

Presented to
Colorado Women's Studies Assoc.

10:45
AIKIDO AND WOMEN: AN EDUCATION IN POWER, NOT DOMINATION

I. Purpose

A. Starting Point

1. Faculty discussions of Keller's feminine science and Gilligan's feminine ethics
2. Correlation of their principles with the practice of Aikido
3. Observation that a disproportionately higher number of women practice Aikido in any given dojo as compared to "harder" martial arts like Karate or Judo
4. Led to the question of what relationship Aikido and recent feminist theories have

~~B. My Aikido training, the students, etc.~~

C. Approach

1. Begin with a brief review of the resurgence of interest by women in the martial arts (in general)
2. Brief summaries of cogent points from Keller and Gilligan theories in defining feminist power
3. Proceed with overview of Aikido
4. Demonstrate the practice of Aikido
 - a. Basic positions
 - b. Ki
 - c. Techniques
5. Turn to women who practice Aikido and their statements

10:46

II. Women in the martial arts

- A. Historically--samurai women were expected to be skilled fighters--only with the onset of peace in Japan did women disappear from the fighting world
- B. Recent growth of interest--really began with a few pioneers in the 60s.
 - 1. Faced all the classic stereotypes about femininity
 - 2. Faced a Japanese-derived male hierarchy
 - 3. Are responding by establishing their own networks, working together to formulate a purpose in the martial arts which responds to modern needs
 - 4. Try to define power in feminist terms
- C. Common threads
 - 1. Two major reasons for entering martial arts
 - a. Response to violent society--for self-defense
 - b. Seeking personal growth, confidence, community
 - 2. Seeking ways to handle violence without becoming violent themselves
 - 3. All of these women went through a struggle, and had the desire to carry through, finding that an understanding of the martial arts led to the personal harmony each sought; a self transformation--to power

III. Feminist power

- A. The question: If rape, if technological domination of nature, if aspects of war are seen as expressions of patriarchal power; while

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feminism is associated with non-violence and caring, how might feminist power express itself.

1. Assumes the corollary questions:

- a. Is there a distinction between feminist and masculinist forms of power
- b. Can women achieve such power without being transformed into men?

2. Suggest that women in the martial arts, particularly in Aikido

~~(in which they participate in significantly higher percentages than most other martial arts)~~ are working out the answer

3. Turn to several feminist theories for thoughts

B. Feminist theories--in brief

1. Carol Gilligan--In a Different Voice--her interpretations of disparate descriptions of moral dilemmas led her to posit two ethical voices (more?)--one tied to a rational and abstract code; one to interconnectedness and caring: abstract principles x relations (& on-going debate)

(p.14-15) (a. Problem with competitive achievement in which success came at expense of someone's failure

(p.14) b. Emphasis on interpersonal relations--connected not separate

(p.38) c. Contrasted act of caring (fem.) with mere restraint of aggression (mas.)

(p.43) (d. Prevent aggression (fem.) rather than seek rules to limit its extent

(p.62) e. Web of connectedness (Ai-Ki) not hierarchy

(p.75) f. Saw lack of power as a sense of vulnerability in not taking

a stand and letting things happen to you (un-connected)--contrast Aiki centering and connection

(p.90) (g. Her ultimate stage elevated nonviolence to a governing principle; not simply not interfering (one version of golden rule) but actively caring

(p.167) h. Cited other studies 1) McClelland: men represent powerful activity as assertion and aggression, women in contrast portray acts of nurturance as strength; 2) Baker-Miller: power from temporary inequality that is used to remove the initial disparity, not cement it.

i. Thus for Gilligan, power involved not only not being a victim but simultaneously connecting with others to prevent anyone from being hurt

2. Evelyn Fox Keller--Reflections on Gender and Science

a. Knowledge is power, but the type of knowledge pursued, the perception of it, and the results of its pursuit may be different for the genders

b. Emphasis on relationship--subjective connectedness to study, not a separate object to be examined (dynamic objectivity)

c. Discussion of domination

(p.100) ((1.) Sees conflict as bringing with it the issue of control
(2.) Depending on vision of relatedness, may choose to contain or to hurt/destroy
(3.) If construe difference as inequality, lead to domination mode

- (p.112) d. Claims that tension between separation and connection, aggression and love is unresolvable.
- (1.) Need not however be in opposition (*polarities*)
- (p.114) (2.) Legitimizing both approaches provides support for a conception of power rooted in maternal love as well as paternal authority
- (p.114) (3.) Can redefine power in terms of mutual interests and well-being rather than primarily in terms of conflict
- (p.114) (4.) Also cites a study showing that societies glorifying female traits of nurturance and fertility tend to be rape-free as opposed to those which tolerate violence and encourage males to be tough and competitive
- e. Feminist science rooted in dynamic objectivity is ecological, holistic medical, etc. Aikido is a training in these attitudes
- f. Thus for Keller, power lies not in domination but in harmonizing relationships
- 3⁹¹ C. In the anthology Reweaving the Web^{of life}: Feminism and Nonviolence, several authors express similar ideas--that women must claim power, sometimes through physical action, but that paradoxically, nonviolence is the way of life underlying this power.
- D. Aikido-- Its principles closely parallel the above descriptions of feminist power. See Aikido as one expression of this power and an avenue through which Gilligan/Keller ideas can be put into action

10.5.14

IV. Overview of Aikido

A. Philosophy

not
passive

1. Principles of resolving conflict non-violently
2. Ethics of pacifism: no harm to anyone--avoid being hurt yourself and choose not to retaliate and hurt your attacker (NOT might = right) *Assertion as nonviolence, not aggression.*
3. Requires strengthening of self to learn to care for attacker
4. In a nutshell, it is a form of power which expresses itself through caring for and relating to other people. It is not interested in dominating others or establishing a hierarchy with oneself separate from and/or above others
5. Uniqueness in education: based on regular physical practice of ethical ideals; practitioner must go beyond the classroom setting and practice these ideals with entire being (the mind-body-spirit triad one hears so much about in holistic ~~feminine?~~ medicines).

B. Founded by Morihei Ueshiba, a 20th century martial artist with strong pacifist bent

1. Had an enlightenment experience in which he realized the true purpose of the martial arts as a ^{universal} love that cherishes and nourishes all beings.
2. "The Aikido which I am now doing is a path that builds people, a way of forging and tempering the body and spirit. It is not a way that injures others, nor is it one that wields against them the evil sword of death."

C. My comments

1. The words Ai-Ki-Do
 - a. Ai: harmony, blending
 - b. Ki: spirit (of the universe)--an inner strength achieved through relaxing and breathing naturally--through connecting with the universe.
 - c. Do (Tao): A way of Life--not a quick course in self-defense but an on-going study
 - d. Thus--the way of harmonizing with the universe
2. As education
 - a. Very personal--you develop at your own rate, without games, scores, or contests; you must take responsibility for your own practice, yet in constant and close relationship to others. Learning to protect yourself extends to learning to protect others.
 - b. Totally involved--not like a student who reads up on ethics in class, then goes to the gym to work out. Here the two aspects must meld.
 - c. Its secrets lie in concentrating and relaxing, leading to a centered physical and mental state; in releasing your own spirit and trusting yourself well enough to be able to trust others.
 - d. How do you deal with conflict--of all forms, not just physical! One master spoke of needing an egoless self, one which identifies with all things and all people, seeing them not

from its self-centered perspective but from their own respective centers (Unno, T.).

- e. Whatever is happening, a practitioner of Aikido is making a claim to power, to self-worth and personal growth. My suggestion is that the appeal of an education in Aikido lies in the way in which a student can grow, not only ~~by~~^y deliberately choosing not to dominate or defeat someone else, but by deliberately choosing to nurture fellow students.

10:57-11:00

V. Practice of Aikido

A. The Aim is to exemplify the philosophy in our lives

1. The techniques of Aikido do not result in the conflict of opposing forces or the matching of power. Attacks are not stopped but allowed to continue. The Aikidoist joins with the power of the attack, becoming the controlling force so that the attack can be redirected harmlessly and harmoniously.... In order to lead another person, we must first be able to lead ourself^s. This type of mind-body control can occur only when the mind and body are relaxed and calm.... Yamada, Y.

11:00

B. Demonstration ~~introduce~~

1. The beginning--control of self: Audience!



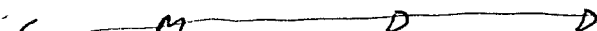
- a. Breathing--relaxed, from belly, sense of no one breathing, unforced
- b. Basic positions
 - (1.) Seiza--pyramid, open 3
 - (2.) Hamni--solid, connected to earth, yet ready to move any direction, Hara as source of movement 3

11:01

(3.) Sitting--settling petal, humility, control β

c. Ukemi--falling away from harm, playful rolling

(1.) Forward rolls--head turned, diagonal:

(a.)  Seiza to kneeling to standing to high fall

(b.) Sense of level--can lead others to what you have learned

(2.) Backward

(a.) Similar to forward seiza $\begin{matrix} C \\ | \\ M \\ | \\ D \end{matrix}$

(b.) To standing

(c.) Forward turned over to back $\begin{matrix} C \\ | \\ M \\ | \\ D \end{matrix}$

d. Center: All points of expanding balloon universe

2. Ki--that power (of belief?, of mind?)

a. Thoughts on it--not really defined: vitality

(1.) A flow of energy through all life--to relax is to open to it; to be tense is to shut it off

(2.) Learn to extend it--reach out

(3.) Heaviness: not lift a child

Strength: old ladies and car

Spontaneity: in harmony

(4.) Turn to studies on eastern medicine to know it exists; hard for westerner (male?) to grasp

b. Principles of Ki--unify mind and body β

(1.) Keep one point: Lift partners when relaxed--demo

(2.) Relax completely

(3.) Weight underside--sitting seiza and lift knees

Ki: best

c. Levels of ability

- (1.) Centering--learning to control one's own energy
- (2.) Partner--harmonizing with another's energy (tenkan)
- (3.) Universal--unifying as a wave in the ocean (2 persons walking)

d. Demonstrations

- (1.) Unbendable arm *Crum*
- (2.) Ki-musubi: mutual ikkyo

centering

3. The foundation techniques

a. Tenkan

- (1.) both static and Ki-flow
- (2.) Leading in circle, walking
- (3.) Lead into throw--let it happen (pick up rock)

b. Irimi--closeness is safety

- (1.) From tsuki--turn hips, face together
- [(2.) With sword--timing, so attack is fulfilled]

c. Notes: no parries or blocks, rather giving up your turf and taking partners point of view

d. A woman's perspective. Reisel (Megan, 3rd-dan)

- (1.) Irimi: I feel tall and strong and mountain-like
- (2.) Tenkan: Feels like the movement of water, smooth and graceful; and at times, turbulent.
- (3.) To her, these were a balance of masculine and feminine

4. Have exemplified ways of avoiding confrontation, now must also neutralize and assume control

5. Major techniques (what-if questions)--no difference if man or woman, size, strength - *Training exercises*

a. Shomen-uchi

(1.) Ikkyo: *M* - *C* *D* i and t; Nikyo, Sankyo (pain, no break)

(2.) Irimi nage *D*

b. Tsuki

(1.) Irimi and down from behind (support) *M*

(2.) Kokyu--on arm thru center *C*

(3.) Kaiten nage *D*

(4.) Kote-gaeshi (knife extension) *M*

c. Yokomen-uchi

(1.) Shiho-nage *D*

(2.) Hug and toss *D*

d. Katate-foolish: free to walk around! *D*

(1.) Kokyu throws *D*

(2.) Forward rolls *M*

(3.) Third point *C*

e. Ryote-tori

(1.) rolls *M*

(2.) Tenchi-nage: balance of energy *D*

(3.) Shiho-nage *C*

f. Hanmi handanchi *D* (~~+2 uke~~)

g. Ushiro--awareness and center: waza *D* (~~+2 uke~~)

h. Rondori *D*

6. Points: blending, caring, controlling, restoring balance, power to use not to kill, to restore equality not to dominate.

3:00+

11:15/16

2:00+

11:18/30

2:00

1:00

1:00


1:30

1:00

1:00

11:25-11:30

VI. Women in Aikido

-  1. Megan Reisel--3rd dan, therapist in LA (Odyssey)
- a. First encounter in Aikido was with fear. Man she knew was kind--grabbed her hard and told her to do tenkan, she froze and felt pain. He insisted that she examine it and see why a wrist grab captured her whole being--a victim to physical violence--small?
 - b. Faced confrontation--put in conflict situations and had to put out--holding back denied her partner the chance to learn (Gilligan rationale)
 - c. Next felt she was losing her feminine self-image in learning these aggressive situations; yet knew she could not imitate male aggression
 - d. Discovered her own anger as the male/female definitions blurred in her mind. The anger, she determined, stemmed from a belief in her own limitations. Redefined warrior as a way of life, not specific to men who sought a new balance
 - e. Now confronted competition (who does better falls, throws, etc.). Found it boring. Went back to basics of accurate execution of technique--playfully training (sometimes rigorous, sometimes gently).
 - f. Now sought to know how to learn, to help each other. Reached a stage where traditional definitions of feminine and masculine (passive, soft x aggressive, hard) vanished and felt simply human, not burdened by limitations.
 - ** g. Has felt no loss of what she calls her feminine nature, but feels that she sees authentic differences rather than stereotypes.

Can draw upon so-called masculine qualities without imitating men (irimi x tenkan).

- h. Sees Aikido as a training in which teacher allows students to be both masculine and feminine, to perform techniques drawing on all aspects of being human; that techniques teach about harmony, about power, and about balance.
2. Cheryl Reinhardt: sho-dan, Feldenkrais, psychology
- a. Mixed the gentle approach to learning of Feldenkrais method with Aikido
 - b. Initial reluctance to learn Aikido--knew she was comfortable with her limitations
 - c. In Aikido learned to be with herself under pressure, recognize habits of withdrawal and defense, and move beyond them
 - d. Originally felt that as a girl, self-defense was foreign; but was pushed past a breaking point in her self-image (which had not included the tremendous power available in Aikido). Evoked a phenomenal mastery in her, so no longer satisfied with her passivity, but sought interaction with others.
 - e. For her, Aikido provides a form for exploring what scares us, what threatens us, what is negative within us. When someone accomplishes without force a new Aikido technique, they reach a bigger and truer self.
3. Patricia Hendricks, Aikido instructor in San Leandro, CA

One needs to be aware of every detail in one's life enabling one to be ready for an attacker at any time. At the same time, one

must have compassion and respect for all life. To be balanced in training one must combine these two aspects.

4. Mary Poulin

"I was radicalized by a woman being raped in my dorm. I said "Damn it" I'm going to go out there and learn self-defense." She began with Karate, but was disenchanted by its routine of getting beaten up and bruised and the killer attitude encouraged by her instructor. She had a nagging feeling that no matter how skilled one became, strength was the major factor. Since practicing Aikido, she has become more aware of vulnerability, but gained greater self-confidence. She gets no more harassment walking on the streets.

** ~~4~~ 5. Dawn McKenzie, Aikido instructor

Competition has no place in Aikido. That is its charm. It's the one place I've found where there isn't somebody who has to win and somebody who has to lose. It's more helping the other person.

If you can control yourself first, then you can subdue and neutralize a potential aggressor. Rather than destroy him, you have a chance to help him grow. And that is the thing that distinguishes Aikido from a great many other things. Hopefully, it is the next ethical step up.

6. Sue Ann McKean, Aikido instructor and world class body builder

Originally surprised by an instructor (1973) who treated women not as passive, weak beings, but as though they had power. Aikido became a way to transcend male/female stereotypes.

7. Sheryl Doran

Unlike competitive sports which are biased towards natural athletes, Aikido is the application of repetition; you don't have to be a natural athlete.

8. Rani Cochran

I had never done anything athletic. Organized sports made me feel awkward, incapable. Aikido nurtures people so beautifully that a lot of those fears are removed. I came to enjoy my body, the feeling of my body moving and responding. Now it's there in everything I do. I experienced my strength as a woman on the mat and then I could begin to break through these stereotypes of feminine behavior off the mat.... To me one of the great appeals of Aikido is its grace. I would very much like to take incoming aggression and merge with it so softly that it becomes as much a part of me as my favorite pair of blue jeans, and as nonthreatening.

9. Frank Doran on power

Individual spirit is sexless and a woman possessing spirit--really putting her Ki out--has tremendous power. This blows a lot of men away. They've never experienced that kind of power.

10. Beth Austin, 40+ yr old nidan, mother, etc.

- a. I got started in Aikido because the class cost next to nothing and it looked like fun.
- b. From the beginning we talked about getting mind and body together.... A technique may look right but be all wrong if you are doing it on the basis of muscular strength alone.

c. Appeal of Aiki: Aikido is totally nonviolent which is hard for some people to understand. But you don't have to cause harm in order to protect yourself. A master never does. Hurting your opponent is a sign that you are not in control and haven't mastered the technique.

* ** d. Aikido is a way to get in touch with your personal power, your ability to be in control of what happens to you, to express your power effectively, nonviolently.

10:30-11:35

VII. Conclusions

A. My starting point

1. Observation that 1/3-1/2 of dojo members were women and that this contrasted sharply with most harder martial arts
2. Observation that a great many women were high-ranking and running their own dojos
3. Question was what about Aikido was so different. What type of promised power?

B. Answers

1. Came from readings of Keller and Gilligan in defining a feminist power and from women publishing their thoughts on Aikido
2. Key lay in the discovery of power, a power that forced these women to go beyond their stereotypes of femininity. But, most importantly, a power that did not lead to domination. "Women were surprised that they did not have to become men and yet could handle power." Their expressions of harmonizing, of caring and nurturing, all seemed to fit in with the Keller and Gilligan theories. Not a return to Victorian passive care but a powerful

outward reaching web of life. Whether there really is a form of feminine ethics may still be debated, but these women exemplify Gilligan's voice through the training in Aikido and their daily lives.

3. Aikido is a unique meeting ground for people who wish to shatter gender stereotypes. Its association with the martial arts makes it a safe space for men while its emphasis on caring, on connecting with other people, and on power without domination has clearly attracted women students. ~~One can hope that Aikido will not be the only non-threatening environment in which people can work together to find their paths to power. It appears to be an excellent way in which a woman can lay claim to power without sacrificing these principles to the forms of violence associated with patriarchal strength.~~ ^{is an} ~~to be an~~ ^{feminist} ~~principles~~ ^{no.}

W.B.S