

“You’re good...for a girl”. Exploring the impact of masculine hegemony on the gender identity of female judoka

Abstract

Gender in sport is a commonly researched area, however there are few studies in sports where mixed-gender fighting during training occurs. This research aimed to explore the experiences of elite female judoka (judo players) in the U.K., and the potential impact of gender upon the athletes’ construction of athletic identities.

A qualitative research design was utilised to analyse gender dynamics and interpret the meanings given to the judokas’ experiences. 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with elite athletes and data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify the main themes.

Two main themes emerged: the treatment of female judoka by others; and the means by which the judoka construct their identities. Findings suggested the judoka are affected by masculine hegemony, often stereotyped and discriminated against both within and outside their sport. Many participants coped by constructing a separate ‘feminine’ identity to avoid any consequences in social settings and to mitigate their participation in judo. While it is evident sport is becoming more accepting of women participating in sports like judo, it is clear female athletes still face a number of issues that must be challenged to promote an equal sporting environment for all.

Keywords: judo, gender, sport, identity, masculine hegemony

Introduction

Since women were first permitted to compete in the 1900 Paris Olympic Games, there has been a gradual shift towards greater gender equality within sport. This was particularly evident in the 2012 London Olympic Games, the first Games where women, making up 44% of the participants, competed in every listed sport (IOC, 2016). Considering that sport was traditionally a predominantly male-only domain, women's participation in sport contests many gender stereotypes, including those regarding physical ability, and women's perceived role in society (Hanson, 2012). Despite the many advances in gender equality, the notion of women participating in combat sports in particular remains in conflict with society's dominant image and construct of femininity.

This paper focuses on the Olympic sport of judo, originally created as a self-defence art that could be mastered by anyone, regardless of size, gender or age (Yoffie and Kwak, 2002). While men's judo was introduced as an Olympic sport in 1964, it was not included in the women's programme until 1992 (IOC, 2005). Strength, endurance, speed, power and aggressiveness are essential in order to dominate in judo (International Judo Federation, 2013b). Given that these are stereotypically masculine characteristics with women traditionally assumed to be more emotional, gentle, compassionate and passive (Krane, 2001), female judoka (judo athletes) are likely to represent a challenge to prevailing notions of femininity.

Background

It is well documented that, from the moment a baby is born, most often he or she will be dressed in 'gender appropriate' colours such as pink or blue, and given 'gender appropriate' gifts, for example dolls or toy cars (Navarro, 2014). Similarly, certain activities and sports are still deemed more suitable for boys, with others more appropriate for girls. Boys are expected to participate in tough, competitive, team sports, while girls are encouraged to participate in elegant sports like figure skating, dance, and gymnastics (Wilde, 2015). Schmalz and Kersetzer (2006) found that young children are acutely aware of the social stigma surrounding gender

and sports, and that they allow this to affect their interests and patterns of participation. This tendency was found by Klomsten, Marsh, and Skaalvik (2005) to be continued into high-school, where girls and boys largely limited their involvement to “gender-appropriate” sports. The penalties for non-conformity can be harsh, with those crossing gender boundaries often categorised by their peers as anomalies or deviants (Krane, 2001), leading to stigmatisation, labelling and stereotyping (Blinde and Taube, 1992, Halbert, 1997).

Coakley (2014) explains that women in sport are often still viewed as invaders of male turf due to gender ideology myths which suggest women are naturally weak, susceptible to injuries, and should only participate in non-competitive activities. The gender practices which reinforce the dominance of men and the positional subordination of women within society are encapsulated in the concept of masculine hegemony (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This theory explains how gender hierarchy also restricts the range of appropriate behaviour for men, accentuating the need for displays of heterosexuality, aggression and assertiveness (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

While today’s society is far more accepting of men participating in traditionally feminine sports and women in masculine sports, in those where the athletes are still able to demonstrate appropriate gender identities, hegemonic masculinity often remains undisturbed (Connell, 1987). For example, while men within sports like cheerleading, figure skating or gymnastics are frequently viewed as inferior or feminised, male cheerleaders are also, conversely, often promoted as brave, strong, agile and heterosexual, with the power to ‘hold and throw’ women above their heads (Anderson, 2008). In fact, Anderson (2008) also found that even men in traditionally feminine sports like cheerleading often retain misogynistic and sexist views about female athleticism. Using women as sexual objects in this way often allows young men to gain respect and status among their peers (Sabo, 2000), perhaps counteracting any challenges to their sexuality or masculinity.

Male dominance and binary gender opposition is still therefore a challenge. Birrell and Cole (1990) explained this binary gender belief, stating that sport influences “the assumption that there are two and only two, obviously universal, natural, bipolar, mutually exclusive sexes that necessarily correspond to stable gender identity and gendered behaviour” (p3). As a result, female athletes must cope with the expectations of suitable gender behaviour while also dealing with the requirements of athleticism (Kolnes, 1995; Cox and Thompson, 2000; Fallon and Jome, 2007; Guérandel and Mennesson, 2007). This dilemma leads to what is known as the ‘female/athlete paradox’, as athletes can struggle to find and maintain a balance between the two identities (Kolnes, 1995; Halbert, 1997; Mennesson, 2000; Dworkin, 2001; Krane, 2001, Krane et al., 2004; Meân and Kassing, 2008; Ross and Shiness, 2008).

Kolne (1995) suggested that heterosexuality is the organising principle within women’s sport, explaining that feminine female athletes have advantages over those perceived as ‘masculine’. Female athletes who meet society’s expectations for women are more likely to achieve power and privilege, leading to athletes over-emphasising their femininity to become ‘accepted’ within society and to avoid the issues often experienced through nonconformity.

Sport and the media have been linked as a relationship which reinforces hegemonic activities (Pedersen, 2002). Media coverage of female sports and athletes is minimal in comparison to men (Duncan, Messner, and Willms, 2005; Cooky et al, 2013) and when female sports are in the media, the narrative often focuses on non-sport related aspects such as personal life, family, and relationships (Wensing and Bruce, 2003), humorous feature stories, or sexual objectification (Messner, Duncan, and Cooky 2003). For example, shooter Corey Cogdell-Unrein was identified as “wife of a Bears lineman” after winning a bronze medal at the Rio Olympics in 2016 (Bryant, 2016).

Pressures and expectations experienced by female athletes to present themselves in a specific way can lead to a number of potential issues, particularly in sports where muscularity is advantageous. This conflict between strength and athleticism and a feminine, acceptable

body can negatively impact athlete's identities, self-esteem, body image, health and performance (Johns, 1996). Many sportswomen attempt to avoid negative stereotypes by avoiding weight lifting and increasing cardiovascular exercise to reduce muscle mass and assume a more accepted 'feminine' and thin body type (Dworkin, 2001). Athletes with a negative perception of their body size are more likely to experience eating disorders and other unhealthy behaviours (Krane et al, 2001). This is concerning in judo as eating disorders are more common in both women (Hoek and Van Hoeken 2003), and in weight classed sports (Stoutjesdyk and Jevne, 1993; Sundgot-Borgen, 1994). One study discovered that 82% of judo players regularly engaged in rapid weight loss (Artoli et al, 2009) and Rouveix et al (2007) highlighted the relationships between eating disorders and body esteem in judoka, stating that they experience high social pressure to lose weight. The study found that female athletes report a lower desired 'ideal' body size and weight than male judoka and non-athletes, and experience low self-worth and body image issues from gaining weight.

Within integrated training settings like judo, the belief that women are always weaker than men can cause women to feel segregated (West and Zimmerman, 1987). While sparring, male boxers were found to withhold their intensity with female athletes and it was common for coaches to treat female athletes as 'weaker', encouraging them to do less intense training or exercises (Channon, 2014). Similarly, Sisjord (1997) discovered female wrestlers often experience unfair treatment in comparison to male wrestlers, receive less attention and coaching, and are viewed as less important. The perception that women are weak and easily hurt is common (Channon, 2013a; 2013b), and can affect women's training environment. While it is important to consider size and strength differences when fighting the opposite gender, men not wanting to 'hit a girl' can result in excessive disengagement to the point that the female athletes aren't able to experience a 'real fight' (Channon, 2013a; 2014). As a result, women may feel frustrated, less competent in their ability and training experiences, and may lose their sense of belonging within the club (Channon and Jennings, 2013).

Negotiating Gender Identity in Female Judoka

Lantz and Schroeder (1999) stated that female athletes identify themselves as more masculine than those who don't participate in sport. Those who participate in masculine sports have been found to purposefully over-emphasise their femininity outside sporting environments (Kolnes, 1995; Halbert, 1997; Young, 1997; Krane, 2001). Krane et al (2004) found that female athletes felt that being feminine contrasted with being athletic, and many believed they were judged differently from 'normal' women, largely due to the development of greater muscle mass. Despite these views, they were proud of their athleticism and strong bodies, and stated that sport made them feel powerful.

Turning specifically to judo, Kavoura *et al* (2015) discovered that many judoka construct multiple identities to appear both feminine and athletic in different environments. Even the older judo players, who were more likely to state they were comfortable appearing athletic and strong were still found to exaggerate their femininity (Kavoura *et al*, 2015). In their earlier study, Greek judo players were noted as feeling embarrassed by their strength and athleticism, avoiding heavy weight training to prevent large muscle gain (Kavoura *et al*, 2014). In contrast, Danish judoka were found to be proud to be different from other women, embracing and constructing their identity as judo players in a more positive manner (Kavoura *et al*, 2014).

Female athletes who are perceived as masculine may face sexist discrimination and prejudice (Krane, 2001). These consequences can occur through negative treatment by coaches and officials, unfair bias by judges, verbal harassment and less media attention (Kolnes, 1995; Halbert, 1997; Sisjord, 1997, Krane, 2001). Sportswomen who participated in non-traditional, masculine sports are often assumed to be lesbians (Young, 1997). This 'lesbian-label' stems from the notion that women who defy gender roles cannot be "real" women (Lenskyj, 1991). This stigmatisation produces a fear of being labelled and, as a result, 'keeps heterosexual women in their place and lesbian women closeted' (Wright and Clarke, 1999, p239).

Violating gender roles often creates issues and conflicts outside sport, for example at social events, school and work (Knight and Giuliano, 2003). Even when performing stereotypical female activities such as shopping for clothes, female athletes are often reminded by friends and those around them that they are 'different' from the norm; for example friends often acted surprised and drew attention to female athletes when they chose to wear feminine clothing (Krane et al, 2004).

To counter the issues related to perceived masculinity, it has been theorised that many female athletes adopt 'apologetic behaviour' as a coping strategy to fit with societal images. This is more common in masculine sports (Kolnes, 1995; Halbert, 1997; Young, 1997; Krane, 2001), and is often a result of pressure and comments from friends, parents, coaches, teammates and boyfriends (Adams *et al.*, 2005; Ezzell, 2009). Apologetic behaviour occurs by intentionally adopting feminine behaviours and characteristics, including hiding or de-emphasising abilities and athleticism, adorning a feminine body with clothing and accessories, associating romantically with men and speaking negatively of masculine or lesbian athletes (Davis-Delono *et al.*, 2009). Athletes were found to predominately adopt these strategies outside the sporting setting, with less apologetic behaviour occurring during participation (Royce et al, 2003; Adams et al., 2005; Fallon and Jome, 2007; Ross and Sinew, 2008). George (2005) and Hardy (2013) revealed that the degree of apologetic behaviour displayed is dependent on the situation and environment, for instance the athlete will feel more pressured to act in a feminine manner during interviews and when socialising with non-athletes but within sport would feel more comfortable and are able to act 'themselves'. This was demonstrated in Ross and Shinenew's (2008) work, where gymnasts and softball players behaved in a feminine manner at formal events and social events, however at training, home or in daily life, they did not go out of their way to act differently. A similar pattern was noted in competitive judo where female players reported over-exaggerating their femininity outside the judo environment, for

example by wearing fashionable clothing, as they feared being perceived as masculine (Guérandel and Mennesson, 2007).

In contrast, Broad (2001) found female rugby players displayed unapologetic behaviour, characterised by a resistance to gender ideals, the confronting of heterosexual expectations, and a challenge to the stigmas which often are a result of this behaviour (for example by opposing beauty ideals, showing and using physical strength and displaying fluid or same gender sexual orientations).

The area of gender issues in sport has been a pervasive theme in sport sociology research but work examining gender in sports like judo where men and women participate in physical combat against each other in training is rare (Guérandel and Mennesson, 2007). While there has been some work involving gender in judo in other countries like Greece and Denmark (Kavoura *et al*, 2014; Kavoura *et al*, 2015), there is a dearth of such work in the U.K.

The focus of this research is to investigate the potential impact of masculine hegemony and stereotypes on the gender identity of elite female judo players. The aim is to explore how female judokas negotiate their athleticism and their femininity, both within and outside a judo environment, and to examine how they manage any potential issues to continue their participation in the sport.

Methodology

The study utilised a qualitative design, focusing on a naturalistic, interpretive approach to analyse the gender dynamics and constructions within judo (Merriam, 2002). This process involves studying things and people in their natural environment, to understand the meanings given to experiences (Ritchie *et al*, 2003).

Semi-structured interviews were used to allow participants to reflect on their individual experiences and expand on areas of particular interests in their own words (Gratton and Jones, 2010). Less formal conversation and elaboration of answers were encouraged, meaning more

rich, descriptive data was collected whilst still following a structure to keep the interview on topic (Jamshed, 2014).

Criterion-based sampling, where participants are selected based on their adherence to a set of predetermined characteristics, attributes, or required experience (Sparkes and Smith, 2014) was employed to recruit participants who were female judo players, competing in junior and senior national teams, and over 16 years old. In total, 10 female judoka were interviewed, comprising 7 junior athletes (age range 16-19) and 3 senior athletes (age 20+). Codes have been assigned to preserve anonymity and are detailed below.

Anonymous Code	Age	Age Group	Years Training
J1	17	Junior	9
J2	17	Junior	6
J3	18	Junior	11
J4	17	Junior	13
J5	16	Junior	7
J6	18	Junior	8
J7	19	Junior	11
S1	22	Senior	13
S2	23	Senior	16
S3	22	Senior	9

Table 1 – (Participant Information)

J=Junior athlete; S=Senior athlete

Following ethical approval from the authors' institution, judoka were approached through the National Governing Body. Interviews were then arranged via email, and took place at the national training centre. The interviews lasted between 20 and 44 minutes, with questions firstly focused broadly on the participants' general experience within sport, before progressing

to specific areas surrounding gender. Printed media photographs featuring male athletes and female judoka were shown alongside image searches for male and female magazine covers to prompt reflection and discussion on representation of female athletes.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Informal notes and audio recordings were transcribed within 48 hours to ensure responses were documented accurately, with the words, tone and language of the participant being captured (Bailey, 2008). Silverman's (2006) six stage thematic analysis process was used to code the data and identify the main themes, which were then peer reviewed as a means of augmenting the trustworthiness and credibility of the data and analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The research highlighted a number of issues related to gender which impacted upon the female judo players. There were two primary themes emerging from the athletes' experiences of identify as a female judoka: internal factors regarding their own body image, and their identity within and without their sport; and external factors, pertaining to their perceptions of gender-based treatment by coaches and male athletes. The subsequent sections consider these factors in more depth.

Perception of Treatment

Participants reported concerns regarding their treatment by coaches and male athletes, falling into three subthemes: coaching bias, masculine domination, and stereotyping sexualities.

Coaching Bias

The majority of athletes reported that they were continually given less attention by the coaches than male judoka:

“Because there are significantly less [sic] girls in the full time set up, to get attention, you do have to, you find yourself asking for attention a bit more sometimes.... It's frustrating sometimes” (S3).

“Girls don’t get as much attention in the club...You see more improvement in guys where they get big and strong when they go through puberty whereas girls don’t get that...I had another coach that liked girls more so he kind of brought me through that phase, up until the point where [the coach] was like ‘oh she’s actually not that bad and I can pay attention to her again’.” (S1).

“Coaches always use boys as examples like ‘look how hard he’s working’... we’re all just standing feeling like we’re getting into trouble, but we can’t work any harder. It’s kind of frustrating but I feel like there’s nothing I can do about it... I just have to get on with it and hope that I do get noticed eventually” (J4).

The female judoka were conscious of being secondary to the men, which led to a sense of frustration and resentment. The prioritisation of the male experience as the most legitimate and the dominance of male physical capital was also expressed in the coaches’ reluctance to permit the women to spar with the men:

“The way they split it at [Squad Training] and stuff, they decide to put the under 46kg boys and all the girls at that side [When segregating the weights, deciding who can fight who]. I fight under 78kg...I spoke to [the coach] and I was like ‘can I go on the bigger side to benefit myself?’ and he was really reluctant to let me go until I said, ‘well look, fighting them isn’t going to help me’. It makes me feel annoyed because it is having an impact on my training and not in a good way” (J5).

“The coaches don’t expect the girls to do as good [sic] as the boys. They always like, sometimes if you’ve not got a partner and you go with the lightweight boys the coaches always split you up...they don’t expect you to do as well against them as another boy would” (J4).

While the coaches’ hesitation to mix male and female athletes in training could be attributed to concerns regarding safety, the segregation was a source of frustration for the women in the study. It was particularly vexing for J5, a heavy weight female, as she felt the coaches’

expectation for her to fight only lightweight boys was detrimental to her training. West and Zimmerman (1987) stated that in mixed sports settings, such segregation due to the belief that women are weaker and not able to be as successful can cause women to feel isolated within the environment, further facilitating the dominance of men. Channon (2014) reinforces this, stating that coaches treating female athletes as weaker and less capable than men promotes a dominant environment for male athletes. Sisjord's (1997) study similarly found female wrestlers felt they came second to the men and that they weren't part of a team as a result of unfair treatment, less attention and coaching, and being viewed as less important.

Male Dominance

The female judoka also experienced negative treatment from male judoka. Firstly, they explained that they were often sexualised by them:

“You sometimes get some unwanted attention from them, just like them trying to flirt with you and chat you up ...there's not really any reason for it other than to entertain them. It's just, boys being teenager boys” (J7).

“It depends on the 'male' but I think a lot of them are quite...because there's not a lot of girls in this sport a lot of them are quite flirty, and probably a bit like, objectifying you because you're one of the only girls... And I think sometimes they just take it too far” (J3).

The objectification of female athletes is a common issue in sport, as they are often viewed as sexual objects for the men to win over, a challenge to be accomplished (Curry, 1991; Messner, 1992; Schacht, 1996). The male judoka appear to use the females as entertainment, objectifying and sexualising them for their enjoyment. The idea that 'boys will be boys' implies that the female judoka experience this behaviour so often that it has turned into normalcy, and as a result they believe this is just what teenage boys do. While this may be a common occurrence even outside sport, it may be exaggerated within judo due to the low number of female judoka. The idea that objectification is the norm can lead to self-objectification

(Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997), resulting in body image issues (Daniels, 2009), and in focusing more on appearance than building talent (McKinley and Hyde, 1996). Sexual objectification is said to gain men respect within their peer group (Sabo, 2000). Therefore, it could be said that the male judoka do this to achieve status among other judoka, and perhaps feel pressured to do so to fit in.

The male judoka were also found to undermine the female judoka's talents and abilities:

“Guys always say like ‘girl’s judo isn’t real judo’...Guys taking away from your achievements because you had less people in your category than they did...I went to a competition and won gold...one of the boys was like ‘aw, my bronze is better than your gold because there was 25 guys in my category’” (J4).

“There’s always ‘aw but you do girl’s judo, it’s not as tough and it’s easier to win medals’... If you do well in a competition, and you’re away with the squad and the boys don’t do as well..., there’s always the comment that ‘well we’ve got harder categories because there’s more people, there’s more men that do judo than females’ So there’s always that... ‘it’s easier for you’. Which is always pretty annoying...There’s always that negative comment about your ability. They’ll say, ‘aw yeah you’re good... for a girl’” (S2).

The idea that ‘women’s judo isn’t real judo’ and that women’s judo is easier is a reoccurring issue for the female judoka. Once again, they are reminded of gender hierarchy (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), as the men demonstrate their belief that they are the dominant sex within judo. The men believe that the women do a ‘lesser’ version of judo than they do, as though they are not skilled enough or strong enough to be on the same level as male athletes. Hargreaves (1994) explained that women’s achievements and skills are often downplayed, undermined, and compared to the performances of men. When the female judoka are successful in competition, the male judoka undermine their achievements, claiming it is easier for them to win as there is often fewer females competing. Undermining the female judoka’s achievements could cause them to lose motivation, feel unsupported and experience feelings

of self-deprecation (Harter, 1999; Donohue *et al*, 2007), which could in turn affect their performance and overall enjoyment of the sport. The results also reflect Hanson's (2012) statement that stereotypical opinions of female athletes cause their abilities and accomplishments to be overlooked.

The stereotypical opinion by male judoka that women are weak also affects the training environment:

“when you're actually fighting guys it's hard to tell if they're actually fighting or going along with it” (J7).

“When you're training and you throw...like a man, they'll be like 'aw that was really good', like quite patronizing. Or they'll be like, quite shocked, em, or they'll maybe just laugh it off like 'I wasnae [was not] really trying' (S2).

The male athletes often 'go easy' against them during fighting, as there is a common perception that females are weak, easily hurt, and can't handle getting hit or thrown (Guérandel and Mennesson, 2007; McNaughton, 2012; Channon, 2013a; 2013b). The female judoka often experience men treating them as inferior, and patronising them even when the women throw them. When they are thrown by a women, they brush it off as a 'mistake' because they weren't trying, and are often mocked by peers for losing to a girl:

“I think I've probably thrown someone and they've [other male judoka] gone...”you've just been thrown by a girl”. It kind of makes you feel like you're worse at judo than them, even though you've just chucked them about. It's like...just cause you're a man doesn't mean you're better at judo than me” (J3).

Conversely, the women also experienced aggression after throwing a male judoka:

“There's this one boy who's got a really high opinion of himself, and he got really angry and really aggressive and was trying his hardest to throw me” (J4).

“There's definitely been a reaction there when they've gone harder during randori [fighting]...trying to throw me even harder and even trying to injure me.” (J5).

This aggression appears to occur from the embarrassment of being thrown. It is apparent that the male judoka feel threatened by defeat, as the women are challenging masculine hegemony (Connell, 1987), disturbing their feelings of dominance within the environment. In this sense, female judoka are viewed as ‘invaders’ of male turf (Coakley, 2014). The male judoka see themselves as the dominant group within the sport, and feel intimidated by the female athletes when they challenge this hierarchy.

Stereotyping Sexualities

Lastly, the judoka described a stereotypical assumption that all female judoka are lesbians:

“My mum was always worried when I first started about me becoming gay!...she’d heard a lot about female judo players becoming gay and like past stories of like somebody’s mum and people she trained with are now lesbians. She didn’t want that to happen to me” (S1).

“They would just *assume*, because you’re quite masculine, quite muscly, their stereotype of someone being gay or something like that” (S2).

“There was a guy I went to school with who was like ‘judo is only for girl’s who are lesbians’...When so many people think the same thing, then you start to question it...You think, ‘oh, is that how I’m seen, is that what people think of me?’” (J5).

Lenskyj (1991) described the ‘lesbian-label’ as a result of society viewing those who contradict gender roles as ‘different’ and not ‘real’ women. In this case, the judoka experience those around them labelling them as masculine, separating them from other woman, and coming to the conclusion that they are lesbian. This may cause the judoka to question their image, as described by J5. In addition, this labelling and stigmatization could prove to have an impact on those judoka who are in fact lesbian, as their identity is being used as an insult.

Athletic Vs Feminine Identity

Identity - Within Judo Vs Outside Judo

Participants discussed their persona within the judo environment, explaining that they behaved in a manner which tended to be tougher, more masculine, and more confident:

“You definitely act more masculine... you’ve got to be more confident, definitely more confident and almost be ‘alpha male’...So you probably talk different, you walk different, you react different when I think about it...you can’t show that you have any weakness” (S2).

“All the girly stuff takes a back seat. You can’t really be emotional or anything like that, you just have to be tough and get on with it a lot of the time. Cause like, it’s a rough sport...You’re not going to get anywhere if you get emotional every time you get a bash” (J4).

The judoka here are challenging traditional gender roles and masculine hegemony (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Within judo, they appear to fully take on the identity of an athlete where the need to be strong and aggressive dominates over societal notions of femininity. In comparison, the judoka appear to embrace their femininity in a non-sporting environment:

“Because you’re aware of maybe...physically you’re more masculine, got muscles and stuff like that. I know myself I would always try and be...a wee bit more quiet, a little bit less confident, and maybe try and not stand out as much. You’re aware of stuff, even stuff like what you wear and how you act and how you speak and things like that, just to try and be more feminine” (S2).

“My hair normally is naturally curly and I always straighten it when I can be bothered...I used to not wear make-up at all but I wear make up every day now. [I do it to...] feel like I fit in with normal girls. I learnt to French and Dutch plait my hair, so that I could do it with other girls and talk about hair and stuff, whereas normally I don’t really care about that” (J5).

These data suggests apologetic behaviour, in which a female adopts strategies to emphasise their femininity to fit with societal images of women (Kolnes, 1995; Halbert, 1997; Davis-Delono et al, 2001; Krane, 2001). Participant (J5) participates in apologetic behaviour by

practicing activities, feminine insignias, she wouldn't normally do, such as plaiting hair or doing make-up so she has something in common with other women.

The over-emphasis of femininity outside sport has been noted frequently in literature (Kolnes, 1995; Halbert, 1997; Young, 1997; Krane, 2001) and the findings of this study demonstrate an obvious contrast in how the athletes act within judo and outside. This echoes Kavoura *et al's* (2015) and Guérandel and Mennesson's (2007) discoveries that judoka construct multiple identities and often exaggerate their femininity for fear of being perceived as too masculine.

Body Image

A prominent issue raised by the judoka was adjusting to change to their physicality that occur as a result of training:

“With what clothes I wear, its ones that won't accentuate that I've got like bigger shoulders” (S1).

“I dinnae have a cauli ear any more but when I was getting it I remember thinking I'll need to wear my hair down all the time because...they've always known people for having cauliflower ears as like big rugby guys, big judo guys so it's not really acceptable...My legs are always covered in bruises...I'd always try and wear tights to cover them up or even stuff like fake tan or stuff like that” (S2).

In this form of apologetic behavior, the women use coping strategies to hide features they fear will identify them as being 'masculine', aware that society does not view women with these traits as 'normal' women (Kolnes, 1995; Halbert, 1997; Krane, 2001). The judo players avoid being classified as anomalies, instead they choose to alter themselves to try and look as they are expected. However, they show that, even when trying to fit in with femininity, they are still viewed as 'different':

“If you are at a wedding or a party...you get noticed because your body shape is different because you train full time. That’s a bit tougher... you get a bit edgy about how people are reacting to the way you look. It’s funny as sometimes it can just not phase me at all and sometimes I can feel pretty self-conscious. You can’t help for a split second letting yourself feel like ‘why can’t I be a bit more like her?...It would be nice to be recognised a little bit more as feminine” (S3).

The athlete demonstrates a struggle to blend in with society, she stands out in social contexts, even when attempting to pursue a feminine identity. Krane *et al* (2004) found that, even when participating in feminine activities like clothes shopping, athletes are constantly made aware that they are different by their friends and those around them. The athletes also mention they are often reminded of the negative perceptions regarding muscularity, which causes self-consciousness:

“A photo I was tagged in, my friends saw it on Facebook and there was another girl in it from judo and they were like ‘Oh my God, look at her shoulders’ ‘her shoulders are so broad’ ‘she looks like a man’...I was like ‘Oh my gosh, do I look like that? Is that what they think of me?’” (J4).

Knight and Giuliano’s (2003) research found that those seen to breach gender roles experience issues and conflicts outside of sport. These issues, as a result, often create high stress for the athlete. High stress and self-consciousness regarding body shape could prove to be detrimental to judo players, due to the weight-orientated nature of the sport. Athletes are more likely to be affected by disordered eating if they have a negative perception of their bodies (Krane *et al*, 2001), if they are female, and if they compete in weight-classed sports (Stoutjesdyk and Jevne, 1993; Sundgot-Borgen, 1994).

Despite the findings that the judoka had concerns regarding their body shape and coping with their athleticism outside judo, they also demonstrated a sense in pride in their strength:

“I quite like my muscles. It’s like...proof of your hard work. I don’t think they look bad” (J4).

“I like having muscles, I think it’s better to have muscles than to not, because it shows that you’ve worked for something” (J3).

“It’s quite empowering to feel strong. It gives you confidence” (J1).

The athletes viewed their muscularity as an achievement, a way that they could demonstrate their dedication to sport. The somewhat conflicted feelings mirror those described by Krane *et al* (2004), stating that, while many women felt femininity contrasted with athleticism and believed they were judged as an outsider, they did feel proud and powerful in terms of their strength. Previous research in judo has been similarly conflicted; while Danish judoka were found to fight stereotypes and embrace their identity as strong women (Kavoura *et al*, 2014), older Greek judoka, while comfortable with their athleticism, still exaggerated their femininity (Kavoura *et al*, 2015).

Conclusion

Over the years, female athletes have become more widely accepted within society, with more women participating in both traditionally feminine and masculine sports. However, evidence suggests that female athletes still experience multiple issues with regard to their gender, affecting them within both sport and wider society. This study explored the experiences of elite female judo players in the U.K., providing a valuable contribution to an under-researched area. Two concepts emerged: the treatment of female judoka by others; and the means by which the judoka construct their identities. Findings suggested the judoka are affected by masculine hegemony, often stereotyped and discriminated against both within and outside their sport. Many participants coped by constructing a separate ‘feminine’ identity to avoid any consequences in social settings and to mitigate their participation in judo. While it is evident sport is becoming more accepting of women participating in sports like judo, it is clear female athletes still face a number of issues that must be challenged to promote an equal sporting environment for all.

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