

Martial Mind: Researching the Spirit, Identity and Well-Being

What makes someone who calls themselves a Martial Artists any different than a person who knows fighting techniques? The core movements and methods of execution are similar to a trained fighter, the difference lies in the philosophical and psychological orientation of Martial Artists.

The Impact of the Martial Arts Path, If You Choose to Walk It.

Martial Mind: Examining the Relationship among Martial Arts Participation, Identity, and Well-Being

Thesis Uni Waterloo, 2010 by Micheal Mainland



Preliminary:

What makes someone who calls themselves a Martial Artists any different than a person who knows fighting techniques?

Expectations of a Traditional Martial Artist

Through a Researchers Lense, How does Martial Arts approach higher levels of psychological, social and physical wellbeing?

[ShuriTe Seminar](#) April 2017

*****Excellent Book : Along the same Theme****

[It's A Powerful Life: A Guide To Everyday Fulfillment Through Traditional Martial Arts](#)

<http://amzn.to/2ETy3GH>

Out of 31 reviews, everyone of them was 5 stars. It resonates with much that we will discuss today,

“No grainy black and white photos of martial arts masters breaking boards with there hands or a stack of bricks with their heads. No complicated diagrams of fancy foot work designed to impress you that leave you in the end as clueless and frustrated as when you started. Shifu Ahles explains WHY it is so important to incorporate martial arts training into your life.

He fully explains the importance of breathing and being in a meditative state WHILE practicing and training. He explains the benefits of living fully in the moment and not worrying about things you have no control over in live. How to train your body to maintain excellent health and feeling happy and energetic. He explains why investing in this practice is an investment in your future health that will able for you to age gracefully. He incorporates meditation all throughout the training and practice.”

“A definite must read for anyone seeking to better themselves, break through self imposed limitations and live a happier and healthier life to the fullest.”

Many of the very traits people are looking for, are right at your fingertips as

an instructor, and as a practitioner.

Research the Psychological, Physical and Spiritual Wellbeing of Martial Artists in Scientific Research with appropriate, objective statistical analysis. By the completion, there is something in here for everyone, I promise.

Transition

What makes someone who calls themselves a Martial Artists any different than a person who knows fighting techniques? The core movements and methods of execution are similar to a trained fighter, the difference lies in the philosophical and psychological orientation of Martial Artists.

***This is where I separate traditional martial arts from athletic and showmanship pursuits. The objectives of the traditional martial artists, along with his other responsibilities are much different than the consensual competition of two athletes, or the aesthetic pressure placed on showmanship, whether it is a lion dance, wushu, on a stage for judges, movies or even in a book. Failure to recognize and reconcile these differences in your practice will cause you many problems.

In Professor Meir Shahaar's work, you will find many references, reaching back to the Tang Dynasty, but more specifically the Ming Dynasty, in the mid-1500's, that points to a number behaviors that are expected of Martial Artists, including the Shaolin.

The WuBeiZhi, the Chinese Training Manual, better known as the Bubishi, has much more than combative training, it has guidelines on a philosophical way of thinking, behavioral codes, how to help yourself and others medicinally.

Choy Li Fut 1805 : When you Fight, Fight to Overcome and Arrive, but never fight by choice. Be moderate in sexual behavior, Eat Healthy, and Never Back Down from the Enemy.

Ip Man wrote a Code of Conduct:

Remain disciplined - Conduct yourself ethically as a martial artist.
Practice being courtesy - Serve the society and respect your elders.
Love your fellow students - Be united and avoid conflicts.

Limit your desires and pursuit of bodily pleasures - Preserve the proper spirit.

Train diligently - Maintain your skills.

Learn to develop spiritual tranquillity - Abstain from arguments and fights.

Participate in society - Be moderate and gentle in your manners.

Help the weak and the very young - Use martial skills for the good of humanity.

Pass on the tradition - Preserve this Chinese art and rules of conduct.

As part of the Traditional Martial Arts, there have long been codes, some known as WuDe in Chinese Martial Systems, or BuDo in Okinawian and Japanese Traditions.

An individual's psychological and philosophical engagement with the training experience distinguishes those who call themselves Martial Artists from those who may know fighting techniques, but lack the associated lifestyle or philosophical identity associated with the Martial Arts. If this is the case, how can we understand Martial Arts training as a set of psychological, behavioural, and spiritual influences that help to create the inner experience reported by its practitioners? What makes training in the Martial Arts more than memorizing a set of techniques and physical skills? How is Martial Arts training internalized and psychologically understood by the individual participant? These are the Answers that will emerge as we peel back the layers of the Martial Arts training experience.

This research study attempts to examine the way in which training in the Martial Arts affects the overall lifestyle of the individual. The central focus of the current study is to Understanding the core relationship between Martial Arts participation and personal wellbeing, and how this is influenced by the identity of the participant, and the spirituality of the participant.

Identity:

is commonly referred to as a multi-layered concept with both personal and social dimensions. A martial artist may personally identify themselves as a student, as compared to a teacher, or a spectator. When they attend a social function, ie, a seminar, that will naturally take on that social identity as well.

one factor that could influence the relationship between Martial Arts participation and well-being is the spirituality of the individual practitioner. Lets follow this hypothesis,

For some people, spirituality can become a central part of the experience and this form of personal engagement can in turn benefit the spiritual well-being of that individual (Heintzman, 2002). In a similar fashion, the degree to which a person incorporates Martial Arts training into his or her lifestyle and personal philosophy presents an interesting psycho-behavioural connection that is likely to differ between individuals. Similarly, the degree of influence of Martial Arts training on the lifestyle and personal philosophy of the practitioner could be facilitated by the individual's depth of spiritual engagement in the activity. Arguably, the more engaged and committed the individual is to her participation in the Martial Arts, the more predisposed they may be to receiving the benefits of that participation to identity development. If so, three other aspects need to be considered when examining the relationship between Martial Arts

First, examine the way in which an individual may engage in a pursuit in such a way that it begins to take on deep personal meaning and significance in the life of that individual

Second, the concept of involvement, that suggests that people differ greatly in the psychological relationship they develop with their training experience

Third, the degree to which one is motivated to engage in the Martial Arts likely reflects the extent to which an individual practitioner might be willing

to embrace his or her art and make it a central part of daily experience.

Six Characteristics of Identity (Not Listed in the Podcast)

1. Multiple Identities Make One Self : The first characteristic outlined by Burke (1980) is that “the self is composed of an organized set of identities” (p.18), and thus, the individual is not made up of one consistent identity. To understand some of the layers and dynamics involved, it is important to recognize that within the individual there are multiple identities that compete within the mind. The self is a combination of all of our identities, but this combination is incredibly dynamic with some identities having far greater influence and importance than others in certain situations.

2. second characteristic of multiple identities is that they are “self-in-role meanings” (p. 18); in other words, how the individual fits into a society made up of a collection of people all playing slightly different and personalized roles. The idea of one’s identity as being influenced by the roles they play in their social environment represents one of the core concepts of Identity Theory.

3. “Identities are defined relationally in terms of counter-identities” (p. 18). Occupying the role of a student within a Martial Arts setting is made possible by the presence of others playing other roles such as Instructor. Also, the length of time an individual has been involved with a club would be an aspect serving to define that role. For example, a long-term student would only be able to self label themselves as senior students if there are newer students occupying the new student role.

4. Identity speaks to the relationship between the individual and his or her environment, and how feedback from the social environment provides feedback that either supports or challenges aspects of the individual’s Identity. Burke (1980) states this very clearly by saying that “identities are reflexive” (p.20). When we engage our social environment, we look for feedback that supports our sense of who we are and the role we think we play in our social environment. For instance, when someone joins a new Martial Arts club, he or she will be looking for cues from other members

and the instructor regarding how he or she should act and interact within the social world of the club, whether the individuals involved are conscious and aware of this psychological process or not. If the individual identifies as a serious member of an organization or club and is treated like a beginner, it will likely cause internal stress or conflict for the individual.

5. This speaks to the indirect ways identities operate in our daily experience. Burke states that, “role/identity (the “I-Myself”) influences role performance only indirectly through the construction of self images and that it is the self-image which then directly influences performance” (p. 20). Our identities influence our self- image, which in turn influences our behaviours. This chain of the psychological process is important. Although we cannot really say that identity directly influences performance, it does indirectly influence our self-concept and that then might affect our behaviours. It is importance to note that the relationship between identities and self-image, from a theoretical perspective they are distinct concepts that are intimately connected. To take this idea one step further,

6. Burke’s sixth characteristic is that one’s identities motivate their social behaviour. Who we think we are and how we see ourselves fitting in and being seen by others, affects how we act in our social environment. Our identity influences how we interact with others while also influencing how we perceive and internalize those interactions. To fully understand what is meant by identity, it is helpful to conceptualize it as being made up of both personal and social dimensions.

Research Questions

1. Do higher levels of Martial Arts Participation and higher identity formation scores predict higher levels of psychological, social and physical wellbeing? What role does spirituality play?

2. To what extent are the concepts of serious leisure, motivation, and involvement related to both Martial Arts Participation and wellbeing? Which of these psycho-social factors exerts the greatest influence? Do demographic factors play a role in shaping the training experience?

Chapter 2 of the Thesis:

BUILDING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE MARTIAL ARTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE LITERATURE

PERSONAL WELLBEING

“One of the most important reasons to study the positive ends of the mental health spectrum is to identify what is missing in people’s life. That is, in between people who are suffering from major psychological disorders and those who possess psychological wellbeing is perhaps a significant and neglected category of people: individuals who are not troubled by psychological dysfunction, but who, nonetheless, lack many of the positive psychological goods in life.”

In 4 separate Research Papers and nearly 20 years, Professor Ryff studied the concept of personal wellbeing (1989, 1995, 1998, & 2008). Her research conceptualizes wellbeing as being composed of six central characteristics: self acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth

Six Central Characteristics of Well-Being

Self Acceptance: Before we can reach for higher levels of personal development, we must first come to terms with who we are and become comfortable with it.

1. Martial Arts Participation and Well-Being

What does that even mean?

2. Creating and Finding Your Self Identity

3. What are the factors that influence your development in the martial arts?

The second characteristic of wellbeing speaks to its social dimension and is termed positive relations with others. Martial Arts training often occurs

within a highly social environment. While some Martial Artists train in isolation, the vast majority train in a club setting. Numerous relationships exist within the training environment, relationships between students and relationships between students and instructor figures. The health and supportive quality of these relationships is important in creating a growth promoting environment for the student.

Autonomy the third characteristic of wellbeing. When discussing the conceptual dimensions of wellbeing, emphasis is often given to “qualities such as self-determination, independence, and the regulation of behaviour from within” (Ryff & Singer, 2008, p.23). Increasing personal independence is highly associated with Martial Arts training. One of the biggest drawing points of the Martial Arts, for both male and female participants, is the chance to learn how to defend one’s self physically. For a significant percentage Martial Arts students, the process of learning how defend oneself is directly related to increasing levels of personal autonomy.

Environmental Mastery refers to “the importance of being able to manipulate and control complex environments, particularly in midlife, as well as the capacity to act on and change the surrounding world through mental and physical activities”

The Fifth Characteristic of Wellbeing is ‘purpose in life’. Martial Arts training process can be very lonely, challenging, overwhelming, and full of sacrifice. Finding meaning in the suffering, finding purpose in the discipline, represents a higher level approach to participation in the Martial Arts. Without meaning, training can feel repetitive and lose its appeal.

The Sixth Characteristic, Personal Growth’s link to Martial Arts training is simple to illustrate. The concepts of budo and wude, personal development through strenuous training, is centrally focused on the ability of Martial Arts training to act as a vehicle for developing higher levels of selfhood. In fact, the concept of personal growth is also perhaps the aspect of wellbeing most directly relevant to the practice of the Martial Arts. The current study is grounded in a very real sense on the idea that training in the Martial Arts is directly linked to personal growth, given the proper environmental settings and personal approach considerations.

Prof Ryff writes, “Taken together, these six dimensions encompass a breadth of wellness that includes positive evaluations of one’s self and one’s life, a sense of continued growth and development as a person, and the belief that life is purposeful and meaningful”

As well as the 6 characteristics of WellBeing, there are several pages dedicated to the 6 roles of identity. I will leave you those to research if you need them and summarize with this:

“the most important distinction to understand is that personal identities are related to roles and social identities are related to group memberships. Both of these perspectives point to psychological and sociological processes occurring within the mind of the individual. To fully understand the dynamics involved in the identity process, a deeper look into the specific nature of identities is warranted.”

SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY

To what extent is the student engaging in his or her training as a form of spiritual experience? Can the role that Martial Arts play in contributing to spirituality be assessed?

The spiritual aspect of one’s self has often been referred to as the most difficult aspect of an individual’s health to measure (Banks, 1980). Spirituality is often compared to psychological health, in that they are both considered important aspects of one’s experience yet they lack a form of clear and defined measurement (Bensley, 1980). Perhaps the most detailed analysis of spirituality has been provided by Professor Hawks (1994), whose idea of spiritual health represents a key theoretical basis for much of the work that has followed.

Hawks (1994) conducted a vast survey of the literature related to spiritual experience and health, and identified a number of characteristics associated with a spiritually well individual. Hawks’ six, yes, Six Again, characteristics of an individual who is spiritually healthy are as follows:

Six Central Characteristics of Spiritual Health

- (1) A sense of purpose and ultimate meaning;
- (2) Oneness with nature and beauty and a sense of connectedness with others;
- (3) Deep concern for and commitment to something greater than the self;
- (4) A sense of wholeness in life;
- (5) Strong spiritual beliefs, principles, ethics, and values; and
- (6) Love, joy, peace, hope, and fulfillment.

Prof Hawks created a definition that describes Spiritual Health as,

“a high level of faith, hope, and commitment in relation to a well defined worldview or belief system that provides a sense of meaning and purpose to existence in general, and that offers an ethical path to personal fulfillment which includes connectedness with self, others, and a higher power or larger entity.

What brings people to the door of the Martial Arts Studio, one is Attraction.

“Attraction is perhaps the most straightforward and easily understood aspect of Involvement because it refers to the individual’s interest in engaging a specific form of leisure or activity (Kyle et al., 2007). When considering Martial Arts Participation, attraction could refer to the desire to get into better shape or to be able to perform high kicks. Hence, attraction is a fundamental aspect of how we develop levels of psychological Involvement in certain activities and pursuits.”

Jump nearly 50 pages over continued literature research, which is impressive, and the methodology chapter, to give you results, conclusions, and a summary of how you can use these results.

RESULTS

Karate and KungFu Martial Arts schools represented the majority of the

participants. A few taekwondo and jiu-jitsu schools participated, but most declined to participate, and as well jiu-jitsu and aikido schools were contacted, invited, but decided against it.

While differences exist between these forms of practice, they all share a traditional approach to training focused on both practical self defence and the development of the student into a more balanced human being.

There are 46 pages of Results in this thesis. Statistical Regression models, significant difference testing on every variable, by gender, by style, at least 20 charts, you name it, it is in there, Let me give you golden nuggets and solid tools :

“There is much more at stake than physical activity or learning a set routine. Training in the Martial Arts creates a positive effect on the psychology and mental health of the practitioner, which is of central importance to grasp the benefits associated with longterm practice.”

DISCUSSION

The study found that Martial Arts participation displayed significant power in predicting wellbeing scores, the psycho-social factors associated with the training experience heavily shaped this relationship.

Michael also found the variables of motivation and involvement are all functional concepts for understanding the depths of the Martial Arts training experience. As well, the role of personal identity and spirituality displayed a high level of power in predicting overall wellbeing scores.”

there were no significant differences between individuals engaged in different styles on the dependent variable of personal wellbeing. This presents an interesting realization, Perhaps style of training is less important than the individual’s personal engagement with his or her training environment.

****As much as there are arguments of style superiority, to the student, that

is pursuing a path to be happier, to understand and cope with their lives, to be safer, the style are insignificant :

What is significant are the relationships being built and how much time the practitioner spends each month in their training. How are you going to get your students to spend more time, drills, fun, sharing, events? What if you are a practitioner and not sure you are getting what you are looking for out of it, have you asked yourself the most important question, have you been committed to training, or half-assing it? If you have put in half effort, then it will not matter which style you participate in, you will come up shallow on the receiving end.

What have you done for me lately rule : just because you have been involved in martial arts for 10 years, doesn't mean you have gotten close to where you could be. It is MAP, the #hrs/month that showed strong predictive power and displayed significant relationships to the key variables under study, tenure did not.

“This is not to suggest that there is no difference between Karate and Kung Fu; rather, it does suggest that for the individual engaged in serious training, certain commonalities exist within this experience regardless of style. The importance of the individual and the importance of proper fit with one's environment are highlighted here. In fact, it is logical to assume that there may be as much variation between members within the same club as there is between members of different styles of clubs..... Put simply, a high ranking Karate student shares more commonalities with a high ranking Kung Fu student than they do with a low ranking Karate student in their own club. Level of training proved to be a more useful classification system than style of Martial Arts.”

The ability of an activity or a practice to create a meaningful affect on the psychological and social wellbeing of an individual is influenced largely by the people making up that social environmental and by the interpersonal rules that dictate behaviour in that setting. Creating a positive psychological and social environment is essential for Martial Arts instructors, regardless of the skill level of participants.

Michael writes to any practitioner the following,

“The overall advice here for Martial Artists is to choose a club where you feel comfortable, challenged physically, supported socially and psychologically by teachers and other students, and then stay there – stick it out over the long run and display commitment. These findings would suggest that long term commitment to training displays more direct significance than style of training. Although the choice of particular style should be based on personal fit considerations, achieving proficiency in that style through long term participation appears to be linked to higher levels of personal wellbeing.”

“... it is not the style of Martial Arts participation, but the way the individual engages with the act of training and incorporates it into his or her daily life that separates individuals.

A highly significant relationship exists between identity and physical wellbeing, something that might not make intuitive sense at first. Why would the psychological identity of an individual be related to his or her level of physical wellbeing? Perhaps this finding speaks to the importance of understanding the healthy mind - healthy body relationship.

In regards to spirituality, remember Prof Hawk’s definition of Spiritual Health that combines the 6 characteristics,

“a high level of faith, hope, and commitment in relation to a well defined worldview or belief system that provides a sense of meaning and purpose to existence in general, and that offers an ethical path to personal fulfillment which includes connectedness with self, others, and a higher power or larger entity.

The style is less important than the emphasis placed on those 6 principles at the individual club level. It may be a matter of focus as in the clubs where the principles of philosophical or spiritual ideas are highly visible, this aspect of individual experience might be triggered. As a side note,

spirituality was also highly related to the serious leisure dimension of perseverance.

Which is something we will followup on.

the most consistently meaningful and important variable was that of perseverance. Perseverance appears to be directly related to “successful” participation in the Martial Arts. Interestingly enough, most of the important data is not related to age or gender, these factor did have some less meaningful connections to other variables, but for the most part, the successful participation in a martial arts, was not explainable by age or gender.

Have Me at Your Seminar

ShuriTe Association in April is a good example of a social function. Two styles that I am asked to teach is the Choy Li Fut and Lama/Hop Gar styles. Everyone gets an opportunity to understand the theories associated with that art, learn training movements that are rare to see, and then put the two together, the theories with the motion. I have found the majority of martial artists that attend seminars are there with excellent attitudes, and have identified themselves in the role of student, to learn and experience, hopefully something new, or to understand something in a new way.

<http://www.kungfupodcasts.com/seminar>

If you are interested in having me teach a seminar on Chinese Martial Arts in your area, they have been well received by karateke, juijitsu, aikido and many other styles of practitioners.

Closing Thoughts : No dog in the race, not trying to guide you into a system, or a sales pitch, he writes,

“PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE – FOUR SUGGESTIONS FOR CLUB

INSTRUCTORS, MANAGERS, AND RESEARCHERS :

The first recommendation is to focus on the creation of psychologically and socially supportive training environments. People express great individual diversity, yet a supportive environment leads to greater achievement potential for all students. Also, supportive training environments are linked to long-term participation patterns. Assuming that a key marketing goal is long term retention of students, understanding the significance of the social environment is very important in creating a successful Martial Arts club.

The second recommendation is to create a spiritually and philosophically open environment, rather than pushing too hard with specific ideas. Spirituality is very important to some people and not at all important for others. The only certainty is that spiritual engagement in activity is largely an individual experience in our current cultural reality. Provide the opportunity, and those would want to take advantage of it will add their own psychological meaning.

The third recommendation is a challenge to instructors to understand that the most important factor contributing to achieving higher levels of overall wellbeing among martial arts participants is the extent to which they have a more fully developed sense of personal identity. From a psychological perspective, the development of a strong sense of self and the fostering of a strong life purpose should represent the main psychological goal of instructors. Identity is directly linked to all measures of wellbeing – physical, psychological, and social.

The final recommendation, and perhaps the most important, is a challenge to instructors to understand the reciprocal relationship between physical health and psycho-emotional health. The mind and body are interconnected in a dynamic multidimensional manner. Individual differences exist, but in general, it is safe to say that balanced across physical, psychological, and social aspects of well being should be the focus on instructors attempting to promote long term health within the student population.”

Remember he isn't try to sell you a style, some software are an

association, Michael wants the same thing for you that I want, what Agent of Actions Peter Consterdine, Paul Bowman, Kai Morgan, Jamie Club, Kevin Tan and Ben Judkins want for you, we want you to have a meaningful experience in your journey martial arts.

Hope You Enjoy!

TW. Smith

KungFuPodcasts.com