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The body self in women who practice aikido

Abstract:

Our thesis explores the experience of corporeality by women who practice aikido. The categories used by those women to describe their body self and its functions were analyzed. In order to explore the subject, quality research was implemented in the framework of grounded theory. Five women comprised the research group, all of whom had been practicing Birankai Aikido for nine or more years. Semi-structured interviews were carried out. Each interview contained five areas referring to practicing aikido, corporality, behavior and the connection between practicing aikido and corporality. Three areas emerged referring to the corporality construct, namely the body, emotions, and interpersonal contacts. The fields of the body and emotions were dominated by a functional dimension, whereas in the field of interpersonal contacts we noted a particularly strong feeling of group affiliation. Participants also displayed a strong need for self-realization, self-control, and persistence. The data collected give sufficient grounds for arguing that women who practice aikido on a regular basis tend to focus on the functional aspects of their bodies and emotions. In so doing they seem to motivate themselves to achieving greater self-realization in the process of studying martial arts.

Keywords:

corporal self, female body, aikido

Streszczenie:

Celem pracy jest zglebienie zagadnienia doświadczenia cielesności przez kobiety trenujące aikido. Analizie poddano kategorie tworzone do opisu ja cielesnego oraz jego funkcji. Prowadzone badania miały charakter jakościowy w ramach metodologii teorii ugruntowanej. Wzięło w nich udział 5 kobiet trenujących aikido w szkole Birankai od minimum 9 lat. Przeprowadzono wywiad semi-ustrukturalizowany, zawierający pięć obszarów odnoszących się do aikido, cielesności, zachowań i związków między aikido a cielesnością. W wywiadach pojawiły się trzy obszary odnoszące się do konstruktów cielesności: ciało, emocje oraz relacje interpersonalne. W obszarach ciało oraz emocje dominuje wymiar funkcjonalny,

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natomiast w racjach interpersonalnych wykazano poczucie silnej przynależności do grupy. Przejawiła się także potrzeba samorealizacji oraz silnej samokontroli i wytrwałości. Na podstawie osiągniętych rezultatów można wysunąć wniosek, iż kobiety regularnie trenujące skupiają się na funkcjonalnym wymiarze własnego ciała oraz emocji, motywując się w ten sposób do samorealizacji podczas procesu nauki sztuk walki.

Słowa kluczowe:

ja cielesne, kobiece ciało, aikido

Introduction

The body self is a theoretically complex concept, one that has seen a proliferation of models that focus on selected aspects of corporality and explore the body-mind connections (Bielefeld, 1999, as cited in Schier, 2009; Kowalik, 2003; Mirucka, 2003; Cash, 2004; Cash & Smolak, 2011; Mirucka & Sakson-Obada, 2013).

For the purposes of our study we used a definition proposed by Mirucka and Sakson-Obada (2013), which defines body self as a mental structure of a relational character that develops over the lifespan. This development is based on the sensations that occur at three levels: neural, mental, and reflexive, each having a corresponding dimension of scheme, image, and meaning. A representation within the first dimension is the body schema. It performs several functions by maintaining the perception of the body as a whole, providing the perception of integrity, spatiality and unity of the body with the person, as well as by coordinating and monitoring body movement. One of the representations within the second dimension is the perceptual image of the self, which is usually based on the wealth of the diverse sensations produced by all the senses. The intensity of experiencing these stimuli has a considerable influence on the perception of the body's boundaries, which may vary from distinctive and clear to blurred and difficult to specify. Functioning properly, the perception of the body's boundaries enables the development of one's sense of individuality. Moreover, the perceptual image of the self within this dimension also includes representations of bodily perceptions and needs, and representations of emotional states. The final dimension of the body self, which is of a relational character and is based on reflexion, is the dimension of meaning. It enables individuals to exercise control over the body self, their sensations, emotional states, and the perception of their physical needs. It also facilitates directing them all at will. People's ability to define their body self and endow it with meaning makes their body self distinctly individual, which impacts on the sense of their own body identity.

Gender differences in build and physiological processes allow women to perceive their bodies as relatively more ambivalent and multidimensional, making them also more

focused on the looks and physical attractiveness of their bodies. Conversely, men attach greater value to the efficiency and functionality of the body (Mandal, 2004). As a result, women's perception of their body self is less coherent and more fragmented, while they are also less satisfied with their looks and exercise a lower degree of control over their bodies (Kochan-Wójcik, 2003a, 2003b).

A review of the literature examining corporality in the context of practicing a sport shows that the majority of existing research is focused on comparing training and non-training individuals' motivation for exercise, subjective or objective perception of their bodies, and the degree of satisfaction with their corporal dimension (Frost & McKelvie, 2005; Abbot & Barber, 2010, 2011; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008; Swami, Steadman, & Tovee, 2009). The few extant studies addressing the subject with a focus on practicing martial arts show that the followers of such sport disciplines are more satisfied with their bodies and find the training helpful in improving their self-control and overcoming shyness. In addition to positive changes in body fitness, other researchers have also observed changes in how individuals perceive themselves and the people around them (Zang & Xu, 2012; Lakes et al., 2013).

A sport discipline enjoying considerable and long-lasting interest in Poland, martial arts have recently witnessed a particular increase in popularity. Further analyses may bring a new dimension to the research question about the quality and direction of relationships between experiencing one's body and practicing a sport, while also giving a new character to the thesis about the differences in perceiving and experiencing one's body depending on the sport discipline followed. A paucity of relevant studies encourages an exploration of the subject. Aikido was chosen as the context for this study in view of the fact that one of the study's coauthors is a follower of this discipline.

The founder of aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, promoted the idea that mastering the technique is not the sole aim of training. Instead, he exhorted his followers to practice the principles of aikido in all aspects of life (Woźniak, 1991). In order to fully master the technique, the training person must be comprehensively fit and able to move in a relaxed, coordinated and flexible manner. A key element of aikido training is the development of becoming accustomed to pain and becoming more relaxed, which helps to stretch the joints and the body. In aikido, strength comes from the movement of the entire body and is associated with looking for the opponents' dead points and making them lose their footing. The training focuses on making the body more flexible, developing the ability to relax, and using one's body in a well-balanced and efficient way. Importantly, the relaxed body makes for a peaceful mind and the training is directed at self-development and reaching for a full integration of one's body and mind. Otherwise, instead of eliciting confidence and composure, a stress situation will trigger one's old habits of escape and aggression. Hence, practicing aikido demands that its followers face adversities and

conflict, with an additional emphasis put on exercising control over one's emotions and behavior so that any potential conflict is resolved in the best manner possible. Fighting is not altogether eliminated, of course, but directed in such a way that the opponent comes to no or little harm (Gembal, 2004).

Cynarski and Litwiniuk (2000) enumerate psychological predispositions for success in martial arts: psychological resilience, ability to maintain emotional balance in situations of high mobilization, as well as being a success-oriented, strongly motivated and ambitious person. In their opinion, motivations for practicing aikido involve the desire for improvement in physical fitness, comprehensive development, feeling joy derived from physical exercise, and the ability to defend oneself against an assailant. The primary motivation for women is the chance to reduce stress by relieving emotions, that is, to self-regulate while also striving for psychophysical integrity (Cynarski, 2001).

Method

Our aim was to gain insight into how women who practice aikido think about and experience their bodies. Narrowing the area of exploration, we wanted to learn about the conceptual categories these women create for the purpose of describing their corporality. Moreover, we attempted to find out what they thought about their bodies and the body-mind relationships, and what functions they wanted their bodies to perform. For these reasons, we conducted qualitative research within the grounded theory framework. In line with this framework, multiple data collection was performed in order to complement the emerging categories, show how they refer to the reality, and use them to develop a broader analytical framework (Sliverman, 2010; Konecki, 2000). This method is induction-based – a middle-range theory is built based on systematically gathered empirical data that is directly related to a specific aspect of social reality. The hypotheses, categories, and concepts developed in the course of such research are liable to multiple modification and verification. Under grounded theory, data verification is merely a stage rather than a goal in itself; therefore, theoretical systematization of the material is preferred to statistical presentation and collection of data.

Within the grounded theory framework, the main procedure in theoretical data collection is the constant comparative method, one that is based on a comparison of cases for the purpose of determining their shared categories and exploring how they are connected, developing new hypotheses, and identifying the theoretical properties of the concepts. This is done by comparing these concepts against empirical data and with each other in order to assign them to the relevant categories.

Participants

Participants were five women aged between 27 and 50, who had been practicing aikido for a minimum of nine years. Hailing from the two Polish cities of Wrocław and Gdańsk, the participants were followers of an aikido style called Birankai. Two of them were married, two were single, and one was in a relationship.

Procedure

The interviews were conducted by one of the authors of our paper, who had also been a follower of aikido Birankai for about 2.5 years. In a series of phone calls, the interviewer provided participants with basic information on the research, including its procedure, the purpose of collecting the data, and the protection of participants' personal data. The interviews were then arranged to take place in Wrocław at the participants' convenience.

We chose to collect the data using semi-structured interviews (Flick, 2012; Jemielniak, 2012). Drawing on the literature, in particular on the idea of the body self by Mirucka and Sakson-Obada (2013), we created a concept map with the following main areas of the interviews:

1. "I" – open questions about participants ("Tell me something about yourself"). It was left to participants to decide what to say and how to present themselves during the interviews, with a view to determining how they defined themselves.
2. "Aikido" – we asked the women to describe their training experience and to define the role aikido played in their lives. Representing the experience shared by participants and the interviewer alike, this topic was also intended to build rapport.
3. "Corporality" – we asked participants to define the word "corporality" and describe their own perceptions of corporality.
4. "Behavior" – another group of questions referred to the women's health and how they took care of it, and their eating habits. We also asked them to define the word "emotionality" and to describe their preferred strategies for regulating emotions.
5. "Aikido – corporality" – here we attempted to find a connection between participants' experience in practicing aikido and their perception of corporality. We also asked questions about relationships between physical training and corporality.

Given the exploratory character of this research, the interviewer was open to the order in which particular topics were raised during the interviews, adapting to each participant's speed and way of expressing ideas. At the end of each interview, which took approximately 30 minutes to complete, participants were asked to briefly summarize their ideas. The interviews were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed word-for-word

including extraneous utterances and the observations made by the interviewer about the participants' behavior.

Results

The interviews were coded in order to develop a theoretical network with key points for each subject area. Under grounded theory, the aim of coding is to determine categories that complement a given area conceptually, rather than to order and classify data relative to already-accepted categories (Konecki, 2000; Gibbs, 2011). According to Kvale (2010), the purpose of coding in qualitative analysis is to reveal relationships existing between the codes and the consequence of a broader context in which the study and its participants are embedded. Having this in mind, we decided to give a graphical representation to the codes and their connections. Carrying out the procedure of theoretical coding (Konecki, 2000), we integrated the codes identified through selective coding by placing them on the maps. Such a graphical representation allowed for immediate access to the codes and their interconnections, as well as for determining the frequency with which each code appeared in the participants' utterances. This greatly facilitated constant comparison, and consequently, also the conceptualization of the interconnections between the codes, as well as formulating new hypotheses. Based on the emerging network of concepts related to the central subject, we were then able to develop three code maps referring to corporality, emotionality, and interpersonal contacts. Following this division, we systematized the data obtained as follows.

Subject no. 1 – The Body

The discrepancies in how participants defined “corporality” and that they had to develop that construct “on the fly” as the interviews progressed may both indicate that the notion has a complex cognitive structure, as well as having no immediately available corresponding category. As a result, participants may have difficulties in integrating this notion, which could also exert an uncontrolled influence on how they act toward their bodies and how they act by using them.

“Um, corporality. Um er how can I put it (...) I don't know, it's my body (...) taking care of it, paying attention to what happens to it, how it reacts and um er some sort of um well, monitoring yourself.” (Interview no. 5)³

“Er corporality I think this is something, er at least for me um this is h how I feel my own body.” (Interview no. 2)

³ Given the limited length of this article, only selected aspects of the analysis are illustrated with excerpts from the original interviews.

At first, corporality was associated with physicality and appearance, then progressed towards issues related to feeling the body, to the functions the body performs and learning them, getting to know the limitations and capabilities of one's own body, learning more about it and taking greater care of it. The recognition of the physical changes brought about in their bodies by training and developing the sense of one's own limitations was associated with the women's feeling more confident in their bodies. Participants observed they had better learned their reactions to stimuli and started to work on controlling the impulses coming from their bodies, and to overcome their physical limitations. Interestingly, the changes taking place within their bodies were seen as a process associated with expanding the awareness of one's corporality. One of the respondents described a transition from intensive training, excessively straining the body and disregarding its needs to achieving balance, becoming calmer, and eventually also taking greater care of her body:

"I started practicing aikido in high school and I trained a lot, and hard. This took its toll mainly on my knees (...) I thought that everyone should decide for themselves how they want to train and it's none of my business really, so I stopped looking at other girls and just started to satisfy the needs of my body (...) Yes, well, maybe it's because I started training as a teenager that I've changed my approach to aikido so much, like it was the case with that pushing my body too hard, comparing myself with others, and so on. But this is also part of training, I guess." (Interview no. 5)

Coporality was also associated with taking care of oneself and with hygiene. One of the respondents described the aesthetic aspect of taking care of her body and the process of preparing for training with others on the mat, including taking a shower and shaving her legs. While she also expressed a general conviction that women take care of their bodies in the aesthetic sense, other participants focused more on the functional dimension of corporality.

The body was described as first and foremost a tool, one which is expected to function efficiently, whereas ensuring that it operates at full throttle was perceived to be the training person's individual responsibility. This dimension was mainly associated with the issue of sustained contusions. Measures that protect against contusions include avoiding people keen on overstepping the limits and respecting one's own limits:

"But I now feel that I have some sort of a brake which makes me stop and maybe I don't train exactly as I would want to, but there is this um well, there is this kind of, I feel these brakes which somehow make me more secure." (Interview no. 3)

“On the mat... so, it’s best to avoid people who are quick to injure others (...) You’re bound to get a contusion, and I don’t want to train with people who don’t take similar care of their bodies as I do.” (Interview no. 4)

Training aikido had greatly contributed to increasing the women’s self-awareness, leading in turn to making them feel more confident about their bodies. This manifested in the need – repeatedly expressed by participants – for taking care of one’s body, and in the greater perceived control of their own bodies. We observed a division of monitoring the condition of one’s body and health into an independent variant (in the case of serious health issues, including contusions) and one where participants depended on specialists (in the case of monitoring the general state of the organism). Additionally, respondents mentioned broadening their knowledge on healthy dieting.

Subject no. 2 – Emotions

We noted a strong division into positive and negative emotions, although emotionality was predominantly associated with the category of a problem and obstacle. Further, emotionality was connected with the function of emotions and their physiological aspects.

“For me emotionality is a curse. Um it has always been with me. (...) So very many emotions in my life, um they are a real bother.” (Interview no. 1)

“It’s some kind of a clue, probably um what I must, what I need to do, but sometimes it’s so hard to understand (...) And some of them are worse, they often lead me down the garden path, but some are actually quite (...) illuminating.” (Interview no. 3)

All the positive emotions, such as joy and pride, were associated with training and were closely related to the body and physiology. Participants were keenest on describing the joy derived from training aikido. They also frequently mentioned feelings of comfort and surges of energy from training as well as from simply being in the dojo. A functional dimension of emotions appeared – a faster and more efficient functioning driven by positive emotions, also leading to making fewer mistakes.

In turn, the category of negative emotions included a broader spectrum ranging from sadness and anxiety to anger, frustration and irritation, but also excessive emotional tension described as a state of feeling quite overwhelmed by emotions during the training. We observed a notable influence of such situations on the behavior of participants, who described themselves in such a context using an array of expressions, from aggressive to being paralyzed and excessively exploiting their bodies. It is worth paying attention to the sources of the various negative emotions: while participants thought fear was associated with the risk of damaging one’s body, the roots of anger lay in the potential exclusion from the social group and a hindrance to one’s development as a result

of sustaining a contusion. Emotions also featured in statements referring to situations outside the training grounds. These included stressful situations at work, a setting where participants recognized a need for keeping their composure and stability, and the sense of no fulfillment and feeling empty stemming from lack of personal interests.

Participants' attempts at controlling their emotions proved to be no easy task, which they strove to tackle through intensive training and creating increased amounts of endorphins in the organism. Interestingly, at this point the women did not refer to physiological aspects of experiencing emotions but rather to cleansing oneself from them.

"I'm cleansing myself from emotions, from what has already happened um, I don't know, by noon at work I'm cleansing myself because someone at home was bugging me all morning; I'm cleansing myself whether I like those people or not, it doesn't really matter who I train with, I always train the same way."

(Interview no. 2)

We observed a variety of defensive mechanisms that included ignoring information likely to elicit negative emotions, verbalizing and sharing problems with closest friends, and using relaxation techniques, such as counting down and breathing exercises. Participants found it useful to impose self-control upon themselves during the training. This is, so to speak, a conscious way to force oneself into taking up and fulfilling the intended task. Participants noted that this invariably led to an increase in control over their emotions, also improving their capacity for containing them.

"When you are somewhere, I don't know, at home or at work, or wherever, you can always go away, I don't know, to the bathroom or somewhere, and spruce yourself up, calm down... and here, on the mat, if things go wrong, or even when they go very, very well, you can't hide it, you can't just disappear for a moment, leave the room and be right back... I can now hold this uncomfortable tension within for much longer (...) I can somehow extend this in time or um somehow, how should I put it, close it within myself for some time, all these bad emotions and let off steam when I'm alone somewhere (...) Anyway, what I can say for sure is that aikido and training helped me a bit to control myself, especially to control my emotions." (Interview no. 5)

Subject no. 3 – Interpersonal Contacts

Two issues emerged in the interviews with reference to the predominance of the male aikido followers and their superior physical strength: that of gender dominance and that of men and women being treated differently in the dojo. Several codes emerged in relation to the gender stereotypes of a weak, submissive female who is also more aware of her body, and of a strong, dominating male. Other issues that emerged with regard

to men included those related to sexuality, of women striving to compete with their male training partners, and an opportunity for further development through training with men.

“It’s just that men are more self-confident (...) they feel so powerful (...) And I need to be cautious not to get a contusion, I really need to be careful (...) Um to be in constant sync with my body um and men just don’t feel it this way, it’s not so easy for them. (...) Or they do feel it, but then it’s already too late and they’ve just got a serious contusion.” (Interview no. 3)

The character of aikido training makes it necessary to practice in larger groups, to work with them, get to know them better and, with time, also become friends. Participants were careful to point out the issues of competing but also comparing oneself with others while training. Interestingly, each respondent associated practicing aikido with meeting new people, making friends, and even finding a partner. This dimension is related to corporality and physical contact as well as to emotions triggered by the people around. Moreover, the women emphasized a very strong sense of belonging to the group of aikido followers and the cultural consequences of a division into the male and female elements.

They were also very consistent in presenting a sense of group belonging and its associated aspects: entering the group, having an extensive network of fellow aikido followers, maintaining these relations outside the training grounds, and working together to keep the dojo tidy. Each woman either has or had an aikido practicing partner. What is worthy of note, participants made a clear division between the women who practice aikido and those who do not, presenting the latter in an unfavorable light as women lacking in endurance and perseverance, and who are also possessive as well as more feminine-looking.

When talking about physical contact, respondents highlighted the process of overcoming their shyness and becoming more open to interpersonal contacts, especially to those with men. The unavoidable physical contact during the training, which is necessitated by the nature of aikido, made the women more familiar with and eventually also accustomed to being touched by others. It is worth pointing out that women who practice aikido decide to do so fully aware of the male predominance in the dojo – it is their informed choice and intention to enter the aikido social group and, while remaining in that group, to develop a strong sense of belonging. In this context, respondents also underlined the division into comfortable physical contact during training and uncomfortable contact taking place outside the social group. Furthermore, participants also emphasized the positive influence training had had on their behavior in conflict situations, which offer opportunities to practice patience and to hold to one’s opinions while also taking account of others’ points of view.

“I became more open to other people er and I make friends much easier now (...) I just had to communicate with those people. This definitely teaches you (...) some sort of openness, I guess.” (Interview no. 4)

“When I train, about say 95 percent of people on the mat are men, so also in interpersonal contact, in contact with men, I mean, I’m now a bit more confident.” (Interview no. 2)

“But I have this feeling I’m now able to give um more in um say some kind of a conflict situation (...) I’m now able to wait a bit longer and um give someone a second chance (...) And also look at the situation from another angle, see how things develop (...) I’m able to understand the other person a bit better.” (Interview no. 3)

Discussion

We conducted this study with a view to exploring how women who practice aikido think about and experience their bodies. Moreover, we wanted to find out what participants thought about their bodies and the body-mind relationships, and what functions they wanted their bodies to perform. The data obtained was analyzed within the grounded theory framework, which allowed for distinguishing three key areas encompassing the construct of corporality: the body, emotions, and interpersonal relations.

Participants’ diverse definitions of “corporality” and the fact they had to develop that construct “on the fly” may both indicate that the notion has a complex cognitive structure and has no immediately available corresponding category. On the other hand, when exploring the changes they experienced through training aikido, participants invariably mentioned a sense of increased control over their bodies resulting from feeling more confident in the body. These, in turn, stemmed from the women’s increasing self-awareness developed and influenced by training situations. Furthermore, the changes experienced through training included an improved overall fitness at the physical level, and developing self-discipline and perseverance at the mental level. Also worth emphasizing is the way participants perceived their bodies, which were described as tools expected to function efficiently; and while training, the person perceived that their smooth operation was her individual responsibility.

The predominance of the functional dimension was observed in the body as well as in emotions. Participants used emotions, irrespective of their value, not only to motivate themselves to achieve self-fulfillment but also to support their conviction of being a persistent person. Overcoming the excessive negative emotions, which manifest in a strong

emotional tension and a desire to quickly reduce that tension, proved conducive to eliciting new, positive emotions. Rather than following an impulse, participants reduced their tension through means that had become fully accepted in that social group, such as partaking in intensive training and observing rigid, self-imposed principles. It was through such tension reduction that the women were able to feel positive emotions. Also worth pointing out are other factors that play a key role in respondents' self-development, such as increased self-awareness, improved emotional self-regulation, as well as attributing major importance to development and self-perception as a persistent person. Similar observations and conclusions were also made by Lakes (2013), and Zang and Xu (2013), who were already mentioned.

Exploring the interpersonal relations area yielded two subjects: a strong sense of belonging to the group of aikido followers and the cultural consequences of a division into male and female elements. With respect to the former subject, participants clearly distinguished between women who practiced aikido and those who did not, presenting the latter in an unfavorable light. A sense of group belonging was also confirmed by participants' establishing and maintaining close relationships with other aikido followers as well as their desire to attend the training regularly. The women's culturally-determined role of and their lack of a natural predisposition to fight were given as the main reasons for male predominance among those who practice aikido. Furthermore, participants pointedly presented gender stereotypes of a weak, submissive female and of a strong, dominating male, and described the gender differences focusing on male versus female biological and physical features, as well as the differential functional aspects of their bodies. Despite such a disadvantage of this discipline's female followers, participants admitted they wanted to compete with and rival men in training, as a result becoming more self-disciplined and persistent in fulfilling their goals.

Interesting to note, women who practice aikido decide to do so fully aware of the male predominance in the dojo. Similarly to when they discussed the subject of learning how to self-discipline the body (where the women intentionally engaged in situations demanding them to keep composure), when exploring interpersonal relations, participants also emphasized the deliberate intention to overcome their shyness and force themselves to establish and maintain contact with others. Putting themselves in situations beyond their control and following self-imposed principles facilitate the participants' constantly developing self-discipline and a resulting sense of self-fulfillment and satisfaction. In view of the current trends in corporality therapy, this conclusion might offer an interesting perspective for therapeutic models based on developing self-discipline and self-control. It is probable that if used to expand the spectrum of therapeutic strategies, such an approach (physical activity based on regular training and self-discipline, as well as ex-

ploring the limits of one's body in direct contact with other people) might allow for more efficiently working with patients whose currently used strategies prove ineffective.

Another issue worth investigating is the reasons behind the women's choice of a discipline dominated by men. The influence of culture on developing the body self has been highlighted by Thompson et al. (2005) and Smolak (2004), among others. Our study's findings demonstrate that emphasizing gender differences and the culturally-determined differential treatment of the male and female aikido followers plays a double role: first, it motivates those women to greater persistence in training through their desire to compete with men; and second, it leaves the women with a safety zone which allows them to explain their failures by invoking the stereotype of the weaker and more dependent woman. At the same time, building relationships with men additionally helps those women to distinguish themselves from their non-training counterparts, who also represent a more distinctively feminine scheme of psychological gender.

A first step in developing a grounded theory of experiencing corporality in the context of training martial arts and aikido, this study suggests the need for a complex and comprehensive approach to corporality, one that takes account in its physiology, the functionality of the body, emotionality, and the context of interpersonal relationships. The qualitative perspective on the subject has allowed for distinguishing a number of categories and their interconnections. It has also indicated that women who have been practicing aikido for several years are characterized by considerable self-awareness in respect to their corporality, focusing more on functionality rather than on image. They also explore and face their limitations, which in turn contributes to their self-development.

Of course, the subject under investigation demands further exploration not only within the qualitative but also quantitative paradigm. Further research on the corporality of women who practice aikido could use the subject group expanded, thus allowing for more developed comparisons that are the basis for building a grounded theory. In this context, it is worth broadening the scope of the research to include women with relatively shorter experience in practicing aikido, as this could deliver new data on the perception of one's corporality, shed new light on the motives behind women's choice of physical activity, and expand the knowledge on the predispositions that make people train persistently or drop out quickly. Further, current empirical data could be used to extend the scope of research by switching the focus from not just the followers of aikido but to a broader group of people practicing other martial arts that combine fighting with spiritual development, such as the popular MMA (Mixed Martial Arts), Muay Thai, and kickboxing.

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