

UC Berkeley

Theses

Title

Capoeira and Minority Youth: A Phenomenological Analysis

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/73s6k6pc>

Author

Bhagia, Sanjay N

Publication Date

2001-04-01

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Capoeira and Minority Youth: A
Phenomenological Analysis

by

Sanjay Nanik [Bhagia]

A.B. (University of California, Berkeley) 1997

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Health and Medical Sciences

in the

GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Committee in charge:

Professor Henrik Blum, Chair

David Presti

Professor Eleanor Rosch

Spring 2001

AS 36
C3 A135
2001
106
MAIN

The thesis of Sanjay Nanik Bhagia is approved:

Henriette J. Blum MD 5-15-01
Chair Date

David E. Presti 5/14/01
Date

Chan Rosen 5/16/01
Date

University of California, Berkeley

Spring 2001

Capoeira and Minority Youth: A Phenomenological Analysis

© 2001

by

Sanjay Nanik Bhagia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	ii
WHAT IS CAPOEIRA?	1
ORIGINS	6
TRAINING AT THE UNITED CAPOEIRA ASSOCIATION.....	7
WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT MINORITY YOUTH?	12
HABITUS & PROPRIOCEPTION.....	16
PROPRIOCEPTION.....	16
HABITUS	18
RESEARCH QUESTION	23
METHODS	25
DESIGN	25
SETTING.....	25
SUBJECTS.....	27
DATA COLLECTION	27
DEPTH INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES.....	29
DEPTH INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTATION.....	30
PHENOMENOLOGICAL MEANINGS OF CAPOEIRA PRACTICE	31
CONSIDERATION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS	32
DATA ANALYSIS.....	33
RESULTS	36
A TYPICAL CLASS	36
THE BODY	40
<i>The Closed Body</i>	40
<i>The Dynamic Body</i>	44
<i>The Soft Body</i>	45
THE WORLD	49
<i>Self-expression</i>	49
<i>Social Interaction</i>	50
<i>Reframing stresses in life</i>	51
<i>Changes in Personality</i>	53
<i>Rootedness/Connectivity</i>	54
<i>Risk-taking</i>	55
DISCUSSION.....	57
IMPLICATIONS	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	61

INTRODUCTION

In various ancient philosophies, the macrocosm is thought to be contained within the microcosm of the human body. Controlled movement of energy in the field of the body through prayer, meditation, dance and worship become a means of resonating with and recognizing the ultimate ground of all being. An example is found in the schools of yoga. The body is described as "the epitome of the universe," and biological and psychological life processes are seen as the microcosm of the world process. (Dasgupta, 1962)

In my first summer after beginning the Joint Medical Program, I was fortunate to spend one month in Havana, Cuba where I volunteered at a psychiatric hospital. Here, I observed the powerful transformative effects of dance and movement therapy that was being used to treat patients. Through my experiences at this hospital coupled with my experiences as a practitioner of yoga, meditation, capoeira, and dance, I have developed an interest in the role of movement and repetitive action in the conditioning of human experience. In this study, I explore the experiences of minority adolescent youth involved in the Afro-Brazilian martial art capoeira.

WHAT IS CAPOEIRA?

Capoeira is an art form that involves movement, music, and elements of practical philosophy. It has been and can still be considered any one or a combination of the following forms: dance, game, spiritual ritual celebration, musical expression and sport. In truth, Capoeira is an eclectic system that embraces the elements of all of those forms since it evolved from one to the other. (Tigges, 1990)

One experiences the essence of capoeira by "playing" a physical game called *jogo de capoeira* (game of capoeira) or simply *jogo*. During this ritualized combat, two *capoeiristas* (players of capoeira) exchange movements of attack and defense in a constant flow while observing rituals and proper manners of the art. Both players attempt to control the space by confusing the opponent with feints and deceptive moves. During the *jogo*, the capoeiristas explore their strengths and weaknesses, fears and fatigue in a sometimes frustrating, but nevertheless enjoyable, challenging and constant process of personal expression, self-reflection and growth.

The speed and character of the *jogo* are generally determined by the many different rhythms of the *berimbau*, a one-string musical bow, which is considered to be the primary symbol of capoeira. The *berimbau* is complemented by the *pandeiro* (tambourine), *atabaque* (single-headed standing drum), *agogo* (double bell), and *reco-reco* (grooved segment of bamboo scraped with a stick) to form a unique ensemble of

unique philosophical approach to capoeira. Capoeira Angola was characterized by a focus on rituals, strategy and tactics of the game; an emphasis on playfulness and theatrics of the movement; and a high degree of combat simulation in which the mere suggestion of an attack should be acknowledged. Capoeira Angola was predominantly practiced as an amusement during weekends and open plaza festivities. (Almeida, 1986)

Both Capoeira Angola and Capoeira Regional have generated new schools and styles based upon interpretations of the teachings of Mestre Pastinha and Mestre Bimba. Some of these schools have attempted to maintain the characteristics of the original styles of these great *mestres*, while others have developed their own characteristics and styles. Most visible outside Brazil are schools belonging to the following stylistic approaches.

- *Contemporary Capoeira Regional*, which emphasizes the efficiency of capoeira's techniques and the athletic aspects of the art, emerged in the early 70's and became extremely popular.

- *Contemporary Capoeira Angola* codified some elements of Capoeira Angola, developed an articulated discourse based on "traditional values", and a well-defined political agenda based on Afro-centric perspectives. This approach started in the early 80's and has influenced the thinking of present day capoeira.

ORIGINS

Although the focus of my research has not been the history of capoeira, I feel that no study involving capoeira would be complete without some discussion of its contested origins. This account by Barbara Browning provides a "simple narrative" of capoeira's origins:

'...the question of where these moves originated is one that impassioned arguments from most capoeiristas. Capoeira is decidedly an Afro-Brazilian art, but which half of this term should be weighted? The simplest little narrative in circulation is something like this: prior to their captivity and enslavement in Brazil, the people of the Kongo-Angola region practiced certain kicking games for sport and recreation. In Brazil, the games were prohibited for all too obvious reasons. But the Kongo people continued practicing their games in seclusion. The roda was formed as a protective circle, and the choreographic elements—as well as music—were added to disguise a fight as a dance. Repression of practice continued even after abolition. The players invented a special rhythm, cavalaria, an imitation of the sound of approaching horses' hooves, to warn each other of police surveillance, and on that cue the capoeira became an "innocent" samba. In other words, capoeiristas generally acknowledge that a martial arts technique and choreographic and rhythmic vocabulary were bought from Africa. But the strategic blending of fight and dance occurred in Brazil, under specific pressures. And while this strategy seems to have been directed against forces outside of the roda de capoeira, it became the fundamental strategy within the game. Dance—as seduction, illusion, and deception—became dangerous, and kicks became elements of choreography. The Portuguese tolerated the roda de capoeira because it was merely dance—perceived without motion or effect, other than aesthetic. And within the circles, Africans in Brazil trained like fighters in the art of dissimulation—how to grin upside down.' (Browning, 1995)

Training sessions lasted usually about one and one half-hours to two hours. Either one of the two *mestres*, Mestre Ra or Mestre Acordeon, or one of the senior students in the group led them. Classes were held six days a week with introductory classes offered at 5 p.m. with intermediate and advanced classes that followed until about 10pm. On Friday's from 6-8 there was an open *roda*. Students in the intermediate classes would show up as early as 5 p.m., an hour before class, to begin preparing for practice by stretching or changing into their capoeira uniform (which consisted of a white T-shirt often with a capoeira logo and a pair of white lycra pants) and more often to socialize with other students and the *mestres*.

To begin training, the instructor would assemble the orchestra by calling several students to take up instruments to accompany the class. Experienced students played the lead instruments, the *berimbaus* (a single-stringed bow with a gourd resonator) and the *atabaque* (a tall drum with a smaller head than the more familiar conga drum). Less experienced players were allowed to play the *pandeiros* (a tambourine). Novices kept time with the *agogo*, a double bell gong that sounds like a pair of cowbells.

The exercises almost always began the same way . The teacher would yell, "*Ginga*." Students stretched out and warmed up doing this first exercise, the *ginga*, a simple four count box step that is the basis of capoeira movement. The name *ginga*, comes from the verb *gingar* meaning "to rock like a wave." The basic *ginga* is a symmetrical step in which the player bobs backwards and forwards moving from side to

pace exacerbated any mistakes in the form and it required enormous muscle exertion to compensate for imbalance when one moved slowly. The strain of trying to substitute strength for technique in these exercises became obvious when students tried to slow down a movement. Our instructors knew that gradual, controlled movements, especially acrobatic maneuvers, demanded more strength and a better sense of balance than quick movements, so we were always encouraged to move slower, taxing our muscles and equilibrium.

WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT MINORITY YOUTH?

All adolescents face **developmental tasks** that need to be accomplished for them to become well-adjusted young adults. As defined by Neinstein, some of these tasks include: separation and individuation, developing a sense of self as a distinct person, separate from family members and others; identity formation, exploration of the biological, psychological, social, and cultural aspects of identity; learning how to develop close relationships with others; gaining control of one's impulses; and learning how to take responsibility for one's actions. (Neinstein, 1996)

Minority adolescents face an additional task or set of tasks that Spencer describes: "traditionally the experience of minorities in the United States requires they not only become marginal persons but also bicultural ones capable of **demonstrating competence both in a larger society and within their own ethnic community**... learning two ways of coping with the tasks, expectations, and requirements of society based on one's ethnic minority status becomes essential for manifest competence and psychological health." Spencer goes on to say that like all adolescents the major developmental task for minority youth is the "achievement of an identity which serves as the basis for the development of a competent self." (1991)

Ethnicity plays an important role in adolescent identity development. Ethnic minority adolescents must integrate their ethnic group membership into all other aspects of their identity to achieve a balance between self, their ethnic group and mainstream America. Ethnic identity is formed through the interaction of the individual and the socio-cultural contexts in which he or she lives. (Gay, 1985) While most adolescent minorities are bicultural, having the ability to cross back and forth between the borders of mainstream culture and their own culture, all ethnic minorities are still affected by the **stigma** attached to their race or ethnicity. The degree to which the child is insulated from the majority members of society and the degree of cohesion of his or her ethnic group also affects the child's perception of ethnicity and stigma. (Sanelli, 1998)

Moore illustrates another dimension of stigma that many minority teenagers face:

"Stigma involves a stereotype, and for minorities the stereotypes include perceptions of deviance. The larger society certainly does label some minority persons, a priori, as 'probably deviant.' Thus to be young, male, black or Chicano in white America is to be a suspect person." (1985)

There have been additional changes in what is understood to be adolescence that are of concern. One recent development is the lengthening of the adolescent period at both the beginning and the end of the period. Although entry into adolescence is still linked to pubertal changes, these changes now occur at much younger ages than previously. The upper end of adolescence has been marked by an increasing older age of entry in work and family role. In addition to being a later event, the transition to

adulthood is characterized by ambiguity about how and when adult status is obtained. "For several years, individuals of adult physique are held in a limbo between childhood roles and adult status and expectations." (Friedman, 1998) This lengthening of the adolescent period is a rather recent development and unfortunately, we "lack well-developed social institutions for the socialization and support of adolescents in this new social climate. This is particularly true for urban disadvantaged youths." (Friedman, 1998)

Numerous reports have documented the health status of youth in the United States and concluded that the main threats to adolescents' health are predominantly the health-risk behaviors and choices they make. Urban minority youth are confronted with more **opportunities for high-risk behavior** than the average adolescent. For the teenagers in this study for example, gangs are a major lifestyle option. Some children, who are at high risk for behaviors that could compromise their health, successfully "negotiate" adolescence, by avoiding behaviors that could lead to negative health outcomes. Others, while relatively advantaged socially and economically, sustain significant morbidity as a consequence of their behaviors. Of the variety of forces that influence adolescent health-risk behavior, the most fundamental are the social contexts in which adolescents are embedded, the family and school contexts are among the most critical. (Resnick et. Al., 1997)

One concern for adolescents that became particularly significant in this study is the **development of habits**. In his article, *Protective factors in Adolescent Health Behavior*, Jessor writes:

"Adolescence is a critical time for the adoption of behaviors relevant to health. Health related habits, values, and lifestyles established during this important formative period are likely to continue throughout life." (Jessor et al, 1998)

Marcel Mauss, a phenomenologist whose work I drew on heavily during the course of this study had this to say in 1934:

"...for men as well as women, the decisive moment is that of adolescence. It is at this moment that they learn definitively the techniques of the body that they will retain for the whole of their adult lives." (Mauss, 1934)

Adolescence is thus an important time for developing ways of being in the world that we take with us throughout our life. So in more ways than one adolescence is a critical period for youth, and more specifically minority youth.

Although, I have presented many concerns that we have for minority adolescents, it is not the intention of this thesis to specifically assess how well capoeira addresses each of these. Rather, it is to present those concerns addressed in adolescent literature that were later found to be issues that many of the youth in this study were struggling with. It is an effort to understand the dispositions that these youth may bring with them to the context of capoeira training.

HABITUS & PROPRIOCEPTION

To introduce you to this section of the thesis, I wanted to present this quote from Michael Jackson's Paths to a Clearing:

"Until I was in my mid-thirties, my awareness extended into my body to the extent that I grew hungry, experienced lust, felt pain or weariness...my body passed into and out of my awareness like a stranger...whole areas of my potentiality were dead to me. When I took courses in yoga, I began to live my body in full awareness feeling the breath under my conscious control, fill my lungs, experiencing through postures the embodied character of my will and consciousness...the transformed awareness brought me up against the full force of habit and ingrained dispositions...habits can not be changed at will because we are the habits...to change a body of habits can never be a matter of wishful thinking or trying...it depends on learning and practicing new techniques"(1989)

I came across this quote near the end of my formal research and found it to be representative of one of the major themes that emerged from my fieldwork: the idea of habits and body techniques. Phenomenology and specifically the ideas of Marcel Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu and Maurice Merleau-Ponty became quite prominent. In this section, I am going to present two of the major concepts that helped guide my thinking as data was being analyzed: *proprioception* and *habitus*.

PROPRIOCEPTION

the body's anatomy of potential, that can be "discovered" through various physical disciplines. And this exploration can lead to new dispositions being formed.

So is training in capoeira then a means of discovering the latent potential in our bodies? For example is learning to do a handstand the reclaiming of the "potential to stand inverted"? Does training in capoeira lead to the instilling of a new disposition that we may call the *capoeira habitus*? How does training in this physical discipline shape the experience that adolescents have of their own bodies and the world in which they live?

METHODS

DESIGN

The study was conducted between the months of June 2000 through April 2001 using a qualitative research design. The methodologies utilized consisted of participant observation, in-depth interviews and document reviews.

SETTING

The research was conducted at two different schools in the San Francisco Bay Area: the United Capoeira Association in Berkeley and Capoeira ABADA in the Mission District of San Francisco. The United Capoeira Association is the school where I began training in capoeira in the spring of 1999 under the guidance of Mestre Ra and Mestre Acordeon. In January 2000, I began my first data collection as a participant observer at this school as a project for my qualitative methods course at UC- Berkeley.

Once I had decided that I wanted to focus the study on minority adolescent youth, I chose the site of my formal study ABADA-Capoeira. ABADA-Capoeira is a capoeira academy located in the Mission District of San Francisco on Mission St. between 19th

Street and 20th Street. ABADA-Capoeira San Francisco is an extension of the Rio de Janeiro based ABADA-Capoeira Foundation (Brazilian Association for the Development and Support of the Art of Capoeira) which is an international organization represented throughout Brazil and in eleven countries including the United States. The academy's artistic director and main capoeira teacher, Mestranda Marcia "Cigarra" is the highest ranked woman from ABADA in the world. (www.abada.org) The school offers free capoeira classes to teenagers through a grant from the California Arts Council-Artists in Residence program, the Zellerbach Family Fund, and Greg McCall. This program began in August 1998.

I chose this site because it attracted minority youth from a diverse community many of whom reported that they could not have participated in capoeira if it was not free. In addition, the community in which these youth live is defined as "unhealthy" because it has unsafe streets, poor schools, and few resources to stimulate, entertain and nurture adolescents. (Dryfoos, 1998)

SUBJECTS

The subjects of the study were minority adolescents between the ages of 14-20 who attended capoeira classes at ABADA. While I was conducting the study, there were approximately 18-20 adolescents at the school, all from ethnic minority groups.

DATA COLLECTION

Participant Observation was unstructured and consisted of my day to day experiences of participating in and interacting with the lifeworld of the school. Within this capacity, I participated in a number of school activities. Initially, I started as a student at the school with the intention of continuing to "play" capoeira at ABADA throughout my yearlong study. But due to a knee injury that I incurred in the summer of 2000, I decided to discontinue training. Instead, I observed classes, conversed with students and teachers, "spotted" students as they tried to learn movements, attended competitions, performances, demonstrations, and the *batizado* ceremony.

As a beginning student, I asked countless questions to *mestres* and other students and I was taught, corrected, encouraged, and scolded. The advice the teachers gave me and the teenagers that I observed in the classes was direct and instrumental with the

purpose of trying to help us become better players and rarely to explain capoeira in an abstract fashion.

Depth interviews of adolescents and of their instructors were semi-structured, flexible, and in-depth. The fourteen interviews (eleven with students and three with instructors) were video-taped and audio-taped and varied in duration from forty-five minutes to two hours. The topics discussed in the interviews were the stories of initiation into capoeira, reasons for continued involvement, likes/dislikes about capoeira training, physical/mental/social changes that were experienced, phenomenological meanings, risk-taking, what they considered a good capoeirista, and the meaning of capoeira's history. Instructors were additionally asked questions about their teaching philosophies.

Ethnographic fieldnotes were generated from experiences gained from participating in the school activities. The fieldnotes were recorded daily and allowed for a flexible and open-ended process of inquiry. Even though such documentation cannot completely recapture all details of relevant discussion and activity according to Hammersley (1995), it does allow for a number of important observations to be recaptured and analyzed.

Documents such as school newsletters, fliers, and postings on the school's website were consulted to provide a thorough understanding of the historical, cultural, and political context of ABADA-Capoeira and its relation to the surrounding community.

DEPTH INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Interview participants were solicited through announcements made in class by the researcher and instructors, a flier posted at the front desk where students check-in, and by asking teenagers individually. Location suggestions made by the interviewer included the participant's home, an office located at the school and a nearby park. All interviews with the exception of two that were conducted in the interviewee's homes were performed privately in the Director's office located upstairs from the studio where classes are held. At the time of contact with a potential interviewee, the study was described. If the teenager was willing, arrangements were made to schedule a date, time and location for the interview. In general the interviews took place before or after the participant's capoeira class at ABADA.

Interview participants and instructors were asked to identify and introduce the researcher to additional potential interview participants and key informants. Such maximum variation and opportunistic sampling strategies and procedures enabled the researcher to become acquainted with a greater number and spectrum of teenagers in the

school than would have been otherwise possible. This approach also helped in gaining the trust of new participants.

Of those with whom interview arrangements were made, nine failed to show at the scheduled time and place. By continually making new appointments, five of these nine were eventually interviewed. Overall, eleven videotaped and audiotaped depth interviews with adolescents were conducted. In addition, three interviews with instructors (including the Director) were carried out.

DEPTH INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTATION

In-depth semi-structured confidential interviews were carried out to obtain information about the meaning capoeira has in these adolescents' lives. All interviews were conducted by the researcher using an interview guide rather than a questionnaire.

Open-ended, repeated, probing questions were used to facilitate the flow of discussions. The interview questions were developed from principles learned in the qualitative methods class taken at the University of California, San Francisco with guidance from the instructor of the course, Professor Adele Clarke. Some revisions were made after a series of pilot interviews were carried out at the United Capoeira Association in Berkeley.

The interview began with a series of demographic questions including age, ethnic background, educational and employment status (if the teenager was not in school or had

grounded in the examined social context and the researcher evaluated the core social, psychological, and structural processes within the investigated social environment. This was done by constant comparison research interpretations against the text.

Using the grounded theory/editor analysis framework, two main models were utilized. Decontextualization-recontextualization was employed. (Atkinson, 1992) It involved fragmenting or "coding" the text and then regrouping these fragments into thematic headings. Thick description of activities in the school and conversations with students and instructors was utilized to uncover conceptual structures or theory. (Geertz, 1973) Thick description used narrative structure to give shape, coherence, noteworthiness and passion to reported events. Both interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed in this narrative structure. Throughout the process, the researcher alternated between offering analyses of ethnographic materials from diverse perspectives on the one hand, and then re-analyzing phenomenologically to reveal experiential dimensions of capoeira practice on the other.

Bias is at work in all research and the researcher took care to minimize the potential for bias by: trying to fit in as a participant observer, minimizing the researcher's influence over routine occurrences in the classes, and promoting equal opportunity for all teenagers at the school to be involved in the study. The researcher achieved reliability of the data through careful record keeping, multiple observations of a repeated event, and analyzing and reanalyzing of transcripts and audio/video recordings at different points in time. To increase the validity of findings, the researcher collected data through different

means (participant observation, semi-structured interviews that are audio/video taped, and document review) and analyzed the data through different theoretical frameworks. In addition hypotheses, conclusions, and developing theories were constantly tested against the data for refutability, modified and reformulated in response to the data, and frequently taken back to the students and instructors to be verified, modified or rejected.

RESULTS

Results are organized thematically into three sections. This organization emerged from the thematic coding process described in the methods section. In the first section, I will describe the elements of a typical class. The next two sections will present the dimensions of the capoeira habitus by organizing them into two broad themes: the *Body* and the *World*. In the section on the *Body* I will explore several dispositions that training instills in the teenager's body. In the section on the *World*, I will describe what the teenagers describe are the dispositions that they have learned and how these dispositions interrelate with the other domains of their life.

A TYPICAL CLASS

Training is the main activity that the students engage in while at the school. The majority of their time is passed in preparation, drilling, exercises, and physical self-development. The specific types of exercises and training techniques employed in capoeira schools can be divided into the following categories: methods to condition the body, exercises that isolate individual movements, pre-choreographed training sequences, and the training *roda*.

In the beginning of every capoeira class, exercises are performed to **condition the body**: make it stronger, more agile, more flexible, and warm it up to allow a participant to meet the demands of the training without getting injured. Many of the exercises employed are taken from other activities such as gymnastics, military "boot camp" exercises, yoga, and other martial arts. Some of the exercises bear no resemblance to capoeira movements and are used to stretch and strengthen the body. Others are capoeira movements such as the kicks or the *ginga* done repeatedly to warm the body as well as get it in motion.

Individual exercises are done to isolate individual movements or facets of capoeira. Exercises are almost always fragments of capoeira taken from the context of play and transformed into activities that can be studied, repeated or perfected by the student. Using these exercises, a student can work on a specific kick, acrobatic movements, instrumental rhythms or other facets of capoeira independently. By separating out the techniques, movements or facets of the game from the complex field of relations involved in capoeira play, training exercises allow practitioners to target individual skills for systemic cultivation. Proficiency is learned by isolating the movements from each other.

Capoeira techniques are isolated in instruction when students perform them alone without a partner or opponent to provide complementary action or interaction. Kicks are

thrown with no target, escapes are practiced when there is no attack to be avoided, and movements are executed against imaginary opponents. Performing movements alone allows the student to focus exclusively on his or her own body, without having to pay attention to such distractions as another player, or ongoing interaction in the *roda*. Later, once the technique has become part of a student's bodily potential, he or she will ideally be able to perform it in the interactive context of play.

In capoeira there is a necessity to respond to any attack by first escaping or avoiding it, and then by initiating a counterattack. **Pre-choreographed sequences** improve reflexes, sharpen perception, and also incorporate in the student inclinations for action and reaction. The complementary exercises (where one student is given an attack sequence and the other given a defense, escape and counterattack sequence) provide basic models for interaction that students internalize through repetition. In addition, sequences provide a model for appropriate responses to different situations that one experiences in play. Instructors insist that they want the students to develop the tendency to react to attacks with appropriate counterattacks or defenses instead of ineffective tactics but also to realize that there are other options and learn to use them. Ideally, the body is trained rigorously so that the participant incorporates patterns of interaction that can be executed fluently during the play, without time to think or consider options.

In addition, we can not forget that there is an opponent. The *capoeirista* must develop sensitivity to the opponent's positioning and movement in space so that if he or

THE BODY

THE CLOSED BODY

One of the ways that new dispositions that are learned in training became apparent to me was by observing new students who began capoeira during the course of the study. The following is a one of a series of descriptions that I made of Marco, a 17-year-old African who began training at ABADA in the fall of 2000.

It is now the end of the class and time for the roda or ring. The students gathered in a circle and a few of the graduados (graduate students with many years of experience) went to the back of the studio and picked up instruments. Marcia and Sereia began playing the berimbau and the other students joined in the orchestra. Two students took their positions at the foot of the berimbau in front of the orchestra. The berimbau was lowered and the play began...

The new student, Marco, was now at the foot of the berimbau. He had the look of anticipation as he sat observing the players in the roda. His adversary Sarah, a graduado (a very advanced capoeirista and an instructor at the school) faced him clapping her hands and singing the chorus. Although Marco had not been playing very long, he always played in the roda if it occurred in the class which he attended. Most

new students I had seen were very reserved about playing in the roda and had to be asked or encouraged to play. Marcia tapped the gourd of her berimbau signaling the next two players to go in. Marco did an au (cartwheel) to the middle of the circle while Sarah touched the ground at the foot of the berimbau and then her forehead before standing up with her back to the circle and performing a back handspring and somersault in sequence across the whole diameter of the circle before stepping out to the ginga. The students cheered and the energy of the circle appeared to rise as the chorus got louder and the rhythms of the berimbau faster. Marco finishing his cartwheel turned to face her with excitement on his face and began his ginga, or sway which is the principle bodily technique in the game.

As both players ginga-ed, their torsos were set into motion appearing as if swaying and sometimes even as if off-balance. The ginga of each player was quite different. Marco had a basic, symmetrical, rocking step that moved from side-to-side in a relatively wide-legged stance. When his body's weight shifts onto one leg, the other foot drops back behind so that he moved slightly backwards and his footsteps marked out a rectangle. His arms moved from side-to-side to counterbalance the body, alternately crossing in front of the torso. The arms were positioned to prevent any attacks to the head. His ginga was stable yet quite predictable without much variation. His torso kept facing Sarah, as he looked her straight in the eyes. Sarah's ginga was constantly changing in a vigorous, elastic fashion. Her feet rebounded off the ground with each footstep, not allowing her foot to rest for a moment. Her arms moved in flowing liquid arcs with the hands loosely opened and cupped. Her center shifted up and down as she switched back and forth between wide and narrow stance.

THE WORLD

In this section, I will present some themes that recurred throughout the interviews regarding what these teenagers find meaningful about capoeira and how they have found it to be transformative. Themes are presented using illustrative quotes from the interview text. Although all of these themes interrelate, I have chosen to create categories for the sake of clarifying concepts.

SELF-EXPRESSION

All the teenagers even those who suggest that capoeira is a single thing believe that there are many ways in which the game is played which allows for a large degree of self-expression. Although they employ the same techniques, sing the same songs, and play the same instruments, how capoeiristas move, sing, and play are personal in ways meaningful to them.

"Well, the first day I took it, I was hooked - it wasn't just like all the other martial arts styles I take, it's really set how you do it... like in the style of karate I took there was punching attacks, grabs, where someone grabs you from behind. There was club attacks, knife attacks. And it was all set out, how you move your body and how you do this and how you do that. And

what I liked about Capoeira was that it gave me the freedom to change how I wanted to do things. I could do things to fit my body. Like in karate, we'd have katas and all those different attacks, and there was no way to change it. There was no way to alter it to be my own. But in Capoeira they teach you the moves and how you put it together to make your own sequence is totally up to you, and that's a lot of what I really like... about Capoeira...And it allows me to express who I am through the way I play and the way I move my body.When you get in the roda, you do something different every time..."(19-year-old African-American)

"You know, I feel like it's more like - it's more like your style, you know, in Capoeira. It's not only one way, but there are many ways, you know, and everyone has their own way to do Capoeira." (17-year-old Latina)

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Not only did they describe capoeira as an art in which they could express themselves, many teenagers articulated what they could say about the others that they interacted with. They described how the kinesthetic of the moving body in the *roda* expressed eloquently much about the practitioner: psychological states, dimensions of the character, who their teacher is, and even social and cultural factors such as racial consciousness. The way in which a person moves both divulges and determines who one is essentially at least in the eyes of the community with which he or she practices. As one teenager described when discussing what one can interpret about a person by the way they play:

"their emotion, how they feel, how their life is, yeah. I can tell a lot about it. It's another way beside you talk to them, you can understand them physically. And too because you still can use your training, you still can understand people by looking at people, not just talking to them. Like if I don't know you,

I've never seen you and you're ...playing, I know how you move, how you think, I know what's your emotion. Things like emotion are in the pit of you, and you use your emotion when you play" (17-year-old Latino)

By understanding that so much is expressed by another when they play, many teenagers described that a new way of interacting with others developed. One common change that was reported was learning how to manage problems and conflicts with others.

*"As much as I care about myself, I do care about the other as well. Even if I kick, you're not going to hurt them, and if you care about yourself, you don't want hurt and harm from them. So you try to be...nicer and manage well with them. It's like, I need your help with this guy, so I don't hurt you too, so I'm going to help you manage better too, I have like all these different sort of movements that you can move with them so that you won't get yourself hurt."
(17 year-old Arab)*

REFRAMING STRESSES IN LIFE

Many of the teenagers reported that their problems and stresses in their lives were forgotten while training especially when playing in the roda. They described playing capoeira as a "therapeutic interlude" from the problems in their lives.

*"And my, my life - my lifestyle right now too. Just like I got no place to go. It's like it keeps me, it [capoeira] keeps me away from all that stuff, you know? Even though I have to deal with it later, but it, but it just like it makes me happy like for two, three hours, and that makes me think good about myself, you know? Positive. Because if I, if I keep thinking about the problems I have out there, I would never be able to do Capoeira in here."
(17-year-old Latino)*

"Capoeira is, is cool when you play because you get totally lost in it. Like I know the other day I was having problems - I was at my grandparents' house, and I had a fight with some of my family. I got into an argument with them. And I decided to leave, and when I left, I was like maybe Capoeira's open, let me go over there. So I went and played in the roda and as soon as I got in the roda, I couldn't remember any of that, you know? And you just get totally lost in the moment. I just lost my job, but every time I come here, it's the furthest thing from my mind. The only thing I think about is Capoeira. And when I come out, I feel like it's just - everything's so much easier to handle after that. Like it's really a form of relaxation. I know a lot of times it doesn't look that way because it's really - it looks like it's really stressful on the body, but when you love to do something that much, it's just like when I get here, it's just like everything else is secondary. And like as far as emotion, I can say that, I always feel like coming to play Capoeira, regardless of, if - which way I play a certain day, if I feel more - if I feel like I want to play this way more, however I feel while I'm playing, but I know every time I'm here Capoeira's the only thing that goes through my mind. Everything else just kinda fades away for that time when I'm here."(18-year-old African-American)

This second quote illustrates another important point. Many teenagers described coming to class with a certain problem or emotional state and after training, having a different perspective on their problems. For example, the same teenager describes his experience of training after having a fight with his family and how the training allows him to reframe his problem:

"I remember coming here and thinking, OK, I don't want to get in there and play aggressive because I know I'm already upset. So I just went in and I tried - and that way I actually played different, which isn't surprising because you usually play in the mood you are in. Like you can't hide in the roda...after I left here, I went right back to my grandparents' house, and I made up with everybody. ...we talked about it ...and when I came here, all my effort was put towards Capoeira. All the ... effort I was putting towards being angry, all the aggression was already spent out in other ways, like in

more ... resourceful ways, I guess you would say..." (18 year-old African American)

CHANGES IN PERSONALITY

Teenagers reported that learning capoeira has transformed them physically, mentally and socially. Common reported changes were improved confidence, self-esteem, and overcoming shyness. The following teenager "paralleled " overcoming shyness to overcoming the fear of movements in capoeira:

(I-Interviewer, R-respondent)

R: " well, I think that with Capoeira and the fact that I'm more confident in myself, I changed the perception that people have of me. You know? Like when I was at school, I was kind of shy because I couldn't speak, and it was kind of like a circle, you know? Because I was shy - no because I couldn't speak people thought I was shy and because I was shy, I couldn't really interact with people. And the fact that now I'm more confident. Even if I don't really speak good English, they kind of have a - I kind of have better interactions with people.

I: So they perceive you differently now.

R: Yeah, very different. I mean - yeah, very differently. I have more friends now, and I don't know, I just - before I was just kind of - I didn't get to know people, like to go in the group and say, "Hey, hi, my name is Marco," anything like this, you know? Get to be alone and to go find a group and speak with them and started to make relationship. I was just waiting that maybe someone will come, be interest in me. But now that I've practiced Capoeira I'm more confident. I just go to people and try to make connection with them.

I: So you feel more confident. You feel more confident in your body and also you - people perceive you differently than before.

R: Yeah.

I: And all those reasons contribute to your being able to make the other connections with people that you wanted to previously.

R: Yeah, exactly. It's kind of like - it's kind of like the same things, when you fear the movements, it's - you can make a parallel, the fact that you fear people. And in Capoeira you just don't think about it. You just go and get the thing you want to do, you know? Go, I mean get what you want, you know? So before I was kind of scared of talking to people because of- I know what they thought about me, and I know that my language was not real good. And now, you know, I just don't think about it that much, and it's more easy to make relationship with people, you know? Because you're not really scared when you talk--oh, what am I going to do what I'm going to say, you know? Did I say a stupid thing? Just say what you want to say and I think it's - people like that, you know? They get to know you and, yeah, it's kind of - yeah, Capoeira definitely helped me in social interaction, I think." (16 year-old African)

"I feel it has given me a lot of confidence, and a lot of power, I think, because I used to be very shy, very, very shy, when I started high school, and that didn't allow me to just build relationships. So since I started doing Capoeira, you know, I haven't been the only one to notice this, but my teachers have too. They've told me that since I've started doing Capoeira, I've become more... outgoing, and I've built better relationships with people, because before I was just, you know, kinda cautious, and I didn't want to tell people a lot about myself. So...now I feel like I'm a lot more confident, and I'm more open, and not open just about myself, but open about... learning about other people." (17-year-old Latina)

ROOTEDNESS/CONNECTIVITY

The themes of rootedness and connectivity came up in two respects. Students described a stronger feeling of connectedness to people at the capoeira school and to people in their lives in general as has been illustrated in some of the previous quotes. In addition, when discussing the meanings of capoeira history [prompted by the question s "What do you know about the history of capoeira? " and "How does this knowledge

affect your involvement in capoeira?"] teenagers described an enhanced connection to their own ethnic culture:

"then I felt that there was a link between my culture and the Brazilian culture. And I feel that Capoeira ... just coming to capoeira is... I feel like I have a relationship kind of with capoeira because it kinda links with my culture because the slaves in Brazil, they had to fight against oppression, and the Mayans in my country had to fight against oppression too. ...And not only in my country, but here minorities have to fight against oppression...Even though we don't see it, you know as in the news, but we feel it." (19-year-old Latino)

RISK-TAKING

Risk-taking is another theme that emerged from the interview text. In her book The Romance of Risk: Why Teenagers Do the Things They Do, Lynn Ponton, an adolescent psychiatrist, argues that "risk-taking is the major tool that adolescents use to develop their identities." (1997) But it is when teenagers get caught in patterns of unhealthy risk-taking that risk-taking becomes dangerous. She argues that we need to "encourage positive risk taking, seeking out and/or supporting opportunities for teenagers to take on challenges in open and nondangerous settings." (Ponton, 1997)

While discussing risks, most teenagers reported that the taking of risks with your body (as is done in capoeira) are worth it and a lot of the more riskier acrobatic movements are an important means of self-expression. In the process of taking risks, several teenagers reported that limits on bodily action were discovered.

"Me personally, I think I take a lot of risks, but I think the benefits outweigh the risks. and it's also, you know, you just know your limits. Like I know - sure, I'm taking a risk, but I know what I can handle. I know that I'm capable of doing certain flips. There're certain moves that I don't try yet, because I know I'm not ready to do them, and so in a way it's an unnecessary risk because I'll just end up hurting myself. But once you take - you know your body. You know what you can do. And you know what risks you're comfortable taking. And for me, I think those moves are cool. I'm impressed by a lot of flashy moves, and so - in that sense, I want to learn how to do them all, so I'm willing to take those risks to learn how to do them, you know..."
(17-year-old African)

A former member of a Latino gang in the Mission (one of two in the study) described how capoeira had reduced his risk-taking outside of capoeira training:

"I used to hang down there in the street with, with my friend, you know. And I used to go break windows from people I don't like, you know pop their wheels, or you know teachers that I don't like, I used to go and tag all over their car. You know I've just done really bad stuff at school, you know. I used to steal things from stores you know...but you know I just quit that shit... I just got bored of... just doing trouble and getting in trouble and people screaming at me all the time...capoeira's enough danger and it's fun..." (16-year-old, Latino)

DISCUSSION

Being a verbal (written) exercise of description and interpretation of the bodily discipline of capoeira, this thesis remains in that realm of informed imagination, most of its weight safely planted on the presumably solid earth of words. Put tritely, the aim of this thesis is to faithfully and informedly interpret the world that is activated when the body is set into motion. Like the pugilists with whom Wacquant became so familiar, capoeiristas can be viewed as "practitioners of a particular bodily craft." (Wacquant, 1995) Whether considered craft, sport, art, or play, capoeira is meaningful primarily in *practice*. The culture of capoeira is derived from a shared experience of skillful and adaptive activity in relation to the world; it is intrinsically cohesive as *habitus*, activated and perpetuated in the bodily practice of capoeira itself. The "practical logic" that structures this *habitus* is comprised of many bodily dimensions that are explored in this thesis.

As part of the exploration of phenomenological meanings, the study followed the ways in which the teenagers become *capoeiristas*, and the phenomenological effect of that learning process on the experiences that they have of their own bodies and of their lived world. This study demonstrated how capoeira considered as a physical discipline shapes the experience that adolescents have of their own bodies and their lived worlds. Over time and with disciplined training, these teenagers learn new skills, reform old

physical inhibitions; learn to read the body of another player in order to anticipate an opponent's actions; and increase their sensitivity to the world around them. -

The propensity to keep *closed*, be *dynamic* and *soft* are all part of the capoeira *habitus* that capoeiristas learn physically and apply to other realms of activity. From a phenomenological perspective, habits can be thought of as the sedimentation of history in the body. The ensemble of habits orients action and conditions sensation. A capoeira *habitus* is a set of habits/dispositions learned through training. This habitus is not only observable and identifiable in action, it also informs one's visceral sense of his/her own corporeality and potential for action by forming dispositions through which social worlds are encountered and engaged.

The teenagers in this study are finding new ways of being in the world by finding potential for action in their bodies through apprenticeship in capoeira. The discovery of latent potential in the body leads to the formation of new dispositions. Given the struggles of minority adolescent youth, the new dispositions created through capoeira apprenticeship prove to be valuable in that they provide a healthy environment for risk taking, increased confidence, a stronger feeling of connectedness both to people and to their own culture, and an ability to find new perspectives to deal with problems in their lives.

IMPLICATIONS

In medicine surprisingly little attention is given to habits themselves: how they are acquired how they affect affectivity, how they feel to the person inclined by habit , and most importantly how they may perpetuate or cause disease. Thomas Csordas characterizes sickness as a condition which not only imposes physical limits on the individual, but also "discourages one from engaging in a whole range of activities that the individual might otherwise be capable of performing." Sickness is both a biophysical condition and a "habitual way of engaging with the world." (1994) Healing then is both a physical process and an existential one. The patient who is healing explores the margins beyond self-imposed bodily limits on action. Capoeira and other types of "bodywork" (Wacquant, 1995) challenge the "sensory commitment to habitual posture." (Csordas) Although capoeira may be an extreme example of a physical activity, this study does illustrate the possibilities that can be discovered through "bodywork."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Almeida, Bira. *Capoeira, A Brazilian Art Form: History, Philosophy and Practice*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1986.

Atkinson, P.. The ethnography of a medical setting: Reading, writing and rhetoric. *Qualitative Health Research* 2 (4): 451-474.

Behnke, E.. 1997. Ghost Gestures: Phenomenological Investigations of Bodily Micromovements and Their Intercorporeal Implications. *Human Studies* 20: 181-201, 1997.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990 (1980).

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1971. "Intellectual Field and Creative Project." In M. Young (ed.) *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education*. London: Collier Macmillan: 160-188.

Browning, Barbara. *Samba: resistance in motion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1995.

Chestang, L. W.. *Character development in a hostile environment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

Csordas, Thomas. 1990. Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology. *Ethos* 18 (1): 5-47.

Csordas, Thomas. 1993. Somatic Modes of Attention. *Cultural Anthropology* 8 (2): 135-156.

Dasgupta, S.. *Obscure Religious Cults*. Calcutta, 1962.

Dryfoos, J. *Safe Passage: Making It Through Adolescence In a Risky Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Finkenberg, M.E.. 1990. Effect of participation in taekwondoe on college women's self-concept. *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 71: 891-894.

Friedman, S. B.. *Comprehensive Adolescent Health Care*. St. Louis: Mosby 1998.

Fritschner, L. M.. 1978. Karate: The making and maintenance of an underdog class. *Journal of Sport Behavior* 1: 3-13.

Fuller, J. R.. 1988. Martial arts and psychological health. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*. 61: 317-328.

Gay, Geneva. 1985. Implications of Selected Models of Ethnic Identity Development for Educators. *Journal of Negro Education* 54 (1): 43-55.

Geertz, C.. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected essays by Clifford Geertz*. New York: BasicBooks, 1973.

Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P.. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Hanks, William. *Referential Practice: Language and Lived Space among the Maya*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Hunter, I. & Saunders, D.. 1995. Walks of Life: Mauss on the Human Gymnasium. *Body and Society* 1 (2): 65-81.

Jackson, Michael. *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989.

Jacobs, G.. 1970. Urban Samurai: The karate dojo. In G. Jacobs (Ed.), *The participant observer*. New York: Braziller.

Jessor, R.. 1998. Protective Factors in Adolescent Health Behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 75 (3): 788-800.

Klavora P & Wipper, K. (eds.). *Psychological and sociological factors in sport*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.

Knolbauch, T.M.. Personality traits and motivations of men and women selecting internal and external martial arts. *Dissertation Abstracts International*. 1985; 45 (11-B), 3622.

Lewis, J.. *Ring of Liberation: Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Madden, M. E.. Attributions of control and vulnerability at the beginning and end of a karate course. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*. 1990; 70: 787-794.

Miller, W. & Crabtree, B.. *Doing Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994.

Mauss, Marcel. 1992 (1934) "Techniques of the Body." In J. Crary and S. Kwinter (eds.) *Incorporations*. New York: Zone: 455-477.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. (Translated by C. Smith) London: Routledge, 1962.

Moore, Joan. 1985. Isolation and Stigmatization in the Development of an Underclass: The Case of Chicano Gangs in East Los Angeles. *Social Problems* 33 (1): 1-12.

Neinstein, L. S.. *Adolescent Health Care: A Practical Guide*. Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1996.

Ponton, Lynn. *The Romance of Risk: Why Teenagers Do the Things They Do*. New York: BasicBooks, 1997.

Rich, M.. The Reason and Rhyme of Qualitative Research: Why, When, and How to Use Qualitative Methods in the Study of Adolescent Health. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 1999; 25: 371-378.

Rauch, H.. 1995 Capoeira: the application in the United States of an Afro-Brazilian martial arts cultural approach to prevention. *Drugs: education, prevention and policy* 2 (2): 161-166.

Resnick, M.. 1997. Protecting Adolescents From Harm: Findings From the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *JAMA* 278 (10): 823-832.

Rich, M.. The Reason and Rhyme of Qualitative Research: Why, When, and How to Use Qualitative Methods in the Study of Adolescent Health. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 1999; 25: 371-378.

Richman, C.L., & Rehberg, H.. The development of self-esteem through the martial arts. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*. 1986; 17: 234-239.

Sanelli, Maria. *Identity Development of Stigmatized Teenagers*. Dissertation, University of the Pacific, 1998.

Schepper-Hughes, Nancy and Lock, Margaret. The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 6-41. (date?)

Spencer, M. B.. Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and Competence formation: Adolescent transition and Cultural transformation. *Journal of Negro Education*. 1991: 60 (3), 366-387.

Tigges, Gabriella. Dissertation: "The History of Capoeira in Brazil." Brigham Young University, 1990.

Wacquant, Loïc J.D. Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers. *Body and Society* 1995: 1 (1), 65-93.