



## **Masculinity as Advocate in Fluid Gender Performativity: An Autoethnography in a Martial Art and Combat Sport (MACS)**

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### **Abstract**

The gender binary is well established in English and reinforced in sports (Wachs 44). Some are gender 'neutral' or 'feminine' (e.g., basketball, gymnastics), but full-contact sports with "overt displays of aggression or strength" are masculine (Hardin and Greer 221). Some of the lowest proportions of women are in MACS (Lindsay et al, 2023; Maor, 2019) due to pressure to "remain in their gender lanes" (Staurowsky et al., 33). Scholars have studied MACS women; though, "[m]any studies of women in MACS... have taken the female apologetic...or the centerfold imperative...as such, overt performances of femininity...have tended to be broadly positioned as problematic, signifying...direct collusion with male power..." (Channon and Phipps 27). However, MACS' effects on the gender identities of elite female fighters (Inter/National competitors) lack; those that include us, talk *about* us, not *to* us. Our experiences cannot be generalized from, nor to, women who started as adults for self-defense. Through analytic autoethnography, including researcher with complete member status and discussion with others within the community (Anderson 378), a reflexive feminist approach was employed to critically examine the author's relationship with scholarship to identify how personal experiences inform the social (Mitchell 235). Data come from memory mining (Poulos 27) three, elite, female fighters' rhetorical experiences surrounding gender identity in a MACS context. Qualitative analysis of memories, discussions, and artifacts show that the rhetoric of male coaches in a masculine/hierarchal power structure can positively affect fluid gender performativity (Butler) and identity, specific to body image and gender norms, of elite female judo fighters.

**Keywords:** Feminist Rhetoric; Gender Identity; Judo; Women