Leisures of Responsibility: Spatializing Care and Wellness in Martial Arts Practice

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Geography

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ABSTRACT

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Geography

The term “martial arts” encompasses a broad spectrum of techniques, philosophies, and training regimes. These movement practices function alongside discourses of health and reflections on cultural significance. While some disciplines, such as Taijiquan, easily fit into understandings of healthful practice, meanings of health in higher-risk practices can be more difficult to decipher. This project explores the seemingly contradictory experience of hard physical contact and health, and the importance of space in setting the stage for the safe exploration of normatively aversive experiences with pain.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The martial arts and the myriad systems within it are a popular pastime for some and a profession to others. Across contexts these bodily practices involve various negotiations around personal health, with physical development being the most obvious. Such challenges run the full spectrum of repairing egregious injuries during a sporting event (i.e., boxing) through health-enhancing activities, such as low-impact strength training and fall prevention (Taijiquan and Qigong). The martial arts have been lauded in both niche and mainstream circles as a means of helping children and adults develop a sense of discipline and self-confidence (Mathisen et al. 2020), and as a healthful athletic practice (Seitz et al. 1990; Draxler, Ostermann, and Honekamp 2010; Fong, Tsang, and Ng 2012). The Harvard Medical School even offered its full clout in support of Taijiquan in its 2013 publication *The Harvard Medical School Guide to Taijiquan: 12 Weeks to a Healthy Body, Strong Heart, and Sharp Mind.* Despite their popularity and benefits, the academic study of martial arts is relatively young and undeveloped. This dissertation seeks to study martial arts from a geographic perspective- one that emphasizes the care-dimensions of these practices and the social worlds around them.

The (Western) medicalization of some martial arts practices has indeed reinforced its mainstream legitimacy. This dissertation will examine martial arts training as distinctive leisure scenarios that directly concern matters of the body. While the aforementioned literature examines health outcomes as they relate to styles and systems, few scholars have examined the caring dimensions of martial arts practices. Such dimensions include the process of building the relationships that sustain programs, or the development of infrastructures that enabled the continued growth of a school. As a leisure practice that often engages some degree of risk, many

martial arts do not medicalize so easily, yet can still have profound influences on how participants engage with the world, learn about themselves and their health.

Martial arts training is one among many classes of activities in which individuals can engage in physical, social, and emotional endeavors. However, in contrast to activities such as yoga or social dance, the martial arts bear the distinction that in many styles the goal of the activity is to exchange potentially dangerous physical contact with a training partner. Quite strange on the surface, indeed. These are everyday practices for millions each year, and I posit that these activities offer fruitful ground for analysis in that they pose challenges to normative thinking around which kinds of activities are considered healthy and why. This project will pool theoretical conversations within leisure studies, health geographies and feminist geographies. It conceptualizes martial arts not as merely a bodily practice, but as a spatial practice of care that creates its own distinctive locales and fosters protracted and meaningful bonds between practitioners. Rather than reproducing a medicalized gaze that treats the body as an object of exploration via the medium of martial arts, this dissertation examines martial arts from the perspective of trainees and their engagements with the world: spatialized, medicalized, and otherwise.

By focusing on care this project interrogates leisure studies from the perspectives of health and feminist geographies. In answering spatial questions, geographers regard human beings as agents who act within, between, and upon spaces to create meaning. This project pays particular attention to spatial practices that foster healthful scenarios in non-medicalized contexts. Leisure scholars have explored the myriad ways that individuals and collectives use time apart from labor and essential care for self and others, as well as the constraints that hinder engagement with leisure activities (Stebbins 1992a; Henderson 1996). Care scholarship provides

the analysis of power and obligation – *who makes these practices possible?* – and offers compelling frameworks for disentangling the contradictions and paradoxes that will arise as this investigation continues (van Dongen and Elema 2001; Tronto 2013). Scholars of therapeutic landscapes investigate how non-(or less) medicalized spaces are created to foster wellness among those who frequent them.

The study of the martial arts as an academic topic has received a small but enthusiastic degree of attention over the decades. However, within geography the martial arts and self-defense cohort is small (Green 2011). Leading inquiry with space will offer more directed attention to geographic influences in the practice of martial arts, as well as the martial arts' impact on localities that host them. On leisure, I will weave academic conventions with some of the more controversial topics in leisure studies broadly as a means of understanding the contradictions of danger and safety in the practice of martial arts. Care scholars offer compelling frameworks to assess the granular activities between individuals and within groups, as well as to pay attention to systemic influences on wellbeing. Applying these frameworks to martial arts settings poses challenges in each literature collection, however these novel applications of established theory will provide a stable critical vocabulary for understanding caring engagements that exist in the martial arts world but are rarely examined.

This first chapter will provide a more detailed rationale for this dissertation and will later review the intellectual interventions I plan to address. Chapter 2 will be a literature review addressing three core areas: therapeutic landscapes, leisure, and care. Chapter 3 will detail my research methods. Chapter 4, the first empirical chapter, will address the locales of these practice spaces, paying close attention to the practical considerations that go into establishing and maintaining such spaces. Chapter 5 will investigate how practitioners challenge normative

understandings of therapeutic landscapes, especially where healthful activities intersect with the relational liberty of leisure. The empirics will conclude in Chapter 6, where the research will explore care as a spatial practice and how practitioners negotiate painful touch. Chapter 7 will compile findings and explore future directions for research.

Rationale

Why adopt a focus on care to look at martial arts geographically? This dissertation aims to develop frameworks for describing the activities necessary for creation and maintenance of martial arts training spaces, paying particular attention to the many responsibilities practitioners must undertake to sustain schools and regulate safe practice. Such practices are hardly one-dimensional. Success and imperfection characterize these efforts as practitioners, school owners, and others navigate the collision of contemporary needs and obstacles with traditional practices. Operating within (and beyond) these limitations, the martial arts offer a unique interplay of cultures and beliefs around health and place generally, and around care specifically. This investigation is rooted in the United States, in which a rich and expansive recent history has birthed countless twists on imported practices. What styles have been preserved, destroyed, or mainstreamed are as much the subjects of the places where they have manifested as the practices are unique unto themselves. At this time we will explore how contemporary practitioners preserve and adapt these methods and beliefs in their own lives and make these knowledges available to others.

Practitioners of mainstream (Western) medicine have encouraged the use of integrative and complementary medicinal practices, such as massage and acupuncture, as a means of mitigating the effects of health challenges and treatment side-effects. Similarly, they encourage

physical activity for its varied benefits towards muscular strength, bone density, and cardiovascular health, to name a few. While the physical benefits had been the primary focus of these interventions, such activities present the opportunity to experience health management in an environment that offers extended time commitment from purveyors of care, as well as the chance to engage health practices in a recurrent setting that fosters strong social bonds. Researchers in nursing (Chen et al. 2008; Singleton and Krause 2009), epidemiology (Szreter and Woolcock 2004; Raja et al. 2009), and geographies of health are keen to recognize the importance of peer networks in the development of healthful practices (Szreter and Woolcock 2004; Derose and Varda 2009). Such networks can also serve as conduits for exchanging health knowledge.

This dissertation aims to understand how individuals who engage in martial arts and self-defense as leisure practices develop networks of social support and exchange health knowledge in less medicalized contexts, paying close attention to how space and local environments function as incubators for health discourse. The project's theoretical origin begins with the concept of *therapeutic landscapes*, from Health Geography, which can be described as any environment that is understood to foster healing, curative, or fortifying activities (Gesler 1992, 2005). Much of the literature focuses on the activities taking place within the therapeutic landscape (Straughan 2010), how locales develop reputations for being curative (Gesler 1993), and how therapeutic landscapes manifest distinguishing physical attributes that enable healing activities (Gesler et al. 2004). Other publications have waged investigations into leisure spaces (Cooper 2007), the home (English, Wilson, and Keller-Olaman 2008), and even medical institutions typically regarded as high-stress (Curtis et al. 2007).

Therapeutic landscapes scholars have always appreciated the range of healing potentials in non-medical or even contentious settings (Finlay 2018). This project will continue the trend as it takes martial arts as its primary focus. The martial arts offer verdant topics for evaluating the physical, social, and symbolic significance of training spaces, and provides a useful framework for evaluating space as a discursive means of conveying wellness-oriented activities. Baer and Gesler (2004, 406) posed a challenge to therapeutic landscapes scholars to explore scenarios with “less positive shades of meaning,” emphasizing that no setting is perfectly therapeutic and that there is much to be gleaned from contested deficiencies. A training environment that necessarily engages with risk will prove an intriguing site for exploring the congruities and contradictions of creating therapeutic places.

This project also draws on the concept of *serious leisure* to conceptualize the continual, often lifelong martial arts practice in which many of the participants engage, and furthermore mobilizes theories of *care* as a vehicle for unpacking some of the more contradictory elements of the project. Robert Stebbins (Stebbins 1992b) distinguishes serious leisure from other forms of leisure in that the participant engages in a “career” of sorts, in which through repeated, long-term engagement develops and expresses specialized knowledge and skills. From this perspective, martial arts practice is neither incidental nor capricious, rather it is an integral activity in a person’s life. Through these shared interests and protracted relationships, these career-leisurists create *idiocultures*[1] around their shared activities, which Gary A. Fine defines as “system[s] of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction” (Fine 1979, 734).

[1] Idio- as in “idiosyncratic” or peculiar. “One’s own, personal, distinct” (Collins Dictionaries 2024a)

Finally, this project argues that care is essential for the creation and maintenance of leisure opportunities, even if those activities do not on the surface appear to be oriented around caring or wellness. Fisher and Tronto (2003, 34) define care as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves [sic], and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web." While most care scholarship implicates the family, formalized medical institutions, and the state as part of this "life-sustaining web," this interrogative lens ought to be pointed towards social groups that are not conventionally regarded as intrinsically responsible or caring entities – leisure groups. There exists radical potential for public engagement through leisure if care is the basis of decision-making[2] (Mair 2002; Henderson 2014).

Without progressing too far ahead of the forthcoming literature review, I present the language "idiocultures of care" as a guiding vocabulary for this dissertation. When care is a directive of idiocultural knowledge, behaviors, and structures in a leisure setting, the wellbeing of participants becomes a priority alongside mastery of the activity itself. Where this collides with activities of the body, participants may engage with one another as proponents of each other's wellness and safer training practices in risky or high-impact scenarios. Therapeutic landscapes as a framework lends itself as a stable framework for the spatialization of wellness practices due to a subject focus on non-medicalized settings and recognition of non-professionalized influences on wellbeing. This intersection of caring, leisurist, and therapeutic

[2] Language borrowed from (Tronto 1995).

perspectives highlights the recreational carer's ability to create and maintain space for healthful discourse.

Positionality

At the time of completing this project, I am 36 years old. I am a black woman and, until about four years ago, athletic and able-bodied. Prior to that, I had been training for eight years in various styles of martial arts. Due to an injury in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic, I ceased all training to focus on healing and slowly working on this dissertation. Like many youths, my exposure to martial arts began through visual media. I consumed much of the same media as my older brother and was thus raised on a healthy diet of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Power Rangers,* and when we were old enough our parents introduced us to Bruce Lee. The reach of Hong Kong film was timeless. We became curious about which elements depicted in media were fictional versus plausible[3].

In second grade our parents enrolled my brother and me in a Tae Kwon Do program that was hosted on Tuesday evenings in the gymnasium of my elementary school in Morgantown, West Virginia. We trained for about a year and a half, and we both attained the second progression of rank to green belt. It was at that stage we learned some realities of movement versus movie magic, as well as an age-appropriate vision of how much commitment is required to achieve such a high skill level. Though I did not train in martial arts consistently again until my mid-twenties, sports did feature as my primary extracurricular activity for most of K-12. I played soccer in the spring and fall through my junior year of high school, and basketball in the winters through eighth grade.

[3] An adult lens on childhood curiosity.

During my 2009 Study Abroad in Japan at Nagoya Gakuin Daigaku (University), I watched a few Kendo intramural classes, and my school did offer Karate as part of the formal educational curriculum. I never enrolled in classes – I *needed* to commit all of my credit time to language – but did drop in for two sessions[4]. The instructor was very kind to us clumsy drop-in students. “Daijoubu!” (Don’t worry! It’s okay!) he would tell us as we delivered wobbly kicks to pads. He would also smile and say “Daijoubu!” as he locked our joints and threw us to the ground. This limited exposure left a strong impression on me. There was a joy with which he conducted his class, and his students were always chipper at the end of the day as they returned to their dorms. I knew wanted to train again somewhere at some point, but access to the styles I wanted to do was limited in my small hometown, Indiana, Pennsylvania.

During my second semester at Virginia Tech, I enrolled in the Kendo Club, where I trained one or two times per week for a year and a half. At that time one of my colleagues in the geography department also invited me to train with her at the Bujinkan Budo Taijutsu Club, again for about one year. When I came to Seattle in 2014, I was fortunate to have found another departmental colleague who encouraged me to accompany them to a local Kajukenbo studio for a trial class. I began the beginners’ cycle there immediately. At the same time I began training at the University of Washington Kendo Club.

Following a concussion in 2015, I opted out of Kendo so as to limit my exposure to repeated head strikes but continued to train in Kajukenbo. Kendo continues to be a major influence on how I think about space as discourse and was a driver to begin this project. In 2018

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[4] The instructor wore a traditional white gi and black belt when instructing classes, but one of his daily outfits was an orange and blue track suit styled as Goku from Dragonball Z. The relationship between the media and martial arts cannot be understated.

when my dissertation was in full swing, I began taking Capoeira classes at the Union Cultural Center and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu classes at Framework BJJ twice per week. Finally, in 2015 I joined the Pacific Association of Women Martial Artists, which holds yearly training camps on the West Coast. During these camps, martial artists from all backgrounds converge to cross-train in other styles, network, and gain deeper understandings of our shared practices. At the present time, my focus has been on regaining physical fitness and recovering my ability to do movements that I had lost during my injury period and the pandemic.

Exclusions and Support for Future Work

My ethnographic fieldwork and interview samples are based on the immediate networks I developed through my time training in Seattle. My training spaces are predominantly white, and this is reflected in my sample. Here I recognize that these spaces would not exist without the efforts and travails of East and Southeast Asian martial artists who brought their knowledge to the United States, and furthermore the Brazilian martial artists who have also immigrated to North America in recent decades (Goncalves-Borrega 2017). During the Yellow Peril, Chinese Medicine and martial arts practices were heavily criminalized (Liu 2019, 20); acupuncture and other traditional Chinese medicinal practices were outlawed in California until the 1970s (Huang et al. 2022). Forerunners in legalization efforts are still alive today, and several of my interviewees owe their own martial arts careers to these individuals. Operating parallel to the captivity of Japanese Americans in prison camps during World War II, the Internment Period also featured a cultural genocide of Japanese traditional practices, including the closure and

destruction of martial arts studios. Seattle features the only remaining pre-Internment Kendo dojo[5], and only two pre-Internment Judo dojos still exist, one here in Seattle.

The Brazilian government also criminalized practicing and dressing as a capoeirista from 1890 through 1937 (Chvaicer 2002). These laws were created to target black Brazilians living in inequitable circumstances – Brazil was the last country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery in 1888. We contemporary practitioners owe our access to those who kept their martial arts practices alive under destructive settings, to their successors, and to practitioners who have more recently immigrated to the United States. In spite of my enthusiasm and admiration for the martial arts and the people who came before me, this history is not intrinsically mine. My dream for this project is to inspire individuals who are closer to these communities to consider the martial arts as an academic pursuit. These practices, for all the health benefits they provide, also serve as a means for preserving cultural expression, and for some even for building connections to their own roots (Respondents 9, 16, and18).

For all the contemporary popularity of the martial arts in the media and sport, these practices are often taken for granted as entertainment. I hope that this project will demonstrate to future scholars who share ethnic or cultural backgrounds with these practices that they are worth knowing and celebrating. Beyond the practical implications of everyday wellbeing, the martial arts have served as a vehicle for cultural preservation. We practitioners have gained innumerable opportunities to better understand global and local histories, to learn new languages, and form strong social bonds. I hope that in the future researchers who are better positioned than I, especially around language barriers and cultural proximity, will be inspired to conduct

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[5] Seattle Kendo Kai.

ethnographic research. Scholars with closer social ties and unique ethnolinguistic connection to local practitioners among whom I have less access may find value in thinking critically about the taken-for-granted histories. These practitioners, to whom we owe our training, are ageing, but their stories and annals ought to be held in equal regard to other more conventional local historians. For my part, I offer the research practice knowledge I have gained in this process to any future researchers who wish to explore affinities for the martial arts.

Problem Statement

A tragic event that illustrates the complexity and contradiction of care in martial arts practice occurred in the late stages of this project. The following story provides a humanizing vignette into the challenges and decisions that practitioners must face while participating in these activities. Some may find the description of injuries disturbing. Author Kevin Bradley reported from *The Bloody Elbow*[6] *o*n November 29th, 2018, that a white belt (beginner) Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) practitioner named Jack Greener was "rolling" (wrestling) with the instructor of his class, Francisco 'Sinistro'[7] Iturralde. Iturralde conducted a maneuver that was beyond the skill level of the beginning practitioner, who did not know how to safely escape from the technique. Greener suffered a fractured vertebra and a spinal cord injury in his neck, underwent multiple surgeries, and was hospitalized for several months. He now lives with incomplete quadriplegia[8] and often relies on a wheelchair for basic mobility.

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[6] *The Bloody Elbow* is a preeminent blog focusing on Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), boxing, and grappling sports. The publication is a subsidiary of Snack Media.

[7] "Sinister" – often high-ranking practitioners will carry the longstanding Brazilian martial arts tradition of adopting a *nom de guerre.*

[8] Incomplete quadriplegia is a condition where strength and mobility in all four limbs is diminished, but the person affected still maintains some degree of function. Quadriplegia (unqualified) indicates no function in all four limbs.

On March 30th, 2023, a San Diego, CA jury awarded Greener $46 million, including $638,000 for loss of past and future earnings, more than $1.3 million for past medical expenses, $8.5 million for future medical expenses, $11 million for past pain and suffering, and $25 million for future pain and suffering. The settlement was levied against owner Michael Phelps[9] and his gym, the Del Mar Jiu-Jitsu Club. Rener Gracie[10], an internationally recognized BJJ master, was called as a professional witness for the plaintiff in the trial and offered his own commentary on appropriate practice, noting, "At Gracie University, the safety of our students will always be our top priority and it will always be a core reason why we do things the way we do" (Bradley 2023). Gracie condemned the usage of the technique on a beginning practitioner as inappropriate and unsafe.

It is common for BJJ schools to video record ordinary practice sessions. My own BJJ school did this on days when there was good natural light. As a result of this mundane practice, the disturbing footage was captured in full, shown to a jury, and has since been circulated broadly on social media. Offering his own commentary, Erik Magraken of *Combat Sports Law* gave further insight on the role of negligence – a *lack of care* as he describes it – in this case:

> "If you watch the footage, it is clear the instructor didn't intend to injure the student. But these lawsuits are based on negligence. *It just comes down to carelessness.* So, the question, was it careless for the instructor to try this high rolling back take when the plaintiff's head was in an unsafe position? A jury said yes. If you run this trial again, a jury might say no, but that's just the way the system works. We're simply talking about coaching carelessness" (Bradley 2023, emphasis mine).

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[9] Not the Olympic swimmer.
[10] Rener Gracie is a 3rd generation BJJ master in the legendary Gracie Jiu-Jitsu family. The Gracie Family is credited with spreading Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu globally following Royce Gracie's (2nd Generation) victory at the first ever Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) event 1993.

The language of "carelessness" resonates with this project. We practitioners do enter these spaces expecting a reasonable degree of risk, but not crippling injuries. How, in the midst of such profound and life-altering dangers, can these combative environments serve as healthful, even therapeutic? Even in 1991, Oler et al. admonished that morbidity and mortality in martial arts be taken seriously as a medical concern[11]. The intervention that makes safer training possible is *care*. Here, I again harken Tronto (1990) asking, "*What makes an act, an environment, a situation caring?"* The story above depicts a scenario in which care was not a guiding principle and a person's life was irreparably altered. The consequences ripple far beyond Jack Greener. Many practitioners have in the past successfully conducted safe and healthful practice sessions and intend to continue these methods; however, I argue that these intentions require continued critique and contemplation, as well as recurrent and serious practice prioritized to the same degree as any combative technique or maneuver we aim to master. Failure to practice with care has consequences for quality of life.

The goal of this project is to advocate spatial and bodily practices that can have positive, healthful consequences on quality of life. The peculiarity of martial arts is that depending on the style, a degree of precarity and risk is an accepted aspect of practice. To some, a direct encounter with danger and/or pain is integral to having the full martial arts experience. Risk is a direct encounter with imperfection (O'Shea 2019), yet it is within these pockets[12] of fallibility that practitioners engage with one another such that – in the best of circumstances – both parties

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[11] Oler, Tomson, Pepe, Yoon, Branoff, and Branch (1991) in *The Journal of Trauma*. They advocate that medical practitioners regard the martial arts with the same sense of risk as they do high-impact sports as a source of neurological injury. They also make recommendations for safer training practices.

[12] "In the pocket" is a term used in striking styles, such as boxing, that describes being so close to the opponent that one cannot rely on sight to monitor the other person. Touch is the primary sensory mechanism.

leave the interaction with their health intact, or perhaps even feeling better about their skill level or toughness after having endured a test. It is within these paradoxes that I find inspiration to disentangle the practices and phenomena that make healthful martial arts practice possible. An atypical comfort with discomfort is no haphazard outcome, rather practitioners make proactive efforts towards creating scenarios where these explorations are safe to pursue.

I also argue that the academic study of martial arts offers a rich resource for understanding behaviors and practices that operate outside normative expectations of interpersonal conduct. Such research subjects offer fruitful opportunities for analysis. Researchers may find theoretical kinship in some areas, as well as challenges to current considerations that can extend established understandings into new arenas. This project is exploratory and aims to highlight opportunities for further investigation. With an endless array of styles, neighborhoods, and geopolitical contexts (not to mention scales) to explore, there are simply too many angles for this single dissertation to examine in a single sitting.

From my own perspective, I follow the recommendations of researchers who will be discussed later in this first chapter, that even though martial arts as an academic topic has few agreed-upon theoretical frameworks, it is nonetheless worthwhile to investigate the subject matter from my own perspectives as a geographer. The frameworks I deploy can help to clarify some phenomena, while other occurrences will propose challenges to normative thinking. The dynamic and controversial world of martial arts offers abundant opportunities for reassessing conventional ways of thinking.

Research Questions

The project will take martial arts as its primary focus. Such activities easily meld to the pending discussion in three ways: (1) martial arts practice often takes place is spaces intentionally separated from the broader world (Williams 2002 on homes); (2) practice is often prolonged and repetitive, sometimes extending over decades, allowing opportunities for strong social bonds to flourish (Doughty 2013 on walking); and (3) a focus on body work provides distinctive opportunities for participants to navigate the health benefits and rigors of training (Andrews, Sudwell, and Sparkes 2005 on gyms). Taken together, sites of martial arts practice foster a distinct environment that relies on the modification and maintenance of space, as well as the promotion of social relationships that generate potentially healthful places. This research will address the following questions:

(1) How do practitioners in leadership positions create physical and social environments that prioritize healthful martial arts practice and wellbeing?

- *How do leaders and students create a therapeutic physical environment that is separate from the broader world?*
- *In what ways do the distinguished spatiality of the dojo (studio, kwoon, etc.) and the social practices within function as a mutually reinforcing dialectic that fosters a therapeutic environment?*

(2) How do martial arts practice environments support health-seeking behaviors where the mainstream medical establishment cannot?

- *How does the opportunity for participation multiple times per week empower practitioners to manage their health?*
- *How can martial arts practice, sometimes spanning decades, reinforce peer social networks that serve to facilitate the exchange of health knowledge?*

Series (1) of the research questions aims to address relational influences on space creation. Beginning with questions of leadership implicates the existence of hierarchies in the creation of these spaces. Though in totality the student body plays an integral role in the overall

functioning and atmosphere of the school, it is the leadership that establishes behavioral norms, dictates the curriculum, and has primary influence over the rental (or purchase) and adornment of the physical space. Though I will go into greater definitional depth in the literature review and analysis portions, I emphasize the proactivity of place-making with this question.

Series (2) of the research questions places emphasis on the space itself, and how its meaning as a potentially healthful setting may influence the people who pass into the space. The follow-up questions treat space as a temporalized process and emphasize the importance of relationships as integral to the function of the training environment. Many practitioners train for years, sometimes even making martial arts a lifelong practice. These enduring activities can bring about friendships and mentorships through which knowledge of safe practice, effective technique, and general social supports are exchanged.

Putting these two research questions in conversation with one another, I aim to capture how multiple classes of practitioners (head instructors, students, etc.) contribute to the creation and operation of their schools. Their actions are intentional, repeated, and occur in a context of shared understanding as to the community's broader purpose, as well as the immediate goals of the training session. Through these research questions I will elucidate how participants create and sustain idiocultures of care, how these idiocultures facilitate wellness and safety in a variety of styles and contexts, and how these (idio)cultural imprints are rendered in the spaces where trainees and leadership pursue common goals.

Significance

Though the subject matter of this dissertation is indeed peculiar, such distinctiveness invites new applications of conventional theoretical constructs and calls attention to a practically

prolific, yet under-theorized activity. According to *Statista*, 6.19 million people in the United States participated in the martial arts in 2021. This is an increase of over a million routinely practicing participants since 2010. Despite the struggles of many schools to survive the COVID-19 pandemic – a topic worthy of its own dissertation[13] – the national trend merely plateaued in 2020, with 6.07 million participating in 2018 and 2019, and 6.06 million in 2020. Just under half of all participants are female. This is perhaps the largest degree of interest since the Hong Kong cinema boom of the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, with such an intriguing level of enthusiastic participation from the public, the martial arts continue to be a niche topic in academic circles. As an academic and martial artist, I hope that my project inspires curiosity in both spheres. Broadly, I aim to contribute further to critical study of the body and bodily practices, particularly in the West where athletic achievements are often uncritically individualized and valorized. For laypersons, I hope that this work can provide a framework for consideration in the process of determining whether a school or club is a healthful and fulfilling fit.

A work of affinity by Xiujie Ma, Jing Xie, and George Jennings (2021) indicates a rising interest in geographic principles in martial arts studies. Their work exploring Taijiquan practice in public parks explores the creation of what they term "park culture space." Their interviewees, Taijiquan practitioners who routinely assemble for training in a Chengdu public park, detailed how through repeated encounters with space they establish a "social space" amidst a "material space" that, for a short while at least, can be their training ground (Ma, Xie, and Jennings 2021). Their analysis via Lefebvre (1991) rings of theoretical neighborliness. Though our points of

[13] Meyer, Molle, Judkins, and Bowman (2021) surveyed 306 martial artists around the world to investigate disruptions around training routines and creative adaptations to COVID-19 pandemic conditions.

origin differ, finding a colleague in questions of space as they relate to martial arts practice is an exciting revelation for future research.

Martial Arts Studies is a Young but Growing Field

For all the confusion of martial arts' origins in mundane contexts, just as much perplexity has existed as the study of combat sports and related activities, particularly in the West. Early efforts towards standardizing the study of the martial arts and combat sports took place in the field of *hoplology*[14]. In brief, hoplology is the study of the of the mechanics and science of combative techniques as a means of deciphering combat effectiveness (Bowman 2015). Military Science is an intensive and well-established field, however many of the issues addressed are often far beyond or tangential to the scope of most contemporary academized martial arts pursuits. Western authors from the 1930s through the 1970s undertook comprehensive historical investigations into Chinese medical and martial arts texts from antiquity (see Henning 1999). Such efforts involved highly sophisticated translation work with the aim of illuminating the historical contexts from whence traditional health and training philosophies originate, rather than pushing for the crystallization of academic standards or core questions. Finally, a bountiful history of martial arts studies exists in many other cultures (Hong and Ok 2019) – Chinese and broader East Asian origins are foregrounded here. However, due to language barriers, Western scholars (including today's author) often struggle to include these works in representative, comprehensive ways.

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[14] See Bowman (2015) for a brief but comprehensive review of late 19th and early 20th Century semi-scholarly martial arts research.

Contemporary efforts towards analytical standardization in martial arts studies have been burgeoning from Europe, with three figures in particular leading the dialogue: Alex Channon (England), Paul Bowman (Wales), and Sixt Wetzler (Germany). Channon writes from Sociology, paying particular attention to mixed-gender sporting activities and discourses of femininity and masculinity. Bowman writes from Cultural Studies, arguing against any attempts to fence so many differing flavors of intellectuals into singular methodologies. Rather, he contends that scholars should aim to answer a handful of core questions and go about addressing such inquiries through the established frameworks of their own disciplines. Wetzler provided the thorough introduction of *Kampfkunstwissenschaft* to the English-speaking world in 2015, which also parallels Cultural Studies approaches.

Avenues for Improvement in Phenomenology and Autoethnography in Martial Arts Research

Phenomenology and autoethnography feature prominently in martial arts research[15] as scholars seek to understand the transformation of non-fighters into fighters (Wacquant 2006) and examine other forms of personal transformation through training (Jennings 2010; Brown and Jennings 2013). My first martial arts-centered encounter with phenomenology occurred through Loïc Wacquant's experimental ethnography of boxing in Chicago[16]. Wacquant would later describe research in which the researcher's body is the data collection instrument as "carnal sociology" and, where appropriate, "carnal ethnography" (Wacquant 2014, 2015)[17]. Wacquant, Stenius and Dziwenka were deciphering a vocabulary for embodiment and embodied research. Such research lends itself to autoethnography in that the researcher experiences all the same

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[15] Kohn (2008, 181) combines these approaches without using the language of phenomenology and autoethnography explicitly in her analysis of Aikido.
[16] *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer (2004).*
[17] Wacquant (2014) specifically addresses ethnographies in martial arts and combat sports.

sensations and rigors as the research subject. Data is seen, heard, and written, *and* it is also touched, smelled, and tasted. In the case of martial arts, data can hurt, merely startle, or even be gentle.

Within both of these works, the authors mention the interplay of spatialized phenomena and individual experience in their theorizations of martial arts practice. “Milieu” is used as a catch-all for the web of social influences that create a culture of fighting that is nested in a fixed geographic locale (Stenius and Dziwenka 2015), but space was never the core question and the works offer little in the way of explicit spatial theorization. Their (radical) theoretical concerns were on individuated matters such as habitus and somatics, with the embodied presence of a person in space being the most consistent geographic link. Whereas Stenius Dziwenka and others seek to understand how practitioners make sense of their training unto themselves, I aim to describe how practitioners make sense of space as a mechanism for providing context that renders normatively aversive experiences desirable.

Care, Responsibility and Contestation

While care scholars have not investigated martial arts per se, their work foregrounds the contentious situations in which care takes place, and the challenging nature of relationships between those provisioning care and those receiving care (van Dongen and Elema 2001). They offer compelling frameworks for describing the physical and verbal exchanges of care work, as well as the internal struggles of care workers and care receivers, paying particular attention towards *not* sanitizing these reciprocities (van Dongen 2001; Hansen 2016). Scholars furthermore center questions of *“who is responsible?”* for creating opportunities, be they opportunities for care, leisure, or some other necessity (Day 2000; Cox 2013). Much like paid

labor or domestic life, martial arts and leisure also cannot happen without *someone, anyone* taking on caring roles and/or responsibilities.

This project will ask *"who cares?"* in the context of martial arts and self-defense practice. On the surface, care in a "martial" (by definition, warlike) framework seems incongruous, however care is essential for the establishment and sustainment of any martial arts program. A field that is deeply invested in its toughness and independence routinely overlooks the necessity of care at every level. Furthermore, authors such as Els Von Dongen, Kim England, and Isabel K. Dyck present fascinating imperatives in the exploration of touch and the body, especially as normative boundaries of touch change based on spatial contexts.

Chapter Conclusion

In the following chapters I hope to convey the broad message that while leisure activity is not inherently caring, under the right circumstances care can be a driver of how leisure unfolds. In activities that involve an elevated level of risk, such as the martial arts, a caring approach is integral to safer practice. Chapter 2 reviews theoretical constructs from three literature schools: care, leisure, and therapeutic landscapes. Chapter 3 addresses research methods, including autoethnography, interviews, and participant-observation. Chapter 4 will be the first of three empirical chapters and addresses the challenges of securing and crafting training spaces. Chapter 5 will delve into the interpersonal dynamics of creating safer training spaces. This chapter pays closer attention to larger groups. Chapter 6 will take a more granular approach to interpersonal interactions, with a particular focus to touch and other matters of close proximity. It will furthermore explore intimacies with space. Chapter 7 will synthesize findings and discuss future directions for research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation cross-examines three schools of literature: therapeutic landscapes, care, and leisure. Fortunately, these literatures feature some degree of overlap or theoretical neighborliness. For example, authors Day (2000) and Henderson and Allen (2001) have explored in great detail matters of care as they relate to leisure. Milligan and Wiles (2010) explore the changing topographies of care and responsibility in the creation of therapeutic opportunities. Andrews, Sudwell, and Sparkes (2005) explore therapeutic landscapes as sites of self care. Setting these literatures in further conversation with one another will provide helpful conceptual overlaps for describing the martial arts as a physical activity that does not fit neatly into any particular category and also poses unique theoretical challenges to these conventional frameworks.

Leisure studies explore the broad potential of what individuals and groups can accomplish when given opportunities to engage their time on voluntary activities. Voluntary relationships are of distinct importance for this project, especially as they open opportunities for participants to engage in caring relationships on an elective basis. Care is the mobilizing force that binds the conversation between therapeutic landscapes and leisure. These literatures emphasize care as a proactive and relational process, regardless of whether the caring acts are obligatory or even conventionally recognized as important. From the therapeutic landscapes school, I will highlight the importance of spatial practices as essential for the development of martial arts training opportunities. This subset of theory prioritizes wellness, and in recent decades scholars have expanded explorations of therapeutic experiences to unremarkable and even contested spaces that nonetheless have profound influence on the wellbeing of participants.

These literatures in application for this project will weave a conversation on the importance of care in the creation and implementation of leisure opportunities, especially when these leisure opportunities are oriented towards enhancing participants' wellbeing and/or sense of accomplishment. The high impact and sometimes violent nature of martial arts practice introduces the risk of causing injury or unwellness, whether intentional or not. This places a high degree of responsibility for wellbeing on leadership and trainees alike. Though the subject matter of martial arts is peculiar, the topic offers opportunities for challenging explorations and compelling overlaps in theoretical research.

Introduction to Literature Review Section 1: Placing Care

Scholars have taken on the political importance of care across multiple scales, between and within institutions, as well as among families and informal networks of carers. "Big P" political concerns address the macro-economic and policy decisions that dictate the broad availability of formalized care services. "Little p" politics center quotidian experiences of care as they relate to gender and cultural norms of who is expected to provide care and under what circumstances. Authors such as Christine Milligan (2003) and Michael Brown (2003) detail the weaving of formalized (public) care services in private spaces such as the home. More recently, scholars have investigated grassroots political organizing of public urban space as spatialized acts of care (Ghose and Pettygrove 2018; Jarvis 2018)[18] [19]. Indeed, caring acts and environments span a plethora of scenarios and, upon further investigation, rarely exist as singularly public or private.

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[18] From "Do it Yourself" to "Do it Together" grassroots urban development projects (Jarvis 2018, 341).
[19] Urban gardening projects as a form of spatial care and rehabilitation, as well as community engagement (Ghose and Pettygrove 2018, 320).

Guiding the basics of this section are Milligan (2003) and Tronto (1995, 2013). Foundational literatures in care have placed great emphasis on the cultural, gendered, and familial assumptions of who is expected to provide care. With care tasks typically falling on female family members and especially on mothers, such investigations necessarily delve into the home and domesticity as a primary site of care (Graham 1991). Milligan (2003)[20] however enjoins that scholars should not fall into the trap of exploring these sites alone, important as they are; caring work is integral for many of society's spheres to function. It also behooves researchers to take a relational approach to care: to observe the intricacies of social interactions and to understand why these relationships and responsibilities exist in the first place, how they fit into (or defy) extant structures of power, and how these interactions manifest spatially.

In her analysis, Milligan (2003) notes several relational phenomena: (1) that care often, but not necessarily, has an emotional component; (2) that the verticality of formalized institutions in relation to informal caretakers (i.e. family members) and patients places both informal caretakers and patients as "cared-for" under the guidance of state, medical, or other professional services[21] In simpler terms, the care of non-professionals is often subordinate to that of formalized institutions; (3) that cultural norms around filial piety and assumptions about care for elders can have a profound influence on the availability and function of bureaucracies in care delivery; and (4) Milligan views sites of care (the home in the 2003 publication) as an

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[20] Milligan notes that, normatively, care is regarded as a "feminine expression of society," implying that in all settings, public or private, care is regarded as inherently feminine (Milligan 2003, 457).
[21] Milligan (2003) also mentions that relationships between patients, their caregivers, and bureaucracies can be contentious in that bureaucracies often treat patients and their caregivers as standardized units rather than individuals with distinct needs.

anthropological space, "as a place of connection, memory and identity [that] is of particular significance in facilitating our understanding of the importance of place in the caring experience" (2003, 462).

Tronto's (2013) update on the uncaring state of democratic societies comes twenty years after her early frameworks on care theory. She notes that under increased globalizing neoliberalization and terrorist attacks, much political research has demonstrated the increased brutality and undemocratic policies that characterize liberal democracies; this scholarship however fails to clearly define what democratic thinking should center in order to improve these conditions (2013, ix). Tronto counsels, "nothing will get better until societies figure out how to put responsibilities for caring at the center of their democratic political agendas" (2013, ix). Reflecting on Tronto's words in 2024, liberal democracies and the many elemental components that make up these societies, health care institutions, and leisure institutions largely continue on an uncaring path.

Tronto's review offers a stark but resonant review in the failures of democracies to meet the basic needs of the masses due to a fundamentally uncaring approach to governance. These shortcomings are echoed in ongoing critiques of profit-driven biomedicine[22], as well as admonishments of the de-politicization of leisure[23]. Despite the grim outlook and challenging present, I argue in accord with leisure scholars forthcoming in this literature review: inclusive and politicized leisure can bolster counter-narratives of democratic possibility. Researchers of therapeutic landscapes note similar concerns: that therapeutic landscapes are not inherently

[22] Gesler (1993); Hoyez (2007).
[23] Mair (Mair 2002); Henderson (Henderson 2014); Stewart (2014).

inclusive[24]. I push further and propose that leisure time leaves open the possibility for participants to engage in caring practices that reject norms of trivial consumption. Care scholarship answers *what therefore should we do?* to rectify these shortcomings in the construction and execution of therapeutic places and leisure opportunities.

In 1995[25], Tronto outlined four *phases of care* and accompanying *virtues of care*. Among the phases of care, she notes *caring about, taking care of, caregiving, and care-receiving* (Tronto 1995, 142; Fisher and Tronto 2003, 34-39, orig. 1991). *Caring about* involves the awareness and the virtue of *attentiveness* that a need has arisen. *Taking care of* entails the virtue of *responsibility* to the acknowledged need – the responder has undertaken the task of provisioning care. *Caregiving* is the concrete action taken to address the need, ideally conducted with a virtue of *competence* to address the need and maintain positive outcomes. *Care-receiving* centers the virtue of *responsiveness* to the feedback of the person(s) whose needs are being addressed – is the intervention positively affective, and how, if at all, can it be improved?

In 2013 (34), Tronto introduced a fifth phase of care and committed virtue: *caring with*. *Caring with* involves the necessity of providing care on a collective basis and resisting the normative tendency to singularize the task of care despite all other systems being interconnected. The virtues here are *plurality*, *communication*, *trust* and *respect* (Tronto 2013, 35)[26]. "[Caring with] requires that citizens care enough about caring—both in their own lives and in the lives of their fellow citizens—to accept that they bear the political burden of caring for the future" (Tronto 2013, xii). The creation of a more just, healthful world is a collective, intertwined, and

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[24] Bell et al. (2018)
[25] Credit to Fisher and Tronto (1991) as the germinal text.
[26] Tronto credits Selma Sevenhuijsen (1998).

protracted undertaking that requires repeated and conscious efforts on the part of individuals acting in concert with one another.

Looking at these works contextually, the authors are deeply concerned with how families and formal institutions interface with one another, and rightfully so. Responsibility towards the care of others is conventionally regarded as the domain of family and trained medical professionals. Each class of carer bears a degree of compulsory involvement due either to their immediate relationship to the care recipient, or by virtue of their professional training. I however argue that these adroit principles have applications in much broader contexts, with my project examining care in the conduct of leisure activities. Where Milligan (2013) outlines power imbalances between professionalized institutions and families, a “third” category of carer in the form of fellow leisure participants emerges as a peculiar but potent driver of caring activities. This yet undefined group does not fit neatly into more conventional paradigms of power. This dissertation aims to describe how leisure participants exercise their own power to create scenarios of wellness for others.

Fisher and Tronto (2003, 40) note the importance of non-familial community care in the practical sense of childcare in small towns, in which shared expectations of caring conduct contribute to a sense of trust between neighbors. Noteworthy is that family and community are clustered together in the analysis and presented together alongside *marketplace* and *bureaucracy*. Leisure groups represent a specific class of community level support. This research represents a wedge in the overall picture of creating a more caring society, and indeed while creating care in bureaucracies and marketplaces has proven difficult on a broad scale, leisure relationships present opportunities to exercise care in localized, interconnected settings. To contribute to a

more caring society, we ought to recreate in more socially conscious ways (Mair 2002; Stewart 2014; Raymen and Smith 2019).

In the context of martial arts, the importance of care arises in two distinct ways: that of hazard management in higher-risk martial arts styles (i.e., Tae Kwon Do), and in the collective advancement of wellness goals in styles oriented towards wellness (i.e. Taijiquan). In a martial arts context that often entails some degree of risk, care must be undertaken to ensure immediate safe practice and to support a healthful, lifelong training career. Training scenarios where health is the primary goal also offer an alternative encounter with care in which the caring relationship is non-compulsory. Voluntary relationships represent a format for horizontal care practices. Peers are tasked with equal responsibility for ensuring each other's safety, and trainees are broadly encouraged to be proactive participants and supporters in these potentially healthful activities.

An Ethic of Care

The *ethic of care* concept has received extensive attention in feminist literature within and beyond the geographic discipline. The ethic of care describes an orientation towards moral development that treats taking care of needs and sustaining relationships as the guiding imperative (Day 2000, 104). Scholars operationalize the ethic or care in contrast (but not in opposition) to the *ethic of justice* (Gilligan and Attanucci 1988). Where the ethic of justice orients towards abstract, universal standards around autonomy, respect for rights, and fairness, the ethic of care centers immediate and concrete circumstances in which needs arise and actions are taken (Tronto 1995; Day 2000). Of note in this upcoming section is that the all authors address the ethic of care in public spaces and leisure scenarios. Singleton (2003), Day (2000), and Spencer-Cavaliere, Kinglsey, and Gotwals (2015) take a conventional approach to the ethic

of care as an analytical tool with which they investigate participation in competitive sport. On the other hand, Cooper (2007) poses significant challenges to normative interpretations of care in her investigation of a lesbian bathhouse and proposes an alternative framework that broadens the potential scope of care scholarship.

Singleton's 2003 work was critical of the Canadian education system's overreliance on competitive team sports in youth physical education. Physical activity on its own can serve as a vehicle for health education, skills-based learning, and cooperative social development (Singleton 2003). Singleton was however skeptical of the narrow interpretation of competitive values that this subset of physical activity engages, especially as so many youths are necessarily alienated from and through competition. She argued for a reevaluation of win-lose competitive sporting as the primary vehicle for moral development that prioritizes adherence to rules as the guiding principle rather than the wellbeing or full participation of players. In these contexts rules therefore function either as a tool to be manipulated for success or treated as obstacles to be circumvented[27] in the pursuit of victory. An alternative vision of sporting through the ethic of care prioritizes the relational aspects of participation, allowing for a broader spectrum of participants to enjoy the benefits of physical activity, *and* that these benefits ought to be applicable in everyday life.

Spencer-Cavaliere et al. (2015) investigate Ultimate Frisbee as a model for alternative competitive norms in team sports. Ultimate Frisbee (often referred to as just "Ultimate") is distinct in the world of competitive sport in that active players usually serve as referees in their

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[27] Carpenter et al. (2022) and Downward, Webb and Dawson (Downward, Webb, and Dawson 2024) on referee abuse. Kamis et al. (2016) on cheating in sports.

own games, even at the highest levels. Cooperation is baked into the relationship between otherwise opposing teams. Furthermore, Ultimate Frisbee is not a professionalized sport, which reduces outside monetary pressures on participation and winning results. Ultimate represents a peculiar moment in (US-American) sporting in which non-professionalization is the ethos for all formats and age groups, while furthermore lumping the responsibility of fair play on the players themselves rather than on referees. Players are responsible for regulating their own behavior, not outside judges.

Spencer-Cavaliere et al.'s (2015) analysis sits at a razor's distance from leisure-based discussions of *amateurism* without ever explicitly mentioning amateurism. Amateurism as *serious leisure* will be discussed in greater detail in the second section of the literature review, but is worth mentioning early as it relates to non-monetized sport and competition. The language of "amateur" is often used disparagingly in a culture that worships professional athletes. A cynical[28] reading of this calumny is "not good enough to be paid" for one's athletic efforts, even though exceptionally skilled, knowledgeable athletes coach the youth sports of tomorrow's superstars and participate in marathons every year. For most amateurs/leisurists, an activity does not have to be monetized to be meaningful (Stebbins 1992b). The etymology of "amateur" is *amo/amare*, the Latin word for "love" (Drummond 1990)[29]. Amateurs participate in sports, woodworking, fine arts, etc. for the love of the activity. What possibilities open when love for the activity and care for the participants collide?

[28] Anti-capitalist.
[29] Drummond's (1990) work was addressing amateur musicians.

Day (2000) raises a conversation around the ethic of care as a means of creating possibilities for positive leisure experiences for women in public space. The ethic of care is usually discussed as a barrier to women's leisure access and potential for enjoyment of public space broadly. Day offers a counter-reading of the ethic of care, highlighting opportunities for having meaningful interactions with strangers, the sense of safety that comes from engaging in shared activities alongside equally mindful others, and a sense of autonomy over selecting recreational locales that offer enjoyment for family members of varying ages. To underline the third point, the very acts of site and activity selection are themselves rooted in reinforcing relationships *and* caring for one's own needs (Day 2000, 113). The broad assertions from this work are that care itself is not inherently limiting, rather care adds a dimension for selecting appropriate leisure opportunities, *and* that ensuring positive leisure experiences for another can still result in positive leisure experiences for the person in a responsible role.

In summary, the ethic of care as it applies to sporting and leisure broadly poses challenges to monetized, competition-based physical activity. When interactions are prioritized for their relational value and the application of those values are not viewed as context-specific, the meaning and significance of these activities in people's lives expands into broader arenas. Worth highlighting in these works, and explicitly mentioned in Day (2000), is that acts of care can themselves be a dimension of leisure. What distinguishes care-as-leisure is that the participants are engaging in these acts voluntarily, rather than their care-giving actions being assumed as their "role." At this stage I leave unresolved the conversation between amorous amateurism in relation to the ethic of care. Perhaps the Ultimate Frisbee players serve as an example of how the love of a leisure activity and the mindfulness of the people participating intersect to create conditions of responsible practice.

The Bodily Practice of Care

In this exploration of care theory, I found peculiar kinship with nursing and healthcare scholars as they navigate the relational complexities of care-givers and care-receivers. Researchers have committed to evaluating systemic influences on care access for patients and the labor conditions of care workers. At more intimate scales, researchers have developed a keen lexicon for describing the tactics and mindsets of individuals seeking to create healthier working conditions for themselves and healthful outcomes for their patients. These scholars introduce a variety of compelling angles, but for the sake of brevity I will address three fundamental concepts that drive this project: (1) the relationship between "care-giver" and "cared-for" (Bubeck 1995) and how these roles relate to "caring for" and "caring about" (England and Dyck 2011); (2) that care is an embodied practice (Twigg 2002; Wolkowitz 2006); and (3) the notion of "dirty work" in care provision, and how proximity to matters of disgust positions care workers to interface with taboo bodily experiences (van Dongen 2001; van Dongen and Elema 2001; Hansen 2016).

Julia Twigg (2002) and Carol Wolkowitz (2006) propose curious halves of a metaphorical handshake as they describe care as an embodied practice. For Twigg, the caregiver's body is the "direct apparatus of care," placing emphasis on the necessity of face to face contact in the provision of care (England and Dyck 2011, 208). On the other hand, Wolkowitz (2006, 147) implicates the body as the "immediate site of [care] labor." Taken together, the body of one labors on behalf of, with, and upon the body of another. This closeness creates opportunities for a sort of physical dialogue and a means of communicating through touch.

Diemut Bubeck's (1995) approach to defining care centers to the activity of "doing" care. She emphasizes the importance of "face-to-face" interaction between "carer" and "cared-for" when the needs of the person "cared-for" cannot be met independently (1995, 207). This angle presents care as a series of actions, and furthermore places some emphasis on relationship asymmetry: one person is provisioning care, filling an area of limitation for another person. England and Dyck (2011, 217) offer two dimensions of the carer's actions: "caring for" and "caring about." "Caring for" can be thought of as the materiality of a caring act, the practical outcome of completing a caring task. "Caring about" encourages us to interpret the body beyond just its physical needs and interventions.

Some types of care work are regarded as noble[30], though broadly the task of conducting care can require workers to engage with patients in stigmatized states of health. Hansen (2016) terms this "the dirty work" of care. Professions that deal with the body, and nursing in particular, sit at a nexus of societal norms under which the "cultural symbolism of the body is at stake" (van Dongen and Elema 2001, 150). A "good" body is capable of moving itself. It is self-contained, and when it releases a fluid or solid of some kind, the owner of that body cleans up after itself. What of those bodies that are not contained or need assistance for containment? "Dirty work" involves the management of bodies that are no longer self-contained, that leak, that cannot move themselves, that often express bodily dysfunctions suggesting a narrowing proximity to death[31] (Hansen 2016, 1094).

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[30] Beachley (2005) on trauma nurses.

[31] Hansen (2016, 1094) on the stigma of age: "Aged bodies have been characterised as socially marginalised and are often perceived as dirty, unbounded, uncontrolled and grotesque, and are furthermore associated with death, decay and dysfunction."

Van Dongen and Elema (2001) convey a parallel conversation to the notions of "caring for" and "caring about" as they relate to touch. First, they note that a medical practitioner's touch serves the utilitarian purpose of rendering care, an *object*-ive exchange of one material body to another. The second meaning of touch tends to center the emotional response of the patient. The objective goal of cleaning a patient after toileting follows some standard procedures, but how does a practitioner conduct this task while preserving the dignity of the patient?[32] Additionally, how can the worker also maintain a sense of poise in this process? Within these conditions of frailty, touch is no longer a singularly objective experience, rather touch becomes an art. "Touching as an art means that people have to redefine, reinvent and reshape their ways of touching others day by day, situation by situation" (van Dongen and Elema 2001, 153). No two patients needing the same prescribed care will respond in the same way, and the same patient receiving the same prescribed care on another day may respond differently. The "art of touch" weaves the completion of objective tasks within the demands of subjective, ever-changing conditions.

Taken together, these perspectives form a web of cross-cutting concerns for the wellbeing of those receiving care as well as those providing it. At stake is an empathetic understanding of the patient's embodied experience, as well as the experience of the worker provisioning care. These reviewed works treat care as a bidirectional interaction, a negotiation. Interpreting these interactions as negotiations or conversations leaves room for understanding and agreement, and on the obverse misunderstanding or disagreement. Between the poles of accord and discord is problem-solving, ideally in a way that is cooperative and respectful. While this is certainly

[32] Campbell (2021) and Shapiro (2018) on medical violence.

intuitive through an analysis of verbal exchanges, less clearly defined is the embodied experience of exchanging touch. Indeed, it has been a sincere challenge to concisely verbalize the nature of non-verbal communication for even this short section.

The caring touch of this section's subjects sits in stark contrast to the often high-impact and painful touch of martial arts practice, at least upon first glance. These scholars, however, offer a compelling lexicon for describing the tenuous process of providing care in such a way that both the cared-for and the care-taker leave the encounter with their wellness intact. Under the best circumstances, theirs is a graceful dance between agony and dignity. Martial arts practitioners operate in a paradoxical relationship with touch, where normatively aversive experiences – hurt, mild asphyxiation – are to be expected or are even desirable. Yet, the same stipulations around the wellness of interacting parties remains. Under the best circumstances, the partner receiving contact will feel challenged but not abused, and the partner giving contact will feel successful but not guilty. Both will ideally leave the encounter with their dignity intact, or perhaps even better for having engaged one another in a productive way.

Spaces of Care

Several of the previous subsections allude to the understanding that care is a spatial practice, or at the very least always happens somewhere. Embedded in the language of "spatial practice" is the recognition that one's everyday experiences shape the places they inhabit (Elwood 2004); there is much to be learned from the mundane. When care becomes a spatial practice, it is part of the everyday actions on the part of the care-giver and cared-for. A nursing facility is intuitive enough as a site where caring acts are practiced and assumed to be happening at any given time, but authors have explored a variety of surprising and overlooked settings in

which acts of care and responsibility towards care are the expectation, even though the care-fullness of a space may not be readily apparent.

Cooper (2007) investigated the care practices of lesbian bathhouse events. Conradson (2003) explored a community drop-in center. Day (2000) and Krenichyn (2004) investigated public parks. Turner et al. (2012), England (2010), and many others[33] have explored homes as sites of care. Feminist scholars of the home present a breadth of accounts on how nearly every dimension of care can, through some means, take place in this sphere, from the social reproductive obligations of everyday life (Kofman 2012) and do-it-yourself (DIY) home maintenance (Cox 2013) to highly sophisticated medical care (Dyck et al. 2005). Theorizing the routine operation of the home is every bit as compelling as when disruptions to the everyday order occur. Few other classes of space have so many ideals attached to them (i.e., domesticity), yet host so many different parts of life.

The home is a fruitful starting point, as most colloquially seem to understand what a home is, yet scholars have demonstrated that settling on a definition is challenging, indeed. Benjamin, Stea, and Arén (1995, 158) offer a deconstructable description of homes:

> "The home is that spatially localized, temporally defined, significant and autonomous physical frame and conceptual system of the ordering, transformation and interpretation of the physical and abstract aspects of domestic daily life at several simultaneous spatio-temporal scales, normally activated by the connection to a person or community such as a nuclear family."

This autonomous, spatially localized, temporally defined system of ordering hearkens discussions of home as haven (Holmes 2009; Warrington 2001; Mallett 2004) which emphasize

[33] Laslett and Brenner (1989) ; Moore (2000); Mallett (2004); Brickell (2011); Walsh (2011).

the home as separate from public realms. Benjamin et al.'s discussion also includes scalar and temporal relationalities of the haven-home with entities beyond the home, calling attention to the "porosity" (Brickell 2011) of the home. Finally, Benjamin et al.'s description highlights the importance of human interaction with people and materialities as integral to place-making (Mallett 2004; Chapman and Hockey 1999).

Taken together, haven, porosity, and relationality convey the dynamism of how a home is produced, how it is crafted as distinct from (supposed) non-homes, and how it relates to the broader world. Even if theorists struggle to settle on a single definition of what constitutes a home, they do agree that home-making, and place-making more broadly, is an active process undertaken as persons ascribe the meaning of home to a particular place through social relationships and the material modification of the locale, an effort towards "bringing space under control" (Mallett 2004, 79). The bounty of this theoretical work is that it is unconcerned with absolute agreement, rather it explores the interlacing influences that create these spaces and shape our understandings of them.

What qualifies as conventional everyday behavior in one space may differ from another. A martial arts training space sits at a peculiar nexus of place-understanding when observed as something more than just a place to fight and get sweaty. Even the browniest of training spaces manifest a core set of values that the owner(s), high-ranking practitioners, and their trainees ascribe to as a means of reaching training goals and maintaining long-term supportive relationships. The home as a source of discourse is distinct in that these are spaces of mundane activity yet are individually remarkable. They are the subject of control and intention, selectively open to the public, but never wholly private. In these "controlled" conditions, forms of touch that are normatively aberrant become acceptable.

Evaluating a distinctly non-home leisure space from a home-centric analysis of place may, like many aspects of this dissertation, seem strange at first. However, overlaps in the functions of dojos and homes are worth noting. Both are sites where intimate bodily experiences are the norm, not the exception. Each environment houses physical and social elements of continuity. Where a home may feature mnemonic elements of genetic family lineage and close friends, a dojo may feature elements of a training lineage, images of current and past practitioners, training family trees, artwork and gifts from trainees and friends. Relationships are treated with reverence in these spaces. Trainees may have designated cubbies where they can store their gear, their own "room" within the school. There is a degree of intimacy in the dojo that in many ways exceeds that of a conventional leisure space.

Concluding Remarks: Care Everywhere

The inclusion of *care* as a mobilizing literature in a dissertation about martial arts perhaps seems unfitting. However, I consider this project to be kin beside a long tradition of care scholars investigating care as it happens in a variety of contexts. I aim to further investigation into settings where care is not obvious on the surface. In his opening address of *Social & Cultural Geography 4:4 (2003)*, David Conradson noted the rich history of care-centered analysis upon which the writers in this edition (today twenty years old) had built their own assessments[34]. I interpreted the accolade as a nod toward exploratory expansion. Works of yesteryear share the commonality of resisting the romanticization of care work, instead mapping the flows of labor, formalized medical demands, and informalized care obligations amid collapsing social safety

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[34] Research subjects/scenarios included mental health care environments, hospices, hospitals, and alternative medicine centers. Refer to Conradson (2003) for complete citations.

nets. The contemporaries of 2003 expand exploration into complex communal relationships, groups versus the state, and all manner of other institutions and social circles[35].

A further commonality of these subjects and research contexts is that caring is to some degree self-evident. There exists the expectation that in a hospital or hospice setting, for example, that care will be provided – even if the provisions are not of the highest quality. What of the scenarios where care is *not* normatively assumed to be integral to the functioning of an organization? I put forth the argument that martial arts are yet another context where the importance of care is simultaneously overlooked and yet still enacted in real time. This extreme activity provides a peculiar encounter with care that, after some sample exploration, should demonstrate another unromantic, contentious care dynamic. One can perhaps even argue that these worlds as we know them could not exist without someone's care work and labor – coaches, ringside medics, family members. Driving an investigation of care in the world of martial arts pushes an examination of how care is overlooked and will hopefully provide self-reflection for how martial arts practitioners themselves can train in more sustainable, caring ways.

The rented and owned spaces visited during research seemed homier than business-oriented. In these spaces, evidence of leadership and student commitment to decades of training and their memories is present throughout. Yet most participants are not committed to these spaces through the happenstance of birth or adoption. Rather, these relationships are voluntary; the overwhelming majority of participants are present in the space because they want to be, and they will continue to be for years or even decades. They navigate conflict and harmony, pain and

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[35] Parr and Philo (2003) on rural mental health, Brown (2003) on hospice care, Conradson (2003) on community drop-in centres [sic].

recovery. I posit that the breadth of relational possibility that leisure time offers allows for the exploration of these close relationships of care and responsibility.

Through the many frameworks and concepts above, we can begin interrogating how leisure spaces and therapeutic landscapes can be created and sustained with care as a precedent. Where Tronto presses for a broad political culture that prioritizes care as the primary goal, this dissertation scales down the analysis to the level of the *idioculture* of care. These idiocultures exist within a broader culture that is in many ways consumerist and uncaring. These idiocultures are imperfect, yet may still serve as sites for expressing care that is counter to the norms and expectations of the broader culture. As the previous authors have demonstrated, care is everywhere, it is contentious, it can be individualized, and it ought to be collective. Though leisure represents one star in the constellation of a democratic society, training spaces offer opportunities for participants to experience, to feel the care of others, and to experience caring for others.

Introduction to Literature Review Section 2: Serious Leisure

Whether regarded as the "freedom to do" things or "freedom from doing" doing things, central to the status of leisure as something distinct from employment labor and domestic[36] work is that the activity is voluntary and that the activity generally brings enjoyment to the participant (Cohen-Gewerc and Stebbins 2013). An early analyst of leisure, Thorsden Velben (1899) was keen to recognize the social dimensions of leisure access, especially as access relates to class status. His work centered consumerist excess, but perhaps just as importantly highlighted the

[36] Cohen-Gewerc and Stebbins (2013, 31) discuss these activities as "obligatory" commitments.

interconnectedness of leisure access to economic access, class identity, and what today we would call *social capital*. In shorter terms, leisure is not a phenomenon that happens in isolation. The opportunity to engage in leisure in the first place is highly dependent on class, responsibility for labor and family, and other time obligations. Simultaneously, engaging in leisure activities may provide a person access to specialized knowledge, social connections, or other benefits associated with being among people in a particular place because they *want* to be there, not merely because they *have* to be there.

With the modern expansion of the middle class in the West, leisure has become accessible to a broader variety of people and has taken on just as many formats. Some activities simply do not fall neatly into "leisure" versus "obligatory." Some people cook because they enjoy the process of concocting a meal, and others make an adventure of eating whenever they can, yet these activities do still serve basic social reproductive functions. For this project, *serious leisure* guides the discussion of leisure activities that do not neatly fall strictly into "leisure" for pure pleasure[37] [38]. Stebbins (Stebbins 1992b, 3) defined serious leisure as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge."

The language of "seriousness" captures a most endearing irony. Paying the mortgage and prepping the family's laundry for the week is conventionally regarded as serious. Serious leisure

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[37] Worth noting is Joffre Dumazedier's (1962) concept of *semi-lisoir*. These are leisure tasks that while they can be enjoyable are still requirements of impot or necessity, such as dog walking or gardening. Cited in Potot (2013, 60).
[38] Cohen-Gewerc and Stebbins (2013, 30): "Three of the main values of leisure are the desire for pleasure (hedonism), the desire for variety in the experiences from which pleasure is derived, and the desire to choose one's leisure."

practitioners commit to their leisure craft with near equal fervor, rivaling that of basic life necessities. Worth reiterating is that leisure participants can develop a high level of specialized skills, knowledge, and social connections resulting from their repeated, consistent encounters with equally committed others in a shared activity. Stebbins (1992) indicated three types of serious leisure: amateurism, hobbyist pursuits, and volunteerism (1992, 5). For the sake of brevity this project centers on amateurism, though hobbyism and volunteerism are not absolutely separate pursuits from amateurism. As Drummond (1990) noted in the previous subsection on care, amateurs participate for the love of the activity, and financial gain is secondary to the enjoyment they derive. That "love" can manifest as highly regimented practice schedules or training regimes through which participants develop a high level of competency and individual identification with the activity regardless of individual monetary gain (Stebbins 1992b, 7)[39].

Bryan-Wilson and Piekut (2020) advise scholars to consider the cultural context in which "amateurism" is being researched. All authors cited in this section have written in the West and have been assessing modern and contemporary encounters with leisure as a reflection of economic accessibility and cultural values. Indeed, thirty years ago Stebbins avoided declaring a singular prescriptive for amateurism[40]. Drummond's work debunked negative stereotypes about amateurs as unskilled and uncommitted compared to their professional counterparts, but again skirted singularity. Any single definition would necessarily be limited in scope, but all four

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[39] Stebbins (1992b, 8–10) details "the professionalization of leisure" and describes scenarios in which amateurs work alongside professionals, becoming intimately knowledgeable of professional standards. Though beyond the scope of this project, it is worth noting the number of highly skilled amateur martial arts practitioners who train alongside professional fighters for no individual financial gain, yet put themselves at serious injury risk in order to further the careers of their professional colleagues.

[40] Stebbins (1992b) noted at the time of writing the importance of mass media in making high-level knowledge more accessible to laypersons, and also that sophisticated professional equipment (i.e. power tools) are increasingly available to non-professionals. Thus, expectations of what amateurs should be able to accomplish are in flux.

authors seem to agree – to some extent – that Western amateurs share a few qualities: (1) a degree of skill in excess of the average public, and/or a desire for continual improvement; (2) cognizance of professional standards regardless of their desire or ability to replicate those standards for themselves; (3) financial gain, if it happens at all, tends *not* to be a primary source of income.

What further distinguishes serious leisure from *casual leisure* is that participants often have "careers" in their pursuits of leisure. The language of "career" suggests a high degree of intention and protracted commitment of time. Practitioners have continuity in their pursuits, and with that continuity comes education and often the support of other serious leisurists with similar interests (Stebbins 1992b; Kohn 2008, 178 on Aikido). This career requires intensive, repetitive individual effort on the part of the participant, which results in a level of prowess and knowledge that separates the seasoned amateur/hobbyist from the casual public and "dabblers" (1992b, 6). The leisure activity is a sort of vocation, and though often unpaid can have immediate personal or interpersonal benefits. The pursuit of knowledge is self-directed, often self-paced, and even in the case that a leisure activity is hosted by an institution, the institution may or may not be under the umbrella of a formalized educational sanctioning body.

Through these shared interests and protracted relationships, practitioners develop *idiocultures.* To recap, idiocultures are "system[s] of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction" (Fine 1979, 734). In other words, participants who engage in like-minded pursuits generally know what to expect of one another based on assumptions of shared knowledge acquisition and acculturation. For Kohn's (2008) Aikido practitioners, acculturation through etiquette and assumptions of skill level based on rank allow practitioners to make

baseline assumptions of how they ought to behave towards each other, such as which honorifics to use, and what techniques are permissible to practice at a safe, rank-appropriate standard.

The serious leisure perspective furthermore addresses two dimensions of temporality in martial arts leisure practice. First is duration, that practitioners often have years-long careers in their original arts and even develop expertise in multiple styles. Second is that of frequency, specifically the frequency with which trainees populate the same spaces with the same people on a repeated basis. This has a profound influence on friendships, the exchange of knowledge, and other components of experiential learning that come with ongoing peer support. As will be discussed in the forthcoming subsection, feminist scholars are critical of the non-relational conventions of leisure studies. Treating leisurists as wholly individuated actors reduces relationships to resources rather than recognizing the importance of collectivized engagement. I am to avoid replicating this habit.

The forthcoming subsections propose challenges to leisure broadly. The discussions within do still meld easily with the serious leisure approach in that all regard leisure as valuable beyond monetary considerations *if* participants give their time and attention to endeavors that are personally meaningful. Feminist authors critiquing leisure lead with the question of difference: differential access and differing interpretations of what qualifies as leisure or play. Critics of leisure justice and civil leisure examine how leisure activities have become decoupled from political discourse, and how leisure time can be reclaimed and made accessible to those who cannot participate routinely. Leisure, serious or otherwise, is not apolitical, and the forthcoming authors will demonstrate how leisure access and the conduct of leisure reflect the norms and expectations of the culture in which they originate.

Idiocultures and Expectations in Leisure Engagement

In reviewing leisure literatures, Fine's (1979) notion of *idiocultures* arose as a compelling framework for describing the unique milieu of martial arts training spaces. At the time of writing, the ongoing debates on defining "culture" in its broad application pivoted Fine's gaze to smaller groups through which interpersonal interaction at a finer scale could be the object of focus. Fine's (1979)[41] definition of idiocultures emphasizes the intra-group normalization of knowledge systems, beliefs, and behaviors that guide present and future collaborations. That is, within each group are norms and assumptions based on what is considered routine or expected within the activity group. Furthermore, Derek Attridge's (2011, 683)[42] definition of idiocultures situates the finite (idio)culture with the broader culture, stating "idioculture is the internal, singular manifestation of the broader cultural field, registered as a complex of particular preferences, capabilities, memories, desires, physical habits, and emotional tendencies." Attridge's approach characterizes idiocultures as a distinctive sample of a broader culture – from this perspective an idioculture is *an* iteration of a broader culture, the particulars of which are what set it apart from other neighboring collectives in the field of interest.

To briefly review Fine's rationale for exploring small groups, the *specificity of cultures* renders internal interactions and external influences in more observable ways than at broader societal-scale cultures and subcultures. At this scale, the "social definitions" within groups and where they collide with "social and environmental contingencies" can be better compared and contrasted with other neighboring small groups (1979, 737). These interactions yield norms and

[41] Fine's (1979) research subjects were Little League baseball teams near Boston, Massachusetts. Within these small groups, he observed (idio)cultural norms that endowed each team with its own distinctly differing play styles, language norms, and even protracted historical contexts.
[42] Attridge's (2011) sets the idioculture at the scale of the individual artist.

understandings that self-replicate within the group and may even diffuse to nearby groups. These small groups furthermore function as "cultural units" that, while distinct in their in-group interactions, are still "continuously engaged in the construction of a social reality, history, and sense of meaning" in a context of broader societal cultures (1979, 737). Finally, the idioculture provides a repertoire of "options" for how to respond to interactions within the group, with other idio-groups participating alongside them (i.e. teams in the same league), and with the broader subculture or culture.

Fine outlined the "social production of idiocultures" through five frameworks: (1) known culture, (2) usable culture, (3) functional culture, (4) appropriate culture, and (5) triggering events, comparing and contrasting these elements between the many teams he followed (1971, 737). *Known culture* addresses the necessity of pre-existing knowledge on the part of at least one group participant in order for new social elements to be introduced. *Usable culture* refers to norms that are mentionable and acceptable within the idioculture. *Functional culture* addresses whether an interaction or way of thinking is perceived as "congruent" with the goals of the group unit (1979, 740). *Appropriate culture* describes elements that remain as part of the idioculture regardless of whether the element moves the group towards its functional aims. Finally, *triggering events* are acute occurrences that are so influential that the group adopts new norms.

Taken together, these angles of analysis outline the basis of routine interaction and intra-group permutation. These elements are useful as a means of describing what is occurring within this wedge of a broader martial arts subculture that is as varied as any other. Even in examining just the West, popular understandings of (Asian) martial arts have transformed many times over the in the past century (Bowman 2020). The ethnographic subject of this dissertation simply cannot answer for every similarity or contrast within the broader subculture – so many

idiocultures exist at these fine scales, each with their own values and merits based on the goals they seek to achieve. Western boxing, American Freestyle Wrestling, and MMA all feature as part of a US American martial arts subculture, yet trainees' experiences differ drastically in many ways from that of my research subjects. As Fine suggests, further comparative analysis with neighboring idiocultures will yield a richer understanding of each.

A shortcoming of Fine's early theoretical work is that it does not explicitly address the importance of space, even though geographic influences are implied throughout the work[43]. Space and place are treated as given, with very little consideration for the importance of the opportunities the place presents or how participants imprint their own discourses or beliefs upon space and place. Elizabeth Keating (2015, 245, 247) refers to space as a "tool for expression," one that "organizes systems and relations, and is organized by them.[44]" In other words, space (and place) in conjunction with human activity function as mutually co-constitutive forces that shape cultural expression.

The forthcoming reviews of geographic theory will help to describe these acculturated and behavioral relationships with space. At a scalar level, "idiocultures" as a construct lends itself to geographic critique. Idiocultures are often more finite than diffuse, frequently placing participants in close spatial and repeated social proximity to one another and with activities unfolding in recurrent settings. This closeness is especially significant in embodied activities, such as sports, which necessarily require participants to be in close spatial proximity to one

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[43] Fine noted that teams tended to center around individual neighborhoods and nearby towns. In one case, routine close proximity meant that players also attended church together and brought elements of their Catholic faith into their interactions with each other in the sporting context (1979, 739).
[44] Citing Lawrence and Low (1990) on built environments.

another. To swiftly entwine Keating and Fine, these idiocultures (sporting or otherwise) express themselves through their presence in and usage of space, *and* place parameters on which forms of expression are considered appropriate given the expected rules and conduct of the idiocultural activity.

As this literature review progresses, I counsel the reader to examine each spatialized theory and sample subject matter through the lenses of known, usable, functional, and appropriate cultures. *Which cultural items distinguish therapeutic places from those not understood for promoting wellness? How does a care-centered approach to interpersonal conduct facilitate alternative, potentially positive experiences through situations normatively regarded as contentious?* A starting question as we examine leisure: *how is space crafted support and sustain idiocultures*[45]*?* To probe further, *how are known, usable, functional, and appropriate cultures imprinted in the physicality and usage of space?* Space and place are not incidental. Space and place are intentional – sometimes spectacular and often mundane. It is in these taken-for-granted assumptions of how space is used and how one ought to behave in it that distinct cultural and place-based manifestations emerge.

Feminist Critiques of Leisure Studies

Feminist scholars of leisure studies bring a critical lens towards gender biases in the assumptions of leisure theory. Henderson and Allen (1991) offer a comprehensive review of these assessments. They lead with the utility and limitations of freedom-based models, observing, "the notion of freedom includes 'free from' as well as 'free to', and this provides an

[45] Dorreen Massey's childhood reflections on boys having access to seemingly endless soccer pitches, and how gender segregation is enacted through space (1994, 185).

important dimension for exploring the context in which leisure occurs or does not occur for women, particularly as related to an *ethic of care*" (1991, 98, italics added). While a valuable point of entry, "freedom" provides an incomplete account of differentiating leisure experiences from other types of experiences. We ought to consider the acculturated norms of who has access to "freedom" in the first place[46]: freedom from employment labor *does not* guarantee freedom from household labor, for example. In their 1995 publication, Jackson and Henderson found that single mothers faced the steepest time constraints to leisure access, and that family structure broadly impacted both men's and women's participation in leisure activity.

As noted in the previous section *Placing Care: An Ethic of Care*, the ethic of care operates concurrently with the *ethic of justice.* In a just world, all persons would have the freedom to exercise leisure time, but this just, abstract ideal is not an accurate reflection of individual or group lived experience. In the upcoming subsection, authors Karla Henderson (2014) and William Stewart (Stewart 2014) term this equitable state *leisure justice.* Socialization and normative societal structuring towards caring roles and, subsequently, care obligations that disproportionately fall on women create barriers to leisure time. In other words, the current state of leisure access is an unjust one based on the dimension of gender and so many other axes of difference (Henderson and Allen 1991).

Henderson and Allen further note that the ethic of care that envisions the self in the contexts of relationships and social order operates counter to Western (neo)liberal ideals of individualism and individual rights. Thus, if leisure is treated solely as an expression of the "individuated person" (Cohen-Gewerc and Stebbins 2013) it fits neatly with liberal

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[46] The criminalization of Capoeira during slavery and early emancipation in Brazil (Chvaicer 2002).

individualism and provincializes the many ways that care may act upon, facilitate, etc. leisure opportunities. There is no "unobliged time" for those responsible for caring (Bella 1986), and to take leisure time to care for oneself is regarded as "selfish" (Henderson and Allen 1991). In their exploration of women members of an over-fifty leisure society, Yarnal, Chick, and Kerstetter's (2008) respondents frequently reported that they never had time to play when they were younger.

Though Henderson and Allen's colleagues in the '80s and '90s tended to focus on limitations, the authors do, however, remind us that constraints are a dimension of difference, not the totality of difference. They conclude their article with a counter-reading of caring acts as shapers and mobilizers of leisure. In reviewing Bella (1986) and Lenskyj (1988), Henderson and Allen emphasize that for many women tasked with coordinating leisure activities, the relational benefits of engaging in leisure with others is a meaningful experience. A "family who plays together, stays together" said Holman and Epperson (1984, 283), again highlighting the importance of collectivized leisure and the relationship-bolstering impacts of these activities. Fortunately, scholars in cognate fields have come to recognize the importance of family leisure as integral to relationship cohesion[47].

Caring relationships in the execution of leisure activities is and has already been happening, if only researchers would look at women first rather than seating analyses in androcentric models (Henderson and Allen 1991). Krenichyn's (2004) research on women's leisure in public parks revealed the importance of caring relationships as a driver for and elemental to leisure engagement. Respondents reported that they receive social support and feel comfortable while exercising in a park where women's physical activity is a normal occurrence.

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[47] See Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) and Orthner and Mancini (1990).

In addition to feeling encouraged to engage in physical activity, being in a busy park full of women added to a sense of familiarity[48] and safety (2004, 121 and 123-124). The park was also a site where parents with accompanying children could meet the leisure needs of both parties, again with the sense of safety that other parents are also watching children, and all can fully engage in their respective activities.

Henderson returns in 2014 with a list of six scopes of observation in assessing differential participation in leisure: (1) Examining the Gendered Dimensions of Leisure; (2) Values/Entitlements; (3) Benefits/Outcomes; (4) Containers/Opportunities; (5) Negotiated Constraints; and (6) Life Situations. She furthermore notes the importance of feminist scholars taking a positive approach to assessing women's leisure. Rather than focusing on constraints alone, we ought to visualize where and how leisure activity is happening for those who have been excluded from leisure research (Yarnal, Chick, and Kerstetter 2008).

In martial arts circles, time constraints around leisure are a constant issue. Many trainees are mothers and nearly all work full-time jobs. Carving out time for training is a constant struggle that we discuss at practices, and my own respondents report problems with attrition related to care and economic responsibilities. While it can be tempting to focus on these negative experiences with leisure constraints, it is necessary to view leisure participation through an active, agential lens. Feminist perspectives in leisure studies have contributed to an evolving catalogue of research participants and subject areas. This project aims to replicate some of these interventions and maintain a broader vision of leisure meanings and possibilities in the lives of

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[48] Respondents also noted the importance of being able to meet new people and feel at ease around familiar faces, even if these individuals are strangers in all other regards.

participants. Respondents to the above studies demonstrate ingenuity and openness in their efforts to engage in leisure activities, and such is the reveal when we observe a broader sample of leisure practitioners who either do not desire or cannot engage in leisure through means that neatly fit into narrow, androcentric models.

Leisure as Public Engagement

Leisure scholars have long been critical of modern engagements with leisure practice. More than a century ago, Thorstein Velben (1899) levied criticism against the classed and consumerist nature of leisure, and indeed this is a recurrent theme through to the present time. Hemingway (1991) more recently outlined three critiques of leisure: (1) it is privatist, (2) that consumerist leisure diverts individual attention from the public arena, and (3) it reinforces homogeneity by clustering individuals who are culturally, socially and economically similar into exclusive leisure groups. Stepping even further back into history, Aristotle's notion of leisure admonishes persons to spend time outside of labor and social reproductive work to engage in public discourse (Hemingway 1991; Mair 2002). Much of modern and contemporary leisure can thus be interpreted as trivial and disempowering, perhaps even socially irresponsible[49].

Heather Mair (2004) draws from these old ideals and renders a framework of *civil leisure.* Civil leisure operates counter to the consumerism of modern leisure activities, with a focus on both "Big P" and "Little p" politics of community engagement. Civil leisure is the opposite of Hemingway's (consumerist) leisure in that: (1) it resists and aims to reform the privatist hegemonic order, (2) it claims and creates public spaces for political, economic social

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[49] Raymen and Smith (2019) use a zemiological perspective in their analysis of deviant leisure. Rather than relying on criminality to define deviance, they examine "social harms" broadly, such as environmental and financial harms incurred through leisure practice or ignored due to the leisure practice itself being socially acceptable.

and/or environmental discussion, and (3) it embodies a multitude of opinion and perspectives, pushing against the homogenization of exclusive leisure groups. Schlembach et al. (2015) explore protests as leisure events that mobilize people – with their bodies and through their politics – to engage in public discourse. Compelling as Mair's framework is, one must resist the urge to dichotomize the *public* and the *private*. Civil leisure offers the opportunity for participants to explore where dialogues on broad public issues bleed into private issues, and vice versa. Colloquially, the personal is political.

As noted in the *Feminist Critiques of Leisure* subsection above, scholars have long been concerned with issues of leisure constraints. Such constraints can be based on gender, economic access, and other social positions that place limitations on a person's ability to access free time for rest, spending time with family and friends, restorative practices in general, as well as personally enriching social activities. Pivoting to the civil leisure question, these constraints *also* impact individuals' ability to participate in public discourse. A recurrent example of this is low levels of voter participation. Writing parallel to Heather Mair (yet citing different disciplines!), Maria T. Allison (2000) arrived at a similar orientation of leisure as a conduit for political and social transformation. Allison melded dialogs of social justice and leisure, pushing scholars to disentangle questions of leisure access and how leisure time can be used to further political initiatives. Contemporary writers such as Karla Henderson (2014) and William Stewart (2014) term this more equitable access *leisure justice*.

In short, leisure justice research examines both how leisure can contribute to social and environmental justice as well as how leisure may be a setting for resisting or reproducing inequity and inequality (Henderson 2014, 340). It is among this kinship of scholars that I introduce the nexus of leisure and bodily practices via Dorn and Laws' (1995) *emancipatory*

phenomenology, which can be described as a way of existing and understanding the world that prioritizes liberatory bodily practices as equally important to identify formation as is oppression in an inequitable world. Equitable access to leisure time has the potential to allow engagement with transformative physical activities, be they sport, martial arts, yoga, or some other activity that bolsters the wellbeing of participants. Protest is arguably among those liberatory physical practices. So much literature focuses on oppressions and constraints, yet this collection of scholars argues to flip the lens of inquiry towards liberatory potentials.

For scholars of politicized leisure, access to leisure time represents the possibility of engaging with matters of public discourse. Allison's (2000) mobilized leisurists walk to the voting booths. Mair's (2004) and Schlembach et al.'s (2015) mobilized citizenry march in the streets. A populace that has no access to leisure time is a depoliticized populace. Engaging public discourse takes time, even if that discourse is (seemingly) as simple as attending a voting booth. The matter of how politicized physical practices fit into the scheme of the broader project is twofold. First, that so much gender-based martial arts education centers self-defense. Second, martial arts training spaces can serve as conduits for the democratized exchange of health knowledge. Whether the little-p politics of the everyday or the Big-P politics of the state, access to unobligated time provides opportunities for fuller participation in public life.

Concluding Remarks: Leisure Liberation

Several perspectives in the world of leisure have been set in conversation with one another with the goal of creating a web of interconnected philosophies and interrogations. Beginning from the perspective of serious leisure, this paper explored the value of protracted and repeated leisure experiences as the basis of knowledge exchange and strong interpersonal relationships. Feminist critiques of leisure interrogate matters of difference in leisure access and

implementation, while also countering the habit of treating difference only as limitation. Scholars of leisure justice note the importance of leisure time as integral to public and political engagement.

While originating from differing viewpoints, all schools arrive at a similar conclusion: that leisure time allows for modes of exploration and engagement that can have profound political and personal impacts. Access to leisure is a matter of equity. For the feminist and leisure justice schools, an eye towards political and Political arenas marks the importance of leisure as a maintainer of social "goods" (i.e., bonding with family or making friends of strangers) and as a potential disruptor of inequitable, alienating social orders. A just, equitable leisure is inclusive, empowered and public, or at least does not silo the potential impacts of leisure participation. Disrupting the social order need not be a spectacle. It can be as simple as taking up space in a busy park – for play or for protest.

At this juncture, I revisit the title *Leisures of Responsibility.* Tronto (2013, 34) notes of *responsibility—caring for*, "Once needs are identified, someone or some group has to take on the burden of meeting those needs." The title is a decree to leisure participants to engage their pastimes as individuals and collectives empowered to intervene on each other's behalf. This is a directive to hold the wellbeing of their fellow participants and themselves as *the* priority. Feminist critics of leisure studies have arrived at this conclusion. Leisure justice scholars have expressed a desire for holistic political outcomes and allude to caring approaches, though they rarely use the language of care with theoretical density. Through those lenses, I ask of the serious leisure perspective, *what can be gained from repeated and protracted experiences with an activity and with others? When there is a difference in needs between participants? When leisure*

access is just? When the leisure practice is caring? These dimensions of leisure experience open angles of possibility for documentation and analysis.

Introduction to Literature Review Section 3: Conventions in Therapeutic Landscapes

Therapeutic landscapes as a theoretical construct emerged in the early 1990s, with much of the early literature focusing on locales of natural beauty and sustained reputations for wellness promotion (Gesler 1993). These settings are distinctly separate from the hegemon of biomedicine and often fill voids on patient care where biomedicine fails[50]. Though these landscapes are not conventional in their happenings towards health promotion, nonetheless there exists some collective agreement that these sites are outstanding in some way that separates them from mundane or less healthful settings, whether through cultural understandings or other values that mark such spaces as cleansing, relaxing, etc. (Williams 1998). The construct has been applied to a variety of settings, including sites of natural beauty and relaxation (Gesler 1993), integrative medical settings (Williams 1998), and places of spiritual significance (Perriam 2015). Broader understandings of therapeutic landscapes include gyms (Andrews, Sudwell, and Sparkes 2005), the home (Nagib and Williams 2018), places of leisure activity, and even self-help groups that defy the formalities of the psychological establishment (Laws 2009).

The language of "landscape"[51] was apt for the time in the midst of debates in human geography, and though the task of detangling these perspectives exceeds the scope of this

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[50] Gesler (1993, 172) addresses the "modern health-care crisis," reviewing shortcomings such as chronically poor patient care and individual outcomes, a failure to engage preventive approaches, and over-reliance on high technology, among other failures.
[51] "Landscape" was an intuitive and practical fit given Gesler's (1993) own focus on natural sites.

dissertation, Gesler's[52] word choice can most concisely be interpreted through Meinig's framework of *landscape as place*. Meinig's approach treats meaning-making in landscapes as interpretable through "some understanding of history and ideology, of process, functions, and behavior, and of larger geographic contexts" (Meinig 1979, 45). Indeed, though patterns and regularities may exist in space, how those extents are delimited and the contents within are interpreted is filtered through the influences of history and culture. In addition to a conventional interpretation of "landscape" as a physical expanse that bears material markers of human influence[53], Gesler and his colleague treat landscape as "a text to be read for what it says about human ideas and activities" (Gesler 1992, 736)[54].

Gesler's (2018, no page number) contemporary definition of therapeutic landscapes takes on an explicitly place-oriented approach: "an analytical framework for examining the process of creating health and wellbeing in places." Jessica M. Finlay (2018) outlines three axes of analysis: the physical environment, the social environment, and the symbolic environment. In brief, the physical addresses what is materially present in space, be it natural, human-made, or some combination of these forces. The social addresses norms of appropriate behavior, as well as internal and external cultural influences that inform those norms. The symbolic addresses the meaning of what the landscape itself represents beyond the conventional or obvious cultural readings. Though thematically these divisions are present throughout the literature, Finlay recommends that researchers will find value in observing overlaps and interplay within these

[52] Gesler (1993, 173) quotes Tuan (1979).
[53] Gesler (1992, 736) citing (Wagner and Mikesell 1962) and (Jackson 1985).
[54] Also Kearns and Collins (2000, 1048–1049)

dimensions, referring to these classifications as more a "convenience" than an absolute (2018, 118).

Though the general orientation of the therapeutic landscapes framework orients towards wellness and positive outcomes, these spaces are still contested, and their creation is neither apolitical nor without broader cultural influence. In their post-colonial examination of medical tourism, Christine N. Buzinde and Careen Yarnal (2012) detail how host nations market and exoticize local amenities to attract and relax wealthy, often Western, patients, yet in some cases fail to meet the basic medical needs of their own populations. In an investigation of urban parks and swimming locales, Thomas (2015) also examined the alienation of stigmatized bodies subjected to "moral tropes around responsible lifestyles and obesity" (Bell et al. 2018, 128). Robin A. Kearns and Damian C.A. Collins (2000) explored the creation of youth health camps in early 1900s New Zealand, a period when genuine concerns over childhood malnutrition and disease (specifically tuberculosis) collided with anxieties of "race fitness" and "racial deterioration" following the Boer War and continuing through the First World War (2000, 1051). These perspectives interrogate how multiple dimensions influence the development of therapeutic landscapes and how they serve some better than others, or perhaps not at all (Bell et al. 2018).

Scholars have also placed continuing emphasis on therapeutic landscapes as places where people go for more mundane health maintenance, not just to alleviate illness or experience exceptional locales. Writing from Urban Planning, Catherine Ward Thompson (2011) cites her contemporaries' efforts towards linking engagement with the natural world and the positive impact this can have on physical and mental wellbeing. These many writings echo Gesler's emphasis on the importance of therapeutic landscapes as places separate from the influences

outside "the realm of people's daily geographies" (English, Wilson, and Keller-Olaman 2008, 69; Gesler 1993). Yet, "outside the realm" need not be a spectacle. For Thomas' (2015) research participants, a park will suffice.

Allison Williams (1998) presented a timely assessment of holistic medicine and therapeutic landscapes. At the time of writing, "alternative medicine" was under-researched, thus Williams ventured to meld the humanistic approach of holistic[55] medical practices with the same humanistic approaches that Gesler and his contemporaries were discussing at the time. Humanism leaves room for subjectivity in the experience of both health and place. Both share a spectral approach – holistic approaches to wellbeing regard health and ill-health as operating on a continuum in much the same way that therapeutic landscapes may serve to heal acute conditions or maintain optimal health. Williams offers a verdant review of humanistic geographic concepts that far exceeds the capacity of this introductory section, however she does echo the same sentiments as her contemporaries: landscapes of all kinds feature some degree of contention because the human experience is subjective. Researchers ought not shy away from subjective discussions because the very designation of spaces as distinguished places is to some degree subjective, even if a place features elements that are agreed upon or observed as "objective" goods.

When (therapeutic) landscapes are regarded as a form of discourse, one can then evaluate questions of who is "writing" this space through their bodily presence and through their physical interventions on the space. What are they writing, and why this person, or these people in

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[55] Today, the language of "alternative medicine" is regarded as delegitimizing or even pejorative in some circles, therefore I will be using "integrative medicine" when discussing my own findings, and "holistic medicine" when discussing Williams (1998).

particular, is "composing" space into place with their chosen methods? Why *this* martial art in *that* neighborhood? Does this school teach the history of their style's founders? Being among/within space and creating place is an active process, and, depending on the goals of the organization, can entail substantial obligation for the participants involved.

Landscapes of Care: The Interplay of Agency and Responsibility

Writing parallel to therapeutic landscape theorists' increasingly critical lens were care geographers. Authors such as England (2005) and Dyck and Dossa (2007) engage with questions of care labor as it relates to who is responsible in the immediate setting and how postcolonial contexts influence the movement of care laborers across the globe. Lawson (2007) similarly admonishes scholars to situate their analyses of care and other topics that marginalize or ignore the importance of care in the context of increasingly globalized neoliberal austerity measures. As the welfare state declines in some places and continues to be non-existent in others, the burden of care increasingly falls on finer, informalized networks.

Writers from *landscapes of care* draw principles from *landscapes of despair*[56]. Landscapes of despair characterizes the consequences of disintegrating institutional supports for wellbeing via the basic framework of therapeutic landscapes. Landscapes of care authors are attuned to the fragmentation and proliferation of care responsibilities to non-professionals and laypersons. As a result, scholars have "begun to articulate care through the differing, and sometimes surprising social spaces that enable caring interactions" (Milligan and Wiles 2010,

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[56] Michael Dear and Jennifer Wolch (1987) deployed the metaphor "landscapes of despair" to describe the fragmented formal medical and informal health networks upon which recently decarcerated and mentally ill persons depend for meeting serious acute and chronic health issues. They place particular emphasis on the precarity of the struggling and infirmed caring for each other's everyday needs in rapidly neoliberalizing cities.

738)[57]. Here we observe increasing attention to how individuals and their care networks confront increasingly uncaring economic and political circumstances to develop novel approaches to recovery and methods of health maintenance.

Milligan and Wiles (2010) furthermore offer several considerations in a landscapes of care analysis, though for the sake of brevity I will look specifically at what they term "topographies of care." They use this phrase to describe a context of fluctuating formalized care obligations and subsequent redistribution of caring responsibilities on informalized parties. Health geographers using the spatial metaphor of topography alludes to arrangement – the constellation of formalized medical institutions, family and community assemblages, and the state (2010, 745). Statutory and private medical institutions (couched in the permissions and demands of state policy) have never been able to meet all the care needs of the populace: family and community care have always been vital to the maintenance of health. The question of topography asks, *where does the unanswered need for care from formalized institutions fall upon other nodes within the constellation of extant (or burgeoning) care nodes?*

A retrospective reading on the landscapes of care school put Milligan and Wiles' analytical principles to work[58]. English et al. (2008) and Williams (2002) investigate the home as the site of care, especially the gendered implications of increasing care obligations when home becomes the site of care. English et al. (2008) contrast everyday versus extraordinary places: extraordinary places (such a hot springs) offer access to services that can boost quality of life,

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[57] Citing Conradson (2003 and 2008)
[58] English et al. (2008) and Williams' (2002) publications indeed predate Milligan and Wiles (2010). Milligan and Wiles (2010) did not cite either of these collectives, yet their theoretical overlaps were uncannily aligned. English et al. and Williams carried out applied works.

but engagement with such places is for a short period of time. Everyday sites, however, offer protracted and repeated engagements with quality-of-life activities, to the extent that these engagements may become a mundane part of life. The authors ask both temporal and scalar questions of where , in the topography of care, such healthful acts are taking place. Furthermore, the authors found that while the increasing care responsibility on family, neighbors, and community is often discussed as a burden, patients and caregivers alike can find empowerment and agency in their opportunities to make health decisions at a distance from the stressors of medicalized institutions.

The landscapes of care perspective highlights the importance of non-medical professionals in the care process. These authors tend to focus on how families interface with the state and/or medical system in the execution of care plans, but worth reiterating from this research is that responsibility, though it may be burdensome, can still provide room for agency. Laypersons can have decision-making power in the care experience. Previous research assesses scenarios in which formalized medical systems are failing and therefore heaping an outsized measure of responsibility onto lay family members. This dissertation pivots the focus towards scenarios where relationships are voluntary – a node in the broader topography of care. Though these caring relationships do not substitute for professionally trained physicians, training scenarios nonetheless provide opportunities for practitioners to engage in the proactive management of their own health needs and participate alongside others who are pursuing similar wellness-oriented goals.

Medical Pluralism: A Diversity of Tactics

The previous section attempted to distill frameworks that highlight the connectivity of care networks to broader economic, political, and social influences that shape the landscape of

caregiving, with a particular focus in the (typically) allopathic medical institutions and their relationship to caregiving. It is important not to lose sight of the very real circumstances under which non-allopathic medical norms have served to support the wellbeing of persons and communities in non-Western societies and have in the past century trickled West – in some cases becoming mainstream (i.e., yoga and Taijiquan). Though Western medical norms have come to dominate the medical-political landscape of many societies, medical pluralism emphasizes that the value of indigenous and non-allopathic medicine is irreplaceable (Janes 1999). The skyrocketing cost of biomedicine is a global concern. Furthermore, trust in Western medicine is hardly universal. Therefore, in these contexts, contestation and/or coexistence between indigenous medicines and biomedicines are baked into the therapeutic topography.

Janes (1999) offers a comprehensive overview of (at the time) current and future complexities of the so-called *medical transition* taking place in non-Western contexts. To clarify, the medical transition is the emergence of conventionally Western biomedical practices as the standard of care in locations where indigenous and non-biomedical practices have historically predominated. Structures of biomedicine fit well with the normalization of global marketplaces and economic practices. In contrast, indigenous medical practices, sometimes termed folk medicine, are administered by trusted community members, usually elders, and are valued as heritage traditions. Furthermore, they often do not neatly fit into the economized systems that often characterize allopathic medicine. Citing earlier works in anthropology, Janes notes that many traditional healers readily integrated novel Western interventions into their own

paradigms[59], straddling the need for legitimacy in both folk and allopathic medical worlds.

The collision of traditional medical cultures has been on the academic radar for decades. Author Allan Young (1983) ushers a useful dialog on *medical belief systems*, noting most importantly that such systems are capable of "generating only a limited range of meanings and solutions," whether traditional, allopathic, or otherwise (1983, 1205). Thus, where there may be fences –norms that enclose specific belief systems –such barriers can be subverted, climbed, torn down. *Pluralistic medical systems* necessarily dismantle these fences, pooling knowledge from seemingly disparate medical traditions to create new avenues for attaining healthful outcomes.

The mainstream adoption of yoga in the West serves as an especially compelling sample of how a revered cultural practice has globalized over the past century. In her comprehensive work on the globalization of yoga, Anne-Cécile Hoyez's (2007) links the resurgence of yogic practice following Indian independence from Britain to its proliferation during the 1970s as the burgeoning nation expanded its economic reach to the United States, Europe, South Africa, Brazil, and Australia[60]. Furthermore, Hoyez (crediting Arjun Appadurai (1996)) emphasizes that the *idea* of yoga was not the main export, rather yogic *ethnoscapes* were established in these new locales. These "identity-scapes," delimited and re-created by Hindu yoga practitioners, were established in far-flung reaches of the globe. While the practitioners could not physically relocate the material landscape of the flowing Ganges River from the Himalayas range and through the

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[59] Janes' (1999) investigation took place in Tibet. Janes cites Lock (1990) and Chi et al. (1996) as rich resources for understanding the challenges of integrating Western medical standards with traditional medicine, especially as it relates to quality control for both the new and old systems.
[60] In the curious case of Prague, Czechia, yoga practice was still illegal immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Undeterred, British and French yoga practitioners imported yoga to the city and established the first brick and mortar institutions (2007, 118).

Indus-Ganges planes[61], they brought with them the spiritual and cultural reverence of these places as integral to the practice of yoga.

At a finer scale, discourses of "purity" around the body and the yoga practice space were another feature of the imported ethnoscape. These beliefs melded easily with pre-existing cultural beliefs on wellbeing. The 'geographicisization of the yogi's body' (2007, 114[62]) as a pure(ifying) body exercising in a pure practice space creates a mutually co-constitutive relationship between the people actively producing a therapeutic space while the space itself, secluded, quiet, dimly lit, and adorned with sacred images of mountains and rivers, facilitates the pursuit of wellbeing. This constellation of broad geographic contexts, ethnic spiritual keystones, and health beliefs have birthed a juggernaut industry that manifests in thousands of micro-geographies across the globe.

In Hoyez's work, the notion of landscape boundaries a vision of therapeutic, cultural, and identity manifestations of yogic practice. Wellness is a function of healthful practice *and* constructive engagement with cultural expression, especially when that culture is out of place from its point of origin. Such an interplay can be seen in the presence of roughly a dozen Chinese herb and medicine shops in Seattle's International District, and is intuitive enough in contexts of Taijiquan or Qigong instruction. More contentious are martial arts contexts where wellness is not an obvious primary goal, or where the risk of injury – intentional or accidental – is high.

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[61] The Himalayas are deified as the realm of Gods, while the Indus-Ganges planes (India's Great Planes) are regarded as the realm of humans, with the Ganges River connecting these two worlds. The significance of these places reaches far beyond yoga; the veneration of these places is inseparable from yoga and Hindu culture and spirituality broadly.

[62] Dorn & Laws 1994

Embodiment: People in Place

The relationship between embodiment and therapeutic landscapes is intuitive given that these spaces facilitate the restoration and enhancement of the body. Yet, as Karolina Doughty (2013) notes that too few scholars explicitly address embodiment in therapeutic landscapes literature. Indeed, the focus had always been on the material features and geographic imaginary of these landscapes, but what are participants doing with their bodies in these landscapes? How are they using their bodies to convey a discourse of wellness in a space? Doughty mobilizes an analysis of social interactions in these environments and the importance of shared movement activity in the formation of therapeutic landscapes. She highlights intersubjectivity, the notion that the subjective experience is "formed through a dialectic process of relationships with others," an orientation that challenges the habit of individualizing health discussions and instead privileges a relational approach to place and others (2013, 141[63]). People are treated as "place-aware" not "place-bound" (2013, 141[64]).

Doughty's participants were distinct from the early literatures of therapeutic landscapes in that their engagement was active and mobile, a stark contrast to quietly soaking in a hot spring. Participants are moving about the landscape, typically the countryside, rather than retreating to a fixed and enclosed locale. Walking with one another, conversations about each other's lives as well as shared experiences of admiration for the natural landscape made for "powerfully restorative" interactions outside of conventional psychological settings[65]. The sociability of the activity was enjoyable: in one notable case, a participant experienced reduced

[63] Fenner 2011, 852
[64] van Ingen 2004
[65] Participants discuss significant life circumstances, such as break-ups, deaths, and depression (2013, 142).

anxiety with verbal interactions while walking alongside others. Where the walking paths necessitate moving in pairs or in single file, the landscape itself funnels walkers' bodies into lull periods of conversation and one-on-one intimacy. Doughty's work treats the therapized body as an active participant in the production of enjoyable experiences.

Isabel Dyck et al.'s (2005) work on the home as the site of long-term care straddles landscapes of care and embodiment literatures ahead of their time. The authors lead parallel discussions of home and the body as "fluid material and discursive sites, with their materiality and meanings in recursive relationship to one another" (2005, 174). This framework reads as a sort of parallel to intersubjectivity within the literature timeline, yet Doughty may have narrowly missed the 2005 quartet due to differences in subject matter and region[66]. Nonetheless, both parties arrive at the same standpoint on matters of the body in relationship with space and other people. Dyck et al. (2005) pay especially close attention to the home as a space that is distinctly subject to cultural norms as well as individualized methods of material and social controls. In more practical terms, the person in space may, through their actions, (re)iterate the meaning or intention of a space, and their decisions on how to use the space may also be informed by the space itself.

Noteworthy is Dyck et al.'s discussion of *bodyspace*, the *private body*, and the *social body*. Bodyspace can be interpreted as physical volume that the anatomical (material) body occupies, and simultaneously the cultural understandings of how a body should exist (appear, function, etc.) in the world. Interpreting the body as a space, things that leave the body, such as

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[66] Doughty's (2013, United Kingdom) keywords include *walking, mobility, and sociality,* and intervenes from behavioral geographies sources. Dyck et al.'s (2005, Canada) keywords include *home, long-term care, and health care restructuring,* and cite labor and healthcare geographies.

sweat or waste, surpass the boundaries of the body. Under ideal conditions, these violations of the bodyspace boundary can be managed with basic hygienic practices, practices that usually happen in private. However, in the context of Dyck et al.'s long-term care patients, the private body, aspects of the body that are normatively contained or hidden from the public (grooming, secretions, waste management, etc.), become the purview of the medical professional who helps the patient with basic sanitary tasks. Those private aspects of the body become subject to the scrutiny of someone other than the person who owns those areas. In this way, normative boundaries of privacy blur, and to a limited extent the private body becomes an aspect of the social body – those aspects of the body that are normatively subject to the scrutiny of the public, where cultural norms and inscriptions are worn and/or judged. Here we see a sample of how the reach of medicine enters the home, blurring the lines of public and private homespace, and subsequently pulls bodily privacy into a state of observability.

As noted in the landscapes of care works in the first segment of this literature review, such perspectives pay close attention to who is doing the work (paid or unpaid) of producing healthful places. Dyck et al. (2005) place emphasis on who is doing the work of not only making space in its conventional formats (i.e., conventions of home layout and usage) but also who is doing the work to alter the materiality and meanings of those spaces (healthcare professionals collaborating or contesting with patients and family). The subjects of this work are treated as agents. They are proactive[67]. The most compelling aspect of this work is in the needs of the patients themselves and how their changing bodies command the alteration of their home spaces.

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[67] A compelling example is of a patient who maintains a sense of feminine beauty and style by matching her pyjamas with her bedclothes, and maintains a sense of spatial control by orienting her bed such that she can see into the main section of her apartment where she can observe workers and guests (Dyck et al. 2005, 179).

Bodies conventionally understood as disabled and less capable of action in the world serve as the impetus of material spatial transformation.

Curiously publishing on a parallel timeline to Dyck et al. (2005) were Andrews et al. (2005). Again, writing on embodied therapeutic geographies[68], they investigated British bodybuilding cultures and gyms, pushing the analytical slider from the loss and illness management end of the spectrum, past general wellness, and arriving at an assessment of physical exhibition and hyper-ability. Similarly to Doughty (2013), they echo van Ingen (2003) in advocating an analysis of sport that investigates the social production of sporting spaces; furthermore, rather than defining the body through sport, researchers ought to pay attention to how "different bodies create or produce sports spaces" (Andrews et al. 2005, 878). The authors address several shortcomings in previous sporting literature, including sports geography's focus on macro-scale issues, an overwhelming focus on elite professional athletes, and the broad cultural influences of sports franchises. Neglected are the overwhelming majority of sports partakers who participate for personal enjoyment, often non-competitively, and who may or may not see the health benefits of athletic efforts as a primary reason for participation. This shift to quotidian sporting necessarily shrinks the research scale to more localized geographies.

Additionally, they admonish that much therapeutic landscapes literature focuses on healing from illness, and less so on optimization, looking good, and adornment – in their study adorning the body with muscles, veins, and bronzer[69]. The authors chose bodybuilding

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[68] These authors distinctly use "therapeutic places" rather than "therapeutic landscapes."
[69] A geography of vanity?

specifically because many do not recognize it as a sport. Athletic? Yes. Healthy? Debatable[70]. Outside of formalized competitions there are no universally recognized rules[71]. The breadth of contradictions that bodybuilding offers made for an enriching exploration that challenged the norms of what is worthy of academic study. Borrowing my language above, and perhaps more intuitively, a body experiencing athletic enhancement serves as the impetus for spatial transformation.

Amateur and competitive bodybuilders take bodily growth to its physiological extreme, committing countless hours to “making gains” (building muscle and strength). Participants use a unique lexicon for referring to a variety of issues, including naming parts of their bodies (i.e., “pecs” instead of pectoralis major), weightlifting strategies (forced reps, pyramids, etc.), and even performance enhancing drugs (“juice” or “gear”) (2005, 881). Posing in front of mirrors together and commenting on each other’s bodies, behaviors that in most other circumstances are frowned upon, are a routine part of the gym’s micro-geographic culture[72]. This culminates in the embodiment of a sort of caricature of optimal health, yet this is no sidewalk sketch. These are human beings building their bodies and a constructing social milieu where these peculiar languages and behaviors are to be expected.

Taken together, these three works demonstrate the proactive processes through which individuals and groups collaborate to produce spatially and temporally specific understandings of

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[70] The bodybuilding world has been reckoning with a rash of high-profile deaths among young male athletes over the past five years ((Smoliga, Wilber, and Robinson 2023)).
[71] The world’s largest bodybuilding organization, the International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation (IFBB) has weight classes (open weight, 205 pounds, etc.) and categories for judging specific physique types, such as fitness, classic physique, or swimsuit (International Fitness and BodyBuilding Federation 2022).
[72] Such publicized scrutiny of the body in some ways renders aspects of the private body as part of the social body.

how to exist corporeally in space. While Dyck et al. (2005) and Andrews et al. (2005) take on enclosed locales as their sites for embodied spatial transformation, Doughty (2013) mobilizes outdoors, emphasizing the experiential[73] aspects of engaging with space, with particular emphasis on the collective participation and shared understanding in fleeting encounters. Moving forward, I place great emphasis on the proactive "doing" of space, bearing in mind that many kinds of bodies shape the usage of space and renegotiate normative boundaries of what kinds of activities and forms of interpersonal interaction can be facilitated as individuals and groups cultivate new norms of interfacing with space and each other.

Concluding Remarks: Potentials in Therapeutic Landscapes

A review of the therapeutic landscapes literature timeline reveals a broadening of topical concerns and an increased attention to the relational aspects of how these places are created and maintained. Recent interventions from writers of landscapes of care and embodiment-focused perspectives pay close attention to the *work* required to create and maintain healthful scenarios. Scholars of medical pluralism observe the frictions and accelerants that steer medical decision-making and service availability in a globalized/ing world. Binding these literatures is the perspective that service consumers are proactive in their decision-making, even if the services available are limited in some way. Furthermore, writers emphasize that health systems broadly and therapeutic landscapes specifically are not merely passive material and financial manifestations, rather these systems reflect the local cultural values around health, beliefs of who ought to be making medical decisions and how a healthy body ought to function.

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[73] Phenomenology is hiding behind the language of intersubjectivity. I see you…

Since the earliest works, therapeutic landscapes literature has been distinct in its centering of non-biomedical health pursuits – though not wholly at the exclusion of biomedicine. This air of methodological *and* spatial autonomy beyond or alongside biomedicine is perhaps the most persistent theme of these works. The investigation of Taijiquan fits well within this legacy given that the art itself has its roots in Chinese Medicine, yet participants practice in a full spectrum of settings, such as kwoons[74], parks, the YMCA (Jennings 2010, 2014), and even cancer wards[75]. Draxler, Ostermann, and Honekamp (2010) inch to the margins of spatiality, investigating "Asian martial arts'" positive quality of life impacts in Germany[76].

More aggressive martial arts are perhaps a tougher sell to therapeutic landscapes scholarship, however researchers in cognate disciplines have already conducted extensive research into the healthful potentialities of martial arts participation[77]. Psychologists have expressed interest in behavior and self-regulation (Lakes and Hoyt 2004; Massey, Meyer, and Naylor 2013). Sociologists have investigated self-development and identity formation (Guthrie 1997; Wacquant 2006; Jennings 2010; Hollander 2004 on women's self-defense). Hayhurst (2013)[78] writing in *Gender, Place, and Culture* explored the application of martial arts instruction in *Girl Effect* international development programs in Uganda. Some of these works address geographic themes, but questions of spatiality are often not the main analytical drivers.

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[74] "Kwoon" is the anglicized pronunciation 馆, which has a Cantonese phonetic of "Gun." 馆 translates directly as "accommodation" or "private school" depending on how it is used contextually. Worth noting is that in the US, martial arts training spaces are often referred to by the Japanese term of "dojo" or sometimes as studios or gyms.
[75] The Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, NY, for example.
[76] This work places the health benefits of Asian martial arts participation in conversation with rising conventional healthcare costs, paying close attention to how practitioners develop a sense of proactivity in the management of their health.
[77] See F Wang, Lee, Wu, Benson, Fricchione, W Wang, and Yeung (2014) for a meta-analysis of martial arts research as it relates to depression and anxiety.
[78] Hayhurst writes from Human Kinetics and the Institute of Women's Studies in Ottawa, Canada.

Such a broad spectrum of writers orbiting in close proximity invites interlocution that can yield a more complete understanding of the martial arts' potential impact on health.

Chapter Conclusion

At this juncture, a variety of theoretical perspectives have been reviewed and it is necessary to explore some of the parallel arguments being made between and within each literature subcategory. Additionally, some components of the literature will be used to interrogate others. From therapeutic landscapes, the goal was to convey the production of space as a proactive and intentional process. On care, the aim was to provide a vocabulary that describes who is doing care-full work and the impact it has on others, as well as how scenarios conventionally unconcerned with care can be made more caring. With regards to serious leisure, the goal was to demonstrate the liberatory potentials of leisure practice. Care permeates the two adjoining sections, though additional attention is needed in the leisure literature.

Exploring Milligan and Wiles' (2010) concept "topographies of care" provides a window into the overlap of therapeutic landscapes and leisure via a caring approach to interpersonal engagement. While the caring topography is often assessed through family relationships and formalized actors, the authors do call attention to "community assemblages" (2010, 745) as part of their analysis. From Andrews et al.'s (2005) exuberant gymgoers to Doughty's (2013) contemplative park walkers, community assemblages can take a variety of shapes. Serious leisure collectives, especially those that center body and wellness-related activities, can serve this role.

Underpinning much of the care literature, especially where the home is the site of care, is the importance of laypeople in the provisioning of care tasks. Worth emphasizing is that

individuals with no professionalized training can still provide valuable wellness support for their family members. The pivot that leisure offers is that these relationships are voluntary, usually take place outside the home – though almost always at the same locale – and that participants are present because they want to be there. This project pushes against the tendency to view leisure as wholly self-serving, and instead explore scenarios where participants engage a sense of duty towards one another. Spencer-Cavaliere et al.'s (2015) self-refereeing Ultimate Frisbee players demonstrate this caring pivot through fair play. Through the martial arts we can explore this shift in responsibility for activities where managing the body through periods of wellness and risk are the primary goal.

Parallel (or perhaps nested?) concepts that piqued my interest were those of *ethnoscapes* and *idiocultures*. In coordinating these two concepts, idioculture can perhaps be described as the mechanistic events that happen in a setting given the shared understandings of personal conduct, technique, etc. that participants assume that they can engage while working alongside one another. The ethnoscape and the people of the specific ethnic or cultural background who guide its creation and spatialize their distinctive forms of expression. Hoyez and Appadurai distinctly implicate migrating persons who bring their customs and experiences to new locations as the creators of ethnoscapes, whereas Fine does not ascribe the development of idiocultures based on identity, rather on "doing" activities together or having shared interest. Where people from the point of origin and non-origin participants commingle, the pursuit of a solid division between "is" or "is not" an ethnoscape is probably not fruitful. I intend to keep these participatory overlaps in consideration as I examine martial arts and its cognate activities.

Next on the docket is reviewing parallel interpretations of difference from the feminist perspective. Henderson and Allen (1991) led the discussion of differential experience in leisure

for this literature review, and concluded with the reminder that constraint is a dimension of difference, not the entirety of difference. At the scale of the body, Moss and Dyck (1996) note that while bodily difference from normative ideals can be the driver of oppression, the body can also be a site of resistance – a standpoint that Dorn and Laws (1995) call an emancipatory phenomenology. I pivot towards leisure, in particular embodied forms of leisure, and ask *upon which axes of difference can leisure participants enact their own emancipatory phenomenologies?* I interpret leisurists such as Mair (2004), Allison (2000), and Schlembach et al. (2015) as describing a sort of "emancipatory leisure" through conventional political engagement and public protest. As this project explores the self-defense components and "Little p" politics of access to public space, there may be room to explore these procedures and as emancipatory leisure practices.

Another clutch of nested concepts is the interplay of social capital, experientially similar others, and relationality. Social capital received brief mention in the serious leisure section, experientially similar others in therapeutic landscapes, and relationality primarily in the section on care. Gage (2013, 44) notes on experientially similar others that those who have endured similar life-altering experiences can offer "empathy and tailored emotional support" to peers living in similar circumstances. Though the word "care" is mentioned in that article over a hundred times, it is almost always affixed to "health" or mentioned in relation to health care quality or procedures. The language of care is, understandably, compartmentalized to the medical authorities, whereas the acts of support shared between experientially similar others are discussed in more specific terms: listening, sharing, supporting, etc. I point this out not to criticize Gage, rather to cue readers to seek vocabularies of "caring" actions where the language of care has necessarily been decoupled from quotidian acts due to the subject focus of an article.

A social capital reading of Gage's empathetic and mutually supportive respondents highlights the value of their shared experiences and knowledge, as well as the scaffolding of their social relations through which social capital is exchanged. Public health researchers have long recognized the importance of social capital in health outcomes (Szreter and Woolcock 2004; Derose and Varda 2009). Those who have access to resources and share access with one another – knowledge, direct acts of care, etc. – can have significant influence on the health outcomes of peers. Szerter and Woolcock are also quick to note that social capital can serve to exclude. In reviewing the use and exchange of social capital, it is important to examine whether those exchanges are rooted in caring relations, or if there are circumstances that disrupt .

Revisiting care in leisure practice, feminist scholars have clearly outlined the role of care in the realization of leisure practice. While the other leisure subsets do not mention care outright, authors do reflect upon some degree of intentionality among practitioners. Leisure justice and civil leisure critics encourage leisure practice that is purposeful and creates connections with diverse others. Serious leisurists commit substantial amounts of time towards activities that are personally fulfilling, which can arguably be considered a form of self care. I posit that while leisure is not an inherently caring engagement, leisure activity can set the stage for caring arrangements to occur.

I find this project at the crossroads of so many bountiful literatures because the martial arts as a daily practice and as an academic field exist as in-between in so many ways. Institutional formality and style lineage occur through a variety of independent governing bodies

that are largely detached from state[79], yet the state athletics commissions regulate combat sporting events that are broadcast globally[80]. Children in crisp, white uniforms attend after-school programs where they learn self-regulation[81] and expend daytime energy learning the same techniques that routinely cause concussions in high-level athletes participating in the same style[82]. There will be no single unifying answer for every element that this paper explores, but the analysis will reveal new applications and interpretations of established works. It is also my hope that non-academic martial artists may find useful language and concepts for describing their most favored pastimes and careers, and evaluating the conditions in which they are training.

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[79] Except for in China. The Chinese government has a unique relationship with the preservation of traditional martial arts as stations of cultural heritage (Yonghua et al. 2021). This is a captivating topic that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this project.

[80] Dortants et al. (2016) on combat sports regulation.

[81] Lakes and Hoyt (2004) on a school-based Tae Kwon Do program.

[82] See Koh (2002) on concussions in Tae Kwon Do. Hutchinson et al. (2014) on concussions in professional MMA.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Methods of Data Collection

This project primarily engaged three data collection methods: autoethnography, semi-structured interviews and participant-observation. When able to visit the physical location during an interview or during participant-observation, I also documented descriptions of the site itself, as well as the neighborhood in which the locale was found. My positionality as an active trainee and periodic instructor served as a foundation for understanding that guided this investigation. This multifaceted approach aims to synthesize the experiences of the practitioners researched and their active process of place-making, with the goal of interpreting these findings through new literatures, as well as reexamining literatures through the participants' accounts. The literatures will aid in conceptualizing events and relationships that take place during these taken-for-granted, personally meaningful activities.

This approach prioritizes the activities taking place within a practice space as equally important to the physical structure in which training occurs. I have undertaken a phenomenological interpretation to the overall investigation, centering practitioner engagement both in and amidst the training space as the unit of analysis. In their autoethnography of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), Magnus Stenius and Ronald Dziwenka's (2015) noted the utility of phenomenology as a perspective that "shows how bodies sense the milieu that they are a part of" and that "taking into account the body's relation to the spatial experience" is essential for

generating a nuanced understanding of actions and behaviors in context (2015, 3)[83]. For Stenius and Dziwenka, phenomenology was a means of interpreting the dialectical relationship between the individual, their environment, and all those things that constitute the environment.

My aim for conducting these three methodologies in concert was to set forth multiple ways of recording and subsequently interpreting occurrences in my research. I follow Sahlke Wall's (2016) suggestion of a "moderate autoethnography" that is measured in data collection methods, offers analysis, and does not sacrifice clarity for the sake of novel presentation. This is a triangulation that puts direct feedback from interview participants in conversation with the observed activities of participants in everyday training settings. I hope to construct well-rounded narratives of incidents, people, and spaces, as well as the circumstances surrounding these eventualities as I captured my research "snapshot" of those moments in time.

Autoethnography

In taking a phenomenological reading of autoethnography, it is my aim to actively engage my positionality in the research process. I view martial arts as a topic worthy of academic study because of these repeated experiences. With a few years of experience and more research-training ahead, I entered into this project with a firm understanding of norms and expectations as I moved within my own routine spaces and explored new others. I already knew enough etiquette and technique norms to pass in most circles respectfully and safely. For most of the research period I was physically durable enough to avoid serious injury. As a result, I was able to invest my efforts in paying close attention to my fellow trainees and instructors without the burden of

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[83] Stenius and Dziwenka (2015) noted that their phenomenological approach took place later in interpretation as their perception of MMA as unmitigated violence changed. The milieu of the gym was the nexus of friendships, practical fighting methodologies, and training norms that provided a basis recontextualizing normatively violent behaviors.

acculturating on the fly. My goal was to remain a training asset for my partners, not become a distracted liability, as I conducted this research.

That being said, I did not from the outset think of this project as autoethnographic, as my primary focus was in on collecting direct feedback from interviewees and observing everyday interactions in my many classes. I viewed myself as a person with insider knowledge and a working martial arts skillset, not so much among my units of analysis. In hindsight my hesitancy originated from an aspiration to avoid solipsism[84] in this project. Autoethnographic works have been criticized as self-absorbed (Anderson 2006) and lacking theoretical rigor (Ploder and Stadlbauer 2016), especially when those works take an evocative approach to data collection and presentation (Wall 2016). I wanted to avoid those pitfalls, yet at the same time it would have been intellectually dishonest to divorce myself entirely from the truth of how my positionality as a rising practitioner influenced my execution of the project.

This work would perhaps best fit into Leon Anderson's (2006, 375) framework of *analytical autoethnography*, which outlines three core characteristics for the researcher to adhere: (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena. This framework offers direct countermeasures to the singularity for which so much autoethnography is criticized, and instead treats the researcher's propinquity to the researched as an asset. There is immense narrative and analytical power in reflecting upon one's own experiences in relation to the experiences of proximal others. I follow the likes of Wacquant,

[84] Panta and Luitel (2022) offer an overdue assessment of solipsism in its many forms and the influence they may have on autoethnographic work. They also explore perspectives of the "self" from both Eastern and Western texts.

Stenius and Dziwenka to the functional extreme of relating and reflecting with others at the scale of the body.

As my experience influences my networks, my perspectives on my own training, and my understanding of how training impacts others, taking a critical reflexive stance and actively engaging my positionality in this research opens the avenue for the reader to understand how I, the author, know what I know. Wall (2008, 44)[85] notes that the challenge of critical ethnographic work "lies in avoiding the traps of creating a product of assertions and imposing our views on our audience." For this brand of embodied qualitative research, there is always a metaphorical filter to the information conveyed. Rather than denying the existence of a filter, I hope to clearly convey what my filter is, and for that filter to be well-defined enough to be subject to a similar degree or reader critique and/or analysis as the feedback of my interviewees and participants observed.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The second approach utilized semi-structured interviews with twenty-three participants. The interviews began in 2017, roughly three and a half years after I began my own martial arts training in Seattle. The majority of these interviews took place from 2017-2019 with opportunities for brief check-ins following the conclusion of the primary interview event. About one third of the interviews were conducted in person. My first trip to California for in-person interviews took place in the summer of 2017, with several other visits in 2018 and 2019. When possible, the interviews were conducted at a training site. The other portion of interviews were conducted over the telephone or over the University of Washington's encrypted Zoom service.

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[85] Paraphrasing Thomas (1993).

These events ranged from fifty to one hundred twenty minutes. During that time I was also actively training in Kajukenbo, Capoeira, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, and boxed occasionally.

The interview design was clustered into three main themes: training history, physical health, and mental health. These subject areas aim to address the foundations of the practitioner's own experiences that influence their decision-making in the present-day (Research Question 1). Where appropriate, if an interviewee had a background in a bodywork profession (i.e., physical therapy or acupuncture), I would ask questions about how these career obligations overlap with their martial arts practice. These scenarios were worth distinguishing explicitly because individuals whose professional work has immediate overlap with their martial arts training often integrate their professional health knowledge into curriculum design. This was especially important when the respondent's martial arts school and professional medical practice are housed in the same building.

In cases where martial arts, spiritual practices, or traditional medicine practices serve as a means to connection with one's heritage, the conversation typically looped with mental health topics (i.e. positive identity formation) or residential history. While this was not the case for every respondent or participant observed, it does represent a dimension of wellness that does not medicalize well but can be addressed in a training context. On a small handful of occasions, I was granted a tour of the training locale, during which the interviewee would explain a variety of topics, such as the reconstruction of a room for its current purposes, the significance of images and artifacts on the wall, among other considerations. Immediately after the tour I would sketch a

rough layout as well as a handful of notable sectors that convey some form of significant spatialized discourse[86].

Individuals who train in martial arts and work in body-centric professions hold a unique position in martial arts training. Their professional background in matters of health is often relevant to training, such as in injury prevention, recovery, and anatomy. For example, a Pilates instructor may integrate the same core strengthening exercises for their martial arts students as they do for their clients. This interview sample also had strong representation from Chinese Medicine practitioners who also train in martial arts. Practitioners often begin as martial artists and then are exposed to Chinese Medicine through their instructors. It is very common in schools where Taijiquan is instructed that the cognate non-martial movement art of Qigong may be taught side-by-side, through which trainees will learn a traditional Chinese lexicon and philosophy of health. They offer a distinctive view of having been inexperienced trainees mastering arts of war while also learning healing practices.

The interviewee was given ample time to flow through conversation, during which I would adapt thematic questions when the interviewee would introduce important events. As I completed my first few interviews, I found that flexibility in expression was helpful for the interviewee. When presented with the interview topic and themes, most prospective participants were enthusiastic about having someone to discuss the taken-for-granted aspects of training. This was as much an opportunity for the participants to sort through their own simmering thoughts as it was a chance for me to receive their commentary. *"Am I making sense?"* was a common refrain.

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[86] Waiting in lobbies was a valuable experience, as these areas are the "front face" of an institution.

Interviews opened with a basic overview of demographic information and a review of current health concerns. We would then review employment and training history. With those basic topics listed, the interview would then progress through the following broad themes: training, physical health, mental health, and, where relevant, how one's medical or health profession overlaps with training. Training questions sought to understand motivations for beginning and sustaining training, as well as how these opportunities shaped practitioners' approach to interacting with the broader world. I opted to address training first in most cases as a means of foregrounding the relationships in which the interviewee manages the thematic challenges that will arise in subsequent sections.

Physical health questions served as the first opportunity to hear practitioners define health for themselves and discuss how they approach the maintenance of their own wellbeing. In this context, encounters with physical health challenges tend to be candid and less stigmatized, especially if the physical health experience is related to a training incident. Diagnosable injury events were treated as an expected matter of practice, not an exception. Physical health typically arose as the second major thematic section in interviews, serving as an easy entry to health questions that can at times escalate into more sensitive topics.

The mental health theme aimed to discover how martial arts practice has both an immediate and long-term influence on the interviewee's emotional wellbeing. Overwhelmingly the interviewees did not discuss their own diagnosable mental health challenges with the same openness as they did their physical health challenges. They did, however, speak broadly about the social and emotional impacts they have seen for themselves and/or the people they train (i.e., steady friendships, feeling confident at work). Finally, the health professional supplemental questions examine how the practitioner's occupation in the health field influences their martial

arts practice and, alternatively, how their martial arts practice has influenced their professional approach. Several of the interviewees have occupations in the health field. They ran the full spectrum of Chinese Medicine through conventional Western (allopathic) practice. Other overlaps include massage and personal training.

Conducting interviews was an enriching opportunity to learn more about the people with whom I have trained for several years, and those who have had a profound influence on the development of supportive social networks. Upon reviewing the interview themes, they initially read as clinical, and indeed this project's origin was seeking to be conventional in as many arenas as possible given the unconventional core topic. Medicalized language tends to remain legible even as terminology has evolved over the past generation, however as I became better at interviewing I became less reliant on those norms while still being able to ask clear questions.

Such language was also useful in my efforts craft early questions that would not directly lead the interviewee to answers. Pain is a flashy topic, and folding care into a martial arts conversation poses its own academic and colloquial challenges. My hope was that due to the inherently social and active nature of martial arts training that the interviewee would by default discuss who was involved in specific events and what that individual did during those events. Without much prompting, interviewees would eventually mention a person who taught, sparred with, cared for, etc. them at some point. From there, we could discuss further the particularities of the close relationships that mattered most to the interviewees.

After the first several interviews, I found that asking time-specific questions early in the interviews, such as *"when did you begin working at this place?"* or *"when did you begin training at [that] school?"* was often an ineffective strategy. Especially for older interviewees who are no longer updating resumes or other using other year-scaled time tracking tools, I found

that interviewees could easily place the circumstances that spurred the change, the people who were involved, and the place where the decision was made, yet were unable to recall an exact year. Thus, I adjusted my initial overviews to address broader questions that prime the memory, such as *"in which industries have you worked?"* or *"in which styles have you trained? Which came first?"* to develop a basic chronology. A pivot in approaching the early sections of interviews arises after session six.

For both the interviewee and me, the opportunity to reflect on their lives and their training was an enjoyable exchange. The overwhelming majority of participants were excited to talk about their training, as so often we are always "doing" martial arts at the end of a frantic workday and do not always take time to marinate on our experiences and motivations. Conversations gained momentum when we got into discussions about training history. Interviewees were most expressive when mentioning fond memories with past training partners. For the handful of interviewees that required some warm-up, I found that focusing on specific events and probing for a variety of thematically relevant details could open the conversation.

Many of the older interviewees took the occasion to reflect on their legacy and changing approaches to teaching. For some younger interviewees, this was a chance to sort through decisions about their long-term wellbeing and professional futures related to martial arts training. Young and old wrestle with the same questions of economic hardship, burnout, and healthful practice in a world with high time demands. The specifics to each individual are unique, but all detail a deep connection to their training and the people they have encountered during their many years as martial artists.

Participant-observation

Participant-observation has served to bolster my experiential and contextual understanding of the groups participating in martial arts and self-defense training. I have opted to participate actively in the training process, taking in the embodied as well as observational knowledge of being with trainees as they learn collaboratively in these environments. These carnal ethnographies (Wacquant 2005) offer a richness of observation that merely watching cannot attune. I took notes on the subject matter being taught on those days and made note of health-related events and commentary that occurred during classes.

As noted above, I had already been training for a little over three years in Seattle, and about five years in total when the project began. During the research I attended anywhere from four to seven class sessions per week. Kajukenbo was my primary style. I had career aspirations in that style and tested for my green belt midway through the high season of research in 2018. In addition to training in Kajukenbo two to four days per week, I would train in Capoeira once or twice per week, and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu one to three times per week[87]. Observation began the moment I arrived onsite. I would always arrive a few minutes early to change out of my street clothes and talk to my fellow trainees. At my routine training site this was an opportunity to catch up on friendly matters and take note of any health issues that my training partners might be managing that day. In newer settings this was an opportunity for introductions.

A noteworthy difference between the Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu program versus Capoeira and Kajukenbo was that I was primarily training during the daytime when I was either not working on campus or had an early morning shift that had me departing before noon. Except for

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[87] This, ironically, was an unhealthy amount of training.

Kajukenbo classes on Saturday mornings, all other training times in other styles were evening classes. There were a few familiar faces that I saw each week, usually higher-ranking practitioners. Among daytime trainees there were new people constantly, and I could often go weeks between seeing certain individuals, and it could be difficult to know if a person had dropped out. Many of the people attending daytime classes were parents taking an opportunity to exercise while their children were in school.

Observation began before entering the building. Both the Capoeira and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu schools had glass storefronts and usually had classes of some kind happening before my classes began. This was an opportunity to see who some of my future training partners could be. Depending on the day, there could be an Aikido class before Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu or a Samba class before Capoeira. I would make note of the artifacts on the walls. Which items were decorative (images, flowers, etc.) versus training equipment (wooden swords, tambourines, etc.). Next was floor construction. Embedded padded floors were markers of a long residency. Do-it-yourself sprung floors were a sign of long-term commitment to safe training in a less than optimal flooring situation. As most of these sites were not purpose-built, this was an opportunity to observe the unique ways that owners shaped their schools to the surroundings they had.

Phenomenological approaches favor the researcher distancing oneself from preconceived notions and biases. However, no investigative gaze is unsituated. I have opted to embrace my background in martial arts training as an aid to understanding the norms and cultures of each setting. I began taking martial arts seriously in 2012 when I began taking Kendo and Bujinkan Budo Taijutsu classes at Virginia Tech. Immediately after moving to Seattle in 2014, I began training in Kajukenbo Kung Fu and continued training in Kendo through mid-2015. Community self-defense was an integral part of the curriculum at my Kajukenbo school, and that pathway led

me to becoming an assistant self-defense instructor for events that took place in a variety of spaces, including theaters, workplaces, and parks. Kajukenbo was my primary martial art, and at the time of starting this project I had attained the intermediate rank of blue belt, with which came some in-house teaching responsibilities. My volunteer work for the school included a two-year stint on the executive board, where I served as the secretary for eighteen months. I also volunteered as the photographer and videographer for events.

I had the good fortune of training in Capoeira, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Tai-Chi, and Qigong during the peak of this project, began taking boxing classes in 2016, and have traveled to yearly Pacific Association of Women Martial Artists conferences since 2015. I engage this world with great enthusiasm for the activities themselves and the people involved. Unfortunately, due to serious non-training injuries in 2019 and 2020, and of course the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been unable to participate in much of any martial arts training. COVID-19's profound jolt on martial arts practice and leisure broadly warrants its own separate dissertation.

I was granted several occasions to train, attend events, and conduct interviews in my participants' training spaces. I visited thirteen sites in total. With these opportunities I conducted a basic landscape characteristic assessment. The analysis took a predominantly holistic approach to gathering and interpreting data, pulling into focus the material presence of features within and surrounding the training space. Holistic approaches catalog the socio-cultural influence of human interactions within and upon a space, blending aesthetic, historical, and sensory observations to develop a narrative of the locale (Tveit, Ode, and Fry 2006). In such an investigation, the physical space itself is treated as a form of discourse. This research approach was not, however, purely phenomenological.

A few a priori assumptions based on well-established, historicized cultural norms around interior dojo construction and adornment were also considered (such as the placement of *Kamidana*[88]). Where possible, I observed the training hall and side rooms, paying close attention to sites of body care (kitchens, medicine cabinets, etc.). The exterior and historical function of the buildings were also taken into consideration, given that most contemporary US dojos are not built from the ground up, and that financial limitations often steer prospective dojo renters into low-cost or peculiar areas (Manzo 2017). After the interview or training session, I sketched floor plans that document the positioning of artifacts (i.e., gifted weapons, pictures, scrolls) and equipment (i.e. knife throwing walls, punching bags, loose equipment storage). This project component thus traces a history of the locale and how the space has been materially crafted to express the values and intentions of the owner and those who practice within the space.

The results of this project present semi-structured interviews alongside participant-observation and landscape assessment. These methods are mobilized in concert to triangulate the many ways that craft practice spaces for these purposes, and how the activities that take place within these spaces influence the broader lives of participants. I found that in interviews, participants rarely introduced the topic of their training space unprompted, yet after being questioned directly participants effused memories of people encountered and events experienced within the locale. Perhaps this is due to the very private nature of many practitioners, or that after so much time inhabiting a space, the space seems mundane and uninteresting to the interviewee.

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[88] A *kamidana (*神棚), which translates to “God Shelf,” is a miniature shrine originating from the Shinto tradition and can usually be found in the training hall of Japanese-origin martial arts schools. Effigies of Shinto gods are traditionally placed in the Kamidana, though some schools may place images of a Buddha or revered past practitioners. These nuances will be addressed further in Chapter 4.

Thus, it is important to emphasize the seemingly mundane things that are, in fact, quite remarkable and demonstrate the discursive function of how spaces are structured. Participating alongside practitioners in their spaces as well as being intentional about documenting the physical spaces where they train was essential for formulating a well-rounded understanding of their experiences.

Research Participants

Sixteen of the twenty-three interview participants were initially identified during my participation in a national conference of women martial arts practitioners, as well as my routine training sites. Persons selected from this conference all had training histories in the West Coast and place women's participation in the martial arts as a high priority in their instruction. Some of the older women participants had worked in the feminist self-defense movement of the 1980s. All but one currently train on the West Coast, and share history in the development and/or continuation of the PAWMA network. Most have experience in the instruction of women's self-defense curricula. Locally, I utilized snowball sampling via network connections in my hometown of Seattle. Due to deep lineage connections, I also targeted practitioners in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles.

For the semi-structured interviews, most participants were high-ranking students and instructors. This was an accident of hierarchical cultures and sampling techniques. Before conducting any activity in these settings, it is proper etiquette to be introduced to a lead instructor by one's own lead instructor. The instructor must then approve the project for their lower-ranking students to participate. Many of the instructors and high-ranking interviewees were initially hesitant to let me communicate with their students before they themselves had gone through the research process, and as such much travel time was dedicated to these "ice-

breakers." The result was a sample rich with highly experienced practitioners, some of whom were then opened to further research being conducted directly with their students.

Sites Visited

The majority of training spaces documented were indoor locales located in urban settings. These sites were typically no greater than about nine-hundred square feet and featured multiple sections for training. A handful of sites documented were multi-use spaces, such as campus gymnasiums and parks. That is to say, there were few if any opportunities for organizations practicing in these spaces to exercise more permanent place-making practices, such as decoration or the construction of living facilities. Finally, three sites assessed served as both training spaces *and* as sites of medical practice. In these cases, the owners/lead instructors were also operating Eastern and complementary medicine practices, i.e., medical Qigong, Pilates, or acupuncture.

Taken together, these sites represent the diversity of activities occurring within training spaces. There is great potential for spatial analysis in terms of observing adherence to cultural norms and seeing how practitioners integrate the norms of other adjacent practices into these spaces. Such varied functions counter notions of martial arts practice as purely destructive and isolated.

Data Analysis

All of the audio and video-recorded interviews were transcribed using Atlas.ti Version 7, 22 or 23. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. I developed an initial global codebook based on literature relevant to the study. From broader geographic themes (i.e., place theory), I coded for discussions of specific places and movement across or between spaces, with a particular gaze towards acts of building the physical structure of these spaces. Such discussions were important for elucidating how the interviewee understands the spaces in question, rather than relying on the

observed space and presumptions of normative spatial arrangement. These conversations also helped to clarify who bore responsibility for specific interventions in the training space. This was especially useful in conversations with school owners, who managed geographic conflicts in their neighborhoods in addition to crafting the interior of the training space. *Therapeutic landscapes* were discussed as part of this broad umbrella.

Coding for leisure-related activities centered martial arts training and involved a narrower subset of literature and vocabulary. with a particular focus on *serious leisure*. Care was somewhat more difficult to code, as the more radical interventions originate from this angle of theory. This codebook section addressed issues of putting care into place, care as a practice, and the ethic of care. Worth emphasizing is that the collision of care and leisure is addressed as under the ethic of care rather than leisure. Cognate themes (gender, labor, etc.) were grouped as individual categories. Where appropriate, codes with conceptual thematic overlap

During the first review of transcripts, I began the In Vivo coding stage of deriving tags form the data itself. On the first pass, the codebook was then reinforced with manifest coding as interviewees introduced topics and perspectives that had not been anticipated with the initial global codebook. Vocabularies unaccounted for in the original codebook often related to health or other substantial life events. During subsequent reviews of the transcripts, latent codes were applied to content that was not explicitly stated but thematically relevant to answering the research questions. This final stage of coding more humanistically conveyed the emic perspectives of the interviewees. The global and manifest codes were largely descriptive in nature. Latent codes were deployed at the interpreted level. Quotes that astutely convey thematic concepts were isolated and used as aides for establishing thematic consistencies between interviews.

The landscape analysis included my own written descriptions and sketches of the locales where training and interviews took place. I also took detailed notes of how spaces were used during training. Where possible, when interviewees discussed details of their training spaces in interviews, I noted those features in real time. I analyzed these results using the framework detailed in Tveit et al. (2006), examining the following criteria: stewardship, coherence, disturbance, visual scale, historicity, imageability, complexity, naturalness, and ephemera. While some criteria fit better than others given that many of these spaces are fully enclosed within a building structure and seemingly devoid of outdoor, natural features, the framework has been helpful for providing a structure for analysis, as well as descriptive depth.

Chapter Conclusion

Given the diversity of activities and experiences with place, deploying multiple methods helps to capture the experiences of trainees and instructors. Taking a mixed methods approach will be helpful for capturing a well-rounded image of training experiences for respondents in various positions. Participant-observation provides frequent and repeated opportunities to experience everyday life alongside fellow trainees. This also provided opportunities to partake in activities of the space, myself becoming part of the place-making process through my own participation in the activity. The temporality of these observations is immediate, and over time amass to a more generalized understanding of how one operates in these spaces – most importantly how to be a good training partner. Learning through experience alongside colleagues is mundane for us, yet these daily moments of interaction are why we continue to train.

Interviews answered more protracted temporal issues around health, training, and the establishment of training locales. Indeed, much can be gleaned from participating alongside

fellow trainees, but we speak very little during training unless we have questions about safety or technique. Otherwise, training is neither the time nor the place for detailed discussion. Interviews offer a window into how participants think about teaching and training. It is an opportunity to reflect on what matters to them and how their training has influenced their lives. Respondents report on everything from social relationships to injury management. In sum, these interviews serve as a sort of origin story for the kinds of sites where participant-observation takes place.

These methodologies do pose some limitations. As a group, traditional martial artists are often private. Finding people who were willing to interview was challenging early on. There are a number of practitioners in this network who are surely troves of oral history but routinely decline requests for both journalistic and research interviews. Respondent 22 "Bridgette," among my oldest interviewees, noted that the existence of women-led martial arts organizations was for a period kept a secret so as to not jeopardize one's position in their current, largely male-led martial arts lineages. Some still carry an orientation towards privacy. Women's representation in sport broadly and martial arts specifically is a tenuous topic even the present day (Schmidt 2013; Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009).

Learning a martial art is a lifelong endeavor. While I learned a great deal in the years that I spent training in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Capoeira, and the periodic visits with Taijiquan, I simply could not capture the depth of lifestyle commitment that each discipline demands. Each style offers something distinct. Practitioners initiate training at differing points in their lives and for varying reasons. I hope that these brief encounters may inspire others to explore training opportunities, or at the very least appreciate the enthusiasm with which trainees participate. My sample is also limited in scope and in place. Snowball sampling can limit the diversity of participants based on limited social connections. While this sample does report common

experiences with martial arts training, it would be worthwhile to repeat this line of questioning with practitioners in different regions of the US (or the world!) and in a greater number of styles.

Taken together, the information derived from these triangulated methods presents nested narratives of martial arts participation. I carried out these methods bearing in mind that my interviewees had themselves engaged in protracted and repeated training sessions over the course of years, and sometimes decades. My experience in the early 21st Century is something quite different from what my respondents who began training as many as five decades ago, but their work laid the foundations for what my contemporaries, my younger respondents, and I do today.

CHAPTER 4: ON THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF LEISURE SPACE

A distinguishing aspect of martial arts training spaces in the United States is that most are not constructed from the ground up for this one purpose. Rather, owners rent or purchase buildings that have served other purposes. Whether a building has seen several resident martial arts schools in the recent past or the current owner is the first to have established the training space, these edifices are reorganized with a great degree of intention and precision, even if the structure itself is not an ideal fit. The task of finding and investing financially in a locale often proves challenging. The martial arts are not a lucrative endeavor. Practical considerations around the need for ample room for martial arts practice, weight rooms, and locker room spaces influence these site selection and design decisions.

Of equal importance is the adornment of the interiors of these spaces. Owners, and in some cases students, may decorate interiors with objects that reflect the norms, history, and values of the training system. Practitioners will furthermore place images of important people from the school's or lineage's history. The training hall functions as a means of spatializing the discourse of a training style. These expressions not only mark the space as a place where martial arts activity is the desired function, but also as a place where practitioners can preserve memories of the past and educate new trainees as to the origins and founders of the school.

This chapter will review findings on how practitioners, especially founding members, manage the physical locales in which training takes place. The chapter will lead with an interview-based retelling of several high-ranking practitioners' struggles to secure (semi)permanent space and stabilize their martial arts programs for long-term success. Next will be a descriptive review of some of the training spaces observed during the research period, as

well as how contemporary expressions of norms and values collide with traditions of antiquity. Finally, though this chapter centers on matters of physical space, the last section will address the behaviors and practices of trainees working in real time to establish spatialized norms and expectations of how space is used; that is, the mundane, everyday spatial practices that reinforce the meaning of these spaces.

Worth considering in this analysis is that these training spaces often include multiple functions. For example, a few respondents also operate Chinese Medicine practices from the same building where their school is housed. In two other cases, high-ranking practitioners and founders used the building as their own personal residence at some point in the school's history. These spaces are sometimes rented to outside practitioners who themselves are also doing some kind of body-oriented leisure endeavor. This may include other martial arts programs that do not have permanent spaces of their own, dance classes, or even self-defense clubs. These spaces thus engage a curious collision of uses that represents a porosity of leisure space: the desire for continuity and optimization clashes with the practical necessity of meeting financial obligations. Meanwhile, home may be one wall away.

With these spaces serving so many functions, markers of conventional martial arts-leisure usage sit alongside features of residency and business. The result is a peculiar spatial manifestation of in-between-ness where the needs of operating a business collide with the practical realities of managing bodies in space. These goals are met through a variety of physical and behavioral interventions that in totality create safer and healthier training environments. Under the best circumstances, the persons bearing the responsibility of securing and crafting training opportunities for others do so with a care-centered approach to ensure lengthy, healthful careers for trainees and continual stable operation of the school.

Finding a Place to call Home… for a School

Respondents often use the language of "home" to describe their desires for settling into and maintaining a stable locale for hosting their practice spaces. The desire for "hominess" seems intuitive for these individuals, yet geographers have demonstrated through decades of theorizing that settling on a singular definition of home is a potent intellectual exercise[89]. Within these dialogues, I find a bounty of helpful frameworks and considerations that can provide a stable language for describing a phenomenon of leisure-hominess. Stepping outwards to a broader discussion of space and place, space as an abstraction of a bounded area is useful for understanding the relationalities that constitute it. Place augments the concept of space as it addresses the perceptual aspects of being among/within space. In perceiving what is present within a space, observers construct ways of organizing knowledge about what is present and how all things present relate to each other and to things beyond the bounds of what is immediately observable. In these moments of perception, space is given meaning, becoming place. Within the organization of knowledge, the spatial "endowed with value" (Tuan 1977, 6) becomes something to be understood.

Author Doreen Massey (1994) encourages us to regard space alongside time, space-time, in that time engages the iterative potential of a specific space. In other words, though a space may be fixed to a specific physical locale, the space itself is not static – space, and subsequently place-making, is a process that is repeated over time. From these frameworks, home as a place can then be understood as a relational space-time process given meaning and reproduced (Laslett

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[89] See Brickell (2011) for a comprehensive review on critical geographies of the home.

and Brenner 1989) through notions of importance or abjection, presence or absence, and all states within these spectra in everyday interaction. The respondents to this project and the training spaces they occupy represent a unique intersection of leisure and a desire for hominess. The result is something distinct and difficult to singularly define, but still represents the outcomes of intentional actions, beliefs, and values.

The most convenient interventions are two-fold. From the therapeutic landscapes framework, the social and physical landscape are the most obvious branches of analysis. I couch the idiocultures framework in the discussion of social landscape, though as Finaly (2018) notes, these thematic divisions are not absolute. The spatial manifestation of idiocultural decision-making ultimately influences what messages of discourse are conveyed through physical space, what norms are expected of participants, and what notions beyond the immediate context these spaces symbolize.

Interdependent Financial Stability: The Value of Pluralistic Approaches

Outside of top-tier prize fighting, the martial arts industry is not a lucrative undertaking. Respondents discuss the individual and collective financial struggles they experienced in the early days of establishing their own schools. A few also discuss the struggle to locate and continually occupy affordable space amidst a perennially expensive West Coast property market. Affording rent or being unable to secure a mortgage were among the most stressful business demands for respondents. The administrative load of running a business in addition to hosting a curriculum contributed to a high degree of stress for many of the respondents, though most eventually landed on a business model that was suitable long-term.

“Aaron” (Respondent 1) provided a detailed history of how he and several of his close friends founded their school, which has now been operating for nearly three decades. His journey

began in the 1980s when he rented his first site for a short two years in Berkeley, CA, then moved to a warehouse location in an industrial sector of another nearby San Francisco East Bay Area urban center. During his initial search, renting from another martial artist was a requirement, so he began cold-calling martial arts schools from the phone book until he eventually connected with an instructor who had recently opened his own school. Aaron reflected on the stress and precarity of establishing his own school alongside that of his business partner "Faisal," (pseudonym) noting:

> "…we initially shared a dojo in Berkeley. It was a very small place. And it was really month to month. We were really struggling financially. It was a really tiny place. The rent was high. We didn't have it built up yet. We were both working easily a job and a half so we could pump money into the school every month. You know... we were paying to teach, and a good amount of tears were shed in the process, you know."

Despite these challenges, Aaron's affinity for his business partner remained solid and they have been friends for several decades.

The two had an immediate rapport during their first telephone conversation. At first, they both recognized each other as having Middle Eastern surnames and sharing a Muslim upbringing. During their first encounter, Faisal asked Aaron, "You're the Muslim brother?" Aaron affirmed. Aaron further recounts their dialogue, "[Faisal] said, 'huh… you know, don't take this bad but we gotta check each other out, you know?' So, we suited up and got on the floor and trained together and had a wonderful time. And we've been friends twenty-six years now, since then." Their initial connection was facilitated through their shared experiences as Middle Eastern immigrants, but they still required physical and social interaction to solidify their partnership. The credential check came in the form of a training session, an embodied exchange of experience and knowledge to convey that they were of similar training philosophies and skill levels.

As noted above, Aaron's initial rental was a short two-year stint with Faisal. The spark for his first move occurred following an inheritance Aaron received from a close aunt. She had been ill for some time and left him a $4,000[90] inheritance. Together with five other practitioners he befriended in his first training space, the collective pooled their funds and began renting a warehouse space in a nearby industrial neighborhood. This was a large, mostly empty space that required extensive construction work from Aaron and these training partners. Beyond being an atypical interdependent financial move, their decision represented a unique opportunity for hierarchies of leadership to be disrupted in terms of practical decision-making for how the creation of the school would unfold:

> "…the good thing about that was from the beginning it was more of a group project… I and the other folks were pretty clear we didn't want to set up a traditional teacher-student thing in terms of the power dynamics. One of the critiques I'd sometimes have of the traditional model is that traditionally the teacher is supposed to know everything and have the answers for everything about running a school. And to me... okay, yes I've done, at that point anyway, I had done fifteen years more martial arts than everybody else, and everybody else had done almost nothing. So yes, in terms of teaching, in terms of curriculum design, all that stuff. Yes, I was going to make the decisions. But in terms of what color we were going to paint the school, like, does being a teacher give me significantly more insight on that? Or even certain financial decisions. There were people there who had a better understanding of finances than I did. There were people there who had better insights on construction decisions than I did. Or how to fix something… I tried to delineate that decisions about the school were going to be made by all of us."

In defiance of conventional power hierarchies, Aaron entrusted his students with significant agency in the process of constructing and financing the dojo, and this move proved to be successful. They remained in that space for ten years until they were forced to relocate due to the death of their landlord and subsequent sale of the land upon which the warehouse was located.

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[90] Roughly equivalent to $12,000 today, as this exchange occurred in the late 1980s.

Aaron's retelling highlights the interplay of competence in the process of caring for, and trust in the process of caring with. Aaron held the value of plurality in high regard, noting that some of his students had greater knowledge on matters such as finance and construction – they were better equipped than he was to perform these necessary measures competently, and their inclusion in decision-making was best for the long-term health of the school. This near-horizontal power relationship empowered students to take on responsibilities on a voluntary basis, opening a path for them to share their skills for the benefit of the school. This trust-based, collaborative approach to forming the first independent iteration of the school would become the norm as the collective encountered new challenges.

Now with greater financial security, the collective again pooled their resources and purchased a warehouse just a few blocks away from their original site. Aaron recounted:

> "…at that point we had a long discussion and we realized, you know, we didn't want to build another school that we were renting, and put a year's worth of work and construction and money into something that was just going to get taken away from us and probably rented out more expensively and somebody else that's going to make money off of, and we wanted a home that we were going to be able to stay in."

The collective connected to an acquaintance of one of the students, a warehouse owner who was looking to sell the building, as squatters had been selling speed from the locale. Noteworthy from Aaron's statement was the language of "home." The desire for continuity and control was on a practical level a financial hurdle, but the reality for the collective was that six of them were living full-time in the rental space they had occupied for ten years, and would again reside in the building they purchased. They were dependent on each other for shelter. "Home" was not a metaphor. During both establishment cycles, the founders slept on training mats while prioritizing the construction of training space. Their residential space was second. When they lost the first dojo, they also lost their home.

As part of the purchase agreement, all contributors entered into a mortgage contract that barred the possibility of using the property purchase as a means of individual financial gain:

> "All the people that put in money bought the building as tenants in common and then we had signed agreements basically saying that no one was ever going to see this building as an investment; that people if they left were entitled to the money they had put into the down payment, but they were not entitled to the value of the actual building… We really wanted to see this as a home."

The asset of spatial fixity was not merely for financial gain. This was a home for the school and for those who would be living on the premises full-time. Through this struggle, Aaron was working as a security guard, and all other resident-trainees had jobs outside the dojo. All used their outside wages to help keep up with the mortgage. This was a collective investment in the survival of the school, a means of protecting their time and commitment to creating a space to call home for a martial arts program they wished to see continue beyond their own career changes, and even lifespans.

Aaron's recount represents one of the most comprehensive reviews of interpersonal and financial struggles of establishing a dojo that I received during the interview phase. His case was distinct for three reasons: (1) that aside from his first two years, he was able to spend ten or more years in a single space, and when he did move, he still remained within the same neighborhood; (2) that he as the founder of his program has been continuously operating it since the first day; and (3) except for the first two years in Berkeley, he has always lived and worked in the same building. The overlap of his residency and laboring life, working in concert with a stable occupational temporality, makes for a distinctive concoction of spatialized memory[91]. While

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[91] Aaron's monastic lifestyle will be addressed later in the chapter.

highly distinct, it served to facilitate a clear narrative of struggle and companionship during an early martial arts career.

Aaron and the founding cadre demonstrate the collision of "caring for" and "caring with" in a way that was ahead of its time. This sample of distributing financial responsibility in defiance of normative hierarchies presents a radical departure from expectations of how power operates in financial decision-making, especially when the potential for property investment is involved. It is an unusually pluralistic approach that became an idiocultural norm that guided their decision-making through crisis events. Their earnest commitment to one another and the school in three separate legal and financial events demonstrates trust and solidarity, virtues of "caring with" that indicate their lifelong investment towards securing a "home" for their school as well as their relationships as both business partners and friends.

Economic and Spatial Conflicts: Finding "Place" where Space is Limited

Founders represent roughly one fourth of the people interviewed for this project. Most individuals interviewed were students and/or non-founders. Being in the position of both *owner* and *non-founder* is a common phenomenon for schools that have been operating for a decade or more. This can happen if the founder retires from martial arts, such as in Site 1. In the case of Site 4, the founder tragically died from cancer two decades ago. In such cases, memories of school establishment may be hazy. The current owner or head instructor may have been in a student role with no administrative responsibilities at the time of founding. Temporal-spatial barriers to memory occurred for founders who had difficulty finding stable locales for operating their schools. Many struggled to recall every past location. The question was almost always met with exasperated sighs – stories of past rentals and lost spaces laced with unpleasant memories.

The struggles Aaron depicted were unique to the individuals undertaking the task at that particular time and context, but the economic difficulties they faced are hardly distinct. “Reyna” (Respondent 17) spoke at length of her many spatial transitions in the Seattle area and provided the other most detailed recitation of her many relocations. When she opened her first commercial school, it was located in a 1,000 square foot house that had previously been host to a Tae Kwon Do dojang. “It had beautiful hardwood floors [we chuckle]. And that was the selling point. Right? It was a beautiful, smooth hardwood floor. And I said this is perfect for karate.” When Reyna and her business partner “Pauline” (pseudonym) received their teaching certificates in Kajukenbo, they moved across the street to a site that was once a nail salon. At the time of interviewing, it was a wine bar.

Before going independent and “commercializing” (her language), Reyna had been working alongside several other high-ranking Karate instructors in the Seattle region. She had been exclusively operating from community centers in the region, offering early daytime and evening classes for adults, and after-school hours for youth. It was during this time that she met her eventual business partner Pauline. Finances were difficult during the community center period and their early transition towards commercialization. “*101 Ways to Do Top Ramen*, that was us,” Reyna quipped. At the time she was working as a data entry technician for a local human services agency and Pauline did seasonal work for UPS. They saved funds from school revenues and their own income to eventually establish their independent operation.

Their third space was a 3,000 square foot facility that had previously functioned as a retail front. The building was redeveloped a few years after the pair began renting the site. Reyna recalled their 2009 ouster and subsequent moves:

> "We got the notice that, well, here you know the developers are going to come and get it. And so, I only had about six months to get out of there. And so yeah, I was freaking out. Where do I find a space? So, we actually moved to [Industrial Neighborhood] for a year. That didn't work at all. Then I finally moved back here. I was in another space that used to be an auto glass shop here in [Neighborhood Redacted]. Was there for about, I want to say, five years, but probably less than that. And then that fell through, and we decided, 'Okay, well, let's just let's just go find someplace else.' And here we are."

The 3,000 square foot facility offered what the house and former nail salon could not: window visibility. "We had huge picture windows, and we were at a corner, and there was a stoplight. So, whenever people would stop, they'd look in and they'd see a whole bunch of people working out and stuff like that punching on bags." The ample space and street level visibility eliminated the need for print advertising, and their student body ballooned to 130 actively training students. This represented a high point in Reyna and her business partner's endeavors, and she was eventually able to leave her corporate position and teach martial arts full-time.

Following their ouster from the storefront, the pair was forced to move to a suboptimal location that was further south from their original neighborhood. Youth could no longer walk to the dojo after school, and railroad traffic posed further time constraints for parents and adults commuting to the location. Industrial trains could stall traffic so intensely that students would miss half of practice. Though the training area was a spacious 2,000 square feet with high ceilings – optimal training conditions, it was located above an antique shop. Reyna recalled conflict over space, "There was an antique shop down below. And I didn't initially take it because we do a lot of jumping… I taught Wushu at the time. And I said, 'Well, with the antique place underneath, you know, would that be a problem?'" The landlord assured her that it would not be a problem. But on the first day of classes when students began jumping and making noise, the owner of the antique store downstairs complained to the landlord. Reyna recalled:

> "So, it got to the point throughout that whole year where we couldn't do any jumping, until, like, 6pm [incredulous chuckle]. So, you know, my kids' classes, you know, couldn't do any jumping after school split. Yeah, you know, so we had to do like, quiet activities… and I said, Nope, we gotta leave."

Though the structure could adequately satisfy the physical volume needs of body-space, it could not contain the sonic volume of the trainees.

The pair soon secured space at an old auto glass shop in their old mixed neighborhood. It was a better fit for students, but they were again forced to leave after the landlord demanded that they pay for an outdoor plumbing issue that would have cost them $10,000. Reyna broke the lease and temporarily moved into a friend's photography studio until she landed in the space where she is today. Her lengthy review depicts the struggles that body-centric business owners face in a world of limited spatial resource. She reflected on her search for training space across the full breadth of Seattle:

> "Ravenna, West Seattle, Northgate and stuff… if you find a space that's big enough, it's set up like an office, and just the amount of money it would take to take down walls or whatever and get it signed off by the city to make sure it's safe for you to take down walls. That gets... I got lucky with this place. I didn't have to take down any walls. But, you know, those kind[s] of open spaces are now becoming very few and far between."

White collar office work, retail, and food services are written into the discourse of space. Open spaces and blank canvases are few. Reyna's final and current nest was previously her friend's medical practice. When the friend retired, she introduced Reyna to her landlord. Today, what was once the lobby is the main training space – only a reception station needed to be deconstructed. Treatment rooms have been converted into dressing rooms, a storage room, and the longest room was converted into a knife throwing studio.

Aaron and Reyna's experiences reflect both macro-level economic spatial constraints as well as the micro-level spatial conflicts that can occur in the pursuit of training space. Both

respondents cited gentrification as an economic hurdle to finding permanent space, as both had faced displacement following developer acquisitions. Aaron was fortunate to have been making purchasing decisions on a large-scale property in the early 1990s industrial San Francisco East Bay Area with the help of five other people. For Reyna, her journey to independent ownership began in the early 2000s, and by the 2010s, it was financially unfeasible for any single person to compete with commercial developers for space purchases in Seattle. Under current conditions, only the wealthy have stable means of writing their activities into the landscape.

At a granular level, Reyna's difficulties with bouncing between so many different landlords with their own financial desires, conflicts with neighbors, and limitations of the available physical building further demonstrate the unique spatial challenges that martial arts business owners face. Today's dojos are typically not purpose-built. Reyna rented a house, a nail salon, a storefront, the attic of an antique store, an auto glass shop, and a medical office – each iteration a palimpsest of the most recent tenant making meaning in a reused place. At the antique shop, bodies "out of control" (Van Dongen and Elema 2001) shouting and shaking ceilings were a violation for the downstairs neighbor. The need for room and tolerant neighbors created instability and required constant moves between spaces as well as demolition and reconstruction in new spaces. These spatial constraints had negative impacts on Reyna as an owner and leisure-creator and on her students seeking leisure space.

Reflecting on Reyna's recollection of frustration and constant moves, we spoke about square footage, optimal floors, and accessible locations, but until we toured the kwoon at the end of the interview, there was very little "place" sentiment in those memories. Dis*place*ment conventionally describes the movement of a person or thing from where it was, but if we interpret place as a form of discourse (Keating 2015) or "lexicon of the human mind and social

constructs" (Kearns and Collins 2000, 1048–1049), the consequence of displacement is the erasure of one's marks upon space, the removal of one's meaning-making process, and the de-contextualization of place into an abstract space yet to be rented or sold for some other purpose. This displacement sits in stark contrast to the ideal of long residency in a single place where memories and meanings can be cataloged, shared, and returned to.

Linguistic Clues in the Description of Training Spaces

The language of "brothers and sisters" and "going home to the dojo" are common figures of speech that inspire reconsideration of martial arts practitioners' relationships to the space of the dojo and the social ties the dojo fosters (Partikova and Jennings 2018)[92, 93]. Throughout the years, several fellow practitioners have emphasized that what makes or breaks martial arts experiences is the health of relationships between and among students and instructors. The "togetherness" of shared learning experiences can be a source of social support as the challenges of practice seem daunting (Guthrie 1995, 1997) and when life events outside of the dojo overwhelm (Wiley 1992). Lantz (2002) went so far as to investigate the familial social dynamics of parents, their children, and siblings training together at the same martial arts schools. The "inside-outside" and relationally-oriented discourse of the dojo hearkens discussions of the home as a possible way of theorizing the creation and maintenance of dojos.

Before progressing, one complication to be addressed is the application of a Western gaze to martial arts of an "Eastern" origin. Reinforcing notions of Orientalism is not the goal. We

[92] A practical reinforcement of family history is the presence of lineage "family tree" posters on the wall.
[93] At my own school, we are tested on our "branch" of the Kajukenbo family tree from founder Adriano Emperado (the root) through to present-day black belts.

researchers must still be aware of how our work may be (mis)interpreted and rectify errors or misrepresentations as we become aware of them[94]. The extant history of these knowledge exchanges is rich and worthy of study. I hope to explore how the martial arts have been integrated, represented, and re-iterated as a means of providing opportunities for people from many walks of life to explore new paths for physical and mental wellness. I also engage in an exploration of social relationships in contexts that sometimes eschew the normative constrictions of broader social hierarchies. The meaning of these arts is context specific. Some schools are more diligent about remembering histories and origins than others. Indeed, the practice of martial arts and the creation of dojos are contested endeavors. The broader subculture of martial arts is incredibly popular, but also misunderstood; nonetheless it is worth investigating the many avenues through which these artforms been sustained and reinvented (Miracle 2015; Looser 2010).

Additionally, I will primarily be using Japanese terminology throughout most of the discussion. Though Chinese arts are also featured in this dissertation, I will not be relying on the little Mandarin and Cantonese I have learned through my martial arts training. I have no formal training in either language. It would be inappropriate to rely on any form of translation beyond the immediate vocabulary acquired during training. I have, however, received formal Japanese language training in the past and can rely more readily on translations and sentence sampling

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[94] Bowman (2020) on the development of "martial arts" as a concept that was consolidated in the 1970s West to describe "Eastern" combative practices.

where applicable. I will always pursue the most simplistic translation where possible and will clearly distinguish when my own interpretations or translation debates are taking place[95].

Curiously, within the language of "dojo" is an immediate link to the geographic concept of *place*. dojo (道場) translates directly as "way" (道) "place" (場), or more intuitively "place of ways." 道 also translates as the spatial metaphor of "path" or "journey," and still yet can also refer to ways of "conduct," "moral principles," or "methods of action." This is not a simplistic, singular translation. Rather it invites the reader or practitioner to contemplate the purpose and meaning of the term in relation to the art itself as well as where the individual sees their own position along these paths or in these practices. In reference to schools where Chinese arts are practiced (i.e. Chun Kuo Kung Fu), I will use the word "kwoon" which is an anglicization of *gun* (馆) from Cantonese. In reference to schools where Korean arts are practiced, I will use "dojang."

"Do" is featured as a suffix in most titles for Japanese arts: *Budo*[96] (武道), the general term for modern Japanese martial arts, combines martial or war (bu - 武) with way (do - 道), literally "the martial way"; Kendo 剣道, the way (do) of the sword (ken) ; Aikido 合気道, the way of harmonizing (ai) with energy (ki); Karate-do 空手道, the way of the empty (kara) hand (te); Judo 柔道, the gentle (ju) way. There is a "going" and a "doing" in this language that meshes well with the understanding of place as discourse and process. Trainees go to a place

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[95] I will be using *www.jisho.org* for immediate translation and *Kanji* (Japanese language text) reference.

[96] Gendai Budo (現代武道) refers to modern Japanese arts that were founded after the Meiji Restoration. Kobudo (古武道) refers to ancient Japanese martial arts (Draeger 1996).

where they will learn a new skill that is performed in a particular way. The dojo itself may then reflect a discourse of the training style in its construction, décor, or other elements that differentiate the dojo from other spaces.

Each martial art embodies differing aspects of how fighting can be conducted. Kendo focuses on the usage of the katana primarily and other long blades. Karate utilizes the power and force of the body without the assistance of weaponry. Aikido and Judo emphasize the manipulation of an opponent's motion rather than the infliction of pain to subdue an attack. Given these differing emphases, each dojo is structured to accommodate the demands (and dangers) of practicing the art. An Aikido dojo may feature soft tatami floors or wrestling mats, as the art emphasizes throwing the opponent to the ground. A Kendo dojo will typically feature wooden dance floors for firm footing. In these simple ways, practitioners render structural interventions that reflect the practical needs of their particular style.

However, because most dojos in the United States are not purpose-built, the elements that mark the usage of the space and styles hosted within can create a striking contrast to what a building used to be. Beyond securing the basic functions of these spaces, owners extensively remodel and make clever use of suboptimal spatial features that cannot be physically modified. A dojo is a place of so many ways: martial ways; financially responsible ways; ways of safe construction. With enough time and attention dedicated to "doing in" and "being in" space, the dojo too becomes a site of discourse (Keating 2015) where the stipulations of the style and the needs of the school coalesce. Taken as a whole, a dojo is an expression of values where great care is taken to construct a safe training environment while also preserving a vision of a past where these art forms originate.

Reflecting on these "places of ways," the language of these spaces depicts an uncanny expression of space as a form of cultural discourse that parallels Fine's (1979) frameworks for the social production of idiocultures, though I pay particular attention to *known culture*. The pre-existing knowledge of a specific martial arts system sets the parameters of how the space will be used as well as delineating the techniques and methodologies the instructors and students alike share and understand. "Culture content is synthesized from remembrances of past experiences" (Fine 1979, 738), in this case centuries-old lineages now being replicated, reimagined, and re-embodied through contemporary trainees who themselves create present memories that will mediate tomorrow's training expressions. In these spaces, participants know which forms of movement and touch are appropriate based on the style being instructed, and also what *is not* appropriate given these known parameters.

Walking Through a Martial arts School in the Mission District of San Francisco

This case represents the culmination of a decades long career in the martial arts. The owner, Master "Sheila" (Respondent 11) has trained in the martial arts for over thirty-five years and has taught in several cities along the West Coast of the United States. Decades ago, she owned a school in the Capitol Hill district of Seattle, WA but settled into her current location following the closure of a massive mixed-use studio that hosted her martial arts school, a social area, and a juice bar. Today's locale is in the Mission District of San Francisco and occupies a large portion of the upper floor in an older building styled in intricate modern brick. The stairwell leading up to the studio is bare and utilitarian, featuring a mix of natural and incandescent light, steel stair stringers, and concrete flooring – quiet and unassuming, clean and cared for, but most certainly liminal.

The foyer features a bench and a place for visitors to place their shoes and other belongings. The portal to the main training space opens to a T-shaped room with a large storage room to the right and locker rooms to the left, creating a somewhat narrow corridor that opens to the training floor. Immediately to the left of the portal is a merchandise podium that also houses some basic administrative materials, such as consent and insurance release forms. To the right is a wall-length table with a water tank, cups, and a few water bottles that students leave at the studio. Stepping forward into the main training space, the most distinguished feature is the distinctive training floor. The training surface design is a unique creation of Sheila's own development. I had never seen anything quite like it in my years of training, nor did any of the schools visited during the study period feature this design. The only other school that had a similar floor was an offshoot location that one of Sheila's students owns.

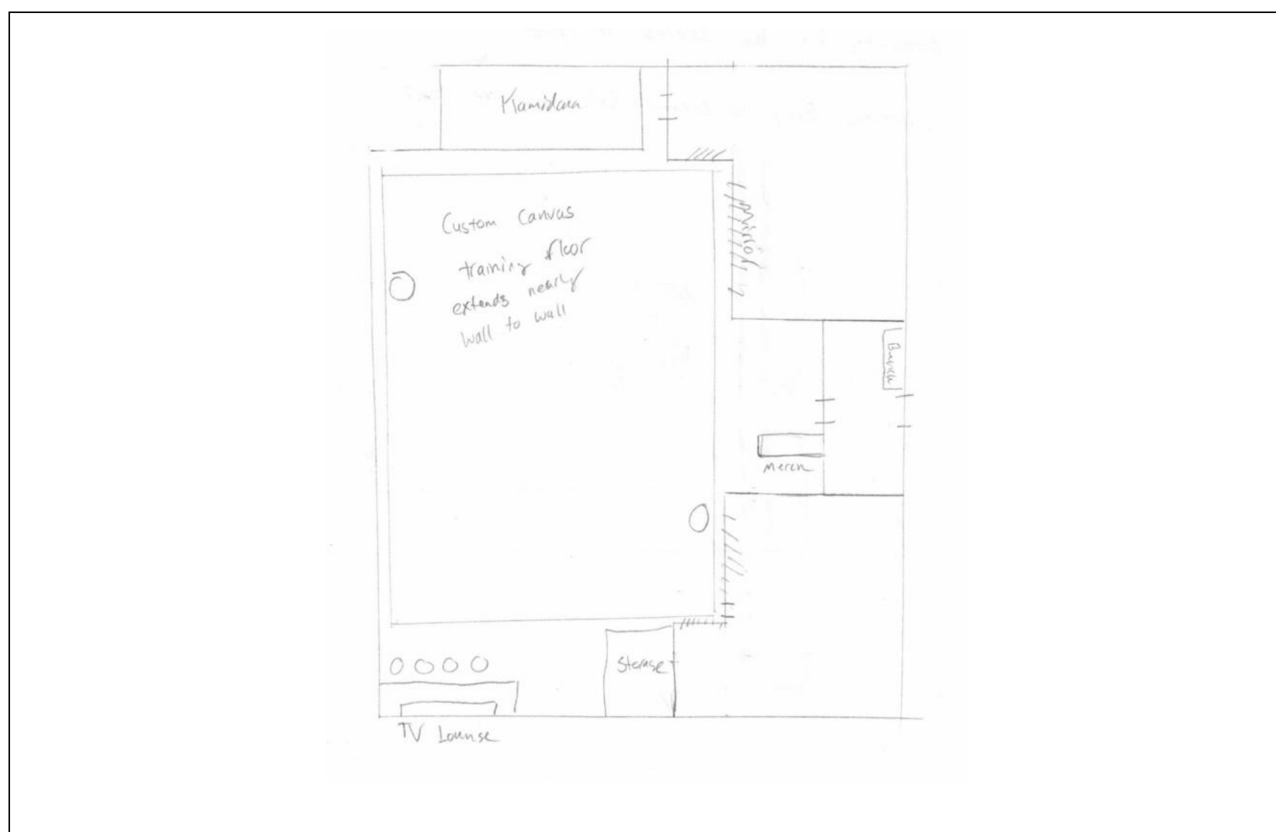

Fig 1: Rapid sketch of site floor plan.

The foundation of the floor is a broad swath (roughly eighteen by thirty feet) of interlocking rubber mats similar to what can be found in many weightlifting gyms. The mats are then framed with wood pieces of slightly lower height that are drilled into the floor. A large piece of thick canvas is then stretched over the entirety of the rubber mat area and up to the wood frame. Rope is strung through grommets at the edge of the canvas and looped into screw eyes that are drilled into the outside edge of the wood frame. The result is a grippy, durable training surface that is gentle on bare feet, which is especially important for such a nimble striking style. Perhaps most importantly, it is easy to maintain. The surface is *just* soft enough for trainees to practice wrestling and throwing without much additional padding, yet firm enough that there is no greater risk for rolling ankles.

To the right of the entrance on the narrow side of the training surface is a handmade wooden platform roughly two feet in height. Upon the platform is a small table that features a statue of Quan Yin[97, 98], a feminine Bodhisattva that represents compassion and mercy, as well as the protection of women, children, seafarers, and people in need. Two bowls flank the statue of Quan Yin. Two larger incense bowls are placed on either side of the platform. The wall behind Quan Yin features a large banner bearing the unique emblem of the martial arts style – it is a "mixed" martial art that blends principles from several different styles but is distinctly different from MMA. Above the banner are several uniformly tied belts ordered by rank from left to right:

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[97] Kannon in Japanese, Avalokitesvara in Sanskrit (Yü 2000).

[98] A statue of Quan Yin was observed in three training halls. All three institutions were women-owned.

white, yellow… brown, and black[99], with white representing beginners and black representing the highest level.

This single wall represents several norms in the arrangement and adornment of some training spaces. A usable culture of norms around rank is emblazoned upon the wall, the clustering of so many symbols in one place indicating that direction is the front of the room. Though this training hall was discussed as a dojang, it does share similar roots and ideal construction criteria to that of the Japanese dojo. Conventionally, the arrangement of the dojo is much like that of the lecture hall, with the instructor(s) sitting near one wall of the main hall and facing the students who arrange themselves in even rows and columns by rank (Phillips 2016).

The layout of the room is discussed relative to the cardinal directions[100]. The instructor sits with their back to the east wall (*kamiza*) and faces west (Tokeshi 2003). Students sit with their backs to the West wall (*shimoza*) and face east. The wall directly behind the instructor is the *shoumen* (正面)[101], the "true (正) direction (面)." Located in the *shoumen* is a *tokonoma* (床の間), which roughly translates to "bed (resting) space," a recessed alcove where images and artifacts of past instructors are placed. Some tokonoma also include a *kamidana (*神棚), or "god shelf," where flowers are placed next to images or statuary of spiritual icons. Students also sort themselves by rank: lower-ranking students will sit on the *shimoseki* (west) side of the room, while higher ranking students will sit on the *joseki* (east) side of the room.

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[99] Portion of belt color list redacted as this is potentially identifying information.
[100] The following includes naming conventions from Geoff Salmon (2012b, 2012a).
[101] Tokeshi (2003) notes that the *shoumen* is an L-shaped structure that is oblique to the instructor. There may be some disagreement as to the standard. Both Tokeshi (2003) and Salmon (2012) should be read as parallel works.

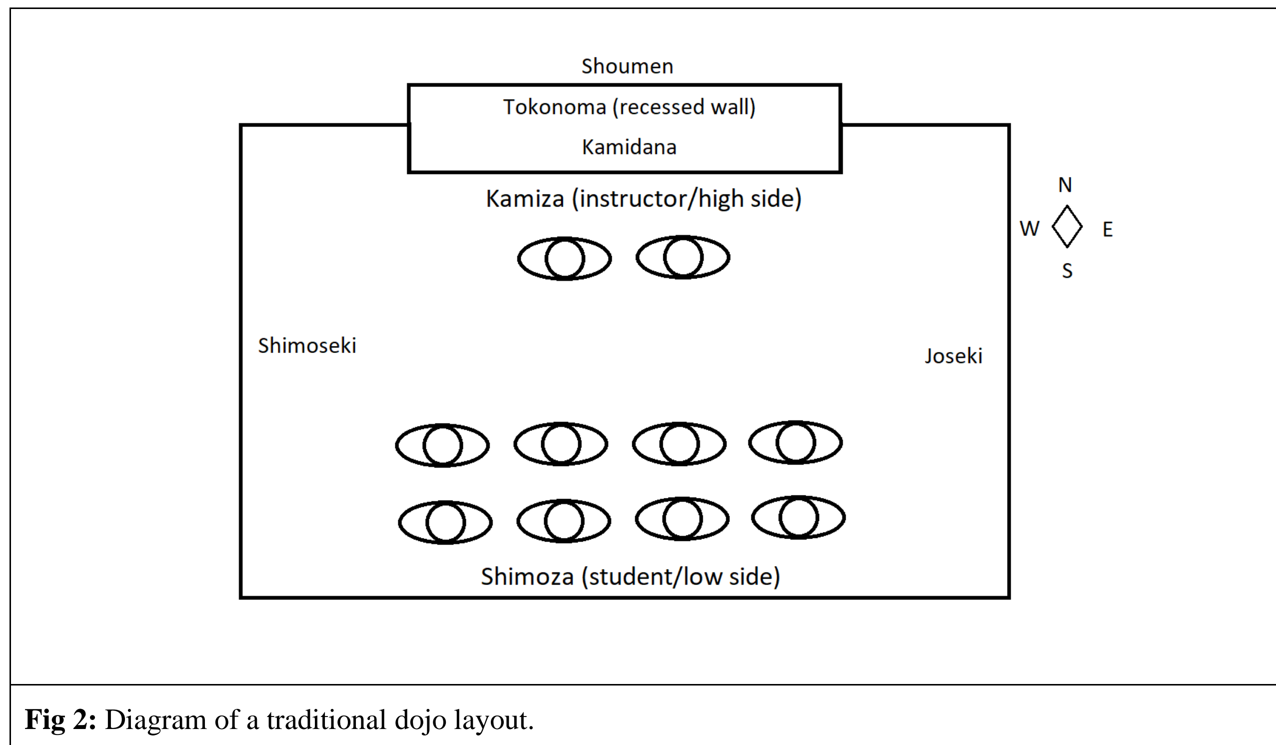

Fig 2: Diagram of a traditional dojo layout.

Another convention represented in Sheila's space is the display of colored rank belts on the wall. Though the usage of belts to represent rank is a relatively recent convention dating back to the early 1900s (Messner 2020), these displays nonetheless serve as important markers of progression through a martial arts curriculum. Belt displays are especially common in Tae Kwon Do schools, but still do appear in other styles. Noteworthy here is that Sheila's first martial art was Tae Kwon Do. The colorful rank stripes are artistically rendered in the banner of the school.

Today's founders contend with the inability to fully replicate the known cultural elements of yesteryear with the realities and limitations of what is available today, given that so few sites are purpose-built. This is a discursive mismatch, of sorts, however this mismatch is not a bad thing. It simply reflects where the needs and norms of contemporary spaces collide with traditional ideals. To recap, functional culture addresses whether an interaction or way of thinking is perceived as "congruent" with the goals of the group (Fine 1979, 740). A physical place-based reading of functional culture would then address whether a way of building or

arranging is perceived as congruent with the goals of the group. Amenities that are taken for granted today, such as bathrooms with running water and refrigerators where practitioners could leave bottles full-time were never factors in the floor plans of antiquity. Practitioners replicate to the extent that they can, however there are limits on the functionality of antiquated ideals. With time and her own self-taught carpentry skills, Sheila converted two large bathrooms into changing rooms with lockers and one shower in each. “I don’t like to stink,” she remarked during our interview.

Flooring: Specialized Forms and Functions

Indeed, these locales symbolize a traditional discourse of how an optimal training space ought to be arranged. Given the limitations of today’s conditions, a single-story monastic compound is difficult to replicate near downtown San Francisco. Practitioners make compromises based on the spaces that are available. With time and attention, they are able to accommodate the differing needs and expectations of 21st Century life. Much like their predecessors, today’s practitioners pay close attention to the safety and practicality of training surfaces, though the methods and materials used differ drastically based on what is available in the present-day.

The preceding section described in great detail the floors in Sheila’s dojang. Reyna also beamed about the hardwood floors in her past training spaces. Whereas the rooms we interact with on a daily basis contain furniture and other amenities that help to define the function of the space, most training halls do not. The floor itself upon which trainees walk, fall, and strike is the defining element of the space. It is vast, mostly empty, and optimized for the free and articulate movement of bodies.

Contemporary building methods such as Sheila's specially designed rubber and canvas floors are a departure from traditional flooring materials such as *tatami.* Tatami is a traditional Japanese floor material made from folded fibers of soft rush grass (*igusa*) layered over hemp or cotton. Tatami makes for a perfect training surface: grippy and gentle on bare feet, with just enough give to safely fall upon. However, high-quality tatami construction is expensive, requires the work of highly specialized craftspeople, and the material itself is difficult to maintain compared to more common athletic flooring materials. For most, tatami is too expensive to attain and impractical to maintain when more convenient but equally effective alternatives are available.

Site 7 serves as an example of contemporary materials meeting practical training needs. At the time of research, the dojo was home primarily to an Aikido school and hosted multiple programs under leaders other than the leaseholder. It featured a variation of the *tokonoma*, which housed an image of Ōsensei Morihei Ueshiba[102]. The fresh flowers next to his image would change every few days – they were never left to wilt. I frequented the space while taking Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu classes. The head instructor and his wife, a mid-ranking student and class instructor, have rented multiple spaces around the city and, for a time, struggled to establish a space that was singularly their own. The couple left the space during the COVID-19 pandemic, and unfortunately the primary Aikido school shuttered in 2023.

The building façade was an open window display with platforms that could have easily hosted a display of small retail shelves. Immediately after walking through the wood and glass

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[102] The founder of Aikido. Ōsensei is an honorific indicating founding status or a high degree of expertise. It is common for Aikido schools to have at least one image of Ōsensei Morihei Ueshiba somewhere in the main training hall.

front door, the floor is level with the sidewalk. The first four feet of flooring extending to the left and right side of the door are carpeted. There were usually a few chairs in the area, and to the right was the shoe rack. The main training floor is separated off with widen trim. The training floor itself is made of thick exercise mats. A thin line of mat guides new entrants along the right-side wall to a small door opposite the main entrance. The path leads to the rear kitchen, bathrooms, and changing areas. Despite some irregular shapes on the left side of the wall, the mats were perfectly fitted to the room. They were firm enough to walk on with safe ankle stability, but with enough give to safely fall upon.

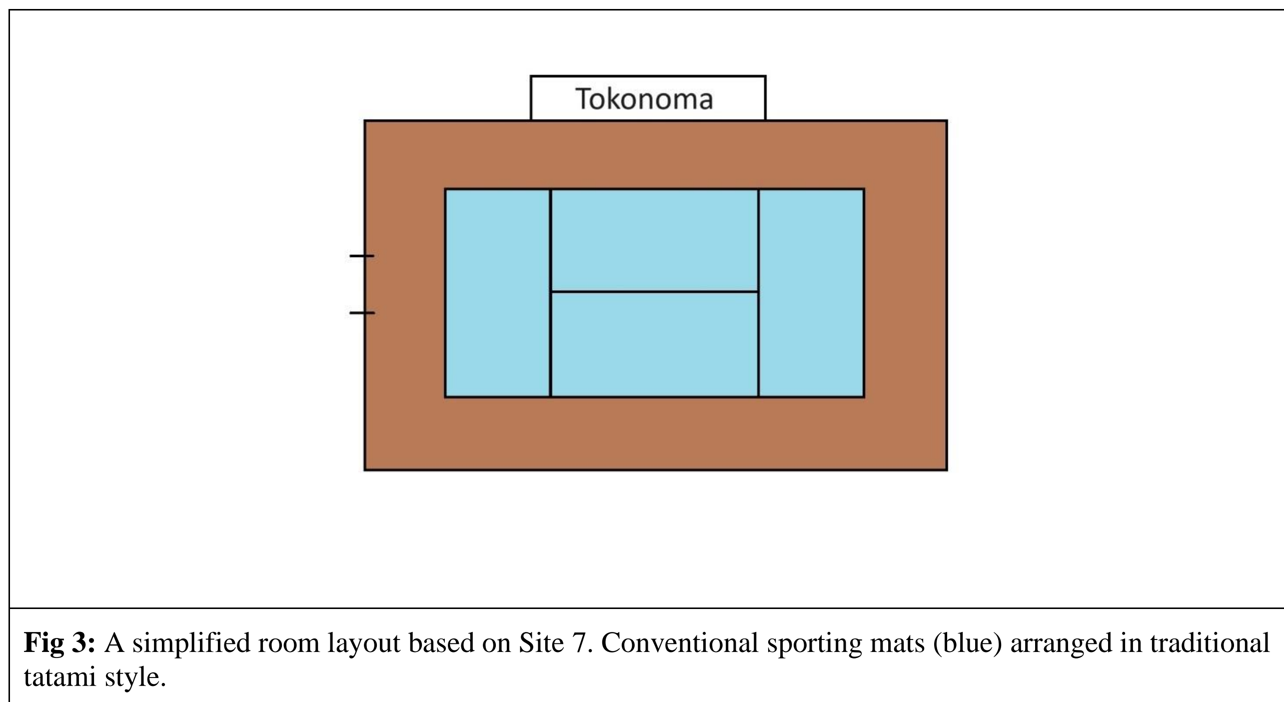

Fig 3: A simplified room layout based on Site 7. Conventional sporting mats (blue) arranged in traditional tatami style.

Embedded in something as seemingly mundane as a training floor is a discourse of classical tatami design sensibilities. Though the owner of the school opted for more practical building materials, her layout of those materials was arranged to reflect traditional norms. There are three basic rules of tatami layouts: (1) no four corners are ever to touch; (2) no single line is to cut across an entire layout; and (3) only one half-panel can be used in any layout (Tatami

2024). In smaller rooms this is simple enough to abide, as depicted in the figure above. However, in a large, unoptimized space such as Site 7 this resulted in an elaborate layout of nearly thirty intricately laid mats which did indeed succeed meeting the first layout standard[103].

Despite nontraditional spatial conditions, the founder of the school took opportunities to replicate a known culture of time-honored design sensibilities, such as in the arrangement of mats, as well as the maintenance of a *tokonoma* to house the image of the style's founder. This spatialized idiocultural expression is the collision of known cultural traditions that inform the arrangement of contemporary materials, all in an effort to create an environment that supports safe training. While this dissertation primarily focuses on care for and between people, it is in these moments that we can observe efforts towards the preservation of history and culture as well.

Another site in the San Fransisco Eastbay, CA features similar accommodations as well as a hardwood training surface. The façade also showcases large retail windows, though this school conceals the interior with white drapes. The hardwood training floor is also set upon a raised floor. At the door sits a low merchandise display similar to what one would find in a jewelry shop. The display is filled with t-shirts and other school memorabilia. The hardwood training surface is a sprung floor. Sprung floor construction involves suspending thin slats of wood above a grid of wide supports. Wide boards are then placed on top of the woven slats. This allows for the floor to flex beneath the weight of an active person. This is a common building

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[103] Worth noting is that even large-paneled exercise mats tend to be smaller than standard tatami panels, and therefore a greater number of individual mats are required to cover a larger area. Tatami panels are often roughly one meter by two meters.

method in dance spaces to help prevent repetitive stress injuries and is a common accommodation in martial arts training spaces as well.

To practice wrestling, rolling, and throws, this school has a smaller padded room that is located through a portal to the left of the entrance. The padding extends from the back wall to the door, about five feet before the front wall. This smaller room has a second entrance with a two-door foyer that students use for bicycle storage – they enter from the front, close the door behind themselves, then open the second door to the padded room. The door to the outside is locked when classes start. The room lacks the décor of the main training space. This particular art does not center wrestling or throws, however practitioners still bow before entering and exiting this auxiliary room. As a training site, it is still a venerated space.

The overall training facility is enviably large. No fewer than twenty-five students were present for each class I attended, with Saturday mornings being especially busy. Most days, the instructors will break off groups of students by rank, and those clusters of students will rotate between the padded room for required rolling and throwing practice, while the other students will train all manner of standing methodologies, such as sparring, forms[104], or punch arts[105]. This collective is fortunate to be able to sustain a training space that accommodates such differing safety needs.

If we treat the physical elements of a place as a form of discourse, we can observe the expression of values and functions "written" into the locale where training takes place. When it

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[104] Forms are a series of choreographed techniques that help students practice stringing together attacks, defensive techniques, and stance movement.

[105] Punch arts are a curriculum of choreographed responses to punches and kicks. They serve as templates for students to respond to attacks and to teach principles of defense.

comes to creating safe training spaces, the needs of the training body dictate how a training hall is constructed and equipped. Paraphrasing Dyck et al.'s description of the (medicalized) home in relation to the body seems fitting in this moment: both the body and the space of the dojo are "fluid material and discursive sites, with their materiality and meanings in recursive relationship to one another [sic]" (2005, 714). In simple terms, when looking through a storefront and seeing a padded floor, it can be deduced that a falling and/or throwing art is the primary resident of the locale, *and* likewise a person passing into this space as a trainee can expect to be thrown.

Reiteration and Re-presentation of Spatial Traditions

The physical spatiality of a dojo or studio represents an amalgamation of current conditions and historical influences that inform design decisions. Spatial fixity allows for more spatialized expressions of values and traditions; yet historically and currently martial arts participants have not always enjoyed access to permanent space. When they do have access, the reiteration of spatial traditions may not be a perfect reflection of historical norms. In the case of university-based clubs or schools with organizational continuity but no permanent space, practitioners will "bring space under control" through their actions and behaviors. Capoeira represents the most extreme challenge to the necessity of space: a *roda* can happen anywhere today because the people who founded the artform, Brazilian slaves hiding their art under the façade of dance, were wholly dispossessed from the ownership of space.

The *shoumen* and its accompanying *kamidana* are distinctly Shinto architectural elements. This spiritual home within a home for *kami*, Shinto gods, while less common in homes

today, has been a long-standing Japanese architectural norm (Roemer 2012)[106]. Similarly, in a dojo, a *kamidana* provides an absolute and uninterrupted locale for spiritual presences to rest in the space – a revered place of their own. It serves as a spatial manifestation of extant and past relationships to the training space. Aaron, a Japanese Jiu-Jitsu instructor from the San Francisco East Bay Area, noted on the *shoumen*:

> "My teachers came from a very traditional Japanese background where the idea is really like, the idea of you as an individual doesn't matter that much. It's the school as a whole that matters, you know. And one of the things at the end of each class is we bow to the shoumen, to the altar. And traditionally in Japan the shoumen holds the collective spirit of all the people who are practicing at the school, all the people who have practiced there, all the people who will practice there. And the idea is to remind the teachers that compared to that, we are only a piece of that, we are a link in that chain. We are not that, you know. And so, it is really the collective effort that makes it. It's really the community that makes it."

When training, a practitioner gestures in reverence to the past, present, and future. Though the practice of martial arts is a deeply embodied experience, one maintains ties to the ephemeral – the departed and those yet to come.

The ability to host a *shoumen* is one of the benefits of spatial fixity in a training space. The *kamidana*, nested within, allows an opportunity for the material expression of traditions atypically found in the United States. Three of the women-led schools I visited featured statuary of Kuan Yin[107], a feminine buddha representing mercy. Several other sites also featured Buddhist idols or gemstones. In these cases, the Shinto language of *kamidana* was used to describe a resting place for Buddhist or ancestral statuary. It is a curious collision in which the language of

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[106] *Butsudan*, Buddhist ancestor altars, are estimated to be in 59-78% of homes (Kawano 2005, 32). *Kamidana* are in just under 50% of homes (Ishii 2004, 21–32, 36). Both cited in Roemer (2012).

[107] Sometimes spelled Quan Yin, Guanyin - or Kannon in Japanese.

kamidana is made visible through interactions with traditional dojo architectural elements and merges with Buddhism's broader international reach.

Traditional Shinto altars may feature *shintai*, small objects such as mirrors or precious stones to house specific *Kami*. *Butsudan*, Buddhist altars, feature their own suite of ritual objects, or *Butsugu.* Images of beloved others may also be housed in the *Butsudan*. US trainees may not give this a second thought, but culturally it represents a melding of structural elements that collide with spiritual practices that are more visible on this side of the Atlantic. Buddhism, though not a primary religion in the US, does feature extensively as part of many individuals' routine spiritual practice and is often acknowledged as integral to the culture of some leisure spaces (Wuthnow and Cadge 2004; Choe 2013). It is also worth noting that Buddhism and Shintoism do coexist in Japan (Roemer 2012), though it is unclear to what extent this coexistence has influenced messaging about the distinctness of *Butsudan* versus *Kamidana*, or in what ways outsiders may (mis)interpret this fluid simultaneity.

A review of my interviews and further investigation of dojos that write at length on their websites about the spirituality of their own schools[108] has revealed broad agreement about the necessity of *Kamidana* or some variation of a physical structure that serves as a spiritual home. Geoff Salmon, kyoshi 7th Dan in Kendo, notes on his website that even though there is an "ideal" dojo layout, many spaces present and historic have not met these standards. At times, seemingly integral elements are missing. I gather from his many decades of training throughout the United Kingdom and Japan that in the 21st Century, traditional nomenclature has been lost in translation

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[108] Donjutsu Do dojo and Seirin dojo offer great detail. Donjutsu Do dojo even sells handcrafted *kamidana* on its website.

or treated as redundant. The vocabulary I introduce in this work represents roughly a quarter of total terms for describing and naming the spiritual wing of the training hall[109].

In cases of spatial unfixity, such as in many university-based martial arts programs, practitioners simulate space through their behavioral norms, modes of dress, and arrangement of bodies during entry rituals. Capoeira represents the logical extreme of managing spatial unfixity. Capoeira originated as a social gathering practice among enslaved Brazilians who owned no property and whose leisure time was limited to one day per week. Slaves had no space or place of their own, so they created it with their bodies. The *roda*, the *Ring of Liberation* (Lewis 1992), is its own spatial practice. The "container" of the *roda* does not need a physical building and never had a building to begin with. The bodies of the capoeiristas and accompanying *bateria* served as the material and social boundary, a radical departure away from abusive labor into a moment of leisure. Today's capoeiristas will hold *rodas* anywhere: campus green spaces, playfields at city parks, or plazas in urban neighborhoods.

The Brazilian practitioners who share and reproduce a Capoeira practice that utilizes language, instrumentation, and the physical practice itself are creating ethnoscapes in real time, much like Hoyez's yogis from decades past. Many in leadership have been training in Capoeira since childhood and use this practice to connect with other Brazilians who have migrated to other countries. What is so striking about Capoeira in particular is that the space of the *roda* is necessarily transient. The *roda's* origins in resistance to violent, racialized dispossession is today

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[109] I found the most consistent vocabulary samples from sources discussing spatial spiritual traditions in Japanese homes. Traditional dojos follow similar architectural norms.

re-presented in any open space. Impermanence is an adaptive feature: a *roda* is a complete ethnoscape without spatial fixity.

Corporeal and Spatial Etiquette

Etiquette serves as an essential element to martial arts training. While less traditional schools engage in variations of entry rituals, more traditional programs replicate entry rituals that have been standardized over generations and remain the same across geographic contexts. Behavioral interventions that separate the norms of the world outside the dojo decouple trainees from distractions and serve to bring full attention to the immediate happenings of the dojo. In reviewing this section's findings, I call attention to these aspects of martial arts training as embodied spatial practices. Through the repetition of these traditions that center on behavior, students and leadership collectively reinforce agreed upon norms. Martial artists may in some cases establish and maintain fixed spaces, and in other cases create ad hoc dojos in makeshift spaces. Regardless of the temporality of the space itself, practitioners actively create and recreate a place for training.

These entry rituals function as the beginning of a place-making process, in particular expressing a symbolic landscape (Finlay 2018) of what a dojo represents. Bodily conduct, uniforming, and language serve as cultural items that are taught and reiterated through repeated visits to the school. In their exploration of *home-making,* Mallett (2004) and Moore (Moore 2000)outline three processes of *place-making*: continuity, control, and separation. *Continuity* is often expressed through memory and repetition. *Control* is the proactive crafting of space (abstract) into place (interpretable). *Separation* describes a state of being detached from other modes of living yet still a site to be "returned to" (Moore 2000, 200; 2004, 208). Taken together,

these three processes regard the creation of the home (place) as a production, a constellation of proactive decisions that distinguish it from other types of places.

These rituals of entry perform all three functions. Regarding continuity, rituals of entry (and exit) are repeated the same way every practice, regardless of where the training session occurs. This repetition habituates an understanding of how practitioners ought to behave in the space and their hierarchical position in the social order. Control manifests as traditions of antiquity that are brought to life using language, body movement (sitting in seiza, and bowing[110], for example), and *corporeal inscription* through the replacement of everyday clothing with customary uniforms. In the case of separation, practitioners follow ancient, prescribed instructions and temporarily surrender their conventional laboring and their familial and academic identities in exchange for becoming a martial arts student.

Collectively, these encounters function as a modality of *experiential learning* that shapes the *spatial narratives* that students, especially new students, have within and about a space. Leisure time offers potent opportunities for experiential learning. As a paradigm, experiential learning highlights educational opportunities outside of academic settings and are contexts that provide a broader variety of pedagogical practices (Elwood 2004). These educational opportunities can impart information of profound personal and political importance (Giroux 1997)). A well-established dojo or studio offers opportunities to experience material and behavioral cultural items that are unique to the style and its region of origin. Leaders and

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[110] Sitting in seiza and bowing are still everyday practices in Japan.

experienced trainees within the dojo impart this knowledge through verbal and bodily practice, deploying their own expertise and a well-crafted space as pedagogical tools.

Spatial narratives are assumptions or meanings ascribed to a specific place that may or may not be based on a person's lived experience. External informational resources may also influence the development of spatial narratives. No two dojos are exactly the same, and some "dojos" are not even dojos at all: on tournament day, the dojo may be a basketball court; during the week, a martial arts club may assemble in a generalized movement exercise room that hosted a Zumba class the previous hour and will host a yoga class immediately after. Through the experiential learning of practicing martial arts, students learn to re-envision a run down, rubberized room as their dojo. They still bow to the room and to each other. They practice their language skills together. The narrative retelling of a space's purpose reshapes the meaning of place, even if it is only on a temporary basis.

Corporeal Transition into the Training Space

Though this aspect of transition tends to be brief, it is nonetheless an important aspect of separating oneself from the outside world. In spaces that lack direct entry to a specified training area, practitioners will immediately bow after entering the front door and remove their shoes. If there is no shoe rack or designated floor space, the practitioner will carry shoes across the training floor and to the appropriate area – usually a changing room. Notably, it is profoundly disrespectful to wear outside shoes on a training floor. Maintaining a hygienic training floor is of practical importance for the health and safety of trainees, but the practice of shoe removal has its roots in embedded historical practices that are still strictly observed in Japan, China, and South Korea.

To be clear, many cultures around the world observe strict norms with regards to shoe removal. Paying particular attention to Japan, prior to a century ago most floors in houses and temples were made of tatami. Tatami floors are expensive to produce and difficult to maintain even in the present day. Furthermore, they stain easily and shred under treaded shoes. Mitigation of wear and tear was managed both through the architectural design of most buildings, as well as through behavioral interventions[111]. Most homes were built with a *genkan*, a lowered portion of the entry room accessible immediately after entering the front door. Here, shoes can be removed, and any debris tracked inside the door will be less likely to reach the raised area of the broader room. Where space is available, the genkan may be quite large, with enough space for multiple household members to keep multiple pairs of shoes on the floor next to the front door.

The Aikido studio Site 7 and my own Kajukenbo kwoon Site 1 embrace a sort of intermediate genkan arrangement. Neither site was purpose-built to include a genkan[112, 113], but the founders nonetheless grafted known cultural norms onto the usage of built space based on design similarities between each. At both sites, the main training space sits atop a raised floor roughly six inches taller than the entryway. The anti-debris design of both buildings presents a narrow "genkan" at the front door, just large enough for a single adult to stand and turn around to close the door. At the Kajukenbo school, two short benches were installed on either side of the makeshift "genkan," providing a comfortable place to sit while removing shoes. It is a practical

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[111] see www.tatami.us for more on tatami maintenance.

[112] The Aikido studio was once a small film theater. The "upstairs" storage area accessible from the kitchen was a loft that used to house a film projector. The larger building was constructed in 1909 and is a mixed-used complex with storefronts on the bottom floor and apartments above.

[113] The Kajukenbo school began as a meat market. Constructed ca. 1900, it is one of the last samples of commercial vernacular architecture in the city. It was later a grocer. A historical photo of the meat market hangs alongside a collection of training pictures in the smaller training room.

coincidence, but here again the space itself helps to guide the behavior of individuals entering and exiting the space.

The next phase of separation involves the replacement of street clothes with a uniform. Most schools require some form of non-streetwear as a means of honoring tradition and providing comfort and safety for training partners. Jewelry items of any kind, including wedding bands[114], are to be removed. The least traditional of the schools had no strict uniform code but still require soft athletic clothing. Spaghetti strap tank tops are discouraged due to a lack of durability while simulating grabs and wrestling. Leggings are also discouraged, as they limit the ways a practitioner can safely grab and manipulate their training partner's body. Even in schools with lenient uniform codes, trainees are nonetheless accountable for preparing their own bodies to be safer to touch for their training partners as well as for their own safety. Simplistic as it is, this dimension of responsible action directly involves practitioners of all experience levels in the execution of healthful training.

A more detailed discussion of language around uniforming is forthcoming, but here I will briefly mention the basics of functional attire. In more traditional schools, practitioners will typically wear a true uniform. In Japanese martial arts, the simplest uniform is a white jacket and pants set called a *gi*. The jacket is completely open in the front and is tied flush to the torso using only a rank belt. Practitioners will often wear t-shirts underneath the gi top. The material thickness of the gi varies between arts: Judogi and Jiu-Jitsugi are thick and heavy to withstand grabbing and throwing, whereas Karategi are lighter and breathable, a structure more practical

[114] This is a practice that is both for the safety of the training partner and the wearer of the band. Rings can cut or bruise partners. Rings made of softer metals can bend and constrict fingers if squashed beneath a partner's weight or wrapped in clothing.

for a striking art. The Korean Tae Kwon Do variant of the gi is called a *dobok*. The top pulls over the head similarly to how one dons a hoodie.

Rank belts serve the practical functions of holding the gi top together and also conveying to other participants the experience level of the wearer. Many, but not all, martial arts also have a belt ranking system. As a student progresses, they will attain a belt with a new color. Wearing the belt lets practice partners immediately know the rank and experience level of their training partner and therefore what appropriate expectations are when interacting with them. A belt may also signify how to address someone: Sensei/Sifu, Mr. or Ms., or even Professor or Grandmaster. Rank belts convey usable cultural information through which trainees can make basic assumptions about how to address or touch another practitioner.

The shedding of daytime clothes and donning of a uniform for training hearkens discussions from anthropologists on *corporeal inscription.* In their analyses of scarification and tattooing customs, authors such as (Van Gennep and Kertzer 2019 (orig. 1909); Lévi-Strauss 1993) examine the skin (of the body) as a surface for inscription, a receptacle for writing culturally relevant discourses. O'Hanlon (1992, 602) further argues that ceremonial wigs can serve as a "second skin." He notes how the shoulder-length wigs of the Wahgi people of Papua New Guinea ceremonially acknowledges the "constitutive power of maternal kin" (Schildkrout 2004, 322)[115]. When placed upon the body, maternal kin and ancestors become active symbolic members of a ceremony that is otherwise oriented towards the celebration of patrilineage. The "second skin" functions as a means of bringing memories into the present.

[115] Paraphrasing O'hanlon (1992).

When martial arts practitioners remove their daytime clothes, they "shed" their "second skin" upon which the conventional daytime world of labor and family is ascribed. First, the steel-toed boots and sneakers are left at the front door. Next, the dress or jeans are stripped away, as is a wedding band or a favorite set of earrings. Practitioners replace the old second skin with a new second skin, a uniform with origins in hundreds of years of history in training, warfare, and struggle, a reality quite distant from the present day but reiterated through corporeal traditions, nonetheless. Before any other activity begins, the symbolism of the body is first transformed.

Rituals of Entry and Mental Transition

Such a relationship to space brings me to reflect on the two contexts in which I participated in Kendo. Both settings were in academic institutions with impermanent spaces, yet the ritual of entry was exactly the same in Blacksburg, VA as it was in Seattle, WA. At the hour, we would be called to order, lining up by rank in one or two lines (depending on class size and room dimensions) opposite from the teacher. The teacher[116] will then announce "Seiza!" *Seiza* is a formalized way of sitting in which a person sits atop their lower legs, with their feet sticking backward beneath the posterior. Knees are spaced a fist's width apart. Hands are then placed in a position called *Hokkaijoin*[117]. "Imagine you are holding a turtle. Be gentle. Now slip your left fingers into your right fingers and flip your palms up[118]," the assistant instructor "Genene" told us beginners on the first day. From Seiza, the head instructor would announce "Mokuso(oooo)!"

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[116] At the University of Washington, it was very common for the highest-ranking student to lead meditation and entry rituals rather than the head instructor.

[117] The Virginia Tech program was less strict about Hokkaijoin, though when Genene was teaching, her technique was exacting. Alternatively, instructors allowed for flat palms to be rested atop the thighs. Most important was that we were being intentional about what we were doing with our hands.

[118] This was such a peculiar but accurate instruction that I remember it clearly and continue to use it when describing Seiza to trainees.

extending the call for as long as the individual saw fit to initiate a period of meditation – eyes downcast but not closed. The term "Moku" (still or silent) "So" (thoughts or thinking) functioned as a strict call to settle the thoughts with which we entered the space and usher ourselves into this new context (Hyams 1979). After a period of silent meditation, the instructor would announce "Yame!" (stop).

Following meditation, the instructor would then announce "Shoumen Ni!" ("towards the shoumen") and we would pivot to our left, pointing our knees towards the corner of the room to the right of the instructor, and then bow. The next instruction: "Sensei Ni!" ("towards the teacher"). We would then pivot back to knees pointing towards the instructor and bow, saying "Onegaishimasu," literally "do me this favor" or more simply "please." This indicates that we are attentive and welcoming to any teachings that the instructor has to offer. Noteworthy is that we did not shout "Onegaishimasu," the way that the instructor shouted "Seiza!" rather we spoke with an inviting temperament. This sequence of events or some close variation is a standard practice in Kendo schools and in Japanese martial arts broadly.

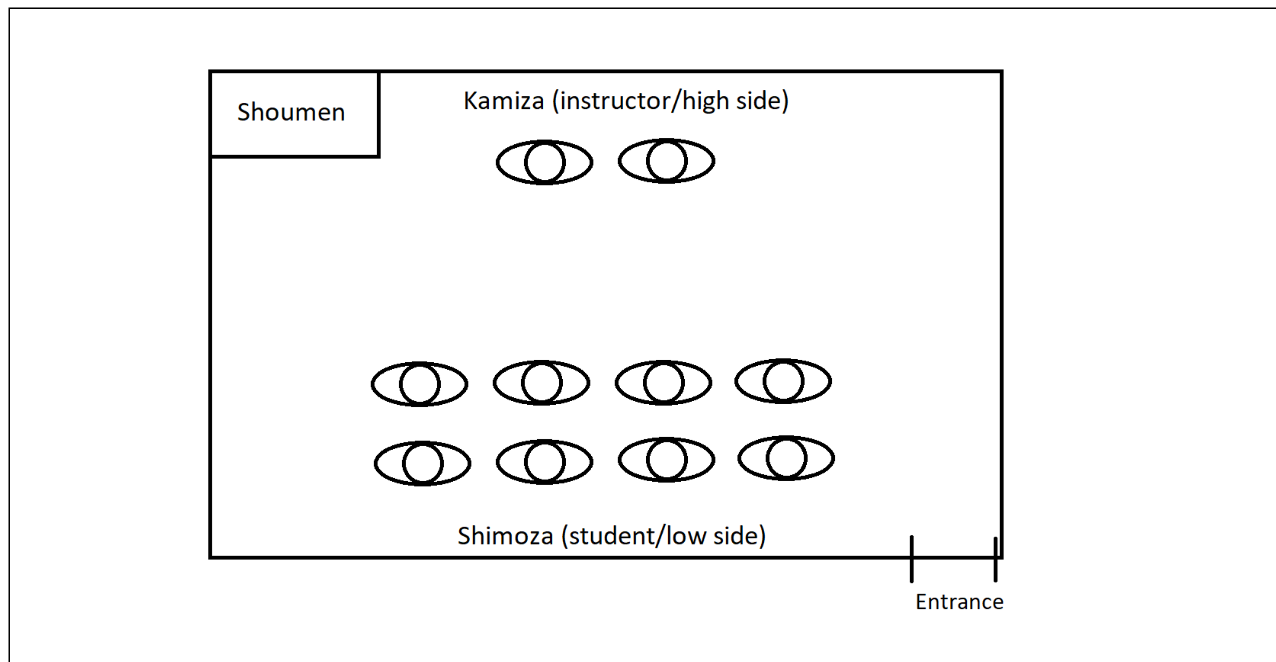

Fig 4: Imagined geographic layout of a kendo dojo. Though at the university Kendo club we never trained in a traditional dojo, we simulated saluting into a room arranged in this way. This corner positioning perhaps closer to how Tokeshi (2003, 74) described these features in relation to one another.

Some variation of bowing into the space and acknowledging the teacher is the standard for most traditional martial arts. All students facing the teacher is the general standard, however in some schools and contemporary martial arts the students and teacher(s) form a large circle. This is the norm at my Kajukenbo school and for other schools that share our lineage. The head instructor usually positions herself with her back to the front door. Students do not sort themselves by rank. This formation is to demonstrate that while trainees are of varying ranks and experience levels, all are equally responsible for our roles as training partners and have something important to offer the school.

The transition ritual begins with the head instructor for the evening calling us to “Set,” standing upright with an alert posture and a closed right fist placed knuckle-side into a sturdy, open left palm. At this stage, our belts are folded in half and draped over our shoulders. When summoned to salute, students and the instructor raise their joined hands to chest level, then

extend the hands outward, rotating from one side of the circle to the other, and then back. At our sibling schools or if we have a special guest instructor, the second-highest ranking student will command the class to salute the head instructor for the day. This was especially helpful in contexts where multiple black belts are present, or if the head instructor for the day is a green or brown belt leading a class with higher ranking students – especially black belts – present. Again, rank status and therefore expectation is inscribed upon the body, however behavioral interventions further inform the hierarchy of the day. The entry ritual continues with a lengthy series of actions including belt-tying, which leads into meditation, and finally opening instructions.

Kajukenbo[119] has its origins as a mixed martial art (not to be confused with contemporary MMA) that was developed in Hawaii immediately after World War II. While the founders, all military veterans, did practice Japanese martial arts such as Jiu-Jitsu, Karate, and Judo, many practitioners of the art did not retain the strict traditional Japanese transition rituals. Nonetheless, the core goal of exiting the world of home and labor stressors and entering the training space is retained. In the case of the Kendo programs, the exercise of these rituals honors traditions dating back hundreds of years to contexts entirely foreign to most of us as US Americans. A basketball court or a rubberized room that was a circuit training space fifteen minutes ago is no dojo in a traditional sense. Here bodily practices are every bit as much spatial practices that bring space into order with the values of the art – even though the space itself may lack a structural discourse of "dojo-ness" a behavioral discourse informs the use of the space. Through their movements,

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[119] Kajukenbo is an amalgamation of five martial arts: Karate (Ka), Judo and Jiu-Jitsu (Ju), Chinese Kempo (Ken), and Chinese Boxing (Bo).

language shifts, and bodily changes, trainees and instructors transform the space into a dojo. Practitioners emulate the existence of a shoumen, bringing acknowledgement of past practitioners and their spiritual values into a future. Decades beyond and thousands of miles away, we compress space and time to unite a legible but ineffable past with a future unimaginable to the practitioners that created these arts.

So vigorous is this collective spatial narrative that more experienced students will correct new students who commit etiquette violations. Students help each other properly tie on uniforms, belts, and armor. They teach each other how to correctly say the head instructor and guest instructors' names. They help each other with basic etiquette in real time. "Your friends aren't going to let you screw up. You know, they're going to go, 'Psst! Say 'Chumbi!'" (Sheila). Gaffes such as stepping over a sword or walking too close to the training space with shoes on are immediately corrected. (Better from a peer than the teacher!) All of these behavioral norms are replicated regardless of the spatial fixity of the dojo. Outsider's understandings or one's own prior assumptions about the space are no longer relevant. This is a dojo, even if it is an ephemeral one.

A Sonic Space of Linguistic Norms

As is readily apparent from previous sections, the inclusion of Japanese language is integral to the ritual practices at many schools. This is indeed true for many other arts to varying degrees. In my research, this was also highly present in Taijiquan and Qigong (Mandarin and/or Cantonese) and Capoeira (Brazilian Portuguese). In all these contexts, developing a foreign language vocabulary is simply the expectation, with some practitioners even committing to full-time language acquisition. For those who do not adopt full-time language learning, the

terminology used in these spaces nonetheless serves more immediately practical uses. Non-English terminology is used for describing names of techniques, rank, or body parts.

The immediate subsection will describe the use of foreign languages in the naming of training equipment, ranks, honorifics, and techniques. The topic of body parts and language will be addressed fully in Chapter 6. Acculturation through language acquisition is an essential element of many arts. Long-term students will gain a rudimentary foreign language education as part of their serious leisure practice. Although this is perhaps not the first thing to come to mind, the durable benefit of learning a new language is among the specialized skills that serious leisurists can develop in their pursuit of mastery.

Basic language acquisition typically occurs in the context of training. Early vocabulary in uniform-wearing schools centers on the extensive language for describing traditional clothing. The vocabulary and style of dress can vary greatly between arts. The term *gi* (着) broadly refers to uniforms in Japanese-origin arts, though it must be noted that the word *gi* on its own is ungrammatical in Japanese, as it is always compounded with another word (i.e., Kimono 着物). The singular use of *gi* is arguably a Western colloquialism, however I am unable to verify at which point in time *gi* became a standalone term. *Keikogi* and *dougi*[120, 121] both describe Japanese training uniforms, though the characters used to write these terms demonstrate some differences. *Keiko* (稽古: practice) *gi* (着: clothes) refers to “practice uniform.” *Do* (道: way, as mentioned above) *gi* (着) refers a set of practices, path, or rules for conducting oneself. From this

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[120] Alternatively, “Dōgi” or “Dogi.” When written in Romaji (Romanization of Japanese) “ou” replicates the “Long O” script.

[121] Gis have distinct names depending on the art in question: Judogi for Judo, Karategi or Dogi for Karate, or Kendogi for Kendo. There are also variations in weight, length, and shape of gis depending on the art.

interpretation, donning these clothes is emblematic of conducting a personal journey. These uniforms function as a form of corporeal inscription. Wearing a *keikogi* implies an intention towards practice: trainees remove the professional symbolism of work clothes after a long day on campus or at work and mark themselves as *Kendouka* (Kendo practitioners).

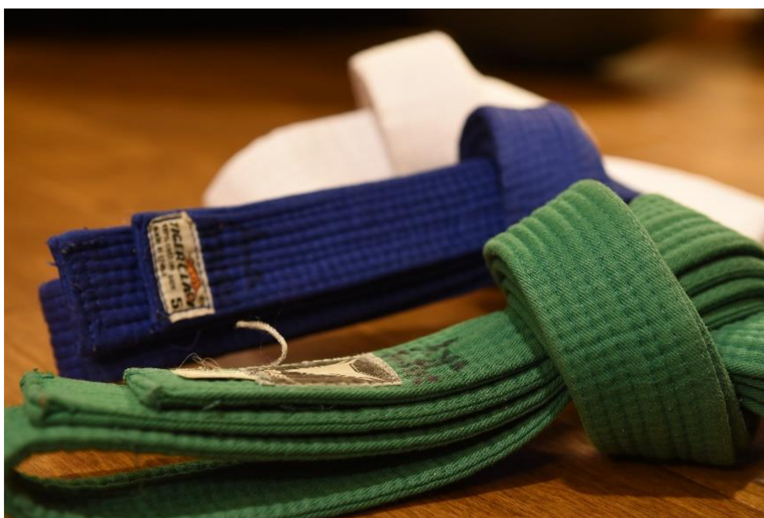

Fig 5: Rank belts (*obi*) commonly found in Japanese and Korean martial arts.

Keikogi in the context of Karate and *dobok* (Korean: Tae Kwon Do) describe the long, straight pants and open jacket that are held together by a belt, the *obi* (Japanese) or ti (Korean, pronounced "tea"). Karate *keikogi* and Tae Kwon Do *dobok* are by contrast thinner and lighter than *gis* used in Judo and Jiu-Jitsu. In general, among interviewees, *keikogi* is the most common language used to describe the more elaborate uniforms used in Aikido, Kendo, and other traditional Japanese weapon arts, such as Iaido (sword drawing) and Kyudo (archery)[122]. The *keikogi* features an extra-long, very thick jacket top that ties at the side, as many of these arts do

[122] Upon reading about uniforming on other schools' websites, this is likely a regional and/or sampling phenomenon and not a reflection of global or even national parlance norms.

not feature belts as a routine part of uniforming. The long bottom of the jacket is then tucked inside and wrapped with the lengthy belt of the distinctive *hakama* "pants." The *hakama* features two distinct legs, though its outward appearance is that of a long and graceful pleated skirt.

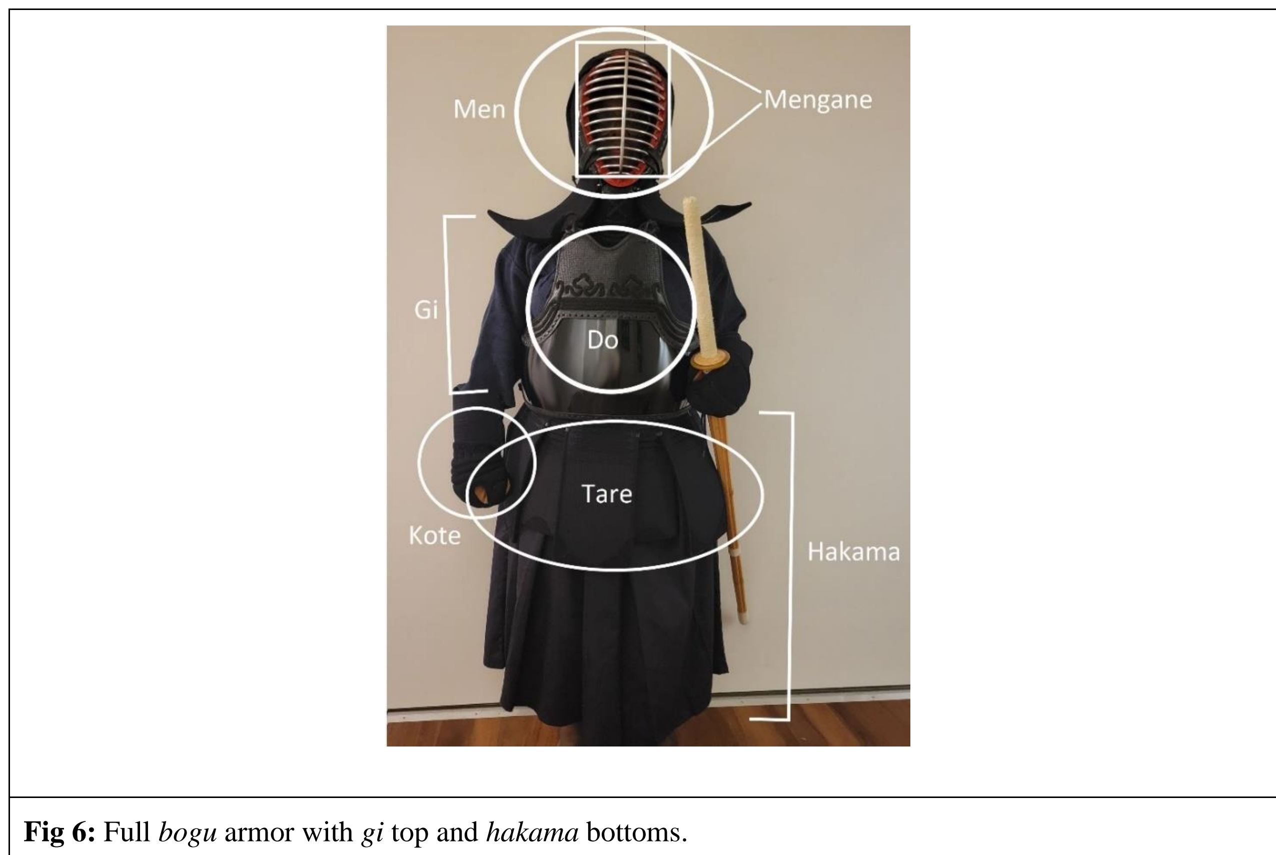

Fig 6: Full *bogu* armor with *gi* top and *hakama* bottoms.

The vocabulary for training equipment is even more extensive in the case of Kendo. The primary practice swords, or *shinai* (竹: bamboo, 刀: sword), are simulated katanas made from long slats of bamboo bound together with leather. The *kendogu*[123] (剣道: Kendo, 具: armor) features four pieces, the *men* (helmet), *do* (breastplate), *kote* (padded gloves), and *tare*, a three-paneled fabric tasset that shields the groin and upper thighs. These few items barely scratch the surface of equipment vocabulary in this armored sport-art – each element of the armor has names

[123] Sometimes simply referred to as *bogu* (防具, defense armor).

for its sub-parts. By the end of the first week, a new trainee may have learned a dozen or more Japanese language terms for describing their uniforms and equipment, never mind techniques for moving the feet, striking, and targets.

“Does my hakama have any wrinkles?”

A site-specific multilingualism blossoms in these contexts. Where necessary, English is provincialized in favor of naming objects and concepts using the known vocabularies of peoples past and/or distant. This aspect of “[acculturation] takes shape at the local level, where small groups form cultures reflecting larger society yet distinctly their own (Guzman 2022, 365)[124].” “Broader society” includes both the influences of the vast and prominent cultures that practitioners reiterate in new places, as well as the allowances and limitations that their host culture offers. In this idiosyncratic collision of broad influences, individual financial factors, and everything in between, the individuals in each school create a milieu that is uniquely theirs, yet reflexive of broader influences.

Another of the immediate and practical applications of language learning is in the naming of techniques. Perhaps most familiar in the English combat sporting lexicon, boxers distinguish jabs, hooks, crosses, etc., and no matter where in the world they train, the name and fundamentals of executing the technique will be the same. In the case of Kajukenbo, the founding members were all English language speakers training in multiethnic, multilingual Honolulu, Hawai’i. While English is the standard, there is no strict adherence to using only English terminology to name techniques. Terminology for the same technique may differ

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[124] Guzman (2022) cites Bonilla-Silva (2015) on racialization. “Acculturation” replaces “Racialization” in my sentence.

between subdivisions of Kajukenbo styles, or even between sibling schools[125], and furthermore vocabulary may be adapted to match the local common language.

In contrast, practitioners training in Kendo or Aikido, for example, will learn the Japanese[126] language terms for techniques. Practitioners of Taijiquan or Qigong will learn Mandarin and/or Cantonese. capoeiristas will learn Brazilian Portuguese. An example can be seen in two similar kick techniques: in Capoeira, "meia-lua de frete" (front half-moon) is a straight-legged kick with which the practitioner begins with the foot outside of the hip and raises the foot as it moves inwards towards the standing foot in an arcing (half-moon) motion. In Kajukenbo, the same technique is named "inside crescent kick." The movement metaphor of imitating lunar shapes is a welcome mnemonic device in a seemingly endless lexicon of techniques.

Using the correct language of origin terminology is regarded as a sign of respect for the history of each style and signifies that the practitioner takes all aspects of their training seriously. While much attention is paid to the athletic physical toil of learning a martial art, the adoption of a new language also requires substantial commitment. In a discipline such as Capoeira, failing to learn Brazilian Portuguese can stifle a training career[127]. I can attest that learning to speak Brazilian Portuguese has been an equal challenge to learning a new movement training, each an

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[125] My own school refers to a specific technique as a "roundhouse kick," whereas a sibling school refers to the same technique as a "side snap kick." Side snap kick at my school is a completely different technique.
[126] *Waza* is the general term for "technique" or "method" in Japanese styles.
[127] A long-time capoeirista I became acquainted with at a P-O event in June of 2019 noted a sense of alienation he felt due to his inability to retain Brazilian Portuguese beyond naming techniques. Despite training for many years, he struggled to hold basic conversation.

embodied practice where old knowledges and habits can be assets in some cases and hurdles in others.

Linguistic norms extend to non-combat contexts as well. Instructors will often adopt traditional honorifics to indicate their rank. Perhaps most familiar is the Japanese term *Sensei* or "teacher." At my own Kajukenbo[128] school and sibling lineages, *Sifu* is a traditional Chinese title given to the head instructor. *Si Gung* indicates the *Sifu*'s teacher. In multigenerational settings where *Sifu* and *Si Gung* are present, the *Sifu*'s students will address *Si Gung* (i.e., Si Gung Tamara) with the appropriate honorific, while the *Sifu* may refer to their own teacher as *Sifu*, though will sometimes use *Si Gung* to verbally reinforce the hierarchical difference among lower ranking students. There is much attention paid to appropriate titles in this idiocultural hierarchy of authority.

A sibling school in San Fransisco Eastbay, CA refers to all black belts as *Sifu*, both as a marker of respect and responsibility towards the kwoon. Rank titles may also occur based on a practitioner's ascendency in the Kajukenbo Association of America (KAA). After attaining the 6th degree of black belt, the recipient becomes *Si Gung* in all training settings regardless of their instructional or lineage relationship with others; 8th degree is Professor; 10th degree is *Sijo* or Grandmaster. Thus, titles may be specific to the school, but also may reflect the power structure of a greater umbrella organization. Here again, this particular Eastbay kwoon conveys its high regard for leadership through its own acculturated usage of titles, yet all schools under the KAA umbrella must abide by the organization's hierarchical norms.

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[128] The founding five members of Kajukenbo were a multiethnic group from Oahu, Hawaii. At the time of publication, I have been unable to verify why the founding members used Chinese-influenced honorifics. There also appears to be Tagalog influences in higher titles, however this is beyond my language ability to interpret.

Kendo utilizes a naming system with three divisions, *Kyu*, *Dan*, and *Shogo*. Unlike many other modern martial arts, Kendo traditionally does not utilize belts. Rather, a rank may be printed on the *tare*, but is otherwise gleaned through conversation, some form of prior announcement or introduction, or ascertained from where the individual sits next to the school leader during meditation rituals. There are six stages of *Kyu*, from *Rokkyu* (6th *Kyu*), the most junior, to *Ikkyu* (1st *Kyu*), the most senior. For *Dan* ranks, the numeration is reversed, with *Idan* (1st *Dan*) being the most junior and *Hachi-dan* (10th *Dan*) being the most senior. Noteworthy is that the numeration of *Dan* is based on years of practice. Traditionally there is no 8th or 9th Dan, rather the rank skips from *Nanadan* (7th *Dan*) to *Hachi-dan*. *Hachi-dan* is only given after ten years of practice following the acquisition of *Nanadan* and being aged 46 or older, and *Nanadan* only after six years of practice following ascendency to *Rokudan*. A lifetime of practice is therefore baked into the system of assigning rank, a system that explicitly names the value of age in its credentialing norms.

Capoeira engages a belt ranking system, though with a major difference. (The Capoeira Angola lineage does not use belt rankings, while Capoeira Regional and Contemporânea do.) Rather than the familiar flat textile belts of Japanese and Korean arts, capoeiristas are given a *cordão* to wrap around the waist, a woven rope similar to that of an academic graduation cable. Practitioners ascend through five titles: *Monitor*, *Instrutor*, *Professor*, *Mestrando*, and *Mestre*. Again, these titles are all in Brazilian Portuguese. For trainees who have been practicing for

many years, a *nom de guerre* may also be given, and this title often becomes a nickname that an individual is best known under, rather than their given name[129].

Reyna reflected on the elementary importance of basic language acquisition, especially among new trainees. She notes, "I don't want… people coming in and just learning how to kick and punch and just generically calling it karate. Right? Especially if they don't know what karate is." For Reyna, teaching language and heritage is an essential part of her curriculum. Teaching history and culture as part of the curriculum works against the tendency towards triviality that characterizes so much leisure (Hemingway 1991). When these histories become an embodied and verbalized discipline, these idiocultures take on characteristics of ethnoscapes (Hoyez 2007). Though the overwhelming majority of trainees are not of the ethnic background of the martial art they are practicing, they are nonetheless disciplined to replicate some aspects of the cultures that birthed their martial arts styles.

In the scheme of Hoyez's (2007) ethnoscapes (and Appadurai's (1996) identity-scapes), today's practitioners sit at a temporal stage and ethnic positionality that differs from Hoyez and Appadurai's research subjects. Hoyez addresses the efforts of ethnic Hindis and Indian-trained yogis to export not just the movement practice of yoga, but also the cultural and spiritual reverences of place in these practices via their formal training and lived experience. Studio by studio, each yoga founder presented both their artform and a vision for what in their origins ought to be revered alongside the practice itself. The present context is a peculiar moment for both yoga practitioners and martial artists in that individuals who are not of the culture of origin

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[129] During a 2019 visit, Mestre "Cobra" Mansa, a revered leader in Capoeira Angola, was simply addressed as Mestre Cobra. I did not learn his surname until I sought more information online.

are often the ones generating idiocultures that "self-generate" (Guzman 2022, 368) a "new" hyper-localized iteration of another culture "out of place" in a global sense, yet very much embedded, distinct, and self-sustaining in its own particular locale.

"Olivia" (Respondent 12) reflected on the necessity of being thoughtful of one's position in relation to others and presented the term "cultural humility." "It really just means knowing that your culture isn't the only one, and your thoughts aren't the only ones, and that your ideas aren't the only ones. And asking other people, inviting other people to share who they are and where they come from." Trainees are to some extent opening themselves to participate in ways of thinking and being that are outside of the expected norms of the dominant culture. They replicate elements of etiquette, uniforming, and language as a means of continually embedding the past and distant into the present time and place. Olivia's mention of "who they are and where they come from" is apt. Martial arts practice comes from an extant people and place, as well as from a past that has shaped that place and its people.

Instrumentation in Capoeira and Linguistic Norms

Capoeira is unique in that it features myriad movement-based, non-combat components. As mentioned previously, playing instruments and singing are integral elements of a comprehensive training regimen[130]. All of these elements combine to create a complete Capoeira training experience. A Capoeira event is called a *roda* (ho-da), or "ring." Participants arrange themselves in a circle. At the apex of the circle is the *bateria* (battery, as in percussive rhythms), where all instrumentalists stand. The Capoeira players interact inside the *roda*. The two players next in line to enter the *roda* align themselves on either side of the *bateria*. When rotating out of

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[130] Additional resources on Capoeira music include Cantador (2020) and Brigham (Brigham 2006).

the *roda*, the players inside the *roda* will move to the base of the ring, and all will shift one space over in the circle as the players nearest the *bateria* enter next.

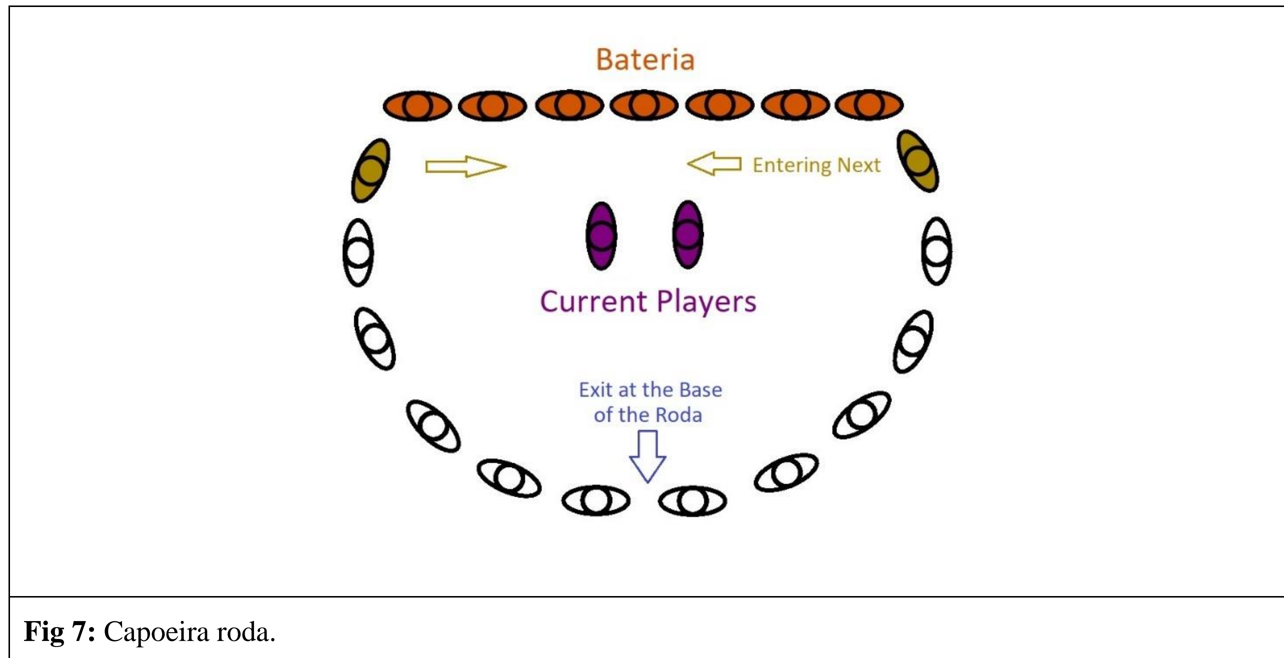

Fig 7: Capoeira roda.

The *bateria* features five main instruments: the *berimbau*, *atabaque* (large barrel drum), *pandeiro* (tambourine), *agogô* (two-tone handheld bell), and *reco-reco*. The lead instrument is the *berimbau*, a large bow equipped with a volleyball-sized gourd. The *reco-reco* (heco-heco) is a textured gourd that produces a trilling sound when scraped. A *roda* will typically have three *berimbaus* of differing tambours. A single *berimbau* is sufficient for practice sessions and is a necessity for playing Capoeira. Note pitches on the *berimbau* are adjusted using a *dobrao*, a large brass coin used to press against the metal bow string. The player taps the bow string with a *baqueta,* a footlong stick. The player of the *gunga* (lead *berimbau*) will also serve as the lead singer. A master capoeirista will learn dozens of songs and *toques* (rhythms) in their career. A beginner capoeirista will begin playing on easier instruments, such as the *pandeiro* or *agogô.* As the trainee develops rhythm, they will graduate to leading instruments, such as the *atabaque* and the *berimbau*.

The *gunga* player will set the tempo of the Capoeira game and choose the song for the *roda* participants to sing. The lyrics of these songs are very much a reflection of the era in which they were written. Many are calls for acts of slave rebellion[131]. Others recount historical events, such as the Paraguayan War[132]. The songs themselves are often structured as call and response, with the *gunga* player singing a line and all other Capoeira players, including non-instrumentalists, serving as a chorus. This simple beginners' song, "Bota Fogo na Cana" (Set Fire to the (sugar) Cane), is an example:

Lead: Bota fogo na canavial (set fire to the cane field)
Chorus: Bota fogo na canavial
Lead: Quero ver laborar (I want to see work![133])
Chorus: Bota fogo na canavial
Lead: Olha cana (look at the cane!)
Chorus: Bota fogo na canavial...

At an especially large event, onlookers who are not in the *roda* but are nonetheless familiar with the songs may also participate as part of the chorus. A *roda* is in itself a broad community activity that features many differing roles for participants even if for some reason an individual is incapable of performing the combative aspects of the martial art.

To train in Capoeira is to learn to play music, to learn Brazilian Portuguese, and to learn history, movements, and songs. None of these elements are commonly instructed outside of Brazilian Portuguese. *If* the instructor for the day can convey these ideas in English, one may be lucky enough to receive a rough translation, but it ultimately falls on the students to retain as

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[131] i.e., the song "Bota Fogo na Cana"
[132] "Paranauê, Paraná." Paraná refers to the river that separates Paraguay and Brazil.
[133] A tongue-in-cheek reference to the commands of slavers. Many Capoeira songs feature audacious lyrics.

many words as they can. Through repeated training sessions – and clumsy conversations with peers – one can develop a degree of listening competency that becomes highly valuable when instructors from around the world visit the school. It is at this juncture where mastery of Brazilian Portuguese can make or break a career.

We are fortunate in the Seattle area to have many native Brazilian Portuguese speakers in the region, a number of whom train in Capoeira and have deep connections to a robust global community of practitioners. The head instructor (*Mestre*) of the host school will either be a native speaker or highly skilled as a second language learner and will speak exclusively to the visiting instructor in Brazilian Portuguese. More often than not, the visiting instructor is either a native speaker or opts to speak Brazilian Portuguese because that is simply what one does when playing Capoeira. In this case, practitioners do not merely borrow terms and intersperse them within English sentences. Rather, English is wholly provincialized. For a practitioner to neglect their practice of Brazilian Portuguese is to intentionally limit their communication with Capoeira's forebears. In that regard, new or inexperienced practitioners have immense power in the quality of experience for a visiting practitioner. *Not understanding* can be just as limiting as *not listening* if by either channel of miscommunication information is not being absorbed.

During my exploration of Capoeira, I found the expression of ethnoscapes via idioculture to be especially potent. Standardized Capoeira is quite young compared to its East Asian counterparts. For example, whereas the Shaolin Monastery has been operational for 1,500 years and the knowledge transmitted across the Pacific in the 1800s, Capoeira came to the United

States in 1975[134] and was mentioned in Western texts for the first time in 1798[135]. Much of the Capoeira leadership in the United States and globally is Brazilian born, bringing with them the lived experience of having grown up in the region of origin. With regards to Capoeira, we are witnessing the development of Afro-Brazilian ethnoscapes in real time. Decades in the future when more Capoeira leaders are non-Brazilian, they will likely face the same challenges that today's East Asian martial arts leaders confront in the preservation of language and culture.

Capoeira represents a comprehensive approach to idiocultural development in a movement practice that is still unfolding in its reach. It is a movement practice that indeed involves combative gestures, which capoeiristas always refer to as playing. The language of "movement practice" also extends to learning to play a half-dozen instruments, singing dozens of songs, and learning to speak functional Brazilian Portuguese. This is a discipline of exhaustive expectations, but one that is distinct in its foregrounding of postcolonial histories. Embedded in the artform itself is the portrayal of oral histories to new practitioners. They learn the songs of enslaved people and the context of when these songs were written. That so much history is immediately preserved sets Capoeira apart as an art where learning more is not an elective, it is a necessity.

Chapter Conclusion

Something peculiar occurs where leisure and therapeutic landscapes collide. Leisure by its nature allows for interactions with activities and cultures that differ from the norms and

[134] Mestre Jelon Vieira (born in 1953) is credited with bringing Capoeira to New York in 1975 (Goncalves-Borrega 2017).
[135] Noteworthy is that this mention of Capoeira refers to the art as "the gravest of crimes" (Desch-Obi 2008, 163).

expectations of employment and home-centric social reproductive obligations. The therapeutic landscapes framework and its cognate literatures provide an intuitive means for understanding how idiocultures both influence and constitute spatialized phenomena. The martial arts are simply a medium with their own distinct expression of what is ultimately a common formative process.

This chapter has set the contextual stage for what is to come. The overview provides a broad and detailed description of the many considerations that go into the founding and shaping of a martial arts school. The first major subsection on securing space conveyed a narrative of hardship, but also of cooperation and trust that resulted in organizational stability for the persons involved. The second major subsection explored the materialities of training spaces as discursive sites. The third major subsection reviewed how the adoption of foreign languages influences participants' understandings of space, their actions, and themselves. All of these efforts are carried out in the interest of establishing the school and maintaining a practice that is as authentic as possible.

Outside of the collective efforts of the interviewees from subsection one, care can be challenging to locate in this chapter. Very little of what has been discussed was intrinsically caring, however these practices do set forth a directive of behavior that in some ways lays the foundation for the potential of care, so long as leadership also folds caring principles into the foundations of their work. At this stage in the development of many schools, so much energy has been directed towards securing a place to train and building out the physical structure to support safe practice. Once learners are present in space, they are taught a full range of movements and vocabularies for describing every aspect of their training, as well as a history and spirituality that may be different from their own. These are high demands placed on the leisurists, but within this

intersubjective relationship between person and activity – all the people, places, and actions the activity entails – room is created for norms to be challenged and new knowledges to be uncovered.

In my review of the leisure literature, I found an orientation that prioritizes the individual's consumption of leisure as the primary flow of inputs, and less attention paid to the leisure practice's demands on an individual beyond their time commitment. At this preliminary stage, founders ask their student-leisurists to take their leisure seriously, to regard this undertaking as something that can be personally enriching and fulfilling. The activity itself has something to offer, it is not just the individual's experience that makes it meaningful. This is expressed through the adornment of space and acculturation that saturates so many aspects of life that are taken for granted – language, modes of dress, hierarchies – all of which are changed to fit the new leisure milieu.

Through their own process of mastery, the students themselves become integral components to each other's learning. As a collectivized, embodied practice, martial arts training necessarily places individuals in close physical and social proximity to one another on a recurring basis. Things as simple as helping each other dress, correcting etiquette, or exchanging language learning resources are gestures towards a sense of caring about each other's learning needs. That is, they are attentive to what they and others must do in order to train safely and learn comprehensively. The ability to respond to those needs and for that response to be performed competently comes with increased experience, but the assumption is that participants will themselves grow into competent practitioners and eventually into leaders.

This is all part of an iterative process that replicates places and practices "out of place," the basis of which are the ethnoscapes that have been imported to new locations as a result of

migration. These “landscape[s] of [migrating] persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” (Appadurai 1996, 33) are reflected in the physical space and the activities themselves. There is an immediacy to Appadurai’s ethnoscapes that is especially resonant in contexts such as Capoeira training, where so many in leadership are also born of the same place where the art originated.

Where temporal and identity distance separates today’s practitioners from an artform’s place of origin, today’s trainees nonetheless replicate what we can in our imperfect repurposed meat markets[136] and laundromats[137] through the construction and presentation of artifacts, such as *kamidana*, or the acknowledgement of *shoumen*. While Guzman and Fine did not provide a spatial theory of idiocultures[138], the framework does provide a structure for understanding how cultural filters set parameters and expectations for interaction. Keating (2015) and Kearns and Collins (2000) have reiterated the message that space can be interpreted as a form and mediator of discursive expression, that is, *discursive space* (Gesler 1993, 74). Present day exercises in etiquette are behavioral interventions that delineate norms of spatial behavior, inclusion, and separation, down to the granularity of the order in which one sits during opening meditation.

The “secular” elements, such as training floor materials, represent a similar contemporizing of martial arts practice. The abandonment of tatami mats in favor of conventional gym padding yet re-presented in the configuration of traditional tatami floor paneling represents a peculiar collision of traditional sensibilities with present day practicalities.

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[136] Site 1 in the Puget Sound Area was originally constructed as a butcher and deli in the early 1900s.
[137] Site 10 in the Puget Sound Area was previously a dry cleaner and laundromat.
[138] Both luminaries hail from sociology.

These physical markers, be they spiritual or strictly functional, are an expression of a small group culture that harkens the norms of another place, made real through the eyes and efforts of today's practitioners. Just as we non-native speakers of Japanese, Chinese, or Brazilian Portuguese may struggle to replicate the spoken discourse of these cultures, so too do we struggle to replicate the spatial discourses of architectural and spiritual norms. It is diacritic, idiosyncratic, and imperfect, if not earnest.

As this dissertation continues, I admonish the reader to contemplate how contemporary practitioners engage with the fruits of others' migration. Which norms of these migrating groups have been integrated or assimilated into mainstream US culture? Which elements have remained distinct? In what capacities do contemporary practitioners succeed at replicating these norms and values, and where do they fall short? Do these idiocultures create conditions of inclusion or exclusion? Have contemporary practitioners created something new? Within these efforts there exists enthusiasm and apprehension, endeavor and imperfection, all in the process of preserving old understandings and generating new meanings in contemporary practitioners' lives.

CHAPTER 5: RENEGOTIATING THE BOUNDARIES OF THERAPEUTIC LANDSCAPES

To this point, the word "fighting" has occurred suspiciously few times in this document considering that this is a project about martial arts. Perhaps the notion of therapeutic landscapes seems ill-fitting given the risk involved in these activities, however I argue that safe and healthful martial arts training is only possible as a result of the careful efforts of participants. Such a proposition presents challenges to normative expectations of therapeutic landscapes and related theoretical constructs. The martial arts are peculiar in that so much of it is self-directed: self-discipline, self-mastery, self-defense. Practiced uncritically, it can play directly into liberal idealizations of individualistic achievement. Yet, without coaches, practice partners, and skilled medical and nutritional staff, world-class athletes would never see such success. In other, and perhaps familiar terms, individual achievement is attributable both to the individual's commitment, talent, etc. *and* to the people who support that individual in both mundane and extraordinary ways.

This project scales away from professional athletics, though some of the systems around coaching and practice mates are similar. Serious leisure practitioners of the martial artists commit to each other's wellbeing and development with no prospects of individual financial gain[139]. They work with each other on a recurring basis, often for years or even decades. These relationships lend themselves to discussions of care in everyday contexts. To reiterate Milligan and Wiles (2010) and Conradson (2003, 2008) the following chapter will "articulate care through

[139] In the field of professional martial arts, serious leisure practitioners will often serve as practice partners for prize fighters. If their professional practice mate wins prize money, the funds are used to pay coaches, fight camp specialists, and the gym business. The gym provides significantly more support for the development of professional fighters than it does leisure fighters.

the differing, and sometimes surprising social spaces that enable caring interactions" (Milligan and Wiles 2010, 738). The subject-worlds of martial arts and therapeutic landscapes need not be in contradiction to one another, rather they offer grounds for a fruitful conversation to describe the peculiar context in which a war-based leisure activity can serve as a conduit for bolstering health and wellbeing.

Integral to this discussion of therapeutic landscapes is the notion that these environments rely somewhat less on professionalization for the provision of care. Authors such as Andrews et al. (2005) and Laws (2009) push this interpretation further as they place emphasis on the value of horizontal relationships between laypersons with experiential understandings who serve as intermediaries for conveying health knowledge. Laws' (2009) respondents place weight on the active exclusion of professional psychiatric workers from their peer-led self-help group. The subjects of the study assembled in a "reputedly dangerous park (2009, 1827)," a conventionally untherapeutic place by mainstream standards. They appropriate their own space in the midst of challenging conditions and mainstream stigma. Individuals with experientially similar backgrounds of struggle in the everyday life and strife in the medical system act as agents for each other's wellbeing. This chapter will explore similar themes of experientially similar others supporting each other's personal development through martial arts and self-defense training.

Laws' respondents represent a sort of deviance from mainstream expectations of who ought to be provisioning care[140]. Where leisure and therapeutic landscapes collide, a conversation opens as to how unorthodox forms of leisure can serve as opportunities for

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[140] The final subsection of this chapter will push even further on the conventions of therapeutic landscapes, as practitioners engage in risky, potentially life-altering activities – again not conventionally therapeutic.

therapeutic or personally enriching experiences. Where practitioners create spaces to engage in activities that openly defy social norms of personal conduct, new understandings of what individuals consider to be beneficial to their overall wellbeing can emerge. The first subsection of this chapter addresses the basic needs of how to delineate space, both in ideal and suboptimal circumstances. It will furthermore address basic risk management practices, as well as how leadership and trainees create a culture of mitigated hazard given the inherent dangers of physical training.

The second subsection will review the importance of experiential learning in the process of transforming practitioners' relationships to public and private space, as well as with their own perceptions of safety and self-efficacy. The subsection will first address the motivations for practitioners to begin their training. The next subsection will overview how instructors and trainees aid in each-others' learning experiences. The final subsection will discuss the transformative impacts of these trainings. Of note ahead of this section is that it focuses on the execution of self-defense clinics more than on long-term martial arts training.

The final subsection will focus on the ways in which protracted martial arts training pushes on the boundaries of therapeutic landscapes. First will be a review of the combat aspects of training and how these often violent gestures promote athletic development. The second subsection will address issues of self-harm, such as overtraining and burnout, and harm to others, such as accidental injury, in training. The subsection will attempt to reconcile these difficulties as they relate to therapeutic landscapes and landscapes of care.

Expanding Conventional Engagements with Therapeutic Landscapes

This forthcoming subsection outlines two needs identified in this study. First on the docket is “creating a container.” The container metaphor, which is popular in non-academic circles, alludes to the need to delimit the purpose and intention of a space and time (Elchuk 2020). In more conventional geographic terms, this can be understood as place-making. Second to be addressed is the issue of risk and injury management. Among the practitioners observed in this study, the goal of martial arts and self-defense training is to *not* physically or emotionally injure fellow trainees, though the possibility of injury is always looming – this is war, after all. The upcoming section will address the careful measures that instructors and trainees take with each other to avoid harmful occurrences.

The following chapter will review both martial arts and self-defense practice spaces. Such spaces share important commonalities, but also significant differences. For similarities, both require behavioral adjustments among practitioners that differ from the norms of the outside world. Furthermore, physical and verbal activities that violate everyday social norms are rendered normative in these spaces. Among the differences, temporal requirements between protracted martial arts training and self-defense clinics, which are often short-term commitments, each class of activity allows for more structure in some cases and less structure in others. They will be treated as different categories, even though the goals and activities in each can at times be similar.

Creating a Container

As addressed in the previous chapter, extensive measures are undertaken to set the stage of martial arts practice. Practitioners engage in space and place-making through a variety of interventions: building and maintaining physical space, spatialized etiquette, and embodied

practices. This following subsection will delve deeper into the granular details of how instructors and students interact with each other to foster an environment that supports learning opportunities. Practitioners facilitate each other's learning and eventual transformation through shared training experiences and purposeful curriculum design. Integral to this process is *creating a container* that is safe for practitioners to train and flourish. Using the language of *creating a container* is intentional. This is a popular colloquialism that appears in self-dense classes[141], political organizing spaces, general facilitation, and even conventional classrooms.

Elchuk (2020, E-1)[142] [143], writing from Theatre Studies, provides an intuitive and comprehensive description:

> "Containers hold and support the wildness of our theatrical investigations and enable us to dive deep. It is why we (usually) practice in a closed studio rather than a busy public space. The most basic container is the studio itself, and the set time of class, or rehearsal, or a performance; space and time define the bounds of our explorations so that we can enter and exit our work clearly. Some other common containers include: the witnessing and responsiveness of the instructor (including creating a supportive environment and intervening in moments of emotional overwhelm or physical danger); the witnessing of the ensemble (especially in moments of risk or vulnerability); "exercises"; physical forms; text; a working agreement created by the ensemble; reflection practices like journaling or 'hunkering'; conscious awareness of one's body, emotional responses, and actions; entering and exiting practices such as a check-ins and closing circles; warm-ups and warm-downs; and any practices that support consciously changing states, in particular that support shifting 'out of' the work."

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[141] Both as an instructor and as a student in self-defense classes, we the language of "creating" or "holding" a container were common terms for describing how to establish a safer environment for the exploration of vulnerable topics.

[142] Elchuk's (2020) article discusses how to create a virtual "container" for theatrical practice in a fully-online environment. The work was written to address pedagogical methods during the early stages of COVID-19 lockdown, a uniquely disembodied experience for an embodied discipline.

[143] Theatre, Performance, and Dance Studies have served as a major conduit for martial arts studies over the decades, especially Capoeira.

As Elchuk aptly outlines, the first container is conventionally a geographic one, a physical space: that of a closed studio. The space is immediately set in relation to time: a class period, performance duration, etc. Subsequent acts of container delineation are behavioral, such as opening and closing circles. Noteworthy is the instructor's responsibility of clearly defining expectations and witnessing students as they work. Students themselves are active participants as they witness each other's work, engage in exercises, and make agreements with each other about appropriate working conditions. On the individual level, students are encouraged to reflect on their emotional responses and bodily awareness. In sum, creating a container is as much a series of conscious actions undertaken *within* the physical space as is the physical space itself.

Creating a container for martial arts and self-defense practice engages similar principles of space-time and conscious action. The previous chapter could be read as a protracted description of container-making in martial arts practice spaces via meditation, uniforming, language, and the design of physical space. This subsection considers variation in the student body, especially age, as well as time allowances in protracted martial arts training alongside time constraints in self-defense contexts. Such variety offers unique challenges (and opportunities) for instructors and their students. One piece of the "container" metaphor worth reflecting upon throughout this chapter is the idea that a container both encloses the items within its walls, while also preventing contaminants from reaching the contents within.

While broadly varying groups are taught similar fighting tactics, expectations and design around youth did arise as a distinct point of difference. Respondents noted how children often require a faster pacing and more contrasting tasks in order to maintain fixed attention. "I think with kids, particularly kids who have attention issues, you really got to keep things moving [snapping fingers with words]. Like every sixty seconds you have to change the activity. It's like

Sesame Street," "Vera" (Respondent 4) noted of her efforts to keep her youth students rapt in physical activity. Sheila also observed the importance of short, unassailable instructions, asserting:

> "I don't care what you've got going on, I said 'attention!' You stand at attention. I say "chumbi," you go here [gestures the chumbi arm position]. I say, 'fighting stance' you do this [raises hands to cover face]. Any questions? I didn't think so. So, you just set that expectation, and all of a sudden dyspraxia and all that other shit just floats away. Now you just have a kid starting from here."

This statement arose during a broader discussion of setting a container for child participants that is separate from their parents. This is especially important, as often family members are watching these classes and may at times try to parent their children during class.

> "They [children] are looking for something external to them. Something they can trust. Something that they know, like, we allow the parents to interact with the kids when they're out there. You [parents] can encourage and say, 'Good job!' but don't say, 'Hey, go back and do that again.' No, don't do that. You are not an authority on the floor. They are my student, not your child, as soon as they cross that invisible barrier, and we do that so the kids know that even if the parent is watching, the parent can't walk out there and interrupt or, or you know step up and hypocritically say, 'You need to do that better.' How come your ass isn't out here? Right? You going to come out here and do it? Yeah? Don't do that. So, by creating that atmosphere, we're, you know, the kids thrive."

Sheila's intervention is twofold. On the one hand, her container encloses a space for the children to have for themselves. On the other hand, she has set clear expectations for how parents should and should not interact with their children – a barrier from parental judgment or hypocrisy[144].

Martial arts and self-defense instructors bear additional responsibility for ensuring their subject matter does not harm participants. "Colin" (Respondent 8) provided input on age-appropriate subject matter for youths:

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[144] In her interview, Sheila directly addressed hypocrisy from adults (her own words) as a source of confusion and driver for rebellion for young people, which she tries to avoid with simple and direct communication.

> "…the way I approach self-defense in that age group is wildly different than it would be for adults… it's about really taking that step in knowing, what is the person going to need, and what does this group, what do they not need? So, like I wouldn't take a group of like, nine-year-old girls and just start talking about rape. It just doesn't seem effective. But like when I'm working with a group of teens, I'm definitely going to cover interpersonal skills and self-esteem and identity issues, and peer issues. Those are going to be more important than the physical pieces."

Tailoring age-appropriate instruction to the audience is of importance both for the effectiveness of the curriculum and the wellbeing of students. Our goal as instructors is not to frighten the participants any further. Such an approach fails to recognize the nature of the student's needs and provides little to no value. It is harmful and uncaring. Rather, an instructor anticipates and observes in real time the student's fears and seeks to understand the impact on their everyday lives. Students are in the class because they are already afraid. Instead, instructors create a container for participants to confront those fears and develop an age-appropriate lexicon for describing and assessing their experiences.

Reflecting on the descriptions of this subsection, I return to Tronto's (2013) five dimensions of care: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, and trust. To recap, attentiveness addresses one's ability to recognize that another needs care and the specifics of that need. Responsibility is the actions taken towards caring for another. Competence addresses the expertise or experience required to administer care in appropriate ways. Responsiveness addresses the care recipient's reaction to the care received. Trust necessitates supportive and relationships that are consistent with values of plurality, equality, and freedom. Care administration ought to be holistic, with "any thorough analysis of care [requiring] that we be attentive to the complete context of care" (1995, 142). The respondents' feedback can be read as attempts towards creating a caring training environment for students, and furthermore in creating a caring space for practice. The respondents all illustrate the co-occurrence of

attentiveness and responsibility. From this standpoint, one may consider attentiveness as the initial observation component of care, and responsibility as the active interventions based on attentiveness.

The temporal and spatial limitations of self-defense classes offer unique challenges for creating a training container. Whereas ongoing programs with spatial fixity enjoy the benefits of traditional and routinized behavioral practices (etiquette, meditation, etc.) self-defense clinics require rapid interventions. For our programs, the classes began with an opening circle during which the instructors would introduce themselves, state their age and occupation, and their training background. The students would then say their names, ages, and why they are taking the class. The first five to ten minutes would then be dedicated to explaining the purpose of the class and how it has been designed to address the specifics of the group (runners versus retail workers, for example). After some brief instructions, including explicit explanation that they can opt out of any aspects of the class, we end with the group saying resistance phrases, such as “No” and “I don’t like that” in unison.

A basic assumption that attendees have a need is baked into the self-defense clinic, and the instructors preempt these needs based on individual experience, past work from others, and the immediate asks of the people attending the class. The respondents’ reflections demonstrated their attentiveness towards the immediate needs of their students. The basic need of a transition away from the outside world was always the first order of business regardless of whether respondents were working in self-defense or martial arts scenarios. In self-defense scenarios, alleviating fear of participation was the next need. For children, creating an energetic, judgment-free, yet well-bounded experience with clear expectations was essential to create a holistic learning environment.

The matter of responsibility qua attentiveness inspires reflection on the curriculum of a self-defense class for which I was a student but *not* the primary audience[145]. The local women's organization that held the program predominantly serves Asian and Pacific Islander women who are victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. Immigration features greatly in the organization's legal advocacy efforts. The course they conducted was for cisgender women, transwomen[146], and nonbinary people. Though the course was open to all people of color, the majority of participants were East or Southeast Asian, specifically Filipina, Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese. I was the only African American participant, and the other non-Asian participant was of Central American heritage but did not specify their national or indigenous background.

The educational component of this clinic was greatly focused on intimate partner violence and human trafficking. On intimate partner violence, the curriculum reviewed conflicting needs around reporting relatives to law enforcement, and the fear of creating further stigma within the victim's own immigrant community. The instructors were furthermore attentive to the need to keep family members out of immigration courts. Beyond the emotional trauma of a family being broken apart – deporting or sending a family member to prison is traumatic for all parties – losing a breadwinner could exacerbate conditions of financial vulnerability for the victim's family. On human trafficking, the instructors conveyed at length recent updates to victim rights in Washington State, at the US federal level, and abroad. They also provided a list of local and national advocacy organizations that provide legal and non-legal

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[145] At the time I was already several years into my own martial arts and self-defense training but continued to seek guidance from outside of my immediate training circle.

[146] Transwomen from East and Southeast Asia are disproportionately targeted for human trafficking, and often lack familial social supports and struggle to navigate legal systems that actively criminalize sex work regardless of whether a person consents to doing that work.

supports to help victims escape trafficking scenarios. The organizers of the clinic utilized their expertise in legal and sociological issues to tailor a self-defense clinic that was cognizant of their audience's distinct needs.

Though the preceding paragraphs largely center the actions of instructors and leaders in the creation of a beneficial training container, students also participate in this process as they share verbal and physical experiences with one another. Martial arts and self-defense classes feature a similar process of pairing, regrouping in totality, then breaking into subgroups again, allowing for students to comingle with a broad spectrum of fellow participants. Martial arts training scenarios, which form long-term relationships, require a greater deal of intention from trainees on their development of training relationships and being inclusive of others. "We work through having preferences," Olivia noted. She continued:

> "'Sophia's' instructions are often 'notice your preferences, but you don't have to observe them every time.' So, you're going to try to find the partner who is closest to you even though your best friend is over there. My preference is for my best friends, but I'm going to choose- it's good manners and good practice for me, to choose this person right here and give myself some uncertainty to work with. And so I'm going to learn to work with everybody, and that's a skill, and kind of builds a thick skin in the sense of discernment.

"Sophia" (pseudonym) the head instructor of Olivia's school sets the tone of inclusion, but she does so by placing responsibility for inclusive decision-making on the students. She encourages them to pair with partners who may be unfamiliar, of a different rank, or simply less enjoyable to work with. On the other hand, this prevents the creation of training cliques that create an exclusionary atmosphere and homogenize training opportunities. Though this project greatly centers the physical components of training activities, the mindfulness components are of equal importance.

At the beginning of her article, Elchuk (2020, E-1) asked, "how can I create the conditions for trust and risktaking to flourish?" The implication here is that in order for risk or some form of danger to be explored, trust is a prerequisite for any activity to begin. This perspective exposes the understanding that the "phases of care" are not exclusively linear. Indeed, Tronto (1995, 2013) reiterates that the results of each phase should be reflected upon, and the information gleaned used to reevaluate the effectiveness of interventions from the care-giver as well as updated needs for the recipient. Elchuk puts forth a "trust-first" order in the phases of care. This is made possible through how the space is crafted to convey messages that the collective's needs and goals are the priority.

Such is the intersubjective power of space. The physical space itself may convey expectations or meanings through its construction and adornment. Socially, leadership expectations of behavior provide filters for what is or is not appropriate, and participants respond to these expectations based on their own past experiences and interpretation of present demands. For Colin, tailoring age-appropriate self-defense content is the first major step in crafting a safe environment. For Sheila, this was setting a behavioral standard for parents to not judge their children as they explore new ways of movement. For the Puget Sound area nonprofit, this was grounding their self-defense clinic in needs broadly identified in their own long-term advocacy work. Even in scenarios where space is not fixed and time is limited, space can be utilized to convey more trust-based, thoughtful approaches to teaching and learning.

Consent Practices in Martial Arts and Self-Defense Training

An assumption of any leisure scenario is that all participants are present on a voluntary basis. However, especially in these scenarios where close and intense bodily contact are the norm, continual consent practices are essential for creating a safe and holistic training

environment. Reflecting on the previous section on creating a container, this can be interpreted as a broad, spatialized consent practice. At the beginning of every class, the instructor reminds everyone why they are gathered in the dojo. Participants are all provided the same information about the goals for the class, behavioral expectations, and who to address if needs arise. After receiving this information, if a trainee decides that this is not the training scenario they desire, they may ask for accommodations[147] or seek another program that will be a better fit.

During beginner class cycles at my Kajukenbo school meditation is named as the primary transition ritual. It is part of a series of actions that help to familiarize trainees with one another, to convey alertness and presence in the immediate moment, and to offer intention. Especially for a group of beginners "circling up," observing each other, and then sharing names helps new practitioners become familiar with one another[148]. Noteworthy is that name introductions are more common in classes featuring low-ranking students and students of broad ranks. Low-ranking and new students may be unfamiliar with advanced students who often train in rank-specialized classes. After name introductions, students and instructors salute each other. Our salute gesture, with the right fist placed gently in an open left palm, indicates our intentions for every class. The fist and open palm represent a sheathed weapon[149]. We are training in an art that simulates war but will exercise restraint in doing so. We are here to fight, even if it is the first day.

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[147] All of the programs I visited offer some amount of accommodation. "Old-school" training spaces may not be as flexible and treat adaptation to rigid expectations of toughness as part of the program.
[148] This is an opportunity to indicate if we have teenage practitioners. Teenage practitioners are not to be struck anywhere on the head or face regardless of rank, as their brains are still developing.
[149] Where idiocultural oral history collides with tradition. One of many historical interpretations is that the open left palm represents a Dragon sitting atop a Tiger, the closed fist. This arrangement codifies conformity to state and societal rules (see Jinli Wushu-Tai Chi 2022 for a more comprehensive and captivating historical overview.)

Fig 8: Salute formation traditionally found in Chinese martial arts. Many other adjacent styles have adopted this gesture.

Worth mentioning here is that beginning a martial arts class with a circle is nontraditional. As indicated in the fourth chapter, conventional spatial arrangements have students lined up in successive rows, just like in a classroom, with the instructor(s) at the front of the training hall. Time for introductions takes place immediately before or after classes. Students may also become familiar at social gatherings outside of class time.

Trainees in martial arts and self-defense alike engage in consent practices on an ongoing basis. To reinforce this, a sort of micro-entry ritual of consent happens each time partners work together as pairs or in groups. After the head instructor has explained a drill, the partners will face each other and salute with the same palm-fist gesture as in the opening circle. This is to indicate that the training partners are ready to begin striking or grabbing each other. Adhering to this ceremony is especially important, as a trainee may have further questions for the instructor or may need an extra moment to fully integrate instructions. Practically this helps training partners avoid sucker-punching each other at the start of a drill, or if for some reason, a drill is interrupted. Such accidents are distressing for all parties. If a trainee needs to stop for any reason,

they will step away from their partner and salute. No words are needed. The gesture is understood, and the partner knows to wait until their practice mate has verbalized their preparedness, saluted and assumed a fighting posture. The waiting partner salutes in response. All parties acknowledge that practice is safe to continue. When the head instructor calls for the end of the drill, partners will stop their activity, salute each other, and transition to listening for further instruction.

These partnered interactions provide further opportunities for negotiating consent and accommodation. If a trainee needs lighter contact somewhere on their body, they may ask their partner for this accommodation[150]. Chronic health conditions and acute injuries are an ongoing challenge, and partners must take care not to exacerbate current injuries. For example, a partner with a rib injury may ask for light or no contact to the torso. In the case of a severe, ongoing injury, a trainee may apply tape in the shape of an "X" on the clothing covering the affected area. Verbal requests for no contact are still recommended but become less of a requirement alongside the use of inscription upon the body.

Another intervention is contact drills. A partner will assume a fighting position, while the other cycles through light, medium and heavy contact on a body target. They will then switch roles. This serves as an opportunity to gauge the intensity of a partner's strikes, and also challenges a trainee to be mindful of their own striking intensity. Here in this safer container of exploration, participants openly explore potentially painful physical contact. They enter into these exchanges trusting that their partner will strike with intention but not subject them to harm.

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[150] Light or no contact to the head is a common request among practitioners who manage migraines and/or vertigo.

If at any time during a free-flowing drill a partner strikes the other too hard, the stricken partner may ask for lighter contact or salute out of the drill and recover.

Martial arts provide another unique vision of consent practices as they relate to rank through the use of uniforms and belts. In traditional arts where a full uniform is used, the donning of the uniform inscribes upon the practitioner their reasons for being in the space. The uniformed practitioner is dressed for combat and ready to learn. In the case of spectators, a uniformed observer who sits on the sidelines may be read as an experienced practitioner seeking a new school or evaluating the unique qualities of a sibling school. A street-clothed observer may be read as a curious outsider looking into taking on a new martial arts practice. The uniform furthermore signifies a commitment to practice. In the case of Kendo or Aikido uniforms (which feature a very thick jacket and beautiful, flowy hakama) are a prohibitive expense. A person who invested the money in a unform or pestered a friend for their old gear is to be taken seriously. The hakama itself requires routine ironing to preserve its pleats and must be folded in such a way that it does not wrinkle. At home I store mine hanging between my puffiest skirts.

Wherever worn, belts indicate rank. With increased rank comes greater expectations of skill and responsibility towards maintaining a safe training environment as well as teaching. This is especially important was lower-ranking students work with higher-ranking students. For example, white belts,[151] as the newest trainees at my school, are not to be struck on the front of the face. White and orange belts (first belt) are not to be kicked in the knees, as they have not yet been introduced to joint protection techniques. Those strategies are taught at the next rank, purple belt. When working with lower-ranking students, clearly marked with an orange belt or

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[151] White belts at my Kajukenbo school typically do not wear belts.

unmarked, high-ranking students must gauge which techniques and striking targets are appropriate for their training partner's level. In addition to banned targets (i.e., front of the face), high-ranking practitioners must also avoid using techniques that involve hard takedowns[152] that require a significant amount of practice on the part of the recipient to be performed safely.

In a peculiar but practical way, rank belts link consent around appropriate techniques to the rules of the school. The low-ranking trainees need not express their limitations. Rather, their belt indicates the appropriate *and* inappropriate techniques that they tacitly consent to under the umbrella of the school's norms. In shorter terms, consent is no longer verbalized, rather it is worn on the body. This corporeally inscribed consent is a form of usable culture that is distinctly utilitarian in this idiosyncratic context. In the everyday, we are discouraged from making judgments about people based on their clothing. Clothing is also not to be regarded as a marker of consent. In this idioculture, clothing operates as a form of qualified consent which conveys permission and limitation. As high-ranks pair with other high-ranks, they again cast assumptions of consent for more advanced techniques.

In spite of these convenient visual markers, some degree of care-full judgement is required of trainees as they interact with peers of similar rank. Practitioners are making repeated judgments about what forms of contact are allowable, delivering contact in a challenging but appropriate way, and evaluating the wellbeing of their partner as well as themselves. A brand-new green belt (first advanced rank) may not know how to safely receive dangerous takedowns that other green belts who have held that rank for a year or more. A person's newly attained rank

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[152] A takedown is a technique that results in the targeted person falling on the ground. Trainees receiving the technique learn to fall safely. Trainees executing the technique practice softening the fall for their partner.

status is typically known, as a belt test is a communitywide activity that all members are expected to attend[153]. On the fly, a partner may ask the newly tested student, “Do you know the takedown for *Punch Attack 9b*?” If the trainee does not know how to receive the technique safely, the training pair will either select a different technique to practice or will ask the head instructor to teach the fresh green belt how to receive the technique.

Over many months of training these skill mismatches become a routine occurrence, providing repeated opportunities for students to ask for and deliver active consent. Broadly, we are encouraged to tell our partners if we do not understand a technique we are about to receive, need lighter contact, or lower intensity. This is somewhat of a covert agency-building drill, to be able to admit when we do not know something or are unable to meet a training goal. Trainees are in a safe place to say “no” when they do not want something, and their training partners gain practice with responding appropriately to “nos” and not taking boundary-setting as a personal affront.

Self-defense classes have separate practices for active consent versus among fellow trainees in the dojo. They are similar to how high-ranking martial arts practitioners work with low-ranking trainees. Since everyone is wearing street clothes and we cannot gauge our trainee’s experience level, we do not engage them with full aggression during the early stages of grabbing drills. Before any contact between trainees is made, instructors first model consent practices for touch on each other. The head instructor will explain the mechanics of a technique, then ask an assistant instructor, “Are you ready (or is it okay) for me to grab your shirt?” When the assistant acknowledges preparedness, the pair continue with the demonstration. The instructors will repeat

[153] A spectator from a March 2022 test described the event as “raising a barn.”

the drill several times with increasing force. The final rendition is a full-intensity throttle for the simulated attacker and a screaming response from the defending instructor.

When it is finally time to break out into small groups and begin drilling, the instructor of the subgroup will again ask if the trainee is ready to be grabbed. The answer is almost always yes, but if we receive a no, we wait a moment for the trainee to take a few breaths, then wave us in to grab. During the first simulation, we do not grab their clothes with full intensity. Such an approach would be inappropriate for their experience level and unobservant of the student's immediate needs. Rather, we position ourselves for the trainee to practice the defense technique, assuming the posture of an attacker. After several rounds of soft gabs, we ask if is okay to dial up the intensity. Again, we do not tear shirt fibers and drive our knuckles into a trainee's chest the way we do to each other during demonstrations. They are not adjusted to the level of ferocity with which we treat each other every day at practice[154]. Instead, we conduct our work with experience-appropriate levels of challenge. Attendees who we recognize as having attended our classes on multiple other occasions may approach the situation asking for more intensity, to which we happily oblige.

At the granular level, these repeated exchanges of consent represent fine-scale occurrence of "caring with." Open communication fosters an environment of trust for trainees to explore intense or potentially painful touch, ideally done in such a way that is respectful of a training partner's limitations and desires for an appropriate challenge. The reiteration of uniforming traditions arguably opens the more permissive side of consent, marking it the body as prepared for some degree of hard contact. Verbal and nonverbal exchanges also serve to convey messages

[154] This adaptation to high levels of pain is sometimes referred to as "body callousing" (Farrar 2018).

of preparedness. Though the contact may be arduous, it is carried out with some degree of thoughtfulness towards the wellbeing and preparedness of the receiving person.

These encounters between trainees do also represent a pivot on the matter of trust that pose a challenge to the directionality of these caring frameworks as they have been presented thus far. Specifically in the context of dojo training, a participant must also trust that their training partner is aware of their own limits and will stop a training scenario that feels overwhelming or unsafe. That is, trainees also depend on the self care of their partners for safe practice, to know their own limits and advocate for themselves when a situation feels treacherous. This arrangement of mutually combative participants sets care-giving and care-receiving in a constant, bi-directional relationship in which both participants are simultaneously monitoring their own wellbeing while also striving to challenge but not harm their practice mate.

Risk Management

All is well and good when participants are dressed appropriately and openly communicating about their skill levels. One memorable moment when this *did not* happen occurred during a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu class towards the end of my time training in that style. An individual named “Kirk” (pseudonym) who was dressed in an olive-colored uniform and a wearing a black belt was visiting the dojo for the first time. He was new to all of us, including “Rebecca” (pseudonym) the class instructor that day. Noteworthy is that the class instructor was a purple belt, two full ranks below black belt, but still highly experienced[155]. As the instructor

[155] During my time at the BJJ school, the owner and head instructor discussed how belt progression can be slow, thus it is not unusual for a person to have a white belt but still have several years of experience. In his program, attaining a purple belt took around five years. Comparatively, a black belt in Tae Kwon Do can be attained in as little as two years.

paired us off as similarly ranked trainees, white belts together, black belts together, etc., we began drilling our latest technique.

We clumsy white belts awkwardly groped at each other's jackets, deciphering where to plank our elbows along our partner's chest and position our feet to achieve efficient throwing leverage. The black belts treated each other like black belts, swiftly flipping each other to the ground and executing the submission technique we had just been taught. We youngsters were startled by the thumping and watched as Kirk was heaved to the floor, his ragdoll legs folding towards his head like a paperclip. Wide-eyed, we continued training with our partners as the blackbelts roughhoused. Kirk's training partner slowed his pace. There was less thumping. At the end of the drill period, we then reconvened when the head instructor called us in to ask questions and begin teaching a different technique.

During this instructional period, the head instructor paired with Kirk, assuming that he knew how to position himself as an attacker. When he failed to initiate a simulated attack, Rebecca stopped and asked, "wait… you're a black belt, right?" Kirk shook his head "No."

"Where did you get this uniform?" Rebecca inquired.

"I borrowed it from a friend."

We were *horrified*, exchanging slack-jawed glances and gasps. Rebecca admonished him to not wear the black belt to class and that he could receive a white belt from the uniform storage area at the end of class, and furthermore to tell his future partners for the day he was not a black belt. I never saw him again. In these spaces we are so heavily socialized to adhere to the uniform code that it was wholly unexpected for a person to misrepresent their experience level. Black belts from other schools routinely visit to cross-train with other high-ranking practitioners and

test their mettle. Therefore, Kirk's presence was treated as another welcomed guest looking for a challenging training opportunity. His "black belt" codified consent to hard training. Black belts know not to treat white belts like black belts. Our inexperience is inscribed upon our bodies. Other black belts, however, are fair game.

Practitioners do their best to not cause (severe) harm to their fellow trainees, however this confluence of misunderstandings was a threat to Kirk's quality of life. He was lucky to not have dislocated a joint or experienced some other form of life-altering injury. In hindsight, this scenario is even more chilling given the injury to Jack Greener in 2018, and Kirk was fortunate that his practice partner was highly skilled in executing this technique. One lapse in focus or miscalculation of force on the part of his practice mate could have dropped Kirk on his head, causing a concussion or worse. Of equal importance is that Kirk lacked experience in how to protect himself during hard takedowns, hence his body being violently folded in half. We trainees also bear some responsibility in not creating scenarios where our training partners cannot accidentally hurt us.

Meditation, uniforming, bowing in and out of parings, all are ceremonies of transition that serve as acculturated barriers to risk. These preparations are legible within the specific context of a training space when an individual has themselves been a learner within and perpetuator of an idioculture. Uniforms, especially belts, function as an ephemeral marker of what is or is not safe to do. Kirk was from outside of the idioculture, from outside this "system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction" (Fine 1979, 734). Being from outside the idioculture, these norms were unknown to him. When he marked himself with a black belt, his training partner referred to the idiocultural milieu and made a judgment about Kirk's

abilities based on the tacit consent of corporeal inscription. The result of this (idio)cultural misunderstanding was a spectacularly dangerous but nonfatal outcome.

This vignette conveys another angle of import as to the function of consent practices: safety. As noted at the end of the previous section, less experienced trainees are not yet tolerant of elevated pain experiences, nor do they know how to protect themselves when receiving intense contact. We are all engaging in a potentially hazardous activity that requires ongoing risk mitigation measures. Observing safety protocols is integral to insuring constructive training experiences in the martial arts. Though the extensive consent practices discussed earlier in the chapter can also be interpreted as protracted engagements with risk management, risk mitigation is not always an inherently caring practice. Sometimes it is simply a practical one: to protect the wearer during hard contact, pinches and cuts from nails, and other training dangers. One can still argue that failure to abide basic protocols is in itself an uncaring approach to training.

Protective Equipment

A practical reason why trainees wear durable *gis* is that they hold up to grabs and falls much better than street clothes. Furthermore, *gis* do not have hard parts, such as buttons or zippers that can injure the wearer or training partner during hard contact. These simple uniforms are worn with the safety of all parties in mind. In striking arts, practitioners do not routinely yank each other's clothing and so *gis* tend to be made from a lighter gauge, more breathable materials. In grappling arts such as Judo or Jiu-Jitsu, the uniforms are nigh indestructible and made of heavy-gauge cotton. The collar on a heavy-gauge Jiu-Jitsu *gi* may measure up to four millimeters thick. gi collar and sleeve grabbing are integral strategies in both styles.

Fig 9: *Gi* sleeve thickness comparison: The *kendogi* is blue, and the conventional *gi* is black.

Thicker yet are *kendogi*. To recap, Kendo is a sword art with which practitioners strike each other with simulated katana swords called shinai. These swords are made from lengths of bamboo. Practitioners can target the head, hands, torso, and throat[156], all of which are protected with specialty armor called *bogu*. In any contest, errant strikes and deflections may send a shinai careening into a participant's arms. The edges of the bamboo can be sharp. Unprotected, these

[156] The throat stab, or *Tsukidare*, is an especially dangerous technique, and we were discouraged from using it as beginners.

erroneous impacts can cause severe bruising, cuts, and in the worst-case splintering. Trainees do not spar unless they have access to a complete *kendogi* and *bogu*.

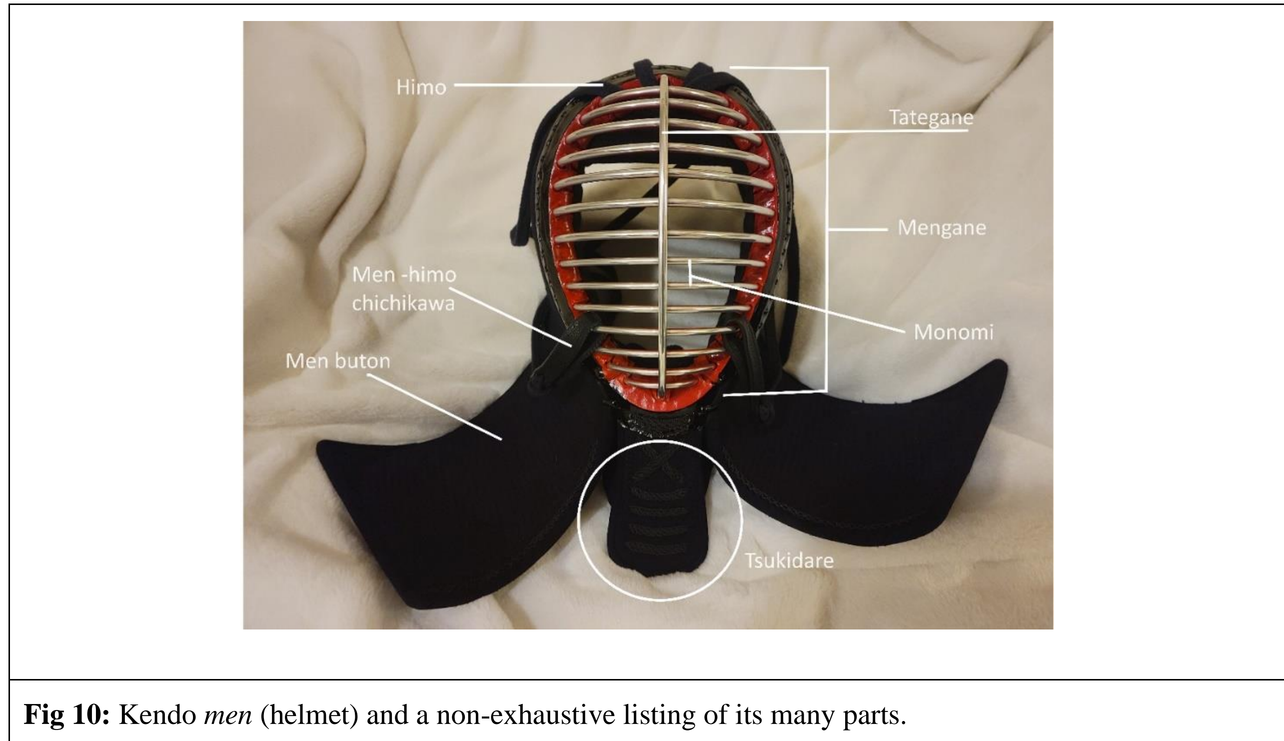

Fig 10: Kendo *men* (helmet) and a non-exhaustive listing of its many parts.

Kendo represents an extreme example of protective uniforming. Contemporary *bogu* armor sets are made from an assemblage of thick cloth, leather, and resin. The helmets, or *men*, feature the *mengane*, the signature ribbed face cage, usually made of Duraluminum[157] or some other light-weight metal. Practitioners will often purchase additional head padding to prevent concussions from exceedingly hard strikes. Elbow pads worn under the sleeves, as well as wrist pads worn under the *kote* (gauntlets) give added protection to the most commonly struck area. Beneath the *men*, some practitioners also wear goggles to defend against flying splinters, as can

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[157] Duraluminum is an alloy made of aluminum and copper. This alloy is harder than pure aluminum, which is likely to bend from hard impacts.

happen when bamboo strikes metal. Traditionally, practitioners would also wear a mask made of thin cloth (*tenugui*) to prevent spitting on each other during strikes[158].

Behaviorally, a mark of a high-ranking practitioner is their ability to strike swiftly without making excessive contact with their partner. Such a skill takes years of practice and the ability to appropriately gauge distance between oneself and an opponent of any height. To score points, a successful strike lands with only the *datotsubu*, the area of the sword between the soft leather tip (*sakigawa*) of the *shinai* and the *nakayui* strap that holds the bamboo slats together at about one quarter of the length of the shaft.

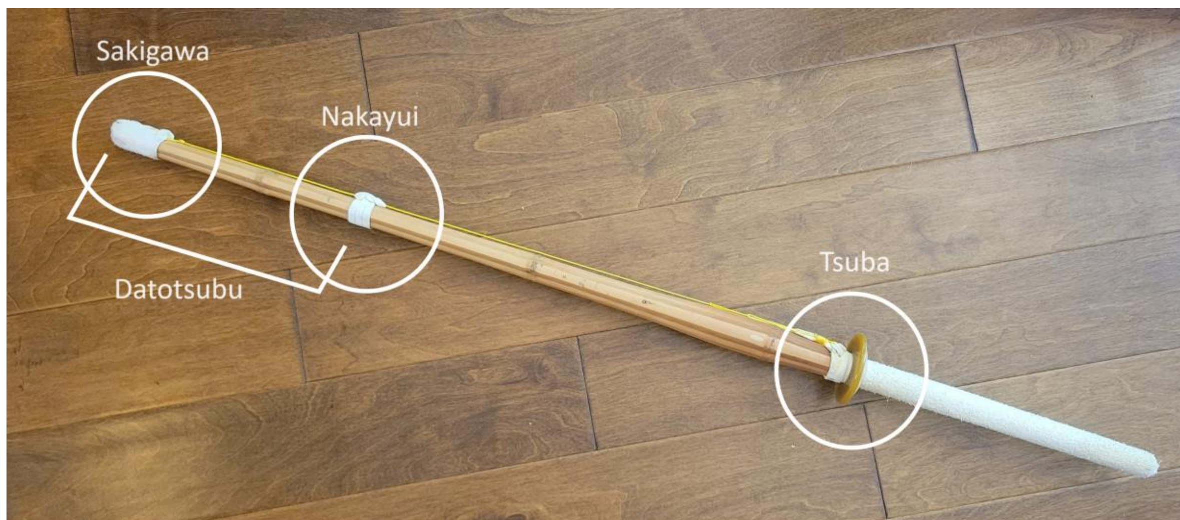

Fig 11: A *shinai* sword. The *datotsubu* is the point-scoring surface and is also the safest extent for striking an opponent. Striking with anything between the *nakayui* and the *tsuba* will not score points and can be hazardous to the person on the receiving end.

[158] When striking an opponent, the attacker *must* announce their intended target as they land the strike. Though we were not required to wear masks, some practitioners installed plastic face shields behind their face shields both to prevent spitting and to protect themselves from splinters. Others wear surgical masks.

This is, in part, a demonstration of the sword swinger's precision, but is also a form of injury prevention. The tip of the shinai whips the opponent. Striking further down the shaft *shinai* with stiff, exposed bamboo can cause splintering. The rigid parts of the *shinai* land with bludgeoning force, more of a clubbing than a whipping and are liable to cause blunt-force injury, such as severe contusions or traumatic brain injury if delivered to the head.

I pause briefly in this moment to reflect on skills development as integral to safe training. Maintaining the health of training partners is, at minimum, a risk mitigation measure. When exercised in a holistic manner, this fosters an idioculture of careful interaction that prioritizes the wellbeing of practice mates as equally important to one's own safety and learning experience. The approach harkens Spencer-Cavaliere et al.'s (2015) assessment of Ultimate Frisbee as a sport where the players themselves are responsible for regulating fair play rather than reliance on referees. The rules of Kendo or any other martial art are different from Ultimate Frisbee, and arguably the health risks of unfair play are higher and occur with greater frequency. Self-regulation is therefore a necessary component for the continued practice of these artforms. Just as an Ultimate player cannot play a game without their own squad and an opposing team, a martial artist depends on the health and ability of their practice mates to provide a comprehensive challenge.

In unarmed striking arts, mouthguards are a routine implement. Some grapplers also wear mouthguards, as accidental elbows and knees are common hazards. These protect the teeth of the wearer, and also protect practice partners from accidental cuts from teeth. Less acknowledged but of equal importance is that mouthguards provide a shock-absorbing effect that can provide modest protection from blows to the head (Knapik et al. 2019). Especially common in boxing and kickboxing is full headgear for sparring. These pads primarily protect the cranium and

feature pads that extend down the cheeks and jaw. Some designs feature padding that extends over the cheekbones, nose, and even the mouth.

Fig 12: 16 oz boxing glove vs 8 oz MMA-style glove. Note the open fingers and thumb slot in the smaller MMA glove.

Clothing and equipment represent several phases of risk management in potentially hazardous training scenarios. The most important priority is for trainees to do their best in avoiding accidentally injuring others. Martial arts as a leisure activity are distinct in that a substantial degree of responsibility for the health of others is placed in the hands of participants, many of whom are laypeople with regards to health or related fields. Ideally interventions on behalf of the wellbeing of oneself and others originate from the standpoint of observant and competent care. Indeed, while most trainees are non-professionalized in their pursuits, as serious leisurists who have “careers” (Stebbins 1992b) in martial arts training develop specialized knowledge and skills around the combative elements of their training as well as how to do so safely. While the credential of “green belt” does not hold the same broader cultural weight as LPN, in the site-specific idioculture of the dojo such a title denotes competence in both combative skill and safe practice, with the added twist that there is still much more for the individual to learn.

Managing Health Events on the Fly

Leadership and students alike are tasked with managing adverse health events during training. Injury is an accepted element of risk in training, and while trainees are usually mindful of injury prevention, wounds can still occur. As in all other scenarios, swift intervention is a high priority. Schools are typically equipped with conventional first aid kits. Monitoring first aid supply levels is a volunteer chore at my Kajukenbo studio, though it is often the owner/head instructor who manages kits. Some schools also maintain a collection of Chinese Medicine supplies. For this subsection I will evaluate injury and health event management at two temporal nodes: (1) the immediate event and medical interventions provided at the time of injury, and (2) long-term or ongoing supports made available to trainees in the training context.

Noteworthy is that some of the interviewees are themselves health professionals. Six are Chinese Medicine specialists, two are nurses, and others are physical therapists and personal trainers. Two learned intensive medical care practices in the military, though neither were medics. Though some of the occupations mentioned do not apply internal medicine directly, advanced first aid is nonetheless part of professional training, as is for physical therapists and personal trainers, for example. Additionally, though many of the interviewees are not trained medical professionals, lay knowledge of health and emergency management is still an asset in the event of a crisis situation.

In their reflections, “Reggie” (Respondent 7) and Olivia noted that when students experience an injury, the students themselves seek help from them as leaders. This is an important shift in health-seeking behavior that will be addressed in greater detail later in this chapter. In brief, trainees self-advocating for help from an instructor is a change from “old-school” training norms from previous decades where students would often hide or not address

their injuries, even if the damage was severe. Respondents in the *Departures from therapeutic landscapes* subsection will review major injury events and a lack of immediate intervention in due time.

Olivia, the lead instructor of a Kung Fu program and lawyer, noted of her responsibilities as the class instructor, “If somebody is injured in class… I have to make an assessment about how they are feeling, what they need in the immediate sense and what the potential long-term consequences are, and that almost always ends in, ‘Please get off the mat’ or ‘let’s get off the floor and see what’s going on.’ And then either, ‘do you need to go see somebody right now, or is it okay to rest just right now?’" In the realm of medicine Olivia is a layperson, yet still takes on the responsibility of evaluating the immediate condition of the injured student. “I am not qualified to give medical treatment but can do a basic assessment.” She emphasized multiple times throughout the interview that she is not a medical professional and does not provide medical advice.

Also distinct in Olivia’s circumstance is that much of her student body is comprised of children under eighteen. When emergent scenarios arise, she expressed no hesitation towards transporting an injured youth student to a medical facility and contacting the parent(s) if they are not present at the time of the injury:

> “Years ago… we were training at this old rec center in Oakland, and they had these really, really old lead lined windows, and we were doing an exercise where you ran down a line and at the end did some self-defense technique. And he palm-heeled right into the window and shattered it, and he cut his arm really badly. And, if somebody has to go to the hospital, we always go with them. So, I stayed with him. We called his mother, and we called the ambulance.”

Given the nature of the injury and the age of the student, most instructors would have either called an ambulance or transported the student to a hospital in their own car. Regardless of a

school leader's medical expertise, the leader's responsive actions nonetheless serve as the first link in the chain of care for the injured student.

In the event of an injury, the interviewees placed a strong emphasis on diagnosing the injured person – to the best of their knowledge – immediately and initiating alleviating measures. A Chinese Medicine practitioner and massage therapist, Reggie discussed at length the benefits of training in the same building as his medical and massage practice:

> "We've had a couple of serious injuries that definitely needed to be tended to, but nothing that was an emergent condition. So mostly it's things like strains and tears and pulls and... that can be treated with needles immediately. Right. Boom, right there on the thing. Knee injuries are common. Wrist injuries are not uncommon. Elbows get hurt. Shoulders get hurt. And all the student does, or mostly I see it happen in real time, but if I don't see it they let me know, and I just say, "Stay right there," and I grab a little travel kit back there. Bring it right out and do whatever... I give them a quick diagnosis and we treat them right then and there, and the results are amazing. But moreover, we have a lot of other tools. (Reggie gestures to his wall of backstock herbal remedies) First-aid kit's always handy."

Trainees enjoy the benefits of having a highly experienced medical practitioner as their head instructor. He provides acupuncture to patients as part of his daytime business and routinely deploys this skillset to initiate healing in the immediacy of an injury event.

Reggie, "Melanie" (Respondent 13), and "Paige" (Respondent 18) operate in distinctive geographic scenarios in that they run their Chinese Medicine services and their schools from the same building. In the event of an injury they have access to a full stockpile of treatment measures from herbs through massage tables, acupuncture to conventional first aid. Many of the other sites I visited also provided access to Chinese herb concoctions. Tiger Balm, arguably mainstream,

was available on most shelves. Most schools had at least one bottle of Jow[159]. "Vanessa" (Respondent 2) described in detail the amenities of the Chinese Medicine cabinet at her Kajukenbo school:

> "Our medicine cabinet at Site 4, not only does it have tapes, and... tapes, Band-Aid, ibuprofen, it has Jow, tendon lotion, hit pills, [San Wat Sow?], and all the other, that's in the main one. And in the mat room, there's this tiny little container, our first aid kit that has Tiger Balm, that has Jow, that, it's like all Eastern medicine remedies."

"Bernice" (Respondent 14), who began training in martial arts in the 1980s and studying Chinese Medicine in the early 2000s, was the practitioner responsible for introducing these many interventions to Vanessa's school. Bernice also introduced Taijiquan and Qigong movements as routine exercises in her classes. Vanessa continued, "In the male-identified dressing room, we used to have two jars. Hit jars. One is tendon lotion, one is Jow, and we make it at Site 4. Homemade, at Site 4. Fill those buckets up! Anyone can come in and fill up a small jar and take it with them." Vanessa's anecdote hints to the empowerment of students to actively participate in the material development of curative amenities, and to freely use these materials as the need arises.

As I reach the conclusion of this subsection, I reflect on a missed opportunity in interviewing. Many respondents discussed how their training taught them how to handle stressful situations. Some examined how martial arts helped them feel safer while alone in public or participating in nightlife alone. Others attributed their ability to advocate for themselves in contentious workplace scenarios to their martial arts and/or self-defense training. What they did

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[159] Dit Da Jow is a slick herbal preparation that is massaged into bruised or swollen tissue in the event of injury. This and other Chinese Medicine interventions will be addressed in greater detail in the final chapter.

not mention was how these adaptations to stress influenced their ability to respond to crisis scenarios. In hindsight, I regret not asking the non-medical professionals if learning to stay calm in the chaos of training translated to keeping a cool head while managing training accidents or calamities in daily life, such as witnessing a car accident. Have repeated experiences with their own injuries shaped their understanding of injury to others? Has the experience of fear and heightened alertness in training developed a sense of familiarity with unpleasant emotions? This oversight warrants further investigation.

A Gathering of Experientially Similar Others

To recap, leisure spaces offer unique learning opportunities for participants pursuing forms of experiential learning and pedagogy. These opportunities occur under conditions of intentional and repeated boundary-making, and under the best circumstances a teaching approach that is grounded in an awareness of what students are seeking and a willingness to adapt to changing needs. The martial arts training experience is particularly embodied, often involving intense athletic experiences and verbal engagements. The social network that develops within these unusual spaces grants the opportunity for *experientially similar others* to converge upon repeating basis. In her 2013 study, Elizabeth A. Gage evaluated seventy-six parents of pediatric cancer patients and the unique network of social supports that they developed while their children were residing in the ward. These experientially similar others are described as people who have managed kindred hardships and who can provide unique emotional and systemic knowledge that inexperienced others cannot. Of equal importance in this definition is that these experientially similar others are often *not* from similar demographic or identity backgrounds, or geographic locations. They are instead tied together—despite social differences—through the shared challenge of optimizing care for young family members.

Martial Arts and self-defense practitioners often converge for the first time for similar reasons. Some have experienced violence and wish to learn how to defend themselves. Others are seeking an athletic and intellectual challenge. Still more often, some begin training to heal physical and emotional wounds. All stay for the collective experience of transformation. All practitioners in the same program will in time learn the same techniques. They will learn a common language for naming and describing techniques and equipment. They will practice the same etiquette norms. They may kick, throw, and bruise one another. Through repeated training sessions and careers sometimes spanning decades, this network of experientially similar others provides training opportunities for practitioners to improve fighting skills and health in general.

Though Gage (2013) was working far outside the idiocultures framework, her work can be read with important similarities to neighboring theoretical works. The parents' intersubjective (Doughty 2013) experience with space was paramount in this study: they lived in a medical institution where they had little social power outside of their own families, conditions that dictated the reach and limitations of their everyday lives. Within these restrictive conditions, experientially similar families developed networks of knowledge that in many ways filled the shortcomings of institutional norms – a small but poignant topography of care[160] (Milligan and Wiles 2010) that arranged new networks of support in adverse conditions. What potentials for interpersonal support exist under less restrictive circumstances, and to what extent does temporality influence the impact of these exchanges? Though Gage's subjects and many of the

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[160] Noteworthy is that while most parents did not go out of their way to develop strong social bonds with other families, the brief interactions they did share were of profound emotional and educational importance (Gage 2013).

forthcoming participants are laypeople, they have much to offer peers through experiential learning and subsequent teaching opportunities.

Violent Encounters: Fear in Public Space and Fear Within

Some participants in martial arts and self-defense begin their training as a means of learning how to defend themselves. In his work as a martial arts and self-defense instructor, Colin noted, “if somebody is coming to a self-defense workshop, it’s because they’re afraid.” Participants frequently cited this motivation for taking the seminars I assisted during my time as a self-defense instructor. Language similar to “I need to learn to defend myself” or “I don’t want to be afraid anymore” was spoken at every event, and always acknowledged with quiet nods from other participants. In 2016, my Kajukenbo school hosted a self-defense seminar in Seward Park that focused specifically on runners. All participants except for one were women. Over twenty participated in the two-hour class, and in the opening circle several participants recounted stories of having been followed and/or verbally harassed by male runners and the fear they experienced. Most believed that they could not have defended themselves if the situation had escalated to a physical encounter.

“Victoria” (Respondent 10), a long-time self-defense instructor at a US west coast university echoed these sentiments as she addressed her own motivations for taking her first self-defense class.

> “I was really, pretty scared a lot of the time before I took my first self-defense class. And I was scared walking around by myself at night, and I was worried about what I would do if there was some, something that happened, and I never… that something [was] never very specified in my mind. It was just, you know ‘there was something bad out there’ that could happen at any moment. I didn’t know what it was, but I knew it was going to be bad, and I knew that I didn’t know what to do.”

For Victoria, though she had not experienced a public assault, the pervasive belief of nebulous danger in public space and her inability to defend herself physically nonetheless shaped her experience of walking alone at night.

"Chelsea" (Respondent 5) noted two motivations for beginning martial arts, with a public sexual assault being the impetus for immediate change.

> "I went into martial arts mostly because I really always thought I would enjoy it and I had been a victim of assault, and it was the action for me to take for my own development, because I have a lot of verbal capacity for self-defense but I really have no physical [Strength?], and I'm not a terribly big human, so I wanted to learn how to protect myself physically."

For Chelsea, taking on a protracted training regimen was essential to develop a sense of safety. Noteworthy is that she had confidence in her ability to defend herself in a verbal confrontation, but not in an embodied, physical encounter. The assault unfortunately reinforced this belief. "I went home. I was totally shaken, and I got home and told my husband about it, and I was like, 'I need to take martial arts.'"

Both the perception of danger in public and lived experiences of public violence served as motivation for these respondents' participation in self-defense. In these cases, fear is a spatialized phenomenon in which dangers exist outside the contained bounds of home and work. For Chelsea and Victoria martial arts and self-defense training served as a mechanism for restoring or achieving a sense of personal wellbeing in public space. Of significance here is that these participants are taking a proactive role in the restoration and eventual enhancement of their own wellbeing. Their intervention was to seek the help of others, a new constellation of carers who, while unknown initially, could be trusted as potential nodes in a new topography of carers based on their extant interest in self-defense and/or martial arts. Though they themselves are

unable to individually deconstruct cultural norms of public violence. At the scale of the body, they are, however, able to dictate new standards of what feels safe for themselves.

While these respondents did eventually find a measure of individual restoration, this undertaking was not a solo project. Chelsea has been training at a women-led martial arts organization for nearly two decades. Victoria began her training in the feminist self-defense circles of 1980s Pacific Northwest. Their adaptation to public life was a collective effort which began as they sought help from others in their self-defense education. Though they chose differing paths, one martial arts and the other women's self-defense, both have enjoyed protracted careers in their respective fields. A decade or more since those initial encounters, both have taught dozens of classes to women and girls seeking their own education. The upcoming section provides a narrative retelling of how self-defense instructors conduct a class, and how students grow into active participants in the application of the material.

Collective Confrontations with Fear

Though participants reported during the early stages of self-defense training a sense of fear before beginning seminars, they were ultimately present for the same goal: the development of physical and verbal skills to protect themselves, and thus alleviate the fear of (potential) victimization. For some students, fear still characterizes their early experiences of training in self-defense. "They were really scared at the beginning, and by the end they are having a really fun time with that [the physical] part of it," Victoria said of her first semester students. No two self-defense courses are structured exactly the same, but the classes reviewed for this dissertation do share physical, verbal, and sociological components, with the sociological component being a contemporary addition to self-defense pedagogy.

The following subsection will review the general structure and process of the self-defense classes I assisted. The subsection immediately after will discuss the sociological components featured in our self-defense program and programs from two other respondents. These opportunities challenge normative assumptions that leisure must be fun. Serious leisure can be "serious" because of the time commitment. It may also be serious because the subject matter is of profound importance to one's quality of life. These samples will demonstrate the process of individual and collective transformation and demonstrate how laypeople themselves can have a profound influence on the outcomes of their peers despite not having a formalized background. In these cases, laypeople become active agents in the development of a therapeutic landscape that can help to restore a sense of wellbeing for themselves and their training partners.

While instructing self-defense seminars and working with new students in the Kajukenbo program are temporally and relationally differing experiences, both spheres of students undergo similar transformations. An important component of this transformation is indeed physical engagement with self-defense techniques. As instructors, it is our role to first demonstrate self-defense scenarios on each other, and then serve as simulated attackers for the participant. We grab, throttle, and scream at each other with gusto, providing a realistic sample of an intense encounter. The instructor improvisationally role-plays as the self-defender responds to the offense in real time, then afterward break down each step taken to thwart the attack. For the early portion of the seminar, instructors will be the only people roll-playing as attackers: we split the group, assigning a cluster of students to one instructor. They then take turns countering a simulated assault from an instructor.

In such teaching scenarios, there is almost always a disparity between the number of students and instructors, often three or four students per teacher, and sometimes more. It

therefore becomes necessary that student participants serve as simulated attackers for one another. Practically, this allows for ample practice time for the student learning techniques. For the student simulating the attacker role, this allows for them to experience the intense verbalization from a less endangered perspective. Student-on-student activity begins with verbal self-defense scenarios only. Students practice saying “No!” “Leave me alone!” to their student partners. The student in the “attacker” role is tasked with standing still and observing their partner. The “attacker” observes the increasing verbal intensity of their partner’s “No!” until the instructors stop the drill, and then the participants change roles.

As the seminar progresses, we move into the teaching physical components of the drill directly to the students. We usually start by instructing students on how to weaponize their bodies – proper alignment of the feet and hips to maximize leverage and the identification of striking surfaces. The first technique is usually a palm-heel strike, that is, using the base of the hand where it connects to the wrist as a durable striking surface[161]. We safely demonstrate on each other where to strike on the body with this weapon. Next, we hold up focus pads at face level for the students to practice striking.

[161] Striking with the palm heel is much safer for an inexperienced striker versus using a closed fist for punching.

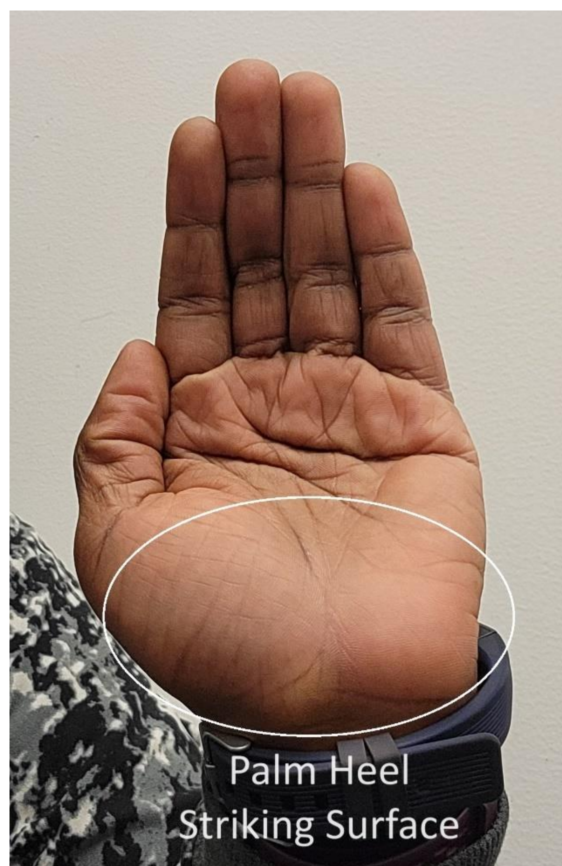

Fig 13: Formation of a Palm Heel Strike. Fingers are pulled together and the hand is tilted back, ensuring that the fingers do not land first.

For kicks, we teach a front-oriented kick that strikes with the ball of the foot, as well as a rear kick intended to strike an attacker standing behind the self-defender. We will then hold kick shields and on the ground and braced with our shins, while the self-defender practices the new kicks. Participants will often start awkwardly, then their strikes will escalate in intensity and accuracy. All the while, as they plunge their feet into the pads, they shout “No!” “Stop!”

The apex of the physical component is self-defense grab escapes, typically bear hugs and attacks on the ground. Fighting from the ground often brings about the most emotional and heated expressions. Many participants, especially if this is their first seminar, will not participate in this component. Even though it is a simulation, the scenario is too familiar to previous

traumatic experiences for the student to engage. What distinguishes this experience from the others is that students now have the opportunity to engage directly with the instructors' bodies using high-intensity techniques. From the pin position – attacker on top of the defender and straddling their hips – the students, in the safest way possible, claw at our eyes, knee our posteriors and practice bucking us off to the side, freeing themselves and continuing to strike and scream as they stand up.

Laypeople as Active Agents of Experiential Learning

Another scenario that is often frightening for students is ground self-defense with a standing attacker. The defender is in a vulnerable position on the ground, but we teach tools for keeping distance between the individual and the attacker so that the attacker cannot climb on top of the defender. A primary strategy is kicking to the knees and groin of the attacker. A grounded kicking scenario that had a profound influence on my decision to pursue this project featured the lone man who attended the Seward Park seminar. Midway through the class, "Paul" (pseudonym) coyly approached the group, introduced himself and asked if men could participate, stating openly that he recently had a violent encounter. He shrunk himself as he said this. Reading the gendered space, he was upfront in conveying that he is not an interloper, yet believed he could potentially find affinity with the group. The lead instructor of the class welcomed him, as did many of the other participants.

Paul stood out from the crowd, not just for being a man. He was distinctly tall for a person of any gender and had his arms folded tightly over his chest as he watched the demonstrations. He pulled up his sleeve, revealing a rainbow wristband, suggesting he may self-identify as gay or queer. Meanwhile, the women who had already been through multiple verbal and physical drills were watching intently with their arms to their sides, sometimes pantomiming

the defensive positions of the instructors as they demonstrated shielding themselves with their hands in front of their bodies. He happened to arrive shortly before the grounded kicking drill. To demonstrate tactics, one instructor held a kick shield at her shin. The other demonstrated "shrimping"[162] to quickly turn herself from her stomach to her back and getting into a stable kicking position. She then stomped at the kick shield, shouting at the simulated attacker to leave her alone.

The instructor and assistants broke up the groups, where then students could practice shrimping into a side or supine position and kick. We do not require students to participate in every activity. Learning self-defense is an ongoing process, and we do our best to meet participants where they are, with the hope that the next time they take another class they will be able to do more activities. Paul stood aside and watched until the end of the drill. But then he asked if he could do the drill, too. A combination of being unfamiliar with the process of participation and being in a gendered space (that was not for him) perhaps influenced his initial hesitance to participate in the drill. The head instructor happily obliged and held a kick shield to her shin. He gave a few test kicks, and then began screaming and thumping his feet into the pad. We stood back and allowed him the time to land as many strikes as he needed to until he stopped.

He was weeping and shivering as he stood up and thanked the instructor. Several of the students and an assistant converged upon him and asked if he was okay. The mass turned into a group hug of students telling him that his attack was not his fault and that he deserves to be loved

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[162] Shrimping is a technique of pulling the knees and elbows close to the stomach, causing the body to take on a shrimp-like shape. This concentrates the body into a structurally sound position, allowing for fast movement in any direction, whether flipping over or posturing up to run away.

and respected – all expressions that we repeated during the opening circle. As he settled, the group began clapping and cheering, hugging, high-fiving and fist-bumping each other after having witnessed this intense moment with a complete stranger. This was the final physical drill of the event. Now with most of us covered in a fresh coat of mud, we “circled up” and moved on to the sociological component of the seminar. At this stage, we check in on how everyone is feeling after a particularly intense section of the course. We then distribute handouts with statistics about violence as well as some notations about gendered social norms that perpetuate conditions of victimization. We allow at least ten minutes of discussion for this final section.

Such intense reactions during drills are not uncommon. It is atypical to *not* have at least a few tears throughout the duration of a seminar. Where possible, assistants will quietly drift in the direction of the person having a strong reaction, ask about their condition, and remain close to them during instructional pauses. In these classes, we openly break social norms around emoting in public. We actively counter the casual neglect of a stranger’s distress in public. Private suffering is made public. Paul’s experience sits at several axes of gender and violence. Broadly, men are more likely to be the victims of violence, especially where the assailant is unknown[163]. The dimensions of intimate partner violence among LGBTQ persons are often poorly understood[164]. Self-defense classes for men are often coded as opportunities for men to fulfill their normative societal roles as protectors rather than opportunities to heal from distressing experiences.

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[163] See Lurigo (2014) for an extensive analysis of violent crime trends and gender-based breakdowns of victimization.

[164] National LGBT Health Education Center and Xavier Quinn (2024) on institutional failures and myths surrounding intimate partner violence in the LGBTQIA+ community.

What of the male victim? We were unsure if he had been bashed or assaulted by a partner. The details did not matter. Paul's sociodemographic background is distinctly different from the women who were participating in the seminar, yet he had many of the same fears and stressors as they did. Among two dozen or so women of their own mixed racial, class, and relationship backgrounds, he found a collective of experientially similar others. For a moment in time these differences melted away in the heat of training. All were witness to familiar fears. For two hours each person confronted those fears, serving as facilitators for one another in verbal exchanges. They were proactive participants in each other's training and subsequent transformation.

Even though the participants in the self-defense clinic were all laypeople, they nonetheless had a major influence on the outcome of each other's training. A park, which may conventionally be understood as a therapeutic landscape all its own, was brought under control as a self-defense clinic in which the participants themselves were active agents in the social arrangement of the space. Their presence in the park is embodied through touch and verbal interactions, and these interactions often defy normatively acceptable behavior in public. Whereas Doughty's (2013) walkers talk and provide low-anxiety opportunities for social engagement, the self-defense trainees create a container for direct confrontation with fear and anxiety. They grab each other. They scream and cry in public. In that sense, they disrupt the conventionally therapeutic discursive space of the park, transforming it from a site of play and restoration to one of adult public outburst that is in its own way therapeutic.

Transformation through Training

The ultimate goal of self-defense and martial arts training is to foster a sense of self-reliance in all parts of life, but especially in dangerous situations. As Victoria noted in the first

section, participants are often afraid at the beginning of the semester-long self-defense course. The physical self-defense component of Victoria's is based in Jiu-Jitsu. "James" (pseudonym), notably a cisgender man, teaches most of the physical components of the self-defense curriculum. Students have the benefit of engaging physically with a trainer who is often larger and stronger than they are. Through these experiences they develop confidence in their physical ability to defend themselves. Victoria further notes, "there's a lot of variation but… generally students tell me that they… they feel more confident. They develop a greater sense of confidence in their physical abilities for sure. And they come to really enjoy the physical part."

Transformation is integral to the curricula of these programs, with instructors pursuing changes deeper than the physical aspects of self-defense. In other words, drills and discussions are the method of intervention, and transformation of a trainee's sense of self and control are the outcome. Yara (Respondent 16) a self-defense and martial arts instructor from California spoke at length of her transformation goals for students in her program,

> "…no matter what your origin story is, at any moment through creative choice, knowing that you are creating your existence of what you allow, what you continue, and what you choose to set to death, you are re-writing your story at any moment. That you're not tied to your youth. You're not tied to events that define you or the loss that has completely altered your heart or shredded your spirit... that there is hope, and it starts with listening more to your inner woman."

Yara and other instructors' descriptions of personal transformation echo the language of Keating (2015) and Gesler (Gesler 1992) discussions of discursive space in that one's understanding of space is filtered through the norms of broader (and sometimes idio) cultures and belief systems. Yara reflects on the need to alter a discourse of the self.

What sets contemporary self-defense apart from the padded attacker classes of the 1980s is this heavy focus on personal history and socialization as drivers for decision-making and

victimization. Colin noted of the conversations he engages while deconstructing socialization and power dynamics:

> "…what's in between me and saying 'No' when I need to say 'No.' If it's like, 'I feel like I'm not allowed to say no' or if I'm culturally or family-conditioned to not believe in my 'No,' any amount of physical striking I learn is useless, because I don't actually believe I have a right to say 'no' or a right to my body. And if that's not addressed, I don't understand how we can even attempt to do self-defense."

Noteworthy here is the emphasis on the necessity of reevaluating socialization as a means of being better able to utilize the physical aspects of self-defense.

"I do a lot of covert sociology in that class," Victoria said of the "Empowerment" section of her self-defense course. Developed in the 1970s feminist self-defense movement, *Empowerment Self-defense* (ESD) is a model that originates from an analysis of gender-based violence (ESD Global 2023). Instructors examine cultural norms and systemic issues that predispose specific groups of people to violence, paying particular attention to groups that are marginalized within their own societies. A well-rounded course will educate participants on societal awareness, situational awareness, boundary-setting, as well as physical self-defense as the last resort. The porosity of this intervention beyond physical self-defense is to equip participants with the resources to create safe scenarios for themselves rather than deferring to cultural norms that relegate them to disempowered roles and relinquish matters of safety to masculine authority figures (McGaughy 1997).

In their own upbringing in martial arts and self-defense work, instructors themselves also noted their own individual transformations. Colin spoke at length of the personal transformation he underwent as he began teaching self-defense, as well as the immediate social consequences of those changes:

> "Like, we invite in what we want, you know? And I notice that in my own life. All the times in my life where, most of the time in my life where I did not see myself as worthy as is, I did not love myself, I did not value myself, was very hard on myself... and I grew up on the East Coast in a depressed coal mining town, so everything in... the way of my people is like, 'if things are hard, be harder,' so I was attracting people into my life that would like break me down and like shame me, because in my head that's what love felt like, and that's what connection felt like. And then I started doing... teaching the workshops I started like, using the stuff I was teaching. Like, I can't be teaching this stuff if I'm not doing it myself, and it started forcing me to make changes, and one of those was realized that I surrounded myself with people that break me down instead of build me up, because that followed a script that I had inside, and I couldn't get rid of those people until I changed the script.
>
> And when I first started setting boundaries, it wasn't like people were like, 'Oh man, thank you so much for telling me how you feel, and that you really value me enough to keep this relationship and do repair.' It was like, people freaking the fuck out on me and attacking me and that was hard, but man once I got through that I now draw in amazing, incredible, loving, thoughtful, healing, supportive people. And it's like, that's the foundation of self-defense. But it's, it's a hard ask."

For Colin to help transform others, he had to transform himself. This was perhaps Colin's most grounding transformation[165], and interview he described being in an ongoing state of transition. At present he is working from a healthier, more balanced place than where he began.

Being in leadership does not mean that one has all the answers. A willingness to recognize one's own needs and adapt to improve one's condition alongside others is integral to creating sustainable networks of care. Perhaps it would be appropriate to add "self-reflection" to Tronto's virtues of "caring with" (Tronto 2013, 35). Self-reflection proactively situates the individual in relationship with others. "If citizens are willing to recognize their own needs, then they can also recognize that others have needs as well," (Tronto 2013, 146). Colin's retelling of

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[165] Colin provided the most detailed discussion about the inner turmoil that arises in teaching self-defense and how his understanding of capacity and coalition building is constantly in flux. He had recently shuttered his brick-and-mortar school in order to make room for a new phase of self-defense work.

personal transformation early in his self-defense conveys a reversed but parallel narrative: through his connection to the struggles of others, he was able to uncover and heal from his own personal wounds – which then made him a more responsive and competent instructor. This reiteration of intersubjective reflections, two mirrors held face to face, has the potential to create cycles of wellness.

As several respondents noted in this chapter, individuals have come to self-defense clinics because they are afraid. They see that in themselves and in their peers. Instructors arrive recognizing this in their participants as well. Instructors will create opportunities for trainees to engage in increasingly frightful scenarios as a means of developing their self-defense skills. Teaching with and through fear becomes a means of confronting those powerful emotions. When students support each other through the practice of verbal and some physical exchanges, they bear witness to each other's acts of personal growth. One's own fear becomes a vehicle for another's growth. Unfortunately what these clinics lack is time, however it is worth noting that interactions do not need to be protracted to have a profound influence on a person (Gage 2013). For a brief moment, anyway, the cluster of individuals become active agents in a care topography in which one is serving as a giver of support and also as a receiver of support.

Departures from the Conventions of therapeutic landscapes

Martial arts training walks a peculiar line between health and harm. There exists an inherent danger in any physically demanding practice, and in particular with practices that are rooted in combat. This poses a contradiction to the basic assumption of therapeutic landscapes as places with a known reputation for healing (Gesler 1993). Andrews et al. (2005) workshop this

contradiction in their exploration of bodybuilding cultures in British gyms. They note conventional engagements with therapeutic geographies in those spaces: that participants are "getting in shape," that they experience peer support, and that they are proactive participants in developing a positive self-image. Amidst those positive experiences, participants may also encounter less healthy experiences: overtraining and steroid use. Indeed, consistent exercise can serve as a healthy activity, but when bodybuilding is treated as an extreme sport or drives an eating disorder, a normatively healthful activity can introduce unhealthy approaches to participation.

The temptation to view therapeutic landscapes as absolutely curative is rooted in the origins of the theory. Hot springs are a delight, indeed. But as we scholars apply this framework to spaces in which individuals are proactive participants in the "therapy" itself, this opens room for contestation within the individuated experience of therapeutic landscapes. The *landscapes of care* perspective treats individuals and groups as proactive agents in processes undertaken to make spaces "therapeutic," and furthermore admonishes scholars to observe scenarios where laypersons wield significant decision-making power. These "surprising" scenarios nonetheless facilitate caring interactions (Milligan and Wiles 2010).

I utilize the language of "departure" to call attention to the ways martial arts practitioners openly interact with objectively hazardous and normatively aversive activities – notably un-therapeutic bodily practices. In some cases, this involves developing a non-normative relationship with painful touch. In others, injury from overtraining and emotional exhaustion from burnout create unhealthful experiences. These scenarios are rife with potential follies that complicate normative assumptions of therapeutic landscapes being universally healthy (Finlay 2018; Laws 2009). Nevertheless, practitioners persist. The following subsection will address

these hazards and contradictions and will pose challenges to assumptions that therapeutic landscapes are always healthy. Rather, us scholars ought to account for the people conducting activities within those spaces in addition to the space itself, regardless of a space's reputation for healthful experiences.

Combat and an Altered Relationship with Pain

Returning to the kitchen of the Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu studio, trainees awaiting their turn "on the mat" took time to communicate with each other in an open environment as they prepared themselves for training. The normatively maladroit question "What did you do to your face!?" would be hurled at anyone sporting a black eye or lip scab. All present in the room smile and chuckle, exchanging knowing nods and empathetic hisses. In addition to showing each other bruises and discussing what parts of their bodies were aching that day, this was also an opportunity for trainees to prepare themselves for class. Practitioners would pass around a roll of medical tape and a pair of scissors, gingerly splinting their fingers together to prevent further sprain injury. Those who could not tape themselves recruited help from a fellow student. Without fail, when the taping was completed, the taper would ask the tapee, "Does that feel good?" and the tapee would fold their hands into a fist and simulate a grabbing gesture.

Writing on the recreational practice of MMA[166], Kyle Green (2011)[167] roots his analytical point of origin through *Nonrepresentational Theory*, emphasizing the construct's focus on the body. Green notes that "the body is defined by capacities in relationships: the capacity to affect

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[166] The sport of Mixed Martial Arts, as practiced in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) or Professional Fighters League (PFL).

[167] Kyle Green's (2011) article interviewed all male participants at an MMA gym. His gendered analysis explored how MMA training provided opportunities for middle and upper-class males to explore non-normative expressions of masculinity more commonly associated with lower-class activities, that being fighting.

and be affected the capacity of movement (or rest) with particular speed (or slowness), the capacity for particular intensities and sensations… what can be done to this body and what can it do?" (Green 2011, 380). In the context of martial arts, bodies can hurt each other, and the owner of a body can experience hurt. However, these painful encounters may not always be repulsive. In fact, as the trainees above demonstrate, they can be desirable, something to share, or at least not be shy about. Green terms this phenomenon *the seduction of pain*.

Embodiment and pleasure are implicit in the language of seduction, but what of pain? The terminology of seduction is apt in this case if one adopts a broader (read, non-sexualized) definition of the term: "to be led astray" or "to persuade to do something disloyal, disobedient"[168]. Green's *seductive* pain "leads his respondents astray" from duties of labor and normative expectations of American manhood. Noteworthy in this analysis is how the upper and middle-class men who generally work white collar jobs and can afford MMA training, which can be expensive. Through the leisure practice of embodied rigor – and danger, they can experience a form of body-driven "laboring" conventionally associated with working-class masculinity[169]. I nudge Green's analysis further, arguing that placing embodied rigors in a leisure setting allows for more extreme experiences with pain to be accessible, even desirable, whereas pain in a paid labor scenario is often associated with unsafe or ergonomically unhealthy working conditions. Green's respondents follow pain away from the disembodied world of white-collar work to a deeper understanding of themselves through vivid experiences of the body: "You don't know

[168] (Collins Dictionaries 2024b); the verbiage implies that one is doing something they should not be.
[169] Also see Abramson and Modzelewski (2011, 143) on middle class men and women who pursue Mixed Martial Arts training as a means of "viscerally realizing American ideals."

yourself until you get hit" (2017, 378). This pain creates distance between the practitioner and everyday life in exchange for closeness with themselves and with their training partners.

Several of the respondents spoke about their experiences with intense physical contact and pain. "Pain is informational. I try to think of it as a very objective thing…," "Chris" (Respondent 20) noted when asked about their experience and interpretation of painful touch. "[It's] different for everyone, but for me pain is a message. And I think in martial arts, I have developed a real curiosity and exploration of pain and not to say, 'high or low,' just like what am I feeling. Am I uncomfortable? Why am I uncomfortable?" I interpret Chris' response as describing a non (or minimally) aversive experience with pain. They interpret pain not as something to be avoided, rather it is something to be understood.

"Lucia" (Respondent 19) provided a narrative response that echoed a similar language of exploration and curiosity to that of Chris. She spoke at length about how she has reconciled her relationship with painful touch in the context of Kajukenbo whereas in other contexts, such as massage, she finds hard or painful touch highly aversive:

> "…with so many areas in my life... yeah, I like things gentle and yet in martial arts, I- probably because I'm engaged, as well. I guess I can't help but think when something is being done onto me, and maybe there's some unresolved, probably have some unresolved trauma from that, even though it's obviously an agreement and this person is here to heal, but it's still very hard for me to work through that. Whereas in Kajukenbo there's an agreement, and there's a curiosity and an exploration, and even an appreciation of solid controlled hard contact. I, for instance, when upper belts hit me hard, it feels good, that kind of contact…"

Lucia conveys two angles of intervention. First, that she is an active subject in a co-constructed experience, rather than being the object of a healthcare practitioner's (for example) hard touch. She and her partner(s) have agreed to a curious exploration. This is a mutually agreed-upon experience with hard touch, and both parties are engaged with proactive intention.

The second angle is the experience of controlled force that is delivered from her partner. Though the strike may be hard, the sense of control from a partner makes it feel "good." Lucia immediately set this "good" hard contact in contrast with aversive hard contact. Her thought continues from the final line of the quote above:

> "…when upper belts hit me hard, it feels good, that kind of contact, as opposed to when I'm sparring with the white belt, something boils out of them. And it's, and it's not any harder than a black belt, but it definitely hurts more because of a lack of control behind it. And it's done pretty much as a as a response of fear and not being aware."

Lucia distinguishes between hard contact that originates from a place of control and attention in the moment and hard contact that originates from something non-attentive and external to the immediate context of sparring. Fear and lack of awareness "boils" out of the white belt's body and collides with hers. The contact is no harder than that of the black belt, but the sensation of uncontrolled touch is distinctly unpleasant.

During an in-class discussion among teacher-trainees, the head of the class conveyed a similar sentiment that distinctly spoke to the notion of "touch" as a form of dialogue (Van Dongen and Elema 2001). "You can feel it when someone is hitting you with their bad feelings. It's like how your tone affects what you say to someone. 'Your hair looks nice today [in a dull and sarcastic tone].' It's the same thing." Touch conveys an objective message and a subjective delivery. This is intuitive enough when one contrasts differences between types of touch: a hug versus a handshake. The respondents pivot their observation to variations within the same classification of touch.

Here, consent and intentionality help to regulate the safety and intensity of painful experiences. Practitioners engage one another with an agreed-upon level of risk, and in some cases even speak fondly about their experiences with minor injury. Olivia said of her early days

of training, “I wasn’t one of those students who was afraid to express myself… to express power physically. I really enjoyed it, and I found other people right away who let me share that with them, and they shared that part of themselves with me. In other words, we were bruised a lot, right away [chuckles].” She spoke of these bruising exchanges as sharing experiences, again implicating the mutually agreed-upon nature of the activity as the mechanism for making normatively aversive experiences desirable. Another seasoned trainee, “Ashley,” (pseudonym) expressed a similar sentiment during a participant-observation session, “When I was a white belt I was [gestures with a closed fist] in it! …I enjoyed the hard contact. I felt empowered!”

When asked about past injury events, Melanie echoed similar sentiments with even greater flippancy towards considerably more serious injuries. “In a sparring thing at camp, at [EVENT NAME REDACTED], and that was my first real-[sic]… I mean, I had broken, dislocated fingers and black eyes and normal stuff. You know, normal battering, but nothing major until the Achilles tendon so I had to have surgery.” For Melanie “normal battering” is simply an expectation to training. To most non-practitioners, these sentiments are peculiar at best, but they demonstrate pain’s ability to lead practitioners away from normative expectations of interpersonal conduct.

Later in our conversation, Olivia revisited some of the benefits and challenges of intense training. The following comes in the context of discussing training preferences. That is, trainees often develop easier training relationships with certain individuals versus others and have preferences for how they like to train. Despite these preferences, it is a norm to train with as many different people as possible during classes. Olivia notes, “The experience of having your back up against the wall with somebody who is friendly to you but punching you over and over again is an experience of learning how to keep a clear head. And to me there is a direct

translation to being able to make decisions under stress." Once again, the friendly relationship between practitioners allows for these (presumably) painful forms of touch to be enriching experiences. Olivia goes on to say that "stress" prepares trainees for less exacting training scenarios; the ability to read and approach situations with level mindset even if a trainee works with a partner who is not the perfect match.

The respondents depict a peculiar but thoughtful relationship with hard contact. Nestled within a fighting culture where hard contact is a sign of respect (O'Shea 2019), practitioners must negotiate their own relationship with and response to intense sensations. At the periphery of the literature for this dissertation was the *deviant leisure* framework. Dialogues of deviant leisure originated from the field of Criminology and thus trended towards legal definitions of criminality to delineate deviance from non-deviance (Erikson 1962; De Block and Adriaens 2013). More recently, scholars have taken a cultural approach to understanding deviance that situates notions of deviance under the "ideological primacy of consumer capitalism" (Smith and Raymen 2018, 63). Legality is treated as a dimension of cultural acceptability, not the only dimension.

Participants in this section and the next engage in activities that outside the context of the dojo would likely result in arrest, or at the very least be frowned upon as ruffian behaviors. Indeed, some degree of imputation still follows Mixed Martial Arts despite its overwhelming popularity[170]. Reading the actions of these respondents through a stigma-based etic lens belies the extensive negotiations that participants undergo for the purpose of attenuating the potentially

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[170] Senator John McCain, once an avid boxer, expressed resistance to the sanctioning of Mixed Martial Arts under state athletics commissions, referring to the sport as "human cockfighting" in a letter to fifty US governors. Noteworthy McCain's combat sports history as a high school wrestler and boxer at the US Naval Academy in the 1950s (Greene 2018; Marocco 2018).

more dangerous aspects of combat-based leisure activity. What on the surface indicates deviation contains repeated and ongoing negotiations around touch and consent. They are proactive in their considerations around what does or does not feel like an acceptable degree of intensity. For these respondents, an idiocultural norm – ideally a caring one – that allows for these mediations is what separates outright harmful hard touch from a challenging, instructive training experience.

Self-Harm and Harm to Others

Several respondents discussed their efforts towards developing more a sustainable and healthful training relationship with the martial arts. Labor and serious leisure activities can be time-intensive, and a handful of respondents spoke of their difficult experiences with maintaining their health and managing their time. Issues of overcommitment tended to fall into two categories: overtraining and employment-related burnout. The consequences of overtraining vary based on the nature of the athletic endeavor. Common adverse outcomes include overuse injuries (i.e. repetitive stress fractures and tendonitis), poor recovery form workouts, and failure to recover from extant injuries (Brenner 2007). Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter describe *job burnout* as "a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job" (2001, 397). The authors note three dimensions of burnout: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. A few respondents will discuss their experiences with burnout as they managed the difficulties of managing everyday life alongside their working obligations at their respective studios.

Noteworthy is that a handful of respondents were working as instructors, held high-ranking positions at their schools, or were the owners of their own studios. Having leadership obligations placed these individuals in a unique position in that alongside their own leisure engagement with the martial arts, they were also tasked with the working responsibility of creating leisure opportunities for others. For some, this work was in the form of paid labor or

residency exchange. For others this work was performed on a volunteer basis. Adding to the complexity of these experiences is that often overtraining the body happens in the process of keeping up one's own leadership obligations while *also* maintaining a rank-appropriate training regimen. This subsection will henceforth examine overtraining as a broad phenomenon that occurs in scenarios of pure leisure as well as labor. Furthermore, this subsection will treat experiences of those whose labor (paid or unpaid) produces leisure opportunities for others as a distinct group.

Self-Harm: Overtraining and Work Burnout

Given the whimsical implications that the term "leisure" entails outside of academic circles, some trainees may take umbrage with my usage of the term to describe martial arts practice. There is nothing whimsical about a lifetime of commitment to a practice that requires the development of useful and repeatable skills. Robert A. Stebbins (Stebbins 1992a) thus argues that an activity's declared status as leisure should be left to the subjective judgment of the individual engaging in the activity. He draws attention to one of Kaplan's seven "essential elements" of leisure, that "[leisure is] often, but not necessarily, an activity characterized by the element of play" (Stebbins 1992b, 5) [171]. In simpler terms, leisure is not always fun. For participants, especially those in leadership positions, this "lack of fun" can manifest in unhealthful ways.

In the final chapter, the subsection on *Contemporary Monasticism* will review Chris' experience in greater detail. Chris reflected on their experiences serving as an *Uchi-deshi* at an Aikido dojo. In brief, *Uchi-deshi* live at the dojo and aid in the basic operational tasks of the

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[171] Citing Kaplan (1960, 22–25).

school. They are also expected to take or assist in most classes. Chris discussed training five to six hours every day. "It's not accelerated, but really intensive practice. It's not good for your body." They were also tasked with the daily management of the dojo, such as administrative work and cleaning. Chris continued, "If I wasn't training or cleaning, I was sleeping or eating… just making sure you're getting enough calories in your body and sleeping as much as possible, but truly it was just the full, like, break you down emotionally, mentally, physically, to bring you back up again but just desperately trying not to get injured."

The commitment of time, physical and psychological toil are exhausting. In hindsight Chris was critical of this arduous structure. They furthermore acknowledged how their tolerance for pain comingling with an excessive regimen led to unhealthy training experiences. "Pain was secondary to whatever the routine and schedule was… both emotional, physical, all of those. Like, whatever pain that existed was secondary to maintaining the schedule and I think I've definitely evolved since then." Commitment to upholding the operation of the training space superseded Chris' own wellbeing. They have since transitioned to a more forgiving approach, which has helped them ward off burnout and maintain physical health. However, at the time of the interview they were continuing to manage chronic musculoskeletal issues related to training injuries[172].

"Miriam" (Respondent 6) reflected on a workplace knee injury that, from her description, was likely a sprain. She attributes the injury in part due to overtraining, though her occupational history also placed significant physical demands upon her. Miriam worked in the restaurant

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[172] Chris cited a fused third arch in their foot, which has greatly limited their ankle mobility.

industry and was also self-employed as a personal trainer, all the while still training in Kung Fu. She describes the physical demands of her many activities at the time:

> "In addition to working in the restaurant I was also teaching and training and doing lots of high impact- both here training in martial arts, but also training people, teaching classes…a lot of things I was doing. There was a lot of jumping. So, I think… there was some overtraining going on certainly, and so I think that weakened things, and so when this particular thing happened, I think it was a combination of probably overtraining and there was something slippery on the floor, and my knee twisted, but my foot didn't move."

It was in that moment she realized, "Oh my God. You know... my movement is my livelihood, and if I can't move, what am I going to do?" She was able to perform all of these demanding tasks until she suddenly was not.

Speaking of my own experience of overtraining injury, during the peak of my participant-observation stages I was training in Kajukenbo, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, and Capoeira while also keeping up a weightlifting schedule. I rarely had more than one day off per week and was practicing for two to four hours each training day. I was in my late twenties and highly energetic, while also fixated on training and research progress. After a certain point, my weightlifting plateaued. Unaware (unaccepting, really) of this decline, I unwisely began learning a new lift but did not reduce weight appropriately and developed tendonitis in my right bicep attachment. This made contact training extremely painful, to the point that I could not block strikes with my right arm. I had to be extremely precise when posting with my right arm to stand up in BJJ, and even had to retrain left-moving cartwheels in Capoeira.

Reflecting on those behaviors, I had experienced so many improvements to my health after I began weight training and practicing Kajukenbo in 2014 that I developed a clouded vision of how physical activity could become unhealthy. My knee pain was greatly reduced. My sciatica went away. I even stopped using antidepressants. Taking on these activities was an

overwhelming net positive, but the margin for error for avoiding injury was narrowed as a result of so much physical work. This placed significant limitations on my training for several months while I recovered. The irony of my situation and that of Miriam is that a sort of disembodiment while engaging intensely in these embodied practices had the consequence of bodily harm. Similarly to Andrews et al.'s (2005) overtraining bodybuilders, though we were in a general milieu that prioritized wellness, a caring approach to this work was not directed towards ourselves.

Harm to Others

"The workout isn't over until there's blood on the floor." Adriano Emperado, Kajukenbo Founder

The martial arts are indeed rooted in practices of war. Great Grandmaster Emperado's motto characterizes an era of particularly hard training in post-WWII Hawai'i. At that time, battle-hardened combat veterans were training one another, and the accepted injury risk was far in excess of how many schools train today. Nonetheless, the ethos remains in that injury and risk are to be expected. Though the respondents and practitioners at-large do their best to engage in these practices in the least harmful ways possible (most of the time), incidences of harm between practitioners and harm to the self are common occurrences. Risk, danger, and the threat of injury, intentional or not, are elemental to simulations of battle. Still yet, practitioners return to continue training in spite of these hazards. Under the best circumstances, they nurse their own injuries and tend to each other, eventually returning to some degree of physical functionality. The circumstances that precipitate these incidences do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they also reflect the values of a work-centric culture – the same that Green's (2011) respondents are trying to escape – *and* a normative milieu of martial arts training that values toughness.

At my own Kajukenbo school, Emperado's above quote exists as a sort of humorous assertation both in that lacerations are fairly common during training, and that the type of injury that would cause so much bleeding is well in excess of anything that we would normally expect to occur. In the opening minutes of my green belt test in 2018, I sustained a cut after dodging a punch to my temple, but my partner's fingernail swiped across my forehead. I didn't notice what had happened until she stopped and exclaimed, "You're bleeding!" The head instructor of my school came to the floor and examined the wound. I stood there awkwardly as she inspected the wound. "Yay! We can all go home now!" I quipped, eliciting giggles from spectators and at least partly defusing the silent tension. We did not go home, and my test continued for three more hours. This was but one of many bleeding incidences that have occurred over the years. A similar memorable moment in 2019 occurred when a trainee observed apparently fresh blood droplets on the floor. Another trainee cracked the same joke about going home, then we examined ourselves and each other for wounds. We never found out where the blood stains came from – probably the class that happened before ours?

In general, the routine management of low-grade injuries is taken for granted as part of everyday training. We observe these marks on ourselves and on others every day. The changing area is a single-room, large outbuilding hidden behind the main structure of the kwoon. Up to a dozen individuals may be changing, eating or rehydrating at a given time. While collectively disrobing in a same gender[173] space is normative in physical training scenarios (i.e. gym locker rooms), asking questions about a neighbor's body is taboo at best. Yet here, trainees will check

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[173] My school was founded as an all-women organization and in recent years has updated its gender inclusion policy to explicitly welcome nonbinary and gender non-conforming individuals. The changing room has two curtained enclosures that trainees can use for any reason.

in on another's condition if they see a particularly colorful or large bruise, a bandage, or if they see another individual donning a joint support that they hadn't used in previous weeks. It is more than likely that someone in that changing room was responsible for delivering, causing the wound. Much like with the BJJ trainees in the kitchen, this liminal space where we begin our transition from the working and family world to practice provides opportunities to openly discuss any issues we're experiencing with our bodies.

Several respondents spoke of injury experiences when training. Common notations were sprains [Respondent 5, 13, and 20]. Respondents also described bruising experiences [Respondents 12, 13, and 19]. Other respondents discussed helping students and fellow practitioners with managing impact injuries [Respondent 4 and Respondent 7]. Vera and Bernice recalled bloody and broken noses. When discussing these experiences, the respondents mentioned them with little fanfare, as such events are hardly noteworthy. Some degree of low-grade injury is an accepted risk. From my own experience, after about a year of training I became less reactive to hard contact and bruising. I often would not notice that a strike was hard enough to have caused a bruise until a day or so later while performing a mundane task, such as putting on a backpack, and feeling a sudden sharp pain.

Another unfortunate injury event, this time involving a bloody nose, occurred at that same green belt test in 2018. "Let's have a safe and challenging test," my head instructor always says as she concludes the opening circle at the start of a test. Worth mentioning is that in testing scenarios training intensity is often elevated. Testers are subjected to several hours of demanding physical endeavors. Endorphins dull pain and general sensations of touch, and non-testers are made aware that tester(s) will be operating in a more reactive state, and that we should approach

all scenarios with a heightened regard for our own safety. “Don’t give more than you are willing to receive,” so to speak.

During the physical self-defense section of my test, my training partner “Mischa” simulated unwanted advances and was moving into my personal space. While to that point I had been successful at stepping back and verbally defusing almost every scenario that had elevated to a physical attack, when Mischa grabbed towards my wrist, I closed my elbows towards my chest to concentrate my balance, and their face plunged towards my arms. In the moment, I perceived their face glancing against my forearm as they fell to the ground flailing somewhat comedically and still in character. At the conclusion of the test during the hug line, Mischa squeezed me and exclaimed, “Nice job! You gave me a bloody nose!!!” I was mortified and apologized profusely. I have reviewed the recording of that sequence a number of times, but I had my back to the camera which obscured the precise moment that they hit their nose. Was it my forearm? Did they strike my knee on their way to the ground as I was posturing to step backwards? Mischa was no worse for wear, and to this day regards that moment as a highlight of my test. Though I no longer dwell on the event, it was an important realization of how beside myself I was after a few hours of solo testing and how disembodying intense embodiment can become under such stressful circumstances.

For contemporary trainees, a low-grade injury is commonly regarded as the mark of a challenging training session. Two practitioners named their time practicing in past decades as distinctly injurious, making note of a more reckless approach to health during the time. Reflecting on her training experiences in the ‘80s and ‘90s, Bernice called attention to an expectant regard for injury compared to contemporary approaches:

> "…we went at it hard, so it was not uncommon for there to be broken noses and blood and, you know, people sidelined from getting it too hard. Now I think there's a little more- a better awareness of health and longevity in the art, and we're a little more thoughtful about what we do with our bodies. So, back then I had a broken nose, I had this, I had that. I had a knee thing. I had an ankle thing. It's just like, no big deal."

Standards and expectations of injury have changed. Mentioned more often in passing is the value of less injurious training methods as essential for longevity in training, but it is noteworthy that Bernice mentioned longevity and mindfulness about how she and her partners care for their bodies while training dangerous maneuvers.

Melanie also provided insight into the training milieu of past decades:

> "There was a lot of dysfunction going on. In the world. You know, women's rights were still not really there. Gay rights were gone… people didn't come out. We started marching in the [pride] parades and they weren't that big… So, it was a whole time of like, 'Beth' (pseudonym) grew up in it, too, and so did 'Megahan,' (pseudonym)[174] where they had to- you had to be a boy. You had to battle your way. You had to be tough. You never talked about your feelings. If you got hurt, you just get back up, you know? I was in a test one time and my shoulder got dislocated and I just sat there in Seiza until the end of the test with my shoulder hanging. I almost passed out, but I said, 'I can't show weakness.'"

In the '70s and '80s when Melanie began her training, standard practice was highly injurious. She did not dislocate her own shoulder – a training partner was involved in that. But the expectation of the time was to continue training. Among the most serious injury events I have witnessed, the student has been given the option to eschew medical treatment until the end of the test if the instructor declares that immediate medical attention is not required, but today students would not feel external pressure to continue testing in the event of a dislocated joint.

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[174] "Beth" and "Megahan" are pseudonyms assigned to well-known high-ranking practitioners. Full names would identify the interviewee.

Other interviewees discussed further severe injury events. Vera said of her experience with broken ribs, "I think my most significant Kajukenbo[175] injury was I zigged when I should have zagged, and I stepped into a kick and got some broken ribs… And I don't blame him. I really don't, and I really blame myself for not timing things and not understanding that he was that much faster than I was." Fortunately, Vera did make a full recovery, but her mention of this injury event places fault on herself due to misreading her partner's abilities and her own to keep up with him. This response demonstrates an accepted degree of risk in training. As noted in the previous section *Risk and Injury Management*, practitioners take many measures towards safe training, but these are all judgements made in the moment, and individual judgement can be imperfect. Vera's reflexive, non-resentful response may also be explained in part by Olivia and Lucia's own mediations on hard touch. In a consenting scenario when all parties are aware of the expectations of one another, hard or painful touch may not be emotionally unpleasant, even if the physical experience is hurtful or jarring.

Another respondent discussed a life-altering injury experience that she sustained during Aikido training. Reyna sustained a bruised spinal cord during a takedown. The immediate aftermath was severe peripheral neuropathy that disrupted her ability to walk, hold objects, and carry out daily tasks. Severe symptoms lasted for around two years, and she sometimes experiences numbness if she sits the wrong way. She no longer receives takedowns or rolls in any other art due to injury risk, however she did continue to train in less physically demanding arts such as Taijiquan and Iaido while recovering from this injury. Again, much like Vera, Reyna

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[175] In hindsight, I am realizing the significance of Vera qualifying this event specifically as a Kajukenbo injury.

did not assign blame or reflect on the precise injury event with anger or resentment. Rather, this was a matter-of-fact hazard of training in an art that features heavily in takedowns and rolling.

What stood out to me is that respondents largely did not speak of injuries from uncaring training partners. As a researcher I should have inquired further on this matter, but Chris provided insights on a distinctly unhealthy Aikido scenario in which practitioners trained with each other in unsafe ways. Speaking on a broader training culture of interpersonal misconduct, they note, "[behaviors] not appropriate on the mat, and like laughter at injury and like asserting your dominance and just being a bruiser rather than... like, you can train hard and obviously there's a level of consent to the potential of injury, but the intention to harm another person is very different. And that being like kind of a running joke." What distinguishes these jokes about injury in this scenario is a lack of care and accountability in training, as well as ill intention on the part of the training partner. When my test partner sliced open my forehead, she stopped the sparring session and called for the head instructor to intervene immediately. In Chris' scenario, some problematic trainees intentionally injured others and never faced accountability for their actions.

This dissertation aims to interrogate when training idiocultures are successful (or unsuccessful) at rendering care legible in their operation. Combative martial arts training comes with inherent risk, and it is worth naming a complementary *idioculture of risk* that is exemplified in these more dangerous scenarios. I chose the language of "complementary" rather than "counterpart" or "in opposition to" in that the ability to take risks can in part be facilitated through crafting a caring space (Elchuk 2020). Sheila noted on the importance of creating a safe container for her youth students:

> "I speak form authority and I speak from experience, so the trust just oozes out of you into what you're doing… and that structure. When the kids figure out that I'm not going to let them hurt themselves, I'm not going to let them hurt others, and I'm always going to make sure that they have fun, and I am always going to make sure that they learn. So, once they figure that out and that the frickin' room is padded, it shifts the risk and reward ratio massively."

Sheila speaks to the importance of setting expectations of safety, that any risk that does arise in her carefully crafted dojang and curriculum is no greater than minimal. It is a measured approach that seems especially appropriate for youths.

Among adults, an idioculture of risk can involve peculiar expectations of full-contact activities that place non-normative expectations of behavior at the forefront of interpersonal interaction. Janet O'Shea (2019, 29)[176] notes that:

> "…when it comes to sport fighting, meanings are inverted so that to refrain from hitting or to hit too lightly implies an opponent is not skilled enough to handle a strike. To not hit, in the martial arts context, is to withhold respect whereas in the real world, to hit is to withdraw respect. Hitting off the mat means 'I'm angry and I want to hurt you,' whereas on the mat it means, 'I think you can handle a challenge."

To not risk bruising a partner is a sign of disrespect, of underestimation. This is a complete inversion of conventional social norms, yet it is the usable and functional cultural filter through which risk can be explored.

Chapter Conclusion

The martial arts and self-defense encounter within therapeutic landscapes is indeed an unconventional one. Some aspects of training fit neatly within the framework, while others push the boundaries of what is normatively understood as therapeutic. As demonstrated in the final

[176] Citing Channon (2013).

subsection, these activities can be outright contradictory, or in cases where training practices are uncaring, harmful to participants. It is my hope as a trainer and participant that every training session fosters growth in participants' lives, even if that growth is incremental, and that if harm does occur it does not have long-term consequences. The conventional component of this chapter that I would like to emphasize is the significance of peer-to-peer and leadership relationships with students. Though leadership is tasked with conveying the standards of conduct and directing the objective measures of clinics and training sessions, the students themselves bear substantial responsibility for the quality of experience that their peers have. The unconventional component is in the navigation of normatively repulsive experiences, and how practitioners find meaning in painful or hazardous experiences.

The most basic interventions of creating a container and basic risk management serve as the foundation for safe practice. This creates a culture in which participants can, with reasonable confidence, believe that the risk of serious injury has been reduced, allowing for participation with less worry of risk and greater focus on learning curriculum and observing the needs of training partners. Any physical practice requires a high degree of attentiveness, but an activity in which participants simulate injuring each other – or do intentionally cause pain to one another – basic safety is the absolute minimum requirement for satisfying, healthful training. Scholars of care remind us that the bare minimum is not enough, and instead we ought to be taking full account of needs when conducting any activity in which another person's wellness and/or our own can be impacted.

In any training scenario, leadership sets the expectations that guide interpersonal conduct between trainees. As trainees interact with one another, responsibility for wellbeing is rendered horizontally. In the case of early martial arts practitioners or first-time self-defense trainees,

individuals with no training whatsoever are entrusted with ensuring the safety of a partner despite their lack of experience. Colloquially this may be considered basic empathy, which is indeed a dimension that can guide decision-making, but caring is an action. Leisure and therapeutic landscapes are brought together through acts that are done in a caring way. Leadership arranges the potentials for these goods to manifest, and under the best circumstances all participants gauge the needs of students and training partners to the best of their ability. Instructors model and engage consent practices. Peers wait for partners to express preparedness. When a scenario is emotionally difficult, peers and leadership alike can convene an immediate circle of support.

When accidental harm does arise, participants can and do take proactive measures towards resolving the issue as quickly as possible. Whether this is administering immediate high-level treatment (Reggie, Respondent 7) or deferring to trained medical authorities (Olivia, Respondent 11), practitioners bear responsibility in reducing the extent of harm or injury when it occurs. In some cases, the students themselves are encouraged to seek out their own treatments and learn basic curative measures in order to care for themselves or their peers. This conventional foundation is a necessary for the safe exploration of the more hazardous aspects of martial arts training.

Some degree of pain or danger is to be expected in a high-impact endeavor. Lucia and Chris differentiate the sensation of hard and painful contact that arises from a place of exploration in the rapturous moment versus hard contact that originates from a difficult mindset that is unrelated to the immediate moment of sparring. Lucia used the language of aversive hard contact “boiling” out of an inexperienced practitioner and a lack of “awareness.” The desire to continue training with a trusted partner seems intuitive enough, but in practice it is not possible

to avoid training with an inexperienced or dysregulated partner. The only way for the inexperienced partner to improve is to continue working with others and eventually bring those "boiling" emotions under control. Again, risk management is done to the best of one's ability, and especially in chaotic or high-pressure situations that ability may be limited. Helping fellow trainees develop into safe, regulated training partners is of equal importance to maintaining routine positive training relationships.

Leisure, ideally constructed and provisioned in a caring way, provides opportunities for individuals to explore these many contradictions. For long-term martial artists engaged in these exchanges, experienced practitioners commit to helping the inexperienced hone their mechanical skills and emotional regulation. Painful touch can be desirable if the contact comes from a place of exploration or high expectation (O'Shea 2019). As will be expressed in greater detail in the final chapter, this peculiar medium of exploration does yield healthful outcomes. For afternoon self-defense trainees in the park, honesty and openness with strangers becomes the expectation, not the exception. They speak openly about their fears, then confront fear through physical and verbal drills. They cry and comfort each other in public. The intersubjective exchange of words, emotions, and touch between individuals shapes that muddy corner of the park into something more than just a park.

These scenarios violate so many assumptions of normative public and interpersonal behavior that on the surface neither seems to fit neatly into the basic assumptions of therapeutic landscapes. It is however within that mismatch that the challenge of locating healthful, caring language or actions yields new understandings of how individuals create curative experiences for one another. Consent, patience, witnessing - all are acts of care. For self-defense and martial arts trainees, their engagement with wellness and transformation is an embodied experience. Whereas

Doughty’s (2013) walkers enjoy the incidental embodied experience of strolling undulating paths through greenspace, for martial arts and self-defense practitioners embodiment is the entire goal.

CHAPTER 6: THE SPATIAL PRACTICE OF CARE AND THE RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

This final chapter reviews the everyday spatial practices that participants perform to support the wellness of training partners as well as the upkeep of space. The first subsection examines healthful outcomes for trainees, with particular attention paid to protracted relationships that foster social connections and the exchange of health knowledge. Language training again returns as an important component of developing a lexicon of the body. This time, however, these words facilitate explicitly healthful practices. The second half of the section will examine injury and recovery. The first section will inform the second in that the knowledge exchanged in these protracted relationships during periods of normalcy can inform decision-making in moments of crisis or in the pursuit of appropriate care.

The second major subsection of this chapter will investigate what I will call the "dirty work" of martial arts (Hansen 2016). Though the dirty work of body-to-body contact in martial arts training does not reach the same level of intimacy has Hansen (2016) or van Dongen and Elema's (2001) nurses, their language for describing when matters of the body are not contained makes for a compelling fit for describing the level of physical closeness that trainees experience together. The types of touch that martial artists engage are outside the normative expectations of polite behavior, yet these are mundane forms of everyday touch that are appropriate to that particular space in those moments in time.

The second half of the second subsection examines the non-martial "doing" of space in daily life. Whereas *Chapter 4* was concerned with securing space and assembling it into a physically, socially, and symbolically durable place, this final subsection explores some of the less glamorous aspects of maintaining and modifying a school. Indeed, while training

components and wellness enhancements are important aspects of space-creation, not all activities that support the training outcomes are intrinsically "martial." Leadership and trainees take on active roles in the sustenance of the training space, taking on responsibilities for managing everyday needs of the dojo. In sum, these approaches to and interactions with space can make for a holistic relationship with training, the locale, and the community at-large for individuals who find value in curating space into place.

Healthful Outcomes from Martial Arts and Self-Defense Training

Overwhelmingly, in-person practitioners and in interviews discuss the health benefits of martial arts training. Websites advertising martial arts programs vaunt the merits of martial arts as a means of "getting in shape" and "developing self-discipline." Taijiquan is broadly recognized in the mainstream medical community as a gentle, healthful practice for ageing persons. Qigong, a non-martial cognate movement and wellness practice, has also received similar recognition[177]. Arguably of equal importance to the training itself is the exchange of health knowledge and self care practices in these spaces, with the inclusion of non-martial arts like Qigong. Long-term practitioners reported martial arts training and the health knowledge exchanged in these training scenarios as a means of bolstering current health and recovering from injury.

My major inspiration for this project was experiential. The fitness and strength benefits go without saying. When in training contexts, practitioners engage in extensive and often intimate exchanges of health information. On one day, a trainee may discuss her progress in

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[177] A school owner whom I visited several times in the Bay Area hosts medical Qigong programs at several cancer wards in the region. He has been operating this program for more than a decade.

Pilates for managing her back pain. On another, she may talk about her experiences with perimenopause. Most practitioners are laypeople, and some others are trained medical professionals. All provide each other with opportunities to discuss health issues that they themselves have either managed in the past or are currently managing. This free exchange of knowledge among laypeople and out-of-context professionals demonstrates what I term a "democratization" of health knowledge.

Laws (2009) described a similar phenomenon in a self-help group of "psychiatric survivors" that assemble meetings in conventionally un-therapeutic spaces, such as parks known for homeless encampments and drug use. Respondents, intentionally *all* laypeople, openly reject formalized medical psychiatric involvement in the self-help group. Participants had negative, traumatic experiences with formal psychiatric services. Instead they were bringing their healing processes under control on their own terms. While the spaces and individuals encountered during my research did not convey such explicit rejection of formal medical institutions, the autonomy of managing one's own health through routine martial arts training bears a striking resemblance to that of the self-help group. The exchange of health knowledge in both contexts exists outside the financial and professional gates of formalized medical care. Furthermore, the spaces where these exchanges occur are unconventional: "dark" and "dilapidated" city spaces known for crime and social disorder for Laws' respondents; the dojo where trainees choke and kick each other for this project's participants.

Martial Arts as a Gateway to Chinese Medicine

The inclusion of so many Chinese Medicine practitioners in this project is no mere coincidence. This particular network of individuals owes this flow of knowledge to the many Chinese Medicine practitioners of the San Fransico Bay Area who have advocated for the

legalization and proliferation of this knowledge over the decades. Many of the interviewees had their first exposures to Chinese Medicine via the martial arts. This experience occurs in a variety of ways: an instructor or high-ranking practitioner introduces basic medicines in the event of an injury. Friends invite each other to try classes together. Healthful Qigong and Taijiquan exercises may be integrated as part of the warm-up at the beginning of class. Still more, instructors may use the Mandarin or Cantonese terms for body parts when describing movements or coaching body awareness. These fragments of health knowledge remain useful tools for some, but for a handful of others the knowledge catalyzes a career shift.

For many in my training network and my network of interviewees, Chinese Medicine holds an undeniable presence. This will be evident throughout several portions of the upcoming chapter. The relationships fostered through martial training facilitate access to knowledgeable individuals who have profound influences on the health outcomes of respondents. These therapeutic relationships enmeshed in therapeutic landscapes, in some cases, represent a pivot towards medical pluralism as a means of health management. These relationships also represent a unique arrangement in that the practitioner providing distinct medical procedures also has a protracted training relationship with the patient, an arrangement that differs substantially from conventional medical practice.

Social Capital: The Commodity of Health Knowledge

Indeed, managing physical injury (acute or otherwise) is a routine occurrence in any movement-centered space. Practitioners often speak openly about their ailments and the interventions they use to correct those pains. Such an open social environment leads to the exchange of knowledge about healing modalities that practitioners have found to be efficacious. Respondents explicitly named nineteen different healing modalities, with nine of those

modalities falling squarely within the realm of Chinese Medicine. They implicated both leadership and peers as parties who introduced them to those healing modalities. The exchange of knowledge in a relationship of trust mirrors discussions of social capital in epidemiology.

Though scholars do not agree on a singular definition of *social capital*[178], an important thread that broadly resonates is the value of goodwill between socially connected individuals. Alder and Kwon (2002, 23) note that social capital "effects the flow of information, influence, and solidarity [made] available to the actor" through the "structure and content" of social relations. This description highlights several points. First, that context influences the type of relationships and the subject matter that these relationships are built upon. Second, that information and relationships mutually co-constitute influence. On this element, I push for a more proactive interpretation of "influence" and suggest "intervention" as the mobilizing language. Third is the importance of solidarity: Gage (2013) may recognize those relationships as *experientially similar* others, but the notion of solidarity more directly implicates some degree of care or concern for wellbeing between parties.

In the taken-for-granted experience of everyday training, these acts of care and exchanges of knowledge occur in mundane encounters. I remember the first time I was introduced to *Dit Da Jow*; I was wholly unfamiliar with Chinese herbalism as a practical intervention[179]. I was however trusting of the high-ranking practitioner who introduced the concoction to me. She was an allopathic medical professional and had been training in the martial arts for more than a

[178] See Szreter and Woolcock (2004) for debates on social capital in epidemiolocal research.
[179] Author Positionality: This was a formative "sense of place" moment as I was beginning to lay roots in the urban Pacific Northwest. For my white fellow trainee, the nonchalant deployment of Chinese herbs was a casual experience for her. For me it was a shaping experience in understanding the legacy of Chinese immigration to the region.

decade. I presented my bruised forearm to her, and she proceeded to massage the slick solution into the bruise. Ouch. She then prepared a small bottle for me and some basic instructions for self-application at home. By the end of the next day the bruise site was no longer painful, and by day two of self-application most of the discoloration had faded.

When respondents were asked about who purveyed health knowledge, fellow trainees and instructors emerged as an important social connection. Lucia began training in Kajukenbo in 2000. In 2008 she began working with an acupuncturist, but prior to this, she had not interfaced with healing modalities outside of Western allopathy or conventional integrative medicine (i.e. massage). Noteworthy in this case is that the acupuncturist was also a fellow trainee at her kwoon, thus this social relationship that originated in the leisure setting became a professional healthcare relationship between the two individuals. Lucia also named another fellow high-ranking trainee who introduced her to integrative healing modalities. Lucia's second partner-healer is also a long-time Chinese Medicine practitioner, and during their time training together she sporadically received interventions. Though both practitioners left the Bay Area several years ago, Lucia continues to seek acupuncture as a routine healing modality.

Reyna detailed a similarly caring relationship with her Taijiquan instructor. The instructor, herself a seasoned martial artist, Qigong practitioner, and internationally recognized Chinese Medicine professor, introduced Reyna to acupuncture and moxibustion following a severe spinal cord injury. Reyna reported that she had been recommended pharmaceutical interventions for pain management, however she was reticent towards taking anything stronger than Ibuprofen. She noted on the efficacy of her Chinese Medicine treatment, "I'd always believed in acupuncture, but I'd never been- I had never taken acupuncture sessions before and it was incredible. The results… for a few days, the edge of the pain would be gone. I mean, would

still be there, but the edge that would keep me awake at night would be gone." Reyna described some initial inexperience with Chinese Medicine but was nonetheless willing to engage with this new modality under the supervision of a trusted instructor with whom she had a training and non-training relationship for many years.

Narratives from Reyna and Lucia harken discussions from the landscapes of care perspective on what authors Milligan and Wiles (2010, 745) describe as "topographies of care." The language of topography implies a spatialized distribution and arrangement of features; when interpreting these arrangements Milligan and Wiles propose the examination of proximity and distance (2010, 741-742). Spatial nearness or distance is intuitive enough, but the authors also advise that we include questions of emotional, social, and economic proximity between those needing care and those who provide care. The topography of conventional neoliberalizing healthcare systems is such that several nexuses of metaphorical and spatial distance sit between the patient and practitioner; systems that "increasingly distance caring *for* from caring *about* (2010, 744)." Everyday carers, often family, are left to fill the gaps.

The arrangement of features, the people and places they occupy, in Reyna and Lucia's martial arts training environments demonstrate a more constructive topography of care in which the distance between *caring for* and *caring about* is narrowed. Physically and temporally, the practitioner-patient always knew where to find the practitioner-provider: they had been training together for years. This proximity set the stage for social and emotional closeness, and subsequently trust. In that regard, space facilitates the arrangement of care topographies such that social capital connections can grow. The subject matter Reyna and Lucia routinely addressed in their training relationships is of importance in that their interactions were already health and

body-centric. As such the relationship change from training partner to health advisor was a small pivot rather than a leap.

Melanie was similarly fortunate to have begun her early training with an internationally renowned Taoist Priest, also a Chinese Medicine instructor and accomplished martial artist. Her school specializes in Taijiquan and Qigong. The instructor treats principles of Taoist philosophy, such as Five Elements Theory, as integral components of martial arts training. She detailed his decades of care for his students:

> "I healed quickly when I was younger, and I do believe it was because I had 'Gabriel' (pseudonym) as a teacher, and he'd do acupuncture on me and Chiropractics [sic], so he'd put us back together quickly. He'd give us herbs. We drank herbs. He'd give us Dit Dai Jow or Zheng Gu Shui or different herbs to put on our injuries, so I really feel like we had- anything that happened to me was kind of like minimal because even if it felt like it was a big deal, he would take care of it for us. He would help us, and he would teach us how to help ourselves. He would teach us how to do, you know, acupressure points on yourself."

His work was even continuing in real time: a few hours before our interview, Melanie had a medical appointment with "Gabriel," during which he performed acupuncture and cupping.

For Vera, a chance encounter with Melanie set her on course to begin training with "Gabriel" (pseudonym) Though Vera had already made the decision to pursue formal education in acupuncture, she had been experiencing severe chronic health issues related to injury and fatigue. Conventional medical evaluations had been unsuccessful for managing her condition. Her upstairs neighbor and fellow Kajukenbo practitioner Sophia introduced Vera to Melanie during a friendly house visit, during which the trio discussed health issues, among other things. "You need 'Gabriel,'" Melanie said to Vera. She then invited Vera to accompany her to a Taijiquan class that was taking place later that morning. Vera recalled her first visit:

> "I walked into Taijiquan class, and everyone was speaking Spanish. All the students who were there in the early morning happened to be Spanish, native

> Spanish-speakers, and I was like, 'I'm home.' He walked in and of course I fell in love with him. So, I started training in Taijiquan with Gabriel while I was in acupuncture school."

To this day, Vera continues to study Taijiquan and Chinese Medicine with "Gabriel. She also operates her own Chinese Medicine and massage practice. During special events, she volunteers her skills as a massage therapist and a Chinese Medicine first-aid specialist.

Melanie's reflection is especially poignant, "even if it felt like it was a big deal, he (Gabriel) would take care of it for us." Melanie had immediate access to Gabriel's professional care *and* broadly caring approach to the martial arts. These distinctly body-centric *leisure opportunities* provide a unique structure for discussing matters of health with an unvarnished practicality. Here the context of martial arts, already bathed in the milieu of Chinese Medicine, creates opportunities for the exchange of knowledge, and in some cases even direct care from highly experienced practitioners. Social capital imparts the valuable asset of healthful training and health knowledge through both lay and professional practitioners who directly intervene in the active care decisions a trainee chooses as needed.

Again, the relationship between Vera, Melanie and eventually Gabriel depicts a closing of distance between individuals needing care and knowledgeable others who can provide it. In this case, Melanie physically brought Vera into the therapeutic space of her own school, where she introduced Vera to her mentor, Gabriel. Broadly, the three parties had a common interest in the subject-world of martial arts, but further strengthened their bonds through the introduction and exchange of health knowledge. Distance is once again narrowed: for Melanie training and educational time with Gabriel was part of her everyday life, and eventually this became Vera's daily routine activity.

English et al. (2008) explore the differences between extraordinary therapeutic landscapes versus everyday therapeutic landscapes[180]. A major distinguishing factor was time: extraordinary places (i.e. nature spas) are visited for a short period; "these landscapes are not intended to support long-term connections to health and healing" (2008, 70). In contrast, everyday places are overlooked or mundane. It is no rare occasion to be in one's own home or dojo. Yet, we would be remiss to overlook the potential flexibility of intervention that everyday therapeutic spaces allow. English et al. (2008) found that even though patients and their caretakers found the increased time and mental burden of coordinating at-home care to be daunting, they also reported a sense of empowerment and agency when crafting spaces of wellness in their own homes[181] as well as interfacing with community-based survivor programs.

Several respondents in that study described a process of bringing exceptional features or experiences into their homes. That is, they narrowed the distance of healing experiences. Noteworthy in my respondents' narratives is that these relationships in martial arts training spaces narrowed care distance through integrative practices. The presence of Taijiquan, Qigong, and Chinese Medicine represent a turn towards medical pluralism as a means of meeting health needs where conventional interventions could not. A site such as a dojo or a gym seems somewhere in between: individual distance from care and knowledge is narrowed due to the banality of routine visitation and old relationships, yet these sites are also not homes, at least not in a conventional sense. These sites do however "house" therapeutic landscapes where

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[180] English et al. (2008) examined the lives of breast cancer survivors and their efforts towards (re)shaping everyday spaces into healthful places that support their recovery.

[181] One respondent created a meditation room in her apartment. Another made a ritual of listening to music at home during intensive treatment periods (English et al. 2008, 73).

practitioners freely interface with knowledgeable instructors and supportive peers where they exchange health knowledge and proactively engage in their own health management.

Integrating Chinese Medicine as Part of the Martial Arts Curriculum

Noteworthy from the previous section is that Vera and Melanie have established themselves as respected martial artists and Chinese Medicine practitioners as a result of their ongoing relationships with other local practitioners. Their mentors offered a distinctly thorough degree of medicinal training. Fortunately, many other practitioners beyond this network also engage a similar process of educating their students in Chinese Medicine and broader healthful martial arts practice. “If you break it, you should know how to fix it,” was a common maxim among trainees working within the martial arts-Chinese Medicine interplay. Imparting a sense of responsibility and competence to intervene successfully for the consequences of one’s actions towards others was thus an integral component to a complete martial arts education.

Reggie offered a narrative account of how he uses his expertise in Chinese Medicine to assist students in first-aid scenarios. In a conversation about injury events, he noted of immediate intervention, “We treat them. We triage them, and we treat them right then and there.” The language of “we” is significant here. After Reggie’s students achieve their white sash (highest rank in their style), students begin learning basic Chinese Medicine. He notes:

> “They learn about acupressure, and they learn about Chinese Medicine, and they learn about some of the herbs. All my senior students know how to make *Dit Da Jow*[182]... we have a bottle for the school, of Jow. Anytime a student gets a bruise, something like that, they go right there and get it on their own. They don’t even have to tell me or ask me.”

[182] *Dit Da Jow*, roughly “Hit Fall Wine,” is a liniment made of herbs and suspended in alcohol. The liquid is massaged into bruised or swollen areas. It serves as analgesic and accelerates the movement of pooled blood and lymphatic fluid (Bisio 2009).

In this case, students become proactive participants in the creation of goods that aid in curative health outcomes of their practice mates. They may even participate in caring for their injured practice mate in a moment of crisis. As Reggie's belt system indicates, learning to heal is an advanced part of the martial arts training curriculum.

Vanessa underwent a similar training experience and offered some reflections from the perspective of a student. She waxed fondly upon the times that Bernice included students in the development of their Chinese Medicine education, chiming, "We had a class on how to make with Bernice. Bernice, one of her workshops- how to make *Jow*. How to make hit pills[183]. How to make this, how to make that, so we all learned how to make it." Unlike Reggie, Bernice's curriculum was not rank based. Any earnest student could participate in herbalism workshops. She would take students on field trips to local Chinese herb shops. Vanessa recalled:

> "…we went to Oakland Chinatown. We were visit [sic]. And she was there, and like, 'Okay I need this, I need this, I need that.' We would go to the herb store in Chinatown. Ask the herb, the person there, they'd give her this, then we went back to Site 4 and made it our own. Amazing right?"

Again, we see a high-ranking instructor proactively equipping students with the knowledge of supporting the wellbeing of their fellow students. These experiences represent unique circumstances in the Bay Area of California. The region saw several waves of Chinese immigration beginning in the 1800s. Chinese Medicine, various spiritual perspectives, Qigong, and innumerable styles of Kung Fu came with them. Today's geography provides ample

[183] *Die Da Wan*, known as "Hit Pills" or "Trauma Pills," this herb preparation is delivered in a cherry-sized sphere with a filling similarly textured to marzipan. It is chewed until soft enough to swallow. It is indicated to reduce blood pooling and aid in bone repair (Bisio 2019; I have eaten one).

opportunities for locals to learn these methodologies, and for ethnic Chinese to continue these heritage practices.

As noted in the previous section, Melanie had a distinctly rich exposure to Chinese Medicine through her head instructor. “Everything to do with Chinese Medicine was in our art. It was built into our art, so I was always shocked when I went into other schools and they didn’t know how to, like, fix things when they broke them. I was shocked. Literally shocked. So I didn’t... it’s like when you grow up with something, you just think everybody does it.” For Melanie comprehensive health training was the expectation. Lucia, who began her training in 2001 in Santa Cruz, echoed similar sentiments from her own early Taijiquan training. She credits her head instructor at the time for teaching the foundations of Chinese martial arts as an integrated health practice, not just a combative one.

Laws (2009) outlined three relational dimensions of therapeutic landscapes: (1) spaces of agency and appropriation; (2) a space in the world; and (3) a non-technical relation with space. For this section, *spaces of agency and appropriation* seems an apt descriptor for the encounters that these practitioners have with Chinese Medicine. *Spaces of agency and appropriation* describes the self-help group members usage of “marginal, stigmatised [sic] spaces [that] resemble less the spaces of hospitals or therapy suites than the transgressive landscapes of counterculture and deviance” as their own therapeutic landscape (2009, 1830). The popular understanding of martial arts training spaces is that of rigor and danger, and indeed as Melanie noted, she routinely encounters training spaces where health issues are not integrated. Nonetheless, those who prioritize the integration of health knowledge create their own “counterculture” of sorts that defies normative expectations form the broader world that does not

readily recognize the martial arts as curative as well as the normative operation of less health-focused martial arts training spaces.

I had the good fortune of visiting “Gabriel’s” school in 2017 and 2019. In that space, a curative experience is self-evident. Upon passing through the front entrance, one is greeted with a lobby stocked with herbs, Feng Shui accessories, and all formats of health-related literature. Two doors to the right of the room are clearly marked as treatment areas. Straight through the lobby and beyond an open portal, one enters into a large, open training space decorated with Five Elements posters and an enviable collection of singing bowls. It is unlike any conventional medical space I have ever encountered, and it is not. Here, student-patients train to be their own caretakers.

Though my visits have been brief, the sense of proactivity in the management of one’s health was very much present[184]. Our warm-ups mobilized our backs and arms before we bent over with a safe, nimble form to pat and rub our knees. “Gabriel” would explain the purpose of each movement and how to transition safely from one side of our bodies to the other. He would outline which Qi Channels we were opening and the broader impacts these improved flows would have on our organs. We learned to speak about our bodies in gentle ways while moving with ease.

A New Body Language

As mentioned at length in *Chapter 4*, language features centrally in martial arts training. In that context, language was applied to equipment, honorifics for addressing fellow participants, and for naming features of training spaces. Each style has its own unique vocabulary for naming

[184] I was usually the youngest person by decades, but this pace was good for me.

techniques. For my primary art, Kajukenbo, these techniques are taught in English, but in other styles these techniques are named in the language of ethnic or national origin. Traditional arts such as Kendo and Judo still use Japanese terminology. capoeiristas speak Brazilian Portuguese in the naming of techniques and in song. Practitioners of Chinese martial arts practitioners similarly learn the Mandarin and/or Cantonese terminology for techniques. As wellness-oriented practices, Taijiquan and Qigong introduce a new language for naming the body using nomenclature that is detached from the stigmas often embedded in common speech.

Taijiquan, and Qigong as a non-martial movement practice, have deep roots in Chinese medical philosophy, and as such practitioners learn a vocabulary for describing their bodies in addition to the techniques they are learning to deploy. Some descriptors for body parts match familiar Western conceptualizations. For example, at nearly every early Taijiquan class I attended, we students were admonished to "open our 'Kua'" when training. We learned that the *Kua* can be interpreted as the inguinal crease, specifically the ball and socket joint of the hip that sits behind the crease we can see and touch. The femur often sits folded laterally inward, as we spend so much time seated every day. Opening the *Kua* activates a healthier range of motion in our hips. The *Kua* is also at the nexus of some of our strongest muscle groups, and furthermore houses the largest bundle of lymph nodes in the body.

At the time of writing, my experience in Taijiquan is limited, but I do hope to adopt it as a long-term study in the near future. I entered into these trainings as a Westerner who was previously oriented towards medical geography with a general interest in medicine. Body "parts" are not talked about as individual pieces or collections of the same type of tissue (i.e. rotator cuff). Rather, they are discussed as regions where multiple systems share space and have influence on neighboring regions. In lengthier classes, we would discuss the health implications

of good circulation and opening Qi channels in these regions. In shorter classes, descriptors would be movement oriented and perhaps would not dig as deeply into systemic health discussions. These sessions were part exercise, health lesson, and philosophy.

Over time we were instructed about a greater number of neighboring but interrelated regions: *Mingmen*[185], *Dantian*[186], *Huiyin*[187]. Noteworthy of these regions is that they denote areas near the pelvis. Taijiquan, and martial arts broadly, emphasize the importance of "moving from your center." In most contexts anything pelvic is usually off limits in common conversation, but in this space, we speak openly about these areas of the body and how we can gain a greater sense of how we are locomoting and breathing if we pay close attention to the sensations we experience in these areas. In these moments, we discuss hidden parts of the body without stigma, using language that is often new to early trainees without carrying the same ignominy as English language terms.

Healing Injuries through Martial Arts Training

The curative qualities of martial arts practice are taken as self-evident in the countries where these skillsets originate. A complete overview of these discourses is beyond the scope of this project, but I would be remiss to only mention Western interpretations of encounters with martial arts training. Over the past three decades, the fields of medicine and exercise science have recognized the martial arts as viable methods of health maintenance. Western discourse tends to take three basic perspectives: (1) for elders, Taijiquan serves as a gentle but effective

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[185] *Mingmen* is located behind the 2nd and 3rd lumbar vertebrae and has several translations denoting "gateway/door" of "power" or "life" (Prath 2023).
[186] While there are three Dantian, the singular mention typically refers to the lower *Dantien*. It is two inches below the belly button and centered in the middle of the pelvic bowl (Prath 2023).
[187] *Huiyin* is the perineum, and is an integral site for breath control and perceiving balance (Prath 2023).

physical activity for maintaining physical fitness and supporting fall prevention. (2) As a sporting activity, the martial arts provide a (mostly) safe opportunity for young people to develop athletic prowess. (3) Training in martial arts can have behavioral and psychological benefits for youths.

As a scholar it is exciting to be researching in the wake of so much enthusiasm among neighboring academic fields. Their efforts lend credibility to the martial arts as an activity worthy of intellectual rigor. They cover issues ranging from psychology (Wang et al. 2014) to injury (Covarrubias et al. 2015), all of which are important matters. However, these discourses are highly medicalized, and while these analyses convey important evidence as to the quantifiable health benefits of practicing the martial arts, they tend to convey a results-oriented discussion of training rather than illustrating the process of recovery (athletic development, etc.), or the meaning of that recovery for participants. This subsection aims to close that narrative gap. The following discussions will illustrate the process continuing to train safely in the midst of injury, as well as the use of martial arts training as a healing modality for both physical and mental health challenges.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, some practitioners have a distinctly non-aversive relationship to the experience of pain in the context of their training. This subsection explores how practitioners adapt their training in circumstances of injury. Whether the injury is sustained in a training or non-training scenario, the consequences of injury do not discriminate between the contexts in which the practitioner will be using their bodies. Under the healthiest training circumstances, physical rigor and bodily self-awareness can serve as means of facilitating recovery following a serious injury. Still more, knowledge gleaned from injury can inform how a practitioner engages with their training partners when they are injured. Though

injury may pose immediate limitations on the abilities of the injured party, one's own injuries may also serve as a means of understanding how to instruct – or train with – others.

The Use of Training to Recover from Physical Injuries

Injury has featured extensively through many phases of this project. Interviewees have reported varying degrees of severity, from the "normal battering" Melanie of bruises and dislocated fingers to life-altering injuries, both chronic and acute, that have required major surgeries and years of recovery. Respondents reported injuries related to martial arts or other forms of athletic training with similar frequency to injuries that occurred during non-training activities. Approaches to healing were varied, but most expressed willingness to engage with allopathic medicine, conventional integrative medical practices, as well as some combinations of Chinese Medicine.

Furthermore, interviewees expressed approaches to injury management and training from two angles. First, once the initial injury event is diagnosed and some degree of palliative intervention is taken, asking if they are willing to continue training before an injury has fully healed. Second, their healing modalities include martial arts training, or the knowledge of their own bodies that they have gained through martial arts training has aided in their recovery. The difference is subtle, but the outcomes for the individuals who detailed their experiences are worth addressing in depth.

Lucia detailed two life-altering health events with which she utilized martial arts training as a mechanism for healing. The first was following a thyroidectomy that severed a nerve,

rendering her half vocal cords paralyzed[188]. The second was a back injury she sustained when she fell from a storage loft and fractured five vertebrae in her lumbar spine. Lucia reflected on the immediate impact of losing control of her vocal cords, “I had to teach myself how to speak again. Because I had so much air leakage, and so I had to learn how to control the paralyzed side enough with all the accessory muscles in that area which we don’t even think about when we speak.” Her doctor was optimistic for her recovery: he recognized that her training as a martial artist and as a musician equipped her with the knowledge of body awareness and pitch, both major assets for such a complex recovery.

Over two years, Lucia worked with a speech therapist to recover her voice. She reflected on the yearslong impact of the injury and details of her slow recovery. In the immediate aftermath of her medical injury, she carried a notepad to communicate because many people could not hear her when she spoke. Simple activities like ordering a cup of coffee were a burden. Lucia attributed her martial arts training and her speech therapist’s “outside of the box” thinking (her own words) to their positive relationship and successful outcome.

Her speech therapist was not a martial artist, but nonetheless recognized her martial arts training as an asset for recovery.

> “He would tell me that the two things that made me a really good candidate for success was this combination I had of my martial arts training along with my musical training. I was a pretty mediocre musician, but I studied music up until high school… because I could recognize tone and pitch, that was a real benefit… I could use my mind to have a way to create these sounds that I couldn’t just automatically create anymore. And then I had the discipline of practice and the body practice to be able to connect with these muscle groups that we generally

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[188] Misron et al. (2014) note that 3.5-5.6% of patients who undergo thyroidectomy experience some form of paralysis related to damage to the recurrent laryngeal nerve. 93-100% of patients make a complete recovery.

> don't think about or generally are pretty unconscious, and that I had the discipline practice to just be able to do these very subtle exercises every single day to like keep up with all these working on specific tones and vowels and consonants to like connect all the dots to be able to say these words as a whole again. He also recognized as a speech therapist that, that the martial arts aspect was a huge benefit to the success of me being able to regain my voice as much as I have been able to."

Recovery for Lucia was a long and arduous process, but both she and her speech therapist recognized the value of her martial arts training for her recovery. She was already familiar with committing to a bodily practice, and also had the discipline to do her therapy practices every day. Today she is able to teach Taijiquan without the aid of an amplifier.

Lucia's back injury had devastating but ultimately recoverable consequences for her martial arts career. She was fortunate to have not injured her spinal cord and did not sustain a traumatic brain injury, despite having fallen horizontally from a high position. She was however, forced to close her acupuncture and Taijiquan practice for one year, which she had been growing over the previous nine. By the time of her back injury, she Lucia was already well-versed in healing others through her Chinese Medicine practice, healing herself through vocal cord paralysis, and had endured various other minor injuries through her years of often grueling martial arts training.

Lucia's recovery was remarkable. The injury occurred the previous year, roughly one year before we interviewed. She cited both her own commitment to Taijiquan and the expertise of her peers in martial arts and Chinese Medicine as factors contributing to her recovery:

> "I feel like it's been a huge learning activity. I've learned so much about my body. I've learned so much about how to unify my body in a- through internal martial arts. My PT who has really turned things around for me, she's my martial arts big sister. We studied the same martial art together… she's able to speak this language to me that I connect with and be able to awaken these new pathways in my body of understanding that I feel that I'm… I don't know, more whole than I was previous to my injury in a strange way."

Challenging as her recovery was, Lucia was eventually able to return to teaching Taijiquan. At the time of our interview, she had been running her new business for fewer than six months.

Porosity: The Internal and External Art of Teaching and Training

Experiencing pain in some form is a routine part of martial arts training, and training through injury is generally the expectation. Fortunately, the bulk of injuries do not pose major disruptions to training or daily life, and even when they do, trainees will determine to what extent they must limit their training rather than abandoning the project altogether. I deploy the language of "porosity" in this section as a means of examining the somewhat nebulous status that injury holds for martial artists in this project and for athletes broadly. Though injury to oneself is undesirable and inhibitory; injury is not an absolute barrier to training.

I borrow the language of porosity from Katherine Brickell's (2011) comprehensive review on critical geographies of the home. Brickell highlights the home as a "multi-scalar" entity where "the personal relations it plays host to transect public and political worlds" (2011, 226[189]). In simpler terms, though a home may intuitively seem separate – private – from the broader world, the relationships and the happenings within the home do indeed have consequences for entities outside the presumptive bounds. Likewise public and political matters also have an influence on the people and events of the home. Porosity aptly describes this scenario in which boundaries between outside and inside are readily observable, yet those boundaries can easily be crossed: private is never wholly private.

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[189] Brickell (2011, 226) in reference to Blunt and Dowling's (2006) threefold components to the critical evaluation of homes: "home as simultaneously material and imaginative; the nexus between home, power and identity; and home as multi-scalar'" (2006, 22).

We live in a culture that values the public spectacle of athletic able-bodiedness (Giese and Ruin 2016). When an athlete experiences a severe injury on the field – in public, they are carted away into a facility outside of public view. The spectacle is now over. Their pain is a private matter for the athlete and their close circle of caretakers to manage. The athlete is placed on an injury list, and they will return to the public when they are healthy. That period of recovery is shared only with coaches, training staff, teammates, and perhaps family. For the overwhelming majority of martial arts training time, there is rarely, if ever, a spectating public. The "spectating public" of a practitioner's health event are already intimate associates: fellow trainees, instructors, and again family.

The lack of spectacle imparts a degree of privacy for the collective management and embodied experience of an injured practitioner's pain. The following descriptions will depict scenarios in which pain or injury do not always result in the practitioner's separation from full participation. In fact, the injury itself can shape behaviors in the training space and even reshape curriculum. To revisit Andrews et al. (2005, 878), rather than defining the body through the athletic activity, we can instead examine how "different bodies create and produce sports spaces." My theoretical pivot from Andrews et al. is minor. By "different" I mean an injured body, or a body that for some reason differs from what is conventionally considered athletically optimized[190]. Additionally, rather than sports, I examine a broader swatch of physical activities[191].

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[190] Giese and Ruin (2018) examine discourses of body optimization for athletic performance through the lens of ableism.

[191] Few of my respondents talked about their training as sports outside of competition, even though most acknowledged the importance of athletic ability.

Practitioners adapt their training to suit the needs of a body that in the moment functions differently from its optimal state. As noted previously in *Chapter 4*, injured trainees can apply strips of tape to the injured area of their body, and/or ask their partners to avoid contact to a specific area. The injured trainee can also undertake interventions to train safely and avoid exacerbating an extant injury. Perhaps the simplest, practical entry to this discussion is in the management of joint injuries, especially the knee. Chronic and acute knee injuries are common. It is rare to go through a week of classes without seeing a taped knee.

In addition to being considerate training partners, practitioners must also be mindful of themselves in ensuring safe practice. One basic intervention is in the safe formation of stances. Stances, the combat poses that we hold as we move through sparring and forms, force us to shape our bodies in ways that can differ significantly from how we normally carry ourselves in everyday life. Some are easier than others. Certain stances can demand flexibility, and, depending on depth, can be painful if an unstable joint or a pulled muscle inhibits one's ability to hold oneself upright in a stance. The instructor for the day will always admonish, "Modify if you need to!" The needs of the individual practitioner may vary from day to day, thus it is on us to determine which changes we can make to ensure we are moving in a safe manner, but not at the expense of proper technique.

In spite of these preventive efforts, injuries are still a frequent occurrence, and practitioners typically make an effort to continue training even if they must place limitations on their activities. Chris narrated an especially rugged approach to training through injury. They have studied Aikido since early childhood and their mother is herself an accomplished martial artist. The only noteworthy training breaks they recalled were due to an automobile accident and the COVID-19 lockdown of 2020. They reported having experienced multiple shoulder

dislocations, torn elbow ligaments, sprains, and minor concussions. Commenting on a severe elbow injury, they recalled, “I was on the mat. And, grateful [sic], when my right elbow got messed up, because the way our gi is folded I could put it [right arm] in my gi like a sling. It was my left, I wouldn’t be able to like just hold my arm in my gi. How convenient!” Adapting to training while their body was not operating to its fullest capability is simply part of training.

For Chris, all aspects of Aikido have been a part of life since their early youth[192], including the painful aspects. Though they opened the conversation with a somewhat roguish attitude, this sense of ease comes from repeated experiences with managing adverse events, which have served as a means of developing self-awareness about how they can still perform despite injury limitations. “With injuries, I am very in tune with how my body moves and how I can move powerfully and absorb force.” Adaptation to altered bodily conditions is essential to their ability to continue training in the midst of physical hardships.

Being under thirty years of age but holding a very high rank in Aikido, Chris walked a balance between youthful toughness, self-awareness, and a sense of responsibility for engaging in hard training with their fellow practitioners. Noteworthy in their quotation below is how their understanding of their own injury management informs how they interact with their fellow trainees, who may also be training injured:

> “…it’s both… a gift and a curse and that very often people aren’t aware of the extent of my injuries because I can just change how I move. …It’s like, ‘oh, you don’t feel injured, and therefore I can throw you and do all this hard stuff to you.’ So, it’s both… if I appeared or acted more injured, then people would be nicer to me, but since I moved so well, it’s like, oh I still am the person, the uke, that’s

[192] Chris’ mother was a high-ranking Aikido practitioner and remained active in her training during her pregnancy with Chris.

> like thrown and demonstrated on and people want to practice hard with because they see what I'm able to do.
>
> And so just being in tune with my body and moving well and being able to manipulate myself and other people's bodies in a really effective manner, I think is how I've protected myself and my injuries and also been very aware of other people's injuries and taking care to adjust my practice with who I'm training with."

For Chris, even though injury may be a barrier to their optimal training experience, they have, through years of training, developed the ability to mask injury, for better or worse. In one regard, "masking" secures full inclusion in challenging training. In another, it does expose an injured practitioner to further pain or injury from continued hard training. Curiously, this understanding also provides insights into how they can behave towards injured training partners and adapt to their needs around training safely.

Zetaruk et al.'s (2005) study reviewed injury events from five different styles of martial arts, which include Shotokan Karate, Aikido, Tae Kwon Do, Kung Fu, and Taijiquan[193]. Their findings were severe, with 59% of Tae Kwon Do practitioners having experienced injury severe enough to require time away from training. In their discussion, they furthermore note the pressures to swiftly return to training that practitioners may feel. Beyond the simple enjoyment of doing something they love, practitioners who spar competitively may take less time off for injuries to heal or may not disclose their injury at all (2005, 33). In their exploration of predictive variables: age, time spent training, rank, and several other factors were considered.

While rank was not found to have a statistically significant influence on the occurrence of injury events, the collision of rank and responsibility did inspire questions about the distinct role

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[193] Taijiquan was excluded as an inferential result due to a low volume of participants.

that many of my interviewees have in their own schools. Chris conveyed a sense of obligation as a high-ranking practitioner despite never having owned or headed their own school. While Zetaruk et al.'s competitive athletes may hide an injury for the sake of tournament participation, the owner or head instructor of a school may not have any choice but to continue training. It is their livelihood. Depending on the age of the school, there may not be enough high-ranking students to substitute while the head instructor recovers. In such cases, the head instructor is forced to teach through their injury.

Reyna and Aaron were faced with this exact challenge. Both sustained back injuries, though under differing circumstances. As mentioned in the previous section, Reyna bruised her spinal cord while receiving a takedown during an Aikido practice. At the time, she was working full-time in an information technology position while also teaching martial arts nearly every day. She shifted all of her individual training to Taijiquan while continuing to teach Kajukenbo. She was, however, limited in her ability to demonstrate athletic techniques to her students. Reyna noted, "I couldn't do jump kicks. I couldn't do throws. Or I couldn't instigate or be thrown. Because it hurt, it hurt to sit, it hurt to stand, you know, my lower back was like, just so spasming all the time. And not to mention that, you know, couldn't feel my hands and feet." This injury was career-altering in terms of how she was able to teach her classes in the immediate context, and how her future training panned out. Though she has made a recovery to the fullest extent, her body remains altered, and she must navigate which maneuvers or activities are safe for her to practice.

An aspect of training that we as practitioners often take for granted is the value of being able to observe our peers and other high-ranking trainees. Much attention is paid to the head instructor, and rightfully so. However, peer support is also essential to our training. Regardless of

the instructor's injury status, students are routinely recruited to demonstrate techniques for others. This usually occurs at the beginning of a drill when the instructor is introducing the content and goals of the drill. In her discussion of student education and advancement, Reyna emphasized the value that demonstrating techniques for peers has for the individual doing the demo, regardless of their rank. Practically, this means that if a head instructor is for some reason unable to demonstrate a technique, a student may be able to fill in for small segments of demonstration. In that regard, the responsibility of broad education also falls on students.

As previously mentioned, Aaron and his close training partners carried out most of the construction of their dojo in the Eastbay. During the construction of the second warehouse, he "tore out a lot of the connective tissues between [his] spine and hip." His allopathic doctor recommended surgery and believed that he would never train in anything physical ever again, but he was reluctant to undergo such an invasive procedure. He instead sought help from a local acupuncturist who had treated severe injuries like his while working in Beijing, but never saw patients with these injuries in the United States. On our side of the Pacific, injuries this severe are typically treated with surgery.

Over a two-year period, Aaron worked closely with the acupuncturist to heal his back injury. At the same time he designed a parallel curriculum to the standard Jiu-Jitsu curriculum that he had been teaching at his school. He detailed these educational distinctions and how he was able to develop a more inclusive curriculum through the lens of his injury:

> "Once you know then everything becomes less effort. But in the learning of throws you have to be able to lift and carry weight. And in the falling you have to be able to take high falls. So, I changed the entire curriculum so that, especially high falls and throws that carried weight were not emphasized and were mostly gone. And a lot of the techniques, other techniques that sort of required not that same kind of mobility was definitely kept in. And that created a parallel

> curriculum that allowed a lot of people especially with back or leg problems or other things to be able to train."

While he did not directly attribute his modified Jiu-Jitsu curriculum as a curative practice, his efforts towards lower-impact training allowed him the latitude to fully recover from a severe injury.

Equally noteworthy of Aaron's curriculum redesign is that he developed a more inclusive martial arts system that enabled individuals with chronic back and leg injuries to train. Worth emphasizing is that much martial arts training, especially those styles that are heavily combat oriented or athletic, favor physical attributes of strength, speed, and agility; all of which are functions of able bodies. Disabled bodies are at a disadvantage when a martial arts style favors physical ability. Jiu-Jitsu at its at its core is less oriented towards raw strength than sporting styles such as Muay Thai or Tae Kwon Do, yet still some doctoring was required to make Aaron's original curriculum even more accessible to those who are unable to engage through brawn. He noted several times throughout the interview that designing a curriculum that was accessible to a diversity of bodies was essential for creating the kind of welcoming yet challenging school he has always desired.

Aaron reflected in hindsight how these inclusive adaptations applied during his work as a bouncer, and how meeting the needs of a diverse student body fundamentally gelled with his practical experience:

> "That's also been useful in terms of retaining students, in terms of having people that come in later in life… who don't want to take quite as much impact… and still be able to progress, and progress quite seriously. I also did that because I felt like honestly a lot of the more acrobatic throws were really good physical education, but they are not actually combatively that useful. When I was doing a lot of my bouncing, I wasn't throwing people, shoulder throws. I was sweeping people down, holding them down, pinning them down and you know... that's it. It's most of that stuff when it's in use has to be very simple."

In other words, the methodologies that were most practical in real-world application were also the ideal means of conveying inclusive and effective techniques. Stripped of spectacle and distilled to pure function, the curriculum evolved into a methodology that was both practical and inclusive of a broader cross-section of students.

Mental Health Impacts of Martial Arts Training

Personal transformation through experiential learning has been an ongoing theme throughout the project. These discussions were couched in the immediate context of martial arts or self-defense training. Interview respondents also reported on protracted mental health benefits to training. These reports align with a small but rich collection of psychology researchers who have investigated the mental health benefits of martial arts training. The following reports can provide some insights into the experiences of the practitioners as they confronted these challenges.

Melanie provided the most extensive overview of her confrontation with addiction. Throughout the interview she recalled exposure to alcohol addiction at home, as well as unhealthy work environments with alcohol addicted employers and cultures of heavy drinking and drug use. For Melanie her, mastery in the martial arts was closely tied with overcoming personal hardships. “For each belt level I received, I quit an addiction.” Over time, she developed a sense of how important sobriety was for both herself and the wellbeing of those she interacted with:

> “…every single time I went to class, I became more acutely aware that martial arts is about being clean and sober and healthy, and that the true path of martial arts was one of being- being healthy so you could help others be healthy. So it was like, you couldn’t help others if you couldn’t’ help yourself. Physically, heal thyself.”

These repeated training experiences served as opportunities for self-reflection in relation to others. For Melanie learning to care for herself was essential to becoming better at caring for others.

Melanie attributed her successful recovery to the non-judgmental support she received from her long-time instructor “Gabriel.” Early in her career, Melanie would often come to class after consuming alcohol to calm her nerves ahead of Judo classes. When she would pair with “Gabriel” for warm-up exercises, he would sniff and indicate that he smelled something on her but would not admonish her for her decision. He never treated her differently. She became self-conscious, and about two years after first beginning Judo she quit drinking alcohol as part of her rank advancement to yellow belt. She repeated this process several times over, including with tobacco, eating disorders, and unhealthy relationships.

In her now decades-long career Melanie herself became trainer and caretaker to students struggling with addiction and mental health struggles. This is a responsible role that Reyna reported on, as well. In discussing her efforts towards tailoring her teaching to the needs of trainees, she said of her student body, “I’ve got recovering alcoholics. I’ve got people that have been attacked on the street. I have had people in here that have been in abusive relationships, and we all have some kind of demon, I think?” For Reyna her role as trainer was to provide an environment for trainees to learn more than fighting alone:

> “I believe that instructors should really employ a lot more empathy and compassion. Not everyone that comes into a martial arts school wants to learn to kick ass. Right? Not every person wants to, to learn about, you know, self-defense, or ‘martial arts is all about death.’ That’s what military is right? You know… not everyone wants to learn that. People want to connect with their bodies. People want to connect with the movement. People want a form of stress relief… or they just want a release of whatever is happening inside them.”

For some of Reyna's students, the "martial" art of martial arts is less the point of emphasis. Training is a medium for fulfilling embodied experiences.

Miriam and Lucia reported their own positive mental health experiences, citing embodied experiences specifically as important components of their healing. For Miriam her early exposure to training alongside people of varying ages and physical abilities helped her to reconnect with her body and eventually resulted in a career change:

> "[School Name Redacted] was a huge, huge part of me pursuing personal training as a path. When I started training here, I had a two year-old and I was dealing with a lot of depression and I was looking for a way to connect with my body, reconnect with my body, feel strong, and when I came here I was just kind of, like, blown away by the fact that there are people of different ages, different abilities, and they were moving in these empowered, confident ways, even, you know, with different physical limitations, and I just remember being like, 'That's really freaking cool!'"

Noteworthy of Miriam's recollection is that she attributes both her own embodied experiences and the experiences of others as inspirational.

For Lucia, training in martial arts enabled her to begin exploring some of the underlying mental health struggles that she attributed to her eating disorder. At the time of the interview, she regarded her eating disorder as an active but well-managed aspect of her life. She said of her self-reflection through training:

> "I'm not sure if… I could say that martial arts, like, helped me from relapsing. I definitely move towards a life of not having an eating disorder. But it will say martial arts help me address a lot of the underlying anxieties and self-doubt that I had. So, it started to help bring to surface the aspects of me that needed healing. That definitely were part of my eating disorder, and my use my eating disorder to, to conceal or hide from those parts. And now that I was done with my eating disorder, martial arts, brought these things about myself to the surface and my ways of being very self-critical and not having confidence in myself."

For Lucia training became a means of exploring parts of her mental health and self-image that underlaid her eating disorder. Training itself was not the complete healing mechanism, but it did serve as a medium of analysis.

Somewhat "Dirty Work": Interpersonal Care in Training and Care for Space

Martial arts training necessarily places practitioners and close bodily proximity to one another. As mentioned previously hard touch or painful forms of contact are routine occurrences. In addition to those potentially intense encounters, practitioners also must manage what could be described as "dirty" encounters with other practitioners' bodies. While not as dirty as van Dongen and Elema's (2011) nurses may encounter, these are still expressions of bodies out of control – "leaking" from one's own bodyspace into another's (Dyck et al. 2005). Again, these sorts of exchanges that would be unacceptable in most other contexts are to be expected in these training spaces where all manner of peculiar encounters with discomfort are the norm. Learning to safely and respectfully navigate these interactions with another person's sweat, saliva, or blood without shame or stigma is essential for maintaining the dignity of both parties.

Curiously, a language does exist to describe the training relationship interactions of martial arts practitioners, that of *uke* and *tori*. This a relationship that requires the full participation of another person in one's own training experience and does involve some among of risk and discomfort for the *uke* especially. Interlocutions between care-based dialogues of touch and combat-based vocabularies of peer education are peculiar, indeed, but will prove to be a compelling fit. The "art of touch" that van Dongen and Elema (2011) describe toes the boundaries of reaching a specific treatment goal while doing no (or the least) harm in the process. Important here is that the wellness of both parties, the care-giver and care-receiver, are

prioritized even though there is often a power differential between the two parties. Similarly, trainees balance the need to execute techniques that can be quite dangerous with the necessity of protecting the long-term health of their training partners.

Of equal importance to the management of these “leaking” bodies is the management of the spaces that contain those bodies. Individuals leave their remains upon the physical space itself – dust, hair, fibers from clothing. Frequent cleaning is a necessity for safe and hygienic training, and indeed many schools have their own structures around ensuring that these basic social reproductive tasks are taken care of each day. Furthermore, just as any other building experiences wear and damage from routine use, leaders and standard trainees alike undertake maintenance and restoration tasks that keep the space safe and functional. These interventions can sometimes violate conventional hierarchies of power as common practitioners come to share their outside professional skills with their institutions.

Being a proactive participant in the creation of safe and fulfilling leisure opportunities can require intervention from a variety of directions. The samples chosen for this dissertation exemplify this reality, though not every school operates in these ways. These are functional cultural elements that aid in the goals of the organization, even if the goal of cleanliness is a mundane one. The work of caring in everyday life is often mundane and overlooked (Tronto 1995) even though it is indispensable in the most basic operations of our many interconnected worlds. That this work is taken on in the context of leisure – one is on a voluntary basis choosing to care for another and for space – represents a subversive potential for leisure as a proponent of pluralistic participation.

"Extra-Common Touch" and the Language of Contact

Teaching and training in martial arts bears curious similarities to van Dongen and Elema's (2001) work exploring the "art of touching" in nursing practice. This final section explores their dialogues on touch in nursing and the peculiar similarities of teaching and training in martial arts. This is hardly a one-to-one matchup of comparisons between martial arts training and nursing. Rather, I deploy their many frameworks as a means of interrogating martial arts practice, with the ultimate goal of developing a vocabulary of touch. I read from van Dongen and Elema's work a narrative of paradox: paradox through which the nobility of care collides with the ignobility of filth; where "surrender" to another's touch is the conduit for restoration or empowerment, where the absolute immediacy of touch can manifest emotional closeness or distance.

At this juncture I explore the notion of a "martial art of touch" and reflect on statements from my interview respondents as well as my own experiences as a student and teaching assistant. At the crux of this review is what the authors term "extra-common touch," meaning types of touch that are beyond the ascribed norms of how individuals make contact with one another (van Dongen and Elema 2001). The act of cleaning a patient after toileting, for example, would be a form of extra-common touch that care workers routinely encounter. The implication here is that only specific people in specialized roles have the permission of the touched person to engage in these ways. In scenarios of care provision, the medical establishment which sets the standard of care further guides the type and efficacy of touch that the touching person is, we hope, also doing this work on a voluntary basis.

Fighting is arguably a protracted exchange of extra common touch. Looking at the example of sanctioned sports, leagues and athletics commissions authorize a time and a place for

two (usually) contestants to hit one another. On fight night referees police the precise kinds of permissible hard touch, given the ruleset of the sport and pre-established safety protocols. Outside of this predetermined time and place, two individuals touching each other in such intense ways could result in fines, or worse, for both parties. For van Dongen and Elema's research subjects the medicalized home is subject to a similar regimen of permission via medicalization and eventuality through space. Perhaps a hair-splitting nuance, but an important one nonetheless, is that the sporting arena was purpose-built for potentially violent athletic endeavors. In the medicalized home where social reproductive forms of care were already taking place, medicalization adds another type of care functionality to the spatial bounds of the home.

The routine training space sits somewhere between these extremes. Students engage combatively with one another, yet these exchanges are not for pure competition or financial gain. In fact, a substantial amount of interaction is non-combative. Instructors and students alike invest time in the construction and care for the space. They advise one another on etiquette and apply tape to sprained fingers. Students sign safety waivers before they can participate in any activities. In healthy settings, training partners engage in mutual educational experiences, exchanges that necessitate physical contact in ways that can violate social norms. Adopting the language of "care-giver" and "cared-for" as a means of describing the training relationship emphasizes the responsibility that fellow trainees have for each-other's learning.

Care-giver and Cared-for, Uke and Tori

A consideration when using this terminology, is that the "giver-for" relationship implies asymmetry, which is especially apparent between patient and caregiver. In contrast, in a training

relationship two partners generally hold similar positions within the school hierarchy. The Japanese arts[194] have a language for describing this asymmetrical yet equally responsible relationship between training partners. In Japanese arts, these roles are called *Uke* (受け, ooh-keh) and *Tori* (取り, toh-ree)[195]. *Uke* refers to the trainee in the attacking role, yet the term is commonly translated as is "the one who receives." *Tori* refers to the person who "takes," as in they "take a practice strike" from the *Uke*. The "receiving" the *Uke* experiences is *Tori's* practice response. In their analysis of Judo throwing techniques, Imamura et al. (2007) labeled the *Tori* as "throwers" and the *Uke* as "fallers." In more provocative terms, Aikido master Gary Boaz defines the *Uke* as "The one who suffers for the sake of learning" (Handwerker 2023).

Master Boaz's interpretation is perhaps florid but is helpful in disentangling some of the confusion that often arises in the discussion of the *Uke* and *Tori* roles. Backtracking briefly to provide a sample scenario this relationship process… a pair of trainees will stand across from one another. One trainee will be selected to practice the defensive technique: the *Tori*. The other trainee – the *Uke* – will be selected to begin the drill by attacking their partner. The *Uke* will deliver a forceful punch to the *Tori*. The *Tori* will respond with a defensive technique, typically dodging or blocking the *Uke's* punch and then countering with their own attack. The *Uke* as "receiver" is not passive. They initiate the exchange and also endure the consequences of the exchange. The terminology of *Uke* and *Tori* places "reception" and "taking" in opposition to one

[194] These terms are used in non-Japanese arts, as well. The terms have arisen as helpful vocabulary in a variety of training contexts.
[195] During the study period, *Tori* was the most commonly used term among practitioners. The role of "technique practicer" has two other titles, which are *Nage* (throw) and *Shite* (do). The title used depends on style, but it is noteworthy that there is only one title for *Uke*.

another, yet these terms are more synonymous than not when translated this way. “Taking” reads as more proactive than “receiving,” but both parties have something to gain in this exchange.

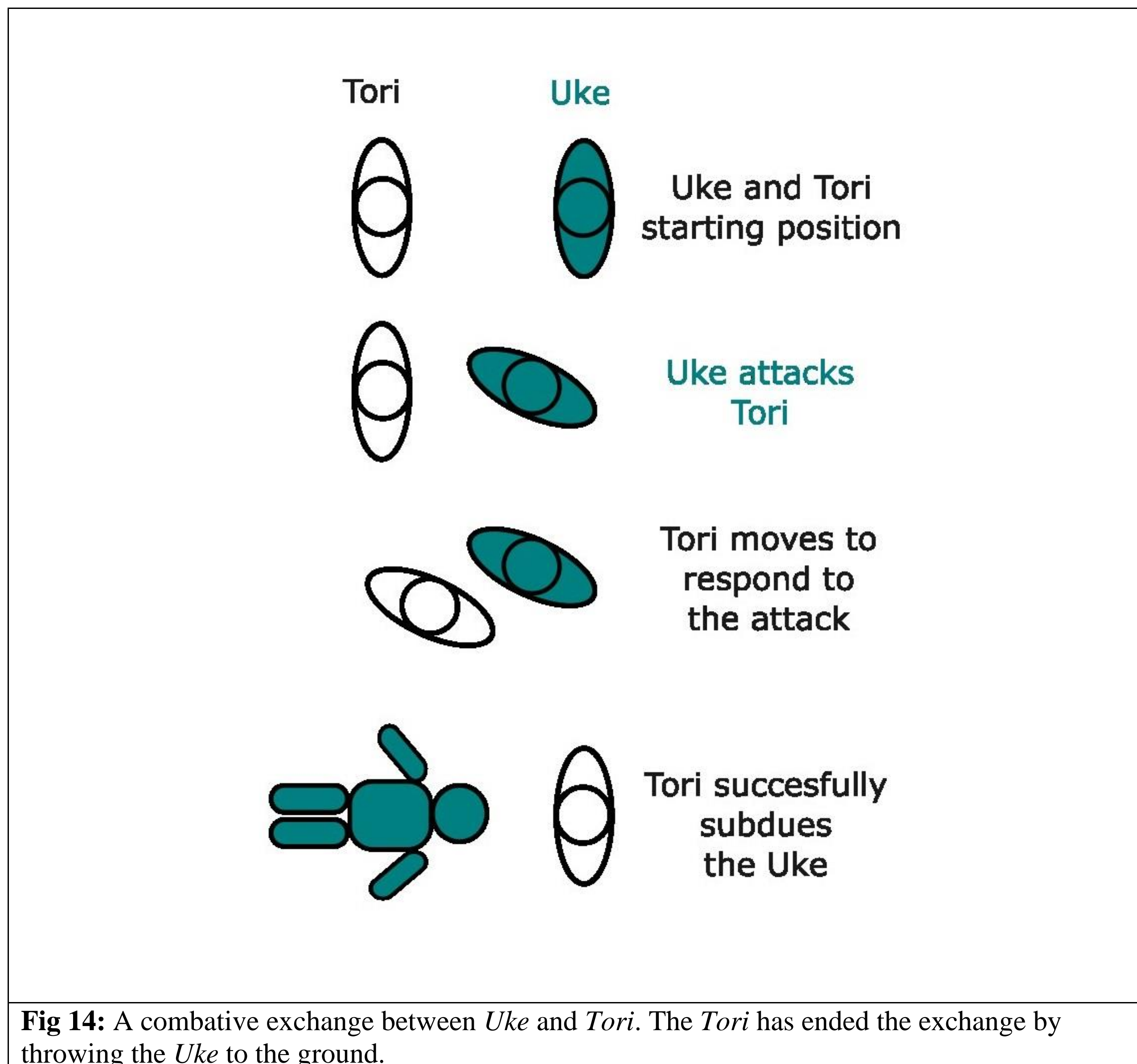

Fig 14: A combative exchange between *Uke* and *Tori*. The *Tori* has ended the exchange by throwing the *Uke* to the ground.

Trainees quickly realize that learning how to receive contact from the *Tori* is its own specialized skill. This skill is called *Ukemi*. Developing *Ukemi* is the process of learning how to safely receive hard contact from a partner, especially in martial arts that involve throwing and joint locks. Kirk, the mislabeled black belt from Chapter 5, had no training on how to protect himself while receiving hard contact. *Ukemi* also includes being able to set a level-appropriate

challenge for one's partner. An *Uke* is supposed to provide force and resistance for the *Tori*, otherwise the *Tori* would not be receiving a realistic challenge. The *Tori* responds in kind, providing to the best of their ability the potent execution of their responsive technique. The *Ukemi* of an Aikido practitioner often involves rolling and falling to protect the joints. For strike fighting, *Ukemi* can be a gesture as small as rotating the knee inward to protect the joint when it is targeted for a kick. *Ukemi* is not surrender. It is also action.

Handwerker (2023) describes the *Uke-Tori* relationship as such an exchange "where both people give, take, and communicate so they can both learn effectively. And each one needs to take care to not injure the other." This language bears striking similarity to van Dongen and Elema's (2001) considerations in their description of the "art of touch," an exchange in which touch is a negotiation, never truly one-sided. It is a dialogue of contact exchange rather than words. A care worker's handling of and dialogue with the patient ought not bring shame or discomfort. Likewise, the patient can give or revoke permission or ask for changes. "The [patient's] body is never just a thing; it shows reactions and emotions, it responds to touch" (2001, 154) much like the *Tori* responds to *Uke*, and *Uke* to *Tori.* The *Tori* learns greater mastery of technique, and the *Uke* develops their *Ukemi*.

As Handwerker notes, good partnership requires care for one another. This is a learning opportunity, not a street fight – even if we are prepping for one. Though a "martial art of touch" does not conventionally align with good nursing practices, the ethos is similar. The body is the "direct apparatus" of education. Careful practice is context-specific: every trainee is different, and the exercise addresses a gap in a trainee's knowledge while still being appropriately challenging. It is contentious: trainees make a measured assessment of each other's skill level to ensure safe practice. In good circumstances, trainees care for and about each other. These

educational opportunities are mutually co-constructive experiential learning encounters, even if the relationship is asymmetrical.

Who is care-giver and who is cared-for? This distinction is perhaps useful in describing moments of unidirectionality in training education. I position the *Uke* as care-giver, as this role provides the challenge and opportunity for the *Tori* to gain mastery of safe and effective technique. Becoming a skilled and safe *Uke* requires a high level of skill, and that skill mitigates risk for both the *Uke* and the *Tori*. *Tori* as cared-for positions the learner as requiring support from the *Uke*. The great coincidence of combative martial arts is that a training partner is a necessity for a complete learning experience.

I close this subsection with a direct address to martial artists and a point of contemplation to the language of *Uke* and *Ukemi*. The verb *ukeru* (受ける) has twelve different clustered translations, but one group of interpretations stood out among the list: “to undergo (e.g. surgery); to take (a test); to accept (a challenge)” (jisho.org). This interpretation of *Uke* provides a richer interpretation of how a practitioner engages in a martial arts exchange, in particular the notions of “undergoing” and “accepting a challenge.” The *Uke* undergoes the execution of prescribed technique yet accepts the challenge of safely receiving the technique. To again borrow language from van Dongen and Elema (2001, 153) “What might appear as the surrender to the touch of others in a [training exchange] may be constrained by a reflexive concern about personal control and personal space.” These interlocking roles guide an active participation in one’s role as *Uke.*

Do(jo)-it-Yourself: Building Maintenance and Cleaning Tasks

The responsibility of crafting and sustaining a training space falls on the owner and students for a variety of maintenance tasks. The respondents of my interviews as well as experiences I have engaged in over the years demonstrate a commitment to upkeep and

expansion. The first launch of a dojo is rarely the final form that it will take. As institutions garner more resources and serve a greater number of individuals, needs arise and the means to meet those needs grows. In some cases, students with specialized trades, such as carpentry, offer their skills to create upgrades to training spaces and other features within the dojo. As such, a sense of responsibility permeates among much of the student body as practitioners are encouraged to take on chore tasks as simple as sweeping routinely or bathroom maintenance, through advanced tasks such as removing carpet and replacing it with hard flooring.

A curious expression of care ethics in leisure occurs in these scenarios where students take on volunteer labor using highly specialized professional skills or learning basic building maintenance tasks on-the-fly to contribute to the school. To paraphrase Day (2000), the responsibility of care as it intersects with leisure is not inherently limiting. Rather, responsibility adds a dimension to leisure that under the best circumstances represents an autonomous and empowered role in appropriate site and activity selection. The martial artists in the following section make a full embrace of care and responsibility, going a step further than site selection: they are creating the site itself. They are place-making with their bare hands.

Inclusive and Sophisticated Construction Projects

Three formative events that inspired this project took place at my own Kajukenbo studio at Site 1 a few months before I formally launched this project. Beginning in 2016, a major construction overhaul began following the long-term enrollment of a student who has worked professionally as a carpenter for over a decade. First, she recruited two-dozen laypersons and directed the complete refinishing of the hardwood training floors and brought her own industry standard floor sanders into the space. The school was closed for a week. We then filled any holes left from weak points and chips in the wood, and finally polished the floors, again with

professional equipment. The second was the construction of new shelving units to store training equipment in the dressing room. At that time, enrollment was so high that there was a dire need for more storage space. Our resident carpenter designed and procured materials, gathered her tools, and recruited a dozen laypersons to learn how to construct shelves. To this day, many of us now do basic maintenance tasks at the studio and at home with the skills we learned from those experiences.

The third task was far more sophisticated: the complete reconstruction of the administration and storage space in the rear section of the building. The carpenter recruited a handful of students to assist with demolition, but moved on to working with only one other person who at the time was interested in apprenticing as a carpenter. Together they completely redesigned administration area, installing fully customized Europly[196] shelving and drawers, as well as creating a greater volume of overhead storage on higher portions of the walls. Among their most impactful changes was the installation of a kitchen sink. The admin cove shares a wall with a bathroom equipped with a shower. With the assistance of a plumber, they were able to route a new pipe to the admin counter for the installation.

Now, with two sinks, handwashing before and after classes was much faster – we were no longer competing for a bathroom that was often locked for privacy reasons. Something so simple and taken for granted as having multiple sinks in the same building was a substantial upgrade for daily usage. We could then also begin deploying reusable stainless-steel cups, as there was plenty of space for a drying rack. The school also has a strong food culture. Meetings

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[196] Europly is a brand of laminate wood – plywood – made with high-quality surface and pulp core materials. The glue that holds the pulp layers together is all-natural and cuts cleanly, leaving beautiful lines on exposed edges.

are *always* potlucks, and every test always ends with a feast. The kitchen sink allowed for the use of reusable silverware, and participants could clean their empty containers at the end of an event for a much tidier commute home. Since then several other shelving and storage upgrades have been made. The carpenter also realigned a very sticky front door. In 2019, the rear emergency exit in the changing building was broken in, and again the carpenter and a few laypeople were able to conduct an emergency door frame repair, securing the building within hours of the violation occurring. The most recent major project took place in early 2023. Students removed the old carpet in the dressing room and installed durable hardwood laminate floors. A dozen students helped to empty equipment cubbies and toy shelves, and then removed them to be temporarily stored in the "orange room," a small auxiliary training room located towards the back of the main building.

Though these acts of crafts(wo)manship are remarkable, they fall in a long tradition of do-it-yourself activities that are visible throughout the school. The largest cubby system in the changing room was a DIY project. Decades ago, a horizontal dance banister[197] was installed in the main training room. The wall mirrors were installed with a wooden cleat system. Students and instructors have painted all of the walls and mounted all of the floating shelves in the training space, including the *kamidana* in the main room. Care for training partners and for the space itself is written into the landscape. Responsibility towards safe training is built into the floors and balance accessories. Care for the hygienic wellbeing of training partners and smooth workflow of school administrators is crafted into the rear room.

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[197] A dance banister is a long horizontal bar positioned slightly above hip height and is used to aid in balance during exercises.

In her investigation of the commoditization of DIY home repair work in New Zealand, author Rosie Cox's (2012, 1) respondents noted that durable home maintenance tasks were "a duty of care that they owed to family as well an important aspect of their identity". For the men in the study, building maintenance was a masculinized expression of domestic responsibility, a means of writing care into the discourse of the home. In this leisure context, a largely AFAB[198] student body expresses a sense of responsibility and care in a similar way. The carpenter who led multiple major projects has expressed the importance of teaching AFAB people construction skills so that they could gain this knowledge outside of the sexist work and training scenarios that she had to endure. In that regard, DIY serves an identity-bolstering role, as well. Though for the men in Cox's study, DIY was an expression of responsible fatherhood, for the trainees at my school it is an expression of independence [199].

The Tradition of Soji and Chore Tasks

The continued hygienic practice of martial arts depends on the training space being clean and regularly maintained. Schools accomplish this by assigning chore tasks to individuals or teams, as well as participating in *Soji* (掃除). *Soji* translates to "cleaning," though its origins have a much deeper purpose. The philosophical concept of *soji* originates from the Confucian tradition that was transmitted to Japan via the recurrent migration of Chinese ideas over centuries of cultural exchange (Beardsley 1965), in which the act of cleaning and maintaining space

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[198] Assigned Female at Birth. The student body of my school is overwhelmingly AFAB-woman identified, but a handful of trainees identify as nonbinary and/or gender non-conforming. Gender expression through corporeal inscription (i.e., makeup and hair cuts) spans the full spectrum.

[199] Unfortunately, a dissertation needs to be fenced in at some point, but these DIY experiences were incredibly fun leisure experiences in themselves. In her discussion of women's' DIY leisure in France, Florence Potot (2013) discusses how some forms of leisure toe the line between pleasure and necessity, as well as the economic constraints to completing home maintenance tasks.

functions a core practice of self-development and meditation, as well as fostering a sense of responsibility for collective wellbeing through the upkeep of space. *Soji* is such a culturally engrained practice that K-12 students in Japanese academic settings routinely participate in *Gakkou* (学校) *Soji*, school cleaning. Nakanishi (1997) notes that *Gakkou Soji* serves as a means of socializing youths towards a deeper sense of connection to each other and an ethic of responsibility towards the wellness of society. The same principle applies to practicing *Soji* in the dojo.

During my first visit to the San Fransisco Eastbay, CA I attended an evening class at Site 4. For the first half hour we trained as a collective – no division of the class by rank – and practiced basic techniques, striking drills, and finally forms that were appropriate for all levels present. The remaining half hour was spent doing *soji*. The three black belts who were leading the class assigned us all cleaning tasks to be performed throughout the dojo. My team's first task was to clean the bicycle foyer: two students pulled the bikes out to the sidewalk and held them up while I swept leaves from the enclosure to the sidewalk. We then collected litter and swept leaves from the sidewalk in front of the dojo, placing each in the appropriate landfill and compost bins. We then returned indoors to wipe dust from trim and other surfaces, pardoning ourselves between students polishing the glass of the display case and feathering the tokonoma. Between the dust tracked in from the busy street outside and trainee skin cells, there was much work to be done!

My own school rarely does *soji* as a collective event, so I was not expecting this affair. Instead, volunteers will carry out cleaning tasks on their own time, usually arriving at the building a half an hour before class or dropping in between classes and renters. People who arrive early but have not been assigned volunteer tasks will dry-mop the training floor before and

after class. The format works well at my school, as we have renters during the daytime and often, it is necessary to tidy up after they have left. Some of the students at the Eastbay school apologized for having a guest clean, but we all still were amused. “Bet you weren’t expecting THIS on your first night!” Though my assignments tended towards the periphery of the school – managing changing rooms, bathrooms, and the black belt lounge were left to full-time students – I still felt included as part of the community to be invited to this task. “Relaxing the boundaries between ‘me’ and ‘you’ or between ‘us’ and ‘they’ marks intimacy, love and care,” (van Dongen 2001, 207). Their inclusion of me in *soji* marked their trust that I would treat their space with care. They showed me an honest view of the mess that occurs when people inhabit a place.

The Aikido school where I briefly trained in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu engaged in *Soji* as a daily practice, as is routine for Aikido programs. Before classes, students and instructors would sweep the floor extensively in preparation for falling on the floor for the next ninety minutes. They would also dust the *tokonoma* and *kamidana*, gingerly tending to the picture frame containing the image of Morihei Ueshiba. The final and highly honored task was emptying yesterday’s flowers from Ueshiba’s vase, cleaning the vessel, and returning it with a fresh bouquet. Students who were compelled would sometimes leave their own flowers on the *tokonoma* for the duration of practice.

Noteworthy in the context of Aikido as a highly traditional and ritualized Japanese style is that the practitioners use the language of *Soji* specifically. “Chore” may be used in casual conversation, but always in the context of *Soji* as a broader practice. Nonetheless, less traditional schools still utilize chore systems for basic maintenance. In the case of my own school, one to three students will volunteer for cleaning tasks. The bathroom is cleaned twice per week. One or two people will be responsible for stocking first aid and sanitary products in the bathroom.

Another monitors soap levels and the supply of paper towels and toilet paper. Mirrors are cleaned weekly. Focus pads[200], "frying pans,"[201] and kick shields[202] are sanitized periodically.

These duties represent but a handful of routine management tasks that are necessary for any space that humans occupy for prolonged and recurrent periods. It is a curious collision of traditional cleaning practices and current-day arrangements that ultimately serve to address the timeless challenge of managing bodies in space. Normatively in public and semi-public spaces, be they leisure or employment, a professional cleaning staff of some kind is responsible for the basic maintenance of space. In these martial arts training spaces, leisurist trainees are the custodial staff. What good is our fighting if we cannot even clean up after ourselves?

Nakanishi's review of *Gakkou Soji* depicts a depth of stewardship for youths in a spatial context that is normally regarded as outside our purview in the West. Children are assigned cleaning tasks in *all* student spaces, including restrooms[203]. This high level of responsibility in a leisure context represents a departure from the individualistic norms of leisure participation. One would hardly consider a bathroom the "cradle of the individuated person" (Cohen-Gerwec and Stebbins 2013, 31)[204]. Cheek aside, *Soji* perhaps represents an angle of serious leisure amateurism that Stebbins (1992) calls *durable benefits.*

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[200] Focus pads are small cushions with a grip in the back, usually a band or a glove. They somewhat resemble a baseball catcher's mitt. It is often noted that Bruce Lee used a catcher's mitt as a sort of proto-focus pad (Russell 2020).
[201] "Frying pan" or "porkchop pad" is a colloquialism for a pad that features a round head and a handle. It allows for the puncher or kicker to strike through the target with full energy, all while keeping the pad holder at a safe distance.
[202] Kick shields are large, thick rectangular pads that allow for a large striking surface and plenty of protection for the holder.
[203] Students do not manage restrooms or most other spaces that adults use exclusively (Nakanishi 1997, 141).
[204] On second thought…

Stebbins (1992, 7) outlines seven *durable benefits*: self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, recreation or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and belongingness, and lasting physical products of the activity. "Social interaction and belongingness," "feelings of accomplishment," as well as "lasting physical products of the activity" fit intuitively enough in an analysis of *Soji.* However, the remaining benefits are largely self-oriented; *Soji* as a collective task carried out for collective benefits poses a normative challenge to the self-orientation of so many of these benefits.

Perhaps an obverse reading of serious leisure amateurism is due: that serious leisure participation is a gateway to belongingness and lasting "products." Further still, perhaps these collective acts serve to enhance these dimensions of self-development. Through *Soji*, one actualizes an agential self, enriches a sense of personal responsibility, expresses care, and embodies an eagerness to improve leisure conditions for others. I narrate this counter-reading as a reciprocal interaction between the broad durable benefits of leisure participation and taking one's responsibilities for the care for the space seriously.

Homelike Features and Social Reproduction about the Training Space

Among the many curiosities I encountered in this exploration were features that can be read as homelike in these spaces. Perhaps more broadly, I read these features as mechanisms for social reproduction with a twist: that indeed these features enable the laborers (instructors, executive directors, and owners) to perform the task of producing a leisure space for student use *and* that these features facilitate participation in the leisure activities themselves. Kitchens, lounges, and showers were central to the operations of four sites. In other cases, where space is limited and an exclusive kitchen or kitchenette wasn't available, most still had a corner with a refrigerator and shelving to store cups, dinnerware, napkins, food and beverage items.

Admittedly, from my training experience and positionality, these features came as a surprise. All of my training experiences (second grade through my master's degree) had taken place in school settings. When I was young, my Tae Kwon Do program was hosted at my elementary school's basketball gymnasium. At Virginia Tech, the Kendo Club met in a multi-use athletic space that had a rubber floor, a mirror wall, and weights with folding mats lining the opposite wall. The Taijustu Club, also at Virginia Tech, assembled in the same building, but rented a large conference room when we had guest instructors from out of state. At the University of Washington, the Kendo Club assembled in the Intramural Athletics Building, where they alternated between a dance room and a basketball court. In these cases, locker rooms and bathrooms were wholly separate, and food could be purchased at a kiosk at the entrance of the building. We, as participants, carried our rank and experiences everywhere we went, but our space was always temporary. What potentialities exist when a program has a space of its own?

Returning to Site 7, the Aikido dojo with the intricate tatami floors, the dojo featured a large kitchen area. On the right side of the kitchen were two sizeable, gender-segregated changing rooms. To the immediate left was a half bathroom. On the other side of the kitchen was a full bathroom with a shower and bathtub. The kitchen itself separated the two bathrooms. It is structured as an island with a bar-style countertop facing open towards the dressing rooms. Within the kitchen, there was a stainless steel two-basin sink, fully stocked with cleaning supplies underneath, as well as a compact stove, microwave, and full-sized fridge. Upon further consideration, the appearance of homelike features in a training space is perhaps less surprising. Homes are purpose-built for managing bodies. Martial arts spaces feature many bodies moving

and working in sweaty (and sometimes bloody) ways. Having the means to feed, water, and clean those bodies[205] is of profound importance.

The head instructor of the Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu school, Sensei Doug, gave one other newcomer and I a full tour. "The kitchen is great!" he exclaimed, as he directed us to a roll of tape and a sharpie to label our water bottles, which we could leave in the refrigerator so we could always have chilled water. "If you bring lunch, feel free to leave it in the fridge, too. Just wash your dishes when you're done." He gestured to the sink and drying rack, which had a few items in it. "… and back here is the big bathroom." He opened the door to a bathroom larger than the room in my own house, bathtub and all. "Just let the instructor for the day know if you plan to use it so we know to stay a little longer.[206]"

This rear area was unusual due to its sheer size. Eight (large) adults could fit comfortably in the area while others flowed in and out of the changing rooms and bathrooms. The open bar-style sink meant that preparing food or washing dishes didn't isolate diners from others. Over my year of training at the school, the kitchen area served as a social gathering space where early arrivals could eat, hydrate, and socialize; and trainees coming out from a hard practice session could recover. During class transitions, this was a rare opportunity to talk to practitioners from the Aikido program, with whom we would otherwise not speak to on a regular basis. It was in these spaces where conversations could happen freely. On matters of martial arts, we would exchange knowledge about training goals and techniques, discuss our favorite professional fighters, and sometimes show off bruises. Beyond martial arts, this was an opportunity learn

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[205] Access to two separate bathrooms with toilets and sinks, plus a kitchen sink was truly the highest luxury.
[206] Some practitioners also shower before class, as one may be sweaty after a long day of work or a hot summer commute.

about the lives we were temporarily escaping from through the practice of BJJ. Participants were parents, day laborers, academics, all of whom had differing reasons for beginning their training.

My own Kung Fu school takes socializing around food to the logical extreme, though with significantly smaller kitchen amenities. The kitchen space is tightly compacted alongside the administrative counter; thus, it is not a comfortable place to socialize. Trainees needing to snack and rehydrate between classes will usually bring their food to the detached changing building, which is much more spacious. Alternatively, the fenced-in, well-manicured back yard[207] shaded with a large persimmon tree and adorned with tulips in the spring, serves as an impromptu picnic site. Though spaces for training and caring for one's needs are physically separated, the distance between meeting both needs is narrow, and both are addressed with near equal importance.

A potluck is *always* taking place at my school. This includes during community meetings, tests, guest visitations, and social events. Practically speaking, sitting through a two-hour kwoon meeting after training for an hour (up to two and a half hours for advanced students!) on a Saturday morning would be challenging on an empty stomach. On test days, a potluck celebration is held to honor the achievement of the student and congratulate the instructors on gaining a higher-ranking initiate. Non-testers will prepare their most popular and elaborate recipes. Enthusiastic chefs will take requests from the testers to prepare their favorite dishes. Olivia recalled her head instructor's process of site selection for her own school and the importance of this dual function, noting, "she said… 'It looks like a really nice space.' And she

[207] Year-round, but especially in the spring, one or two students are tasked with mowing the grass.

could already see the kitchen. She was like 'I know what to do: I want to teach Kung Fu and have spaghetti dinners constantly.'"

Another unique feature was present at Site 4. The studio featured both a hardwood training surface and a padded room. Walking along the catwalk to the left of the embedded floor pads and through an open portal led to a rear section where two gender-segregated changing rooms and a bathroom were located. Further back still was the black belt lounge. I first noticed the lighting of the space. The two training spaces are somewhat dimly lit, with most lightbulbs bathing the space in a warm, incandescent gold. The wooden features of both sections added to the fawny visuals. Both the corridor to the rear and the changing rooms were barely lit at all, almost cave-like. The lounge was, by comparison, incredibly bright. The walls were painted the color of daytime rain clouds. Where trainees in the darkened corridors and training spaces speak softly and step aside to allow each other to pass, the lounge was bright and bustling with activity.

S is large and has been operating for over thirty years, thus the body of actively training blackbelts is quite large, about twenty at any given time before the pandemic. One of the perks of attaining a high rank is exclusive access to the lounge, which features plenty of seating, a refrigerator, and ample gear storage. In the back of the room is a wooden loft that appears to have been purpose-built. The head instructor and her highest-ranking co-instructors use the space for rest, storage, and administrative work. Though I came that day bearing a gift basket of oranges, I did not dare request access to this hyper-exclusive space.

Contemporary Monasticism

As noted previously, contemporary dojos in the United States are rarely ever purpose-built, and these institutions are largely detached from their spiritual and monastic roots. Nowadays it is rare for owners and trainees to reside at their studios, but such situations do exist

and were formative experiences for respondents in the past. Respondents indeed spoke of their experiences with living and training in the same space during their early careers. Often done for economic reasons rather than spiritual, full-time residency creates another peculiar angle with which we can view the complex and overlapping functions that martial arts training spaces can serve.

Reflecting on popular images of martial arts and monasticism, the visage of Buddhist monks clad in loosely fitting robes and bearing shaved heads may come to mind. This media mythos is however not wholly rooted in fantasy[208]: the Shaolin Monastery in Henan Province, China has been in operation for over 1500 years. It is among the most spiritually and culturally revered locales in China (Zhouxiang 2018, Shahar 2000). Yearslong, even lifelong residency was and continues to be a common experience for monks – theirs is a profession of total lifestyle transformation and spiritual commitment. While the life of a monk is not luxurious, it does provide stability, educational opportunities, and a sense of purpose in a highly regarded cultural institution. Today's US-American "monastics" operate in a context with profound contrasts to China's national treasures. Though these individuals operate outside of formalized or historicized recognition, they nonetheless derive a sense of purpose and foster strong relationships in these settings.

The black belt loft at Site 4 mentioned in the previous section was once upon a time the full-time residence of that school's founder. During the early 1980s she lived in, trained in, and created leisure opportunities for others in the same place. This was a common arrangement, with

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[208] Bowman's (2021) *The Invention of Martial Arts* attempts to decipher the mythos behind the language and concept of "martial arts" as a distinctly Western construct.

several respondents noting that martial arts are not an inherently lucrative industry (Respondents 1, 7, 8, 18, 20). Aaron took on a similar living and management structure during the same period. He reflected on his experience of establishing his first dojo in the San Fracisco Bay Area. "…we built this warehouse out… a third of it was lived space and two thirds of it was training space, and six of us lived there. It took about a year to construct, during which time we were already training. We constructed the training space first and lived on the concrete next door, and then built the rest of it up."

Establishing the first dojo was a community project involving a half-dozen full-time residents. Non-resident trainees, who made up the majority of the student body, would also offer their construction skills and time. What began as a warehouse became a gathering space for a variety of activities and relationships over the next ten years. Aaron continued, "At that time, I think what really started coming together is the core of people who were living there, who were all people who were training, and who eventually all of them became instructors, started really forming a nucleus around which the rest of the school started coalescing as a community." The core six and their comrades enjoyed training together and social events. "We used to have potlucks at least once a month."

At the time Aaron was in his late twenties. His housemates were also young men in their mid-twenties through thirties. He also reflected on age and the layout of the warehouse as factors for community building: "…the average student was significantly younger than they are now. I think the average student was probably in their early to mid-twenties and so people were hanging out on our dock and people were hanging out in the living room until late at night talking about martial arts and this and this [sic], and there were always people hanging around the school." Young folks enjoying each other's company late into the evening is hardly unusual, but the space

they were occupying was unique in that it was also their dojo. It featured a living room and even had a truck loading dock that functioned as a makeshift balcony.

Unfortunately for Aaron and his students, his school was forced to relocate following the death of their landlord. He and another clutch of five trainees, many of whom had made home and dojo with him at the first location, pooled their funds and repeated the process of building out yet another warehouse. "Again, we fixed the training area first. The first few months… the six of us who were living there, living on the small mat, and the classes went down on the big mat." By "mat," he meant an exercise mat. There were no mattresses or sofas to sleep on. In time, the crew began work in the upstairs living area where he and several other instructors reside together, just up one flight of narrow stairs from the ground floor training rooms. We interviewed in the kitchen over tea while his housemate/business partners sat quietly in their living room.

Another respondent described a distinctive residency period during which they served as an *Uchi-deshi* at a nationally recognized Aikido dojo. The role of *Uchi-deshi* is rooted in Japanese traditions of dojo ascendency. In antiquity, if no family member was available to take over a dojo following the extant owner's retirement, a student would be selected to live a monastic life at the dojo. The *Uchi-deshi* would be coached in leadership development and teaching methodologies. Brenda G. Jordan and Victoria L. Weston (2003) and Bill Haase (1998) describe the role of Uchi-deshi as an apprenticeship. Today's *Uchi-deshi* in the United States serve as live-in trainees and instructors, not unlike an artist in residence in a fine-arts studio. Ascendency to dojo ownership is rarely the final outcome. Their time commitment is measured in months rather than decades. Chris worked as an *Uchi-deshi* for one four-month stint with another six-month stint the following year. They did however note that these shorter periods

were a change from how the position had previously been staffed. "I say it's changed because previously people would be there for, like, years" Chris.

At the peak of their training, Chris noted that twelve to fifteen individuals routinely served as *Uchi-deshi,* with a core group of about five fully committed to that work at any time. Conducting administrative work and carrying out chores were the defining distinctions between visiting live-in practitioners and *Uchi-deshi*. Chris had visited this dojo multiple times in both capacities. Reflecting on their experience as a visitor, "You had to take all the classes, otherwise you're considered *Uchi-deshi*, and there is a distinguish[ing] between visitors who are expected to take like three classes a day. I didn't have any chores, versus the *Uchi-desih* who took all the classes and had all the chores." The pace of life and training was grueling.

Here again, the lines between leisure, residency, and labor blur. *Uchi-deshi* do not work for pay outside of the dojo. Rather, they help with operational tasks and classroom instruction. Chris noted, "the expectation was-, you take all the classes, you clean, you help with desk duties, new students, and that would look like waking up, leaning, morning class, and then if you had desk duty... answer the phone, welcome people as they come in…" *Uchi-deshi* were also expected to participate in five to six hours of classes each day. Chris continued, "…a ton of cleaning and also in helping new students. As new folks came in, we would instruct them in the back of the mat, to help them with like some basic falling and footwork and hand movements before they join the whole class."

Contemporary monastics hold a peculiar position in the framework of leisure. Aaron and his cadre of five were all paid employees who committed substantial volumes of time to this endeavor. Building up and maintaining the Jiu-Jitsu school was their primary goal, with outside employment (bouncing, security) serving to support their basic survival needs and the needs of

the school. They furthermore bore the responsibility of crafting leisure space for others, and this responsibility happens to coincide with this employment activity that they also do for the love. This collective and the many other owners interviewed for this project are, however, *not* amateur leisurists. They are professionals.

When observing dojo owners and their employees, it is worth detangling assumptions around professional athletic undertakings. It is easy to equate professional athleticism with sporting and lucrative contracts, but most athletic persons working in professional capacities do not engage in such institutions. For comparison, an estimated 340,000 personal trainers are employed in the United States (Read 2023), versus roughly 1,600[209][210] NFL football players (Catalina 2023). Though these hundreds of thousands of personal trainers and thousands of martial arts school owners work in a professional capacity, they do so in support of others' leisure and professional pursuits.

Persons operating in support roles are already overlooked. Where these professional responsibilities collide with social reproductive responsibilities, the result can be unglamorous, even if the job and its products are still beloved. The role of *Uchi-deshi* takes the interplay of leisure, professionalism, and volunteerism to its logical extreme. They live where they work, and their work pays for their residency but nothing more. They facilitate others' leisure through their own leisure practice *and* through their administrative responsibilities. *Uchi-deshi* train with the hourly commitment of a full-time job and teach to an exceptionally high standard.

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[209] NFL teams are allowed up to 53 active players on the roster, with 32 total teams in the league.
[210] If one includes the two other high-profile outdoor professional leagues, the XFL (8 teams, 51 players) and the United States Football Leage (USFL – 8 teams, 52 players), the total number jumps up to around 2,600 (Seifert 2023; Anderson 2023).

To add one final quirk to the role of *Uchi-deshi,* Lucia spoke of the care they received from visiting trainees, as well as the affinity that *Uchi-deshi* share with one another after having served in that unique role. Trainees would bring spare food and prepare care packages for the *Uchi-deshi*. If a group of trainees and *Uchi-deshi* dined out, the *Uchi-deshi* did not pay for food. It was understood among the other trainees that the *Uchi-deshi* were sacrificing professional work time in exchange for facilitating training opportunities for others and continuing the smooth operation of the dojo. Trainees would also provide their own expertise. Lucia recalled a physical therapist who would look after the *Uchi-deshi's* injuries and provide healing exercises for free.

The monastics provide an immense theoretical challenge to this project, but that is why they are so distinct. The language of apprenticeship helps to distinguish their peculiar position of highly responsible non-owner, trainee-trainer. They are professionalizing and holding an increasingly elevated position in the dojo hierarchy. Yet, for all their institutional responsibility they are still equally accountable for refining their own training. Such is the inbetweenness that this project attempts to unravel. These situations challenge us to reevaluate assumptions of what leisure, care and responsibility can look like. Scenarios that do not fit neatly offer new and creative avenues for interpretation, or perhaps themselves may sprout new theoretical constructs that broaden our understandings of how individuals and groups make sense of their surroundings.

Chapter Conclusion

This final chapter explores some of the more intuitive applications of care in martial arts practice, as well as the health benefits that practitioners experience through their years of training. Beyond the basic benefits of physical fitness, respondents reported on the mental health

benefits of training. They furthermore recounted experiences through which their martial arts training served to help them in healing from injury. Respondents placed high value on peer and mentor relationships. These partnerships facilitated the open exchange of health information and formed webs of connection between experienced professionals and acquaintances in need. Within these partnerships of health knowledge exchange is also an exchange of normatively aversive forms of touch.

In addition to matters of care as they relate to health and the body, care for space featured as a central component to long-term training experiences. Temporal commitments span from the immediacy of dry-mopping the floor before the start of a class through the management of major construction projects. In the most extreme cases, practitioners commit to residency full-time, living their daily lives as stewards of the training space as if it was their home. Owners and other persons in high-ranking positions of leadership bear the unique responsibility of navigating martial arts as their profession, whether part-time or full-time, for their own leisure enjoyment, and in the creation of leisure opportunities for others. Even under constructive circumstances, caring for oneself and others is an imperfect process.

Save for the small handful of owners who bear legal liability for operating safe businesses, all other participants have little direct guidance in terms of care obligations for one another. One's own beliefs and dispositions and leadership's efforts towards creating a culture of care-full training set the stage for participation. The challenge of writing on care in relation to leisure is that so much of care scholarship examines obligatory conditions of care provision, whereas leisure practice operates on the assumption of non-obligated commitment. From those (seemingly) opposing standpoints, it would be peculiar that one would voluntarily commit their time to taking care of others as a form of leisure.

Volunteer[211] opportunities, such as chaperoning school events or assisting patients at blood donation events, immediately come to mind as counterexamples of these assumptions. Feminist authors such as Krenychin (2004) and Henderson and Allen (1991) take a more radical approach, arguing that the ability to choose what happens in that unobligated time is what makes moments of leisure. Civil leisurists and deviant leisurists would agree. The civil leisurist engages voluntary time with the expectation that a political or public good will become of their actions. That outcome is rewarding. The deviant leisurist is unconcerned with conventional goodness, and those outcomes are also rewarding. The caring leisurist chooses caring approaches to leisure because those expressions of care are personally rewarding.

In practice, these caring martial arts leisurists express their concern for one another through the sharing of knowledge, parallel participation in high-risk scenarios, and intimate subject matter. The *uke-tori* relationship is not one of recklessness. Rather, both parties bear responsibility for each other's long-term wellbeing despite any risk.

[211] Volunteerism as serious leisure was a somewhat later development in Stebbins' arc, but nonetheless holds its own unique discourse of leisure rewards, skill sharing, etc. in the leisure discussion (Stebbins 1996).

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This dissertation set forth to investigate martial arts practitioners and the places they create to train in their craft. Though the subject matter is unusual, I follow a burgeoning chorus of scholars who regard martial arts as a topic worthy of academic study. Geographers are uniquely positioned to investigate this and other embodied practices that rely on relationships between individuals and groups of people. The peculiarities of places, people, and the phenomena they perpetuate is at the root of this study. The journey through literature and findings weaved through issues of wellness, access, accountability, and the value of leisure as part of society.

When Hemingway (Hemingway 1991) ask whether leisure and democracy were "[in]compatible ideals," he led that conversation describing how conventional engagements with leisure served consumerist, privatist, and socially homogenous ends perpetuate class-based inequity and exclusion. Those most common interactions with leisure were at best regarded as a distraction from participation in public discourse. Civil leisurists and leisure justice scholars instead aimed to convey a framework for forms of leisure that do not detract from the public participation and foster an interconnected agency. Their vision of leisure encourages democratic participation and connection between broader subsets of societal groups. It was startling to view leisure as a broadly deficient class of anti-democratic activity.

Seeing this literature set alongside Tronto's (1995, 2013) work helped to clarify why it is so important to find areas of leisure practice where values of plurality and open participation are happening. The stakes are high, and leisurists have much to contribute to the discussion of how individuals can use their time in more healthful or enriching ways. Civil leisurists and leisure justice scholars allude to the desire for more participatory forms of leisure – this is discussed as

leisure activities that are invested in the high stakes of democratic participation (Mair 2002). A justice frame does not go far enough to situate a person and their activities in relation to the condition of others. A missing link to making that connection is care-oriented approach that recognizes the inherent nature of interdependence and places equal importance on lived relationships as it does abstract ideals.

In this dissertation I set out to understand where these principles show up in martial arts practice. The martial arts are the subject medium under interrogation. However, I think that other types of leisurists and leisure activities can be questioned through care frameworks to elucidate how leisurists can counter consumerist, isolationist, uncaring norms of leisure practice. Locating care in martial arts practice was not always easy. Care and its many virtues do not guide every decision, and even when these principles do guide judgments the outcomes are not always perfect. This can be read as a deficit. However, this does advance an imperative that martial artists, especially those in leadership, begin thinking critically about how their work is situated in broader experiences of need and public participation. Martial arts training can easily be subsumed into narratives of individual achievement and the physical domination of others; however, a more holistic approach would be in evaluating how training is inherently dependent on relationships with others, and how to foster relationships of accountability and trust.

The therapeutic landscapes perspective lends itself to conversations in care theory. Therapeutic landscapes can in some cases be regarded as specialized expression of care. These expressions are, however, not independent of broader cultural influences and expectations. Furthermore, it is important to not fall into the trap of only seeking positive interpretations and experiences of therapeutic landscapes. No therapeutic place or landscape is perfect. Higher-risk

martial arts practice scenarios place these contradictions, shortcomings, and possibilities in full relief.

When carried out with an awareness of participant needs and rooted in practitioner wellness, the martial arts have immense potential to support activities that bolster attitudes towards open participation and wellbeing. More broadly, voluntary relationships via leisure activity provide the opportunity for participants to engage in thoughtful, pluralistic relationships that counter the uncaring norms of market-based governance. Of course, leisure only addresses a slice of these shortcomings, and "unobliged" time is hardly something that all have access to. This work cannot answer the broader stakes that political scientists aim to address. There is however immense power when individuals invest what leisure time they do have in activities that prioritize wellness and relationship building. This is a voluntary investment in caring.

The scale of the intervention is fine, impacting handfuls or, perhaps, classrooms full of people at any given time. However, any prospects for social or change must consider the value of strong interpersonal relationships in the nascence of interdependence. At such a fine scale, I utilized the framework of idiocultures to describe the distinctive convergence of people, their art forms, and the places they manifest. These relationships in small spaces and regional networks have the potential for immediate impacts in everyday life. With enough time and experience, trainees themselves can become active participants in creating wellness opportunities for others.

As the feminist scholars have indicated through decades of care research, care is not something to be read as a singular ideal or perfect in its implementation. Rather care and understandings of who is responsible for performing that caring work is, like many other elements discussed in this work, subject to influences the broader culture in which it is taking place. Care or the responsibility of caring is not, however, just a limiter of opportunity or

participation, rather it is a dimension that can entail agency. Care is not simple nor unidirectional. Care does not take place in the vacuum of a household. Care is contested at every phase, and every virtue can be challenged based on the conditions of the immediate context.

Differences in approaches to care between martial arts disciplines, let alone self-defense, represent the first angle of contestation. Some styles are more obviously wellness-oriented than others. This however does not mean that they cannot be practiced concurrently. In fact, it is often the case that people in leadership who have experience in these wellness-oriented martial arts will bring those influences into how they teach their more combative classes. Furthermore, these combative and non-combative worlds share the benefit letting practitioners share intense experiences of the body alongside other people. This breaks down barriers on matters of the body normatively relegated to private conversation and facilitates mundane discussions of the body and wellness.

A substantial amount of preliminary work goes into making this possible. Practitioners learn about the histories of their martial artforms. They may learn languages to properly name their movements and actions in a way that is more accurate to the place from whence their discipline originated. They will learn rituals and ceremonies. They will don new clothing. They will adorn space in ways that meld classical sensibilities with contemporary conveniences and limitations. Trainees will learn intricate vocabulary for describing all of these things features. This leisure is serious in the sheer volume of material and time commitment that is required to become proficient in so many aspects of their training. Leisure activity taking place in an idioculture of care will ask participants to take the directives of care – awareness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, and solidarity – as seriously as all other aspects of their leisure activity.

The next phase of constructing an idioculture of care is the task of fitting caring approaches into the martial art one is practicing. Again, there are martial arts such as Taijiquan that fit into this mold more easily than combative martial arts. This is where contention but also some of the most interesting contradictions take place. In one regard, agree-upon risktaking is not possible without trust (O'Shea 2019; Elchuk 2020). No physical activity is wholly without risk, even the gentler ones. However, we can have different expectations of the degree of risk that is present when we are performing those activities. Corollary to an idioculture of care is an idioculture of risk.

An idioculture of risk is arguably easier to place in a martial arts context than an idioculture of care. After all, the most popular depictions of martial arts on mainstream television involve a high degree of risk to the health and wellbeing of fighters. Such a degree of risk is well in excess of what most martial artists will engage in. That being said, amateur fighters are not absolutely free from accident or calamity. Under the best circumstances trainees will engage in several stages of risk mitigation measures beginning with the basics of uniforming. They will learn meditation and consent practices, and learn to pull their undivided attention to the present moment where they give full commitment to safe and challenging practice. With time and experience they will eventually develop a level of physical toughness to endure hard practice, a level at which hard or painful contact is no longer frightening. In fact it may become desirable.

These body-centered activities and relationships set up distinct opportunities for individuals to move within their own bodies and interact with the bodies of others in less stigmatized ways. Sharing information about current health status, or successful interventions simply becomes part of the training experience. Through the sharing of their own knowledge and familiarity with the training conditions with their peers, laypeople as experientially similar others

(Gage 2013) can have a profound influence on the health outcomes of their training partners. In that regard, leisure spaces and leisure-based relationships can potentially serve as nodes in the topography of care (Milligan and Wiles 2010).

The contested nature of touch in these contexts is worth further exploration. Values and expectations around hard contact are the complete opposite of general social norms. These are situations in which *not* hitting hard enough can be regarded as disrespectful or patronizing. Yet hitting someone hard has the inevitable risk of injury. Practitioners still find satisfaction or a sense of accomplishment after having endured such contact in this particular context (Channon 2013; O'Shea 2019). In this idioculture of risk, the hazard of hard contact is fully recognized, and trainees enter into these situations having agreed to a measure of inevitable risk that is acceptable. For these participants enduring risk is part of the appeal (Green 2011).

Important to remember is that practitioners enter into these exchanges with the trust that they're training partners will not cause them serious harm. This is a peculiar exercise in trust and, in a way, "caring with" that does not receive enough attention in martial arts circles. That a person will offer their trust and accept the trust of many others, multiple times per session is a phenomenon of potentially immense relationship-building power. Some of the interviewees alluded to this relationship structure. Among less experienced students, this is an untapped avenue for trainees to critically evaluate how they engage in training relationships. These are repeated opportunities to recognize when those relationships feel enriching. A trainee may also learn to describe the shortcomings of interpersonal engagements – perhaps a lack of care – that may characterize an unfulfilling training relationship.

Thematically, a few items echoed throughout this dissertation. First was the issue of temporality, and how time impacts the ability of participants in leadership to build relationships

with each other or have influence in each other's lives. The interviews foregrounded long-term relationships and the lifelong benefits that participants enjoyed as a result. As advantageous as those relationships were, we need not privilege lengthy relationships to the erasure of shorter relationships. In situations of brief temporality, such as at self-defense clinics, individuals who work together for only a few hours can still have profound impacts on each other's wellbeing. The broad message here is that regardless of the amount of time individuals spend in each other's presence, an approach to those brief relationships that models interactions grounded in attentiveness, responsiveness, competence – again caring virtues – can nurture constructive interactions between unfamiliar people.

Second is the ethic of care and the ethic of justice as they to leisure practice. Both schools of thought are advocating leisure practices that prioritize fair participation, equitable access, and a diversity of participants in any leisure scenario. Rather than relying on a rules-based order to participate, care-oriented partakers will modify substantial aspects of the normative order to achieve a state of fairness. I again reflect on Spencer-Cavaliere et al.'s (2015) Ultimate Frisbee players who eschew refereeing as a basic function of the game, even at the highest levels. This operates counter to the norms of the sporting world. Care work is distinct in that so much of this activity has always operated outside and between, as well as within, the purview of broader systems. There is a potential subversiveness in care, and this is worth investigating further if those caring relationships are established on a voluntary basis.

Finally, in hindsight, stigma plays a much greater role in this project than has already been explicitly stated. I had previously mentioned stigma as it relates to talking about bodies and illness, and those parts of bodies that are not in common conversation. I also talked about stigmatized people and stigma related to age. The "human cockfighting" controversy of MMA

was the closest I came to any discussion of stigma around the martial arts (Greene 2018), however even that was a qualified statement specifically addressing MMA, not Tae Kwon Do, boxing, or other classical styes. My use of the language of stigma was tied to people, not to places or activities (Laws 2009). A retrospective reading of martial arts in the context of this work is that fighting is a stigmatized activity. It is in many ways illegible in the lexicon of therapy and wellness. In that regard martial arts and self-defense training lends itself to newer approaches in the evaluation of therapeutic landscapes. Some of these training sites and social circles are openly and unapologetically imperfect. Contestation is inherent in the activity.

Worth noting about this study is that I only interviewed individuals who had committed to several years of practice. Intrinsic to the selection is that these are people who as a whole found something of value through martial arts training. In the fifth chapter and briefly in the sixth chapter there was a discussion about what can happen in these environments when participants have negative experiences, such as acute accidental injury, overtraining injuries and burnout. In the worst circumstances, participants noted uncaring injurious interactions with training partners. Despite these misadventures, trainees were largely still able to find meaning or purpose in their craft in order to continue training.

There is another side to this dynamic that would be equally as telling but perhaps more difficult to consolidate for research: those who tried training in martial arts and found nothing of value. They did not find that these practices contributed to their wellness, or perhaps they had ideological disagreement or procedural mismatch that set them apart from these practices. To these people any therapeutic value to martial arts was probably not legible. There was no therapeutic landscape experience (Conradson 2005), let alone a wellness discourse to be found.

For these individuals, these experiences were unreadable at best, and at worst potentially frightening.

Conradson (2005) notes that while some qualities of a place may have broad appeal (i.e. a slower pace and natural beauty), no place or landscape is intrinsically therapeutic for everyone. In an environment that is so culturally marked, such as a training space, room for intrinsic therapeutic legibility is especially narrow. So much of the experience in those spaces is based on (idio)cultural expressions and filters. For trainees who choose not to stay, perhaps they had a fundamental disagreement with the known culture upon which the discipline was founded. The usable culture that may have been a poor procedural fit, or the functional culture an ideological mismatch. If factors not directly related the core goal of the organization did not align in some way with the individual, still more mismatches can take place.

All of this is to say that seeking a singular diagnostic as to whether or not a place is therapeutic is perhaps asking the wrong question. Rather we ought to be investigating how one may be able to locate affinity within the idioculture(s) that these spaces encapsulate. Some places such as hot springs have intrinsic factors that are more amenable to therapeutic approaches to a broader range of people. Martial arts training spaces, especially those styles that can be more combative, may not be easily readable to a broad cross section of people.

In the case of serious leisure spaces perhaps the stakes are lower. It is, however, a missed opportunity towards countering uncaring norms in broader society when a group choses to exclude in a context of leisure and the latitude it provides. I do strongly support the idea that every person should have an opportunity to learn about the potential benefits of comprehensive, body-centric activity. Open access to these opportunities allows individuals (or groups) to decide if an opportunity is a good fit, or if they should continue looking elsewhere for an activity that

better suits their needs and ability at that time. Either outcome is a productive one – the agential exploration of these options is in itself a valuable experience.

It does, however, in a lower stakes scenario underscore how therapeutic landscapes can serve to exclude. Having an able body is a major asset in many of these activities. This is also a time commitment that excludes those who have high time commitments to family or work. It is within these spaces where we can deal with contention openly we can develop the vocabularies for describing when things go well and when things do not go well. When we demand care of scenarios where it can be difficult to locate, we can also develop the vocabulary for describing scenarios where care is supposed to be, but it is not present. It is my hope that this framework born of contention and contradiction can serve as the basis of future analysis for the comparative research of small but similarly oriented groups.

The research goals of this dissertation were somewhat broad and exploratory. Through interviews, participant-observation, and supplemental landscape assessment I set out to triangulate a narrative of meaning-making in practitioners' lives. An issue that I regret not probing more was upstream approaches to self care. As noted in *Chapter 1* my research questions were initially written from a medical geography standpoint. Those questions were better suited for discussing acute crisis and management. I made the adjustment to include more explicit probing questions about routine maintenance later in my interview cycle. If these topics arose in some of my earlier interviews it was because the interviewee volunteered the information, not that they were asked for it explicitly.

Partaking in such broad participant-observation work was a privilege, and these efforts yielded a wide-ranging but compelling sample of the varieties of interactions martial arts training had to offer. Should a similarly structured project like this be repeated, I would like to see

repeated and protracted visits to schools training in the same styles. A comparative analysis approach based on the idioculture of each school similar to Fine's (1979) repeated visits with little league teams in the same city may yield insights about which values are seemingly more universal than others, and what experiences or expectations set these people and places apart.

Another topic that was simply beyond the scope of what I could accomplish for this project was a complete analysis of monetized sporting in martial arts. This creates a distinct economic angle with witch martial artists are now making judgments. These judgments are being made in a context where multiple concussion can happen in a single fight (Bernick et al. 2021). Additionally, for elite level athletes there exists a vast support and coaching network to aid in the athlete's success. This includes (but is not limited to) fitness trainers, dieticians, methods coaches that specialize in specific styles or facets of Mixed Martial Arts. However, the most intriguing participants, from this project's point of view, are that of the high-level amateur or regional-level training partner.

These individuals are highly skilled and are an invaluable training resource for their professional counterparts. Many are themselves aspiring professionals who are active on regional fight circuits[212] and regard these full-contact training opportunities as the ideal way to gain access to the best fighters the industry has to offer. They engage in maximal practice skirmishes complete with the risk of broken bones and knockout injury. Yet these trainees will receive neither individual fame nor financial gain for committing their health to the advancement of the gym's superstars. Prize fighters do contribute their winning purses to their coaches and gyms, and surely their non-professional training partners experience some sense of responsibility

[212] Small fighting promotions that host local fighters in untelevised events.

towards the advancement of the school. These are often amateur fighters enduring professional risks, and their idioculture of risk is distinct in that the dangers are potentially life-altering, but so are the rewards.

The martial arts as an area of analysis have much to offer academic researchers, and geography researchers will enter into the conversation with a plethora of perspectives and frameworks with which to evaluate their findings. Some theoretical components fit well with extant martial arts practices, while others leave open questions or challenges to conventional ways of thinking. It is in those mismatches where curiosity lies, and in these explorations we can help trainees and scholars alike more clearly understand where they are situated in these worlds and what they can glean from these practices.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Respondents

Respondent	Pseudonym	Location	Style(s)
1	Aaron	San Francisco East Bay, CA	Japanese Jiu-Jitsu, at least four other styles
2	Vanessa	San Francisco East Bay, CA	Kajukenbo, Kung Fu, Taijiquan
3	Unquoted, declined recording	San Francisco East Bay, CA	Kajukenbo
4	Vera	San Francisco East Bay, CA	Kajukenbo, Kung Fu, Taijiquan
5	Chelsea	Puget Sound, WA	Kajukenbo
6	Miriam	San Francisco East Bay, CA	Kajukenbo, Kung Fu, Judo, Taijiquan
7	Reggie	Puget Sound, WA	Kung Fu, Taijiquan
8	Unquoted		
9	Unquoted		
10	Victoria	Pacific Northwest, US	Women's self-defense
11	Sheila	San Francisco Peninsula, CA	"Mixed" Martial Art, more than five other styles
12	Olivia	San Francisco East Bay, CA	Kajukenbo, Kung Fu
13	Melanie	San Francisco East Bay, CA	Kung Fu, at least five other styles
14	Bernice	San Francisco East Bay, CA; various	Kung Fu, Taijiquan; various
15	[Removed from study]		
16	Yara	Los Angeles Metro Area, CA; various	[Identifiable]
17	Reyna	Puget Sound, WA	Kajukenbo Kung Fu, Taijiquan, Filipino Martial Arts
18	Paige	San Francisco Peninsula, CA	Taijiquan, Kung Fu
19	Lucia	San Francisco East Bay, CA	Kajukenbo
20	Chris	Great Lakes; various	Aikido, various
21	Unquoted	Central Valley, CA	Judo
22	Bridgette	Puget Sound, WA	Taijiquan, Qigong, Liangong

Unfortunately, I was unable to directly quote every interview participant, though their participation did shape the framing, interpretation, or presentation of some details.

More specified forms of Kung Fu may reveal the identities of research participants.

Appendix 2: Site Visit List

Emboldened sites were explicitly mentioned in the dissertation.

SITE	STYLES	DESCRIPTION
1	**Kajukenbo**	Medium-large studio in a quiet residential area. Historic building. One of the rare freestanding buildings.
2	Kajukenbo, Aikido, Taijiquan	Medium studio in a mixed-use building. Residences above and restaurants at ground level. Somewhat older building but not historic. Busy street.
3	"Mixed" Martial Arts School	Very large studio in mixed use building with residences above and restaurants at ground level. New build within past 20 years. Busy street.
4	**Kajukenbo**	Very large studio in historic mixed-use building, primarily businesses. Dense neighborhood. Busy street.
5	**"Mixed" Martial Arts School**	Very large studio in historic commercial building. Located on upper floor.
6	**Kajukenbo**	Very large school in a church
7	**Aikido, BJJ**	Medium studio with ample kitchen space in historic mixed-use building. Restaurants and retail on ground floor. Residences on upper floors
8	Capoeira	Older but not historic building. Shouldered by various small businesses on all four corners of the intersection. Distinctive artwork would make this site identifiable.
9	**Japanese Jiu-Jitsu**	Very large studio in warehouse in an industrial neighborhood in the. Massive freestanding building.
10	**Kung Fu, Taijiquan, Chinese Medicine**	**Small training studio that shares space with a Chinese Medicine and massage practice. Very large freestanding building**
11	Karate	Very large studio in a business park warehouse
12	Filipino Martial Arts	Small studio in an industrial warehouse
13	Muay Thai	Extra-large studio in a warehouse in an industrial neighborhood
12	Boxing, Muay Thai, professional wrestling	Extra-large studio in a commercial building. Restaurants and bars on either side.
13	MMA	Warehouse park
14	MMA	Warehouse park
15	Taijiquan, resistance-based personal training	Commercial building along busy thoroughfare
16	Kajukenbo, WuShu, Taijiquan, Filipino	Former medical office converted into a multi-room dojo. Adjoined to other low-height buildings.

	Martial Arts	Located along the neighborhood "main street"
17	Boxing	Sizeable gym that serves amateurs and aspiring professionals. Equipped with roped ring. Located in a trendy neighborhood in a mixed-use building. Newly built withing the past twenty years.
18	Boxing	Satellite gym of Site 17 located several neighborhoods away. Older, plausibly historical building. Shares space with a medical office, and sits at the corner of an intersection of two busy streets with other commercial ventures and residential units.
19	MMA	Elementary school gym
20	Boxing	High school gymnasium. This event was a "smoker," a many-hour event during which boxers of all ages and skill levels engage in a string of amateur fights.
21	Kickboxing, boxing, neural boxing, fitness	Large strip mall area of a shopping complex with a Target and Trader Joe's.

Appendix 3: Correct usage of Taijiquan, Taijiquan, etc.

For this dissertation I used the notation of Taijiquan. This is the Pinyin romanization of the term, and thus the most contemporary notation. Tai Chi, Tai Chi Chuan, and Taiji are also correct methods of naming the artform. Tai Chi is likely the easiest to search, as it is the Wade-Giles romanization that has been in use for decades. For more information, explore the citations below. A thank you to one of my Taijiquan interview respondents for directing me to these resources.

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