

Martial Arts as a Remedy for Racialized Police Violence

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I. INTRODUCTION

Over half a decade ago, law professor Cynthia Lee offered an intriguing argument in an article titled *Race, Policing, and Lethal Force: Remediating Shooter Bias with Martial Arts Training*.¹ In short, Professor Lee argued that if law enforcement had martial arts training, they would be less likely to incorrectly assume that Black suspects are armed and shoot them.² Since the publication of her article, police killings of unarmed and nonthreatening Blacks has persisted,³ resulting in a national outcry.⁴ In this essay, I revisit Professor Lee’s argument in a more nuanced manner. First, I contend that police’s racialized fear emerges in a variety of ways and manifests itself in several ways, including—but not limited to—shootings. Second, I contend that one way for

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¹ See generally Cynthia Lee, *Race, Policing, and Lethal Force: Remediating Shooter Bias With Martial Arts Training*, 79 LAW & CONTEMP. PROBS. 145 (2016).

² *Id.* at 147–51.

³ See data at Mapping Police Violence, <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/> [<https://perma.cc/8MUW-9E3P>].

⁴ See Sarah J. Jackson, *The Headlines that Are Covering Up Police Violence*, ATLANTIC (June 3, 2020), <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/06/george-floyd-protests-what-news-reports-dont-say/612571/> [<https://perma.cc/7WTP-6XJB>]; Wesley Lowery, *Why Minneapolis Was the Breaking Point*, ATLANTIC (June 10, 2020), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/06/wesley-lowery-george-floyd-minneapolis-black-lives/612391/> [<https://perma.cc/WR2K-VZZJ>]; Caroline Mimbs Nyce, *America’s Racial Contract Is Exposed Anew*, ATLANTIC (May 28, 2020), <https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2020/05/george-floyd-americas-racial-contract/612313/> [<https://perma.cc/U4XH-MCLJ>]; Alan Taylor, *Images from a Worldwide Protest Movement*, ATLANTIC (June 8, 2020), <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2020/06/images-worldwide-protest-movement/612811/> [<https://perma.cc/NA6G-HDQ7>].

police to deal with this racialized fear is by employing certain martial arts to more effectively, and less lethally, subdue and arrest suspects. It is via these certain types of martial arts—namely those that do not require striking but instead employ takedown techniques, joint manipulation, and nonlethal holds—that police can effectively, and nonlethally, physically engage individuals. I offer Brazilian jujitsu (“BJJ”) as an example.

II. RACE AND POLICE VIOLENCE

In the United States, policing has been racialized from its beginnings, dating back to the institution of slavery.⁵ Not surprisingly, given the long arc of race and racism in the United States, people often harbor negative biases towards Blacks,⁶ often subconsciously.⁷ There is no reason to believe that police are immune from such biases. Further, these biases, arguably, precipitate more violent encounters between police and Blacks, as compared to other racial groups, especially Whites.⁸

Many of these biases fit with the average American’s negative evaluative judgments of Blacks, even at the implicit level. For example, people become angry more easily as frustrations run high when race (Black more so than White) is implicated, even subtly.⁹ In addition, people attribute both subhuman and superhuman qualities to Blacks, which has implications for how Blacks may be treated. Whites more easily associate Black males, and not White males, with nonhuman primates.¹⁰ Furthermore, when people make such associations, they perceive police violence against Blacks as being justified.¹¹ At the same time, people attribute superhuman qualities—supernatural, extrasensory, and magical

⁵ Gregory S. Parks, “When They See Us” *The Great White Awakening to Black Humanity*, 21 U. MD. L.J. RACE, RELIGION, GENDER & CLASS 1, 6 (2021).

⁶ Like Cynthia Lee does in her article, and like many others who write about race, the author “purposely capitalizes the ‘B’ in ‘Black’ and the ‘W’ in ‘White’ to highlight the fact that Blacks and Whites are commonly perceived in the United States as members of clearly defined racial groups.” Lee, *supra* note 1, at 145 n.1.

⁷ See generally Andrew R. Todd, Kelsey C. Thiem & Rebecca Neel, *Does Seeing Faces of Young Black Boys Facilitate the Identification of Threatening Stimuli?*, 27 PSYCH. SCI. 384 (2016).

⁸ See generally Lorie Fridell & Hyeyoung Lim, *Assessing the Racial Aspects of Police Force Using the Implicit- and Counterbias Perspectives*, 44 J. CRIM. JUST. 36 (2016).

⁹ John A. Bargh, Mark Chen & Lara Burrows, *Automaticity of Social Behavior: Direct Effects of Trait Construct and Stereotype Activation on Action*, 71 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 230, 238–39 (1996).

¹⁰ Phillip Atiba Goff et al., *Not Yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization, and Contemporary Consequences*, 94 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 292, 296–97 (2008).

¹¹ See *id.* at 301–02.

mental and physical qualities—to Blacks.¹² This belief in Black superhumanization leads to the perception that Blacks feel less pain than Whites.¹³

More generally, people also tend to make more positive associations with Whites and more negative associations with Blacks. While most people across racial groups—i.e., Asian, Latino, and White—show no explicit racial preferences for Black over White, many do. But many more show such racial preferences and lack of neutrality at the implicit level when assessed by measures like the Implicit Association Test (“IAT”), which measures the ease with which people associate positive and negative concepts with racial categories.¹⁴ Implicit racial bias is linked to the amygdala—a subcortical brain structure, involved in emotional learning, perceiving novel or threatening stimuli,¹⁵ and fear conditioning.¹⁶ On functional magnetic resonance imaging, Whites’ amygdala activate far more when they are subliminally presented with Black, as opposed to White, faces.¹⁷ Moreover, the degree of amygdala activation is significantly correlated with race IAT scores.¹⁸ These findings suggest that Whites demonstrate more fear (or emotional learning or perceiving novel stimuli) of Blacks than Whites.

These findings are consistent with decades of empirical social science on race and threat perception. Whites perceive Black, as opposed to White, faces as angrier. Whites are more likely to characterize racially ambiguous faces as Black when presenting angry facial expressions than when presenting happy expressions.¹⁹ Whites tend to characterize Black faces in dimly-lit conditions as hostile when, in fact, those facial expressions are neutral.²⁰ People perceive Blacks as bigger and more formidable than Whites; they perceive Black men as

¹² Adam Waytz, Kelly Marie Hoffman & Sophie Trawalter, *A Superhumanization Bias in Whites’ Perceptions of Blacks*, 6 SOC. PSYCH. & PERSONALITY SCI. 352, 353 (2015).

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Jonathan Cardi, Valerie P. Hans & Gregory Parks, *Do Black Injuries Matter?: Implicit Bias and Jury Decision Making in Tort Cases*, 93 S. CAL. L. REV. 507, 523–24, 524 nn.113–19 (2020).

¹⁵ Kevin N. Ochsner & Matthew D. Lieberman, *The Emergence of Social Cognitive Neuroscience*, 56 AM. PSYCH. 717, 720 (2001).

¹⁶ See Elizabeth A. Phelps et al., *Performance on Indirect Measures of Race Evaluation Predicts Amygdala Activation*, 12 J. COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE 729, 729 (2000).

¹⁷ See William A. Cunningham et al., *Separable Neural Components in the Processing of Black and White Faces*, 15 PSYCH. SCI. 806, 811 (2004).

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Kurt Hugenberg & Galen V. Bodenhausen, *Ambiguity in Social Categorization: The Role of Prejudice and Facial Affect in Race Categorization*, 15 PSYCH. SCI. 342, 342–45 (2004).

²⁰ Jon K. Maner et al., *Functional Projection: How Fundamental Social Motives Can Bias Interpersonal Perception*, 88 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 63, 66–70 (2005).

more capable of harm than White men.²¹ And when Blacks look “prototypically Black,” people view them as more formidable.²² When what precipitates seemingly aggressive behavior is ambiguous, Whites—more so than Blacks—get the benefit of the doubt.²³ Not surprisingly, people endorse greater use of force against Black men than against White men.²⁴ Also not surprisingly, police are more likely to focus on Black, as opposed to White, faces when thinking about crime.²⁵

Threat perception is not only reserved for Black adults or Black males.²⁶ People more readily associate threatening words with Black boys than with their White counterparts.²⁷ Black boys are seen as less childlike than same-aged White boys.²⁸ Black children beyond age nine and adults were rated as less innocent than White children beyond age nine and adults.²⁹ Further, the characteristics associated with childhood are applied less to Black boys than to White boys.³⁰ People assume that Black boys are older than their actual age and perceive them as more culpable for their actions than Latino and White boys.³¹ Even professionals who are more experienced in dealing with criminal suspects overestimate the age of Black and Latino crime suspects.³² These findings are emphasized when people dehumanize Black males by subconsciously associating them—and not Whites or Latinos—with nonhuman primates.³³ This dynamic also takes place with Black girls.³⁴ People generally perceive that Black girls need less nurturing, less protection, less support, less comfort, and more independence than their White peers,³⁵ and Black girls are viewed as more

²¹ John Paul Wilson, Kurt Hugenberg & Nicholas O. Rule, *Racial Bias in Judgments of Physical Size and Formidability: From Size to Threat*, 113 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 59, 65–66 (2017).

²² *Id.* at 71–73.

²³ Birt L. Duncan, *Differential Social Perception and Attribution of Intergroup Violence: Testing the Lower Limits of Stereotyping of Blacks*, 34 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 590, 592–96 (1976) (in the context of a school fight, study participants perceive shoves as more aggressive when the person who does the shoving is Black).

²⁴ Wilson, Hugenberg & Rule, *supra* note 21, at 70.

²⁵ Jennifer L. Eberhardt et al., *Seeing Black: Race, Crime, and Visual Processing*, 87 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 876, 877, 887–88 (2004).

²⁶ See Todd, Thiem & Neel, *supra* note 7, at 385, 390–91 (finding that people are no less likely to be biased against Black youth than Black adults).

²⁷ *Id.* at 389–90.

²⁸ Phillip Atiba Goff et al., *The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children*, 106 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 526, 539–40 (2014).

²⁹ *Id.* at 529.

³⁰ *Id.* at 529, 539–40.

³¹ *Id.* at 532.

³² *Id.* at 535.

³³ *Id.* at 538–39.

³⁴ REBECCA EPSTEIN, JAMILIA J. BLAKE & THALIA GONZÁLEZ, GEO. L. CTR. ON POVERTY & INEQ., *GIRLHOOD INTERRUPTED: THE ERASURE OF BLACK GIRLS’ CHILDHOOD* 4 (2017).

³⁵ *Id.* at 1.

adult than their White peers at critical stages of development.³⁶ When adults perceive Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like, those girls receive harsher punishments despite their status as children.³⁷

This confluence of factors suggests that when people, especially—but not only—Whites, engage with Blacks, they are likely to register those situations as more threatening than when interacting with Whites. For police, the perceived level of threat in those interactions result in more physical harm to Black individuals, as compared to White individuals, during police encounters.³⁸ This is because of the higher levels of anxiety and fear associated with the former than with the latter. Fear is a negative emotional experience that is accompanied by predictable biochemical, behavioral, cognitive, and physiological changes directed towards absolving the stressful event. Fear may trigger a flight or fight response, which can be predicted based on the type of stimulus. However, the human body can misinterpret stressors and overreact in unnecessary ways. The social situation and environment tend to be the main determinants of these responses.³⁹ Many types of responses are available to human beings when reacting to a perceived threat, including aggression. Sometimes, that aggression manifests itself in the form of “preemptive strikes”—i.e., a quick attack designed to defend one’s self against a perceived threat before the threat is consciously processed.⁴⁰ The perceived threat of being attacked, as well as feelings of hopelessness,⁴¹ anxiety,⁴² and fear precipitate aggression and preemptive strikes.⁴³ Accordingly, because police are likely to make certain biased assumptions about the threat-level of people based on race, they impose more physical punishment against Blacks than Whites.

When it comes to weapon perception, people more readily associate guns with Blacks and benign objects, like tools, with Whites.⁴⁴ In addition, people

³⁶ *Id.* at 8.

³⁷ *Id.* See generally KRISTIN HENNING, *THE RAGE OF INNOCENCE: HOW AMERICA CRIMINALIZES BLACK YOUTH* (2021), for a more detailed analysis of the adultification of black youth.

³⁸ See *Mapping Police Violence*, CAMPAIGN ZERO, <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/> [<https://perma.cc/8GDS-XE2F>].

³⁹ See Dora Simunovic, Nobuhiro Mifune & Toshio Yamagishi, *Preemptive Strike: An Experimental Study of Fear-Based Aggression*, 49 J. EXPERIMENTAL SOC. PSYCH. 1120, 1122–23 (2013) (noting the influence that social cues such as fear, greed, and conflict have in determining a fight versus flight response, as well as heightened fear in group environments).

⁴⁰ Nir Halevy, *Preemptive Strikes: Fear, Hope, and Defensive Aggression*, 112 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 224, 225 (2017).

⁴¹ *Id.* at 224.

⁴² Inga D. Neumann, Alexa H. Veenema & Daniela I. Beiderbeck, *Aggression and Anxiety: Social Context and Neurobiological Links*, 4 FRONTIERS BEHAV. NEUROSCIENCE 1, 1–2 (2010).

⁴³ Simunovic, Mifune & Yamagishi, *supra* note 39, at 1122.

⁴⁴ B. Keith Payne, *Prejudice and Perception: The Role of Automatic and Controlled Processes in Misperceiving a Weapon*, 81 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 181, 183–85 (2001).

more readily associate guns with Black boys than with White boys.⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, on a computerized task where people have to rapidly identify an object in a person's hand and decide to shoot or not shoot that person, people tend to misidentify Blacks as armed when they are, in fact, unarmed (false alarms), and thus, shoot them. Conversely, people are more likely to mistake Whites as unarmed when, in fact, they are armed (misses), and thus, not shoot them.⁴⁶ What is most consequential is not the ease with which people associate threatening and non-threatening objects with racial categories, rather, it is what they do when making those associations. Just like civilians, police are more likely to mistakenly shoot unarmed Black suspects than unarmed White suspects.⁴⁷ However, after repeated exposure to the shooting simulation, police can eliminate the racial bias.⁴⁸

III. REDUCING POLICE LETHALITY THROUGH MARTIAL ARTS

An array of approaches has been found to reduce police violence—e.g., body cameras, implicit bias training, increasing the hiring age, peer intervention, procedurally just policing, and reducing high-adrenaline encounters. However, Professor Lee's proposal to require martial arts training is a novel one supported by empirical social science.⁴⁹ Further, certain types of martial arts are likely to prove more effective than others at aiding police in de-escalating incidents.

Martial arts are systematized, physical combat traditions that are practiced by groups and individuals for self-defense, competition, and physical and mental development. Martial arts are considered to be “systems that blend the physical components of combat with strategy, philosophy, tradition, or other features thereby distinguishing them from pure physical reaction.”⁵⁰ Styles have emerged from such places as Brazil (e.g., capoeira, Brazilian jujitsu), China (e.g., kung fu, wing chun), Israel (e.g., krav maga), Japan (e.g., aikido, judo, karate), Korea (e.g., hapkido, tae kwon do), Nigeria (e.g., dambe), Senegal (e.g., Senegalese wrestling), Thailand (e.g., muay thai), the United Kingdom (e.g.,

⁴⁵ See Todd, Thiem & Neel, *supra* note 7, at 385–89.

⁴⁶ Joshua Correll, Bernadette Park, Charles M. Judd & Bernd Wittenbrink, *The Police Officer's Dilemma: Using Ethnicity to Disambiguate Potentially Threatening Individuals*, 83 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 1314, 1315–17, 1319 (2002).

⁴⁷ E. Ashby Plant & B. Michelle Peruche, *The Consequences of Race for Police Officers' Responses to Criminal Suspects*, 16 PSYCH. SCI. 180, 181–82 (2005).

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 182; see also Joshua Correll et al., *Across the Thin Blue Line: Police Officers and Racial Bias in the Decision to Shoot*, 92 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 1006, 1015 (2007).

⁴⁹ See Lee, *supra* note 1, at 165–70.

⁵⁰ Thomas A. Green, *Introduction*, in *MARTIAL ARTS OF THE WORLD: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA, VOLUME ONE: A–Q*, at xvi (Thomas A. Green ed., 2010).

catch wrestling), and the United States (e.g., collegiate wrestling, shoot fighting).⁵¹

Juxtaposed to modern martial arts, traditional martial arts focus on developing both internal (e.g., breathing) and external (e.g., kicking and punching) techniques that give students the ability to balance between mental and physical strength.⁵² Traditional techniques also emphasize the psychological, spiritual, non-aggressive aspects of the discipline.⁵³ On the other hand, modern martial arts training emphasizes competition and aggression.⁵⁴ Traditional martial arts tend to reduce aggressive behavior, whereas modern martial arts promote a more competitive persona.⁵⁵ Among youth, martial arts training reduces aggression,⁵⁶ particularly among those who train in traditional martial arts.⁵⁷ Traditional martial arts have also been a method in fostering self confidence in adolescents. The practice of connecting the mind and the body promotes self-awareness and requires focus on emotional control. Such training teaches students how to remain calm under physical stress, thereby improving their capacity to respond appropriately. The self-control and emotional maturity that traditional martial arts teach allows people to know how to handle themselves in violent situations.⁵⁸

Martial arts help develop “mental toughness.” As such, an important quality that martial artists possess is confidence.⁵⁹ Similarly, they aid practitioners in managing fear to help win a “fight.” This concept is referred to as “emotional management”; it is the strategy in which individuals can suppress their feelings. This is important in martial arts because fighters need to act confidently and comfortably to make their opponents feel inferior, which is often done through intimidating body and verbal language.⁶⁰ Among Taekwondo practitioners,

⁵¹ For a review of martial arts styles, see generally MARTIAL ARTS OF THE WORLD: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HISTORY AND INNOVATION: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HISTORY AND INNOVATION (Thomas A. Green & Joseph R. Svinth eds., 2010).

⁵² James Hernandez & Kathryn B. Anderson, *Internal Martial Arts Training and the Reduction of Hostility and Aggression in Martial Arts Students*, 20 PSI CHI J. PSYCH. RES. 169, 170 (2015).

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ Anna Harwood, Michal Lavidor & Yuri Rassovsky, *Reducing Aggression with Martial Arts: A Meta-Analysis of Child and Youth Studies*, 34 AGGRESSION & VIOLENT BEHAV. 96, 97 (2017).

⁵⁷ Michael E. Trulson, *Martial Arts Training: A Novel “Cure” for Juvenile Delinquency*, 39 HUM. REL. 1131, 1135 (1986).

⁵⁸ Stuart W. Twemlow et al., *Effects of Participation in a Martial Arts-Based Antibullying Program in Elementary Schools*, 45 PSYCH. SCHOOLS 947, 948 (2008).

⁵⁹ Mark A. Chen & David J. Cheesman, *Mental Toughness of Mixed Martial Arts Athletes at Different Levels of Competition*, 116 PERCEPTUAL & MOTOR SKILLS 906, 911–12 (2013).

⁶⁰ Christian A. Vaccaro, Douglas P. Schrock & Janice M. McCabe, *Managing Emotional Manhood: Fighting and Fostering Fear in Mixed Martial Arts*, 74 SOC. PSYCH. Q. 414, 426, 429 (2011).

those who have won in competition report lower somatic and cognitive anxiety and higher self-confidence compared to those who have lost.⁶¹

Training in martial arts and having a high perceived use of force self-efficacy predict confidence in going hands-on, even when accounting for officers' perceived motivation and apprehensiveness.⁶² Nonetheless, the degree to which police refrain from weapon usage and excessive force has been called into question. At the heart of this issue is the inability of some police to de-escalate certain situations.⁶³ Often enough, martial arts offer not only combat techniques, but also de-escalation skills.⁶⁴ De-escalation techniques are a recommended non-physical intervention for the management of violence and aggression. The research shows that the strongest impact of de-escalation training appears to be on de-escalation-related knowledge, confidence to manage aggression, and de-escalation performance.⁶⁵

In light of these challenges, some police education and training programs are considering less-lethal strategies to give officers a greater chance of utilizing nonlethal options.⁶⁶ In this regard, not all martial arts are created equally. Striking arts (e.g., krav maga, muay thai, boxing, tae kwon do, kickboxing) are likely to lead to more physical harm to Blacks with whom police have confrontational interactions than may be needed.⁶⁷ Conversely, non-striking arts (aikido, Brazilian jujitsu, judo, wrestling) would be better to get an assailant to the ground, control them, and handcuff them with little harm to their person. One particularly popular non-striking art is Brazilian jujitsu (BJJ). As its history has been explored:

⁶¹ Chris Chapman, Andrew M. Lane, John H. Brierley & Peter C. Terry, *Anxiety, Self-Confidence, and Performance in Tae Kwon-Do*, 85 PERCEPTUAL & MOTOR SKILLS 1275, 1276 (1997).

⁶² See Jose Torres, *Predicting Law Enforcement Confidence in Going 'Hands-on': The Impact of Martial Arts Training, Use-of-force Self-efficacy, Motivation, and Apprehensiveness*, 21 POLICE PRAC. & RES. 187, 187 (2018).

⁶³ James Cat Fitzgerald, *Aikido and Law Enforcement: Why Training the Concepts and Techniques of Aikido Might Just Bridge the Gap Between Officers and Communities*, in AIKIDÔ: THE TRINITY OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION 223, 224–26 (Winfried Wagner ed., 2015).

⁶⁴ Kieth M. Jones, *The Quick Defense Personal Self-Defense System*, in PROTECTION, SECURITY, AND SAFEGUARDS: PRACTICAL APPROACHES AND PERSPECTIVES 283, 287–88 (Dale L. June ed., 2012).

⁶⁵ Cf. Owen Price, John Baker, Penny Bee & Karina Lovell, *Learning and Performance Outcomes of Mental Health Staff Training in De-Escalation Techniques for the Management of Violence and Aggression*, 206 BRIT. J. PSYCHIATRY 447, 447 (2015).

⁶⁶ See John O'Neill et al., *Police Academy Training, Performance, and Learning*, 12 BEHAV. ANALYSIS PRAC. 353, 354 (2019); *The Changing Landscape of Policing*, NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE & EDUCATIONAL FUND, <https://www.naacpldf.org/george-floyd-anniversary/> [https://perma.cc/6HAT-65MF].

⁶⁷ Brian Browne, *4 Steps to Incorporate Jiu-Jitsu into Your Department's Use of Force Training*, POLICE 1 (Aug. 6, 2021), <https://www.police1.com/police-training/articles/4-steps-to-incorporate-jiu-jitsu-into-your-departments-use-of-force-training-7aFsiNpIaS6811bx/> [https://perma.cc/4P8K-V85X].

BJJ traces its origins to the early 1920s, when five brothers in Brazil created the art based on their exposure to Japanese Kodokan The brothers—Carlos, Oswaldo, Gastao Jr., George, and Helio Gracie—modified the judo they were taught while focusing more on the art’s ground fighting and leverage aspects. This form of self-defense spread and is now practiced all over the world.⁶⁸

BJJ is unique, as it is a means to disarm and disable a person without the act of striking. Instead, it includes, “holds, locks, blood chokes and joint manipulation.”⁶⁹

Evaluating the benefits of BJJ, the Marietta, Georgia Police Department implemented a mandatory BJJ program for officers after a video of an arrest in which a suspect was injured went viral. Two years after its implementation, a study found that “there was a 23% reduction in TASER usage by officers, a 48% decrease in officer injuries, a 53% reduction in civilian injuries and a 59% decrease in overall use-of-force by Jiu-Jitsu trained officers.”⁷⁰ Since then, BJJ training for police officers has gained traction. Although progress has been slow, more and more states are adopting BJJ as part of their police training programs. This trend is matched with a social media movement—the hashtag #bjjmakeitmandatory circulates widely.⁷¹ Here, as in other contexts, it may be true that a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing. John Danaher, 5th degree BJJ black belt under Renzo Gracie, has noted that “white belts with good intentions have wrecked more training partners than black belts with bad intentions.”⁷² As such, “some” BJJ training may be insufficient to reduce harm to assailants. Rather, law enforcement certification, or obtaining a blue belt (the first official colored belt in BJJ), may be required to offer some confidence that police will be able to effectively use martial arts techniques.

Even beyond the technical skills, confidence, and discipline that martial arts may offer police, training has the potential to expose them to a broader racial community. As psychologist and BJJ practitioner Holly Reusing describes in her research, “martial arts training offers a unique process within our culture for individuals to engage in powerful transformative work, which potentially

⁶⁸ Adam Banner, *Can Brazilian Jiu-jitsu Curb Police Violence? HBO’s ‘Real Sports’ Takes a Look*, ABA J. (Sept. 22, 2021), <https://www.abajournal.com/columns/article/can-brazilian-jiu-jitsu-curb-police-violence-hbos-real-sports-takes-a-look> [<https://perma.cc/3MUL-EKLS>].

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ Browne, *supra* note 67.

⁷¹ Jake King & Clayton Culpepper, *Teaching Control Tactics with Jiu Jitsu*, POLICE MAG. (Feb. 17, 2020), <https://www.policemag.com/543316/teaching-control-tactics-with-jiu-jitsu> [<https://perma.cc/68CP-S29E>].

⁷² John Danaher (@danaherjohn), INSTAGRAM (Jan. 22, 2021), https://www.instagram.com/p/CKXk016HQ2/?utm_medium=copy_link (on file with the *Ohio State Law Journal*).

creates a genuine sense of community within their social environments.”⁷³ In addition, a dojo can provide a community support structure that not only allows students to work on moving away from individualistic mentalities with respect to survivalism, but also allows them to work on moving towards “a less ego-centered relationship with the community and the larger Self.”⁷⁴

In this community, where there are diverse practitioners, there is a chance police may encounter individuals of diverse racial backgrounds and come to see their humanity. For example, the Contact Hypothesis has long been considered a popular strategy to reduce intergroup bias. It proposes that simple, intergroup contact is not sufficient to automatically reduce intergroup bias, and therefore, certain prerequisite features should be present to reduce bias through contact.⁷⁵ Equal status, cooperative interdependence, common goals, and context of supportive norms are all crucial factors to determine the success of the Contact Hypothesis.⁷⁶ Intergroup contact is more effective for reducing intergroup bias when different groups experience contact situations with equal status.⁷⁷ As social psychologist John Dovidio and colleagues have demonstrated, bias is reduced when different groups’ areas of expertise are differentiated and equally valued.⁷⁸ Further, setting a common goal helps people between groups to cooperate and communicate with each other, which leads to a reduction in intergroup bias, especially under the condition of cooperative interdependence.⁷⁹ Such intergroup contact is even more successful when the contact exists in the supportive context.⁸⁰ Additionally, opportunities for personal acquaintance and the development of intergroup friendships are critical to the success of intergroup contact. The opportunity for personal acquaintance between group members facilitates intergroup communication, which, in turn, implicitly establishes trust and reduces anxiety and discomfort between groups.⁸¹ Through the above process, negative stereotypes, hostility, and dislike toward outgroups are mitigated, and the intergroup bias is then reduced by the continuous contact.⁸²

Besides these prerequisites, there are underlying mediating and moderating mechanisms that translate appropriate intergroup contact into more positive

⁷³ Holly McClung Reusing, *The Language of Martial Arts: The Transformative Potential of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Through the Lens of Depth Psychology* 43–44 (Mar. 11, 2014) (Ph.D. dissertation, Pacifica Graduate Institute) (ProQuest).

⁷⁴ *Id.* at 44.

⁷⁵ John F. Dovidio, Samuel L. Gaertner & Kerry Kawakami, *Intergroup Contact: The Past, Present, and the Future*, 6 *GRP. PROCESSES & INTERGROUP RELS.* 5, 5 (2003).

⁷⁶ *Id.* at 14.

⁷⁷ *Id.* at 8.

⁷⁸ John F. Dovidio, Samuel L. Gaertner & Ana Validzic, *Intergroup Bias: Status, Differentiation, and a Common In-Group Identity*, 75 *J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH.* 109, 117 (1998).

⁷⁹ Dovidio, Gaertner & Kawakami, *supra* note 75, at 8.

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *Id.* at 8–10.

attitudes and relations as both cause and effect of diminishment of intergroup bias.⁸³ Functional relations between the groups and behavioral, affective, and cognitive responses are all involved in the proposed psychological mechanism.⁸⁴ Functional relations can be transformed to positive attitudes. For instance, the success of cooperation will produce positive, reinforcing outcomes, resulting in an association with positive attitudes and attractiveness toward outgroup members that help reduce intergroup bias.⁸⁵ Considering behavioral factors, when positive intergroup interaction is built, the intergroup contact will be favorable.⁸⁶

Regarding affective factors, emotion is important in intergroup contact. To promote the reduction in intergroup bias, intergroup contact can operate by reducing negative affective reactions such as anxiety toward outgroup members, as well as by increasing positive affective ties such as empathy.⁸⁷ Anxiety strengthens stereotypes toward others, primes negative impressions to outside groups, interferes with effective communication, and leads to intergroup distrust, while empathy enhances people's motivations to behave in a more supportive way toward others, independent of how much they like them.⁸⁸

As for cognitive factors, learning new information about others is a critical step in how intergroup contact improves intergroup relations.⁸⁹ Gaining more information about others can reduce bias in at least three ways. First, people can see others in a personalized and individual way if they learn more information, which helps build new and non-stereotypical associations with outgroup members.⁹⁰ Second, "greater knowledge of others may reduce uncertainty about how to interact with others, which can reduce the likelihood of avoidance of members of other groups and reduces discomfort in interactions that do occur."⁹¹ Third, "enhanced intercultural understanding" derived from obtaining new knowledge about outside groups might reduce intergroup bias by increasing recognition of injustice.⁹²

Affecting social categorization is another critical way that improves intergroup relations and reduces intergroup bias by positive intergroup contact.⁹³ Positive intergroup contact can produce recategorization that "changes the conceptual representations of the different groups from an 'us' versus 'them' orientation to a more inclusive 'we,' which redirects the forces of

⁸³ *Id.* at 9.

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 9–10.

⁸⁵ Dovidio, Gaertner & Kawakami, *supra* note 75, at 9.

⁸⁶ *Id.*

⁸⁷ *Id.* at 10.

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Id.* at 10–11.

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 10.

⁹¹ Dovidio, Gaertner & Kawakami, *supra* note 75, at 10.

⁹² *Id.* at 10–11.

⁹³ John F. Dovidio, Angelika Love, Fabian M. H. Schellhaas & Miles Hewstone, *Reducing Intergroup Bias Through Intergroup Contact: Twenty Years of Progress and Future Directions*, 20 GRP. PROCESSES & INTERGROUP REL. 606, 609–10 (2017).

ingroup favoritism to promote more positive orientations toward others formerly perceived as members of an outgroup.”⁹⁴ Social psychologist Charles Perdue and colleagues, in their work, found that referring to ingroup or outgroup status using “us” or “them” subconsciously perpetuates intergroup bias.⁹⁵ Therefore, changing the conceptual representations of the different groups helps reduce the intergroup bias.⁹⁶

IV. CONCLUSION

Policing in the United States has been racialized from its roots. And people of color, especially Blacks, have long been viewed as angry, hostile, violent, and a threat—whether consciously or subconsciously—by people across the board in the United States. Unsurprisingly, police view Blacks with suspicion, trepidation, and hostility in their interactions with them, and consequently, police tend to engage Blacks with more hostility and violence than they do other racial groups, especially Whites. While there are a range of preventative measures and interventions that can reduce violent, bias-driven outcomes, one is to require police to be skilled in martial arts, especially those styles, like BJJ, that equip police with the confidence, discipline, and technical skills to deal with stressful situations and safely subdue those who they deem a threat. Even more, martial arts training has the potential to broaden the diversity of individuals police meaningfully engage with, thus reducing their racial biases and fears.

⁹⁴ *Id.*

⁹⁵ Charles W. Perdue, John F. Dovidio, Michael B. Gurtman & Richard B. Tyler, *Us and Them: Social Categorization and the Process of Intergroup Bias*, 59 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 475, 482–84 (1990).

⁹⁶ *See id.*