



Self-Defense Training to Reduce the Fear of Violence Among Women and Girls

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Community contributes to the experience of fear and risk of violence within a girl's and woman's lived reality. Girls and women also try to navigate an internalized gendered body discourse that deems them not capable of self-protection. The purpose of this research was twofold. First, this research describes self-defense as a navigating tool to mitigating gender violence expectations in daily lives filling a gap in self-defense literature for women's self-empowerment. Second, this research begins an understanding of how empowered self-defense could address the fear of high-risk environments and increase confidence. The study took place in Tijuana, Mexico, in 2017. The post-self-defense seminar questionnaires indicated that all the women understood the risk of violence and the types of violence encountered. Ninety-eight percent of the participants stated they would use real-life techniques in potential confrontations. This improved capability of using techniques can reduce perceived fear of violence by this group of women and girls in Tijuana, Mexico.

Keywords: violence risk reduction, self-defense, physical feminism, social context, reflexive narrative

Mexico is depicted as one of the most violent countries for women. "In January 2019, an average of 10 women were murdered every day" (Wattenbarger, 2019, para. 4). Wattenbarger (2019) refers to this as femicide. Femicide is the killing of women because they are women. Romero and Hernandez (2008), analyzing violence against women, reported that those under the age of 15 had a high risk of dying from assault. Homicides occur primarily between the ages of 20 and 34 and are attacked by strikes, weapons, and strangulation. Understanding the social context of women in terms of fear and risk of violence can sway how a self-defense seminar can be adapted to increase participants' physical and mental well-being. In addition, the literature on gendered violence in Mexico predominantly focuses on the sex trades (Katsulis et al., 2010; Katsulis et al., 2015), border communities (Tellez, 2008), and women who seek work at maquiladoras (factories) (Livingston, 2004).

Calderon et al. (2019) reported organized crime and violence in Mexico through 2018. The authors are associated with Justice in Mexico based in San Diego. The program has been compiling data and analyzing trends for the past ten years. The report indicates an increase in violent crime, homicide, and victims through 2018. The program suggests that organized crime is a significant contributor and localized to certain areas. Finally, Tijuana was placed in the top ten most violent municipalities in 2018 (Calderon et al., 2019). The authors of the report indicate a continued crisis in terms of risk of violence and that, to improve community security, the government needs to address this issue.

The evidence points to Mexico being a high-risk area of violence against women. Violence against women can be connected to the machismo culture in Mexico (Wattenbarger, 2019). A patriarchal society where women and girls have less power, privilege, and opportunities than men (Mendoza et al., 2021). The literature indicates that self-defense is an efficacious approach that enhances women's self-confidence and can decrease the possibility of incidents of violence toward them (Senn et al., 2015). The purpose of this research is to understand the fear and risk of violence among girls and women in Tijuana, Mexico, and the potential for a self-defense course to reduce these feelings and perceptions. This study furthers previous research by extending and connecting the potential impact of self-defense in its social context, specifically within this perceived high-risk Mexican community. Research conducted by Hollander (2010, 2014), Senn et al. (2015), Brecklin and Middendorf (2014), Cermele (2004), and Orchanski et al. (2008) reported on women in university and college-based courses. Though I do not diminish the potential risk on higher education campuses in Canada and the United States, this research is unique in exploring more vulnerable populations. I did not approach the elite of Mexican society but the everyday women and girls in the Tijuana community where the seminars took place. Therefore, this research addresses the limitations of previous research where the risk or potential risk of violence is higher. I have brought a set of skills to an extremely unique socioeconomic demographic, not seen in the previous literature, that may potentially reduce perceived risk.

The research gained institutional review board approval at Wright State University (IRB #06147). The internal research fund at Wright State University – Lake Campus, the regional campus, was able to provide support for travel to Tijuana. All other expenses were self-funded.

Physical Feminism

Gendered discourse, for this article, will focus on the language, representations, and socio-historical images that have represented the female body as incompetent and weak. Also,

physical feminism will be defined as an approach that empowers the female body and challenges gender norms (Shelby, 2020). Dowling (2000) describes this gendered body as "frozen." She suggests that the frailty myth creates a restricted body where females are labeled weak and incapable. This perception of the female body is used as a form of social control. Self-defense training can challenge this perception of the gendered body and the discourse that supports it. The benefit of this challenge is that *thawing* the body empowers women. Thawing refers to the body becoming unrestricted. Furthermore, self-defense is for everyday life as it fosters changes in women's relationships with their bodies in such a way as to decrease their fears of violence (Rentschler, 1999), potentially reducing risk.

According to Cahill (2009), self-defense challenges gender role assumptions. It situates rape in a social and political context that empowers women within that context by contending that "feminist self-defense classes seek to denaturalize the threat of sexual violence" (370). Still, Brecklin (2008) suggests that outcomes associated with assertiveness, self-esteem, and self-efficacy eliminate fear, while Hollander (2010) contends feminist self-defense (FSD or Empowered Self-Defense, ESD) training increases self-confidence, reduces fear, and empowers women. The ESD approach compliments physical feminism. It is used to disrupt dominant gendered discourse and put the body into action (Channon, 2018). ESD is not necessarily focused on martial arts training but on empowerment. Power is experienced through girls' and women's voices and bodies (Jordan and Mossman, 2021). McCaughey (1998) argues that self-defense "confounds the script of the helpless female victim and the unstoppable male attacker; she is refusing the sex-class status that the attack attempts to impose" (p. 296), hence challenging gender ideology. The value of ESD is its ability to redefine what women can and cannot do. It encourages female participants to understand that they do not have to be victims. In turn, this may reduce the tendency to self-blame and enable them to become empowered through physical self-protection. These approaches and perspectives are essential in addressing violence against women in a patriarchal society such as Mexico, where stereotypical gender norms exist.

Aaltonen (2012) offers self-defense as a practical way of resisting gender ideology and victimization. McCaughey (1998) indicates that rape culture accepts men's violence against women as usual and women's resistance to this violence as unnatural. Society envisions a male body that is aggressive, strong, and dominant and a female body that is passive, weak, and submissive. Self-defense challenges this body discourse and, in turn, challenges rape culture. Gendered bodies are understood as socially constructed and, therefore, malleable. Here lies the efficacy of self-defense to reduce the fear and risk of violence.

Hollander (2010) presents three reasons for women's participation in a feminist self-defense course: women have heard positive testimonials, women want a more assertive, confident, and capable self, and women fear being caught in a violent situation. Women who have experienced assault tend to gravitate to self-defense programs. Findings by Brecklin and Ullman (2004) indicate that survivors of assault pursue training, including those who had experienced severe attacks. In addition, Brecklin's (2004) extensive analysis of 3,187 students from a national survey indicated that some women who participated in self-defense courses had experienced childhood or adulthood victimization. Past experiences seem to spur women to take self-defense courses, perhaps because of the programs' potential to help women recover from the effects of violence in their lives.

Physical feminism (McCaughy, 1998) enables women to increase or improve self-defense skills, body empowerment, self-confidence, and physical and mental health. However, the lived reality of women's and girls' lives are complicated. Though the research within the self-

defense movement indicates empowerment, self-defense is more than just attending seminars and classes; it must be placed within the women's and girls' social context. Self-defense provides a tool for an embodiment that can be used to navigate the lived reality for women and girls, in this case, in Tijuana, Mexico.

The Body and Trauma

Research has consistently found a correlation between the experience of abuse as a child and unhealthy behaviors during adulthood (Monnat & Chandler, 2015). One explanation for the association is that the body holds trauma within it. For example, the body produces adrenaline and cortisol that help it respond to impending danger, creating the fight or flight response (Forkey, 2018). David et al. (2006) discussed the longevity of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in their study of the impact of self-defense intervention on women who had experienced military sexual trauma. This study was a small quantitative study with a sample of 10 women. While small and uncontrolled, the findings suggested that the self-defense treatment increased self-confidence and provided relief to symptoms of PTSD. Also referring to the trauma/body connection, D'Andrea et al. (2011) suggested that chronic environmental exposure alongside mental distress will have health consequences. This distress can be similar to the constant exposure to violence. Meditation (Ortiz & Sibinga, 2017) in terms of mindfulness and yoga (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2020) have been used as a treatment for adverse childhood experiences (ACES), providing additional support for interventions targeting the body. Here, the mindfulness practice in meditation and yoga could increase self-awareness and reduce stress. The study reported here continues the investigation into the impact of chronic stress related to the potential for violence on the everyday lived reality that women and girls face in Tijuana, Mexico.

Methods

Research Design and Procedures

Using a feminist paradigm, specifically a physical feminist and empowered self-defense approach, the purpose of this research study was to explore the fear and risk of violence as a lived reality of women and girls that resided in Tijuana, Mexico. Self-defense colleagues in San Diego and Tijuana organized two seminars at their facility and another with teachers at a private educational academy.

There are many approaches that can be taken when conducting qualitative research. I have chosen to follow the reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) model put forward by Braun and Clarke (2020). Here, the reflexive model embraces the values and subjectivity of the researcher within the qualitative process. In doing so, the researcher continually revisits codes and interpretation and follows research rigor by creating transparency through examining decision-making, planning, and bias at each stage of the process. Due to the nature of this exploratory research, codes referring to observation are then developed into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Themes are shared meanings of the participants that can be fully reflected upon in the discussion where the larger meaning of the findings as they relate to the perception of risk within the community. Therefore, the codes generate the themes. The institutional review board approval of a single

researcher suggests that the study proved to follow methodological rigor.

My role in this research was multifaceted. First, I applied reflexive narrative as transparency and rationale for various decision-making (Johnson et al., 2020). Mindful of transparency, I firmly believe that self-defense training can be a vehicle for addressing gender norms. Self-defense can be used to embody a woman or girl, and this embodiment can affect other aspects of one's life. In doing so, McCaughey's (1998) physical feminism exemplifies how women and girls becoming their protectors is key to empowering women. Therefore, complementary to this perspective is using an empowered self-defense approach when teaching self-defense to women (Channon, 2018). The seminars included both discussing gender and violence and physically practicing techniques.

The balance of instructor/researcher is complex and requires navigating the seminars carefully.

However, this dual role was advantageous. As the researcher, I was able to tour the area and observe the social context of the lived reality of the female participants. This understanding added to my role as a self-defense instructor. These observations could help confirm the interpretations of the survey and place observations in a social context. As a result, I adjusted the self-defense seminars to be more relevant to what I had seen and through conversations outside the seminars. Unfortunately, in understanding the social context through the observations and key informants, I was not able to interview or complete more extensive, detailed observations during the seminars.

The participant-observer role allowed me to discover the nuances that might not have emerged otherwise by observing people within their lived reality (Takyi, 2015). In addition, the participant-observer role allowed me to place myself within the research in a self-reflexive place (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Here, the language, behavior, and actions (Berthelsen et al., 2016) are examined and shared. For this reason, I feel that, as the participant observer, I was beginning to understand the physical and social environment that created a high-risk area. For example, when two key informants and I went to a food truck, I noticed complete darkness. There were no streetlights. It was hard to see around me. It made me uncomfortable. I felt the fear that at any moment some person could have attacked me.

The purpose of the seminars was to teach physical defense strategies through scenario based self-defense. At the beginning of the seminar, I presented my role as an instructor. Once the seminar was completed, I introduced myself as the researcher, where I asked, with the help of my key informants, if they would like to participate in a research study. This helped the participants disconnect their participation in the seminar from the research. If participants attended both seminars, they would only complete the questionnaire once.

Participants

The sample was self-selective. Two seminars were promoted for the Tijuana community, and one seminar was conducted at a private school academy. The women and girls who attended these events chose to come assuming they were interested in learning self-defense. "Seminar" for this research is defined as a time allotted to participants who want to learn non-physical and physical self-defense strategies. Each seminar will have a discussion and physical practice piece. A key informant and a self-defense instructor promoted the seminars to the community. The seminars were open for girls and women 12 years of age and older. As the seminar instructor, I was asked if younger girls could participate. I chose to let them participate. I chose to do this because of previous discussions with a key informant and an understanding of the high-risk

environment in which they lived. The seminar at the private academy was open to all female teachers and was arranged by a key informant. Upon completing the seminars, the girls and women were asked to participate in the research by voluntarily completing surveys.

A total of 40 females participated. Participants ranged from 8 to 52 years of age. Of note, some participants at the seminars may have belonged to the Tae Kwon Do club where the seminars took place. A male demonstration partner would aid in demonstrating the effectiveness of the techniques on larger and stronger attackers. In addition, as the seminar was open to girls under 18 years of age, the guardian would have the choice to remain. As an illustration, the father of a girl, age 10, remained with his daughter. Additionally, male students from other classes at the facility were used as block pad holders for the women. Two age groups emerged. The first group was under the age of 18. The nine participants in this group ranged from 8-13 years of age, with an average of 10.89 years. One of the participants had come with her father, who stayed to watch. Three of the participants in this age group had previously taken some type of self-defense. Six participants had no self-defense experience.

The second group comprised 31 women over 18 years of age who attended either the public seminar or the private academy. Twenty participants attended the public seminar. Of this group, the participants ranged from 18-52 years of age with an average of 36.55 years. Specifically, nine women were 40 and over, five were between 30-39, and six were under 29. Eleven participants were teachers at a private school and between 27-48 years of age. The average age was 35 years. The occupations included an educator, psychologist, florist, housekeeper, architect, accountant, student, physiotherapist, and periodontist. Approximately 71% of the women (22) stated they had no self-defense experience.

Data Collection

In my review of the literature, the authors did not detail their survey construction and several had used existing scales. I was not trying to replicate existing research but took an organic approach focusing on parts that seemed to be missing in the literature. This research was exploring the space within the literature that was missing. In creating the survey for this research, I drew my attention to the perception of risk of violence within the community and techniques that were taught within these programs, and their applicability to the community. This intention did not focus on the ability to replicate but on the organic evolution of a program intended to connect with the social context of the participants.

A questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions was used to collect data on various aspects of self-defense. In addition, to better understand the social context of Tijuana in terms of risk of violence, key informants, photos, and observations were used. Upon completion of the seminar, a post-seminar survey questionnaire (translated and back-translated into Spanish) was administered to participants who expressed interest in being part of the research. The survey was given in the training facility. Confidentiality was assured as the researcher was the sole individual who collected the surveys. The surveys did not request any names. I also ensured that the participants were spaced to avoid viewing each other's responses. After participants completed a consent form, they could then complete the questionnaire. Participants under 18 who expressed interest were given assent forms, parents completed their consent form, and the participant completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire focused on the risk of violence, perceptions of violence, experience with violence, and immediate perceptions of the self-defense program. Little was mentioned regarding

specific techniques used and how the participants perceived those techniques within the literature. Were these scenarios and accompanying techniques something they would experience in their lived reality? The findings focus on participant responses to the following questions:

- Please describe any experiences you have had with violence.
- Were the self-defense situations realistic?
- Were the techniques easy to learn?
- Do you feel you will be able to perform the technique in a real-life situation?

As an instructor, I am concerned that techniques relevant to a student's world can be applied, and the techniques are easy to learn.

Autoethnographic Narratives

Autoethnography uses personal experience to interpret group practices and the environment (Adams & Harrmann, 2020). Critical self-reflexivity is used to draw a connection between the self and culture. Here, this methodology proves an integral part of developing the self-defense seminars to reflect the risk of violence that could be potentially experienced. Autoethnography can be used with other forms of data collection (Adams & Herrmann, 2020), as it will be used in this research to support survey findings. The autoethnographic narratives provide a contextual grounding for the survey findings. These developed from environmental observations and discussions with participants and informants.

As the instructor of the seminars, I was limited in making complete observational notes. To gain contextual understanding, I decided memoing after a class or at the end of the day was the best option. Therefore, these memos will be presented as autoethnographic narratives to begin the exploratory contextual understanding of the risk of violence in these women's lives. These memos centered around seminars, conversations, and notable observations of the space surrounding the training facility and the local area. I was careful not to do any extensive notetaking during conversations or in front of participants. Therefore, memoing was done at the end of the day or the interaction. Generally, participants could communicate their thoughts during the seminar and discussions afterward; however, key informants and others in the class, familiar with English, were used as translators. I was not fluent in Latin Spanish and wanted to understand what others were communicating. In collaboration with memoing and photos, key informants were used to provide support or help to understand the risk of violence within Tijuana.

Coding

The analysis utilized structural coding. Structural coding is question-based, meaning that the question is used as an initial label. For example, specific questions were asked to address participants' experiences with violence within this research. Once this initial coding was completed, the codes were re-organized to create more concise codes. Finally, the codes generated themes that were supported by autoethnographic narrative.

The Empowered Self-Defense (ESD) Approach addresses gender and violence and incorporates physical defense strategies within a social context. ESD addresses gender norms and then discovers how to begin to change the gendered socialization of women practically. This

practicality is important within Tijuana as issues of femicide (Garza, 2020) and gender norms (Mendoza, 2021; Cohen et al. 2021; Dansereau et al., 2017) are prominent within a machismo society such as Mexico. In Jordan and Mossman's (2021) discussion of feminist self-defense (FSD), self-defense skills are used to increase confidence and attitudes, allowing the skills to be put into action. The mind and body are addressed simultaneously. For example, the mind can be addressed by understanding how women's and girls' bodies are frozen (Dowling, 2000) simultaneously the body is taught how to use its voice or strike.

The Smartsafe program was used as the baseline for an ESD approach. The program relies on reality-based techniques situated within a specific scenario. It was essential to teach the participants how to adapt these techniques as the scenario changed. As the confrontation changed, the participants could use their new self-defense tools as the situation dictated. Smartsafe presents techniques and knowledge on a self-defense continuum. The continuum progresses from non-physical avoidance techniques to physical techniques that require women to engage, inflict pain, and leave. Violence is placed within a gendered social context which allows psychological barriers that prohibit many women from feeling they have the ability or power to "fight" back to be approached. Noteworthy within the terminology of Smartsafe is the use of "target" instead of "victim." This term begins the work of moving away from the victim role, suggesting vulnerability and incapability. The target indicates a position that has agency. In Dowling's terms, this terminology works toward thawing the female body and realizing that women and girls can protect themselves.

Smartsafe is usually a 10-week program, which would consist of one to one and a half hours of training per week. Ideally, the Smartsafe program would be used as a 10-week program, however, the program was adapted for two to two- and half-hour seminars. The program does not need to be sequential and can be adapted according to the population. As a practicing martial artist and certified Smartsafe instructor, I have come to understand that self-defense seminars should reflect the community in which it is being delivered. Program adaption was based on observations and key informant conversations most applicable to the participants, my previous self-defense teaching and training, and my past 30 years within the field. I also stated within the seminars that if there were situations that the participants wanted to address, we could adapt. To reduce fear and risk of violence among the specific participants, I needed to use scenarios typical within their community. It was important to address authenticity as part of the research rigor. Here authenticity is transactional, and relationship-based. I wanted the participants to trust me and ensure that my concern addressed the community's needs. Rigor also applies to the decision-making, safe-guarding, and thorough consideration at each step as has been explained. Smartsafe is not a program focused on generalizability, but it is a living organism that evolves with its participants. It is a program that is interactive and adaptable according to the community in which it serves.

Smartsafe addresses situations that include knife defense, gun disarm, strikes, and ground survival, several of which were addressed in the seminars. Content may have differed depending on the seminar. Examples of scenarios that were addressed include: being bear-hugged from behind and being dragged into a car (abduction), having a knife to the back of the ribs as the attacker directs the target to either get money or something else, having the attacker put a rope around the target's neck from behind, being choked on the ground with the attacker in between the target's legs, and learning how to strike.

Findings

Survey findings will be presented with autoethnographic narratives as represented in Table 1. The participants answered questions about the types of violence they have experienced. While 21 of the 31 (68%) women participants indicated experiencing violence, none of the participants under 18 years of age reported previous experiences of violence. It is likely that more women could have experienced violence but were not prepared to disclose it within the study context. The seminars were open and not survivor-specific, which may have contributed to a reticence to disclose. Written responses indicated that, though the girls under 18 did not experience violence, two were concerned that it would happen to them.

Comments supported this survey finding during a children's only seminar at the academy. The comments were related to potential abduction and bullying. Several children presented a scenario where someone would call a child and state that a family member was abducted and then ask for a ransom. The family member was not abducted, but this was a scare tactic to exploit the child. The young children were also concerned about multiple attackers where a group would attack a child. These observations could indicate a high fear of violence as voiced by the community residents who participated in the research and through comments and conversations.

Table 1
Survey Results with Reflexive Narrative

| Category | Participant Response | Reflexive Narrative |
|--|---|---|
| Forms of violence experienced. | Sixty-eight percent stated they had experienced some violence. | As I spoke with women in the community and in the seminars, at least three women stated a knife used to the back of the ribs to get money was common. |
| Situations addressed in seminar realistic. | Ninety percent stated they thought the situations were realistic. | This was a positive response as it can suggest that the seminar was relevant within the participants' lived experience. |
| Use techniques in real situation. | Ninety-eight percent stated they would be able to use the techniques in their lived world | These responses are positive as it suggests the techniques can be used, with little training, in their everyday lives. |
| Immediate reactions to self-defense seminar. | Adjectives such as secure, self-confidence, safer and stronger were used. | These reactions are similar to other research in the area and is a positive indicator of how a self-defense program can influence self-perception. |

The women wrote about experiencing several forms of violence: harassment, family violence, abduction, verbal abuse, partner violence, assault, robbery, threats of violence, and environmental threats. For example, a 23-year-old recounts her experience as follows, "[I] was

deprived of freedom for four hours in [my] own car" while another stated that "my family has suffered threats through phone call[s], we have had friends who have been extorted and who have been kidnapped." Therefore, all the groups seemed to indicate a fear of violence within the community. Several of the women at the seminar seemed to feel free to describe their experiences of assault. One participant's history of abuse began as a young child, although she was hesitant to label it rape. Another had experienced three attempted assaults. She had resisted and seemed very proud that her resistance had staved off the assaults. Violence was also experienced with the use of weapons. An informant stated that it was common to be held by a knife to the side back ribs and asked for money. Participants at both seminar locations highlighted this scenario, indicating that they had personally experienced violence where a weapon had been used. The risk of violence as described by these participants in Tijuana should be considered in understanding the context of participating in a self-defense seminar or any other public health initiative which addresses the fear of violence. As the literature indicates, women join self-defense seminars because of past experiences.

Ninety percent of the participants perceived the situations to be realistic. Eighty percent of the participants believed that the physical techniques were easy to learn. Being able to apply the techniques and have the confidence afterward increased a sense of self-awareness and capability as expressed by this woman, "this gave me in two hours a confidence that I did not have or I did not know what I could have to defend myself against an attack regardless of the size of the other person." This self-reflection contributes to the positive experience that the participants felt and that 98% of the participants believed they were able to use these techniques in real-life situations.

These participants seemed to express a generally positive reaction to learning self-defense. These positive reactions transcended throughout the age groups. Participants felt more secure, self-confident, safer, and stronger after training. The participants' responses included reflections such as "realized there is much strength in me," "feel safe knowing some technique," "can say I am a strong woman capable not weak," and "I am small and not muscular, but it seems that the techniques can work in spite that." These statements are powerful, as they are situated in a high-risk social context. The self-confidence and strength expressed can lead to presenting oneself as less of a target in self-defense training terms and has the potential to reduce their fear of violence in such a high-risk area. Environmentally, as I observed, the streets have few lights. It is dark. I walked through the lower socioeconomic neighborhoods; I was vigilant. I could understand the fear of walking in such darkness. At one point, I was out with some informants, and suddenly, I saw a man very close to me. I was concerned.

Discussion

The girls and women within this research live in a place where fear and risk of violence are part of their lived experience. Socioeconomic status did not seem to be a factor; violence was a risk for all. Their perceptions are congruent with the literature indicating that Tijuana may be at high risk for violence. However, more importantly, self-defense seemed to reduce their fear of violence because they seemed to change their self-perception of their ability to be their own protectors. This change may provide an avenue for challenging the gendered norms that still seem prevalent (Cohen, 2021; Mendoza et al., 2021; Dansereau et al., 2017). This change is not to say that these women have come out of this experience with no risk of violence. However, they seem to have come out of this experience feeling more capable. As an instructor, I could

sense the empowerment as these girls and women struck the block pads using their complete bodies and voices. As a researcher, I viewed their non-verbal cues of wanting to hit. It appeared they were living and experiencing their bodies. This research does not address early childhood trauma though I understand it is some of the most profound traumas affecting health and adulthood. I was unable to address the issue in the context of this research.

Self-defense training is the embodiment of physical feminism (McCaughey, 1998). The women and girls within the study began to perceive themselves as capable of defending themselves. This self-perception challenges the "frailty myth" described by Dowling (2000). It thawed these female bodies such that 98% of the women and girls felt they could use the techniques within an environment riddled with the risk and fear of violence. It appeared to reduce their fear of violence which, in turn, can affect their fight, flight, or freeze reaction. The woman learns to live within her body as the female body thaws from its gendered body discourse. As Whitson (2002) suggested that boys learn to live their bodies at a young age, the self-defense learning environment offered these women and girls an opportunity to live their bodies. They are learning to use their complete body as a tool for self-protection. The perceived increase in empowerment can challenge gender socialization.

The Tijuana self-defense participants suggested that the risk of violence transcends social location, economic lines, and social lines. These women and girls represented the intersectionality of class and gender in terms of risk and fear of violence as depicted by their physical and social environments. All age groups perceived the context of their daily lives as areas with a high risk of violence. This study highlights the possibility that self-defense programs can affect the perceived capacity to react to a violent situation. In addition, this study evidenced the individual advocacy that self-defense seminars can provide, at least in the short term.

Although the information shared through the findings in the survey and autoethnographic narratives are informative, addressing limitations could enhance future research. This study provided a short-term self-defense seminar that required longer-term practice. Future self-defense programs should provide a more extended period for reflection in the group and physical practice. In creating a more extended program, participants could be interviewed by researchers to create more detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences but also time to apply them to their everyday lives. Another limitation is balancing the instructor and researcher roles. The instructor needs to focus on providing an effective program. A second researcher, who takes the role of complete observer or participant observer, should be placed within the class to note complete, detailed observations. Further research is needed to understand the systemic, structural factors that support violence against women in Tijuana, Mexico. Kelly and Green (2019) suggested that, sociologically, exploring the lived realities of those who live within a place and space can change those spaces.

Recommendations for Practice

1. Self-defense can be viewed as part of a multifaceted approach to addressing violence against women in high-risk areas. Professionals within public health and services have the possibility of liaising with ESD practitioners within their communities when appropriate.
2. Self-defense programs using an ESD approach focuses on addressing gender, violence, and physical empowerment within a social context. This approach could be a good fit within a K-12 educational system. Girls would be able to address gender socialization

which could lead to empowerment. This empowerment and confidence could impact various aspects of their lives, such as body image issues.

3. Suppose a program such as a self-defense seminar is used as a tool to address risk or reduce risk. In that case, the scenarios should reflect those the community would confront. The personal voice of those individuals would then be better addressed. The administrators of a self-defense program or seminar would need to go within the community where the program is to be administered and ask girls and women what their concerns or situations have been.
4. Practitioners, advocates, and the like should observe the community and talk with community members. When dealing with risk reduction, the understanding of risk must be placed within the social context and the lived reality of those within the community. The rapport gained by conversing and interacting with those that experience the risk and allowing them to have a voice within its reduction is empowering, increases self-agency, and *buy-in* into the ability of the *tool* to help reduce risk. Familiarity and knowledge of the language or having a translator will help with this process.
5. The choice of martial art is an essential consideration in such an initiative. Reality-based self-defense systems provide a better fit for this type of community initiative. Reality-based self-defense systems can address the fluidity of a confrontation and teach less specialized techniques, which makes it easier to learn. In addition, a female lead instructor should be used, a male demonstration partner used to emphasize the technique's effectiveness, the program should be women-only and administered using an ESD model.

Conclusion

Self-defense seminars in high-risk violence areas can be part of a multifaceted approach to addressing violence against women. In the short term, seminars such as these can provide one method of increasing confidence to challenge gendered norms. By using physical feminism, gendered norms are challenged. They are challenged by thawing the female body from gendered socialization, where women and girls are depicted as weak and incapable. An ESD approach bridges the abstract challenging of gendered norms to the practicality of performing physical self-defense.

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