

**Kick, Punch, Grapple: Exploring Women's Motivations for Mixed Martial Arts Participation**

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The most popular spectator sports in the United States of America are those sports perceived as masculine (Messner, 2002). Mixed martial arts (MMA) exemplifies masculinity, and has become one of the largest viewed sports internationally. For example, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), the world's largest MMA promoter, set an attendance record for an MMA event in North America (attendance 55,724), while generating over \$12 million in gate revenues from one event in Canada (Okamoto, 2011). Further, the average MMA viewership for the "UFC on FOX" television broadcasts is 3.5 million viewers, and the UFC was the most watched non-Olympic event during the 2012 London Olympics (Nielsen Media Research, 2012).

Not surprisingly, the masculine nature of the sport means that men dominate participation, and there are few MMA promoters that include female competitors. Dana White, president of the UFC, has previously justified the exclusion of women fighters based on the quality of fighters available and the depth of competition (Segura, 2012). In order for women's MMA to develop, the number of quality fighters must increase and this requires opportunities for women to be recruited into the sport. Women do participate in other, more traditional, masculine sports. For example, the number of female wrestling competitors has significantly increased and it is assumed that women's participation in MMA will likely conform to this trend (Leng, Kang, Lim, Lit, Suhaima, & Umar, 2012; Pfister, 2010). The challenge is to discover ways to introduce women to a sport that is hyper-masculine and dominated by males.

The purpose of this exploratory study is therefore to investigate the motives of women who currently participate in MMA. Identifying motivations for female participation has implications for recruiting women to participate in MMA and in masculine sports in general. While there is research that observes spectator motivations surrounding the consumption of MMA, there is limited literature that defines participant motivational factors, further substantiating a need for knowledge in this area.

Lox, Martin, Ginis, and Petruzello (2010) define motivation as "the degree of determine, drive, or desire with which an individual approaches or avoids a behavior," (p. 48). At the forefront of motivational research is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which proposes that individuals seek challenges based on three primary psychosocial needs: a need for self-determination (autonomy, self-dependent behavior), a need to demonstrate competence, and a need for relatedness. These three needs are fulfilled along a continuum with amotivation and intrinsic motivation sitting at opposite ends and extrinsic motivation centered between them (Deci, 1975).

Although overall enjoyment is a strong motivating factor for participation in sport (MacLean & Hamm, 2008; Lee, Whitehead, & Ralchin, 2000; Gould, Feltz, & Weiss, 1985; Kolt et al., 1999), there are specific motivating factors that pertain to female participation. The research to date has shown that females rated appearance, weight management and fitness as important motivation factors for participation (Henry, Sanborn, Senne, Nichols, 2011; Myers & Roth, 1997; Rintaugu & Ngetich, 2012). Another category of motivation for women's participation is resistance to the hegemonic femininity that is existent within the culture of sport. Women are also motivated to participate in sport because they utilize it as a form of empowerment (Lim et al., 2011; Krane, 2001).

Another consideration is the effect that perceived constraints have on motivation. Constraints are factors that inhibit a person from participating in an activity, and can be psychological, physical or social in nature. The implications of research completed by Alexanderis and colleagues (2002) suggest that the most crucial intrapersonal dimensions are time and individual knowledge. No relationships have been discovered between interpersonal and constructional constraints and motivation. Likewise, intrapersonal constraints only affect intrinsic motivations, and not extrinsic motivational factors. With women MMA participants it is not known what motivates participation or

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the ways in which constraints may be manifested. This exploratory study therefore investigates these issues by interviewing women that currently train in MMA.

Twelve semi-structured interviews will be conducted with female mixed martial arts participants who train at an elite MMA training facility in southern Ontario. The number of interviews conforms to recommendations to reach saturation of information for interview studies (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are considered appropriate as this is an exploratory study and because this format enables the research question to be explored, while enabling additional related areas of interest to be investigated (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The interview guide is designed to explore participants' previous experience in sport and to learn about their entry into, and experience of MMA training, and their future intentions for participation (e.g., competitive aspirations). Within this, participants will be engaged to discuss their motivations for participation.

Each interview will be audio recorded and is expected to last approximately 45 minutes. The audio recordings will be transcribed and analyzed using a deductive and inductive approach. The deductive approach will attempt to match respondents' responses to motivational categories utilized in the Sport Motivation Scale-6 (Mallett, Kawabata, Newcombe, Otero-Forero, & Jackson, 2007). These categories include: amotivation, identified regulation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, integrated regulation and intrinsic motivation.

The inductive approach will use an open coding format as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). This approach is included to identify the meanings ascribed to each of the motivations identified above and to explore alternative motivations and justifications for participation. Moreover, this approach will explore the ways in which participants view their ongoing participation in the sport and why they take this stance. This is considered an important component of the study because it potentially provides information to develop transitional strategies for participants interested in moving from a more recreational experience to one that is competitive. Data collection is currently in progress and analysis is projected to be completed by January, 2013. The results of the explorative analysis will help to lay the groundwork for future research in this area while assisting in facilitating more effective recruitment and retention strategies for MMA fight teams.