

## CASE REPORT



# Gender Issue in Masculine Sports in Indonesia: A Case Study

<sup>1</sup>Berliana Berliana\*, <sup>2</sup>Alimin Hamzah, <sup>2</sup>Mesianna Simbolon

<sup>1</sup>Sport Coaching Education Study Program, Faculty of Sport and Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia. <sup>2</sup>School of Postgraduate Studies, Faculty of Sport and Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia.

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## ABSTRACT

**Background.** Women's participation in sports has been improved in terms of number and types of sport. This improvement is realized due to culture change as an impact of direct dissemination of family of athletes. During the past 15 years, the change seems to be evident where on the 2005 Sea Games, Indonesian female athletes had the opportunity to participate in the event, even though their achievements were not as remarkable as the athletes of the other countries. **Objectives.** This study aims to investigate the opportunities of Indonesian young female athletes to have a career in masculine sports. **Methods.** Two Indonesian young female athletes who excel in judo and weightlifting were selected to participate in this study. By employing feminist theory, the study explains how parents and schools preserve the culture and pass it on from generation to generation. However, if the same opportunities are provided to each child, even young female, could have significant achievement similar to the study participants. **Results.** From the interview, it was revealed that Indonesian female athletes' predicaments in training were due to; a) changes in the body shape; b) hegemonic masculinity culture; c) family factors. **Conclusion.** At the same time, this study was also considering the sports family as a social agent in providing the community with an understanding regarding the consequences of the extended training process and the matches that female athletes have to experience to achieve something remarkable.

**KEYWORDS:** *Gender, Family, Sports, Masculinities, Patterns of Parent.*

## INTRODUCTION

Hierarchy based on genetics in a sport that segregates gender differences is still exists today (1). The demographic factor reveals that there is still a discrepancy in women's participation in sport including in Europe and Asia (2, 3). In fact, in the 1900s, women's sports activity in Africa was regulated by the government (4). Moreover, the economic status of athletes could also determine their choice of sport (5, 6). Modern sports intended for women are more likely performed to improve their body posture and beauty (7). Historically, women's representation

in sport tends to improve (8). Sports that are considered masculines, such as bodybuilding and boxing, are preferred by young females as a result of the post-feminism trend (9). However, women who choose masculine sports are often being socially marginalized and excluded from their supporting community (10). These findings highlight the importance of gender differences. Women's exhilaration and anxiety in boxing, which is similar to men's, masculinity as a quality or potential difference between women and men, enables the exploration that is similar to a male's

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\*. Corresponding Author:  
**Berliana Berliana**, Ph.D.  
E-mail: berliana@upi.edu

perspective. For example, Denfeld (11) explain that through boxing, one could refine the concept of aggression, detached from pure gender (male), and revealed that this is the human condition and not limited to one gender only. Baudrillard (12), Badinter (13), Schneider (14), and Scott (15) also explained that masculinity is construction to differentiate the role of the male in a society where it is considered less synchronized with human biological tendencies, making it more difficult to adopt. On the other hand, masculinity refers to the attributes cultivated by a culture that are related, but not to men, such as certain confidence, aggressiveness, assertiveness, mental and physical courage. Schneider's (14) paradigm states that the gender marker key has categories that could traverse the homogeneous life, such as radical differences, having high negative charge, and able to include violence and death. This is a challenge for people with masculine role. On the other hand, Connel (16) explains that masculinity, within each pattern and hierarchy of the modern world, is considered as a social practice in which hegemony masculinity can be observed. It legitimates the male domination and the subordination of female.

Several discussions can be found regarding women's achievements in sports, especially in developed and developing countries, such as Indonesia, by observing the opportunity given to women to have a career in masculine sports. The latest data shows that In Australia, women ethnic minority women have the lowest participation in sport (17). This issue especially influences women's sport participation in Indonesia It is important to conduct a study concerning the issue of parenting and family permission for women to have a career in a prestigious sport. The government's support in developing women's sports is still inadequate and has affected the unsatisfactory achievements of Indonesian women's sports to date (18). Although the 'gender equality' policies in sports have been long established (19), there are still many impediments in training to achieve success.

One of the main reasons is the low number of women national athletes. It is influenced by the culture adopted by the parents where women are "deemed" inappropriate to perform prestigious

sports. Therefore, this study investigated the lack of opportunity given to Indonesian women to perform masculine sports. This issue was rooted in the parenting issue, school environment, and lack of government support. It was also influenced by the culture that determines sports based on gender, psychological characteristics change perspective, socio-economic of a family, and the appropriation of wearing sportswear. The culture also dictates that vigorous sport is still considered as 'masculine hegemony' (20). In this case, Schiller (21) argues that martial arts and combat sports (MACS) significantly influence the construction of masculine identities in inserting symbolic importance in the objectives of biological differences, which are often considered to have symbolic importance for masculinity concerning the identity of gender, sexual, and ethnic. In relation, boxing is conceptualized as a masculine space (22).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Research Design.** This study employs a narrative approach that investigates a case study to understand and further explore an issue. Therefore, the study is expected to describe, analyze, project, and interpret the experience, perspective, and voice of female athletes related to women's role in masculine sports.

**Participants.** The participants consisted of two female athletes in a body-contact sport, judo, and non-body contact, weightlifting. Both of them are also university students. The participants' families are enthusiastic about sport and they have been practicing for five years old. At the time of the study, the judo athlete was 20 years old, and weight lifters were 21 years old. The participants were selected after a discussion with the coaches were taking place regarding their achievements. It has to be noted that the achievement of female athletes in masculine sports in Indonesia is still relatively low because the type of sport is considered only suitable for men. However, both of the athletes have international-level of achievement and SEA Games medalists.

**Data Collection.** The data was collected through observations and interviews. The processes were taken place at the home, training ground, university, and venue, depending on their location at

the time. The process was conducted daily for six months from April through September 2018. Each of the interview section lasted for three to four hours, with a total of 600 hours. The process was taken place in different locations and times for each participant. Moreover, to improve the social relation, the interviews were mostly taken place at a restaurant. Direct observations were also conducted at the training facilities and the universities.

The observation and interview results were documented as field notes. Recording equipment

was also used to support the process where the data can be replayed to complete the field notes. During the process, interactions with the athletes' parents, coaches, and Physical Education teachers were also taken place. During the data collecting process, pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality by upholding the principles of research ethics and to protect their privacy. In total, two interviewees were involved in this study. Two of them were female. [Table 1](#).

**Table 1. Profile of the Informants (N = 2).**

No	Gender	Age	Sport	Code
1	F	20	Judo	#1
2	F	21	Weightlifting	#2

By summarizing the demographic descriptions of the sources, it was revealed that new information cannot be discovered during the final step of the interview process. Therefore, the point of data saturation was reached. To ensure the validity of this study, analyst triangulation (23) and informant feedback processes were adopted. It means that the data was independently analyzed and the results were compared to reduce the bias potential. Further investigations with the sources were also conducted to observe whether the findings represent their opinions and to discover further "evidence" of their perspective. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian and recorded with the informants' consent. The recordings were also transcribed word by word for further analysis.

**Data Analysis.** Each of the recordings is transcribed word by word. Framework (24) for thematic analysis was also employed. The analysis was conducted by using a data-led approach with an inductive coding process because the codes were formulated based on data socialization. Therefore, the entire data analysis involved regular re-evaluation and alternating documentation between deductive and inductive procedures. The collection of empirical data was conducted through semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol that prompted to answer such questions related to the topic of the reason of choosing the extreme sports, the response of

their responds family upon knowing the participation in masculine sports, social and physiological challenges, the received supports, and the parties who provided it. In this study, the interviews were classified into relevant interview questions. Besides, in-depth and exploratory interviews were conducted to gather more data. The interviewee or informant is referred to as #1 for the judo athlete while #2 is given for the weightlifter to maintain confidentiality. In classifying the interview data, three criteria were used, which are completeness of information, reevaluation, and new insight. Since the conducted interviews were defined to make meaning, according to Tindall (25), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and a discursive approach were also necessary to be exercised to explore context-bound meaning from the participants' regarding their perspective on female athletes in masculine sports. Moreover, data reduction that focused on relevant data, which reduced the irrelevant data, was also conducted.

The data from the athletes and the other sources were transcribed and given coded to reveal the themes. In this study, seven sub-themes were found, which include sports introduction, physical suitability, social environmental reactions, motives, emotional reactions and injuries, femininity, and the impact of sports. These themes can be observed in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Coding Process

No	Data	Codes	Categories	Themes
1	#1. Every day, I enjoy accompanying my father to the training facility because my father is a coach and I was interested to join the training. Another encouragement was seeing my brother and uncle who often went abroad for matches. The lack of female athletes gave me a great opportunity to be selected in competitive events.	The Appeal of the Activity	Family	Sport Introduction Phase
2	#2. Every day, I lifted the dumbbell that was made by my father from a lump of cement because I wanted to be an athlete like my two older siblings who always had money and went out of town to have competitions.	Sport Introduction Phase	Family and Environment	Sport Introduction Phase
3	#1. My talent was discovered by my father, who was a judo coach, using common sense, with several indicators that include strong and tall body shape and also strong will. Then, he decided that I was suitable to be a judo athlete.	Talent and Talent Promotion	Parents	Physical Suitability
4	#2. My willingness to have remarkable achievements was started when I saw my brothers. At that time, they already had their income from their achievement. My motivation to have achievement in weightlifting was due to my family's economic situation that was below average. I chose weightlifting because it does not require complex movements. I could do it with a muscular body.	Masculine Sports	Family Economy	Physical Suitability
5	#1. Nobody harassed me in general, there is no one, whether it is my family, neighbors, or my friends at university. They were amazed when I appeared in newspapers or television. I also feel proud. However, some people asked me, "aren't you afraid to compete?"	Masculine Sports is Taboo for Women	Mass Media	Social Environment Reaction
6	#2. The response given to me by my surroundings was very positive even though they asked about women's abilities and incompatibilities in weightlifting. There are some common questions like, "Isn't it heavy?" "Does your stomach hurt when lifting the weight?"	Very Positive	Society	Social Environment Reaction
7	#1. Emotional reactions can be evident during winning and losing matches. I usually cry when I am lost and I could cry for a while and it will stop eventually. While crying, I always think that there is no need to cry. But I always cry in the end. On the other hand, managing myself when I win is easier. A lot of delights happen because I win. The training and competition cultivate athletes in managing their emotions.	Emotion management	Investing time and energy and also persistence	
8	#2. I enjoy doing my university tasks and daily practice, although I am more motivated to be more accomplished in sports rather than academics. I prove this to keep practicing even at the times where my coach is not present by repeating the training program that I always keep.	Training	Happy to Experience it	Motivation to Achieve
9	#1. I experienced quite a long injury period for approximately five months. It was enough to make me depressed where I could not do activities including training. Swimming was an option to maintain my physical condition and especially to rehabilitate my injuries on the shoulder blades that was occurred during training.	Risk	Injury experience	Emotional Reactions and Injuries
10	#2. I failed to win a medal in National Sports Week (PON, Pekan Olahraga Nasional) 2004 due to injury. I suddenly felt pain in my knee. My husband, who is also a coach, can help me to cope with my overwhelming emotion.	Hard to avoid	Experiencing Failure	Emotional Reactions and Injuries
11	#1. I always deal with my monthly menstruation with various methods so that it doesn't interfere with my training. In my opinion, menstruation doesn't always interfere with training and match. It could just give you a feeling of discomfort. I do not bother me because I don't feel pain.	Biological Interference	Obstacles to train and compete	Female Nature
12	#2. Married female athletes have to face the dual role of serving their husbands and taking care of their children while also training. Fortunately, my husband is also a former athlete and a coach, so he is quite familiar with his wife's activities and helps me with the household chores.	Social Environment	Female athletes' dual roles	Emotional Reactions and Injuries
13	#1. From a financial standpoint, the income I received from bonuses or prizes was very helpful to meet my family's needs. "My enthusiasm and hard work in training are more than enough. By winning a competition, I receive financial provisions that could help my family economy after my father."	No complaint	Financial	Sport Impact
14	#2 I have achieved a lot from my accomplishment, including financial support that could help my family's economy. Also, I was able to pay for my education from junior high school to university.	Informant Involvement	Pride and Confidence	Sport Impact

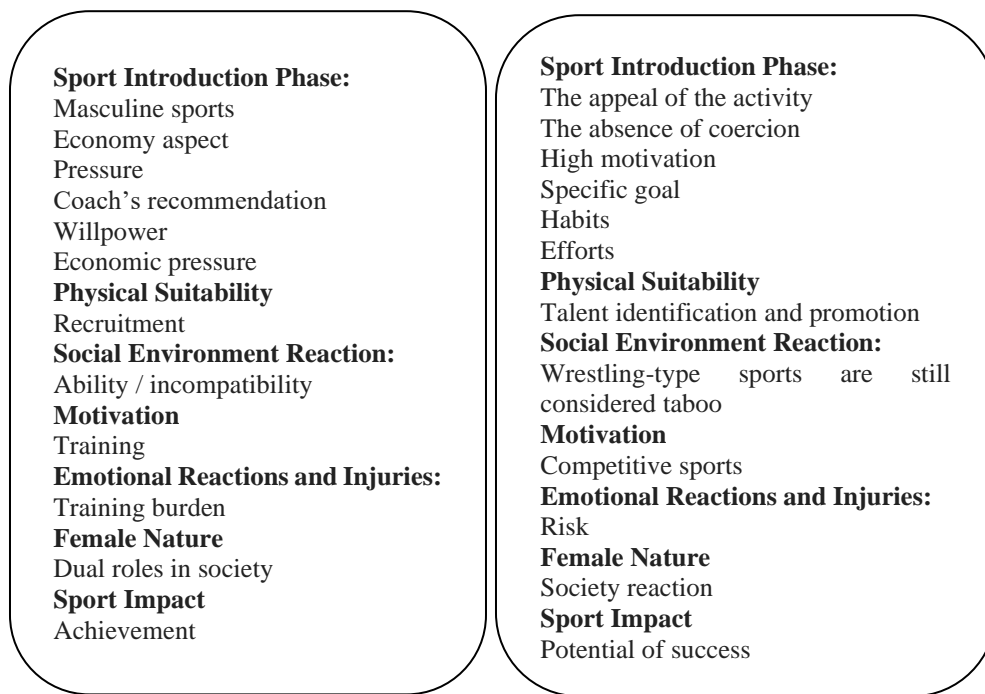


Figure 1. Themes and Sub Themes of Judo and Weightlifting Athletes

## DISCUSSION

During the analysis, it was revealed that the opportunities for sports development were still dominated by males, which was in line with cultivated Indonesia's customs where sports are portrayed as competitive activities that are suitable for men and masculinity. Several studies summarized that modern sports were invented by men to cultivate young males to be 'real' men (26, 27). Due to this notion, women who perform such activities would be considered as 'deviation' (28-31). The interviews revealed that the low number of female athletes who have achieved remarkably in masculine sports was influenced by the lack of opportunities given by their families for them to have a career in sports. The reason includes a) a body shape change will occur as in male case; b) hegemonic masculinity culture; and c) family factors.

Grahn (32) studied body shape change due to sports activities. It was found that the young male is constructed to be athletes to withstand vigorous physical activity. On the other hand, female, as feminine, are idealized for reproductive development (point a). For point b, Evans and Davies (33) discussed the topic of masculinity where the male is the dominant gender in sports. Besides, family factors (point c) influenced the lack of female athletes' achievement in sports. A

similar study was conducted by Scheerder, Tasks, and Lagae (34) who found that parents had an impact in influencing young females to participate in sports.

**Body Shape Change of Female Athletes.** This notion is one of the reasons why parents and the general society in Indonesia in general, including female athletes themselves, avoid or reluctant to perform or excel in sports. For example, an interview conducted with Fitri, a neighbor of the female athlete, revealed that judo was considered to be suitable for men. She further expressed that she worried to see women fighting where it could damage their reproductive organs. She also revealed that it could change the shape of a female body and male-like characteristics could be developed. A similar response was also expressed by Mawar, one of the weightlifter neighbors, where she disapproved of the idea of a female to be accomplished in this sport. Showing concern, she expressed her worries that female's reproductive organs may be impacted and they could have a shorter body posture and broken bones due to the weight. A similar opinion was also expressed by many of the neighbors. Although they admitted that they were not well acquainted with the athletes, they stated that women were not suitable for a vigorous exercise that should be done by men. This stigma, which is still developing in society, could lower the opportunity for young females to have a

career in the type of sports. Several studies, however, actually explained that the body of female athletes is portrayed as multidimensional (35). It further explained that the athletes would notice the differences in their body shape with other women who are not active in sports (36). On the contrary, the traditional perspective dictates that the woman should have a slim body as the ideal shape. In the recent trend, almost every woman prefers to maintain a slim body with low fat and taut muscles that can be built up through sports (36, 37).

The culture of hegemonic masculinity that limits the opportunity for women to have a career in sports is still influenced by the culture of each family (see Table 2) (1.1). In general, the families in Indonesia are reluctant to permit their daughters to perform vigorous sports. As told by one of the judo trainers, there was a girl accompanied by her mother to the training facility. Then, the mother saw the training process where the coach has to touch and hug the trainees. It was one of the judo techniques where contact has to be made between the individuals. After seeing this, the mother prohibited her daughter to train further. This condition has resulted in a high drop-out rate of the athletes. On the other hand, judo athletes and their families assume that the achievement in judo is a good career investment. This motivates the athletes to train without any coercion or pressure (see Table 2 (8.2)). Similarly, the assumption of society dictating that women are 'not appropriate' for weightlifting is shrouded by hegemonic masculinity, stating the perception that vigorous work, such as weightlifting, is a job for men. On the other hand, a female should only perform domestic duty. This notion is rejected by weightlifters stating that anyone, regardless of gender, could excel in sports. Besides, they also believed that their achievement is a method to earn a living, like any other job.

It is argued that hegemonic masculinity is still in for debates, whether it can be altered, modified, or even replaced. This struggle is intensified by the parenting at home and by the teachers at school who are still obscured in culture. As the presented example, hegemonic masculinity is referred to as the amalgamation of physical characteristics, psychological qualities, and ideology that is promoted ideal for men (38). Not only in terms of activity as previously described, but the selection of colors, types of games, attitudes, and types of sports are also assumed to be at the level of feasibility that intensifies the

hegemonic masculinity. The reproduction of masculinity in schools is still flourishing as in Singapore where sports are regarded as a form of masculinity (38). Besides, in the UK, it is apparent that elite schools are the social reproduction of hegemonic masculinity (39). It is paramount to grab the attention related to the women role in sports, especially vigorous sports that are considered masculine. Eventually, with the rising popularity of female athletes who desire to have a career in sport, it is still hoped that they would still be able to perform their dual roles, which are to become an accomplished athlete and to excel in their domestic role. However, it is a dilemma to reduce women's role to perform well as athletes and vice versa.

**Family Factors.** Both of the athletes are from a family of athletes where the father of the judo athlete is a national coach. Despite this, the introduction of judo to her daughter was not forced (see Table 2 (2.2)). On the other hand, the process was an imitation of the father's activities. As it was informed, the athlete loved to see the wide field when she came with Hamir every day to the training facility. She liked to mimic the movements of the other athletes during training and gradually became motivated to participate in training. This intrinsic encouragement increases the desire to join the train. Other than the father, the two older brothers are also athletes of other sports. Because of this environment, most of the discussions at home were usually about training activities and competitions. It is similar to the weightlifter where she interviewed two of her older brothers who also performed well in weightlifting and wrestling. The interest of the two female athletes to perform in vigorous sports were mostly influenced by family factors. This fact was providing them with the freedom to choose the type of sports to be focused on. A similar pattern has been conducted in form of observation and study. It is revealed that sports participation is genetic in the pattern of a family of athletes that could produce elite athletes (40). In this case, several studies have provided strong evidence that the performance of athletes is determined or influenced by genetic factors (41).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to analyze the opportunities of young females to participate in vigorous sports and is considered to be only suitable for males in Indonesia. It was found that culture had a major influence in minimizing the opportunities for a

female with the sole reason of suitability of sports from a gender perspective. On the other hand, society also perceives that women are laborers who could only perform domestic works. Despite this, the family of athletes did not discriminate against their daughter or son's choice of sports. This type of family of athletes can be considered as agents of reforms that could provide indirect dissemination to justify that females also have the right to participate and excel in any sport of their choice. The dissemination process could diminish the hegemonic masculinity culture and develop a moderate way of thinking for all of the Indonesian people regardless of the cultural perspective in sport. It means that, with all the consequences of the training and competition that female athletes have to go through to be accomplished athletes, it is completely unrelated to the other issues with the impression of "suitability" regarding their choice of sports (see [Table 2](#)).

Finally, it has to be emphasized that a family, especially parents, has a major part as a social agent of parenting and dissemination of sports. It should be noted that the influences of siblings and other relatives could not also be diminished.

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Therefore, sport advocacy, including by disseminating its values, needs to be encouraged through various communication channels, including mass media and direct counseling in the field to communicate to the audience. In conclusion. Opportunities should be given to children regardless of their gender for active play or exercise, which provides benefits for their cognitive skills and their social development.

## APPLICABLE REMARKS

- The findings of this study could be beneficial for coaches and policymakers. Moreover, all of the Indonesian people could also be benefited from this finding by providing equal opportunities for their children to participate and excel in all types of sports regardless of their gender.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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