Article Title:

Capoeira for beginners: Self-benefit for, and community action by, new capoeiristas

Authors:

Jordan, M.*, Wright, E. J., Purser, A., Grundy, A., Joyes, E., Wright, N., Crawford, P., and Manning, N.

*Corresponding Author & Principal Investigator: Dr Melanie Jordan, ORCID iD 0000-0002-4447-6145, Assistant Professor, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, NG7 2RD. Email: melanie.jordan@nottingham.ac.uk. Telephone: 01159 515 410.

Author Details:

Dr Melanie Jordan
Assistant Professor
School of Sociology and Social Policy
University of Nottingham
melanie.jordan@nottingham.ac.uk

Dr Edward J. Wright
Postdoctoral Researcher
Sociology & Social Policy
University of Nottingham
Ed.wright@nottingham.ac.uk

Professor Nick Manning
Global Health and Social Medicine
King's College London
nick.manning@kcl.ac.uk

Professor Paul Crawford
Professor of Health Humanities
University of Nottingham
paul.crawford@nottingham.ac.uk

Dr Nicola Wright
Assistant Professor in Mental Health
School of Health Sciences
University of Nottingham
Nicola.wright@nottingham.ac.uk

Dr Aimie Purser
Lecturer in Sociology
School of Sociology & Social Policy
University of Nottingham
aimie.purser@nottingham.ac.uk

Mr Andrew Grundy
Research Associate
School of Health Sciences
University of Nottingham
andrew.grundy@nottingham.ac.uk

Miss Emma Joyes
PhD Research Student
School of Health Sciences
University of Nottingham
emma.joyes@nottingham.ac.uk

Abstract:

Capoeira could be defined as a Brazilian martial art and game to be played. This research explored how capoeira play might be considered to facilitate connectedness amongst newly-recruited persons, plus any other ramifications of capoeira involvement. A beginners' course of capoeira was provided to participants, free of charge, in an English city in the West Midlands — new capoeiristas in a new venue for capoeira. Researchers attended classes to collect/construct overt non-participant observation data. In addition, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the new capoeiristas post-course. This article explores researchers' observation fieldnotes and interviewees' narratives. These qualitative data-driven debates include the concepts: self, identity, escapism, multiparty endeavour, community, temporality, enjoyment, and transcending boundaries. Capoeira is theorised in a fresh manner that highlights social benefits of capoeira – for example as an enjoyable and supportive group endeavour which includes elements of social play and community-building – plus benefits for self that can transcend the boundaries of the class. Findings highlight how capoeira can be considered an inherently multiparty endeavour whereby social actors form, and experience, a community in order to embrace capoeira play. Data suggest capoeira can facilitate group playfulness, joviality, and laughter. Further, capoeiristas can enact and experience – some mode of – escapism via capoeira, whereby new place and pursuit can facilitate hedonistic diversion from the mundane. Capoeira appears to provide adventure and liberation into a relatively unburdened part of, or place in, social life. Corporeal and discursive boundary-empowerment can also be experienced by capoeiristas, fostering positive identity work in the wider world. Capoeira can be argued to facilitate mutuality (*e.g.,* community experience and group work) and egoism (*e.g.,* an individual's identity work) concurrently. This research suggests that modified capoeira for beginners can be beneficial for both the new capoeiristas themselves and for positive community action during and beyond class.

Keywords:

Introduction:

Capoeira could be conceptualised as a non-institutionalised and non-formal leisure and physical activity. Hedegard (2012) defines capoeira as 'a Brazilian martial art' (p. 510), whereas Wesolowski (2012) refers to capoeira as an 'Afro-Brazilian fight/dance/game' (p. 82). Downey (2005) introduces capoeira as a demanding acrobatic art that combines dance, ritual, music, and fighting. Weslowski (2012) explores the history and global expansion of capoeira and highlights: 'Once a weapon of the weak, informally learned by male slaves on the streets and outlawed by Brazilian authorities, capoeira today is taught to men, women, and children in schools, health clubs, dance studios, and community centres throughout Brazil and around the world' (p. 82). Capoeira, the Brazilian game, is now played globally. Rosenthal (2007) notes how capoeira is also 'catching the eye of academics' (p. 262). Capoeira research is developing in both prevalence and authority. This specific capoeira study explores how capoeira play might be considered to facilitate connectedness amongst newly-recruited persons, plus any other ramifications of capoeira involvement.[1]

A beginners' capoeira course of classes was provided free of charge for participants in a dance school in a city in the West Midlands of England — new capoeiristas in a new venue for capoeira. Members of the research team attended these capoeira sessions to collect/construct qualitative overt non-participant observation data. In addition, interviews were also conducted with participants at the end of the course. This article explores some of the data from this fieldwork and capoeira is discussed regarding positive outcomes for capoeira beginners. Inductive analysis of the dataset results in four themes for discussion: Capoeira as a multiparty endeavour; Enjoyable group playfulness; Escapism via capoeira; Transcending boundaries. These four themes emerged from the data. However, empirical and conceptual precursors (*e.g.,* academic expertise and extant literature) guide analysis. Therefore, relevant elements of the study and salient literature are now reviewed.

Burt and Butler (2011) demonstrate how 'the art form of capoeira' (p. 48) can be linked to cultivating positive change (*e.g.,* prosocial learning and character development) in aggressive, marginalised, and disenfranchised adolescents when the martial art is integrated into a culturally- and therapeutically-sensitive model whereby principles of behaviourism are embraced. To summarise, Burt and Butler (2011) explore capoeira as a therapeutic intervention. Capoeira is argued to, under certain circumstances (*e.g.,* collaborative teamwork), assist in positively modifying behaviour. This represents a marrying of clinical work and capoeira

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training. Further, Grinden and Botha (2015) also analyse capoeira as an alternative activity (in this study, for children in Cape Town, South Africa) in order to counteract potential ramifications of subsistence in harmful and disadvantaged locales; the teaching of capoeira is debated as a possible instrument for capacity-building, pro-social engagement, adolescent development, and social integration. The literature, to date, demonstrates capoeira can be transformative; undertaking capoeira can produce measurable outcomes for those involved.

Joseph's (2008) research marries transnationality and sport literatures via the medium of capoeira and demonstrates how 'real (international), imagined (virtual and emotional), and corporeal (embodied) 'travel' to Brazil are key experiences of the senior capoeirista' (p. 194). Another Joseph (2012) article presents ethnographic work 'with Canadians who practise the Afro-Brazilian martial art, capoeira, to discuss, renew and perform African heritage, black circulating cultures and Canadian nationalism' (p. 1078). This is linked to the work of Downey (2008) who highlights the crucial role imitation plays in capoeira and examines 'the interactional dynamics of imitative pedagogy in capoeira' (p. 204) plus the necessary social accomplishment therein; thus, the cultural scholarship amongst teacher and taught is an instrumental element of capoeira and capoeira learning remains a justifiable site for academic exploration. Indeed, the relationship between the capoeira course leaders and the new capoeira students is debated within this paper. Overall, the extant academic literature highlights how involvement in capoeira can have tangible effects at myriad levels of experience.

Beyond the capoeira literature, this study also embraces evidence from the arts and health humanities field. As an example here, Fancourt *et al.* (2016) demonstrate the psychological benefits of a group drumming intervention for mental health service users which lasted ten weeks. In comparison to the control group significant improvements were found (*e.g.,* decreases in depression and increases in social resilience) and all changes were maintained at three month follow-up. Via this programme of group drumming and participants' interview and focus group data, it is evidenced that group drumming can provide a creative and mutual learning space (Perkins *et al.,* 2016). The concept of mutuality is central to this capoeira paper too. Further, regarding yoga, Perez *et al.* (2016) conducted a mixed methods feasibility study to test whether incorporating a twenty week Kundalini yoga programme, where both children and staff took part, into a residential home for children improved well-being outcomes. In terms of findings 'all the participants reported that the study was personally meaningful and experienced both individual (*e.g.* feeling more relaxed) and social benefits (*e.g.* feeling more open and positive)' (p. 261). To conclude, Crawford *et al.* (2013) demonstrate 'the importance of arts … how they provide ways of breaking down social barriers, of expressing and understanding experiences

and emotions, and of helping to rebuild identities and communities' (p. 55). These crucial concepts of identity and community are also debated in this paper.

Overall, therefore, literature in this broad field, which combines social theory and leisure activity, is extensive and proliferating. This paper, with capoeira as the game / martial art / leisure activity for analysis, contributes to this research realm. The concepts of self, identity, escapism, multiparty endeavour, community, temporality, enjoyment, transcending boundaries, and society are included in the analytical and data-driven element of this paper. However, before this findings section, the design of the study is outlined.

Study Design:

The Capoeira Course:

One hour capoeira classes ran weekly, free of charge, for participants. It was a standalone capoeira course organised by the research team. All elements of the capoeira classes were funded from the study's budget – see Acknowledgments section. Thirteen classes were provided. No experience of capoeira was necessary to begin the capoeira classes. A few participants had previously attended a taster session or watched some capoeira play online, but the participants were all still novices in this martial art. Two capoeira leaders ran the classes. These two course leaders were at different stages in their capoeira careers. One of these leaders was an adolescent who was training to become a capoeira instructor and essentially acted as an extra demonstrator for the main and senior capoeira course leader. This experienced capoeirista has over fifteen years' professional experience as a capoeira Professor and is internationally recognised as far as Brazil, Israel, Siberia, and Indonesia; this British capoeirista is also fluent in Brazilian Portuguese and a capable Afro-Brazilian percussionist and vocalist. These two course leaders were paid to deliver the teaching (£29 each, per hour). Thus, the study includes two participant groupings – the capoeira students for the beginners' course and the two capoeira course leaders. This course took place in a prominent dance teaching venue in a city in the West Midlands of England. It was the first capoeira venture to take place at this venue. At the end of the thirteen weeks this capoeira course ended. Post-course, participants were introduced to, without obligation, the course leader's capoeira academy in the local area and many participants expressed a desire to continue with their capoeira play at this site.

Recruitment to this research occurred via traditional methods and social media routes; for example, paper flyers and a Facebook page. During recruitment Participant Information Sheets were used; the information provided included details of the Principal Investigator, definitions

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and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, descriptive details of the capoeira course and the research methods to be used, plus specifics regarding the funder and ethical approvals. Consent Forms were signed by participants and collected by researchers. The study received ethical approval from the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Nottingham. Eighteen participants joined the study. All those who attended the classes were research participants. The participant group was naturally occurring and self-selecting. Participants understood they were free to leave the course at any stage and without giving reason. It was also not a requirement of the research that participants attended every class. Around ten participants attended each week. At two different points in the course, capoeira items were gifted to participants, to facilitate deeper engagement with capoeira culture and play: a free capoeira t-shirt and a free capoeira music CD.

Demographic data were collected from capoeiristas:

Gender	7 males, 11 females;
Age	9 x 18–30 year olds, 8 x 31–40 year olds, 1 x 41–50 year old;
Ethnicity	1 x Black British African, 3 x Black British Caribbean, 11 x White British, 1 x White & Black Caribbean, 1 x Asian British Indian, 1 x Asian British Pakistani;
Main Occupation	2 x A volunteer, 1 x A carer, 3 x Self-employed, 12 x In waged employment.
Highest Qualification	1 x PhD, 2 x postgraduate taught degree, 8 x undergraduate degree, 2 x A levels, 1 x Diploma, 1 x None, 3 x Not completed section.

Research Method:

Quality and rigorous study design and practice requires fit between research aim, methodology, method, fieldwork conduct, and analysis. Regarding methodology, this capoeira work implements an inductive approach to the datum–theory relationship, a constructionist ontological position, and an interpretivist epistemological orientation. To summarise, (a) an inductive approach implies research observations lead to the generation of theory, (b) a constructionist ontological position considers social phenomena to be perpetually reconstructed by social actors via continual processes of social interaction, and (c) interpretivism places a large emphasis on understanding social situations (including participants' understandings). Fitting with this underpinning philosophical approach, therefore, two qualitative research methods were utilised: overt non-participant observation and semi-structured interview. Martin

(2011) debates qualitative research in sport and highlights 'one of the strengths of qualitative research is a consideration and appreciation of the context' (p. 343). Accordingly, within this work, context is embraced and analysed via the observation fieldwork. Regarding interview as method in this realm, Kavoura *et al.* (2015) utilised an interview method in their Brazilian Jiu Jitsu research and Torregrosa *et al.* (2004) interviewed elite athletes regarding their futures. Interview and observation methods are appropriate and popular research tools in this field, which combines martial arts and social science research. Further, these research methods aptly fit the research aim and, thus, facilitate the collection/creation of appropriate data for this study.

Multiple researchers from divergent academic fields completed fieldwork. The researchers who undertook data collection included the Principal Investigator plus early-career researchers and tenured academics, all from the same university. The interdisciplinary research team includes expertise in the sociology of sport, social theory, humanities, medical sociology, mental healthcare service user perspective, nursing, and sociology. Such a diverse team might experience compatibility issues (*e.g.,* epistemological or theoretical); however, for this project, scholars intentionally aligned around the methodological underpinnings in order to focus on the research aim. In practice, this required team members to (a) engage with 'the actor's point of view' (Hughes and Sharrock 2007, p. 251), (b) embrace interactionism (*i.e.,* 'to understand how members of society, individually and collectively, come to form and act upon the definition of a situation, whatever that may be' Hughes and Sharrock 2007, p. 251), and (c) recognise interpretations (of both participants and researchers) relate to the socio-cultural background of the individuals.

During the capoeira classes researchers occupied an overt non-participant observer role – researchers sat at the back of the room and watched the session in full view of the capoeiristas. Seven capoeira classes were observed by researchers. Once the classes ended, nine participants completed semi-structured interviews post-course. These nine participants were not systematically selected by the research team; although the post-course event was advertised to all research participants, it was these nine interviewees who self-selected to attend. Multiple members of the research team, including the Principle Investigator, attended this final capoeira class and met with the capoeiristas for interview. The interviews were expected by participants – the class attendees knew researchers would join them that evening. In terms of practicalities, whilst some participants undertook interviews the other capoeiristas continued to play capoeira – then *vice versa*. These interviews were optional. There was no obligation. The Semi-Structured Interview Guide included three sections: Theme One = Joining & Feelings; Theme Two = Activities & Relations; Theme Three = Reflections & Future. No follow-up interviews

were considered necessary (*e.g.,* all audio was of sufficient quality for transcription). The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim by a transcription company. Within this article pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality; anonymity is also upheld, as participants are not identifiable even if, for example, all of Elliot's quotes are considered in tandem. Elliot is a pseudonym for one of this study's participants. Other pseudonyms in this paper, for the new capoeiristas, include Adrian, Emma, Tanya, Robert, Lucy, *etc.*

Analysis Process:

The form of analysis undertaken in social science projects is governed by fitness for purpose – analysis method must suit research question and research data collection tool(s). Thus, thematic analysis was utilised for this study as it is apposite to exploratory research and the *raison d'être* of this inductive qualitative work. Identification of a thematic framework is carried out by drawing loosely on *a priori* issues as derived from the study's purpose, as well as issues raised by the respondents themselves, and unexpected views or experiences that occur in the data (Pope *et al.*, 2000). Grbich (2007) considers the process of thematic analysis to consist of two complementary data reduction techniques: block and file, and conceptual mapping (pp. 32–35). Both of these disparate yet complementary processes were utilised in this study. Initial codes were written on the observation and interview data by researchers, then the conceptual mapping exercise and theme development was undertaken, freehand on paper, amongst colleagues and with the codes. Colleagues worked with the dataset separately and produced myriad codes independently. At team meetings codes were then debated and themes were created. The analysis process took the team circa six months.

Findings:

Capoeira as multiparty endeavour

Stephens and Delamont (2006) highlight how in capoeira settings 'the teacher instructs and the disciples obey' (p. 319). In this study, the hierarchical set-up is less present in the data and, instead, the concept of community dominates interviews and observations. Data from this study evidence capoeira as a multiparty endeavour. Relationships between course members are crucial. Capoeira is both verbalised by participants and observed by researchers as a communal pursuit.

"Bernard [the capoeira instructor] points out it's not about you [as individuals], it's about us watching and interacting with each other" (Researcher D, Obs. Data).

"Bernard mentioned the necessity of working in pairs and how crucial it is in capoeira" (Researcher F, Obs. Data).

"There's a strong community aspect ... It's a very social event ... The community aspect I like a lot" (Adrian).

"We're really strong as a community" (Elliot).

Capoeira as multiparty endeavour is demonstrated; participants narrate capoeira as inherently social, but take this further, and argue that social bonds amongst the group are crucial – that the capoeira community is key to the session. Delamont and Stephens (2008) highlight how, in capoeira, 'dodges and escapes are valued as much as attacks, and students spend hours not only practising kicks but also learning many ways to escape' (p. 63). These two elements are observed in this study, but the notion of this task as a *group* pursuit is prominent; working with others is prioritised first-and-foremost.

"Bernard encourages the pairs to read body language and not to worry about the height of the kick, but instead focus on reading the interaction. To think about distance and closeness of partner" (Researcher A, Obs. Data).

"They are instructed to continue to work in pairs and match their bodies and movements to each other in a gentle warm down. At various points Bernard instructs the participants to swap partners, which they do willingly" (Researcher B, Obs. Data).

"This call: 'Change partners!' is noted as a common call from Bernard, repeatedly throughout the class" (Researcher A, Obs. Data).

"The class swap partners a lot and interact with different people throughout the class" (Researcher B, Obs. Data).

The notions of community and capoeira appear linked. As noted in the preceding literature review, the arts and humanities literature supports this proposed link between practice engagement and community experience. Crawford *et al.* (2015) write:

> 'Art, in any form, is a uniquely human phenomenon. As such, any essential attributes of the performing arts must be consistent with the essential attributes of being human. One of the most fundamental bases of humanity is *relationship*' (p. 83, emphasis in original); hence, 'the performing arts, like persons, are located within the living contexts of shared, culturally situated, relational space and time' (p. 84).

Capoeira includes, therefore, both collective action and social connection. To strengthen this developing analysis, the term connection is utilised by interview participants often.

"When I'm playing it, it becomes, it can become a really good game, as it's a form of connection, it's a form of communication without the words" (Emma).

"You're always swapping partners, but you still feel like you're making a connection with everyone" (Tanya).

"I was able to kind of connect with people on a different level. And strangers, not being strangers, when in class" (Adrian).

It is salient that this novel community experience for participants was forged in a new physical setting with previously unknown persons (apart from two family members who signed-up for the course and the two course leaders who usually work together). The venue for capoeira was new to most participants, and the people playing together as capoeiristas were also new to each other, yet the theme of connection is strong. Therefore, the apparent ability of capoeira to enable positive connections amongst persons so swiftly is notable. Indeed, time as a concept is important and debated later in this article.

New connections made via the capoeira course, and experiences of group work facilitated by capoeira, are narrated positively by participants. What is poignant, however, is that comfortable and beneficial multiparty endeavour is not instantaneous. Instead, data highlight how the process occurs incrementally throughout the capoeira course.

Interviewer: What has that been like, that sense of community?

Participant: Well, I mean, because it developed as the course went on, and once you realised that everyone is looking out for each other and trying to help, it's nice, it's like you've got that support, you've got your friends, you've got the people looking out for you (Robert).

Further, data suggest this multiparty endeavour and equitable group work is feasible in tandem with individual development and positive benefit for self.

"With capoeira it's about community as well as self … So self-improvements and working with others. So I enjoy that aspect." (Adrian).

"It's like learning a language for the first time, you feel very empowered that you're able to communicate with somebody else in a new way, you know, for the first time ever" (Course Leader Bernard).

"Bernard explains the benefit of exercises for self and the group as a whole" (Researcher F, Obs. Data).

To continue this theme, within this study, researchers observed in the field, and then explored via interview data excerpts, where capoeira can perhaps be considered to combine altruistic and ego work. Friedrichs (1960) analyses altruism and states: '… the focal characteristic of the altruistic individual, then, is the other; and altruism becomes, for present purposes, the inhibiting or controlling of ego's behavior to provide for the satisfaction of alter's impulses or desires' (p. 497). This study exploring alter and ego by Friedrichs (1960) 'provides some limited quantitative support to the clinical hypothesis that acceptance *by* others is related to acceptance *of* others' (p. 506, emphasis added). Herein arguably lies the temporal element, as people require time to develop this acceptance. Hence, capoeira could be linked with positive notions of time, self, other, acceptance, and community-building. These themes continue throughout the article. As an example, the interviewee below conceptualises this marrying of group and self via the concept of journey.

"Once you realise that, you know, everyone's there to help you on your journey, and everyone recognises that you're on a different journey to them … then those [initial] confidence issues kind of disappear" (Lucy).

"We've been through this journey together" (Lucy).

Once again, however, the development of this personal journey – and the facilitation of others' journeys – has a temporal element. For this participant, the capoeira journey commenced when community spirit developed and initial self-confidence concerns ended.

Enjoyable group playfulness

Stephens and Delamont (2014) research the goals that capoeira teachers have for their students, which include: 'play good capoeira (with style and elegance) and enjoy doing so' (p. 155). Play, joviality, enjoyment, and humour are evident in this study's dataset and data highlight how this is undertaken in a group sense. For the participants in this study, enjoyment of self is achieved via group participation during capoeira play, pair work, group interaction with the course leader, and even before the classes commence.

"Prior to the session, the group were talking about the pain they were in from the week before, although with an element of humour" (Researcher F, Obs. Data).

"Participant 1 and Participant 4 pair up; after initial laughter, they focus on the task" (Researcher A, Obs. Data).

"A mixture of joy and serious concentration pervades" (Researcher E, Obs. Data).

"Bernard [the capoeira instructor] uses humour to structure the classes" (Researcher E, Obs. Data).

"Bernard makes small jokes whilst teaching, and involves the class in jovial call-and-response interactions" (Researcher F, Obs. Data).

"Use again of call-and-response between Bernard and the class, received with humour" (Researcher F, Obs. Data).

Capoeira play is convoluted. Capoeira has been argued to involve contrasting and contradictory features — *e.g.,* opening–closing, equality–hierarchy (MacLennan, 2011). Indeed, Stephens and Delamont (2006) highlight how capoeira might be considered a somewhat 'Janus-faced activity' (p. 319) including humour and playfulness but also trickery and deception. Interestingly, the version of capoeira observed in this research embraces the first two features but not the final two elements.

Gumze (2014) cites the concept of *malandragem*, which represents the art of fraud, survival, mind reading, and hiding of intentions via capoeira play. Delamont (2006) states 'the potential danger of capoeira' (p. 168) and Gumze (2014) highlights the capoeira social status of being *cara perigoso* (dangerous guy) (p. 10). Once again, however, data for this study diverge from previously disseminated findings. Danger is not posed by the beginners' capoeira classes in this study and there is, instead, a heavy emphasis on collegial enjoyment. Whereas trickery and deception might be understood to entail an individualistic goal of becoming *cara perigoso*, these classes, by virtue of that being offered perhaps, for beginners, focus instead on community building. These findings are important as they suggest that, when capoeira tuition is newly-commenced in settings where capoeira/capoeirista culture does not already exist, the more devious and dangerous elements of capoeira play require specific introduction and facilitation by the capoeira leader, and therefore may not necessarily develop at all – as is the case in this study of capoeira beginners.

There is a deeper point related to this, regarding whether the deviousness of the capoeirista can be taught from the top-down or whether it has to be learnt through practice and engagement in

existing capoeira settings/cultures. As Downey (2008) notes, capoeira is learnt via tuition, but also by observation and 'self-guided practice' (p. 206). As the fieldnotes collected during this study suggest, there was no element of non-participatory observation of capoeira practice by participants, nor the chance to explore, for instance in a free-form sparring session, how different techniques might be used in order to deceive, trick, or otherwise outmanoeuvre others. Such mastery within martial arts in general takes regular and sustained practice in order to achieve these abilities (*e.g*., Wacquant, 2004; Graham, 2013; Hogeveen, 2013). Therefore, the beginners' capoeira course delivered for this study, at only thirteen weeks long, did not permit time or cultural opportunity enough for self-guided and advanced practice to develop. This study provided a form of modified capoeira, and in a venue used for other pursuits (*e.g.,* dance classes), which raises the question of whether the results would have been the same in a setting specifically and exclusively for capoeira.

To return to the data, fieldwork suggests that laughter, communication, confidence, creativity, and friendly physical contact did develop throughout the course. This physical enactment of capoeira culture can be found in the published capoeira literature. For example, Stephens and Delamont (2006) describe how individuals arriving for a class 'slap hands or do high fives' (p. 317). Laughter often occurs amongst the participants, as observed by researchers and articulated by participants in interview. The positivity in the space utilised for the capoeira classes is palpable and fieldwork excerpts record the enjoyment of individual participants within this supportive group setting.

"Smiles and, in some cases, physical contact used in greetings (hi-fives or handshakes)" (Researcher D, Obs. Data).

"Two participants hi-fived each other after completing a set move well" (Researcher F, Obs. Data).

"Once again the atmosphere in the room is full of excitement and laughter" (Researcher B, Obs. Data).

"I have a good giggle here" (Lucy).

"As the exercises get more complicated the amount of laughter in the room increases and more and more of the pairs start to interact with each other [intra-pair]; the atmosphere feels supportive but focused on the task" (Researcher B, Obs. Data).

"Laughter and smiling in the pairs whilst practising techniques" (Researcher F, Obs. Data).

The short timeframe in which a sense of community developed is poignant. All researchers, in this respect, remark their surprise at the way in which a community feeling established in such a short space of time amongst the participant cohort. Arguably, it was bodily interaction that produced such cohesion. A sense of community, familiarity, and joviality with each other's physical bodies is present in the data.

"One participant gets hiccups and the whole group laughs with them" (Researcher E, Obs. Data).

"Bernard explains capoeira is an intimate practice and is about discovering harmony with others" (Researcher E, Obs. Data).

"For Bernard, it is important in capoeira that you work with the other person, where eye contact is important; in synchrony with partner and working in harmony" (Researcher F, Obs. Data).

"You get to know people … in a shorter space of time than you do through sitting and talking with people … and, and sort of physical learning really" (Emma).

This research suggests bodily interaction through capoeira is (a) felt at the subjective level and (b) condenses the time in which it is possible to establish social bonds through knowing new others. Time has previously featured in analyses of the body (Bourdieu, 2000; Foucault, 1991), exercise (Crossley, 2006) and indeed capoeira (Delamont *et al.*, 2017). Less prevalent in the analysis of body and time both in general, and in the capoeira context, is how the establishment of new, positively-experienced interpersonal social bonds may be accelerated through group-based physically exertive activity, over social interaction in which the physical is not at the fore. The capoeira observed in this study arguably immediately encourages transcendence of self and other, in that at least some of the routines practiced cannot be undertaken individually and, hence, *demand* bodily co-operation. Participants literally feel and experience other participants' bodies as they work as pairs, meaning, ultimately, that they get to know one another from the outset of the course in an intimate capacity. Arguably, less physical forms of social interaction may not allow for this form of swift knowing. However, questions remain. For example, this capoeira course was relatively short, thus would a lengthier course facilitate any additional group playfulness? Put another way, does capoeira play and community spirit continue to improve for capoeiristas forever, or does it reach its peak quickly and then plateau? A future study would benefit from follow-up work to explore the nature of early-onset *versus* long-term community experiences and effects of capoeira play.

Escapism via capoeira

Capoeira affords myriad opportunities and one of these, for interviewees in this study, is a temporal distraction from their public (*e.g.,* workplace) and private (*e.g.,* family) realms, roles, or responsibilities. Participants narrate escapism as one element of capoeira classes. Time spent undertaking capoeira is understood as time away from the everyday. Data suggest both new place and novel pursuit can facilitate hedonistic diversion from the mundane. The physicality of the venue and the practice of capoeira are fresh routes to removal from the more usual and routine elements of social life, for these research participants.

"… people really enjoy being part of this mutual communication and escaping from err, err, from whatever's going on in their normal lives … It's very liberating" (Course Leader Bernard).

"I would say it has had a positive effect. I think from a, a, a mental attitude perspective I would say that it's, it's a distraction from the norm that you have during your day, whatever stress, whatever thoughts you might have of work or home or whatever else, it distracts you for that period and for the short interim period thereafter from what you were thinking about, so it's that distraction" (Lindsey).

"The reason why I did capoeira was because … I have a lot of stress … so I can forget … it's like, forget about everything and just be there at capoeira. And it's like I'm on medication … forget everything and just focus on something I love doing" (Elliot).

" … escape from my day to day activity … this is my one hour of escape from the usual routine, so I look forward to it" (Lindsey).

"I'm just looking forward to the next week that it happens" (Michelle).

Marrying capoeira as a pursuit and the notion of public and/or private escapism is not entirely novel. For example, Lewis (1999) debates the possibility of capoeira as a means of departure from the everyday. The argument is convoluted as, for Lewis (1999), the everyday actually remains an ordering and integral feature of the sport; indeed, the everyday, from which escape is sought, is ultimately made less escapable through this form of temporary departure. That is, escapism via capoeira classes may actually act as a conservative force to maintain the *status quo*; the existent everyday order of life remains unchanged, albeit capoeira's temporal escape function (Lewis, 1999). Notwithstanding the dissimilar context and different population, Deuchar *et al*. (2016), who focused on young Danish gang members, boxing, and recidivism also argued that 'the boxing gym provided the young men with an opportunity to escape from

some of the pressures associated with stigmatization and social exclusion' (p. 733). However, shortcomings of providing places of temporary escape are also discussed: 'while boxing might provide a context where tough men momentarily feel safe enough to give voice to feelings of emotional hardship and develop more legitimate masculine identities, it might unintentionally also reinforce narrow notions of masculinity, homophobia and sexism' (p. 737). This work of Deuchar *et al*. (2016) demonstrates temporary escapism from some aspects of social life can potentially reinforce other aspects of social order and, further, that escapism is never fully possible (*i.e.,* some features of the everyday travel with those seeking escape, as the intended places of respite share similarities with that which they are trying to escape); in the example of Deuchar *et al*.'s (2016) fieldwork site – the boxing club – it would be homophobia. Similarly, Wacquant notes that the boxing gym offers its members an 'escape' (Wacquant, 1995, p. 501) from a ghetto imploding under post-industrial economic conditions. Equally, as Wacquant (2004, p. 17) also notes, the gym is an 'island of order'. Taken together, the implication is that the boxing gym facilitates feelings of freedom *through* constraint. There are three idioms through which the prizefighters interviewed by Wacquant (2001) narrate their experience: prostitution, slavery, and animal husbandry – all of which are usually understood as conditions from which escape is sought, rather than themselves being the destinations of escape. Yet, prizefighters find these conditions preferable to other means of work, for the relative freedom being a boxer affords (Wacquant, 1995, 2004). Thus, between Lewis's, Deuchar *et al*.'s and Wacquant's scholarship, the liberal conceptualisation of freedom (and therefore escape) – operating, like many liberal conceptualisations, in reductive binary form – is rendered an insufficient way in which to understand what spaces such as boxing clubs and capoeira dance studios might offer. Thus, liberation and confinement are not zero-sum games, and it is through living in conditions where supremacy is afforded to the individual that experiences can be articulated as liberating (and not recognised as containing any element of confinement).

This debate regarding conservatism alongside escapism is interesting, especially when considered with this study's capoeira interview dataset, which offers a different narrative, whereby capoeira is depicted as liberating *only* and not conservative, confining, or detrimental. A problem here is the difference between the experience of liberation on a phenomenological level (as narrated by the interviewees) and liberation at a sociological / systemic level (as often debated in the academic literature). These findings and theory are not in opposition, but instead debate different yet related topics. Arguably, the capoeiristas' experiences of liberation in this study are necessarily achieved through submission to (and embodiment of) the structure of capoeira. There is a lack of recognition about anything restrictive regarding capoeira tuition in

this dataset; there is an absence of appreciation of this necessary submission to capoeira as a structural force becoming sedimented within the body.

Further, these findings gain additional interest when mobilised to consider literature from the field of health humanities. As an example, art therapy literature considers escapism to be feasible via conceptualising escape differently to its conceptualisation above. For Warren (2006), art therapy can arguably facilitate escapism, distraction, and time out from reality, plus, these elements are evaluated as beneficial for persons experiencing mental illness, such as anxiety, or for those who are highly stressed. Stickley *et al.* (2007) debate art's ability to take people to other places both metaphorically and literally (*e.g.,* art might physically and literally remove people from social isolation via planned communal arts activities; art may offer escapism, in more of a metaphorical way, via a sense of adventure and an unknown end point). Perhaps, therefore, the capoeira classes provide a place and a time in life to – albeit temporarily, and arguably not fully (*e.g.,* due to the acceptance of, and subservience to, capoeira structure) – escape some of life's wider stresses (*e.g.,* employment and family responsibilities); data suggest how capoeira participation can provide adventure into a, relatively, unburdened part of, or place in, social life. Equally, this is to suggest that other creative practices such as art therapy which are considered to be purely liberating might be reconsidered in light of the above.

Notwithstanding this debate regarding escapism and capoeira in this study, participants also, somewhat conversely, took elements of capoeira beyond the boundary of the classroom back into their wider lives, as debated below.

Transcending boundaries

Participant narratives highlight how capoeira skills can have application beyond the physical and social boundaries of the classes, hence themes of boundary-empowerment, temporality, and identity work are relevant. For example, the one hour per week capoeira class does not, at least for the participants in this study, act as a discrete period in time separated from wider elements of their lives; the boundary is experienced as porous and social actors utilise the capoeira course to enhance their identities beyond the weekly sixty minutes spent at the venue. Hence, there are elements of capoeira that can transcend the original context – both the building and the group. Theoretically, there are links here with the work of Putnam (*e.g.,* 1993) who debates dilemmas and logic of collective action, civic engagement, plus social capital, and appeals for 'focus on community development' (p. 10). Accordingly, the community of new capoeiristas in this study might be considered an example of a bridging network (Putnam, 2000), due to its intra-group heterogeneity, thereby connecting people who are unlike one another, whilst also facilitating

coordination and cooperation for *mutual* benefit. Indeed, participant narratives demonstrate how capoeira can manifest itself in people's lives in a broader – and positive – sense. Empowerment is relevant here, as the creative and community experiences within the capoeira sessions are not just passively experienced during the hour, they are being actively used – in identity projects – beyond the class and in participants' wider lives. Thus, elements of a community-spirited pursuit can be selectively transferred into individuals' lives beyond the temporal and physical space of the classes.

"I feel like I've learnt something and I've gained something from it in terms of both having new skills and also socially" (Adrian).

"Like I mentioned, when I went to X [European capital], and I met someone who also practiced capoeira, it allowed me to interact with that person, whereas usually I wouldn't have [interacted], or I would have found a different means, but it gave me another thing in common with them, so we were able to have a little bit of a [capoeira] exchange … So, yeah, it gives me another method of interaction with someone … I expected [from the course] a general skill set of capoeira moves which I may be able to apply within a capoeira exchange, which I did" (Lindsey).

"But like I say I'm quite, I'm usually quite shy and reserved and the more exposure I get to different people in different situations, I'm hoping, is building my confidence and my ability to interact with people wherever" (Tanya).

"I've been really happy after capoeira" (Elliot).

"It gives me something to talk about at work" (Tanya).

"It feels good at work talking about having something outside [of work]" (Lucy).

In this study participants experience the power to transgress the boundary of the capoeira session and achieve wider personal gain from the originally group-focused pursuit. Therefore, mutuality and egocentricity appear possible in tandem. This theme runs throughout this article – capoeira for self *and* community.

An associated finding exists in the literature, but in relation to gender. The work of Joseph (2005) highlights how female Brazilian capoeiristas can transgress gender boundaries and how capoeira can facilitate the accommodation, borrowing, and lending of culture amongst those who practice the 'all-encompassing lifestyle, philosophy, sport, martial art, dance, and game'

(p. 31) that is capoeira. Therefore, extant and developing evidence regarding the transformative nature of capoeira is compelling.[2]

Conclusion:

Via this research, capoeira is theorised in a fresh manner that highlights social benefits of capoeira – for example as an enjoyable and supportive group endeavour which includes elements of social play and community-building – plus benefits for self that can transcend the boundaries of the class. Findings from this study highlight how capoeira can be considered an inherently multiparty endeavour whereby social actors form, and experience, a community in order to embrace capoeira play. Our data suggest capoeira can facilitate group playfulness, joviality, and laughter. Further, capoeiristas can enact and experience – some mode of – escapism via capoeira, whereby new place and novel pursuit can facilitate hedonistic diversion from the mundane. Capoeira, therefore, appears to provide adventure and liberation into a relatively unburdened part of, or place in, social life – at least for the participants in this study. Nevertheless, as debated in this paper, the phenomenological experience of escapism *versus* actual escapism might be fruitfully considered in future work. Corporeal and discursive boundary-empowerment can also be experienced by capoeiristas, fostering positive identity work in the wider world. Capoeira can be argued to facilitate mutuality (*e.g.,* community experience and group work) and egoism (*e.g.,* an individual's identity work) concurrently. In summary, this research suggests that modified capoeira for beginners can be beneficial for both the new capoeiristas themselves and for positive community action during and beyond the classes.

Nevertheless, the capoeira course provided was modified for this study (*e.g.,* no trickery in the capoeira play), intentionally aimed at an absolute beginner level, held in a dance-focussed rather than capoeira-specific venue, short in timescale (at just thirteen weeks), and the sample was small and self-selecting. Thus, with these limitations in mind, this study has also generated future questions for research: How is ethnicity performed during capoeira play, amongst an ethnically diverse urban cohort of self-selecting capoeiristas? Which benefits of capoeira possess longevity, or are positives short-lived? Can capoeira play and community engagement become mundane? Finally, how do capoeiristas negotiate their progression in the art form, as they transcend the status of novice?

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[2] This section has explored how personality can be developed beyond the boundaries of the class but, conversely, for a debate regarding the development of personality *within* the framework of capoeira itself, see the work of Fuggle (2008).

Acknowledgements:

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