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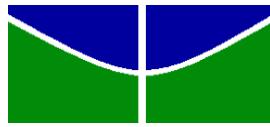
Embodied Subjectivity in High-Performance Paralympic Sports: Gender, Subjectivity, and Cultural Dynamics in Female Athletes.

A Clinical Sport Psychology Approach.

Laura Rojas Vidaurreta

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Silvia Renata Magalhães Lordello Borba Santos

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I dedicate this thesis to my mom, whose unconditional love, strength, and resistance have been my foundation. To my husband, for his unwavering support, patience, and encouragement—not only throughout this journey but in every step of life.

I also dedicate this work to the 2012 Cuban Paralympic team, for all that they taught me and for inspiring me in ways that continue to shape my path.

To Cuba, the country of my childhood, to Havana, the city of my university days, and to the nation my grandmother believed in and defended — I owe much of who I am today to the values, memories, and identity you've instilled in me.

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To my father, thank you for your constant presence throughout my life, for still being there, and for believing in our family.

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Finally, to the female resistance—the everyday kind and the high-performance kind—this work is, in many ways, inspired by and dedicated to our daily fight.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the embodied subjectivity of female Paralympic athletes within the sociocultural and sporting contexts of high-performance sports. Guided by González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, it examines how gendered and embodied expressions are negotiated, emphasizing the multidimensional nature of these experiences. Using Qualitative Epistemology and constructive-interpretative methodology, the study develops case studies that highlight the singular, dynamic, and evolving subjective configurations of female athletes.

The research identifies the Paralympic sports arena as a complex cultural and subjective space where societal norms, gender expectations, and individual identities intersect. Through systematic reviews, theoretical analyses, and empirical case studies, this work advances a theoretical model to explain the role of embodied gender expressions within the cultural-historical context of sports. It underscores the significance of fostering inclusive practices in Clinical Sport Psychology, challenging traditional frameworks that marginalize subjective experiences.

Ultimately, this thesis advocates for a holistic understanding of the female athletic experience, positioning Clinical Sport Psychology as a critical tool for addressing the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women in high-performance sports.

**Keywords:** Clinical Sport Psychology, female Paralympic athletes, embodied subjectivity, gender as performance, high-performance sports, González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity.

**Título** - Subjetividade Corporificada nos Esportes Paralímpicos de Alto Rendimento: Gênero, Subjetividade e Dinâmicas Culturais em Atletas Femininas. Uma Abordagem da Psicologia Clínica do Esporte.

## **Resumo**

Esta tese explora a subjetividade corporificada de atletas paralímpicas no contexto sociocultural e esportivo dos esportes de alto rendimento. Orientada pela Teoria da Subjetividade de González Rey, examina como as expressões corporificadas e de gênero são negociadas, enfatizando a natureza multidimensional dessas experiências. Utilizando a Epistemologia Qualitativa e o método construtivo-interpretativo, o estudo desenvolve estudos de caso que destacam as configurações subjetivas singulares, dinâmicas e em constante evolução das atletas.

A pesquisa identifica a arena dos esportes paralímpicos como um espaço cultural e subjetivo complexo, onde normas sociais, expectativas de gênero e identidades individuais se cruzam. Por meio de revisão sistemática, análises teóricas e estudos de caso empíricos, este trabalho avança em um modelo teórico para explicar o papel das expressões de gênero corporificadas no contexto histórico-cultural do esporte. Destaca a importância de fomentar práticas inclusivas na Psicologia Clínica do Esporte, desafiando estruturas tradicionais que marginalizam as experiências subjetivas.

Por fim, esta tese defende uma compreensão holística da experiência atlética feminina, posicionando a Psicologia Clínica do Esporte como uma ferramenta fundamental para abordar os desafios e as oportunidades únicas enfrentados por mulheres nos esportes de alto rendimento.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicologia Clínica do Esporte, atletas paralímpicas, subjetividade corporificada, gênero como performance, esportes de alto rendimento, Teoria da Subjetividade de González Rey.

## Introduction

I opened my doctoral thesis in Education, defended in 2019 under the mentorship of Fernando González Rey, with a poignant quote from Ijeoma Umebinyuo's *Questions for Ada*. This quote resonated deeply with me, reflecting the feminine legacy of my maternal family, and embodying the evolving questions and complexities I explored through Fernando's framework of subjectivity:

*"Nobody warned you that the women whose feet you cut from running, would give birth to daughters with wings."*

At that moment—undertaking a novel approach in sportive education and particularly in Cuban Sports Psychology, which remains largely unexplored—this research presented an extremely complex challenge. It demanded a professional framework characterized by differentiation and creativity to explore the experiences considered as competitive failure in Cuban Paralympic high-performance sports. We approached sports as a space of socialization and relational systems, where athletes' decisions and behaviors were inseparable from the subjective configurations emerging through the dynamic interplay of subjective productions during concrete performances. This perspective allowed us to analyze the experience of failure in competition (failure as not achieving the goals proposed) as a subjective, singular, dynamic, and socially constructed process, where recursivity emerged as an alternative to navigate experienced conflicts.

From the wealth of information constructed in dialogue with 13 Cuban Paralympic athletes, two male cases were selected for the thesis construction. However, among the other 11 athletes, the experiences of women, though a minority, revealed a multidimensional and complex representation of human experience, particularly different from male productions. This realization inspired the continuation of my work on subjectivity, focusing on the feminine domain, as reflected in further works as *Bodies and Subjectivities: Women in Cuban Paralympic Sports* (2020)<sup>1</sup>.

The possibility of understanding the construction of the female body within sports captivated me. This field seemed to offer theoretical and methodological innovation, enabling an entry point into Sports Psychology from clinical and practical lens, while also meeting the high-performance demands of elite sports.

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<sup>1</sup> Vidaurreta, L., & Vidaurreta, L. (2020). Bodies and subjectivities: Women in Cuban Paralympic sports. *Studies in Psychology*, 41(1), 161–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02109395.2019.1710802>

My entry into sports and psychology—and into Fernando's framework—was deeply influenced by my mom. Luisa Vidaurreta Lima introduced me to the affective and professional spaces that remain central to my career. Strengthened by the profound affection and shared experiences with her, I grew as both a woman and a professional. As a psychologist, trained in 2011, I began my career working with the Cuban women's handball team before quickly transitioning to oversee the psychological preparation of Cuba's Paralympic team. During the four years that I worked at the Sports Medicine Institute in Cuba, I kept being identified as 'Luisa's daughter', a trait that overflowed with pride!

In 2012, with the London Paralympics approaching, the athletes were at critical points in their training, aiming for peak performance. Cuba achieved its best historical performance, ranking 16th overall. However, amid these successes, some highly accomplished athletes failed in competition. What was missing? This question drove me to rethink my professional practice and address failure in sports as a complex human phenomenon, transcending deterministic causal relations between events. This line of inquiry revealed the importance of symbolic productions laden with emotionality, which define human singularity and cannot be ignored in analysis.

The focus on subjectivity has historically been peripheral to the dominant themes in Sports Psychology. In my 2019 analysis, which I maintain today, three factors contribute to this marginalization: First, the predominant focus on intervention as synonymous with operation, procedure, or prediction, rooted in a positivist view of science. Second, the belief that data reflects and validates reality. Third, a reluctance to "question reality" (Vidaurreta, 2005)<sup>2</sup>, avoiding engagement with what cannot be classified, labeled, or empirically reduced (González Rey, 2002)<sup>3</sup>.

This traditional framework often neglects the richness and complexity of human experiences, particularly those emerging in the intense, high-pressure environments of high-performance sports. Here lies the untapped potential of Clinical Sport Psychology, which extends beyond the conventional scope of enhancing performance or addressing acute mental health issues. Instead, a clinical point of view in Sport Psychology brings attention to the subjective, emotional, and relational dimensions of the athlete's experience, providing a more holistic and nuanced

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<sup>2</sup> Vidaurreta, L. (2005). *Comportamiento táctico del Baloncesto Femenino cubano de Alto Rendimiento (1974–2000). Gestión por la rapidez mental* (Doctoral Dissertation). La Habana: Universidad de las Ciencias de la Cultura Física y el Deporte.

<sup>3</sup> González Rey, F. L. (2002). *Sujeito e subjetividade: uma aproximação histórico-cultural*. Tradução de Raquel Souza Guzzo. São Paulo: Pioneira Thomson Learning.

understanding of their psychological organization. Clinical Sport Psychology positions itself as an interdisciplinary bridge between performance psychology and broader psychological practice. It could be said that this approach emphasizes how individual athletes construct meaning and navigate personal conflicts within the sociocultural and relational contexts of their lives.

While women's participation in high-performance sports has been marked by remarkable achievements, their progress continues to challenge entrenched gender hierarchies globally. In Latin America, this struggle is particularly pronounced, as high-performance sports remain deeply rooted in traditional masculine norms and structures. These cultural dynamics, often influenced by pervasive "machismo", limit women's access to resources, leadership opportunities, and media representation. Gender hierarchies are further reinforced when female athletes defy conventional norms of femininity, as seen with figures like Serena Williams or Caster Semenya, whose strong, muscular bodies provoke societal anxieties. In Latin America, these tensions are amplified by socio-cultural barriers and systemic inequalities, making the region a critical site for exploring the intersections of gender, power, and sport. Despite these challenges, a growing movement advocating for gender equity in sports is beginning to dismantle these barriers, paving the way for more inclusive practices (Soccer Without Borders, 2021; SIGA Sport, 2023; López de D'Amico, Benn & Pfister, 2016; Reuters, 2024; AP News, 2024; El País, 2024)<sup>4</sup>.

How do female athletes interpret their experiences in high-performance sports within a social context that both celebrates competition and reinforces traditional gender norms? This question underpins my new doctoral exploration, remaining faithful to my commitment to Fernando's

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<sup>4</sup>Soccer Without Borders. (n.d.). *Gender equity accelerators*. Retrieved from <https://www.soccerwithoutborders.org/gender-equity-accelerators>

Soccer Without Borders. (2021). *Gender equity in Latin America: Advancing equality through sport*. Retrieved from <https://www.soccerwithoutborders.org/post/gender-equity-latin-america>

SIGA Sport. (2023). *UN Women Brazil and SIGA join forces to promote gender equity in sport*. Retrieved from <https://siga-sport.com/press-releases/un-women-brazil-and-siga-join-forces-to-promote-gender-equity-in-sport>

López de D'Amico, R., Benn, T., & Pfister, G. (Eds.). (2016). *Women and sport in Latin America*. Routledge. Retrieved from <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781315736020/women-sport-latin-america-rosa-lopez-de-amico-tansin-benn-gertrud-pfister>

Reuters. (2024). *Copa America to feature its first female referees*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/copa-america-feature-its-first-female-referees-2024-05-25>

AP News. (2024). *Indigenous women in Ecuador take on soccer by inventing a sport: Handball in traditional skirts*. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/7797db8aaabbfc848da250520c9da6fb>

El País. (2024). *Juegos Olímpicos y paridad de género*. Retrieved from <https://elpais.com/chile/2024-07-27/juegos-olimpicos-y-paridad-de-genero.html>

perspective and continuing the dialogue on subjectivity. Thus, the opportunity to embark on a new doctoral process with this theme felt not only important but also deeply loyal to myself. I know that Fernando would have been proud and supportive. This drive to continue engaging in dialogue and exploration of subjectivity stems clearly from our shared Cuban heritage and resilient academic journey. Now, in this new phase of my life, from a still historical-cultural and subjective perspective, I advocate that one of the most significant cultural practices in the construction of the body occurs in high-performance sports. High-performance sports provide a critical cultural space to interrogate how gendered expressions and bodies are socially constructed and negotiated.

As Schulze (1990)<sup>5</sup> notes, "the deliberately muscular woman breaks with dominant notions of sex, gender, and sexuality, creating competition and conflict, anxiety and ambiguity" (p. 171). This insight raises key questions about how female athletes perceive and manage their experiences in high-performance sports, particularly in environments that uphold and reinforce societal expectations of how women should look and behave.

High-performance sports, as Goellner (2004)<sup>6</sup> points out, are "permeated by ambiguities," simultaneously fascinating and unsettling men and women alike. This environment challenges traditional gender discourses while exposing the tension between freedom and control, as well as representations of masculinity and femininity. However, as Hardy (2015)<sup>7</sup> highlights, hegemonic femininity—characterized by traits such as submission, dependence, and concern for physical appearance—remains a sociologically "correct" version of womanhood. This hegemony contrasts sharply with the expectations in sports, where masculinity is associated with aggression, strength, and dominance.

As we established, sports are particularly well-positioned to examine intersections of bodies, sexuality, and gender (Davison & Frank, 2007; Theberge, 1993)<sup>8</sup>. Traditionally, the sportive body

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<sup>5</sup> Schulze, L. (1990). *On the muscle. Fabrications: Costume and the female body*. London: Routledge.

<sup>6</sup> Goellner, S. (2004). Mulher e Esporte no Brasil: Fragmento de uma História Generificada. In A. C. Simões & J. D. Knijik (Eds.), *O mundo psicossocial da mulher no esporte: comportamento, gênero, desempenho* (pp. 359–374). São Paulo: Aleph.

<sup>7</sup> Hardy, E. (2015). The female 'apologetic' behavior within Canadian women's rugby: Athlete perceptions and media influences. *Sport in Society*, 18, 155–167.

<sup>8</sup> Davison, K. G., & Frank, B. W. (2007). Sexualities, genders, and bodies in sport: Changing practices of inequity. In P. White & K. Young (Eds.), *Sport and gender in Canada* (pp. 178–193). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Theberge, N. (1993). The construction of gender in sport: Women, coaching, and the naturalization of difference. *Social Problems*, 40, 301–313.

has been treated as a mechanical object—dissected, conditioned, and used to maximize performance or attractiveness. However, this approach has faced criticism (Hall, 1997; Mckay & Miller, 1991; Santos, Oliveira & Wichi, 2013; Vidaurreta, 2005; Vidaurreta & Da Costa, 2019)<sup>9</sup>, especially regarding its narrow focus on specific physical performance while neglecting the broader implications of embodied gendered experiences.

Women athletes often face a dual status: they are simultaneously framed as athletes and as women (Hardy, 2015). Their highly developed bodies frequently transgress normative ideals of femininity. These bodies not only challenge gender expectations but also pose a "double threat": they achieve physical parity with men while embodying alternative representations of femininity. This transgression is particularly pronounced in the case of disabled athletes, where the dichotomy of "abled" versus "disabled" bodies introduces additional layers of complexity (Hodkings & Baily, 2009; Zitzelsberger, 2005)<sup>10</sup>.

Research on femininity construction among women with disabilities is limited, leaving significant gaps in understanding how gender and sexuality intersect with disability. Ancet (2010)<sup>11</sup> highlights that societal perceptions often position people with disabilities in an ambiguous state between childhood and adulthood, rendering their sexuality and sexual identity "unthinkable" (p. 41). This view leads to the widespread assumption of asexuality, particularly among women, framing them as unable to fulfill roles as partners, spouses, or mothers (Zitzelsberger, 2005).

As a result, the relationship between disability and femininity cannot be considered uniform or generalized. Addressing this complexity, we can better understand how the intersecting identities

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<sup>9</sup>Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Sage.

Mckay, J., & Miller, T. (1991). From old boys to men and women of the corporation: The americanization and commodification of Australian sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 8, 86–94.

Santos, I. A., Oliveira, A. F., & Wichi, R. B. (2013). As formas de preconceito no futebol feminino. *EFDeportes*, 180.

Vidaurreta, R. L., & Da Costa, J.M. (2019). Health and performance: The omission of subjectivity and education in sport practice. In F. González Rey, A. Mitjáns Martínez, & D. Goulart (Eds.), *Subjectivity within cultural-historical approach* (pp. 245–258). Basel: Springer.

<sup>10</sup> Hodkings, S. L., & Baily, S. (2009). The discursive construction and invalidation of disability. In C. Marshall, E. Kendall, & M. Banks (Eds.), *Disabilities: Insights from across fields and around the world* (pp. 213–229). London: Praeger.

Zitzelsberger, H. (2005). (In)visibility: Accounts of embodiment of women with physical disabilities and differences. *Disability & Society*, 20, 389–403.

<sup>11</sup> Ancet, P. (2010). Virilité, identité masculine et handicap. In A. Ciccone (Ed.), *Handicap identité sexuée et vie sexuelle* (pp. 157–170). Paris: Eres.

of being female, an athlete, and living with a disability could shape subjective experiences in the context of sports.

The construction of gendered bodies is an ongoing process. As Butler (1990, 1997)<sup>12</sup> emphasizes, gender is a "performance" rather than a static reality. Sports offer a privileged space where these processes can be interrogated, using the body as both a medium and a site for the negotiation of gender norms. Female paralympic athletes must continuously navigate the tensions between societal expectations and their own embodied experiences, raising critical questions about how they negotiate gender, particularly in terms of embodied gender expressions.

Through this research, motivated by the desire to understand how female paralympic athletes negotiate gender in their embodied expressions, considering the sociocultural and sporting contexts that influence these negotiations, the aim is to develop a theoretical model to explain the sports space from a cultural-historical perspective. This model will explore the subjective emergence of embodied gender expressions among female paralympic athletes in high-performance contexts. Specifically, the objectives that guide these productions are to:

1. Analyze sports activity as a subjective space where embodied gender expressions are conceptualized as singular, dynamic, and evolving processes.
2. Develop indicators of female resistance within sports by exploring the Paralympic arena as a subjective space with the potential to influence and impact embodied female experiences.
3. Examine the emergence of subjective configurations as dynamic and interconnected systems, emphasizing the mobilization of symbolic-emotional resources to address life's challenges and sustain athletic performance.

The ideas presented here challenge traditional educational practices in sports and the role of psychology in this domain, offering contemporary elements for discussion. The organization of the line of analysis and production flows from the conceptualization of what is in the literature as a theoretical and grounded reference for the proposed discussion, carried out in the format of a systematic review, followed by productions that reinforce the epistemological and methodological

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<sup>12</sup> Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.  
Butler, J. (1997). *The Psych Life of Power: Theories in subjection*. Standford, California: Standford University Press.

position defended from a conceptual-theoretical point of view, explained with the construction of female case studies, proposed here into two original articles.

Drawing from González Rey's theoretical framework of subjectivity, this work allows for an exploration of the experiences of female athletes, particularly those participating in high-performance Paralympic sports, and the ways in which their bodies are configured through these subjective experiences. Thus, sports and bodily practices can be considered spaces of transgression, where the subjectively produced sportive experience manifests as a form of affirmation of female participation.

The document contains three manuscripts, developed concurrently, and presented in English. As mentioned before, the first paper is a systematic review that explores the multidimensional knowledge required in the field of Clinical Sport Psychology, emphasizing the importance of considering the subjective and cultural factors that shape the experiences of female athletes. This text highlights a practice grounded in experience that considers the qualitative dimension of the sporting reality, advocating for an inclusive, multidimensional approach in Clinical Sport Psychology<sup>13</sup>.

The manuscript continues with a second paper<sup>14</sup> that discusses the body as performance from a methodological perspective, examining two case studies of Colombian Paralympic athletes through Qualitative Epistemology and the constructive-interpretive method. It underscores the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of female athletes in challenging traditional gender norms in sports. The final paper presents a case report that provides a grounded understanding of a specific athlete's reality, which can reveal insights that might be overlooked in broader analyses. It allows the exploration of how personal history and subjective experiences, using a case report, intersect with social pressures in a deeply individualized way, providing arguments rooted in psychological preparation.

For several reasons, in this proposal, the athletes included are Colombian nationals, being INDERVallle the institution that welcomed the first idea of conducting a study with a cultural nuance, including Colombia, Cuba and Brazil. This intention will remain among my future research interests. Colombia enters the scene, besides having had an important participation of Cuban coaches and professionals in the achievements reached by the Paralympic sport, for being the country of birth

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<sup>13</sup> The systematic review was accepted for publication in *Trends in Psychology*.

<sup>14</sup> Manuscript accepted for peer review in *Studies in Psychology*.

of my husband, and a scenario that was becoming familiar also from the professional point of view for me.

As the approach to the female athletes' sports preparation began in the aftermath of the most challenging period of the pandemic, the virtual format predominated during the initial dialogues with both INDERValle and the athletes themselves. During the project presentation to INDERValle, the selection psychologists suggested a group of six sportswomen with consolidated experience in high-performance Paralympic sports, as this was the primary inclusion criterion.

This study employs a Qualitative Epistemology rooted in the constructive-interpretative method, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between theoretical development and practical engagement. The process values the heuristic potential of information, not as static data but as meaningful contributions to the evolving theoretical model. This is achieved through "rupture and continuity," where hypotheses emerge dynamically during the research process, guided by indicators that open new exploratory pathways (González Rey, 2005)<sup>15</sup>.

Central to this approach is the creation of dialogical spaces where participants are active agents in the research process. These dialogical dynamics encourage participants to reflect, articulate experiences, and engage in mutual knowledge construction. The conversational dynamics foster the emergence of new subjective productions and allow participants to confront and express contradictions and tensions within a safe, interactive framework (González Rey & Mitjáns, 2017)<sup>16</sup>.

Following the timelines set for submission and resolution of ethical considerations by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Human and Social Sciences at the University of Brasília, the field work was allowed to start in January 2023. Individual conversational dynamics were conducted biweekly with each participant from April to December 2023. These sessions, lasting an estimated of 1.5 hours each, resulted in an average of 15 dynamics, carried out via Zoom. These sessions typically occurred at consistent times—between morning and afternoon training sessions—but the schedule had to remain flexible due to the varying demands of the athletes' training periods and the time zone. The conversations often took place in the athletes' dormitories, homes, or rooms at

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<sup>15</sup>González Rey, F.L. (2005). O valor heurístico da subjetividade na investigação psicológica. In: González Rey, F. L. (org.). *Subjetividade, Complexidade e Pesquisa em Psicologia*. São Paulo: Pioneira Thomson Learning, p. 27-51.

<sup>16</sup> González Rey, F.L. & Mitjáns, A. (2017). *Subjetividade. Teoria, epistemologia e método*. Editorial Alinea. São Paulo.

the training center. To accommodate their training schedules, days with heavy workloads or outdoor practices were avoided.

The conversational dynamic functioned as a central methodological framework, integrating various resources to foster authentic and multifaceted expression among participants<sup>17</sup>. These included written and oral production tasks, such as sentence-completion exercises tailored to provoke meaningful responses. Visual and auditory materials, such as video recordings of competitions capturing moments of victory and defeat, were paired with public images of female athletes to elicit subjective narratives and facilitate in-depth discussions. Additionally, photo elicitation was employed, using photographs as prompts during interviews to explore participants' emotional and cognitive responses to social representations of female athletes<sup>18</sup>.

In the same online format, ongoing dialogues with coaches complemented the athletes' perspectives, offering insights into their performance, emotional states, and overall development.

Initially, drawing from experience in Cuba and considering the longevity typically associated with Paralympic practice worldwide, we proposed an inclusion criterion of female athletes with over 10 years of systematic high-performance training and participation in elite competitions, such as the Paralympic Games and World Championships. This aimed to select athletes who had faced the maximum competitive challenges, encompassing both victories and defeats. However, in Cali, the last five years have been pivotal for the development of Paralympic sports, leading us to delegate the evaluation of this criterion of experience to the sports psychologists. The type of sport was not a predetermined selection criterion; however, the selected athletes were ultimately from individual sports disciplines.

The communication during the conversational dynamics was conducted entirely in Spanish, with all research activities and recordings authorized through a signed consent form, ensuring compliance with ethical guidelines<sup>19</sup>. Over time, the process evolved beyond its initial research objectives, taking on the characteristics of a psychological preparation for the athletes during this time.

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<sup>17</sup> A set of details regarding the instruments used as resources in this research process is summarized in Annex 4. Since these are common and transversal elements across the articles discussed, we deemed it efficient to condense them in this appendix.

<sup>18</sup> See Annex 4 for more details.

<sup>19</sup> CAAE number: 61954022.2.0000.5540 (see Annexes 2, 4 and 5).

This integrative and flexible methodological framework was designed to adapt and expand as the investigation unfolds, emphasizing the production of subjective knowledge. By legitimizing the singularity of each participant's experience, the last goal of this approach is to propose a theoretical model as a resource for generating intelligibility and articulating new approaches within the complexity of high-performance sports. The analysis focuses on recognizing that these emerge through the dynamic interplay of female athletes' lived experiences, contexts, and personal histories. Rather than seeking universal conclusions, the case studies aim to generate multiple intelligibilities about the research problem, highlighting the richness and specificity of each female athlete's journey.

It is hoped that this research will inspire reflections on processes of interpretation and recognition of the female sportive experiences, in which the subjectivity productions come to life.

## I) Developing Multidimensional Insights into Embodied Pathways: A Systematic Review of Female Sport Experiences<sup>20</sup>

### Abstract

This systematic review examines the female sport experience through subjectivity, highlighting it as a realm of symbolic-emotional productions shaping lived experiences, emphasizing uniqueness and cultural influences. It challenges traditional positivist approaches by reviewing recent publications in Clinical Sport Psychology journals, emphasizing the constructed nature of gender and the pivotal role of the female body in sports contexts. Sport is portrayed as a transdisciplinary, multidimensional, and complex configuration of actions influencing gendered bodily dimensions. The review advocates for recognizing the distinct embodied experiences of female athletes and promotes a more inclusive and holistic approach in Clinical Sport Psychology.

**Keywords:** Clinical Sport Psychology, qualitative dimension, subjectivity, embodied female experience.

### Resumo

Esta revisão sistemática explora a experiência esportiva feminina sob a perspectiva da subjetividade, um espaço para produções simbólico-emocionais que moldam vivências, destacando singularidade e influências culturais. Baseada em publicações recentes em periódicos de Psicologia Clínica do Esporte, desafia abordagens positivistas tradicionais ao entender as complexidades do corpo feminino no esporte. O objetivo é sublinhar o gênero como performance, em que o corpo feminino assume um papel configuracional e constitutivo na formação das experiências esportivas. O esporte é visto como uma configuração transdisciplinar, multidimensional e complexa de ações que moldam dimensões corporais de gênero. O artigo destaca a importância de reconhecer as experiências corporais únicas das atletas femininas e propõe uma abordagem mais holística na Psicologia Clínica do Esporte.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicologia Clínica do Esporte, dimensão qualitativa, subjetividade, experiência feminina 'incorporada'.

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## Introduction

The study of several aspects gathered under the umbrella of the human experience seems to lend itself to an exciting setting in the world of sport. The human being in action during high-performance sports condenses a variety of learning and experiences that not only enhance the execution but also—and most importantly—make up the athlete's humanity. The positivist goal of 'dissociating' sport performance from the athlete is no longer sustainable in today's world. The role of psychology in this high-performance world has been recognized and has become more complex by accepting the specificity of each athlete from the point of view of how he/she interprets the world of affects and feelings.

Sport Psychology research is predominantly influenced by Western perspectives, and professional practice reflects the cultural limits of elite sport. Analyzing Sport Psychology from a multicultural perspective challenges our worldview, enriches our practice, and advances the field in ways that serve the public interest. In this context, focusing on the body could deceptively redirect analyses to the biological, concrete, and observational space of the physical sportive spectacle. Human complexity in a broader context places Sports Psychology in the challenge of truly understanding the individual performer at the junction of behavior, thoughts, and feelings.

The so-called sports sciences have accepted a model of science strictly related to the methodology of sports training that seeks to validate the legitimacy of the intervention in sports performance (Vidaurreta, 2019). This approach obscures the recursive relationships between the social and cultural practices of the human body, ignoring that they are reciprocally configured in all human activities and systems.

The athlete, understood as a living subjective world, shifts the focus from the certainty associated with traditional knowledge in psychology. Theoretical-epistemological frameworks, such as González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity and his Qualitative Epistemology, allow us to begin conceptualizing the female body as a psychological configuration in development. This perspective acknowledges the fluidity of human experience, viewing subjective experience and human performance as a continuum. In this scenario, a qualitative approach is essential. According to Dembo (1976), we need to move in this direction to free the social sciences from their traditional stagnation.

The practice of Clinical Sport Psychology is based on the recognition of the fluidity of human experience, and the understanding of subjective experience and human performance as a continuum. Legitimizing the sports space as a complex also implies the rejection of binary categorizations, inherited from archaic or unilateral intervention models. Clinical Sport Psychology involves,

The application of knowledge and methods from the various substantive fields of psychology for the promotion and maintenance of psychological and physical health and well-being; the optimization of athletic performance for individuals, families, and organizations involved in sport; and the prevention, assessment, and amelioration of personal or performance difficulties which psychological influences either contribute to or relieve (Gardner and Moore, 2006, p. 9).

The experience-based practice is important for Clinical Sport Psychology because it helps practitioners to critically signify the efficacy of traditional interventions and develop new theoretical models for understanding athletic performance. Many commonly used interventions in Sport Psychology have equivocal support and poor methodology, and that practitioners should be cautious about assuming their efficacy. Instead, practitioners should carefully consider the experience lived for interventions and provide clients (athletes) with informed consent regarding their questionable efficacy (Moore, 2007). An experience-based practice of Clinical Sport Psychology would involve an expanded consideration of the relationship between psychological well-being and athletic performance, and a philosophical shift in which the field of Sport Psychology is no longer dominated by one strictly concretized in evidence, in sports performance and its improvement. For Clinical Sport Psychology, performance results from a progressively developed process, where the enhancement of the athlete's psychological processes leads to better performance in sport and potentially other life domains.

Female athletes face implicit challenges of high-level performance and the condition of being women. In such contexts, gender hierarchies are threatened when women's bodies are deemed excessive for conventional gender representation standards—too fat, too old, too sexual, or not sexual enough. The strong and muscular bodies of athletes like Serena Williams, Caster Semenya, Santhi Soundarajan, and Edinanci Silva exemplify 'bodily transgressions' negotiated on their path to success in sports. Schulze (1990) states, 'The deliberately muscular woman disrupts dominant notions of sex, gender, and sexuality, and any discursive field that includes her risks causing competition and conflict, anxiety, and ambiguity' (p. 171).

What happens when gender ideologies merge in a male-dominated sports culture? How do female athletes interpret their experiences in elite sport, where norms about 'what a woman should be' are legitimized? Specifically, what can be learned about the subjectivities of women competing at elite levels?

This discussion aims to 'use' sports activity as a transdisciplinary, multidimensional, and complex configuration of action developing the bodily dimension within gender contexts. Analyzing competitive experiences as unique subjective processes involves understanding sportive action dynamically, recognizing subjectivity as integral to the clinical sports psychology framework. This systematic review analyzes recent scientific and academic papers addressing the female body in sports practice from an embodied approach. These publications help to build a critical state of the art, anchoring our analysis to nuances of female singularity in sport. We aim to understand how women's sports' bodily dimension has been approached from the perspective of subjectivity.

Our debate space is structured on the overlap between Clinical and Sport Psychology and education. Studying subjective productions in practitioners at this level reveals experiences encompassing sports training development to ideologies in perpetual change, consolidation, and conflict.

## Method

A qualitative approach was employed to conduct the overall investigation and to specifically analyze the results. The reporting process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement (Moher et al., 2009).

### 1) Eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria are shown in Table 1. Qualitative, cohort/cross-sectional studies, single case studies, and systematic reviews/meta-analyses papers published in the last five years (2019-2024) were selected. The papers were published in journals linked to current discussions in Sport Psychology and Clinical Sport Psychology related to Social Science, with approaches that consider gender and body as constructions or processes in women's sports. Due to the anticipated small number of available studies, a range of study types was included.

	INCLUSION	EXCLUSION
<b>Population</b>	Female athletes	Female athletes who do not practice sports systematically
<b>Study Type</b>	Qualitative, cohort/cross-sectional studies, single case studies, systematic reviews/meta-analyses	Experimental studies, expert opinion/editorials,
<b>Timeline</b>	2019-2024	Before 2019
<b>Outcomes</b>	Gender as construction, female practice in sports, embodied approach of performance.	Quantified performance effects. Gender strictly associated with biological sex.
<b>Context</b>	Sport, exercise, physical activity, sport psychology, clinical sport psychology.	Any other context.

Table 1. Eligibility criteria.

## 2) Information sources

The databases used for identifying the studies were Medline (PubMed) and Web of Science for the standard review process, and Google Scholar for a complementary manual search.

Databases searched and initial and pre-screening results are presented in Table 2.

Search	Databases Included	Period of search	Initial results	Pre-screening results
1-5	Medline (PubMed)	Feb 1 - March 4	71	71
1-5	Web of Science	Feb 15 - March 11	79	79
1-5	Google Scholar	Feb 22 - March 18	22	7

Table 2. Information sources

## 3) Search strateg

A series of five searches were conducted on a weekly basis with each database, after performing test searches to refine the keywords. The filter and limit used was the publication year range 2019-2024 (see Table 1 and 2).

## 4) Study selection

Once the database searches were completed, the first author screened the titles and abstracts of the publications to eliminate those that did not fit the inclusion criteria. Articles were moved on to full-text screening when it was not possible to decide from the titles and abstracts or when it seemed that the inclusion requirements were satisfied. A second independent researcher reviewed and discussed the first author's full-text screening decisions. A manual search was also conducted through the reference lists of the full-text articles.

## 5) Data extraction

The first level of data extraction was the responsibility of the first author, and all information was checked by the second independent researcher. Data were extracted onto an electronic template created for the review purpose. The process included extracting the central idea as it appears in the supplementary information, with details such as the author, journal, year, population description, design, theoretical model, outcome measures, and findings. The results were

categorized into five core themes: gender, female practice, female body, subjectivity, and female experience.

## Results

### Study selection

Due to the variety of study designs, participants, and outcomes, we decided to present the review results, arguments, and approaches as a synthesis. The PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1 shows the searching phases and results.

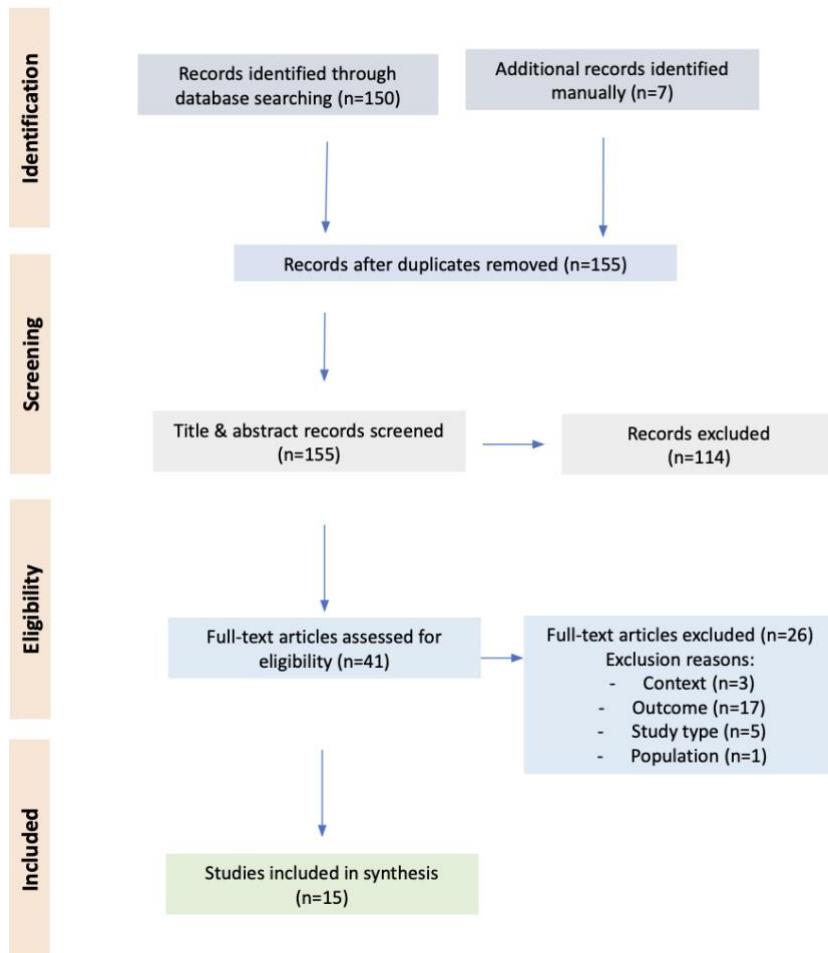


Figure 1. PRISMA's flow diagram

The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the selection process of the studies included in this systematic review. After the initial search, a total of 172 studies were identified across Medline (PubMed), Web of Science, and Google Scholar. After removing duplicates and screening titles

and abstracts, 41 articles were eligible for full-text review. Of these, 15 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis.

### **Study characteristics**

Individual study characteristics are fully detailed in the supplementary information. The selected studies were qualitative designs, including observation (Daly et al., 2024), informal-unstructured interviews, and semi-structured individual (Kavoura & Ryba, 2020; Huellemann et al., 2023) and group interviews (Levi et al., 2022). Several studies employed feminist approaches (Couch et al., 2022; Mann & Hacker, 2024; Scott, 2019; Isard, Melton & Macaulay, 2023, between others) and constructive interpretative methodologies (Vidaurreta & Vidaurreta, 2020). Two papers reviewed literature related to embodiment (Marmeira & Santos, 2019; Fraser & Kochanek, 2023). One paper was theoretical (Schiavio et al., 2019).

### **Study findings**

#### **Overview**

Several articles included in this review, as Isard, Melton & Macaulay (2023), Hyman, White & David (2021) and Kavoura & Ryba (2020) for example, contribute compelling arguments to the ongoing debate. However, a significant number of studies specifically focusing on the construction of the subjective body experience of female athletes from the perspective of sport psychology and clinical sport psychology were not found. The arguments emerging from the articles have been organized around three central themes: (i) gender as a performance, (ii) embodied approach in female sport practice, and (iii) subjectivity as a qualitative dimension of female sport practice.

#### **Gender as a performance**

Fraser & Kochanek (2023) and Kavoura & Ryba (2019) discussed the challenges faced by female athletes in elite sports due to sociocultural factors, gendered environments, stereotypes, and societal norms that influence opportunities, development, and performance compared to their male counterparts. These authors highlight the pressures female athletes face to embody resilience and individual responsibility within their athletic pursuits, drawing on scholars like Butler, Foucault, and Weedon to analyze how female athletes construct their identities through societal expectations and discursive practices.

Ryba, Ronkainen & Aunola (2021), Couch et al. (2023), and Mann & Hacker (2024) explored the gender conception within the context of dual career policies, emphasizing the role of societal norms and cultural scripts in shaping athletes' identities and aspirations. These studies underline the dynamic and socially constructed nature of gender roles and the impact of gendered performances on athletes' experiences in dual career development.

Levi et al. (2023) examined coaches' perspectives, highlighting the need to individualize athletes rather than generalize based on gender. They found that despite initial gender-neutral approaches, differences in coaching strategies and perceptions between male and female athletes eventually emerge, challenging complete gender neutrality in coaching.

Studies like Hyman, White & David (2021) approached femininity through Black feminism, emphasizing the intersectionality of race and gender. Fraser & Kochanek (2023) challenged hegemonic femininity in women's sports, exploring how evolving ideals of femininity influence female athletes' engagement in sports. Scott (2019), Isard, Melton & Macaulay (2023), and Vidaurreta & Vidaurreta (2020) addressed gender as a social construct influenced by societal and cultural norms, with subjectivity shaped by intersectional factors such as race, (dis)ability, class, sexuality, and age.

### **Embodied approach in female sport practice**

The selected articles - Fraser & Kochanek (2023); Kavoura & Ryba (2019); Ryba, Ronkainen & Aunola (2021), Huellemann et al. (2023); Schiavio et al. (2019); Daly et al. (2023) - recognized that the female body is a construction that integrates aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability. Levi et al. (2023) discussed how female athletes navigate the paradox of femininity and muscularity, striving to meet both athletic performance standards and societal expectations of femininity. The research emphasizes the need for inclusive coaching practices that support women athletes in achieving their goals while challenging traditional gender norms.

The authors highlight how female athletes use their bodies as sites of performance, agency, and resistance within a male-dominated sports culture. This perspective explores the intersection of physicality, gendered expectations, societal norms, and personal narratives, offering a holistic understanding of the female embodied sportive experience.

Marmeira & Santos (2019) emphasized the importance of considering the body and action in understanding human development, cognition, emotion, and behavior. They argue that the body,

sensory experiences, and motor interactions play crucial roles in shaping perception and human relations.

### **Subjectivity as a qualitative dimension of female sport practice**

Although subjectivity is not directly addressed in most articles, the elaboration of female sports experiences demonstrates an understanding of the qualitative dimensions of human phenomena that transcend the concrete and observable condition. From Kavoura & Ryba (2019), Ryba, Ronkainen & Aunola (2021), Couch et al. (2023), Mann & Hacker (2024), Fraser & Kochanek (2023), Huellemann et al. (2023), Schiavio et al. (2019), Hyman, White & David (2021), and Scott (2019), subjectivity is understood as a dynamic and complex process influenced by cultural discourses, gendered expectations, and individual experiences.

Isard, Melton & Macaulay (2023) explored subjectivity in relation to everyday resistance in women's sports, highlighting how athletes use sport to resist societal gender norms. This includes challenging who is allowed to participate in women's sport and how, using their own participation as acts of resistance.

Vidaurreta & Vidaurreta (2020), drawing on González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, emphasized the subjective nature of athletes' interpretations, emotions, and self-perceptions as they navigate the intersection of femininity, athleticism, and disability. They presented three main outcomes:

1. **Subjective Configurations:** The research highlights how subjective configurations shape athletes' perceptions and experiences in sports.
2. **Symbolic-Emotional Production:** The paper emphasizes the symbolic-emotional production underlying athletes' lived experiences and interactions within high-performance sports.
3. **Empowerment through Subjectivity:** The research suggests that subjectivity can serve as a resource for empowerment and self-determination among female athletes with physical disabilities, driving personal growth, resilience, and autonomy within competitive sports.

## **Discussion**

Drawing on the arguments synthesized from the reviewed literature, this discussion constructs an alternative perspective that advances Sport Clinical Psychology and challenges existing paradigms by interpreting the female experience within competitive sports.

### **The Gendered Body**

Women's significant achievements in competitive sports have established their capability and prowess across various domains of human performance. However, despite these advancements, gender equality in sports remains an ongoing struggle. The societal view of women is often overshadowed by male hegemony (Adelman, 2006; Carrington, 2002; Connell, 1987; Crossett, 1990; Watts, 2011).

Authors such as Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, and Judith Butler provide critical insights into gender theory, emphasizing that gender is not a fixed identity, but a fluid construct shaped through repeated acts and societal norms. Butler's notion of gender performativity challenges the idea of stable identities, suggesting that gender is continuously constituted through embodied practices and cultural norms (Butler, 1990, 1997). This theoretical framework intersects with phenomenological perspectives from authors like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, underscoring the embodiment of gender as a historical and socially mediated phenomenon.

Sport, while often structured around biological sex categories of male and female, is not merely a reflection of natural distinctions. Foucault critiques the linkage of natural sex with distinct gender roles, arguing that these associations are culturally constructed to serve specific societal interests (Foucault, 1978). The body, according to Merleau-Ponty (2006) and Beauvoir (1949), is historically and culturally mediated, challenging the dichotomy between biological sex and gender identity. This cultural construction influences both individual actions on the body and societal perceptions of gendered behaviors.

### **Feminist Perspectives in Sport Psychology**

Scholars such as Couch et al. (2022), Mann & Hacker (2024), Scott (2019), Isard, Melton & Macaulay (2023), and Gill (1994) advocate for a feminist approach in Sport Psychology. This approach seeks to dismantle sexist assumptions and practices while integrating gender studies to highlight the unique experiences of women in sports. It emphasizes empowerment, challenging

hierarchical structures, and fostering social change rather than solely focusing on individual transformation (Marmeira & Santos, 2019; Fraser & Kochanek, 2023).

Gender should be defined as a socially constructed concept that encompasses the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors associated with being male or female in a particular society or culture. Gender is not a fixed or innate characteristic but rather a product of socialization and cultural norms. Authors as Gill (1994), Deaux & Kite (1987), Geis (1993), Schiavio et al (2019), Hyman, White & David (2021), Isard, Melton & Macaulay (2023), Vidaurreta & Vidaurreta (2020) argue that gender stereotypes and beliefs are pervasive and influence everything, including sports, and that it is important to recognize and challenge these stereotypes to promote gender equality in sports.

### **Body Construction and Gender in Sport**

Sport serves as a critical cultural arena where gender norms are constructed and contested. Historically, sport has been a domain for men to demonstrate masculine traits and reinforce hegemonic ideals of masculinity (Crossett, 1990; Kimmel, 1990). Conversely, the concept of femininity within sport has often been limited to characteristics such as submission and appearance-focused behaviors (Hardy, 2015). These societal constructions influence the embodiment of gender in sports, shaping how athletes perceive and perform their identities within competitive environments.

Goellner (2004) describes the world of sport as a territory “permeated with ambiguities [...] at the same time, it fascinated and destroyed men and women, both because it questioned the legitimizing discourses of their own limits as behaviors of each sex, as well as because, through its rituals, vibrates the tension between freedom and control of emotions, and also the representations of masculinity and femininity” (p. 367). The notion of femininity for Hardy (2015) becomes hegemonic in the sociologically ‘correct’ version of women, summarized in the white, heterosexual, middle-class woman. Likewise, a hegemonic femininity is defined by traits such as submission, dependency, concern for physical appearance and emotional capacity. Consequently, “the social construction of sport is a space where hegemonic masculinity is defined, and sports participation is associated with masculine traits, such as aggressiveness, strength, power, dominance and violence” (Hardy, 2015, p.155).

The construction of gender in sport is multifaceted and dynamic, influenced by cultural narratives and societal expectations. Marmeira & Santos (2019), Fraser & Kochanek (2023), and Vidaurreta & Vidaurreta (2020) argue that sport is not only a site for physical development but also a social

space where bodies and identities are continuously negotiated. Subjectivity, as conceptualized by González Rey (2019), emerges from these interactions, representing a complex interplay of symbolic, emotional, and historical dimensions within sporting contexts.

Subjectivity can be understood as a "[...] configurational system, organized by diverse subjective configurations in different moments and contexts of human experience" (González Rey & Mitjáns, 2017, p. 62). It involves a complex reality experienced by humans as creative beings (Mitjáns, 2005). Subjectivity is cultural, social, and historical—not as an internalization but as a production that integrates symbolic social processes with human emotionality. The body and its productions emerge from a symbolic-emotional organization.

Action, therefore, becomes a source of subjective sense, expressing the body's individual condition, which is dynamic due to the continuous flux of senses characterizing human experiences. Consequently, the body acquires a subjective organization through configurations that form a network of moving subjective senses. These senses are moments within the continuous flux that constitutes subjective action configuration. This perspective challenges the dominance of object activity as the guiding category in analyzing sport as human execution in any analytical dimension.

Based on the arguments from the reviewed publications, the body in sports is a complex process, inseparable from understanding female sportive experiences. The body is configured and shaped by its life story and current social existence. The female athlete's development and the subjective configuration of her actions are elements that define her unique sportive experience.

Gender as a subjective production helps us to understand the high-performance sportive experience of women as a configuration. Clinical Sport Psychology must interpret sports experiences from perspectives recognizing the lived multidimensionality, where gender can be a source of conflict and resistance, as well as the production of subjective resources that distinguish individuals from one another.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

The arguments synthesized from the reviewed literature underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of gender in high-performance sports. This discussion highlights several implications:

1. Recognition of subjective processes in shaping female athletes' identities and experiences, particularly those with physical disabilities.
2. Promotion of alternative methodologies in Clinical Sport Psychology that prioritize empathetic engagements and contextual understanding of athletes' narratives.
3. Exploration of symbolic-emotional networks within sport to enrich the understanding of gendered experiences.
4. Challenge to traditional gender norms through the embodiment of strength and resistance by female athletes.
5. Examination of how athletes navigate societal expectations and physical limitations in defining femininity and athleticism within competitive sports.

### **Final remarks**

The number of articles included in this review makes it possible to understand how initial and incipient the issue of female bodies in sports practice as subjective configurations still is, and how the body dimension continues to be approached from a markedly binary and non-processual approach. The opportunity to advance along the path of González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity allows highlighting human processes and phenomena that have not been the focus of attention of other theories. In particular, the recognition of the subjective, bodily, and lived experiences that are configured in sports commitment, from an embodied approach, offers a more flexible starting point to negotiate the theoretical and methodological challenges created by traditional and conservative discourses in Clinical Sports Psychology.

The review aimed to bring arguments to the debate that would allow progress to be made in the understanding of the unique and singular dimension of the body experience. The papers reviewed and the authorial reflections enable to interpret the variety of life experiences of athletes, giving voice to their worries, challenges, and struggles. The subjectivity approach enables the study of the female body as an object of learning in its close connection with the social space of female sport practice, with the social environment in which the female athlete lives, and with all its subjective productions that are presented diversely in each woman athlete. The subjective emergence of the female other is transformed in the course of the actual experience and in the network of connections established by these subjective creations.

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## **II) Performing Gender: A Qualitative Exploration of the Gendered Body in High-Performance Paralympic Sports**

### **Abstract**

This article investigates the construction of gender within the realm of sports by examining the experiences of X and T, Colombian female Paralympic athletes. Grounded in González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, the study employs a Qualitative Epistemology and a constructive-interpretative methodology to gain insights into the lived experiences of female athletes in high-performance sports. The analysis underscores the significance of recognizing the uniqueness of these athletes to challenge traditional gender norms in sports. By exploring the intricate interplay between athletic performance, personal lives, and gender roles in the case studies presented, the article highlights the necessity of a holistic understanding of athlete's lives. Ultimately, this work advocates for a paradigm shift toward promoting gender equality and inclusivity within the sports domain.

**Key words:** Gender construction, Female Paralympic athletes, González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, Constructive-interpretative methodology

### **Resumo**

Este artigo investiga a construção de gênero no âmbito esportivo ao examinar as experiências de X e T, atletas paralímpicas colombianas. Com base na teoria da subjetividade de González Rey, o estudo adota uma epistemologia qualitativa e uma metodologia construtivo-interpretativa para compreender as vivências das atletas em esportes de alto rendimento. A análise destaca a importância de reconhecer a unicidade dessas atletas para desafiar as normas tradicionais de gênero no esporte. Ao explorar a complexa interação entre desempenho esportivo, vidas pessoais e papéis de gênero nos estudos de caso apresentados, o artigo ressalta a necessidade de uma compreensão holística da vida das atletas. Este trabalho, por fim, defende uma mudança de paradigma em direção à promoção da igualdade de gênero e inclusão no domínio esportivo.

**Palavras-chave:** Construção de gênero, Atletas paralímpicas, Teoria da Subjetividade de González Rey, Metodologia construtivo-interpretativa

## Introduction

One of the difficulties in addressing gender issues in sports is that it is still considered that the experiences of men and women would always differ owing to predetermined and perceived physiological differences. It stems from a failure to recognize individual experience and the social variables that affect sports involvement. According to Wellard (2016), recognizing the primary role of the body is one method to sort through the complexities of gender in the context of sport and physical activity in order to recognize the many social factors that are demanded in female athletes' experiences.

Female engagement in sport is also hindered by gender discourses that defend traditional, restricted, and rigid representations of women. While accepting the individualized nature of the experience of embodied life, an alternative embodied approach enables researchers to examine the implications of these (and other) forms of knowledge systems (Woodward, 2015; Haegeke, Yessick & Zhu, 2018; Isard, Melton & Macaulay, 2023; Marceleira & Duarte Santos, 2019; Wellard, 2016).

Sport participation is not entirely contingent on an individual's physical ability in engaging in the movements required for a certain sportive event, or "performance." In historically conceived, cultural and athletic settings, bodily performance reproduces normative social standards related to hegemonic codes of sexuality and gender identity. According to Connell (2005) and Butler (1990), sport highlights the performative aspects of gender within a broader culture that are organized in bodily representations of highly developed bodies. In sports, aggressive masculinity is often linked with high performance. Performance is positively impacted by "being" aggressive during competition and in general, and these manifestations are seen as essential components for success. In the end, the physical dimension of the body comes to be prized above other social groups and employed specifically as a gender identifier. Female athletes must adjust to their bodies' expected levels of performance.

Sport-related requirements center on physical prowess, which isn't necessarily related to gender. The focus is on sportive ability. Success in sports requires "gaining" specific knowledge about the body, requiring accurate movement patterns that allow it to develop. Female athletes encounter scrutiny over their physiques. During the 2024 Olympics, discussions emerged about the muscularity of female athletes, highlighting ongoing societal discomfort with women who defy traditional feminine aesthetics, for example, Imane Khelif and Ilona Maher. Aly Raisman, Simone Biles, Serena Williams, Caster Semenya, Lia Thomas are other examples. These instances

underscore the persistent challenges female athletes face in balancing societal expectations of femininity with the physical demands of their sports. Despite their accomplishments, they often confront criticism that undermines their identities as women, solely based on their athletic physiques.

Athleticism and femininity are not mutually exclusive. The possibility of understanding gender as a process that takes part in the sport action recognizes a strong and muscular sport body configured by the practice itself, which is also organized in a subjective dimension with singular definitions and attributes. When considering the intersection of being female, living with a disability, and competing in high-performance sports, the complexity of analysis deepens significantly. Female Paralympic athletes often face dual marginalization due to both gender and disability, while navigating a sport's arena traditionally designed for able-bodied men. This intersectionality introduces unique challenges, including limited access to training resources, societal stereotypes, and underrepresentation in media.

The ideas discussed here, beyond pretending to be a gender proposal, are intended to be a discussion of women's sport, female practice, and action in high performance. To achieve this, we draw on Gonzalez Rey's framework of subjectivity, in which Qualitative Epistemology and the constructive-interpretative method emerged as resources to produce case studies that highlight the singularity of the development of the female body's experience in paralympic high-performance sport. The goal of this study is to develop and construct a theoretical alternative in the field of Clinical and Sports Psychology that advocates for understanding the experiences of paralympic female athletes who participate in high-performance sports.

### **Female resistances and gender as a negotiation: subjectivity approach**

Despite ongoing efforts to reshape discourses on gender and sexuality, there remain significant gaps in our understanding of how femininity is constructed among individuals with disabilities (Ancet, 2010; Zitzelsberger, 2005; Hardy, 2013; Gill, 1994; Godoy-Izquierdo & Díaz, 2021). A continuous activity as sport, with the body in motion, provides a unique setting for discussing gender as 'performance' (Butler, 1990, 1997; Sherry et al., 2015).

The recognition of the recursive relationship between bodies and genders is often marked by conflict, particularly for disabled women, whose experiences of femininity should not be viewed as uniform. This interaction is colored by the singularity and individual construction of the reality of life. Advance theoretically in the explanation of the genesis and emergence of human productions

linked to the body, as well as seek the development of new explanations capable of integrating emotions as subjective processes inseparable from productions organized in the course of action and forms of human expression, will allow us to understand what this triple 'state' of woman, athlete and disabled entails.

Subjectivity can be defined as "[...] configurational system, which is organized by diverse subjective configurations at different times and contexts of human experience" (González Rey & Mitjáns, 2017, p.62, *our translation*).

[...] é um macroconceito que integra os complexos processos e formas de organização psíquicos envolvidos na produção de sentidos subjetivos. A subjetividade se produz sobre sistemas simbólicos e emoções que expressam de forma diferenciada o encontro de histórias singulares de instâncias sociais e sujeitos individuais, com contextos sociais e culturais multidimensionais [...]<sup>21</sup> (González Rey, 2012, p. 137).

González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity introduces the concept of subjective configuration, which has exceptional value as a theoretical resource for understanding the construction of female bodies, based on the recognition of symbolic-emotional networks in process, framed as athletes' productions in spaces within femininity and female bodies are configured and operate subjectively. For González Rey (2017), subjective configurations are not fixed; they permeate our daily lives and continually evolve through the dynamic interplay of various subjective experiences.

The multidimensional, recursive, and contradictory character of subjective productions becomes a new level of analysis of complex human systems, typical of their subjective condition. The categories of subjective sense and subjective configuration are two advances in the Theory of Subjectivity. Both, the subjective senses, and the subjective configurations imply the generative nature of emotions in the plasticity that they must evoke symbolic processes and be evoked by them (González Rey, 2014). Subjectivity is assumed as an ontology of the human condition and the female athlete as a constant producer of differentiated processes of subjectivity in the face of their realities<sup>22</sup>. The singular character of these productions is a rescue that González Rey made,

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<sup>21</sup> [...] a macro-concept that integrates the complex processes and forms of psychic organization involved in the production of subjective senses. Subjectivity is produced on symbolic and emotional systems that express in a differentiated way the encounter of singular histories of social instances and individual subjects, with multidimensional social and cultural contexts [...] (González Rey, 2012, p. 137, *our translation*)

<sup>22</sup> For sport, the category of activity, adopted from one of the Soviet thought positions led by A.N.Leontiev, has become the rector, marking the theoretical and methodological approach in working with athletes, particularly at the time of Sport Psychology specialty's birth. This concept of activity turns out to be an "umbrella" category or supracategory for psychology in general. In short, activity has assumed such a dominant role in critical psychological thinking that it has enabled it to fill in for almost any complex

perhaps linked to humanist positions within psychology, acquiring a different relevance: they are productions that generate multiple symbolic-emotional processes, which are defined as subjective senses.

[...] O subjetivo é um sistema, mas nunca representa 'toda a subjetividade', nem da pessoa nem de um espaço social específico; o subjetivo é um sistema como configuração atual do processo que se organiza no curso da ação e no curso da história de vida das pessoas e de seus espaços sociais, alimentando-se das múltiplas produções simbólico-emocionais que caracterizam as experiências dessas pessoas e dos diferentes espaços sociais em que vivem em momentos históricos e contextos distintos da vida individual e social [...] (González Rey 2015, p.15-16)<sup>23</sup>.

Given so, gender, from the perspective of González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, is also not a fixed or static category but a dynamic and socially constructed configuration that emerges through the interplay of individual experiences, sociocultural contexts, and relational dynamics. Applying this framework to gender highlights the intricate ways in which individuals actively produce and negotiate their gendered identities within specific sociocultural and historical contexts. Gender, therefore, is not merely a biological or social construct but a subjective configuration shaped by lived experiences, emotional processes, and the continuous dialogue between the individuals and their environments. This perspective enables an understanding of gender as a fluid and multifaceted process, deeply intertwined with other dimensions of identity, such as race, class, ability, and sexuality.

The concept of configurational logic aligns closely with the notion of complexity, as it resists reducing subjectivity to isolated elements or conflating it with an all-encompassing "everything" (González Rey, 2014; 2019). In high-performance sports, the subjective configuration of gender becomes particularly significant, especially for women navigating environments traditionally shaped by male norms and values. For female athletes, including those with disabilities, these configurations are shaped by societal expectations of femininity and athleticism. This interplay

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psychological dynamic. The activity made it possible to represent the psyche based on the image of the world and reduce it to the relationship of man with objects (González Rey, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> [...] The subjective is a system, but it never represents "all subjectivity", neither of the person nor of a particular social space; The subjective is a system as the current configuration of the process that is organized in the course of action and in the course of the life history of people and their social spaces, feeding on the multiple symbolic- emotional productions that characterize the experiences of those people and the different social spaces in which they live in historical moments and different contexts of individual and social life [...] (González Rey 2015, p.15-16).

highlights how gender intersects with other subjective dimensions, as the body and emotions, to produce nuanced and multifaceted experiences.

The emergence of subjective configurations linked to specific life experiences integrates thoughts, emotions, and fantasies as essential components of any psychological function associated with those experiences (González Rey & Mitjans, 2017). Subjective senses are never fully captured by individual perspectives or deliberate statements. Instead, these productions are woven into the fabric of beliefs and expressions, often remaining hidden from the explicit understanding of others (González Rey, 2019).

The subjective configurations that emerge from action hold a regulatory value distinct from other subjective productions, as noted by Vidaurreta and Vidaurreta (2020). These configurations underscore the uniqueness of how subjective experiences are organized within human action. When these experiences align coherently, they can serve as a basis for developing theoretical models that deepen our understanding of human subjectivity. This perspective is particularly relevant when it is integrated into Clinical Sport Psychology, where such models contribute to a holistic approach to athlete development. By viewing the athletes as active creators of their reality, Clinical Sport Psychology acknowledges that sportive experiences are not only constructed but are also deeply shaped by intersecting dimensions such as gender. Gendered dynamics influence how athletes navigate their environments, shaping their emotions, actions, and identities in ways that demand a nuanced and singular approach.

Furthermore, the fluid and evolving nature of psychological processes highlights the importance of contextualizing the athlete within broader social and gendered configurations. Each individual action is part of a sequence of behaviors and interactions that transcend the individual, reflecting an ongoing interplay between the athlete's inner world, gender identity, and environment. Clinical Sport Psychology benefits from this epistemological understanding of the subject as an evolving entity, where actions, emotions, thoughts, and gendered experiences are continuously reconfigured. This approach enriches theoretical models while also informing practical methodologies that address how gender shapes athletic experiences. By integrating gender as a core dimension of analysis, Clinical Sport Psychology can better support athletes in navigating complex lived realities, promoting both personal growth and sporting excellence.

[...] In turn, the concept of the subject represents the one who opens his own path of subjectivation, which transcends the normative social space within which his experiences take place, exercising creative options in the course of them, which may or may not be expressed in the action (González Rey & Mitjáns, 2017, p.72).

As an epistemological category, the subject holds a fundamental role in the process of knowledge production, offering lens to understand the complexity of human experience and action. However, the concept of the subject alone was not sufficiently flexible to capture the subtle, daily micro-emergences of individuals actively generating new paths of subjectivation. These small, localized acts of agency often remained unexplained within traditional frameworks of subjectivity. To address this representational gap, González Rey and Mitjáns (2017) introduced the category of the agent as a complementary construct. This category provides a more nuanced understanding of how individuals, even within constrained sociocultural contexts, enact changes and create new subjective configurations through everyday actions and decisions.

The agent, unlike the subject, would be the individual - or social group - situated during events in the current field of their experiences; a person or group that makes everyday decisions, thinks, likes or dislikes what happens, which in fact gives them a participation in this course (González Rey & Mitjans, 2017, p.72).

Sport provides a unique and dynamic space for the study and production of knowledge about subjectivity, gender, and performance. As a highly visible and culturally significative domain, sport is deeply intertwined with societal norms, relational dynamics, and individual identity formation, making it an ideal setting for exploring the interplay between these factors. The physical, emotional, and psychological demands of paralympic sport not only challenge traditional notions of identity but also create opportunities to observe the emergence of the reconfiguration of subjectivities in real time. By treating sport as more than just a site of competition and performance, researchers can delve into the nuanced processes through which individuals construct meanings, negotiate conflicts, and transcend traditional boundaries. This perspective positions sport as a privileged space for advancing theoretical and practical understandings of human subjectivity and the transformative potential of embodied experiences.

### **Qualitative Epistemology and the Constructive-Interpretative Method**

When attempting to study human subjectivities, Qualitative Epistemology (González Rey, 1997, 2005a, 2005b) provides a solid foundation for such endeavors. For the approach we advocate, knowledge is understood as a constructive-interpretative production. Qualitative Epistemology defines knowledge production as a constructive process, emphasizing its procedural nature, where interpretation lends coherence to the results, reflecting the uniqueness of what is being studied. This process is always constructive, as theory does not aim to encapsulate the diversity of individuality within its current categories (González Rey, 1997; González Rey & Mitjáns, 2017a).

These insights translate into a flexible and dynamic conceptual framework capable of incorporating incomplete processes into the course of its development.

Qualitative Epistemology, rooted in constructive-interpretative methodology, emphasizes that knowledge production is a dynamic and dialogical process. This approach highlights communication as a crucial medium for generating information and underscores the importance of singular experiences in scientific knowledge production (González Rey, 1997, 2019; Vidaurreta & da Costa, 2019). Here, the process of knowledge production advances through dialogical communication established between the researcher and the participants. This interactive process relies on communication as the underlying dynamic, driving various methodological stages, whether focused on studying a Paralympic female athlete or the broader social processes they engage with. The quality of expression becomes an essential aspect of valuing the information produced by participants, serving as a defining criterion for legitimizing individuality as an essential level in knowledge production. Consequently, individuality represents a constant moment of openness and confrontation in the development of any theory and allows for the definition of unique elements that are decisive in constructing broader theoretical elaborations (González Rey, 1997).

Combining Qualitative Epistemology with a constructive-interpretative approach allows for a deep exploration and interpretation of participant's expressions. This interactive process positions communication as a central dynamic space, where the quality of participant's expression significantly impacts the value of the information produced. Recognizing singularity as a key aspect of knowledge development highlights the importance of subjective experiences in the understanding of human existence. Dialogue in this methodological framework is continuous and complex, involving time, contradictions, and emotional depth. As González Rey notes, “(...) Dialogue requires time to be arranged. It implies contradictions, unexpected unfolding paths, new decisions and thoughts, intense emotions, which taken together could lead to its consolidation or interruption” (González Rey, 2019, p. 45). Maintaining an active dialogue is crucial, as researchers must navigate theoretical conjectures while advancing both dialogue and theoretical construction.

Methodologically, the construction and interpretation of information appear to be the only viable pathways for approaching subjectivity within the professional relationship between psychologist and athlete. It enables the exploration of sports and bodily practices, particularly for paralympic female athletes, as “networks of resistance and transgression” and platforms for critiquing norms of femininity (González Rey, 2019, p. 38).

## **Social scenario of this proposal**

In this line of thinking, the approach aims to reveal subjective experiences related to the female body, acknowledging the athlete as a complex, emotionally invested existence (Vidaurreta & Vidaurreta, 2020). Validating these experiences as forms of scientific knowledge involves recognizing research as a continuous theoretical endeavor. This includes developing theoretical models that offer coherence and consistency in understanding the subject matter. Generalization in this context refers to “(...) the ability of a theoretical model to generate new interpretations and articulate different links between them” (González Rey, 2019, p. 37). The concept of subjectivity as an ontological basis aligns with this approach, exploring subjectivity as a complex system that provides clarity on intricate phenomena.

Dembo (1976) suggests that “the best method to address a topic that is part of someone’s current experience is through their relationship with others”. Detailed case studies within this approach are essential for both theoretical and practical construction. The research process developed here allowed the creation of the social context as a creative act. This approach captures the dynamic, subjective nature of social configurations, increasing the quality of the research (González Rey, 2019, p. 20; Mitjáns, 2005). Resources as dialogical conversational dynamics, open written instruments, video feedback interactions offered a complex and diverse information research scenario to be constructed and interpreted. This approach allows for interpreting fragments of conversations, offering a richer understanding of the subject matter. In consequence, theoretical model constructed here aim to be a resource for provide a comprehensive explanation of the studied topic.

Indicators and hypotheses contribute to the internal consistency and legitimacy of theoretical constructions, facilitating the development of subjective interpretations. During the relationship itself, essentially dialogical, productions emerge and can be interpreted and understood by tracing hypothetical paths that, as the process progresses, become more structured spaces or new hypotheses through the constitution of alternative indicators.

We present the cases of two athletes as illustrations of how knowledge can be constructed using the Theory of Subjectivity, Qualitative Epistemology, and the interpretative-constructive method. The first case is a 24-year-old Colombian Paralympic swimmer, referred here as X, and the second case is a 34-year-old Colombian Paralympic champion runner, named T, who lives with a visual impairment.

The research involved approximately 15 conversational dynamics, each lasting around 1.5 hours and conducted via Zoom. These sessions were scheduled flexibly to accommodate the athletes' training demands, typically occurring between morning and afternoon sessions in settings such as dormitories, homes, or training center rooms. Conducted remotely, the dynamics leveraged the Zoom platform to ensure accessibility and continuity. To avoid interference with their schedules, days with heavy workloads or outdoor practices were excluded.

The conversational dynamic served as a core methodological framework, incorporating diverse tools to encourage authentic and multidimensional participant's expression. Key resources included sentence-completion tasks designed to evoke meaningful responses and visual and auditory materials, such as video recordings of competitions and public images of female athletes, to inspire in-depth discussions and narratives. Photo elicitation, using photographs as prompts during interviews, was also employed to explore emotional and cognitive responses to social representations of female athletes.

### **Ethics demands in this research**

In compliance with ethical standards, the study was approved by the Instituto de Ciências Humanas e Sociais da Universidade de Brasília - UnB Ethics Committee (CAAE number: 61954022.2.0000.5540) in January 2023. The cases conversational dynamics and case constructions tooked part between April 2023 and December 2024.

This study ensured that X and T provided informed consent. Prior to participation, X and T were fully briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Written informed consent was obtained from her as a research participant, for the use of their data and any related images in this publication. The written informed consent was secured and is retained by the authors/investigators as required.

### **Case X**

X is an athlete who struggles with upper-limb motor function.

Sport has always been a way for me to express myself. I realized I was good at something, which made me happy [...] Since I was a child, I have been known as a warrior, since from the moment I was born, everyone said that I would not live, and I have now been living for 23 years. So, I consider myself a warrior woman who has learned to overcome any hurdle [...].

Constructing a theoretical model that does not pretend to identify concepts or categories that can be generalized, seems to be a difficult problem to overcome. It takes effort to understand the model

as a potential route rather than as a predetermined layout. The interpretation and creation of knowledge from this reference is difficult and complex because of this.

In any case, the very nature of the process of construction and interpretation of knowledge that González Rey's referent of subjectivity brings with it contemplates processes of construction that somehow achieve relative stability and 'north' feelings, perceptions, and experiences of the various socialization spaces where the athlete lives. It means that these subjective productions, organized in subjective configurations and with self-regulative value in behavior, would become the basis of the theoretical framework that is being built to explain a particular phenomenon, such as X's bodily experience, which is part of everyday action, that X performs as a woman, athlete, daughter, and friend.

### **Embodied experience and sport**

About the performative body in action using video feedback scenario, X reflects,

It was a truly unique feeling, almost like I was flying instead of swimming—strange, too. My body supported me in this journey because I felt so joyful and confident. I never thought I could move with such speed or energy [...] Despite my differences, I never felt overprotected, but I was aware that my body was different, and I think that made me stronger [...].

Beginning the dialogue with thought-provoking questions about the broad experience of sports, X reflects on her unique relationship with her body and the sense of difference that does not equate to impairment. This acknowledgment highlights an adaptive perspective, where the permanence of their condition fosters resistance, knowledge, and strength. X's description of her body as a source of support, enabling feelings of joy, confidence, and speed, underscores a positive embodiment—a harmonious integration of physical difference into her identity as an athlete.

This narrative reveals how sport becomes a transformative space, where the athletes, not only recognize their capabilities but also redefine their relationship with their body. The emphasis on "not feeling overprotected" suggests a critical distinction between dependence and empowerment, indicating that the sense of agency is central to their sportive experience. Moreover, the idea that their difference "made them stronger" points to the reconfiguration of challenges into sources of personal growth and empowerment, illustrating how subjective configurations of the body are deeply tied to experiences of self-worth and achievement.

You may think that because I'm disabled, I've always felt different, and you'd be right, but when I think about myself, it's not my disability that comes to my mind first.[...]

The Paralympic world is very different from the conventional one. I learned to understand the visual classifications for competitions and the broader Paralympic landscape. It has been a process. [...]

It was a difficult blow for me to lose my mother when I was 10 years old, which is why I took a break from swimming for a while. If it hadn't been because of my father and brother, I would not have returned to sport. Family is everything; it is my team that allows me to achieve my goals [...].

X begins to appear in these initial emphases as a human being who has developed subjective resources that allow her to construct herself with autonomy. X is a creative subject with decision-making, introspection, and negotiation abilities who realizes her potential in the process of developing personal choices based on her own subjective resources within the possible impairment environment, as paralympic practice, in which she lives. Her subjective senses begin to emerge configured into her own actions.

It is possible to construct an indicator associated with accepting herself as she is, coming up with new ways to cope with X's condition, and understanding disability as a human experience. The decisive impulse to lead a positive life is evident in the following explicit statement, which emphasizes that her disability does not limit her. This indicator is growing through various expressions that feed the subjective construct of impairment for X.

I'm aware that I'm not 'normal,' but who is? These arms (*raising her arms*) are just like the color of someone's eyes—some are brown, others are blue, green, or even a mix. My arms look like this. They're different, so what? I feel beautiful [...].

The symbolic-emotional 'load' of having a physical limitation in a performance setting is signified in her feeling pride in herself, in her athletic success, and in her strength as a young female athlete. Another indicator that points in the direction of the previously described subjective configuration is the use of the phrases below as "(...) I think the looks were no longer about seeing me as a strange girl, but rather about seeing myself as a champion, so I began to like the attention. Nothing feels strange anymore", in relation to the construction of her body as a personal representation for X, and as a performative product that is distinguished by different in an external observation.

I was very embarrassed when they (*referring to other athletes that shared the training space*) stared at me at the beginning, although over time it has gone away. At first it was more complicated because this is a kingdom of men and I, well, at first, I was ashamed of everything. But when I began to stand out by winning, I think the looks were no longer about seeing me as a strange girl, but rather about seeing myself as a champion, so I began to like the attention. Nothing feels strange anymore [...].

The constructed indicators allow us to hypothesize that there is a strong, efficient, adapted, and independent personological construction that legitimizes X as the subject of her experience, which

is lived in an authentic and healthy way. X's reflection provides valuable insight into the social dynamics of gender and disability within the context of high-performance sports, particularly in environments traditionally dominated by men. Her initial embarrassment at being stared at reveals how social perceptions and expectations can amplify feelings of vulnerability and self-consciousness for female athletes entering male-dominated spaces. The "kingdom of men" she describes underscores the entrenched gender norms and power imbalances that frame sports as a primarily masculine domain, where women—and particularly women with disabilities—are often seen as outsiders or anomalies.

However, X's narrative also illustrates a significant transformation. Her shift from feeling ashamed to embracing the attention reflects a reconfiguration of her social identity within this space. Winning and excelling allowed her to challenge the initial perceptions of being a "strange girl," replacing these with admiration and respect as a champion. This progression demonstrates the potential of sportive achievement to disrupt entrenched stereotypes and recast how female athletes are perceived.

As a Colombian swimmer, X's journey also reflects broader cultural narratives where success in sports can offer a platform for renegotiating identity and visibility. Her story highlights how the intersection of gender, disability, and cultural expectations shapes subjective experiences, showing that recognition and achievement can serve as tools for breaking down social barriers and fostering empowerment. Overcoming these societal stigmas, X reclaims her presence in the "kingdom of men," transforming it into a space where her abilities and achievements, rather than her difference, define her identity.

### **Femininity, action, and body**

X offers her thoughts on what it means to be a young woman in Colombian society, in the world of athletics, and at peak performance levels. This subjective ability is strengthened as she organizes her reflections in such an insightful way, addressing her experience as a female body perceived as different, while her discourse transcends this notion.

I learned to aspire to be desired rather than pretty. There is a significant disparity between how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. Knowing that in my relationships, the other person accepts me for who I am allows me to be at peace with myself [...].

While a 'different female form' is recognized and accepted, one that X admires and respects for who she is, she also comes across as vulnerable and recognizes the opinions of others could affect how she feels.

I've always been timid, partially because I felt different from the other girls in my area or school, but also for other reasons. I'm constantly concerned about how others perceive me. Sometimes I wonder what they'll call me among themselves. Will they laugh at me? [...] I know these aren't things I should be thinking about, but I do from time to time [...].

Gender as a production that develops, occurs, and is configured throughout the action, can be an interesting rescue in this situation since it also helps us to recognize the potential for conflict that some subjective productions may encounter. The synthesis of body and gender is present here, with the disabled body carrying a specific emotional weight in the emergence of her feminine condition. It's interesting to think about how much X has been able to subjectively configure her body and her female self-perception, but how at the same time gender translates into a space of conflict, where the other still plays an important role in well-being and personal body satisfaction. And all this is permeated by sports space.

Sport is a crucial arena for X's achievement, resignification of experiences, self-validation, and personal progress. These are indications that enable us to analyze and construct the subjective configuration of sport.

Sport has given me more confidence. Finally, I go out, swim well, and everyone applauds me, and they applaud me (*emphasizes*). That makes me feel good [...].

These subjective elements of the subjective configuration of sport are also linked to the hypothesis about the strong, efficient, adapted, and independent personological construction that legitimizes X as the subject. In terms of sportive experience, we consider one of the Paralympic Games experiences to be thought-provoking.

The moment arrived, and everyone in the call room (*the space where the swimmers wait before being called to their lanes*) was screaming, and I was hitting myself all over my body, saying, 'this is my opportunity, it is unique, I don't know if I will return to the Paralympic Games tomorrow, so I have to give it everything'. I remember that, not much else [...] When everyone was rejoicing, I couldn't believe it. I was like, "What happened here?" When I turned to look at the board, I noticed my last name with half blurred, in the (.) line. I rubbed my eyes to make sure I was seeing correctly and then started to celebrate [...].

Here, the body seems to serve as a tool for performance and as a mean of expressing athletic action. Many athletes engage in a ritualistic action described by X as "hitting myself all over my body" to activate and become ready for her strongest execution possible at that precise moment. And it is also very common that the evoked memory of a specific sportive action focuses on the before, and in the result. High performance sport is a special occasion. It is an instantaneous physical outburst of the highest sportive abilities. Focused to the point where virtually all extraneous stimuli are eliminated, the trained body is allowed to be and perform. This form of sportive behavior,

which is seen as an indicator of champion profile, is also another factor which plays into shaping the sportive experience from the standpoint of being a determined, real individual with a high level of self-awareness.

The range of space available for female participation in Paralympic, Olympic, and international sports remains a source of dispute. It becomes an incentive to fight and win on multiple occasions, like in the case of X. X's critical and socially engaged thinking appears here, as another indicator that strengthens the subject position.

There was a lot of concern before going to (...) because there were only two spots available for women. It felt really unfair to me—there were more spots for men than for women, and it was clear that we weren't given the same importance. We talk about equality, but you can feel the difference when there are nine spots for men and only two for us. Thankfully, with the approval of a invitation, we were able to have four women competing. I believe this is the most female swimmers we've had at the Paralympics in history [...].

The sportive action becomes a scenario subjectively configured, with critics and reflection, by X., where the subjective productions are organized in the actuality of the facts in a singular way, also linked with the macrosocial context. Subjective productions reach a specific motivational implication where family and sport are the subjective spaces that nucleate their sporting experience.

In June 2022, X became world champion. Bringing photos of that moment the dialogue brought interesting elements.

The World Cup was a wonderful experience<sup>24</sup>. I had never participated before, and after seeing what I saw at the Paralympics, I felt more secure and comfortable. There was a lot of motivation since the competitors were also pleased because they could share with a reference, because they regard me as a reference [...]. The medals are amazing, recognizing one's constant labor and dedication during training sessions [...].

The condition of living with a disability can be subjectively configured, as X shows us, based on the resources that she develops to integrate it into the bodily and life experience in a non-predominant conflicting way - not meaning conflict-free. X manages to express important intentional-volitional resources that allow her not to "drown" in any life situation and continue her personal projects with pride and strength. This is a positioning of the subject of sportive and life experience, because the subjective configurations that are being organized are nourished by the decisions and active positions assumed continually by X.

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<sup>24</sup> This event will enter in history as one of the most representative for Colombian swimmers, because, for the first time, almost 50% of the Colombian delegation was made up of women, and women were medalists in an event of this category.

## Case T

*Unfortunately*, everything comes to an end, including life in sports. The key is knowing when to choose the right moment to step away. It's better to leave while you're still winning [...] that way, people remember you as the champion you've always been [...].

This textual expression comes from T., a high-performing Colombian athlete, who lives with a visual impairment and has achieved titles as a champion. The depth of reflection evident in this statement serves as an intriguing foundation for constructing this case study. The completing sentences as an open written instrument places the athlete facing a differentiated universe of phrases as inductors such as *Unfortunately*, in which the meaning must be produced and where is given complete freedom to decide the volume of information that the athlete wants to produce.

### Embodied experience and sport

In the instance of 34-year-old Colombian runner, experiences from the personal sphere—more specifically, from her marriage and the type of union that T and her husband have created—are entwined with the sportive experience.

I didn't want anyone to see me during that time [...] We've been together for a long time, and we love each other. [...] I didn't want to train like that. [...] Since my husband is also an athlete, and there's always a lot of talk, I didn't want people to have a negative opinion of him [...] We talked about it, and he apologized [...].

Here, in T, another dimension of bodily experience appears, which brings elements linked to a potential situation of violence, embodied in a body that is, at that moment, lived with shame and avoidance of contact. This same body is the body that laughs, the body that performs the sportive action and the body that is the vehicle and basis of the sportive experience.

In a clear way her husband's moral character and social representation are important to T. Concern over how the husband is seen in that setting seems to be the center here. Somehow this clear manifestation of concern in relation to others knowing, can hide different emotional components: shame, guilt, denial, fear, resistance to being perceived as fragile, or fear of being seen as a victim.

There is a recognition of the existence of a conflicting situation based on thinking that it would give rise to opinions of others about their relationship that are linked to physical violence due to the presence of bodily marks. At the same time, her main concern appears explicit in her agony

so that her husband's reputation is not damaged or undermined in any way. Thus, subjective productions linked to her family space and intrinsically to the female role in that context appear in the subjective configuration of the sportive experience.

The fact that neither I nor the girl (*referring to the daughter*) lack anything offers my mother a piece of mind. I kept all of that far from her because I didn't want to worry her—what if it turned out to be nothing? Time will say [...].

T seeks rational justifications for her not-active-opposition stance in the face of the aggression that can characterize her relationship with her husband by emphasizing his role as a good father, his concern and care for his daughter, as well as the financial support that he represents. That is, she gravitates on gender roles that reinforce the dominance of female dependency, fragility, and gender resignation in certain female settings.

T's body also reflects the tension between her private and public selves. In the private sphere, her body bears the marks of conflict, both physical (maybe bruises) and emotional (navigating relational dynamics with her husband). Yet, her public role as an athlete demands that these marks remain hidden to preserve an image of strength and control. This concealment underscores how her body becomes a canvas for societal narratives of femininity and athleticism, where vulnerability must be masked to maintain the ideal of the resilient, strong, well care, and successful female athlete.

T explains her perspective on a period of returning to training, after being away due to what had happened.

It was more convenient for me because, of the two of us, I have had the most success in athletics and my husband, who is a really excellent father and plays with the kid a lot, was the one who stayed with her when I went back to training. I'll return shortly. As a result, he gave the girl his whole attention and showed her a lot of love [...].

About her subjective family configuration, what can begin to be traced as a hypothetical path is the feminine position of resignation, resistance, and integrity where the daughter is the center, and she and her suffering are not legitimized. Her reputation as champion is a weighty factor in her sportive setup. T is known. And she wants to continue to be because of her performance, not because of her personal violent relationship. This is a valuable element to understand the conflict in which T can inhabit.

The state of living with a visual disability does not appear to be a crucial point among the expressions that first occur in conversations with T concerning the sportive experience. This could be because visual impairment is among the most common and least severe disabling conditions. Before the inductor *My eyes* in the instrument to completing sentences T expressed,

*My eyes are my problem, that's what life decided for me, they don't make things impossible for me, but sometimes it's hard to do things that have details [...].*

When T says that her daughter has no visual situations, despite the fact that the disability does not appear as a conflict but rather as a trait, there is a certain reflection of T in regard to the positive sense of not having visual impairments.

*Fortunately, my daughter seems to have no vision problem at all at the moment. My vision has always made me feel a little uncomfortable, especially when I read. I enjoy reading [...].*

Motherhood introduces another layer to T's subjective body construction. Her reflections on her husband's role as a father and her own as a mother reveal the centrality of caregiving in her familial experience. This dynamic reinforces traditional gender roles, where her body, even as a high-performing athletic entity, is still tied to notions of maternal responsibility and sacrifice. Her pride in her husband's attention to their child during her training highlights a reciprocal acknowledgment of caregiving, yet it also points to the emotional weight she places on ensuring her daughter's well-being.

### **Femininity, action, and body**

Regarding the subjective configuration of sport, another intriguing indicator that is oriented around T is related to the fact that for T, from a more mature position, sport has a significance as a life process, which guides and attributes personal relevance to her.

*Sport has given me the opportunity to be known and admired by the public, and that is something I will always cherish. When you are an athlete, your results last a lifetime. [...] I'd have liked to be a psychologist since I enjoy assisting individuals and learning about their issues [...].*

Subjective development should not be confused with harmony, or with the absence of conflicts. Consequently, as a hypothesis, it is possible to think of a condition of subjective development when, with contradictions, conflicts, "setbacks", frustrations, T is living her life experiences with authenticity and integrity. Family members have an important emotional weight, which are configured in relation to those conflicts, contradictions, etc., from a condition of overcoming what is considered adverse, in a specific social space. Despite the tensions, T's subjective construction of her body is not limited to external pressures. Sport provides a space where her body becomes a source of agency, empowerment, and personal fulfillment.

*My partner* is a good man, a bit impulsive, but a very good husband and father.

*I want to be remembered as a good person.*

There is an important affective charge in relation to what her husband means to T. She considers him a "good man" and it is the same adjective she uses for how she would like to be remembered. T owns her actions and her life decisions. There seems to be no enough suffering that leads to significant changes in her relational scenario. This may be due to living in a cycle of violence but at the same time it may be evidence of small agencies or emergencies who generated new paths of subjectivation producing resources to deal with conflict on a daily basis.

Everyone is aware of my tendency to be quiet around folks I don't know. I play (*jokes*) with my teammates, but I do it sparingly because, above all, it is different to be married to someone who is an athlete like you and who is familiar with the local customs. My hubby has my undying regard [...].

There is awareness of the situation, and the awareness doesn't seem to be permeated by dissonant suffering. On her life path, it is T who leads.

In T's case, the subjective construction of her body appears to straddle multiple narratives: one of strength, public recognition, and athletic excellence, and another of private vulnerability, relational negotiation, and maternal responsibility. These narratives intersect and shape her lived experience, suggesting that her body functions simultaneously as a source of personal identity and a canvas for societal expectations. The intersectionality of these dimensions highlights the complex ways in which T navigates her roles as an athlete, mother, and individual in high-performance environments. Her body becomes a mediator between her personal aspirations and the external pressures imposed by cultural norms and the high demands of competitive sport and familiar life.

The high-performance scenario places the body under maximum physical and psychological strain. At this level, the demands of sportive activity encompass both physical exertion and emotional experience, with success hinging on the integration of diverse variables—physical, cognitive, and emotional—at critical moments of execution. This intricate balancing act is reflected in T's subjective experience, where the demands of her athletic performance are not separate from the broader complexities of her life. These demanding scenarios manifest in her life experience through mismatches, resistance, adaptation, and, at times, resignation. However, T's ability to cope efficiently and effectively underscores her emergency in transforming these challenges into sources of strength.

What stands out in T's narrative is how the sportive arena serves not only as a space for performance but also as a guiding force for her personal and relational experiences. The discipline, focus, and perseverance required in sport appear to inform her approach to other domains of her life, including family and social networks. This suggests a reciprocal relationship where her sportive identity shapes her personal identity and vice versa. Additionally, the maternal dimension in T's case adds a unique layer to her subjective construction, where the body simultaneously carries the roles of nurturing and competing. This duality underscores the tension between societal expectations of femininity and strength, particularly in the context of high-performance sports.

T's experience further highlights the fluidity of subjective configurations. The moments of resistance and adaptation in her sportive life reflect broader emotional and relational dynamics, demonstrating how the sportive body becomes a powerful site for negotiating identity, agency, and purpose. Her capacity to navigate these challenges with strength and creativity positions her not only as an accomplished athlete but also as a catalyst for personal transformation within and beyond the realm of high-performance Paralympic sport.

### **Final remarks**

The singular character and the relevance of the dialogue were the two critical characteristics that strengthened the researcher's connection with T and X in a space of total immersion in fieldwork. The subjectivity frame became a methodological "tool" for the cases construction and discussion by providing resources for gaining intelligibility during the research process. This began with the integration of indicators into hypothetical constructions and progressed to the elaboration of theoretical productions aimed at explaining the human realities studied. Thus, the research was, unequivocally, a process of theoretical production.

This way of working in new facets that can be harmoniously combined with what had previously characterized the working relationship with athletes as a clinical sports psychologist. Professional practice undergoes a process of transformation, where the legitimization of singularity shapes the development of psychological preparation strategies.

T and X allow us to interpret two distinct types of feminine experiences, each with unique characteristics, where subjectivity manifests in the specific ways in which their realities are lived. Sport, as a space for personal and professional realization, emerges with different nuances in each case. For both athletes, the production of subjectivity as female athletes is inseparable from the act of participating in sports. Their lived experiences reveal the intricate connections between

their actions and their identities, underscoring the transformative role of sport in shaping their subjectivities.

The plot built during this research generates demands, challenges, and responsibilities, both for the participants and for me as a researcher. The process developed here reinforces the impossibility of separating action research from professional practice oriented toward subjective development—an approach that any field interested in the human condition must pursue.

The cases of T and X highlight the multidimensional construction of the female body as both a lived and a socially interpreted reality. For T, the body carries layers of meaning—being simultaneously a source of vulnerability, and empowerment through her sportive achievements. This duality reflects the societal tensions surrounding women with disabilities, who must navigate the intersection of perceived fragility and resilience. For X, her body transcends traditional notions of femininity through its strength and speed, reshaping how she is perceived both within the “kingdom of men” and in broader societal contexts.

In both cases, the body emerges not only as a vessel for performance but as an active site of resistance, negotiation, and transformation. This underscores the need to understand the female body in sport as a subjective construction—one that interacts dynamically with sociocultural expectations, individual agency, and the broader context of high-performance athletics. By recognizing the interplay between these factors, we can further explore how sport serves as a critical space for redefining and reconfiguring what it means to embody femininity.

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### **III) Beyond the Physical: The Interplay of Body and Subjectivity in Female Athletic Performance**

#### **Abstract**

In high-performance sports, understanding the female athlete's body as both a driving force in skilled performance and a contributor to cognitive processes is crucial. This paper examines how societal narratives and subjective experiences shape female athletes' body image, self-perception, identity, and psychological well-being. Through González Rey's framework on subjectivity, we analyze the dynamic role of the body in cognitive-motor tasks, highlighting the unique challenges female athletes face, such as pressures related to body image and identity. Focusing on the case of an experienced Colombian high-performance Paralympic athlete, this study demonstrates the potential of psychological preparation strategies that construct athletic experience through a subjectivist lens. Our findings advocate for an approach in Clinical Sport Psychology that recognizes and empowers female athletes' unique embodied experiences, promoting enhanced performance.

**Keywords:** Clinical Sport Psychology, female athletes, athletic identity, subjectivity, cognitive-motor performance, psychological preparation.

#### **Resumo**

Nos esportes de alto rendimento, compreender o corpo da atleta feminina como uma força motriz no desempenho habilidoso e como um contribuidor para os processos cognitivos é essencial. Este artigo examina como narrativas sociais e experiências subjetivas moldam a imagem corporal, a autopercepção, a identidade e o bem-estar psicológico das atletas femininas. Através do referencial de González Rey sobre a subjetividade, analisamos o papel dinâmico do corpo em tarefas cognitivo-motoras, destacando os desafios únicos enfrentados pelas atletas, como as pressões relacionadas à imagem corporal e à identidade. Com foco no caso de uma atleta paralímpica colombiana experiente no alto rendimento, este estudo demonstra o potencial de estratégias de preparação psicológica que constroem a experiência esportiva a partir de uma perspectiva subjetivista. Nossos achados defendem uma abordagem na Psicologia Clínica do Esporte que reconheça e valorize as experiências corporais únicas das atletas femininas, promovendo um desempenho aprimorado.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicologia Clínica do Esporte, atletas femininas, identidade esportiva, subjetividade, desempenho cognitivo-motor, preparação psicológica.

## Introduction

In high-performance sports, the body serves not only as a vehicle for physical action but also as a critical informant of cognitive processes. The intricate interplay between bodily and cognitive resources in executing motor tasks within complex and dynamic environments offer valuable insights into the mechanisms underpinning skilled athletic performance. Far from being a passive executor of commands, the body actively contributes to decision-making, learning, and adaptation, asserting its role as an integral force in the athletic context (Araujo, Davis & Button, 2019; Higham & Polley, 2017).

Sport psychology, from a clinical lens, provides a rich framework for exploring bodily experiences—ranging from precise, sequential movements to fluid, continuous actions—that both influence and are influenced by emotional and cognitive processes. Within this framework, the body emerges as a site of knowledge and learning, embodying the culmination of preparation and execution required in high-performance environments. Recognizing the body as a dynamic construct within athletic experience offers a deeper understanding of the mechanisms driving skilled performance. This perspective is essential for developing interventions that integrate physical and cognitive preparation, enabling athletes to achieve optimal performance in competitive settings.

In the context of Clinical Sport Psychology, the female body occupies a uniquely complex role. A critical perspective for comprehending the real-life experiences of female athletes is subjectivity, especially when they negotiate cultural narratives and societal expectations related to gender. These factors emerge in relation with self-perception, body image, and identity, with significant implications for psychological well-being and athletic performance. By examining the interplay between subjective productions related to body image, self-perception, and performance, sport psychologists can address the challenges female athletes face, while also fostering empowerment and determination.

This paper focuses on the case of A., a Colombian high-performance Paralympic runner with visual impairment, examining the psychological preparation integral to her athletic training. Through evaluations and categories informed by psychological preparation, we explore how these frameworks contribute to construct the athlete's embodied sportive experience through subjective lens. This case study highlights the endurance of female athletes within the Paralympic arena,

emphasizing its role as a transformative social space that shapes female morphology and fosters psychological growth, and the role that psychological preparation plays in this.

### **Psychological Preparation in High-Performance Sport: foundations and challenges**

Psychological preparation is essential in enhancing both tactical and technical performance in high-performance sport, equipping athletes not only with physical skills but also with the mental determination needed to execute complex strategies under pressure. Research by McPherson and Kernodle (2007) emphasizes that effective tactical performance depends on an athlete's ability to make quick decisions based in the technical background and adapt to dynamic situations, supported by mental skills training like visualization and scenario planning to mentally rehearse tactical spaces.

Moreover, the connection between an athlete's psychological state and their technical and tactical performance is well-documented (Vealey, 2007; Gould & Udry, 1994; Rubio, 1999, 2001, 2007; Bakker, Whiting & Van Der Brug, 1993; Riera, 1995; Riera & Cruz, 1991; García Ucha, 2009, 1997; Rezende & Valdés, 2004; Vidaurreta, 2012; Vidaurreta & Vidaurreta, 2015). Skills such as emotional regulation ensure that stress or excitement does not interfere with tactical or technical execution, while self-efficacy, as highlighted by Bandura (1997), bolsters confidence in decision-making and technical skill execution. Psychological preparation thus not only addresses personal aspects of athletic life but is also aligned with the demands of peak performance, seamlessly integrating with technical and tactical skills to foster clarity and endurance in high-pressure environments.

The assessment and preparation strategies tied to sports training theory and methodology, represent a broad intervention field for performance enhancement, especially in tactical preparation, seen as a foundational aspect of athletic activity (Ozolin, 1983; Harre, 1988; Forteza, 1999; Platonov, 1994; Vidaurreta, 2012). Athletics, characterized by its codified rules and high demands on motor precision, timing, and endurance, contrasts with team sports by focusing primarily on individual performance, where athletes adjust to environmental conditions and pacing. This individual yet dynamic nature means that decision-making in athletics is influenced by various perceptual and situational factors, including pace, technique, and energy expenditure, as athletes adapt their strategies on the fly to optimize performance in tactical motor tasks during competition.

While athletics is a pursuit of psychophysical excellence, it also represents a psychosocial endeavor. The psychological aspects, particularly the development of competitive strategies, are

often critical to achieving success, as technical-tactical understanding becomes a foundation for strategic, competitive actions (Pérez, 1997; Schinke, 2001). In-depth analysis of the pedagogical process in athletic training reveals specific nuances of competitive performance that vary across events, offering insights into the unique psychological demands of each discipline.

Contemporary views on psychological preparation emphasize its dynamic and contextual nature, recognizing the interplay of gender, motor demands, and tactical execution. By adopting tailored, integrative approaches, Clinical Sport Psychology can better support athletes in achieving peak performance while fostering endurance and well-being across diverse contexts. Gender differences play a pivotal role in psychological preparation, as societal narratives and cultural expectations that shape the way male and female athletes experience and approach sport. Female athletes often navigate unique pressures related to body image, identity, and societal perceptions of femininity (Grosz, 1994; Theberge, 2000). These pressures could be part of their confidence, self-efficacy, and mental endurance, which are critical components of psychological preparation.

### **Female Bodies in Sport: Performance, Subjectivity, and Identity**

The female body, as both a site of performance and as a construct of societal narratives, occupies a central position in sports. Moving beyond the technicalities of preparation, the analyses delve into the subjective experiences of female athletes, to examine how bodily and emotional dimensions converge in shaping athletic identities and performances.

Embodied performance in sport is deeply intertwined with subjectivity, as athletes experience and construct their bodies not just as physical entities but as central to their identities and lived experiences. González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity (2019) offers a valuable framework for understanding how the female athlete experience is subjectively produced in the sports space. In high-performance environments, athletes do not merely perform tasks or execute skills; they continuously produce senses, interwoven with senses, related, and complexed through their bodily experiences. For female athletes, whose bodies have often been subjected to societal scrutiny and gendered expectations, this subjective level organized as negotiations are particularly significant. Sport becomes a space where they embody not only their physical capabilities but also their resistance to or reinforcement of social norms, actively shaping their sense of self (Bourdieu, 1993; Dunning and Elias, 1986; Theberge, 2000; Carrington, 2010; Pugh, 2015).

Sport is an incomplete and unfinished activity, due to it being a subjectivation set where individuals evolve. Considering the intrinsic complexity of the human condition in every area, sportive interaction must be understood as interconnected with broader contexts, extending beyond the limits of the activity itself. It highlights the story of athletes who, as the main characters in their own life, embody singularity in everything they do. According to González Rey and Mitjáns (2017a, p. 62), subjectivity is "a configurational system, which is organized by diverse subjective configurations in different moments and contexts of human experience". Recognizing subjectivity as a central human dimension for understanding experience allows us to identify sport as a possibility for development that can be sensitively constructed, interpreted, and singularized.

El deporte, por ejemplo, implica una configuración subjetiva del desarrollo cuando su práctica genera sentidos subjetivos estrechamente asociados a formas de vivir la actividad deportiva, que se asocian con múltiples vivencias como realización, reconocimiento, placer, persistencia, audacia, disciplina, y muchas otras, las que con frecuencia son facilitadoras de cambios de la vida en general del deportista. Sin embargo, esas vivencias expresan una configuración subjetiva en proceso, que se desdobra en nuevos sentidos subjetivos y puede dar lugar a otras configuraciones subjetivas, no llevando de forma directa a un proceso de desarrollo (...) Cuando se toma el segundo rumbo, el deporte, lejos de un camino de desarrollo puede llevar al deterioro de la persona, algo que ha sido frecuente en deportistas, inclusive en aquellos que han obtenido grandes éxitos en sus carreras. Esos procesos que generan configuraciones subjetivas que implican al individuo de forma diferente en áreas diversas de la vida son, a su vez, altamente sensibles a las posiciones de los individuos en el curso de sus experiencias vividas (González Rey & Mitjáns, 2017b, p. 13)<sup>25</sup>.

The categories of subjective sense and subjective configuration are two important advancements brought about by argument from the Theory of Subjectivity. Subjective senses and subjective configurations both suggest that emotions are generative in the sense that they are malleable enough to both elicit and be evoked by symbolic processes (González Rey, 2019). The concept of subjective configuration of the Theory of Subjectivity is a very useful theoretical tool to identify and understand networks of symbolic-emotional senses that athletes form in the process of living

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<sup>25</sup> Sport, for example, involves a subjective configuration of development when its practice generates subjective senses closely associated with ways of experiencing sporting activity. These are linked to multiple experiences such as fulfillment, recognition, pleasure, persistence, boldness, discipline, and many others, which frequently facilitate changes in the athlete's overall life. However, these experiences express a subjective configuration in process, which unfolds into new subjective senses and may lead to other subjective configurations, without necessarily resulting in a direct development process. (...) When the second path is taken, sport, far from being a path of development, can lead to the deterioration of the person—something that has been common among athletes, even those who have achieved great success in their careers. These processes, which generate subjective configurations that involve the individual differently across various areas of life, are, in turn, highly sensitive to the positions individuals take in the course of their lived experiences (González Rey & Mitjáns, 2017b, p. 13 – our translation).

in different social environments (González Rey, 2019). Subjective configurations are the conceptual resource that attempts to guide the complexity and volatility of human experience.

From this perspective, González Rey (2014, 2019) introduces the notion of social subjectivity, which refers to the collective and relational dimensions of subjectivity embedded within social practices, institutions, and cultural narratives. Social subjectivity is not separate from individual subjectivity but instead forms a dialectical relationship with it, shaping and being shaped by personal symbolic-emotional productions. In the context of sports, social subjectivity becomes evident in the collective productions and shared emotional frameworks that influence how athletes experience their roles, relationships, and environments. For instance, the social subjectivity of a team culture or a sports institution can profoundly affect individual athletes' subjective configurations, either fostering empowerment and growth or perpetuating exclusion and stress. This interplay underscores how social dynamics are integral to understand individual subjectivity in the context of high-performance sports.

From the approach of subjectivity, identity should not be understood as fixed or static attribute, but as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by the interplay of symbolic, emotional, and historical dimensions. Having said that, identity can be understood as a subjective configuration—a stable network of senses that individuals construct through their lived experiences within social and cultural contexts. Given so, identity is result of individuals interactions with their environments, negotiating societal norms, cultural narratives, and personal experiences. It is produced through the dialectical relationship between individual subjectivity and social subjectivity, where personal emotional-symbolic productions intersect with collective expectations and cultural constructs. This interplay creates a unique, fluid sense of self that adapts and transforms over time, influenced by new experiences, relationships, and contexts.

It all relates down to viewing subjectivity as an ontology of human existence and understanding the athlete as an enduring generator of unique subjectivation processes in response to their own reality. González Rey's framework emphasis on the inseparability of the symbolic and the emotional—which has a distinct epistemological expression—and allows us to consider how the body is integrated into all aspects of human subjectivation and how this impacts our comprehension of sports practice.

This position dialogues with others that are relevant to the proposed discussion. The work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) on embodied subjectivity provides a critical lens to examine how bodily actions contribute to the cognitive and emotional lives of athletes. Female athletes navigate a landscape where their bodies are often perceived through dual lenses—both as a tool for

performance and as a site of gendered perception. Their experiences of training and competing are shaped by this duality, as they inhabit and express their physicality while simultaneously confronting societal expectations about femininity, and athleticism. Through their embodied actions in sport, female athletes forge a singular subjectivity that reflects their personal, cultural, and athletic experiences, intertwining body and mind in ways that challenge traditional gender narratives.

Building on these ideas, Grosz (1994) highlights how the female body is often positioned in society as a "corporeal other," suggesting that women's bodies are culturally constructed in ways that impact their participation and performance in sports. For female athletes, embodying performance means navigating this "otherness" while striving to reclaim their bodies as emergencies of power and capability. In high-performance sports, this reclamation is a dynamic process, wherein female athletes continuously negotiate the boundaries between their bodily experiences and the societal constructs.

The three approaches to understanding embodied performance in female athletes—González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty's embodied subjectivity, and Grosz's feminist perspective on the body—offer distinct yet complementary insights into how athletes experience and construct their identities through their bodies. González Rey emphasizes the role of subjectivity as a dynamic and socially constructed process, where female athletes continuously emerge in the construction of self through their lived experiences in sport. This approach highlights how the athletes' life experiences are organized and produced in a subjective and singular dialogue through their bodily performances, building their subjective worlds in relation to personal experiences and social contexts. For González Rey, the body is an emergence, a place of subjective production where individual and collective narratives come into play, especially in relation to gender and sport.

In contrast, Merleau-Ponty focuses on the body as a fundamental component of human perception and experience, viewing bodily actions as integral to cognitive processes. For female athletes, this approach underscores how their lived experience of their body's shapes not only their performance but their understanding of the world. Meanwhile, Grosz critiques the cultural constructions of the female body, framing it as the "corporeal other" within society. Her feminist lens explores how societal norms and gendered expectations influence the ways in which female athletes experience and inhabit their bodies in sports. Grosz's approach emphasizes the external pressures on female athletes to conform to or resist societal constructs, while González Rey and Merleau-Ponty focus more on the emergency of processes in complex embodied experiences.

Together, these perspectives offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between body, subjectivity, and social context in female athletic performance.

In a sort of integration, Vidaurreta & Vidaurreta (2020), drawing from González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, examine the female body within Cuban sports, highlighting the intricate interaction between biological and social aspects of femininity. They argue that societal expectations and external pressures on women's bodies influence self-perception, body image, and sports participation. By shifting the focus from mere physical appearance to the subjective experiences of female athletes, the authors emphasize the emotional and psychological aspects of embodiment as central to athletic performance. Confidence, motivation, and performance, they contend, are deeply shaped by how women experience their bodies in sport's social life. In a unique way, what it brings is an empathetic, straightforward and plural look at the realities of female athletes in high performance.

## **Methodology**

This methodological section explores psychological preparation in sports as a dynamic and critical context for understanding the experiences of female athletes in high-performance settings. By employing González Rey's constructive-interpretative methodology and Qualitative Epistemology, the study investigates how athletes actively shape their embodied experiences within elite sports. This perspective highlights the athlete's role in generating meaning from lived experiences, moving beyond rigid frameworks or predetermined categories. Specifically, it examines how female athletes integrate their bodies into their athletic identities, revealing the complex interplay between individual subjectivity, cultural norms, and the demands of sport into social subjectivity. The body is positioned as both a cognitive and emotional informant, shaping the subjective processes that underlie performance. Qualitative Epistemology further emphasizes the importance of athletes' voices and interpretations, framing psychological preparation as an embodied process where subjectivity, cognition, and the body interact.

The constructive-interpretative methodology complements this epistemology by emphasizing the co-construction of knowledge through dialogical and interpretative processes. This methodology views the athlete as an active position in generating insights about their psychological states, rather than a passive subject of external analysis. It prioritizes open-ended, flexible methods—such as case studies through conversational dynamics and reflective dialogues—that enable the emergence of new senses and subjective configurations. Case studies, in particular, serve as a powerful tool within this framework, offering a detailed examination of individual athletes'

experiences in a social and complex space. These studies allow for the exploration of nuanced psychological dynamics, such as how athletes navigate challenges, embody their identities, and adapt to the demands of their sport. By capturing the singularity of each athlete's journey, case studies not only illuminate their subjective worlds but also provide valuable insights that can inform tailored psychological preparation strategies, fostering both personal growth and enhanced performance.

The construction of indicators based on the dialogue with A, a 27-years-old Colombian high-performance Paralympic runner with visual impairment, intertwined with the goals of psychological preparation, creates a scenario of interpretation of A's current sports experience based on the recognition of the role that subjectivity plays (Vidaurreta & Da Costa, 2019). Conducted over six months, the conversational dynamics involved biweekly sessions lasting approximately 1.5 hours each, facilitated via Zoom. These sessions were designed to accommodate A's training schedule, typically taking place in familiar settings such as training center room. This remote approach ensured flexibility while fostering an environment conducive to meaningful dialogue.

In addition to the conversational dynamics, general assessments—such as measures of QI, anxiety, and temperament—were incorporated into the process. These assessments enriched the discussions by providing relevant insights into the athlete's psychological preparation and integrating objective data with subjective reflections. This holistic approach enhanced the proposal's capacity to address A's specific needs and challenges in the context of high-performance paralympic sports.

The following case construction approach uncovers broader themes of identity, force, and determination while addressing A's challenges posed by gendered expectations in high-performance environments. By leveraging the structure of these dynamics and integrating insights from the athlete's reflections, the analysis seeks to capture the complex interplay between subjective experiences and the broader sociocultural context of sport. Additionally, a concrete period of psychological preparation process was conducted, focusing on specific areas that emerged through the interactions, addressing both personal and performance-related challenges.

## Athlete A

As a rule, each sports training is a process of development of the athlete who performs it, and carries with it a load of socialization, as well as personalization of the sports culture, which in a personal way, and according to their characteristics, they incorporate into their systematic practice through training. In high performance sports, psychological preparation is integrated into the periodization of sports training, where physical and technical preparation sets the pace and the goals to be achieved. As mentioned before, the psychological resources are placed at the service of the technical-tactical performance, where the individual responsibilities in the successful motor execution take center stage.

The athlete A is a 27-years-old female with 10 years of sports experience and a high school education level. Her intellectual level is considered below average. She presents normal levels of anxiety and has a sanguine temperament. Personality traits include being extroverted, cheerful, and impulsive<sup>26</sup>.

Athlete A, with visual impairments, competes in the paralympic discipline of athletics in Colombia, a sport that demands agility, speed, strength, and precision in actions leading to optimal performance. Due to a lengthy athletic career involving intense training loads, knee injuries began to occur frequently. Surgical interventions were undertaken, followed by the implementation of comprehensive physical recovery plans to aid in rehabilitation and restore peak performance levels.

I used to be a strong runner, always leading in my races. My strides, pacing, and speed felt instinctive; I didn't have to think about them—they just happened. However, after my injuries, it feels like I'm trying harder but getting less out of my performances. I'm starting to lose my place on the team, and that's really frustrating for me [...].

To discuss the psychological preparation performed with athlete A from González Rey's approach to subjectivity, the focus would shift from addressing isolated psychological traits and physical preparation strategies to understanding the complex, subjective processes that shape her athletic experience. From here, the emphasis lands in the continuous, dynamic construction of subjective productions based on the interplay between A's personal emotions, social influences, and experiences, allowing to construct the interplay with traditional assessments performed. Here's how the case can be analyzed through this lens.

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<sup>26</sup> Results associated with Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI), Cattell Anxiety Scale, Raven's Progressive Matrices (RAVEN), and Behavioral Observation.

## Subjective Construction of Athletic Identity

The athlete's experience is susceptible to be generated by gathering resources, perceptions, and social productions in a cultural-historical dimension associated with her personality construction and traits, such as extroversion or impulsiveness, in combination with her subjective processes and the context in which she operates, in a configurational organization. For example, the A's sanguine temperament (extroverted, joyful, impulsive) should be interpreted and understood as part of the fluid emergency of subjective senses that make up her self-knowledge, perception, and idea of herself. The stability achieved by these complex productions, adequately integrated into personality as a system and serving as the guiding principle of Athlete A's life experience, is organized into subjective configurations. These configurations include how she interprets her role on the team, her perceived responsibilities, and her emotional investment in both individual and collective performance.

I know what I need to do, but I feel disconnected somehow.

[...]

I just can't move fast anymore. I want to push forward, but it's tough for me to build my momentum to reach the finish line. That didn't happen before [...].

Sport is a vital space for Athlete A, where she feels a sense of belonging and recognition. Executing technical and tactical actions with a physique that allows her to perform at a high level is a central element of her emotional experience in athletics. Athlete A has a visual disability that does not appear in connection with her current experiences. The implicit condition of living with a disability may or may not add another layer of complexity to her situation.

The absence or limitation of her physical abilities due to injuries, potentially combined with her visual challenges, is present in the way of how athlete's A perceives her current athletic life. Feelings of limitation related to be a paralympic athlete doesn't seem to be part of her approach to competition. The changes imposed by her current athletic circumstances have led to a constant process of comparing who she was to who she is now, creating a significant emotional burden. This interpretation suggests that her condition does emerge as a factor but is not directly related to her identity as a Paralympic athlete. From the perspective of sports results, A continues to be a top performer, but she feels the impact of her physical changes on her performance and associates this with losing her place on the team, resulting in a negative emotional and affective state.

In high-pressure situations, she may experience heightened anxiety and self-doubt, further complicating her performance. Additionally, her subjective experience in sport has been shaped

by her interactions with teammates and her emotional responses during critical moments in a race or event, conforming central elements of her social subjectivity. These productions reflect her subjective configuration of self in athletics, which plays a crucial role in how she navigates challenges and performs under pressure.

The bodily dimension serves as a setting for the configuration, actualization, and emergence of subjective feelings that construct the sportive experience. Given Athlete A's visual disability and physical challenges, it's especially important to recognize how her body interacts with her emotions and perceptions during training and competition. This holistic approach in psychological preparation allows her to acknowledge her feelings, understand their impact, and find ways to leverage her experiences to enhance her performance and overall enjoyment of the sport.

The psychological preparation with Athlete A should focus on strengthening her individual accountability in fulfilling the responsibilities required for her specific events. Her self-confidence, both in her individual performance and her contributions to overall team dynamics during relay events or team competitions, needed to be reinforced. Moreover, mechanisms for emotional self-regulation were crucial to strengthen, enabling her to maintain composure and focus during high-pressure situations, such as qualifying heats or final rounds.

### **Social and Cultural Influences on Performance**

Athlete A's perception of her abilities and performance might be influenced by team dynamics, cultural expectations of female athletes in her sport, and societal pressures related to gender roles in competition —all of which are brought to life within the framework of social subjectivity. Through the lens of González Rey's social subjectivity, these influences are not merely external but are deeply intertwined with the athlete's subjective configurations. Social subjectivity highlights how individual experiences are shaped by collective symbolic-emotional networks, which emerge from interactions within cultural and institutional contexts (González Rey, 2019; Vidaurreta & Vidaurreta, 2020). For Athlete A, this means her sense of self and performance is co-constructed through the expectations and narratives embedded in her sport and society. This perspective underscores the role of sport as a space where social subjectivity is both produced and contested, allowing Athlete A to resist, reinterpret, or internalize the societal meanings attached to gender and athleticism.

I've always been a strong woman—not in a masculine way! but physically strong, with muscles. Growing up in a big family with lots of cousins and uncles, we were always doing more rough-and-tumble things [...].

I got into sports because I was always quick, even though I'm not that big [...].

In the Athlete A's sportive experience has been shaped the interpretation of certain social narratives about her abilities or about what is expected from her in sport. This could manifest itself in feelings of self-doubt or a lack of confidence in making decisions in the field when she is not in 'her best condition'. Psychological preparation, from this perspective, would involve helping the athlete reflect on these acritical narratives and provide arguments that allow her to construct new interpretations that align with her actual sportive strengths. The work with her needs to be not only focused on technical skills, but also on exploring and questioning the social pressures she might face as a female athlete, reinforcing her sense of agency in decision-making and performance on the field.

The movements go fast in my head, but my body doesn't go with me. I feel heavy, slow, and clumsy. I don't feel myself.

[...]

I know the race inside and out, but it's frustrating—my body just doesn't respond the way it used to. I can visualize what is, but it feels like I'm stuck in slow motion.

[...]

I understand what needs to happen on the track, but when I go to execute, something feels off, like I'm not in sync with myself anymore [...].

From statements of this nature, is possible to interpret that there is a specific emotional relevance intertwined within the sportive experience, indicating that competition situations and their outcomes are configured within a significant affective network for Athlete A. The result of the competition is not perceived solely as an endpoint; rather, it is experienced as a process in which self-knowledge plays a crucial role. Athlete A's frustration reflects a disconnect between her cognitive understanding of performance and the physical execution of her movements. This dissonance highlights the intricate relationship between body and mind in athletic identity. The perception of being "out of sync" suggests a disruption in her subjective configuration, where previously aligned symbolic-emotional and motor processes now feel fragmented. This disruption does not merely affect her athletic performance but resonates on a deeper level, challenging her sense of self and identity as an athlete.

Moreover, her experience of heaviness and clumsiness underscores the embodied nature of her emotional struggle. It reveals how subjectivity, as theorized by González Rey, is not confined to cognitive processes but extends to how the body is experienced and interpreted within social and competitive contexts. Athlete A's statements also reflect the dynamic interplay of past and present subjective configurations; her memories of fluidity and control in performance contrast sharply

with her current experiences, creating a tension that influences her emotional state and sense of agency.

Athlete A's reflections often center on aspects of her performance, such as feeling like she has a "heavy body" and experiencing "slow movements." This evaluation of her physical readiness for performance is also shaped by her athletic experience, where her body occupies a unique and significant dimension, enriched by her current challenges. It is not merely a predisposition but a complex subjective organization that manifests in her actual actions.

The indirect association of having a "heavy body" with feelings of sadness further underscores the emotional significance of the sportive situation for Athlete A. The weight of her condition—consciously expressed in her assessment of her current physical condition, and not related to her visual disability—affects her competitive experience, where the expectations surrounding performance are also influenced by the objective outcomes. The interplay of these factors distorts her subjective organization, making it challenging for her to reconcile her past capabilities with her current reality, thus impacting her emotional state during competitions.

These reflections suggest that Athlete A's sportive experience is situated within a broader social subjectivity, where cultural narratives about performance, gender, and success shape how she interprets her abilities and struggles. The "race" she describes is not just physical but also symbolic, encompassing her internal battle to reconcile her current self with her athletic aspirations and societal expectations.

A key aspect of her psychological preparation emphasized understanding what is now optimal physical condition, which serves as the basis for executing her technical skills in athletics, allowing her to shed the intention of performance enhancement to instead promote endurance, making room to build a renewed sense of self that aligns with her current capabilities and evolving identity. The plan also focused on improving her situational awareness, with special attention to recognizing tactical cues in the dynamics of competition and making informed decisions based on initial assessments of each race or event.

### **Co-Constructing Psychological Strategies**

In González Rey's constructive-interpretative methodology, psychological strategies are not imposed but co-constructed with the athlete through a dialogic process. The athlete's preparation would involve helping her become an active participant in her psychological development. Rather than simply telling her to "reinforce responsibility in her position," the focus would be on exploring

how she understands responsibility within her athletic role and how her internal emotional states—such as impulsiveness or joy—might influence and be influenced by her actions on the field.

I've been competing in athletics for a long time, and I've learned a lot about the sport. Even though my body feels slower or less coordinated, I can still analyze race strategies, mentor younger teammates, and make smart decisions during events. That's where I can really contribute to the team at this stage in my career.

[...]

I may not be the fastest anymore, but I understand how to position myself effectively and support the team in achieving our goals [...].

For example, in addressing the suggestion to improve emotional self-regulation, the goal was not to suppress Athlete A's current conflicting emotional experiences but to explore how these subjective feelings can be shaped and understood in a non-limiting way. This involves generating alternative resources that allow her to positively experience her current performance. Instead of framing her challenges as deficits, the focus shifted toward leveraging her extensive experience and cognitive understanding of the sport to redefine her role and contributions within the team.

The case of Athlete A was developed through a pedagogical interpretation aimed at enabling her to compete and perform effectively despite significant injuries. Psychological preparation was structured around a psychopedagogical approach to "refine" her performance patterns in speed and distance, adapting these to her current physical condition. This included fostering self-efficacy by emphasizing her strategic insight, mentorship capabilities, and ability to contribute to the team's collective goals. By validating her evolving identity as a mentor and strategist, the intervention also strengthened her sense of purpose and influence, transforming her perception of limitations into opportunities for growth and contribution.

Furthermore, this approach encouraged Athlete A to view her performance through a broader lens, one that integrates personal achievements with the success of the team. This reconceptualization of her role not only mitigated the emotional impact of her physical decline but also enhanced her psychological endurance. By aligning her subjective configurations with her current capabilities and team dynamics, the intervention supported her in maintaining a meaningful connection to her athletic career, fostering both individual fulfillment and team cohesion.

## Discussion

In the context of psychological sport preparation, focusing on athletes' subjective experiences—comprising emotions, personal productions, and social influences—offers a comprehensive approach to understanding their performance. Grounded in González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, Qualitative Epistemology, and constructive-interpretative methodology, this approach underscores that athletes engage in more than physical performance: their athletic experiences are shaped by a dynamic continuum of subjective productions in social contexts. This perspective invites coaches and psychologists to foster reflective dialogues that encourage athletes to explore the emotions, experiences, and challenges tied to their athletic identity.

This framework emphasizes the inseparability of the symbolic and emotional dimensions of an athlete's experiences, highlighting how their subjective configurations emerge from an interplay between individual, social, and cultural contexts (González Rey, 2019). For Athlete A, this means her performance challenges, including injuries and changes in physical capacity, are not just physical obstacles but are also shaped by how she interprets these experiences emotionally and symbolically. Athlete A's frustration with feeling "slow" or "clumsy" can be seen as a response not only to physical limitations but also to the internalized expectations of excellence tied to her athletic identity and social subjectivity.

By raising awareness of these subjective elements, psychological preparation can be tailored to help athletes either align with, or reframe their experiences. For instance, when athlete A perceives performance adjustments due to injury as a threat to her identity, she can be guided to view these changes as opportunities for growth and transformation. In the case of Athlete A, helping her to reinterpret her evolving role within the team, as a mentor and strategist not only reaffirms her value but also provides a renewed sense of purpose, facilitating a positive reframing of her athletic identity.

González Rey's approach also highlights that emotions are deeply interwoven with other aspects of athletes' subjective worlds, including their self-concepts, relationships, and social contexts. Emotions in this framework are not isolated phenomena but are dynamically influenced by interactions within social environments (González Rey & Mitjáns, 2017). For Athlete A, the emotions expressed in statements such as "I don't feel myself" reflects a disruption in her subjective configuration, where the once-aligned symbolic-emotional and motor processes now feel fragmented. Addressing this dissonance involves acknowledging the emotional and social dimensions of her athletic experience, as emphasized by Merleau-Ponty's (1962) view of the body as an integral component of perception and cognition.

For female athletes, these subjective experiences are often intensified by social constructs around gender, performance, and identity. Social narratives, such as those critiqued by Theberge (2000), influence how female athletes negotiate their self-concepts within competitive environments. Psychological preparation, therefore, must address these broader influences, empowering athletes to challenge restrictive societal narratives and fostering an autonomous athletic identity. In the case of Athlete A, cultural messages surrounding femininity and physical strength can be explored through reflective dialogue, enabling her to construct a more empowering narrative of her athletic journey.

Since subjectivity is dynamic and constantly evolving, psychological preparation should be seen as a flexible process rather than a fixed set of techniques. As athletes encounter new challenges or progress in their sport, their subjective experiences adapt, necessitating a psychological approach that allows for ongoing reflection and reinterpretation of experiences. González Rey's constructive-interpretative methodology supports this adaptability by promoting collaborative dialogue between athletes and psychologists or coaches, where new strategies are co-constructed through an interpretation of the athlete's lived experiences. For Athlete A, this dialogic process facilitated the development of tailored strategies that not only addressed her technical and tactical challenges but also strengthened her emotional determination and team-oriented contributions.

Overall, González Rey's framework enables a shift in focus toward a holistic understanding of athletes as complex individuals whose performance is shaped by an interplay of personal, emotional, social, and cultural factors. Through this approach, psychological preparation transcends basic mental skills training, cultivating a deeper awareness of the athlete's subjective world. As seen in Athlete A's case, integrating these insights fosters a renewed athletic identity, enhances endurance, and supports both psychological and physical aspects of performance. For Athlete A, her bodily actions and responses reflect subjective productions influenced by her social, cultural, and emotional contexts. By recognizing the body as subjective experience and site, psychological preparation can empower athletes to reinterpret challenges as opportunities, creating pathways for continued growth and fulfillment in high-performance environments.

## Final remarks

Psychological and physical preparation must be understood as a dynamic interplay of personal experiences, physical challenges, and subjective productions, particularly concerning her body. Despite significant knee injuries that have impacted her physical abilities, Athlete A retains a strong connection to her identity as a high-performing athlete. Yet, this identity has been disrupted by a shift in her bodily experience, which she now perceives as “heavy” or “slow,” creating a dissonance between her intentions and physical capabilities.

González Rey's Theory provides a framework for examining this emotional and cognitive dissonance. Athlete A's body, once a source of strength, now evokes feelings of frustration and inadequacy, affecting her subjective sense of self. By working collaboratively with Athlete A, coaches and psychologists can help her to redefine her role by focusing on strengths such as leadership and strategic awareness. Integrating her subjective experiences with her physical performance allows her to acknowledge the emotional impact of her injuries and use this awareness as a resource for adaptive psychological strategies.

The constructive-interpretative methodology fosters a collaborative approach, where psychological preparation strategies are co-constructed through dialogue. This process builds trust and enables strategies that resonate with the athlete's evolving subjective experiences, particularly those involving her body. By involving athletes in their psychological preparation, practitioners cultivate a supportive environment essential for effective performance enhancement.

Ultimately, Gonzalez Rey's perspective highlights the importance of addressing the emotional and social dimensions of athletic performance, particularly about how the body is experienced subjectively. For Athlete A, redefining her relationship with her body, integrating her current physical state into her athletic identity, and strengthening her value to the team can foster a cohesive sense of self, improve well-being, and sustain her success in high-performance sports.

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## Final Remarks of the Thesis

The intention behind these papers was to build a comprehensive framework that addresses the complex negotiation of gender by female athletes, focusing on the embodied expressions of gender within high-performance sports. The overarching goal was to contribute to the development of a theoretical model that explains the sports space from a cultural-historical perspective, capturing the subjective emergence of embodied gender expressions as dynamic and evolving processes influenced by sociocultural and sportive contexts.

In this context, **negotiation** refers to the dynamic process through which female athletes actively engage with, adapt to, resist, or reconcile the societal, cultural, and institutional expectations surrounding gender and body. It encompasses how they navigate and manage potential tensions between their identities, their embodied experiences in sport, and external pressures tied to normative ideals of femininity and masculinity.

By exploring these dimensions, the papers sought to provide insight into how symbolic-emotional social constructions—embodied in athletes' bodies and movements—shape and constitute their subjective experiences. The theoretical model positioned the sportive environment as a culturally and historically contextualized space for analyzing these embodied gender expressions, offering a unique, subjective framework that views the high-performance sports arena as a transformative and educational space. This model is intended to recognize and articulate the processes of gender expression, resistance, and subjective development that female athletes with disabilities navigate, thus contributing to a culturally sensitive and dynamic understanding of their experiences.

Despite being challenging, presenting the work in articles allows for fluidity and dynamism in the proposed analysis. The systematic review challenges traditional perspectives in Clinical Sports Psychology by highlighting the subjective, gendered experiences of women in competitive sports. It frames the female body not only as biologically distinct but also as deeply shaped by cultural and societal expectations. Drawing from feminist approaches, the review emphasizes empowerment and challenges ingrained gender stereotypes and biases, advocating for social change through recognition of the unique struggles and strengths of female athletes. By centering gender as a critical element in Clinical Sport Psychology, it calls for methodologies that prioritize inclusivity and equity, creating a more supportive and fair sporting environment.

Bringing arguments from González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, the review explores how sportive contexts can produce and transform subjective configurations, intertwining symbolic, emotional, and historical dimensions. The perspective underscores the importance of understanding female athletes' identities as dynamic and context-dependent. By adopting a subjective, embodied approach, the analyses of the papers found advocates for innovative methodologies that foreground the lived experiences and personal narratives of women in sports. This approach not only enriches the understanding of female athletes' journeys but also advances the field of sports by integrating gendered perspectives into practice.

The case reports investigate the gendered experiences of three Colombian female Paralympic athletes. Using a constructive-interpretative methodology, the X and T case studies delve into the athletes' lived experiences in high-performance sports, focusing on how their identities, subject and agency intersect with gender norms in the athletic domain. The analysis highlights the need to appreciate each athlete's singularity to challenge restrictive gender norms, advocating for a more inclusive approach to understanding female athletes' life and identities within sports. My researcher's engagement with X and T enabled a deeper exploration of each athlete's unique experiences, reflecting how subjectivity shapes their sportive experiences as female athletes, and underlined the importance of dialogue and immersion in fieldwork.

The final case discussion examines the psychological experience of Athlete A, following multiple knee injuries and surgeries, encounters a significant shift in her athletic identity. This case represents a concrete period of psychological preparation, during which reflective dialogues were conducted as part of a structured support process. Through a constructive-interpretative methodology, I worked collaboratively with Athlete A, allowing for the emergence of hypotheses that guided the psychological support provided to her. These dialogues explored the personal significance of her sportive experiences and emotional responses, enabling Athlete A to reframe her experiences of physical limitations as opportunities for growth. By addressing relational dynamics within her team and societal pressures linked to gender, this approach cultivated emotional endurance and reinforced her self-worth beyond physical performance.

The organization of the articles reflects a progression of growth and analytical depth within the proposed framework. Anchored in the domain of Clinical Sport Psychology, the arguments surrounding subjectivity find their most practical application and nuanced understanding in the final case study, where they are contextualized within the processes of psychological preparation.

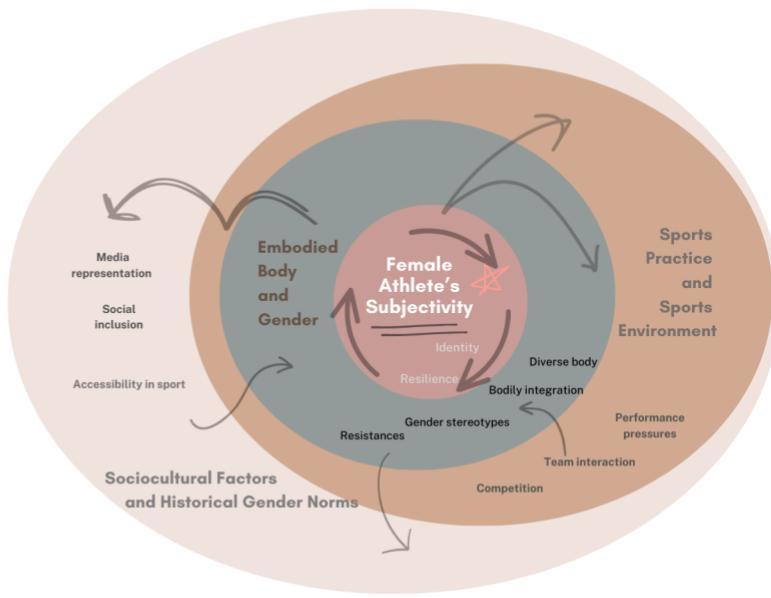
Cases T, X, and A share several common elements that highlight the complexities of subjective experiences in high-performance Paralympic female athletes, particularly in relation to González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity:

**1. The centrality of the body in subjective production:** In each case, the athlete's body plays a pivotal role in shaping their athletic identity and sense of self. For athletes T, X, and A, the body is not only an instrument for performance but also a site where personal productions, emotions, and social influences converge. Disabilities, injuries, physical limitations, high skilled performances or societal expectations around female athleticism are being part of how each athlete perceives herself and her capabilities within her sport.

**2. Emotional tension and identity emergence:** All three athletes experience emotional challenges tied to their performance and physical experiences, which provoke a re-evaluation of their own experiences and realities. Athlete A's struggle with feeling "heavy" and "slow" mirrors the emotional dissonance that athletes T and X face as they navigate their roles within a gendered sports environment. These athletes confront and redefine their self-worth beyond physical performance, an effort that involves grappling with personal limitations and societal expectations. In this framework, identity is seen as relational and contextual, constructed in dialogue with others and shaped by the multiple roles and intersections that individuals navigate. It reflects not only how these female athletes perceive themselves but also how they engage with and are perceived by the world around them. Thus, identity, through the lens of subjectivity, is a personal emergency configured into a social experience, constantly evolving as the athletes reinterpret their experiences and assert actions within the constraints and opportunities of their environments.

**3. The constructive-interpretative methodology as a resource for understanding female experience:** Each case involves a dialogic, constructive-interpretative approach to psychological preparation, where the psychologist co-constructs experiences and strategies with the athlete based on her unique experiences. This methodology enables athletes to gain insight into the emotional and social dimensions of their performance, fostering personal growth and endurance. Through reflective dialogue, each athlete works toward reframing challenges as growth opportunities, reshaping their subjective experiences in ways that positively impact their mental and physical performance. These shared elements underscore the importance of a holistic approach to psychological support for female athletes, one that values the interplay between body, emotion, and experience in high-performance sports.

A visual representation of a theoretical model could serve as a conceptual proposal, helping to organize and to illustrate complex interactions within a phenomenon. Here, in examining the high-performance sports environment for female paralympic athletes, a layered, concentric model can reveal how sport practices influence and are influenced by subjective experience, gender, and disability. Each layer or circle in this model represents a distinct yet interrelated domain, moving from the athlete's subjective world outward to broader sociocultural factors.



At the core of the model lies the female athlete's subjectivity, encompassing identity, values, and lived experiences. This central core is what permeates and organizes, nourishes, and shapes all the others, and is a set to be shaped too. Its centrality in this tentative of representation is not intended to evoke a separation between internal and external, nor anything related to internalization or passivity in the reception and processing of the social. The central core is a kind of junction of all the layers.

Surrounding this core, the first layer highlights the body and embodied gender, depicting how the athlete's experience of gender and disability is configured in the interaction during the action. The next layer represents the sport and training environment, encompassing the athlete's social interactions, competitive context, and the norms within the sports arena. Finally, the outermost layer situates the athlete within historical and sociocultural factors, such as gender norms, societal perceptions of disability, and media influence. Bidirectional arrows between these layers illustrate the ongoing, reciprocal influences across domains, emphasizing how the athlete's subjective

experiences, body, sport practices, and social context continually shape one another in the complex space of high-performance sport.

For athletes X, T, and A, the body emerges as a site of subjective production, where physical ability, perceived limitations, and societal expectations converge to influence their athletic identities. Overall, the A case provides a distinct and personal lens through which to examine the complexities of gender negotiation among female athletes, offering a complementary perspective to the broader analyses presented in the X and T cases. These cases illustrate how subjective experiences are essential for understanding the psychological complexities of performance, highlighting the importance of embracing an embodied, holistic approach in supporting female athletes.

In an era where female athletes are redefining the boundaries of gender and athletic performance, the importance of tailored psychological approaches has never been more critical. Constructive-interpretive methodologies, as demonstrated in these cases, offer a transformative approach by prioritizing the singular subjective realities of each athlete. By engaging in co-constructed dialogues, these frameworks not only address performance and socioemotional challenges but also empower athletes to confront and challenge societal norms that often constrain their potential.

This work highlights the urgent need for Clinical Sport Psychology to evolve beyond standardized techniques, embracing approaches that celebrate singularity, resistance, and diversity. Female athletes are not merely performers within a rigid system—they are creators of their own narratives, capable of turning limitations into opportunities and changes into sources of strength. By championing their voices and experiences, we can build a more inclusive, dynamic, and empowering sportive landscape, ensuring that every athlete's journey is both recognized and supported.

## Annexes

**Annex 1.** Notification correspondence of acceptance for publication of the systematic review *Developing Multidimensional Insights into Embodied Pathways: A Systematic Review of Female Sport Experiences* in the journal *Trends in Psychology*.

**Annex 2.** Approval statement from the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Human and Social Sciences at the University of Brasília - UNB for conducting the research.

**Annex 3.** Notification letter of acceptance for the manuscript *Performing Gender: A Qualitative Exploration of the Gendered Body in High-Performance Sports* for peer review in the journal *Studies in Psychology*.

**Annex 4.** 'Processual fabric': instruments as resources.

**Annex 5.** Risks and Benefits: declaration about this research.

**Annex 6.** Research's timeline.

**Annex 1.** Notification correspondence of acceptance for publication of the systematic review  
*Developing Multidimensional Insights into Embodied Pathways: A Systematic Review of Female Sport Experiences* in the journal *Trends in Psychology*.

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**Date:** 15 Oct 2024  
**To:** "Laura Vidaurreta" laurarvidaurreta9@gmail.com  
**From:** "Trends in Psychology - Editorial Office" mariamerriejul.ladag@springer.com  
**Subject:** TPSY-D-24-00321 - accepted but needs final editing

Dear PhD Vidaurreta,

We are pleased to inform you that your submission *Developing Multidimensional Insights into Embodied Pathways: A Systematic Review of Female Sport Experiences* has been accepted for publication in *Trends in Psychology*

However, before your paper can be forwarded to our Production Department, you are requested to make the corrections indicated below.

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With kind regards,  
Giuseppina Marsico  
Editor in Chief  
*Trends in Psychology*

Comments to the author (if any):  
Reviewer #1: A few minor requests for editing are included in the attached pdf.

There is additional documentation related to this decision letter. To access the file(s), please click the link below. You may also login to the system and click the 'View Attachments' link in the Action column.  
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**S T U D I E S**  
**I N**  
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21 November, 2024

**Manuscript accepted for review**

Manuscript Number: REDP-2024-0007

Article title: *Performing Gender: A Qualitative Exploration of the Gendered Body in High-Performance Sports*

Article type: Open Issue

Assigned Editor: Miguel del Río (Managing Editor)

Dear author,

I write to inform you that your manuscript titled *Performing Gender: A Qualitative Exploration of the Gendered Body in High-Performance Sports* has been accepted for peer-review. It has been assigned the following manuscript number: REDP-2024-0007.

You will receive more information and/or a Reviewing Report from the assigned Editor shortly.

Best wishes,

Amelia Álvarez  
Editor  
*Studies in Psychology / Estudios de Psicología*

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#### **Annex 4. 'Processual Fabric': instruments as resources.**

The heuristic value of information, whether extracted from informal situations or instruments, depends on its significance for the theoretical model aimed to be developed and how it relates to the hypotheses constructed throughout the investigation, based on indicators that encourage the continuous creation of new hypothetical pathways. This is the concept of rupture and continuity in this research approach (González Rey, 2005)<sup>27</sup>.

Scientific thinking in the field of sports focuses on evidence, particularly in terms of how things work. Instrumentalism hinders communication and, consequently, the recognition of the other as a subject, making genuine expression more difficult. In contrast, Dembo (1976)<sup>28</sup> viewed the relationship with the other as a way of addressing the subject immersed in their current experience. The emergence of dialogue is always a significant signal of the subjectivation processes related to the subject participating in the dialogue (González Rey & Mitjáns, 2017)<sup>29</sup>.

Thus, they lose any relevance if considered in isolation or applied automatically. From this perspective, the purpose of these resources is to facilitate the participants' expression rather than becoming an end in themselves. Based on these premises and guided by the themes to be addressed in this proposal, the analysis corpus will comprise three sets of instruments, which we will refer to as resources of subjectivity: conversational dynamics with athletes, written expression resources, and diverse materials illustrating their life trajectories as athletes.

Instruments must be understood as differentiated forms of expression by athletes, gaining meaning within the social context of the research, whose purpose is to promote dialogue, reflection, and the co-construction of knowledge. These tools are not ends in themselves but serve to facilitate the emergence of subjective productions, allowing athletes to articulate their experiences, emotions, and perspectives in authentic and meaningful ways. By integrating these instruments into a broader relational and contextual framework, this kind of research aims to capture the dynamic interplay between individual subjectivity and social influences, fostering a deeper understanding of the athletes' lived realities and the factors shaping their performance and identities.

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<sup>27</sup> González Rey, F. L. (2005). O valor heurístico da subjetividade na investigação psicológica. In: González Rey, F. L. (org.). *Subjetividade, Complexidade e Pesquisa em Psicologia*. São Paulo: Pioneira Thomson Learning, p. 27-51, 2005a.

<sup>28</sup> Dembo, T. (1976). The dynamics of anger. In J. De Rivera (Ed.), *Field theory as human science: Contributions of Lewin's Berlin group* (pp. 324-422). Gardner Press.

<sup>29</sup> González Rey, F. L., & Mitjáns, A. (2017a). *Subjetividade: Teoria, epistemologia e método*. São Paulo: Editorial Alínea.

It is important to highlight that this proposed set of resources was characterized by its flexibility and integrative capacity, incorporating new elements that modify and enrich its construction as the investigative process unfolds.

### 1. **Conversational Dynamics**

Conversational dynamics provide a space for participants' expression, where their presence in the dialogue is understood as a subjective configuration of a constantly shared and evolving space (González Rey & Mitjáns, 2017). This dialogical configuration allows participants to reflect and focus on specific experiences, enabling the researcher to interpret and uncover meaningful insights. As González Rey & Mitjáns (2017, p.87) state, "[...] dialogicity, as understood within the framework of the Theory of Subjectivity, is a process that always involves individuals as active agents of dialogue, characterizing dialogue as subjective production". These conversational systems will produce a fabric of information involving participants both individually and in groups, fostering naturalness and authenticity. The goal is for participants to feel like protagonists in the process, engaging in reflective and interactive conversations that generate new spaces for exchange.

The axes and questions for conversational dynamics included:

#### **Axe 1: Body, subjectivity, who I am in sports?**

- How do I see myself as an athlete?
- How do I perceive myself as a female athlete?
- How would I like to see myself?
- What does sport mean to me?
- What has my athletic life been like?

#### **Axe 2: Body representation, what does it mean to be a woman?**

- How do I represent my body?
- How do I experience my body?
- What is the relationship between my body and my athletic performance?
- What has my bodily history been like up to now?

#### **Axe 3: Emotions, experiences, my transformed self?**

- Am I disabled?
- What sets me apart from other athletes in my specialty?
- How do I experience my condition of disability?

These conversational dynamics were recorded with prior authorization from participants. All instruments, including written materials, were analyzed in relation to the hypotheses and indicators constructed during the research process. It is important to note that these proposed axes were characterized by their flexibility and ability to integrate new elements, evolving and enriching their constructions as the investigative process unfolds, grounded in the dialogical relationship built between the researcher and the athletes.

## **2. Written Expression Resources**

Seeking different forms of expression, the intention is to include written production tools while also allowing oral responses if preferred. For instance, the completing sentences exercises position the athlete before a universe of phrases where meaning must be generated, granting them complete freedom to determine the amount of information they wish to provide, using unlimited blank sheets. Sentences were read aloud upon the participant's request, and each athlete received a personalized set of phrases designed to provoke responses relevant to the research focus and to encourage dialogue.

## **3. Visual and Auditory Stimuli**

Incorporating visual and auditory material, such as recordings of competitions, victories, defeats, and commentary evaluations, aims to evoke reflections specific to each athlete. These recordings fostered unique storytelling and lead to dynamic group discussions.

## **4. Photographic Interviews**

The idea is to use photographs to evoke thoughts, reactions, and feelings from participants about aspects of social life. Public images of female athletes, collected from magazines and websites, were used as stimuli to promote dialogue during the dynamics.

## **5. Dialogue with Coaches**

Conversations with sports coaches provided evaluations of participants' performance, contributing broader insights into emotional states and execution.

**Annex 5.** Risks and Benefits: declaration about this research.

Any psychological research process that seeks to approach, through dialogue and authenticity, the singular life experiences of certain individuals inevitably organize interpretations that, concerning what is considered reality, advance through hypothetical pathways. This research report included reflections about images, references, specificities of competitive situations, and athletic results of the participants, which were legitimately obtained, shared, and accepted as part of this joint research process by them and me.

As research involving human participants, minimal risks existed, such as invasion of privacy, addressing sensitive issues like conflicts with the body image of the selected athletes, analyzing thoughts and feelings never previously revealed, and experiencing discomfort, embarrassment, or behavioral changes during audio and video recordings. To mitigate such risks, the research process was conducted with complete confidentiality and anonymity, establishing an empathetic relationship that seeks to ensure an inclusive and open dialogue space. Personal information, informed consent forms (TCLE), and graphic and audio recordings are securely stored by the researcher, using numerical codes to replace names. These codes are linked to participants only through a password-protected digital spreadsheet on a personal computer.

All necessary ethical procedures for this type of approach have been reviewed, considered, and fulfilled. A model of TCLE, along with the authorization form for the use of images and voice recordings for research purposes, were elaborated for this purpose. The findings of this study will contribute to understanding that many female athletes indeed experience conflicts with their bodies, as they are shaped by numerous gendered discourses—feminine ones associated with “woman” and masculine ones tied to “athlete.” This embodied conflict is not uniformly experienced based on monolithic notions of “woman” or “athlete.” Instead, it varies for female athletes depending on factors such as race, sexuality, and the sport practiced. This research could ultimately also contribute to the prevention of often invisible and neglected mental health issues in the context of women’s sports.

Recognizing these gender performances also implies acknowledging the athletes’ resistance to gender transgressions associated with their participation in sports. This perspective represents a novel approach to Clinical Sport Psychology within the context of high-performance Paralympic practice.

**Annex 6.** Research's timeline.

Activities	Start Date <sup>30</sup>	Expected Completion Date
Systematic Review Article <i>Manuscript 1 - Developing Multidimensional Insights into Embodied Pathways: A Systematic Review of Female Sport Experiences</i>	01/04/2022	22/02/2023
Data Collection - Conducting the Dynamics	22/04/2023	22/01/2024
Data Analysis - Construction and Interpretation of Information	23/02/2023	22/08/2024
Original Article 1: Case Studies <i>Manuscript 2- Performing Gender: A Qualitative Exploration of the Gendered Body in High- Performance Paralympic Sports</i>	01/04/2022	22/08/2023
Project Qualification	22/03/2023	24/07/2023
Original Article 2: Case Studies <i>Manuscript 3 - Beyond the Physical: The Interplay of Body and Subjectivity in Female Athletic Performance</i>	01/01/2023	01/12/2023
Thesis Writing	01/04/2022	01/12/2024
Defense	01/11/2024	02/12/2024
Submission of Final Research Report to the Ethics Committee	01/11/2024	02/12/2024

<sup>30</sup> Dates in Day/Month/Year