



## Background and Site Information

- Martial arts often marketed for improving self-defense skills & physical & mental well-being
- Difficult to determine which factors contribute to positive changes<sub>5</sub>
- Curriculum, training environments, instructor teaching styles, student demographics unique to each studio → Difficult to generalize existing research<sub>4</sub>
- Lack of research on psychosocial outcomes of adult sport participation<sub>2</sub>



**Site:** Santa Teresa West Coast Martial Arts (WCST)

- Mixed martial arts studio est. May 2000
- Member of Ernie Reyes West Coast World Martial Arts Association (WCWMA)

**Instructors:** KJN Joe Soltis (owner) & KJN Samantha Gonzalez

**Student Body:** 212; ~300 pre-COVID



### WCWMA Purpose Statement:

“Develop oneself physically, mentally, spiritually, and with good character”<sub>3</sub>

**Gap:** WCST currently lacks a formal way of assessing whether program is achieving purpose statement

## Aims and Objectives

**Purpose:** Assess how training at WCST impacts students’ physical, mental, spiritual, & character development.

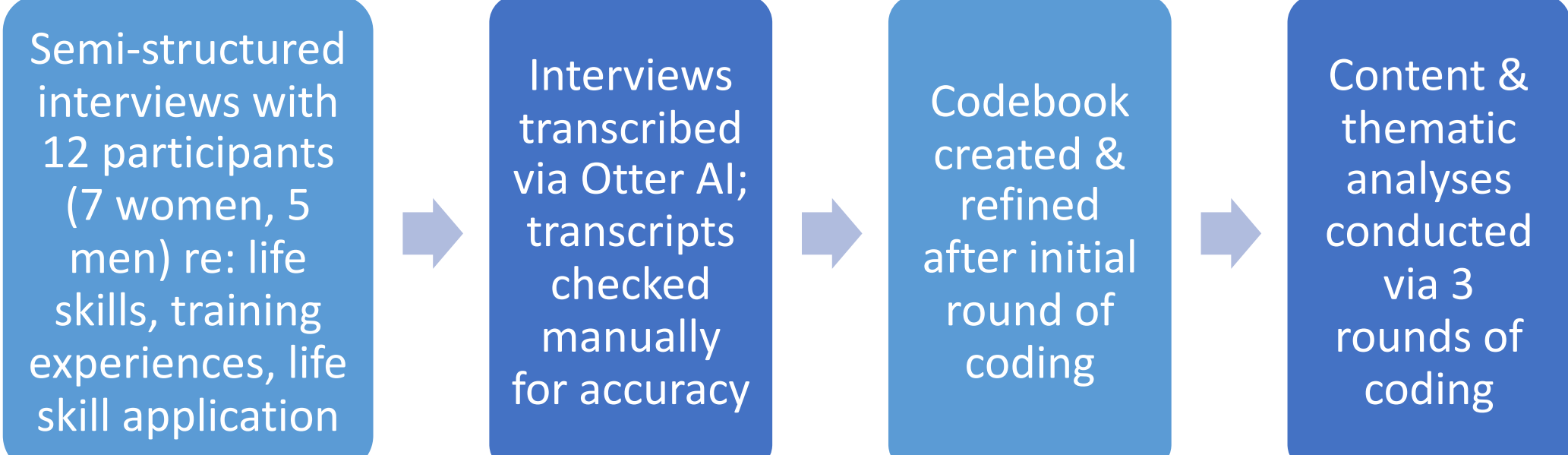
- **Aim 1:** Identify life skills learned or reinforced via WCST training
- **Aim 2:** Identify how students apply life skills to support participation in occupations outside of martial arts
- **Aim 3:** Explore which aspects of WCST training are most meaningful to students & drive retention

## Methods and Participants

### Participant Inclusion Criteria

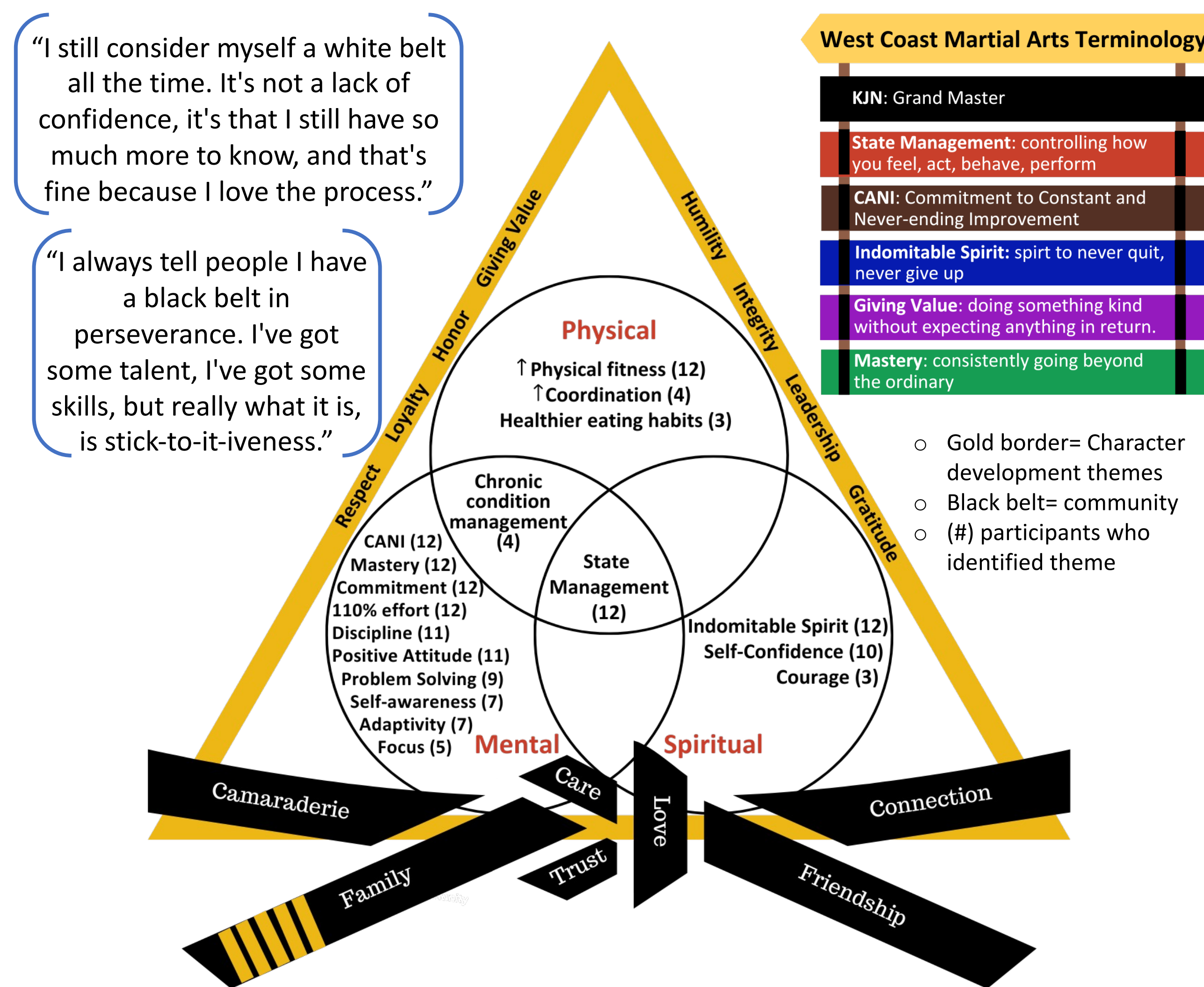
Current or former WCST Student	18 years+ at time of interview
Tested for 4 <sup>th</sup> degree black belt or higher after 2019 (training 10+ years)	Not teaching WCST classes at time of program evaluation

AGE AT START OF TRAINING		CURRENT AGE (MAY 2023)	
50+	2	61-70	2
40-49	4	51-60	5
19-39	3	41-50	2
4-18	3	30-40	3



## Aim 1: Content Analysis of Life Skills Reinforced at WCST

**100%** of participants described changes in physical &/or psychosocial health that positively impacted martial arts training & overall quality of life



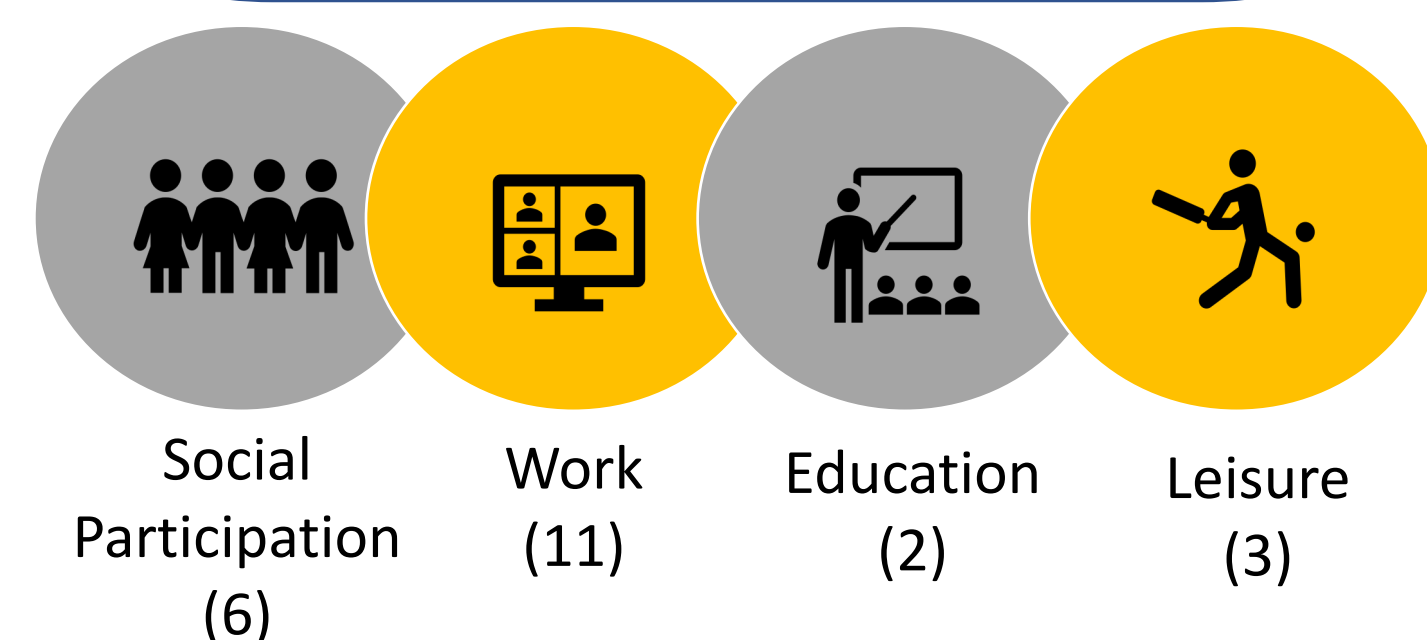
## Aim 2: Thematic Analysis of Martial Arts as a Masters Sport

“I’m proud of being a black belt. It’s my greatest accomplishment.”

**Theme:** Navigating the black belt journey during adulthood facilitates self-empowerment and personal development.

- Identity development & maintenance beyond roles as parent, spouse, employee
- Challenging age & gender norms
- Reinforcing lifelong learning mindset
- Personal goal setting & monitoring
- Sense of pride in commitment, competence, & accomplishment
- Enhanced cognition via intellectual stimulation
- Expanded social networks → social & emotional support, opportunities to act as role models

100% of participants reported translating skills reinforced WCST training to at least one occupation outside of martial arts



“It was sticking with something and having the tenacity in adulthood of being able to be my own cheerleader and prove to myself that I could achieve a goal.”

## Results/Findings

### Aim 3: Thematic Analysis of Meaningful Aspects of WCST

“What makes KJN Joe and KJN Samantha so special is the way they convey love for students. It’s the best...”

**Theme:** Instructors go above and beyond to bring out mastery in students through modeling:

- Excellent technique
- Training with 110% effort
- Attention to detail
- Respect, care, giving value
- Empowering teamwork
- Meeting people where they are
- Openness to feedback & learning from others
- Holding others to high standards of excellence

Investing in each student as a martial artist & person drives commitment, learning, passion

“[I care] so much about not letting down my instructor, and it’s because he makes you feel loved [and] appreciated. He makes you want to do better for him.”

“[KJN Joe] showed an example of this great balance of firmness and love. My character was shaped by how I saw him coach, teach, do business...”

“It’s the people.”

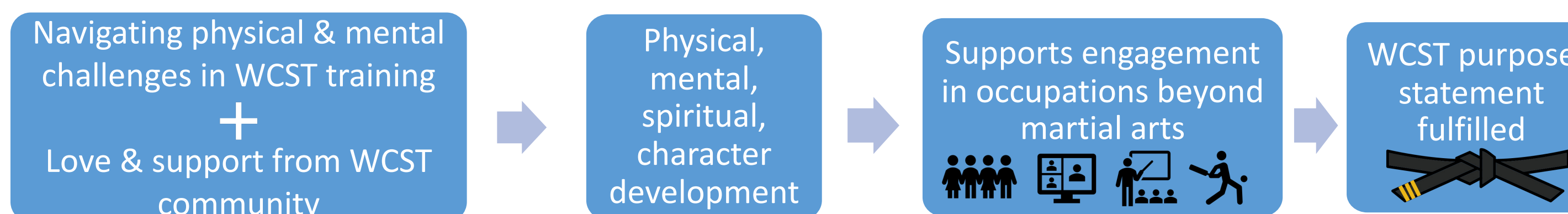
**Theme:** Connections with WCST teammates & instructors define students’ black belt journeys. Love & care from the WCST “family” transcend martial arts to support students in all areas of life.

“It was nice to see all these people who love one another in the context of martial arts love one another in the context of when real life happens. [A former student’s death] was such a sad experience, but we all came together and were there because of love.”

“All the success I’ve had in martial arts I attribute to [my partner]... I want to be a good partner for her which forces me to up my game.”



## Discussion



Sports Participation = avenue for physiological & psychosocial development across lifespan<sub>2</sub>

- WCST’s philosophical & structural underpinnings are suited to foster personal growth in adults

Social influences = key drivers of adults’ interest, commitment, & success in Masters sports<sub>1</sub>

- 100% of participant self-reflections highlight belonging to tight-knit WCST community as most meaningful aspect of their black belt journey → opportunity for social participation
- Much of learning was relational → watching teammates & instructors lead by example

Role of coach = foster setting in which athletes can “flourish, self-discover, and satisfy their growth needs for achievement, self-esteem, and belonging”<sub>1</sub>

- Masters athletes benefit from coaches who use adult learning principles & individualize coaching strategies to athlete’s unique goals & attributes → increases intrinsic motivation<sub>1</sub>
- WCST instructors invest in making each student feel seen & valued while holding them to high standards of excellence → facilitates students’ development as martial artists & overall personal growth

“I love martial arts, but **more so it’s the people**. You feel like you’re home, you’re safe. These people have your back.”

### Limitations

Program evaluation cannot be generalized, small sample size, researcher affiliated with community

### Acknowledgements

Thank you to the WCST BKJNs & KJNs who shared their martial arts journeys. Special thanks to KJN Joe & KJN Samantha for their support.

### References



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