



Disability Inclusion: Catalyzing Change Through Sport

May 5 - 7, 2025
Park City, Utah

**MOVE
UNITED**
EDUCATION
CONFERENCE

Hosted By





ReCreating Beauty: Wheelchair Tai Chi as a Transformative Adaptive Sport

Danielle Lauber, PhD, CTRS

Middle Tennessee State University; Department of Veterans Affairs

Zibin Guo, Ph.D.

The University of Tennessee Chattanooga

Move United Education Conference 2025

May 3-7, Park City, UT



Session Objectives

1. Introduce W/A TC as an adaptive sport and recreational therapy modality
 - identify 2-3 ways that W/A TC can impact patient perspectives of power, beauty, and/or ability
2. Discuss how participation can shift perceptions from disability to ability
 - engage in 2-3 W/A TC moves from a sitting, standing, or wheelchair position
3. Explore its applications in rehabilitation and inclusion
 - identify 2-3 ways that W/A TC as an adaptive sport can align w/rehabilitative and reintegrative healthcare

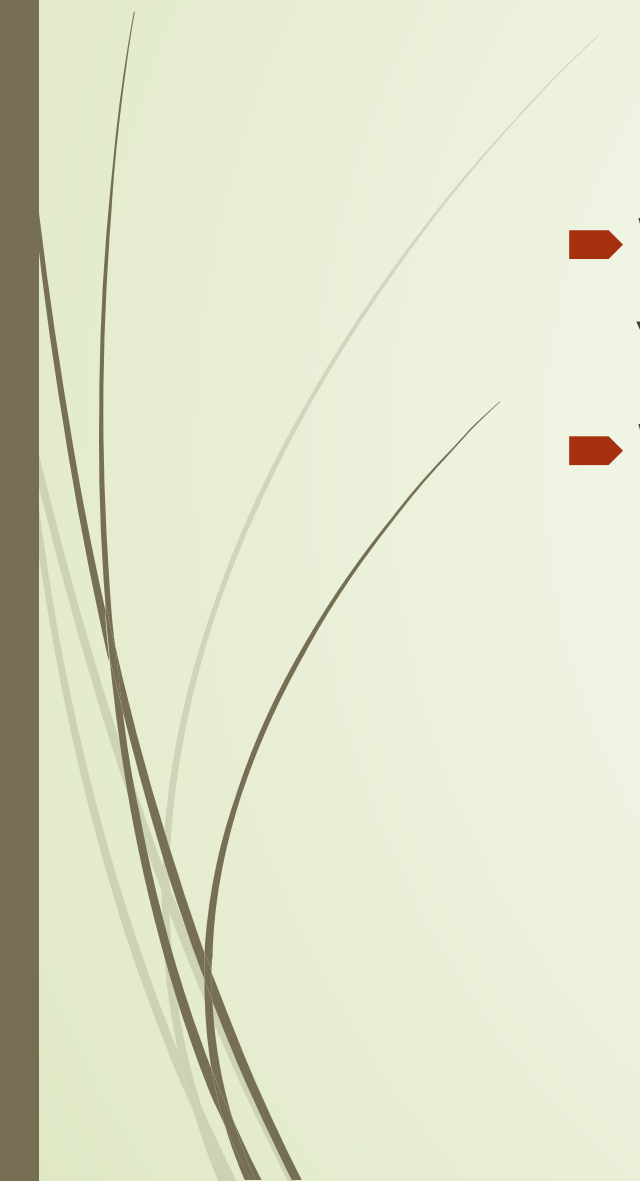


Agenda

- Introduction, demonstration, and impressions gathering
- Overview of wheelchair/adaptive tai chi in adaptive sport and recreational therapy
- Research discussion (changing perspectives from disability to ability)
- Discussion of wheelchair/adaptive tai chi as a transformative modality
- Conclusion, audience practice, and Q&A



Demonstration & Impressions

- Write down 3 single-word impressions of what you see after the demonstration
 - Watch W/A TCC Demonstration
- 

A Multifaceted Art



- Tai Chi Chuan originated as a form of internal martial arts
- A popular traditional and popular mind & body healing program
- Mind-centered body engagement
 - Slow, circular, flowing, gentle and graceful



Tai chi

Principles of Tai Chi Chuan

- The Mind Commands the Body's Movement - *mind over the body*
- Moving with Calming and Gentle Force - *Engaged*
- Moving with Synchronization - *Unified*
- Flowing and Circular Motion – *Overcome through embracing*

A Force of Four Ounces Deflects One Thousand Pounds

- Redefine the concepts of power and ability
- Transforming “inability” (a force of four ounces) to “ability” (deflecting one thousand pounds)
- However, the conventional practice method requires ambulatory ability



Wheelchair Tai Chi – An Effective Model of Engagement

- The wheelchair Tai Chi
 - The unique feature:
making the wheelchair motions as part of the Tai Chi movement
- Wheelchair Tai Chi demonstration as a kickoff event for the opening ceremony of the 2008 Paralympics



Ancient Wisdom with Modern Application – Inclusive Tai Chi





Wheelchair Tai Chi as Sport

- Implies competition, skill, physical activity
- Endless benefits
 - Physical health & skill building (Kim et al, 2024)
 - Physical and mental quality of life (Isidoro-Cabanas et al, 2023)
 - Improved self-worth, health, well being, social inclusion (Devine et al, 2015)



Barriers

- Barriers to sport
 - Equity, accessibility, opportunity
- Barriers to adaptive sport
 - Medical, scheduling, motivation, transportation, equipment (Kim et al, 2024)
 - Financial, attitudinal, support, public policy (Marques & Alves, 2021)
 - Lack of opportunity? Knowledge?



Recreational Therapy Perspective

- “systematic process that utilizes recreation and other activity-based interventions
- RT offers holistic rehabilitation practice focusing on barrier adaptation and adaptive strategies
- Adaptive sport efficacy through:
 - Positive biopsychosocial outcomes
 - Physical health and skills competency building
 - Social benefits
 - Facilitation considerations

Program Implementation with the U.S. VA Healthcare System

- From 2017 to 2023, the project team, funded by seven consecutive years of grants from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, partnered with the VA Healthcare system and implemented this program at 85 VA medical centers nationwide.
- Trained over 1,500 Healthcare providers
- Has become one of the most popular mind & body empowerment programs within the VA Healthcare System and benefited tens of thousands of veterans with a disability, including PTSD.



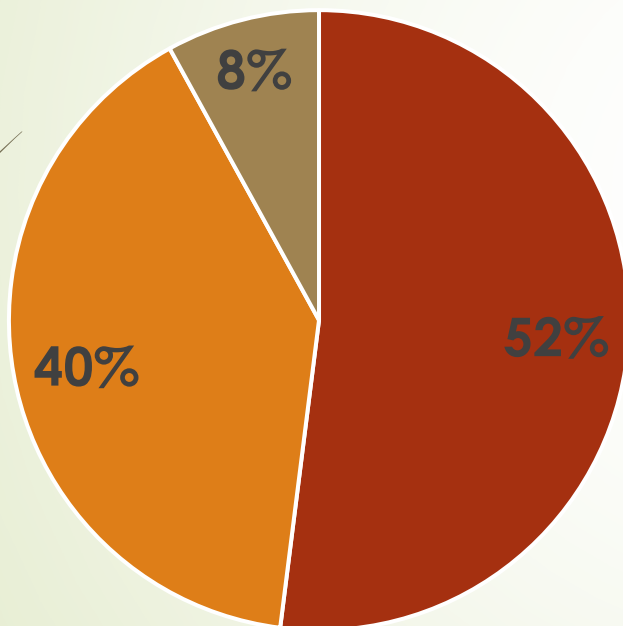
Program Focus

- Ability focused
 - All body conditions are platforms of engagement
 - cultivating a sense of ability through illustrating martial arts applications
 - Transform the wheelchair from a disability symbol to a tool for creating beauty, flow, and power.
 - Making all parts of the body a flowing system.
- Nature connection
 - Cultivating a mental connection with nature through using metaphors and similes
 - Transform the state of mind from a socially focused into a naturally centered



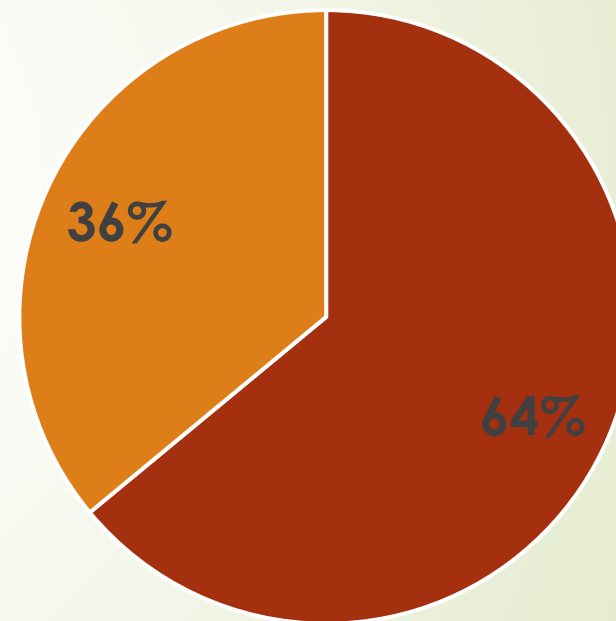
Program Participation Impact: Healthcare Providers' Perspectives

Perceived Physical
Improvements



- Major positive effect
- Minor positive effect
- No effect

Perceived Mental
Improvements

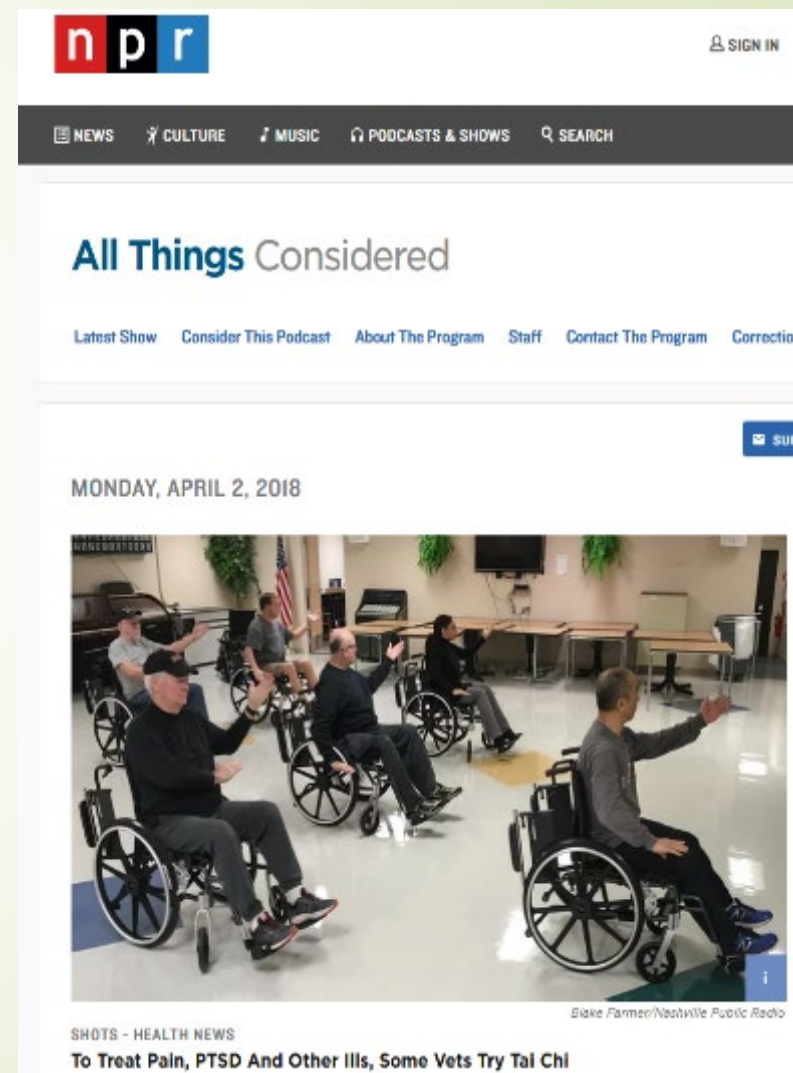


- Major positive effect
- Minor positive effect

Program Impact:

Veteran Participants Perspective

- “Thank you for all you have done to give us veterans the Tai Chi program. I have participated from the start, and I cannot tell you how it has helped me physically, emotionally, and socially.”
- “Since January of 2021, I have had shoulder surgery, neck surgery, back surgery, knee surgery, and a hysterectomy. Recovering from each has been difficult, but the gentleness of Tai Chi has allowed me to get my body moving without great strain, while adaptive Tai Chi offered options to take those issues into account and still do the forms”
- “Even though I was in the wheelchair, I felt that I was so powerful and could overcome the negative emotions through yielding and redirecting like the bamboo.”
- I was not bothered or annoyed by the traffic and erratic drivers. I was able to ‘yield and re-direct’ my thoughts, and instead of focusing on the traffic, I focused on the trees
- “Practicing Tai Chi in the chair makes me forget my disability”
- “Even though I was in the wheelchair, I felt that I was so powerful and could overcome the negative emotions through yielding and redirecting like the bamboo.”



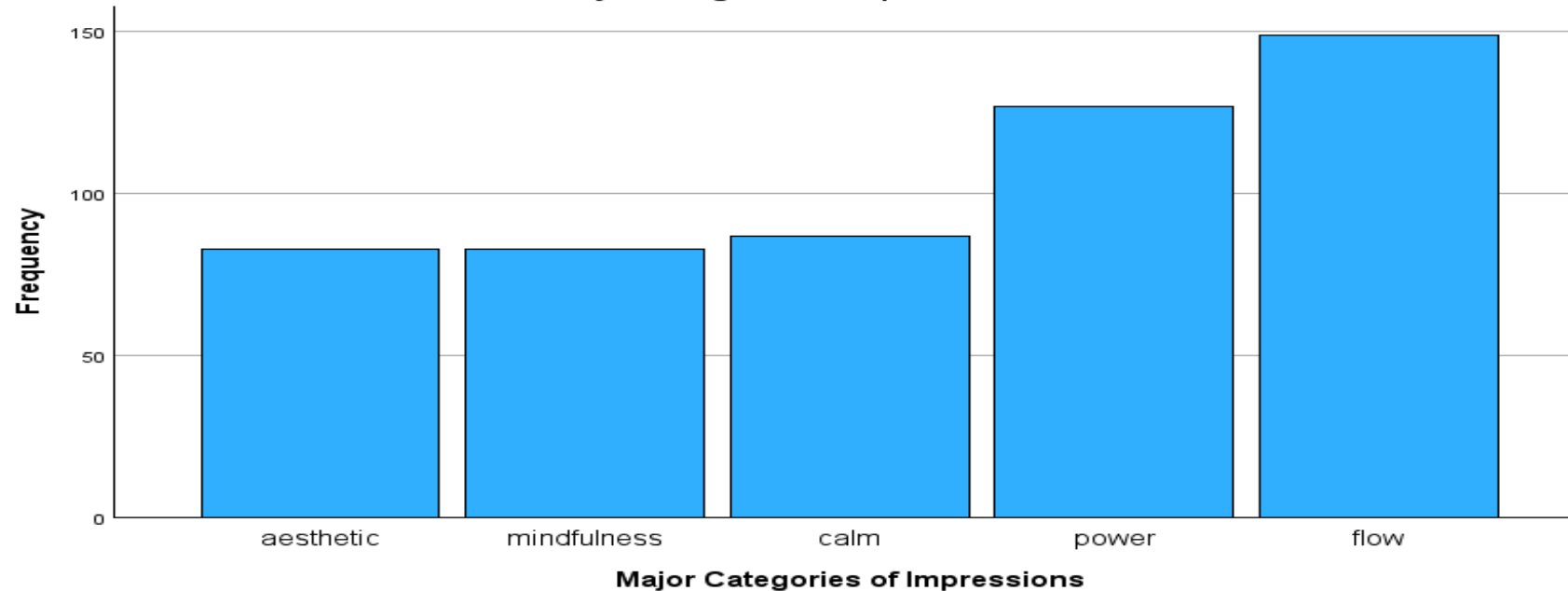
Flow, Power, Calm, Mindfulness, and Beauty

Perceived Effects of Wheelchair Taijiquan ($n=140$)

Major Categories of Impressions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	aesthetic	83	15.6	15.7	15.7
	mindfulness	83	15.6	15.7	31.4
	calm	87	16.4	16.4	47.8
	power	127	23.9	24.0	71.8
	flow	149	28.0	28.2	100.0
	Total	529	99.4	100.0	
Missing	1	3	.6		
Total		532	100.0		

Major Categories of Impressions



“Flowing is not just a principle of the Tai Chi Chuan movement. It is also a way of life.” —a veteran participant.

- Flow not only characterizes Taijiquan, but it is also how we describe nature and define beauty.
- In both the natural and social worlds, flow is the process of cultivating and a result of power.
- When our minds are tranquil, fluid, centered, unified, and flowing, so will our bodies.



“Flowing is not just a principle of the Tai Chi Chuan movement. It is also a way of life.” —a veteran participant.

- Cultivating the ability to flow is at the heart of martial arts and part of Taijiquan’s enduring legacy.
- The wheelchair and inclusive Taijiquan embody and practice these values.
- They also serve as a metaphor – regardless of body conditions, we all can flow and cultivate “a force of four ounces to deflect one thousand pounds.”





Practice

- ▶ Let's practice!
- ▶ Standing, sitting, wheelchair, moving
- ▶ 2 key moves



Conclusion

- Introduce W/A TCC as an adaptive sport and recreational therapy modality
 - Impact patient perspectives of power, beauty, and/or ability
- Discuss how participation can shift perceptions from disability to ability
 - Actively engaged in 2-3 W/A TCC moves from a sitting, standing, or wheelchair position
- Explore its applications in rehabilitation and inclusion
 - W/A TCC as an adaptive sport can align with rehabilitative and reintegrative healthcare

Thank you!

