



Negotiating female judoka identities in Greece: A Foucauldian discourse analysis



Anna Kavoura ^{a,*}, Tatiana V. Ryba ^b, Stiliani Chroni ^c

^a Department of Sport Sciences, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

^b KIHU – Research Institute for Olympic Sports, Jyväskylä, Finland

^c Department of Sports and Physical Education, Hedmark University College, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 18 October 2014

Keywords:

Cultural praxis
Discourse analysis
Ethnography
Gender
Martial arts

ABSTRACT

Objectives: The objectives of this paper are to trace the discourses through which female Greek judokas articulate their sporting experiences and to explore how they construct their identities through the negotiation of sociocultural beliefs and gender stereotypes.

Design: This article is based on interview data from a larger ethnographic research with women judo athletes, grounded in a cultural praxis framework.

Method: Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted during fieldwork in Greece. Interview data were analyzed drawing on a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis.

Results: We identified four concepts—biology, gender, femininity, and judo/sport—that were central to unearthing the discourses in which female Greek judokas constructed their identities. Female athletes (strategically) negotiated multiple identities, each serving different purposes.

Conclusion: The gender power dynamics in Greek society at large are reproduced in the sporting experience of Greek female judokas. Although women have agency to negotiate their identity, they tend to accept the “given” subject positions within dominant discourses of gender relations. By doing so, female athletes become agents in the reproduction of patriarchal power.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Negotiating a female judoka identity in Greece

In most cultures, images of fighting are incompatible with the socially constructed ideal of femininity. Since sport is one of the major contemporary sites where physical prowess is paramount, the taken-for-granted association of combat with the male physique and psyche creates gendered relations of power, which perpetuate patriarchal structures in the cultural field of martial arts (Halbert, 1997; Hargreaves, 1997; McNaughton, 2012; Sisjord, 1997; Velija, Mierzwinski, & Fortune, 2013). Feminist researchers and critical scholars of sport psychology have asserted that asymmetrical power is linked to gender inequalities and discrimination, creating additional obstacles that female athletes face in the course of their athletic (and non-athletic) development (e.g., Choi, 2000; Gill, 2007; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004).

Sporting experiences are certainly unique, but the meanings they acquire are shaped by specific social and cultural contexts

(Kavoura, Ryba, & Kokkonen, 2012; McGannon, Curtin, Schinke, & Schweinbenz, 2012). Despite the growing body of research in cultural sport psychology (CSP), little is known to date about how social norms, as well as (sub)cultural values and beliefs are implicated in the identity negotiations of female martial artists. Responding to the call from the editors of this special issue to “reveal the importance of intersectionality in CSP,” we focus on women's judo in Greece. Our purpose in this paper is to (1) trace the discourses (systems of knowledge) through which the female Greek judoka (judo athlete) articulates and makes sense of her experiences; and (2) develop a theoretically informed analytical understanding of how she constructs her identity through the negotiation of sociocultural beliefs and gender stereotypes. Our overarching goal is to produce culturally situated research, which contributes to feminist cultural praxis.

Theoretical considerations

To explore the identity negotiations of female judoka specifically in the Greek cultural context, we drew upon the cultural praxis framework proposed by Ryba and Wright (2005). Cultural praxis was developed as a critical approach in sport psychology and

* Corresponding author. Riga Feraiou 59, Kallithea 176 71, Athens, Greece.
Tel.: +30 6975941994.

E-mail address: anna.kavoura@jyu.fi (A. Kavoura).

employs cultural studies to highlight the complex interactions of power and sociocultural difference in the production of knowledge and applied work in the field. Drawing on the cultural praxis framework, scholarship by Ryba and Schinke (2009), Ryba, Stambulova, Si, and Schinke (2013), and Schinke, McGannon, Parham, and Lane (2012), added rich theoretical and methodological layers to the concept of inclusion and consideration of marginalized identities and experiences. In this paper, we focus on issues of sociocultural difference, social justice, and identity within a cultural praxis framework in order to situate our research in the glocal culture of judo. By “glocal” we indicate that the female judokas, who participated in this study, practice and understand judo in a unique way due to the juxtaposition of the sport's globalized culture and the local Greek culture. Moreover, this research is epistemologically grounded in Foucauldian and feminist post-structuralist theories (Butler, 1990, 1997; Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1978, 1983, 1988; Weedon, 1997).

Within sport psychology, the concept of identity has been researched from diverse theoretical perspectives, such as standpoint feminist, feminist cultural studies, critical feminist, critical race and queer (e.g., Butryn, 2002; Fisher & Bredemeier, 2000; Gill, 2001; Krane et al., 2004; Krane, Waldron, Kauer, & Semerjian, 2010). The contribution of feminist post-structuralism in furthering the analysis of women's experiences in sport and exercise as constituted within the discursive sociocultural realm has been illuminated by McGannon and Busanich (2010) in one of the first CSP textbooks “The Cultural Turn in Sport Psychology” edited by Ryba, Schinke, and Tenenbaum. From a post-structuralist perspective, identity is understood as a shifting temporary construction communicated to others, which is fluid, and a discursive accomplishment that is simultaneously local, social, cultural and political (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1988; McGannon & Busanich, 2010).

Foucault's (1972) concept of discourse and Butler's (1997) articulation of subjectivity are particularly useful in understanding the roles that language and cultural discourses play in the process of identity negotiation. For Foucault (1972, 1978), discourse consists of certain sets of knowledge and social practices, establishing what is accepted as reality in a given society. For example, there are cultural standards regarding a woman's appearance, behavior, and values that shape our understanding of what is considered as feminine (e.g., youthful, thin and (hetero) sexy body; emotional and nurturing disposition) and what is not feminine (e.g., bulky body and aggressive temperament) (Krane et al., 2004; Markula, 1995; McGannon & Spence, 2012). These socially constructed sets of knowledge, or the way we talk and think about the feminine ideal, constitute a discourse of ideal femininity. Subjectivity, or who we think we are and how we situate ourselves in the world, then is constituted through the discourses to which the subject has access (Butler, 1997; McGannon & Spence, 2010, 2012; Weedon, 1997). Thus, the limited ways that female bodies are represented within dominant discourses are tied to the experiences and subjectivities of female athletes. For example, a female athlete whose subjectivity is constructed within a discourse of ideal femininity that represents the ideal body as thin and sexy might feel “not feminine enough” and experience tensions about her athletic and muscular body (Krane et al., 2004).

According to Foucault (1977, 1978), discourse entails mechanisms of power that regulate the behavior of individuals in the social body. For example, failing to conform to the cultural standards represented within a discourse of ideal femininity could have social consequences for the female athlete, such as experiences of discrimination and stigmatization, limited (and/or negative) media

attention, and fewer sponsorship opportunities (Krane et al., 2004; Shilling & Bunsell, 2009). Highlighting the relationship between discourse and power, the term “subject position” is used by Foucault (1978, 1983) to point out the ways that people are categorized into hierarchies (of normalcy, health, class, gender, etc.). A subject position is a location for people in relation to dominant discourses, associated with specific rights, limitations and ways of feeling, thinking and behaving (Weedon, 1997). For example, being subjected to a biological discourse that represents women's biological nature as incompatible with sport (Vertinsky, 1994), a female athlete might occupy the subject position of the weak, or the one in need of help, positioning herself lower in the hierarchy than her male counterparts.

The issue of choice when negotiating identity and/or taking up a subject position has been discussed by post-structuralist scholars (e.g., Cosh, Crabb, & LeCouteur, 2013; Cosh, LeCouteur, Crabb, & Kettler, 2013; Foucault, 1978, 1983; Jiwani & Rail, 2010; McGannon & Spence, 2010). Drawing on the aforementioned literature, we consider female athletes as agentic individuals, who have agency in decision-making processes. However, women are also discursively subjected to particular subject positions, which are structured with both possibilities and constraints for action. Subsequently, identity negotiation (or identity management) is an active process that entails levels of agency, consciousness and self-knowledge (Foucault, 1983).

Previous empirical work within exercise psychology has contributed to our understanding of women's subject positions constructed within dominant discourses of motherhood and exercise (McGannon & Schinke, 2013; McGannon & Spence, 2010), as well as within media representations of women's exercise (McGannon & Spence, 2012), and the implications for women's motherhood identities, experiences and exercise behavior. Within sport psychology, Cosh et al. employed a discursive psychological approach to explore issues of choice and identity in sporting retirement (Cosh, Crabb, et al., 2013) and in transition back to sport (Cosh, LeCouteur, et al., 2013) as represented within newspaper media. In addition, Crocket (2014) explored athletes' subject positions within competitive sports in relation to sporting retirement. To our knowledge, no previous research published in a sport psychology journal has attempted to empirically study and theorize women's identity within sport contexts using a Foucauldian approach. This study aims to extend the work exploring discourse and subject positions that already exists within sport and exercise psychology, into the area of women's martial arts and combat sports.

In this paper we discuss the ways in which female Greek judokas construct and negotiate identity while being subjected to dominant discourses and cultural stereotypes. Specifically, we examine how they speak about themselves and what discourses offer them possibilities to make sense of themselves and their experiences. This approach opens up additional possibilities for research and practice within sport psychology by furthering our understanding of the psychological and behavioral implications of subject positioning as a useful concept to explore identity. Moreover, women's underrepresentation in martial arts and combat sports (as in sports in general) is often presented as a “women's issue” (Hovden, 2006). Therefore, explicating how the discursive field of power relations forms the conditions for female athletes' understanding of themselves (as expressed in the specific ways of speaking about their sporting activities) is important for disrupting the existing taken-for-granted culture in judo. Our research offers insights for how women may act on their agency and adopt specific strategies to negotiate their identities as well as craft new subject positions within discourses.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/894289>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/894289>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)