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Confident Girls Pack a Punch!

Katrin McBroom

HONORS PROJECT

Submitted to the University Honors Program

at Bowling Green State University in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with

UNIVERSITY HONORS

12/10/12

Dr. Margaret Krueger, Women's Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Dr. Vikki Krane, Human Movement and Sports Studies/Psychology

Throughout my entire childhood and early adolescence I felt that I had an enormous amount of untapped potential. By nature I was tall, skinny, and not very muscular. Additionally, I have always dealt with extreme anxiety and earned mediocre grades. Attempting to boost my self-esteem and provide an outlet for my stress, my parents let me try nearly every sport available in the area and through my grade school (basketball, volleyball, track, tennis, swimming, and ballet). I even tried playing piano at one point. Despite trying each of these activities, none of them stuck. Mentally and emotionally I felt that I should be succeeding in each of these endeavors, but typically I was the worst on the team and lacked the physical strength or skill to excel. Although I often felt anxious and couldn't find an activity that "fit" me, I always had a tendency to embrace the idea of girl power.

For high school, I chose to attend an all-girls Catholic high school. I started to make more friends and my ideas about girl power were shared with many of my peers. One day in class a close friend of mine was explaining her recent enrollment at a karate school where she was learning different kicks, punches, self-defense techniques, and even how to use weapons. I was instantly curious about how I could try a class. That night I spoke to my parents and two days later, I was sitting in a meeting with the senior instructor of All American Karate. I participated in a one on one lesson with him and learned a basic block, kick, and punch. The contact with the pads when I punched or kicked felt amazing. I was praised for how fast and strong I was hitting, and I knew this was for me.

My parents gladly enrolled me after discussing all the skills I'd be learning physical techniques and life skills such as confidence, goal-setting, and self-discipline. Looking back now, I am positive that I truly wasn't very fast or very strong, but this instructor saw my

motivation and potential. I also didn't realize at the time that karate would completely change my life.

Today I am twenty-two years old, an excellent student, physically fit, confident, a second degree black belt, and a martial arts instructor at All American Karate. Over the past seven years, I have truly tapped into my potential and feel confident that there is still much more I can achieve. I believe martial arts were the catalyst to these personal improvements. When thinking about the specific ways in which martial arts have positively affected me, I have identified certain criteria that contribute to this effect: I notice the karate classroom is very gender neutral in many ways. Ultimately, this could play a major role in confidence and self-esteem building for females, and it is what many other sports or activities lack. Second, my karate school, like many others, teaches valuable "life skills" curriculum that are not explicitly taught in other organized physical activities.

Specifically, this equality is the inclusion of both boys and girls/men and women in the same training environment, as well as identical expectations of performance. At my karate school, everyone must participate in the same exercises, learn the same material, and physically achieve the same goals. For example, part of the test to earn a black belt includes completing the required number of 75 push-ups. When practicing self-defense techniques, sparring, and grappling, students work together with each other in partnerships of mixed sexes. While at first glance this may seem unfair for women or girls to be working with men or boys that are physically stronger and bigger, this is actually an advantage. Should a female ever find herself being assaulted by a man, it is much better to have had previous experience striking at and being in close quarters with someone who may be much more physically overwhelming. In short, men and women training together is beneficial for women because it creates a comfort level with

aggressive physical contact. Thus, women are able to react with less fear and are more confident about their ability to successfully protect themselves.

Another element of gender equality is the gender neutral uniform all the students are required to wear. In martial arts, participants typically wear a “gi,” or uniform. They are loose fitting so as not to restrict movement, and differ greatly from traditional women’s sport uniforms. This is a contrast female dress in a dance class or volleyball, for example, in which uniforms are usually skin tight, reveal more skin, and even sexualized. When I took ballet I could not help but notice how my body differed from the girls around me. In contrast, the martial arts gi makes me feel less distracted about my appearance since all the other bodies in the room look virtually identical when in uniform, and allows me to focus on the moves or techniques I am practicing.

Finally, males and females are equally encouraged to be leaders and must learn what many instructors and schools label as “life skills.” On the first day of class I was told I had to start developing a “black belt attitude,” which meant I must act as a positive role model in every way so as to better lead others. Life skills I started to learn in class include confidence, self-discipline, goal-setting, attitude, persistence, respect, and many more.

In addition to the physical training I completed (and continue to participate in) with my fellow classmates which made me noticeably stronger, my anxiety and fears felt more manageable and controlled. I felt I could make friends more easily and speak up in the classroom. I was less self-conscious about what other people thought of me. More importantly, I felt more comfortable in my own skin. Over the last seven years I have seen friends struggle with peer-pressure, depression, and a lack of ambition or drive to succeed personally and academically. However, I think my training has allowed me to overcome these issues.

My curiosity about these questions has led me to develop the questions I have chosen to investigate in this research. Are younger girls gaining confidence and self-esteem from martial arts? Do they recognize these changes? How do they feel about their training in general? This research project is designed to shed light on these questions and ideas, supplement the lack of research on these topics and provide an opportunity for girls to discuss their feelings and experiences.

Literature Review

After researching the topic of girls' confidence and self-esteem in relation to martial arts, I found there is not an abundance of published. One of the most relevant research articles I have found is by Thomas Alley and Catherine Hicks (2005). Alley and Hicks examine peer beliefs in regard to males and females participation in sports that are also typically gendered male and female. In the study, the researchers designed scenarios that were given to their participants who were male and female high school students. These scenarios described a hypothetical student by their race, sex, which sport they played, and their name (initials only).

The results depict major stereotypes that this age group holds (Alley and Hicks, 2005). Participants rated females as overtly "masculine" if they participated in a sport such as karate, while males were rated as more "feminine" if they participated in a sport such as ballet. The research findings suggest that the sports males and females choose to participate in effects how their peers view them and that this may influence what sports boys and girls choose to engage in.

Alley and Hick's (2005) findings directly relate to my current research since this study suggests both boys and girls hold stereotypes about what sports are "male" vs. "female." Furthermore, this stereotype could influence girls' confidence and self-esteem. For example,

adolescents seeking peer approval will be less likely to participate in activities that may make them noticeably different from other boys or girls around them. Alley and Hick's research implies that a girl would be less likely to do a sport such as karate since it would decrease her perceived femininity.

Another study that directly relates to the topic of girls participation in martial arts is by Anastasia Higginbotham (2006). This study takes a qualitative approach and describes Higginbotham's own experience as a martial arts instructor, working with young girls. She observes that younger girls (under 13) tend to be more confident and willingly participate in martial arts, while older girls (closer to 15 and up) become more introverted, lose self-esteem, and are hesitant to participate in martial arts. Higginbotham relates this hesitation to peer attitudes. In other words, Higginbotham discusses the idea that girls are self-conscious about other people—especially boys—will find them unattractive when participating in a more aggressive sport.

However, her research is also unique because it suggests that women and parents of young girls avoid training, or allowing their daughters to train in martial arts because it makes them realize female vulnerability (Higginbotham, 2006). Specifically thinking about potential physical or sexual assaults is understandably disconcerting, but Higginbotham is concerned that too many parents and girls would rather hope assault never happens rather than be realistically prepared and aware of that possibility. Higginbotham is in no way placing responsibility for the outcome of assaults on victims (typically females), but is fearful rates of violence will continue and would like to see more girls able to empower and protect themselves.

Higginbotham (2006) also notes that because our society is failing at preventing males from committing assault, “the only thing that stops a rapist from raping us is when the girl or woman he has chosen physically prevents him from raping her, either by fight or flight...why not prepare to defeat the person who may attempt to rape us and move on” (Higginbotham, 2006, p. 55). When beginning my interviews, I wondered if and to what extent girls would discuss feelings about learning self-defense. After considering Higginbotham’s research, it seems she believes karate should be a mandatory part of young girls’ educational experience. I would have to agree that teaching all girls and women how to defend themselves would yield nothing but positive outcomes.

Finally, Higginbotham (2006) describes the self-defense workshops she runs. She and her fellow instructors create realistic scenarios in which they have students apply full force techniques on people that are fully padded to gain some actual experience defending an attack. She states that, “even 14-year-old girls who resent our twisted scenarios get off on the permission we give them to fight back with as much intensity and aggression as they can generate” (Higginbotham, 2006, p. 57). Much like the 2005 Alley and Hicks study, Higginbotham is emphasizing the effects of social pressures girls feel to act in traditionally non-aggressive ways. When these social pressures are removed and girls are told behaving in aggressive or “masculine” ways is necessary, they respond with excitement. I was very interested to hear about social influences from my participants after realizing this is a major focus in research.

Another relevant study has been done by researchers Sara Lotifan, Vahid Ziaee, Homayoung Amini, and Mohammad-Ali Mansourina (2011). This study is relevant because it focuses on adolescent girls and martial arts participation. However, the aim of the study is to

understand girls' martial arts participation in relation to aggression. Specifically, the study measures total reported anger and total reported reactive anger, or how much anger one feels on average compared to how well one controls anger when reacting to a specific situation. The study is also unique because it considers not only karate, but the style of judo, and compares martial artists to non-martial arts athletes and non-athletes. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between boys and girls in their anger measurements based on scores yielded from the Adolescent Anger Rating Scale (AARS) questionnaire.

A similarity between boys' and girls' anger levels in martial arts is highly interesting and relates to my own observations. This reveals another aspect of equity between the sexes in martial arts participation. There are cultural stereotypes that martial arts are perceived as aggressive, and could be described as a sport that controls expressions of anger—meaning student actively choose when and when not to use force, and when they do, how much. For example, the ability to strike quickly with power requires an aggressive mental state. However, Lotifan et al. (2011) implies that when one must express physical power and aggression, boys and girls do not differ and have very similar reported experiences in martial arts and on the AARS.

In a qualitative journal article, Joyce Nower (2008) discusses women and martial arts. She explains that it is imperative for females to also be “physically brave and strong...this kind of knowledge deepens our awareness and our assertiveness, the two qualities that help protect us from violence...” (Nower, 2008, p. 28). Similar to the other studies I have outlined above, Nower also supports the necessity of placing power in women's hands to protect themselves from violence. In addition she theorizes that society leads women to believe doing martial arts will lower their femininity in the eyes of their peers, but in reality, once a woman becomes

involved it enhances her body and mind: “The martial arts ethos, in rejecting the objectification of women, too, acts as a bulwark against contemporary pop culture that boils everything down to sexual domination and women’s value lying in their sexual objectification (Nower, 2008, p. 28).”

In other words, martial arts participation connects a woman more intimately with her body and allows her to recognize its true potential and worth as opposed to accepting the messages fed to her by the media and society, which focus on her superficial, “sexualized” development. Martial arts can act as a reality check or wake-up call from the assault of sexual and aesthetic expectations society puts on her by giving her a setting that supports a different set of values: being aware, confident, strong, brave, and essentially independent. These are all qualities society typically values in men, but Nower (2008) argues we need to spend more time building these traits in women and girls. In my research, I will be exploring whether or not girls mention awareness of these traits, or if they feel these things while participating in karate class.

A similar focus on helping females build awareness, confidence, and bravery is found in an article by Uchikawa and Sen (2005). The article was created by a woman who teaches self-defense. She states that teaching another woman how to fight, “You see that your body is a weapon. Your voice is a weapon. Your hair-clip is a weapon. Your high heel is a weapon. But the biggest shift was her feeling that she has the right to protect herself” (Uchikawa and Sen, 2005, p. 5). She goes on to describe that society breeds girls to follow rules and directions, which often consist of being gentle and not fighting. Thus, when a woman is attacked and given commands by her assailant, her first response is to obey. Furthermore, since they are encouraged to act this way, girls lack confidence in acting assertively and decisively. Simply being told it is acceptable to fight and speak up greatly boosts confidence and the likelihood a female would

defend herself. In my research I would like to find out how girls feel about speaking up and being aggressive.

Another researcher, HarmoniJoie Noel (2009) examines gender and martial arts. He interviewed fourteen male and female martial artists. He states that his participants—both male and female—described beliefs that martial arts combats societal stereotypes about women as physically weak and vulnerable. Also, women especially explained during interviews that they developed more confidence when learning how to defend themselves from assault. Additionally, men stated women were seen as equals in regard to physical ability in martial arts classes. Noel's findings support my own observations about karate and gender. Noel suggests that karate and its culture can “be one potential avenue for un-doing the inequitable power relations that exist between women and men” (Noel, 2009, p. 17).

My current research will examine what type of experiences girls participating in martial arts are having and if they recognize benefits of karate. As outlined, past research suggests girls feel pressure to retain a high perceived level of femininity, and martial arts have shown to decrease a girls' perceived femininity (Alley and Hicks, 2006). Finally, I am excited to compare my own experiences with young females, curious to see how my feelings match up to theirs, and share these findings so as to help create better understanding and awareness of how much martial arts can potentially impact a girls entire life.

Methods

Participants

The four participants of the study are two nine year olds, one ten year old, and one eleven year old. Each girl is Caucasian and lives in Northwest Ohio. All of the participants have three to

four years of karate experience and are black belts, aside from one participant who has trained just under one year and is an orange belt. Participants are current students at Jon Penny's Black Belt Academy, which teaches American Karate. I went to their karate classes in which young girls between the ages of seven and twelve were participating, along with boys and girls of all ages (family class) and explained I was interested in interviewing girls about their martial arts participation. After my announcements and upon request, I passed out additional contact and information sheets, as well as parental consent forms. Girls could talk with me and their parents and decide whether or not they would like to be interviewed. A total of four girls volunteered and completed interviews.

Participant one is ten years old, has done karate for three years, and is a black belt. Participant two is nine years old, has done karate for three to four years, and is also a black belt. Next, participant three is nine years old, has done karate for four years, and is a black belt. Finally, the fourth participant is eleven years old, has done karate for just under a year (about eleven months), and is an orange belt. Participant four is able to act as a unique comparison to the first three participants who all have years of experience and black belts since she is still considered a basic student with under a year of experience

Procedures

Information and Consent

I selected a karate school in Northwest Ohio called Jon Penny's Black Belt Academy. This karate school teaches American Karate to children and adults, ages 4 and up. Approximately 250 students train at the school. I gained permission from Mr. Penny to speak with his students during their regularly scheduled class time on a Friday and Saturday afternoon

(two visits). On both days I spoke at the karate school, I announced my study to family classes that consisted of students (boys, girls, men, and women) ages seven and up. These family classes were open to all skill levels (white through black belt—or basic through advanced). In other words, this class consisted of students with varying experience and skill levels. I explained that I was interested in discussing with girls ages 7 and up their participation in martial arts in an interview format. After I announced my study I would remain in the back of the classroom to give students and their parents' information and consent forms if they volunteered to participate. Parents of interested volunteers read the information and consent sheets, signed the consent sheet, and returned them to me the same afternoon.

Interviews

I let the parents and participants know that the interview would last approximately 15 minutes. I interviewed one participant on Friday, and three on Saturday. The interviews took place at Mr. Penny's school in an office where we (the participant and I) could sit down in a quiet environment. Each interview was recorded on an audio device (transcripts in Appendix). To begin the interview, I had each participant sign a consent form as well. Participants were told they could skip any question or stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable. Next, I would talk with participant for a few minutes in order to gain a better comfort level with me.

After talking for a few minutes (about hobbies, plans for the weekend, etc.), I would tell her that I was going to begin asking her questions about karate, and that I would be recording her answers. Once the participant agreed, I began asking questions from a previously created list of questions (Appendix). If the participant had comments that deviated from my list of questions, I would continue to discuss those topics—as long as they were relevant to the study. Once all

questions were answered or the participant stated she had no other comments, I thanked the participant for their help. Following the interview I reminded the participant and parents of the participant that they could keep the information sheets and contact me with any other questions about the study.

Results

One of the first questions I asked the girls, was why they started taking karate. I asked this question because I was eager to learn how other girls got involved. The First Participant explained, “Well, my brother started karate, uh, it looked kinda fun.” Similarly, the Second Participant responded, “Because my brother was doing it, and I’m like: that looks fun! Let’s try it! Because I like to try new sports, because I’m really like, sporty.” Participant Four explained that, “my friend does karate here. He um, he’s a red-black belt. His brother and him do it...My mom saw an ad in the paper about karate and I was like, hey my friend does that...and I was like yeah! I want to try it!” Each of these Participants had a sibling or friend who already trained at the school that possibly assisted them in warming up to the idea of training. An interesting idea to take note of is that each of these girls began karate after seeing a male sibling (or male cartoon character) participating. A lack of a female role model doing karate did not seem to effect girls’ decisions to join.

However, Participant Three got involved in a very different way. She stated, “I uh, was watching Spongebob, and I wanted to do karate. So my mom signed me up.” All it took for her to get involved was a cartoon with a karate themed episode. A commonality in their responses is that all the girls wanted to try karate simply because it looked like fun. Whether it is a cartoon, a

sibling, or a friend doing karate, bystanders can clearly see the high energy and excitement martial arts offers.

Next, I asked the participants what about karate seemed so fun. Participant One said that, “all the moves looked really cool.” The Second Participant stated, “Well, kind of everything,” looked fun. However, Participant Three got more specific. She explained that, “I like all the protection and stuff.” In other words, she was eager to learn self-defense. Finally, Participant Four told me her friend “talked [her] into it.” Although she also noted that her mom, “thought it would be good for self-discipline.”

While there is some variability of responses to this question, a common theme is that martial arts seems fun in a way that may be difficult to explain for someone just starting out and that there is someone in each participant’s life that believes martial arts would be a positive activity for them. As the interviews continued, I was able to get more specific details on what the girls enjoy about karate now as opposed to what seemed fun when first starting out.

After discussing how the girls got started in karate and why, I asked them if they played any other sports. Participant One responded, “Sometimes I play basketball, sometimes I play soccer.” The Second Participant came to the interview dressed in her volleyball uniform and also noted that, “I’m a little curious about sports.” Next, Participant Three explained that she does not do other sports but stated, “once in a while I do cheerleading.” Finally, Participant Four said, “Yeah, cheerleading, and softball, and probably going to do basketball.”

I also asked each of the girls what they liked most about karate. Participant One replied, “My favorite...is katas.” Katas are traditional forms that consist of a specific series of blocks and strikes. Martial arts students often have to memorize katas of varying lengths, which ultimately

promote focus, memory, and building proper technique of moves. She described her favorite kata—Universal 6 and 7 combined—a form that is sixty moves in length. I commented that this kata sounded very challenging, and she replied, “Yeah! I need a challenge...we do more challenging things in black belt club and leadership. It’s my favorite because we usually practice teaching or public speaking.”

Participant Two responded, “Mostly partner work. Cause then it’s something fun we are doing. Family class is too basic, but the black belt class, then we take a step forward in how hard it is.” Again, a comment about how much a challenge is enjoyed was made. While both girls explain different challenges, they both identify the challenges as their favorite aspect of class. Participant Three said, “[I] prefers to hit bags...my favorite thing is grappling and leadership stuff.” When I asked her to describe why she likes grappling so much. She replied, “You work on the ground and you can flip people over...mostly [it’s] good that I am able to flip some people that are bigger than me. More rough.” This Participant identifies a more advanced element of class also as her favorite. While she does not explicitly state the word challenge, she clearly suggests she enjoys grappling because she can effectively complete difficult techniques (i.e. flipping people that are bigger than she it). Finally, the Fourth Participant explained her favorite part of karate: “Like, doing, learning self-defense, playing games, and just having fun.” Here, I heard self-defense mentioned again and of course, fun.

When asking the girls what they dislike about karate, it becomes increasingly obvious what keeps girls motivated and engaged in martial arts classes. The First Participant stated, “I don’t like the first half of karate class. Cause the basic students are a little out of control.” Participant Two replied that “push-ups” are her least favorite part of class. The Third Participant said, “Sparring. I don’t like hitting other people, and I don’t like them hitting me.” Finally, the

Fourth Participant stated, “Push-ups and sit-ups. I’m not good at them.” The responses here show that the girls perhaps dislike the conditioning required in karate, but especially dislike practicing techniques that are very basic in comparison with their current skill level. It seems the enjoyment they gain from karate greatly outweighs the negative parts.

One of the most interesting questions I asked that yielded equally interesting responses was: How do you feel when you do karate? Participant One said, “I feel excited...It’s really fun, so I am really happy and excited!” Participant Two stated, “Really...yes! Because I don’t have to do homework here...I’m like yes! I get a break.” Next, Participant Three explained specifically how she feels when she is punching bags: “It feels just like air coming through. And since it’s so fast, it’s mostly like a second...[you notice] how hard it feels when you’re punching. Sometimes you feel kinda angry about it because you’re thinking about something.” I commented on this response and asked her if when she is upset, hitting bags makes her feel better. She responded, “Yeah,” and when she is done punching she explained that she feels, “good. I feel really tired. But you can feel how hard you punched.” Participant Four responded, “Like, really happy. Because I always wonder what we’re doing today. Just like, happy.”

After comparing each participant’s response, I found that the girls expressed a sense of happiness, excitement, and stress relief when doing karate. Participant Three suggested that she also feels particularly strongly about the sensations she gets from making contact with the punching bags. Both participants provided very insightful responses. They are recognizing feelings of strength and relaxation. These girls are recognizing qualities that I as an adult place high importance on. This supports an answer to my original question: do younger girls feel similar benefits from martial arts training as I do? It seems at least on some degree, yes.

Finally, one of the last questions I asked the girls was a hypothetical one about whether

or not they would encourage a female friend, and a male friend to try martial arts. In regard to telling a female friend to do karate, Participant One stated, “I would encourage her to try karate...Over the years you get really good and start to love karate.” The Second participant had to leave her interview early in order to get to volleyball practice and was unable to get to this question with me. The Third Participant explained more girls should do karate, “because mostly on cartoons there are only boys that really do it, so um, it’s just that if we could get more girls to do karate it would be more fun.” Participant Four stated, “I would tell her like, you should do it! It helps you do better in all kinds of stuff.”

When responding to the same hypothetical question about a male friend, the girl’s responses did not change. Participant one sums up each of the girls’ thoughts explaining, “I don’t think I would tell him anything different.” In short, the participants find karate is equally beneficial for boys and girls.

Discussion

In comparison to past research the benefits for girls from martial arts is supported. For example, Higginbotham (2006) discussed the enjoyment girls can gain from being allowed to strike with power and intensity. A feeling of pride and excitement from hitting the bags was brought up during the interviews. The participants also discussed enjoyment from learning self-defense, which was discussed by Higginbotham (2006), Nower (2008), and Uchikawa (2005). Another interesting finding in my research is that girls are aware of females as unexpected participants in martial arts, yet find participating is very enjoyable despite these stereotypes as suggested by Noel (2009).

Although I worked with a relatively small sample size, I was able to gather insightful answers and valuable information. In general, I found that my own experiences are similar to the ones these girls described. While the girls do not necessarily state the exact same experiences as mine, they have conveyed almost identical general emotions and feelings. Emotions like relief, excitement, and happiness were common themes in the girls' discussions. Also, the experience of facing and overcoming challenge was mentioned often by the participants. In my training, I have gained an enormous amount of confidence from overcoming challenges in martial arts. The participants' conveyed their favorite part of karate was learning challenging techniques, speaking in front of or teaching others, and learning new things. The participants also noted increases in their confidence and skill the longer they stay involved in martial arts.

In short, I have found that the responses in these interviews suggest girls develop confidence and competence through involvement and martial arts, and if nothing else, have a great deal of fun when participating. The enjoyment these girls report is enough to support the importance of their involvement. The karate school is a venue for combining physical challenge with deep personal and emotional development. Through my research I have learned not only are young girls having experiences similar to my own, but girls have very individual and personal experiences. Each interview was like a snapshot of their life experience and window into their values.

These girls are not focused on how much pressure society places on their expected roles as females. Rather, they are concerned about how much excitement they feel about new moves and lessons, and are interested in more girls joining because they want other girls to have fun as well. Despite the complexity of girls' participation in martial arts, it can be viewed very simply: girls want to be engaged in activities that are fun and challenging as much as boys do. It boils

down to being treated in an equal way—with an equal chance to learn important physical and mental skills. Parents, teachers, coaches, and instructors need to understand that there is an enormous amount of societal pressure on girls to become feminine woman as outlines in my literature review. However, if girls become active in martial arts at a young age (or even as women) and are held to the same expectations as their male counterparts, those pressures can be mitigated. Furthermore, by helping girls tap into their physical and mental potentials through martial arts participation, they gain confidence in their abilities. In short, martial arts participation is an excellent opportunity for girls to experience healthy challenge, have fun, and grow in to confident women.

Appendix

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been doing karate?
3. What other sports do you play?
4. Do you have friends that are girls who play sports too?
5. What is your favorite activity?
6. Why did you start karate?
7. Tell me about a typical day in karate class.
8. How do you feel when you do karate?
9. Can you tell me about a time when you were having a really good time in karate class?
What made this day so special/good?
10. Can you tell me about a time when you were having a really hard/difficult time in karate class? What made this day so hard?
11. What do you like best about karate? Why?
12. What do you like least? Why?

13. If a friend who is a girl wanted to begin taking karate classes too, what would you tell her about it?

14. If a friend who is a boy wanted to begin taking karate classes too, what would you tell him about it?

Interview Transcripts

(Sentences labeled “Me,” notes the questions I ask or answers I respond with to the girls. “P” notes the participant’s responses or comments.)

Participant #1

Me: How old are you again?

P: Ten

Me: How long have you been doing karate?

P: Three years.

Me: Three years? Great.

P: Close to three and a half.

Me: Why did you want to start karate?

P: Well, my brother started karate, uh, it looked kinda fun. So, I just started with my sister.

Me: What did you think looked fun?

P: I thought all the moves looked really cool.

Me: I bet so! I saw you working on self-defense, kicks, and all kinds of stuff!

P: Yes! It’s really cool.

Me: And you said you play other sports right?

P: Yes.

Me: what else do you play?

P: Sometimes I play basketball, sometimes I play soccer.

Me: So, what kind of stuff in those other sports are similar to what you do in karate? Or are they not similar at all?

P: Well sometimes when I am kicking the ball in soccer, some of the kicks tend to be a front kick. Sometimes I do a round kick. The sports sometimes mix.

Me: Very cool! Do you think karate helps then, or does it not help you?

P: It helps me. Karate teaches me kicks I can use to hit the ball.

Me: Ok, now do you have friends the same age as you that play sports too?

P: Yes. Rachel plays volleyball. And, uh...I think. Yeah, I forgot this other girls' name.

Me: That's ok!

P: She plays soccer too.

Me: Are you friends with any girls here at karate?

P: Yes! I am friends with lots of them.

Me: Nice! Did you know any of them before you started?

P: I kind of became friends after.

Me: Ok, so what would you say if your favorite activity out of all the sports you do?

P: Hmm...I don't know right away.

Me: That's ok! Take some time to think about it....

P: Well, karate is probably my favorite.

Me: Is there a specific reason it's your favorite?

P: Not really. It's just fun!

Me: That's really good! Now what do you normally do when you come to class. What is a typical karate class day like?

P: Uh, first we bow in. We get into the lines, pass our cards down, and then we usually do a few combinations and punches. We do that before we get into push-ups and sit ups—and I forgot jumping jacks! After half an hour, we bow out basic students, and then the black belt club and leadership students are together for fifteen minutes, and the leadership students are together for fifteen minutes.

Me: Wow! That sounds like a lot. You mentioned all the push-ups and sit-ups. What do you think about all that stuff?

P: Umm...I don't like them.

Me: No?

P: No, I don't like all the jumping jacks, push-ups and sit-ups...we had to do 35 push-ups in a minute, and 40 sit-ups in a minute on our black belt tests.

Me: wow! You are pretty good at those then!

P: Yeah! But I just don't like them.

Me: *laughs* that's alright! What is your favorite thing to do in karate then?

P: My favorite would be....katas.

Me: Could you talk about those a little bit?

P: Well, each belt level has a different kata. Yellow and orange belts have their katas. Purple, blue, and green belts have their katas. And brown belts and above to red black belts have their katas. Then black belts have their katas. Right now it's my favorite kata.

Me: Yeah?

P: We are doing Universal 6 and 7 combined.

Me: How long is that one?

P: It's like, 60 moves.

Me: Cool! So why is that one your favorite?

P: We get to moves I've never seen or heard of before. Like "Parting Wings." It's like, umm, you do uh, like, different moves all in one and you get to do four spinning hook kicks in a row and me and my friends call it the dizzy kicks. It gets you so dizzy!

Me: Sounds challenging. Do you like how hard it is?

P: Yeah!

Me: Are other katas you do easier?

P: Yeah! I need a challenge.

Me: That is so cool! Do the other sports you do have similar challenges?

P: Yes.

Me: This might be a difficult question, but if you were talking about like soccer or another sport you do, what would be a similar challenge to the kinds you have here?

P: Ummm, punishments.

Me: What are those?

P: Sometimes we do pushups, if we're doing a scrimmage at practice, you usually have, they pick the punishments and they usually do push-ups or sit-ups for a minute.

Me: Ok, so earlier you described a really good karate day, and what you like at karate. What is your least favorite part of karate?

P: Umm, I don't like the first half of karate class. Cause, the basic students are a little out of control.

Me: *laughs* Ok!

P: It gets be unfocused.

Me: Ok, so you like it better when you are with more advanced students.

P: Yeah.

Me: Do you do different stuff with the advanced students, when the basic students are out of class?

P: Yeah we do more challenging things in black belt club and leadership. Leadership is my favorite because we usually practice teaching, or public speaking.

Me: Wow!

P: I like practice teaching the best because we get to make up our own combinations and then can teach them to the class. And, it's like moves they have never seen before.

Me: Cool, do you think other friends your age practice public speaking?

P: Yes, most of them are in leadership.

Me: What about your friends not in karate? Do they do well with public speaking? Like in class at school?

P: They do ok.

Me: Do you think karate helps you more with that stuff?

P: Yeah, at first when I started karate I was so nervous talking in front of a group. And now, I'm really confident, don't say uuhs or umms a lot.

Me: I know that can be really tough! Talking in front of people. Good work. So, you like katas, but what overall is your absolute favorite thing about karate?

P: Hmm...I really don't know. There is so much stuff!

Me: This is kind of a pretend question. Let's say you have a friend that is a girl. Would you tell her to try karate? Or, would you tell her not to?

P: I would encourage her to try karate.

Me: What would you tell her about karate?

P: You start out as a white belt. Over the years you get really good and start to love karate.

Me: Very cool! Is there anything you would tell her to be careful of? Or like a reason why she shouldn't do karate?

P: I would tell her...uh, like, to be careful of doing stuff you're not supposed to. Like being off focus, like goofing around. Not to do that.

Me: Good advice! What if you had a boy that was friend? Would you tell him to do karate too? Would you tell him the same thing as your friend that is a girl?

P: Yes, I don't think I would tell him anything different.

Me: Do you have any other thoughts in general about karate you want to share?

P: Umm...I can't put my thought on it.

Me: That's ok! How about this: how do you feel when you do karate?

P: I feel excited and uh, really. It's really fun, so I am really happy and excited!

Me: Ok great! Do you feel the same when you do karate now as when you first got started?

P: During the middle I changed feelings about it, but I really wanted to be a black belt so I stucked with it, and went back to loving it.

Me: Ok, so there was a time you didn't like it too much? You said that was the middle. When was that?

P: It was around the middle section of karate, like the middle of the second year.

Me: Cool, what kind of was getting you down about karate?

P: The longer push-ups. Like, you had a purple blue and green class, and you had to do longer sets of push-ups than in my yellow and orange classes. You had to do more challenging moves.

ME: It's cool you like those challenges now. Do you want to keep taking karate?

P: Yes.

Me: What's your goal, why do you want to keep taking it?

P: My goal is to teach people karate and umm, like, to get really high in karate and do the really hard stuff cause I love challenges.

Me: Interesting! You don't hear many people saying that. Do you want to keep playing your other sports too?

P: Well, I don't really like soccer as much. You have to make a really big commitment and have to put so much time into it.

Me: Is karate a big commitment too?

P: Yeah, but you can come whenever except on Sundays.

Me: Ok, so you mentioned you want to teach too? When did you decide that?

P: About a year ago.

Me: Why do you want to teach?

P: I want to help people do karate, and help them like, encourage them to stick with karate. Umm, and like well that is about it.

Me: Sounds like you'd make a good teacher. When you are in karate do you only work with girls your age? Or do you work with boys too?

P: I work with both

Me: Both? Do you feel more comfortable with boys or girls?

P: Well, I feel most comfortable working with my friends.

Me: Do you have friends that are boys and friends that are girls?

P: Yeah.

Me: Ok, so as long as you are working with a friend you are most comfortable.

P: That's it!

Me: That's nice you have a good group of friends here. Anything else you want to add about karate classes?

P: No I don't think so.

Me: Thank you so much for your help! That's everything I needed.

P: You're welcome!

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