**Women in Aikido**

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 In the Japanese language the term Aikido is defined as ‘way of adapting the spirit’. Founded in the early 20th century by Morihei Ueshiba, the art of Aikido incorporates meditation and self-reflection in order to blend with a partner’s energy, leading to a system of throws, joint locks, striking and pinning techniques that are meant to provide a non-lethal form of defense for the practitioner. Along with the defense aspects, Aikido works to balance the mind, body, and spirit, leading to an overall improved sense of wellbeing for the practitioner (aaa-aikido, 2018). Since these principles involve the absorption and redirection of a partner’s energy, and it does not require strength or muscle mass to preform, the art of Aikido is especially beneficial for women (Aikido Centers, 2018). The following is an examination of Women in Aikido including the importance of women practicing personal self-defense, and the benefits of the development of a higher level of overall wellbeing by practicing Aikido. Finally, profiles of high ranking Aikido female practitioners will be examined including the contribution each has made to the development of Aikido.

**Violence against Women**

 According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) violence against women is a major public health crisis. It is estimated that 35% of women worldwide have experienced either a physical or sexually violent act in their lifetime. Along with this, almost 30% of women in a relationship worldwide have reported that they have experienced some sort of physical or sexual violence by their intimate partners. The consequences for these assaults can be dire, leading to both long term and short term physical, mental, and emotional health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, injury, child endangerment, reproductive dysfunction, and even death (WHO, 2018). For these reasons it is important for women to become mindful of their surroundings and practice a self-defense martial art such as Aikido which works to neutralize an attack without causing grave bodily harm to the attacker thus bringing about a state of peace.

**Benefits of Self-Defense**

Women who practice Aikido as a self-defense see several benefits. This includes (a) empowerment and self-confidence, (b) improved cardiovascular health and motor skills, (c) over all improved mental health (academy of martial arts, 2018). All potential victims of violence should learn self-defense. All victims of a violent attack including women who have experienced physical or sexual violence have essentially been disempowered. This occurs when an attacker over powers their victim and forces them powerless, thus leading to both physical and psychological damage. By learning and using Aikido, women empower themselves by employing skills which neutralize a partners attack. Along with this, the physicality of practicing a martial art such as Aikido can help to build self-confidence and physical strength, thus improving ones overall mental and physical health.

**Examples of Women of Aikido**

**Dr. Ah Loi Lee**

Dr. Ah Loi Lee is a medical doctor and acupuncturist who was the first woman outside of Japan to obtain the rank of 7th Dan in Tomiki style Aikido. She studied under both Tomiki sensei and Yamada Sensei in England (Pranin, 1992).

**Patricia Hendricks**

Patricia Hendricks is a 7th Dan Aikikai Shihan. She began studying Aikido in 1974 under Mary Heiny and Stan Pranin, and in 1984 she found the Aikido of San Leandro dojo. She holds a Menkyo Kaiden and is the division one head of the California Aikido Association (Hendricks, 2008).

**Conclusion**

 Aikido uses the principles of blending and with a partner’s energy, and redirecting that energy. For women, practicing Aikido helps to empower the individual through self-defense, and improve both body and mind. Due to the harmonious principles in which Aikido was founded, by blending with a partners force rather than applying force, little strength or mass is needed to neutralize an attack, thus making Aikido the ideal self-defense art for women.

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