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Samurai of Gentle Power : An Exploration of Aikido in the Lives of Women Aikidoka

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**Samurai of Gentle Power:
An Exploration of Aikido in the
Lives of Women Aikidoka.**

by Katie Noad



**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
Leisure Science Honours
at the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences,
Edith Cowan University**

July 1996

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study of women's experience of the martial art of aikido comes as a response to the paucity of texts on women in the martial arts. My 16-year involvement with aikido and my studies in the field of Leisure Science have led me to explore the apparent contradiction between the traditionally masculine domain of martial arts and prescribed female/feminine behaviour. As a feminist researcher and as an aikido participant I acknowledge a close connection with my topic and hence the subjective nature of this study. I am not trying to produce an absolute truth, but present some of the complex individual realities of the participants of this study.

Twelve women who had been practising aikido for more than two years were interviewed for this study. Their stories sketched pictures of their personal experiences of aikido and illustrated what aikido meant to them. After reviewing relevant literature and its relationship to participants' stories five major themes emerged: female values in a masculine environment; empowerment and self development; spirituality; social behaviour and intimacy; and sport, martial arts and aikido. While the construction of physicality, sport and the martial arts has been largely from a male perspective, applying a postmodern feminist perspective lead to a redefining of masculine and feminine behaviours. Dispensing with the binary opposition of masculine versus feminine the redefined behaviours were interpreted as female value qualities and, according to the participants' stories, these qualities were to be found in aikido.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

3.12.96

NOTE ON REFERENCING

As this research seeks to bring women's stories to light, so the referencing shall identify and acknowledge the women whose ideas are represented in this thesis. It was my intention to follow the example of Shulamit Reinharz (1992, p. 16) using "women's full names... rather than vague, impersonal, masculinist surnames". Wherever possible I have used authors' given and family names when referencing in-text in an effort to break from a masculine writing convention and help redress the invisibility of women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the women who generously gave of their time to participate in this study and inspired me to look afresh at aikido. I would also like to thank Kandy James for providing guidance and encouragement to a wayward student who rarely set foot on campus, Pamela Weatherill for inspiring me to take a great leap of faith and Lekkie Hopkins for her valuable assistance. To my partner Noriko Shimada, a million thanks for sustaining me body and soul throughout the lengthy process of this study. My appreciation to my aikido instructor Loi Lee, who helped infuse me with new enthusiasm for my training in the midst of my academic studies and to my students who sometimes must have wondered where my mind had gone.

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INTRODUCTION: A NEW BEGINNING

In our culture, mastery and nurturance have been defined in opposition.

Women have been charged with nurturance, men with mastery.

(Carol Pearson, 1994, p. 37)

This research into women's experience of the modern Japanese martial art of aikido began because I was searching for clarification about something I had been involved in for 16 years. Aikido had become such an important part of my life that I could not remember when I did not know it. I had become aware of, and was unsettled by, the dualities manifest in aikido and was struggling to find a balance between the female nurturance and the male mastery that were apparent in its practice.

Finding a paucity of resources on women in aikido, or women in the broad range of martial arts, I looked to the bigger picture of sport and physical activity. A comparison between the behaviour and attributes of sport played mostly by men and that played mostly by women showed that sport played a major role in shaping masculine and feminine ideals and keeping the status quo of male dominance within society.

The values placed on participation in sport as a "means of expressing the tough and aggressive norms of masculinity" (Dunning & Sheard, cited in Lois Bryson, 1990, p. 177) have been modified considerably for women's sport which has more emphasis on the feminine attributes of grace and beauty and, "should not involve bodily contact" (Anna Engel, 1994, p. 439). Compare the confined space of a netball court and its restriction on women's movement, to the large open space of a football oval where

men can run freely. Netball is said to be a popular sport amongst women and girls because it is "non-aggressive and non-macho... a sport where the rules of the game have been deliberately designed to prevent body contact and rough play" (Seebohm & Ashburn, 1985, p. 8). These types of restrictions are part of society's sanctioned control of women's bodies. Constrained physical expression can be equated with enforced vulnerability.

From the limited resources on women in the martial arts and from the stories told by the women who participated in this study I found that a prime motivational factor for women to enter the male domain of martial arts is the desire to take control of their bodies and their lives. Catharine MacKinnon (cited in Catherine Schnell, 1989, p. 2), expresses an opinion held by other feminist writers that men's ability to "dominate women is enabled not only through imposing a semi-conscious state of fear but also in a physical disablement of women's bodies through effective maiming of physicality". The women in this study saw the strength and power displayed in martial arts as their tools for self defence, but there is a paradox. Having no experience in rough play or body contact sports many women feel intimidated by the aggressive, fighting nature of the martial arts.

Not all martial arts display aggressive power. There are the traditional martial arts which follow a model promoting physically aggressive training and sparring, and can be classified as hard or external arts. Examples of these are kick boxing, karate and taekwondo. Then there are those arts which can be classified as soft or internal, such as tai chi or aikido, which promote a more harmonious relationship with training

partners and do not aim to compete or injure. All of these martial arts have aspects of self defence and potential for empowering the participant.

Many women can see the benefits in practising martial arts but only some take that first step and start training. When interviewing American women about their involvement in the martial arts, Alisa Solomon (1992, p. 58) found that one participant, Susan Chandler, chose the internal martial art of aikido as a path to empowerment, feeling that within aikido's movement lay the possibility of power for each individual. It is also my own experience that through the strength and power of aikido there is great potential for empowerment and, importantly to me, it is aikido's principles of cooperation and respect which enables this empowerment to be gained without the cost of beating an opponent (both in the physical sense of the meaning or by making them lose).

In diametric opposition to empowerment there is submissiveness and suppression of power which is rewarded and encouraged by some instructors and their organisations. One of my concerns, which led me to explore other women's experience of aikido, was that aikido's principles of cooperation and respect can be interpreted in such a way as to negate women's full potential for empowerment. By listening to other women's stories of their aikido experiences I was able to look at aikido through other women's eyes and see it anew. This was my new beginning.

In searching for information about women in the martial arts I was struck by its void. Once again, women's experience had been rendered invisible by the androcentric construction of knowledge (Susan Hekman,

1987; Shulamit Reinharz, 1992; Dale Spender, 1983, 1985). There was an abundance of literature on martial arts in general, and many books and magazines dealing specifically with aikido. Amongst them I found only two books by women about women in the martial arts and aikido. Their titles indicate the authors' desire for visibility "Women in the Martial Arts" (Carol Wiley, 1992) and "Women in Aikido" (Andrea Siegel, 1993). Both the authors are of the opinion that women experience a different reality in their training in the martial arts. As discussed in feminist and phenomenological scholarship, there are many realities (M. Falco, 1987; Max van Manen, 1990; Shulamit Reinharz, 1992). It is important to foreground women's many realities.

Traditionally, martial arts is an arena where aspects attributed to masculinity such as, competitiveness, physical power and mastery, have become appropriated by men, supporting their position in the male/female hierarchy. Women come to the martial arts seeking that which has been denied them, power. Power to protect themselves and take control of their bodies and their lives. According to Catherine Schnell (1989, p. 35) women "may be accessing forms of physicality which has [sic] hitherto been denied, but this does not mean that they access the entrenched power base of being male". Here is highlighted another paradox. In order to empower and protect themselves against harassment and abuse, in the main inflicted by men, women enter a traditionally male domain where they come into close and sometimes violent physical contact with men.

Throughout the process of this research, aikido's multiplicity of meanings, and the values placed on them by different women, became apparent. It

also became apparent that they were not peculiar to aikido alone, but were to be found across the broad spectrum of sport/physical activities. Within the history of women's physicality lay the origins of gender appropriate behaviour which prevail even today and create inner conflict for women who wish to pursue the very physical activity of a martial art which apparently embodies masculine, not feminine ideals.

My desire to explore women's experience of aikido led me to talk to 12 women between the ages of 17 and 50 who had had more than two years experience with aikido. To give voice to these women I chose to approach this research from a feminist perspective, drawing on an interpretive paradigm. I wanted the process of the research to be empowering for both the researcher and the participants, and personally I wanted to experience what it was to be a 'feminist researcher'.

Karla Henderson (1991b, p. 14) stated that for research "to be empowering for women, [it] should be based on the feminist consciousness of the researcher" and expressed her belief that "nothing can really be fully explained in a critical rational sense, but much can be understood" (Karla Henderson, 1991a, p. 23). With some trepidation and excitement, I have tried to break with the familiar male academic paradigm, which purports to be rational and objective, and expose my research as being proudly subjective because it expresses the individual truths of the participants, including myself as the researcher/participant, supporting the world view that there are multiple realities.

Having already completed a major research piece using the conventional male academic paradigm I have chosen to leave that path

and present this study in the first person, showing a close connection with the topic I have elected to explore. I will lead the reader through the steps of my study as they were undertaken, therefore the literature review is not the second chapter but the third. This is so because I proceeded with my interviews and transcriptions before reviewing the literature. In this way I took my direction from the raw data of the interviews as to what literature needed to be reviewed. Chapter Two deals with what can conventionally be called method but is not labelled as such because my intent is to accentuate the learning process and discoveries which took me through this study.

The questions posed in this study are:

- what does the experience of participating in aikido mean to women and,
- what are their training experiences?

These questions are explored initially by looking at women's experience of physicality, sport, the martial arts and, the dichotomous nature of their involvement in the martial arts. In Chapter Two, my research process is revealed along with a discussion of what I consider to be the feminist perspective of this study. Chapter Three is a review of literature and discusses aikido, its origins and, its present day principles and practice. It presents a female-value model of sport and considers if its characteristics are to be found in aikido. It is in this chapter that I introduce the research participants who so generously told their stories. (As an appendix, sketches of all the participants are presented to acquaint the reader with the range of women who participated in this study.)

The preparation of Chapter Three saw a shift in viewpoint from my initial

proposal and this is shown in the following chapter. My original proposal for the research had included a conceptual framework which did not take into consideration the different social experiences of women who practised aikido before they entered the dojo, or training hall. A change to a feminist framework and a deeper look at influences on women's physicality became my new direction and the introduction to Chapter Four.

In Chapter Five the participants voice their ideas and feelings as to the meaning of aikido. The following chapter explores the training experiences of the participants and culminates in the expression of the differing nature of a female defined aikido to that of the traditionally male dominated martial art. Ultimately, the conclusion of this study ties together five main themes interwoven through the women's stories and the process of my research: female values in a masculine environment; empowerment and self development; spirituality; social behaviour and intimacy; and sport, martial arts and aikido. Suggestions for further research complete this final chapter.

Definitions

Dan grade means black belt rank. The higher the rank the higher the number e.g. 4th dan is higher than 2nd dan.

Dojo is translated to mean training hall or members of a martial arts club using the dojo. The word dojo represents both singular and plural cases. The suffix "**ka**" is added to words like aikido (aikidoka) and judo (judoka) to mean a person who practises that art.

Ki is an Eastern concept of energy and power it is difficult to define in Japanese, let alone translate it into English. For the purpose of this study

I have taken it to mean the power which can be focused and directed to manifest itself as the force behind powerful aikido techniques. See Saito (1975, p. 113-5) for a more substantial explanation.

Kyu grade means ranks below black belt. The higher the number, the lower the rank e.g. 5th kyu is a lower rank than 2nd kyu.

Mat: when aikidoka refer to "the mat" they are talking about the mats, like those used for judo, on which they train.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This chapter continues to provide background to the study by examining, from a feminist perspective, the meaning and connotations of the term *subjective* as it applies to this research. I then go on to discuss the added influence of a phenomenological framework and the methods used in my inquiry. This chapter will take you through my own progressive steps of discovery and learning as I built the foundations to the framework for this study, it has therefore been termed a process rather than method.

A New Feminist Voice

Having discovered my voice as a feminist researcher I have situated this study in a feminist framework and interpretive paradigm. In challenging traditional positivist theory, feminist epistemology deconstructs the belief that "the social world is knowable in the same scientific manner that the natural world is knowable [and] that this knowledge is obtained through objectivity with the aim to achieve absolute [truth]" (Pamela Weatherill, 1994, p. 8). Instead of this exclusionary view, a feminist perspective, as described by Dale Spender (1985a, p. 5), has the central crucial belief that: "there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge".

I strongly agree with Dale Spender's notion above, that "there is no one truth", but multiple social realities which come from the differences of many individuals. I would agree that research, itself, is value-laden from the influences of the researchers' own social realities, in the main influenced by the androcentric social construction of knowledge (Susan

Hekman, 1987; Shulamit Reinharz, 1992; Dale Spender, 1985; Rosemarie Tong, 1989). This should be acknowledged and hence the subjective nature of research acknowledged.

Just as there are different feminist perspectives, which in themselves reveal complexities and pose contradictions, for example liberal, socialist, radical, and postmodern, there are different world views which represent an otherness to a malestream culture which poses itself as universally representative. Feminist research, that is research done for the empowerment of other women, incorporates the views and experiences of the researcher and the women who choose to participate in the research. These women express their social realities, their otherness, reality as they see it, through women's eyes.

Feminist Framework

Susan Hekman (1987) points to the rationalist base of, "subject/object, rational/irrational" as being rooted in a distinctly male mode of thought and society, and reinforcing the male/female hierarchy. It is argued by Susan Hekman (1987, p. 75) that an androcentric definition of 'knowledge' asserts that "objective, complete knowledge is male, while subjective, fragmentary knowledge is female" and hence infers that, as male/masculine equates with positive and neutral, female/feminine simply becomes negative, and the inferior of the two. This can be seen as analogous with the norm of male dominance in the male/female hierarchy of traditional society.

The devaluation and oppression of things female and feminine has epistemic underpinnings and is rooted in what Lloyd (cited in Christine Di

Stefano, 1990, p. 63) sees as "rationality which has been conceived as transcendence of the feminine". In her feminist critique of rationality, Susan Hekman (Polity, 1994) points to "man made" language and how it has structured the way knowledge has been produced. She identifies the male and female dichotomy produced by man made language where men are the "occupants of the sphere of rationality" and women are relegated to the sphere of emotion and feeling, or, in other words, irrationality (Susan Hekman, 1994, p. 51). The epistemological discussions on rationality and its links with 'reason' and 'knowledge' are complex, and as a novice in this area go beyond my experience. The debate rages about masculine and feminine concepts of epistemology and the inclusion or exclusion of things female in definitions of such concepts as rationality. I can identify with McMillan (cited in Susan Hekman, 1994, p. 57) who redefines rationality to include feeling, emotion, and intuition. By doing this she steps outside the binary and oppositional postures of androcentric knowledge.

Post-structuralist feminists (and I am beginning to see myself as one) take a stance of resistance to the "distancing aspects of male theory" with the notion that the constructing of knowledge is a subjective experience (Betsy Wearing, 1996, p. 37). It is both contextual and relational. Knowledge production comes out of socially specific experience. It is coloured by one's own experiences and values and as such is subjective in a positive sense. Judith Lorber and Susan Farrell (1991, p. 212) believe that most research which is put forward as objective, is "never truly objective, but always biased by the theoretical assumptions, by the framing of the research question and the interpretation of the findings". So let us admit that it is subjective. As a researcher I believe that to be

subjective means to be honest in revealing one's values and it means, as Sandra Harding (1987, cited in Costa & Guthrie 1994, p. 249) notes, placing the researcher "in the same critical plane as the research subject".

Interpreting the Voices From a Feminist Perspective

Susan Bernick (1991, p. 122) claims that there are three principles that can be used as guides for feminist methodology and theory:

1. the personal sphere is central to women's experience;
2. each woman's process of explaining herself to herself and the life story she tells as a result of that process must be respected; and
3. neither the process nor the story of one woman can be fully understood in isolation from (at least some) other women's processes and stories.

These principles became apparent to me after I had conducted my interviews for this study. By situating the research in an interpretive paradigm and using an interview process which was semi-structured and flexible it was possible for 12 women to speak about their personal experiences of aikido in rich and descriptive narratives.

This study was situated in the interpretive paradigm because I believe that there are multiple social realities and that they cannot be separated and isolated into independent parts which can then be studied. Phenomenology has as its roots in the reflective discipline of philosophy. As Karla Henderson, well known in the field of leisure studies, (1991a, p. 23) expressed, "nothing can really be fully explained in a critical sense, but much can be understood". I gave deep reflection, from a feminist

perspective to the experiences reported by the women who were studied, and within the guiding framework of feminism, interpreted the findings.

Bullock (cited in Karla Henderson, 1991a, p.10) sees that "reality is the meaning attributed to experience, and social reality is not the same for all people". Having already stated my assumption that there are multiple social realities, the interpretive paradigm in which phenomenology is situated allowed me to explore the research participants' aikido world by asking them to remember, interpret and express their experiences in their own words. In this way I looked for the answers to phenomenology's central question: "What is the structure and essence of this phenomenon for these people?" (Michael Patton, 1990, p 88).

Pilot Study

The qualitative research process has an effect on both, the researcher and her subjects, "the researcher through putting herself in her subjects' shoes and the subject through greater consciousness and self-awareness. Thus, both teach and learn in the course of the study" (Judith Lorber & Susan Farrell, 1991 p. 214). Through two semi-structured pilot interviews I hoped to assess my method and interview technique. I chose two women from my aikido club because rapport had already been established and they were easily accessible. One woman in particular had expressed her wish to participate in the study and as I had already decided not to interview my own students in the study (see below) it was opportune to involve her in its preliminary stages.

I was excited at the prospect of sharing women's aikido stories and went to the interviews with a bag full of expectations. The pilot interviews

showed me that I should expect only to engage in social interactions with the participants and not expect any great revelations. I changed my approach accordingly, but did not feel the need to change my interview guide.

Interviews

Qualitative feminist interviewing allowed for the voices of the once 'invisible' women of aikido to be heard. The interviews were an interactive experience where I answered participants' questions and shared my knowledge and experience. This type of reciprocity "invites intimacy" (Pamela Cotterill, 1992, p. 594) and promotes rapport between the researcher and the participants.

Interviews were carried out with women aged between 17 and 50 years of age, from a diverse range of backgrounds, who had been training in aikido for two or more years. There was no criterion regarding age. This just happened to be the age range into which the 12 volunteers fell. The criterion of two years of aikido training was chosen with the aim that the women would have spent enough time training to have acquired some grasp of the complexities of aikido. The women I interviewed had been doing aikido for between 3 - 14 years and so their level and depth of experience in aikido varied considerably.

As was the case for Pamela Cotterill (1992, p. 595), it was through personal networks that I selected these women and this was a delimitation. My major aikido networks were in Perth and Melbourne so I contacted a number of individuals within certain aikido groups in those cities and explained my research to them. I invited them to participate in

the research and/or requested that they nominate likely participants. I also asked these contacts to inform the likely participants about my research and ask their permission for me to be given their names and phone numbers. Through this method I was able to contact 14 women. Two women found it difficult to make a suitable time for the interview and after contacting them more than twice I felt that it was not necessary to pursue them further. Because this is an exploratory study and also because of time restrictions I decided that 12 women were sufficient to gather a variety of information about women's experience of aikido in Australia. There was also the limitation that out of an estimated 200 members of the combined aikido groups within my network, there were only approximately 50 women. Some of these 50 did not suit the criterion of two years of aikido training and others belonged to my club of which I am the chief instructor. Pamela Cotterill (1992, p. 595) suggests that when the interviewer is a stranger to the research participant they may feel uncomfortable and try to respond with the "right" answers "to conceal privately held views they believe are unacceptable to others". In my case it was not that I was a stranger, but rather a familiar person in a position of relative power which influenced my choice not to interview the women whom I taught. My thinking was that they may have felt restricted in making certain opinions known or that they had to give me, as the chief instructor, (rather than as the interviewer) the 'right' answers.

I initially obtained verbal consent over the phone from participants and then met with individuals, in their home, their office, their dojo, a cafe and in one case, at the participant's request, my home. The settings of the dojo and the cafe were the least conducive to a satisfying exchange. Those interviews done in the cafes had distractions such as general

noise and the coming and going of customers. Those in the dojo were less distracting but not as comfortable. Even empty, the dojo still seemed to hold an air of formality.

After meeting the individual women and obtaining written consent from them (sample of written consent form shown in Appendix B), I conducted my semi-structured interviews with the use of a tape recorder. The semi-structured nature of the interview was chosen because it allows "free interaction between the researcher and the interviewee" (Shulamit Reinharz, 1992, p. 18). By using a tape recorder this free interaction was not interrupted by note taking, although I did note body language, especially when interviewees used their hands or facial expressions to describe things. Most interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour, but there were two in particular that went well over an hour. I knew these two women well, we felt relaxed in each other's company, and the interviews felt like an opportunity to engage in a deep conversation about our shared world of aikido.

The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed the participants to speak for themselves and reveal their realities. Similar guides were used in each interview such as: "Tell me what aikido means to you" and, "In your experience of aikido, what has been important to you?" I tried to let conversation take its natural course and took cues from participants' narratives to pursue particular topics or issues which they raised.

I transcribed all the interviews and in doing so got to know the participants' responses intimately. I spent many hours listening to the tapes and, read and reread the transcriptions. When the transcriptions

were complete I sent copies of individual interviews to each woman for critical comment and clarification. This was also an opportunity for women to make requests not to include, or to change, information.

Researcher as Instrument

As the researcher I saw the aim of my participation being to facilitate expression and interchange of thoughts and feelings shared by the women with whom I spoke. I did grapple with the notion that my length of experience as an aikidoka may either blind me to the obvious (because I find it difficult to remember how it felt when it was all new) or assist me to probe areas familiar only to those experienced in aikido. Another concern was about the balance of power within the interviews. According to Pamela Cotterill (1992, p. 599) this "depends to a large extent, on the perceptions of the person being interviewed". I was conscious that my status as a fourth dan instructor may have lead some of the women to perceive me as the 'expert' and perhaps made them reticent to express their views. It was because of this that I did not ask participants what rank they were unless they brought up the topic or it was connected with a story they were relating.

Analysis of Interviews

As soon as possible after each interview I made notes about my thoughts and feelings about the interview, and noted particular points that pricked my interest. Karla Henderson (1991a, p. 121) also sees the value of keeping fieldwork journals which describe the process of the research being conducted. When transcribing the interviews I made note of things such as satirical comment, laughter, raised eyebrows and long pauses. This ensured I did not miss any nuances when reading and rereading the

transcriptions.

Coding of transcriptions was done by grouping together key topics or issues which were represented in the participants' stories. The coding revealed each woman's experience of aikido and her thoughts and ideas regarding women in aikido and the martial arts. I used a funnelling process to categorise data starting with a very broad category and then regrouping information within it into smaller subcategories. For example I began with the broad category of 'meaning of aikido' and then subcategories such as 'definitions of aikido', 'things gained from aikido' and, 'comparisons to other martial arts'.

Ethical Considerations

The women who participated were fully informed about the study and signed informed consent forms before commencing their interviews. Each woman was assured of confidentiality and her right to withdraw from the study at any time. Giving consideration to the small aikido population from which the participants were chosen, I explained to the women that all people's names and place names would be changed and every endeavour made for participant anonymity, but it could not be guaranteed. Because of my interest in, and familiarity with, Japanese culture I selected Japanese names as pseudonyms.

After receiving the transcription of their individual interview, participants had the opportunity to request deletion of any data they did not want included in the study or alteration of text from the transcripts. There were minor changes made as a result. One request was to delete a name, while other requests were for clarification of text.

CHAPTER THREE:

WARRIORS WE WILL BE, GENTLE WE MAY BE

Martial Arts: The Way of the Warrior

By warriorship we are not particularly talking about the skills to wage war in the conventional sense. We are not talking about how to ... crank up our aggression ... so that we can burst forth and conquer all our enemies. Warriorship here refers to realizing the power, dignity and wakefulness that is inherent in all of us.

(Chogyam Trungpa, 1994, p. 6)

By itself, the term "martial" is associated with the military and training for warfare. Martial arts have been variously known as fighting arts or combat arts. In the West there has been great interest in Asian fighting arts, particularly those with their origins in China and Japan. As this study deals with the Japanese martial art of aikido I will explain a little of the background to the Japanese martial arts that are seen in Australia today. Martial arts has been used as a generic term covering both "bugei", martial arts, and "budo", martial ways, which, strictly speaking, differ in purpose, nature and technique. According to Donn Draeger (1980, p. 91) a distinctive feature of bugei is their broad combat utility whereas budo did not have the same utility in combat. From my understanding of Japanese language and culture bugei such as *jujutsu* (fighting hand to hand with minimum use of weapons) and *kenjutsu* (offensive swords techniques) were developed by the Japanese warriors to prepare them for life and death situations. Budo such as *judo* and *kendo* are derived from their jutsu origins and have aims of self development without the purpose of martial application. In further discussion I will use the term

martial arts as a generic term referring to fighting arts in general.

Martial arts, because of their combat origins, have long portrayed an image of traditional masculinity. Action films in the martial arts genre show men with powerful physiques displaying great feats of strength, by pummelling their opponents with feet and fists. These images of "highly valued strength, power and aggressiveness" contribute to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity (Lois Bryson, 1990, p. 175). In martial arts, as in rugby for example, controlled violence has been positively sanctioned as a male activity.

Sport/Physicality

"[W]hat is at stake is the activity and agency, the mobility
and social space accorded to women"

(Elizabeth Grosz, 1994, p. 19).

Neither sport nor society, as presently constituted, serves women's needs particularly well. By deconstructing the meaning of power, in the masculine sense of strength and domination, and reconstructing it to mean a feeling of energy and capacity, women will begin to erode the dominant values of today's society exemplified in sport.

Sport as a patriarchal institution has been widely discussed by many authors (Susan Birrell & Cheryl Cole, 1994; Lois Bryson, 1987; Susan Cahn, 1994; Jennifer Hargreaves, 1994; Michael Messner & Don Sabo, 1990). According to Jim McKay (1990, p. 129), Australian studies on gender inequality in sport have generally come to the conclusion that "sport is a hypermasculine, misogynist institution that ritually oppresses

women". The institution of sport, like education, unequivocally plays a role in perpetuating the dominant male culture where men, regardless of their sporting prowess, are "guaranteed sporting rights and privileges for which many women must struggle" (Jim McKay, 1990, p. 144). Feminists have been challenged with the task of wresting men's monopoly on uninhibited use of space and motion.

At the basis of liberal feminism is the assumption that the oppression of women comes from the enforcement of women's differences from men. In sport this was exemplified in the difference between "traditional (men's) sport" and "sport for women". Some of the characteristics noted by Carole Oglesby and Christine Shelton (1992, p. 184) were that men's sport was risky, active, dominant and aggressive, and in comparison, women's sport was safe, passive, subordinate and cooperative. The effect of liberal feminism was to argue for equality and, open up certain traditional sports to being more acceptable for women to participate in. Within the last 10 years tournament fighting in some styles of martial arts, such as kick boxing and Tomiki system aikido have become accessible to women.

The liberal feminists' argument of equality, that women could be as good as men and do what men do still does not elevate the value of femaleness or feminine characteristics. The outcome of women being able to access traditional sport, showing they can do what men do, still does not enable the feminine to rise above its low status and be honoured. Instead, it sustains male values and practices and makes a new generation of female warriors. Equality in this sense does little to transform the structures that disempower women and empower men.

Lois Bryson (1987, p. 350) argues that the male dominated arena of sport positively sanctions the use of aggression/force/violence and links highly visible movement skills with masculinity. She goes on to say that this conception of "sport for males has the effect of inferiorizing femaleness and female activities" and implies that females are unable to do things that are skilful and highly valued (Lois Bryson, 1987, p. 350).

The multiple influences of the biological argument against women's participation in 'strenuous' sports, men's domination of the sports arena and, men's control over women's bodies have all served to physically disable women's bodies and discourage women's participation in sports. Roberta Bennett et al. (1987) argue that giving girls and women the opportunity and encouragement to develop physical competence and gain a well developed repertoire of movement skills will give them access to power through self confidence and the ability to control their own bodies.

Looking at the Body

Debate in Western philosophical thought around the roles of the body and mind has wound a course through the dualistic approach of Descartes to the monism of Spinoza. Contemporary feminist theory has a number of positions attempting to reconsider and retheorize the conceptions of body. Elizabeth Grosz, (1994) categorises some of these positions as egalitarian feminism, social construction and, sexual difference. The dichotomous thinking of Descartes sets up oppositionary characteristics of mind and body, and hence a hierarchic system which can be correlated and associated with the opposition between male and female, where man and mind, woman and body, become

representationally aligned and, at the same time, indirectly links the male mind to knowledge itself (Elizabeth Grosz, 1994).

Some versions of patriarchal philosophy and feminist theory see the female body as inert, "passive and reproductive but largely unproductive, an object over which struggles between its 'inhabitant' and others/exploiters may be possible" (Elizabeth Grosz, 1994, p. 9). This can be illustrated by the frequent forms of abuse and coercive mistreatment of women's bodies which we know occurs. Elizabeth Grosz stipulates the requirement for "frameworks within which women's bodies must be acknowledged as active, viable, and autonomous. In so doing, the exploitation of women's bodies can no longer be neatly rationalised or wilfully reproduced" (1994, p. 9) .

Women Warriors

"The way of the warrior is to see who and what we are as
human beings and cultivate that"
(Chogyam Trungpa, 1994, p. 6).

Martial arts gives women a framework within which to cultivate empowerment through the interconnected training of mind and body, but it also presents many complexities and contradictions. The contradiction between the social images of a traditional female: faithful, gentle, caring, sensitive and sympathetic, and the female athlete: competitive, aggressive and risk taking, make it difficult, if not impossible for women to pursue enjoyment and empowerment through the martial arts. Another hurdle for many women is that they come to the very physical practice of martial arts without the experience of rough and tumble play and contact

sports which most men have. As expressed by an interviewee in Carol Riley's book *Women in Martial Arts*: "How many men in class have you seen throw their hands above their heads, shrink back and say 'Don't hurt me'?" (1992, p. 2). Which brings us to the very issue predominant in women's experience of martial arts, self defence. Women coming into martial arts for self defence must deal with issues of sexual assault and abuse. For example, while training, it is very difficult for some women to cope being grabbed around the neck which they may relate to an abuse scenario. Some women may also be fearful of dealing with more than one attacker in a training situation. This type of fear may come from perceived and/or experienced assault situations. Some women come to martial arts to prevent becoming a victim of assault or abuse, others come as part of a process of recovery from assault and abuse.

Survivors of assault/violence

Although it has been well documented that sports reproduce the dominant culture it can also be a site of transformation of the culture (M. Ann Hall, 1990, p. 231). Martial arts can be the site of transformation of individuals' psychological attitudes. Battles fought in the dojo are not always physical, they are battles fought within: "against fears, frustrations, hopelessness, despair, cynicism, and self-limiting concepts" (Carol Wiley, 1992, p. 4).

I will relate to you some women's stories about their paths to recovery from abuse. The first story in Carol Wiley's book *Women in the Martial Arts* (1992) is about an abuse survivor reconnecting with her body and healing her inner wounds through her practise of tai chi. She found that her physical practice contributed to a greatly improved emotional state. A

key aspect of her training was the need to "stay in conscious relationship with her body while simultaneously relating to another person" (Jody Curley, 1992, p. 11).

At 15, Kathy Hopwood was living on the streets in Washington DC. She was often sexually harassed but always managed to get away without being raped. She thought she was pretty tough and surviving well. She heard about a women's karate class and decided to give it a try. Her first lesson was a battle, she felt awkward and helpless and spent a long time crying. "I considered myself pretty tough from the years on the streets. Yet here I was crying my eyes out because my tough self-image had finally collided with my very real and very fragile self-esteem of being a survivor"(Kathy Hopwood, 1992, p. 44). Kathy endured that first lesson and many more. The challenges she faced in her training were part of a process that lead to her empowerment.

Martial arts emphasise a strong mind/body connection, a 180 degree turn around from the philosophical assumption of dichotomously opposed characteristics of mind and body where denial of the body supports the mind's integrity (Grosz, 1994, p. 3). Martial arts can be a powerful tool for personal transformation.

Aggression/Violence

Some women have leapt into the masculine domain of martial arts finding it an acceptable arena in which to display physical force and aggression; something denied to them in women's sports. Melanie Murphy, a karateka, expressed her enthusiasm for this type of opportunity to display aggressive behaviour, "I enjoyed being in an environment

where I could be aggressive and loud" (Alisa Solomon, 1992, p. 55). It is necessary to be aware that aggression is given a different value or meaning by women in the martial arts. The value is in control of one's own body and expression of power as capability, not, as it has been suggested by a colleague, the male value of how much one can brutalise others. Although some women have been able to escape the restrictive practices placed on their physicality, and appropriate the aggressive and competitive qualities embodied in martial arts, they must contend with a number of issues.

Women from around Australia gather at the Women in Martial Arts (WinMA) annual camps. They train together and exchange their stories of their experiences in the martial arts. From those stories and from those told to me as a teacher of aikido and women's self defence, I am aware of the reasons women are prompted to start training in the martial arts. Women come to the martial arts for various reasons, for sport, exercise and, predominantly, self defence. In their quest for physical skills and confidence, women who begin training in the martial arts have often been confronted with a catch-22 situation. They have found that they need to be both physically and emotionally tough to survive in systems based on competitive and aggressive male values.

In the few texts pertaining to women in the martial arts there is little mention of women's experience with aggression or violence in the dojo, but there was a very disturbing incident reported recently in Aikido Journal's 1995 and 1996 issues regarding the alleged sexual and physical assault of female students by their male instructor: "... young women who didn't get with the program [making themselves sexually

available to the instructor] were ending up ... in the [hospital] emergency room with broken arms" (Mark Seymour, 1995, p.4). Stories of this type of abuse of power for sexual favours are known to happen in other environments such as educational institutions and the work place. The female students in this dojo story were in an environment where physical contact was the norm and sometimes injury through accident can occur, but as Mark Seymour (1995, p. 4) points out, "these behaviors can only exist if the rest of us refuse to act ... [and] choose to ignore the situation".

In discussion with fellow WinMA (a network for women in the martial arts) members and through my own experience I have noted that there is a high drop out rate of women in the martial arts. Women's varying degrees of inexperience and/or dislike of rough physical activity which often equates to hurting others or being hurt contributes to this. One participant in Catherine Schnell's research commented that after a training session women feel like "they've been run over by a truck" (1989, p. 46). Another participant spoke about how she felt intimidated in a mixed class: "the brutality of men who were training, ... [the] desire to do things only because they hurt ... men don't understand what its like to be timid and frightened of physical things as much as women". The report of one other participant illustrates what "benefits" equality in the dojo can bring: "he treats everyone as equal, ... he will come along and kick you in the stomach if he thinks you are not using the right muscles ... he is very rough ... with women and men".

What level of roughness, brutality or violence should be tolerated by instructors and students of martial arts is a point to be debated elsewhere. However, what I would like to illustrate (with two anecdotes

told by two well known male aikidoka), is the level of violence that is tolerated by some men and, I would suggest, would not be tolerated by most women. Terry Dobson, in his early days of training in Japan, was often on the receiving end of some very brutal techniques performed by one particular instructor. Although his inner voice said that this was not what aikido was about, he continued to receive techniques from the instructor. One day the chief instructor came into the dojo and witnessed Terry's situation but said nothing. Terry was astounded, but he also said nothing (and continued to train for many years). He ends his story in a light tone saying, "I sure learned how to take ukemi (receiving a technique) with that man" (1996, p. 22). Ellis Amdur also tells of his trials in Japan as a novice aikidoka, being smashed violently into the mat, punched and having his head hit the wall. His reflections, many years later, were on the Japanese model of manhood and its influences on martial training. Noting that martial arts has always been primarily a male activity, he acknowledges the existence of "a strong belief that violence and brutish behavior, within certain surprisingly liberal parameters, is something that young men have to work out"(1996, p. 22, 24). As the Australian National Committee on Violence (1990) testifies, tolerance of violence is not peculiar to Japan.

Sexuality

"There is a cultural contradiction between athletic prowess and femininity" (Susan Cahn, 1994, p. 165).

To participate in the martial arts women must contend with the popular opinion that doing these types of traditionally male activities would lead to the questioning of their femaleness and sexuality. Appropriating

competitive and aggressive qualities found in the masculine domain of martial arts, women display strength and control over their own bodies and by implication make the protection of (but not from) men extraneous. Displays of competence and assertiveness have often led to women's sexual preference being the subject of innuendo and gossip (M. Ann Hall, Dallas Cullen & Trevor Slack, c. 1989 p. 41). The implication being, that to display behaviour outside that of traditional gender role expectations means that women are sexually deviant and are called, in a derogatory sense, lesbians.

Brigit Palzkill's (1990) research concluded that the development of an identity and existence as a lesbian creates a dissolution of, and a mastering strategy for the inner strife caused by the oppositional male/female role conflict apparent in sport. The "fear of female sexuality unleashed from feminine modesty and male control" (Susan Cahn, 1994, p. 165) runs a parallel course with the resistance and opposition to a patriarchal social order, as manifest by women's participation in the martial arts.

Aikido

Freedom to explore our physicality and express our physical prowess gives us relief from the often frustrating and aggravating experiences of daily life in urban Australia. The energy generated in martial arts training is not merely an expression of physically relieving these frustrations, it "is used to further the student's self-development and self realization" (Herman Kauz, 1977, p. 24). Although a beginner may start only on a physical level with her training, as she continues she will grow increasingly conscious of herself as a whole, her body, her mind and her

spirit, which must work together harmoniously to develop her martial arts skills.

The mind/body benefits of martial arts training have been noted by many practitioners from different fields. Moshe Feldenkrais, the founder of the Feldenkrais bodywork method, had his background in the martial arts and, in turn, a number of his pupils have come full circle and found the modern Japanese martial art of aikido integrates well with the aims, values and methods of Feldenkrais bodywork. Others, unrelated to the field of Feldenkrais have seen and used an interrelationship between aikido and mind/body therapy (Richard Heckler, 1984 & 1994) and, aikido and conflict resolution (Thomas Crum, 1988; Arnold Mindell, 1993). One student of American aikido instructor Robert Nadeau, felt that Robert teaches in a way that consciously, physically embodies concepts and laws which would otherwise only be "abstract intellectual truths" (Martin Weiner, 1990). In other words, aikido's movement is being used as a metaphor for life.

Aikido movement is derived from movements taken from "sword and spear fighting, jujutsu, aikijujutsu and other ancient, more esoteric forms of the martial arts" (Adele Westbrook & Oscar Ratti, 1990, p. 18). There is emphasis placed on using the concentration of internal energy (ki) from one's centre (centre of gravity/one point). A skilful aikidoka will not seriously injure an attacker. Neutralisation is the aim. The dynamic movements used for evasion, extension and centralisation are the basis from which neutralisation of an attack is applied. Well performed aikido techniques look spherical, fluid and relaxed. They are both graceful and powerful. There is a smooth extension of power, a fusion of mind and

body.

Etiquette in the dojo is important as a formal framework which promotes respect between all those on the mat and respect for those who have paved the way and given of themselves beforehand through the teaching of aikido. Even though this etiquette is adhered to with much bowing throughout a training session, this does not necessarily promote a rigid militaristic atmosphere. In "striking contrast to the oftentimes [sic] intense, rigidly controlled atmosphere typical of the practice of so many martial arts" an aikido dojo usually has a relaxed, non competitive, and good-humoured atmosphere (Adele Westbrook & Oscar Ratti, 1990. p. 27).

Of course there are many differences between the types of practice and atmosphere in each aikido dojo. In my experience this comes from the parent organisation's culture and the character and qualities of the individual instructors. In aikido there is much scope to reinterpret and transform traditional male/female sport and martial arts concepts and develop a safe mode of interpersonal connection and path to self awareness, self expression and empowerment for participants.

Aikido and Female Values

In aikido there is a celebration of the feminine, and traditional masculine or feminine values are not attributed as being the domain of only one gender or the other. Carole Oglesby (1990, p. 242) suggests that the male contributors to the book, "Sport, Men, and the Gender Order" "speak of their alienation from self ... [from] their own feminine". In aikido it is possible to find a balance. Words associated with aikido are grace, power, safety, connectedness, speed, trust, skill, balance and harmony.

To me aikido is often like walking the edge, the edge between submission and opposition, acquiescence and defiance. There is opportunity in aikido to brutalise but, following the ethics of aikido, one chooses not to do so. When practising aikido I want to be powerful but not violent, I want to know I have connected with my partner and neutralised her attack, I don't want to feel that my partner is being passive, I want to feel her powerful energy come out to meet mine. Aikido is a complex dance of the spirit, the mind and the body.

Aikido is a very intimate dance which washes away the "asocial [or] ... anti-social stance" that can be found in masculine characteristics of competitive sport (M. Ann Hall, 1987, p. 4). To "depersonalize" an opponent, even if a friend, in order to objectify them and inflict injury is part of male team sport (Helen Lenskyj, 1994, p. 38). You cannot do aikido by psychologically or physically distancing yourself from others. It is connection with others that teaches you. During training you touch and are touched by people soon after you step onto the mat. Even though there are no formal introductions or exchange of personal history before engaging with your partner in close body contact, once you step on the mat there are no secrets, "you get what's essential about a person ... it's pretty clear on the mat who we really are" (Andrea Siegel, 1993, p. 47). You soon find out if your partner is stiff or notice that they will not meet your gaze or, perhaps it is you who stiffens and cannot look your partner in the eye.

Aikido has "made a great leap from the ... aggressive, fighting martial arts to a spiritual martial art that seeks to abolish conflict" (Koichi Tohei, 1962, p. 17). In aikido we are taught to blend with the movement and energy of

a partner not to clash with it. It is a martial art system which generally avoids contest (I know of only one aikido style that incorporates contest) and it is often a point made by aikidoka, that aikido is noncompetitive. This is borne out in the philosophy of aikido and the training methods which manifest it. Most practice is done cooperatively, hence facilitating mutual trust and respect, which exemplifies the female values expressed by Helen Lenskyj (1994, p. 37) such as, sport being a safe mode of interpersonal connection, which does not disrupt human relationships. Aikido training is done with a 'partner', not an 'opponent'.

Summary

On the surface there seems to be a conflict between female value sport and martial arts. Aikido is a non-sport (i.e. no competitions) martial art which expresses a strong concern for a student's mental, moral and physical development (Herman Kauz, 1977, p. 39). Through its training methods women can reconnect with their bodies executing powerful techniques without the aim of brutalising their partners. "Only as the body receives its full share of attention can we begin to approach that harmonious interplay of body and mind expressed as an important ideal by outstanding thinkers of the past" (Herman Kauz, 1977, p. 26). The existence of the link between mind and body becomes underscored when both the masculine and feminine qualities of physicality are embraced. The transformation of the meaning of power from domination to ability and capacity is an important part of female values in sport/aikido.

There is little literature addressing issues of women in the martial arts. This research intends to redress this paucity and looks at the implicit

female values in the martial art of aikido through the eyes of women aikidoka.

CHAPTER FOUR ON THE MEANING OF AIKIDO

A Change in Direction

Embarking on a research project in an area which was important to me and had direct relevance to my life, meant a chance to devote my time and energy to *studying* aikido as well as training and teaching, a chance to give some depth to my intellectual and intuitive knowledge about aikido. In preparing my initial research proposal I looked at one level of my 16 years of aikido experience to find what areas of my life had been affected by aikido and what areas aikido had made me more aware of. I produced a conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 below. My conjecture was that the interviews with women aikidoka would reveal data relating to the themes shown in Figure 1.

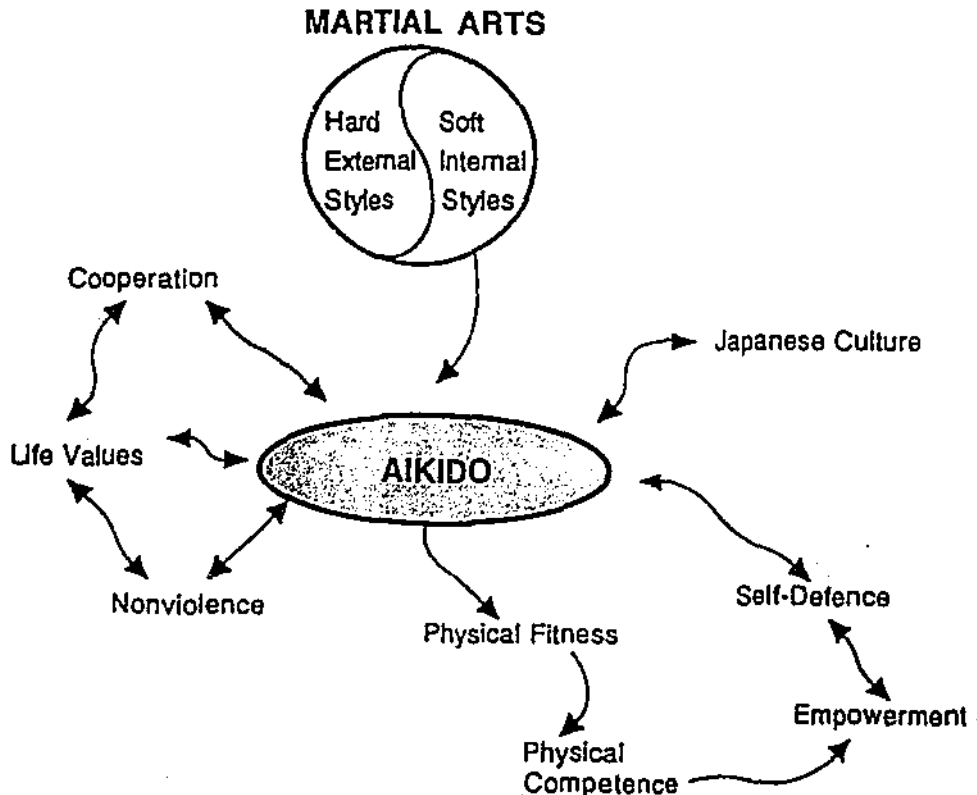


Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework was based on my own experience, starting aikido after completing a women's self defence course taught by an aikido instructor. From the self defence I wanted physical competence to protect myself and confidence to live a life unrestricted by fear of physical assault. Gradually, through my years of aikido training, I became comfortable with my body, learned many physical and mental skills and, gained great pleasure in expressing myself physically. As well as this my interest in Japanese culture grew and as time progressed I found aikido's ethics and values to be in harmony with my own. The non violence of aikido training and the cooperative and caring nature of the training practices were in step with my own personal values.

Over the years I aimed more and more for an elusive perfect technique and lost sight of the myriad of factors that are integrated into the practice of aikido. After spending many hours talking with the women aikidoka involved in this research I still had a niggling feeling that I was only scratching the surface of something much deeper. My narrow focus was revealed to me when I spoke to a colleague who had no experience in the martial arts. She alerted me to the issue of touching in aikido. She commented on the way aikidoka have close body contact with a partner after only a few minutes acquaintance. "Yes", I said "it's a wonderful thing, and it makes for a good environment in the dojo." "But people don't usually do that!" she said. "Look at all the restrictions we place or have placed on our bodies."

I realised I was taking things at face value because of my familiarity with the practice of aikido. I was accepting things as status quo without seeing

how these situations were not “normal” outside the dojo. It took an outsider to aikido to jolt me awake. I was no longer mesmerised by the light plays on the surface of the ocean, but had been inspired to dive into its depths. In doing so I recognised the complexity of meanings and influences interwoven in the aikido experience of women.

I also became aware of the limited options which the familiar pattern of binary oppositions sets up, and I was not comfortable with them. The new direction was to drop the masculine versus feminine dualities such as, “the male-defined dichotomy of mind/male, female/body” (Betsy Wearing, 1996, p. 47), because they support fixed binary oppositions which maintain one position as more valued than the other. In their place I chose to take a postmodern stance of multiple realities with differing values. I envisaged the participants’ stories within a dynamic and interconnected framework. Most women who participate in the martial arts continually cross backwards and forwards between the traditional masculine and feminine domains as they display feats of power but without the intent to violate or dominate. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1993) suggests that by breaking out of confined prescribed territories, deconstruction of the oppositional stance of male versus female is made possible. Crossing to and fro across the borders, women aikidoka begin redefining certain behaviours. They break away from the “singularity” and “pointedness” of a prescribed male-made territory and begin to explore a “mobile complexity” as discussed by Rosemarie Tong (1989, p. 225) This mobile complexity is exemplified in the many meanings the participants have given aikido.

Participants

Before I introduce you to the meanings that were interpreted from the raw data I will firstly introduce some of the women who supplied it. This will give you a more complete picture of some of the individual women who participated in this research. I have chosen to sketch the characters and aikido experiences of three of the participants. Their stories represent the diversity of personal character, aikido experiences and life styles amongst the women with whom I spoke. Among these three aikidoka one still lives at home with her parents, one is in a lesbian relationship and the other is married with children. They vary in age from late 20s to late 30s and all are employed outside the home. The main thing that they have in common is their love of aikido.

Chisako

Chisako has never participated in any team sports but is active in non team activities, such as swimming and aerobics. She began her aikido training in Japan and has been training for between three and four years, although not consistently. Having practised aikido for a relatively short period Chisako is still apprehensive about some of the physical aspects of aikido. To begin with, she found rolling "nerve-racking" and, even now, is still "terrified of going backwards".

During our conversation Chisako expressed her enjoyment of aikido and feels her training has already boosted her confidence in her abilities to deal with other people in her daily life and, the physical demands of aikido. However, she still expressed considerable anxiety about the possibility of injury during practice. It seems that the gains Chisako perceives she has made through her aikido training prompt her to keep

pushing the boundaries of her comfort zones, but she does so tentatively.

Teruko

Teruko has been practising aikido for over ten years. At the same time as she began aikido, Teruko also began doing massage and later expanded her interest to reiki, a healing art. She says that her aikido training has given her the opportunity to develop her spirituality, and that training has also brought about a more balanced self.

In the ten or so years of Teruko's aikido career she has continued to practise with the same group. She has never ventured to train aikido outside of that group or to try other martial arts. She is a focussed and confident woman, with an air of self assuredness. As an instructor she sees herself as a role model for other women in her club and, feels that she and the junior women are "afforded respect for the fact that they are actually doing a martial art and doing it well".

Teruko was aware of the different qualities that women and men bring with them onto the mat. Her notion was that men need women in the class more than women need men. Women brought with them a caring quality which tempered the "macho" energy of the men. Having women in the class allowed the men to dispense with their aggressiveness and, express their softness or less traditional masculine qualities. For women, Teruko felt that aikido provided an opportunity to develop self confidence, agility, grace and beauty of movement.

From a life centred on family and building up a new business with her

partner, Teruko now organises her life around aikido training. She has derived from her training a more balanced self and, improved her self discipline. Teruko can see herself on the mat for another 20 years to come.

Yaeko

Yaeko is a confident and strong willed person. Her aikido career has spanned 14 years. She has trained with many instructors and in different styles. At one stage in her aikido career she was almost ready to give it up completely such was her disillusionment with the attitudes and practices of the organisations within which she trained and their instructors.

Yaeko tried other martial arts, mostly harder styles, which she found interesting and fun for a short time but which did not give her the satisfaction she found in aikido. Her experience in the kick boxing ring revealed to her a dynamic which she found to be quite offensive. Not only was she being attacked by her opponent but also by the spectators who were encouraging her opponent to, "kill her, kill her!"

Yaeko's experience in other arts as well as aikido, and as a teacher of women's self defence put her in good stead for her position on a state martial arts body. Her main concern as a member of this body was to ensure that women had an advocate on the board and to push for their rights as consumers of women's self defence programmes and martial arts. Yaeko has strong feminist principles which she expressed in the course of our conversation and was aware of the complexities of aikido and its scope for women's empowerment. She was also alert to how

aikido's philosophy of "softness and harmony" could be used to maintain the traditional concept of female appropriate behaviour and, she was mindful of the double standards for women and men that can become apparent. From all indications, Yaeko's involvement with aikido will continue for many years to come.

Aikido, What Does It Mean?

Listening to Yaeko's and the other 11 women's taped interviews and, reading and re-reading the transcripts, two major themes emerged, the first concerned the meaning of aikido and the second encompassed the women's training experiences. What emerged in the first theme was a strong reference to the underlying principles of aikido, as found in the meaning of the Japanese characters "ai-ki" which have been interpreted as a meeting or blending of energies. Blending with a partner rather than clashing with an opponent was perceived to be a main focus of the women's training. Perhaps these same principles led the research participants to comment that aikido was not a sport. This was a debatable point amongst the 12 women. For many women aikido acts as a catalyst for personal development and this was true for the women who participated in this study. Other issues in the first theme relate to the physicality of aikido, the social relationships that are built through training and the length of time women envisaged themselves participating in aikido.

Re-reading the 12 stories over and over again I began to feel a close connection with the women aikidoka who participated in this study. I found each woman, like myself, had struggled with or was challenged by some sort of adversity during her aikido training. The second theme

which emerged looks at these episodes in the lives of the women aikidoka and how they dealt with them. The emergence of female values in aikido became apparent in the participants' stories and this was exemplified in both themes. To conclude the second theme, the women express their ideas concerning a woman's way of training as distinct from a traditional male approach which is still the norm in the martial arts, and this is discussed in Chapter Five.

Aikido Means Many Things

Aikido meant many things to the women who chose to participate in this study. In responding to questions such as "what does aikido mean to you?", "what do you feel aikido is?" or "how would you describe aikido?", overwhelmingly, most women talked about aspects of harmonising with other people's energy or blending with their partners' movement. They also felt that staying centred was important. This meant not being taken mentally or physically off balance, and being focused in the present. These impressions are closely connected to the literal meaning of the Japanese characters which make up the word aikido.

Blending

"Ai" means to meet, to blend, to be in harmony. "Ki" is a concept about energy and is used when talking about spirit, mind and heart. For example, when the characters are reversed "ki-au" ("ai" is then read as "au") they can describe people of "kindred spirit". The women in this study were of kindred spirit or like mind in the sense that they all expressed a strong feeling that aikido focused on harmonising, blending, and centring.

Centring is about concentrating on a single point within yourself to keep balanced and be able to cope with the surrounding dynamics. In a physical sense Chisako said it was "being able to blend with someone and cope with whatever came at you, with any sort of movement". According to Asako, to be centred and focused was essential to effective aikido. She stated:

To do aikido well you can't be thinking about anything else, you have to be very focused, and that's one of it's big pluses. ... it centres me, it gets me back into my body a lot ... and the blending is to me.... all about energy. ... You can fight with it or you can flow with it.

To flow with something in aikido terms is to move with another person's energy, to blend or harmonise with their movement. Although most of the women believed that working in harmony was the aim expressed in aikido's philosophy, two women were somewhat sceptical about how this philosophy was actually put into practice. Yaeko made a point that although people "espouse these wonderful virtues of harmony and the ability to deal with an attack ... in a way that is calm and compassionate, and [aim for] the ability to move very gracefully under pressure", it is not necessarily what happens in practice.

Asako too, was not totally accepting of aikido's espoused virtues. At the beginning of our conversation, in a positive tone she stated, "whether one likes it or not it's quite a cooperative thing. So that's sort of unusual for me", but later she echoed Yaeko saying, "it's all supposed to be ... your harmony or your way to enlightenment, and all this kind of stuff, but I don't believe that".

Being creative with conflict

Even with this healthy amount of scepticism, the combined length of time these two women have been practising aikido is over 25 years and they expressed many interesting insights about their practise of aikido and its influence on their lives. Yaeko is one of the participants who thoughtfully spoke of aikido as being parallel to conflict resolution. Her idea was that aikido represented:

a way of dealing with conflict in a fashion that is about compassion ... not being passive ... but rather being able to take an energy, no matter what it is, and being able to turn that or move it so that it is not harmful to you.

With flexibility of mind and body aikidoka can work creatively with conflict directing their joint energy toward resolution. Mitsumi saw a connection between "recognising your weaknesses and trying to improve ... and relating to people in a positive rather than negative way". Kazuko's understanding was that by working with a partner cooperatively a pair works towards a common goal, and this facilitates both people's development.

Making the connection

When developing technique in aikido the emphasis is on meeting your partner's energy or blending with their movement. Integrated in the development of the physical aspect of technique is the development of awareness of the other, your partner. Meeting and connecting with people in aikido is an opportunity to make good relationships (Kazuko) and as those relationships develop so does trust. Teruko talks about the

exchange of trust in aikido, when you are putting yourself in the hands of your partner and trusting them with your safety. You are also trusting yourself to express your power without damaging your partner or yourself. By understanding of that concept of trust, says Teruko, and "giving yourself to it" you are opening yourself up to more possibilities and experiences, and this can lead to big improvements in your aikido.

Building relationships on trust is not difficult in aikido because you are not clashing with an opponent, you are training cooperatively. As Kazuko said, "the aim [is] not to hurt people". Yaeko illustrated the nature of relationships between partners in aikido with her comment, "we're not often on about winning ... there's more a notion of caring for your partner". Exemplified in these women's comments about exchange of trust and building of relationships are the central female values of placing importance on positive interpersonal relationships and connectedness, as discussed by Helen Lenskyj (1994).

Physicality and Empowerment

In answer to the question, "what have you gained from aikido?" and a prompt to tell a before and now story, the women I spoke with told stories of personal growth and empowerment, outcomes which have been demonstrated in other research on sports participation (Rob Lynch, Tracy Taylor, Kristine Toohey, & Jock Collins, 1995). The physical, social and psychological benefits of aikido are woven into the participants' stories. Developing a "sense of body" was one aspect of this growth which was mentioned by Asako as something to be gained from practising aikido. The unrestrained use of their bodies is a new pleasure for many women. Ryoko, through her aikido, overcame a block about being a "physical

klutz", gained confidence, and reclaimed her body, extricating herself from the social devaluing of her woman's body. Kazuko, who has always been an active participant in sport, said it was aikido that helped her become less self conscious about her body and "physical contact with other people".

The close physical contact in aikido circumvents the mores usually adhered to in our daily interactions with other people. It is essential in practising the techniques of aikido to touch and be touched by other members of the dojo. These circumstances facilitated a great achievement for Maya, "the ability to be with a group of people ... and to be touched by people". Mitsumi's aikido experience has also given her some unexpected outcomes. Already physically active with other leisure pursuits, the outcomes of physical competence and empowerment in themselves are not unusual, but Mitsumi expressed her surprise that they were achieved as a result of her aikido training:

I've gained a lot more physical fitness ... a lot more coordination, and confidence, in that I did something that I never thought I could do. ... it's been very empowering to do aikido. And before that I would never have really credited something physical as being so empowering. I wouldn't have thought that was really necessary or important to life, but now I think maybe I wasn't right, you know, it is.

Others did not express surprise at the positive outcomes they had experienced through aikido but rather an emphatic endorsement of aikido training as a tool for self development. Yasuko spoke of aikido as

a "healing tool. A tool of self discovery ... a way of learning about myself and about others". Later in the interview she stated, "it's changed who I am and it's changed me for the better". When clarifying a point with Ryoko about seeing aikido as a means of self development, her response was without hesitation, "Absolutely, most definitely".

Self defence

Self defence was an issue touched on in most of the women's stories which gives an indication of the awareness of the prevalence of violence perpetrated against women and of women's vulnerability to that violence. Ryoko, Izumi, Chisako and Maya all indicated that they now felt capable of looking after themselves. Teruko felt that with the experience of their aikido training, women did not have to consider themselves victims. As inferred by Teruko's words, integrated with their newfound physical capabilities to protect themselves is the psychological strength of these aikido women to throw off the social conditioning which would restrict them from actually fighting back.

Physicality and Enjoyment

Fighting back is antithetical to qualities which are usually labelled as feminine. Passivity has been seen as one of the attributes commonly deemed desirable for women (Coakley, cited in Rob Lynch et al., 1995). These aikidoka are contributing to the redefinition of the female body, to accord women "activity and agency, ... mobility and social space" (Elizabeth Grosz, 1994, p. 19). The physicality of aikido gives women licence to uninhibited use of space and motion.

The physical aspect of aikido is very dynamic and even after 14 years of training Yaeko still finds aikido “very exhilarating and in some ways gives [her] the same buzz”. This “buzz” is the same experience Asako mentions with amusement when she makes a comment about, “all the endorphins running around in my brain, [and] getting physically high”. Physical release of emotions is what Izumi sometimes uses aikido for. She added, in conclusion to her comment, that aikido “is something that makes you happy”. As Myra Betschild (1995) pointed out, this could be related to theories on the release of endorphins that heighten the physical experience and deaden pain.

It's Not Sport

As expressed by this study's participants, aikido is very much a *physical* activity with plenty of physical contact with other players, but not everyone sees it as a sport. What came to light during the conversations with participants was their differing opinions about whether aikido is sport or not sport, and whether it is self defence or not self defence. Also connected to these discussions are some women's experiences of sport before they began aikido.

Prevalent in the Australian culture is a masculine construction of sport. Qualities synonymous with masculine virility through the expression of strength, speed and aggression are, according to Coakley (cited in Rob Lynch et al., 1995, p. 175), what legitimately constitutes sport. I believe that it was with this image in mind that some of the participants decisively stated that aikido was not a sport.

Mitsumi, whose other leisure pursuits include such activities as skiing,

rock climbing and bush walking, said clearly, "I've never been interested in sport and I've never played sport, and aikido doesn't make me think of sport." Yaeko's early experience of aikido exemplified the masculine image sport, "it was about toughness. It was about not succumbing to injury or weakness ... [it] was a very male thing".

The aggressive competition of sport was something the women were glad to be rid of in their aikido practice. Kazuko who came from a competitive sport background expressed her joy at finding aikido was not competitive and said that she did not ever want to do competitive sport again. "It's like I win, someone else loses, and I just don't think that's the way it has to be" (Kazuko). Asako had experienced martial arts competition and decided that she "didn't want to ... pummel people you know to death, just to win". This was a very clear indication that the women I spoke with did not wish to enter into competition or participate in tournaments which perpetuate a "win at all costs" mentality and allow only for victory or defeat.

On the issue of aikido being a self defence or not, Mitsumi felt that aikido did not fit into her concept of a martial art. She said, "to me, I don't think of it as being martial arts and self defence and practical street fighting and things like that." Whereas Yasuko's initial reason for beginning aikido was to learn a self defence. She stated, "I had one specific reason in mind when I joined aikido, [it] was to look after myself, self defence". Yasuko believes aikido is "a good form of self defence" but Asako, although agreeing with her, believes aikido is "not particularly effective in a martial sense for a long time". The disagreement about aikido being, or not being, a sport or self defence illustrates the complexity of issues and

values embedded in our concepts of sport and the martial arts.

There is no contention that many women seek out the martial arts with the intention of learning how to protect themselves, instead, the dialogue exemplifies concerns about violence to the person outside the sporting arena and the glorification or sanctification of violence within the sporting arena.

Comparisons With Other Martial Arts

With the apparent difficulty at coming to a consensus on what aikido is, or is not, the women aikidoka gave comparisons to other martial arts and sport in an effort to convey their own meaning. In comparison to other martial arts which Yaeko has tried, aikido's intent, usually, is not to inflict injury on others, and it does more than just operate on a physical level.

Here is her story about training in kick boxing:

I found I was sort of doing it as a bit of a challenge I suppose, but I found after a while that I became really repulsed by what it was about. ... I found getting in the ring and doing all that stuff was fun, but when people on the outside were yelling kill her, kill her, I found that quite offensive, and I just also found the whole dynamic to be unhealthy or something.

Yaeko's length of experience in aikido and her involvement in martial arts in general give her a unique perspective when comparing different arts. She was well aware of the aggressive aspect to martial arts and chose not to continue in styles promoting this. While still training in kick boxing she became more and more disillusioned with its narrow focus on only

physical aspects:

training became more violent and I was just not interested. ... And the physical component of it, like push ups and going and going and going, to me was like, well yeh, so what. I've become physically fit, what else? To me it had no depth. It was just very basic, very crude.

For other women too, aikido is a "deeper practice", it is more than a physical activity, it involves an integration of mental and physical training. Mitsumi compared this aspect of learning aikido to learning classical music:

like music, there might be movements that are pre-written, but it's how you interpret them [aikido has] a similar degree of really difficult physical movements that combine with a mental sort of thing, the way it does for ... learning classical music.

Enjoyment of the "mental stimulation" (Maya) of aikido is accompanied by an element of play which is found in the rolling and falling and physical contact with others. This is something which Yaeko notes is missing from her experience in karate:

when I try and do katas in karate, ... there's no rolling or falling ... and there's no interaction unless it's that block, hit, kick sort of stuff. And so there's something about that that doesn't give the same buzz that aikido does.

Referring to the rolling and falling of aikido, other participants spoke about aikido as a "roly-poly martial art" (Asako) as opposed to a "kicky

choppy sort of thing" (Ryoko), or "strikey kicky ... ballistic explosion stuff" (Asako). When talking about "the kicking punching stuff" Hiroko enjoyed it as "fun", but also said, like Yaeko, that "aikido goes deeper".

Nearly all the women gave their thoughts on other martial arts. Some having had experience in them, and others having formed their opinion as spectators. Hiroko's opinion was, "with karate ... the movements are rigid, ... stiff". Ryoko thought that as aikidoka, "we're more into taking the energy of the other person and converting it into a roll or something. Where [karateka] are more into blocking the energy." This sort of idea about energy was an important factor for Mieko in making her choice to follow the path of aikido. She had had experience with other harder arts and from that perspective spoke of a sensitivity to people's energy which is developed in aikido "more than most [other] martial arts" and, in her opinion, at a faster rate than in most other martial arts.

Kazuko and Ryoko drew similarities between aikido and judo and jujitsu, which have common roots to aikido. Ryoko went further to describe judo as "more wrestley" and jujitsu as "a lot rougher" than aikido. Mitsumi commented that her mother was concerned about her doing a martial art because she was of the opinion that it was "to do with beating people up". Mitsumi herself changed her opinion of martial arts after she began aikido:

Before I would have thought of a whole lot of people punching and kicking and fighting, and now I think of it more as, you might see people doing that, but what they're really doing is learning something or putting something that's more got to do with their spirit and their

soul in it. [Aikido is] to do more with self control and improvement, and I have a feeling that all the other martial arts have that aspect as well, they're not to do with just violence ... They're to do with somehow using that physical activity to achieve something to do with moving somewhere in your life.

Aikido sits within the category of martial arts but, as illustrated by these women's stories, differs when comparing aspects of competition, aggression/violence and the balanced integration of both physical and mental components when training. Exemplified in the descriptions above are not stories of battles and defeats but harmony and unity.

Social Relationships

Aikido "is an art where you work closely and intimately with people, and there has to be a high level of trust" (Teruko). This intimacy and trust has been the starting point for the development of close relationships between aikido dojo members. Usually the process of forming relationships is the reverse, a relationship having begun then progresses toward intimacy and trust. Aikido has turned this around.

Eight of the 12 women participating in this research mentioned that their involvement in aikido had a social aspect to it. Izumi simply said, "socially it's just been really great". Kazuko reported that aikido had become "a really big part of [her] social life". Yasuko's connection with other members of her club came as a welcome bonus:

I had one specific reason in mind when I joined aikido, [it] was to look after myself, self defence, not for a social club

but, ... there is that side of it and I really welcome that side of it. ... I've made some good friends

Three other women spoke of interpersonal relationships available to them through their involvement in aikido, adding a different hue to the picture. Maya gained the "ability to be in a group of people", which she'd never had before, and she considered that "quite a useful social adjustment". Mieko tried to describe her feelings about connecting heart to heart with people she trained with but found it difficult to articulate it. She said, "When the heart's open and you feel the energies that exist something changes, and I can't describe it in words ..That's the kind of relationship I would ideally like to have with people in my life". Teruko described the immediate connections which can be made with people with whom you are training in close physical contact and to whom you must entrust your safety:

It's an immediate connection because we have the same sport that we do. And because we kind of feel that we belong to this kind of family, you don't have to go through all the kind of palaver ... to actually get to the person. ... all the social stuff. You can ... do away with all that and just have a connection with the person and find out about them.

This is what I found when interviewing the women who participated in this research. The aikido "family" connection was made and in all cases a comfortable rapport was soon established.

Continuing Aikido

Finally, but not of the least significance in the women's stories, were the remarks made about the length of time each individual felt they would continue aikido. The women who participated in this study were aged between 17 and 50 years old. None of them indicated that their involvement with aikido was a temporary thing. Nobody said that they would have to stop aikido at a certain age. One of Mieko's attractions to aikido was "that you can continue to practise to a very old age". Maya, who began aikido in her 40s said, "you can do it when you get old, you won't get hurt as much. It's not aggressive". Yaeko, who has been training for 14 years also spoke of the continuation of her aikido training: "There's something in there that keeps drawing you to continue (laughs) ... it's something to be pursued and it gives back. ... what I've got out of aikido is just immeasurable". Participation in aikido can be done at many levels. If the interest to train is still there age and/or differing levels of physical condition will not put a dampener on these women's participation.

Summary

The thoughts and feelings expressed by the women, about aikido and its meaning to them describe a holistic and integrated concept. Aikido touches on many issues which have direct impact or relevance to these women's lives. There was much spoken about blending, centring and, harmonising with the energies of other people as an important part of aikido. Having experienced aikido's physicality, women commented on the close and intimate contact of aikidoka and how this effected interpersonal relationships. Comparisons were made to other martial arts and sport and, opinions varied as to whether aikido was or sport or not.

Aikido means a lot to these women, and it is an activity in which most have indicated that they will continue.

CHAPTER FIVE
ANSWERING ADVERSITY:
TRAINING FROM A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Re-reading the 12 stories over and over again, I began to feel a close connection with the women aikidoka who participated in this study. I found each woman, like myself, had struggled with or was challenged by some sort of adversity during her aikido training. This second theme looks at these episodes in the lives of the women aikidoka and how they dealt with them.

We Didn't Want To Give It Up

Six of the twelve women who told their stories for this study have experienced some sort of injury or bad health which has kept them off the mat for some time or, experienced adverse training environments where personal or political conflict within the dojo or organisation made it uncomfortable or unsafe to train. Not wanting to cease their aikido practice these women found various ways to continue.

Asako had a lingering and debilitating illness which sapped her energy and made it extremely difficult to carry on a normal lifestyle. She felt that aikido was one of the "tools" that kept her going and enabled her to "participate and feel part of the world". It was impossible for her to go skiing, running or swimming but, after some months of being sick, Asako was able to go back to the dojo and join in some of the stretches and warm ups, even though she was still unable to train. She persevered and little by little added an exercise or technique to her regime but it was a long time before she could participate fully.

During this time Asako began learning tai chi to help control her energy levels and to try a lighter form of exercise and this in turn has assisted with her aikido.

Mitsumi received a broken collar bone from a bad fall during training and was a bit shocked "to have a serious injury". It took three or four weeks of deliberation before she finally would get back on the mat. Mitsumi said, with some amusement, "You start thinking is it worth it? Do I ever want to put myself in a situation where this might happen again? But I sort of knew I wasn't really, really serious".

Mieko's story contained tales of both injury and personal conflict in her dojo. Because of a bad fall, her first time on the mat resulted in a dislocated shoulder, "in a very big way". Mieko recovered and regained her confidence. She joined a local aikido club but work commitments and moving from time to time saw her training with new groups of people. At each dojo she was treated differently. Some were friendly and welcoming, while in others "there was a problem for women training". In one dojo, it was after gaining her first level black belt that she "started to get a bit of respect from certain men in the dojo". In another dojo Mieko felt she wasn't being given any attention and left entirely to her own devices. She felt their attitude was, "We're not going to give you any energy". According to Mieko, "it was very hard" and, it was her experience of training elsewhere which helped her to survive and keep training in aikido. She also observed that this was not so for other women who did not feel welcome, and "consequently there weren't very many women who came and stayed".

Women Are Outnumbered

According to all the women in this study there are more men in their dojo than women. Some women told of the experience of being the only woman in the dojo. Mitsumi was one such woman and spoke of her experience as the lone woman participant in her dojo: "I had a very long period where I was the only woman there. And I really didn't like that feeling". At the dojo where Chisako is currently a member, she was the only woman when she first joined. Kazuko believes that now the ratio at Chisako's dojo is approximately six men to every one woman. Yasuko at first thought that her dojo had a 25% female membership but upon further reflection reduced her estimate to 12.5%.

The number of women training in aikido is small compared to the number of men and both Mieko and Yasuko expressed their wish that there were more women doing aikido. Mieko exemplified her frustration by saying, "I'm sick and tired of being just only me at times and a sprinkling of other women who've got a dodgy commitment ... I would like to see more women welcome at training in aikido in Australia". Yasuko did not express herself as emphatically as Mieko but did say, "I'd love more women to be training here. 'Cos I love it so much I'd encourage it".

Training in a Masculine Environment

Training in martial arts generally means training in a traditionally male environment. The women who told their stories for this study have been training in aikido between two and 15 years. Some are still considered beginners while others have achieved dan grade (black belt) ranks. Their individual experiences as women in predominantly

male controlled dojo vary but there are many similarities.

Most martial arts systems are based on competitive and aggressive male values yet there are women who persevere in these systems and achieve high rank. Yaeko strongly believes that to survive in the traditionally male environment of the martial arts women have to be physically and emotionally tough. In her case:

it was about not succumbing to injury or weakness ...
And I believe ... that approach, is a very male approach
and interpretation of it all. ... there's a lot of women
operating in those environments, in exactly the same
way. I would have been if I was still there. I'd be like
that because the only way you can survive in those
environments is to conform.

When making a comparison between the way men and women train, Chisako said "that the guys tend to be rougher at first than the girls ... they don't think about the other person". Maya felt that women "won't come up and try and cripple you just for the hell of it, which is a tendency with young guys ... just to see if they can do it". Asako told of one particular club where she trained where there were "all these young bucks with their testosterone roaming around ... And there's a guy there ... who's like 'thugs anonymous', who's inflicted grievous bodily harm on a number of people over the years, and I hate his aikido".

Keeping the Status Quo

It was Yaeko who spoke thoughtfully about a double standard that she has experienced while training in various clubs.

I've noticed that when I do something very strong and powerful, physically powerful, that uses the same amount of strength a man [uses] often on me, I'll be told, you're using too much force. ... When in fact, I know if we measured it, that they would be using weight and strength but they just don't ever realise it.

She also expressed her concern that "the sort of things that can actually tend to maintain women as being passive and non physical in some sense, can be drawn out in aikido, or seen as being why it's good for women" and that this type of passive and conformist behaviour is rewarded by a smooth passage up the ranks. According to Yaeko:

A non assuming, quiet woman, you know, who is adoring but also tends to get married to or is in some way related in the dojo to the instructor or other members. They are the women who survive and stay.

Touching People

Aikido is a recreational activity in which both women and men, from children to adults, have the opportunity to participate together and practise with each other. During aikido training sessions the level at which techniques are applied vary with the level of skill of each aikidoka. In principle, applying an aikido technique does not rely on physical strength therefore it is usual to see men and women training

together without division according to body size, weight or strength. Practising aikido brings participants into close physical contact with each other. Techniques which have potential to injure are being constantly applied and, to receive such techniques willingly involves a strong element of trust between partners.

Two women who participated in this study felt aikido gave them a unique opportunity to interact closely with men in a safe and friendly environment. Ryoko expressed her pleasure "that it's pretty well one of the only places that I have interaction with men, and I enjoy that. I enjoy that male energy". Chisako also found aikido to be a unique environment for interaction between women and men where she could "have good fun, nice normal contact with men".

For some women in this study, the practice of aikido was a challenge to overcome a reluctance to be in close physical contact with men. One woman reported that her friend, upon watching a class, said she felt that training in aikido would be "a bit embarrassing because there was so much physical contact". Mitsumi, was another who was not keen to practise with men and started out a little wary of the close physical contact with them. She reported that it was unusual for her to be participating in an activity where there was so much physical contact with people, "particularly touching lots of men", and this made it difficult for her when she first began aikido but now she is accustomed to it.

Female-Value Aikido

Aikido techniques inevitably involve some sort of circular action. It may be that the whole body pivots in an arc or a whole circle to neutralise the power of a strike, it may be a quick turn of the hips to avoid an attack, or perhaps just a turn of the wrist to break a grip or effect a lock. These movements are best performed with a flexible body and mind. Softness rather than strength can accomplish powerful techniques without injuring the attacker.

When learning the skill needed to overcome hardness with softness Mieko argues that "women have an advantage in aikido because they can't use strength and if they use strength they get hurt. That's their big lesson. ... they generally have more flexible and supple bodies so they are better at aikido early". According to Maya, those women who persevere with their training "are usually very good, very dedicated, and with some exceptions, charitable people to train with".

Away from the physical side of aikido, an interesting story was told by Mitsumi who explained with mirth:

Very few men laugh when they are training. I can't think of a man where I've heard him burst out laughing in the middle of aikido. Women do that much more frequently, and if you're training with another woman you will often both laugh at something together, and men don't do that. And I even had one man who said to me, "if you keep laughing at me I'm going to stop training with you".

Two of the women who have had the opportunity to train under a female instructor made favourable comments about their experience. Ryoko said that one of the things that she liked about doing aikido was that she had a “woman instructor” and Maya said, “it’s interesting to be taught by women. It’s a great relief”. Yaeko sums this issue up by saying, “if we had an aikido defined by women it would be different”.

Summary

The lived experience of the women aikidoka who participated in this research demonstrates courage and tenacity in the face of injury and sometimes hostile environments. These women are always a minority in the dojo and sometimes without any other female support while training. However, within the traditionally masculine environment of the martial arts they have found that aikido can offer them unique and valuable opportunities to physically express themselves in an uninhibited fashion and in a manner that is acceptable to their own values. These values incorporate power without aggression and a building of positive interpersonal relationships.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF AIKIDO

We seem to have come full circle from the days when men said "Our games are too dangerous for you," and women argued, "No they're not," to an era in which some women are saying, "We've tried your games, and you know what? They *are* too dangerous. From the looks of your mutilated bodies, they're too dangerous for you too. We're going to make up our own games, or alter your games so we can take care of ourselves." (Mariah Burton Nelson, 1991, p. 185)

Changing the rules and taking care of themselves and others is what the aikidoka of this study have, consciously or not, participated in. In expressing their meaning of aikido the women of this study have exemplified their own definition of this Japanese martial art. One which speaks of harmony and unity not battles and defeats. In the stories of their aikido training the participants have illustrated their personal development and the ways they have dealt with being a woman in a man's world of martial arts.

Female Values in a Masculine Environment

This analysis of 12 women's experience of aikido, from a feminist perspective, is mediated by my own reality as a woman aikidoka. I will bring into this discussion the postmodern influence of deconstruction, to verbalise the complexity of meanings and influences interwoven in the aikido experience of women. I have perceived that the women of this

study have shown a propensity to “border-hop” (Trihn T. Minh-ha, 1993) between the territories of gender and gender appropriate behaviour as they practise aikido and celebrate both feminine and masculine qualities apparent in aikido.

The traditionally feminine and masculine qualities confine both men and women to very limiting behaviours. Carole Oglesby (1990, p. 244) comments on men's need to “expand, elaborate, [and] accentuate the expressive elements of personality”, and Lois Bryson (1990, p. 179) points out that women are “positively discouraged from demonstrating aggressive behaviour and physical strength”. Such constraints can be overcome by a transformation beyond traditional stereotypes but in the meantime women who cross the boundary into masculine behaviour are assumed to be lesbian (Carole Oglesby, 1990, p. 243, 244).

“In a society where they remain constantly at odds in occupied territories” (Trihn T. Minh-ha, 1993, p. 174), women need to continually cross to and fro across borders to resist being absorbed into the hegemonic confines of their prescribed territory in the male-is-norm world. Deconstructing homogenising categories so as to extricate women from the hegemonic position of devalued other, feminists can redefine a female-value sport which celebrates characteristics such as, integration, solidarity and community, and at the same time empowerment and expression of the individual.

Female-value is that which is valued by women. It does not mean feminine, but may show some qualities usually associated with femininity. It may also exemplify qualities usually associated with masculinity. The

female-value aikido, which I have interpreted from the participants' stories and my own experience, redefines these qualities to befit a set of values and ethics which include:

 caring, but not at the expense of the carer;

 valuing connection and interrelations with others, not one-upmanship;

 power/strength to *do* as in ability and agency, not power *over* as seen in dominance;

 aggression shown as a power to protect, or standing up to oppressive practices, not aggression as violence, violating and dominating others and;

 competition as a testing and improvement of skill, not for demoralising or brutalising others in a win-at-all-costs battle.

Empowerment and Self Development

By redefining certain concepts and behaviours, as mentioned above, a more complete and balanced group of *human* qualities and behaviours (qualities and behaviours sanctioned for both women and men alike), would include responsibility to nurture and empowerment through ownership and control of one's own body. It was clearly apparent that the women in this study had gained much through the mind/body practice of aikido. Mitsumi's improved physical confidence and coordination and the processes by which this was gained, was acknowledged by her as a catalyst for empowerment. She was surprised that her empowerment was gained through a physical activity and said, "I wouldn't have thought that was really necessary or important to life, but now I think ... it is."

As implied by the women of this study and other studies (Roberta Bennett et al., 1987), in practising aikido, women have the opportunity and encouragement to develop physical competence and gain a well developed repertoire of movement skills which will in turn enable them to access power through self confidence and the ability to control their own bodies. One important aspect of being able to control their own bodies is learning the skills of self defence. Teruko, who now instructs aikido, stated that by learning aikido, women would not have to "consider themselves a victim" if they were ever in a situation where they needed to defend themselves. Nearly all the women I spoke with mentioned that they valued aikido for self defence and that it had enabled them to walk to the shops at night (Maya), feel more confident being out alone (Ryoko) and, in general, become more autonomous by being able to look after themselves (Yasuko).

Working mind and body as one unit instead of oppositional entities as the dualistic approach of Descartes would have it, the women of this study have acknowledged themselves as active, viable and autonomous. Ryoko overcame a feeling of being a "physical klutz" and endorsed aikido for her own self development and Yasuko described aikido as a "healing tool" and a "tool of self discovery". It is not simply the physical activity of aikido that enhances self development but also, and very importantly, the close interaction with partners (both male and female) which sets up intense learning situations analogous to interactions in our daily lives.

Spirituality

The aspect of aikido which held prime significance for all 12 aikidoka was that aikido's key ethic, in principle and in practise, was developing

harmonious relationships with oneself, others, and one's environment. According to Lindsay Fitzclarence (p. 107, 1990), "what is needed is a celebration of the physical as an aspect of shared expressive action and socially useful work, where useful skills are developed to promote a stronger sense of socially responsible self". He may not have been thinking about aikido when he wrote that statement, but according to the participants of this study aikido fits his notion well. Giving their definition of aikido, the women aikidoka talked about aspects of harmonising with other people's energy or blending with their partner's movement. Chisako describes blending with her partner as a "smoothness ... you just flow together rather than tugging and pulling both of you come together and catch that energy". Aikido's physical activity and close interaction with others creates a complex dance of the mind, the body and the spirit and contributes to a more stable culture.

Connection with others, integration, solidarity and community are all issues which are interwoven throughout the participants' stories. Teruko exemplifies this in her statement that, "female energy is softer, and it's coming more from love... not from stab, smash sort of stuff ... women don't relate in that way at all". Helen Lenskyj's (1994) argument that connectedness is the central female value is supported by Yaeko who commented that when practising aikido "we're not ... about winning ... there's more a notion about caring for your partner". The trust built between women aikidoka (in fact between most aikidoka, male and female) by this type of caring connection with partners and their shared love of aikido fosters a close "family atmosphere" (Teruko).

Social Behaviour and Physical Intimacy

I was well aware of the trust involved in practising aikido, having given permission to my training partners over the years to throw me around and twist my joints, trusting that they would not injure me but I had to be alerted to the fact that there was also a very important aspect of that trust that I had overlooked. Ryoko and Chisako highlighted the fact that there is very intimate physical contact between partners when practising aikido and that it is rare to have physical intimacy without sexual overtones. Chisako described it as "good fun, nice normal contact with men".

This was one important aspect of the women's enjoyment of aikido but for most it took some time to grow accustomed to the physical contact. For Maya it was a year before she "could stop breaking out into a cold sweat when somebody grabbed [her]". Traditional socialisation supports "the process whereby the female body becomes sexualized, controlled and oppressed" (M. Ann Hall, 1990, p. 235) but aikido, along with other sport, exercise and physical activity, can enable potential resistance and opposition to that process.

Sport, Martial Arts and Aikido

It has been suggested that women may not be able to successfully challenge the "destructive male values" manifest in the male-dominated world of sport (Helen Lenskyj, 1994, p. 37), but with a growing awareness that sport has been male-defined there is a growing awareness that sport can be redefined. Kazuko illustrated her search for a new definition by showing her dissatisfaction for traditional outcomes of competition: "I win, someone else loses and I just don't think that's the way it has to be". For some of the women who participated in this study the dominant definition

of sport meant fierce competition and winning at all costs and with this in mind they emphasised that aikido was not a sport. Mitsumi's opinion was clear: "aikido does not make me think of sport".

Aikido is defined as a Japanese martial art and/or self defence and the popular image of martial arts is still an unquestionably masculine one, particularly as it is portrayed in popular films. The images on screen are of muscular men being aggressive and violent, but aikido as it is practised in the dojo does not fit this image. Its founder transformed what could have been an aggressive, fighting martial art to a spiritual martial art which seeks to abolish conflict (Koichi Tohei, 1962, p. 17). This aim was not overlooked by Yaeko and Kazuko who related aikido's methods to conflict resolution.

Learning how to resolve or avoid conflict by way of learning self defence was foremost in the mind of Yasuko when she began aikido. Maya, Chisako, Ryoko and Teruko all perceived women's need for self defence and through aikido were able to explore the boundaries of power and physicality to this end. Hence they gained confidence in their own ability to defend themselves and for Maya this meant changing her "attitude to going down to the shop at night ... I might get messed up [she said,] but I'll make a lot of damage before I go". The aikido dojo was a safe environment where they were allowed and encouraged to test out aggression.

As practitioners of a martial art it was acceptable to develop power and strength and as aikidoka the women discovered the potential for redefining a behaviour such as aggression, which to them had been

unacceptable (and to which at some time they may have been subjected), and changing its practice to be utilised in their own defence rather than to subdue or dominate others. Aikido also gave women the framework within which they could reinforce the value of certain traditionally female qualities such as graceful movement and cooperation with others.

What Does the Experience of Participating in Aikido Mean to Women and What Are Their Training Experiences?

Through the process of this research I have realised that shifting the debate from the binary opposition of the value of masculine behaviour versus the value of feminine behaviour, to a deconstruction and redefinition of the meanings of those behaviours would enable women (and men) to explore uninhibited use of space and motion and to fully express themselves.

Through my own experience of aikido and from listening to the women who participated in this study it is apparent that our training has motivated us to overcome socialised tendencies toward passivity, low self confidence/esteem and self sacrifice. We have learnt to become autonomous and stand up for ourselves both physically and politically. We have learnt to enjoy the full expression of physicality and we have learnt to redefine and reconstruct behaviours which were once confined to the limited territories of the male or female genders. The martial art of aikido has given us a framework to connect our own individual physical and intellectual spheres and through our empowerment connect in a positive way to our communities.

Back to the Beginning

As an exploratory study this research has but scratched the surface of a wide range of issues revolving around women in the martial arts and specifically aikido. This study has somewhat resembled my study of aikido, there have been moments of great enjoyment and discovery and yet I am not wholly satisfied with the results, nor do I feel the study has come to a conclusion. This is an area of study which as yet has few texts and it deserves a much deeper exploration. This study on women and aikido has kept me mostly excited and enthused, but sometimes disheartened, a little like a quest for the Holy Grail. As I finally come to the completion of my efforts thus far, it is with a feeling of being unsatiated that I conclude this study but I also feel urged to pursue it further.

Future Directions

On the whole, within the group of women who participated in this study, the dan ranked women had more depth of experience and knowledge of aikido. With these and other dan ranked women a further, deeper investigation of issues regarding masculine and feminine qualities apparent in aikido and the transformation of gender appropriate behaviour through the practise of aikido would be the next step in the incremental process which began with this exploratory study. Through dialogue with dan ranked aikido women, using both individual discussion and group discussion a more substantial text could be developed.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANTS

Ryoko is in her mid to late 30s and has been practising aikido for four years. She has reached the rank of 4th kyu. Ryoko is a freelance professional in a creative field and has come from a non sporting background. She defined herself as a physical klutz before beginning aikido. She was training twice a week but is not training at the moment.

Izumi is a high school student in her late teens and has been practising aikido for approximately eight years. She trains three or four times a week and has reached the rank of 1st kyu. Izumi is active in other sports.

Mieko is in her late 30s and has been practising aikido for 12 years. She has reached the rank of 2nd dan and with her male partner runs her own small dojo. When not studying for exams Mieko trains/teaches three or four times a week. She is currently studying at university and has trained in other martial arts.

Chisako is in her late 20s. She has been practising aikido for approximately four years with some short breaks and has reached the level of 3rd kyu. At one stage she was training three or four times a week but is not currently training. Chisako is a professional working at a tertiary institution and participates in other physical activities which are not team sports.

Kazuko is in her late 20s and has a competitive sport background. She has been doing aikido for approximately three years and is still a kyu grade. She practises twice a week. Kazuko is in the teaching profession.

Maya is in her mid 40s and is a middle to high ranked professional. She does not have a background of sports participation and has been doing aikido for approximately six years and is a dan grade. She also practises another martial art.

Hiroko is in her late 20s and is a single parent. She has been doing aikido for three to four years. She does not do any paid work outside the home, and has been active in sport in the past. Hiroko is a kyu grade.

Mitsumi is in her late 30s and is in a professional managerial position. She has been practising aikido for approximately four years and trains two or three times a week as work commitments allow. She is active in other physical activity but not team or competitive sports. Mitsumi is still a kyu grade.

Yasuko is in her mid 20s and works in a semi professional occupation. She has reached dan rank level and trains regularly. She also does some instructing.

Yaeko is in her late 30s and has been practising aikido for approximately 14 years. She is a professional in a tertiary institution and also instructs aikido. She has attained the rank of 2nd dan and teaches/trains at least twice a week.

Asako is in her late 30s and has been doing aikido for approximately 10 years. Asako has also trained in another martial art, but changed to aikido. She is a physically active person and has reached dan rank. Asako is in a professional occupation.

Teruko is in her early 40s and has been doing aikido for approximately 10 years. She both trains and instructs two to three times a week and has reached dan rank. Teruko is self employed.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Samurai of Gentle Power: An Exploratory Study of Aikido in the Lives of Women Aikidoka.

Within the big picture of sport and recreation many women have expressed the desire to participate in a nontraditional sport. A sport which is nonaggressive and cooperative. To me aikido fits this type of sport. I have been practising aikido for 15 years and am interested in hearing other women's stories of their experiences with aikido and what part it plays in their lives.

If you choose to participate in my study I would like to tape an interview with you. It would last for approximately one hour. You are most welcome to listen to the tape and/or read the transcription. A copy can be made available at your request. Your input will be greatly appreciated. If at any time you wish to withdraw from this project please feel free to do so.

Any questions concerning the project entitled "Samurai of Gentle Power: An Exploratory Study of Aikido in the Lives of Women Aikidoka", can be directed to Katie Noad of the Department of Leisure Science on 337 5386 (AH).

I, the participant, have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

Participant

Date

Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

How did you begin aikido?

Preconceived ideas about aikido.

What do you feel aikido is?

What does aikido mean to you?

How would you describe aikido?

Any special experiences/moments.

Impression of other martial arts in general.

Compare to other martial arts.

What do you like about aikido?

What do you value in aikido?

What have you gained from it?

What do you want from it?

Before and now story.

Philosophy of aikido.

Influence on your daily life?/What role does it play in your daily life?

Dojo atmosphere/culture.

Expectations.

What do you think aikido has to offer women?

Anything you would like to add.

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW EXCERPT

Introductory conversation as I start the tape...

Katie: It may be something to do with that I am a woman instructor and it may act as encouragement, or they may feel more secure or something. But um, the other dojo I've visited so far, perhaps three to one, four to one.

Mitsumi: Yeh, I don't know whether it is female instructors because, well the classes they run in Toyochō with female instructors don't have more women turning out for them than male. And in Aikikai, the state that has an enormous number of women training, as in, I think, about 60% of them are women, is in Saitama, and they have two male instructors there.

(Katie: Oh, right) But the group that has the most women is the group that is associated with the university up there. So they ... I was talking to one of them just recently about it. She was saying the instructor also ran self defence classes for women at the university and some of the people moved over from that.

Katie: Yeh, that could be. I tend to find, when I teach self defence, that because it's not very aikido, that the women who really enjoy that self defence have started to enjoy it because finally they are in a space where they are allowed to be aggressive, and yet it is still a safe space where they can let out all this stuff that they're not allowed to. Or [rather] they're told they're not supposed to hit people, and things like that. And a lot of them enjoy actually hitting and kicking things. Not me preferably
(Mitsumi laughs) We have shields or bags for that.

Mitsumi: You're saying that it doesn't necessarily follow with aikido.

(Katie: mm) I would agree, to me aikido , I don't think of it as being martial arts and self defence and practical street fighting and things like that. It's just like, aikido, which is something that is just really lovely. So, mm

Katie: Yes, my self defence course is completely a world away from aikido. They need something that they can learn in a short amount of time, in the time of the course, and you can't do that with aikido. It takes too long.

Mitsumi: Mmm, maybe it depends on the motivation. Some people must come into aikido because of um, because of self defence.

Katie: So how did you come into aikido?

Mitsumi: From that camp.

Katie: So what were you doing ... that does go back a bit.

Mitsumi: This was the camp, the Women in Martial Arts Camp that was in Yokohama about three and a half years ago, and Asako bullied me into going on that.

Katie: Where did you know Asako from?

Mitsumi: Oh Asako and I, we've been friends since first year uni. We're really, really old friends. And um, she talked me into going on it. She .. you'll just be interesting, you've never done anything like this, you'll mix all these things. She wasn't particularly talking to me about aikido, and I thought it was all very interesting, and I quite enjoyed it, but there was nothing there that I particularly wanted to keep doing, except maybe women's self defence. But then we did the aikido classes and it was just , ahhh, I've fallen in love. It was just like that, so I went and did ... I started doing aikido with Asako to see what I thought and it just went on from there.

Katie: Oh good. So then you didn't any idea about aikido, preconceived ideas, before you began?

Mitsumi: No. All I knew about it was um, actually listening to Asako talking about all the problems in the Tomiki school where she'd been training, and all the controversy. And she hadn't been talking to me about that in terms of aikido just in terms of

Katie: personal politics.

Mitsumi: yeh, talking about big issues in a friends life. So all I heard in that sense was bad, but I, ... when I'd been listening to that I'd never thought of doing aikido myself. It was more ...

Katie: Mm, well that's interesting. And, so if somebody asked you now what is aikido, how would you describe it?

Mitsumi: That's a very difficult question.

Katie: They ask me all the time. They ring up and say what's aikido?

Mitsumi: Don't know. I don't know. It's really hard to answer that one. Um, the closest thing that reminds me of aikido is playing a musical instrument. And I play a few musical instruments, and I've always really, really enjoyed that. And aikido is very, very similar in my way of thinking, in that it's ... there's like notes that are pre written. There might be movements that are pre written, but it's how you interpret them and you can keep playing the same piece over and over again, and each time you see something different in it, or do it more or whatever. And aikido reminds me of that. A similar degree of really difficult physical movements that combine with a mental sort of thing, the way it does for learning something. Particularly of learning classical music. It reminds me of that a lot. The thing that's different, and that I find difficult about it is that you don't do it on your own, you do it with someone else. And you don't just do it with someone else as in they're next to you, you're actually touching them and it's very physical, and I um ... yeh.

Katie: You're making a slight grimace there, what does that mean?

Mitsumi: Oh, just that I found that very difficult when I started off in aikido because I'd never done anything before that involves touching people, particularly touching lots of men, and they're all dripping with sweat and, smelly (laughs).

Katie: That's unfortunate sometimes.

Mitsumi: No, but .. and I'd never done anything where I got bruised, so that was quite shocking to look at your wrists or have people say, what's wrong with you (**Katie** chuckles). And yet now a bruise seems like a very minor sort of injury while at the time that was quite confronting to actually have a bruise from um, doing something with someone. Not from walking into a chair, but from someone else. Not saying that people try and deliberately bruise you at aikido but it happens, that is a consequence.

Katie: So did you not do much sport before?

Mitsumi: No, I've never done sport, so I don't know whether aikido is similar to sport. It reminds me of music, because I've done a lot of music. Um, I've done a lot of things like skiing, and bush walking, and rock climbing, which I don't really think of as sport . And things like that are things where you have to push yourself to your limit sometimes and aikido is a bit like that too, so it reminds me of that in that way. But I've never been interested in sport and I've never played sport and aikido doesn't make me think of sport.

Katie: When you say sometimes you have to push yourself in aikido, in what way?

Mitsumi: Um, you have to push yourself to keep going if you feel really tired, so it can be quite pushing yourself physically. Um, to train with someone you might have preferred not to of everyone else in the class, but you have to do that. To do things that might be difficult (**Katie:**

physically?) Mm, and to um, do things that ... like when I first started aikido I looked at you know all the hard rolls and difficult techniques and thought well, I'm never going to do any of those, I'm just going to do this and enjoy it but I'll never worry about anything like that. But now I am doing ... you know, I found that I did end up learning all those sort of things, but I did find that very confronting all the way through, like conquering of fear or having to face up to things. You know so it's more that sort of ...

Katie: So what kept you going if there were those things that you had to get through?

Mitsumi: Because I ... because I really, really like it. (laughs)

Katie: What are the things you like about aikido?

Mitsumi: Um, the ... apart from really liking aikido, the other things that were really good were when I first started training with Asako so there was another woman there in the class, because not so long, maybe about twelve months afterwards, was when she became ill and she stopped training, and so I had a very long period where I was the only woman there. And I really didn't like that feeling. I used to feel like the odd one out. Not to say that everyone else there wasn't really nice, but it's .. it makes a big difference having another woman there. Someone you can talk to in the change room and just that women approach things differently to men. And men have this, there's a sort of boys feel about it. It's hard to describe properly, so it was good having her there, and it was good having a teacher who was um, really interested in trying to help me. And I felt that, you know, I could ask him and he would help me, and he was pleased if I was making good progress or learning things, like... so, which I actually didn't like that to start off with because I prefer to be anonymous, but once I got used to that I found that gave me a lot of

support.

Katie: Oh good.

Mitsumi: So that's separate, but the other thing is, just aikido itself, there's something very, very attractive about it. Just um, I really enjoy it and I'm not quite ... and that's the real reason why I keep doing it.

Katie: What 's the attraction? What do you feel like when you're training?

Mitsumi: Terrible (laughs heartily) Exhausted (laughs some more) No, um there's something just very, it's very similar to the reasons I like playing music and things. Just, for some ... it just seems very beautiful to me, aikido. And ..

Katie: To look at, aesthetically?

Mitsumi: To look at and to do, both. And it's got something to do with that, why I like doing it. I can't ...

Katie: Yeh, ... I'm just trying not to put words in your mouth. I want to hear it in your own words.

Mitsumi: Yeh, and I really like the challenge of it. Sort of it's ... the, you know, the intricacy of it , and the way it seems to just involve your mind and your body somehow, all combined. And I wouldn't want to do something with a lot of competition, with competition in it, so it doesn't have that. I like that it's sort of ... you're judging yourself against yourself