

Women athletes and mixed martial arts: a qualitative systematic review

Mulheres atletas e artes marciais mistas: uma revisão sistemática qualitativa

Mujeres atletas y mezcla martial arts: una revisión sistemática cualitativa



Grasiela Oliveira Santana da Silva

Secretaria de Estado da Educação, do Esporte e da Cultura de Sergipe, Aracaju, Sergipe, Brasil

e-mail: grasielaoss@hotmail.com



Angelita Alice Jaeger

Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil

e-mail: angelita@ufsm.br



Maria Paula Monteiro Pinheiro da Silva

Faculdade de Desporto da Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal

e-mail psilva@fade.up.pt

Abstract: The inclusion of women athletes in combat sports breaks social stereotypes and shows new looks on femininity. This investigation aims to reflect on the state of the art of women athletes in Mixed Martial Arts. We searched databases with the specific descriptors MMA and Women, Qualitative / Essay / Interview / Discourse. After the readings and inclusion and exclusion criteria, the sample comprised eight studies, resulting in three categories: Masculinity and being a woman; The body in / out of the octagon; Physicality of female athletes. It is possible to verify that fighters subvert the speech of heteronormativity, fight and construct a social visibility beyond their body spectacularization.

Keywords: Qualitative Systematic Review. Mixed Martial Arts. Women. Femininities.

Resumo: A inserção das atletas nos esportes de combate rompe estereótipos sociais e revela novos olhares sobre a feminilidade. O estudo reflete o estado da arte da presença das mulheres atletas no Mixed Martial Arts. Realizamos uma busca de estudos em bases de dados com os descritores específicos MMA e Women, Qualitative/ Essay/ Interview/ Discourse. Após as leituras e seguindo critérios de inclusão e exclusão, oito estudos compuseram a amostra, resultando tais categorias: A masculinidade e o ser mulher; O corpo in/out no octógono; Fisicalidade das mulheres atletas. É possível verificar que as lutadoras subvertem o discurso de heteronormatividade, lutam e constroem uma visibilidade social para além da espetacularização dos corpos.

Palavras-chave: Revisão Sistemática Qualitativa. Mixed Martial Arts. Mulheres. Feminilidades.

Resumen: La inserción de las atletas en los deportes de combate rompe estereotipos sociales y revela nuevas visiones sobre la feminidad. El estudio refleja el estado del arte de la presencia de las mujeres atletas en Mezcla Marcial Arts. Se realizó una búsqueda, en bases de datos, con los descriptores específicos MMA y Women, Qualitative/ Essay/Interview/Discourse. Después de analizar, siguiendo criterios de inclusión y exclusión, ocho estudios compusieron la muestra, resultando en las categorías: La masculinidad y el ser mujer; El cuerpo in / out en el octógono; Anatomía de las mujeres atletas. Es posible verificar que las luchadoras subvierten el discurso de heteronormatividad, luchan y construyen una visibilidad social más allá de la espectacularización de los cuerpos.

Palabras clave: Revisión Sistemática Cualitativa. Mezcla Marcial Arts. Las mujeres. Feminidad.

Submetido em: 01-03-2019

Aceito em: 31-07-2020

Introduction

Modern sport has become a highly prized institution, something people value and identify with, whether as athletes or spectators. Although Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) has gained ground in the sports field over the last decades of the 20th century, its dissemination through cyberculture (blogs, websites and other social networks) contributed significantly to its propagation, closeness and / or remoteness of sports lovers (GRESPLAN, 2014).

The combination of different martial arts and / or combat sports (capoeira, Jiu-Jitsu, muay thai, kickboxing, taekwondo, karate, judo, wrestling, boxing, wrestling and kung fu) makes MMA a challenging practice and raises interest in what is forbidden, the threshold of violence and the accessibility to the practice of women athletes.

Currently, women athletes are increasing in MMA (JARDIM, 2018). Women in a territory, which has been seen as a stronghold of masculinities, became a threat by breaking with the ideals of a normalized femininity, thus strengthening the role they are playing (ADELMAN, 2003; SILVEIRA; STIGGER, 2013).

This investigation presented masculinity (s) and femininity (s). They are discourse shaped, which recognizes and legitimizes the domination and power as attributes of men's social privileges. This would characterize a view of hegemonic masculinity moulded as a process of female subordination. In turn, masculinities and femininities convey a unique character of being a man and being a woman constructed throughout the various experiences of life (CONNELL; MESSERSCHMIDT, 2005).

Investigating and discussing women in combat sports becomes of great relevance to provide new insights on the construction of femininities in the arena sport. Although daring and liberating, women's visibility in a culturally masculinized sport is still incipient, reflecting the lack of scientific production on this scope. Some

studies point out a lack of research involving gender and fighting sports and that the discussions are mainly focused on a health-driven perspective (FOLLO, 2012; CAVALCANTI et al, 2018; JACOMIN et al, 2013). This review is significant to follow a path in combat spaces where stories of resistance and achievements are told.

A qualitative systematic review was conducted to follow, with new possibilities and viable directions to clarify other gaps (GOMES; CAMINHA, 2014). Analysing women in a MMA context through a systematic review is to enable the creation of a thought network, concepts and awareness that connect knowledge from research sources, revealing new paths and reflections on female visibility in culturally masculinized body practices.

Materials and methods

This systematic review encompasses and analyses qualitative studies on women athletes in MMA. It is structured into 4 phases: database detailed search, paper selection meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria, full reading and subsequent content analysis.

Criteria for Paper Selection

The current review used databases and has chosen relevant topics.

EBSCO + Sportdiscus comprised Sportdiscus full text, Academic Search Complete, Sociology Source Ultimate, MEDLINE full text and PsycINFO Pubmed, Scopus, Web of Science and Scielo . At first we used English and Portuguese keywords: Mixed Martial Arts and Women. The process of study screening and sifting used the abstract and two of the authors screened all studies. After the initial results, we defined another electronic search strategy and other keywords became necessary in both languages: Qualitative / Essay

/ Interview / Discourse. This process conducted during September 2017, allowed us to map qualitative papers, with women and their relationship with MMA.

Quantitative or mixed methodology, non-scientific and repetitive publications were excluded (see table 1).

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Scientific papers; Qualitative research;
Exclusion Criteria	Papers focusing on women and MMA. Quantitative or mixed research; Repeated papers; Non-scientific papers; Papers without feminine sample.

No temporal delimitation has been established for database search, but all studies here included were recent. It is important to remember that women athletes have been having an effective participation in MMA since 1996, but the entrance into the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) officially marks their insertion in November 2012, being official since the first dispute in February 2013 (GRESPLAN, 2014, 2015).

After data analysis all the information has been treated to enable the awareness of contents interpretation, hence allowing all text possibilities (BARDIN, 1977). Systematic procedures and reading objectives were applied to understand what was in and between the lines. Categorization procedure was conducted through the repeated and connected expressions. Papers presented in table 3 established a connection and described features related to women athletes and MMA. All the texts of the select studies were extracted electronically and entered into QSRNVivo 12. This software was used to assist in the coding and management of the data. QSRNVivo 12 developed hierarchical coding trees to organize

emerging categories and help in exploring the relationships between them. Group discussions and peer debriefing were held to address differences in coding and understand the results of each article. Moreover, the three authors verified independently coding and analysis for reliability by examining analysis consistency.

Results and discussion

The first search with the keywords Mixed Martial Arts and women presented 114 studies. After the insertion of other delimiting words – Qualitative / Essay / Interview / Discourse 32 studies remained (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Organization of selected papers

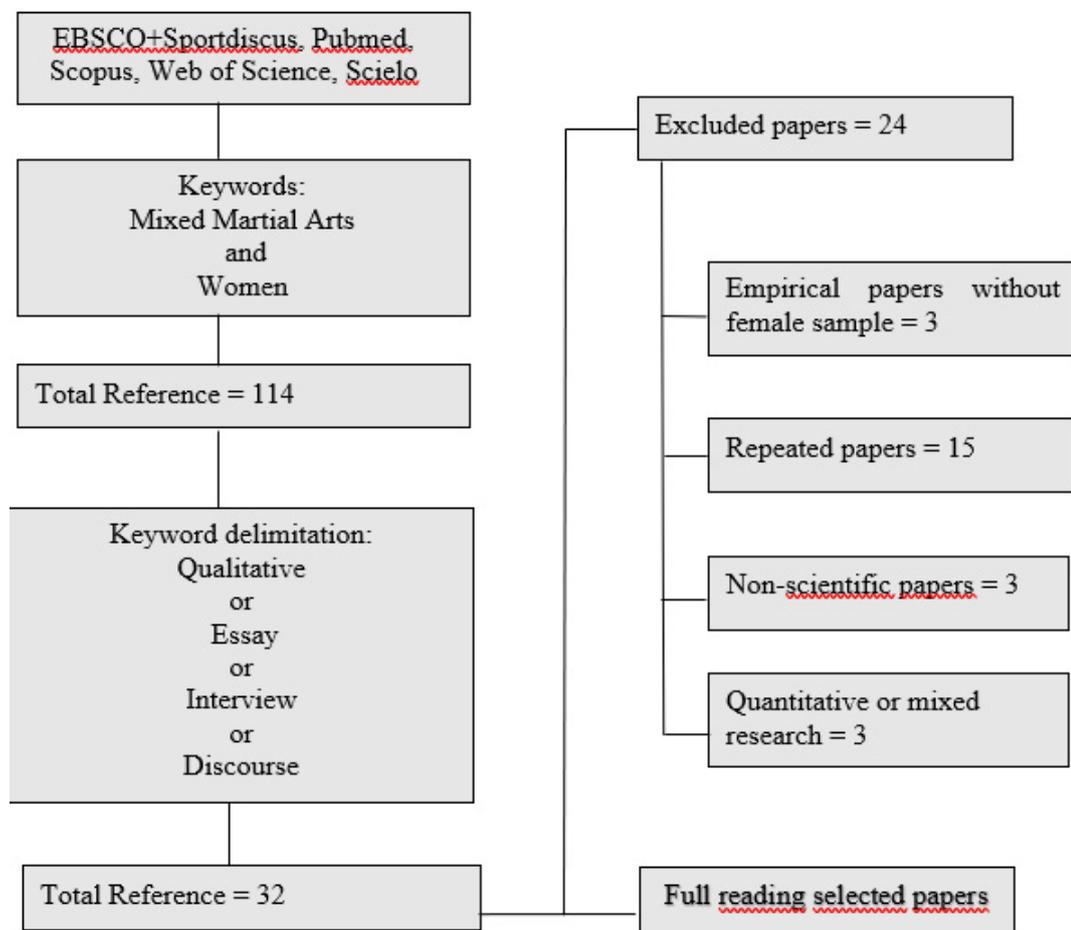


Table 2. Variables included in the coding process

CONTENTS	CODING VARIABLES
Authorship	Authors' surname.
Publishing Time	Year of publication.
Countries	Identify countries' research.
Database	Display the databases where the paper was found.
Purpose of the study	Present the research objective.
Related concepts	Identify the main paper concepts.
Information sources	Identify papers main data sources
Methodology	Paper methodology.
Participants	Present the sample.
Results	Present main results.

This investigation aimed the scientific production on women athletes in MMA by applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, being 8 papers selected for content analysis. After their full reading, we correlated them to enable a critical appreciation and highlight important elements about women's insertion into MMA. Contents and coding variables are presented in table 2: (FERNANDES et al., 2015; JAKUBOWSKA; CHANNON; MATTHEWS, 2016; MCCLEAREN, 2015; MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014; MING; SIMPSON; ROSENBERG, 2016; SAILORS; WEAVING, 2017; SALVINI; MARCHI JÚNIOR, 2016; WEAVING, 2014).

Table 3. Studies summary

AUTHOR (YEAR)	COUNTRY	DATA BASE	PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	R E L A T E D CONCEPTS	METHODOLOGY	RESULTS
Ming, Simpson and Rosenberg (2016)	EUA	Sportdiscus with full text	Exploring how athletes experience, interpret, accept, tolerate, and resist to the contradictory role adopted through participation in sports of power and performance.	Poststructuralist feminism; Phenomenology.	Empirical study Sample: 12 female athletes aged between 21 and 50 yrs. Interviews	The perception of femininity has evolved and certainly contributed to a new significance of the competitive athletic body detached from the dominant ideas of heteronormativity.
Sailors and Weaving (2017)	England	SCOPUS	Verify whether Rousey's embracing of Glamazon identity is an act of autonomy or evidence of a false consciousness.	Power	Essay	Power relationships cannot exist without resistance. Autonomy is a competence performed in a self-reflection process. Rousey has transformed herself to be identified as a Glamazon
Weaving (2014)	England	Web of Science; EBSCO+ Sportdiscus.	Verify if women's participation in the UFC challenges the traditional stereotypes of passivity and female physical invisibility.	Phenomenology	Essay	Women's fights in the UFC have boosted the potential for new gender constructs. The presence of women in MMA represents either the experience of authenticity and truly free bodies.
Fernandes et al. (2015)	Brazil	Scielo	Analyse the representations of femininity of professional Boxing and Mixed Martial Arts fighters to understand how these bodies put on the scene the transience and the possibilities of construction of the feminine.	Identity	Empirical study sample: 3 female athletes, two from Olympic Boxing and one from MMA. Interviews	Boxing and MMA fighters live different situations of body exhibition: in the fight characterized by performativities and outside featured by a normalized femininity.
Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm (2014)	Canada	EBSCO+ Sportdiscus	Analyse women's involvement in MMA.	Civilizing Process	Empirical study sample: 6 Female athletes aged between 20 and 35 yrs. Interviews	Behavioural norms associate female bodies as passive. Aggressiveness in women is considered uncommon, undesirable and particularly uncivilized. The disgust of women's bodies in MMA is the result of a civilizing process that narrows what women are allowed to.
Jakubowska, Channon and Matthews (2016)	EUA	EBSCO+ Sportdiscus	Explore how Joana Jedrzejczyk's two championship fights have been represented in the Polish media.	Gender	Essay	Although there was a gender discussion associated to a heterosexual fighter, the Polish media tended to look at her praising her personal qualities and taking pride in the significance of her victories. It is possible that the athlete's performance has been observed and evaluated in accordance with "male" sport norms, but the fighter's success challenged the discursive construction of gender.
McClearen (2015)	EUA	EBSCO+ Sportdiscus	Analyse the acceptance and inclusion of gender trespassing in MMA from cissexism and sexism discourses.	Cissexism and sexism	Essay	Sexism guarantees that the power to be a physical threat exclusively lies in the male body and reaffirms the need for criteria based on a biology in determining gender in MMA and in fighting sports.
Salvini and Marchi Júnior (2016)	Brazil	Scielo	Identify and analyse the discourse of rivalry between two MMA fighters: Ronda and Cyborg from reports published in the Tatame Magazine.	Field theory	Essay	Fighters' speeches illustrate the disputes over the intent to maintain or subvert positions within MMA. Verbal clashes are used as career advancements.

The first publications meeting criteria selection were from 2014 (table 3), with Brazil and the United States as prime MMA references. Essays and empirical researches are the main publication focus, although the latter smaller, due to the reduced number of female professional athletes. Essays had their origin both on cyberculture and on Ronda Rousey's biographical elements. Empirical studies were based on data from 21 athletes' interviews. We verified that their objectives pointed to women's access to a sports practice dominated by restrictions and to the (re)construction of stories of struggle, resistance, achievement and recognition.

Consequently, we intend to present and discuss the results and infer from women's positions in combat sports. Three categories emerged: I) Masculinity and being a woman: a challenge to passivity; II) the in / out body in the octagon: Athletes' femininities; III) Physicality of women athletes: The belief of training and pain.

Masculinity and being a woman: a challenge to passivity

MMA is a preserving masculinity sports practice whose power and knowledge define and delimit the construction of a strong, virile and courageous athlete (MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014; MING; SIMPSON; ROSENBERG, 2016; JAKUBOWSKA; CHANNON; MATTHEWS, 2016). The reproduction of masculine identity is a reflection of a social structure that exerts forms of control over female and male bodies, forms that works in a performative way to build body materiality and to materialize body sex (BUTLER, 1999). Therefore, the idea is that any materialization of sex occurs only within regulatory norms, and "...that sex is produced, that is, demarcated, circulated, differentiated and perceived as binary only within power relations" (LIMA, BELO, 2019, p.5). Nevertheless, binary perspectives go beyond body distinctions, since discourses are body part and it is not possible to separate the lived from the discursive body (PRINS; MEIJER, 2002). Text analysis allows observing that sex category covers women with the shadow of sacralisation

of a normalized femininity, boosted by fragility, emotion and passivity. Sport, as a social institution and a significant cultural phenomenon, constitutes either a fertile ground to body and subjectivity production and to the reproduction of representations of femininities and masculinities. These representations are constructed in context amidst power relations legitimized in discourses, practices, identity belonging and subjects' positions (FERNANDES et al., 2015).

The presence of women athletes in MMA represent a norm trespassing that breaks, pressures and questions behaviours of masculinity ideals, challenge norms and develop gender identities that are incompatible with what has been imposed on them: passivity, delicacy and body invisibility (MING; SIMPSON; ROSENBERG, 2016; SAILORS; WEAVING, 2017; WEAVING, 2014; JAKUBOWSKA; CHANNON; MATTHEWS, 2016). Accordingly, the fights undertaken in the octagon reflect the construction of a femininity, dissociated from an apathetic and servile behaviour. Women athletes in a privileged space build the culturally characteristic experiences of normalized masculinity, present restructured and (re)meaningful bodies from what is socially attributed as feminine (FERNANDES et al., 2015).

Their path in MMA is full of fissures on the borders of a masculine space, which is defined by feminine body transgression and movement. Their attitudes are considered deviant from what is to be intrinsically feminine, they imbalance constitutive norms and set a new femininity. As athletes, they deny certain behaviours and gestures associated with standard femininity and incorporate others belonging to masculine culture (FERNANDES et al. 2015). Although the display of their performance shows strength and courage, they care about hair and nail colour, elements that seek to assure their femininities. Thus, they seem to consider two contexts of self-assertion, in sport and in society. Self-assertion in sports, associated to physical training, development of techniques and compliance with the requirements of a professional athlete;

in society, related to the care with the appearance and with the elements of a normalized femininity (GOELLNER, 2005b).

Over the years, the various ways of becoming a woman and live her femininity, body perceptions, desires, and pleasures have been socially regulated, condemned and denied. On the other hand, sport is structured in discourses that produce particular body types classified by sex and that determine what is suitable and capable for each one. However, the perception of a female physical body neglects the range of “bodies” that frame the “feminine” (MCCLEAREN, 2015). To break with the normative sex impositions is to experience and perceive the diverse possibilities of femininities, to erase sexual boundaries and to subvert old certainties between sexes, thus becoming protagonists of their own stories. Their inclusion into MMA defies standards and destabilizes a field created and maintained under male’s domain structured upon the biology of body and sex, simultaneously representing a threat and a complementarity. A threat to call attention to women’s insertion into a sport constitutive of masculinity; complementarity for symbolizing a modern and civilized condition of partnership between men and women in social practices and spaces (GOELLNER, 2005a)

MMA practice is a threat to the myth of female frailty, with the training, physical preparation and sport characteristics redesigning a new athlete’s image. Thomazini, Moraes, and Almeida (2008) refer the assimilation of a double ethos as essential for belonging the group: the self-control, whose result is body transformation, hence controlling and rationalising pain. Consequently, ethos when incorporated by the athlete demystifies the awareness of the essence incompatible with the practice of combat sports.

The body in / out the octagon: athletes' femininities

MMA diffusion process, made largely through media strategies, contributed to the propagation and perception of women athletes in combat sports. Although legitimate, the insertion of women into combat represents a violation to the norm and threatens the Western Culture (ADELMAN, 2003; GOELLNER, 2005a, 2005b)

Although MMA athletes present a transgressive stance, many find themselves trapped into a sexist sport and into a social culture that reinforces and demarcates binarisms and strengthens the demands of hyperfemininity and heterosexual ideals (SAILORS; WEAVING, 2017). The labelling of female bodies, holding particular features, favours athletes' exclusion and hinders the construction of a plethora of skills and competences, which are associated to MMA practice. Dunning (1986b) sustains that sport issues and preserves ideologies and values that guide relationships between sexes. Nevertheless, this centralizing power can be the driving force of women taking action in the face of what they consider to be of their interest. Women erase the frontiers of normalisation and walk on previously forbidden paths that allow them a greater visibility and respect for their choices, despite being depicted in social spaces with a normalized femininity, which is considered legitimate, especially in many sport contexts (FERNANDES et al., 2015).

MMA was not the first and probably will not be the last sport to display a differentiated femininity of discourses and standards of normalization. Several studies (ADELMAN, 2003; DUNNING, 1986b; GOELLNER, 2003, 2005a; JAEGER; GOELLNER, 2011) have already had, in the core of the relationships established between men and women, a discussion about female athletes' behaviour, that crossed barriers and established rules to follow and guidelines to meet.

Jaeger and Goellner (2011) conducted a study on bodybuilding and presented a muscle potentiation of women athletes' body

that breaks and claims cultural representations of being feminine. More than preparing for the fight, they invest in their appearance and develop an exercise practice that, like the bodybuilders, tones their muscles and challenges normalized femininity, evidencing the femininities lived in the plural.

Accordingly, the multiple experiences and influences build the possibility of living femininity, breaks regulatory norms of a feminine body, a body that historically and cultural has been recognized as an attribute of nature (SCOTT, 1995). MMA athletes experience and distinguish it between two spaces, inside and outside the octagon, bridging relationships between them using the experiences, definitions and delimitations about being a woman (FERNANDES et al., 2015). These athletes invest and perceive their bodies according to the most diverse forms of cultural imposition, aiming to adapt them to the belonging criteria established by the group. Sailors and Weaving (2017) defined MMA athletes from two concepts: Glamazon and Amazon, sustaining that, the same athlete can incorporate two different ways of feeling and perceiving her body connected to the octagon in / out space. Amazons have an excess muscle and discursively construct their identity in the arenas exhibiting strength, skill and courage. Glamazons are outside and fitting into the social ideals and gender norms, hence considered feminine, fragile and heterosexual. It is possible to associate Ronda Rousey to both profiles. If, on the one hand, she affirms and defends the necessity of building a powerful body, distanced from the idealization of a fragile and delicate female body, on the other hand she promotes and defends the stereotype of hyper-femininity eroticized through photographic sessions.

Combat sports can be observed as a transgression and repetition arena, but also through the spectacularisation and sensualisation of athletes' bodies (FERNANDES et al., 2015; SAILORS; WEAVING, 2017; WEAVING, 2014). Women are allowed to play the sport as long as they do not distance themselves from the gracefulness and delicacy. The body became the cause of different justifications (LOURO, 2018) and in certain practices, it became

more visible and liable to all kinds of looking. Rousey is seen as the ideal type of fighter. Besides the efficient body technique, she displays attributes, such as sensuality and muscle volume within the normalized threshold (SALVINI; MARCHI JÚNIOR, 2016). There is a suspicion that the woman who exhibits a virile body distances herself from femininity, integrating nuances of masculinity. Yet, athletes reaffirm their femininity by exhibiting their beauty and spectacularizing their bodies. Women athletes' discursive representations and spectators make the apology to beauty and femininity as something to be preserved and worshiped, especially in sports considered violent (GOELLNER, 2005b).

The octagon in / out spaces, although divergent, intensify the inclusion of a female fighter and establish allegedly secure discourses of a delicate and more feminine reference. Women's breakthrough in power and performance sports enables the possibility of a cultural concept remodelling of what it means to be feminine (MING; SIMPSON; ROSENBERG, 2016). Femininity is intrinsically womanly and the several ways of experiencing. The space available to the female body is often of a larger radius than that she uses and incorporates into (SAILORS; WEAVING 2017; WEAVING, 2014). To define references and criteria that evaluate and decide how each athlete approaches or distances herself from a desired "norm" is an exercise of power, but it is possible to witness a resistance and subversion against the disciplinary impositions. Neither the embodied subject is the same all the time nor can the apparatus that builds its body holds it in a single existing way: either is it trapped or can it escape; sometimes athletes are glamazons other times they are amazons (FERNANDES et al., 2015; SAILORS; WEAVING, 2017).

Physicality of women athletes: the belief in training and pain

Professional MMA embodies high performance training that demands athletes to manage their body to acquire strength, technical skills and endurance. This sport offers them experiences of a lived body, when they take possession of the masculine symbols of physical fitness, namely great physical effort (MING; SIMPSON; ROSENBERG, 2016; WEAVING, 2014). The sparring process, which is effective to fight preparation is characterized by the use of minimum rules and real fight simulation and is the closest example of belief in training and resistance to pain. Showing or exercising strength, indulging in combat, giving or taking blows and taking bodily risks are attributes that women seem unable to make of their own and, therefore, would belong exclusively to masculinity (LOUVEAU, 2000). However, there seems to exist a need to protect the female body against physical damage originated by a probable violent action, whether coming from the competitions or from the resulting damages of training techniques (ADELMAN, 2003; MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014).

Courage, determination and strength take part in the resignification process of women athletes' role in MMA. Physical intensity is either related to the rejection of a weak and passive body and to the wish for the challenge (MING; SIMPSON; ROSENBERG, 2016; WEAVING, 2014). For a long time, fighters' participation was impossible by being sustained onto a discourse that classified, hierarchized, named, excluded, judged, evidenced and marked these women's bodies in different ways and in different social scenarios (JAEGER; GOELLNER, 2011).

The construction of female body physicality has a direct connection with the built experiences in sport. As Butler argues, bodies do not exist outside of cultural interpretation (BUTLER, 2003). Therefore, MMA women athletes actively participate in the construction of their physicality and in their singular image

of femininity. They respond, react and imprint on their bodies peculiarities that often escape the norms established as suitable to a woman. To be part of an inherently masculine sport triggers and reinforces discussions and societal perceptions on the beauty and delicacy of female bodies, still insistently based on the pillars of a biological and anatomical body determinism (MING; SIMPSON; ROSENBERG, 2016).

This physicality establishes a relationship with the search for excitement. Athletes' disputes waged in the Octagon involve a liberating excitement, not only reflected on their physical effort and dexterity techniques, but above all, an excitement of breaking the ties that bonded them to an anatomically fragile and passive body. We can establish a relationship between excitement and de-routinization of daily activities and what would be appropriate and safe, since the whole context of MMA, from the preparation to the struggle itself is seen as a challenge. There is a change in the body shape, the acquisition of a greater force, the technique refinement and the resistance to pain (MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014). There is an awareness of a potential injury increase as a result of participating in a contact sport. Training and competition are elements linked to experiences of pain and injury (MING; SIMPSON; ROSENBERG, 2016).

Physicality in MMA means that damaged bodies are an inevitable and frequent occurrence (MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014). Training and fight injuries confirm the courage and resistance to pain, and reaffirm the sense of sports belonging in which the marks and scars left are seen as a motivating factor of a personal fulfilment. Conversely, when leaving MMA, a bruised female body is often seen as the result of an abusive relationship against a woman (MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014).

The idea of a woman being able to injure and be injured by someone else violates the conception of a civilized female body and portrays the fight as something more repugnant when practiced by them. What we witness today is a socially accepted aggression, the result of a ritualized confrontation where rules are

established and followed by all (DUNNING, 1986a). It is necessary to emphasize that in this triad of training, - pain and violence, mental control plays a fundamental role. The mastery of this ability allows the maintenance of training and struggle, a better physical performance and, consequently, the achievement of the outlined goals (MING; SIMPSON; ROSENBERG 2016). On that account, MMA fighters give visibility to new forms of representation of being female and demonstrate, through the belief of training and pain, that they are prepared for the struggle waged inside and outside the octagon.

Conclusion

The analysis of the studies set the course of scientific productions from the relationship between women athletes and MMA and gave visibility to the discursive creation of femininities in the space of combat sports. By being protagonists of this great sport spectacle, they build their physicality in a very particular way. Therefore, they share not only a liberating excitement of being, but above all they construct a social visibility that allows them to delineate new drawings in the relation fights - body -sexuality, far exceeding adversities that, every day appear in fighter's construction and daily recognition. Women athletes' physicality brings to light the manageability of their bodies, and connecting them with training, pain and mental control becomes essential to a struggle waged inside and outside the octagon. The transition between two spaces establishes a relationship with their perceptions of femininity that, when built from their life experiences, emerges and points to femininities lived in the plural.

Power relations established in the context of MMA feed themselves with the construction of the show, athletes' bodies undergo different control strategies under different mechanisms and discourses. They are athletic bodies that adjust themselves and resist to the relations of power that spread through that territory.

This qualitative systematic review suggests new possibilities of research, among others, the importance to analyse the complex relationship between MMA women athletes' singularities and the exacerbated control of a femininity constructed in favour of spectacularization. Future studies, it will be crucial to analyse the corporeal identities constructions of MMA women athletes from two key elements: power and spectacle.

References

ADELMAN, M. "Mulheres atletas: re-significações da corporalidade feminina". **Revista Estudos Feministas**, v. 11, n. 2, p. 445-465, Jul/dez. 2003

BARDIN, L. **Análise de conteúdo**. Lisboa: Edições 70. 1977.

BUTLER, J. **Problemas de gênero: feminismo e subversão da identidade**. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Civilização Brasileira, 2003.

BUTLER, J. *Corpos que pesam: sobre os limites discursivos do "sexo"*. In: **O corpo Educado: pedagogias da sexualidade**. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica. 1999.

CAVALCANTI, T. S.; MÉLO, R. S.; SANTOS, A. B. L.; MOURA, C. B. G.; MOURA, D. L. Empoderamento, mulheres e práticas corporais: uma revisão sistemática da literatura. **Revista Licere**, Belo Horizonte, v. 21, n. 3, p. 319-344. 2018.

CONNELL, R. W.; MESSERSCHMIDT, J. W. "Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept". **Gender & society**, v.19, n.6, p. 829-859. 2005.

DUNNING, E. "Dynamics of modern sport: Notes on achievement-striving and the social significance of sport". In: ELIAS, N.; DUNNING, E. **Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process**. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 203-221. 1986a

DUNNING, E. "Sport as a male preserve: Notes on the social sources of masculine identity and its transformations". In: ELIAS,

N.; DUNNING, E. **Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process.** Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 242-259. 1986b.

FERNANDES, V.; MOURÃO, L.; GOELLNER, S. V.; GRESPAN, C. L. "Women in combat: Representations of femininity in boxers and MMA fighters". **Revista da Educação Física**, v. 26, n. 3, p. 367-376. jul/sept. 2015.

FOLLO, G. Uma revisão de literatura sobre mulheres e artes marciais: onde estamos agora. **Sociology Compass**, v. 6, n. 9, p. 707-717, 2012.

GOELLNER, S. V. **Bela, maternal e feminina: imagens da mulher na Revista Educação Física.** Ijuí: Editora Unijuí. 2003.

GOELLNER, S. V. "Mulher e esporte no Brasil: entre incentivos e interdições elas fazem história". **Pensar a prática**, v. 8, n. 1, p. 85-100, jan./jun. 2005a.

GOELLNER, S. V. "Mulheres e futebol no Brasil: entre sombras e visibilidades". **Revista Brasileira de Educação Física e Esporte**, v.19, n. 2, p.143-151, abr/jun. 2005b

GOMES, I. S.; CAMINHA, I. d. O. "Guia para estudos de revisão sistemática: uma opção metodológica para as Ciências do Movimento Humano". **Movimento**, v. 20, n. 1, p. 395-411.jan/ mar. 2014

GRESPAN, C. L. **Mulheres no octógono: performatividades de corpos e de sexualidades.** 2014. Dissertação (Mestrado) - Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Escola de Educação Física, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências do Movimento Humano, Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil.

GRESPAN, C. L. **Mulheres no Octógono: performatividades de corpos, de gêneros e de sexualidades.** Curitiba: Appris. 2015.

JACOMIN, L. S.; ITO, I. H.; FERNANDES, R. A.; CHRISTOFARO, D. Estudos sobre arte marcial e lutas na literatura brasileira: revisão sistemática. **Revista Colloquium Vitae**, jul/dez, 5 (2): 0-0. 2013.

JAEGER, A. A.; GOELLNER, S. V. "O músculo estraga a mulher? A produção de feminilidades no fisiculturismo". **Estudos Feministas**, vol. 19, n. 3, p. 955-975, set/dez. 2011.

JARDIM, J. G. "**It's time**"! **MMA feminino, Mercado da beleza e cis-heteronormatividade**: uma etnografia multissituada com lutadoras brasileiras. 2018. Tese (Doutorado em Ciências Sociais) - Universidade Estadual Paulista (Unesp), Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências. Marília, SP.

JAKUBOWSKA, H.; CHANNON, A.; MATTHEWS, C. R.. "Gender, Media, and Mixed Martial Arts in Poland: The Case of Joanna Jdrzejczyk". **Journal of Sport & Social Issues**, v. 40, n. 5, p. 410-431. 2016.

LIMA, V. M.; BELO, F. R. R. (2019). Gender, Sexuality and the Sexual: the Subject between Butler, Foucault, and Laplanche. **Psicologia em Estudo**, 24, e41962. Epub February 18, 2019. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4025/1807-0329e41962>.

LOURO, G. L. **Um corpo estranho**: ensaios sobre sexualidade e teoria Queer. São Paulo: Autêntica. 2018.

LOUVEAU, C. Mulheres desportivas, corpos desejáveis. **Le Monde Diplomatique** – Edição Portuguesa, 19 (2), p. 20-21. 2000.

MCCLEAREN, J. "The paradox of Fallon's fight: Interlocking discourses of sexism and cissexism in Mixed Martial Arts fighting". **New Formations**, v. 86, p. 74-88. 2015.

MIERZWINSKI, M.; VELIJA, P.; MALCOLM, D. "Women's Experiences in the Mixed Martial Arts: A Quest for Excitement?". **Sociology of Sport Journal**, v. 31, n. 1, p. 66-84. 2014.

MING, S.; SIMPSON, D.; ROSENBERG, D. "An Exploration of Experiences of Female Participants in Power and Performance Sports". **Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal**, v. 24, n. 1, p. 35-42. 2016.

PRINS, B.; MEIJER, I. C. "Como os corpos se tornam matéria: entrevista com Judith Butler". **Revista Estudos Feministas**, v. 10, n. 1, p.155-167. janeiro. 2002

SAILORS, P. R.; WEAVING, C. "Foucault and the Glamazon: The Autonomy of Ronda Rousey". **Sport, Ethics and Philosophy**. v 11, n. 4, p. 428-439. April. 2017

SALVINI, L.; MARCHI JÚNIOR, W. "More than a weight issue: Analysis of the content of rivalry discourses between MMA (mixed martial arts) fighters Ronda Rousey and Cris Cyborg". **Movimento**, v. 22, n. 3, p. 795-808. Janeiro. 2016.

SCOTT, J. Gênero, uma categoria útil para a análise histórica. **Revista Educação e Realidade**. Porto Alegre, v. 20, n. 2, p. 71-99, jul/dez. 1995.

SILVEIRA, R. d.; STIGGER, M. P. "Jogando com as feminilidades: um estudo etnográfico em um time de futsal feminino de Porto Alegre". **Revista Brasileira de Ciências do Esporte**, v. 35, n. 1, p. 179-194. jan/mar. 2013.

THOMAZINI, S. O.; MORAES, C. E. A.; ALMEIDA, F. Q. "Controle de si, dor e representação feminina entre lutadores (as) de Mixed Martial Arts". **Pensar a Prática**, v. 11, n. 3, p. 281-290, set/dez. 2008.

WEAVING, C. "Cage fighting like a girl: Exploring gender constructions in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC)". **Journal of the Philosophy of Sport**, v. 41, n. 1, p. 129-142. novembro. 2014.

Publisher

Universidade Federal de Goiás. Faculdade de Educação Física e Dança. Publicação no Portal de Periódicos UFG. As ideias expressadas neste artigo são de responsabilidade de seus autores, não representando, necessariamente, a opinião dos editores ou da universidade.