorities, which can be complicated considering the traditional environments, but channels for receiving narratives of problems

of this nature should be open, in a welcoming, non-discriminatory, or prejudiced way.

Concluding thoughts

In this paper, we sought to analyze how the hegemonic sports culture affects karateka women's embodied subjectivities through the dictates of the male gaze. The article focused on the strict binary gender order definitely in place in the karate environment. We provided conceptual pieces on naturalized sports culture, and hegemony and the male gaze. Sports culture does not replace or nullify the martial culture but adds to it, intensifying the challenges imposed on women who are seen as other through the hegemonic male gaze. We approached two categories, on the eroticization of women in sport, and on the desirous male gaze over karateka women.

Sports environments are hybrid places, of permissions and prohibitions, as they allow going beyond the limits of life outside sports arenas, while restricting, controlling and in some way repressing the expression of all drives by rules. Even though sport and specifically high-level sport is about extreme demands on the body, the limits of intimacy do not have to be exceeded. This is unjustifiable, despite the extreme requirement for performance becoming legitimate. However, women's limits are understood by some as likely to be not respected but exceeded. Athletes interviewed oppose this, although at times they deviated from the central problem, specifically by engaging in criticism of other women. This leads to men simply benefiting from the established hegemony, even those who do not actively work for it. They may benefit though from this culture through the desirous or regulator gaze.

The notable media-related problem that sells athletes emerged, showing that athletes are aware and critical of the problem. Under the commercialization proposed by the media, athletes are left open to gazes of exploration, inferiorization, domination, regulation, and desire. Due

to this, they experience feelings of inadequacy, discomfort, doubt, and often, deception. It also caught our attention the unfair feeling reported of ridiculousness, which is configured as the exercise of male domination supported by symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2012). This showed that even though women are strong in remaining in environments like this and are fighting unfair situations, they need help. At the end of the article, we offered Juno's approach, but most of the athletes cannot naturally find that strength. We emphasize that they are brave in being there, facing oppressions daily, and becoming stronger. They often develop reflexivity and critically of the context, but it certainly is not an easy task to be carried out alone. So, a community of practice among women is welcome as much as having the support of conscious men, those with greater understanding capacity, as they are internal to male culture.

Infiltrated agents, belonging to the problematic environment but aware of the problems, are essential agents. Wheaton and Thorpe (2018) present satisfactory results in action sports that use

the help of some influential men committed to reversing unfair scenarios for women. In addition, karateka women within the field with some prominent places already conquered, represent fundamental agents of struggle. From the inside, even if slowly, they could open doors because they have the benefit and the pain of knowing the journey. The suffering already experienced by so many women can assume a redemptive function, gain meaning, ceasing to be in vain and becoming justified. It is still suffering, obviously better if it could have been avoided. But the cause of acting to avoid possible future suffering, known in one's own skin, the empathic knowledge of how much it hurts, is a powerful driving force for change. Suffering some pain in our own skin can be, in this sense, a driving factor of a critical stance that leads 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, in addition to the evident fight in the name of social justice.

Contribuciones de autoría

Fabiana Cristina Turelli: conceptualización, curación, análisis, metodología, desarrollo del proyecto, recursos/fondos, validación, escritura inicial, escritura final.

Alexandre Fernandez Vaz: conceptualización, metodología, recursos, supervisión, validación, escritura final.

David Kirk: conceptualización, metodología, recursos, supervisión, escritura final.

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