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Combat experience on the edge of losing control; and then what? Disruptive situations and development according to Masters of Martial Arts and Combat Sports

O combate no limite do descontrole; e depois? Situações disruptivas e desenvolvimento segundo Mestres(as) de Artes Marciais e Esportes de Combate

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to identify and understand how martial arts and combat sports' instructors perceive potential changes in their students after disruptive situations in combat practices. In order to achieve this objective, an empirical-phenomenological approach has been used. So far, 21 interviews (out of a total of 133) have been assessed under suspensive listening, which have subsequently been subjected to intentional crossing analysis, with the aim of unveiling the lived meaning of the phenomenon in question through phenomenological reductions. The results present four units of meaning: Combative Intensification, Disruptive Situations, Interventions by the Master, and Changes in the Process. Their synthesis describes the experience's object. We conclude that, in the face of disruptive experiences, according to the perspective of the masters, the experiential updating of the ethical pole of martial arts and combat sports practice is inseparable from their ethical-pedagogical actions in the relationship with the apprentice.

Keywords: Ethics; Martial arts; Phenomenology; Teachers; Violence.

Resumo

Objetivou-se identificar e compreender como os(as) professores(as) de artes marciais e esportes de combate percebem eventuais modificações em seus(as) alunos(as) ocasionadas por situações disruptivas vivenciadas por estes(as) durante práticas de combate. Para atingir esse objetivo, utilizou-se uma abordagem empírico-fenomenológica, na qual, até o momento, analisaram-se 21 entrevistas (de um total de 133), realizadas sob escuta suspensiva, que posteriormente foram submetidas ao cruzamento intencional, com o intuito de desvelar o sentido vivido do fenômeno

em questão por meio das reduções fenomenológicas. Quatro unidades de sentido apresentam os resultados – A Intensificação Combativa; Situações Disruptivas; Intervenções do(a) Mestre(a); Mudanças no Processo – e sua síntese descreve o objeto de experiência. Conclui-se que, face às experiências disruptivas, segundo a perspectiva de mestres(as), a atualização vivencial do polo ético da prática de artes marciais e esportes de combate é indissociável de suas ações ético-pedagógicas na relação com o(a) aprendiz.

Palavras-chave: Ética; Artes marciais; Fenomenologia; Professores. Violência.

Currently, despite the growth of research on combat modalities, one aspect that makes them unique still does not seem to be sufficiently emphasized, even though, in fact, its demarcation may be decisive for the foundation of a Psychology of Martial Arts and Combat Sports (PMA&CS) and, consequently, for practitioners, instructors and researchers. Such modalities are the manifestations of the body movement culture most likely to overcome the barrier from the sporting phenomenon to the violent phenomenon (Telles et al., 2022). This proximity and, at times, even lack of distinction – both in experience and conceptually (Barreira, 2017c) – can be translated into a particular Ethic mobilization of the fields of knowledge (Kim & Cruz, 2021; Mickelsson & Stylin, 2021; Miloradović, 2019; Silva & Nóbrega, 2021; Simões et al., 2021), Psychology (Barreira, 2019b; Harwood-Gross et al., 2021; Kooi, 2020; Mickelsson & Stylin, 2021; Moore et al., 2023; Pujso et al., 2019; Serrano Rodrigues et al., 2021; Silva & Nóbrega, 2021; Szabolcs et al., 2019) and Pedagogy (Burt et al., 2023; Kooi, 2020; Lima & Fabiani, 2023; Matos et al., 2015; Pereira et al., 2021). This phenomenological elucidation enables interdisciplinary connections between normally sparse areas, favoring new theoretical and practical approaches in the teaching of combative modalities.

In the field of physical practices' pedagogy, the teaching of martial arts has been described as eminently technical, although with variations in the strategies adopted in their implementation. In this connection, Pereira et al. (2021) have investigated the teaching of martial arts in state schools in Greater Florianópolis, highlighting the strategies used by the instructors: teaching a single modality; teaching through motor exercises; teaching through combat modalities; teaching based on technical reproduction; and teaching through games. Furthermore, the authors argue that, although the technical view of martial arts and combat sports is predominant, reducing them to simple repetitions of movements neglects other important dimensions of the content, restricting students' freedom of expression and creativity.

Thus, the issue of aggressiveness, a characteristic of fighting, is a striking aspect of the practice of Martial Arts and Combat Sports (MA&CS). However, this topic of combative modalities continues to be a source of controversy and divergence regarding its psychosocial "effects" (Vertonghen & Theeboom, 2010). Contemporary scientific literature points to a divided field, in which, on the one hand, the possibility of a person's development over time of practice is emphasized, as exemplified by Harwood-Gross et al. (2021), Mickelsson and Stylin (2021) and Simões et al. (2021); on the other hand, the risk of inciting violence resulting from involvement in combat practices is emphasized, as demonstrated in the works of Meller (2020), Neto et al. (2021) and Simões et al. (2021).

Although the relationship may not be direct, it is less controversial to understand that, in MA&CS, the student's conduct is closely linked to the teacher's teaching modalities (Avelar-Rosa & Lopes-Ros, 2019; Silva & Nóbrega, 2021; Telles, 2022), especially regarding the ethical pole of the practice, as justified by Barreira (2014, p. 209, our translation):

It would not be possible to measure, in all its dimensions, the moral impact of the relationship between master and disciple, but the role played by the master in the martial arts scenario does not allow for his relevance to be easily diminished. It is especially in practice and training that appropriate and inappropriate behaviors are taught. (...) Whatever the means, it is clear that

the ethical pole of a martial art finds its tradition energized by the relationship of the master with his students and disciples³.

In the same direction, Simões et al. (2021, p. 840, our translation) conclude in their research:

With this work it is possible to conclude that the practice of MA&CS [Martial Arts and Combat Sports] is an excellent means of biopsychosocial, ethical and aesthetic development of children and adolescents, as long as the training is conducted by qualified professionals with impeccable ethics⁴.

In addition to the frequent edifying discourses in MA&CS and the presumed idealization of an “irreproachable ethic”, there is still little psychological evidence on how the personal development of the practitioner can occur considering his/her experience with the proximity between fighting and violence in MA&CS. In the combat practices, the specificity of this proximity manifests itself in disruptive situations⁵, causing the expectation of interventions and guidance from the master and his/her students.

Thus, the theme of this investigation is only possible based on theoretical-conceptual grounds that highlight the interest and relevance of the practitioners’ experience, according to the phenomenological explanation that has been developed in the works of Barreira (2013, 2014, 2017b, 2019a) and collaborators – Miranda and Barreira (2022); Serrano Rodrigues et al. (2021); Telles et al. (2018). In short, this allows us to address the ambiguities and ambivalences present in the fight. To this end, it is essential to point out that, for practitioners, the meaning of violence is often not defined from the outside, by the act of objectively transgressing the rule (idealist perspective) or by the pain and injuries caused by the blows (physicalist perspective) for example, but rather during the experience; which came to be better understood with attention to what was designated by the concept of “sensitive norm”⁶ (Barreira, 2017b). The focus on this ambivalent territory and difficult conceptual definition points to the relevance of studying the experiences lived in combat practices as “psychological-combative transitions”, as described by Miranda and Barreira (2022).

According to the authors’ description, through the phenomenological discernment of combative actions associated with combat practices, “play-fighting, fight, brawl, duel, self-defense, and instrumental offensive combat”⁷ (Miranda & Barreira, 2022, p. 36, our translation), the proximity of fights to the violent phenomenon is not omitted, enabling the study of how this can be experienced and its consequences. However, it is important to emphasize that, despite its imaginary closely associated with combative situations of duel, self-defense, or instrumental offensive combat, in its institutional context, MA&CS practices occur specifically as teaching, learning, training, and competition, which is why it is not assumed that combats unfold in one of these three violent combative forms.

³ In the original text: “Não seria possível mensurar, em toda a sua dimensão, o impacto moral da relação entre mestre e discípulo, mas o papel ocupado pelo mestre no cenário das artes marciais não permite diminuir facilmente sua relevância. É especialmente na prática e no treinamento que as condutas apropriadas e inapropriadas são ensinadas. (...) Quais sejam os meios, nota-se que o polo ético de uma arte marcial encontra sua tradição dinamizada pela relação do mestre com seus alunos e discípulos”. (Barreira, 2014, p. 209)

⁴ In the original text: *Com este trabalho é possível concluir que a prática de AM&DC [Artes Marciais e Desportos de Combate] é um ótimo meio de desenvolvimento biopsicossocial, ético e estético de crianças e adolescentes, desde que os treinos sejam conduzidos por profissionais qualificados e com ética irrepreensível (...).* (Simões et al., 2021, p. 840)

⁵ For this study, “disruptive” situations are understood as training or competition experiences that involve psychological tension pressing toward violence, thereby causing the risk of distortion of the phenomenon of “fighting” into that of “brawl”.

⁶ The Sensitive Norm, as defined by Barreira (2017b), refers to an intercorporeal and pre-reflective structure that guides the behavior of the practitioner in situations of physical contact, establishing limits between what is considered acceptable or not. It is based on the bodily senses – touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight – and is in constant interaction with the context and with the body of the other. With regular practice, it is possible to stretch their limits to expand them. Breaking this norm is equivalent to the transition from a sporting manifestation to a violent phenomenon, as it occurs in some combat practices.

⁷ In the original text: “brincadeira de combate, luta, briga, duelo, defesa pessoal e combate ofensivo instrumental”. (Miranda & Barreira, 2022, p. 36)

Therefore, when discerning combat phenomena, psychological research has been shedding light on the combative transitions between the phenomena of “play-fighting”, “fight”, and “brawl”.

What is already known (Miranda & Barreira, 2022) is that the recurring challenge posed to a MA&CS practitioner is: to sustain the lived experience of combat while fighting; avoiding both the complacent experience of play and, more importantly, the raw experience of brawling. The phenomenon of fighting should be understood as an action with physical, psychological and spiritual qualities of being willing to dominate the opponent’s bodily mobility through the blows allowed in the modality. Thus, the “motivation for physical fighting is found in itself, that is, what motivates it is the fight, not because it gives vent to hostility, nor because it repairs honor, nor because it is playful”⁸ (Barreira, 2013, p. 429, our translation), but the essence of its motivation is “in combat for combat’s sake”⁹ (p. 429).

Since fighting can resemble violent conflict between people who attack and defend themselves – such as dueling, self-defense, instrumental offensive combat, and brawling – sustaining a fight requires achieving a subjective disposition that is constantly threatened to shift to playfulness, where the complacent experience prevails; when this occurs it gives lightness and takes away the gravity of the fight by depriving it of the determination to win required in a combative challenge. On the other hand the shift may take the direction of the raw experience of brawling, when anger and fear, for example, blind the subject, preventing him/her from seeing the other as anything other than a thing, attacking him/her indiscriminately. However, it is essential to emphasize that this does not mean the complete exclusion of these experiences during the fighting, but rather that they do not predominate to the point of determining the actions of the practitioner, which would correspond to the collapse of the fight into complacency or violence (Miranda & Barreira, 2022).

The sharp phenomenological criticism of conceptual inaccuracies in the field of MA&CS leads back to the importance of empathy, according to the perspective of Edith Stein’s phenomenological analyses (Ranieri & Barreira, 2012), as the first and most elementary basis for recognizing actions between two practitioners who recognize each other as another self. However, this condition can change, leading to the deletion of the other, since, as Barreira (2017c, p. 369) puts it, “Physical combat (...) corresponds to some of the more concrete, extreme, and elementary ways through which empathy, i.e. the recognition of the other, can effectively be developed or become obscure in human relationships”. This tension can lead to psychological-combative transition phenomena, making the challenge of sustaining the fight the most essential for the psychological understanding of the potential maturation of the martial performer. But how does experiencing these transitions change the practitioner’s behavior or even his/her way of being?

It is known, therefore, that it is in the determination to fight – that is, in the determination to win and not be defeated – that the objective of mutual improvement between fighters is achieved during combat practices (Miranda & Barreira, 2022). As this improvement occurs in different situations for each person, Miranda and Barreira (2022, p. 49, our translation) explain:

what can and cannot be done in a fight is dynamic and intersubjectively modulated, depending not only on the masters, but also on the sensitive norms of each one, on the attention to the sensitivity of others and on the way in which the combative exchange is put into practice. This characteristic influences not only the principle of the rules, but also the degree to which unpredictability appears¹⁰.

⁸ In the original text: “*motivação da luta corporal se encontra em si mesma, ou seja, o que a motiva é lutar, não porque isso dê vazão à hostilidade, nem porque repare a honra e tampouco porque seja lúdico*”. (Barreira, 2013, p. 429)

⁹ In the original text: “*no combate pelo combate*”. (Barreira, 2013, p. 429)

¹⁰ In the original text: “*o que pode e o que não pode ser feito em uma luta é dinâmico e modulado intersubjetivamente, não dependendo apenas dos mestres, mas também das normas sensíveis de cada um, da atenção à sensibilidade alheia e da maneira como o intercâmbio combativo é posto em prática. Tal característica não influencia apenas o princípio das regras, mas também o grau em que a imprevisibilidade aparece*”. (Miranda & Barreira, 2022, p. 49)

In this way, it is up to the teacher to ensure appropriate control of the combat setting in order to provide a space that stimulates learning from unpredictability as a manageable risk (Miranda & Barreira, 2022). Therefore, the institutionality of MA&CS reveals that the participation of the master in the student's development process is inevitable; the master is in charge of identifying and mediating situations in which the confusion between fighting, indulgence and violence becomes more pronounced and drags the practitioner.

Therefore, since these phenomena do not necessarily occur with objective, quantitative or qualitative demarcations, clear and externally identifiable, it is relevant to research how the identification of psychological-combative transitions occurs. After all, it is through the way all participants react to the advantage, disadvantage, success or frustration in their regular practical experiences that the learner can become more capable of interacting – or not – with the opponent (Miranda & Barreira, 2022).

Thus, knowledge and recognition of the transitions between different combative experiences foster the modulation of the experiences/practice environments that qualify changes in the perception of oneself and of those who practice MA&CS (Barreira, 2019b). Since the teacher conducts the practice and teaching, it is up to him/her to make ethical-pedagogical decisions after situations of loss of control of his/her students. It is reasonable to assume that such decisions can foster well-modulated settings, in which potential hostile feelings do not lead to losing control and a humiliating embarrassment (intimidation), both closely linked to the violent experience. It is also possible to assume that, in these cases, such occurrences will be associated with the abandonment of the practice. On the other hand, when loss of control occurs, how do these authority figures manage the situation?

Therefore, the present investigation aims at understanding both the perception that masters of Martial Arts and Combat Sports instructors have of disruptive experiences and of the consequences thereof for the practitioners. It is understood that, in view of these situations, which specify the borderline of combat experience in MA&CS, the masters' interventions can be decisive in whether or not a positive development in the modality occurs with the practitioner.

Considering these theoretical-conceptual assumptions, the core objective of this investigation was to identify and understand, through first-person experience reports, how Martial Arts and Combat Sports teachers perceive potential changes and personal developments of their students produced by their lack of control in combat practices.

Method

In order to achieve the proposed objective, this investigation was based on an empirical-phenomenological approach, characterized as a qualitative, exploratory and descriptive investigation. The orientation of this approach comes from classical phenomenology, initiated by the philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl (1869-1938), in which attention falls on the apprehension of the meaning of things and, thus, of the community world, constituting a reflection on how things present themselves to those who experience them (Ales Bello, 2006; Barreira, 2018; Barreira & Coelho Júnior, 2023).

Participants

For this investigation, an intentional sample composed of a total of 21 experience reports (interviews) of different female and male instructors was used¹¹ (8); the respondents practiced

¹¹ These were made in a project financed by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), process number: 2019/1157-6 – “Towards a theory of body combat: towards a Psychology of Martial Arts and Combat Sports”.

different martial arts and combat sports, namely: *Capoeira* (4); Boxing (1); Judo (3); Karate (7); Muay Thai (2); Taekwondo (2); and Wrestling (2). The category of teachers used here is as fluid as that used in practical contexts, and for the purposes of the research it is sufficient that the interviewee be someone recognized in their community of practice as being in charge of teaching classes in their modality. Thus, the time of the interviewees' teaching in their respective modality varied between 2 and 47 years. In terms of age, the youngest teacher was 22 years old and the oldest was 73 years old.

The respondents were located – and, therefore, taught classes in their modality – in different regions of Brazil, namely: North Region (3); Northeast Region (2); Central-West Region (8); Southeast Region (4); and South Region (4).

Considering the volume of material, which includes 133 interviews conducted in Brazil (FAPESP No. 2019/11527-6), it is estimated that approximately half the total number of interviewees ($n = 73$) met the inclusion criteria in the sample of this section. Although there are still recordings to be transcribed and analyzed, the outcome is consolidated from an empirical point of view. The analysis will continue after the transcription, allowing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon facets, but, based on the phenomenological reduction, it has already been possible to elucidate aspects that reveal the sequence of its manifestations. Furthermore, those who agreed to participate in the study were instructed before starting the interview, on the purpose of the research, having signed the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF), previously approved by the Research Ethics Committee of *Escola de Educação Física e Esporte de Ribeirão Preto*, Universidade de São Paulo (EEFERP-USP, Ribeirão Preto School of Physical Education and Sports, University of São Paulo) through the *Certificado de Apresentação de Apreciação Ética* (CAAE, Certificate of Presentation of Ethical Assessment) number 57691616.0.0000.5659. The identities of the participants were anonymized, which is why pseudonyms were adopted associated with the excerpts of the interviews used. The criteria for protecting the identity of the interviewees abode by the following structure: 1st letter identifying the gender of the interviewee – F (female) or M (male) –; 2nd letter with the initial of the practice modality; 3rd letter with the acronym of the region in which the teacher worked; followed by the number of years that he/she practiced the modality.

Instruments

The central “instrument” of the investigation based on this perspective, is, as stated by Barreira and Coelho Júnior (2023), the phenomenological interview, whose operational key is “Suspensive Listening”. Its application corresponds to “data collection” or, more precisely, to the “intersubjective production of experience reports” (Barreira, 2017a), material that was treated and reviewed. It was a semi-structured and in-depth interview, audiotape recorded. The interview was conducted following a script prepared based on the object of experience targeted by the research. In preparing the semi-structured script, each question formulated sought to avoid the use of concepts, being designed to ask the interviewee to refer to his/her own experience, whether it was lived by him/her or witnessed directly, that is, perceived together with people with whom he/she practiced his/her martial arts modality. This type of formulation already follows the principles of “Suspensive Listening”, a conceptual operational device that extends the ideal of the *epoché*¹² in the interpersonal encounter (Barreira, 2018).

¹² *Epoché*, when applied to phenomenological interviews, implies the conscious suspension of the interviewer's previous assumptions, beliefs, and judgments. In this context, suspensive listening is established as a central practice, in which the interviewer refrains from inducing or intervening in the interviewee's narrative, although he or she continues to guide him or her to speak based on his or her own experience. Suspensive listening allows the interlocutor to return to and express his or her experience in an authentic way, without the distortions of external interpretations, creating a space in which the phenomenon reveals itself as it is experienced by the person reporting it. By adopting this stance, the interviewer not only listens, but also enables the other person to connect with his or her experience in a genuine way, free from external influences or pre-established expectations.

Thus, the interviews were conducted and digitally audio-recorded using a tablet or cell phone (smartphone) from 2020 to 2023, within the framework of a larger FAPESP project No 2019/11527-6, which lists an extensive number of questions. However, for this investigation, the guiding questions to be taken into consideration were: 1) Have you ever seen your students or practitioners experiencing loss of control during combat practices and fights? 2) Have you noticed if those experiences caused any change in the way the students fight? 3) Did you notice if those experiences changed the students' way of being? 4) How important are these experiences?

The interviews were subsequently transcribed in full and made available in writing for assessment.

Procedures

From a procedural point of view, this investigation can be described as "Collaborative Work" and the process "Empirical-Phenomenological Analysis".

"Collaborative Work". As part of a larger research project (FAPESP No 2019/11527-6), four studies have been conducted simultaneously in the Research Laboratory¹³, which have led to collaborative work between graduate and master's researchers in order to speed up transcription and to improve the assessment, especially with regard to the psychological reduction, described hereafter.

"Empirical-Phenomenological Analysis". After the transcriptions, the material was assessed; however as it was in the form of continuous text, it required the researcher to adopt an attitude of phenomenological reduction in three moments: Psychological Reduction (synthetic description of individually lived experiences), Eidetic (examination of the multiple manifestations of the phenomenon based on psychological reductions) and Intersubjective (detection and explanation of what is shown as intentionality). After the Psychological Reduction, the other moments – Eidetic and Intersubjective – are equivalent to the Intentional Crossing, a "comparative analytical process" (Barreira, 2017a, p. 348). However, there is a back and forth movement between the three moments throughout the entire process (Barreira, 2017a), so that one analysis refers to the other reciprocally.

Therefore, after the material was fully transcribed, it was read and read again in order to identify and review pre-reflective and intentional acts pertinent to the manifestation of the object of analysis.

Results

The analyses undertaken led to an essential chain of experiential facets pertinent to the object. Thus, four Units of Meaning describe them and they are called: 1) Combative Intensification; 2) Disruptive Situations; 3) Interventions by the Master; and 4) Changes in the Process. The synthesis of these groupings of meaning ought also to be added. Although these outcomes are considered consolidated by a type of analysis that puts pressure on its descriptive possibilities until it becomes explicit an irrevocable constancy of these elements, it is important to point out that these results can still be enriched by the description of a greater diversification of their manifestations, as more masters' reports are transcribed and reviewed.

1) Combative Intensification: In each situation of loss of control, the masters interviewed indicated that they become aware of a combative intensification preceding such loss of control.

¹³ Research Group on Phenomenology and Body Practices.

It should be observed that, for those masters, this combative intensification is not foreign to the fight, nor is it even undesirable. The reports suggest that the combative challenge requires this intensification; therefore, there is an implicit understanding of those masters that the practice setting should nurture adequate tension: “I think it is important for people to go through situations where they have to persevere alone, overcome certain difficulties. I think it is necessary. The question is how we lead people to make their way to this route” (F.K.S.26). However, the challenge growth through combative intensification also brings an increased risk of loss of control, a situation for which the practitioner ought to be prepared, after all, “everywhere there will be someone wanting to test you” (M.K.S.50). As stated in the excerpt below, “provoking loss of control”, in the words of a master, does not mean wanting there to be a loss of control per se, but rather expanding the combat challenge, modifying the combat so that the practitioner is pressured not to lose control, despite the adversity. “So, in karate, I provoke loss of control, I disrupt the students’ steady environment. (...) Because, when an imbalance exists, a few children do not lose control. In this case then, there is no need for loss of control” (M.K.NE.33).

As there is an expectation that there will be an intensification of combat, it should not be avoided nor understood as being necessarily the prelude to a loss of control situation, even though no report has indicated a loss of control free from prior tension.

And this guy started trying to test a black belt (...), new [at the academy]; he was also doing really well. (...) When I noticed the situation and seeing that he was pressing, pressing and pressing, and the other guy was responding, didn’t lower himself (...), and continued fighting normally. (F.K.S.26)

2) Disruptive Situations: In most reports of uncontrolled actions, a feeling of hostility towards the opponent predominates. It is not only necessary to point out that the motivation for this feeling varies significantly, depending on the context and what is happening between those involved – sometimes even rivalries that burgeoned prior to the situation witnessed – but, above all, it is important to emphasize that, despite being predominant in the reports, the loss of control is not essentially linked to hostility. There are control failures that are perceived as technical and motor, when, for example, practices are proposed in which the blows should not hit the opponent and actually do, or when the force applied exceeds the expectation of the practice. In this type of physical intensification, it is not uncommon for these outbursts of control to not even be noticed by the person initiating them, until they hurt the other person or trigger disruptive situations based on the opponent’s reactions, when the opponent also intensifies his/her blows, until, for example, hostility predominates between them. However, there are situations in which, even because the opponent is unable to react, the outburst of control is evident considering the disproportion and inattention to what is happening to the person being struck. A similar episode is well illustrated in this excerpt:

I was teaching and it was *kumite*¹⁴, and he started hitting her, the *uchikomi*¹⁵ exercises – on the counterattack, and you can’t hit on the counterattack. So he kept hitting her, until there came a moment [in which], when we got to a more free exercise, he literally hit her, (...) and he was a green belt and she was a white belt. (F.K.S.26)

While factual markers such as belt color or weight may be relevant in demarcating expectations between opponents, they are not always decisive. Despite the equivalences in these and other aspects, the imposition of poorly accepted or unexpected dominance itself may be related to a situation of lack of control.

¹⁴ Fight.

¹⁵ In karate, these are the repetitions of sequences of blows with the partner as a “target” who may or may not respond according to a predetermined sequence.

And there came a time when this guy (...), he got really angry [because] the other guy wasn't accepting him dominating the fight. And he started a sequence (...), he left like this, you could see in his eyes that he wasn't thinking about what he was doing anymore. He went all out; he pushed the guy against the wall, (...) he grabbed [and] pressed the guy, with both hands, against the wall. (F.K.S.26)

3) Interventions by the Master: In the reports, as soon as the teacher perceives a rupture in the combative sports phenomenon with a trend towards a violent phenomenon, that is, a loss of control, the instructor intervenes. The intensity and manner in which the interventions occur vary significantly, depending on the unfolding of the situation. At the edge, situations occur of "having to separate and (...) having to ask to leave the class" (F.K.S.26). However, when a student attacked him excessively during a capoeira game, the reaction of the interviewed master expresses what seems to be the most typical way of intervening directly in situations of imminent or frank loss of control. It involves responding conclusively in combat, in order to demonstrate, in the fight, the consequences of the loss of control:

And then, at that moment [when] he came to combat with me, (...) [he] came with violent and fast blows (...). At that moment, I retreated [and] dodged out. When I dodged, he was facing me. I headbutted him; he stumbled five steps back. When he straightened up, I gave him a jumping tackle and threw him against the wall. (M.C.CO.25)

In addition to the specific and strictly combative interventions, there are those that occur through conversation and guidance with the student who lost control, or, in the case of children, also with their families. In the reported dialogues, the close relationship between the combative "emotion" and the MA&CS technique practiced stands out:

And then you have to work on that emotion: 'No, wait, whose fault is it? Whose fault is it? The one who hit or the one who got hit?'. In the case of karate, 'Did you know how to defend? Did you know the move? So it's your fault, because you didn't defend yourself. What are we going to do about it? Are we going to fix that? Are we going to be faster? Are we going to pay more attention? Are we going to connect with each other to find out?' (M.K.S.40)

But what results did the Master's interventions lead to?

4) Changes in the process:

It's better that he bursts in here now, at ten years of age, (...) - I know what his limit is and we work here -, than when he's eighteen and he shoots someone, [or] he's twenty and he takes the car and runs over someone. I want him here! (M.K.NE.33)

The comparison of this report expressively evokes two extremes of what the intentional crossing allows us to see as a development process from the perspective of the instructors. The first extreme presents tragic hypotheses of personal loss of control in society in adult life. The second, within the scope of combat practice and guidance from the teacher, is the episode of a fight between children that turned into a brawl. In both extremes, the central issue is the complete breaking of personal limits, that is, disruptive experiences that result in violence. In its extreme or not, the process of going to the edge in MA&CS makes it possible to "work on it", learn from the experience and develop from it; in other words, deal with the increase in tension with better conditions to avoid breaking with such tension.

The disruptive situations reported indicate different spheres of broken limits and changes regarding the practitioner. In a more technical sphere in which the limit experienced is associated with motor gestures and how to perform them, the guidance of the instructors tends to direct the

students' attention and improvement to what is under their purview. What the actions and their consequences teach can also be enhanced with analogies:

Let's assume this analogy that someone got hurt (...): 'When I went there, face to face with my colleague, I thought he was going to attack weakly [and], so, I defended very weakly! (...) I can't trust that the other person, in front of me, will also act like I'm going to act. (...) Next time, I will have to defend very strongly, because I don't know how it's going to come; the defense has to go and take it, I can't take a blow'. So, the principle is: *I have to defend myself strongly*; if the other person attacked weakly, great. But, if he attacked strongly, even better, because I would defend myself! And then they will learn (...) for their life: 'Wow, I'm there talking to such and such a person, I can't assume that he will act like I'm going to act; I have to act in a way to protect myself, but that doesn't need to hurt anyone' (...). I need to defend myself strongly, in this analogy, [which means:] (...) I have to be there alert, I have to pay attention. So, they bring up many parallels with their life in the actual class. (F.K.NE.21)

It is important to observe, from the above narrative that in a fight there is no separation, but rather intimacy between the technical motor sphere and the relationship with the opponent. In this intercorporeal relationship, the attention focused strictly on the performance of one's technical-combative capabilities has important consequences:

You have to see if your karate helped you center yourself or alienated you. Are you going to beat everyone? Well, it didn't help you, it alienated you. (...) [Centering yourself] is trying to take care of yourself, right? And you have to see the other person too. (M.K.S.50)

However, the condition for change is associated with the understanding of what happened, which on certain occasions requires more than an adjustment of the motor gesture to the intentions and intensities appropriate for the struggle and its consequences, something that happens in the dynamics of the sequence of experiences itself, but also involves their joint evaluation:

It changes; it changes a lot. It changes (...) in two directions: either he will realize [due to] that lack of control he needs (...) to listen a little more (...) [and] he will change; or he will abandon the practice. (M.T.CO.33)

Thus, the different reports of abandonment of MA&CS show how there is no guarantee that the disruptive experience will lead to development: "Sometimes, change did happen, yes. (...) But sometimes, the student would abandon the practice of the martial art; he couldn't do it" (M.K.S.40). For change to occur, the teachers emphasize the need for adequate intervention guidance:

Without guidance, it is not always. I think that there are many times when there is no perception of what happened there. (...) I think that, for students (...), it is important to have guidance on this. And, from the moment that you are able to affect these people, in the sense of showing them how to interpret what happened, (...) then I think we can cause some kind of change. (F.C.SE.19)

Becoming aware of other implications and issues associated with the loss of control, which involves the other people affected and the practitioners' community in which one is inserted, causes participation in an effort for self-control, but also in reflective processes with potential commitments and accountability of the persons in their MA&CS modality:

Yes, I think there is (...) a little bit of commitment there (...). And I think that will depend on what is important to each of those people. So, (...) when a situation happens and that person receives guidance about the situation that happened, whether it be a conversation, (...), a game that shows them what happened, I think they start to notice themselves more and start to ask themselves (...): 'What else is there?' And I think that this question 'what else is there?' generates some reactions of taking responsibility for oneself and taking responsibility for others, which I think automatically starts to extend to the person's life. (F.C.SE.19)

From Analysis to Synthesis

The range of possibilities for disruptive situations and the interventions by the masters, precede a similar magnitude for the changes that occur in students. However, the intentional analysis thereof allows us to reduce this range within a change “process”. This process begins with the gain in technical and motor control to avoid losing control – circumstances that are more frequent among beginners who have yet to incorporate the motor gestures of the modality and do not know how to measure the force of their blows. In the continuum of the process, we reach a sphere in which the increase in impetus and the imposition of actions, voluntarily or involuntarily, blindly override the opponent, consequently requiring greater attention and consideration to what is happening to those who train and fight. A broader sphere, since it encompasses the previous ones, is reflexive and concerns self-accountability for the consequences of the lack of control experienced, thus characterizing itself not only as control, but as self-control.

It is, therefore, an experiential process in which, gradually, the consequences of motor actions correlated to disruptive episodes, in different domains, lead to changes that characterize the practitioners’ development. When motor gestures go beyond the limits of the practice and, in the extreme, cause injuries, the sphere in question is corporal and empathic, being related to technical-motor control and lack of control, as well as attention to the other. When the impetus between opponents escalates unbridled in their actions and reactions, one enters more properly the psychic sphere of the disruptive experience. Finally, the psychosocial sphere stands out when actions are driven by a sense of self-affirmation that transgresses the norms and the field of what is acceptable in martial arts combat practice. This differentiation of spheres is relevant, since, although they may manifest themselves in an intertwined way in the disruptive situation, the correct understanding of the domain that determines the loss of control allows for appropriate intervention and guidance on a case-by-case basis. When these experiences and consequences affect the individual – or are witnessed – and appropriated in their connection, there is, first of all, a change in perception. By extending to consequences not previously understood, this perception directs the action not only to avoid deviations into violence, but to lead it to the success of the practice. The efficiency gained for the success of the practice does not always mean victory in the fight, since, in certain circumstances, such as those in which one clearly has an advantage over the opponent, the success of the practice lies more in allowing a challenging fight than in imposing oneself and winning promptly. This entire process only leads to development due to a direction towards the best consequences of the actions, whether physical, psychological or psychosocial, consequences that update the expectations and values of the MA&CS practiced. Without the adequate masters’ interventionist participation, the actions would have random and arbitrary consequences, much more susceptible to violence which, due to its proximity, represents a threat to the ability to fight.

Discussion

The fight, as defined by Barreira (2013, p.422, our translation) “is a physical confrontation in which one opponent tries to physically overcome the other”¹⁶ and it fosters the emergence of ambiguous feelings, both among those who fight and those who watch a fight (Barreira et al., 2019). Such ambiguity, pointed out by Barreira and Telles (2019), is essential for the practice of sports to occur, in which, at the same time that one desires and requires the other in the dispute, he/she also becomes an obstacle to what is desired in practice.

¹⁶In the original text: “um combate é um enfrentamento corporal em que um adversário tenta superar fisicamente o outro”. (Barreira, 2013, p. 422)

This presence of the other in combat, which is alive and constant, is what is taken into account to incite, as well as modulate, the movement in the fight (idem), since the perception of the presence of the other accompanies the “impossibility of full control of our actions”¹⁷ (Barreira & Telles, 2019, p. 97, our translation). As also noted by Miranda and Barreira (2022), in MA&CS, unpredictability is a characteristic of the hand-to-hand experience and, due to the act of restricting bodily mobility – the purpose of the fight –, there is a bodily constraint that “tends to be correlated with a moral constraint”¹⁸ (Barreira, 2013, p. 432, our translation). Therefore, “The subject of the physical fight finds in the opponent’s antagonism the adversity that proposes and intensifies the challenge for self-improvement, a figure of ethical life”¹⁹ (Barreira, 2013, p. 442).

If interpreted using physicalist or idealist approaches, we can’t observe this duality of feelings, which is essential in situations in which the scene takes place in the experiential context of hand-to-hand combat, such as in fights. Therefore, it is not uncommon from the perspective of the fight’s spectator, positioned in the third person, to perceive fights as violent, mistakenly understanding what is experienced in a hand-to-hand dispute (Barreira, 2019a). In this external, third-person position, the most intense and incisive fights contradict any possibility of empathy between the combatants; hence, without paying attention to the specificity of the interpersonal tension of mutual improvement in fights (Barreira, 2017c; Telles, 2020), there would be no process of recognition among the practitioners that the other is the other. On the contrary, the phenomenological analysis shows that “the practice of fighting implies special attention to the adversary and not, as might be suggested by the idea of confrontation, its nullification”²⁰ (Barreira, 2013, p. 416, our translation).

These outcomes show that MA&CS instructors perceive possible changes in their students due to disruptive situations, being ethically and pedagogically guided by the consideration that learners are able, in a critical moment, to avoid losing control and, if they do lose control, to reap gains resulting from the experience. This leads to consider the importance of understanding how the moments lived by the people involved in the action are experienced. Improving self-control is evidenced as a continuous ethical incitement in the fights, aiming at “a personal change in which the challenge of dominating the opponent has repercussions at the same time as a challenge of self-control”²¹ (Barreira, 2013, p. 440, our translation). Therefore, the outcome corroborates empirically how the ethical pole of the practice of MA&CS is dynamized, mainly, in the relationship between apprentice and teacher (Barreira, 2014; Simões et al. 2021).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that merely presenting the student’s changes according to the teacher’s view may be a limitation, since the learners’ perceptions were not considered. However, due to the difficulty of accessing such lack of control situations, as well as the confidentiality provided for by the FICF’s, this contact became unfeasible during the course of our investigation.

Conclusion

Hence, with the aim of identifying and understanding, based on first-person experience reports, how Martial Arts and Combat Sports’ instructors perceive their students’ potential changes

¹⁷ In the original text: “*impossibilidade do controle pleno de nossos atos*”. (Barreira & Telles, 2019, p. 97)

¹⁸ In the original text: “*é tendencialmente correlato a um constrangimento moral (...)*”. (Barreira, 2013, p. 432)

¹⁹ In the original text: “*O sujeito da luta corporal encontra no antagonismo do oponente a adversidade que propõe e intensifica o desafio para o auto aperfeiçoamento, figura da vida ética*”. (Barreira, 2013, p. 442)

²⁰ In the original text: “*a prática da luta implica uma atenção especial ao adversário e não, como pode ser sugerido pela ideia de confronto, sua anulação*”. (Barreira, 2013, p. 416)

²¹ In the original text: “*uma modificação pessoal em que o desafio de dominar o adversário repercute contemporaneamente como desafio de autodomínio*”. (Barreira, 2013, p. 440)

and personal development resulting from disruptive situations experienced during combat practices, it is understood that this perception is anchored in an essential combative intensification in combat practices, as well as in an appropriate teacher's intervention, necessary when loss of control occurs.

It is concluded, therefore, that in the face of disruptive situations, the master's interventions seek to direct the practitioner's perception towards greater physical, technical and emotional self-control. It can be inferred that the psychological transition between physical combat and violence occupies not only a core ethical place in the practice of Martial Arts and Combat Sports, but also that the appropriate management of the teaching-learning process is decisive in promoting a positive change in the student, who is in his/her development phase.

However, it is worth noting that the observation of the personal development of martial arts and combat sports' practitioners after a disruptive situation, when viewed solely from the perspective of the teacher, is a significant limitation of this investigation. This is because it does not encompass a possible perception of self-development of the practitioner in a situation that goes beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable in a hand-to-hand combat, nor does it consider how this experience could be lived in the first person.

Therefore, further to our investigation, it could be explored how masters and instructors perceive their own disruptive experiences and potential changes and personal development, from a first-person perspective, especially considering that they themselves recognize the existence of transformation processes in their students through their interventions.

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