

**American Kenpo Karate**

**Spring Lake Park**

**Concepts for Women's Self-Defense**

**Belt Promotion: 1st Degree Black Belt**

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## Preface

The goal of this exercise was to determine the most effective principles from Kenpo and Tang Soo Do in order to create a female self defense class based on these concepts. My first introduction to martial arts study in 1990 was under the direction of a strong, kind, learned woman. From her, I learned a fundamental understanding that women can take care of themselves and do not necessarily need to be the weaker sex. My reasons for adamantly wishing to share my experience with others are personal.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Initial Comparison of the Two Styles: Tang Soo Do and Kenpo</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>The Themes</b> .....	<b>6</b>
The use of hip .....	6
The flow of the move .....	8
Deadly strikes and target areas .....	8
Support against a choke .....	9
Arm locks .....	10
The 4 against 1 rule .....	10
Flexes .....	11
Merge of gravity .....	11
Getting off line .....	12
<b>Conclusion and Thoughts</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>15</b>

## Introduction

Somewhere between the idea and the execution, the theme of this paper took a different path. I had intended to write a structured article, detailing the best practices learned from both Kenpo and a previously studied style, Tang Soo Do. From these best practices, I would create 10 different techniques, each incorporating a theme, which could be taught to a group of women as a self defense class.

So I began the journey of this creation, thinking about pieces of techniques and concepts that I found the most valuable, practicing my explanations on my children's classes and creating my own ten techniques and lesson plans. I gathered some female friends, all who had never studied martial arts or taken a self defense class, and began the sessions. Here is where everything changed. Instead of feeling the teacher, the potential expert in the room, I found myself challenged with situations presented and was overwhelmed by how much I learned from their questions.

We explored the following concepts, which will be discussed within this paper: 1) The use of hip torque 2) the flow of the move 3) arm and wrist locks 4) and flexes while learning several basic Kenpo techniques. During the classes, I added concepts that enhanced the teaching flow and addressed many of the questions asked.

This paper now details both my original thoughts and explanations as well the learnings from this group of women. The paper is a blend of information, education and moments of informality, which represents my teaching style. I hope that you will enjoy our journey.

## Initial Comparison of the Two Styles

Tang Soo Do (also known as Soo Bahk Do), translated as "the way of the China (or open) hand", is both a 'hard' and a 'soft' style of martial art, with the hard external influence coming from the Soo Bahk and the soft internal from the Northern Chinese systems. As with many styles, there is great debate about its origin and history. The reigning theory of the style comes from the

writings of the Grand Master Hwang Kee, who claims that similar material was documented approximately two thousand years before the Indian priest, Dahlma the monk (Daruma in Japan) was credited with the birth of martial arts. Modern day Moo Duk Kwan Tang Soo Do was "born" in 1945, originating as the product of traditional Soo Bahk Ki and the Tang method, a Chinese style from the Tang dynasty. In time, the style absorbed several effective aspects of other existing martial arts, such as Tack Kyun Bop, Yu Sul, Kung Fu, Japanese Karate, and Aikido. The strong Korean influence to this style is particularly noticed in the use of offensive and defensive hip twists (also known as achieving Hip torque) as well as the dynamic kicking combinations. However, many of the self defense techniques against front, cross and double grabs trace to Japanese arm/wrist movements.

The Tang Soo Do style is considered a method of self defense (Ho Sin Sool) or instinctual reaction and was modified as needed for that purpose throughout the generations. Students are taught that the idea of Ho Sin Sool begins with awareness of your surroundings, circumstances and potential threatening situations. Secondly, instead of becoming a victim, the student should redirect the aggressive force (which is likely larger/stronger), using minimal physical power. Ideally, one should use the energy of the attacker against them. In most situations, when your attacker pushes, you pull away and if they pull, you push.

Tactically, Tang Soo Do teaches wide and long leaning stances, which translate beautifully into forms, and might be ideal for a sword fight or a battle on a horse, but I never felt them to be practical for modern day self defense. The movement through the shoulder width, Kenpo-based stances mimics the Tang Soo Do fighting stances, but feel more free moving. Furthermore, the use of hip in a defense from a leaning stance utilizes moving from the hips and upward. The back heel remains grounded and the back leg is often locked. In Tang Soo Do, the hips may move apart from the stance. For example, when stepping forward with a high block/rising block (aka upward block) the hips are turned sideways during the stack up and then turned forward again during the actual block.

Interestingly, Kenpo originated in 1954, not long after the “birth” of Tang Soo Do. This system was developed by Senior Grandmaster Ed Parker, following training by the late Professor William Chow, as a modern method for present day self defense. The techniques allow the user to adapt to his or her own physical ability. To me, much of what I’ve learned from the past 9 years of study, indicates small differences between the principle concepts of Tang Soo Do and Kenpo. As mentioned above, the Kenpo stances are narrower and faster changing. Furthermore, the defense is much closer with Kenpo, leaving little room between you and the attacker. (Tang Soo Do did hold a great focus on breaking boards, something I am glad to no longer have to do). All in all, much of my previous study translates well into Kenpo, once I adjusted my stances and got over the fear of being so close. The themes described below are generally the same to both styles perhaps with slight modifications.

## **The Themes**

### ***The use of hip***

Hip rotation is a method of generating power from the large muscle groups of the body, generally achieved by pushing off the ground with the back leg. This was the first concept I wanted to discuss. Most women naturally turn their hips well, so I was thinking that this would be an easy beginning. As both styles teach the concept of hip torque, I blended my explanation between the two, since I find that each work well in different circumstances. Although the hip turns similarly, the addition of the back heel turn into the Kenpo forward bow gives a fluid motion and does not separate the hips from the rest of the body. Furthermore, additional reach is obtained. However, for short distances that require immediate response, particularly with the front arm, I feel that a quick hip turn in the absence of a full forward bow is quite effective.

### **Main principles**

- 1) In general, women will be physically weaker than our attacker, so we need to make up for that!
- 2) Our power comes from our center. Think of your arms and legs as extensions of the center.

- 3) When you turn your hips, the power of the strike is added to the force generated from the turn. This is part of the principle of torque.
- 4) The rotation of the hip should be in combination with motion against or away from the target (; the hips being closest to the center of our bodies from where the turn and line initiates. (Okay, that one got more complicated...))

Torque is defined as “the tendency of a force to rotate an object about an axis, fulcrum, or pivot. Just as a force is a push or a pull, a torque can be thought of as a twist (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torque> ).” In layman’s terms, torque can be described as a measure of the turning force on an object. The power of the move depends on three factors 1) the force applied, which is directly proportional to the speed and power behind the hip turn 2) the length of the lever arm (in our case the difference between an inward elbow strike and a horizontal forearm strike), connecting the axis (hips) to the point of force application (opponent’s target); and 3) the angle between the two. The greater the angle, the more torque and power is applied. Therefore, a reverse punch is more effective than a front punch when hip is applied, as the angle between the force and lever arm vector is increased.

We started with the explanation above. Fortunately, the students were all science majors so the concept of torque was easily accepted. After a few minutes of turning the hips side to side to get a feel for the movement, we moved through the idea of neutrals and the power behind the forward bow turn. Then we put the concept to use. Using a heavy bag, we tried several different strikes, first not allowing the hips to turn and applying torque transitioning from neutrals to forward bows. There was indeed great surprise to note that most could knock over a bag “without hurting my hand!” A general opinion of “wow, I am stronger than I thought” resonated through the class. I felt it was a good start. Interestingly, adults enjoy jab, cover, punch as much as the kids do!

Most of the motion was focused forward for this initial session, therefore I was surprised (but pleased) when the question was raised about reverse motion. “Can we use the same principle to strike behind, let’s say with an elbow?” (The answer was certainly yes, but was tabled to the next class and is described as follows.)

We next practiced defense against a close rear shoulder grab where I was able to introduce my second set of concepts, *the flow of the move*.

In general, a response should have at least three parts

- 1) The initial response that controls the situation. This can be a block, a pin to prevent choking, whatever it takes to gain your ground and get a moment of control. Screaming helps here as well. This is almost always the most important move. (I did not mention that the control move can also be a strike, for example a blocking punch or an inward block that doubles as a strike to the bicep. For this class, I wanted to keep it simple first, then add on as the concepts and use became more of a natural response.)
- 2) The second move is the change from victim to defender. Now that you have mentally and physically begun to take control of the situation in step one, the next strike is your response to the attack and the initial creation of the escape route.
- 3) The third and remaining responses allow for whatever you need to do to keep him from either following you or create enough time and room to escape.

For this exercise, we started with 1) simple cross pin to the grabbing hand (modified by some with the use of fingernails), 2) Stepping back with a back elbow (targets modified by height and desire to injure) 3) Follow up defense of student choice. I suggested a back hammerfist as my desire was to leave in the direction of front. Others felt more comfortable with a reverse palm heel and another did not want to try and leave until the knees were buckled by side kicks. We played with several what if situations based on the rear shoulder grab. Some examples: in a crowd versus alone on the street, a moderately annoying drunk in a bar versus an aggressive stranger in a parking garage.

For those “one of us is leaving and it’s going to be me” situations, we discussed the use of the *deadly strikes and target areas*. After practicing the use of panther punches, dragon’s head punches and additional handswords on the heavy bag, we gently applied each punch to ourselves to understand how little force was needed to (for example) break a windpipe or drive



a nose into the brain (5 pounds of pressure). The general consensus was "I hope I never have to use these, but it's good to know how".

We then discussed how not to be seen as a victim. Of course, many of the women had considered not walking alone at night etc and carrying their keys in their hands as a weapon. I shared the teachings of a Chicago homicide police officer who advises women to carry a ballpoint pen as a simple weapon. He considered it much better to leave a pen in someone's leg or eye, then to have to remove a set of keys lodged in a body part in order to escape. We further discussed how feeling that you could retaliate makes you appear more confident and may give an attacker pause.

Next, we extended the principles learned to a variety of chokes. Instead of a real shoulder grab, we turned the attack into a real choke with one arm with the victim remaining upright. We upgraded the pin in the first move to include a lock against the choke. The concept of *support against a choke* was introduced. In general, the victim will not have equal or greater arm strength than the attacker. So, by definition, if the victim pulls down against an attacker, who is pulling up as if to choke, the victim will exert her maximum strength and still remain choked. However, if the arm is anchored/locked into the chest, by driving the elbow into the stomach, as though hitting oneself into the stomach, then the angle of incidence has changed. The attacker is now pulling against the total body weight of the victim in order to continue the choke. The motion takes very little strength and provides control against the choke. Furthermore, a head turn against the arm to open the airway was explained. This concept was well received and students were interested to see how easily this worked for them.

Having tried several chokes (one arm from the side while standing, one arm from the back while standing, from behind in a variety of "circumstances", many found combinations with which they felt the most comfortable and continued to look for openings for the next target. We explored what worked for each person and whether or not exits or openings were achieved. This yielded a bit more complex set of classes, students were very uncomfortable with "peeling the arm off" and preferred to add different pain point strikes in order to have the attacker release the hold. Perhaps this feeling was a bit too real for many.

## **Arm Locks**

An armlock is a “single or double joint lock that hyperextends, hyperflexes or hyperrotates the elbow joint and/or shoulder joint (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armlock>).” A lock applied to the shoulder joint is referred to as a shoulder lock, applied to the elbow joint is called an armbar. Care is needed in practicing armlocks, as they can easily cause serious muscle, tendon and ligament and even bone-related injuries.

We start with a simple arm bar to the elbow, complete with a hip turn. Again, using a grab to the shoulder, this time a cross grab to the front, we begin with the kenpo inward block stepping through to block above the arm. Then, as the hip turns to the opposite direct (think glancing salute), the arm bar is applied. Once the opponent is down, then the student may chose where the targets are open. The side of the knee was a favorite option.

To move this concept into grabs to the wrist, it is important to remember the **“4 against 1 rule”**. A victim would never choose to fight four opponents when then can win against one, so why try to escape from a grab against 4 fingers when there is only one thumb? We used modified outward blocks against fingers and thumbs to understand the concept. This was done with cross grabs, same side and double handed grabs. (For double grabs, I personally like upward/outward blocks which flow into handwords ending at the collar bone. The hands are then in perfect position to grab the head and bring it to the knee.) Stepping back added to the power of the break (think single exit). Sometimes one must create either space to exit or a small release against a very strong opponent, so we added heel stomps and elbows as initial deterrents. Then, as before, we added secondary moves following release from the grab. By this point, I had abandoned the more complex series of strikes I had thought to teach and encouraged each woman to create her own scenarios.

Finally, the concept was extended to wrist locks, combining the rules for escaping grabs with the elbow lock described above (Think crossing talons). Somehow this went better than I thought it would. Perhaps as we were so focused on hip turning, there was no one trying to force the moves?

One of my favorite arm locks is the figure four lock (also used in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and judo ) as an extension of an upward block against a high punch or club, or as a wrist lock after a failed grab. The final lock visually represents the number 4 where the shoulder or wrist is trapped between the defendant's arms, while one hand locks on to the opposite arm. As this is slightly more complex, I am saving this teaching for the end. However, this is a technique that I would employ if ever needed.

### *Flexes*

As we moved towards the end of the session, the ideas of flexes were introduced. Flexes are a style of arm/wrist bar by which the wrist is "flexed" into an unnatural position and is held by the opposing motion of the thumb and the middle finger of the attacker's hand. A flex may be considered inward or outward (towards or away) and may utilize a one or two hands to lock the flex. In general, if the opponent has a large wrist, I use two hands, but that is my preference. If the attacker has awareness of the pressure points on the hand or wrist, additional control may be gained. Flexes <sup>d</sup>o not require a great deal of strength, but the angle achieved on the opponent's wrist and the position of his middle finger against the wrist is crucial. Control is achieved primarily through the position of the thumb, creating a push pull move until pain is achieved.

We started <sup>ing</sup> ~~use~~ a flex as a defense against a front grab to the collar. This is an easier flex that combines the idea of the outward flex with the "support against a choke"-related concept of anchoring the arm. Anchoring the arm provides an introduction to **merge/marriage of gravity**, using the weight of the body as additional strength by sinking the entire body down, in this case, stepping slightly out and bending the knee to drop the body down slightly. This would assume that you had no option to step back, perhaps the victim is up against a wall. This same attack was ~~be~~ recreated with the option to step away. This time, we stepped back with the flex, perhaps shuffling back to lock on even further. The additional of the rear front kick to head or groin followed by an inward horizontal or downward elbow, rounds out the class. The concept of merge of gravity was reviewed again with the land in the downward elbow. Flexes were

certainly easier for some than others. The more coordinated the individual, the easier to move with the flex.

At the end of the class, I asked each student to come up with a situation that they are concerned may occur. We then used the concepts studied to create some what if scenarios. When planning the session, I tried to consider situations in which women were likely to find themselves. I was quite certain that someone would ask for defense against a knife or gun but wanted to leave that to the end. This also allows the opportunity to address a key concept that had not been mentioned: **getting off line**. The plan is to practice getting off line and using a waiter's tray motion into a controlling grab, then adding on. Getting off the line of fire is simply about removing yourself from the motion forward and removing the target. As expected, this scenario was requested and we used the basic beginnings from "clipping the storm" and "capturing the rod" to start the scenario play. During this work, we discussed how frightening the idea of a gun or knife attack would be. Several of the women wondered if they could react, knowing that the likelihood of being shot or injured was very high. Another woman, whose daughter works in a rape prevention center, interjected a somber thought: if your attacker will hurt you in that initial moment, he will do much worse to you later. We discussed the idea of accepting, that in defense, you will likely be injured. However, it would be an injury on your own terms. At least you would have some control of the situation.

After playing with several chokes from behind, a scenario arose that I had not considered. One of the women travels often for work, many times alone, and is concerned about an attacker following her to her hotel room and pushing her inside. After discussing preventative measures, (ie walk past the room if you feel you are being followed, maintain all senses...), we began playing with this scenario. Initially we assumed that the attacker would push on the door to try and gain entry. For this defense, we combined a reverse hip step back defense (back elbow or hammerfist) and then turning to a palm heel or horizontal elbow to the door to slam it shut. Secondly, we assumed that the attacker would attempt to push the victim into the room. We used the waiter's tray opening of "broken rod" followed by several kicks to push him out of the room and allow for time to retreat.

With that scenario play, we were out of time. Given a longer session, I would have liked to have added simple take downs, but the class gave me a great deal to consider. For the future, I'd like to introduce more scenarios for women who travel alone. Furthermore, as much as I love flexes and would use them if need be, they were too complex for the initial class. For this type of teaching, the simpler was the best.

## Conclusion and Thoughts

In summary, my goal of this work was to determine the most effective principles from Kenpo and Tang Soo Do in order to create a female self defense class based on these concepts. Together, a group of female friends and I explored the use of hip torque, the flow of the move, arm and wrist locks , merge of gravity, the "4 against 1 rule" , support against a choke and flexes while learning several basic Kenpo techniques.

Interestingly, while writing this paper, I came across a quote from a former student of Ed Parker's who described his theory of 50 Ways to Sunday and the "what if" rule. I found these thoughts close to what I was hoping to accomplish. Here are some basics, now what ~~is~~ <sup>if</sup> something different happens? For me, memorization is the most difficult part of the martial art. I think and react more in concepts. Memorizing the names of different techniques, while valuable, feels less effective than understanding the concepts and the whys of the technique.

For this class, I wanted to see if the idea of focusing on the concepts, while using techniques as examples would be as effective to other students as it is to me. As the class only went for a few weeks and no one (fortunately) was actually attacked afterwards, I suppose it is presumptuous to draw a conclusion of success. However, when I see women able to understand and apply an idea in multiple situations and then feel that perhaps they could be one less victim, I believe the experiment was successful.

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## Glossary

*Angle of Incidence:* The perpendicular angle of a strike on its target to achieve the maximum effect.

*Armlock:* A "single or double joint lock that hyperextends, hyperflexes or hyperrotates the elbow joint and/or shoulder joint."

*4 against 1 rule:* Heather's name for the concept of remembering to look for an opening against the thumb.

*Flexes:* A style of arm/wrist bar by which the wrist is "flexed" into an unnatural position and is held by the opposing motion of the thumb and the middle finger of the attacker's hand.

*Getting off the line of fire (or getting off line):* The act of removing yourself from the motion forward and removing the target of the original attack.

*Hip rotation:* A method of generating power from the large muscle groups of the body, generally achieved by pushing off the ground with the back leg.

*Kenpo:* Originated in 1954, this system was developed by Senior Grandmaster Ed Parker, as a modern method for present day self defense. The techniques allow the user to adapt to his or her own physical ability.

*Merge/marriage of gravity:* Defined as a power principle of our applied body mass on a vertical plane, this is simply the additional power obtained from the dropping of the weight downward in the same line as gravitational pull.

*Support against a choke:* A method of anchoring the elbow into the chest, by driving the elbow into the stomach, as though hitting oneself into the stomach. The attacker is now pulling against the total body weight of the victim in order to attempt to continue the choke.

*Tang Soo Do:* Translated as "the way of the China (or open) hand", Tang Soo Do is both a 'hard' and a 'soft' style of Korean martial arts that was created in 1945 by Grand Master Hwang Kee.

*Torque:* The tendency of a force to rotate an object about an axis, fulcrum, or pivot.