Embodying the Mind: Movement as a Container for Destructive Aggression

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Violent, nonmentalizing individuals who act out aggression do not usually respond to verbal therapeutic approaches alone. We suggest the movement in physically oriented therapies, such as yoga and martial arts, combined with psychodynamic psychotherapy are critical in reaching these individuals. We also suggest embodiment as a direct link to the kinesthetic core of easily disturbed attachment experiences. This process embodying the mind requires a safe, containing context found in the therapist. Clinical vignettes show how this might be done in both individual and social contexts. These vignettes also show a way to think about such a combination of techniques and theories.

Insubstantial but violent, a gang member imitates the forms of the society that denies his existence. In the absence of community, he is initiated and he initiates. In the absence of a cause, he makes war. In the absence of justice, he condemns and is condemned... A gang is a manifestation of shame and inadequacy... our imitations of order postponed an understanding: traditional order itself had engineered the terrors that drove us into gangs. A gang completes the erasure of identify begun by misfortune, and so it is a violence practiced unto itself. **Entering a gang, a nobody becomes a nothing with a bold new name.**

Donald Revel (1993, p. 82)

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**AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHOTHERAPY, Vol. 62, No. 1, 2008**
Need you,
Dream you,
Find you,
Taste you,
Fuck you,
Use you,
Scar you,
Break you.

Lose me,
Hate me,
Smash me,
Erase me

Trent Reznor, Nine Inch Nails, (1994)
The ultimate aim of the art of karate lies not in victory or defeat, but in the perfection of the character of its participants.
  Master Gichin Funakoshi (Shoto, 1975)

INTRODUCTION

Modern forms of violence are like the many–headed serpent, the hydra: poet Donald Revell, revered martial artist Gichin Funakoshi, and alternative rock singer Trent Reznor (of Nine Inch Nails fame) make for strange bedfellows, but each illustrates elements of the puzzle. Revell’s sensitive essay on violence derives from his childhood experiences in a Bronx gang. He considers the paradox that gang members are alone together since their commitment to violence opposes any genuine relatedness. As Revell implies, he enters as a nobody and becomes a nothing. Sometimes, the gang member becomes aware of this societal deception and responds by unleashing rage. Senseless killing characterizes our society, a society that is a scientific and economic leader but has the violence profile of a third–world nation. The Nine Inch Nails lyrics offer an example of the beliefs of a segment of our civilized but violent society. The lyrics spiral into degradation, hurting, torture, and humiliation, culminating in a sadomasochistic frenzy of personal destruction resulting in the ultimate erasure of the self. In stark contrast, Funakoshi speaks of karate as an art with character development as its main goal. Yet in the public eye, karate epitomizes violence.

Effective interventions for ameliorating destructive aggression are rare. Verbal psychotherapy conducted in an office often falls short of reaching the goal of helping a person stay peaceful and nonviolent. We hypothesize that martial arts and other formally structured physical practices like yoga
and dance therapy have potential as linking objects (Volkan, 1981). Linking the mind of the violent individual to the memory of the body ego of childhood, can then be made available to work with in a psychotherapeutic and less violent context. In the case of traditional martial arts, the philosophy and codes of conduct also enhance character development and altruism in the style of the gentle warrior of ancient legends. Other practices, such as yoga, are often also taught within the framework of an altruistic and compassionate philosophy and ethical practice. We theorize that these physical practices assist the violent individual’s in linking connected elements of his current behavior and thinking to a kinesthetic mindset more typical of earlier preverbal developmental stages. Thus, in the context of combined physical and psychological work, establishing these links in the consciousness of the patient, a process we call embodiment, helps make sense of the shattered thoughts and affect that lead to violent actions.

Our interest in the application of physical practices as therapeutic interventions for violent patients stems from our observations over many years of teaching and practicing martial and meditative arts that many students consciously or unconsciously begin training to heal and resolve psychological wounds. We conducted a questionnaire survey of 170 consecutive students who enrolled for training to determine motivation for studying the art (Twemlow, Lerma & Twemlow, 1996). Of these 170 students, 45 had experienced a significant, unexpected attack in the course of day–to–day existence. Strikingly, beyond such obvious motives as self–defense and physical fitness, there was the wish for increased self–discipline (141), a desire for spiritual practice (111), and a search for an outlet for aggression (91). These findings suggest that individuals often may apply for such training because of difficulty in handling their own violent, fearful impulses as well as for existential needs, and spiritual meaning and purpose. We posit that the healing process results from a complex interaction of the mind and body in a contained social context that allows for the safe exploration of affect.

We also offer concrete case examples of how training in one such practice, traditional martial arts, can help rebuild pathological attachment experiences and develop the fundamental psychological, interpersonal, and physical skills necessary to transform destructive aggressiveness into self–confidence and pro–social assertiveness. We use the application of martial arts to the treatment of violent children and adolescents to illustrate how to integrate the physical techniques of martial arts in combination with psychodynamic psychotherapy. The special role of the
martial arts dojo, or training area, is explored as part of a healing, containing, and holding social context. We call this process Embodiment of the Mind.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF PHYSICAL ADJUNCTS TO PSYCHODYNAMIC THERAPIES

In the United States, a number of states have developed “boot camps” or related programs as alternatives to incarceration for violent young offenders, i.e., a socially sanctioned method to examine the use of strict and even severe discipline to treat violent individuals. These boot camps sometimes are called “shock incarceration”. A study by Bourque et al. (1996), showed that outcomes varied according to the intent and design of the program. In 1990, there were about 50 such camps, in 30 states; several of these camps had been in existence for as long as 10 years. There was a higher rate of recidivism for individuals sentenced to boot camps established primarily for punishment (with little time allocated for rehabilitation) than for individuals who did not go the camps. Recidivism rates were lower in states where the rehabilitation part of the program was given more time. Conclusions suggest that successful juveniles learn best by “doing”. In summary, such programs need to focus on concrete feelings and self-concept, discipline, self-control, physical conditioning, structured activities, academic and vocational education, and values clarification, which are all aspects of traditional martial arts training.

From a psychoanalytic perspective then, martial art training is a corrective emotional experience that assists in embodiment through attachment to a safe, powerful, and predictable adult role model. In that sense, this process is a form of therapeutic leverage, not manipulation, of transference. We have described this leverage of transference in more detail in Sklarew, Twemlow, and Wilkinson (2004).

There have been many studies suggesting positive effects of physical practices in physical and psychological illness. Researchers at the Harvard Medical School studied the effects of Qigong (a practice derived from martial arts) on the immune system of recovering cancer patients (Kerr, 2002). Two schools of thought explained positive affects on cancer outcome. The biomedical team interpreted the effects as the result of non-specific therapy combining relaxation and exercise. The Qigong practitioners saw the effects as being the result of specific body movements and visualizations that direct healing mental “energies” to specific areas of the body. They referred to this as the “mind-in-body” experience. This
dualistic debate highlights the main issues in understanding the relationship between the mind and body as it unfolds in combined treatment.

Movement, music, and visualization have been used successfully to help very young psychiatrically disturbed children improve self-control and increase receptiveness to music (Krason & Szafraniec, 1999). Directed movement also has beneficial effects in treating other conditions. Thirty-eight children with autism were treated effectively by using creative movement therapy (Hartshorn, Olds, Field, Delage, Cullen, & Escalona, 2001). There was an increase in attentive behaviors and a decrease in stress behaviors. At an Israeli general hospital, dance was used as a regular part of inpatient treatment of chronically medically ill children (Mendelsohn, 1999). The children’s movement was examined at three levels: (1) body/functional, (2) interpersonal, and (3) symbolic. The mood of patients with fibromyalgia using “mind–body” exercises, such as relaxation, Qigong, and meditation showed significant improvements (Creamerm, Singh, Hochberg, & Berman, 2000). The improvement, after the eight–week study was sustainable up to four months after the end of the intervention.

There are reports supporting the beneficial impact of Tai Chi on elderly patients in helping reduce falling incidents by increasing the patients’ balance and flexibility as well as strengthening lower extremities (McKenna, 2001). One hundred thirty four Dutch individuals, ages 64 to 96, were studied in a movement therapy program called Psychomotor Activation Program (PAP); findings suggest beneficial effects in cognition and social behavior (Hopman–Rock, 1999). In a study of 200 geriatric clients enrolled in either a Tai Chi class or balance training, those in the Tai Chi class clearly showed improved functioning in everyday life (Kuttner, Barnhart, Wold, McNeely, & Xu, 1997). Another study of younger subjects, ages 20 to 40 years, found that Tai Chi provided a low–stress method to enhance stability, kinesthetic sense, and strength of knee (Jacobson, Ho–Cheng, Cashei, & Guerrero, 1997). A Taiwanese study found that Tai Chi practitioners had better health and mood states, lower blood pressure, and fewer falls than nonpractitioners (Chen, Snyder, & Krichbaum, 2001).

Similar improvements were noted using movement in the treatment of adolescents. One study showed improvements in the adolescents’ cognition and their understanding of social relationships (Farber, 2001). A case study from Israel (Weiser, Kutz, Kutz, & Weiser, 1995) illustrates how the martial arts experience led to a client exploring his feelings more productively in psychotherapy. In a study of 60 boys in a large city, martial arts classes taken as part of the middle school experience resulted in decreased
violence and other positive outcomes (Zivin, Hassan, DePaula, Monti, Harlan, Hossain, et al., 2001). An Australian study used intensive interview techniques to discover that rape and incest victims benefited from martial arts as a way to recover from trauma (Ratcliff, Farnworth, & Lenin, 2002). A Chicago study looking at 30 women studying karate found that the experience of martial arts training led to an increased sense of empowerment (Guthrie, 1995).

Dance and movement therapists have been longstanding proponents of using physical strategies with adolescents with behavior disorders. A British survey of 41 dance and movement therapists revealed that 84.5% used movement therapy with teens with behavior disorders, and 54.1% of these therapists used physical techniques with youth with learning problems (Karkou, 2001). Canadian therapists have reported success using a combination of exercise and psychotherapy in the treatment of mental and emotional disorders (Hays, 1999). Shannon, Fallon–Cyr & Fallon–Cyr, 2002 traces the origins of modern body therapies beginning with Reich’s pioneering work on the relationship between the body and its energy. The key process outlined is a “focusing of somatic experiences,” as seen in specialized programs such as Pesso–Boyden system, Rubenfield synergy, bioenergetic analysis, and dance/movement therapy. A study of 38 autistic children’s (ages 3 to 7 years) response to creative movement therapy showed improvements in attentive behaviors and a decrease in stress behaviors (Hartshorn, Olds, Delage, Cullen, & Escalona, 2001).

Yoga has been included in many Asian approaches to psychotherapy. Specifically, Krishna Rao 2000, focuses on how the yoga asanas (body postures and body maneuvers) may provide an avenue for dealing with character armors, tension, and attitudes. Gallo (2002) reports on the use of acupressure techniques in the treatment of psychological traumas, opining that the direct physical intervention allows for the use of a person’s own energy to heal slowly stress–induced mental and physical ailments. Hassan–Schwarz Galle (2000) presents yoga and hypnosis as methods that work synergistically with psychotherapy and target “inner awakening” as a metaphor for exploring the unconscious. Wiener (1999) presents a comprehensive guide to action–centered methods that use physical movements including dance, art, yoga and drama as companions to ongoing psychotherapy treatment plans especially in resistant populations.

Mullen & Cancienne (2003) have included the use of movement to increase self–awareness in physical education classes of middle school
Movement as a Container for Destructive Aggression

children. Instructors used Yoga as a platform to explore other health issues including sex education and career development, noting that combining yoga and psychotherapy could lead to measurable improvements in breathing capacity in 34 asthma patients aged 14 to 65.

In sports literature, martial art is an example of character-building activity. The contention is that an individual who cannot fight is more likely to act belligerently from fear than one who has learned the techniques of fighting. “The resulting belief in one’s ability to win fights removes the motive for belligerence or proving oneself” (Buck, & Kim, 1979 p. 24). We certainly agree that self-confidence lessens the chance of one becoming a victim, or even of attracting interest, to one’s own presence. Fear generates a pheromone that often attracts the attacker. A case in point: one student had an uncanny capacity to “attract” those who wanted to fight him. He joined a karate school because he was often the object of bullying first at school and later in adult life. He claimed that he never deliberately attracted attention to himself. In the context of the dojo, his fearfulness caused all eyes to focus on him. Students commented that he smelled different when he was really scared.

Other martial arts programs have shown some success. Haaland (personal communication, 1998), reports a study of 20 criminally involved youth, 70% of whom successfully completed his program. As the training advanced there here was a significant improvement in classroom behavior with a marked increase in self-respect and self-discipline. In that study, “anxious and wired feelings” were reported in a majority of students seen to be most helped by strenuous physical activity, such as hard workouts and board breaking. Interestingly, meditation also was self-rated as quite useful by nearly 50% of the trainees. These students also gave self-reports of improvement in areas of social competence and affect.

Nosanchuk (1981) interviewed 42 students at various martial arts skill levels and found that longer training is associated with lowered aggressiveness. This study did not find a satisfactory explanation in spite of measurement of improvement in self-control, self-assertiveness, self-esteem, and self-confidence. In a later study, a comparison was made between those trained traditionally with ethical practice integrated and those trained in modern schools that focus only on fighting techniques. Advanced students in the modern schools tended to be more aggressive, while those in the traditional schools were less aggressive. Nosanchuk emphasized the importance of the relationship with the teacher, the ethics and philosophy of the system, and the centrality of nonviolent teaching techniques (Nosanchuck, & McNeil, 1988).
Trulson conducted a more sophisticated study, in which 34 juvenile delinquents were selected on the basis of MMPI scale scores to be trained intensively over a six–month period in one of three settings:

(1) traditional martial arts with emphasis on philosophy and ethics,
(2) modern martial arts with emphasis on fighting, and
(3) no martial arts training but contact with an instructor and aerobic physical activity.

The instructor was the same for each of the groups, in an attempt to control for expectancy effects. After six months, the traditionally trained group had normalized MMPI scores with significantly lower aggressiveness. The group trained in fighting only showed an increase in delinquent tendencies on the MMPI, a significant increase in aggressiveness, and no change indicated in personality factors. In the control group, there was no significant difference in aggressiveness (Trulson, 1986).

Daniels and Thornton (1992) compared 40 young men in a university karate and jujitsu club with 39 who were in campus badminton or rugby clubs. Hostility was measured on the Buss–Durke Hostility Inventory. The martial arts group was significantly less verbally and physically assaultive during training sessions than the other groups. The study controlled for effects of students who wished to present a desirable image for martial arts. Although the subjects did not receive traditional martial arts training; that is, there was not an emphasis on the ethical and meditative aspects of the training, heavy contact during sparing was discouraged, along with an emphasis on mastery of technique and respect for the instructor. In contrast to Nosanchuk’s research, this study shows that a respectful relationship with the instructor and an emphasis on mastery of technique seemed to substitute for the accoutrements and philosophy of traditional training. A sportsmanship curriculum was shown to improve positive class behavior in elementary schools using this intervention as part of the physical education curriculum (Sharpe, 1995).

Pyecha (1970) compared judo practitioners with other sportspeople on personality variables and found that judo practitioners became more warmhearted and easygoing than those in the control groups. Gleser et al. (1992) used modified judo training for a small group of blind, mentally retarded children. Besides improvements in physical fitness, there was a decrease in anxiety and especially notable, an increase in cooperativeness and in helping each other. Rothpearls (1980) review of four studies of the personality traits of martial artists suggested there may be a cathartic release of hostility through training, with more advanced practitioners showing better control over both anxiety and hostility.
Some literature, for example Fuller (1988), suggests that internal, softer martial arts forms, such as aikido, rather than external martial arts styles, such as Tai Kwon Do, may be better suited for psychotherapy. There is face validity to this form of argument since internal styles tend to emphasize self-reflection and self-control, and do not have a repertoire of attack techniques. Instead, they tend to be more defensive in their focus than more overtly aggressive, harder, external styles such as karate. Published experimental studies, although quite limited in number and in sophistication, have tended to be conducted on external styles, yet still show a decrement in both verbal and assaultive hostility.

The exact elements of the martial arts practice that serve a healing function have been a point of speculation. Columbus (1998) attempted to clarify why people practice martial arts. He suggested four key “meanings” for people studying martial arts: (1) protection from criminal victimization, (2) growth and discovery, (3) life transition and (4) task performance. Increased rank has been associated with a pattern of enthusiastic optimism (Kurian, Verdi, Caterino, & Kulhavy, 1994). Ryan, Fredrick, Lepes, Rubio, and Sheldon (1997) found both the martial arts and aerobics have the positive effect of building “intrinsic motivation.” Practicing martial arts was found to improve task completion or mastery orientation (King & Williams, 1997) and martial art achieves the necessary activity parameter to impact positive mood states (Toskovic, 2001). Movement helps mood become more positive. Stevenson (2002) developed a multicomponent intervention to deal with anger in inner-city African American males. Basketball and martial arts were used successfully in a faith-based program to bolster self-confidence. Lantz (2002) used martial arts to help couples and families cope with their conflicts. Parmigiani, Bartolomucci, Palanza, Galli, Rizzi, Brain, and Volpi (2006) showed that testosterone and cortisol levels in Martial arts were not reliably related to outcome of the contests, once more highlighting the enormous individual variation in the complex way individual fighters fight.

Various studies report martial arts and movement in general to be useful in reducing violence and the trauma associated with it. People hurt by direct and indirect exposure to coerciveness in their immediate caretaking home environment shut down and used violence as their shield. Children developing in these coercive families have problems developing empathy, and their aggression develops in symbolic bundles of violent impulses lurking in the developing child. Increasingly sophisticated studies aim at teasing out the key ingredients of the various movement therapies and martial arts. No definitive, empirical answers have been found, but the
studies and anecdotal case reports suggest reasonable hypotheses for using this psychosocial intervention (non–pharmaceutical) for violent behavior in individuals, small groups, and nations.

Our paper takes the position that physical practices begin with the body and attempt to move to the mind under the protection of the instructor with psychotherapeutic skill. Mitrani (1995), influenced by Stern’s early work with infants, emphasizes the holding of these early experiences as body functions or as “psychobiological containers” (page 68) possibly explaining how violent individuals may quickly stop thinking and begin to act in a very aggressive, nonmentalizing, and unminded way as a defensive strategy to ensure survival.

EMBODIMENT OF THE MIND IN THE PHYSICAL SELF: MARTIAL ARTS

The instructor and psychotherapist coconstruct the reality of a container for aggression, the commensal container (Bion, 1970), within which everyone is safe to try “new moves”. The instructor is the overseer of justice, ensuring that aggressiveness is contained and controlled. Self–psychology (Kohut, 1971) posits a psychological process of mirroring with caregiver as a key element in developing a healthy sense of self. Fonagy, Gyorgy, Juris, and Target (2002) describe this early process as an attachment experience of mentalization which

...normally comes about through the child’s experience of his mental states being reflected on, prototypically through experience of secure play with a parent or older child, which facilitates integration of the pretend and psychic equivalence modes, through an interpersonal process that is perhaps an elaboration of the complex mirroring of the infant by the caregiver. (p. 57)

A well–known Indian yogi who participated in the Voluntary Controls Program of the Menninger Clinic once observed that all of the body is in the mind, but not all of the mind is in the body. This rather oversimplified conundrum captures the problem before us: how to cathet the body with “mind.” The mind of a violent individual is trapped in the brain, relegated there from an earlier developmental stage, creating an unminded body1 so to speak. As the mind is embodied over time, in tandem with the relationship with the physical practices instructor, the mind cathects the whole body as an important part of self–expression with the progressive

1Jonathan Lear suggested this phrase.
acquisition and integration of verbal skills, better control and understanding of feeling and self-states, and knowledge of how the body functions.

Embodiment of the mind is a psychoanalytic theory of action, conceptualizing how physical practices assist the violent patient in transforming unacceptable impulses, regulating affect through mentalization, protecting the self, and establishing healthy intimacy. We hope to show that the attentional, perceptual, and in the case of traditional martial arts, the ethical components of the training become more formally psychotherapeutic when embedded in a psychoanalytically informed treatment context.

American College Dictionary 1962, defines embodiment: “to give a concrete form to: express, or exemplify in concrete form; to include in a body; organize.” Traditional psychotherapy often ignores the body and places strict boundaries around physical contact. In contrast, embodiment gives pride of place to the body, creating healing pathways to earlier damaged attachment experiences and giving form and grace to the whole self. Language routes into the conflicted areas are often very circuitous, demand trust, and a capacity for abstraction and psychological mindedness, two qualities rare in violent individuals. Martial arts, with its physical rituals, contains the trauma in a minded, rather than unminded, way. The pathological “acting out” of the violent individual can then be “acted on” in the training ritual. Similarly, dance and movement therapists create physical experiences that lead to self-awareness and exploration of areas of conflict.

Embodiment of mind is a process involving four powerful therapeutic forces:

1. mentalizing,
2. help containing and transforming coercive power dynamics within social relationships,
3. creating healing positive role models with respectful self controlled behavior, and
4. benefits to cognition from training in coordination, attention and overall balance and integration from directed disciplined physical activity.

The mechanism of action of embodiment speaks to the dimensional quality of the relationship between inner reality and social context. Certain functions of mind are developed as part of the normal neurobiological attachment process, referred to by Fonagy and Target, (2002) as “Interpersonal Interpretative Models” or by Levin, (2002) as the “Executive Control Network”. These concepts, rooted in neuroanatomy, describe the
functions of the mind as it reflects and judges others in the social context and regulates its own arousal. Power dynamics described by Twemlow, Sacco and Williams, (1996) also impact how people function in coercive social situations.

The psychodynamic literature increasingly reflects the importance of nonverbal physical communications in understanding how psychotherapy works and how technique can be improved. Stern’s (1985) work, derived from studies of infant–mother communication, suggests that much psychological change results from the nonverbal rather than the words used in dynamic therapies. This implicit component of the relationship involves a patient–therapist resonance with mirroring nonverbal movements, reflecting that implicit connection with the therapist. Stern also feels that there must be a mutual recognition that resonance is important and a feeling that the resonance is special, reflecting a deeper understanding than mere verbal, intellectual, and logical exchange as essential components of the work. Being unable to be spoken about makes the implicit relationship more conscious, intuitive, and special. Ritualized physical practices such as martial arts and yoga make much of that implicit component.

Gaddini (1982) theorizes that there are “...primitive mental experiences of the body which are made up of particular sensations connected to a particular function (originally that of feeding)” (p. 379). The use of the reflective mind evolves from this set of primarily sensation–oriented experiences beginning in the womb. He further points out that the womb is a physical experience alive with sensation. The always–present contact with the internal world of the mother is terminated at birth, and the need to have physical contact with the mother becomes primary. If a caregiver fails in the key element of soothing her baby, then the baby’s world may experienced as a dangerous place, filled with dread and enemies, a projection of the unsoothed internal state of the baby. Violence can thus become “hard wired” into the infant. In this conceptualization, the baby relies on the repetitive physical contact with the mother to help develop a sense of safety. This model uses the idea of a “body–mind–body circuit” to explain “body fantasies” or stored memories of preverbal experiences. Violence may enter a baby’s world through this mechanism and remain insulated from the impact of psychotherapy exclusively reliant on verbal strategies, and the capacity to understand abstract ideas. Gaddini (1987), in a later paper, posits a continuum from the more highly evolved mind states to the more primitive body states. He describes psychoanalysis as the verbal way of moving up and down that continuum, beginning with the
words on the couch and moving into more primitive memories stored in the body.

THE UNMENTALIZED MIND OF THE VIOLENT INDIVIDUAL

From the perspective of mentalization, the trajectory for violence is established early on in development. Interpersonal violence is an important evolutionary adaptation. In certain particularly harsh human environments it is likely to contribute materially to the survival of the individual’s genes and is thus “protected” by natural selection. In other human contexts violence is seriously maladaptive. Obviously, it undermines the possibility of safe productive collaboration with individuals and groups directly concerned with violent conflict. Perhaps more generally and pervasively it undermines the optimization of human capacities for meaning generation, communication and creativity.

Because of the potential usefulness of violence for survival, a significant proportion of human infants are probably born with the potential to be violent (Tremblay, 2000). Several recent longitudinal studies have shown that in a representative sample of children (followed from about two years), half are never significantly aggressive, but about 30% show significant early aggression, which subsides in the majority, leaving only about 3%–5% with high levels of out-of-control, destructive aggression that continues into adolescence and beyond (Cote, Vaillancourt, LeBlanc, Nagin, & Tremblay, 2006; Campbell, Spieker, Burchinal, & Poe, 2006). It seems that many of us make an early choice between a violent and a nonviolent path through life. We have to make the choice early because there is an evolutionary cost to following the physical aggression trajectory: those who are violent are less likely to take part in social collaboration, meaning making, and cultural construction.

So how is an infant to decide soon after birth which path to follow, which is more likely to be productive, in the sense of ensuring survival? Evidently, what is required is some kind of a signaling system, a way in which the infant can learn about the kind of social environment that he is likely to face as he matures. It is hardly surprising then that children who stay on the violent trajectory from infancy to adolescence are far more likely to have been observed to receive hostile, ineffective parenting in early childhood as Cote, et al. (2006) found.

The use of parenting as a signal to the child about the likely environmental demands is an ingenious adaptation. In this way, the parent is capable of signaling even to the newborn the kind of environment he/she might expect. When caregivers do not have the time or resources to devote
attention to the infant, physical aggression more likely is needed to ensure survival. Specifically, the uniquely human capacity to envision mental states in our fellow humans (mentalization) to understand their actions is not compatible with meaningless, destructively violent actions. Thus, the relational aspects of the containing therapeutic alliance, together with the revision of the early pathological attachment experience that violence is necessary for survival, is reformulated within the physical/psychotherapeutic process.

Fonagy’s research demonstrates that this capacity is molded initially in the interactive process of the early attachment system. Mentalization enables children to “read” other people’s minds and grasp the feelings, beliefs, thoughts and intentions underlying human behavior, that of their own and that of others. Mentalization promotes four essential developmental achievements:

1) the achievement of the sense of intentionality and continuity of the self,
2) the capacity for social reciprocity, empathy and the flexible activation of mental representations in response to social context,
3) the ability for self–regulating, limit–setting, affect–modulating and direction–giving functions, and finally
4) the capacity to symbolize, play, fantasize, and use humor.

Fonagy (2003) distinguishes two types of violence. One type he calls representational, where preexisting mentalization fails. In such violent individuals, there is a need to create, in the victim, a repository for an alien traumatized frightened nonmentalizing, disavowed self that can be projected and then destroyed in the violent act. This is done to enable the self to survive contamination and destruction by that toxic alien self, making the self more coherent and safe, in phantasy and by the violent act itself. Violence in the negative, according to Fonagy is by contrast affectless, random, and unprovoked. Such acts, following Green (1999), may be seen as disobjectalized, where the victim has no meaning (mental representation) in the perpetrator’s mind except in a dehumanized, symbolic way. The goal of the violent act is the removal of a perturbation that cannot be regulated; in this form of violence there is no preexisting mentalization.

As we have reported elsewhere in studies of adolescent murderers (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco & Vernberg, 2002) affectlessly violent individuals are not likely to end up in treatment unless it is forced on them through the criminal justice system. To such individuals, the victim symbolizes a concept, not a person, whereas for the representational type at least some humanness exists in their emotional relationship to the
Movement as a Container for Destructive Aggression

victim, i.e., the victim has representational meaning and personal emotional impact. In the case of symbolic violence (violence in the negative), there is often a build up of symbolic injustices with perverse, often sexualized, fantasies that are relieved in the act of violence as ego–syntonic, justified revenge with an aftermath of calm and rational thinking. In representational violence, the perpetrator usually knows the victim, and frequently the act is consummated under the influence of drugs and alcohol in a climate of emotional distress and psychiatric illness. This violence is experienced as ego–dystonic, and usually aggravates rather than relieves the perpetrator’s anxiety. Examples of the former are seen in the fate of adolescents involved in several of the recent school homicides, which are strangely similar to the mindset of the serial killer.

Social–cognitive research into oppositional defiant and conduct disordered young people who fail to mentalize has clearly shown that these young people have a variety of difficulties in processing social information. These difficulties include encoding deficits in which they fail to pay attention to some social cues and are hypervigilant to other, attributional biases, frequently announcing hostile intentions where none are present; misinterpreting social cues, especially affect in others, for example, such a child might be quite surprised that he frightens people, and social problem–solving deficits, where solutions for conflict situations are poor both in quantity and quality. Assuming that many, if not most, representationally violent individuals have traumatic backgrounds, with fearful and frightening caregivers and absent containers for aggression, the resulting self is socially incompetent, uncreative, and often makes errors in attributing intent; that is, it has little value in improving both the individual’s feeling of well being and interpersonal effectiveness. The ritual of physically based therapeutic practices seems to transform the pathological self through healthy identifications. The individual moves away from nonmentalizing fear (fight/flight) to more trusting, modulated self–regulation and developing socially accurate skills in terms of understanding others, giving accurate feedback about attributional bias, and developing a broad repertoire of conflict–resolving and self–defense skills. The following is an example of how martial arts benefited a boy exhibiting symbolic violence in the negative, which began with school bullying.

J. had been expelled from several schools; he was known to ill–treat his peers rather affectlessly, and in one instance, he injured a peer. J. was ordered by the criminal court to seek treatment for his sadistic bullying. J. was ordered by the criminal court to seek treatment for his sadistic bullying. His parents did not consider therapy useful but complied with the court order.
J.’s background included a father who was severely alcoholic, physically abusive to him, and a nonparticipant in much of his upbringing. J.’s mother was “dead” in Andre Green’s sense. There was severe domestic violence, and his parents divorced when he was 8 years old. More physical abuse by his mother’s boyfriends followed. Because of poor his social skills, including lack of manners and incapacity to interpret social cues, J. was humiliated at school by his peers. His sadism increased after puberty as a pathological identification with his father, who had taught him to “whack” anybody that attacked or bullied him.

His therapist decided to utilize martial arts, as well as psychotherapy, as part of the treatment but did so with some obvious trepidation. His therapist regularly attended martial arts lessons and used them as opportunities to solidify concepts that had been discussed during their sessions. Over the period of his martial arts training, J. illustrated many of the aspects of a traumatized individual, terrified by softness or gentleness in others, which in turn provoked in him a macho stance that was grandiose, demeaning, and humiliating of others. On more than one occasion, he would take this out on female students but each time was able to apologize publicly and perform services as part of reparation. He frequently over– or underestimated the aggressiveness of opponents in fighting, with the consequence that few liked him or wished to spar with him.

Remarkably, the boy remained in martial arts training for five years and achieved a black belt. Part of his black belt training required that J. perform a community service. At first, he wanted to charge for this service, but eventually he reluctantly complied with the black belt requirements. J. chose to teach self–defense skills to severely physically handicapped children in a local institution. These children, who were confined to wheel chairs, were often physically assaulted or threatened. At first, he felt overwhelmed by the task, since many of these children could not speak and were brain damaged. Later, he was able to talk with his therapist and with the instructor about how much these severely impaired children frightened him, describing “flashbacks,” as he called them, to his earlier abuse and to his fears of being injured or brain damaged when he was little. Eventually, J. developed an exquisite sensitivity for these children, and became attuned to their limited capacity for physical and verbal skills. He eventually became a legend in the residential setting. He was a model of community service, and he was quite proud. There was a noticeable increase in his capacity for sensing the internal states of others.

By developing meaningful personal relationships guided by an exquisitely sensitive instructor and therapist, the boy was able to move to
represent these damaged children as meaningful relationships and ameliorate his toxically spoiled alien self. The crippled children that he worked with were, of course, less of a threat to him than his father, and he was protected by the containing framework of the martial arts community, the structured relationship with the instructor, and the open communication between the instructor and therapist. Thus, it gave him enough space to think about his own traumatized thoughts and feelings and to verbalize them with the assistance of a therapist. After the community service, J. did much better at school. He graduated from high school, went to college, and obtained an undergraduate degree before entering the military.

He then entered the military in a dangerous Special Forces division, which enabled him to continue to reflect in a leadership role there. It was a remarkable shift towards mentalizing in this otherwise sadistic young person. Eventually he became part of a contemporary theater of war, and wrote a touching letter from the frontline about a situation in which he had contained his fear and used his training to avoid a gruesome death in the line of fire. Noticeably, there was no bitterness or revenge, but instead a detached and wistful disappointment in the political leaders whom he felt relished killing and erroneously felt that war would solve anything.

**EMBODIMENT IN THE SOCIAL CONTEXT**

Embodiment is a process that also occurs in a social group context, affecting the individual in that context. An embodied group is a work group acting in a coordinated way to get things done for the good of both the group and the individual. As the child grows up in a family, he or she eventually enters society’s first nonfamily social context, the school. Schools often over focus on the use of verbal techniques both to teach and control students’ behavior. Our approach suggests a different concept: to make ideas real: action is required. Doing something, as in physical education, sports programs, and the altruistic module of the Peaceful Schools Program (Twemlow, Sacco & Williams, 1996), suggests the possibility for actions to stimulate mental processes. For example, being competent to handle a bully is self–reinforcing, and might induce an elevation in self–esteem (a mental state). Getting beyond the narcissistic focus is contained in the altruistic idea that doing good for others also helps the altruistic individual. The Peaceful Schools program encourages such actions to embody the mind, actualized in the role of the helpful bystander, a natural group leader who is selected for two main natural leadership skills. The first is that his or her actions are motivated to benefit to the group as a whole, not individual promotion. Second, the helpful
bystander has an intuitive knowledge about how to use the group as a whole to diminish the power of the bully. The integration of physical process and mental activity in the classroom creates a large group embodiment of mind. These ideas are spelled out in detail in Twemlow, Fonagy, and Sacco (2004).

The Peaceful Schools Project (Twemlow, Fonagy & Sacco, 2002; Twemlow, Sacco, & Twemlow, 2007) was a randomized, controlled trial of a systemic intervention to reduce violence and bullying in Kindergarten through grade 5 elementary schools, involving more than 3,000 children. As part of its approach, the project utilized a martial–arts–based training method called The Gentle Warrior Program (Twemlow & Sacco, 1998; Twemlow, Nelson, Vern, Biggs, Fonagy, & Twemlow, et al., in revision, 2007). This intervention uses as a core concept the “Gentle Warrior,” that is, an individual who is strong, capable of fighting and defending himself, but also is altruistic, gentle, compassionate, and respectful of others in the community, as in Nietzsche’s idea of the utopian leader, “a Roman Caesar with Christ’s soul.” Kaufmann, 1967 Trained instructors use a lesson plan emphasizing

1. cognitive coping skills with capacities for self–regulation, including methods of recognizing angeriness and fear in self and others with relaxation and self–regulating techniques for controlling fear;
2. physical skills derived from defensive martial arts, including stable stances when defending one’s self, ways of deflecting punches, grabs, pushes, pulls, body slams, and various other aggressive actions, and falls without hurting oneself.
3. reflective (mentalizing) skills, including discussion of the warrior code of conduct and its values, reading stories with morals that illustrate aspects of the values of the warrior code. Extensive time is also spent in role playing, where children assume the role of bully (victimizer), victim, and bystander to reinforce understanding the mindset connected with the roles and how to manage them.

Table I illustrates these ethical principles, emerging from such training as conceptualized by a 12–year–old boy in several haiku, as part of his black belt project.

This intervention theorized that violence in the school is dependent not only on the victim, victimizer and their relationship, but also on the audience of bystanders (members of the social context). The bystanders facilitate and keep violence going through active participation (bully or aggressive bystander), passive, fearful participation (allowing themselves to be used by the bully—passive or victim bystander), or aspects of denial
and avoidance (avoidant and abdicating bystander). Conversely, helpful (altruistic) bystanders can reverse the violence–inducing social process by activating the positive power of the group through action and psychological modeling. In this social interaction, these roles were hypothesized to be cocreated by the total social climate of bystanders, including parents, the school board and surrounding community, teachers, administrators, support staff, and children. Thus, the martial arts component of this program teaches cognitive skills, to create a background of safety and a feeling of well–being in a holding environment (Winnicott, 1956, 1962; Sandler, 1960), with instructors responding to the appropriate developmental level of the child. Role playing helps children process negativity in nondestructive ways. The commitment of the whole school to the program reinforces a secure attachment experience in which human relationships are highly valued (rather than dismissed as secondary to material and competitive success). Regular workshops encourage community members to become informed and involved. Children are encouraged to assist in cleanup and other helpful activities in the community. The program

Table 1  THE GENTLE WARRIOR CODE OF CONDUCT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benevolence</th>
<th>Courage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling for others</td>
<td>Showing bravery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being gentle with people</td>
<td>Helping others at a risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroying hatred</td>
<td>Giving of yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hide beyond the truth</td>
<td>Stand up for what’s right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for your destiny</td>
<td>No matter what people think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sun shines the light</td>
<td>Believe in yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Politeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand up for people</td>
<td>Showing openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t give a thought to yourself</td>
<td>Being polite with the truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show others the way</td>
<td>Accepting others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control</td>
<td>Veracity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding back again</td>
<td>Showing truthfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping your wits about you</td>
<td>Lies are carried beyond bounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never letting go</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing the right way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Become one with all that is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness of mind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Created by Dustin Silverman, a 12–year–old boy, at the time of writing, with black belt, (shodan) rank from the School of Martial and Meditative Arts, Topeka, Kansas. These haiku were written from his own understanding of the code based on his years of practice.
encourages children to keep in touch with peers who are sick or absent from school by actively engaging them in the classroom process while they are at home. The embodiment process in the Gentle Warrior Program used an action–oriented mode of learning familiar to young children to reinforce and “remind the body.” The consolidation of the embodiment process is assisted not only by the appeal to the mind to train the body, but also the converse. Typically, we assume mental states create physical responses, but physical actions also induce mental states. Thus, the training of the helpful bystander in altruistic actions is self–reinforcing from this perspective and directly assists reflective (mentalizing) verbalization and consolidation of these skills.

In comparison to the control conditions, the peaceful schools showed a significant reduction over three years in self–reports by children that aggression was a legitimate way of solving interpersonal problems. There was a marked increase in helpful bystanding, that is, a bystander who would altruistically help settle down fights and violence, protect victims from bullies, and try to reform bullies. Relational and overt aggression, as measured by peer nomination together with aggressive (bully, bystanding) and overt victimization, were significantly reduced. Peer nomination, self–report and teacher report showed a reduction in aggressive bystanding. There was also a significant decrease in off–task behaviors in the classroom, as observed by blind raters, thus improving the conditions for learning. A substudy with a multiple baseline design (Fonagy, Twemlow, Vernberg, Sacco, & Little, 2005) also showed a significant increase in academic performance in children who had spent two or more years in Peaceful Schools Programs. Another substudy (Jacobs, Vernberg, Twemlow, & Fonagy, in preparation) of bystanding behavior, in a sample of 305 third and fourth grade students, demonstrated the importance of teacher attitude in supporting that aggression is not legitimate for both boys and girls. Girls who felt more strongly connected with the school had a more significant “aggression–is–not–legitimate” attitude and showed more helpful bystander behavior than boys. Conversely, if teachers supported aggression as a legitimate way of solving problems, there was more aggressiveness in such schools and less helpful bystanding behavior. Analysis of children in Gentle Warrior classes showed a reduction in victimization of others and an increase in helpful bystanding in boys (but not in girls) rated by the instructor as successful in learning embodiment skills (Twemlow et al., submitted). Overall, it appears that the key factor in shifting the climate of violence in these elementary schools depends, in large part, on the actions of children who become more understanding and empathic for
Movement as a Container for Destructive Aggression

victimization (helpful bystanders) and more directly helpful to others. Being less afraid of intervening when victimization occurs, changes over time to a social valuing of helpfulness over powerfulness.

Martial arts do not use discipline for punishment’s sake, but for the pursuit of self-awareness, protection of the needy, and the integration of the mind and body to perfect the physical elements of the martial arts techniques to enable these ends to be met. Martial arts training in the social climate of a traditional dojo become a direct way to improve therapeutically self-awareness of physical movement and the inner control of breathing and emotions, such as fear and anger. This training teaches the students how to relax even while very physically active, improving the capacity to respond correctly. Inner affective regulation builds systematically while the student learns the physical aspects of a martial arts move. It is impossible to perfect a martial arts technique if the student is tense, out of control, angry, or inattentive, since these lead to being off balance and committing errors, which only are correctable in a relaxed mindset. Internal states may be directly impacted by the martial arts instructor, who may discuss (help) the process of inner control and its impact on successful ways of handling aggression in other social contexts. These factors are now discussed.

FACTOR ONE: EMBODIED SELF-REGULATION (MENTALIZATION)

It is often difficult to engage certain populations in discussions about violence. Purely cognitive, “how-to” approaches are usually tolerated and dismissed by delinquent teens. Martial arts can offer an opportunity to express, and put into physical motion, some of the trauma experiences. One example of how a martial arts group fosters mentalization among gang-involved, violent adolescents involves the use of martial arts techniques in a group at a residential program. The process created a self-regulating structure, making sense of the random street fighting:

Fourteen racially mixed, violent adolescents in a secure, community-residential placement participated in martial arts/life skills training. The group combined discussion and martial arts, alternating each during a 90-minute lesson. The martial arts component stressed physical escapes from various street-fighting holds, such as headlocks, full nelsons, and hair grabs. No attack techniques were taught, no one in the group was forced to participate in the physical practice. Approximately half of the group never did any strenuous physical exercises, instead only participating in the
breathing, relaxation, and stretching exercises. Everyone participated in
the circle talks that followed the physical segments of the group.

In a group of this type, the leader must be both a martial arts instructor
and therapist. Martial arts engages the peer leadership, individuals primar-
ily gang involved, who had a great deal of street fighting experience. The
instructor set the simple physical rules: the amount of physical power used
in the techniques would be balanced. The point of the training was to offer
ways to avoid conflict. The harder the youth tried to hold onto the
instructor, the more balanced power the instructor would use in escaping
the attacker’s grasp. The ideal to learn the technique was a half–speed
practice.

The group began with stretching, breathing, and relaxation exercises. Then, the mat became the focus of the group. The instructor invited a
youth to demonstrate a hold, which the instructor would then escape,
explain, and teach. Initially, the young men challenged the leader’s con-
taining ability. They needed to know if the instructor was “for real.” This
job typically fell to the house enforcer, who would put a crushing lock on
the instructor to the glee of the group. Using a simple behind the knee
pressure point and hair grab, the instructor would escape and the youth
would hit the mat, thus establishing the instructor’s credibility.

Most young people wanted to know about pressure points. They
practiced on the instructor and on each other. The youths began to
describe the physical fights they had been in and how they had been
physically injured on the street. The youths expressed their most feared
attack methods, and the group would explore ways of escaping.

Discussions were very frank, and dialogues covered sex, love, peace,
and self–control. No self–disclosure was required. Discussions involved
exploring the difference between pleasure and peace. The instructor posed
the question about how long a person could take any pleasure from a sex
act. The obviously unsophisticated members would always nervously say
“forever,” but the more experienced members knew that when you feel
pleasure in one way for a brief time, it is natural to want to change it to
some other pleasant feeling, posture, or act. Peace and self–control were
offered as alternatives. Self–control drills such as breathing techniques and
mental imagery, marked the end of each group session. The students were
taught the uses of breathing and mental imagery. One such drill involved
“holding a poker face” when being verbally insulted and provoked. This
often was made into a competition, with the youth winning residential
privileges or reduced punishments (this residence used a point and level
system of behavior control). The drill had the person stand with his back
against the wall. He would try to hold a straight face while the rest of the group verbally attacked him. The only rule was no physical contact.

The group members gave permission to curse, use racial slurs, denigration of mothers, grandmothers, gender identity, etc. In–your–face contempt, screaming, gesturing, and even lewd dancing was allowed. Residential staff members were not allowed in the group, but the staff agreed to the suspension of the house rules about such conduct during the group session. The instructor went first. A timekeeper with a stopwatch timed how long the person could “look past” such taunting. Initially, only the instructor could make it past one minute. Then, the group caught on.

The youths eventually became quite proficient at the “poker face.” However, they were disciplined for using the technique when staff confronted them. The group rules were clear in not allowing this practice outside the group. Eventually, a karate class was located in the community, and the youths who wanted to practice were able to join it while in the residential program.

FACTOR TWO: CONTAINMENT AND REGULATION OF UNCONSCIOUS POWER DYNAMICS

Twemlow, Fonagy, and Sacco (2002) outline several key elements forming the foundation for children to feel safe at home and school. The first element is the “container,” which can be seen in the dojo as the ring of seated students and the instructor monitoring the physical techniques or sparring. The second key ingredient is feeling held in a containing structure, that is one responsive to developmental needs. Finally, the dojo, the relationship to the martial arts instructor, and the history and traditions of the style create an open social system with a sense of continuity, belonging, and meaning. Members then feel safe to try new ways to physically master techniques, as well as develop the social and emotional skills, i.e., they feel connected to an attachment system that supports their growth.

The regulation of unconscious power dynamics in social contexts is also a key component to the achievement of a nonviolent response to the challenge. Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco (2004) articulate the social roles of bully, victim, and bystander in dialectical terms based on unconscious power dynamics, defined as the conscious and unconscious process by which an individual or group coerces another individual or group against their will. The bystanding “audience” splits off the sadism, projecting it into the victimizer retaining the libidinal as enjoyable, to maintain a cohesive self, and yet to participate in the dialectic. The victim and victimizer embody these limited roles, and often know afterwards how
limited they are. These complex roles are obviously cocreated and essential to each other. To consider them separate and independent entities leads to ineffective interventions. By ritualizing and desensitizing the individual in the context of the martial arts relationship, traumatized people (who are also violent) may achieve a greater opportunity to create the space between thought and action and develop an affective connection so that the victim and victimizer both become meaningful, rather than dehumanized.

In contrast to the victim/victimizer/bystander relationship, the martial arts dojo and rituals demand earned respect and abhor social humiliation. There is a “ranking system” where black belts are given clear priority; everyone bows in respect to the senior instructors and to one another throughout the training time. Students and instructors bow to each other in respect before stepping onto the dojo workout area. When two students are sparring or practicing a physical technique, the bystanding class watches; they usually sit upright in an attentive and respectful way around the students practicing the physical techniques. Everyone feels safe to try new things, fail, make stupid moves, and look foolish.

In other research (Twemlow & Sacco, 2002), we hypothesize that social systems with high degrees of humiliating coercion and disconnected relationships between individuals lead to dismissing the value of human relationships leading, eventually, to both violence and terrorism. An example of the importance of the social climate and a securely attached, containing environment in a safe context is illustrated in the following vignette, where the martial arts training was coordinated with the treatment of a seriously bullied man with mental retardation and severe psychiatric problems.

A 30-year-old, mentally retarded (IQ 58) man was exhibiting outbursts of physical aggression toward his mother, who was his sole custodian after divorce. The father was involved but unable to communicate with the mother, because of a restraining order. Both father and mother of this disabled young man shared an interest and desire in maximizing their son’s capacity to live a normal life. The client was bullied by many of his peers because of his disability.

The patient was mildly overweight when he started training, and had just begun therapy and a course of psychiatric medication. Many of his interactions were echolalic. His body was rigid, and he had extreme reactions to anyone placing their hands on him (we later learned he had witnessed domestic violence at home). Although he loved to wear his karate *gi* (uniform) to class, he often acted inappropriately by speaking out of turn, giggling, repeating, and running out to the bathroom. The
instructor and class shared the task of working with him, pulling him into line or correcting his behavior. This altruistic behavior helped create a mentalizing, other-directed mindset in the students.

He followed the basic drills and modified class activities; he was able to learn to fall, escape from grabs, defend from the ground, and stretch and relax. He enjoyed the mock fighting, and each student would have a chance to spar with him. He was encouraged to defend himself, feel a part of the fighting circle, and stay with the one-minute time limit per round. The class always took the sparring seriously, bowing to him, shaking hands, and then creating safe, but high-energy, action during the round. Then after his turn at sparring, the client sat down and watched the other, much more intense sparring matches. He was always very tired and relaxed after class.

Both parents shared transporting him to and from class and often watched the client perform a new skill. The class became fond of him as a special student and not some kind of stigmatized mascot, and he was definitely included as part of the social climate. The combination of Depakote, Zyprexa and the martial arts training resulted in a 12-month period without physical outbursts at home. The parents proudly reported to the instructors their son’s success at not exploding and following through on his responsibilities. The move here was that he was accepted, held contained and secure in the attachment system that responded best to his needs to feel accepted and useful. The dojo models a community in miniature. Defective and less capable members of any community enrich diversity, encourage altruism and improve the life of healthy non-defective members by encouraging selflessness.

FACTOR THREE: MARTIAL ARTS STIMULATES HELPFUL BYSTANDING

A great deal of aggressive behavior is fueled by the presence of an audience that passively enjoys the sadism of a bully humiliating his victim (bully bystander). The bystander is part of the social context that promotes violence and aggression (Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2004). Even to those who profess nonviolence, violent behavior is often exciting and very stimulating to watch. Many aggressive youths motivate others to be aggressive by cheering violent behavior and bullying. This bystanding can be active or passive, open or quiet, but in any case, the result is the acceleration of violent behavior. Martial arts classes stress the role of the helpful bystander. Students help one another practice physical moves. The instructor teaches the techniques and is available to help students. Passive
watching and detached observing is discouraged in a martial arts class. It is the students who also teach and adjust one another’s techniques. Instructors motivate students to tune into each other and to work with partners and in small groups. Everyone strives for improved technique, not domination. There is no enjoyment in hurting another student. This creates a collective consciousness of being a helpful bystander.

The martial arts training area is a potential treatment milieu. When a disruptive student first arrives and begins to agitate a karate class, the group joins with the instructor in clamping down on the unfocused behavior. The emphasis in this approach is the milieu and the group experiences not the physical techniques themselves. The process is illustrated by a vignette illustrating the value of martial arts in creating a helpful bystander role rather than a bully bystander role with mockery, exclusion and rumor mongering.

A group of young women from a residential program for aggressive female adolescents participated in a weekly martial arts group. One young woman, was heavily pierced and tattooed. She was obese, Caucasian, and described herself as “punk.” The rest of the group were Latin and African–American young women. She was always a discipline problem at the residential program. She fought with her peers and did not fit in. When she came to the martial arts class, the instructor invited her in to sit against the wall and watch. She reluctantly did and the class proceeded. Other students joined her along the wall. Then, the instructor had everyone sit against the wall; everybody became bystanders to one student and instructor practicing self–defense against a knife.

This exercise fascinated her and she was joined by the rest of the class cheering on the student against the instructor, who was thrusting with a wooden knife. Eventually, she jumped in and quickly mastered the technique of “looking in the eye” not at the knife. The group cheered her on. She lasted the minute and a half of the sparring drill. The group cheered her name as she eluded the knife attacks. The group accepted her as they joined with her in a helpful bystanding role during the drill. She joined the class at the end of the session for breathing exercises and the ritualistic bowing and respectful handshaking.

The structure of a typical karate class reinforces the values of being helpful and respectful. The role of the bystander is redefined. The value of being helpful and compassionate is reinforced in the social rituals of the martial arts class. The formal rank structure helps antiauthoritarian youths develop tolerance for discipline as it applies to the learning of martial arts techniques. This process occurs in the dojo where violent attacks are
simulated and defensive techniques taught. This process leads to increased
self-confidence and an increased probability of martial arts students
becoming helpful bystanders in situations beyond the karate school.
Becoming a teacher is part of the training and allows the student to
experience a different role, as leader for the class as a whole. Very
disturbed students are quite difficult exacting taskmasters.

FACTOR FOUR: TRANSFERENCE LEVERAGE

Violence, in the research literature, has been related to the absence of
fathers. Marks (2002) comments on the role of the father in a child’s
development: “He (the father) provides the mother and infant with some
relief from each other, gives weight to the infant’s separate reality and may
also influence the infant’s capacity to symbolize” (p. 98).

Fonagy and Target (2002) refer to the father role as the “. . . originator
of triadic psychic capacities specifically symbol formation” (p. 46). In the
martial arts treatment context, the road through a violent symptom to its
cause involves the humanization of depersonalized, internalized mental
representations (unthinkable in the abstract verbal sense), using the body’s
movement to remember and reactivate positive attachment experiences.

For example, the code of respect inherent in traditional martial arts is
an ongoing “container” and multimodal “mirror” based on fixed, non-
coercive models for managing power for strong aggressive, antiauthoritarian
behavior. Respect is a necessary first step in martial arts. The leader
then earns some transference equity (through idealization) by leading the
group in skill building through teaching control and modification of
coercive power dynamics, which are transformed into satisfying skill
mastery rather than a bullying sadomasochistic ritual that excites but does
not create contentment.

A group designed for adolescents living in a residential program and
who had a history of serious problems with violence, incorporated Japa-
nese karate into its more traditional psychodynamically informed residen-
tial program. The teacher demonstrated defensive and self-protective
drills with a variety of self-enhancing messages that he gently and lovingly
elicited from the group members. Teaching these adolescents in a tradi-
tional setting is difficult. Sensei James is an African American black belt
from the Bronx. He is a product of UNITAS, a program for street kids
located in the Bronx, New York2. His tattered black belt and bandana

Fn2

2Personal communication with Unitas Director, Ed Eissman and Unitas Social Worker, Reed
instantly linked him to the kids. He immediately connected to this small group of young men and women as a loving and unconditional physical motivator, who also encouraged them to speak about their traumas with each other and with him.

When the kids would complain, “I can’t do this,” Sensei James would gently reply, “You can’t do this, YET.” The kids attached to him and stayed with the structured physical exercises. They did not want to leave after 90–minute lessons. Sensei James began classes with “listening drills,” which involved three positions with Japanese names. He played a type of “Simon Says” in watching the line of students either get it right or make a mistake. He always cheerfully corrected and encouraged everybody until everyone got it right. He then asked everyone to applaud themselves. He always had a section of his drills where he asked his students to close their eyes and do the physical techniques from “body memory.” While their eyes were closed, he would repeat sayings designed to empower and increase self concept, such as, “I am in control of my body. My mind is powerful; I can do whatever I work at; I am respectful; and I am polite.” As he asked the students to repeat after him, he would repeat the statement and ask for a “louder and prouder” response. The kids echoed the response together and with gusto. They were moving and reflecting. Thus, he became a substitute attachment figure for the children with the strength to listen understand and not retaliate.

Martial arts students must accept guidance from a teacher that he/she respects. The out–of–control, violent individual senses the need for containment. Interactions that do not embody his or her mind creates anxiety and sometimes a retaliatory anger in which the helper/therapist is attacked. Failure to deal with one’s own ambivalence about treating violent patients can be dangerous and nontherapeutic. The young student reluctantly accepts such unacceptable injunctions (involving obedience and self–discipline) in order to master a desired skill, which also happens to aid in the cause of developmental maturation. Thus, the transition from unperceived, paradoxical injunction to an insightful self–aware coherent individual is achieved.

CONCLUDING COMMENTARY

Physical movement in the context of psychodynamic psychotherapy is seen as a critical link in reaching the violent, nonmentalizing individual who is “acting out” aggression. These patients are notoriously resistant to talking therapy. Abstract words and ideas seem not to “reach” the violent individual. Embodiment is the process of directly addressing the kines-
Movement as a Container for Destructive Aggression

thetic core of early attachment experiences. The goal of physical movement in this context is to provide a safe container and a healing non-coercive social context, which allows violent individuals a chance to re-tool their experiences under the guidance of a healthy ethical role model.

This style of intervention is not just exercise or recreation. Movement is used as a therapeutic tool for embodying the mind, needing spocific training and skills. Early attachment experiences are preverbal, thus many childhood traumas experienced early in an infant’s life are locked away in sensorimotor memory, incapable of being accurately and directly verbalized. Movement can enhance the access to these traumas and offer a physical enactment in the transference that is immediately accessible to therapeutic effort, and begins an alliance that can be used to sustain lasting change derived from self-awareness, in therapists appropriately trained. An aggression protocol that highlights such an approach was developed at The Menninger Clinic HOPE unit, treating refractory patients from all over the world. The protocol requires a trained nurse, preferably with martial arts or Special Forces military training to work closely and regularly with the angry (often depressed) patient. The goal is to verbalize their thoughts and associations while physically working out on a punching bag, a variety of easily obtained hand mitts, and other martial arts equipment. The patient then journals the associations and connects them with often childhood abuse memories. The goal here is to see the connection with repeated past pathological patterns and to thus expand self-awareness. Many healthcare facilities are promoting wellness programs. Weaving these laudable ventures into treatment is lagging behind, unfortunately, since there is a lot more to this process than feeling positive, exercising, and engaging wellness pursuits.

Acknowledgements: Our thanks are due particularly to Kyoshi Stephen Twemlow, chief instructor, and the students of the Topeka School of Martial and Meditative Arts, who inspired much of this work and who were patiently open to our sometimes radical suggestions. We also thank Master Robert Morini, Sensei James Arana and Reed Larsen of the Springfield School of Martial and Meditative Arts. These papers are based on a presentation to the Ninth Annual Multi-Cultural Conference on Children and Families titled, Historical Trauma and Community Healing: The Endurance of Cultural Character, presented by the University of New Mexico, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Albuquerque, New Mexico, May 11–12, 1995.

REFERENCES


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Movement as a Container for Destructive Aggression


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