

Thesis for grading to Master VII°degree



Women @ ITF Taekwon-Do



Annick Van Driessche
ITF-Belgium

Content

1. Preamble.....	3
2. Benefits of Taekwon-Do for Women.....	5
3. The Position of Women in the ITF.....	7
4. Female Role Models in Taekwon-Do	9
5. ITF Women’s Development Program.....	11
6. Bibliography.....	12
7. Summarized Curriculum vitae.....	13

1. Preamble

When I started practising Taekwon-Do, doing grading for Master VII°degree was not something I had in mind.

At first I just wanted to practise martial arts, but soon I really started to love Taekwon-Do and practising became an addiction.

After a while I had new goals : becoming better in the different disciplines of Taekwon-Do & participating at championships.

Becoming a black belt was the logical next step, just as teaching. The dojang became my second home, conducting classes a new mission.

When the national coach selected me for the national team, I was happy with the new opportunity. It was sometimes hard to combine my studies, and later a full-time job, with having an own gym, being a national team member, participating at all kinds of events on national and international level, but I loved it.

Meanwhile I got married to someone who was (and is) as addicted to our martial art as I am. It makes it easier, as there is no need to explain certain things, but it also makes it more difficult as sometimes we tend to forget life is more than Taekwon-Do alone. No regrets however of the choices I made.

Anyway, when ITF-Belgium needed a new president in 2001, I didn't hesitate to put myself forward as a candidate.

It was soon obvious that the combination with competition was difficult, it was time to become an umpire and to help other practitioners to achieve their goals.

But I loved, and still love, to exercise seriously all the facets of our martial art, so besides being an instructor, a competitor, a coach, a member of board, an umpire,I will in the first place always be a student in Taekwon-Do.

I realize I received a lot of opportunities, and in the first place I need to thank my husband for this, Master Frank Vanberghen (VIII°degree). As pioneer of ITF-Belgium and as its first president he made sure ITF Taekwon-Do could be practised in our country. He created many possibilities for me, he always stood at my side, being very comprehensive when I had to go to yet another seminar, meeting, class.....

I also want to thank my parents and sister for giving me the opportunity to start with Taekwon-Do, being at my side as supporters the first years. I'm also grateful for their understanding, as we have to miss quite some family moments.

The last persons I need to thank are my first instructors, Pascal and Sandra Van Kerckhove, resp. III° and I°degree, who introduced me in the basics of Taekwon-Do and who asked me to become their assistant-instructor and secretary of their club.

Why did I choose this subject, 'Women in ITF Taekwon-Do', for my thesis?

I never really thought about the subject until GrandMaster Pablo Trajtenberg asked me to write an article about women in Taekwon-Do for the magazine 'Taekwon-Do Generation', in 2005. Since then I noticed the lack of women in certain fields of the ITF, I started to look

around, to ask myself the question why there were not too many women in certain positions.

I think it's a question worthwhile thinking about, as for sure it would be good for ITF Taekwon-Do to have more females on a higher level, on all levels. Therefore we first need to know why we lack this at the moment, or why women practise Taekwon-Do. We need to understand if this is a problem and if yes, if it's a general problem of our society, or only a problem in certain aspects of this society.

For sure I know, as I experienced it myself, that we need more female role models.

One of my new goals in Taekwon-Do is, even on a small scale, to help women and especially young girls to gain the self-confidence they need to stand firm in nowadays society. I believe it's possible to do this just by showing them that they should not be afraid to take their place in life....and the best way of demonstrating this, is to lead by example.

2. Benefits of Taekwon-Do for Women

As I already wrote in the magazine 'Taekwon-Do Generation' in 2011:

'ITF Taekwon-Do offers its practitioners – not only the female students - a lot of advantages in 4 facets : as a martial art, as a sport, as a way of life and as a tool in social development. It has many benefits on physical, mental, social and familial level.

Women however think otherwise than men, they sometimes have other reasons for practising or they need other circumstances.

To emphasize the benefits of Taekwon-Do for women it's necessary to know what's important to women, what their concerns are.

Most women are looking for a good balance between their job and their private life, having a career and having enough quality time with the family. They need to manage everything at home, but they still want to keep some time for themselves and their hobbies. This is a very difficult exercise, keeping everything in balance.

A lot of women are concerned about their health, the shape of their body and their weight. They want to do physical exercise, but they're afraid of injuries. Women want to feel safe, exercising in a nice atmosphere, gaining self-confidence and they want to learn about how to defend themselves.

Both on physical and on mental level ITF Taekwon-Do can offer a lot to those women.

Exercising increases the general physical fitness. It increases the general physical strength, not only of few muscles, but it involves the whole body, thus developing and maintaining a good posture and core stability. Taekwon-Do helps to create a stronger and leaner body, without creating bulky muscles that most women don't like.

The repetition of kicks, with the use of muscles around the hips and lower abdomen, have a benefit on these muscles which are a problem zone for most women. It improves the shape of the body because the flabby fat tissue will be changed into lean tissue.

After childbirth in particular, some areas are stretched and weakened, and Taekwon-Do training is ideal to restore this lost muscle tone.

Kicking and jumping strengthens the bones. This is especially important for women, because osteoporosis or weakening of the bones is common when getting older.

Practising Taekwon-Do also increases flexibility. Already many women are more flexible in their muscles than men, which is a big advantage in Taekwon-Do, and through training their flexibility gets better and better. This flexibility helps to slow the ageing process a little.

Taekwon-Do also increases the flexibility of the joints.

By doing Taekwon-Do on regular basis, it's easier to maintain a healthy weight. The estimated calorie consumption for a vigorous Taekwon-Do work-out is about 600 calories/hour. Popular diets become unnecessary. It's possible to maintain a healthy weight the 'fun' way : maintaining a balanced diet together with regular exercise through Taekwon-Do. And it is much safer for the body to maintain a good weight than to oscillate weight-gain then diet.

Regular Taekwon-Do training at a participatory level with a qualified instructor carries a fairly low risk of injury. Taekwon-Do is practised without the use of weights or special equipment and since the body sets its own limits, injuries are reduced.

Kicking and punching a target is also a huge stress relief, which is perfect after a busy day at work. Channelling this stress is perfect for body and mind.

Through Taekwon-Do women will get mentally stronger, which helps when life gets tough. Mental and physical strength are great for building self-confidence and boosting self-esteem. Taekwon-Do helps women to feel better about themselves, to like themselves more, to feel more positive. By practising Taekwon-Do, women also develop better self-discipline, and this will help them in daily life.

ITF Taekwon-Do can also be beneficial to women on other levels.

During Taekwon-Do classes women learn how to defend themselves and they will develop the mental strength to use these self-defence skills if it becomes necessary.

The increased confidence helps women to feel safer in their daily lives. Taekwon-Do students also learn awareness and simple strategies to avoid dangerous situations before they occur.

Taekwon-Do is a martial art for the whole family. Women can practise Taekwon-Do together with their partner and/or children, and every member of the family can develop skills at his or her own rhythm and pace. So no more worries about quality time with the family. By joining classes together women find a single solution to multiple concerns: being available for the children, being together with the partner and having time to work out and develop their own skills.

Taekwon-Do also has great benefits for children, including enhancing a strong values system through the Do and reinforcing the role and authority of parents, which improves life within the family. Also this is beneficial to women, as they will be happier at home when all is at peace.

We can conclude that ITF Taekwon-Do is extremely beneficial for women, besides the fact that it's also fun to practise this martial art.

Through Taekwon-Do women develop both physically and mentally, learning new things the whole time and, contrary to many other sports and activities, men have respect for women, as both men and women benefit from the Do.

There's no real 'macho' culture within the ITF Taekwon-Do family.

Because of the scientific background of Taekwon-Do, designed by General Choi Hong Hi, the speed's dominance over mass, it's well suited to women, and smaller, lighter people in general. Through Taekwon-Do training women get physically fitter and stronger and by toughing out hard training sessions and facing their fears they develop mental strength, calmness and self-confidence.'

3. The Position of Women in the ITF

On the 2005 World Championships in Germany, GrandMaster Trajtenberg asked me to write a part of an article for 'Taekwon-Do Generation' concerning women in Taekwon-Do :

'More and more girls and women start practising Taekwon-Do, and in most dojangs we can see quite some girls in dobok.

When we compare the number of girls and women in Taekwon-Do with the number of female practitioners a couple of years ago, the difference is noticeable.

When I started to practise, most of the times I was the only female in the dojang, nowadays in my own gym e.g. a lot of times the ratio male/female is nearly 50/50. A lot of these young girls and women also like to participate at competitions, seminars and other activities and in a later stadium many of them become umpire or coach, instructor or assistant-instructor. However, only few will reach the national and international level.

Still today we're lacking women in key positions like the ITF Board of Directors and the Standing Committees, or in national boards and committees. On big championships (World Championships, continental championships) only few female umpires are present, just as national coaches. We can see many junior female competitors, and senior I° and II°degrees. In the categories from III°degree on, the number of female competitors is decreasing and in general worldwide we're lacking female Instructors and for sure Masters.

In the early days of Taekwon-Do there were only few female practitioners. The idea of having women in Taekwon-Do was not really supported by General Choi Hong Hi and the Korean Masters. It was a different time with a different way of thinking.

The latest years however girls and women are encouraged to be part of the Taekwon-Do family, there's no longer a macho culture within ITF Taekwon-Do and taking the philosophy of Taekwon-Do into account (Taekwon-Do for everyone regardless of religion, sex, political ideas,...) female practitioners are welcome. Also the fact that training methods have been changing over the years made Taekwon-Do more accessible to women.

So the problem is not the lack of female practitioners.

Then, is it a problem that only occurs in ITF Taekwon-Do?

No, not at all.

Only, when people, male and female, practise sports, at a certain age they stop practising, mostly when they quit competition. Taekwon-Do however is not (only) a sport, it's a martial art. Practitioners evolve in Taekwon-Do, in grade, in functions, etc. Certain grades and certain functions come with age, and this is where women are stopped. It's a social problem.

It's still more difficult for women to combine work and the family with other time-consuming activities.

At a certain age, they're supposed to have a job and a family. They can still practise Taekwon-Do, but it's more difficult for them to leave home for several days, therefore it's difficult to e.g. be umpire at World Championships, to follow International Instructors Courses and thus do gradings, to have a function and go to meetings and congresses.

Also most women don't have the need to 'prove' themselves, they have less 'macho behaviour', or they don't have the self-confidence to put themselves forward for certain positions.

It would be good having more women into positions within ITF Taekwon-Do, both on national and international level : to have other ideas, other thoughts about some aspects & questions, to represent the female practitioners, to think about more feminine issues within Taekwon-Do (e.g. how to attract more women, what aspects of Taekwon-Do women want to practise, how to have more female instructors, what to do with women in cultures where men and women should practise separately, and so on).

However, there's still a long way to go. The way of thinking should change, and women should start to believe in themselves and in the need to have more women involved in all facets of Taekwon-Do.

One of the things that could help, is having some female role models in ITF Taekwon-Do.'

It's obvious that it's partly a general problem in our society, and for sure in some regions or cultures it's an even bigger problem than in certain other countries. But still...also in the most liberal communities there's still a lot of work to be done. How many female presidents or prime ministers have been elected? How many companies have a female CEO? How many sport associations have female board members?

As an example : the website www.catalyst.org publishes the list of 'Women CEOs of the S&P 500'. On June 13th 2016 only 21 women held CEO positions at S&P 500 companies.

The question for the ITF, as an organization : do we keep on following the general tendency, or do we need to take a leader role, following the philosophy of Taekwon-Do?

The International Taekwon-Do Federation should set an example, and the first step towards equality would be the election of a female ITF Board Member.

Not only would this be good for the image of our federation and martial art, not only it would be good to have a 'female touch' in certain issues, but also it could be the start of having more females on the level of national boards and in committees.

Another very important step, and a good sign towards (young) female practitioners, would be the designation of a first female GrandMaster IX° degree. This could show other females the possibility of gaining higher ranks for women within our federation, it could be a strong signal about the equality of both genders within ITF.

4. Female Role Models in Taekwon-Do

It's my opinion that ITF needs more female role models, examples for other women, examples for our young female practitioners especially. The ITF needs female GrandMasters, more female Masters, more females in key positions as e.g. the Board, in committees and so on. The ITF should show its practitioners that it's the time for a new future. The ITF has to show the world the possibilities and opportunities of having females on all levels of the organization, despite the fact that (some parts of) society is not following this path. Maybe the ITF should show the world that it's 'better' than certain parts of this society, keeping the tenets and the oath of Taekwon-Do in mind. Leading by example.

A role model is a person who serves as an example, or whose behavior is emulated by others. The term first appeared in Robert K. Merton's socialization research of medical students. Merton hypothesized that individuals compare themselves with reference groups of people who occupy the social role to which the individual aspires.

Role models may significantly impact a person's future choice of career. Role models show significant effects on female students' self-confidence in pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematical fields.

This also applies on sport careers or the development in martial arts.

A role model is not the same as an idol, which is someone who's being worshipped.

Are there any female role models in ITF Taekwon-Do, any female pioneers who are or can be an example for other female Taekwon-Do practitioners?

For sure in a couple of years there will be more of them, as luckily some things are changing, although not fast enough. Maybe in a couple of years ITF will have its first female GrandMasters, more female Masters, more high ranked female practitioners and competitors, more female umpires. Maybe more women will be part of committees or have a key position in the ITF Board, or in their national associations. We already have some great females that used to be fantastic competitors. They can be role models for young girls.

For me, the few female Senior Masters in ITF are role models. Not because they're holding the rank of VIII°degree, but because of what they achieved and the path they had to follow, all of them, to achieve this in times that were even more difficult than nowadays. Not surprisingly they're all having a very strong will and a lot of perseverance. They were never following the easy way, on the contrary. All of them have followed their dreams regardless of the resistance they had to face. All of them have very interesting stories to tell.

My personal role models:

- **Master Christa Wintzer**, VIII°degree, Germany (°1943) was the first female IV°degree in Europe.
- **Master Sheena Sutherland**, VIII°degree, Scotland, the first European female Master, holding key positions in the AETF for years.
- **Master Zorzon Azucena**, VIII°degree, was the first female Master in Argentina. Master Zorzon became World Champion twice (in 1981 and 1990).

In the (even very near) future other females can take their place. In ITF we have some strong women that can show other women the way and the possibilities. Some females that used to be very good competitors, women who are still involved in ITF Taekwon-Do nowadays as coach, as instructors etc. Some examples are Master Anna Anastasiadou Ghadir (Germany), Julia Cross (Scotland), Pato Garelik and Soledad Serrano (Argentina),...

5. The ITF Women's Development Program

The International Taekwon-Do Federation has several good programs for a target audience, like e.g. the Kids Program, and several committees working hard to develop specific aspects of ITF Taekwon-Do.

In my opinion however we're still lacking a program especially for women, or even better an ITF Women's Development Committee.

Women can do the same things as men.

However, for certain women it would be nice having some more self-defence techniques during classes instead of some other disciplines, and a specific program could attract more female practitioners, of all ages.

In many cases young girls start to practise because their parents want them to be able to defend themselves and build up self-confidence, as in nowadays society this is important.

Women of a certain age would also like to practise Taekwon-Do, but sometimes they feel that they're not able to do some of the other disciplines within our martial art.

If not a specific separate program it could be helpful to have an extra women's self-defence course.

On the other hand it's also important to know that in certain cases women feel more comfortable to join classes with only other female practitioners. Again in the case of hosinsul it's much more comfortable to exercise the techniques with other women, not having to worry about how uncomfortable it can be to being grabbed by a male practitioner.

Also for sparring techniques and exercises it's sometimes better to train separately, as some men tend to hit and kick harder, and women get worried about the pain or possible injuries.

Besides this in a lot of countries women are not allowed to have a male instructor and/or to have classes at the same time as men. In these countries ITF will need female instructors, to conduct the regular classes. But these instructors also need education. These female instructors are not permitted to travel abroad, or to participate at International Instructors Courses, International Umpire Courses or other courses and seminars.

Therefore an ITF Women's Development Committee and a specific program could be useful. This committee, consisting of female instructors, could be sent by ITF to some countries to educate the local female instructors, which would be a big step towards the expansion of the International Taekwon-Do Federation.

6. Bibliography

- Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role_model
- Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, <http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persoonsverheerlijking>
- Taekwon-Do Generation, 2011
- Taekwon-Do Generation, 2006
- Catalyst, <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500>

7. Summarized Curriculum vitae

Positions

- President ITF-Belgium, elected the first time in January 2001
- President ITF-Flanders, elected the first time in January 2003
- Vice-president ITF-Flanders 2001-2002
- Member of the PR Committee VTB (joined committee ITF & WTF in Flanders) June 1999-December 2001
- Member of the Disciplinary Committee ITF-Flanders 1997-1999
- Secretary Taekwon-Do school Ge-Baek Lokeren since January 1995

Instructor

- Assistant-instructor 1996-1997
- Instructor in own gym, Ge-Baek Lokeren, since January 1998
- Teaching license 15000 since July 2004
- Recognised Instructor ('Trainer B') by Flemish Sports Ministry
- Conducted seminars on national and international (Romania, Czech Republic, Vietnam, Bulgaria, Ireland, ...) level and assisted the instructor several times during seminars on national/international level

Black Belt Gradings

- I degree, 22 December 1996, Frank Vanberghen (V degree)
- II degree, 20 December 1998, Frank Vanberghen (VI degree)
- III degree, 17 December 2000, Frank Vanberghen (VI degree)
- IV degree, 29 June 2003, Master Brendan O'Toole (VII degree), International Instructor N° 1170, Thesis: 'The Positive Influence of Taekwon-Do on Children and Youngsters'
- V degree, 2 March 2007, Master Brendan O'Toole (VII degree)
- VI degree, 17 December 2011, Master Raul Sanchez (VIII degree)

Competitions

- Member of the national team 1997-2002
- European Championships 2001, Czech Republic, bronze sparring female -52kg
- European Championships 2002, Spain, bronze tul female III degree
- World Cup 2012, England, gold sparring female -55kg, gold female special techniques, bronze female tul IV-VI degree in the category advanced senior
- World Cup 2016, Hungary, gold sparring female -55kg, silver female tul IV-VI degree, silver female special techniques in the category advanced senior & best female competitor
- Belgian Champion : sparring 6 times, team tul 1 time

- Several medals tul & sparring on national and international championships 1995-2002

Participation International Instructor Courses

- Seminar General Choi Hong Hi, March 2001, Budapest-Hungary
- First IIC, February 2003, Cologne-Germany
- IIC, October 2004, Brussels-Belgium
- IIC, October 2007, Brussels-Belgium
- IIC, May 2009, Miesbach-Germany
- IIC, November 2010, Utrecht-The Netherlands
- IIC, January 2013, Tralee-Ireland
- IIC, November 2013, Oostende-Belgium
- IIC, May 2014, Dublin-Ireland
- IIC, November 2016, Paris-France

Organization of events

- 8th IIC, October 2004, Brussels
- 28th IIC, October 2007, Brussels
- 88th IIC, November 2013, Oostende
- 21st IKC, May 2016, Lokeren
- The organization of several seminars, national and open championships, courses etc. within ITF-Belgium

Umpire

- Umpire A900 since June 2003
- Umpire B567, December 2000
- ITF Hall of Fame, June 2007 (Quebec City, Canada) Best Umpire
- AETF Umpire Course, Cologne-Germany, October 2002
- ITF Umpire Course, Limerick-Ireland, June 2012
- National umpire courses, first one in 1996
- Umpire on national level since 1997
- Umpire on international level since 2002
- Umpire on European Championships since 2003 (Croatia), on World Championships since 2004 (Italy)

Students on official competitions

- Students of Ge-Baek have been selected for the national team since 2001. Medals on World Championships : 1 silver, 4 bronze. Medals on European Championships : 2 gold, 2 silver, 5 bronze