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### Knowing your place and commanding space

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**Knowing your place and commanding space:  
De/constructions of gendered embodiment in mixed-sex  
karate**

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## Knowing your place and commanding space: De/constructions of gendered embodiment in mixed-sex karate

Feminists have long acknowledged that gendered divisions in access to spaces of leisure, and how women and men physically take up that space, reproduces gender inequality. This article will explore how karate practitioners participate in the space of mixed-sex karate practice and how such uses of space de/construct gendered embodiments and a gender hierarchy. Data presented is drawn from nine months of ethnographic emersion within three karate clubs and fifteen photo-elicitation interviews with karate participants from the three clubs. The findings of this paper suggest that whilst women often occupied spaces of expertise within the karate hall, gendered distinctions in uses of space emerged in the more subtle ways in which women and men used their voice, responded to the tacit and smelt dilemmas of sweat, and moved their bodies across physical space. This research highlights both the potential of physical leisure practice to ‘undo’ conventional gendered embodiments that particularly restrict women’s intentionality in the world (Young, 1980), and the power of spatially-attuned research to illuminate the minute ways in which unequal gender relations are naturalised, legitimised, and done.

Keywords: gender; embodiment; space; combat sport; phenomenology.

### Introduction

As activities we predominantly choose to engage in, leisure practices play a significant role in the construction of our sense of identity (Aitchison, 2013) and our embodiment (Channon & Jennings, 2014). Our embodiment is developed in relationship between the spatial dynamics of the places we occupy, our bodily senses, our feelings, intensions, and pre-existing sense of identity, and those we share spaces and places with (Pink, 2011). Differences in women and men’s access to leisure spaces and spatial engagement within contribute to constructing gendered bodies that move through the world differently (Young, 1980).

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3 Karate is a sport and leisure practice that centres upon developing combative  
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5 dispositions-techniques such as kicks, punches, strikes, and throws. Within karate  
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7 women and men are given opportunities to use their bodies in ways which command  
8  
9 space through the equally expected performance of karate techniques and training drills  
10  
11 by women and men (Maclean, 2015). As such, how do women and men negotiate the  
12  
13 unisex movements and tasks expected of karate practitioners, alongside gendered  
14  
15 expectations of their bodies, in the mixed-sex shared space of karate?  
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18  
19 By drawing on a combination of Young's (1980) phenomenological approach to  
20  
21 gender and constructivist approaches to gender, this paper will explore how women and  
22  
23 men marked and negotiated space within mixed sex karate practice, and how this  
24  
25 impacted gendered embodiments and notions of a gendered hierarchy. Through  
26  
27 exploring how karate practitioners move through physical space, assert their voice, and  
28  
29 exude or cover up odours seeping from their bodies into the shared space of the karate  
30  
31 hall, this paper will highlight the integral role of space to the de/construction of  
32  
33 gendered embodiments and a gendered hierarchy. This research highlights the potential  
34  
35 of physical leisure practices to nurture bodily dispositions that 'undo' conventional  
36  
37 gendered embodiments that particularly restrict women's intentionality in the world  
38  
39 (Young, 1980). In doing so, this paper contributes to literature on gendered  
40  
41 embodiment, and embodiment in physical leisure practices.  
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45

### 46 ***Gendered embodiment and space***

47  
48 Our embodied being is subject to an intricate set of expectations of what it is to  
49  
50 *be* a man or a woman that require intensive reflective bodily management (West &  
51  
52 Zimmerman, 1987). This broaches not only our physical appearance, but also how we  
53  
54 use or do not use our voice, how we smell, and how we visibly and tacitly move our  
55  
56 bodies through, and interact with, the spaces we occupy. Underpinning gendered  
57  
58 expectations of the body are expectations of distinction between women and men. Such  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 differences are in turn drawn on to legitimise unequal power relations between women  
4  
5 and men (Connell, 2009).  
6

7  
8 In adopting a phenomenological approach to understanding gender, Young  
9  
10 (1980) highlights the centrality of lived experiences of women's bodies within the  
11  
12 spaces and places they occupy in the construct of gendered ways of using, inhabiting,  
13  
14 and perceiving the body. Women are suggested to form an embodiment that understands  
15  
16 their bodies as *objects within space* orientating their body towards accommodating the  
17  
18 needs and desires of others (Martin, 1998; Satina & Hultgren, 2001) and forgoing their  
19  
20 own intentions within the world (Young, 1980). Young (1980) suggests there are three  
21  
22 modalities of feminine motility that are sourced in experiencing the body as an object:  
23  
24 Ambiguous transcendence, inhibited intentionality, and discontinuous unity with  
25  
26 surroundings. Ambiguous transcendence refers to restriction in movement through the  
27  
28 world. This leads to inhibited intentionality whereby the possibilities of bodies in the  
29  
30 world are restricted, which in turn, leads to a discontinuous unity between individuals'  
31  
32 aims and their surroundings. These three modalities intertwine to construct a feminine  
33  
34 bodily existence that's interaction with the world is restricted or immobilised, spatially  
35  
36 confined, and has a severed link between the possibilities in the world and capacity  
37  
38 within their bodies. As such, restricted use of space is central to a feminine  
39  
40 embodiment.  
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46  
47 In contrast, men are societally encouraged to experience their bodies as  
48  
49 mechanisms to express themselves in the world, take up space, and where they can, to  
50  
51 dominate (Connell, 1995; Martin, 1998; Pronger, 1999; Young, 1980). How these  
52  
53 encouragements are embodied will vary across men and women based on factors  
54  
55 including class, race, age, and the spheres they engage in. However, they present an  
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1  
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3 overarching gendered framework that limits women's actions in the world and enable  
4  
5 men's, recreating gendered access to power and status.  
6

7  
8 By combining both constructivist and phenomenological approaches to gender,  
9  
10 we can see gendered embodiment as both responsive to ideologies of gender difference,  
11  
12 and grounded in the lived experiences of such ideologies. As active agents in the  
13  
14 construction of the spaces and relationships we are emplaced within, we may also build  
15  
16 embodiments that challenge notions of difference between women and men, and thus  
17  
18 'undo' gender (Deutsch, 2007). As such, to understand gendered embodiment within  
19  
20 leisure spaces, we must thus understand its spatial components, and its relation to  
21  
22 'doing' or 'undoing' (Deutsch, 2007) gender.  
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### 28 *The gendered spatial division of leisure*

29  
30 The gendered, spatial, division of leisure has long been highlighted and critiqued by  
31  
32 feminist leisure researchers (For examples see: Aitchison, 2013; Mcrobbie & Garber,  
33  
34 1975; Scraton & Watson, 1998). The spatial separation of men and women within and  
35  
36 across leisure institutions has been suggested to sustain a gender hierarchy by placing  
37  
38 value in what men do, and reducing women's access to such socially valued knowledge  
39  
40 and skills, whereby 'the more pronounced the degree of spatial gender segregation, the  
41  
42 lower is women's status relative to men's' (Spain, 1993, p.137). Women and men's  
43  
44 structured emplacement in predominantly separate leisure spheres thus contributes to  
45  
46 the differing sets of everyday experiences, knowledge, and skill sets that develop  
47  
48 different ways in which women and men come to use and experience their bodies  
49  
50 (Young, 1980), re/create ideas of differences between women and men's bodies  
51  
52 (Connell, 2009), and enable the legitimization of a gender order.  
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58 The sociology of leisure literature has long acknowledged sport as a prominently  
59  
60 gendered space – as a male domain – sourced largely in the exclusion, side-lining,

1  
2  
3 marginalisation, and/or segregation of women from men in sporting arenas (Burnstyn,  
4 2004; Hargreaves, 1994; Mansfield, Cauldwell, Wheaton & Watson, 2018). Not only is  
5 sport often marked as a male domain, Pronger (1999) suggests that spatial dominance  
6 *within* sports practice is used to perform male sexual dominance:  
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13 ‘Since, on their own, no penis and anus as mere body parts could ever produce the  
14 incessant territorial aspirations of their phallogentric master and society, a host of  
15 strategies and practices are promoted to encourage men and boys to take and  
16 enclose more space beyond the limited view of their ‘private parts’ (Pronger,  
17 1999, p. 381).  
18  
19  
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22  
23 In this way sport acts as a mimetic field for performing patriarchal violation and  
24 dominance of another, whereby the invasion and control of space is positioned as  
25 central to sports practice, and sports practice to masculine embodiment.  
26  
27  
28

29  
30 Precisely because of sport’s legacy as a male domain and disassociation  
31 with/discouragement of women, women’s participation in sport is suggested to present  
32 challenges to a conventional feminine embodiment and women’s uses of their bodies in  
33 space (Allen-Collinson, 2011). Allen-Collinson (2011) suggests sport is a particularly  
34 rich field for feminist phenomenological explorations of women’s intercorporeal  
35 experiences of the body in motion. In engaging in sports practice, women are  
36 encouraged to spread their bodies across space to hit, slam, block, excellerate, jump,  
37 throw, intercept, and tackle, developing a relationship with their body that recognises  
38 the active capacity of their bodies (Kotarba & Held, 2006; Pavladis & Fullagar, 2016;  
39 Thorpe, 2009) and asserts their bodies across space. The extent to which sports women  
40 perform and develop dispositions that challenge conventional ideas of feminine  
41 embodiment and motility is dependent upon both the age at which such dispositions are  
42 learnt, and the gendered expectations of those who share the sporting space  
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60 (Mennesson, 2012).



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However, the gendered spatial composition to best facilitate women's sports participation, whilst challenging the unequal power relations between women and men, is debated by sports feminists (Hargreaves, 1990). Whilst women-only sports practice can provide a safe space that enables women to challenge restrictions of conventional feminine embodiment (Brady, 2005; Mennesson, 2012), the sex-segregated structure of women's sports practice leaves room for the myths of men's biological, hierarchical difference to women to be reproduced (Hargreaves, 1990; McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). As such, within separatist approaches to sport, power relations between men and women (outwith and within sport) remain unchallenged (Hargreaves, 1990). In turn, the meanings of women's embodied experiences of women-only sports practice is constructed in relation to a subordination to their male sporting counterparts.

A key hypothesis explored in sex-integrated sports research is whether or not sex-integrated sports practice challenges ideas of difference between women and men, and in turn, reduces inequalities between women and men (Channon, Dashper, Fletcher & Lake, 2016). Whilst research suggests that sex-integrated sports practice can indeed challenge assumptions about the differences between women and men, and consequently support the formation of positive relationships (Anderson, 2008; Maclean, 2016), mixed-sex practice of sport has also been found to be spatially dominated by men. Men's spatial dominance of mixed-sex sporting practice occurs through: taking the most prestigious playing positions (Henry & Comeaux, 1999), hogging play (Comley, 2016; Hills & Croston, 2011), and encroaching on spaces women occupy (Comley, 2016). Women in mixed-sex sport often subsequently create their own spaces for play or play subordinated aspects of the sport (Comley, 2016; Hills & Croston, 2011). This draws further questions, as Hargreaves (1990) previously theorised, surrounding the capacity ~~for~~ toof sports that rely on masculinist frameworks of

1  
2  
3 aggressive competition to undermine unequal power relations between women and men  
4  
5 in sport whether practiced mixed-sex or not.  
6

7  
8 Negotiations of space and uses of the body in space within sex-integrated  
9  
10 martial arts and combat sports (MACS) are done so whilst walking a particularly close  
11  
12 line to a socially constructed ultimate resource of men's power and difference from  
13  
14 women – fighting ability (McCaughey, 1997). Indeed MACS spaces have historically  
15  
16 been constructed as male preserves (Matthews, 2016; Wacquant, 2004). Despite  
17  
18 increasing numbers of women entering the field, boxing in particular has been  
19  
20 suggested to remain marked as a male space where narratives connecting men to  
21  
22 violence and power continue to be reproduced and consumed (Matthews, 2016).  
23  
24 However, the practice of many martial arts delineates from a competitive framework  
25  
26 found in boxing. As such, these mixed-sex sport spaces can perhaps escape the  
27  
28 masculinist frameworks that Hargreaves (1990) suggests limits the gender transgressive  
29  
30 capacities of mixed-sex sport.  
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34  
35 Given the societal associations between masculinity and violence, this stream of  
36  
37 sex-integrated research has had a particular focus on women's positions within MACS,  
38  
39 and the moulding of women's uses of their bodies towards the conventionally masculine  
40  
41 capacities of fighting (See: Maclean, 2015;2016; McCaughey,1997; Noel, 2009; Velija,  
42  
43 Meirzwinski & Fortune, 2013). Through the mastery of combative bodily dispositions  
44  
45 women contend directly with men for their place in the sporting hierarchy (Maclean,  
46  
47 2015), and forge embodiments that reject notions of their body as fragile, passive, and  
48  
49 vulnerable to men (McCaughey,1997; Velija et al., 2013).  
50  
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53  
54 Whilst the emerging literature on developments of bodily dispositions through  
55  
56 combative practice brings attention to the carnal lived body (Sanchez Garcia & Spencer,  
57  
58 2013; Wacquant, 2004) and the gendered lived body (Carlson, 2017; Channon &  
59  
60

Jennings, 2014; Noel, 2009; Velija et al. 2013) the spatial nature of the gendered, carnal, lived body remains a relatively untouched mine of intricate detail that weaves together embodiment within physical activity contexts (Allen-Collinson, 2011). In this article I will demonstrate the centrality of uses of space to the de/construction of gendered embodiment within mixed-sex karate practice.

## **Methodology**

To illuminate uses of space within karate, and the extent to which these embodied uses of space ‘do’ or ‘undo’ a gendered embodiment, the research adopted a sensory ethnographic design. A sensory ethnographic approach was chosen with the desire to explore the minute and mundane pieces of life-as-lived that build our embodied and gendered experiences of what is normal, grounded in an understanding of researcher and participants as “emplaced in social, sensory, and material contexts characterised by, and productive of, particular power configurations that they experience through their whole bodies and are constantly changing” (Pink, 2009:33).

In following a common trend of ethnographic fieldwork, data collection combined forms of participant observations and interviews from across three karate clubs situated in Scotland and the north of England: Lothian Wado-kai, Juniper karate club and Bushido. Whilst karate is commonly seen as a Japanese martial art, its practice emerged through a blend of Chinese, Japanese and Okinawan martial traditions that placed particular emphasis on slightly varying philosophies and physical practices (Tan, 2004). Reflecting its bricolage past, contemporary karate clubs take various different forms with a prominent distinction being between those that are ‘traditional karate’ that position themselves closely to the practice and philosophical origins of karate as a martial art, and those that are ‘sports karate’ that utilizes the techniques of karate for competition. The type of karate practiced impacts the cultural constructions of

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2  
3 appropriate interactions within the dojo, and as such, the forms of gendered  
4  
5 embodiment de/constructed. The three clubs within this study blended both ‘traditional’  
6  
7 and semi-contact ‘sport’ karate whereby classes entailed both traditional technique-  
8  
9 based drills, and competition specific training drills. Participants within these clubs  
10  
11 were aged between 16–74 with the majority of participants aged between 16-20 and  
12  
13 then 30-45. Skill levels ranged from absolute beginners to members whom had over  
14  
15 30years experience and competitive accolades. My position as an established karate  
16  
17 practitioner eased entry and participation in the clubs where participant observations  
18  
19 were carried out over the course of nine months.  
20  
21  
22

23  
24 The participant observations took the form of a sensorially attuned ‘observant  
25  
26 participation’ (Wacquant, 2004) that sought to reflect on the sensory processes my body  
27  
28 underwent during training in order to make the normal and taken-for-granted pieces of  
29  
30 my embodiment visible and open to gendered critique. As many of our sensory  
31  
32 experiences are taken-for-granted and overlooked in our reflections of our experiences,  
33  
34 each karate class I sought to focus on one sense in order to encourage a reflection that  
35  
36 may tap into overlooked ways in which we use a sense, the meanings such sensory  
37  
38 expressions hold, and their impact on gendered interactions and embodiments. The  
39  
40 senses focused on largely reflected the ‘western five’ – sound, smell, taste, touch, and  
41  
42 sight – but also included feelings of movement and heat. Whilst there are indeed many  
43  
44 other senses that have been identified and could have been explored (Pink, 2009), these  
45  
46 senses were selected as they were the sensations most frequently recognized and  
47  
48 discussed within karate classes. Sensory observations were described in field notes after  
49  
50 each karate class, generating a depth of data on each sense.  
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55  
56 Fifteen individual photo-elicitation interviews (6 men, 9 women) supplemented  
57  
58 my own embodied experiences of karate practice with insights into the embodied  
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1  
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3 experiences of others. Participants were asked to take photos to show ‘the good, the bad,  
4 and the ugly of karate’ in an attempt to draw a broad picture of their experiences within  
5 the sport. Interviews were structured around the participant’s stories of their  
6 photographs, enabling the meanings and experiences central to the participants  
7 embodied experience of karate to lead the conversation (Wang, 1999). I interspersed  
8 these discussions with questions interrogating gendered elements and sensory  
9 experiences related to their photographs and stories. In turn, this enabled a more  
10 complex multi-layered approach to understanding the doing and undoing gender. From  
11 these discussions, gendered distinctions in the ways in which participants talked of  
12 experiencing and using space with their bodies in the karate hall emerged. Interview  
13 transcripts, photographs, and field notes were then thematically coded for sensory codes  
14 emerging most prominently as informing karateka’s embodied experiences and sense of  
15 embodiment. These were smell, tacit engagement, voice/sound, and movement in space.  
16 The findings of this article present the interplay of sensory experiences in  
17 de/constructing a gendered embodiment, and gendered spatial patterns emerging in  
18 sensory uses of the body within karate, that in turn illuminate the multi-layered  
19 complexities of gendered embodiment.  
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## 44 **Findings and Discussion**

### 45 *Occupying Space Through Physical Movement*

46  
47 Interactions within karate are structured around a very visible hierarchy of status  
48 reflected in the varying coloured belts practitioners wear that mark their graded level of  
49 ability (Maclean, 2015). This structure ascribes the level of respect that *should* be  
50 granted to a practitioner, suitable interactions between practitioners, and physically  
51 structures and divides the space of the hall, lining practitioners from lowest grade to  
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1  
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3 highest grade. Despite this strict hierarchal structure of practice that denoted uses of  
4 space within the karate hall, gendered distinctions in the ways in which men and women  
5 occupied physical space emerged. The extent to which gendered distinctions emerged  
6 varied between those women and men who had started karate as children, and those  
7 who had started karate as adults.  
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There was a tendency for women, particularly those who started karate in adulthood rather than as a child, to position themselves beside the lower grades when standing lined up, or to avoid partnering with higher grades, despite recognising the benefits of training with high grades:

When I was a low grade I used to want to train with people that were higher grades and black belts because I used to think: you always want to be pushed, and you want to be with people who are like that. But part of me feels a bit guilty if I am training with someone who is better than me. I think they're not getting anything out of it. Sandra, Bushido.

Training with higher grades and positioning themselves beside higher grades was seen as occupying a privileged space. In avoiding doing so, and rather positioning themselves beside lower grades, women avoided situating themselves in prestigious positions that reflect the competency of their karate abilities. By consistently spatially aligning themselves with lower grades, some women expressed a subordinate understanding of their bodily abilities and themselves. Many women also found ways to minimise the space they used by moving out the way for others, moving into smaller spaces for their own practice so others had room, or hiding outwith of the gaze and space requirements of others:

I like being at the end next to the lower belts, hiding in the corner. I mean the other week I was right at the back behind the pillar and I loved it! I felt I was in me own little space doing me own thing. Rebecca, Bushido.

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3           Such actions not only refrained from using the body to take up space, it also  
4  
5 limited women's abilities to progress by limiting the uses of their body in karate  
6  
7 practice and not gaining the experience of training with higher grades.  
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10           Men who started the sport as adults did not appear to hide themselves,  
11  
12 frequently position themselves at the bottom of their graded group, nor frequently give  
13  
14 up their training space needed for training to others. For some men who started karate in  
15  
16 adulthood, the problem was the opposite – they used up too much space:  
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19  
20           James and Peter were having an intense sparring match, so intense they took up  
21  
22 most of the room. They moved from one side to the other, bumping and barging  
23  
24 past others – including senior grades - fixed on their sparring. After moving  
25  
26 straight through Stuart and Steph's sparring, Stuart, a black belt, confronted them:  
27  
28 'Ay, watch what you're doing lads.' Field note, Juniper karate club.  
29

30           Indeed many men who started karate as adults were more forthcoming than their  
31  
32 female counter parts to move throughout the hall for their own practice and seek to spar  
33  
34 or train with higher grades, sometimes, as in the field note above, crossing lines of  
35  
36 hierarchical respect when doing so. Although their movements were sometimes drawn  
37  
38 in by more senior graded men or by the instructor through verbal instructions to 'calm it  
39  
40 down' or 'watch where you're going', women rarely confronted men who crossed into  
41  
42 their training space.  
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45           These men's bodily movements demonstrated a comfort with taking up space in  
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47 the karate hall, an obliviousness to their use of space being problematic, and in some  
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49 instances, an air of entitlement to such space. Their use of space not only asserted an  
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51 alignment with prestigious spaces in the hall often above their rank, it also marked an  
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53 entitlement to women's space (Comely, 2015). This reoccurring gendered pattern of  
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55 uses of space in the hall affects both the experience and subsequent meanings women  
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57 and men attached to their own bodies (Satina & Hultgren, 2001), leading the former to  
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3 an accommodating and self-subordinating embodiment, and the latter to an embodiment  
4 that was freely moving and deserving of expression in space.  
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7  
8 However, amongst the adults who had started karate as children, uses of their  
9  
10 bodies across space in the karate hall were more similar than different. Both women and  
11  
12 men would confidently take their place in the hall, with women commonly positioning  
13  
14 themselves at the highest point of the graded line above men of the same grade within  
15  
16 two of the clubs I trained with. These women and men would cover the hall as they  
17  
18 sparred weaving amongst the other practitioners, at times nudging others out the way to  
19  
20 maintain their space, take to the floor to demonstrate movements and kata to the rest of  
21  
22 the class, and confidently extend their body's limbs, and swiftly move across others  
23  
24 trajectories to perform well. The marked focus and confidence of women who started  
25  
26 karate as children in commanding their bodies through shared space in comparison to  
27  
28 women who started karate as adults points towards the pervasiveness of early  
29  
30 conditioning of our bodies (Martin, 1998; Mennesson, 2012) and the potential of  
31  
32 physical cultures in forming our gendered embodiments. As such, karate practice  
33  
34 offered women a bodily conditioning that deviated from a conventional, spatially  
35  
36 restrictive, feminine embodiment (Young, 1980) through broaching a recognition of  
37  
38 their bodies as skilled, often more skilled than men, and thus worthy of occupying  
39  
40 space.  
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46  
47 An exception to the gender neutralised occupancy of space amongst those who  
48  
49 had practiced karate since childhood appeared when their bodies were exposed:  
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51  
52 At the end of the class I continued to chat to Steven as we packed our hand and feet  
53  
54 protectors into our bags ready to leave. As we were chatting Steven started to take his  
55  
56 karate top and trousers off to change into jeans and a t-shirt. I anxiously focused on  
57  
58 maintaining eye contact with him as he continued to talk so casually and comfortably  
59  
60 standing only in his boxers. As I left the hall a dozen men and boys remained in the now



1  
2  
3 spacious hall changing and chatting about the class. I squeezed into the cramped  
4 women's toilet where the girls and women got changed. Field note, Lothian Wado-Kai  
5  
6 Men's freedom in contrast to women's to undress within the hall and expose  
7  
8 their bodies worked to construct the karate hall as a space for men, framed by a  
9  
10 heteronormative male gaze. Within this process women's bodies were marked as  
11  
12 'other', as sexual, and as such, bodies that cannot be shown. This in turn marks the  
13  
14 karate hall as a form of male preserve (Matthews, 2016) despite the many challenges  
15  
16 women's karate excellence and childhood participation poses to gendered power  
17  
18 relations (Maclean, 2015).  
19  
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21  
22

23 Those who started karate as adults and those adults who started when they were  
24 children share the same karate hall, and as such, both sets of gendered or de-gendered  
25 uses of space meet in the hall, and come to negotiate the space. Taken together, despite  
26 formal spatial divisions of the hall dictated by level of ability, the overall pattern points  
27 towards men's comfort with their bodies and use of their bodies within the karate hall,  
28 whilst women tread precariously along lines of hiding their (sexualised) body, limiting  
29 its active occupation of space, whilst fulfilling the physical, expressive, requirements of  
30 karate practice.  
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### 43 *Sweaty smells and sweaty bodies*

44  
45 Karate practitioner's use of space is not confined only to the floor space in the hall that  
46 they stand in and move their bodies through to practice their art. The command of their  
47 voice, and exuding smell, are ways in which karate practitioners mark space and take up  
48 space within the karate hall. The physical exertions of the body moving through space  
49 make sport an arena where sweat, and the smell of sweat, is an inevitable component of  
50 the sporting body (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). A particularly problematic area  
51 for karate practitioners were their hand and feet protectors which appeared resistant to  
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1  
2  
3 washing away the smell of stale sweat. As practitioners punched and kicked their way  
4  
5 across the hall, a trail of smell followed from their protectors. The merging smells of  
6  
7 sweaty bodies, karate suits, and equipment was something karate practitioners had to  
8  
9 become accustomed to when training, and their own propensity to sweat was something  
10  
11 they had to come to terms with:  
12  
13

14           The karate hall is a pretty smelly place. You get used to it to the point you don't even  
15  
16 notice it. I think if you do sport you expect to smell a bit. If you didn't, you'd be  
17  
18 worried you hadn't been doing it (training) right! Katie, Bushido.  
19  
20

21           Being a karate practitioner entailed accepting and normalising an olfactory  
22  
23 condition that one will mark their place across the hall with the smells of physical  
24  
25 exertion, and that one will need to get used to others smells of exertion.  
26  
27

28           Whilst a normal and inevitable part of sports practice, smell is also embedded  
29  
30 with gendered and moral expectations that mark sweat as a scent particularly  
31  
32 undesirable for women (Classen, 1998; Waitt, 2014) and that contradicts expectations of  
33  
34 feminine embodiment to be orientated towards the desires of others (Young, 1980).  
35  
36 Women often view an orientation to the-body-as-seen, and as such spatially removed or  
37  
38 distant, as a solution to the tactile and olfactory threat of sweat in action (Waitt, 2014).  
39  
40 Yet, rather than avoiding the exertion of karate classes to avoid exuding sweaty bodily  
41  
42 smells, some women managed the scent demands of femininity by wearing perfume or  
43  
44 deodorant on top of a freshly washed suit. Instead of lingering a smell of sweat as they  
45  
46 moved across the hall, these women infused their movements with feminine fragrances.  
47  
48 Through such actions these women's presence within the karate hall was marked, and  
49  
50 marked in gender distinct way.  
51  
52  
53

54           For many women, the renegotiation of sweaty smells as a symbol of hard work  
55  
56 undermined the common gendered and moral frameworks around smell, transforming it  
57  
58 into an accepted, and expected element of being a karate practitioner:  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 I came out of Paul's class absolutely soaked. The sweat was literally dripping off  
4 me, my face was beetroot, and I was stinkin' (of sweat), but that's what you want.  
5  
6 You want to come out like that, it shows that you've really worked and you've had  
7  
8 a great class. Steph, Juniper karate club.  
9

10  
11 Through this transformation, women karateka were able to justify their imprint in the  
12  
13 smellscape of karate classes based on notions of working hard and being a good  
14  
15 karateka. Such a framing of smell as hard work has more commonly been found to  
16  
17 normalise and value men's exertions of sweat, and in turn legitimise gender hierarchies  
18  
19 (Waite & Stanes, 2015). In marking their space and movement through the karate hall  
20  
21 through the scents of either bodily sweat, perfume, or both, women asserted their bodily  
22  
23 being in the karate hall, and in doing so, marked their bodies as worthy of taking up  
24  
25 space, working hard and being valued (Satina & Hultgren, 2001).  
26  
27  
28

29  
30 Sweat not only took up space and asserted place within the karate hall through  
31  
32 smell, but also through tacit exchanges between bodies. Karate practitioners were often  
33  
34 tasked to bridge personal spatial boundaries that involved the rubbing together of bodily  
35  
36 fluids:  
37  
38

39  
40 As I kicked towards Mathew's face I could see a splash of sweat spray from my  
41  
42 footpad towards his face, and even worse I could see Mathew's eyes close and face  
43  
44 screw just for a second before he opened his eyes again as if to pretend nothing had  
45  
46 happened – nothing disgusting had happened. I felt embarrassed, but continued to  
47  
48 kick. To ease my embarrassment I reminded myself that I had experienced the  
49  
50 sweat of others splash onto my face or be squashed onto my body in a close  
51  
52 encounter many times before, and that the disgust it brings only exists  
53  
54 momentarily. Field notes, Lothian Wado-kai.  
55

56  
57 Within such instances, practitioners are given privileged access to the intimate  
58  
59 space of another, whereby sweaty smell and sweaty touches become a normal part of  
60  
61 women and men's embodiment within the karate hall. Here, it appeared the

1  
2  
3 interpretation of sweaty bodies as hardworking karate bodies enabled women and men  
4  
5 practitioners to transcend taboos of smell, and expectations of femininity, to mark their  
6  
7 space within the hall through smell in rather similar ways.  
8  
9

### 10 11 ***'Kiai!': Making women's voices heard*** 12

13  
14 Shouting is another fundamental way in which practitioners command space within the  
15  
16 karate hall. Whether it is the instructor shouting instructions to the class, practitioners  
17  
18 shouting to add emphasis and aggression to their techniques, or practitioners cheering  
19  
20 for class mates during fitness drills or mock competitions, the use of voice is frequent  
21  
22 and centrally important to karate practice. The prominent type of shouting engaged in  
23  
24 by karate practitioners is the 'kiai' – a shout placed on the exertion of a technique  
25  
26 deemed to finish an opponent. The kiai is a short and sharp shout teamed with a facial  
27  
28 aggression that contributes to the set of bodily dispositions expected of karate  
29  
30 practitioners. This style of using voice not only embodies an ethos of control and  
31  
32 aggression, it also works to assert confidence in combative techniques and power  
33  
34 position within the karate hall:  
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40  
41 I say to some of the lower grades who maybe aren't as confident yet, I tell them its  
42  
43 important to kiai. To prove the point, in the middle of training, I'll give out a big  
44  
45 kiai and say to them 'did anyone flinch?' And the answer is no ... It's not just  
46  
47 standing in the class shouting, it's a release, its part of the technique... They just  
48  
49 need to realise that no one cares; it just shows you've done the move and you know  
50  
51 what you're doing. Stuart, Juniper karate club.

52  
53 I think if you have someone beside you who is loud and powerful, and you're  
54  
55 quiet, I think you feel more like you're in the background. So I tried to make it a  
56  
57 bit louder. Even though I'm not the greatest person at karate I think if I am good at  
58  
59 kiai-ing at least that's something. Kirsty, Bushido.  
60

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2  
3           Whilst these vocal expressions are expected of both women and men, gendered  
4 reactions to vocal expressions in sport have been noted in tennis, whereby the media  
5 alongside sports governing bodies have been highlighted as policing women's grunting,  
6 but not men's (Kennedy, 2001). Conducting assertive, loud uses of voice that  
7 commanded the hall and boomed ones determination in combat appeared troubling for  
8 some women - much more noticeably than women's discomforts utilising physical  
9 space through movement. When lined up, performing solo, or sparring, some women  
10 would remain completely quiet, or perform quiet kiais with uncertain voices.  
11 Explanations from instructors were often given to try and convince quiet women of the  
12 essential use of their voice to perform karate properly. Two of the clubs used specific  
13 training drills to tackle women's reluctance to kiai: grouping the women to perform  
14 moves with loud kiais whilst the men were allowed a rest and only allowing the women  
15 to join the men one by one as they kiai'd appropriately; or asking the women to perform  
16 the same movements repetitively, often in front of the whole class, until their kiai met  
17 the volume and assertive standards of the instructor. In contrast to the treatment of  
18 women's grunting in tennis, the actions of karate instructors encouraged women to  
19 display a loud, aggressive, confidence when throwing their karate techniques.  
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42           The longer women had participated in karate the more comfortable they  
43 appeared kiai-ing in the karate hall, with senior graded women appearing unfazed as  
44 they kiai'd aggressively and freely. Kirsty, an intermediate karate practitioner reflects  
45 on the normalization process of kiai-ing:  
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50  
51           When mums start (karate) they look mortified when you tell them they need to shout in  
52 front of everyone. And to be fair, I thought it was strange when I first came here too. I  
53 thought 'I'll get this wrong and look an ejjit in front of everyone'. But, Sensei Katie  
54 insists we must kiai! So, you get used to it - I love it now. You can't shut me up! Kirsty,  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60           Bushido.

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3 The embodied comfort to kiai thus appears as an outcome of ongoing direct  
4 pedagogic action from karate instructors (Channon, 2018). When women did kiai, they  
5 did so with a notably higher pitch than men. In doing so, women found a way to manage  
6 both presenting femininity whilst engaging in an aggressive use of voice and face more  
7 commonly associated with men, but crucial to the sports practice. For many women,  
8 kiai-ing was seen as an important part of embracing a fighting spirit, and was  
9 experienced as an empowering expression of their karate identity:  
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20 I love kiai-ing. You feel a buzz, a strength, right through your body. It makes you  
21 feel strong, like you've channeled all this energy through into your punch. In that  
22 second you just feel completely like a karate athlete from head to toe. Steph,  
23 Juniper karate club.  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 Through developing the skills and confidence over time to vocally assert  
29 themselves and their intentions within the karate hall, karate practice encouraged women  
30 to undo passive embodiments, and develop an active and assertive embodiment – thus  
31 undoing gender (Deutsch, 2007). This remolded embodiment was associated with  
32 benefits that reached beyond the karate hall:  
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40 I was proud of me self at work yesterday because there was an incident with my  
41 manager and I didn't like the way he spoke to me and I dealt with it - I actually  
42 dealt with it and told him. I felt dead proud of me self for that because I probably  
43 wouldn't of done that before (I started karate). You know, you have to assert  
44 yourself in karate, even if it's just announcing the name of a kata, and I hate doing  
45 it! But I thought possibly the confidence from doing it in karate is maybe... you  
46 know... changing these other things in me life. Rebecca, Bushido.  
47  
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53 The use of karate practitioners voice to assert aggression and dominance in their  
54 practice was a disposition more quickly embodied by men. In doing so, they make a  
55 vocal claim that marks dominance in the hall:  
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3 I have got no problem with Kiai-ing. If I'm going to do something I'm going to let  
4 everyone hear about it. I've won more points by missing and kiai-ing than not.  
5  
6 Even when I've known its missed in competition, I'd still give it the big kiai and  
7  
8 look as if I believed I'd scored, and then referees think - I didn't see it but it must  
9  
10 of been in! Stuart, Juniper karate

11  
12  
13 It was notable that the men's kiais were louder than the women's. Two men in  
14 particular kiai'd noticeably louder and longer than the rest. This was strange as a  
15 punch is sharp and so a kiai also expected to be sharp. The kiais of these men  
16 sounded like a warrior shouting along their run-up into battle. A group of teenage  
17 girls in the class giggled at this. Field notes, Lothian Wado-kai.

18  
19  
20  
21  
22 In Stuart's case, his kiai was successful in convincing others of his dominance  
23  
24 over his opponents, despite the physical reality being different. For the men in my field  
25 notes, the reception of their claim to dominance was quite different. Although the girls'  
26 laughter may partly be in relation to insecurities they may have held themselves around  
27 kiai-ing, in this instance, the laughter appeared to be directed towards the men's  
28 assertions to dominance. The men's display of dominance evidently did not convince  
29 the girls, who asserted confidence in their own judgments and positions as karate  
30 practitioners by laughing. Here, the hierarchical structure of karate based on the belt  
31 system creates a space whereby girls can laugh at men asserting their dominance  
32 without risk.  
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45 Instructors too used their voices' volume and tone to set out their authority.  
46  
47 Although the instructors I trained under came from differing clubs, there were  
48 similarities across the manner in which they exerted their voice: Calm and smooth when  
49 giving instruction; loud and faster paced when they wanted their student to increase the  
50 pace and intensity of their practice; and assertive and sure when instructing students to  
51 change or adapt movements of the body to reach the correct technical standard.  
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3 Already holding an ultimate position of power, what instructors said to their  
4 students, and how they said it, held particular power in shaping the confidence of their  
5 practitioners to express and explore their bodies' abilities within the space of the karate  
6  
7  
8  
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10 hall:

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12  
13 He noticed that I couldn't do the combination and singled me out. I understand that  
14 he is there to help and correct, but he wasn't. He made me do the move on my own  
15 but didn't come and stand next to me, he spoke in a loud voice so that the rest of  
16 the class and spectators could clearly hear that I couldn't do it. I felt as if he was  
17 laughing at me - he even smirked at one point - and making it his business to  
18 intimidate me... It was the manner in which he spoke to me that upset me. I was  
19 trying my best but got flustered as he was singling me out. He spoke in a loud  
20 voice, 'that's not sliding, that's stepping!' I felt if he had come over to me and had  
21 a quiet word and shown me what to do I would have understood more and reacted  
22 better to him. This went for a few minutes and then I could feel myself getting  
23 angry. I glowered and at him... I felt like crying. He made me feel totally  
24 incompetent and very small. Rebecca, Bushido

25  
26  
27 Whilst this use of voice to embarrass and belittle a student was not routine of  
28 karate instructors, the deeply hierarchical structures of power within karate enabled this  
29 vocal assertion of power and disempowerment to occur. The vastly disproportionate  
30 quantity of men in comparison to women occupying roles as instructors meant that this  
31 form of disempowerment was notably committed by men. In this incident, this worked  
32 to backtrack Rebecca's belief in her body as an active and capable body, and her worth  
33 in using her body to command space in the karate hall, reinforcing an inhibited  
34 intentionality (Young, 1980).

### 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 **Conclusion**

54  
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56 What it is to *be* a woman or *be* a man is constructed in our everyday lived and emplaced  
57 corporeal interactions. Ideas of gender that mark power differentials between women  
58  
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2  
3 and men do not exist purely in the structures of society, but are spatially located on  
4  
5 bodies, and are negotiated through situated bodily performances of difference. The  
6  
7 leisure spaces we can participate in and the way in which we use our bodies in those  
8  
9 spaces are as such key parts in the construction of our gendered embodiment that in turn  
10  
11 maintain social inequalities between women and men.  
12  
13

14  
15         Constructions of gendered embodiments in mixed-sex karate practice entail a  
16  
17 tension between two spatial hierarchies: of grade and gender. Karate's sex-integrated  
18  
19 structure and uniform set of bodily demands constructs karate as a place with potential  
20  
21 to develop women and men's bodily uses and movements in manners which 'undo'  
22  
23 gendered difference and form a unisex 'karate embodiment'. Further it provides a  
24  
25 setting where women can be recognised to outperform men at a karate embodiment  
26  
27 (Maclean, 2015), and as such, access more, and more prestigious, spaces than men.  
28  
29 Karate embodiment thus offered an alternative embodiment to the spatial restriction  
30  
31 entailed in a conventional feminine embodiment (Young, 1980), structured by the  
32  
33 bodily and spatial rules of karate's graded, rather than gendered, hierarchy of status  
34  
35 (Maclean, 2015).  
36  
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40  
41         Whilst on the surface men and women karate practitioners performed the same  
42  
43 techniques and training drills as one another, the sensory ways in which they utilised  
44  
45 space to do so revealed nuanced ways in which imprints of gender permeated  
46  
47 practitioners bodily motions in the karate hall. Through bodily expressions, such as the  
48  
49 volume and pitch of a kiai, or the way one commanded space through movement, or hid  
50  
51 into a small space for practice, some women and men's practice of the unisex bodily  
52  
53 movements of karate were infused with gendered markings. Men's comfort with using  
54  
55 their bodies within the karate hall enabled them to territorialise space in the hall  
56  
57 (Pronger, 1999) to fully perform their practice. Through positioning themselves with  
58  
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3 lower grades, in smaller spaces, and with quiet or silent vocal assertions drowned out  
4 amongst the noise of the karate hall, some karate women embodied a subordinate  
5 understanding of their bodily abilities and themselves. Such gendered divisions of space  
6 mirror those found within the mixed-sex sport literature (Comley, 2016; Henry &  
7 Comeaux, 1999; Hills & Croston, 2011). These spatial inequalities created a gendered  
8 hierarchy prioritising men's spatial needs, that in turn enabled men to perform karate  
9 requirements more fully and freely than women, and ultimately assert men's power  
10 within the arena.  
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21 An overall pattern of men's dominance in karate spaces may reflect the  
22 closeness with which the spatially commanding embodiment of karate sits to a  
23 masculine embodiment men are likely to have experienced and developed in other areas  
24 of their lives (Connell, 2009; Martin, 1998) and the distance with which such an  
25 embodiment sits from feminine embodiment (Young, 1980). As such, the gendered  
26 distinction in uses of space does not necessarily mean that changes to women's  
27 embodiment were not occurring in ways that undo gender. Indeed many women pointed  
28 towards increased spatial uses of their body in karate, and the capacity of such an  
29 embodiment to transgress into other areas of their lives. Such transitions in bodily  
30 intentionality were sometimes a product of deliberate pedagogic work by instructors  
31 (Channon, 2018) and other times an unintentional outcome of karate practice. Karate  
32 practice thus enabled women to reframe their relationship with their body as one  
33 grounded in a physical agency, capacity, and worth to address their subjective goals in  
34 the world. The longer women practiced karate, the more this appeared to contribute to  
35 an undoing (Deutsch, 2007) of the spatially restrictive elements of feminine  
36 embodiment.  
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3 The propensity for differences in commanding space in the hall to be expressed  
4  
5 by those who started karate as adults in comparison to those who started karate as  
6  
7 children suggests that ways of using our bodies are much easier learnt than unlearnt.  
8  
9  
10 This suggests that rather than an ‘undoing’ of a gendered embodiment, mixed-sex karate  
11  
12 practice from a young age develops a counter embodiment that develops alongside, or  
13  
14 instead of, the spatially confined feminine motility outlined by Young (1980). As such,  
15  
16 karate’s sex-integrated structure and non-competition orientated hierarchy of ability  
17  
18 presents potential for creating *relationships* of equality between women and men sought  
19  
20 by Hargreaves (1990) when the practice begins in childhood. Further research exploring  
21  
22 how women and men’s embodied spatial relations within the karate hall reflect or relate  
23  
24 to their embodied relations in other settings would meaningful add to understandings of  
25  
26 de/constructions of gendered embodiments in sport.  
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