



### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## SPORTS PRACTICES AND VIOLENCE AMONG YOUNG MOROCCANS FROM DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASSES: A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

The practice of sport is certainly characterised by a desire to go beyond one's abilities in order to achieve a good performance. Within this framework, we can often witness intense interactions that could easily tip over into different forms of violence. This sociological study is part of this context, and its aim is to focus on the impact of social representations on violence in sport. The aim of our research is, on the one hand, to identify the types of violence in relation to the properties of each sport and, on the other hand, to study the impact of the groups to which one belongs (socio-cultural aspect) on the construction of social representations in relation to the practice of competitive sport and, more specifically, violent behaviour. Three competitive sports were chosen: tennis, judo and football. social. The selected population consisted of 113 young amateur athletes, 15 parents and 06 coaches. We opted for a mixed approach to our research methodology, using both questionnaire and interview techniques. Analysis of the quantitative data showed that each sport was dominated by a particular social category. In football, 75% of participants belonged to a disadvantaged social class. Judo seems to attract young people from an average social category (62%), whereas in tennis 69% of participants belong to a privileged social class. The second observation concerns the distribution of the typology of violence, which seems to follow the logic of a socio-cultural distribution in terms of social class.

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### Introduction:-

Sport is an institutional fact. It refers to a set of interaction situations between different actors who meet in a codified social space. These elements form its sociological identity. Interaction in sport, synonymous with competition, follows a logic of negative-sum games. This desire to achieve the best performance is often accompanied by the manifestation of aggressive or even violent behavior. Violence in sport refers to a multiplicity of causes, it manifests itself in different ways and can be read from several points of view.

The work of Elias & Dunning can be considered as the first analytical framework for the phenomena of violence in sport. As far as we are concerned, our reflection is also part of a sociological perspective by emphasizing the impact of social representations on violent behavior. Jodlet (1989) defines social representations as being "... A form of knowledge, socially developed and shared, with a practical aim... and contributing to the construction of a reality

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common to a social group...". Social representations are understood here according to the conception of Morin (1983), inspired by the work of Moscovici and Jodlet, who approach them as "organized blocks of ideas, beliefs and attitudes which function as dogmas of the daily and which seem to serve as a principle of demarcation and differentiation between groups.

Our objective consists on the one hand of identifying the types of violence and their relationship with the properties of each sport and on the other hand of verifying the relationship that could exist between the groups of belonging (sociocultural aspect) and the construction of social representations. on violence in sport. To do this, two questions will guide our research: how is violence identified in sports? Can it be explained socially and culturally?

### **Modèrne sport: a socio-cultural phenomenon**

The end of the eighteenth century saw the birth of moderate sport in elite schools in England. It was a game designed to socialise and moderate the individual through duelling and competition. In this sense, several authors (Markovits, 1990; Brohm, 1992; Elias & Dunning, 1993) believe that the birth and development of moderate sport is closely linked to the evolution of so-called mass democracies, which have undergone different types of change in terms of education, moderation and industrialisation to fit in with the spirit of the consumer society. The regimentation and codification of the various forms of leisure pursued the aim of moderating sport and using it as a lever for social control and socialisation.

Queval (2004), for his part, points out that modern sport is part of a thesis that advocates the importance of man's control over his environment, which requires him to develop and even perfect his skills. On this subject, Parlebas (1986) stresses that "Sport is above all a situation; this motor task is subject to rules defining a competition); finally, and this is where a large part of its sociological identity lies, sport is an institutional fact Sport therefore represents the playful and competitive motor skills approved by the institution". To underline the specific features of mod sport.

### **Violence in sport from a social psychology perspective**

In many sports we can observe various acts of aggression and violence that undermine the purpose of modern sport and the well-being of its participants (Kerr, 2005). These include intimidation, breaking the rules of the game and unsportsmanlike behaviour (Bodin & al, 2001; Cox, 2005). Some authors consider that these violent behaviours are regulatory strategies that are defined according to different variables (nature of the sport, age, gender, level of expertise, etc.), the aim of which is to achieve performance, or to seek status, social or financial recognition (Coulomb et al., 1999; Kavussanu et al., 2006). From this perspective, understanding violence is an attempt to understand a highly complex phenomenon. Studying it requires in-depth reflection and rigorous analysis in order to explain its many facets.

Social psychology is one of the scientific fields interested in studying issues of this kind. Moscovici (1976) defines social psychology as the science that attempts to understand "the age-old conflict between the personal and the collective". Allport (1968) states that "Social psychology consists of trying to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the implicit and explicit imaginary presence of others".

Social psychology studies aggression and violence within interaction situations. To study aggressive behaviour, social psychology focuses on the nature, characteristics and actors involved in a violent situation. It draws our attention to the fact that personality traits are not the only ones involved in producing such behaviour. When such violence takes shape in a particular world, we need to understand the phenomenon of violence itself and also the environment in which it is embodied, without avoiding an examination of its consequences.

Violence is a difficult phenomenon to grasp at the levels of description, analysis and action, because it has a multiplicity of causes, manifests itself in different ways and can be read from different points of view. To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, we prefer to draw on and refer to the thesis of Norbert Elias. This thesis focuses on the study of the nature of relationships that take shape in situations of competition within regulated groups.

Norbert Elias draws our attention to the fact that forms of violence are defined according to time and place. Playing a game of football by kicking people in the knees (hacking) was not considered violent before 1871, not very fair play at the beginning of the twentieth century, and downright unsporting today. Although fairly general, this notion

makes it possible to bring together a whole range of concepts already expressed under other terms and to make them work, provided, of course, that their specificity is respected.

In their work, Bélanger & al (2006) invite us to distinguish between aggressive behaviour and violence. They point out that aggression "...is a mechanism that enables human beings to adapt and evolve..." and "becomes problematic when it constitutes the main mode of social interaction and comes to compromise the integrity (physical, moral, psychological, material, etc.) of others". This is when aggression takes the form of violence.

In an effort to compare forms of violence between sporting practices, numerous studies in the sociology of sport have proposed typologies of sporting disciplines according to their specific motor characteristics or their social properties (Parlebas, 1986-1999; Pociello & al. 1981).

### **Social representations: the impact of the collective and culture**

In order to look more closely at the impact of the groups to which we belong on the emergence and development of violent acts in sport, we feel it would be interesting to explore the concept of social representation. Sociologists stress the existence of a relationship between social or collective representation and culture. In this respect, Durkheim established the notion of collective or social representation by drawing on ethnological analyses and investigations of traditional societies, immediately raising the question of the relationship between the individual and the collective in the functioning of thought.

Moreover, social representation could be part of an interpretative logic when it analyses the psychic productions of agents according to their place in the social system and the influence of social determinations. In the same vein, Morin (1983) considers social representations to be the product of a fairly complex process which takes shape within a social group. This process is made up of thoughts, beliefs and attitudes "which function as everyday dogmas and which seem to serve as a principle of demarcation and differentiation between groups".

In this sense, we can consider that social representations represent a reality in themselves that is structured by the social and contextualised to form part of discourses that can be used here and now in different situations and contexts of interaction and communication. This discourse is a reflection of attitudes, thoughts and beliefs and takes shape through a corpus of words, opinions and expressions of feelings.

This discourse is a specific product of social thought in use. In this respect, Bourdieu (1980) considers this discourse to be a language, i.e. "a practice of the person who, attached to understanding in order to act, uses language with a view to practical ends, just enough for the needs of practice and within the limits of practical urgency".

We feel it is important to emphasise that all verbal interaction and exchange is characterised by the implementation of strategies that are often unconscious. The subject, as a social actor, is seen in this context as an agent who produces meaning. It is the nature of this meaning that could testify to its type of insertion in a social context. This context is characterised and defined by its code system and frames of reference. This context is at the origin of the construction of the perceptions and behaviours of the social actor.

Emphasis is also placed on the role of the social imaginary in the development of social representations. If we consider that representation is an act of thought by an individual in relation to an object, social representation is characterised by the fact that it is a representation shared by the members of a group, produced collectively, and having a social function, i.e. establishing communications between the members of the group and with those of other groups. These aspects were developed by Jodelet (1984), who considers social representation to be a mental process, part of the mental mechanisms used in thought in action, in communication. This is a cognitive orientation which attempts to understand the psychic functioning of an individual in a social interaction situation.

### **Methodology and Results: -**

Our experimental design focused on the choice of three competitive sporting activities: tennis, judo and football. The chosen population was made up of 113 young amateur athletes with an average age ( $A=15.8 \pm 2.2$ ) and a minimum of 2 years of practice. 15 parents and 06 coaches also took part in the survey. We opted for a mixed approach to our research methodology, using both questionnaire and interview techniques.

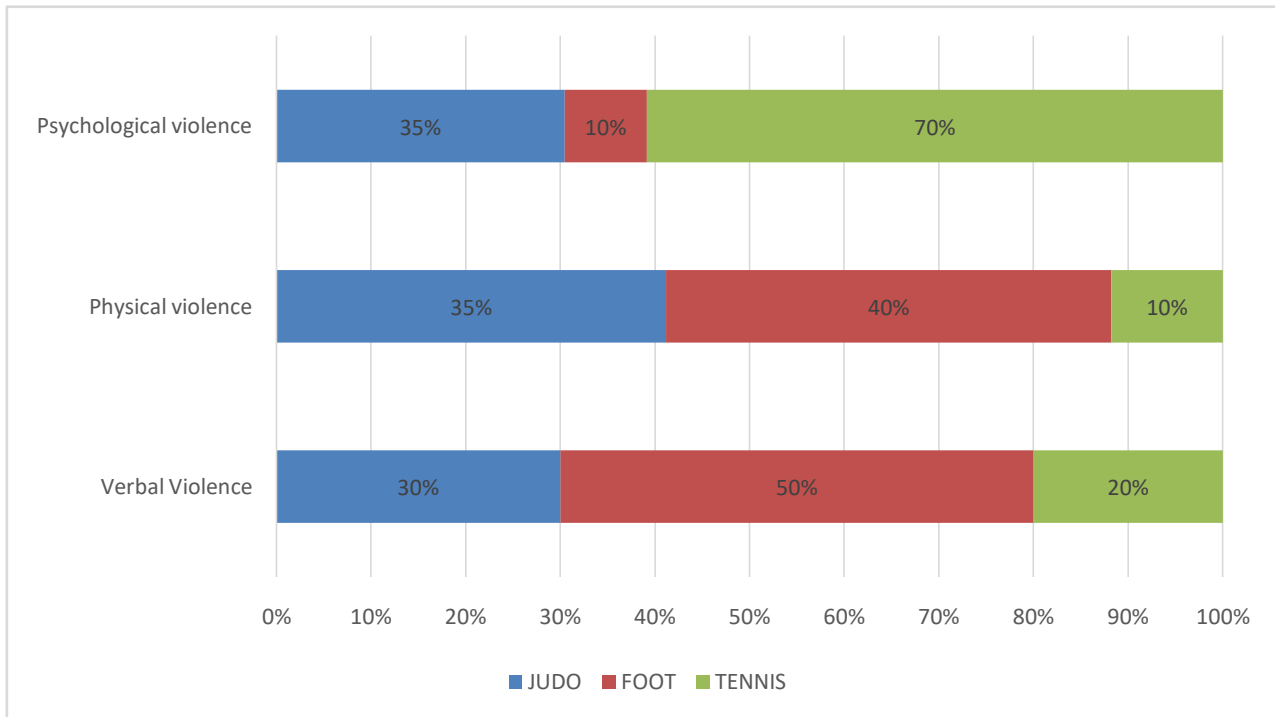
For the population of young athletes, a data sheet was drawn up to collect categorical data along with a 30-item questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into 5 categories: "reasons for practising competitive sport", "typology and forms of violence in the sport practised (experience)", "main causes of violence (perception)", "discourse of the family environment on competitive sport" and "attitudes of the family environment towards violent behaviour in sport". In the second phase of the study, we invited 15 young people (5 participants in each sport), 15 parents and 6 coaches (2 coaches in each sport) to take part in a semi-structured interview.

Analysis of the quantitative data shows that each sport is dominated by a particular social category (figure 1). In football, 75% of participants belong to a disadvantaged social class. Judo seems to attract young people from an average social category (62%), whereas in tennis 69% of participants belong to a privileged social class.

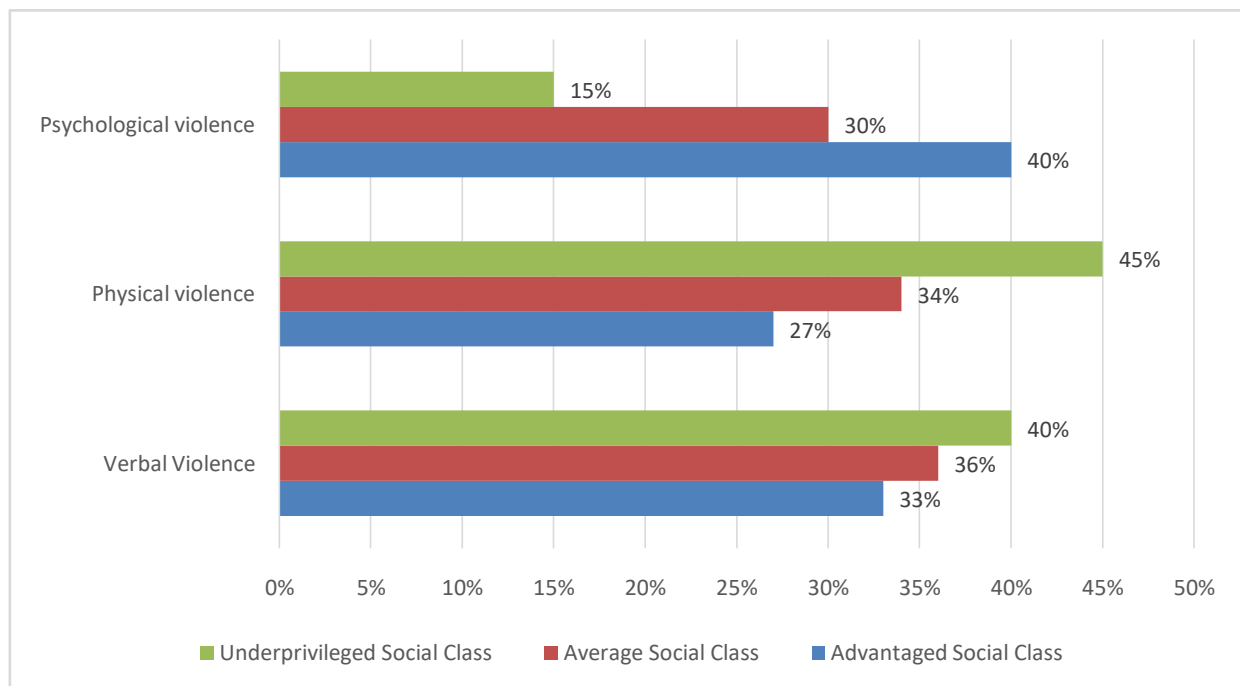


**Fig 1: -** Distribution of sports participation by social class.

The distribution of the typology of violence seems to follow the logic of a socio-cultural distribution in terms of social class (fig2& 3). For example, footballers, most of whom belong to a disadvantaged social class, display more physical and verbal violence than other categories.

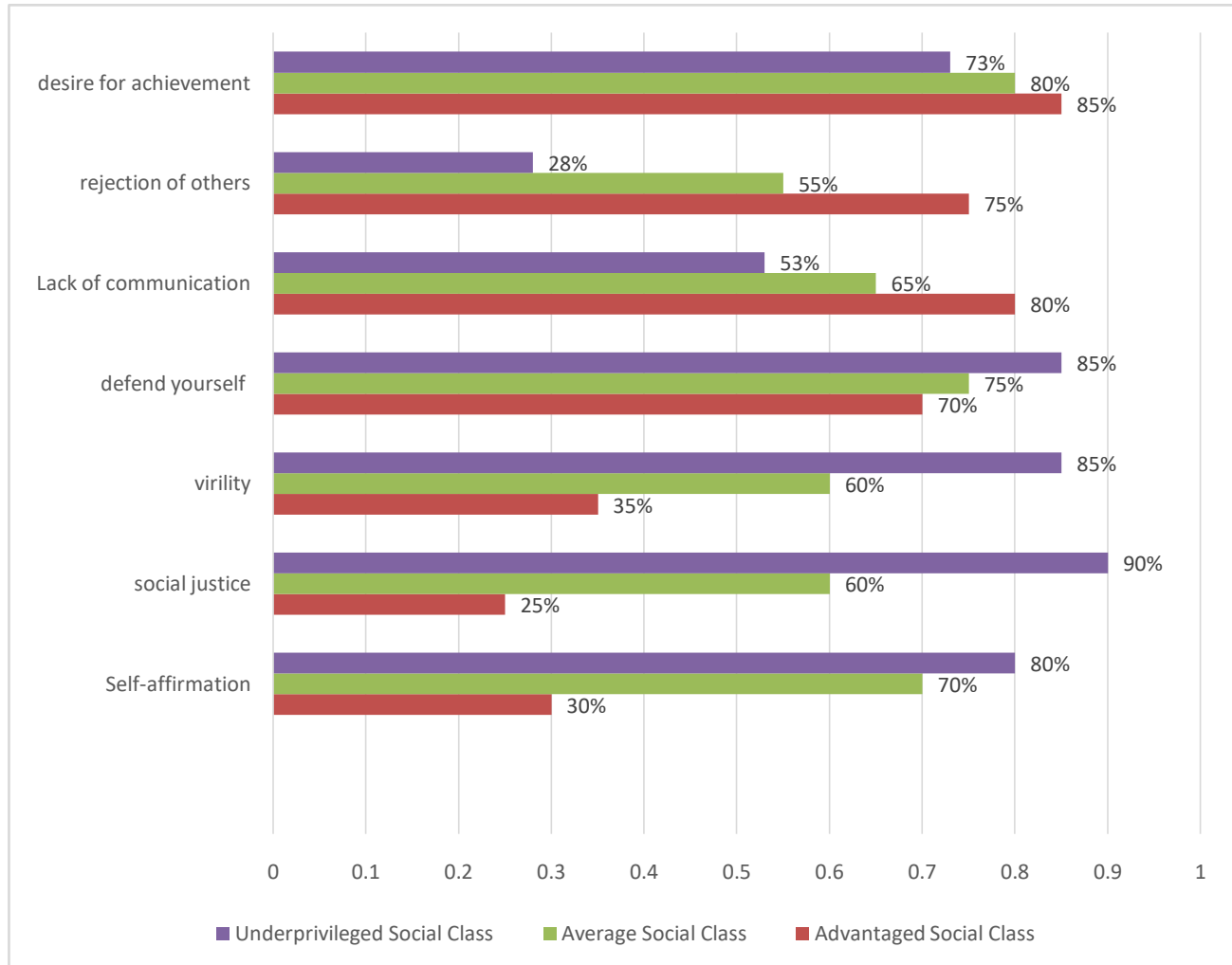


**Fig 2: -** Distribution of the typology of violence according to the sport practiced.



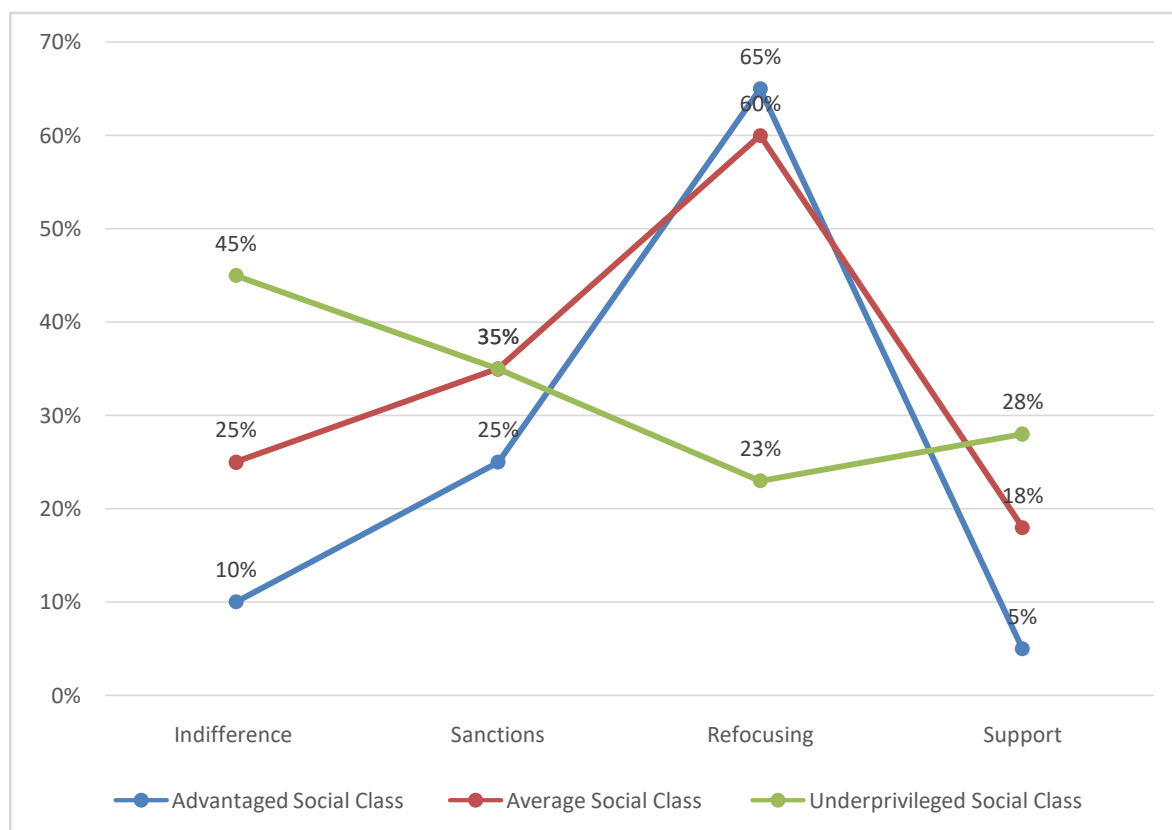
**Fig 3: -** Distribution of the typology of violence according to social class.

In terms of their perception of the causes of violence, young footballers, for example, tend to talk about the nature of the activity to explain their aggressive behaviour. Two types are mentioned: the first is called hostile aggression, which means wanting to cause pain and harm to others. This type is fuelled by anger and frustration. The second type is instrumental, where the priority is to win the game, even if it means hurting the opponent (Cox, 2005). Supporters, the stakes of the competition and pressure from coaches were also cited by young people as factors fuelling violence.



**Fig4: -** Distribution of reasons for violence according to social class.

With regard to the impact of the family and socio-cultural environment, the responses vary according to social background (fig4). Young people from a privileged social class, for example, evoke social representations that shape a social behaviour that calls for discussion and negotiation to manage interactions. Violence and aggression are seen as anti-social behaviour. Judo and football players seem to agree that their socio-cultural and family environment conveys social representations that encourage aggressive and brutal behaviour in competitive situations.



**Fig. 5:** - Distribution of the typology of violence according to social class attitude.

The content analysis of the semi-structured interviews focused on three elements of representation: opinions, attitudes and stereotypes (Moscovici, 1976). The first four most frequent elements are:

1. Violence is a regulator of social relations (67%)
2. It is a socially learned behaviour within the group to which one belongs (59%)
3. Young people reflect the values and beliefs of their family and socio-cultural environment (38%)
4. Violence is a way of expressing themselves and existing socially (36%)
5. Violence is a logical consequence of competition (31%)

### Discussion:-

This study has enabled us to observe that the choice to practise a sport reflects an individual's lifestyle, through which they mark their membership of a particular social group. We also raised the fact that the expression of violence in competitive sport among young people can take two forms: "real action" and "symbolic action". A third observation concerns inequality in the forms of violence. This seems to be linked to social inequality. We also concluded that violent behaviour is the result of a socio-cultural distribution in which each class is guided by a system of representation. Finally, the results obtained suggest that the attitudes of the groups to which one belongs towards violent behaviour seem to fuel the structuring, hierarchisation and dynamism of social representations of it. Our conclusions are in line with those of previous work by a number of researchers, including Bourdieu (1979). These studies looked at violence as a means of legitimising social and cultural inequalities (Pociello, 1981).

In his study of sportspeople's representations of violence, Guilbert (2009) highlighted the existence of a socio-cultural distribution of sporting violence. He postulates that social background, level of education and forms of violence appear to be significant structural determinants in defining and explaining violence in sport. The first finding of this study refers to the fact that "violence in sport is not limited to brute force, open violence, that which affects the physical integrity of individuals, but also takes other forms, verbal, psychological... more insidious forms that affect the moral autonomy of individuals". The second finding is that "sports and sporting allegiances generate differentiated and collective representations of violence, identified and identifiable, in which sportsmen and women find themselves and which differentiate them from other sportsmen and women".

We note that the findings of our research, despite their limitations, corroborate some of the conclusions cited above. They are in line with the conclusions of the work carried out by Dortier (2002), who considers that violence is a matter for society, that we do not choose our violence, but are chosen by it, and that the violence represented or practised by sportsmen and women, and its forms in particular, are the product of the sporting, social and cultural properties of the sporting arenas to which they belong.

### Conclusion:-

The study of social representations in sport seems to be of capital importance. The athlete as a social actor is considered as a producer of meaning and through this meaning expresses his or her type of insertion into the social world represented by sports arenas. Violent behaviour as a social behaviour seems to be regulated by the belief system and values of the group to which one belongs, independently of the sport chosen. Social representations in sport, i.e. discourses on the practice of sport or on sport in general, are therefore also the expression of this belonging/differentiation which is a principle of socialisation.

As a research perspective, a structural analysis seems relevant to make comparisons in order to better understand and analyse the positions taken.

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