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Martial Arts Studies and the Sociology of Gender: Theory, Research and Pedagogical Application

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Introduction: Martial Arts Studies and Gender Studies

In this chapter, I offer an outline of the interrelation of two fields of study, namely martial arts studies and gender studies. I begin with a brief rationale of how the study of martial arts and combat sports (hereafter, MACS) can illuminate the sociology of gender, and vice-versa, of how attending to the core concerns of gender studies can add important dimensions of enquiry to the field of martial arts studies. The chapter then progresses on to discuss two short thematic cases, illustrated through my own and others' research, to show how questions of interaction, performativity and power can be addressed through a combined focus on gender and martial arts. I conclude by arguing that the potential for MACS to challenge normative constructions of gender requires purposeful pedagogical action, the likes of which martial arts studies researchers are well placed to develop through critical academic enquiry.

Why martial arts for gender studies?

It is my contention that gender studies scholars should pay close attention to MACS as sites of research and reflection for three specific reasons. Firstly, MACS are fundamentally embodied activities, while the body and questions of embodiment are clearly of vital importance to understanding contemporary gender problems. After all, the body is central to the construction of meaning attributed to gendered difference, and it is through our embodiment of gender that the realities of such differences become reified. As Joyce Carol Oates succinctly describes with respect to boxing, "a boxer is his body, and is totally identified with it" (2006, p.5). Indeed, the rapidly expanding martial arts studies literature reveals that concerns over bodies and embodiment are centrally important to the practice, organisation and representation of MACS (cf. Farrer and Whalen-Bridge, 2011; Sánchez García and Spencer, 2013). Similar to many other physical cultural activities, the opportunity to develop reflexive self-knowledge, effect personal transformation, or contest dominant social discourses via processes of embodiment have been repeatedly noted by scholars studying gender and MACS (e.g., Channon and Matthews, 2015; McCaughey, 1997; Mierzewski et al., 2014; McNaughton, 2012), some of whose work will be returned to below.

This leads into the second point of interest; namely, the symbolic proximity of martial artistry to the matter of physical violence. This sets MACS apart from other physical cultural pursuits – such as athletics, dance, fitness or team games – in notable ways. Perhaps most importantly in this respect, training and competition here typically involves the development and performance of the ability to *physically dominate others* (or at least, effectively resist their attempts at dominating oneself). This holds particular significance for gender studies, given the close association physical domination holds with normative, discursive constructions of masculinity, and the attendant consequences such discourse holds for sustaining idealisations of gendered power differences (Bryson, 1987; Connell, 1995; Matthews, 2014). While (typically male-dominated) sports such as rugby, gridiron football, or bodybuilding involve various kinds of symbolic, ritualised performances that involve or imply physical dominance, MACS very often centre on literally dominating a resisting opponent. In this

sense, it is not uncommon to hear (certain) MACS disciplines described as ‘quintessentially masculine’, ‘male preserves’, or ‘hypermasculine spaces’, etc. (cf. Carlsson, 2017; Matthews, 2014; Mennesson, 2000).

However, while this characteristic resonates with public discourses suggesting an essentially masculine character, the third key point of interest is that many MACS are practiced in ways which attempt to de-emphasise gender difference. Many practitioners dismiss such notions out of hand; as Carlsson writes, quoting a male boxing trainer, “In the ring, you’re not a man or a woman: You’re a boxer” (2017, p.1). Meanwhile, classes in many disciplines are taught in mixed-sex settings (Channon, 2013a; Maclean, 2016), and women’s participation in competitive combat sport is becoming both increasingly common and visible (Channon and Matthews, 2015). Unlike in most sports, uniforms in many martial arts are unisex, covering and thus hiding some of the most obvious sexual differences between men and women. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for coaches or instructors to purposefully ignore or even challenge gender norms within training environments (Dortants and Knoppers, 2012). Thus, MACS provide fascinating settings within which to investigate the construction and performance of gender, and to explore the possibility for challenging normative manifestations of this phenomenon.

Why gender for martial arts studies?

Scholars in the newly emerging field of martial arts studies cannot afford to lose sight of gender in their analyses. The first and perhaps most obvious reason for this is the sociological importance of gender to the normal procedure of social life itself. As Kessler and McKenna write, “In our society, the decision that one makes as to whether someone is a woman or a man is probably necessary, and is certainly crucial for all future interactions and for giving meaning to the other person’s behaviour” (1978, p.vii), such that “gender very clearly pervades everyday life” (p.3). Lorber argues that this pervasiveness of gender means that for most people, “talking about gender... is the equivalent of fish talking about water” (1994, p.13). As such, it stands to reason that gendered behaviours and beliefs impact deeply on the social practice of MACS, and indeed, this supposition has been well borne-out by empirical research (returned to below). Bearing in mind that gender constructions are almost always implicated in hierarchal distributions of power (Connell, 1995), studying gender provides a window on the exclusionary, exploitive, or otherwise harmful manifestation of (hetero)sexism, homophobia, and intersectional social privileges within MACS spaces – while also, of course, laying the intellectual foundations for contesting them.

Understanding gender is therefore a necessary (although of course, not sufficient) step in grasping the multifaceted nature of the experience of martial artistry today. Even those interesting moments wherein gender is challenged or forgotten by martial artists, as alluded to above, remain marked by gender inasmuch as it gives those experiences particular sociological significance. If gender is indeed as pervasive as Kessler and McKenna (1978) state, then any normalised departure from gendered normality (such as, for instance, men and women hitting one-another in training) highlights something profoundly *abnormal* about martial artistry. As Butler (1990, p.149) notes, “the strange, the incoherent, that which falls ‘outside’, gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world... as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently”. What we might call a ‘normalised abnormality’ of gender performance in MACS holds out the promise of offering rich empirical opportunities for martial arts studies scholars interested in such academic problems. In this light, examining gender in MACS contexts can be seen as a route to answering some of the more pressing questions raised by martial arts studies over the past few years. Among others, these include those surrounding the interrelation between political forces,

social hierarchies, and the embodied practices of martial arts; of how martial arts mediate the place of the self within society; and how personal and social transformations might be realised through pedagogical work in the martial arts. Critical theorising relevant to such questions abounds in gender studies, a field heavily influenced by feminist theory and praxis¹.

On a related note, the criticality of (feminist-informed) gender studies offers a further boon to martial arts studies, as a tool for proactively advocating for positive social change, as well as careful introspection regarding the development of the field of study itself. The paradigmatic positioning of martial arts studies requires us to recognise that its research endeavours involve the *active production* of knowledge rather than its objective discovery. Epistemologically, this invites critique of the characteristics of the social interactions and relationships that shape these acts of production. As with the practices of martial artists then, the practices of martial arts studies scholars may also be marked by gendered forms of behaviour, shot through with (often unrecognised) power relations that have the potential to both influence the knowledge produced as well implicitly normalise the inclusion or exclusion of people involved in its production. Although I don't mean to focus on this point in this chapter, it is worth pointing to two pieces of commentary on this issue emerging in the wake of two martial arts studies events from recent years, which debated the extent to which forms of male/masculine privilege shaped academic discourse (Bowman, 2016; White, 2016). While gender is not the only sociological phenomenon affecting academia in such ways, recognition of its pervasiveness is a necessary step in protecting the intellectual credibility, and democratic credentials, of martial arts studies as an academic field.

With these points in mind, I now turn to exemplifying how the intersection of martial arts and gender as objects of study might inform sociological enquiry, foregrounding notions of interaction, performativity and power to illustrate my case.

Gender Performance, Power Relations and Social Change: Some Animating Concepts for Martial Arts Studies

Although there are myriad theoretical approaches to understanding gender, the notion of performativity holds considerable traction across much of contemporary academic discourse on the matter. Although often attributed to Butler (1990), theories of gender performativity were earlier forwarded in West and Zimmerman's (1987) Goffmanian model, and before that in Garfinkel's (1967) and Kessler and McKenna's (1978) ethnomethodological work. Regardless of its genesis, the notion is typically adopted by many other theoretical interpretations of gender today. Although various scholars' articulations of the concept may differ, at its root is the notion that gender is not an expression of innate, sex-linked qualities, or of one's inner, core identity, but rather a socially-constructed reality brought about through individual behaviours and interactions, with its significance derived through reference to culturally-specific structures of meaning. In other words, gender is something which people continually 'do', and for which others hold them accountable to do 'correctly' in order to be recognised as a (certain type of) man or woman. Understanding how individuals thereby do gender within MACS settings; how dominant expectations for men's and women's behaviour shape their embodied practices; and how contradictions and potential improprieties are negotiated along the way, has animated much research on MACS.

Although these are certainly interesting questions, the constitution and confirmation of one's gendered identity through interactive social performance is not an inert or power-neutral phenomenon but, as noted above, has implications for sustaining observable social hierarchies. Indeed, sociological theories of gender very often offer commentaries on how the performative construction of gender supports power differences in the lives of various people, with reference to social categories such as sex groups, sexualities, class and ethnicity (among others). Rather than see such power differences as completely intractable, performative theories of gender suggest that if certain individuals' or groups' power is accomplished through doing gender one way or the other, then this may be open to contestation if gender is done differently (or indeed 'undone', as some have argued – see Deutsch, 2007). Regarding hierarchal relations between men and women, West and Zimmerman succinctly argue that if “the gender attributes deployed as a basis of maintaining men's hegemony are social products, they are subject to social change” (2009: 114). This observation has also been a key driver of research on MACS, where scholars have explored the possibility for such practices to subvert the inequities and exclusions sustained through embodied gender performance.

With these two phenomena in mind – the performance of gender and its relationship to sustaining or challenging power differences (which I will express below as 'gender/power') – I now turn to two case studies exploring a small range of selected research on contemporary MACS practices, largely drawn from Europe and North America. These highlight, in turn, the kinds of further work that martial arts studies scholars might do to critically illuminate the relationship between gender and martial arts in future research.

Performances of Gender in Mixed Sparring Encounters: Holding Back and Lashing Out

As noted previously, the association between (potential or actual) physical dominance and idealisations of masculinity marks out various MACS disciplines as a prime example of what might be imagined as 'male-appropriate' sport/leisure activities. The fact that many practitioners are quick to criticise such notions does not mean that this implied masculinity has no impact on the lived experience of training and competing within them. Indeed, as empirical research on MACS has shown, individuals still continue to 'do gender' in these ostensibly de-gendered spaces. The ways in which gender is thereby done sheds light on the complexities involved in attempting to depart from deeply entrenched, normative social structures through embodied practice.

The first example I choose to illustrate this comes from research on sex integration in martial arts. Several studies over the past few years have specifically explored sex-integrated training environments (e.g., Channon and Jennings, 2013; Guérandel and Mennesson, 2007; Maclean, 2016), while many others have included phenomena pertinent to them in broader analyses (e.g., Carlsson, 2015; Lökman, 2010; Mierzwinski et al., 2014; McNaughton, 2012; Owton, 2015; Paradis, 2012). Many instructive themes arise from this body of work, but perhaps foremost among them is the observation that integrated training forces participants to confront gender as an embodied social problem; a phenomenon which carries important consequences for (re)shaping the place of gender in conceptions of the self and other.

In this respect, the potential efficacy of mixed training for providing opportunities to counter normative gender constructions, particularly as they relate to or support notions of hierarchal sex difference, has often been highlighted. Writing of her experiences in training with and fighting alongside male kickboxers, McNaughton notes that “the fact that I can hit harder than some of the men that I train with... violates nearly all traditional conceptions of what it means to be a woman” (2012, p.7). Concluding their study of mixed training in a range of martial arts, Channon and Jennings argue that physical exchanges such as sparring, if premised on equality between men and women, involve “a lived-out ‘undoing’ of gender, impacting upon... understandings and embodied performances of sex difference” (2013, p.500). Carlsson neatly summarises the impact such experience had on her own (gendered) sense of self: “In the moment, I do not think about that I am a woman and my opponent is a man. There is nothing apart from two boxing bodies that seek to hit and not be hit” (2017, p.11-12). Meanwhile, for Maclean, “the physically and emotionally intimate practice of karate challenges conventional ideas of gender difference and ways of doing gender” (2016, p.1379), building mutually respectful relationships between men and women that challenge (hetero)sexist gender norms. Yet while it is important to note the possibility of these outcomes, common to each of the studies cited here and above is the observation that men and women training together nevertheless continue to behave in line with dominant gender norms in various ways, often to the extent that such outcomes are thrown into doubt.

This is specifically the case when considering mixed-sex sparring interactions. Thanks to the symbolic proximity of martial artistry to acts of physical violence, some men feel a strong sense of unease when sparring with women, owing to the stigmatising construction of male-female physical combat as a manifestation of violent abuse. Thus, to ‘hurt’ a woman while sparring is a deeply dishonourable act. Meanwhile, because of the association between physical dominance and masculinity, some men experience the prospect of ‘losing’ to a woman in a sparring exchange² as threatening, since as men, they assume that they ought to be able to easily win any such encounter. In the former case, men withhold meaningful effort, undermining the efficacy of the exercise; in the latter, they apply too great an effort, risking injuring or intimidating their partner. While research shows such problems generally affect novice MACS practitioners more than others, they can also be persistent among those who are more experienced:

I feel really uncomfortable that I could hurt a woman in that way, even if she’s asking me to do it I feel really uncomfortable, you know, physically uncomfortable with doing that. (Interview with ‘Steve’, kung fu black belt and instructor, in Channon, 2013b, p.102)

After 30 seconds, Claire brings down Julien in a spectacular manner... Then he gets up and increases the physical intensity of the fight. His movements are livelier, he pulls harder on the kimono and redoubles his attack efforts. Claire falls twice. (Field notes from elite judoka training session, in Guérandel and Mennesson, 2007, p.175)

In explaining these phenomena, Guérandel and Mennesson (2007) refer to the use of two interpretive frames used to give meaning to social exchanges in sex-integrated judo: a judo framework, prioritising the expectations of the sport and involving no reference to gender, and a gender framework, stressing socially normative codes of propriety for interactions between men and women. With respect to how and when such frames become active in shaping interactions, Channon (2013b) refers to the role of habituated gender ideals which are strongly inflected with

notions of honour (i.e., men shouldn't hit women), while Owton points to lingering attachments to notions of male privilege and entitlement:

The power from his 'old boy' punch felt fuelled with sexism and misogyny; a flooding of historical women's suffrage and oppression had hit me in that one punch saying 'you shouldn't be here'... that's why it had hurt more. (Field notes from mixed boxing sparring encounter, in Owton, 2015, p.231-2)

In both cases, it is those moments in which sex-integrated training most clearly threatens what R.W. Connell (1995) refers to as the 'gender order' – the orthodox structure of gender relations privileging men and masculinity over women and femininity – which seem to activate Guérandel and Mennesson's (2007) 'gender framework' within integrated MACS. That is to say, the closer such interactions come to challenging the idea that men are always, inevitably going to be better than women at fighting, the more likely they are to be destabilised one way or another through the reassertion of gender as a principal guide to behaviour.³

Taking the power dynamics embedded within normative gender relations into account, such an observation reveals an important sociological phenomenon regarding the persistent nature of power. As human behaviour approaches a threshold at which orthodox structures of power are threatened, various mechanisms for the maintenance of those structures spring into action. On the one hand, a code of honour (and/or fear of stigma) sees bodies withdraw from engagements that might trouble power-laden idealisations of their relative capacities (men will always beat women in fights, therefore such a fight is unfair/illegitimate and should be avoided). On the other hand, the threat of forfeiting one's personal status (you lost to a woman; therefore you have lost face as a man), results in disregarding the situational rules of interaction, instead using overwhelming physical force in an attempt to restate the wider social basis on which that status is supposed to rest.

As interesting as such phenomena as these may be from a critical, scholarly point of view, such an observation also begs an important pedagogical question. If there indeed remains the possibility of effecting change in gender/power relations through MACS, as several researchers (including myself) have argued, then how might we work to bring this about? How can we minimise the disruptive impact of gendered frameworks on MACS training, while maximising the possibilities for MACS to 'undo' gender itself, building less exclusionary and more socially just forms of physical culture? The answers to such questions may lie in an examination of a related area of literature.

Politicising Gender and MACS: What's 'Feminist' about Feminist Self-Defence?

To date, martial arts studies scholars have been slow to recognise the value of a considerable body of work on women's self-defence, composed by feminist researchers over the past several decades. From the 1970s onwards, this work has set out a comprehensive agenda for the intellectual theorisation, ethical defence, and pedagogical modelling of strategies by which women might actively resist the norms of 'rape culture' through self-defence training (e.g., Hollander, 2004; McCaughey, 1997; Pascalé, Moon and Tanner, 1970; Searles and Berger, 1987; Thomson, 2014). Countering beliefs in the inadequacy of resistance against supposedly inevitable male physical dominance, several studies have shown that self-defence training is effective in reducing both attempted and completed sexual assault (e.g., Brecklin and Ullman, 2005; Hollander, 2014; 2016).

Further to this, others have identified that self-defence training offers transformative experiences to women, both in terms of recovering from post-assault trauma, but also relative to the ‘unlearning’ of harmful forms of femininity that have normalised an expectation of victimhood (e.g., Cermele, 2010; Hollander, 2004; McCaughey, 1997). This important work departs from lines of reasoning embedded in dominant constructions of gender, which position women *vis-à-vis* sexual assault as inevitable victims-in-waiting, who must rely on men’s goodwill or protection in order to be and feel safe from attack⁴. Celebrating female agency, dismissing notions of inevitable female violability, and refusing to take male domination for granted offers a significant shift in conceptualisations of male-to-female violence. Particularly, it departs from a normative paradigm centred purely on the ability of men to choose a woman’s fate for her, reasserting women as active agents in social interaction (De Welde, 2003).

While this logic has riled some feminist commentators, for whom self-defence advocacy carries echoes of ‘victim blaming’ (i.e., a rape victim ought to have defended herself – see Hollander, 2016), scholars advocating self-defence point to its transformative value in refiguring how women have been socialised to see themselves as passive objects of men’s decision-making, which carries far-reaching consequences for everyday life (Rentschler, 1999; Standing et al., 2017; Thomson, 2014). Among others, these include improved self-confidence, reduced levels of fear, greater body satisfaction, a heightened consciousness of sexism, and greater feelings of autonomy. As McCaughey writes, self-defence instructors “do not merely teach women to fight. They teach women that they are important, that they are worth fighting for” (1997, p.98). And for De Welde, this means “women are able to see themselves as having an effect on their own lives rather than (being) wholly determined by the volition of others” (2003, p.250).

The consensus emerging from this wide body of scholarship is therefore that self-defence training offers powerful experiences that can effectively disrupt dominant discourses constituting gender/power, with a range of tangibly positive effects on women’s lives. Yet, a key observation to arise from this work is that such transformations are linked specifically to the use of overtly feminist pedagogies. In line with the logic of values-based approaches to physical education and sport coaching (see Lambert, 2015; Whitehead et al., 2013), outcomes of physical training regimes linked to emotional, ethical or social phenomena cannot be assumed to arise naturally from predominantly technical, skill-based approaches to teaching and learning.

As such, simply learning to fight within (non-feminist) MACS classes may fail to realise the range of positive outcomes noted here. This may be for a number of reasons, but each pertain to the value of recognising the role played by gender/power in constituting women’s lives in relation to the body. Firstly, regarding the physical skills taught, techniques that rely on a kind of physicality one does not (currently) possess, or which take a long time to learn, are unlikely to lend themselves to acute personal transformations regarding assumed weakness. Thus, De Welde (2003, p.251) describes a feminist self-defence instructor’s design of a technical syllabus which emphasised women’s (‘natural’) lower body strength, which “was not imbued with elaborate martial arts movements or with strength tactics that could have been inaccessible to most women”. Meanwhile, Rentschler emphasises the importance of teaching ‘high-damage’ techniques early in self-defence courses, specifically to show women “that they are capable of inflicting pain and physical damage on attackers of all sizes and shapes” (1999, p.156). McCaughey succinctly summarises the reason why: “women feel differently knowing that they could kill someone” (1997, p.86).

Secondly, with respect to the social environments of gyms, it must be remembered that typical discursive constructions of MACS often echo orthodox assumptions about gender and fighting ability. Perhaps unintentionally, this may help to reproduce male privilege in certain training settings (Matthews, 2015), particularly in gyms where instructors fail to grasp the ways in which gender norms pervade classes that they teach. McCaughey notes that various, unchallenged gendered expectations among students in a non-feminist self-defence class “added up to an often condescending or embarrassing atmosphere” (1997, p.79), making for an unproductive experience. Such interactional dynamics echo the problems discussed above regarding mixed sparring, yet in this context, gendered awkwardness becomes more than an obstruction to learning. If the object of training in self-defence is to overcome the harmful impacts of gender on one’s life, yet gender remains salient and insurmountable in practice, then the purpose of training collapses into farce, its promise vanishing.

For Thomson (2014), this underscores the necessity for ‘empowerment self-defence’ instructors to spend time discussing and sharing stories regarding the social and ethical contexts of gender and violence. Further, Guthrie (1995, p.111) describes how women “emphasized the importance of the gynocentric environment” of a feminist self-defence centre on their continued involvement in learning karate, including specifically-designed physical spaces, women-only training, cooperative approaches to training and engagement in community activism. Meanwhile, Hollander argues that feminist self-defence should be specifically characterised by “substantial training in assertiveness (verbal self-defense) and discussion of psychological and emotional issues surrounding both violence against women and self-defense” (2004, p.206). Foregrounding specific, psychic effects of gender on the process of learning to fight makes these problems visible, while mental skills training helps overcome them and storytelling exemplifies how others have successfully done so in the past (Cermele, 2010).

For these authors and others, a feminist consciousness is vital in realising the promise of self-defence training as a means to challenge dominant formations of gender/power. By purposefully foregrounding an awareness of how societal gender norms contribute to the disempowerment of women, meaningful strategies for overcoming this can coalesce into practice. Referred to as ‘physical feminism’ by McCaughey (1997) and others (e.g., Rentschler, 1999), the embodied experience of self-defence training can effect profound personal transformation, inviting the ‘undoing’ of gender through the medium of MACS. Yet, as with other feminisms, physical feminism does not happen by accident; it requires a clear political orientation to be manifest in practice through a careful pedagogical design sensitive to the objectives it seeks to achieve.

Concluding Thoughts

Returning then to the questions posed above, insights from research into feminist self-defence point towards the necessity of *purposefully* working towards ‘undoing’ gender in MACS settings in order to reduce the obstructions it can pose to effective training, while maximising the value of that training in contesting gender to begin with. Scholars with interventionist ambitions may therefore wish to move beyond the production of knowledge via critical intellectual analyses drawing on gender theory, towards the development of critical pedagogical models on the basis of that knowledge. In line with the feminist praxis discussed here, the social justice implications of revealing possibilities to transform sexist, homophobic or otherwise harmful cultural norms invites researchers to become actively invested in propagating ideas and practices which can do so. Thus, the development of

readily applicable models for instruction, coach education, and so on, which build meaningfully on the insights gained from social scientific research, may become a worthwhile endeavour for colleagues with a desire to effect tangible change in the fields of practice comprising contemporary MACS. This has been a clear ambition of the feminist self-defence literature discussed above, yet comparatively few attempts have been made outside of this sub-field to condense research into gender-critical pedagogical models (see Channon, 2014; Van Ingen, 2011).

While it is crucial that efforts at doing so build meaningfully on extant empirical research, my attention in this chapter to scholarly work that may be useful in this context has been necessarily narrow, in the interests of space. The topics I have discussed lend themselves well towards informing pedagogy, but efforts at developing progressive interventions would do well to also draw on other investigations and theorisations at the intersection of gender and martial arts studies. To do some justice to this wider body of work, it is worth noting that gender has been a topic of interest in specific analyses of masculinities (Matthews, 2015; Spencer, 2012) and femininities (Channon and Phipps, 2017; Kavoura et al., 2015); studies of intersectional identities (Chan, 2000; Chin and Andrews, 2016; McCree, 2011); in historical research (Jennings, 2015; Van Ingen, 2013); film studies (Caudwell, 2008; Lu, 2011); sport media analyses (Jakubowska et al., 2016; Quinney, 2016); and sport development studies (Hayhurst, 2014) concerning martial arts – to name but a few. Each of these areas may offer productive insight for colleagues wishing to extend knowledge in the field, or build recommendations for applying it in practice.

In conclusion then, despite a tendency for some scholars to (still) begin journal articles with claims as to the dearth of research on the two, the study of MACS and gender is well established and, it seems, continuing to grow in various exciting directions. This research provides opportunities for academic concerns from two different fields to intersect neatly, benefiting the construction of knowledge in both. As I have attempted to argue in this chapter, questions over how best to utilise such scholarly knowledge in applied interventions deserves to become a key focus as this research moves forward. Doing so will not only expand on the relatively slim offering made in this direction to date by martial arts researchers, but will also contribute towards martial arts studies' impact on the communities and wider societies that constitute the objects of its scholarly attention.

Notes

- ¹ In this sense it is probably worth remembering Stuart Hall's famous (although somewhat problematic) pronouncement as to feminism's impact on British cultural studies – a paradigm which has clearly influenced the early trajectory of martial arts studies itself: "As a thief in the night, [feminism] broke in, interrupted, made an unseemly noise, seized the time, crapped on the table of cultural studies" (1992, p.282).
- ² This is itself a strange proposition, given that the purpose of sparring while training is principally to learn, and not 'win' – a fact which can be quickly forgotten when gendered anxieties replace the normative meanings otherwise constructed around MACS activities.
- ³ These dynamics are not the only ways in which gender framing interrupts mixed training encounters. For instance, see Channon and Jennings (2013) and Mierzwinski et al. (2014) for discussions on the role or sexualisation in framing male-female touch in MACS.
- ⁴ It is worth noting that such logic often features in public campaigns supposedly intended to reduce sexual assault, which advocate avoidance behaviours by women such as not walking alone at night, not drinking to excess, being wary of 'signals' they give to strangers, and so on. It is also evident that, despite some exceptions, the efficacy of self-defence training – women's active resistance to men's violence – is often erased in mainstream media accounts of sexual assault (Hollander and Rogers, 2014), further normalising an absence of women's agency from discourse on the subject (see Cermele, 2010 for a powerful account of the value of women's self-defence stories).

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